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THE METAPHYSICAL STRUCTURE OF SOLITUDE

by

JANOS SALAMON

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Philosophy in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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Abstract

THE METAPHYSICAL STRUCTURE OF SOLITUDE

by

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To be alone, one must be separated from *something*. Solitude, paradoxically, turns out to be a relational concept which requires for its logical foundation the duality of a subject and an object of isolation, of longing. Keeping this logical structure in mind, I distinguish between four types of solitude: *ordinary*, *heavenly*, *cosmic* and *divine*. Ordinary solitude lacks any metaphysical dimension for, here there is no ontological division between the subject and object of separation. It is not that these two are of the same kind, for this is true of all four types of solitude, but that here the element separating the subject from the object is not different in kind from either. In heavenly solitude, by contrast, the soul is separated from her objects of longing, (Ideas) by an ontologically inferior element, the sensible world. Here, instead of a mere logical foundation, we have a metaphysical one, instead of duality, dualism. To the metaphysical a cosmic dimension is added when the object of longing is no longer perceived as immanent to the cosmos but transcendent to it. Now the cosmos itself is seen as the obstruction separating the subject from its ultimate object of longing. The ascetic

impulse is present even in ordinary solitude, (a portion of the sensible world is negated for the sake of another, cherished portion of it), but it intensifies in heavenly solitude, as the soul turns away from the sensible world altogether, and finally, in cosmic solitude it reaches its logical extreme when it becomes the gnostic mission of world-destruction. At the end, these three human varieties of solitude are contrasted with divine solitude which, unparadoxically, is non-relational and has monism for its metaphysical basis. This divine variety is then hailed as the resolution, the end of all human solitude.

PREFACE

The unpopularity of philosophy is due largely to the general perception that few things are more likely to deprive man of his self-possession than prolonged reflection. One must be tied to the world if one wants to live in it, and these ties can only be loosened by unnecessary abstractions. But the intellect in humans, unlike in animals, can never be entirely subordinated to the will to live, and so it is that man cannot look at the world with those peaceful animal eyes through which the wisdom of nature is said to speak directly.

The unconditional obedience of the intellect to the will to live in this world is a necessary means by which a close adaptation to this world is achieved. And so, when the intellect begins to wander from its task it can do so only in an otherworldly direction. This straying of the intellect makes itself felt as an indefinite longing. Indefinite because its direction is merely negatively determined as not-this-world. Such obscure longing is the first, primeval form of solitude. The intellect has wandered far enough to recognize its independence, but nothing is thereby grasped, beheld, or even approximated. The overwhelming sense is that of being suspended in and surrounded by Nothing. This primeval, unreflected perception of solitude as coming face to face with nothingness is experienced as the root of all fears; the *horror vacui* adds a darker hue even to the fear of death.

Upon reflection, however, it becomes apparent that solitude is a relational concept. The awareness of being alone presupposes the awareness of possible company. One has to be

isolated from *something* to be isolated at all. It follows from this realization that solipsism, the idea that I alone possess real existence, is logically unrelated to the problem of solitude, a problem which could not even arise if, in fact, I were alone in the universe facing nothingness. The paradox of solitude, then, is that the existence of others and the awareness of such existence are necessary conditions of the awareness of being alone.

As a relation between a subject and an object of isolation, solitude has duality for its logical ground. The metaphysical dimension is added only when this duality becomes dualism, when the subject perceives himself as *ontologically distinct* from his object of longing. And finally, solitude acquires its moral dimension when it is suffered as an isolation from a higher, or purer grade of reality, or from reality as such. This reality can be regarded by the longing subject as immanent to the cosmos he inhabits, (Ideas), or as transcending it, (God). Accordingly, one can speak of heavenly, or of cosmic solitude as two different types of disruptions of metaphysical continuity. The subject derives his sense of ontological inferiority from that element of obstruction, which comes between him and the perceived reality. The closer his association with this element, the more acute his sense that his own existence, or at least the nature of it, forms part of the obstruction. Now a disengagement from this world is seen as a condition of adapting to another. This, briefly outlined, is the formal structure of asceticism. The immediate goal of the ascetic is world negation, which can be attempted passively by withdrawing from the world, or actively by engaging in it with malicious intent. But whichever way is chosen, world negation is only instrumental to achieving the ultimate goal of recovering

metaphysical continuity, ending heavenly and cosmic solitude. The ascetic, even as he is out to destroy the very god who has created this world, has another, (true), God in mind, and this sets him apart from the nihilist who, in the midst of god- and world destruction, has nothing particular in mind, although he is likely to refer to this as freedom.

God expresses His infinite freedom through creating with nothing particular in mind. There is nothing His creative Will has to obey, not even His own Intellect. The world is not fashioned after eternal Ideas, or patterns and so it contains no clues about the essence of its creator who thus remains inscrutable to His creatures. The source of the modern subject's cosmic solitude is this isolation from the incomprehensible, infinitely distant God of nominalist theology. The subject of heavenly solitude, although isolated from his eternal objects of longing, (Ideas), could realistically expect to be united with them through knowledge. The incomprehensibility of the object of his longing bars the possibility of a similar epistemic salvation for the subject of cosmic solitude. Since he cannot know God, but also cannot resign himself to the isolation, he has two options: he must either wait for God to reveal Himself, or he himself must become God. The choice is between received redemption on the one hand and self-redemption on the other, and the modern subject is born from opting for the latter. In his ambition to become God, man sees the world not only as empty of useful clues, a metaphysical v.. ..um, but as a downright obstacle, a trap, a monument of deception created by a malicious god. The world as an impediment standing between him and the true God must be eliminated. From this point on, the ascetic program of world-negation is radicalized into the gnostic mission of world destruction. Considering the difficulties involved in attempting to

become, or imitate an incomprehensible, transcendent God, it is not surprising that man scales down his project of theomorphosis to an imitation of divine freedom. But, for this pursuit of absolute freedom to have any chance of success it must first turn against its theological root. A truly autonomous subject cannot be the product of imitation, not even of an *imitatio dei*. The original project is secularized as the 'self-expression of the autonomous subject'.

If God had to bend His Will to the necessity of any kind, (Ideas, cosmic laws, rules of logic, etc.), then He would be kept company by a reality not His own making. But His Will *is* necessity. This insures His absolute freedom and His absolute solitude. Man arrives at the threshold of absolute freedom by gradually giving up all those eternal objects of longing which his intellect, wandering from its task of adapting to this world, had held onto during its long ascetic-gnostic career. But when the intellect's otherworldly longing is deprived of all its objects it does not thereby come to an end; instead, it becomes indefinite once more. Its sense of independence from the will to live is once again the sense of being suspended in nothingness. Except, now the emptiness where one floats unattached to any reality of not one's own making is recognized as the emptiness of divine solitude. This recognition, however, does little to alter the primeval, illogical terror of being absolutely, irrevocably on one's own.

Of course, solitude without a metaphysical dimension is always possible. In its ordinary sense it is understood as a disruption not of a metaphysical but of a social continuity. A temporary straying from the fold. To end it one must simply prick up one's ears, as it

were, and catch up with the flock on the move. It appears, however, that against the reality of what I have termed heavenly, cosmic, and divine solitude, ordinary solitude is a mere theoretical construct.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

§ 1. Subjectivism and the logical conditions of solitude

It is often said that we moderns live in an age of subjectivism. There is something suspect about this claim even if it rings true. In comparison, the suggestion that we live in an age of technology seems unproblematic. For it is easy to accept the fact that all previous ages had lived without airplanes and computers but it is difficult even to imagine an age in which the subjective experience would have had any less weight than in ours. We are apt to regard the primacy of the first person singular perspective as part of the human condition. Whatever the political, moral or aesthetic ideals of a given age may be, and to whatever extent they mold the individual consciousness, part of this consciousness always appears unaffected. This in itself sounds trivial, however the point is that it is not just any but the *essential* part of the individual consciousness that appears unmoved. The shifting currents of external, objective events along with the traces they leave on the subject are accidental, only the unaffected subject itself is essential. The world may come and go, it may shrink or expand but my distance from it remains constant.

The notion of solitude comes first to sight as an awareness of a constant distance, a fundamental discontinuity between the experiencing subject and the events experienced. For me to be conscious of such a distance is to be conscious of my inability to ever perceive my own experiencing as just another event: a limitation which isolates me as a subject.

In a strictly physical sense I am of course never isolated. This is hardly surprising since, as far as we know it, the natural elements go through and through the world, my skin is no barrier. Nor am I isolated on a purely phenomenal plane, for here my existence is nothing but an event in a causal chain, a fact which remains true even in a lifeless desert.

So, perhaps from an objective point of view I am never alone. But what difference does this make if solitude is by definition a subjective experience; if objective external events leave the 'essential part of consciousness' unaffected?

In general terms then solitude seems to emerge from the relationship between history (objective external events), and that part of individual consciousness which is unaffected by history. But is there such an unaffected part; is there such a thing as a pure isolated Ego? Descartes thought there was but his notion of pure individual subject of experience

is based on a logical error. The 'I' can ascribe states of consciousness to itself only *if* it can ascribe them first to others. The subject turns out to be a secondary, derived notion. If the appearance of the Cartesian pure Ego has marked the beginning of our modern age of subjectivism, this age surely must have come to an end with the discovery of Descartes' logical error. Yet the reign of the subjective perspective continues. And if we find it difficult even to imagine another age without this underlying fundamental intuition, that just shows how deeply it is embedded in ours.

§ 2. Solitude: a relational concept

But there is more to this than a simple logical error. We have come to the notion of a pure isolated Ego which is essentially ahistorical, extra-social and non-objective whose existence nevertheless presupposes that of others i.e., the existence of society, history and objective external events. The source of solitude is not that the Ego overlooks the very condition of his own existence, the existence of others. On the contrary, it is precisely a sometimes dim, sometimes more acute awareness of not being alone that forms the logical ground of his solitude. The problem of solitude is grounded not in a logical error but in a paradox. For the logic of the concept of solitude requires a plurality of subjects (plus some communication between them in the absence of which each subject's

predicament is as good as that of a metaphysically single one). The condition for me to feel alone is the awareness that I am not alone. Even the mere idea of the possibility that I am not alone seems sufficient for me to feel alone. But of course this can never be a mere idea. In order to ascribe any experience to myself as a subject, in order for me to be a subject of experience I have to be confronted with another subject.

It is clear then that the problem of solitude *couldn't* arise if I was in fact alone in the universe, and it *doesn't* arise because I imagine this to be the case.

§ 3. Solipsism: logically unrelated to solitude

Cartesian doubt brings the ego to the brink of solipsism only to save it from the abyss by introducing the concept of the true, non-deceiving God. For a refutation of solipsism, however, an examination of its logical structure would have sufficed. Just as in order to refute radical egoism the limits of the egoist's 'I'-centered universe do not have to be transcended by the introduction of a avenging God or Hell or some other non-natural entity. It is enough to point out that such egoism is self-refuting.

Solipsism may be self-refuting but this doesn't help us with the problem of solitude for, as we have seen, the two are not linked. What works for one is useless when it comes to the other. We can say to the solipsist, "the more emphatically you deny the existence of

others the more evidence you give of being a subject of experience (doubt, in this case), and the more evidence there is that you are such a subject the more obvious it is that there are others of your kind." To say this to the solitary Ego would be banging on open doors. He understands it very well that the condition of his own existence as a subject is the existence of others and vice versa, it's just that he doubts if there is anything more, something non-formal, beyond this. As if the entire meaning of existence in general would be exhausted in the mutual fulfillment of the formal condition of each other's existence. As if we subjects were each other's logical constructs. And such conclusion, unlike the Cartesian solipsistic one, involves no logical contradiction.

So the pure isolated Ego proves to be an illusion; there is no such thing as a solitary subject of experience. But this does not mean there is no such thing as solitude. The question however still remains: what is the subject of solitude? What, if anything, is that essential, unaffected part of individual consciousness? Is it essential because it is immune to accidental objective events?

One possible model for the subject we are looking for is the neutral or impartial observer familiar from epistemology and ethics respectively. Perhaps our subject is such an observer with the difference that he is a product of abstracting not from all subjective but from all objective circumstances. The reason why this will not do should be clear by

now. The existence of others is an objective circumstance from which no abstraction is possible for the subject if it is to be one at all, that is, if it is to be a subject of any experience, including solitude.

It would be senseless for anyone to strive for neutrality or impartiality without making the assumption that it is at least possible to break through the barriers of the subjective perspective. But the validity of this assumption is perfectly compatible with a deep sense of isolation. Once it is clear that the individual subject has the objectively existing realm of other subjects to thank for his own existence, some link between the two realms is rather to be expected. The primary notion of a 'plurality of subjects' is logically continuous with the secondary, derived notion of a single individual subject. Their separation is only apparent and thus cannot be the real source of solitude.

§4. A preliminary sketch of the structure of solitude

Ordinarily, the problem of solitude is conceived first and foremost as a psychological one. But then, ordinarily the single source of solitude is thought to be the isolated individual -- an assumption that appears untenable on logical grounds. But it should appear untenable on empirical-psychological grounds as well: individuals permanently tied together in communities of various sizes often yearn for isolation and sometimes

even perceive it as an *antidote* to their consuming sense of solitude with all its attendant existential anxieties. This alone should suggest that the source of solitude is something other, more complex, than the isolated individual. What our logical investigation has shown so far is only that solitude is, paradoxically, a relational concept. If it is indeed a subjective experience then one of the two terms of this relation is fixed: it is the individual subject of experience, the 'I'. As for the other term, the possibilities are many, ranging from the smallest possible unit, the *I* itself, to the largest, the world itself. The possibilities falling in between, (e.g. social class, society as a whole, country, political or moral environment, etc.,) are certainly worthy of close attention. However, for the most part, I intend to occupy myself with the two extremes. In both cases, whether the source of solitude is the *I*'s relation to itself (self-consciousness), or its relation to the world itself,(metaphysical self-consciousness), solitude appears as a permanent fixture of ultimate reality. One can always realistically hope to alter one's distance from one's social or moral environment, but hardly from one's self-consciousness or from the metaphysical structure of the world. So, while a book written under the title, The Sociology-, or The Psychology- or The Ethics of Solitude could theoretically afford a more or less optimistic conclusion, no encouraging news is expected to be uncovered by an inquiry under the title, The Metaphysical Structure of Solitude.

§ 5. An outline of the logically complete structure of 'classical' solitude

It is an unalterable feature of the subject that it can relate to itself. Self-consciousness is a given and so is the metaphysical structure of the world. If the source of solitude turns out to be the subjects frustrated relationship with something irrevocable within him, or in the world outside him, then, what was originally conceived as a manageable logical or psychological problem, would suddenly gain cosmic dimensions. And this would change everything. For cosmological or metaphysical problems can only be contemplated, not managed. Of course, if the object of our contemplation is the Idea of Beauty or Goodness, or any other perfection, contemplation is all we want, and all that is required. But solitude is not commonly thought of as a perfection, especially not on a cosmic scale. The heroes of Homer and the seventh century B.C. Greek poets for example find the source of human solitude in the relation between the mortal human subject and the immortal divine beings. These heroes and poets do not simply contemplate but *lament* the fact that the gods had abandoned us humans. They could grant us eternal life, it is in their power to do so, but instead they let us grow old and sink to Hades where we become mere wailing shadows. The gap between mortals and immortals is unbridgeable and anyone, who forgets or overlooks this immutable feature of cosmic structure, pays a fitting price for his hubris. And a fitting price for any of us thinking himself to be immortal is violent death, promptly meted out by the gods.

Eternal life eludes every sentient being of every species, and in this sense we are not alone. We share the fate of all finite existences. But we alone appear to be conscious of this fate. Consciousness of our finitude against the background of infinity is unique to us and in this most important sense our isolation is complete.

The source of this ancient sense of solitude then is the relation between the self-conscious subject and the cosmos itself. But suppose the cosmos with its unalterable metaphysical structure, lorded over by the Olympian gods, turns out to be an illusion. Suppose infinity as perfection proves to be a mirage. Where then is the background against which we should lament our finitude? This I take to be a characteristically modern dilemma. With the demise of the Olympian gods we are no longer pining away on the dark side of the Great Ontological Divide. We have, however, become autonomous now as Nietzsche suggests we should, by awakening from a dream about a superior world, but by gradually incorporating its superior qualities in our subjective existence. Yet, this work of world-destruction, this draining of its objective values into the subjective realm does not lead to the deification of the subject after all. To understand the reason for this failure, which I attempt in the final chapter, is a key to the understanding of the modern subject. Here I merely want to remark that our autonomy, expressed by imposing our rationality on an empty, (neutral) world does not protect us from a new type of solitude which, unlike the ancient one, contains in its structure an

object of longing as vaguely determined as the ontological divide between it and the subject is blurred.

§6. Inter-subjective solitude

The advantage of inhabiting a universe of rational order, a cosmos, is that there is a rational explanation for everything that takes place within it. The blow of the recognition that we are alone is softened by the further realization that there is a good reason for our solitude: the gods had abandoned us. This reason is as good as the cosmic order of which humans and gods are permanent fixtures. But we moderns have dropped the idea of cosmos and divinity altogether. The advantage of inhabiting a universe of man-made order is that this ancient sense of solitude is removed without a trace. If there is no God, there is no one to abandon us. Yet, even if Cartesian subjectivism is not its primary source, solitude is the ruling sentiment of our modern age. To say with Nietzsche that God is dead is simply to say that, for better or worse, *we are alone*. Except, now no rational explanation is readily available. In fact, we seem to be stuck with the error of Cartesian logic once again, only this time on a universal scale. A collection of egos (we humans) can no more be the single subject of experience than a single individual ego can. The 'we' as a collective subject can ascribe states of consciousness to itself only if it can ascribe them first to others, to at least one other subject outside the *we*. But it is the

essence of the modern view that no such super-subjective subject does in fact exist. How then is it possible for us to feel alone? If solitude is a relational concept and we collectively count as one term at one end of this relation, what is on the other end?

The assumption behind the notion of inter-subjective solitude is that it is possible for all of us to be aware of being thoroughly connected to one another and yet, at the same time to be conscious of being utterly disconnected from something outside the realm of our common existence. Of course, our sense of being isolated from something outside us does not have to appear as a contrast to the nature of our social existence, it can also appear as a parallel. Our more or less complete alienation from one another, the lack of a social matrix may even find its explanation in our isolation from a super-social one. It is possible that our ordinary solitude has the same transcendental ground as our inter-subjective solitude. Every moralist worth his salt will insist that this in fact is the case. It may be. What *must* be the case, however, for our inter-subjective solitude to be real is that there exist a realm from which we are isolated but the reality of which is guaranteed by its subjective consciousness-independent existence, or in one word, by its *Bewußtseinsunabhängigkeit.*

§ 8. The sense, or nonsense of 'we are alone'

But now that we have lost our trust in the idea of a cosmic order it is unlikely that any related idea of a ground which transcends our human dimension will again gain credibility among us. Instead of lamenting our isolation from the Ideas, or God, or the thing-in-itself we celebrate our freedom from them. This freedom may be the only common ground we have but at least it is *our* ground. We may be united only by the consciousness of being isolated exactly from nothing but this is just enough to dispel the foreboding sense of 'we are alone', or more precisely, to take the sense out of this claim. If the logic of inter-subjective solitude demands the existence of a collective subject on one end and an object of longing or isolation on the other then the structure of this relational concept is dismantled by the realization that there is nothing on the other end. And if there is no collective object then nor is there a collective subject of longing. This explains the nature of the modern, post-Cartesian consciousness containing the certainty of the 'I', the probability of the 'you', and the implausibility of the 'we'. Of course the modern subject knows what solitude is but, since the objects of his longing are immanent to the sphere of his existence, and since his ability to adjust his desires to available objects is a necessary adaptation to this world, his solitude has no metaphysical ground, his longing has no transcendental dimension. Eternal longing was a self-imposed burden of pre-modern consciousness which, in its various forms of ascetic expression, (most

notably Platonism and Christianity), represented an aberration of the life instinct. Modern man admits to inhabiting only the surface of this earth and so the superficiality of the gesture with which he, as the subject of ordinary solitude, dismisses three thousand years of heavenly solitude befits his self-image.

§ 9. *The specter of divine solitude*

The judgment of 'formerly all the world was mad' comes easy to superficial man but the continuing celebration of the superficiality of surfaces is already wearing out the revelers themselves. Surfaces *are* superficial but the exuberance with which the discovery of this tautology is greeted must eventually turn reflective and inquire into its deeper sources. The hilarity gives way to a more pensive mood as man sobers to the recognition that he has gained his freedom following the death of something greater than him; that taking full possession of his freedom, rejoicing in the death of God without self-irony, self-pity and self-contempt will be impossible until he himself becomes God. It may be objected that if man gained his freedom at the death of a superior heavenly being, this superior being gained *his* greatness at the cost of belittling the earth, devaluing the world man inhabits. It is true that the primary impulse of asceticism has always been world-negation but at least it has aimed to achieve freedom, redemption, the end of heavenly solitude through the elimination of an obstacle it considered inferior, not superior to the true

nature of man, -- at least its motives have been noble. In fact, it is largely because asceticism falls in love with its own nobility that it fails to achieve its goal. Longing for the eternal object is gradually replaced by longing for longing itself. Thus it is that the eternal object of gnosticism, (asceticism's ultimate expression), the true, acosmic God remains fixed as a *desideratum perpetuum* at the objective end of man's cosmic solitude even though, by a thorough destruction of the world, the ground has been prepared for a union with the true God.

But in the end, the death of God Himself proves to be as inadequte a ground for man to become God as is the ascetic destruction of the world. Man continues to hang on to the human varieties of solitude, -- ordinary, heavenly, and cosmic, -- all of which rely on dualism for their metaphysical foundation. The necessary condition of ending all human solitude is abandoning the metaphysics of dualism not in the name of nihilism, but for the sake of monism. It can be done through a total rebuilding and rehabilitating of this world, accompanied by the re-naturalization, de-substantialization, that is, essential elimination of the subject, (see Nietzsche), or through an equally unhesitating final dismissal of the world and deification of the subject, (see advaita Vedanta). The result in both cases is divine solitude, a prospect as incomprehensible as it is terrifying.

Chapter 1. The Metaphysical Ground of Solitude

§ 9. Monism and pluralism: equally inadequate grounds for solitude

At first sight it seems natural to derive the concept of solitude simply from the physical constitution of the universe. All things appear to be extended and lie within boundaries. These fundamental physical facts spell discontinuity, separation, and isolation. If the world is indeed a mere aggregate of isolated entities, and if physical isolation itself gives rise to solitude, we have to look no further for a clear determination of our concept.

The first of these two assumptions implies the existence of void, that is, of non-being. Of course the existence of non-being poses a considerable logical problem the radical solution of which is to admit the reality of Being only. This is Parmenides' solution. In the unchanging, unmoving continuous plenum of his universe there is no room for isolation. Could there not be an infinite number of these universes? Yes, but only with gaps, void, i.e. non-being between them. Although the logical problem returns, now plurality, motion and change can be explained and thus the empirical coherence of the world can be restored. The universe, restored to rhyme with common sense by the

Atomists, is absolutely discrete: particles completely full of Being (in the Parmenidean sense) are separated by space completely void of it. Throughout their purely mechanical interactions the particles retain their Parmenidean internal state of unchanging, unmoving, continuous, homogeneous, indivisible plenum. This then is a universe of perfect isolation. When the particles (which differ in shape and size) combine to form complex entities, the principle of their combination is, 'like tends towards like, and like acts upon like'. Atoms of similar shape and size will congregate. But there is no 'community' here. The attraction is solely mechanical, the qualities involved (shape and size) are purely external, i.e., those with which the atoms are facing the void, so to speak. Now, since there is no interaction of internal qualities, and since the inner state of the atoms is entirely unaffected by their inclusion in or exclusion from an entity, it is clear that the notion of isolation will never arise on an atomic horizon. An atom, once again, is just a Parmenidean universe and, as such, cannot come into contact with non-being or void and thus cannot even begin to form the notion of 'distance' which would separate or isolate it from other atoms/universes.

On the atomist view there are only two elements of reality: the Full, (atom) and the Empty, (void). If the closely related concepts of 'void', 'plurality', and 'isolation' cannot arise within the limits of the Full, they must, if they are to appear at all, appear outside these limits, in the Empty. In other words, if the existence of a plurality of isolated

universes will not be recognized from within any of them, it has to be recognized from without all of them. But assuming, with the theory, that every drop of Being is concentrated in these atomic universes, there is nothing left outside them to be the subject or the object of recognition or any other act of consciousness. In the universe of perfect isolation this very fact of fundamental discontinuity will go unnoticed. No entity will 'feel' isolated. Furthermore, suppose an extra-atomic vantagepoint could, after all, be taken up by, perhaps, an unembodied spirit. Even this observer would remain oblivious to the ultimate discreteness of the atoms swirling around him. Because, from this external perspective the interplay of external or purely relational properties will appear as real interaction: atoms, attracting or repelling one another, influencing and modifying each other's action. There will be simply nothing in their behavior to suggest that they might lack inner lives (say, intentional properties), or that these lives might be entirely unaffected by external modifications.

Parmenidean Monism does not allow the concept of isolation to arise. When the One, with all its characteristics intact, is multiplied to infinite numbers by the introduction of the void, the result is Pluralism par excellence complete with an ideal model of isolation. Only, now the separation of perspectives is so perfect that none of them affords a vantagepoint from where the separation itself could be perceived. Take, for instance, my own perspective. How can I, as an absolutely independent Reality who is able to perceive

only his own internal states, avoid the conclusion that I *am* the One; that Thought (my thoughts), and Being are identical?

The identity of Thought and Being is the primary principle of Eleatic monism and it simply means that, on the one hand, what can be thought exists and, on the other, what cannot be thought does not exist and what does not exist cannot be thought. In order for me to become aware of my existence as absolutely independent from that of others I am required to think of a void between us, i.e., I am required to think of what does not exist. This, of course I cannot do: the truth of pluralism excludes the possibility of its own verification. Eleatic monism may be inconsistent with empirical facts (plurality, motion, and change), but the atomist theory is inconsistent with the fact that I know it to be true. The isolated entities pluralism posits can be surveyed only from a perspective the existence of which it forbids. In this system the reality of separate beings is allowed only from a transcendental viewpoint the possibility of which is, at the same time, denied. When this perspective does enter the system of pluralism, we get the monadism of Leibniz, and here isolation becomes fully visible at last.

§ 10. Monadism: another inadequate ground

The existence of an infinite number of mutually independent beings (monads) is

overseen by an extra-mundane Being (God) who is the 'sufficient reason' for their existence, while for His own no reason can be given, it is 'metaphysically necessary'. (God is the place, as it were, where giving reasons comes to a stop). Every monad is *sui generis*, that is, every one of them 'expresses' the world differently, each operating on an internal principle; their inner being is not influenced by any external cause. Consequently, these 'windowless' units are as unaware of each other's existence as the atoms of Democritus, yet they behave *as if* they were aware not only of their fellow monads but also of the perfect unity and concordance in which they all share.

The perfection of this harmony is ensured by the very independence and isolation of its elements. Isolation ensures independence, and independence ensures the greatest possible variety of existing things. Everything possible demands existence. (Leibniz regarded this a metaphysically necessary principle). There are an infinite number of possible universes demanding existence but of these God has chosen to make actual only the most perfect one. Since existence itself is a perfection (a 'magnitude of positive reality'), the most perfect universe contains the maximum possible number of existents: "... once it has been granted that being prevails over not-being, that is, that there is a reason why something should exist rather than nothing, or that transition from possibility to actuality is to take place, then, even if nothing further is determined, the consequence is that there exists as much as is possible in accordance with the capacity of time and

place (or of the possible order of existing) -- in very much the same way as tiles are fitted together so as to put in as many as possible within the given area." (1)

Isolation, then, emerges in Monadism as cracks between the closely fitting tiles laid down by a perfectionist God. It plays a strictly instrumental role in the divine project of furnishing the best possible world, and thus it remains as an entirely external property. Monads are as unaware of their separate existence as ordinary tiles are of the cracks between them.

Our original aim was to derive solitude from isolation but if the latter is indeed an external property, like the shape or size of Democritus' hollow atoms, it is unclear how this derivation will be effected. The objective fact of isolation must enter the inner life of *some* being before it could become solitude, which is, after all, a subjective experience. In monism isolation, the separate existence of things, is dismissed as an illusion of the senses; in pluralism it is affirmed as an objective fact without a witness; finally, monadism reaffirms the fact and stands a single witness who, however, turns out to be the very creator of this fact.

On closer examination, we find that the God of monadism is a creator of independent physical entities merely indirectly. Strictly speaking, He creates but monads which are

simple substances, metaphysical points and 'true entities', which form the necessary logical condition of a fully furnished, or closely fitted universe. "Without true entities there would be no plurality", says Leibniz in his *New System*. But the plurality of separate bodies is merely phenomenal, reality belongs not to these 'entities by aggregation' but solely to their ultimate underlying simple substances. Reality is homogeneous: it consists of infinitely many tokens of a single substance type. These tokens differ only in their degree of perception, some (rational spirits) perceiving or expressing the universe clearly and distinctly, others (say, plants) more dimly and confusedly. God, although self-created, is just the Chief Monad, and as such, He is not of a different substance.

§11. Dualism: the only possible metaphysical ground of solitude

A pluralism that insists on the reality of a single type of substance is essentially a form of Monism, no matter how distinct an existence the tokens of that type might enjoy, and no matter what principle of distinction might be employed within the system. In atomism the principle of distinction is external (shape, size and position), in monadism it is internal (degrees of perception) but in both, the distinctions themselves are infra-substantial: they do not involve the isolation of (at least two) different substances. For this we have to turn to the dualism of Descartes.

In the Cartesian universe the infinitely deep gap, the void that divides the world of created things in two does not, as the atomists would have it, lie between extended entities shut up within the confines of their boundaries. For, extension in length, breath and depth belongs to space as much as it belongs to bodies, although in the first case it defines a generic, while in the second an individual identity. Space, by virtue of being infinitely extended is infinite body because the essence of body is extension. The unbridgeable gap then lies between extended, corporeal things on one side and unextended, incorporeal things on the other. These two mutually exclusive, opposing types alone deserve the name of substance, for they need only the 'cooperation of God' in order to exist. Here, finally the notion of isolation enters the consciousness of the isolated being itself. I, as a conscious being, possess the primary, unacquired and certain knowledge of my existence as an unextended, incorporeal substance. Although extended, corporeal things are not directly given to my consciousness, and so my knowledge of their existence is less certain, I clearly and distinctly perceive them as tokens of an altogether different substance type. This other substance is just as self-existent as I am. Our isolation is absolute: my body does not think, and my mind has no body.

Beyond insisting that everything is either mind or matter, Cartesian dualism includes the further ontological claim that everything is either a substance or the modification of a

substance. The modifications of matter are rest and motion, the modifications of mind are ideas and sensations. I as a thinking substance am directly acquainted only with my own mental modifications, and since knowledge depends on direct acquaintance, (a basic principle of Cartesian epistemology), I know nothing but my own ideas and sensations. Being on intimate terms with my sensations can contribute however merely to my self-knowledge, for sensations do not represent objects outside me -- only ideas do.

The Cartesian subject is saved from a solipsistic isolation by his ideas which, although indirectly, still connect him to the world. But it is exactly this indirect, oblique connection between two fundamentally different substances (mind and matter) which creates the unique condition necessary for the consciousness of isolation to arise in a subject. Relations in Eleatic monism are hallucinatory (Being is single and undifferentiated); in atomism they are entirely external (inter-atomic); in monadism entirely internal (intra-monadic), but in dualism they are *problematic*. For, while it is a common feature of the first three systems that the internal state of the respective units of reality is unaffected by external modifications, in dualism two wholly unrelated types of reality are claimed to be none the less related through the modifications of one occasioned by the other.

The notoriously puzzling logic of this relation between mind and matter is part of a

larger plan the author of which has not so much logical as moral and metaphysical coherence in mind. Just as in monadism isolating the greatest possible number of tokens belonging to a single substance type is instrumental to the higher moral purpose of creating the best possible world, so in dualism the isolation of two distinct substance types is instrumental to the same purpose. The difference is that while in Leibniz's system isolation serves to maximize quantity for the sake of a universal principle of perfection, in the Cartesian system it serves to fix the objective existence of quantity, i.e., matter as quantity of space, the clear and distinct perception of which in turn helps maximize subjective self-consciousness. The perfection of the universe is for Descartes inexorably bound up with indubitable, certain knowledge: salvation occurs through epistemology. But in this Cartesian universe the requirement of certain knowledge is that a maximally conscious subject (the knower) be confronted with a maximally unconscious object (the truth).

§ 12. The radical isolation of two substances, and the perception of this isolation by one of them. The consequences of Cartesian dualism

For me as a subject, to be conscious of a thing's objective existence is to perceive that thing clearly and distinctly as not me. My idea of an object is clear when it is perfectly understood and distinguishable from all other ideas; and it is distinct when its inner

structure is perfectly clear to my mind. The 'representative reality' of ideas and the 'inherent reality' of represented objects are both guaranteed by their distinctness, that is, by their perceived isolation. To perceive something clearly is to recognize the fact of its isolation from other things, or to understand its outer structure; to perceive something distinctly is to recognize the existence of its isolated elements, or to understand its inner structure. The emphasis is on isolation, a concept central to Cartesian metaphysics and epistemology. By contrast, the same cannot be said about the "dualism" of Plato in spite of the sharp distinction he makes between the sensible world of bodies and the intelligible world of Forms. For, sharp as it may be, the division between these two realms is not substantial (it does not involve the separation of two substances), but hierarchical. Only the soul is destined to possess inherent reality, the body is not. What ultimately counts in this pseudo-dualism is that the soul attain to this reality by attaining to true knowledge. For this to occur the soul must indeed be separated from the fetters of the body but merely to be united with the Forms to which it is akin. The emphasis is on akin. The essential affinity between soul and Form makes the possibility of their connection plausible. The Cartesian mind as thinking substance, on the other hand, is akin solely to its own modifications. So the connection between the mind and its ideas can be seen as plausible but the claim that this in itself could yield knowledge (self-knowledge) appears to rest on the logical error of subjectivism discussed above.

The untenable logic of a primary, unacquired self-knowledge of the subject aside, knowledge of the external world will clearly have to be acquired from some causal interaction between subject and object, between mind and matter. But unlike the Platonic soul and the Forms, the Cartesian mind and matter have nothing in common. How is any such interaction to take place here if, as Descartes maintains, the possibility of this always depends on an essential likeness between cause and its effect?

It is part of Descartes' larger plan to insist on the radical separation of the two substances: this way the mind/soul is saved from corruption by matter (the Platonic element of the plan), and at the same time matter/physics is saved from the prejudices of the mind, from the contamination of subjective sensations (the modern, anti-Platonic element).

The concept of 'mind' and 'matter' are derived through the abstraction from all those respective mental and physical properties without which these two concepts can still be conceived. Since both turn out to be a substance, by definition both can do without the other's existence. "Real distinction between two or more substances ... is discovered from the mere fact that we can clearly and distinctly conceive one without the other." says Descartes in his *Principles*, (2) However, the same 'light of reason' that shows those properties of the two substances that are necessary to conceive them does not in any way show the necessity of their interaction. In other words, the mind-body, or subject-object

interaction is contingent and thus arbitrary from a rational point of view.

The empirical fact that mind and body happen to be joined in some relation is an embarrassment to Descartes' rationalist design the metaphysical coherence of which is only further reduced by his unconvincing post facto explanations. This coherence is restored by the occasionalism of Malebranche who, in the spirit of Parmenides, refuses to be embarrassed by empirical facts.

The incoherence of dualism, the problematic relation between mind and body, between the subjective and the objective realm has been the target of criticism and ridicule from Arnauld and Foucher to Ryle and Wittgenstein. But the power of Descartes' influence on modern thought was never due to the way he explained how the subjective related to the objective. His achievement was not that he could unite but that he could separate these two realms more sharply then anybody else. The very sharpness of this distinction accounts, to a large extent, for its intuitive appeal, even if the result is a highly problematic subject-object relation.

§ 13. Freedom, isolation and solitude. Descartes and Kant: epistemological and moral salvation.

The larger plan of Descartes is best summed up by himself in the subtitles of the first and second edition of his *Meditations*: "in which the Existence of God and the Immortality of the soul are Demonstrated", and "in which the Existence of God and the Real Distinction between Mind and Body are Demonstrated". These objects of ultimate concern -- the existence of God, the distinction between mind and body and the immortality of the soul -- coincide with those that Kant took to be the chief problems of metaphysics: God, freedom and immortality. A 'real distinction' between mind and body is, as we have seen, necessary to ensure the subject's freedom from the corrupting influence of matter. It is a separation of unconscious, inert passivity from conscious, self-acting spontaneity. The freedom thus gained provides the basis for the Cartesian method of doubt by allowing the subject, as a pure thinking substance, to examine his beliefs and withhold or grant assent to them at will. Similarly, for Kant freedom is the result of detaching the subject from its material surroundings (Nature, the empirical world). Only in its isolated, transcendental capacity can the subject become a moral agent. Here, freedom through isolation serves as a ground not for indubitable knowledge (genuine science), but for indubitable action (genuine morality).

According to Kant, Descartes' real distinction between mind and body leads to a 'problematic idealism' whereby the existence of objects in space outside us is indemonstrable or doubtful. But with his own distinction between the empirical and the transcendental subject Kant shares his predecessor's fate. The weight and influence of his moral philosophy is due largely to that famously sharp distinction, which however leaves us with a no less problematic relation between the two types of subjects, making it doubtful whether the a priori principles legislated by transcendental egos, inhabitants of the Kingdom of Ends, can ever have their synthetic application in the empirical realm. If Descartes can be accused of creating a ghost in a machine by his mind/body dualism, it can be, with equal justification, brought against Kant that his transcendental/empirical distinction created a Swedenborgian ghost in a Newtonian machine. The further suspicion is that what they both celebrated as the freedom of an autonomous subject, on closer look turns out to be the solitude of a ghost.

Consciousness cannot be isolated from itself, so when isolation appears in consciousness it can appear only as a rift between consciousness and its unconscious object. If this is interpreted as a rift between man and Nature then indeed freedom, and not solitude, seems more readily derivable from isolation. For, it makes sense to say that the unbridgeable gap separating me from the pen in my hand or from the pine under my window gives me the freedom to know and to control them on the on hand, and on the

other to act in a way neither the pen nor the pine could ever act, i.e., conforming to my own self-prescribed laws. But in what sense can I be said to be solitary or experience solitude on account of the unbridgeable gap between the pen and me in my hand or the pine under the window? In no sense, unless of course I experience solitude on account of my freedom.

Freedom may be a product of isolation but, by making science and morality possible, it holds out the promise of unity, not of solitude. The hope is that correct knowledge and right conduct will bring man closer to Nature, i.e., to the nature of things, to God's design or to the very structure of rationality. Of course, this hope, cherished most ardently by the Stoics, presupposes a Stoic metaphysical conception of the universe as a seamless whole pervaded by *ratio* or *logos*: the essence of man *and* Nature is reason. Man can realize his unity or harmony with Nature by taking possession of his rationality through correct knowledge and right conduct. Contrary to this, in the universe of Cartesian dualism and Kantian transcendental idealism man realizes his *freedom* by facing and resisting an irrational and non-moral Nature. There is no longer an all-encompassing rational structure here to guarantee, simply by man's conforming to it, the certainty of knowledge or the moral worth of conduct. For Descartes, man's relation to Nature, like the mind's to the body, is a contingent empirical fact -- contingent upon God's will. The thread of rationality runs not from 'one end of the universe to the other' but only from the

immediate intuition of the thinking self to the principles deducible from that intuition. This thread does not even run between the ideas of the thinking subject, because a criterion of their truth is that they be distinct, completely self-contained and understandable by themselves apart from reference to one another. So, I, as a thinking subject, am indeed free to acknowledge or doubt the truth of any of my ideas, but this freedom does not allow me to connect them, nor does it allow me to connect my subjectivity with the world. For Kant, the principles of rationality are universal (the Stoic streak in his moral philosophy), but they do not run through the universe. Although they unite all rational beings within the Kingdom of Ends, they do not unite this realm with anything outside it. It appears then that neither Cartesian science nor Kantian morality can realize freedom's promise: the unity of man and Nature.

Of course, if the new outlook, metaphysics modernized by Descartes, requires a strict subject/object distinction as a necessary condition of freedom, we can hardly expect freedom to aim at the cancellation of its own condition, that is, at the unification of the conscious subject with the unconscious object. Yet, the subject who enjoys this freedom wants to do just that, for he is so constituted that his primary intuition is of unity, not of isolation.

§ 14. Self-certainty and the unity of apperception: the permanent backgrounds of the subjective experience in general and of solitude in particular.

In his original position the Cartesian subject is conscious only of his own existence as a thinking thing. His isolation from another substance and so his very freedom is a matter of subsequent reasoning and not of immediate intuition (*connoissances directes*). So, bare self-knowledge precedes the knowledge of the external world and exceeds it in certainty. For, the knowledge intuition gives us is "primary, unacquired and certain", says Descartes. To this he adds:

"We touch upon the mind with more confidence than we give to the evidence of our eyes. You will surely admit that you are less assured of the presence of the objects you see than the truth of the proposition: I experience therefore I am?" (3)

But this means that objective scientific knowledge can never match subjective self-knowledge in certainty; it could do so only by becoming itself subjective and thus intuitive, a feat which requires nothing less than the complete fusion of the conscious subject (mind) with the unconscious object (body). Science cannot perform this task since it would involve, as we have seen, the elimination of freedom, which makes science possible in the first place. Yet, the subject cannot be satisfied with any knowledge that is less certain than that of his own existence. The road to his epistemological salvation is blocked by his own freedom, by his isolation from another

substance (body/Nature) inaccessible to intuitive knowledge.

The primary unity of the Cartesian subject, the fact that the mind perceives itself to be permanent, unchanged by its various modifications, is a pre-scientific recognition gained through the inner perception of an empirical ego. For Kant, this unity belongs to the transcendental ego, and it is the "pure, original, unchangeable consciousness which precedes all data of intuition and by relation to which representation of objects is alone possible". Since the transcendental ego is but a logical condition of experience, it cannot itself be given in experience and thus the unity of its apperception cannot form the content of even the barest self-knowledge of an empirically real ego.

But it is still psychologically possible for the subject to *think* of himself as a unitary substance, a 'thing in itself', that is, a thing which is constituted and determined by its thoughts alone, just like the Cartesian mind. In fact, it is necessary for the subject to think of himself in this way if he wants his actions to have a moral, and not just a physical, character. Just as the Cartesian subject in pursuing his epistemological salvation cannot be satisfied with any knowledge less perfectly certain than that of his own existence, so the Kantian subject seeking his moral salvation will not be content in the end with any action not instrumental to achieving a state of perfect coherence modeled after the idea of unity, a product of his reason. For, if, as Kant himself says, reason has a natural drive towards unifying the conditions of experience (time, space and the

categories) by proceeding to the unconditioned, it seems inevitable that it should be driven to fuse the entire set of these conditions (the empirical realm) with the condition of morality (the transcendental realm). And indeed, as Kant also suggests, the ideal of historical development is the establishment of the Kingdom of Ends as an actuality. Here, presumably, the a priori principles of morality would no longer have to be applied synthetically in the empirical sphere of human action because in this noumenal kingdom on earth man's nature or, what here would amount to the same, Nature itself would be rational through and through. Although this is a mere ideal, it has a real function, as does the intuitive self-certainty of the Cartesian mind. They both serve as a permanent background against which the subjective experience in general is measured and found wanting in a sometimes vague, sometimes more determinate sense. The two main venues of renewed attempts to realize the ideal of unity are romanticism, the impulse to subordinate the subjective (man) to the objective (Nature), and modern rationalism which acts on the reverse of this impulse.

It is freedom, the product of isolation that perpetuates the subject's detachment from its background of original unity. And it is the resulting subjective experience that can be termed 'solitude'. In the end then, we can say that although indirectly, through freedom, solitude does derive from isolation. Not from the physical isolation of things and beings in general but perhaps of humans in particular and, more fundamentally, from the metaphysical isolation of absolutely distinct substances or realms.

Chapter 2. Classical Varieties of Solitude

So far, I have talked only about the formal conditions of solitude and have arrived at the conclusion that it is a relational concept which requires duality for its logical, and dualism for its metaphysical basis. The source of solitude then is to be found in the relation between two substances, between two things with distinct fundamental attributes.

The material conditions of solitude will come to sight by determining the nature of both terms at either end of this relation. As I suggested before, it also belongs to the formal conditions of solitude that for it to arise at all it must arise in a consciousness, and whether this consciousness is individual or 'collective', the phenomenon itself remains subjective.

§ 15. The mental-physical dualism as a possible source of solitude

First I want to focus on the nature of solitude as it appears in the consciousness of the individual. In this case, one term of the relation is given: it is the 'I', the ego made

unique by its fundamental attribute, consciousness. The other term then, if it be unique, that is a different substance, can have anything but consciousness for its essence. This, following the Cartesian scheme, leaves extension. So, the second term is an extended thing (body) or the totality of all extended things (Nature) which yields the mind-body relation on the one hand and the man-Nature on the other as possible sources of solitude. Before, I interpreted the rift between consciousness and its unconscious object as the man-Nature rift. Although the direct consequence of this schism is freedom, and freedom makes science possible, science in its turn, I argued, could yield nothing that would match the ego's subjective experience of intuitive and absolute self-certainty. It is through this frustration that consciousness might become divided against itself: an infinite, eternal half against a finite, ephemeral one; and it is this state to which Hegel referred as the "unhappy consciousness". This presents the possibility that the source of solitude is the ego's relation to itself, a possibility we must consider later.

Our task now is to look for the source of solitude in the, admittedly puzzling, mind-body relation. I as a conscious ego am separate and free from my own body and thus able to contemplate it qua body, that is, as another substance. But, once again, such knowledge gained through this freedom can result in nothing matching the immediate self-certainty with which I know the existence of my own consciousness. Measured by the absolute

standards of immediate self-certainty my body is no closer to my consciousness than any other body or the entire set of them (Nature). In other words, to consciousness everything not immediately present is *irrevocably* external. The mind by nature is epistemological impartial to all bodies, including its own. But, as a matter of empirical fact, man consists of both mind *and* body, a union that should go unnoticed by the impartial mind and which it will notice only to the extent that it is able to shed its native impartiality. The question, the one that sets up our riddle, is how the mind becomes epistemological partial to its body. Our aim here is not to solve this riddle of dualism but to show how it provides the metaphysical ground for our modern solitude.

The utter isolation of mind and body can be perhaps most clearly grasped when we realize how straightforwardly Parmenidean the nature of Cartesian consciousness is. For, in the latter, just like in Parmenidean monism, thought and being are one, (ego cogito=ego sum). This is the ground of the ego's immediate self-certainty, as much as the obstacle in the union of mind and body. A substance in which thought and being coincide confronts another substance which is devoid of thought altogether. The suspicion that it is then devoid of being as well can never be entirely removed. The trouble is that the mind will always remain oblivious to empirical demonstrations of its union with the body since in its attempt to understand this union it can only follow the

model of its own self-understanding which, as we have seen, is a strictly non-empirical project. There appears to be no passage from the 'inner space' of consciousness to the vaguely and indirectly perceived 'outer space' of extension. If the ego's self-certainty is not shaken by empirical demonstrations that's just because the foundation of this certainty includes nothing imported *ab objectis externis*. Nor does it include anything taken from the principles of logic, so appeals to these are equally ineffective. This certainty, says Descartes, comes as "self-evident in a simple mental intuition", it is "a sort of primary notion which is not the conclusion of any syllogism." (1)

It is in vain then to point out that the pure ego, as a primary, underived concept logically cannot exist. The certainty of the ego's *connaissance directe* thus remains unshaken by Kant's refutation of idealism. For all the ego maintains is what Kant himself says about the representation 'I am', viz., that it includes in itself the existence of a subject; it readily admits that such representation does not include any empirical knowledge but denies that on this account the possibility of all knowledge is excluded. It is the intuitive self-knowledge of the ego that survives all scientific refutations, preparing the way for the triumph of idealism even as the ego concedes the existence of the objective conditions of its identity: the logically prior mind-body complex and other external objects. For, in the ego's rank ordering the objective conditions of its identity can never match the

subjective condition, the certainty of its intuitive self-knowledge.

§ 16. The Platonic soul vs. the Cartesian mind. 'Classical' vs. 'modern' solitude

Now, the superiority of this self-knowledge derives from the superiority of its object, which the ego perceives to be eternal in the same sense as the objects of the Platonic soul's noetic perception, the Ideas or Forms are eternal. The ultimate aspiration of the soul is to be united with these true objects of knowledge. Until this goal is achieved she is suffused with longing and striving for the incorruptible Forms. Such striving for what is Good, or True, or Beautiful absolutely is Eros. The soul can be said to be solitary because she is conscious of being separated from something; and can be said to suffer from solitude because she is conscious of being separated from her original, superior element. But the Cartesian mind is separated only from what it takes to be its inferior, at least epistemological inferior, corporeal element. It is this isolation from sensuous influences that makes the mind free to reject everything but those ideas which it perceives clearly and distinctly. The mind, like the Platonic soul, is driven by Eros, it too strives to rise from the low regions of confusion and doubt to the high realm of clear vision and certainty. The difference is that while the soul has a long journey ahead of her, the mind, its existence, is *identical* with the object of its longing. The mere act of

thinking yields the highest certainty, that of its intuitive self-knowledge. At first sight, the mind's unity with the object of its 'longing', this Platonic heaven on earth seems to leave no gaps to close, no room for solitude.

The possibility of philosophy hangs entirely on the distinction between knowledge and opinion, while the possibility of Cartesian science depends on the distinction between truth and error. Both distinctions in turn are rooted in something that constantly remains, (*remanes capax mutationum*) i.e., in something that really is: the Forms as they are perceived by the soul's eye on the one hand, and the mind as it is perceived by itself, on the other. The mind persists through the changes of the surrounding bodies, including its own, because it is non-spatial and atemporal just like the Platonic Forms. But if, by virtue of being identical with what is real, it is metaphysically self-sufficient in a way that the longing Platonic soul is not, what stops the mind from perceiving itself as complete as the Platonic soul when she is finally united with the Forms, or the Aristotelian god who never has to 'go beyond his own ends' and whose sole activity is contemplation of himself?

For Descartes, as much as for Plato and Aristotle, the quality of thought (knowledge) depends on the nature of its object. The crucial difference is that while the Forms

and the Aristotelian Unmoved Mover are eternal by their very nature, the Cartesian mind catapults itself into eternity by doubting itself out of space and time. If this mind were truly immutable, eternal, extra-spatial and extra-temporal, no doubt could ever arise in it. It realizes and affirms its immaterial nature not by re-entering a supersensible realm, as does the liberated Platonic soul, but by objectifying the body. To give content to its subjectivity, by defining itself as an 'unextended thing', the mind depends on the epistemologically inferior objective world. It is this dependence, induced by the emptiness of its own subjectivity that prevents the mind from being metaphysically self-sufficient.

These considerations, then, yield two different paradigms of solitude: one is a soul's awareness of being separated from her original, superior element, or man's awareness of being isolated from the company of his equals, this I term 'classical solitude'; the other is the mind's awareness of being isolated from, yet dependent on, an epistemologically inferior, elusive element, alien to its nature but necessary for its self-understanding, or, in the end, its awareness of being isolated from Nothing -- 'modern solitude'.

The classical paradigm exhibits the logical structure required by solitude as a relational concept. Here, the two terms of the relation are the longing soul at one end, and the

object of longing at the other. Between them stands the sensible world, which acts as a semi-transparent divider separating lover and beloved but at the same time affording glimpses of perfection and eternity. The soul fully emancipated and reabsorbed in her native supersensible element no longer experiences solitude, and nor does the forgetful soul experiences it, the one weighed down by her earthly attachments, her 'eyes always looking down', her head 'stooping to earth' having no recollection of her high birth. So, neither the fully emancipated nor the fully enslaved soul knows of solitude, in this esoteric sense; both of them are at home in their respective elements. It is only the soul stuck between heaven and earth, as it were, that is conscious of being isolated, cut off, alone in this world. Evidence of her heavenly origin is supplied by memory, but these are mere fragments. Her urgent desire is to recover all memories of her true existence to which she longs to be restored. Upon being released from her earthly bonds her first words at Heaven's Gate are:

> "I am a child of Earth and of Starry Heaven;
>
> But my race is of Heaven alone...
>
> And lo, I am parched with thirst and I perish.
>
> Give me quickly the cold water flowing forth from the Lake of Memory.(2)

§ 17. The first variety: heavenly solitude.

Corresponding to the ancient distinction between heavenly and earthly eros (Eros ouranios/Eros pandemios) another distinction can be made between heavenly and earthly solitude. The forgetful soul unaffected by the former can still be consumed by the latter. And indeed, 'solitude' ordinarily refers to a state of isolation felt not as an insulation from the realm of eternal Forms but simply from the society of humans. To live alone, says Aristotle, one must be either a god or a beast, -- man is a social animal. Ordinary solitude then, requiring no Platonic-Pythagorean metaphysics for its ground appears to spring directly from man's nature. The difference between these two types of solitude lie, once again, in their respective objects of longing: objects of sensible experience (fellow-humans) versus supersensible objects (Forms). It follows from this difference that the two experiences are different in quality, something to be expected anyway, considering that in one case man's empirical, while in the other, his metaphysical nature is frustrated.

Heavenly solitude is the permanent state of the remembering soul throughout her embodied and thus alienated existence. Not even the company of kindred spirits can change this, since, being embodied, they too are alienated, they are part of the objective world which is generally an impediment to the soul's homebound journey and at best

can only be instrumental to it. Even the most beautiful embodied spirit serves as a mere reminder of Beauty itself. The soul's heavenly solitude is not to be mitigated by worldly love and friendship, although these are the exact antidotes to ordinary solitude. The soul by ceaselessly 'scanning beauty's horizon' is prevented from a 'slavish and illiberal devotion to individual loveliness'.

The ideal subject of heavenly solitude is the philosopher. His pursuit of true knowledge (wisdom) leads him beyond the world of opinion, beyond society. It is the relative success of this pursuit that makes him so keenly aware of the separation from his objects of longing, and it is in order to lessen the frustrations of his heavenly solitude that he seeks the repose of ordinary solitude. To decrease the distance in one direction, (Forms) it must be increased in the other, (society); to help overcome the higher form of solitude the lower is embraced. Like the proverbial bull who goes off to the woods ("*abiit et taurus in sylvam*") to roam alone through the glades, despising the company of cows, not wishing to use the same pastures, the philosopher too removes himself beyond the bounds of society and embraces his earthly isolation. His judgment of society is dictated not by the high regard he has for himself but by the high aspirations of his soul. In the light of these aspirations, in addition to the epistemological inferiority of sensible objects, the moral inferiority of the life of the multitude is clearly discernible. "The

utter vulgarity of the herd of men comes out in their preference for the sort of existence a cow leads", says Aristotle. (3) And in Plato's *Republic* we find the following picture of the philosopher: "Those who belong to this small class have tasted how sweet and blessed a possession philosophy is, and have also seen enough of the madness of the multitude; and they know that no politician is honest, nor is there any champion of justice at whose side they may fight and be saved. Such an one may be compared to a man who has fallen among wild beasts... He is like one who, in the storm of dust and sleet which the driving wind hurries along, retires under a shelter of a wall; and seeing the rest of mankind full of wickedness, he is content if only he can live his own life..." (4)

§ 18. Answer to a sober objection

The philosopher longs for the same earthly solitude from which the non-philosoper suffers. It is, of course, to be expected that an ordinary man should not long for but should suffer from ordinary solitude. After all, what makes earthly solitude ordinary is that ordinary men suffer from it. But, perhaps there *is* no other type of solitude to suffer. Perhaps those heavenly objects of longing are the mere inventions of philosophers.

This, then, is the place to face the sober objection that man's metaphysical nature cannot properly be frustrated because he has none; that real solitude can be rooted only in a separation from real objects of longing, such as actual beings of sensible experience, and not in a separation from imaginary objects, such as supersensible Ideas or Forms; and that, in sum, a man longing for his shadow, and melancholy for not being one with it is no better than a man afraid of his shadow imagining himself completely separate from it. But, by assuming what it should establish first, such argument begs the question against Platonic metaphysics whose central theme is that the fleeting objects of sensible experience are shadows cast by the truly, i.e., eternally existing supersensible Forms. In any case, the distinction itself, the one I am making between heavenly and earthly solitude, *does* presuppose Platonic dualism. Whether or not this metaphysics, the arguments supporting it, can stand up to logical scrutiny is beside the point here. In an obvious and important sense discoveries of bad arguments in Plato or in Descartes come too late. Our minds are already made up -- by them. We can perhaps change our minds, or even reinvent ourselves but not without a good deal of previous self-understanding. It is doubtful if very much of this can be gained with the help of the two currently celebrated Schools, which by the way are most likely to raise the above objection, the Historicist-Perspectivist, and the Analytic School. The anti-essentialism of the first renders the project at hand obsolete: if we have no 'selves' there is nothing to

understand about them; the *Begriffsmanie* and mathematical empiricism of the second present us with 'models' of the self which are of such dimension that we can fit into them only by hacking our experince down to size.

Clearly, a lot more would have to be said on this subject before concluding that the dominance of these two Schools marks an age, which is intrinsically hostile to self-understanding. But one has one's suspicions, the underside of one's presuppositions, and mine have led me to attempt this task of self-understanding by starting with the existentially pervasive, persistent, irreducible experience of solitude. My presupposition, which makes me suspicious of both historicist and empiro-mathematical reductionism, is that the experience of solitude cannot be reduced to the categories of history, sociology, or empirical psychology because it, like our experience in general, is essentially subjective. A viable theory of the 'I' (self-understanding) must aim at the rational reconstruction of the intentional, not at the elimination of it. If the subjective is part of the real then one must be a realist about the subjective domain, and if this perfectly natural stance appears defiant that's only because the dominant views on the matter are divided among those who regard 'real', on the one hand and 'subjective', on the other as hopelessly inexact concepts. While the perspectivist is convinced that talk of what is and what isn't real necessarily deteriorates into dogmatism of one sort or another, the

analyst believes that talk of 'irreducible subjectivity' inevitably collapses into psychologism. But our realism about the subjective involves no more danger of dogmatism than our realism about the objective. Our concept of 'reality', whether we apply it to an intentional object of our consciousness or to an empirical object of the external world, is equally defensible or indefensible against the truth of skepticism.

Realism about the subjective does not commit one to the existence of intentional objects accessible only from a single perspective and so, it does not commit one to the superficially plausible but incoherent view that solitude is a private affair. Although the experience of solitude is subjective the conditions of its existence must always include a clearly definable objective element: the object of longing. This can, but does not necessarily have to be an empirical object. On the possibility of such alternative hangs the distinction of heavenly and earthly solitude, an alternative that presupposes that the simple truth of empiricism is wrong. To weigh empirical objects against intentional ones and decide which of the two deserves the name of reality is not my task here. My purpose would be equally well served if I thought justifiable to assign empirical reality to one and transcendental reality to the other, or to deny the reality of both. In the latter case I would have to conclude that the experience of solitude, in the absence of a real object of longing, is an illusion. But even such a conclusion would not affect the course of

this study, which, as the title suggests, is an analysis of the *structure* of solitude. After all, illusions too have structures. It is the phenomenon of solitude that merits philosophical investigation, and such an undertaking can only benefit from the Cartesian insight, later incorporated in Husserlean phenomenology, that the structure of illusion is as real as that of objective, (extra-mental) reality. It forms a main part of the structure under examination here that solitude is a relational concept with two clearly definable terms at either end of the relation. It is only when one of these terms, the object of longing, is left undetermined that the experience of solitude can be reduced to a mere feeling. Discussions of this experience would then amount to little more than frustrating attempts to trade in inexpressible mental contents. The charge of psychologism would then be rightly raised, and the bold phantasy of the perspectivist or the narrow imagination of the analyst would be rightfully employed in naturalizing the problem of solitude by shedding light on the causal origins of this vague and undefined experience. But my contention is that it is a *defect* in the structure of solitude when one of the terms remains undefined, or its logical space is left empty. That Cartesian subjectivism is characterized by the first defect and nihilism by the second is part of my general thesis. In contrast to the logical shortcoming of the modern paradigms of solitude the classical paradigms, heavenly and earthly solitude, are classical in the sense that they exhibit the ideal structure of solitude. The soul, and man, are isolated from and long for the Forms, and other humans

respectively.

§ 19. The second variety: earthly or ordinary solitude

Ordinary solitude, I have said above, appears to have its source in the nature of man who, unlike beasts or gods, is essentially a political animal, that is the natural context of man's biological organism is the social organism of the State. The political conception of man and organic conception of society to which the ancients, with the exception of the Stoics, subscribed could be summed up by saying that the smallest social and teleological unit is not the individual but the State. There is as little reason to consider the private citizen (*idiotes*) to be a teleological unit complete with his private final cause as there is to consider an individual cell to be a moral agent operating in harmony with its own conception of the good. As the health and ultimately the very existence of the human animal's biological organism depends on the close cooperation of all its constituting cells, so does the health and existence of the State depend on the cooperation of its individual members. Entities, which become obstacles in the way of this cooperation, are expelled both from the individual and the social body. Of course, the individual body, especially the parts close to its surface, can on occasion be rid of perfectly healthy, functioning cells through injury, and similarly, society can be injured by the

breaking off and isolation of individuals who occupy its edges.

Even those who cannot fully embrace such an organic conception of the State would be likely to perceive society's general tendency to expel or to leave behind all elements which in their movement contradict, for ill or for good, the otherwise uniform gravitation of opinions, lifestyles and mores towards a common center. The peripheral existence of the two archetypal fringe elements, the Criminal and the Revolutionist, might seem to qualify them to be the ideal subjects of ordinary solitude. This is not so, however. For, criminal or revolutionary actions are not the causes but the consequences of originally loosened ties connecting these two types to society. Their occasional physical isolation, (imprisonment or exile) is just the physical manifestation of their psychological distance from the 'core of society'. This, however, does not mean that they thereby join the philosopher as ideal subjects of heavenly solitude. For, unlike the philosopher who in his 'unnatural' capacity to live alone is both a beast and a god, the Criminal and the Revolutionist are not devoid of the natural social impulse, it is merely modified in them. The Criminal's behavior in its nakedly instinctive, beastly tendencies is still an imprint, albeit a negative imprint, of the given society's moral code. An action *outside* this code would not be perceived as criminal. And the Revolutionist, in spite of the godlike features of his creative vision, still labors within the moral and intellectual confines

of his society, even if he is among the first to perceive a sudden shift of those boundaries. ("Woe to the Revolutionist who is not himself the creature of the revolution!"). So, in contrast to the philosopher's asocial stance criminal behavior is merely subsocial, while revolutionary behavior is merely supersocial, -- there is a difference between existing outside society and living on the fringe of it.

The ideal subject of ordinary solitude is ordinary man. Whether the object of his longing is others in general, which constitutes his sociability, or a particular other, which constitutes love, the social sphere is his native realm. Extended physical isolations from this realm he regards as accidents which he, unlike the philosopher, would not think of prolonging any more than a victim of a shipwreck would hope for one more day of drifting in the open sea before being rescued. And he rightly regards it an accident, for his physical isolation, when it occurs, is not a manifestation of anything and especially not of his psychological independence from society's gravitational pull, a notion all the more unthinkable since ordinary man by definition is someone who forms an integral part of the same large mass whose gravitational force he obeys.

§ 20. The resolution of heavenly and earthly solitude. Their antidotes and their logical opposites.

In its ordinary variety we have solitude at its simplest. The structure is straightforward: the subject (man) is physically isolated from the object of his longing (other humans), and the solution, removing physical barriers, presents only technical difficulties.

The solution of heavenly solitude differs from this in one important respect: It involves the removal of *all* physical barriers, including one's own body, for everything corporeal, not soul-like, not eternal stands as an obstruction between the soul and the incorporeal, changeless Forms. It is a final solution. The soul when returned to her original element and united with the Forms instantly runs out of possible objects of longing and shall no longer experience solitude. One who became united with the real and is now metaphysically self-sufficient is separated only from the unreal for which he longs no more than any ordinary inhabitant of the sensible world. (5)

A man suffering from ordinary solitude does not consider the immortality of his soul as a requisite for the solution of his problem. He does not think that the corporeal is an unsuitable context of true existence; it does not occur to him that the existence of bodies *in toto* could be the source or indirect cause of his solitude, only that some objects

happen to lie between him and other objects he happens to long for. When the obstacles are removed and he re-enters society, he is once again an integral part of a whole.

If solitude involves moral dependence on the object of longing, i.e. the subject cannot attain to the Good or to the good life independent of that object, then the logical opposite of solitude is self-sufficiency. Heavenly solitude finds its final resolution when it passes into its logical opposite after the soul's unification with her objects of longing. The question is whether ordinary solitude can find *its* final solution by passing into its logical opposite, whether ordinary man can become self-sufficient by being united with his fellow-humans. The soul does not attain to self-sufficiency by uniting with her equals, with other souls. Her objects of longing are perfections and as such they are superior to her. She partakes in the superiority of the Forms by uniting with them, that is, by gaining an unobstructed view of their perfection. She achieves metaphysical and moral self-sufficiency by gaining an unobstructed view of the True and the Good, respectively. On the other hand, ordinary man's objects of longing are other imperfect ordinary humans.

It is unclear how man's union with his equals might confer on him anything that could elevate his state to the level of moral self-sufficiency. The Platonic soul is driven by Eros, the desire of the lower for the higher; the imperfect for the perfect. But the objects

of ordinary man's desire tie him to a world, the sensible world, where only illusions of perfection are available. His union with such shadowy appearances then cannot amount to more than an illusory moral self-sufficiency, an antidote to his ordinary solitude, which might serve as an anesthetic but not as a cure. Ordinary man's forgetful soul denies him the knowledge of the True and the Good. He is left with opinion, and since one is as good as another, his only way to differentiate among them is to give most weight to those held by the most. In other words, in choosing the objects of his desire he must rely on public opinion. This is what yielding to the force of psychological gravity means.

The danger of relying on public opinion when choosing one's objects of longing is that these objects may very well turn out to be gratingly incongruous with one's soul for the simple reason that the soul herself is not created by public opinion -- not even the soul of ordinary man. Here the fundamental instability of earthly moral self-sufficiency becomes visible. For, even the most earthbound soul is Platonic in the sense that she is driven, unknown to herself, by heavenly Eros. In the Symposium, Diotima explains the moving principle behind earthly love thus: "And why all this longing for propagation? Because this is the one deathless and eternal element in our mortality. And since we have agreed

that the lover longs for the good to be his own forever, it follows that we are bound to long for immortality as well as for the good -- which is to say that Love is a longing for immortality." (207a)

In her forgetfulness the soul may be incapable of recognizing the Good itself, that is the eternal Good, but she wants to possess what she perceives as good for eternity. It is ordinary man's desire to possess the object of his longing 'for ever' that testifies to his underlying psychological continuity with the subject of heavenly solitude, and which propels him beyond the realm where only his empirical nature is exposed to frustration. This metaphysical ambition is out of proportion with the dimension of every conceivable sensible object no matter how firmly possessed, and it can originate only in that 'deathless and eternal element' of the soul which reveals her affinity with the Forms, objects truly worth desiring. The presence of this element in one's soul is enough to shatter the security of one's morally self-sufficient position gained by surrounding oneself with the objects of one's desire. Regardless of the extension and the intensity of his social integration, ordinary man cannot escape the occasional feeling of being utterly alone. He can be touched by heavenly solitude because of the unbroken continuity running from all souls, including the most forgetful ones, to the Forms and ultimately to the Good. Such continuity however does not extend to the knowledge of the Forms. The difference between the remembering and the forgetful soul is not that the one is more

knowledgeable than the other,(more erudite about the Forms),but that one has knowledge and the other has opinion.

As the quality of thought is determined by the nature of its object, the quality of ordinary man's thought is determined by the ephemeral objects for which he longs. This in itself would disqualify him from even an intimation of heavenly solitude. It is his paradoxical desire to possess the ephemeral *for ever* that raises the quality of his thought to the level where the idea of being alone in the midst of his possessions dawns ever so vaguely on him. The magnitude or intensity of his desire, however great it may be, plays no role here. For, that magnitude is applied directly and solely to the ephemeral object itself. What does make the difference is his confused attempt to elevate the transient objects of his desire to the rank of eternal ones (Forms) simply by abstracting, that is wishing, away temporality from his favorite temporal objects. The quality of his thought is raised and he is able to have a brush with heavenly solitude not because he has attained to knowledge of the Forms and now has a sense of what it is like to be separated from them, but because the very absurdity of his thought, the idea of eternal possession of the ephemeral, brings his soul into contact if not with the eternal objects, at least with eternity generally and thus vaguely understood.

§ 21. Eros and knowledge: the unifying and the dividing principles of heavenly and ordinary solitude.

Once the lower or the imperfect is brought into contact with the higher or the perfect, desire on the part of the former for the latter inevitably follows. That is, it follows from the nature of a teleological system, where everything is subordinated to the idea of the Good, that every element is morally dependent on every other element superior to it. If this teleological system in question forms a rational, intelligible order, a cosmos then it is possible for any given lower element to come into direct contact with any higher one, including the highest elements the Ideas or Forms. Such direct contact can be termed 'knowledge'. A curious problem arises, however, when this possibility is left unrealized by the vast majority of the elements participating in this hierarchy of dependency, when in the absence of direct contact with their superior elements they do not know what is higher, what is lower nor, consequently, what their position is in the hierarchy. The question then is how can a system which must remain unintelligible to most of its members constitute an intelligible whole? The answer is that what alone counts, that

is, the real, the realm of perfect Forms, is perfectly intelligible, and those who come into direct contact with it are presented with a vision of real, abiding self-sufficiency -- the annihilation of all solitude. The status of the Forms is not affected by the circumstance that to most souls they remain unintelligible, for the point is that these Forms enjoy *objective* existence and intelligibility. On the other hand, the status of those souls, which fail to attain to the vision of objective reality, is very much affected: their self-sufficiency will be as illusory and transitory as the shadows they mistake for objects.

In their basic structure heavenly and ordinary solitude are symmetrical. In both cases, the subject, man, is separated from objects of longing which are in principle accessible to him. But the symmetry ends here. The structure of ordinary solitude, as I have suggested, is fundamentally unstable. Ordinary man, the ideal subject of this structure, could find the final resolution of his solitude in a complete social integration only if such integration were conceived as a state of mere physical proximity, and if man were thought to be essentially a physical object. But, of course among physical objects the very problem of solitude would not arise -- it is, after all, a subjective experience. To the extent, however, that ordinary man obeys the impersonal force of psychological gravity, he does behave as if he were an object yielding to the blind forces of physical laws. While this can be explained by the forgetfulness of his soul, the reason for the

fragility of his moral self-sufficiency, which he derives from his proximity to the psychological center of gravity, is that his soul, although forgetful, is akin not to the ephemeral objects he longs for but to the eternal ones, the Forms. In sum, for the structure of ordinary solitude to be genuinely stable -- to include a clearly determinable subject, object, and final resolution -- the subject of ordinary solitude must be either reducible to a physical object, or his soul must be as ephemeral as the objects of his desire. Barring these two equally hyperbolical conditions, ordinary man's existence will consist largely in the project of rebuilding the defenses against his solitude at the pace of their continuous disintegration.

By contrast, the stability of the structure of heavenly solitude, that there is no uncertnaity or confusion about its antidote, or logical opposite amounting to its final resolution, is insured by the stability of the Forms. To be united with these is the metaphysical ambition of the ideal subject of heavenly solitude, the philosopher, an ambition, which induces him to seek ordinary solitude. Once he is left alone with the eternal objects, he has no doubt of being in the best company, and no desire to be distracted from its pleasures by transient concerns. Ordinary man, on the other hand, is never absolutely certain if he is in the best company, or to put it differently, he looks for distraction, sooner or later, even when he thinks he is in the best company. This is because he too is

carried beyond the sensible world of transient concerns by that metaphysical ambition, only in his case this ambition, in the absence of knowledge, is directionless and weak letting him drop back ever and ever again into the sphere he wistfully aims to transcend. As if in a convection cycle, his soul, agitated by the limitations and imperfections of this world, rises steaming to more rarefied regions, then, cooled and condensed in the dizzying hights, falls and circles back below.

The structural and psychological continuity between these two kinds of solitude and their respective subjects is due to a single motif, or moving principle, Eros which operates in a teleological system, a cosmos they both inhabit. What separates the subject of heavenly from that of ordinary solitude, the philosopher from the non-philosopher (ordinary man), is, once again, not the different intensity of their longing for their respectively cherished objects, not the varying extent to which they are infused by Eros. For, the philosopher and the non-philosopher equally desire the good life, and one is as convinced as the other that this is incompatible with solitude, with the isolation from one's objects of longing. Nor does the difference lie in the direction Eros moves the two subjects, for Eros is unidirectional, moving always from the lower, less perfect toward the higher, more perfect. It is his recognition of this movement's destination that distinguishes the philosopher from the non-philosopher. The destination of Eros is immortality in

general, but specifically it is the eternal Forms, and in a cosmos, ultimately the Good. Within the bounds of such teleological, hierarchical order the superiority of the philosopher consists in his awareness and recognition of the final destination of *all* desires. While still tied to the sensible world through his body, he already dwells on the 'Isle of the Blessed' not because his knowledge of the Good unites him with this highest eternal object but because it lets him see clearly that from which all subjects of all solitudes are ultimately separated. Residence on the 'Isle of the Blessed", the good life cannot be attained without the knowledge of the Good, which alone can guarantee the soul's rest within the stability of heavenly solitude rescuing her from the convection cycles she is condemned to ride in the world of opinion. This samsara of the soul is not to be escaped simply by relying on one's native instincts, as it were, equating the knowledge of the Good with the 'knowledge' of the Pleasurable, what 'feels good'. For, feeling good is a state of temporary satisfaction, an episode of proximity to one's object of desire. The trouble is that the soul survives every such episode; she emerges from these transitory experiences with the impression that she herself is not transitory, which in turn gives her the impression that she is not at home in this world of interludes. She might want to *make* it her world by clinging on to this or that interlude in an effort to immortalize it, ('arresting the moment'). But this attempt to eternalize the ephemeral or trivial is as futile as her attempt to trivialize the eternal by denying her own eternal

nature in the transcendent pauses between two episodes, ('surrendering oneself to the moment', or 'living in the now'). All this is a result of misunderstanding the nature of Eros, which takes a purely instrumental view of the present, regards every earthly attachment, no matter how devout, a merely temporary affair, useful only as a stage in the ascent to the object of all desires.

§ 22. Ordinary solitude: a life of catharsis without illumination

The mental-physical dualism turns out to be the metaphysical basis of solitude in a rather unexpected way. The isolation of these two substances is lamented by our Romantic Age as the alienation of mind from body, of reason from intuition, of man from Nature. The key to man's moral self-sufficiency, to the problem of his solitude appears to be the elimination of this dichotomy, restoring the presumably original unity of the mental and the physical. Yet the two varieties of solitude discussed so far have their roots not in the separation of the mental from the physical but in the separation of the mental from the mental, and of the physical from the physical. Instead of one substance being the other's object of desire, it forms an obstacle, an impediment to the other's desire for itself. In the case of heavenly solitude, the methodology of removing this obstacle, the sensible world, has evolved through a long history running from Pythagoras and Plato to medieval

mysticism, and then to German idealism. The most systematic treatment of this methodology in antiquity is found in Proclus who taught that the soul, to be united with her own kind must enter into herself and begin the ascent, (*anagogê*) which has three stages: purification (catharsis), illumination (*ellampsis*), and union (*henosis*). In ordinary solitude, the intruding non-physical element disrupting the unity of the sensible is the idea of 'forever' (eternity). The effort to remove this obstacle together with its related notions of immortality, God and freedom also has a long tradition stretching roughly between Greek and British empiricism. But, once again, the structural symmetry of the two types of solitude stops here. While the subject of heavenly solitude can rightly claim to have been thrown into a world essentially alien to his nature, the subject of ordinary solitude throws himself into the non-physical world of Ideas, (*kosmos noetikos*) when through love he longs for immortality. Pure physical attraction to another object he may claim to be involuntary, but not the idea of possessing that object for eternity.

Contemplating the loss and the future recovery of the supersensible realm may be the characteristic posture of the subject of heavenly solitude and of the ascetic in general. But, since the recovery cannot be affected by mere contemplation, the concrete task, the daily chore of the ascetic life will consist in a direct, unceasing assault on the sensible. If this is perceived as passive withdrawal from the world, it is also the most violently

adventuresome action from a transcendental point of view. Similarly, it should be observed that the direct aim of the hedonist or aesthetic life is not the sensible itself but the supersensible which gets in the way of its fulfillment and which it seeks to destroy. To the subject of ordinary solitude, the supersensible is represented first and foremost by the idea of eternity, or immortality. Since the subject of heavenly and that of ordinary solitude, the ascetic and the hedonist, share the same divine soul, their ultimate goal cannot be different, but since only the former *knows* the way there he will flee from distractions even as the other escapes *to* them. To manage his inability of directly facing the infinite, (eternity, immortality), with which Idea he is nevertheless stuck, ordinary man cultivates a taste for infinitely desiring finite things, or desiring an infinite amount of them, -- an inevitable consequence of being burdened by an intimation of eternity but possessing no knowledge of the eternal Forms. It is a life of catharsis without illumination.

Ordinary man, whose fate is a life of catharsis without illumination, has a ready answer to the classic moral question, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?" (Mark, VIII.36) Because he can neither contemplate nor eliminate the idea of eternity or immortality, he wants to be distracted from it. He wants to gain the whole world precisely in order to forfeit his soul. If he cannot do away with the Idea, he

will target the means of its perception directly. But the soul, on account of her divine origin, cannot be annihilated, not even by gaining the whole world. Thus, as the unity of the sensible remains incomplete so does the final solution to the problem of ordinary solitude. Ordinary happiness, which a life of diversion promises, is forever disrupted by hints of heavenly solitude. A fitting description of the subjects of ordinary solitude is given by Pascal:

> They have a secret instinct driving them to seek external diversion and occupation, and this is the result of their constant sense of wretchedness. They have another secret instinct, left over from the greatness of our original nature, telling them that the only true happiness lies in rest and not in excitement. These two contrary instincts give rise to a confused plan buried out of sight in the depths of their soul, which leads them to seek rest by way of activity and always to imagine that the satisfaction they miss will come to them once they overcome certain obvious difficulties and can open the door to welcome rest." (6)

The raison d'être of ordinary man, his entire life plan is confused and hidden from himself because it is the greatness of his original nature and, in the final analysis, the source of this greatness that lies buried out of sight, in the depths of his soul. He is unable to rid himself of this source, and his remote, implicit connection with it, through his notion of 'forever' prevents him from reducing himself to a temporary object. His attempt to view himself as a purely sensible being which can then unite, freely and without any residue of solitude, with the larger sensible world, fails. Yet, this failure of a total dissolution in the sea of his own restless activity does not dispel his dream of

true happiness, of rest. Now, remembering his cathartic brush with the idea of eternity, kindled by his metaphysical ambition he too wants to dwell on the Isle of the Blessed. He thinks himself ready to make the necessary ascent but, in the absence of illumination about the eternal Forms he is stuck at the first stage, where, although touched by a sense of heavenly solitude, he continues to apply the method of sensible or physical reduction that has proved to be unsuccessful in managing ordinary solitude. That Isle of rest, he insists, can be reached after overcoming certain obstacles, but these are in fact created by his own restlessness, by his own fear of getting there. His fear of the unknown bliss could be stopped if its source could be eliminated, that is, if the supersensible disruption of the unity of the sensible could be stopped altogether. "The best thing would be to make himself immortal", says Pascal, "but as he cannot do that, he has decided not to think about it." (7) But, as the failure of sensible reduction shows, man, in the end, cannot make himself entirely mortal either. His despair is divided between these two failures, just as his soul is divided against herself by those two contradictory secret instincts, all of which make the problem of his ordinary solitude unresolvable.

Chapter 3. The Nominalist Roots of Cosmic solitude

The analysis of heavenly and ordinary solitude is based on the assumption that their subjects are driven by Eros. But it is clear that Eros can operate only in such a teleological system where the lower, even the lowest, because of its fundamental affinity with the highest, is able by its own effort to raise itself to the supreme height of this ontological-moral hierarchy. What would be the sense, the purpose and the function of a universal desire on the part of the lower, the imperfect for the higher, the perfect if the possibility of an eventual ascent were *in principle* excluded? In a world where all subjects of solitude are constitutionally incapable of making a moral progression towards the highest object of desire, Eros has no place. The unification with this object, the annihilation of all solitudes, would still be possible, but only through the intervention of the object of desire itself. This world is the world of Christian theology where the soul's ascent to her original divine source is replaced by God's descent to a non-divine man, that is where Eros is replaced by Agape. Here, the problem of solitude will emerge in an entirely different light.

§.23 Beyond Eros. Longing for the inaccessible.

The first difference to notice is man's fundamental dissimilarity to the highest object of his desire, (*summum bonum*). Whereas the Platonic soul, separated from the supreme Form, the Good, is herself essentially good and is corrupted only by her association with the sensible world, post-Hellenistic Christian man is conceived to be corrupt in his innermost being, in his will. In no sense is man a disguised divinity. The spirit of life which God breathed into him was not God's own spirit, but a created spirit. (1)

Now, the distinction between heavenly and ordinary solitude was possible on the ground that subjects of both inhabited an intelligible cosmic order and that one of them, the subject of heavenly solitude, had the ability of entering into direct contact with the very top of this cosmic hierarchy, to raise itself to a vision or knowledge of the object of all desires. The distress of heavenly solitude is caused by the wedge driven between the soul and her original divine nature, that is, by the sensible-physical interruption of the original supersensible unity. Yet the perception of this unity at the same time insures its recovery because in her noetic vision of the eternal Forms the soul catches a glimpse of herself, of her own eternal nature. Thus the soul's self-knowledge, which leads to the realization of her native immortality, proves to be the key to the moral self-sufficiency necessary for

the overcoming of heavenly solitude.

The advantage of inhabiting a teleological system where self-knowledge coincides with and is derived from knowledge of the highest cosmic principle is that self-knowledge in itself guarantees moral self-sufficiency. To discover the underlying unity tying my soul to, as it were, the essence of the cosmic order, is to realize that whatever I appear to be separated from does not belong to me essentially, does not belong to my essential nature. And *this* is the ultimate form of self-sufficiency. The Greek exhortation to self-knowledge, (*gnosi seauton*), unlike its Christian echo, (*reditus in seipsum*), is not a call for an 'inward turn'. This much must be clear from considering that here the condition of knowing one's real self is the knowledge of reality on a cosmic level, the knowledge of the eternal Forms. The soul's ascent, the very existence of this concept, depends on the soul's engagement with the sensible under the guidance of Eros. The direct target of the ascetic life, as I suggested before, is the sensible. The final destination is Being or Reality, but the starting point is not Nothing. For, here the sensible is conceived to be *between* Being and Nothing, and as such a suitable context of emerging toward Being. If, however, the human soul turns out to be fundamentally distinct from the highest Reality (God), and if the sensible realm turns out to be a creation out of Nothing, then there is exactly nothing to be gained for man by straining himself in either of these two

directions. The ideas of perfection, eternity and immortality are still present in man's thought but in contemplating them he can no longer recognize his own nature. For self-understanding he now must turn to examining his subjective existence, and this self-examination undertaken as *itineraris mentis* must end with the unsurprising discovery of *infirmitas mentis*. Man's parallel perception of his own weakness and the infinite power of his Creator results in a new configuration of solitude. In this type, the subject and the object of separation, required by the logic of this concept, are indeed present, but now the possibility of their union is excluded *in principle*. The simultaneous awareness of the object of separation and of the absolute inaccessibility of that object raises the question whether the concept of solitude under these circumstances does not fall short of its logical requirements. It seems that to experience solitude, to 'feel alone' it is not enough to be aware of not being entirely alone; the subject's awareness of an at least theoretically possible union with the object of his longing is also necessary. How can longing arise in me for something the possession of which my very nature prohibits? On the other hand, isn't this type of longing the most real because the most extreme? And, isn't the experience of separation from and longing for the absolutely inaccessible the highest, the most extreme form of solitude?

§ 24 The flower of nominalist theology: man, a product of indifferent divine creation.

The metaphysically inaccessible highest object of desire I have been speaking of is the *deus absconditus* of nominalist theology. (2) This God, unlike the God of neoplatonist, and even Thomist theology, is no longer constrained by the universal Ideas, by the eternal Forms in His creation of the world. Any limitation imposed on the process of divine creation would be, in the words of Ockham, "like putting God in a box". If the spirit of man is no reflection of the divine spirit, nor is the rest of creation, the world, a manifestation of God's true nature as absolute power. The difference between God's *potentia absoluta*, (what He is capable of creating) and His *potentia ordinata*, (what He in fact has created) is the difference between infinite potentiality and finite actuality or between infinite freedom and its finite manifestation.

The necessary condition of original creation is absolute freedom. To say that this divine creation does not require of God a glance at some eternal patterns, (*exempla*), i.e., that He does not need 'ideas' before He can set to work is to say that the infinite divine freedom is not *libertas*, (freedom to truth) but *indifferentia*, (*idem facere vel non facere posse*). Just how vastly far man is left behind in all this should be clear from considering that the reality we are trying to grasp through the categories of our intellect is the

product of a will which is indifferent to any categories, intellectual or otherwise. So, what we end up grasping is a limited, contingent reality, the temporal existence of individual things, while the universal ground, (*ratio*) of these existents remains incomprehensible. What prevents man from rising to the metaphysical occasion is no longer a psychological weakness, the forgetfulness of his soul. That weakness, in any case, allowed for exceptions and thus for the philosopher/non-philosopher, and heavenly/ordinary solitude distinctions. This new type of *infirmitas*, on the other hand, extends to the ontological level: man as a product of indifferent divine creation is, by the very structure of his being, and without ecxeption, incapable of rising to the vision of eternal reality, and consequently, incapable of making a moral progression toward it.

This then is the peculiar position in which man finds himself: although the sensible realm reminds him of its Creator, he must live with the realization that this world does not contain a single hint to the nature of the creative Intellect. God simply does not need the creation of this, or any other particular world to exercise the freedom of His will. It is not a condition of possessing infinite freedom that it be exercised. After all, infinite freedom is infinite because there are no conditions attached to it. A short way to characterize God's relation to His creations is to say that it is nowhere coded into His essence that He should create *anything*, or that once He does bring something into

existence He should impart any of His essence to it. The world is a metaphysical space created between God and Nothing, and littered with existents without divine essences. An existent without essence is an accident, which has being only in a qualified sense. It is not an *ens*, (being) but an *ens entis*, (a being of a being), like a color that exists only as a color of something. So, all creatures, including man, are divine accidents, or tremors, as it were, of God's will.

Only individuals exist. The real meaning of this fundamentally theological claim is that contrary to Greek and neoplatonist Christian doctrines nothing stands between God and His creation. No ether of universals, (realm of Ideas, etc.,) to connect creatures with each other and with their Creator. There is nothing metaphysical about the common air individuals breathe. It's just air. Similarities which give rise to the illusion of extra-mental universal concepts are simply similarities of facts. In other words, things do not resemble each other by their resemblance; relations are not things. The uniformity and regularity of Nature, the interdependence and intricate relations of individuals, all this is a reflection of nothing but the indifference of the divine will, which in turn is a reflection of nothing at all, and especially not of something His intellect might be compelled to recognize. In the absence of mediating universals, all individuals are ontological 'absolutes' (Ockham), that is, every distinction between them is a 'real

distinction', (*distinctio realis*), or, nothing real is univocal with anything else. Although our ability to at least conceive the existence of God presupposes that the term, 'being' can be predicated univocally of Him and of us, in so applying this general term, no reality corresponds to it. 'Being' stands for all beings, not for something in which all beings participate. No real thing participates in the nature of any other real thing, this is another way of saying that individual absolutes alone exist, and to these all relations can be reduced. This results directly from God's decision to remain hidden beyond His indifferent creation. Since there is no third element in which both He and the world partake, whatever form of enlightenment man wishes to find he must look for it in the world where its Creator does not appear.

If God in creating the world had to pay attention to universals, if His will had to obey His intellect grasping the same universal ideas we do in our utterances of them, then these would have to be more than mere sounds (*flatus vocis*). They would have to allow an insight by which His nature could become intelligible to us, fulfilling the philosopher's dream of understanding the Whole. But, of course, any concession on the part of the divine creative will to previously existing general principles would mean that the world could not have been created *ex nihilo*. So, given the absolute freedom of God's will which makes Him sublimely indifferent to any overarching general ideas, cognition of

reality is possible for man only through the immediate, 'intuitive', apprehension of individual entities. Besides introspection, the single source of knowledge is sense perception. The idea that modern empiricism has its origin in the exalted theological project of maximizing God's freedom is all the more worth contemplating since the relation between empiricism and metaphysics in general, (never mind theology), is considered to be an eternal and uncomprimising opposition by contemporary devotees of this celebrated creed.

§ 25. God as an incomprehensible exception. Immanent vs. transcendent objects of desire.

The unbridgeable gap between God and man is an inevitable consequence of the fact of creation, which is an arrival, a coming to be, an event, and as such it does not reflect the utterly uneventful existence of God. An absolutely original event can have only an absolutely uneventful existence for its ground; the creator of a temporal world cannot Himself be subject to time. What the world does reflect, and must for its entire duration, is the circumstance of its birth, that primeval sequence of before and after, of cause and effect. There is no sense in which the divine being could have a history, but the world cannot escape it. Ever since the first effect followed the first cause, the existence of the

world is an unrelenting sequence of causes and effects. Men inhabiting the *kosmos* may have felt being thrown into the labyrinth of the sensible realm but there was a way out for those who remembered their original point of departure. But for man as a product of divine creation there is no hope of escaping through self-enlightenment. The created intellect, acting on a natural impulse, may try to retrace its steps along the chain of causality but there are clear guarantees that instead of an ascent to the vision of the divine *prima causa* this journey will lead to a dead end. For one thing, God can disrupt the chain of causality at any point. He can, if He so wishes, dispense with any given secondary cause, that is, with any sensible object and, acting as an immediate efficient cause, create in the mind the perception of that object directly. This amounts to the perception of non-existing things, the possibility of which renders the sequence of causes and effects, and thus the very laws of nature, arbitrary so that understanding them will reveal nothing about God's nature except what we have known all along: His absolutely free will and inexhaustible power. Another guarantee of God's inaccessibility is that man can never, like his Creator, bypass the laws of nature, he cannot take day trips outside the confines of causality. Although the concept of God requires that man conceive of Him as an exception from every temporally mediated cause-effect relation, this exception is incomprehensible. What the *intellectus creatus* cannot grasp is the *ratio* on account of which God does not need a cause, not for His existence, and not for the creation of

the world. Man, on the other hand, depends on his creator not only for his existence but also for his understanding the ground of this existence. That this latter cannot come from understanding the world, is nothing new. What *is* new is that unlike the man of *kosmos*, created man can never by his own effort transcend the sensible world; he is not equipped for the task. "Not immortal O Greeks, is the soul in itself, but mortal" (3)

It is not difficult to understand how an immortal soul entangled in a web of transience could become consumed by an overwhelming sense of heavenly solitude. What is puzzling here is that for most souls, in spite of their divine nature, solitude is an earthly matter, an ordinary frustration of desires aimed at ordinary objects. The explanation is that these souls are forgetful. But how can an immortal soul forget, and moreover, strive to forget her immortal nature? Similarly, it is easy to see that created man, given his genealogy discussed above, cannot share in the divine essence and thus his soul must be irrevocably mortal. But how can he then encounter immortality even as an idea? The man of *kosmos*, because of the underlying affinity and continuity between the eternal reality without him and within him, can be said to be at least potentially one with the highest object of his desire. Since ultimate reality is immanent in it, the *kosmos* itself cannot be, and does not have to be transcended by its inhabitants to reach their *summum bonum*. There are plenty of reasons for the immortal souls to be wary and skeptical

about the sensible realm but their relationship to the cosmic order as a whole is of fundamental trust. Created man, by contrast, finds himself in a world where ultimate reality, identified with the Creator as *ens realissimum*, is strictly transcendent. Conscious of having been created by an infinitely distant, incomprehensible power, man's relation to his transcendent object of desire is one of alienation, (*peregrinatio*). If it is a curious fact about immortality that a soul possessing it can yet lose sight of it, it is no less puzzling that a soul entirely devoid of it,(the created soul), could as much as entertain the notion of it. The psychological weakness of an immortal soul forgetting her own divine strength is matched here by the apparent psychological strength of a mortal soul attempting to overcome her ontological weakness, a hopeless, structural isolation from her transcendent object of desire.

It is time to reconsider the objection that isolation from a metaphysically inaccessible, incomprehensible, transcendent object of desire does not fulfill the logical requirements of the concept of solitude. For, the logic of this concept demands an existing subject and object, whereas here a subject thinks itself sundered from an unknown and in principle unknowable object, which is as good as imagining oneself sundered from a non-existent thing. Longing for things that do not exist just doesn't qualify as solitude; it is better characterized as a state of mind in which one reflects on and laments one's

limitations and imperfections. It appeared before that the reality of Ideas or Forms, and so the possibility of their becoming real objects of desire could also be challenged, but I have dismissed that protest as a murmur of partisan metaphysics. Now, however, more is needed to show that the isolation of man from God does in fact manifest the logical structure of solitude. The trouble is that the nominalist concept of God looks indistinguishable from the Kantian thing-in-itself, a thing whose existence is ideal from man's point of view and real only from a transcendental point of view. This God then is a thing-in-itself that has become a subject and as such He alone knows the reality of His existence. It is only by adding to this picture the nominalist theological doctrines, subtracted by Kant that God as a proper object of desire will emerge.

§ 26. The inward turn. Faith: a mode of knowledge by which man is simultaneously assureed of the existence and infinite aloofness of God.

Man cannot remember his way back to God, for his alienation is not a result of forgetting; he cannot discover Him in His creation, for that is merely an arbitrary fragment of His will; and finally he cannot apply to Him directly, for there is no common language, a language of universal Ideas, in which He could be addressed. Yet, God

remains to be man's ultimate object of desire, for, as Ockham says, "No object other than God can satisfy the will, because no act which is directed to something other than God excludes all anxiety and sadness. For, whatever created object may be possessed, the will can desire something else with anxiety and sadness."(4)

Under these circumstances the 'inward turn' is the last resort. Unable to ascend to God Himself, man climbs onto an inner stage where God descends to him revealing the reality of His existence, communicating the knowledge that is forever unavailable to the human science of divinity, to natural theology. While the inward turn is the origin of modern subjectivity, this inner arena, (*forum internum)* is the birthplace of modern consciousness. The latter is divided, by the circumstances of its birth, into two separate regions. One is conscience where the revealed knowledge of God, (*recte scire*), appears, and the other is man's inner experience of negativity, his recognition of his ontological weakness, (*infirmitas*), of his inability to reach by his own effort that which he desires above all.

The Platonic soul, raising herself to the height of the eternal Forms, gains knowledge of them at their level. Created man, on the other hand, gets to know God not on God's but on his own level. This knowledge is handed down to him and he receives it through faith. It is because knowledge through faith is obtained not at the rank of the object but

of the subject of desire that it can never unite the subject with the object -- the subject does not *conform* to the object by such knowledge. And it is for this reason that although man carries the knowledge of God in his consciousness the latter must remain divided. As a result of divine revelation, God Himself does not become internal to man, only man's alienation from Him does in the form of a sharp division and opposition between an inner sense of depravity and conscience, between *infirmitas* and *recte scire*. One way to explain why man's consciousness has to suffer this internal division is that the divine revelation received therein leaves the inaccessibility, incomprehensibility and transcendent character of God unaltered. At no point can man's reason make itself useful in receiving the divine message, for this message simply bypasses the medium of reason's deployment. God, as we have seen, can on occasion dispense with a secondary cause and create the effect in us directly; we recognize this as a miracle. But He can also take the totality of causes and effects, the world, and bypassing it as a single secondary cause, create in our consciousness a direct effect of His being. This unmediated message, which instead of reason, faith alone can register, makes the highest object of man's desire known to him.

The logic of the concept of solitude does not require that the object of isolation be known by the intellect. The logical structure is complete, and falls in the category of

'classical', as long as the object is determined in some way or another. In this case, it is determined through faith. It cannot be done in any other way. No longer within the reach of the intellect, knowledge of the supreme object of desire has to enter consciousness from outside, it is the imported item of *extrinsecus lumen*. At any time, God can turn the world, physical laws and all, upside down without the slightest effect on His own nature. This is what makes the world a metaphysical vacuum, devoid of all reliable clues that could lead human reason to God. Faith, the only way out of this void, is the reverse of self-enlightenment. So much so that its point of contact with consciousness, with the inner arena is not, properly speaking, internal to man. Conscience is not a pre-existing space in man waiting to be filled with the Word of God, but a space created by the divine revelation itself.

The man of *kosmos* felt at home with his object of isolation. Whether a subject of heavenly or ordinary solitude, he did not doubt the he and the object his longing shared one and the same space. If he was the former, he thought of this space as essentially metaphysical, if the latter, as essentially empirical. In either case, the subject of solitude was conscious of having been carved out of the same substance as the object of his desire. The hidden God of nominalist theology, however, shares no characteristics with His creatures who long for Him. As mentioned before, the background context

of heavenly and ordinary solitude is an intelligible order to which man relates with a fundamental trust. But when this *mundus intelligibilis* is replaced by a *mundus creatus*, the trust turns into an anxiety of eternal alienation from a being who appears to have gathered up all intelligibility in Himself, but who descends into our consciousness only to declare His existence. The trust turns into anxiety when man realizes that the created world as such, including himself, has no bearing on his alienation, not on the problem itself, nor on its possible resolution. In other words, it is not something in him, like in the case of heavenly solitude, or something in the world outside him, like in ordinary solitude, that isolates him from his *summum bonum*. The barrier is the very nature of the object for which he longs. Alienation from such an object causes man more than mere anxiety; it causes him to realize that his anxiety is simply irrelevant. The mode in which he relates to God, unlike the mode, (Eros), in which the soul relates to the Ideas, just does not effect the connection between him and his object of isolation. For, once again, this connection, the contact, takes place on his own subjective level, in his consciousness, and this level, the rank of created things in general, is so far below God that there can be no real relation between Him and things, no matter what relation things perceive to have to Him.

§ 27. A negative participation in eternity. From this, hope, a necessary ingredient of solitude is extracted.

There is a good and simple reason why the man of *kosmos* has no conscience. It is that eternal Forms, or Ideas do not have to declare their existence to the soul, in which, consequently, no room has to be made for the revelation. Since they are immanent in the *kosmos*, such revelation would be superfluous. By contrast, because God is a transcendent being, man's knowledge of Him depends entirely on the divine announcement. We have seen how the acquisition of this knowledge completes the logical structure of solitude. The question before us now is whether the sole purpose of revelation, of creating man with a conscience, is to make him fully aware of his extreme solitude, of his eternal alienation from his Creator. The suspicion arises that the *deus absconditus* of nominalist theology is also a *deus malignus*, that the acts of creation and revelation are reflections of evil intent. We must keep in mind however that the hidden God of nominalism is still a Christian God, and as such He adds to the inexplicable acts of creation and revelation the equally inexplicable, because purely unmotivated and uncaused, gesture of salvation. The God of Christianity does not descend to man and declare His existence to him in order to conduct an experiment by setting up the conditions of extreme solitude, but to rescue him from his radical isolation.

Just as God's perfection includes all imaginable perfections, man's ontological weakness entails all possible imperfections and insufficiencies. The consequence of man's utter dependence on God for his own existence is that he must depend on the divine creative power for his knowledge and desire of his *summum bonum* as well. After creation, man is still just a mortal vessel, which may, if God so pleases, be filled with the knowledge of immortality, that is, of Himself. In the subject of heavenly solitude, the desire for the highest good arose with self-knowledge, with remembering the immortal nature of one's soul. Now, however, after creating him, God must also create in man the desire for) Himself. *Da quod iubes* (you give us what you command), as St. Augustine sums it up. (5) This echoes the lines from Romans: "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which was given onto us". (6) The trouble is that unlike before, now knowledge and desire of the highest good do not harmonize. By knowing God through faith, man does not get closer to a fellowship with Him. The revelation does not change man's mortal nature, nor does it alter the fact that the single barrier between man and the highest object of his desire is the very nature of that selfsame object. Man experiences this as the ultimate form of solitude, a position of being left behind *forever* by that which *is* for ever. A more complete absorption of the idea of mortality can hardly be conceived.

The radical separation between mortals and the immortal God seems to unify the playing field of mortal desires and their frustrations. Since all souls are mortal, there can be no distinction between heavenly and ordinary solitude based on two disparate psychological states: one in which the soul remembers her immortal nature and longs to align it with the eternal Ideas, and another in which the soul fails to recognize her own divinity and is, instead, filled with the absurd desire to match a vaguely intuited notion of eternity with her favorite temporal objects. Created man's self-knowledge, the inward turn, reveals nothing but the fact of eternal alienation from his Creator. Here, once again, the question arises whether the awareness of eternal alienation from one's object of desire can be the source of any form of solitude at all. For, measured against the logical criteria of this concept, the new state of divided consciousness, the finality of the mortal/immortal division, appears to exclude the possibility of solitude in the same way as the psychological state of airtight solipsism would. If I am sealed off from my object of desire for eternity, I might as well be totally alone as far as the possible company of that object is concerned. And, if I am totally alone, the relational concept of solitude can never arise in my mind.

The experience of being separated forever from that, which is forever, finds its most melancholy expression in the Greek elegies before Plato's time.

"No mortal man is truly blessed but all are wretched whom the sun beholds". (Solon) (7)

"Few and evil are our days of life; but everlasting is the sleep which we must sleep beneath the earth". (Simonides) (8)

"But precious Youth is short-lived as a dream, and ugly baleful Eld is hanging plumb over our heads"... (9) " It is best of all things for the sons of earth not to be born, nor to see the bright rays of the sun, or else after birth to pass as soon as possible the gates of death, and to be deep down beneath a weight of earth". (Theognis) (10)

"Brief is the growing-time of joy for mortals, and briefly too doth its flower fall to earth ıken by fell fate. Things of a day! What are we -- and what are we not! A shadow's dream is man". (Pindar)(11)

If these melancholy expressions are taken to be sentiments of absolutely hopeless isolation from immortality, then they cannot be regarded as demonstrations of human solitude, -- the lack of an at least theoretically possible union with the object of desire would forbid it. Yet, such a possibility is implied throughout these lamentations. The

common subject belonging to these voices, just like the subject of ordinary solitude, partakes in the idea of eternity unwittingly. It may be lamentable that we all must die, but our sleep is *everlasting*; we may regret now that the gods have abandoned us, but they have abandoned us *for ever*; and we may soon have to pass through the gates of death, but then we shall exchange temporal existence for an *eternal* non-being. This negative participation in eternity is the common source of hope for the Greek elegian and for the Christian follower of the nominalist God. Although it, in itself, does not make man immortal, death, as an escape from temporal existence, seems to be a step in the right direction, toward eternity. Of course, applying the notion of eternity to non-being is not less absurd than applying it, as the subject of ordinary solitude does, to temporal objects. Yet, it is from this absurdity that both the elegian and the Christian believer extract the hope necessary for the experience of solitude. Few and evil are our days of life, says Simonides, *but* everlasting is our sleep, he adds. The hope of escaping temporal existence emerges simultaneously with the knowledge of eternity, or in theological terms: no revelation without salvation; the notion of the latter is necessarily bound up with, or built into, the notion of the former.

§ 28. *Eros as* ***amor ex misera****, vs. Agape as* ***amor ex misrecordia.*** *The illusion of self-redemption vs. the reality of received redemption.*

Salvation, then, is the fulfillment of the hope born at the moment of revelation. If this revelation comes through self-enlightenment (catharsis), then redemption will be self-redemption; if it comes as *extrinsecus lumen* then redemption is received as a gift. In either case, it is the end of all solitude, the final reconciliation between the subject and its highest object of desire. What difference does it make then if man arrives at it on his own, or if it is given to him? It doesn't seem to matter. However, before concluding that what we have before us is an example of two different systems of thought converging on the same truth, we should remind ourselves that the metaphysics of received redemption is largely a result of a spiritual uprising against the metaphysics of self-redemption. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates talks about light as "the bond which links together sight and visibility" in the sensible world; the source of this light is the sun. In the intellectual world, the sun is the highest object of all desires, the eternal Idea of the Good, which makes all other ideas, 'things of the mind' knowable to the soul. For, "the soul is like the eye: when resting upon that on which truth and being shine, the soul perceives and understands and is radiant with intelligence". (508c) Light, then, is the living element, which in its literal sense connects the eye with the sensible objects, while in its

metaphorical sense directs the soul to the eternal Ideas. It is the central task of the Christian revolt to put this living element of self-redemption in its proper place: "...and they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the lord God giveth them light..." (Rev. 22:5)

The engine driving the soul toward a state of self-sufficiency is Eros, a love on the part of the lower for the higher, which is possible only because the lower has within it traces of the higher. The Christian, and especially the nominalist Christian objection to this is that man has no traces of the 'higher' within him and consequently, Eros is nothing but a desperate longing for something fundamentally alien, something that man does not and cannot have. It is essentially *amor ex misera*, an acquisitive love born out of want and desperation. As an unceasing will to possess what it does not have, Eros is never without an agenda, a motivation, an efficient cause, and therefore cannot reach beyond the realm of causality up to God who is pure spontaneity. Instead of self-sufficiency, Eros can create only a dangerous illusion of it. In his search for the higher world, man may indeed transcend his immediate sensible surroundings, and looking down from these new heights may imagine himself well on his way to a union with his *summum bonum*. This, however, turns out to be mere conceit, *superbia*. The ideal subject of heavenly solitude, the philosopher, in his attempt to 'take heaven by storm', claims to remember his

divine origin but in fact is forgetful of the vast distance separating his ascending soul from the divine. Picturing himself an inhabitant of the Isle of the Blessed, he is, in reality, entrapped by a false sense of security; aiming at self-sufficiency and self-redemption, he becomes a prisoner of his own self-satisfaction and self-delusion. The way to God can lead only through God's love for man. The necessary condition of redemption is that Eros be replaced by Agape, *amor ex misera* by *amor ex miserecordia*. The Augustinian distinction between a love that is due to the dryness and neediness of the soul (*indigentiae siccitate*), and a love that springs out of sheer fullness and benevolence (*beneficentiae ubertate*), is another reminder of the difference between mortal longing and divine grace. If the soul is not immortal by nature then Eros is mere mortal longing, and the defining characteristic of mortal love is that it is always intentional, it must have an object to which the longing subject relates as does desire to satisfaction, or cause to effect. Since God transcends the chain of causes and effects as much as that of desires and satisfactions, He cannot, after all, be the highest object of man's desire.

Given man's ontological weakness, his attempt at self-redemption necessarily originates and ends in illusion. The soul, rising above the transient world, expecting to catch a glimpse of the eternal Ideas, to 'contemplate the vast ocean of Beauty itself', finds herself in the metaphysical vacuum I have talked about before, a vacuum left by a God whose

being incorporates eternity and all possible perfections in itself. But man mistakes this emptiness for the rarefied atmosphere he associates with the nearness of God. Measuring his proximity to the divine by the distance he had traveled from the sensible realm below, he is dizzy with a hollow satisfaction. The sole remedy for the delusion of self-redemption is the reality of divine *humilitas*. "To cure man's superbia God's Son descended and became humble". (12) To put it in the simplest theological terms, man's failure to redeem himself is the failure of the flesh to become Word. Now, if redemption is possible at all, it must occur through the realization of the sole remaining possibility, through the Word becoming flesh. Incarnation fills the logical gap between revelation and redemption, a gap created by the Christian concept of man as a fallen creature, on the one hand, and of his possible salvation on the other. As we have seen, revelation in itself cannot raise man from his fallen state. For this abstract knowledge to have a redeeming effect, God's tangible presence, through His Son, is necessary. What man could not acquire by his own effort on God's level, he must now receive as a gift on his own level.

§ 29. *The Cartesian unmasking of the nominalist God. From heavenly to cosmic solitude*

It may very well be that the metaphysics of self-redemption leans on a mistaken assumption about man's essentially divine nature, but the metaphysics of received

redemption fares no better in its assessment of human psychology. If man is incapable of redeeming himself, he is, in the end, also unwilling to receive his salvation *ab externis*. Christian theology interprets this stubbornness as a proof of man's fallen condition, of his corruption. Such interpretation results from the attempt to identify with the objective divine point of view. But man, as the subject of solitude, has his own reasons for rejecting a final reconciliation between himself and the highest object of his longing on his own level. For one thing, the nominalist God is too much like Yahwe of the Old Testament whose existence is revealed to His people not as a truth but as a command. Even if the truth of divine existence cannot be discovered in himself, man still thinks of truth in general as something to be acknowledged freely, and not as something to obey. Also, man has second thoughts about receiving God's spontaneous, purely unmotivated love because he cannot

rid himself of the suspicion that there *is* a reason for this love, only he is deemed unworthy to be let in on this. Man cannot help seeing God's spontaneity as a piece of irrationality against which he reasserts his own rationality: if I am not worthy of redemption why am I yet redeemed? God sends His Son to mediate, as it were, between Inaccessibility and Corruption but man comes to perceive this as an attempt to reconcile irrationality with reason. No mediation is effective here. Anything less than a direct access to God Himself, including His reason for Grace, leaves man with a residue

of sadness and anxiety, with symptoms of ultimate alienation. Christ the mediator is crucified out of sheer frustration with the idea of mediation itself; Incarnation is seen as the devaluation of the highest value.

This then is the beginning of a counterrevolution, which follows the revolt against the metaphysics of self-redemption. The purpose, the central demand of that revolt was, paradoxically, the surrender of man's claim to any divinity within him. Eternity, Immortality, Freedom, Autonomy were all flung away as usurped privileges and bestowed upon the Creator, a distant, omnipotent Will. The aim of the counterrevolution, led by Descartes, is to return to man's original program of actively seeking assimilation to higher, and ultimately to the highest levels of reality. The ' ' slogan of that program was to "imitate the order of the heavens (13) -- Cicero's formulation to which the ancients, from Plato to the Stoics would have subscribed, even if the latter would have meant 'heavens' in a literal while the former in an abstract sense. Man was born to contemplate the cosmos and imitate it. Of course, when Descartes returns to this grand enterprise, he encounters a very different highest reality. Instead of the gods of Greek mythology, or the Ideas, or the self-thinking Thought, or the Logos, he faces the nominalist God of Christianity; a transcendent, incomprehensible existence instead of an immanent, intelligible essence. The trouble with trying to imitate a transcendent and

incomprehensible God is that no nomos emanates from Him, no guaranteed, non-arbitrary laws of nature, or moral conduct. Moreover, for all we know, He might turn out to be an evil, deceiving demon. This *deus deceptor* is the God of the first two Meditations. Subjectively understood (14), He is the projection of man's ontological weakness, his doubt (15) and uncertainties. Objectively, He is the demiurge of gnosticism who has created this dark world, this *tibil* with the sole purpose of entrapping the light, the transcendental inner self of man that connects him with the highest God. It is this extra-mundane, 'true God' who alone can be the object of imitation, and whose existence Descartes sets out to prove in Meditation III. and V.

Who is this true God? Determining His identity is the key to the entire Meditations, to Descartes' original intention. To grasp the nature of what Descartes took to be the highest reality is much more vital than to make sport of challenging the rationality of the proofs he provides for its existence; (for, generally speaking, metaphysics is logically prior to logic). Only those who take Descartes' professed intention at face value fail to understand this. He did indeed say that he would seek truth by the light of reason alone. But how could he possibly have kept this promise when his heart was set on assimilating to a God of inscrutable rationality?

The nominalist God which Descartes has to face proves to be, upon examination, an unstable compound of radical gnostic dualism. The Meditations is the laboratory where this compound is broken down into its constituting elements, the *deus deceptor* and the *deus verax*. The first can be known through His creation but this knowledge is worthless since it does not lead to the true God. The nature of the second is not revealed anywhere in the cosmos, only in the transcendental inner self of man, in his mind where He is known as an idea. Heavenly solitude gains an entirely new meaning here. Instead of being separated *from* the cosmos, from its essence represented by the Ideas, man is cut off *by* the cosmos, by its essence and all, from the true God. The road to this God is opened precisely by the knowledge, (*gnosis*), of being trapped in this alien world, of being the 'the light exiled from the Light, the life exiled from the Life'. Putting an end to this new, cosmic solitude calls for the destruction of the world, which is what Cartesian asceticism, the 'withdrawal of the mind from the senses', sets out to do. The revolt against the metaphysics of received redemption goes beyond merely recapturing the notion of self-redemption and culminates in self-anointment, in the deification of the subject. For, up to Descartes, the subject, that-which-underlies-thought, had been regarded not as a pure ego but as a substance capable of taking on accidents; the foundation of thought lay in concrete beings. Now however, the certainty and truth of thought finds its *fundamentum inconcussum* in thinking itself. The world, which now

appears to me only as a representation according to the laws of my thinking, has become an object. God manifests His freedom as *indifferentia* by not revealing Himself in the world. Man, by objectifying the world shows that he too can transcend it, be free of it.

Descartes' first and deepest intention is the deification of the subject, and epistemological salvation through systematic doubt is the means by which this intention is carried out. Contrary to appearances, the realization that this world is a metaphysical vacuum does not come as a result of the empirical employment of systematic doubt. It is the other way around. The divine gesture of world-annihilating doubt is contingent on the a priori premise of the emptiness of the world. The mind withdraws from the senses not in frustration with the sense-world but in frustration with a God, the *deus absconditus*, who has hidden Himself from His creature. The Cartesian project is a purely metaphysical one; after all, we must not forget, a revolt against the nominalist God is at the same time a revolt against empiricism.

Chapter 4. From Cosmic to Divine Solitude

§ 30. Overcoming cosmic solitude: its necessary condition: the destruction of the created world

The uneasy balance within the concept of the nominalist God is held by the two opposing forces of gnostic dualism. Man's salvation lies in the realization of this fateful dichotomy, in the understanding that God can be hidden either because it pleases Him to deceive man, or quite to the contrary, because the world, which is not His creation displeases Him in its baseness. The true God has nothing to do with this world; His names in the gnostic tradition are 'the Alien', 'the Other', 'the Nameless', 'the Hidden'. From the gnosis of this dichotomy, man proceeds to establish his kinship with God. First he notes that 'the Alien' applies univocally to God and to himself, with the only difference that while God is alien *to* this world, man is alien *in* it. It is natural to conclude from this that man shares this divine trait with God because he himself is divine. God and man are equally alone and they both have the world, *haec cellula creatoris* in Marcion's contemptuous phrase, to thank for their solitude. The doubting, certainty-

craving Cartesian subject is the subject of this new, cosmic solitude, the 'light enveloped in darkness', the 'lost pearl enclosed in an animal shell hidden in the deep'. The pearl is the divine spark, the spirit, (*pneuma*), or in Cartesian language, the *res cogitans*. Overcoming cosmic solitude, assimilating to the transcendent true God requires the destruction of this godless world. The surviving residue is the Cartesian subject, a worldless God.

Overcoming the ancient variety of solitude did not require the annihilation of the cosmos, only the transcendence of the sensible realm. Since Ideas, the highest objects of desire, were considered immanent to the cosmos, access to them could be seen on the analogy of the access to all other beings of sense perception. It went without saying that the notion of beings standing forth as valid in themselves without the mediation, that is, the representation of a subject, could be extended to the pure structure of beings as well. It was taken for granted that structure and continuity, or essence and existence belonged together. True, in the teleological hierarchy of the cosmos sensible things ranked below intelligible things due to the instability, or discontinuity, of their structure, but such arrangement was part of the 'certainty' of the order and perfection of the whole. (1) When, however, the highest essence comes to be seen as a transcendent, arbitrary Will, and the world as a manifestation of this Will then the continuity of no structure is

guaranteed any more (2) -- essence is sundered from existence. The only certainty to be found in this new metaphysics is in the free self-determination of the divine Will, in *potentia absoluta*. It is this aspect of the nominalist God that has nothing to do with creation. The other aspect, known to man through the product of *potentia ordinata*, the created world, is easily transformed into an independent and opposing power, into a God who deceives by means of His creation. For, the product of *potentia ordinata* is but a jumble of discontinuous structures. The truthful aspect of God, i.e., the true God is the non-creating one. The certainty discovered by the Cartesian subject is a certainty founded not in any structure of the world but in thought itself. To demonstrate that this thought is related to a substance, the subject must prove that after the elimination of the world there still remains something to do the thinking, that there is in fact a ***res*** *cogitans* left on the scene instead of a mere *cogitatio*. In other words, the subject is facing the momentous task of disentangling and extricating himself from the world without ceasing to exist as *something*. And this, thought alone can accomplish.

The Augustinian inward turn has now evolved into a self-reflection whereby the subject in his quest for certainty, that is for redemption, escape from the *tibil*, reflects his way out of the world back to the light of divine reason. To the objection that all this takes place merely in thought the answer is that in this and no other manner can the subject

demonstrate his autonomy. Self-redemption is possible only in thought; there is no other way to the true God than through a clear and distinct perception of His essence. The real trouble is that once the world is left behind, and the essence of the subject, (thinking), mingles with the divine essence in that acosmic homeland, the existence of both essences becomes equally difficult to prove. Ironically, it is quite easy to show the reality of the deceiving God. For, He has left behind a trail of evidence, namely, the world, His creation. It makes no difference that this creation might be wholly an illusion designed to mislead. As Descartes famously argues in Meditations II., from the mere fact of deception it follows that there exists at least something suffering this malice, and so, from this same fact it also follows that there exists something perpetrating the malicious deception. Arguing in this way is employing a special variety of the cosmological argument. I take the evident, and contingent existence of something, (the fact of my deception), as an effect and from here I proceed back to its necessary cause, (the *deceptor*); I move from an existence to its originating essence. Now, since the true, non-creative God has left no traces in the world, to show His reality a different kind of proof is needed, one that proceeds from His essence to His existence. Yet, before employing the ontological proof, Descartes does make use of the cosmological one to show the existence of the true God. It is remarkable that while he infers from the imperfection of the world to the existence of an imperfect God, a deceiving demon, from the finite

imperfection of his own being he argues to the existence of an infinite, perfect being. This is possible only because he possesses a most powerful idea of an infinite, perfect being. The idea may have a transcendental origin but it is embedded in an empirical subject, and so it is a contingent effect of a necessary cause. The cosmological arguments of *Meditations III* are the initial steps toward the true God by a subject who is still held by the cosmos, the realm of causality, temporality and contingency.

§ 31. The ontological argument: The subordination of its logic to the aims of the gnostic mission

The great ambition of the *Meditations V* is an escape from a God, who reveals His (evil) essence in the world, to a separate God whose essence is accessible to man only in an equally separate region: in his thought. This is how the counter-revolutionary aim of self-redemption escalates into the deification of the subject. Instead of waiting for the divine descent, for thought (the Word) becoming being (flesh), the Cartesian subject becomes pure thought. Of course, now that the subject has left the world behind, his own existence will be just as much a matter of demonstration as that of the true God he joins. Whether it is the existence of the *res cogitans*, or of the *deus verax* that is in question, everything depends on the possibility or impossibility of concluding the existence of

an essence from the essence itself. In sum, everything depends on the validity of the ontological argument. This issue is far from settled by Kant's celebrated refutation of the ontological proof. For, properly speaking, it is not so much a refutation of a fundamentally anti-nominalist/anti-empiricist project as an assertion of his own nominalist empiricist leanings. To say, as he does, that when I think of an essence as the highest reality, (without imperfections), it still remains a question whether it exists or not, is indeed to call attention to the fact that the certainty of God's essence and the certainty of God's existence can be thought separately. But the Cartesian/gnostic reply to this is that it is precisely because of the irrevocable split between essence and existence that the realm of the *potentia ordinata*, the empirical world, (with the empiricists in it), must be left behind. Similarly, the claim that the inferences from the proposition, 'I think', admit only of a transcendental employment of the understanding which employment excludes any admixture of experience (3) will not be seen as a devastating criticism by someone whose intention is to transcend, in the very first principle of his philosophy, the empirical employment of the understanding.

Descartes' *Meditations* is not an exercise in epistemological self-restraint but in soteriology. It is indeed impossible to prove the unity of essence and existence in a world born from their separation, but there is a difference between trying to prove this

unity and trying to recover it. Leaving the cosmos behind means, among other things, abandoning traditional (Aristotelian), cosmos-based logic together with its standard of proof. When the validity of my thought is no longer grounded in structures outside me but in my own thought, the new criterion of truth will have to be formal consistency. The perfect being exists because to think the contrary involves the same inconsistency as to think of a triangle whose three angles are not equal to two right angles. The difference between proving and recovering a truth about the divine essence is that the first must always include man and the world, besides God, while the second is strictly between man and God.

The circularity of the ontological argument derives directly from the acosmic unity of the enlightened and the divine subject. What, from a cosmic point of view, looks like a logical flaw is really an indication of the subject's overcoming of cosmic solitude, of his successful return to the realm of certainty. I perceive clearly and distinctly God's essence, (including the attributes of benevolence and veracity), which in turn is the very condition of perceiving it clearly and distinctly. (4) In this position of unity in isolation the subject grounds his and God's existence in his own thought the validity of which is then guaranteed by God -- they mutually underwrite each other's existence. This, admittedly, is not easy to make sense of, logically or otherwise. Through the ontological

argument we seem to have entered the esoteric region of Christian mysticism: 'the eye with which I see God is the same with which God sees me' (Meister Eckhart). It is well to remind ourselves here once again of the nominalist origin of this predicament. The existence of the world testifies to God's existence as its Creator but it does not reveal His essence. The radical extreme of this notion is the gnostic doctrine that the reason why God's essence is not revealed in the world is not that He has very little to do with it because His *potentia ordinata* is just an arbitrary fraction of His *potentia absoluta* but that He has nothing to do with it because, in fact, these two realms belong to two different, opposing Gods. The nature of the created world testifies to the existence of a petty, malicious, deceiving God. This cosmos contains no clue regarding the essence of the true, acosmic God, except in the essence of the self-reflecting subject, in his thought.

It is indeed dizzying to contemplate that while God alone guarantees the reality and thus the credibility of the subject as a witness the subject is the single witness to God's reality. The nominalist response to this conundrum is to conclude that God has become an idea of reason, a mere concept, the 'God of the Philosophers', or, in short, He is dead. The mystic would agree with this conclusion if the subject, (soul), were in fact relating to God through an idea or an image. "God, however, does not need any kind of an image, and He *has* none." says Eckhart. "God is effective in the soul with no 'means', image,

or likeness. He is effective truly in the soul's foundation into which no image has reached except God Himself with His own being". (5) The relation between God and man is unmediated. But the Cartesian subject, pursuing his gnostic vision, has no use for either the nominalist or the mystic solution. He has sacrificed the world for the certainty of the clear and distinct perception of the divine essence, and now he can hardly be expected to call this perception a mere idea. He, contra the mystic, relates to God through an idea, moreover, he has two ideas or images of two different Gods one of whom is unmasked as an evil deceiver. All the trust and certainty that has been lost in one God must be recovered in the other, -- this is the gnostic mission of the Cartesian subject.

§ 32. The resurrection of God through the fusion of the only two remaining certainties: the existence of the thinking subject and the essence of the true God.

From Plato to the Stoics, the unity of the highest essence and its existence needed neither proof nor recovering. The Good, or the Logos illuminated, in varying degrees, every corner of the cosmos, its objects as well as the intellect perceiving them. By contrast, the gnostic true God of Descartes illuminates solely the subject's intellect making him the single witness and guarantor of the existence of the divine essence. But if I have to guarantee the existence of an essence then the unity of the two is already lost, which

means that it is now possible to think of a most perfect essence, God that does not exist. The difficulty with the ontological argument is not that it fails to demonstrate the objective, (cosmic), reality of God but that it leaves us uncertain whether God's essence involves His supra-objective, (acosmic), existence in Himself, or in the thought of the subject only. While the need to prove God's reality arises from the nominalist separation of essence and existence, the unity of these two in me appears to require as little demonstration as in the Platonic cosmos. As the existence of the world is a necessary consequence of its essential Goodness (6), my existence follows necessarily from *my* essence: thinking. I am unambiguously aware of my own reality, nothing can shake the certainty with which my essence involves my own existence.

Descartes' gnosticism consists in his intention to recover the perfection of the cosmos, its unity of essence and existence, *outside* the cosmos. But, in what acosmic substance is this perfection to be found? Once the *res cogitans*, led by his quest for certainty, for redemption, reflects, that is, doubts his way out of the world, he seems to be as good a candidate as the *deus verax* who never had anything to do with this world. Escaping the world, the thinking subject recovers certainty not in the true God whose existence requires proof but in himself who, as it turns out, needs no such demonstration. The *ego sum* need not be, and cannot be the conclusion of a syllogistic deduction from

cogitatione.

The unmediated certainty of the ego's existence seems to provide the self-sufficiency necessary to end all solitude. The subject can now be said to relate to himself with the same immediacy as the mystic relates to God. Consciousness no longer stands divided against itself, it is no longer 'unhappy', that is, unredeemed. The tension between conscience and the inner sense of depravity, between *recte scire* and *infirmitas* is resolved by doubting away the source of all depravity and uncertainty, the created world. The trouble is that self-redemption requires more than just self-certainty of existence. To be redeemed the subject must survive the destruction of the world as *something*, as a substance: the unit of self-sufficiency. What does survive, however, is the mere 'I think' which Kant rightly calls an expression of an indeterminate empirical intuition. Thought cannot qualify as a substance, for it can never be pure thought, it must always have an object, it is eternally transitive. And it is because thought must always have an object that it cannot itself be one, i.e., it cannot be an object of immediate perception, only of reflection. The actual act of thinking eludes thinking itself and is to be glimpsed at only obliquely in its completed form, -- instead of *cogitare* it can be caught only as *cogitasse.*

A different way of saying that the 'I think' falls short of being a substance is to say that

neither the 'I' nor the 'think' can be defined a priori. It would not do to define *res cogitans* negatively as *res non extensa*; in determining his essence the subject cannot depend on the world he had just destroyed through doubt. In the end then, the subject, following his gnostic mission, arrives at the acosmic homeland in a peculiar condition: his existence needs no demonstration while his essence cannot be given one. It is just the other way around with the true God whose essence is clearly perceived but whose existence *needs* proof. The stage is now set for the theomorphosis of the subject, for the recovery of the unity of existence and essence through the fusion of the subject's self-certainty of existence with the divine essence.

As in the ontological argument of Meditation V, the hidden God of nominalism begins to assume the character of the alien God of gnosticism He appears more and more as a mere idea from a cosmic point of view. He is the sole necessary being but this necessity is that of a concept; it is the necessity of Thought grounding itself in itself. Hegel may be right in saying that this sterile conceptual necessity of God's reality is the mirror image of man's separation from the world, from nature but then, in gnosticism such separation is craved and deliberately aimed at as a condition of salvation. Furthermore, it may be granted that the lost unity of man and the world can be restored only artificially through the unity of the Concept which realizes itself in the various forms of man's

world/nature-domination but clearly, this artificial unity is not what the gnostic *res cogitans* is ultimately after. Cosmos-domination, becoming *maitres et possesseurs de la nature* is merely an act of revenge, a parting shot by man at the world which held him captive so long. It is possible but mistaken to interpret the Cartesian program of subjugating nature as man's way of making himself at home in the cosmos; on the contrary, it is his way of covering his retreat from it. From a gnostic point of view, and thus from the point of view of Descartes' deepest implicit intention, Enlightenment rationalism grossly mishandled the inherited instrument of subjugation, the *Mathesis universalis*, by regarding it as a tool of salvation. The *ordo et mensura* of the world that this general science aims to investigate (7) can provide no foundation for certainty; the very idea that nature has a mathematical structure is but a mere hypothesis. To assume a position of control, man must be allowed a synoptic, God's-eye view of the created world. Since the creator proves to be a deceiver, the scope of the new science will be limited to probabilities. For, how could an attempt to look at the world through the eye of a deceiving God result in certain knowledge? Science can only surmise the essence of a *deus malignus* with a nature as dark as His purpose. The essence of the true God, on the other hand, stands in plain view to the mind's eye with greater clarity than any other idea. That it is, alas, a mere idea is suggested by the fact that it requires proof, a requirement that can be waived in all other cases but not in this one: God's essence alone entails His

existence. The real, and rather esoteric, task of every ontological argument is not to prove the existence of God but to resurrect Him by fusing the concept of the divine essence with the living breath of the subject's indubitable existence.

§ 33. Taking possession of the divine heritage. The final test

This then is the most dramatic variety of solitude: when the thinking subject is cut off from the highest object of his desire, or more precisely, from his clearest idea not by contingencies of an everyday life in the cosmos, (ordinary solitude), nor even by the entire realm of contingencies, (heavenly solitude), but by the cosmos itself. God and man are separated not by the sin and fall of man but by the atrocity of the world's existence. The end of cosmic solitude, man's reunion with the true God, must come about on an extra-mundane ground. Only in its cosmic variety is solitude truly otherworldly. Heavenly solitude together with its resolution is, in comparison, a domestic problem: the homecoming of the Platonic soul is an internal affair of the cosmos whereby the soul realigns herself with the eternal cosmic essences, with the Ideas. Now, the subject of both types of solitude relies on self-redemption, and for both the possibility of redemption depends on the reality of ideas. Viewed from the cosmos, the crucial difference is that for the Platonic soul, unlike for the Cartesian mind, the task, indeed the very notion, of

demonstrating the reality of Ideas, or the existence of essences simply never arises. And this is so precisely because the soul's homecoming is an internal affair, because objects of sensible and intelligible perception are seen to exist not only in the same cosmos but also on a continuum extending from visible things to the pure structures they embody. The Cartesian subject, on the other hand, is faced with the nominalist heritage of an utterly severed connection between existence and essence, between the Real and the Idea. How is this lost, acosmic unity to be regained if proofs of God's existence persistently fail?

Viewed from extra-mundane ground, the reality of a wholly alien, transcendent God turns out to be in no more need of demonstration than the reality of immanent essences considered from the cosmic point of view. In the latter case, the very nature of the world is evidence in itself, while in the former the world itself is regarded as spurious and so is any evidence derivable from such a source. It appears then that to grunt under the burden of proving the existence of essences, or of God is a fate to be endured only in times of theological indecision, in times when the eternal or divine essences are perceived as neither entirely immanent, nor entirely transcendent. A typical product of this indecision is the cosmological proof a version of which does appear in the *Meditations* without, however, having any measurable effect on the centrality of the ontological argument in Descartes' overall gnostic design. The ontological argument is the subject's own

way of homecoming and as such, it is perfectly unconvincing to the objective world. But, I have already disregarded the world when, as a thinking subject, I set out to establish the reality of God from the idea I have of Him. Just as the slave-boy in Plato's *Meno* recollects the solution of the geometry problem rather than proves it, so in the ontological argument the Cartesian subject recovers the unity of existence and essence instead of demonstrating it; it is a matter strictly between him and God. The world just doesn't figure in the two constituting elements of the unity: not in the self-certainty of the subject's existence, and not in the acosmic divine essence.

The subject of heavenly solitude inhabits an essence-dominated cosmos where salvation comes through recollecting essences, and eventually being absorbed into them. This resolution of solitude by absorption of existents into essences is reversed in the case of cosmic solitude. Here, it is the subject's indubitable existence that absorbs the divine essence into himself. The result is the divine subject, modern man.

It seems fair to say that by becoming God, man has at last achieved self-sufficiency: the end of all solitude. Another way of saying that he has become God and self-sufficient is that he has incorporated within the boundaries of his subjective existence all essences, all possible eternal objects of desire. What is left is eternal desire itself. Instead of

Platonic Eros aimed at the Ideas, Fichtean *ewige Streben* aimed at nothing. It is part of man's theogenetic inheritance that his Will is not constrained by any necessary path or direction. From the nominalist *deus absconditus* turned *deus verax* of gnosticism, he has inherited unlimited freedom. For him, as for the acosmic, gnostic God, this unlimited freedom is guaranteed by the absence of essences, or, to put it more concisely, by the inessentiality of the world as such.

While, in the nominalist God the supremacy of the Will over the Intellect was regarded as part of His perfection, (as a ground of perfect freedom), in man the same imbalance accounted for his error, for his false judgment. (8)

Now that man has taken God's place, the dominance of his Will over his Intellect is no longer a source of error but of perfection. Yet, it is this perfect, unlimited freedom that fills him with un-godlike hesitation when it comes to take full possession of his divine inheritance. The trouble is not that, because of the Intellect's subjugation by the Will, he cannot comprehend his own freedom, for neither could the nominalist God. Rather, it is the realization that the corollary of his inability to understand his own freedom is his inability to fathom and absorb the meaning of being utterly on his own.

This is the last test before man could truly take possession of his role as God; the last

advance from cosmic solitude, the most extreme human variety, to the solitude of God. In all human varieties of solitude, -- ordinary, heavenly and cosmic --, the common sustaining element is striving. The strain of separation from the object of desire is at the same time an organizing and ordering force of the desire itself. The greater the strain, the more clearly determined the purpose and direction of the Will. By becoming God however, man forfeits his right to strive. Incorporating all objective essences, the subject swallows up the world, as it were. What is now left to strive for? Now that it is no longer principled by essences, or ideas, at what should the Will direct itself?

The underlying motive of the Cartesian revolt against the metaphysics of received redemption was that such gift came with an intolerably high price: the simple acceptance of Grace, that is, the surrender of all striving. The brilliant success of that revolt was marked by the deification of man. Yet, ironically, in the end the same price must be paid; man must submit to the very conditions the rejection of which had been the original cause of his revolt. Of course, there is a difference between a Will rendered irrelevant to redemption by the Grace of nominalist theology on the one hand, and by the actual achievement of redemption on the other. It is the difference between the finite, ineffectual human, and the infinitely free divine Will. Man fails the final test before becoming the true God by failing to see this difference, by being unable to grasp fully

that the infinitely free divine Will is essentially ineffectual not because, as the finite, depraved Will, it is oppressed by unalterable actualities, but because it is beyond all actualities; it has no need to alter anything to assert itself, in fact, it has no need to assert itself at all.

§ 34. Failing the test of divine solitude. A return, with a smile of self-irony, to the consolations of asceticism

It follows from the foregoing analysis that the modern age is not so much the second overcoming of gnosticism (9) as the second failure of gnosticism's anti-cosmic revolt. The human varieties of solitude examined above can be regarded as field-exercises in asceticism. In the ordinary variety a portion of the contingent world is negated for the sake of another, cherished portion of it; heavenly solitude involves a turning away from the contingent world of tokens to face the realm of eternal types directly; and finally, the subject of cosmic solitude aims at the destruction of the cosmos, (types, tokens and all), to be united with, and thus become, the transcendent true God. It is just this final transformation for which these exercises in asceticism with their escalating intensity seem to be preparations. And, it is only when gnosticism, the most extreme form of asceticism, is done with its work of world- destruction that the liberated subject

discovers the price of absolute self-sufficiency, the fruit of his unlimited freedom. For, it is clear that perfect self-sufficiency necessarily deprives the Will of any particular target, or orientation. If man finds this disorienting rather than liberating, that's because while his long training in asceticism might have prepared him for the loss of the world, it has done nothing to prepare him for the loss of meaning he derives ultimately from his striving, from his solitude. Apart from the ascetic ideal, observes Nietzsche, man had no meaning so far. (10) It is this sole meaning of his existence that man has to give up on the threshold of becoming the true God. The dualism of subject and object of longing, the entire metaphysical foundation of all human solitude, must be relinquished to make room for the strict monism of divine solitude.

Gnosticism fails to achieve its goal of deifying man because man, in the end, is unable to let go of the familiar, life-giving comfort and ecstasy of his solitude. At the final moment, he recognizes the state of divine solitude, the end of all striving, of all solitude, as alien to him, as a state properly belonging to an alien God. The trouble is that in the expectation of uniting with this alien God, all bridges had been burnt. Shying away from becoming the true God, man must return to a world destroyed in the hope of becoming Him. In other words, he must now make himself at home, (*bei sich*), in a world which is no longer simply suspect, or mistrusted amidst various forms of ascetic strivings,

but which is reduced to nothingness. It is in this sense that the failure of gnosticism defines the modern age.

One of the twin pillars supporting this age is Disenchantment: the recognition that the world had been sacrificed for nothing. The other is Self-irony. The simple irony is that man, whose ambition was to become the true God becomes the false one instead; because he would rather will nothingness than not will at all (11) he assumes the role of the *...eus deceptor* whose Will must be asserted even if in the creation of a false, deceiving world. But it is a reversed, or self-irony the unfading smile of which accompanies man's spurious creativity. For, in its original meaning, irony is dissembling, pretending to be less than one really is. Self-irony, on the other hand, is pretending that one is less than what appears, and knowing that in fact one *is* less. Man is modest, to the point of skepticism, about his role as *maitres et possesseurs de la nature* but at the same time he knows that this modesty is perfectly justified, for as a false god he is the possessor and lord of nothingness. All solitude, all longing could have come to an end. It is with this knowledge that man survives his failure to become the true god, and self-irony is his way of coping with his prolonged existence.

The Will to nothingness is in itself free of self-irony, of bad conscience. In the hands

of hyper-ascetic gnosticism it is the Will to destruction with a view to redemption. But when the work of destruction is done, its teleological aim fulfilled, the Will must take a new turn. For, the Will to nothingness can no longer be a Will to destruction when nothing is left to be destroyed. Nietzsche's point is that because the Will is blind to every authority outside itself, i.e., it is blind to teleology (12), it never considers its work done, brought to an envisioned end. Instead, it continues on its path of willing for the sake of willing, and when it runs out of things, (essences), to destroy, it turns against the remaining nothingness: it turns creative. When the shabby origin of our last value is revealed, we cheerfully begin to create new ones. But our good cheer has nothing to do with the durability of these values, with the hope they hold out for us of a peaceful serenity when the Will retires, releasing the world from its grasp. There *is* no other world for the will to retire to, and this discovery, this liberating news is cause for celebration.

The Cartesian-gnostic subject survives the destruction of the world as pure thought and seeks to determine itself by uniting the certainty of its existence with the essence of God. It backs down, however, when it turns out that this unity, becoming God, spells the end of that all too precious, all too nutritious dualism which has for so long nourished and sustained every ascetic straining of Eros, every variety of reassuring human solitude. When the dualism of subject and object of longing vanishes, so does all meaning. The

Nietzscean *Übermensch*, on the other hand, survives the world's destruction as pure Will the strength of which is measured by the extent to which it "can do without meaning in things..., can endure to live in a meaningless world..."(13)

For a long time, asceticism has been understood as a resolute answer to a dilemma. A choice must be made between the world and God, and the ascetic comes down, hard, on the side of God. But then the suspicion arose that asceticism has its long history only because its preferred choice is not at all God, against the world, but the eternal preservation of the world/God dualism itself. In other words, asceticism is not a tenacious holding out for the better, a renunciation of the immediately given in the name of a distantly available; rather, it is a form of final resignation, a melancholy self-indulgence of the Will understood as desire. It is not a longing for redemption but a longing for longing itself. But asceticism turns self-indulgent only when, in the end, it recoils from taking its single coveted prize. The dread of divine solitude teaches man to love, or at least to live with, the different varieties of human solitude all firmly grounded in the dualism of subject and object of longing.

§ 35. Reversed gnosticism. A second invitation to divine solitude

The God of nominalist theology was incomprehensible to man because of the unbridgeable gap between Him and His creation. Gnosticism undertook the elimination of this gap through the elimination of creation. Its method was deductive: from the ultimate reality of the true God the nothingness of the world and the falseness of its creator were derived. But, unlike the less extreme varieties, this all or nothing dualism of absolute true and false cannot be a permanent home for man. Failing to become the true God, the only remaining option is to become nothing, that is, the false creator who reflects upon his counterfeit creation with a smile of self-irony. What, then, keeps man from becoming the true God? The answer is that, in the end, he mistrusts his own method of deduction. What he turns away from is the paradox, inherent in the ontological argument, that to subscribe to the premise declaring the reality of the divine essence he himself must be divine; accepting the premise of God's reality is at the same time self-acceptance. The farthest that man can go is to examine the proposition, 'I, in my core, am the true God', and entertain it as an idea but not as the utterance of the highest knowledge, the only redeeming *gnosis*. Unable to give his full trust to this a priori certainty and its corollary method of world-annihilating deduction he puts his half-trust in the diligent inductive method of accumulating little half-certainties about his

world which he then comes to see as at least half real, i.e., not real to the point of excluding skepticism but real enough to hang on to it. With the *potentia absoluta* once again beyond reach he must make himself at home in the realm of the *potentia ordinata*. From this follows yet another definition of self-irony: man's way of making himself at home in a world the reality of which he cannot convince himself.

This building up, then, this age of Restoration following the destruction of the failed revolution, is attended by self-doubt on all sides. It is often pretended but never seriously expected that accumulating half-certainties could add up to something tangible, to a meaning, to *that* meaning which in the golden days of asceticism could be derived in a single deductive step. Man cannot completely convince himself of the reality of this world because he cannot relinquish entirely the idea of another one. It is this self-doubting empiricism, this half-hearted inductive hunting-gathering that Nietzsche opposes so vehemently. His reversed Platonism, or more comprehensively, his reversed gnosticism is a return to the original deductive model, but turned upside down. While in gnosticism the nothingness of this world was deduced from the reality of the divine essence, here the nothingness of another world, (realm of the divine essence), is deduced from the a priori premise of the reality of this world.

Kant thought it a scandal of philosophy that a convincing proof of the world's existence was still lacking. Nietzsche, on his part, simply affirms this existence. "What must first be proved is worth li" " (14) Dialectic, the weapon of the weak, the physiologically inhibited must be replaced by instinct, the guide of the healthy. Similarly, Will, understood as desire, as longing for another world is to be replaced by Will interpreted as the self-assertion of the uninhibitedly alive, as the Will to power. In Nietzsche's eyes, skeptical doubt about the existence of this world is directly linked with longing for another. Every weakness is the direct or indirect result of one's weakening one's ties with this world. To cure this malaise, this disease of the Will, the dualism of the ascetic ideal must finally be abandoned. There is only one world without any escape route. But exactly because there is no escape, no other world, there is also no basis and background for self-irony, self-belittlement, self-pity, and even self-nausea. Evidence of such a cure can be had by passing the 'eternal recurrence' test, which consists in assuming that "This life, as you are living it at present, and have lived it, you must live it once more, and again innumerable times." (15) Eternity, from which man in all three forms of solitude imagined himself to have been cut off, is now embedded in every moment of his life. For, all the 'unspeakably small and great' in his life has come to him infinite number of times in the past, and will come to him infinite number of times in the future. This ecstatic Dionysian affirmation of life requires self-overcoming. One must, in the

original sense of *ek-stasis*, step outside oneself and become more than human. The benefit of overcoming one's mere humanity is that the possibility of all human varieties of solitude automatically falls away. The cost is the loss of the self, of its substantial identity. The ascetic ideal not only gave meaning to man's life and suffering, it also defined his identity as a subject. Deprived of this ideal, of an eternal object of longing from which his identifiable quality derived, the subject becomes an aggregate of points of force, a quanta of power. In the ecstasy of life-affirmation the self, like the flesh of Dionysus, is torn to pieces. But man, brought up on the steady diet of ascetic longing, cannot bear to end his solitude on this note. Considering that the original goal of asceticism was to recover the true self by clearing away the world, which weed-like had grown over it, it is hardly surprising that man is now reluctant to give up his self for the world. It is with a novel and deepened significance that the question, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?" is asked again.

Man asks the same question even though he understands that this time the world is recommended not as a distraction, as an anesthetic to numb the pain of his solitude but as the only, all-encompassing reality which allows no logical space for the familiar forms of human solitude. He understands that here the dualist metaphysical foundation is disassembled and taken down; the two elements required by the logic of the

concept of solitude are reduced to one. What remains is the object, (the world as given), but it is now an object of affirmation not of longing. The subject of longing, (the self, or soul), evaporates as an illusion of perspective. (16) But the idea of a subjectless world is unbearable to man. It strikes the horror of emptiness in his heart, for a world without a subject is one without recognizable human solitude, and so it is a world empty of meaning.

§ 36. Pragmatic considerations

It is a testimony to the power of the ascetic ideal that man, at the mere contemplation of the possibility that all longing is at an end, is seized by the existential anxiety of 'something is lacking'. Whatever the outcome of self-overcoming might be, that new species would have to endure a life devoid of meaning, that is, a life of entirely new type of solitude. Along with man, the very logic of the concept of his solitude will have to be overcome. What makes this new type of solitude divine is that, defying merely human logic, it is non-relational. But this precisely is man's original, pre-logical, instinctive notion of solitude, that it is a state of absolute non-relatedness, of being surrounded by Nothing on all sides. After all, it was against the background of this logically untenable notion that the analysis of solitude as a relational concept appeared

paradoxical. The sound logical foundation of the paradoxical concept of solitude and so of asceticism does not guarantee the stability of their metaphysical foundation. Much of the appeal of Nietzsce's rhetoric derives from its affinity with that original, instinctive, non-dualist, non-paradoxical concept of solitude. Yet, the power and beauty of his language do not match the actual influence of his proposed alternative metaphysics. The reason for this, I suggest, is a strategic mistake. The starting point of this strategy is that dualism, (world/God, this world/other world...), is much too extreme a hypothesis and extreme positions cannot be dissolved through moderate ones, only by extreme but reversed positions. The vehemence of Nietzsche's rhetoric is called for by what he perceives as an emergency state of affairs. As a result of asceticism's long, virtually unbroken reign since the time of Plato, this world has been driven to near extinction in the name, and for the sake, of another one. In the course of this, morality was born and with it man's moral identity as a subject of longing. To reverse this decay, and to erase the specter of man poking through his life on earth as a worldless subject, a subjectless world must be posited, a world populated by forces that are dominating or dominated according to their difference in quantity. (17)

Opposing the extreme position of asceticism head on is in fact the most circuitous and unpromising way of going about the problem. If the goal, ultimately, is to

disassemble the metaphysical structure of dualism, this purpose is better served by harnessing asceticism's own brand of reductive tendencies instead of setting *our* own brand against them. Asceticism, especially at its most intense, in gnosticism, comes so close to self-annihilation, to an abridgment of its stark Light/Darkness, Subject/World dualism into a pure Light, or pure Subject monism. True, here the groundwork for man's self-overcoming has been laid by the destruction, not by the affirmation, of the world but the same salutary effects of monistic metaphysics would follow. Every human variety of solitude, longing, ascetic self-torture, world-negation, and with these, morality itself would come to an end. It stands to reason that the end of morality is much sooner and more directly achieved if we endorse what already *is*, rather than introduce a new ought. Although hesitant to deduce the final consequences of the fact, man, with a long ascetic past behind him, *is* a worldless subject, and so it is counterproductive to suggest that he *ought* to affirm, become one with, a subjectless world.

§ 37. The end of longing. Reality as the region closest to the self

The purest expression of man's primeval, pre-logical, monistic notion of solitude is to be found in advaita Vedanta, literally a 'non-dualist end of knowledge'. The single reality is said to be the Self, (*Brahman*), the knowing subject who by his sheer self-luminous,

self-resplendent existence consumes the illusory phenomenal world as though it were 'bread soaked in the sauce of death'. (18) This consumption, or destruction of the world is really a process of gradual abstraction from everything that is not-Self, and it takes place in four stages. In the first, waking state, (*Vīsva*), the subject's consciousness appears as though related through various gates of perception to outer objects. Possessing 'seven limbs and nineteen mouths he enjoys gross things'. (19) In the second, dream-sleep state, (*Taijasa*), consciousness appears as though related to internal objects, impressions and it is said to enjoy subtle objects. In the third, deep-sleep state, (*Prājña*), everything becomes undifferentiated, a mass of mere consciousness. *Prājña*, consciousnes par excellence, is free from the diversity of objects and their perceiving subject. While *Vīsva* enjoys gross objects and *Taijasa* enjoyes subtle ones, *Prājña* is undifferentiated enjoyment itself, the unmanifested vital force, ". Then he is untouched by good and untuoched by evil. " (20) Yet, as the sole cause of the waking and dream state is misapprehension of Reality, the cause of the dreamless sleep state is non-apprehension of it. All three are conditioned by a cause, only the fourth state, (*Turiya*), is wholly unconditioned. Here, in the absence of both misapprehension and non-apprehension, sources of false perception, the single reality of the Self makes itself visible.

For Nietzsche the history of an error comes to an end when everything that is not this world is abolished. No more wistful longing, no more mist, no more skeptical circumspection. "Noon, moment of the briefest shadow, end of the longest error, high point of humanity..." (21) The same hour of noon is reached by advaita Vedanta when stripping away all illusions the worldless subject, the Self without a second, without attributes, (*nirguna Brahman*), comes into view. "When from thence he has risen upwards, he neither rises nor sets. He is alone standing in the center... and indeed to him who thus knows this Brahma-upanishad (the secret doctrine of the Veda) the sun does not rise and does not set. For him there is day, once and for all."(22) Advaita Vedanta, the logical completion of gnosticism, and Nietzschean reversed gnosticism share the view that man is held hostage by the idea of a 'remote, important region' to which he is bound hand and foot through ultimately unrealizable desires and longings. They also agree that the only region of reality is the one closest to man, and that the most immediate region is that from which man is never separated. Once it is recognized that one is never separated from it reality instantly ceases to be an object of longing and desire. For Nietzsche, the single, inescapable reality is this world, man's absolutely permanent home without an entrance and without an exit. The eternal sand-glass of existence is ever turned once more, and man with it. (23) But what could be more inescapable, more proximate to man than his own self? , – asks Vedanta. If the

criterion of reality is that man never be separated from it than the world must be disqualified since one loses contact with it in dreaming and in dreamless sleep.

The self-certainty of existence that in Cartesian gnosticism belonged to the thinking subject is elevated in Vedanta to the ultimate, single reality of the Self, the *knowing* subject. Yet, while man hesitates to come out of the shelter of his familiar solitude by following Nietzsche's urging to re-naturalize himself and 'undeify nature', he also resists his own deification. The ancient teaching of Vedanta dares to draw asceticism's final conclusion. If this conclusion did indeed, as Nietzsche mistakenly observed, lead to nothingness it would not be so fiercely resisted. It is not the idea of nothing itself, (no world, no subject), that is dreaded most, but the idea of a subject surrounded by Nothing. Man is capable even of a 'voluptuous enjoyment of eternal emptiness' as long as he can convert Emptiness into another desideratum, a task that, due to his extensive training in asceticism, should come easy to him.

The three varieties of human solitude, stages of intensifying asceticism, appear to be an orderly progression toward divine solitude, -- the world is to be denounced in the right order. Man's ordinary solitude can be seen as corresponding to his waking state where the gross things of the world are longed for; heavenly solitude to his dream state where

the subtle objects of the world, or the objects of a subtle world are desired, and cosmic solitude can be said to correspond to his dreamless sleep state where with his last ties to the world, to *maya* severed, his consciousness stands as an empty vessel ready to be filled up with reality. It is here at the threshold of monistic metaphysics that the progression comes to a halt.

The original impulse behind the Cartesian radical separation of subject and object is to light up the former against the darkest possible background. But, as it turns out, the Cartesian subject does not really need such a contrast for its self-determination, it does not need to be lit up, because it is self-luminous. Moreover, it is clear that this subject's repeated confessions of its dependence on divine creativity and grace are confessions of reverence for a being with which it shares the ability of self-determination. There is nothing in the metaphysical makeup of the subject that would prevent it from becoming the object of its highest reverence, or desire.

"Everyone becomes like what he loves", says Augustine, "Dost thou love God?, then, I say, thou shalt be God". But man, facing the prospect of divine solitude, the dissolution of all solitudes, has another confession to make: he does not want to become God because he has already become that which he

loves most, and what he loves most is not God Himself but God as an object of desire. To become God is to give up this highest object of desire, for it is to give up *all* desire, *all* striving, *all* meaning. Nothing can persuade man to give up all meaning, least of all the prospect of absolute freedom. Yet, the anxiety that seizes him at the threshold of divine solitude is not the anguish of apprehending freedom itself, or nothingness itself, but the anguish of resisting his own metaphysical nature. Another way of saying that he wants to gain the whole world to forfeit his soul is that he insists on a meaning, or a goal to forfeit his divine capacity of absolute self-determination.

Up to this point, the scale of escalating asceticism and solitude was such that each stage was justified, given meaning to by a subsequent higher intensity stage. So, in this sense ordinary solitude with its merely implicit longing for eternity was justified by heavenly solitude where this longing was made explicit by directing it to specific objects, (Ideas). The same separation from earthly, (gross), objects which ordinary man perceived and shunned as meaningless suffering was embraced by the philosopher who justified it as a means of bringing him closer to his subtle objects of longing. The gnostic, on the other hand, celebrated his separation from both the gross *and* the subtle objects of this cosmos,

and saw both ordinary and heavenly solitude as a means of bringing him closer to the acosmic homeland. But this dialectical series of vindication comes to an end with divine solitude, which instead of justifying all varieties of human solitude dissolves them. If reality is that from which one is never separated then it obviously cannot be an object of progressive approximation. Recognizing the single reality of the Self turns out to be the culmination of a reversed Hegelian dialectic. Instead of everything coming together, finding its justification, in the end, everything leading up to the moment of recognition falls away as an illusion. Appearance is a rising and passing away *without* subsisting intrinsically, and truth is not the Bacchanalia where no one remains sober, but the morning after.

NOTES – Chapter 1.

1. *On the Ultimate Origination of Things*, Leibniz, Philosophical Writings, ed. By G.H. Parkinson, London:Dent & Sons, 1973, p.138

2. *Principles of Philosophy*, Descartes, Philosophical Writings, ed. By Elizabeth Anscombe, Indianapolis:Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1971 LXp. 193

3. *Letter to the Marquis of Newcastle*, ibid., p. 300

NOTES – Chapter 2.

1. Descartes, *Reply to the Second Objections*, Oeuvres, H.-T., vol. VII, pp. 140-41

2. Harrison, Jane, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek religion*, New York:Meridian Books, 1955, p.573

3. see Pausanias' speech in Plato's *Symposium*, 180d

4. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Maryland:Penguin Books, 1969, Book I. chapter 5, p.30

5. Plato, *Republic*, New York:Modern Library, 496 c-d

6. For the point that unlike in the case of justice or honor, where appearances will do for some, when it comes to the good, every one expects and accepts only the real, see *Republic*
505d, "but no one is satisfied with the appearance of good -- the reality is what they seek; in the case of the good, appearance is despised by every one."

7. Pascal, *Pensées*, London:Penguin Books, 1973, #136, p.69

8. ibid. #134, p.67

NOTES - Chapter 3.

1. see St. Augustine's *Sermo*, xcvi, cap.ii.2

2. By using the term, 'nominalist theology' I wish to emphasize the theological ro of nominalism, i.e., that the latter is a particular theological position. I take William of Ockham to be the thinker who has articulated this position most clearly. His fundamental assumption about the relationship between God and man is that there is no mediating element whatsoever between the two, no Ideas, no universals, no essences. Some of his central tenets that follow from this assumption are:

   - no universal belongs to the essence or quiddity of any substance
   - being and existing are synonymous
   - similarities between beings are simply similarities of facts
   - no common reality exists at the same time in two members of a species
   - no *universale in re*, (this is maintained against Plato); and no

universale ante rem either, (contra Aristotle)
- the existence of the universal consists in an act of the understanding solely

All of the above insures the absence of any mediating element between God and His creation, which in turn insures His absolute freedom.
The doctrinal position reflected in these tenets is, in my view, best characterized as 'nominalist theology'. There are at least four alternative characterizations here.
(1) 'Theological nominalism', (used by Copleston in his discussion of Ockham, vol.III, p. 88/): by implying that it is a certain kind of nominalism that is at issue here, this expression falls short of signaling my more radical claim that nominalism is a certain type of theology.
(2) 'Terminist theology': 'terminism': applied first to the followers of Ockham, and used synonymously with 'nominalism' to designate the doctrine that universality belongs only to terms in their logical function. Since this expression is out of use today, it could not serve my purpose of showing the continuity between 14th century and contemporary nominalism.
(3) 'Ockhamist theology': this would be too narrow; it would unnecessarily exclude those subsequent, including temporary, theological positions which diverge from that of Ockham yet still deserve the name of nominalism.
(4) 'Voluntarist theology': this could be more properly applied to the 'softer' position of Duns Scotus who allowed the existence of essences, although insisting that God has absolute freedom in choosing between them at will. Anti-realism in its purest form is achieved when universal Ideas or essences are denied existence even in God. It is only by denying the existence of essences altogether that the absolute freedom and the absolute hiddenness of God is insured. This *deus absconditus* is the product of nominalist theolgy.

3. Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos*, xiii, 1

4. William of Ockham, *Super quattuor libros sententiarumsubtilissimae quaestiones*. Lyons, 1495, I.4.S.

5. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X, ch.29

6. *Romans*, V, 5

7. *Elegies*, Book i, 14

8. in *Greek Elegy and Iambus*, Loeb Classical Library, London:William Heinemann, 1963, p.133

9. in *Studies of the Greek Poets* by J.A.Symonds, London:A. & C.Black,1902, p.236.

10. ibid., p.236-7

11. *Pythian VIII.* transl. by Geoffrey S. Conway, London:Rowman & Littlefield, 1972, p.144

12. St Augustine, *De Trinitate*, lib. Viii, chap. V.7

13. *De Natura Deorum*, II. 11-14

14. For Descartes allowing the possibility that the *deus deceptor* is his fiction, see *Meditations* I. #21

15. Descartes, like St. Augustine before him, views doubt as part of man's *infirmitas*; see *Meditations* III. #46

NOTES - Chapter 4.

1. See eg. Plotinus' *First Ennead*, viii.7. and Plato's *Timaeus*, 30 c-d

2. See Descartes' letter to Mersene, 6. May 1630

3. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A348

4. See *Meditations* V. #70

5. Meister Eckhart, in *Breakthrough. Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality*,

New York:Image Books, 1978, transl. by Matthew Fox, p.296

6. Plato, *Timaeus*, 29e-30a

7. Descartes, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind, IV.*

8. See *Meditations* IV.

9. Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, Cambridge:MIT Press, 1983, transl. I.R.Wallaca, p.126. Blumenberg links the first attempt to overcome gnosticism to St. Augustine who undertook the task of saving the cosmos in the face of this fiercly acosmic doctrine.

10. "Sieht man von asketischen idealen ab: so hatte der Mensch, das Tier Mensch bisher keinen Sinn." *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, in Das Hauptwerk, München:Nymphenburger, 1990, v.4,p.175

11. Ibid. p.176 "Daß überhaupt das asketische Ideal dem Menschen so viel bedeutet hat, darin drückt sich die Grundtatsache des menschlichen Willens aus, sein *horror vacui*: er braucht ein Ziel, -- und eher will er noch das Nichts wollen als nicht wollen".

12. *The Will to Power*, New York:Vintage Books, 1968, p.546, sec.#1062

13. Ibid. p.318, sec.#585

14. *The Twilight of the Idols, (The Problem of Socrates*, sec.#5)

15. *The Gay Science*, sec.#341

16. *The Will to Power*, sec.#659, see also sec.#594

17. Ibid. sec. #635, #636, #637; also, #556, #643

18. *Katha Upanishad*, I.2. 25

19. *Mandukya upanishad*, I. 3.

20. *Brihadâranyaka upanishad,* IV. 3.22

21. *How the "Real World" Finally Became a Myth, The History of an Error,* #6 in *Twilight of the Idols*

22. *Khandogya-upanishad,* III.11.1.3

23. *Gay Science,* #341

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