Loneliness
in Philosophy, Psychology, and Literature

Ben Lazare Mijuskovic
Acclaim for Ben Mijuskovic’s

*Loneliness in Philosophy, Psychology, and Literature*

“Indeed, a most impressive survey has been undertaken by Professor Ben Mijuskovic in his fine book, *Loneliness in Philosophy, Psychology, and Literature*. He shows most effectively how prominent the themes of literature and inwardness have been in creative literature from quite early times, in the myth of Prometheus, the *Odyssey*, in parts of Plato and Aristophanes, and in the Upanishads, down to the most recent writers of fiction and philosophy. Robinson Crusoe recovers the importance it had for earlier speculative thought (the ‘History of Robinson and Friday’ as we have it in Hegel’s ‘Outlines of the *Phenomenology of Mind*’) and is shown to be part of a concern which continues through Proust to the British novelist Arthur Machen and his frightening portrayal, in his own words, of ‘a Robinson Crusoe of the soul’ and to Thomas Wolfe’s ‘We walk the streets of life alone’ matched by Conrad’s ‘Heart of Darkness’ and Golding’s ‘Pincher Martin.’ Mijuskovic concludes that, on the philosophical foundation of the ability of thought to ‘curl back on itself, the disciplines of literature, philosophy, and psychology have erected a significant and true insight into man’s fundamental nature, namely that that each of us, separately exists in isolation, in a state of desolate loneliness, enclosed within the confines of a monadic prison which we continually strive to escape.”

—H. D. Lewis, editor of *Religious Studies*

“*Loneliness as a Universal Prism*. Epistemic loneliness is seen as innate. In the view of Ben Mijuskovic, all acts of consciousness and conduct are inevitably motivated by the wish to escape or evade loneliness. However, to do so is impossible because consciousness is so constituted that loneliness serves as its sovereign *a priori*. In other words, loneliness is an absolutely universal and necessary principle. Because of this, loneliness is the prism through which man views reality, without being aware that it is a prism. Mijuskovic believes that there can exist no theory through which one can rescue himself
or others from this loneliness, as any action he takes is simply a result of the ‘master motivator,’ loneliness itself.”

—Wikipedia

“Existential isolation cuts beneath other forms of isolation. No matter how closely we relate to another individual, there remains a final unbridgeable gap. Each of us enters into existence alone and must depart from it alone. Each individual since the dawn of consciousness created a primary self (*transcendental ego*) by permitting consciousness to curl back upon itself and to differentiate a self from the remainder of the world. Only after that does the individual, now ‘self-conscious,’ begin to constitute other selves. Beneath this act, Mijuskovic (1979) notes, there is a fundamental loneliness; the individual cannot escape the knowledge that (1) he constitutes others and (2) he can never fully share his consciousness with others.”

—Rollo May and Irvin Yalom in *Current Psychotherapies*, edited by Raymond Corsini

“Loneliness in its existential form was also furnished major momentum by forerunners of existentialism itself, such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, themselves two self-confessed utterly lonely individuals. Far more recently and in the United States, William Saddler (1978) and Ben Mijuskovic (1979; 1980) pioneered philosophical studies on, respectively, loneliness and what I reference as aloneliness and both did so from phenomenological and interdisciplinary perspectives as well.”

—John G. McGraw in *Intimacy and Isolation*

“The most sustained and comprehensive attempt to argue the ontological primacy of human aloneness is Professor Ben Lazare Mijuskovic’s *Loneliness in Philosophy, Psychology, and Literature*. 
It is a boldly written book, one upon which any student of solitude will want to test his wits.”

—Philip Koch, author of Solitude

“The scientific study of loneliness is new, little more than a half-century old, but loneliness has always been a dominant theme in literature, philosophy, and art. ‘Loneliness forges its powerful expression in all great literature, often in disguise,’ writes philosopher Ben Mijuskovic. ‘Loneliness is a prism through which we see the entire spectrum of human life reflected in its multiform attempts to transcend the very feeling of isolation by communicating with another. It has always been the same since the childhood of Western consciousness.”

—Karen Christensen and David Levinson in the Encyclopedia of Community: From the Village to the Virtual World

“During the 14th century, however, a radically new conception of the universe was proposed in the works of Nicholas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno, and suddenly man was confronted with the possibility that he might be merely a trespasser in an alien universe. The new cosmos was infinite and centerless. It had no definite form and man lost his preeminent status within it. Man experienced a dramatic sense of loss; he felt abandoned and purposeless. He was violently expelled alone into the limitless expanse of endless space and time, into the dark void of a meaningless universe.”

—Quoted from Ben Mijuskovic by Richard Hovey in “Jasper’s Nietzsche: The Lonely Iconoclast,” Karl Jaspers: Man in the Modern Age

Self-Help Methods for Reducing Loneliness. “Most psychologists and sociologists see loneliness as a result of the environment. Taking a different point of view, Ben Mijuskovic (1980), like the existentialists, regards aloneness as the basic nature of humans, not as a result of our childhood or our circumstances. He says loneliness is not an
illness to be cured or treated with social reform; it is an unavoidable human condition to be faced. As we recognize our aloneness, we struggle desperately to find something more stable than ourselves to depend on. Death is not horrifying to us because it might be the end of everything (i.e., no awareness whatsoever), but rather because our consciousness might continue and we would be all alone. It is interesting, indeed, that all conceptions of an afterlife involve being with God and others or returning to life in an other form as a way of reducing loneliness. [As quoted by Mijuskovic.] Thomas Wolfe in Look Homeward, Angel, wrote; ‘He understood that men were forever strangers to one another, that no one ever comes to really know any one … Which of us has known his brother. Which of us has looked in his father’s heart … Which of us is not forever a stranger and alone?...we escape it never, no matter what arms may clasp us, what mouth may kiss us, what heart may warm us. Never, never, never, never, never, never.’”

“The book employs an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from the fields of philosophy, literature, and psychology to argue for a view that human beings are absolutely isolated from each other and are existentially lonely. A theory of consciousness is developed in order to answer the question: given that humans are alone and lonely and are also aware of their existential loneliness, what must consciousness be in order for that to be possible?...The interdisciplinary approach is impressive and refreshing in the use of literature as a source of support for the model. The book is very eloquent and persuasive.”

—Laura Primakoff, University of Texas, in Book Notes

“The author has employed an interdisciplinary approach to the problem of loneliness. While psychologists have touched upon the problem, they have not done justice to it. Mijuskovic sees loneliness not simply as a frequent human condition but rather an aspect of man’s ontological being. In his words, man is ‘intrinsically alone and irredeemably lost’ and is ‘continually struggling to escape the solipsistic prison of his frightening solitude.’ This basic thesis
is supported through philosophical analysis and wide-ranging examination of relevant literature … [T]he author has presented a challenging picture of much human behavior as a flight from loneliness. On the whole this is an intriguing book which should be of particular interest to psychologists of a humanistic persuasion.”

—Parker E. Lichtenstein in *The Psychological Record*

“A book on the nature of loneliness, a topic finally beginning to achieve its necessary prominence in the world of psychiatry, is welcome indeed. The author of the present volume arrives at this presentation of the topic as no newcomer, but one whose former discussions of the matter have brought him appropriate appreciation. Accordingly, the mere appearance of this book sets the psychiatrist’s digestive juices flowing as he reflects on his anticipated epistemological meal … The examination of loneliness in this presentation is put forth in so compact a manner, and with so weighty a scholasticism, that it is not possible to review this book in a synoptic form. Whether the psychiatrist understands it completely, it demands his attention and consideration. The effort will not be wasted and one leaves this book with a deep impression of its significance.”

—Nathan Roth in the *American Journal of Psychotherapy*

“Ce livre en est à sa seconde édition et propose une étude à la fois philosophique, psychologique et littéraire de la solitude fondamentale humaine. Mais le souci métaphysique reste prédominant et l’analyse du statu même de l’esprit est le fil conducteur de ce travail; on verra ainsi comment l’aspect insulaire de l’esprit qui pense par soi, l’isolement de la vie de conscience nous mettent dans une situation qu’en même temps nous redoutons et chercher à compenser … L’enquête menée par l’auteur, la documentation proposée sont faites pour nourrir une réflexion renouvelée sur un thème permanent. Les renvois continuel a la psychologie, la psychiatrie, a la littérature et la philosophie font de ce travail d’une part un bilan culturel et d’autre part un document
existential. Il est écrit d’une façon suggestive et sa lecture reste agréable.”

—Michel Adam in Revue Philosophique

“Dr. Mijuskovic is well versed in both modern fiction and contemporary psychology and his discussion of certain literary works is sensitive and insightful. He has ably defended his thesis that man is intrinsically alone and that man’s loneliness is made possible by the reflexive nature of consciousness. He illustrates through numerous philosophical arguments and literary examples that man’s aloneness is the primary truth of human existence. The book is rich enough in reference material to serve as an excellent resource for the student.”

—Kailash Mithal in Research Journal of Philosophy and Social Sciences

“Bracketed with earlier writings, which it incorporates, this study draws together the results of an extensive reconceptualization of human culture and self-image. Mijuskovic’s new root-metaphor hinges on the idea of the person ‘in desperate isolation.’ That is his intuition. For a decade he has been researching and redescribing the position as it appeared to him in philosophy, psychology, and literature. Loneliness is for him a condition to be acknowledged—in art or social science. Escape via friendship or other dimensions is all one can hope for—escape into forgetfulness of the given condition … Recommended for college and university libraries and, perversely but realistically, also for theological libraries with a concern for how the other (intellectual) half lives. Extensive, entertaining footnotes.”

—Choice

“Mijuskovic has written an important book, one that is essential for anyone interested in the nature of loneliness, its expression in literature or its pathology. In a mere one hundred pages, Mijuskovic has packed a treasure of arguments and exegesis; he discusses numerous classic literary and philosophic texts with a richness of detail usually found in books four or five times the length. His style is clear, brisk, and often elegant … His thesis is best construed ontologically
since he draws his conclusion that man is ‘metaphysically isolated’ by a transcendental argument. I think his thesis is best cast in a Heideggerian idiom. Loneliness specifies the basic ontological state of *Dasein*, and fear is its sole mode of state-of-mind, its only mood. Thus, neither ‘fear’ nor ‘loneliness’ should be understood ontically. Fear is not to be understood as a phenomenon alongside shyness, timidity, misgiving, or being startled, nor in competition with courage, equanimity, complacence or nonchalance. Similarly, loneliness is not to be understood as a phenomenon alongside solitude, seclusion, isolation or remoteness, nor in competition with crowdedness or camaraderie. Thus, all the apparent counterexamples to his thesis are examples of momentary flights from transcendental loneliness, from which all men flee, back into which all men inevitably fall.”

—Al Martinich in the *Journal of Thought*

“Philosophy, psychology, and literature are not generally recognized enough as closely related. It is true that these disciplines have been guilty of dogmatism in unguarded moments: Philosophy has criticized many assumptions and intellectual tools of psychology; psychology has argued against philosophy’s hypotheses and has sounded forth against those aspects of living and human experience that cannot properly be studied in the laboratory. In general, the relationship between and among philosophy, psychology, and sociology have not been respected … In this little volume, Ben Mijuskovic writes broadly and documents well the thesis that he develops most logically. This study employs an interdisciplinary methodology and the author argues rightly that loneliness has been the universal concern of mankind since the Greek myths and dramas, the dialogues of Plato, and the treatises of Aristotle … In this study, the author deals not only with loneliness but with the philosophy of loneliness as a serious and distinct field of concern. He does not write depressingly but truly extends considerable hope for mankind for to him human existence is worthwhile. Professor Mijuskovic has written most clearly and encyclopedically in a truly philosophic vein on the inter- and intra- relationships of literature, psychology, and philosophy. He writes most knowledgeably and points out that
loneliness is a universal theme in Western thought from the Hellenic Age into our own contemporary period....But the author realizes it is not enough to insist upon the simple, unjust solitude of man. It is also necessary to indicate why man is intrinsically isolated. Accordingly, Dr. Mijuskovic directly involves himself in a constructive theory of consciousness, a kind of Philosophy of mind, a model of awareness, which accounts for the essential aloneness of man.”

—Hirsch Lazar Silverman, Seton Hall University, in Social Science

“I quite literally discovered your book, and felt it was far more comprehensive, insightful and complete than my own book. I only wish you had written that book before my own work, since it would have been of immense help, especially from a conceptual point-of-view. It is exciting to see a field such as Philosophy recapture from Psychology what is rightfully its turf. Certainly human loneliness is one of the great philosophical problems of our modern age, and I think it ought to be a great way to get our young people thinking—(thinking philosophically that is) once again.”

—James Lynch, author of The Broken Heart: The Medical Consequences of Loneliness

“Ben Lazare Mijuskovic has become a most prominent and informed writer on the subject of loneliness and his thesis bids fair to become the basis of a whole corpus of psychiatric and psychoanalytic thought. “[L]oneliness, more correctly the drive to avoid a sense of isolation, actually constitutes the dynamic psychic force underlying all human consciousness and conduct … I am intimating that loneliness, as a principle, may be every bit as ultimate and comprehensive as Freud’s doctrine of sexual needs … I would hazard the … mutual need for companionship, the natural desire to meet, to communicate, and unify with another human being is really motivated by the instinct to overcome a desperate feeling of aloneness rather than to gratify sexual dissatisfaction … But to overcome loneliness is not to escape it or vanquish it for long, and like the lovers who momentarily conquer
it, one is always under the threat of separation. [W]e die alone even when we are condemned with others (Sartre’s *The Wall*).’ So death, like sleep, is permeated by loneliness. ‘Loneliness constitutes the basic structure of man’s self-consciousness. And so God, whom man has created, is endowed with a “reflective” awareness of his (man’s) every act and thought, whether it be wicked or laudable, for the really important thing is not whether one is to be punished or praised but rather that man is not to be abandoned, estranged, one is not to be left alone, so that one shall not become a solitary atom of consciousness, forsaken to existence among the limitless expanses of dark space and empty time.’ One quickly gets the impression that Mijuskovic gathers all human personality functioning under the rubric of loneliness and he is convincing enough to command serious thought. Mijuskovic musters much evidence for his view from literary sources.”

—Nathan Roth in *The Psychiatry of Writing a Will*

“This study contends that loneliness has been the universal concern of mankind since the time of the early Greeks. While it enlists an eclectic method, the central themes are philosophical, and more particularly the line of argument is phenomenological and metaphysical. There is general agreement with the tri-partite construction of Husserl: transcendental ego, noesis, and noematic structures. The totality of what is experienced belongs most surely to a realm of meaning bestowed by the knowing subject, and all other reality is deemed to be a matter of secondary inference. This almost dogmatic point of departure, however, by no means precludes the inclusion of extensive theorizing in the fields of social psychology and sociology … This perspective serves the author well as a device whereby writings in several fields of social science and in different literary genres are related in an always meaningful, sometimes brilliant way.”

—*International Review of Modern Sociology*

“The thesis of Mijuskovic’s study is that the central motive of human conduct is the fear of aloneness. Individuals seek the
companionship of others, join in social life, and create cultural works most fundamentally as a flight from the experience of loneliness. He presents an ‘image of man as intrinsically alone and irredeemably lost, man as continually struggling to escape the solipsistic prison of his frightening solitude.’ Mijuskovic attempts to establish a conception of monadic consciousness that will explain and illuminate the sources and manifestations of human loneliness. His argument develops in a surprising and improbable direction: Whereas most thinkers have regarded loneliness as a secondary and derived condition, stemming from the interruption of an original union with others, he feels that the ultimate and primordial human state is that of being alone and that relatedness to others is the secondary formation. The book presents the above thesis through discussions of the theme of loneliness in the works of such authors as Descartes, Kant, Husserl, Sartre [in philosophy], Defoe, Dostoyevsky, Conrad [in literature] and Freud and Lang [in psychology]. Whatever one may think of postulating loneliness as the central fact of the human condition, the essays can be read as a series of reflections relevant to the emerging discipline of the psychology of knowledge. One of the great tasks facing this new field of study is the exploration of how emotional experience infiltrates and colors creative works in various intellectual domains. Products of literature, psychology, and philosophy may be studied not only in their explicit contexts, but also in terms of how they may embody metaphorical symbols of personal subjectivity. From this perspective, to take just one of several possible examples, Mijuskovic’s discussions allow us to perceive a close kinship between the image of Robinson Crusoe in Daniel Defoe’s classic, R. D. Laing’s conception of the inner true self, and the idea of the transcendental ego in the philosophy of Edmund Husserl. Each of these representations may be viewed as symbolizing an experience of the self’s solitude, arising from the personal world of its creator and taking a form that awakens wide resonance in the community at large. In developing the position that man’s essential (metaphysical) nature is to be alone, Mijuskovic equates the concept of man’s separateness with that of his alienation and solitude. For instance, in describing the transition from the undifferentiated, oceanic oneness of early infancy into the world of differentiated self and object representations, he writes, ‘The more
sharply etched and determinate our image is, the more it stands in stark alienation and opposition to the "other." Likewise, he argues, ‘Man is completely alone; that is to say his primary ontological condition consists in existing as a separate entity from his fellows.’ For Mijuskovic, being separate means being alone and alienated; the possibility of a life clearly separate but existing in underived mutuality with other lives seems not to exist in the world he describes. Love, mutuality, and companionship are in his view ‘ontologically secondary’ (and ultimately futile) efforts to escape the fundamental solitude of the human condition. The book may also be read as a fascinating document of loneliness, for no author would focus so single-mindedly on this emotion unless he had himself experienced it at a deep level. If it is assumed that what Mijuskovic claims regarding cultural products in general holds true of his own work in particular, then his book must itself be seen as an example of the flight from lonely isolation. How does his intellectual project accomplish this flight? I would suggest that by locating loneliness in the heart of universal human nature, he has transformed the feeling of alienated solitude into the most deeply shared of all human experience.”

—George E. Atwood in “All Men Are Together in Their Loneliness,” Contemporary Psychology

“Of unusual interest is a new book about the person from a different perspective, namely his loneliness. Ben Mijuskovic has approached this question from a ‘multidisciplinary’ perspective in his Loneliness in Philosophy, Psychology, and Literature. Abundant but selected literary examples are introduced to illustrate this highly original approach and there are some striking descriptions not only of types of loneliness but also instructive considerations of the relation of loneliness to narcissism, phenomenology, and the possibility of a private language.”

—Idealistic Studies

“This book deserves to be read and pondered. It is a book that should stimulate discussion among those interested in the human
predicament. Mijuskovic’s radical individualism will surely challenge the currently fashionable view that humans are innately social creatures. It is to be hoped that the dialogue between the human sciences (psychiatry, psychology, sociology, anthropology) and philosophy will be renewed by this provocative book.”

—Psychiatry

“The scholarship is erudite and thought provoking. All psychologists interested in research on loneliness should study this work. The basic premise also has implications for psychotherapists. It really does matter whether the therapist considers existential isolation as the basic datum of human experience or as a defect of bad socialization to be overcome … Mijuskovic makes a powerful case for loneliness.”

—Contemporary Psychology (second edition of the book)

“An important book, one that is essential for anyone interested in the nature of loneliness, its expression in literature or its pathology … a treasure of arguments and exegesis … the style is brisk, clear and often elegant.”

—Journal of Thought (second edition)

“Fascinating work … remarkable book. In its interdisciplinary connections, its richness of detail, and its philosophical acumen, this book is unique … a provocative and eminently worthy addition to the author’s important work in the nature of human nature.”

—Revue Internationale de Philosophie

“The interdisciplinary approach is impressive in its comprehensiveness and refreshing in the use of literature as a source of support for the model. The book is very eloquent and persuasive … it is very worthwhile reading for a compelling presentation of a model of existential loneliness.”
“Dr. Mijuskovic writes knowledgeably and documents well the thesis which he develops most logically arguing rightly that loneliness is the universal concern of mankind … The author has written in a clear, encyclopedic, and truly philosophic vein on the inter- and intra-relationships between literature, psychology, and philosophy … He deals not simply with loneliness but with the philosophy of loneliness as a serious and distinct field of concern … and he involves himself in a constructive theory of awareness which accounts for the essential isolation of man.”

—Journal of Individual Psychology

“Dr. Mijuskovic is obviously well versed in both modern fiction and contemporary psychology; and his discussion of certain literary work, in particular, is sensitive and insightful. The book conveys to the reader a sense of personal commitment, quite apart from its speculative interest and responsible scholarship.”

—Social Science

“Although Ben Mijuskovic agrees that awareness of and concern about loneliness have greatly expanded in tandem with the consequences of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, his main argument is that loneliness is not merely a special aspect of modern alienation but an inevitable part of consciousness, and that the drive to combat loneliness is the basic explanatory principle behind man’s functioning. As he develops this thesis with masterly command of diverse materials, Mijuskovic convincingly makes his major points; equally important, he elicits a resonance in the reader—an introspective concurrence about the characteristics of the experience of loneliness.”

—History of European Ideas

“Although Ben Mijuskovic agrees that awareness of and concern about loneliness have greatly expanded in tandem with the consequences of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, his main argument is that loneliness is not merely a special aspect of modern alienation but an inevitable part of consciousness, and that the drive to combat loneliness is the basic explanatory principle behind man’s functioning. As he develops this thesis with masterly command of diverse materials, Mijuskovic convincingly makes his major points; equally important, he elicits a resonance in the reader—an introspective concurrence about the characteristics of the experience of loneliness.”

—Canadian Review of Comparative Literature
“The range of Professor Mijuskovic’s scholarship leaves little ground on the subject of loneliness unexplored but his manner of presentation is neither dull nor pedantic. In fact, his insightful use of literature, psychology, and other perspectives has the directly personal impact of forcing each of us to confront his own isolation.”

—James Howard, author of The Flesh-Colored Cage

“This perspective [of loneliness] serves the author well as a device whereby writings in several fields of social science and in different literary genres are related in an always meaningful, sometimes brilliant way.”

—International Review of Modern Sociology

“He has cast a particular light on a variety of important writings and has suggested an interesting connection between philosophic and literary interpretations of the human condition.”

—Ethics

“Professor Mijuskovic’s book is a thoughtful, stimulating contribution to a heretofore neglected area of study. His presentation of the philosophical roots of loneliness is rewarding for the clinician as well as the philosopher. I recommend the book to all who are interested in the area of existential psychotherapy.

—Irvin Yalom, author of Existential Psychotherapy

“The book is undoubtedly the best treatment of loneliness from the philosophical perspective and is likely to remain so for a long time. Furthermore, the philosophical perspective, at this time and possibly for the indefinite future, may offer the most understanding (versus “explanation”) of the subject. Professor Mijuskovic has ably defended his thesis that man’s loneliness is made possible by the reflexive nature of consciousness. He illustrates, through numerous philosophical arguments and literary examples, that man’s aloneness
is the primary truth of human existence. The work is contemporary in its ‘in touchness’ with man’s predicament but at the same time demolishes the trite and falsely comforting contention that loneliness is a problem of recent civilization. It is rich enough in reference material to serve as an excellent resource for any student of man.”

—Joseph Hartog, editor of *the Anatomy of Loneliness*

“The theory is one that, as he deftly shows, is well represented in diverse dimensions of culture (e.g., in philosophical theories of the rationalist and idealist tradition, in literary works of the introspective genre, and in psychological systems of the Freudian, egological, and depth-psychological schools). The strengths of the book are (1) the lucidity and passion with which the main thesis is presented, and (2) the masterly way in which the materials from all three disciplines referred to in the title are employed to exemplify this thesis. Mijuskovic is both a scholar and a serious philosopher, and this, his second book, is a learned and stimulating statement. It is a book that gathers diverse ideas into a succinct perspective and challenges the reader to reflection and response. The viewer highly recommends it to both those who are interested in the specific topic of loneliness and to those who are willing to submit their values and aspirations to a stern test.”

—*Journal of Social Philosophy*

“Writing within the existential tradition, Dr. Mijuskovic sees man as intrinsically alone, yet continually struggling to escape monadic confinement. This struggle, in his opinion, is a universal factor motivating all human beings. Drawing on literature, philosophy, and psychology, his book offers erudite and insightful analysis of why we encounter alienation. His recent writing suggests therapeutic principles designed to alleviate our inevitable sense of isolation. As I did, students and colleagues interested in loneliness will benefit from reading Dr. Mijuskovic’s important work.”

—Daniel Perlman, author of *Loneliness: A Sourcebook of Current Theory, Research, and Therapy*
“If the distance desired cannot be traversed metaphysically and structurally by being or becoming the other, then perhaps it can be bridged epistemologically, to wit, through the functions of connectedness. To exemplify epistemic loneliness, one can invoke the views of Ben Mijuskovic who maintains that all acts of consciousness are inevitably motivated by the wish to escape or evade loneliness. However, to do so, he reasons, is impossible because consciousness is so constituted that loneliness serves as its sovereign a priori, in other words, as its absolutely universal and necessary principle. Consequently, loneliness is the prism by which we perceive and evaluate reality, although we are not, as a rule, aware of the prism itself. In Mijuskovic’s estimation, no theory of consciousness can explain how we can satisfactorily reach into others or be reached by them in order to rescue and reclaim consciousness from its ‘master motivator,’ loneliness itself. Be they methodical or haphazard, all endeavors to liberate oneself from (epistemic) loneliness remains unsuccessful.”


“Western philosophers from Rene Descartes, Gottfried Leibniz, Immanuel Kant, and on through Edmund Husserl and Jean-Paul Sartre have conceptualized human consciousness as monadic islands separated by uncrossable seas (Mijuskovic, 1979). And yet the remoteness from the knower to the known suggests that loneliness is the piece of consciousness that can reflect upon itself (Mijuskovic, 1979). No human being can really know another’s unique experience, and yet individuals yearn to share their distinct, fleeting slices of eternity anyway. The best one can do is to point to one’s loneliness and hope that another has had the same or a similar experience, conceding that “one never knows a human being but one occasionally ceases to feel that one does not know him” (Andre Malraux as cited in Mijuskovic, 1979, p. 13).”

—Alyson Crabtree in *Foundations of Chronic Loneliness in the Western Psyche*
“In principle, loneliness is considered to be temporary. Some philosophers, however, are convinced that loneliness and the struggle for intimacy are the essence of human existence and, as such, are permanent and universal experiences (Mijuskovic, 1996).”

—Jenny de Jon Gierveld, Theo van Tilburg, and Pearl Dykstra in Cross-National Comparisons of Social Isolation and Loneliness: Introduction and Overview
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ben Mijuskovic currently teaches in the departments of philosophy and humanities at California State University, Dominguez Hills. His primary interest is the history of consciousness with a special focus on loneliness. He is the author of three books, *The Achilles of Rationalist Arguments; Loneliness in Philosophy, Psychology, and Literature*; and *Contingent Immaterialism*, as well as numerous articles in *Dialogue, Telos, International Studies in Philosophy, Philosophical Quarterly, Sophia, Journal of Thought, Southern Journal of Philosophy, Critica, Philosophy Today, Schopenhauer Jahrbuch, Psychiatry, Psychology, Review of Existential Psychiatry and Psychology, Psychocultural Review, Journal of the History of Philosophy, Idealistic Studies, Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Journal of Social Philosophy, International Review of Contemporary Sociology, Cogito, Adolescence, Child Study Journal, The Psychotherapy Patient, Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, Essays on Philosophical Counseling, Philosophy and Literature, Philosophy and Theology, Philotheos, Kritike*, and others. He has a PhD in philosophy and an MA in comparative literature, and he is a licensed clinical therapist (LCSW). In this latter capacity, for a quarter of a century, he has worked with Headstart children, abused children referred to Child Protective Services, and the elderly referred to Adult Protective Services, and he has treated both acute and chronic patients suffering from serious disorders, including schizophrenia, major depression, bipolar disorders, and anxiety disorders in locked, institutional, and outpatient settings. His insights into loneliness are culled from both his theoretical studies and his practical experiences.
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It is my pleasant duty to thank the individuals as well as the institutions that have aided me in pursuit of my study on loneliness, both through their encouragement and their informed advice. In this regard, I owe a special debt of gratitude to Professor Paul Dibon, of the Sorbonne; Professor Richard Popkin, at Washington University; and especially to Ms. Gloria Parloff and the editorial staff of the journal *Psychiatry*. Indeed, the multidisciplinary method pursued in the present book is a direct outgrowth of an article entitled “Loneliness: An Interdisciplinary Approach,” which appeared in *Psychiatry*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (May, 1977). I am also greatly indebted to Professor George McClure, chairman of the philosophy department at my home institution, Southern Illinois University, for his theoretical guidance and for sharing his comprehensive knowledge of the humanities and social sciences with me. Their informed judgment and unfailing support have sustained me through the many and inevitable frustrations that accompany an effort of this nature. The inquiry began at Yale University, where I was a postdoctoral fellow during the 1975–1976 academic years, and it was continued while I was a visiting associate professor of philosophy engaged in research at Northwestern University in 1977–1978. The completion of the work was made possible by a grant awarded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Finally, I wish to thank the editors of the following periodicals for their kind permission to reproduce articles that appeared, in earlier form, in their journals: Thomas Lynaugh of *The Psychocultural Review*, Robert Lechner of *Philosophy Today*, John Blazer of *Psychology*, Marie Coleman Nelson of *The Psychoanalytic Review*, and James Van Patten of *The Journal of Thought*.

University of California
at Los Angeles
The present study, Loneliness, depends philosophically on a companion work, titled Contingent Immaterialism (Amsterdam: Gruner, 1984), which expounds an “idealist” theory of self-consciousness coupled with an “existential” description of human isolation.

Contingent Immaterialism consists of three parts. Part 1 outlines historically a traditional immaterialist model of the mind in relation to (1) a doctrine of meanings and relations, with specific application to the meaning of “space” and an “external world.” The discussion then proceeds to connect the immaterialist paradigm of the mind to views concerned with (2) the freedom of consciousness as well as (3) the immanent temporality of awareness. Drawing on many of the implications and conclusions offered in part 1, part 2 derives and develops a substantive and positive “philosophy of mind,” which emphasizes individually constituted meanings, a radically free consciousness, and an immanent temporality. In addition, this section argues that although the mind is immaterial, it is nevertheless “conditioned” by material factors. However, it is insisted that the mind cannot be reduced to, identified with, or explained by its contingent material origins. Given the monadic paradigm of an isolated self-consciousness, defended throughout the first two parts, the final section concludes that the individual is doomed to a loneliness that he/she continually strives to escape.

The term “contingent immaterialism” is intended to mean that under certain physical conditions, an entirely novel manifestation may emerge that is qualitatively dissimilar to what preceded it. Thus, it is conceivable and possible that an active mental entity may “result” from the juxtaposition of material elements in time. Such would be the case if the mind were to be generated from physical conditions. Without going further into this line of thought, suffice it to indicate that Aristotle in the ancient world, Hume in the modern age, and Sartre in the contemporary period could have assumed such a position. Similarly, Samuel Alexander, in Space, Time, and Deity
(1920), may be recruited in behalf of the same conclusion in his doctrine of “emergent evolution.”

Generally speaking, immaterialist theories of consciousness and the activities of the mind are most often committed to claims in defense of (personal) immortality. But obviously, the previous trio of cited authors represents a marked exception to this “rule,” and, in fact, it is not a necessary implication of the immaterialist or “simplicity” paradigm.

Speculatively, it is also conceivable that there are other dimensions, aspects, or attributes of ultimate reality beyond our more familiar four-dimensional space-time continuum influencing the relation between matter and mind or nature and self—such as those proposed by string theory or Spinoza’s infinite attributes—and that these may have to await further elaboration.
PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION: LONELINESS AND SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

The thesis of this preface, and indeed of this entire work, is that only the self-conscious or reflexive paradigm of awareness is capable of accounting for the phenomenon of loneliness and that embedded in its dynamic is a powerful desire to avoid it.

In his recently published study, Professor John G. McGraw takes issue with my depiction of loneliness as a universal motivational force and my identification of loneliness with the fear of loneliness. Referring to Loneliness in Philosophy, Psychology, and Literature, he states,

Universal loneliness is, in effect, depicted by Ben Mijuskovic in his assertion that whatever human beings do or do not do stems from but a single “source, or fund, of frightened psychic energy,” to wit the “fear of loneliness” (Mijuskovic, 1979, p. 2) … Consequently, the American philosopher reduces all apprehensiveness regarding any type of aloneness … to what I reference as aloneliness … Not only does Mijuskovic compress solitude to the fear of aloneness, but also, he does so to such diverse phenomena as alienation, depression, and boredom, all of which I consider not to be loneliness but its cousins (ibid, pp. 20, 49–56). In support of his thesis, namely that loneliness—or what is for Mijuskovic, the fear of loneliness in general—is the absolutely universal, basic, and ineradicable motivator of human beings in all their consciousness, and conduct, he cites Honore de Balzac:

Be he a leper or a prisoner, a sinner or an invalid is: to have a companion for his fate. In order to satisfy this drive which is life itself, he applies all his strength, all his power, the energy of his whole life. Would Satan have found companions without this overpowering craving? (Mijuskovic, 1979, 1985).
Even though they are plainly different experiences, many people, including Mijuskovic, are liable to confound being afraid of loneliness with loneliness itself.¹

Indeed, in previous publications, I have argued two related theses. The first is that the primal instinct to avoid loneliness, along with the accompanying need for prolonged intimacy, from the cradle to the grave, is the strongest motivational drive in human beings. I argue that following the replenishment of air, liquid, nourishment, and sleep, the most insistent and immediate necessity is man’s desire to escape loneliness and, further, that this desire is far more demanding than the attraction of sexual gratification. Beyond insisting on the primacy of our human concern to struggle with the specter of loneliness within consciousness, I have also sought to account for why this is the case.² In pursuing the second theme, I have distinguished three dominant theories of consciousness in Western thought upon which the feeling of loneliness might be established. Setting aside the doctrine of “neutral monism” advocated by William James and Bertrand Russell, the three paradigms are (a) the self-conscious or reflexive, (b) the empirical or behavioral, and (c) the intentional or phenomenological (Mijuskovic, 1976, 1984, 2005).

The first, self-consciousness, is already apparent in Plato’s Theaetetus in the following exchange between Socrates and his youthful respondent. The aged philosopher defines thinking or consciousness as the soul’s internal dialogue with itself:

Socrates: And do you accept my description of the process of thinking?

Theaetetus: How do you describe it?

Socrates: As a discourse that the mind carries on with itself … but I have a notion that, when the mind is thinking, it is simply talking to itself. (Theaetetus, 189e)

Quite early on in the history of philosophy and consciousness, self-consciousness and rational thought become identified. Such is the case, for example, in Aristotle’s description of the circular
characteristics of the Unmoved Mover’s “thinking as a thinking on thinking” (*Metaphysics*, 1074b, 34).

Since, then, thought and the [conceptual] object of thought are not different in the case of things that have not matter, the divine thought and its object will be the same, i.e. the thinking will be one with the object of its thought. (1074a, 4–7)

Thus man, being endowed with reason, may also, at certain privileged moments, display this active and reflexive mode of thought as the deity does. Further, as we shall see, implicit in this model of an immaterialist self-consciousness is the perfect simplicity, unity, and identity of the soul in its self-knowledge.³

Subsequently, the simplicity assumption is similarly promoted, both ontologically and epistemologically, to first-principle status in the Cartesian *cogito* (Second Meditation). According to Descartes, self-consciousness is immediately, directly aware of itself; it knows itself by an act of intuition. By contrast, it is restricted to inferring mediately, indirectly, through propositional judgments, the existence of the external world and other minds, since, as Descartes wonders, perhaps for all I know the men I see passing by in the street are nothing but automatons wearing hats and coats, cleverly artificed mechanical robots (Third Meditation). For Descartes, of course, God’s goodness guarantees that our beliefs are veridical (Fifth Meditation). But notice, there exists in the very structure of consciousness a spontaneous power to transcend, to go beyond the immediacy of thought by its inferential—albeit dubitable—power of consciousness, to posit an independent external sphere as well as other minds beyond our own. There appears to be in the mind an outward impulse toward creating analogous realms of consciousness as animated as our own, toward minds we believe are endowed like ours with similar, although not identical, sensations, feelings, and thoughts.⁴

What remains implicit and undeveloped in Aristotle’s and Descartes’s discussions of the immaterial but active nature of thought becomes eminently clear in Leibniz’s opening sixteen sections of *The Monadology*. Each individual is constituted as a perfectly distinct ontological entity. For Leibniz, the monad (soul) persists as an unextended, self-enclosed, “windowless” being. It exhibits an
epistemological “multiplicity in unity” within self-consciousness, and, as a continuous self, it represents an ethical identity. Without going further into the model, suffice it to say that Kant, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in the two (rather different) Transcendental Deductions of the Categories, and Husserl, in the *Cartesian Meditations*, both deepen and masterfully exploit this famous monadic principle as well as its insular consequences. It is this paradigm of cognition that alone is able to ground the unique sense of loneliness discovered in each of us as solitary beings.

The second theory of the “mind” as equal to the brain is shared by materialists, empiricists, phenomenalists, and behaviorists. It is ultimately grounded in the brain and the central nervous system. On this view, consciousness is mechanically explained as the causal result of the motion of matter external to the brain and its contingent impingement on that organ. Thinking is reducible to the physical, physiological relations between various stimuli and their responses; behavior is simply the reactive causal consequence. Connections are merely the result of the “association of ideas” principle. The brain is understood as essentially passive until triggered by external stimuli. This view permeates the materialism of Democritus, Epicurus, and Hobbes; it is prevalent in Locke’s empiricism when he pronounces that God could have created thinking matter; it is involved in the phenomenalism of Hume when he quite inconsistently declares that matter not only may be the cause of thought but that it actually is (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, Part IV, pp. 246); and it persists most notably in American behaviorism, which denies the very existence of the mind (Watson, Thorndike, Hull, Skinner).

The official doctrine illustrating the process of “thought” reads as follows.

May I take a message? In the brain, neurons communicate through chemicals called neurotransmitters. These molecules seep out of one neuron and excite another, triggering electrical signals that produce thought, emotions, memories, and will. (1) An electrical impulse triggered by hearing a sound makes neurons release a chemical into the synapse, the gap between one neuron and the next. (2) The chemical (serotonin) fits into receptors, specially shaped molecules, on the neighboring
neuron. (3) The presence of the serotonin in the receptor sparks an electrical impulse in the neuron, and the sequence continues until it culminates in a thought, feeling, or action. (Dixon Rohr, *Newsweek*, February 7, 1994)

But the critical issue is, what sense does it make to hold that “neurons communicate through chemicals”? Communication is a human meaning. How is an “electrical impulse” transformed into thoughts, consciousness, and self-consciousness? Even sensations and collections of sensations are not meanings.

In basic sympathy with the foregoing model, Professor McGraw quotes with satisfaction the following passage as a fruitful explanation for our loneliness:

Neuroscience has discovered that our brain’s very design makes it sociable, inexorably drawn into an intimate brain-to-brain linkup whenever we engage with another person. The neural bridge lets us affect the brain—and so the body—of everyone with whom we interact, just as they do us … That link is a double-edged sword: nourishing relationships have a beneficial effect on our health, while toxic ones act like slow poison in our bodies. Our social interactions even play a role in reshaping our brain, through “neuroplasticity,” which means that experiences sculpt the shape, size, and number of neurons and their synaptic connections.” (quoted on page 18 by McGraw from Daniel Goldman, *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships* (New York: Bantam Books, 2006, pp. 4–5)

But if this view is correct, how are we to account for the fact that a person can be lonely in a crowd of human bodies? I know what it means to say, “I feel lonely” or, “I know I was lonely this morning.” But what sense does it make to assert that “My brain is lonely?” An electro-encephalograph may indicate that a person is thinking but it cannot tell us what he is thinking.

There is something else that Professor McGraw elects to avoid. If one is to reduce the mind to the brain and its physiological mechanics and chemical elements, it would seem to follow, as a direct
consequence, that loneliness not only could be but indeed should be addressed with medication.

We recall that in 1909, Sigmund Freud gave a series of lectures at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, outlining the main theories of psychoanalysis, which was attended by key representatives of the American Psychological Association. From that moment, psychoanalysis became the dominant Weltanschauung of American psychiatry. It remained so well into the 1960’s, when it began to lose ground to a brain-oriented, behavioral picture of man. Indeed, the American Psychiatric Association declared that all mental disorders were due to chemical imbalances in the brain, and the 1990s were heralded as the “decade of the brain.” The turn to psychiatric medications and the complete revolution toward pharmaceuticals was accomplished.

The third candidate for a theory of consciousness is indebted to Franz Brentano, the early work of Husserl, and Jean-Paul Sartre. The intentionality thesis conceives the essence of consciousness as an awareness of something other than itself; it transcends itself; it is beyond itself; it endows the world with intentional meanings. Unlike the circular and reflexive model of self-consciousness, it shoots its vectorial arrows of meaning toward the world of objects, other selves, and values. Consciousness is meaning-intending. Its most powerful defense occurs in Sartre’s Transcendence of the Ego (1937).

Professor McGraw enlists this paradigm below in his own cause (as well as the behavioral model above, as we have seen). But I submit that as “first principles,” basic premises, and ultimate paradigms, the three models are intrinsically incompatible and mutually exclusive. One assumes either (a) a reflexive/self-conscious principle, (b) a materialistic/behavioral model, or (c) an intentional/phenomenological theory of the mind without a self; but not a combination of two (or more). As William James (and Pascal) pronounced, first principles as ultimate options are forced, momentous, and living. Indeed, attempting to mix or blend absolute beginnings is like being a little bit pregnant: you either are or you’re not.

However, Professor McGraw declares,

[H]uman consciousness is intrinsically directed to beings beyond itself, principally to other human beings and their
persons. Human consciousness as being originally ordered to beings outside itself is known as the intentional, or phenomenological, model of the mind … The mind’s being intrinsically ordered to other individuals qua human beings is often known as the relational [principle or theory]. It’s being directed to other human beings qua persons is the personological paradigm of consciousness. [By contrast] its being directed toward itself is designated as the reflexive model and as directed toward its external actions but especially its internal acts, it is known as the reflective. (McGraw, p. 21)

Again:

Metaphysical solipsism rests on the false and falsifiable supposition that consciousness is from the first, reflexively directed to itself instead of being initially related to objects outside itself (extramental reality), as the phenomenological and the relational model of the mind contend. (McGraw, p. 52)

In sum, Professor McGraw defends both the behavioral and the intentional paradigms/principles despite their incompatibility. But, once again, the same difficulty arises as above. If there is no self, then how can “one” be lonely? A similar problem appears in Sartre’s “Existentialism Is a Humanism,” for if there is no self, in what meaningful sense am “I” responsible for “my” decisions? And if there is no self-consciousness, how are we to account for loneliness? Shall we say that there is loneliness but that it does not “belong” or “attach” to any self?

In addition, it’s worth pointing out that Husserl, the father of phenomenology and initially the major proponent of the intentionality principle, changed his mind about eliminating self-consciousness and instead later argued for its preeminence. In this connection, it is worth consulting Husserl’s Cartesian Meditations, especially Sections 31 and 32, and the marginal manuscript note where he states that “the being of the transcendental ego is antecedent to the being of the world.”

But in general, in his study of loneliness, McGraw repeatedly assumes a constant empirical model of human nature as intrinsically
social. This seems to be his primary explanation for accounting for loneliness when one is deprived of its fulfillment. He believes that the social aspects of human beings are ingrained in our behavioral natures and are sufficient to account for our desire to be with others. In brief, he posits an empirical claim regarding an assumed social behavior of human beings to explain “why” we are lonely. Certainly thinkers like Thomas Hobbes, who views the natural state of man as “a war of all against all” wherein “life is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short,” would disagree, as would Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Sartre for quite different reasons.

By contrast, I wish to plumb deeper into the recesses of consciousness in order to exhibit the very structures of thought as constituting (not causally conditioning) our desire (a) to extend our self toward the other as well as (b) to include our self with the other (Heidegger, *Mitsein*). The reflexive structures and activities of self-awareness I regard as universal and necessary (a priori) mental elements and acts in the Kantian sense, spontaneously generated from within the resources of the mind itself. (So Leibniz.) I maintain that the principle of self-consciousness, emphasizing the a priori structures of consciousness, is originary and primary, whereas empirical “human nature” is derivative and secondary.

Three of the great rationalist and idealist philosophers are committed to the reflexivity principle of self-consciousness in different ways. Descartes holds that conceivably one could be intuitively self-conscious even if no other minds existed—“I think [equals] I am”—although he rather quickly asserts that the idea of God ontologically precedes the idea of myself and thus assures me that there is a reality beyond myself. Kant, by contrast, holds that empirical self-consciousness is mutually conditioned by a realm of phenomenal objects (including other selves), which in turn presuppose and are grounded in the transcendental unity of apperception and the transcendental object = x (Deduction in A). Self-consciousness for Kant thus involves a mediate or relational existence against a background of phenomenal entities. Hegel, on the other hand, insists that the self is conditioned by other selves; in short, that personal identity is socially constituted and there is no self-consciousness
apart from the dialectically reverberating consciousnesses of other selves (*The Phenomenology of Spirit*, “Lordship and Bondage”).

But the terrifying conceivableability of an absolute and eternal companionless existence belongs to Kant, who speculates that, since the self may stand alone against and in contrast to a realm of lifeless objects, it is possible to imagine an absolutely solitary, self-conscious existence. Kant cites the nightmare of a character named Carazan, who dreams that because of his egoistic greed, avarice, and disdain for the feelings of others, he is condemned to a singular existence, to live throughout eternity absolutely alone without communion with any other sentient creature, abandoned in an abyss of silence, loneliness, and darkness. Such a speculation clearly demonstrates Kant’s threefold commitment to the unity of self-consciousness, the temporal continuity of the self, and its essentially monadic character.6

As a parenthetical comment, it is interesting to note that Kant’s commitment to a Leibnizian metaphysical and epistemological paradigm of an absolutely solitary, completely insular, and “windowless” monad is quite compatible with his own version of subjective idealism. What is problematic, however, is Kant’s need to ethically connect the categorical imperative with a sense of freedom and duty, which is intrinsically and necessarily directed to the good of others (i.e., to selves clearly distinct from my self, a realm of separate rational beings).7

In my initial study of loneliness, I had proposed that no human being would ever elect to be immortal at the price of being the only self-consciousness in the entire universe.

Indeed, no religious writer, advocating a doctrine of personal immortality, has ever expressed a desire for unique immortality; rather, it is always an afterlife with God and/or other consciousnesses. (Mijuskovic, *Psychiatry*, p. 127)

And yet McGraw confidently declares several times in his text that what he terms as “metaphysical” or “solipsistic” loneliness is practically inconceivable. Nevertheless, he goes on to state,

I propose that no absolutely absolute loners of any kind exist when it comes to the threat of being forever devoid of an
existence of another person, irrespective of how detestable and hostile such an individual might be. All of us would become alonies were we faced with the possibility of endless aloneness of any sort, especially emotional, since such a state would constitute a veritable hell. (McGraw, p. 24)

No human being would be able to abide an existence perceived as devoid of all others. Accounts of individuals who did so and remained sane … must, in my view, be adjudged as apocryphal. (McGraw, p.31)

Hell is absolute isolation in every sense of the word. (McGraw, p. 40)

Conceivably, by dint of some catastrophe, only one person could remain existing in the universe—an inconceivably lonely existence. (McGraw, p. 52)

And, finally,

One of the reasons each of us is convinced that others extramentally exist is simply that none of us could tolerate the actuality of their objective nonexistence. (McGraw, p. 54)

Accordingly, it seems to me that these sincerely expressed horrors, passionately exclaimed by McGraw, testify to a “fear of loneliness"! It is this fear that lies at the bottom of each human soul.

But the sense of desperation does not have to be grounded in metaphysics or solipsism. The loneliness only has to be personal and subjectively intense in respect of its feeling “absolute” in a psychological sense in a particular individual, in the respect that any possibility of existing otherwise is inconceivable to that person. If one believes that one’s loneliness will be unremitting and irredeemable, then the necessary and sufficient conditions for psychological and emotional solipsism will be met. Indeed, elsewhere I have treated this absolute sense of psychological abandonment in children by focusing on the disorders variously termed as “marasmus,” “anaclctic depression,” and “hospitalism” in the works of Anna Freud, Margaret
Ribble, Rene Spitz, John Bowlby, Harry Harlow, et al. Anna Freud, for example, discusses and documents the early infant deaths of half of the children under the age of one when they were institutionalized in England during World War I due to the absence of their mothers, who were engaged as factory workers in deference to the war effort. More recently, the DSM-IV has termed these desperate crises of loneliness and emotional neglect “separation anxiety,” “reactive attachment disorder,” or “failure to thrive.” One is also reminded in this context of the ego’s regressive efforts to return to the infinite security of the “oceanic feeling,” the most primitive stage of development discussed in Freud’s Civilization and Its Discontents, wherein loneliness is suspended precisely because there is no self (Mijuskovic, 1979–80, 1996, 1987).

Similarly, James Lynch, in The Broken Heart, recounts the legendary story of Edward II of Sicily, who devised an experiment to discover the original language of mankind by depriving newborn children of their natural mother’s nurturing and instructing their caretakers not to speak to the infants. Alas, the experiment proved to be a failure since all the children died.8

At the other extreme of life, Lynch has also indicated that the widowed frequently expire from loneliness within six months of their partners’ death.

As Joseph Conrad declares in An Outcast of the Islands, “We are lonely from the cradle to the grave, and perhaps beyond.”

In previous writings, I have indicated that loneliness is both a meaning and a feeling. As a meaning, it can be defined as the self-conscious desire to be positively, mutually, and reciprocally related to another thinking being and yet being unable to relate in this desired fashion. (Plants won’t fulfill the required condition but some animals might.) As a feeling (or sensation), it is indefinable just as all sensations and feelings are indefinable. Just so, the color yellow, as a simple quality, is indefinable (G. E. Moore). It can be experienced, but it cannot be defined any more than the color yellow can be conceptually transmitted or communicated to someone who is congenitally blind.

As I indicated previously in Psychiatry (1977), all meaningful concepts must have a significant opposite; the contrary of loneliness
is intimacy, a reflexive, inclusive sense of *mutual* togetherness or belonging with an other distinct being. The essence of intimacy derives from the reciprocal *sharing* of feelings, meanings, decisions, and values with another significant self-conscious being, or a divine one. Solitude, by contrast, is a positive feeling when one is alone, as is the case with the overwrought housewife, the solitary lover of nature (Thoreau), or the contemplative aesthete (Schopenhauer). However, it should be noted that any unduly prolonged and/or enforced isolation will eventually turn into negative feelings of loneliness and abandonment (as evidenced by Kant’s frightening example of Carazan above).

As a parenthetical note, Frieda Fromm-Reichmann’s groundbreaking 1959 article in *Psychiatry* actually begins with her realization of a schizophrenic’s absolute sense of loneliness. As a result of their loneliness, schizophrenics seek an alternate universe only to find that it exhibits its own set of horrors. These terrifying psychotic fantasies are graphically depicted in Anna Greenberg’s autobiography, *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*. The character of Dr. Freed in the novel is actually Frieda Fromm-Reichmann. Indeed, as a practicing psychotherapist, the author treated and observed a large number of psychotic individuals in whom intense loneliness (and anxiety) resulted in the de-realization of the wounded self. The dynamic between loneliness and psychosis is clearly evident in these individuals despite the sufferers’ strong tendencies to isolate themselves when their failed efforts at intimacy only result in a more acute and chronic sense of abandonment.

I recall once hearing that during sensory deprivation experiments, people often imagine creating animals as companions.

As shown above, one of McGraw’s disagreements with me accuses me of “confounding the fear of loneliness with loneliness itself” (McGraw, p. 19). This isn’t quite correct, and I can only refer the reader to some twenty-plus articles published between the years 1977 and 1996.

Indeed, what I have argued is that there are a priori (universal and necessary) synthetic relations connecting loneliness and its constitutive elements: narcissism; hostility; entitlement (Zilboorg)⁹; anxiety (Fromm-Reichmann)¹⁰; depression; anxiety (Fromm)¹¹; and a
sense of incommunicability (Hoskisson)\textsuperscript{12}, which is always emotional but often expressed verbally in linguistically developed individuals (Mijuskovic, 1996). Thus, anxiety becomes an a priori constituent of loneliness, an essential feature of its dynamic. There is Freudian anxiety, which is fueled by unresolved internal conflicts. And there is Sartrean anguish (anxiety) and forlornness (loneliness), both of which are constitutive existential categories/structures of individual human existence. For the latter, both categories are the result of a radical sense of solitary freedom and disconnectedness. But there is also the garden variety of all-too common loneliness when each of us feels separated from those for whom we yearn.

There are at least five major philosophers who are committed to a priori but synthetic meanings within consciousness. Plato does so in the \textit{Meno} when he universally and necessarily connects two distinguishable concepts, color and extension, in order to produce an insight into the relation between Virtue and Knowledge (of the Good). Further examples are: Kant’s twelve conditioning categories of self-consciousness; all of Hegel’s categories of Being, Essence, and the Notion in the \textit{Science of Logic} as well as Consciousness, Self-Consciousness, and Reason in \textit{The Phenomenology of Spirit}; and at least three of Sartre’s candidates, to wit, color and extension; sound, pitch, and timbre; and Consciousness and Being (\textit{Being and Nothingness}, “Conclusion”). Together, they testify to the mutual agreement between these philosophers on the issue of the prevalence and importance of the a priori synthetic. Indeed, more to the point, Husserl emphasizes that it is the essence of physical objects to be presented perspectivally through mutually exclusive aspects, whereas thoughts are always completely given when they are given at all. There are neither sides, nor interior dimensions, nor exterior angles to our thoughts. They are solipsistically self-insulated within the ego (\textit{Cartesian Meditations}). They are self-contained and monadic.

In short, McGraw appears to have little or no interest in whether or not the \textit{unity} of consciousness and self-consciousness has anything at all to do with loneliness.

But there is another neglected factor by Professor McGraw. This has to do with a subject matter that generally flies under the banner of “personal identity,” the issue regarding the \textit{continuity} of the self.
Thus, for example, philosophers in the seventeenth century were already aware that all the cells in the body are completely replaced within seven years. Consequently, the criteria for the identity of the self could not be grounded in bodily identity alone. Actually, it is Locke who, in the second edition of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, recognized the topic of possible criteria in regard to the self as a separate question and added a chapter dealing with it (II, xxvii). In his discussion, he offers two criteria: a version of the Cartesian *cogito* (which is inconsistent with his other reflections on the “unobserved observer” principle of awareness) and memory. The latter condition is criticized by Leibniz, who posits the unconscious and then argues that we often forget acts and thoughts that are nevertheless veridically attributed to us by others and certainly by God (Mijuskovic, 1975, 2008).

When Hume addresses the issue of personal identity, he concludes that the “self” is nothing but a bundle of atomistic impressions of phenomenally constructed “associations,” which are in continual flux and temporally “succeed” each other with inconceivable rapidity. Their soldering power is the empirical force of the imagination. In addition, according to Hume, the mind is like a theater before which the impressions, like players on a stage, strut and disappear, never to play their roles again. What he fails to acknowledge, however, is that the self-awareness of *temporal succession* (above) cannot occur unless there is an underlying or unifying self to bind, to hold the transitional moments together within the same consciousness (Kant). Further, he neglects to answer just *who* is the audience, *who* is watching the stage? Even on Hume’s own terms, it’s a perception without a perceiver; it’s Locke’s problem of the unobserved observer all over again, because perceptions are not reflexive. In the appendix to the *Treatise*, Hume makes frank admission of his perplexity (Mijuskovic, 1971).

It is at this philosophical juncture that Kant connects two critical themes, namely the spontaneously generated temporal activities of consciousness, or time-consciousness (first edition *Critique*, A 99 ff.), with the empirical unity of self-consciousness that in turn is conditioned by the transcendental unity of apperception (second edition, B 131).
(A) Whatever the origin of our representations, whether they are due to the influence of outer things, or are produced through inner causes, whether they arise a priori, or being appearances have an empirical origin, they must all, as modifications of the mind, belong to inner sense. All our knowledge, thus, is subject to time, the formal condition of inner sense. In it they must all be ordered, connected, and brought into relation. This is a general observation which, throughout what follows, must be borne in mind as being quite fundamental. (Critique of Pure Reason, A 99)

And in the second edition of the Critique,

(B) It must be possible for the ‘I think’ to accompany [unify] all my representations [conscious thoughts]; for otherwise something would be represented in me which would not be thought at all, and that is equivalent to saying that the representation would be impossible, or at least would be nothing to me … But this representation [of unity] is an act of spontaneity. (B 131)

In my view, the unity of consciousness rests upon and is grounded in the immanent temporality of consciousness. In any case, whichever takes precedence, or indeed, whether they are “simultaneously” coactive, they both function as a priori conditions for human loneliness precisely because there is a reflexive self sufficiently extended temporally to be aware that it is lonely. Neither the body nor the brain nor acts of intentional consciousness extending to transcendent meanings that remain unattached to any ego accounts for the intense sense of loneliness.

Differently put, why is it that I indubitably know—short of psychosis—that I am self-conscious and that my sensations, feelings, and thoughts are mine and not yours; that they belong to me?

Because Professor McGraw avoids these vital considerations in his classificatory study of loneliness, he concludes that it is a subject best dealt with empirically and, as such, that it can be cured since it is contingent upon certain environmental factors. In short, he argues that loneliness is similar to a disease in that it is due to an aberration of circumstances. He simply assumes, on “empirical”—and therefore
contingent—grounds, that humans are “innately” social creatures, that, given the fact of human nature, it is unnatural for them to be lonely, and that conditions which are causally responsible for their aberrant states of loneliness are solely and completely determined by external and environmental factors, or by their “natures,” as if humans were similar to ants and bees.

What Professor McGraw has essentially offered to the interested reader is an excellent (and quite likely comprehensive) taxonomy of various forms of loneliness. However, as beneficial as it is, it’s a little like cataloging different forms of life without defining life itself. Accordingly, in his introduction, he parades “five American social illnesses” that demonstrate how “when they are present, most markedly in their totality, relatedness [intimacy] rushes away” (McGraw, p. 3). The following quintet of toxic factors is described in clearly maladaptive psychological terms as “quasi fixations” and “social diseases.”

“Successitis,” or “successivism,” the dishonorable and runaway ambition to gain, for instance, popularity, celebrity, power, status, and wealth;

“Capitalitis,” or “economic atomism,” the unregulated, rapacious, “free market” capitalism, the kind that triggered the present world financial crisis;

“Rivalitis” or “rivalism,” the unmitigated, self-aggrandizing attempt to conquer or even crush all competitors (“competivitis”);

“Atomitis,” or social atomism, or hyper-individualism (“individualitis”); [and]

“Materialitis,” or “antispirtualatomism,” including “affluenza,” “possessionitis,” “consumeritis,” “stuffitis,” and “discarditis.”
(I’m not sure how this demonstrates that we are lonely. It appears to show instead that some of us are driven by selfish and egoistic motives, not necessarily that these individuals are lonely. They appear to be ethical condemnations as opposed to psychological features.)

But all this makes it sound as if loneliness were unnatural, something to be ashamed of, a sickness of the soul, a condition to be cured. By contrast, I believe loneliness is grounded in and constituted—meanings are “constituted” as opposed to behaviorally “conditioned” physiologically or phenomenally “constructed” from raw sensations according to the principle of the association of ideas (Hume)—by the very nature of self-consciousness. As Kant and Freud both emphasize, in very different ways, self-consciousness inevitably occurs when the ego realizes that it inhabits a realm of Being mutually conditioned by and in contrast to other selves. Again, it might be worth repeating that in Hegel’s phenomenological description of the dialectical evolution of the self, which is mutually conditioned by other selves, the narcissistic ego struggles for recognition against the consciousness of the other self (Phenomenology of Spirit, “Lordship and Bondage”). The conflict engenders a desire for recognition, but only on one’s own terms; the desire is for unequal re-cognition of the self at the other’s expense of transforming him into an “unfree” object (Sartre, Being and Nothingness, “The Look”; originally, Sartre considered titling his autobiographical novel Nausea: On the Loneliness of the Mind).

Kant demonstrates, in the first Critique, that (phenomenal) self-consciousness is mutually conditioned by a realm of (empirical) objects and other selves, which exist and persist in opposition to each other as conditions for the possibility of self-consciousness. (Psychosis is quite likely the collapse of the ability to maintain that distinction.) As Kant sought to establish the universal and necessary conditions of self-consciousness, in the dual forms of intuition and the twelve categories of the understanding, which make human experience and Newtonian science not only possible but actual and inevitable, just so I have tried to outline the constitutive dynamical elements and spontaneous activities underlying our reflexive awareness of loneliness.
Is it any wonder that we experience discomfort from our separation? For loneliness to exist, first there must be a unity of self-consciousness. This reflexive actuality consists of a unity of sensations, feelings, and thoughts within a single sphere of awareness. I must be conscious that what I am thinking belongs to me and not to another being. Secondly, the self must have some continuity through and in time; I cannot be lonely if consciousness merely consists of discrete and distinct instants of time, absolutely disconnected from each other, like the separate frames of a movie reel. Beyond these conditions, there are also critical practical considerations to be taken into account. Our concern (Heidegger) with loneliness and the related desire to escape it produce significant emotional reactions, which in turn affect all our passions, thoughts, and actions.


Kritike, 4:2 (2010), 105-132; and Introduction to Domeracki, Piotr, Dimension of the Phenomenon of Loneliness, forthcoming.

4. Mijuskovic, Ben, “Descartes's Bridge to the External World: The Piece of Wax,” Studi Internazionali di Filosofia, III:3 (1971), 65-81; reprinted in Georges Moyal, ed., René Descartes: Critical Assessments (Crom Helm Publishers, 1996), II, 312-328. In the poem by J. W. Johnston, The Creation, I quote him as writing, "And God said, 'I'm lonely; I think I'll make me a world'" (Psychiatry, p. 2). Just so, the lonely soul of man has created a realm of other minds, separate little spheres of existence, which he endows with lonely thoughts similar to his own.


The Phenomenological Ego. It is a very revealing fact that originally, i.e., in the first edition of Logische Untersuchungen, Husserl rejected the conception of an identical subject over and above the intentional acts of consciousness, very much in the manner of David Hume and other empiricists. But by the time Husserl published Ideen (1913), he had completely reversed himself, a reversal which he acknowledged frankly in the second edition of Logische Untersuchungen.


"I will only provide an example of the noble dread which the description of a total solitude can inspire, and to this end I will extract several passages from Carazan's dream in the Bremen Magazine... The more his riches had grown, the more did this miserly rich man bar his heart to compassion and the love of others. Meanwhile, as the love of humankind grew cold in him, the diligence of his prayers and religious devotions increased. After this confession, he goes on to recount: One evening, as I did my sums by my lamp and calculated the profit of my business, I was overcome by sleep. In this condition I saw the angel of death come upon me like a whirlwind, and he struck me, before I could plead against the terrible blow. I was petrified as I became aware that my fate had been caste for all eternity, and that to all the good I had done, nothing could be added, and from all the evil that I had done, nothing could be subtracted. I was led before the throne of he who dwells in the third heaven. The brilliance that flamed before me spoke to me thus: Carazan, your divine service is rejected. You have closed your heart to the love of humankind, and held on to your treasures with an iron hand. You have only lived for yourself, and hence in the future you shall live alone and excluded from all communion with the entirety of creation for all eternity. In this moment I was ripped away by an invisible force and driven through the shining edifice of creation. I quickly left innumerable worlds behind me. As I approached the most extreme limit of nature, I noticed that the shadows of the boundless void sank into the abyss before me. A fearful realm of eternal silence, solitude
and darkness! Unspeakable dread overcame me at this sight. I gradually lost the last stars from view, and finally the last glimmer of light was extinguished in the most extreme darkness…In this bewilderment I stretched out my hands to actual objects with such vehemence that I was awakened. And now I had been instructed to esteem human beings; for even the least of them, whom in the pride of my good I had turned away from my door, would have been far more welcome to me in that terrifying desert than all the treasures of Golconda.


In previous publications, I have historically traced the prevalence and the influence of an inference that Kant calls the Achilles, the most powerful, of all rationalist demonstrations in the history of ideas (Critique of Pure Reason, A 351–352). This proof, which ultimately derives from Plato (Phaedo, 78b), has been used repeatedly, and it has served as a major philosophical influence since the Hellenic Age. The form of the argument is fairly straightforward: the essential nature of the soul consists in its power of thinking; thought, being immaterial, is unextended (i.e., simple), having no parts; and what is simple is (a) indestructible, (b) a unity, and (c) an identity. I have charted the incidence and force of this demonstration from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries—from the Cambridge Platonists to Kant and then later into the works of Hegel, Schopenhauer, Marx, Bergson, Brentano, Husserl, Sartre, Wittgenstein, Russell, and others. The argument is continually invoked in various related and expanding contexts, becoming crucial in dealing with problems concerning (1) the immortality of the soul; (2) the “transcendental” condition necessary for the unity of consciousness (or the rationalist principle that the soul must be an immaterial unity in order for consciousness itself to be possible); (3) the necessary and sufficient criteria for the establishment of personal, or moral, identity; and (4) the basic underlying premise of a specific metaphysical and epistemological idealist doctrine. Thus, it is contended that if concepts, ideas, meanings, or thoughts are intrinsically unextended and given directly, immediately, to consciousness, it at once becomes problematic to understand how an immaterial soul, mind, or state of awareness can know a material, physical, extended, “external” world. But if we assume instead that the mind, with its attendant meanings, is “simple,” or immaterial, it then easily follows that (5) we can investigate and describe unified and identical meanings as they are absolutely given within awareness. Further, (6) Hegel contends the argument constitutes a proof for the freedom of self-consciousness.
And I have claimed that this same Hegelian model of awareness serves both Bergson and Sartre with their conceptions of the freedom of consciousness. In addition, (7) still others insist that the proof functions as a paradigm for a particular theory of time-consciousness, a “temporal romanticism” that seeks to collapse the immediately qualitative (as opposed to the quantitative, the extended) data of inner sense, given directly to intuition, as alone constitutive of true reality, absolute being. (8) Finally, in its contemporary and constructive (as distinguished from historical) context, the simplicity argument actually represents an alternate paradigm of the mind—one might say an antidote—that is diametrically opposed to the prevailing materialist and physicalist attempts at reducing awareness to, or identifying consciousness with, a “mind”-brain construct. Thus, I take issue with D. M. Armstrong’s recent claim, in A Materialist Theory of Mind, that “the mind is the brain,” and hence reducible to, identical with, or explainable by “central state materialism” or the physiological networks of the central nervous system. In opposition, I seek to establish counterarguments from basically three different standpoints: (1) the unity of meaning in cognitive apprehension and the existence of pure, a priori relational structures in consciousness; (2) the indubitability of an essential element of freedom in awareness; and (3) the primordiality of the temporal nature of human consciousness. All three, with their implications, I argue, sufficiently testify to the inability of the physicalist model to provide a persuasive account of these mental presences and accordingly entail the abandonment of the materialistic, mechanistic conception of the “mind”-brain model.¹

After completing the historical and subsequent theoretical phase of my investigations, I stopped to ponder what conclusions, of a practical and positive sort, could be derived from my scholarship. Upon reflection, it suddenly seemed clear to me that I had all along been tracing a special and conspicuous model of the human soul or, more specifically, an immaterialist theory of consciousness, one which, throughout the long tradition of Western thought, had culminated in portraying the mind as a monadic, solipsistic, insular existence. Having arrived at this juncture, I naturally asked myself if I believed this hermetic state to be the actual and primordial exemplification of human being. In short, did I think it was truly
illustrative of man’s real situation, namely, that the self exists in virtual isolation from the remainder of reality (or “realities”) and other men? And it occurred to me that if I were on the right track, then, among other things, I should be able to uncover numerous clues and strong evidence throughout various disciplines in support of my hypothesis. Hence, I determined to explore the fields most interesting to me, those of literature and psychology, as well as the area of study best known to me, philosophy, in order to search for depictions of man as an absolutely lonely, isolated being. I enlisted an interdisciplinary method, hoping that by means of my former constructive, immaterialist philosophy of consciousness, I could press it into service to discover a unifying model of the mind whereby I might bind together, at least, the disciplines of philosophy, literature, and psychology through their mutual adoption of a common mentalist principle. At the same time, I began to formulate a “reductivist” theory of human motivation (not unlike Hobbes’s general claim that all human action is pursued self-interestedly and egoistically or Nietzsche’s paradigm of the will to power). According to my doctrine, however, I wished to conclude that all men are activated by a fear of aloneness or loneliness—and that consequently every human thought, passion, and action derives from this one original, ubiquitous source, or fund, of frightened, psychic energy. Since I endeavored to offer a strictly universal principle, it followed that one counterexample alone would demolish my entire theoretical edifice. After completing my study, I remain confident, however, that such a defect cannot be found. All men are poignantly lonely; all men desperately seek to escape this condition. Some, admittedly, are more “successful” than others. But there are no exceptions to this basic structure of human consciousness. In fact, I would claim that this has always been affirmed since the unfolding of Western thought. Thus, to cite Aristotle alone, as one choice among many possibilities, a human being who does not feel lonely is either a beast or a god.

The man who is isolated—who is unable to share in the benefits of political association, or has no need to share because he is already self-sufficient—is no part of the polis, and must therefore be either a beast or a god. (Politics, 1253a)
Man is a social, a “political,” that is to say, a communal animal. Without the desire for companionship (or without at least significant “substitutes” for absent fellowship), he becomes progressively less human.

Loneliness universally forges its powerful expression in all great literature, often in disguise but in many instances quite openly. Thus, in Milton’s *Tetrachordon*, we hear him expounding that “It is not good for man to be alone … Loneliness is the first thing which God’s eye nam’d not good” (Gen. ii, 18; see also his *Divorce* tracts). With this conviction, Milton was merely echoing a desolate cry that had been reverberating through the tunnel of the ages before him. And nothing has altered in the hollows of time since then. Indeed, our own contemporary art alternately whispers and shouts this identical sound of human loneliness, whether it be exhibited within the chambered verses of an Emily Dickinson or proclaimed by the erudite poems of a T. S. Eliot (see especially *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*). Or, to vary the metaphor, loneliness is a prism through which we see the entire spectrum of human life reflected in its multiform attempts to transcend that very feeling of isolation by communication. It has ever been the same, since the childhood of Western consciousness, from the Hesiodic legends (e.g., Deucalion and Pyrrha), to our own favorite children’s fables (e.g., *The Little Prince* by Saint-Exupery), the idea of loneliness has continually dominated man’s consciousness.

That man feels himself to be absolutely alone became undeniably certain for me. Further, that the meaning of man is structured by a constant, futile struggle against his isolated state of conscious existence was equally manifest. But why man is—or senses himself to be—alone was not at all clear. Consequently, I have tried to develop a theory of consciousness, a *Philosophy of mind*, which alone can account—on various levels, metaphysical, ontological, epistemological, phenomenological, existential, psychological, passional, etc.—why man is condemned to despairing solitude and just how he feels himself to be so sentenced.

I have alluded above to the relation between the expression of loneliness in literature and a theory of consciousness. I now want to say something about this connection. Elsewhere, I have argued that the mind displays certain twin powers of thought. Accordingly,
the mind can be either self-conscious, reflexive (as in Descartes) or transitive and intentional (as in Husserl) in its activities. This dual structure of awareness itself can be invoked in order to interpret more fully the conception underlying most—if not all—literary works. Thus, for example, we can summon the pattern to better illuminate, from “within,” such a novel as George Eliot’s *Silas Marner*. It is, we remember, the story of a lonely hermit, who progressively withdraws into himself until one day, quite by chance, he happens upon an orphaned child who “replaces” his purloined gold (attempted identification of self with an external object). At this point in the narrative, Silas is suddenly forced “outwardly.”

The gold had kept his thoughts in an ever-repeated circle, leading to nothing beyond itself; but Eppie [the foundling] was an object compacted of changes and hopes that forced his thoughts onward, and carried them far away [beyond] their old eager pacing towards the same blank limit. (*Silas Marner*, I, xiv)

Silas, prior to discovering the infant, had been driven inwardly, through loneliness, into the nothingness that is the self, toward the emptiness of self-consciousness. (And, desperately, he had sought to invest his life with significance by symbolizing it through the accumulation of gold). This constitutes the reflexive, circular activity of thought in which the subject, or the ego, initiating the thought, and the object of thought, as the concept contemplated (the gold), become indissolubly one, albeit in an ultimately vacuous, purely conceptual unity (the Cartesian cogito). But after securing the abandoned child—the orphan, in literature, often symbolizes human aloneness—Silas is forced “outside” of his own consciousness, beyond himself, and he begins to relate himself to a conscious existence other than his own. Only then can he escape the solipsistic confinement of his own self-consciousness, which, as the author herself informs us in no uncertain terms, had advanced toward a deadening emptiness for the old recluse. Now, it is my contention that before we can begin genuinely to understand the novel, we must initially grasp the two factors to which we have just alluded. First, there is the obvious universal appeal of the novel, grounded in the intrinsic loneliness
of man (which, in Eliot’s case, takes the form of the claim that man ought not to be condemned to despairing solitude). Second, each novelist has himself made a commitment—explicitly or implicitly—to a particular theory of human consciousness, and the novelist’s work cannot be understood apart from that fundamental principle. *Silas Marner* is a classic novel because, relatively speaking, it succeeds in making clear to the reader both of these assumed perspectives: namely, that man is alone, lonely, and that the mind can flee from solipsistic self-consciousness by concentrating on an existent other than itself (but if it does not do so, it is doomed to remain locked in a self-conscious nihilism). The latter consideration inevitably involves the writer in a theory of consciousness.

Each of us must be connected to something beyond ourselves; we must transcend our monadic limits of consciousness by relation to another, preferably conscious, being; we must escape our self-centered dots of awareness and create a temporal “space” between two immaterial points of awareness, if we are to “escape” isolation and achieve communication. (But to seek escape and to secure it are far different things.) As Emily Bronte expressed it well in defining Catherine’s relation to Heathcliff:

> But surely you and everybody have a notion that there is, or should be an existence of yours beyond you. What were the use of my creation if I were entirely contained here? If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger. I should not seem a part of it [I would not belong anywhere] … I am Heathcliff—he’s always, always in my mind—not as a pleasure, any more than I am always, a pleasure to myself—but as my own being—so don’t talk of our separation again—it is impracticable.” *(Wuthering Heights*, IX)*

Indeed, not only impracticable (i.e., impossible) but terrifying as well, for without Heathcliff, Catherine risks “losing her mind,” losing her very existence. (Cf. T. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, IV, iv.)

Now, it may be objected that not all literature, not even all great literature (nor for that matter, neither psychology nor philosophy) is
predicated on the assumption that an underlying presence of loneliness is a crucial element of human care and concern. For instance, it could be argued quite plausibly—with the possible exception of the “underground man”—that there is practically little or nothing of thematic loneliness as a motif in the novels of, say, Dostoyevsky. But here, I think, it is vital to notice, as we previously intimated in discussing George Eliot, that novelists—and mankind in general—tend to fall into two distinct categories: (a) the reflexively oriented and (b) the “escapist” doctrinaires. (I use the term “escapist” in a descriptive, not pejorative, sense. We shall have a great deal more to say about both tendencies in the ensuing pages). Dostoyevsky belongs to the second group of thinkers, in at least the important following respect. He is convinced that the lone individual, without God and/or society, must inevitably succumb to disintegration. More specifically, it is his conviction that the personality of anyone attempting to survive alone will deteriorate toward “intellectual disease” or insanity (witness Raskolnikov and Ivan Karamazov). So it is not the case that the Russian writer believes that man is not alone but rather that his entire literary energies are expended in trying to unfold, as an ideal, a universe in which loneliness will be overcome. And he does so by yearning for an ideal communion of selves (humanity) or the unification of the self with God (religion). In violent disagreement with the model of the atomic individual—advocated by the Cartesian and Leibnizian cogito; the Hobbesian Epicureanism of materialistic science; the social contract theorists; utilitarianism; and naive communism—Dostoyevsky valiantly seeks (as did Hegel and Marx, for quite different reasons) to transform man into a spiritual, communal being, one who would naturally learn to identify his own salvation with that of his fellows. Aloneness, then, is the evil of the past and present for Dostoyevsky, whereas spiritual unity will be the future good.

“To transform the world, to recreate it afresh, men must turn into another path psychologically. Until you have become really, in actual fact, a brother to every one, brotherhood will not come to pass. No sort of scientific teaching, no kind of common interest, will ever teach men to share property and privileges with equal considerations for all … You ask when
it will come to pass; it will come to pass, but first we have to go through the period of isolation.”

“What do you mean by isolation?” I asked him.

“Why, the isolation that prevails everywhere, above all in our age—it has not fully developed, it has not reached its limit yet. For every one strives to keep his individuality as apart as possible, wishes to secure the greatest possible fullness of life for himself; but meantime all his efforts result not in attaining fullness of life but self-destruction, for instead of self-realization he ends by arriving at complete solitude. All mankind in our age have split up into units, they all keep apart, each in his own groove; each one holds aloof, hides himself and hides what he has, from the rest, and he ends by being repelled by others and repelling them … For he is accustomed to rely upon himself alone and to cut himself off from the whole … Everywhere in these days men have, in their mockery, ceased understanding that the true security is to be found in social solidarity rather than in isolated individual effort. But this terrible individualism must inevitably have an end, and all will suddenly understand how unnaturally they are separated from one another … But, until then, we must keep the banner flying. Sometimes even if he has to do it alone, and his conduct seems to be crazy, a man must set an example, and so draw men’s souls out of their solitude, and spur them to some act of brotherly love, that the great idea may not die.” (The Brothers Karamazov, II, vi, ii)

But this is not the denial of the loneliness of man; rather, it is its affirmation. And the subsequent struggle against its reality can in no way alter the original, primordial fact. At best, Dostoyevsky is reduced to the mere hope that it need not always be so.

Thus, the present book defends a universal psychological theory of human motivation, contending that the thoughts as well as the actions of all men can be interpreted as a desire to avoid the feeling of existential, human isolation. In pursuit of this thesis, the work
draws extensively on the disciplines of philosophy, psychology, and literature. In this sense, it relies heavily, as previously indicated, on an interdisciplinary approach.

Chapter 1 begins by providing us with an image of man as essentially alone and irredeemably lost as well as a picture of man as continually fighting to escape the quasi-solipsistic prison of his frightening solitude. It schematically moves from the ancient Greek myths to the modern novel. Secondly, it exploits the German idealist and the contemporary existentialist traditions in order to establish a model of consciousness as an existential “nothingness” (e.g., as in Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*). This “immaterialist” paradigm of awareness (which I have also discussed at length in the previously noted publications) further insists that although consciousness is an immanent nothingness, an existent emptiness, it nevertheless displays an exploding freedom, which posits “transcendent” relations, meanings, and even other, opposed consciousnesses in order to escape the confines of a completely monadic, solipsistic existence.2

Chapter 2 argues that modern man, at least since the seventeenth century, has become increasingly aware of his desperate isolation and that this realization was precipitated by the Cartesian turn toward a reflexive model of consciousness, wherein the ego, the subject, is able to “curl back” on itself by thinking upon itself as an object to itself. This circular paradigm of mental reality next appears to engender the personal, introspective narrative form of the modern novel, classically signaled by Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*.

Chapter 3 maintains that loneliness is grounded in the primal reality of individual, immanent, subjective, inner time-consciousness—as it is developed in the theories of Leibniz, Kant, Bergson, and Husserl—and more fully in man’s growing realization that although he exists with others in the context of a public and communal space, he dwells alone in internal time. In literature, for instance, this personal, temporal structure of consciousness becomes translated into various stream of consciousness styles, as for instance those of Joyce, Faulkner, and Thomas Wolfe.

Chapter 4 seeks to show that any attempt to distinguish, or contrast, the terms “aloneness,” “isolation,” and “solitude” is futile, since all of these references, properly understood, are reducible to the
more primordial form of “fear of loneliness.” The discussion in the main is directed against the representative view of a contemporary phenomenologist, Rubin Gotesky, who claims that not only are there different species of loneliness but that there is even a positive, pleasant variety, which he calls solitude. Gotesky’s own analysis closely follows the thought of Berdiaev, the Russian philosopher.

Chapter 5 introduces a psychogenetic and phenomenological account of the origin of the monadic ego, and its “creation” of the consciousness of the “other,” by drawing on the dialectic methods of Fichte and Hegel and then by showing the similarity of this construct to Freud’s later conception of the narcissistic “oceanic feeling” as the initial source for the sense of individual human isolation.

In Chapter 6, I indicate how phenomenology—broadly enough conceived so as to include the methodological principles of both Husserl and Hegel—directly leads to uncovering the absolute isolation of the human ego. In this respect, I contend that the pursuit of the phenomenological method necessarily betrays the hidden solitary essence of the self as it constitutes the a priori structures, or “conditions,” of its own self-consciousness. In pursuit of my interpretation, I offer a reconstruction of Husserl’s theory, moving from his early position, which in light of the intentionality paradigm of awareness had strictly precluded the possibility of the ego’s self-consciousness, and ending in his mature view of a genuinely Cartesian, reflexive self. Thus, the chapter shows that the phenomenological attitude itself directly leads to Husserl’s admission of the monadic, solipsistic, hermitic “transcendental subject.” We also discover that loneliness is essentially, or eidetically, constituted as an immediate a priori synthetic unity, one which relates or connects (Kant’s binding function) the self to a realm of (a) nonconscious and (b) alien-conscious beings that stand in conflict with, or at best in distinction from, one’s own self-awareness. In addition, Hegel’s phenomenological description of the Master-Slave struggle in the Phenomenology of Mind is reinterpreted in order to lend support to the contention that self-consciousness is inevitably alone and lonely.

Chapter 7 continues to defend a phenomenological approach to loneliness by indicating that the meaning and reality of aloneness precedes any and all behavioral, environmental, and cultural
conditioning factors. Thus, for example, it is held that the “absolute givenness and immediacy” of loneliness is primary and originary to consciousness, whereas the use of language and “talk about” loneliness is derivative and secondary. Husserl’s opinions are upheld, and Wittgenstein’s and Ryle’s are challenged.

And, finally, chapter 8 takes issue with R. D. Laing’s recent interpretative allegation that Cartesian dualism is in effect responsible for determining schizoid and schizophrenic states of mind. Consequently Laing claims, most notably in *The Divided Self*, that the Cartesian, bifurcated model of the self, which posits a strict dichotomy between the ego and the world, the self and other selves, constitutes the basic ingredient of mentally aberrant configurations. Accordingly, Laing tenders a Heideggerian paradigm as a therapeutic device toward correcting the “distortive” Cartesian conception of both the diagnostican and his patient alike. On Heidegger’s account, the self is unified, integrated; it is described as existing through its body, immersed in being, and “with others” (*Dasein* as being-in-the-world). Nevertheless, at the same time, Laing himself paradoxically confesses, on “existential” grounds, that man is “irredeemably alone.” But this seems blatantly contradictory, for either (a) man transpires alone or (b) he exists as being-in-the-world; he cannot, in an ultimate sense, exist in both of these opposed ways at once. In this spirit, I seek to discredit Laing’s own alternate, presumably non-Cartesian, model of the self as hopelessly implicated in and vitiated by inconsistencies, which, ironically enough, lead Laing himself into emphasizing man’s absolute psychic loneliness as the ultimate reality.


2. Throughout, I shall use the term "solipsism" with certain qualifications and reservations which will become apparent as the chapters develop. Suffice it to say for the moment that I am not arguing in behalf of "classic" solipsism.
In this chapter, I wish to accomplish two things. First, I shall offer an image of man as intrinsically alone and irredeemably lost, man as continually struggling to escape the solipsistic prison of his frightening solitude. Second, I will attempt to offer a theory of consciousness that will afford an insight into why man is so desperately lonely. In order to prosecute my case, I intend to draw on the disciplines of psychology, literature, and philosophy. Obviously, there can be no promise of any permanent “cure” for this affliction, since if, indeed, man is essentially isolated, he can never in principle overcome this monadic condition. Perhaps in the ancient sense that “the truth shall set us free,” he will be better able to cope with this existential fact of human isolation as a result of understanding it; however, there can be no final escape from, or transcendence beyond, loneliness so long as man is alive. In saying this, I do not wish to suggest that man is unable temporarily to alleviate his sense of loneliness but rather that the relief can never be permanent or even long lasting.

There is a strong tendency to regard loneliness as a modern, or even merely a contemporary, phenomenon. Often, for example, it is described as some sort of “alienation” brought about by our technological, bureaucratic, economic or societal organization. This view, I am convinced, is quite mistaken. Rather, I believe that man has always and everywhere suffered from feelings of acute loneliness and that his entire existence is consumed by the struggle to escape his fate. In this regard, I wish to contend that the feeling—and reality—of forlornness constitutes the very essence of man’s existence and that the “reflexive” awareness of radical isolation consists of a primordial and undeniable structure within human self-consciousness (reflexion, apperception; a mirror reflects, it merely passively doubles what is present; the mind, by contrast, actively transforms what it is thinking). Thus, each of us, in utter separation—consciously or unconsciously, successfully or failingly—agonizingly twists in order to escape his
unique destiny. Now, in saying this, I do not mean to suggest that “human nature” is ever the same or that it is unchangeable. With the Existentialists (as well as with Hegel and Marx, in a qualified sense), I would agree that man is always free to create himself anew, to posit absolutely novel meanings for his own individual existence, or to shatter the bonds of a confining “environmental determinism.” I agree with Sartre:

I am free … Freedom has crashed down on me like a thunderbolt … I am free. Beyond anguish, beyond remorse. Free … Suddenly, out of the blue, freedom crashed down on me and swept me off my feet … I knew myself alone, utterly alone in the midst of this well-meaning little universe of yours. I was like a man who’s lost his shadow. And there was nothing left in heaven, no right or wrong, nor anyone to give me orders. (Sartre, The Flies)²

So there is no question here of offering a static conception of human nature, of exhibiting man as constantly of the same “stuff.” Quite the contrary, man, as an individual, is always free to change his “essence,” “meaning,” or “purpose,” so long as he is self-conscious. But, again, this spontaneity is itself grounded in something more primevally fundamental, something that transcends the distinction of either free or determined, and that is the fact that man is alone.

Has man really always viewed himself as alone, abandoned? In a previous article, I maintained that the biblical figure of Job and the tragic personality of Oedipus offer paradigmatic examples of enforced solitude.³ Carl Jung himself draws on antiquity when he suggests a symbolic connection between the Prometheus myth and loneliness.⁴ According to Jung, Prometheus’s theft of fire represents a step toward greater consciousness (illuminated reflection). Thus, the rebellious Titan robs the gods and thereby gains increasing knowledge (fire as light, light as knowledge) and although he benefits mankind, nevertheless he thereby raises himself above, and alienates himself from, the humanity he so valiantly sought to befriend. “The pain of this loneliness is the vengeance of the gods, for never again can he return to mankind. He is, as the myth says, chained to the lonely cliffs of the Caucasus, forsaken of God and man” (Jung, Works, Vol.7, 156-
Prometheus, a Titan, is neither an Olympian nor a man; he is set apart, alone. He is a marginal figure. By stealing fire, he has stolen light, the symbol of knowledge and consciousness. And his penalty is the resultant knowledge that he is completely alone. Prometheus, the friend of man, himself has no friend, for there is no one to share his suffering. In this sense, the tale allegorically depicts the universal condition of each man as an individual, for we also suffer in the vain attempt to reach outwardly, toward other human beings. Similarly, the solitary task of Sisyphus, in the underworld, epitomizes the isolation of human existence. The boulder is unthinking, material being; in stark contrast, the reflexive thought of the sufferer is absorbed in the cognitive apprehension of the isolated nature of his sentence (Camus). And, of course, still in the Greek period, the empathy and pity we feel for Odysseus’s plight arises from his “homelessness” and our recognition of his painful estrangement from friends and family. Surely in the saga of Odysseus we find a clear example of the theme of solitude and the longing for home that it produces (see especially Odyssey, Books I and V). Similarly, we discover the motifs of forlornness and separation in the dialogues of Plato. In the Symposium, in Aristophanes’s speech in praise of human love (189 d ff.), the playwright recounts the story of the hermaphroditic race, which was split in half as a result of Zeus’s anger over a digression. As the dramatist relates it, after the separation,

when the work of bisection was complete it left each half with a desperate yearning for the other, and they ran together and flung their arms around each other’s necks, and asked for nothing better than to be rolled into one … And whenever one half was left alone by the death of its mate, it wandered about questing and clasping in the hope of finding a spare half-woman—or a whole woman, as we should call her nowadays—or a half-man. And so the race was dying out … So you see, gentlemen, how far back we can trace our innate love for one another, and how this love is always trying to reintegrate our former nature, to make two into one, and to bridge the gulf between one human being and another.
Freud himself cites this passage from Plato’s *Symposium* in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. To throw light on the “origin of sexuality,” he has resorted to an appeal to the Aristophanean myth. The issue, as Freud conceives it, centers around the “hypothesis” that certain primeval life-instincts may be found in animal organisms; in turn, these instincts quite possibly have generated or evolved into our contemporary sexual drives. The key to understanding the power of such instincts lies in recognizing their impulse toward unity, more specifically the instincts’ desire for unity between male and female. Thus, according to Freud, Plato’s allegory suggests the possibility that the “living substance at the time of its coming to life was torn apart into small particles, which have ever since endeavored to reunite through sexual instincts” (p. 52). Now, of course, on Freud’s theory, “sexual energy” is the primary motivating force in human beings. As opposed to this view, I wish to claim, instead, that loneliness, or more correctly the drive to avoid a sense of isolation, actually constitutes the dominant psychic force underlying all human consciousness and conduct. Freud and I, therefore, seem rather far apart. But perhaps we are not so distant as it may appear at first glance. For in an explanatory footnote to the *Symposium* quotation, Freud himself appends an illuminating, even a somewhat betraying, passage from the *Upanishads*, which does, significantly enough, explicitly emphasize the principle of loneliness rather than sexuality.

Therefore a man who is lonely feels no delight. He wishes for a second. He was so large as man and wife together. He then made his Self to fall in two, and then arose husband and wife. Therefore Yagnavalkya said: “We two are thus (each of us) like half a shell.” Therefore the void which was there, is filled by the wife.

Clearly, here in the Vedic legend, loneliness, as opposed to sexual instinct, dominates. Had Freud recognized this, I think it is conceivable to imagine that he might have formulated an entire psychological system grounded in the principle of human loneliness instead of the one he actually did go on to establish, founded on the primordiality of the sexual drive. In other words, I am intimating
that loneliness, as a principle, may be every bit as ultimate and comprehensive as Freud’s doctrine of sexual needs.

For my own purposes, however, I want to interpret the above selection from the *Upanishads* as a concession that consciousness is a “void,” a nothingness, and further that the ego recognizes its own emptiness and proceeds to posit the existence of the “other” as a companion consciousness in order to assuage its intense feeling of aloneness—its overwhelming sense of a “lack”—and obliterate or forget its sense of absolute isolation. (In Freud, of course, the sexual orgasm produces the effect of achieving a perfect fusion and integration between the participating lovers, a single unity and identity of consciousness. In this sense, the feeling of separation is overcome for a brief moment before monadic consciousness reasserts itself).

Although admittedly, in the Hellenistic age, there is little offered by way of an explicit model indicating the intrinsic isolation of man, we are nonetheless able to uncover many and powerful illustrations of it, if we probe but a little beneath the surface of the literary tradition. For example, such a model may be found in Lucretius’s *De Rerum Natura*, when the poet-philosopher begins his discussion regarding the evolution of society by portraying every man as initially living apart from others and for himself alone (*De Rerum Natura*, 960–961). (The description itself anticipates Hobbes’s characterization of man’s lot in the state of nature as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”)

Indeed, the very principle of the epicurean atom—like the later model of the Leibnizian monad of the eighteenth century—implies singleness, self-containedness, and unrelated substantiality. The individual eagerly seeks to escape this state of hermitic existence, as Lucretius tells us, primarily by a sexual union with another human being. But I would hazard that the foregoing mutual need for companionship, the natural desire to meet, communicate, and unify with another human being, is really motivated by the instinct to overcome a desperate feeling of aloneness rather than to gratify sexual dissatisfaction.

Furthermore, it may be argued that the concept of acute loneliness is served, in the Latin mind, by the idea of exile. Thus, for instance, Ovid’s *Tristia* or *Letters from Exile* can be interpreted as the author’s
powerful expression of longing for family, friends, and country, which was precipitated by his banishment from Rome. Furthermore, the ideal of resignation advocated by the dominant philosophic schools in the Roman Period—the Stoic, Epicurean, and Sceptic—are all predicated on the assumption that man exists alone and hence that the wise man is he who can resign himself to this miserable state of affairs. Once the “organic bonds” of the Hellenic polis had been dissolved, and without the consolation of a caring God, or gods, the sage must search for consolation in either (a) acknowledging the harsh, inevitable order of the universe as it insensitively carries man along (like a dog tied to a chariot); (b) intimate but restricted friendship; or (c) nihilistic self-sufficiency. But what is all this but a compelled awareness of the complete aloneness of the individual and the ensuing determination of each man to exist as best he can in a world that denies him political, social, and religious solace?

During the Middle Ages, there is admittedly but slight recognition of man’s abandonment, but this is because medieval man thetically posits a perfectly self-conscious being, eternal and ubiquitous, an absolutely all-knowing subject who is solicitous enough to create each individual soul in his own image (as self-conscious), a being, who, although he continually tests man in this world, nevertheless condescends to permit communication through prayer and eventually offers the hope of perpetual preservation in a mutually enjoyed eternal existence. (Later, Descartes will speculate that God not only creates but continually preserves, or re-creates, each soul at every moment of its existence.) Thus, Augustine is not alone. Every page of his Confessions consists of an intimate dialogue with God.

But to overcome loneliness for a while is not to escape or vanquish it for long, and, like the lovers who momentarily “conquer” it, one is always under the threat of separation. In similar fashion, medieval man feared above all to be estranged from God, to have his thoughts alienated from the inclusive, reflective light of God’s perfect comprehension (to pray in vain).

Loneliness thus constitutes the inevitable structure of self-awareness that grounds the desperate attempt of each of us, separately, to transcend our mental prison by seeking refuge through communication with another reflexive being. Whereas the subject
matter of history, as Aristotle informs us, is properly events in their particularity, by contrast, the sphere of art depicts themes with a universal appeal. Thus, despite the hiatus of time, we readily grasp the emotional continuity between the tragedy of Oedipus and, for example, the solitary sorrows of Richard II, Lear, and Antony in Shakespeare’s Renaissance plays. They are all bound together by the common idea of the solitary nature of human suffering. When man reflects on his own sadness, he is inevitably compelled to realize his absolute difference and isolation from the “others” and the singularity of his unique death. The confrontation with his own uniqueness, in turn, promotes the mental anguish that directly follows from each man’s acknowledgment of his separated state of awareness/existence. And it is through projecting our own thoughts and feelings “outwardly” that we grasp this universal “transcendental” condition; that we, as spectators, are led to sympathize, empathize, and even identify with classic tragic figures despite their seemingly removed or “noble” statures. These tragic heroes are “reduced” to our own level because it is in reality the condition of each man, separately, to exist alone. The apprehension of this fact transforms the powerful dramatic figures of the past into the more familiar contemporary “pathetic” characters of today and finally even into ourselves. For example, it is not because we are horrified by the idea of incest that we feel fear and pity for Oedipus but because we all know what it is like to be absolutely alone. Similarly, it is through this same basic emotional affinity that we recognize, in *Death of a Salesman*, the identical conception upon which tragedies have always depended. Willy Loman, with his suitcases in hand, traveling as a stranger from town to town, living in hotels, starved for human companionship, affection, and “respect” (recognition by others) is “terribly lonely.” And he is even a stranger in his own home, to his sons and wife, and to himself. The “salesman,” the man who pretends to know and like everyone, in the end, realizes he knows and can count on no one, that he has traveled the confused temporal expanse of a lifetime, like the highways of America, as a solitary atom. Although in his youth he enjoyed the conviction that his personality was his means to friendship and security, in his advanced maturity he sees that, to others, he means even less than the material goods he sells.
Again, within the present period, the discipline of literature is permeated with images of radical human isolation. Thus, Malraux, in *Man’s Fate*, speaks of men not ever being able to know other men, for “one never knows a human being, but one occasionally ceases to feel that one does not know him”; of a forbidden solitude where no man can be joined by another; of each human being as absolutely “unique, isolated,” different.

First of all there was solitude, the inescapable aloneness behind the living multitude like the great primitive night behind the dense, low night under which this city of deserted streets was expectantly waiting.11

Inescapable loneliness and the futility, the impossibility, of human communication is a powerful theme in T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*.

I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only
We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison.

The closed door, or the locked room, symbolizes separation for Eliot as it did for Thomas Wolfe. The key fumbles in the latch; we do not see the other; the door does not open; no one enters, and hence no one is able to speak to us, to share our empty room. But, like Wolfe, who also previously enlisted the metaphor of the atom (*Look Homeward, Angel; Of Time and the River*)—the atom as a unit, horribly self-sufficient, self-contained, intrinsically unrelated, and indivisible—Eliot invokes a comparable model of monadic isolation. Thus, Eliot, with God (Wolfe leaves God out of his conception of human reality), appeals to what “Issues from the hand of God, the simple soul” (*Animula*). Perfectly alone, the soul, a mental simple, an atom of consciousness, struggles to escape its fate:

The pain of living and the drug of dreams
Curl up the small soul in the window seat
Behind the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*,

8
Issues from the hand of time [the soul is created by God] the simple soul
Irresolute and selfish, misshapen, lame
Unable to fare forward or retreat.\textsuperscript{12}

In the foregoing, I have sought to provide a brief but comprehensive synopsis of how the theme of loneliness has dominated the literary and philosophic writings of the West. In doing so, I hope to have dispelled the mistaken notion that there is either an absence or even any qualitative difference between the depiction of malignant solitude in the past as compared to that of our own present.

In concluding the first part of the discussion, perhaps it would be helpful to present our view of loneliness in contrast to Marx’s related, but rather different, notion of estrangement: alienation. On Marx’s account, we are alienated from nature, other men, our work, and even ourselves by bureaucratic and economic systems as well as by technological means of production. We are isolated through the agency of the physical machine and our own “dehumanized” labor. In this sense, Marx contends, life (i.e., the material conditions of production) determines, “produces,” or results in a stunted, deformed “human” being (mere animal consciousness). Against this model of “scientifically” explaining enforced, inhuman separateness, I wish to contend that man’s consciousness of his condition precedes the “material conditions,” or at least overshadows them, and that it is exactly this awareness which makes man’s alienated state so intolerable. As Marx would have it, in the \textit{German Ideology}, “life determines consciousness”; as I conceive it, (self-)consciousness conditions and structures life (Kant, Hegel), and that is precisely why man struggles to change his existential situation. If life did in fact determine consciousness (as Marx at first naively claimed), then we could never change it. Revolution, in principle, would be theoretically impossible, and the lot of the worker would simply get worse and worse without any hope of amelioration.\textsuperscript{13}

The more difficult problem is still before us: how to account for man’s loneliness, how to specify the conditions which make our awareness of separation possible, and, indeed, necessary. Why—metaphysically and psychologically—is man alone? Why does he feel estranged from his fellows and different from the remainder
of conscious, existent beings in general? This is the topic that will concern us during the second part of the chapter. In treating it, I will offer a theory of consciousness and a paradigm of the mind, which, I believe, shall successfully “show” why loneliness constitutes the basic structure of man’s (self-)consciousness.

But perhaps before we embark on our analysis, it is first worth commenting that although we shall strive, in the following, to conceptually elaborate on loneliness, there will nevertheless remain an irreducibly nonconceptual, felt quality about it, probably because loneliness is constituted in consciousness as both a meaning and a feeling. As a meaning, the essence of loneliness consists in the overwhelming desire of the yet-unrelated ego to locate, unify, connect, or bind itself in relation to other egos (even animal egos, pets) or objects (e.g., hobbies, amusements). As an emotion, loneliness is manifested within consciousness as a confrontation with its own self-awareness, its own nothingness, its own meaninglessness; but since this emptiness is identical to loneliness, it appears as an immediately felt quality, which has perfect being in itself, without relation to anything else. And so we can only “point” to it in ourselves and assume that our listener has had the “same” experience of it. We can allude to it, but we cannot conceptually express it as a feeling. As Hume argued, in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, I cannot conceptually convey or communicate to you the taste of pineapple if you have never experienced it; I cannot describe it to you because all description rests on relations between two or more existent entities. Just so, loneliness is, in great part, a feeling, an immediate “sensation” that cannot be conceptually imparted to another who has not experienced it. In short, although I can define, say, the number three for you, I cannot bring you to “understand” loneliness by just talking about it. Having said all this, I now intend to go on and first introduce loneliness as a feeling and then usher it into the guise of a relation, a meaning.

According to Rollo May, “the chief problem of people in the middle decade of the twentieth century is emptiness”; “they feel vacuous, empty”; they sense “some vacancy within themselves.” Further, May is inclined to argue that the “feelings of emptiness and loneliness go together” (p.26). I would certainly agree with this insight, and indeed, it is just this connection that I propose to pursue.
Consequently, I intend to depend on a strikingly similar model of consciousness, which directly draws on the above characterization of the mind’s awarenesses and feelings of emptiness (or the mind as empty). It is exploited in a novel by André Malraux when he declares

The greatest mystery is not that we have been flung at random between the profusion of the earth and the galaxy of the stars, but that in this prison we can fashion images of ourselves sufficiently powerful to deny our nothingness.15

The entire orientation directed toward interpreting consciousness as a reflexive nothingness stems from the principle behind the Cartesian revolution in epistemology. Thus, Descartes defines ideas, thoughts, or states of consciousness—in opposition to material beings—as simple, unextended, and immaterial. Consciousness, as a diaphanous “medium,” however, is a reflexive and “existential” nothingness, “through” or “before” which material objects parade their presence. But the real identification—apprehended directly, “intuitively”—is between thought’s immateriality and the nothingness of thought.

On a more complicated level, according to the Cartesian argument, thought is represented as being able to “curl back on itself,” self-consciously, reflexively; and, unlike sensation, it does not naively assume the object to be given (in its completeness) from without. Therefore, at certain privileged moments, thought can have itself for an “object” (the criticisms of philosophers ranging from Hobbes to Gilbert Ryle notwithstanding). When thought achieves this “inward turn,” then it may be said that the subject (knower) and the object (known) have fused or merged into a perfect unity, which nonetheless preserves the duality of the original distinction within itself. Not very creatively, but certainly quite predictably, Leibniz similarly maintains that the defining characteristic of human reason is the power of apperception, self-consciousness (i.e., reflexivity) grounded in mental activity. Kant himself later promotes this epistemological tradition and argues that certain relational activities must be accomplished—a specific set of spontaneities of thought are presupposed (Critique of Pure Reason, A 51 = B 75, A 99–104; A denotes the first and B the second editions of the Critique)—before man can be conscious
(i.e., self-conscious). (All consciousness is self-consciousness, for Kant, precisely because all consciousness is relational, i.e., the subject is always mutually conditioned by objects.) The ultimate locus from which these “transcendental” acts emanate is the unity of consciousness, which is itself grounded in an immaterialist and monadic paradigm of the mind. Similarly, the idealism of Fichte leads him to claim that the ego (unconsciously) posits itself; next, it thetically posits the “other,” or nonego, as a sphere in opposition to itself; and finally (with the foregoing conditions being fulfilled), it is able to return to itself, self-consciously. For Fichte, all these activities take place completely within the realm of mind. And the entire philosophic reconstruction—as well as the psychogenetic development—depends on the premise that matter in principle cannot reflexively unify itself without self-destruction because the parts of matter are external to each other.

Hegel, in the *Science of Logic*, is even more explicit than his predecessors on the issue concerning the nothingness of consciousness, since he identifies Being—as pure, abstract, universal, empty thought—with consciousness of empty being. Hence, he concludes that both consciousness of Being and awareness of Nothing are identical. (Nevertheless, Hegel announces that the entire historical, cultural development of the mind consists in a return, a circular journey, a “reflexion” back to this primal beginning; even though empty consciousness becomes “full,” i.e., contentful, conceptually “concrete,” in the end, it yet remains an immaterial “nothingness,” i.e., reason as determinant self-consciousness, hence Marx’s criticism of Hegel’s “abstract idealism.”) In turn, the views of Fichte and Hegel strongly resemble Freud’s later paradigm of the narcissistic “oceanic feeling” as set forth in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, as we shall see more fully in a subsequent chapter. There—we could interpret Freud to be saying—the expansive, amorphous, unbounded consciousness of nothingness in the infant is at once invaded by the plenitude of sensation (Hegel’s section on Sense-Certainty in the *Phenomenology*). And, at first, the child identifies himself with the plenitude of given “external” being. After a short period of time, however, he begins to realize, to recognize, that he is neither omnipotent nor identical with everything which appears to him in
awareness, and he develops the notion of the “other,” both as object and as other-consciousness (usually the mother, at least initially). Put differently, through the frustrations inevitably involved in the denial of the unlimited demands of the pleasure principle, the child is forced to develop the relational conception of a nonpliable reality, one which opposes his overweening demands. In any case, the point is that Freud’s model of consciousness, once it had broken away from its earlier physiological and neurological base, could readily be assimilated to the reflexive, idealist theoretical construct we have traced. And Freud’s theory of mind, I would further hold, is, like that of his German predecessors, grounded in an immaterialist paradigm of consciousness (cf., for example, The Interpretation of Dreams, VII, F).

But once more, the point I am concerned to establish is that we can phenomenologically and psychologically describe the progress, or process, of consciousness toward self-consciousness while still operating completely within the framework of a model of awareness, one in which awareness is still interpreted as a nothingness. The value of such an interpretation, it seems to me, is that it would account for what is often referred to as the “toneless quality” of our experience of loneliness. For instance, Harry Stack Sullivan tells us that “it is a very difficult therapeutic performance to get anyone to remember clearly how he felt and what he did when he was horribly lonely.” But loneliness has a “toneless quality” precisely because it is the absence of an awareness of any thing or sensation; it is a meaningless nothingness. When a human being successfully “reflects” on his self, reflexively captures his own intrinsically unique situation, he grasps (self-consciously) the nothingness of his existence as a “transcendental condition”—universal, necessary (a priori)—structuring his entire conscious-being-in-the-world. This originary level of recognition is the ground-source for his acute sensory-cognitive awareness of loneliness. This is why human beings often describe, or refer to, their loneliness as an emptiness.

In the theories of Descartes and Leibniz, it is possible for the lone ego to be conscious of itself, even should the “external world” be annihilated. (My own position is that this sort of solipsistic, or subjective idealist, doctrine is untenable.) After considerable
confusion and some false starts in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant finally decides in the second edition that consciousness of the self is reciprocally conditioned by consciousness of objects. (Other selves, according to Kant, are “constructions,” or syntheses, of judgments—all judgments are relational—relegated to the same ontological status as external objects.) It follows that self-consciousness, as a subjective, temporal structure of immaterial, internal feelings, presupposes a relatively stable or uniform order of external change, which Kant terms nature, a permanent background against which the self apprehends its own transient states of awareness. But presumably, even on Kant’s own principle, a feral man would be self-conscious. And, as I have outlined Kant’s position and its implications, I would tend to agree with it. It could similarly be claimed, I suppose, that certain solitary animals are nevertheless aware of their own identities.

In contrast, by Hegel’s account—as well as Fichte’s before him and Marx’s after him—consciousness of the self, theoretically, must be mutually conditioned by other self-consciousnesses, by the presence of other or social selves. (Generally, this is what Hegel says, although I shall shortly provide a passage with a more Kantian tenor.) On this usual interpretation of Hegel’s views, loneliness becomes difficult to “explain.” Indeed, it becomes highly problematic, because the self, on this theory, can only come into being through the interacting presence of the other(s). It cannot in any sense “precede” the other. According to this doctrine, enforced solitude would be something derivative, secondary, dependent (on, say, the absence or withdrawal of the other self); thus, loneliness would not be the basic, fundamental, primitive structure for which I have argued. To resolve this difficulty, we must recall that there are actually two quite different, but nevertheless both primary, structures in the mind. First, there is the reflexive aspect, which we have already discussed at length. And, secondly, there exists an element of freedom, which is signaled by the spontaneous nature of awareness. Accordingly, in the idealist tradition, this active power of the mind is credited with the ability to transcend the realm of the externally given, to go beyond the confines—temporally and spatially—of the immediately present. Thought essentially “blows outwardly” (as well as inwardly); it posits something other than itself,
and in so doing it recognizes the other as related to itself. Thus, simple, monadic consciousness, though intrinsically unrelated, through freedom posits relations and the “other” as a means of escape from its solipsistic prison; the relations—or structures—which consciousness desperately fashions are “ideally” conceived as reflective, reverberating mirrors (Hegel, the faculty of the understanding as reflective) doubling the certainty of the self’s own existence. Again, ideally of course, through the device of intersubjective communication, the most complete satisfaction is achieved when the other responds as itself a sympathetic self-consciousness and thereby extinguishes, at least momentarily, our poignant solitude (Hegel, the faculty of reason as reflexive, returning to the self with the other). Actually, this entire *Philosophy of mind* derives from Hegel in a sense, for, as he informs us, “Individuality is awareness of one’s existence as a unit in sharp distinction from others.” Following Hegel, we agree that immanent to the consciousness of the individual are two “moments” (structures, temporal modes of relation), the first consisting of a pure, empty self—“relatedness,” sheer unrelatedness to an other, and the second constituted by a freedom directed outwardly, toward the other.

This second moment [of transcendent mediacy] appears as the moment opposed to the first [moment of self-contained immediacy, unconsciously or implicitly self-conscious]; … it [the second moment] is intrinsic to freedom … Here the ego leaves undifferentiated indeterminacy [the first stage] and proceeds to differentiate [relate, distinguish] itself, to posit a content or object [and thereby recognize it as such] and so to give itself determinacy. My willing is not pure willing but the willing of something. A will which … wills only the abstract universal, wills [absolutely] nothing and is therefore no will at all … The fact the will wills something is restriction, negation [difference, otherness, alienation]. Thus particularization is what as a rule is called finitude [through the negation of the other object or self]. Reflective thinking usually [mistakenly] takes the first moment, [i.e., indeterminacy as the higher and absolute moment] while it regards restriction as a mere negation of this determinacy. But this indeterminacy is itself only [relatively] a negation in contrast with the determinate,
with [the other as] finitude; the ego is this [implicit, reflexive] solitude and absolute negation [i.e., freedom] … The ego as such is in the first place pure activity, the universal which is by itself. But this universal determines itself and to that extent is no longer by itself but posits itself as an other … Freedom in this sense … we already possess in the form of feeling—in friendship and love, for instance. Here we are not inherently one-sided; we restrict ourselves gladly in relating ourselves to another, but in this restriction know ourselves as ourselves.\(^2^0\)

Negation is determination (Plato’s *Parmenides*, Spinoza, Sartre).

So, let us grant that the mind indubitably exhibits the two aspects of (a) reflexivity and (b) freedom. It therefore follows, as James Howard suggests, that we may try to conquer our loneliness either by (a) an incorporation, an encapsulation of the other within our selves, bringing the other reflexively into our own sphere of consciousness; or (b) a transcendence, a reaching out for the other. Again, both of these maneuvers rest in the dual ability of the mind either (a) to curl up within itself or (b) to explode outwardly. Usually this results in the twofold campaign, outlined above, of each individual battling on two fronts in order to alleviate his tragic sense of forlornness.

We function at any given time between two strategic poles of complete incorporation of our world, swallowing it all, or complete escape from the boundaries of skin, turning ourselves inside out to join that which is beyond our direct knowing. We can achieve neither goal. Since we cannot make it, we face continuing frustration. We cannot engorge ourselves enough to take in the whole world, nor can we evert ourselves to unite with that which is external to us.\(^2^1\)

As Hegel emphasizes, the mind has the capacity to intro-reflect as well as to extro-reflect (*Philosophy of Mind*). When it does the former too successfully, too completely, then, I would contend, it becomes aware of a unified nothingness; it becomes reflexively conscious of its internal emptiness, and this directly results in the feeling of abandonment, emptiness, and lack—in short, loneliness. In contrast,
when the mind extro-reflects, it is actually anxiously trying to keep itself occupied with various forms of diversion (Pascal, Kierkegaard), lest it be driven back into a confrontation with the nothingness that haunts each individual human psyche. Indeed, what we generally call boredom is really just the growing awareness of nothingness, one which the mind reaches in the performance of its inward turning. Consequently, boredom resembles loneliness in all aspects except intensity.

As soon as want and suffering give man a relaxation, boredom is at once so near that he necessarily requires diversion and amusement. The striving after existence is what occupies all living things, and keeps them in motion. When existence is assured to them, they do not know what to do with it. Therefore the second thing that sets them in motion is the effort to get rid of the burden of existence, to make it no longer felt, “to kill time,” in other words, to escape from boredom. Accordingly we see that almost all men, secure from want and cares, are now a burden to themselves, after having finally cast off all other burdens … Boredom is anything but an evil to be thought of lightly; ultimately it depicts on the countenance real despair. It causes beings who love one another as little as men do, to seek one another so much, and thus becomes the source of sociability … The strict penitentiary system … makes mere boredom an instrument of punishment through loneliness and idleness. It is so terrible an instrument, that it has brought convicts to suicide.22

But there is another major reason for man’s feeling of isolation, although perhaps this cause may be applicable only to man in the West. Quite often, it is remarked that the natural sciences developed in the West as a result of an early conceptual distinction between the subjective mind and the objective world. Indeed, in the famous Divided Line passage in Plato’s Republic (VI, 509d-511e), we already have a clear formulation of a problematic relation between the knower and the known and a radical separation between (a) states of mind (imagining, believing, thinking, knowing, and intellectual intuition) and (b) objects of knowledge (images, visible things, mathematical
objects, Forms, and the Good). This difficult relation continues to puzzle thinkers until the time of Descartes, when the riddle is not so much resolved as it is intensified into practically an antithetical dualism between knower and known. We may recall that according to Descartes, in the Meditations, the mind is better known than the body, for each of us is in immediate contact only with our own thought, and, hence, the existence of an external world and other minds can only be inferred; they are, therefore, intrinsically dubitable. This theme, followed to its logical conclusion, certainly ends in conceiving of the subjective mind as perfectly isolated, since the mind is interpreted as existing distinctly, separately from bodies in general and the consciousness of the other in particular. Further, Descartes informs us—and he was anticipated in this view by Galileo and even Democritus and Epicurus—that the apprehension of tertiary and secondary qualities is to be attributed to the subject whereas, by contrast, the primary property of extension is conceived as existing—being ontologically located—independently of the knowing mind. The former qualities are thus defined as purely private, enclosed as they are within a cognitive, immaterial point, the consciousness of the lonely ego, whereas the latter property, extension, is designated as the proper sphere of the natural sciences. So, again, we reach a radical bifurcation between the self and the world. Eventually, Husserl, in The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology, lays the entire blame for the dichotomization between man versus science and science versus values and life on the materialistic method, which culminates in the separation adopted by the natural sciences in physics and psychology (Crisis, Part 2). Husserl himself is hopeful that this “alienation,” or fragmentation, of subjectivity from the rest of “life” and nature can be overcome by a reunification, a reintegration of the two spheres at the more primordial level of the Lebenswelt.  

My own conviction is that this will not happen, and that if anything, the separation will become more intense, more absolute. Indeed, as Eastern and emerging nations are forced, in the interest of survival, to adopt the Western attitude toward science, I expect the feeling of man’s isolation will intensify. And when this occurs, then,
for better or for worse, I believe those cultures will be closer to the fundamental “dualism” of reality.24

We are the hollow men, each of us, separately. We are the marginal men, for each of us longs to belong somewhere but does not truly belong anywhere. We are the lonely men.

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* An earlier version of this chapter appeared in an article in the Review of Existential Psychiatry and Psychology (Winter, 1977).


2. As we shall presently see, freedom itself is one of the two basic structures of consciousness that emanate from the monadic but nevertheless “transcendent” character of man’s awareness. Furthermore, freedom is a direct implication, as Sartre suggests, of man’s state of aloneness. Without God, a realm of eternal values, or a real sense of solidarity with his fellows, the individual is absolutely alone in the universe and consequently completely free to choose any meaning for his own existence, including that of no longer existing (Schopenhauer).


4. C.G. Jung, The Collected Works of C.G. Jung (Princeton, 1970), 7, 156–157, note 1. Interestingly enough, Prometheus, although tortured and physically bound, nevertheless freely resists Zeus’s judgment and punishment; he is alone and free. Again, consult the myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha for the theme of loneliness in the creation legends.


6. And yet the idea of loneliness plays a prominent role in Old English literature, in such poems as The Wanderer, Seafarer, Woman’s Message, and Ruin, where the themes of exile and solitary survival are powerfully represented. Similarly, the opening lines of Dante’s Inferno refer to the poet as lost in darkness, abandoned on a “lonely slope” in life. Surely this allusion is sufficient to symbolize Dante’s state of mind when he feels himself separated from God and man. Correspondingly, the late-fifteenth-century morality play Everyman presents the essential insularity of each human being at the moment of death. (I am indebted to Professor Katherine Ashley of SUNY at Binghamton for these examples from the Middle Ages.)

7. “I have been studying how I may compare, This prison where I live unto the world: And for because the world is populous, And here there is not a creature but myself I cannot do it; yet I’ll hammer it out” (Shakespeare, Richard II, V, v); see also Shakespeare’s Sonnets. Cf. J. A. Howard, The Flesh-Colored Cage (Hawthorn, 1975), p. 92. Howard’s book, along with Frieda Fromm-Reichmann’s
article “Loneliness,” which appeared in Psychiatry (February, 1959) and was reprinted, in part, in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy: Selected Papers of Frieda Fromm-Reichmann (University of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 325–336, are the best analyses of loneliness of which I am aware. Probably the first systematic study of loneliness as a subject matter in its own right is G. Zilboorg’s paper “Loneliness,” Atlantic Monthly (January, 1938).

8. Tolstoy’s “The Death of Ivan Ilyich,” Malraux’s Man’s Fate, and Sartre’s The Wall express the idea that we die alone even when we are condemned with others.


10. The theme of being a stranger to one’s self is the dominant concept in Conrad’s The Secret Sharer with its hopeful ending. That optimistic conclusion is violently wrested from us in the tenebrous gloom of Heart of Darkness.

11 A. Malraux, Man’s Fate (Modern Library, 1961), p. 59; see also M. Friedman, To Deny Our Nothingness (Dell, 1967), pp. 38–42.

12 “There is no [real] communication between us. Each is imprisoned in his own consciousness. Only sympathy, Eliot implies, can begin to overcome the isolation of modern man” (Friedman, p. 37). Again, Eliot’s model of the soul, mind, or self as monadically simple has been invoked since the writings of Descartes, Leibniz, and Kant, and later by the phenomenological meditations of Husserl and the existential descriptions of Sartre, in order to prove (or “show”) that the soul is a restricted “unity of consciousness”; uniquely identical (personal identity); radically free; temporally enclosed; and, finally, absolutely alone; see Introduction, footnote 1, for supportive references.

13 Cf. B. Mijuskovic, “Marx and Engels on Materialism and Idealism,” Journal of Thought (July, 1974). Indeed, even the machine-like labor of the worker is preferable to the alternative of solitary boredom and reflection on the nothingness of monadic consciousness. There is a much worse mode of existence than servile labor, and that is the complete absence of labor altogether, as in prison, for example, which inevitably forces self-centered preoccupation and focus on the isolation and emptiness of one’s condition. If the mind is forced to concentrate, to scrutinize, to engorge itself—through the agency of a reflexive awareness—madness may mercifully intercede.

14 May, p. 14, but once more I would insist that this is true of all times and not just the 1940s or 1950s.

15 A. Malraux, The Walnut Trees of Altenberg (Lehman, 1952), p. 74; see also Man’s Fate, pp. 355–356. Other contemporary archetypes exemplifying the nothingness quality of awareness are advocated in the following works: M. Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. Macquarie and Robinson (Harper & Row, 1962), 231–234, 311, 321–322, 324, 356, 393; cf. W. J. Richardson, Heidegger:
Through Phenomenology to Thought (Nijhoff, 1967), pp. 72, 195 ff., 284, 537; J. P. Sartre, The Transcendence of the Ego (Noonday, 1957), pp. 38, 91, 93; Being and Nothingness, trans. H. Barnes (Washington Square, 1966), Part 1, V, esp. pp. 42, 54, and 760–761. Consciousness is clear, translucent, lucid, empty exactly because it is a nothingness; it is “a hole in Being”; and consult translator’s comments in The Transcendence of the Ego, pp. 1, 21, 22; see also J. Catalano, A Commentary on Jean Paul Sartre’s Being and Nothingness (Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 13–14; W. Desan, The Tragic Finale (Harper, 1960), pp. 19–20, 23, and M. Grene, Sartre (New Viewpoints, 1973), pp. 124, 126, 129. Further, see W. Barrett, Irrational Man (Anchor, 1962), pp. 29, 65, 226–227, 238, 243, 247. And, finally, H.D. Lewis, The Elusive Mind (Humanities, 1969), pp. 18, 84, 232, 306. As we shall soon make clear, it is because man can freely posit meanings, creatively endow his life with (fictitious) significances and Sartrean “projects,” pointing toward which he strives that human existence becomes “meaningful.” The recalcitrant Being of the world and that of the other(s), both external to himself, serve as the realm to creatively fashion his own image without the blueprints of God, human nature, or society directing him with reassuring forgiveness. Hence he (quixotically and futilely) struggles to go beyond the prison which is comprised by a self-consciousness of his own nothingness; or he attends a Being who is as vacuous as his own nothingness (Beckett, Waiting for Godot).

16 The first clear examples of the principle of reflexivity are to be found in Aristotle, Metaphysics, 1075 A; and Plotinus, The Enneads, IV, 7, 3, and 6; see again Introduction, footnote 1. To my mind, the most interesting figure to apply and indeed immerse himself—unconsciously, I suppose—in this ancient reflexive paradigm of the mind is the twentieth-century American novelist Thomas Wolfe. Wolfe’s major works (Look Homeward Angel; Of Time and the River; and You Can’t Go Home Again) are autobiographical in a most acute and desperate way. Indeed, Wolfe’s loneliness can be seen increasingly to feed on itself as he introspectively recreates and relives the suffering of his isolation, until finally the reader becomes uncomfortably aware that this intensity has virtually reached self-destructive proportions. See also A. Machen, The Hill of Dreams, and W. Golding, Pincher Martin, to be discussed below.


18 The doctrine of the intentionality of consciousness—conscience is always consciousness of something other than itself—found in Brentano, Husserl, and Sartre (and anticipated by Descartes and Hegel) is grounded on this model of the spontaneity or freedom of consciousness. In Kant, spontaneity is productive of relations, not intentionalities. Consult Introduction, footnote 1.


20 Ibid., p. 228. In this final optimism of the last sentence, I am afraid I cannot concur; I only wish we could know ourselves as well as Hegel intimates. On the other hand, perhaps it is best that we do not.
21 Howard, p. xiii; see also p. xi.


23 “Underlying the economic, social, and psychological aspects of alienation can be a profound common denominator, namely, the alienation which is the ultimate consequence of four centuries of the outworking of the separation of man as subject from the objective world. This alienation has expressed itself for several centuries in Western man’s passion to gain power over nature, but now shows itself in an estrangement from nature and a vague, unarticulated, and half-suppressed sense of despair of gaining any real relationship with the natural world, including one’s own body” (R. May, E. Angel, H. Ellenberger, *Existence—A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology* [Basic Books, 1958], p. 57). In “Science as Vocation” (*Essays in Sociology*, trans. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills [Oxford, 1946], pp. 129 ff.), Max Weber argued for a strict bifurcation between the realms of science and value and contended that science was intrinsically unable to solve questions of meaning for personal existence. Cf. H. Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement* (Nijhoff, 1965), I, 79–80. Obviously, any and every subsequent separation accomplished between the subject, on the one hand, and objects, the external world, and other minds, on the other hand, directly leads to an intensification of the sense of loneliness within individual consciousness. To broaden the interdisciplinary dimension toward the biological, see J. Lynch, *The Broken Heart: The Medical Consequences of Loneliness* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), pp. 159–163.

24 Cf., R. Wright, *Black Boy*; R. Ellison, *The Invisible Man*; R.P. Warren, *Blackberry Winter*; and C. McCullers, *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, the latter in which the author empathetically describes the family estrangement as well as the social alienation of a black doctor in the South. In connection with the foregoing concept of the marginal man, I might interject that it is somewhat distressing to find studies, like E.V. Stonequist’s *The Marginal Man* (Russell, 1961), so singularly lacking in theoretical insights. Thus, throughout the text, it almost sounds as if the consciousness of estrangement, the feeling of alienation, is “explainable by” or “reducible to” merely a different or anomalous shade of skin pigmentation. But this reasoning is unsound; one cannot “understand,” grasp from within, the sense of marginalness in this way any more than one can be led to “see” the difference between two paintings by simply noticing that dissimilar colors are employed.
In the chapter before us, I want to concentrate on the awareness of loneliness. What are the conditions that make the sense of human isolation itself possible? In this regard, I am proposing to operate within a Kantian framework. It may be remembered that Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* is addressed to resolving the problem of how consciousness itself is possible, it is devoted to a “transcendental” inquiry that analyzes the conditions and active structures making consciousness, or human experience, possible. And Kant theorizes that unless certain a priori requirements are fulfilled, then, indeed, human awareness could not occur, or at least it could not exist as we know it. In short, human experience would either be impossible or radically different without certain presuppositions. In an analogous manner, I intend to scrutinize loneliness by first investigating consciousness, by determining what consciousness must be like in order for loneliness to be manifest within the mind. Now, let me hasten to caution that despite my present adoption of a Kantian attitude in this chapter, I do not wish to preclude any phenomenological insights into loneliness, and, in fact, they will be developed in subsequent sections of the book. In other words, although Kant’s perspective affords us a transcendental—an indirect—means of understanding loneliness, the phenomenological method, by contrast, promises “intuitive,” direct, immediate “seeing” into the phenomenon of human isolation. Nevertheless, I believe the two methodologies are not opposed but rather strongly support each other, as we shall soon suggest.

In a former article, I argued that there are basically—or reducibly—three, and only three, models of consciousness in the history of Western speculation.¹ They are (a) the behaviorist; (b) the intentional; and (c) the reflexive paradigms of cognitive apprehension.
The behaviorist doctrine maintains that the physical world impinges on (ultimately) the brain, that external stimuli cause effects in organic matter, as in central state materialism, or responses in overt bodily actions, as in behaviorism proper (Hobbes, Holbach, La Mettrie, B. F. Skinner, G. Ryle, D. M. Armstrong). The intentional model, in opposition to the previous theoretical construct, maintains that the essence of consciousness lies in its structure of “intentionality.” Awareness is always consciousness of something other than itself, other than consciousness itself (some meaning, or noema); it “blows outwardly,” it points toward, it is directed beyond itself (Brentano, Husserl, Sartre). Nevertheless, the second theory shares with its predecessor the identical conviction that all “mental events” are to be interpreted as unidirectional, transitive, vectorial, arrowlike, whether that quality is to be understood as essentially causal (as in behaviorism) or immanently structural (as in phenomenology). But there is still a third archetype of mental cognition, one which attributes a reflexive nature to the powers of the mind. This latter pattern insists that consciousness, really self-consciousness, is fundamentally circular, that thought is endowed with an ability to “curl back on itself.” Indeed, this was popularly held by both the rationalist and the idealist traditions as the primary defining characteristic of mental activity. Thus, the mind was conceived as exhibiting a unified “return,” one in which the self (as subject) could be shown to apprehend itself (as object), the self and its thought being present as an object to itself, within its own sphere of consciousness (Aristotle, Plotinus, Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, and Bergson). Now, it is this last paradigm that will concern us throughout the book, because I am convinced that on its philosophical foundation the disciplines of literature, philosophy, and psychology have erected a significant and true insight into man’s fundamental nature: namely, that each of us, separately, exists in isolation, in a state of desolate loneliness, enclosed within the confines of a monadic prison which we continually strive to escape. In other words, I wish to contend that according to the first two models of consciousness—the behavioral and the intentional—it is difficult, if not inconceivable, to understand how loneliness is even possible. If behaviorism were correct, loneliness could only be regarded in terms of bodily isolation. But then it would be correspondingly
impossible to explain how one can feel alone in a crowd or when one is with others. Furthermore, on the materialist principle, our body is simply our own; and if loneliness is “caused” by bodily isolation, then it should follow that we are always and continually alone. But this is absurd and contrary to fact. (Analogously, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the materialists attempted to ground personal identity on a physicalist criterion and failed; see Introduction, footnote 1.) Similarly, the intentionality paradigm of awareness, consistently drawn out, directly leads to the denial of a reflexive ego, or indeed, for that matter, it entails the rejection of any (immanent) ego whatsoever in consciousness (Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*). But surely it is meaningless to try to account for loneliness apart from the existence of the self, for there seems to be an intrinsically solipsistic quality of solitude. However, solipsism without an ego appears virtually a contradiction in terms. Consequently, if we assume that the three models provided above constitute an exhaustive matrix of possibilities, and if we further grant that the first two theories are deficient in affording an insight into the feeling and meaning of loneliness, then it follows, by a process of elimination, that we must look for help in the third, the reflexive structure of awareness. Furthermore—and this is important—the reflexive model of consciousness is only possible if, and only if, or on the condition that, the mind is immaterial, as I have argued elsewhere. And so now the way is clear to consider and concentrate on this final mental paradigm alone.

Something important, and highly unusual, occurs when Descartes formulates the reflexive principle of the *cogito* (historically following Augustine and Jean de Silhun). It is a significant event not only in philosophy but also, and perhaps more vitally, in the field of literature as well. More specifically, I am suggesting that the modern novel—through its emphasis on the “personal” narrative means of exposition—evolved from and is patterned after the same model of the mind, and its concomitant mode of expression, adopted in Descartes’s solipsistic meditations. Whether wittingly or not, and regardless of whether a work is written in the first-person or third-person form of narration, there is suddenly a shift in perspective that can only be appreciated if we realize the accelerating dominance of the reflexive
paradigm of consciousness in the intellectual history of the West, a pattern which in turn generates the principle of the existential loneliness of man. Thus, to consider what I regard as a significant clue in the history of ideas, it seems no accident that *Robinson Crusoe* was composed some seventy years after the philosophy of Descartes had appeared on the intellectual scene. Now, I am not contending there is any evidence of a direct historical influence of Cartesian thought on Defoe (in fact, I failed to find any despite a concentrated search), but I am, nevertheless, claiming that there is considerably more than a superficial resemblance between Descartes’s *Meditations* and Defoe’s solipsistic chronicle. Thus, I want to hold that there is a certain conceptual affinity, if not an ideological conspiracy, between these two masterpieces of intellectual thought. Accordingly, the interpretation I am advancing is that both thinkers are mutually committed to a reflexive paradigm of the mind and that from this principle it follows that both authors conceive of man as essentially in isolation. More obviously, of course, Defoe’s hero suffers from loneliness, from the effects of a prolonged solitude that leads him to question why he is alive at all, whereas Descartes himself rather facilely escapes his own mental internment by quickly “proving” the existence of a God that continually sustains his finite existence and even guarantees him immortal companionship (Third Meditation and Synopsis). Nevertheless, by their commitment to the reflexive nature of thought, the principle of self-consciousness, both writers share the same method, and consequently, perhaps unconsciously but nevertheless inevitably, depict man as absolutely isolated. Or, put differently, we may say that Robinson Crusoe’s consciousness “reflects” the reality of his island—symbolizing the world—from his own unique point of view in much the same way that Leibniz conceives of the windowless monads, each of which is internally aware, as solely reflecting the universe from its own limited, finite, individual perspective. (To “reach” the infinite nature of God signifies, for Defoe and Leibniz, the final escape from the condemnation of the finitude of solitary existence).

But first, in order to understand more deeply the nature of reflexive consciousness, perhaps it is best to turn to the quasi-phenomenological and dialectical approach of Fichte. We recall that
according to the German philosopher, the spontaneity of thought freely posits itself as an ego, not yet conscious of itself, as a condition for its eventual return to itself, culminating in the attainment of a true and perfectly self-conscious, reflexive freedom (Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx’s social and class consciousness). In Fichte, this power results in the productive and practical ego—through its sheer willing activity—generating an “external world,” along with the creation of other moral selves, as a sphere in which it can ethically operate. In this sense, the world is constituted as a transcendental, structural condition which makes possible practical action. For the purposes of our discussion concerning loneliness, within a context of the freedom of consciousness, however, we may exploit Fichte’s model by extending it into a basically Feuerbachian pattern in the following fashion. Man’s consciousness is an immaterial “nothingness,” but it is one that not only exists but moreover exists reflexively, aware of both itself and its freedom, at least at certain “privileged” moments (see my articles in Philosophy Today and Idealistic Studies). Differently put, at certain times, consciousness may become aware of its own emptiness, its nothingness, in violent contrast to the smug, self-contained, self-sufficiency of an opposing, sometimes inert, often intermittently heaving and undulating matter (cf. Roquentin’s “experience” of the roots of the chestnut tree—the “in-itself”—in Sartre’s Nausea). The antagonistic and violent contrast between (1) a void and the freedom of consciousness, which desires “it knows not what,” set against (2) an absolute passiveness (matter), which ignores it, frightens consciousness. It is then driven, desperately, to seek some similar, familiar, recognizable being that will serve to alleviate its dreadful burden of monadic isolation. This other being must always be present with—and in relation to—consciousness, and, ideally, it should be a kindred existence that is always there (eternally) and whose presence is manifest everywhere (ubiquitously, infinitely). But further, this other being must itself respond; it should care about man’s frightening loneliness, and it ought to assuage his dreadful penalty of solipsistic existence by perpetually satisfying him that he is not alone, that he does not exist in vain (i.e., solitary, unrelated, a “useless passion”). (Recall the desperate words of Christ on the cross when he believes himself abandoned, forsaken to utter aloneness by
God). In short, this companion being must be itself self-conscious. Man thus freely creates God, a being who hears his every prayer, for he can communicate with God. Man accordingly endows this other consciousness with a “reflective” awareness of his (man’s) every act and thought, whether it be wicked or laudable, for the really important thing is not whether one is to be punished or praised but rather that one is not abandoned, estranged, that one is not left alone, so that one shall not become a solitary atom of consciousness, forsaken to existence among the limitless expanses of dark space and time. Hell is not suffering, even if it is at the lowest sphere of Dante’s inferno, for at least there one grieves with others. Hell is being condemned totally alone to eternal consciousness, wandering throughout a darkened universe as a solitary monad, with pathetic windows of awareness reflecting the meaningless blackness (Pascal, Pensées). Solipsism is a “false” metaphysical doctrine not because it is wrong but because it is psychologically terrifying. In this sense, it can be said that the consciousness of man, a relative and finite nothingness, has freely, spontaneously, created an Absolute Nothingness, which guarantees the mirroring of man’s self-conscious or reflexive thought. Similarly, in Feuerbach, man eventually realizes that he has posited, “projected,” the attributes of goodness, knowledge, power, etc., in an external substance or being, God. Nevertheless, this process of alienation itself dynamically and dialectically conditions the possibility of man’s future return to his own human consciousness in recognizing that it is actually man who has the predicates of benevolence, wisdom, strength, etc. Feuerbach himself, of course, desires to replace man’s worship of God with the religion of Humanity. However, it may be pointed out in this connection that just as it is possible to “remove” the existence of God as an empty abstraction, so it is conceivable to regard the concept of Humanity as a mere fiction. But if one transcends both of these, then nothing remains except the reflexive loneliness of the ego, a solitude forced to feed upon its own desperate isolation. The latter, I would submit, is the true state of affairs.

That each of us is alone is a tragedy. But when we attempt to reach the other, because no one wishes to be alone, we at once discover ourselves struggling against the other for domination, a supremacy which demands that the other recognize our own reflexivity while
entirely subordinating his self-consciousness and freedom to us. We endeavor to force our antagonist to consciously acknowledge our self-consciousness as the primary, if not sole, reality. Meanwhile, we strive to transform the self of the other into merely possessing the status of an object, a thing devoid of consciousness (Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, Master-Slave). But paradoxically enough, we further alienate ourselves from the other in the very process of trying to secure or reach him by attempting to compel him to submit to our “masterhood” (our self-consciousness). And yet we cannot do otherwise, for it is exactly because of our reflexive aloneness, constituting as it does the inner truth of our being, that self-consciousness cries out so desperately and yearningly to be admitted, by force if necessary, by the other. This, as Hegel acutely points out, is the “History of Robinson and Friday” (“Outlines of the Phenomenology,” 35; so also A. Kojève and Sartre). And, of course, the foregoing dialectical conflict merely serves to reinforce and intensify our original, primordial feeling of loneliness. The story of Robinson Crusoe is an allegory repeated in the life of every individual who comes into contact with human existences other than his own, and it is also the tale of the human race as a distinct species. No other animal suffers from loneliness so acutely as does man.

In seeking to establish my claim concerning the relation between the reflexivity of consciousness and loneliness in literature, I shall offer a discussion of three twentieth-century novelists who, I believe, are most clearly committed to both the reflexive model of consciousness and the reflexive method of narrative presentation. Also, I shall try to show how each writer, in varying degrees, progressively recognizes the ultimate element of human loneliness. I intend to commence by considering the French writer, Marcel Proust, and specifically his work *Swann’s Way*. Proust is strongly influenced by Bergson, and especially by the latter’s views regarding the immateriality, reflexivity, and temporality of consciousness. As Proust conceives it, the individual can immediately feel (Bergson’s intuition) the “past,” the past as present, as it is directly given to consciousness, but he cannot intellectually or conceptually reproduce it. To conceptualize an object or an event involves dismembering it, dissecting it. But we destroy a sensation or a memory when we analyze its constituent
“parts.” On the other hand, when we really, genuinely experience a feeling, when consciousness is immediately invaded by qualitative existents, when we are captured by the very qualities that constitute our being, then we are immersed in the reality of a unique isolation, one in which our very experience becomes indistinguishable from the self. This is what Proust means when he announces that the “essence was not in me, it was myself” (p. 55). And yet it is exactly this introspective capacity itself that rests on an immaterialist interpretation of awareness for its very possibility, since only if the mind is immaterial can consciousness be reflexive.

When I saw any external object, my consciousness that I was seeing it would remain between me and it, enclosing it in a slender, incorporeal outline which prevented me from ever coming directly in contact with the material form; for it would volatilize itself in some way before I could touch it. (p. 104)

Following “the way of ideas,” or subjective idealist, argument invoked by a host of French thinkers (Montaigne, Descartes, Malebranche, Bergson), Proust maintains that we are never in direct contact with any object in the external world since our ideas, or modes of consciousness, mediate, or interpose themselves, between the physical object and our immaterial minds. Consequently, material entities become present within the diaphanous medium of awareness as immaterialized (Proust’s volatilization) qualities and feelings. Nevertheless, we are temporally cognizant of these immanent “objects” as they succeed one another, as they preserve their identity, through subjective time, within the ego. And, actually, even visual qualities (e.g., colors) are conceived as essentially unextended, since the mind itself is immaterial i.e., “simple,” unextended (Bergson, Time and Free Will). Put differently, colors, as qualities, are nonextensive and nonquantitative. Because of the mind’s complete immersion in purely qualitative being, Proust conceives of the true self as an immaterial pinprick of intensified consciousness, a point not in space and existing apart, separated from both material things and “other minds.” Hence, we are alone, and yet our isolation continually strives to reach the consciousness of the other.
For even if we have the sensation of being always enveloped in, surrounded by our own soul, still it does not seem a fixed and immovable prison; rather do we seem to be borne away with it, and perpetually struggling to pass beyond it, to break out into the world, with a perpetual discouragement as we hear endlessly, all around us, that unvarying sound which is no echo from without, but the resonance of a vibration from within. (Internal time as sound; Bergson, *Time and Free Will*) … sometimes we mobilize all our spiritual forces in a glittering array so as to influence and subjugate other human beings who, as we very well know, are situated outside ourselves, where we can never reach them. (pp. 107–108)

And so we discover, those of us who are sufficiently interested in searching into our own introspective states of consciousness (for there are primarily “extro-spective” modes of thought as well), that we exist alone through time. We try to communicate with the other consciousness; Swann at last tries desperately to understand, to “know” Odette, but he realizes sadly and far too late that we can never know another human being and seldom, if ever, even know ourselves. When we do grasp the self, it is through the agency of a rather momentary feeling, a memory of the past that suddenly swallows our present consciousness.

The most sustained, and quite possibly the most frightening portrayal of loneliness of which I am aware, is to be found in Welsh novelist Arthur Machen’s *The Hill of Dreams*. Perhaps Thomas Wolfe approaches Machen in certain passages, but Wolfe’s is a rather different attitude toward enforced solitude, for Wolfe is trying to break out toward the external world; he is like a powerful bird raging against the bars of a cage. The main character in Machen’s novel, on the other hand, is progressively retreating inwardly, within the farthest recesses of his being, into a tunnel of blackness, like a small, burrowing creature that is terrified of the forest full of danger and pain, the world of man. In the introduction to his book, Machen unambiguously provides the reader with both the theme and the purpose of his literary endeavor:
I asked myself why I should not write a “Robinson Crusoe” of the soul … I would take the theme of solitude, loneliness, separation from mankind, but, in place of a desert island and a bodily separation, my hero should be isolated in London and find his chief loneliness in the midst of myriads of men. His should be a solitude of the spirit, and the ocean surrounding him and disassociating him from his kind should be a spiritual deep.

The novel, although recounted in the third person, is nevertheless projected through an obvious sympathy, or identification, with the main character, Lucian, and indeed so much so that it should be described as a personal narrative, the third person style actually offering to the author another means and level of concentric reflexion. And, in fact, as the introduction informs us, the work is fairly autobiographical. It is the story of a boy driven by a loneliness so great that he can only escape from the real cruelties and the disappointments of the external world (see especially page 152) by mentally fashioning an ancient Roman city in his imagination. As a sheer illustration of desolate isolation, I believe, nothing in either literature or philosophy surpasses Chapter 6 of the work, which describes the progressive disintegration of the fragile human psyche. And we, as readers, ourselves increasingly become entrapped, through the author’s use of the reflexive paradigm of consciousness, in the same sense of absolute aloneness. Explicitly copying “the metaphysicians (who) insist on the consciousness of the ego as the implied basis for all thought” (pp. 127–128), Lucian strives to create, through feeling, an immaterial world in the realm of mind and dream alone. (Feelings are intrinsically inner, mental, nonspatial, nonphysical.)

As the chemist in his experiments is astonished to find unknown, unexpected elements in the crucible or the receiver, as the world of material things is considered by some a thin veil of the immaterial universe, so he who reads wonderful prose or verse is conscious of suggestions that cannot be put into words … the world so disclosed is rather the world of dreams. (p. 138; see also p. 126)
On a higher, more reflexive level, what Machen has formulated is a mental experiment in prose, mixing in Bergsonian fashion the feelings, the mental elements, through which his chemistry of the mind will generate a new reality. *The Hill of Dreams*, it may be said, then, attains levels and metalevels of reflexion, for as the author is self-consciously captured by his own method and truth, just so the protagonist, Lucian, is intensely aware of what is happening to him, and he abets it knowingly. Hence, in the end, he quite “logically” conspires to bring about his own destruction. In this sense, the third-person style of narrative especially highlights the reflexive model of awareness because both the author and his subject are “in on it,” so to speak. The style is a reflexion on a reflection; not, to be sure, a mere reflection of a reflection, as in two mirrors facing each other that simply reverberate their flat images, but instead a reflexion that intensifies and deepens the solipsistic apprehension of the self. In this sense, consciousness becomes a “mirror” of infinite dimensions and depths, receding inwardly and reflexively pivoting toward a center of monadic insularity. It comes as no surprise, then, when toward the close of the novel, the writer summons the monadic paradigm of an enclosed, a darkened loneliness:

Unhappy above all and forever lost, Lucian sat within the dismal room … [E]very window was black, without a glimmer of hope, and he who was shut in thick darkness heard the wind and the rain, and the noise of the elm-tree moaning and beating and weeping on the walls. (p. 254; again, sounds are predominantly temporal, inner, and subjective)

Correspondingly, in Leibniz, the monads are windowless and self-contained. Individually, each mental atom “reflects,” or mirrors, a purely unique internal world, present solely within the confines of the lonely ego, from its own particular point of view. Further, Machen’s repeated references to fantasy and dreams throughout the book recall the philosophic refutations of Montaigne, Descartes, Berkeley, and Arthur Collier, who question the alleged reality of the external world. For these thinkers, the idea of a “physical” world is merely a dream, an illusion, one which is held to be either (a) an inherently self-contradictory idea or concept; or (b) intrinsically
separate from, or alien to, the subjective mind. And, lastly, Machen often alludes to Lucian’s thoughts as “meditations” (pp. 137, 139, 219). And may we not regard this last as a Cartesian clue, encouraging the reader to interpret Lucian’s thoughts as the reflexions of a lone ego contemplating its own solitude?

Whereas Machen specifically treats a particular subject’s sense of isolation, the American author Thomas Wolfe presents loneliness as the primary concern and the universal condition of all mankind. According to Wolfe,

We are so lost, so naked and so lonely in America. Immense and cruel skies bend over us, and all of us are driven on forever and we have no home. Therefore, it is not the slow, the punctual sanded drip of the unnumbered days that we remember best, the ash of time; nor is it the huge monotone of the lost years, the unswerving schedules of the lost life and the well-known faces that we remember best. It is a face seen once and lost forever in a crowd, an eye that looked, a face that smiled and vanished on a passing train, it is a prescience of snow upon a certain night, the laughter of a woman in a summer street long ago … and all of our lives is written in the twisting of a leaf upon a bough, a door that opened, and a stone... we walk the streets of life alone.

We see a face only once and realize that we shall never see it again. We recognize that the other is a stranger to us and we are to them. We become acutely aware that all men are strangers to each other, that all of us, separately, are strangers on the earth, intruders in the realm of material being, trespassers in the crude, unfeeling sphere of existence that has preceded us and will continue without us after we are gone, after the last flicker of consciousness has been extinguished within our brains.

And it was not the loneliness of the dreamer, the poet, or the misjudged prophet, it was just the cold and terrible loneliness of man, of every man, and of the lost American who has been brought forth naked under immense and lonely skies, to “shift for himself,” to grope his way blindly through the confusion and brutal chaos of a life as naked and unsure as he, to wander
blindly down across the continent, to hunt forever for a goal, a wall, a dwelling place of warmth and certitude, a light, a door (XXX).

Impressed and influenced by James Joyce’s “stream of consciousness” style, Wolfe himself draws on a strikingly resembling form of “personal” narration, one which allows him, through his very method of presentation, to mine the wealth of introspective data, chock-full of a loneliness encrusted with temporality. Thus, as he composes his novels, Wolf’s reflexive consciousness continually shifts between offering personal and universal insights into the reality of human loneliness. In turn, both of these themes are interwoven (1) within the context of an immanent, subjective form of temporality and (2) against the background of a public, objective time, the time of America’s rivers and trains. In the first model, loneliness and temporality are blended, colored together indissolubly; in the second scheme, lonely men travel against the groundswell of omnipresent, independent time. Thus, what each man senses is both that he is alone and that all men are lonely. If one is sufficiently articulate and introspective (and perhaps brave enough), then one will try to describe this loneliness, as Wolfe himself does. (In a later chapter, we will analyze at greater length the connection between loneliness and subjective, immanent time.)

I want to conclude now by offering some general remarks on our topic. In Proust and Machen, there is an obvious tendency to conceive of the mind, of consciousness, as immaterial, ideal, mental, and consequently subjective. (I am not suggesting that this consequence always follows from the immaterialist premise. Hegel, for example, holds that all reality is mental, and yet he does not thereby conclude that it is therefore personal or individual; quite the contrary.) Similarly, for Wolfe, it appears that at least consciousness of subjective temporality is necessarily conditioned by an immaterialist doctrine of the mind (see Of Time and the River, LXXV). But since, strictly speaking, all qualitative impressions and feelings are given internally to the mind, within the structure of immanent temporal consciousness, Wolfe’s model is also (like that of the previous novelists) essentially a mentalist one as well (cf. Look Homeward, Angel, Chapter 4). In addition, in all three writers, the French, Welsh,
and American, there is a fundamental dependence on the reflexivity of consciousness model, an emphasis on subjective awareness, on unique self-consciousness. This, in turn, I have argued, directly guides novelists toward concluding that man is alone and lonely. But even granting that consciousness is reflexive in its very nature and, further, that man is lonely, what, more specifically, is the origin or source of this frightening solitude? I am convinced that the answer lies in the fact that only in concentrated monadic reflexion can man become aware that his consciousness is a “nothingness,” albeit a unified, self-enclosed nothingness (Descartes, Defoe—man as an insignificant “nothingness” before God—Hegel, Malraux, Sartre).

How is (consciousness of) loneliness possible? It is only conceivable if the mind is an immaterial, unified nothingness that can reflexively inspect its own ideas and states. The mind, then, is an “existential” nothingness. The error that behaviorism, phenomenology, and phenomenalism alike commit is that they center their analyses on the object, either on overt bodily things or behavior; the noema, the object-intended; or constructions of meaningless sense-data. But the reality of loneliness is, if anything, the concern of the subject, and only the reflexive system provides an adequate account of it. The three mistaken theories (above), by entirely removing or grossly disparaging the role of the subject, have virtually removed loneliness itself from life.

Consequently, we should not be startled to find Proust, in Swann’s Way, for example, describing consciousness as “the abyss of not-being” (p. 4; see also p. 453). Furthermore, since consciousness is a nothingness, strictly arguing there can be no public, objective, external criterion of personal identity for Proust; the empirical, phenomenal “self” is merely a vestige, an illusion, a fiction created through the agency of the imagination, that functions by unifying diverse remembered qualitative experiences as if they formed a continuity (pp. 481–482; so Bergson). The real self, on the other hand, according to Proust, is constituted by the reflexive awareness of our own ultimate nothingness. It is constituted as an isolated, monadically unified emptiness, aware of its vacuousness and separation from the remainder of physical being, a sphere of being which may (or may not) include “other minds” as alienated forms of existence in opposition
to the apodictic certainty of our own empty self-consciousness. In this respect, there is no criterion of personal identity, a standard to be applied to the self from without. But rather the true self just is; it exists, and it cannot be “proved” by appeals to external or “objective” criteria.

In my previous *Psychiatry* article, I maintained that the theme of loneliness has dominated Western philosophic thought and literature since the time of the Greek myths and dramas (especially the legends of Prometheus, Deucalion and Pyrrha, Oedipus, and Antigone). But quite clearly, although this is the case, loneliness does not develop into a distinctly formulated concern in Western history until roughly the modern period, around the seventeenth century. Accordingly, I have contended in this chapter that the recent phenomenon of human solitude is in great part due to the development of the introspective form of the novel.¹²

But just as certainly there were other forces at work as well in determining the inward, reflexive turn, the circuit back toward the immanence of the single ego. One such influence was provided by the astronomical theories of Nicholas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno. Man suddenly found himself thrust from his secure position in the finite, hierarchically structured closed world of the ancients and medievals and abruptly propelled into a vision of an infinite universe entirely transcending his ability to comprehend it (A. Koyrè). Overwhelmed by the image of a nonconscious independent reality, eternal in temporal terms and infinite in spatial dimensions, the universe must have appeared to him not as sublime but as meaningless and frightening. And hence, no doubt, in his search for a new meaning for his existence, a new sense of relatedness, man was constrained to turn within himself and away from the unfathomable expanses of matter and stars. It is at the junction of this cosmological revolution, I wish to suggest, that man increasingly began to realize his absolute expulsion from external reality (the universe was infinite, he was finite; the universe was eternal, he was temporal) as well as his isolation from the remainder of his kind. And quite likely the discovery of the “New World,” of peoples outside of and different from his familiar scheme of things, strongly reinforced his growing sense of separation. In this context, man began to search for his own unique value not
in the incomprehensible and dimensionless expanses of an eternal realm of being or across the oceans but rather within his own center of consciousness. Additionally, as Max Weber has speculated, the Protestant Ethic itself also had a powerful tendency to drive man within himself, toward a Riesmanian “inner directedness,” which led man more and more into a direct preoccupation with his inner self, a concern which finally resulted in man’s apprehension of his intrinsic isolation. Also, we remember that the scientific and philosophic revolutions of the seventeenth century posited a distinction between primary, objective qualities (those conceived to exist independently of knowing minds) and secondary, subjective ones (thought of as existing within, and dependent upon, the subject: Galileo, Descartes, Gassendi, Hobbes, Locke). This too soon resulted in the distinction, and consequent separation, of (a) the knower and (b) the known (the latter including both objects and other minds or selves). Once more, the result was an intensifying feeling of estrangement, which simply further determined man’s sense of isolation, not only from nature but also from other men, since the subjectivity of consciousness posited was so extreme and idiosyncratically complete that it became theoretically impossible for men to share either sensations or ideas. Each consciousness became restricted to a Lockean “way of ideas,” wherein the subject could only immediately experience his own ideas. Consequently, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in the doctrines of subjective idealism and phenomenalism, a radical dualism was engendered between the inner self and external objects as well as between the immediate ego and its inference of other minds. Later, in the nineteenth century, Marx himself, following Hegel’s twin concepts of alienation and estrangement rather closely, developed a more properly social theory of alienation. Thus Marx postulated a violent economic conflict between the individual and nature, the machine, his fellows, and finally even himself. Needless to stress, a scheme of things that posited such a violent dialectical struggle between the subject and the remainder of existing realities, other men, and economic institutions could only regard the individual as hopelessly abandoned (at least during the major portion of the history of social consciousness). Nevertheless, I once more hasten to repeat that although Marx’s views of alienation clearly reinforced
contemporary man’s sense of estranged isolation or enforced solitude, still it is markedly different from the principle of loneliness that I have undertaken to exhibit because, according to Marx, alienation eventually can be overcome. On our account of the state of affairs, since loneliness constitutes the intrinsic condition of man, it can never be transcended or escaped but rather serves as the ultimate Kantian “transcendental” presupposition of man’s very existence.

Man has the ability to extro-reflect, to concentrate on the external world, to remain preoccupied with diversions, amusements, sports, projects, tasks, “causes,” people, to search for fame, popularity, power, etc. As long as he focuses his attention “outwardly,” he is quite secure from confronting his own loneliness. However, should he reflexively turn inwardly, “intro-reflect” (Hegel, Philosophy of Mind; Royce, The World and the Individual) and curl his thoughts within, then he is at the mercy of a terrible reality. Not only truth dwells within (Plato, Augustine, Descartes, Husserl) but terror as well.

* An earlier version of this chapter appeared in the Psychocultural Review (Spring, 1977).


2 Certainly, sociologists and psychologists have invoked this same reflexive principle in order to ground their own theories of the frightening solitude which permeates the very mental fabric of man’s existence. Cf. E. Fromm, Escape from Freedom (Avon, 1969), p. 36; and J. Howard, The Flesh-Colored Cage, pp. 9, 18. The reflexive nature of awareness, for both theorists, is the defining attribute of man, as opposed to the other animals; only man is self-aware of his existential loneliness. Similarly, Leibniz claimed that man alone, through monadic reflexion (apperception), was self-conscious; animals were merely conscious (perceptive). Cf. also C. Moustakas, Loneliness (Prentice-Hall, 1961), p. 8. In like fashion, D. Riesman suggests a connection between inner-directed (i.e., reflexively oriented) children and loneliness (The Lonely Crowd [Anchor, 1956], p. 90).

3 The Cartesian cogito, it may be stressed by following numerous commentators, is an existential truth, and not a conceptual or epistemological claim, although obviously, by providing the criteria of the clarity and distinctness of ideas, it goes on to serve in this connection as well. See again Moustakas, p. 24, and N. Berdiaev, Solitude and Society (Greenwood, 1976), p. 87. Prior to the Cartesian Revolution, specifically addressing itself to formulating an egocentric Philosophy of Mind, man was rather more concerned with speculations on first an independent, non-
human reality (the Metaphysical Age) and later the absolute being of God (the Theological Age).


5 See also ibid., pp. 346, 518–519. In Kant, the mind is not extended, it is not material; hence it can only manifest an intensive force. The appearance of extension is itself contributed by the non-physical mind, which, again, is not really spatial although it is able to endow phenomenal objects, including the brain, with their aspect of extension. See Introduction, footnote 1.


8 I have also dealt with Wolfe’s view of loneliness in “Loneliness: An Interdisciplinary Approach,” Psychiatry. See also Loneliness at the Core: Studies in Thomas Wolfe, ed. C. Holman (Louisiana State University Press, 1975), especially the first essay, by the editor.

9 Thomas Wolfe, Of Time and the River, XIV; see also: VII, XXV, XXX. Compare with the preface to Look Homeward, Angel. The leaf, the closed door, and the stone are invariable metaphors of loneliness throughout Wolfe’s writings.

On my theory, it would seem most natural for novelists to express the theme of loneliness through the essentially introspective mode of the first-person narrative. However, the difference between the expository method of first- as opposed to third-person narration is really a matter of psychological rather than “logical” choice. Many novelists prefer to disclose their own personal isolation by means of a protective third-person “screen,” which effectively destroys the all too-immediate proximity between the author and the reader. This device, consequently, provides many writers with a desired “distancing effect” (Edward Bullough). Otherwise, quite likely, much of the novel would strike us too forcibly, perhaps too pathetically rather than artistically, personally instead of universally. David Copperfield, Martin Eden, Of Human Bondage, Sons and Lovers, and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man are all novels which posit the centrality of loneliness at man’s core; each is autobiographical, and yet they are all composed in the more “removed,” “objective” style of the third person, as is Machen’s Hill of Dreams. But in this context, it is instructive to recall that Thomas Wolfe “instinctively wrote in the first person, and that the appearance of the bulk of his work after Look Homeward, Angel in the third person represents editorial not authorial decision” (Loneliness at the Core, p. 78). The point then is that it is easier to write about loneliness in the first person but that, nevertheless, many authors decide to abandon the intrinsically more intimate style for aesthetic
or personal reasons. And, finally, it may not be irrelevant to note that the very choice of the third-person narrative often tends to mask the theme of loneliness, in the case of lesser writers, from the authors themselves. Cf. J. Thompson’s commentary on Soren Kierkegaard’s temperament and writings in *The Lonely Labyrinth* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), p. 12: “Objective thinking points outward toward the world and its problems; subjective thinking points inward toward the individual. ‘All existential problems,’ writes Kierkegaard, ‘are passionate problems.’ For when existence is penetrated with reflection [i.e., reflexion] it generates passion” (*Postscript*, 313). Moreover, it is precisely this passion which isolates the subjective thinker from his fellows and makes his path a solitary one. ‘Every man who has passion,’ remarks Kierkegaard, ‘is always to some degree solitary’” (*Postscript*, 383); cf. also pp. 72, 81–84. Joseph Conrad also serves as a prime example of a novelist whose introspective stories plumbed the depths of solitude by their penetrating descent into the darkness of human subjectivity. As Robert Penn Warren has suggested, in the Modern Library edition of *Nostromo*, Conrad’s central characters in his many writings continually mirror “the introverted and lonely” personality of their creator. In the same vein, Albert Guerard, in the introduction to the Laurel editions of *An Outcast of the Islands*, *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, and *The End of the Tether*, has spoken of Conrad’s “Jungian descent into the self” and has observed that “Conrad was never wholly comfortable when using the objective third-person narrative form in writing about the interior life.” Conrad, as other commentators have indicated, is one of the most subjective of English writers, and he is so precisely because he is convinced that each man is alone and a stranger even to himself. Blackness, darkness, blindness, even the jungle, “where men deteriorate in solitude,” are mere symbols for the individual’s awareness of his own absolute isolation from his fellows and his surroundings, the jungle or the sea, the latter two elements representing an ultimate realm of uncaring being set in opposition to involved and involuted consciousness. In general, deafness, consciousness without sound, like blindness, awareness without color, shade or form, symbolizes loneliness, being cut off from even the possibility of communication with the other; see *The Beethoven Companion*, ed. T. K. Scherman and L. Biancolli (Doubleday, 1972), p. 491. Cf. also Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus* (Vintage, 1971), p. 52; and Carson McCuller’s *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, which poignantly describes the companionship of two deaf mutes and the inexpressible sorrow of one at the death of the other.

10 See, again, *Look Homeward, Angel* (Scribner’s, 1952), p. 31. In this particular passage, the contents of brain and skull undergo a welcome transformation as the data of consciousness (impressions, feelings, sensations, colors, etc.) are translated into subjective thoughts, in short, into immaterial entities.

11 Cf., again, my papers in *Philosophy Today*, pp. 296 ff. and *Psychiatry*, p. 129, note 20. In these articles, I have compared the feeling or sense of nothingness with Freud’s “oceanic feeling” (see also Berdiaev, p. 88); we shall take this topic up in a later chapter.
12 Writings which scholars have traditionally interpreted as the earliest forms of the novel include Murasaki Shikibu’s *Tale of Genji*, an early-eleventh-century Japanese work regarded also as the first *psychological* novel; it strongly emphasizes the themes of loneliness as well as boredom throughout its millennia of pages; Cervante’s *Don Quixote*, which portrays the insular delusions of the aging knight errant; and Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* chronicling the mariner’s enforced solitude for a quarter of a century on his deserted isle. All three exemplify the utter loneliness of the individual mind.
CHAPTER THREE
LONELINESS AND TIME-CONSCIOUSNESS*

In what follows, I wish to show how a theory of immanent, subjective time, as it is developed in the philosophical views of Leibniz, Kant, Bergson, and Husserl, serves to ground—directly and indirectly—the dominant tendency of contemporary Western thought in recognizing the imprisoned solitude of the individual ego, trapped within his own unique sphere of awareness. This paradigm itself is, in turn, forcefully illustrated in certain works of literature here discussed as well as in the “stream of consciousness” style of expression, perhaps most notably exemplified in the novels of James Joyce and Thomas Wolfe.

Leibniz’s theory of the monad, although patterned along the lines initially established by Descartes’s model of the *cogito*, nevertheless exhibits some critical differences from it. Both thinkers concur on the substantial independence of the ego and go on to emphasize its reflexive powers; in the latter context, as we have previously suggested, both philosophers postulate that the activity of thought—qua subject—possesses the ability to “curl back,” by thinking on itself—qua object. In other words, the function of thought has the power to grasp itself as an entity within its own sphere of awareness, thought can think itself. Further, both (a) thought (as subject or object-thought, i.e., concept of an object) and (b) consciousnesses, minds, are immaterial and unextended. But Leibniz improves on Descartes by introducing specific—and crucial—additions to the earlier rationalist paradigm of awareness. Hence, he underlines the (a) unitary and (b) dynamical aspects of the monad, whereas Descartes remained content to emphasize its reflexive character. (a) Leibniz defines consciousness (perception) as a multiplicity in unity, wherein different sensations, conceptions (Kant), or judgments (Hegel) are held together as contents within a single, self-enclosed mind (*Monadology,*
§§ 1–16; this itself is an anticipation of Hegel’s “unity of difference and identity” conception). For Leibniz, the opening passages of *The Monadology* are intended to secure for his “philosophy of mind” the principle that consciousness can exist only insofar as it is a unity. (b) Clearly, however, beside manifesting itself as an intrinsic unity, the monad—in human beings at least—likewise shows itself to be a self-conscious sphere of activity, a reflexive dynamism (*ibid.*, §§10–13; again, by contrast, in Descartes, consciousness is often represented as a passive medium).¹

This novel theoretical construction at the very foundation of the Leibnizian system, by concentrating on reflexivity, unity, and temporal activity, strongly attracted Kant, who proceeded to transform the model in a most powerful manner.² Accordingly, in the so-called Subjective Deduction of the first edition *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant undertakes to exploit Leibniz’s ideal of a self-enclosed dynamic awareness by expounding on its temporal implications. In this context, the three-fold transcendental synthesis of intuition, imagination, and conception (A 99–104)—virtually a *Critique* in miniature—offers to interpret the transcendental unity of apperception (i.e., self-consciousness, with its empirical counterpart, the unity of consciousness) as essentially a temporal unity. Furthermore, time-consciousness is one which primordially (preconsciously at first) and fundamentally (basically, universally) constitutes the entire field of individual or subjective consciousness.³ Consequently, as Kant announces,

> Whatever the origin of our representations, whether they are due to the influence of outer things, or are produced through inner causes, whether they arise a priori, or being appearances have an empirical origin, they must all, as modifications of the mind, belong to inner sense. All our knowledge is thus subject to time, the formal condition of inner sense. In it they must all be ordered, connected, and brought into relation. (A 98–99; see also A 34 = B 51)

> As Kant conceives it, all consciousness is self-consciousness. In this way, he depends on the reflexive character of awareness as much as his two great predecessors, Descartes and Leibniz. But, unlike
them, he searches “beneath,” “below” (as opposed to “beyond,” transcendently, metaphysically) the level of consciousness into its transcendental conditions. And he finds that unless the mind accomplishes certain synthetic—essentially temporal—activities, then consciousness itself is impossible. The interpretation that these synthetic acts are creative, generative, and productive of time itself has long been recognized by H. Vaihinger, N. Kemp Smith, M. Heidegger, and others. Indeed, Husserl himself eulogized Kant’s efforts in the Subjective Deduction as genuinely phenomenological (Ideas, §62), and it is to be gathered from his comments that what impressed him were Kant’s views on immanent time. In any case, awareness practically becomes identified with temporal apprehension, so much so that the unified structures replace the more familiar and famous model of the “original unity of apperception.”

But notice that throughout all this, Kant continues to insist on the self-unified integrity of the monad while still stressing its temporal dynamism as immanently constitutive of the ego. Thus, the self basically becomes a temporal self, aware of its own internal activities (feelings and meanings) and its own states of consciousness. Indeed, what it primarily apprehends are immaterial, or ontologically unextended, qualities through internal time (see Leibniz, Monadology, §8). The soul, ego, or monad, not being material or physical, cannot be extended and, therefore, it is not quantitative; if it were (which it is not), then it could not think, because “senseless matter cannot think” according to Leibniz, Kant, and indeed, the entire rationalist-idealist tradition.

Although Bergson himself is certainly no Kantian, he nevertheless summons principles which are congenial to Kantian (and, as we have already indicated, Leibnizian) modes of argumentation. Thus, he posits (a) the reflexive nature of awareness; (b) the monadic and unitary character of consciousness; (c) the essentially temporal quality of true thought (i.e., duration); and finally (d) that the ultimately real is only accessible through an intuition which grasps the immediately felt (the felt as opposed to the conceptualized, intellectualized, causal, spatial, or mathematically quantified; qualities versus quantities). Hence, for Bergson, the intellect always distorts reality, despite its practical or utilitarian function.
Regarding the self, Bergson underscores its reflexive property as temporally manifested, in complete conformity with the orientation we have been concerned to trace.

There is at least one reality which we all seize from within, by intuition and not by [conceptual and hence distorting] … analysis. It is our own person in its flowing through time, the self which endures.4

In addition, Bergson also pays tribute to the “multiplicity in unity” model of awareness as it is self-consciously grasped within the mind by immediate, intuitive, immaterial apprehension.

That the personality has unity is certain; but such an affirmation does not teach me anything about the extraordinary nature of this unity which is the person. That our self is multiple, I further agree, but there is in it a multiplicity which, it must be recognized, has nothing in common with any other. What really matters to philosophy is to know what unity, what multiplicity, what reality superior to the abstract one and the abstract multiple is the multiple unity of the person. And it will know this only if it once again grasps the simple intuition of the self by the self.5

It is important to note here that according to Bergson’s early work, *Time and Free Will*, both the unity and the continuity of temporal consciousness are guaranteed by the immaterialist paradigm of the mind.6 Further, duration is apprehended directly, immediately, intuitively by the reflexive power of awareness.

In his initial and yet most influential writing, Bergson argues that while in the service of the intellect, objective time has been distortively represented (to re-present is to be in mediate, indirect, or “removed” relation to something) as “the measure of motion.” And thus time has been regarded as dependent on space and its concomitant mathematical concepts, on conceptual measurement. Nevertheless, Bergson assures us, there is also a very different form of time, duration, which is immanently and directly apprehended in consciousness. And this latter species of time is given apart from spatial implications. In fact, all feelings, and even sensations, are
essentially qualities; therefore they, like the mind itself, are intrinsically unextended, unified, and single, and consequently they can be present alone within consciousness.\(^7\) (This aloneness, as we shall soon see, will constitute the independent, substantial, immanent sphere of the lonely ego.) As in the previous tradition, so also according to the Bergsonian archetype of the mental, awareness is necessarily a multiplicity in unity (\(TFW\), p. 239). This unity, however, is a temporal one, which Bergson describes as a melting, an interpenetration, a fusion, a compression of diverse qualities into the unity of a sole consciousness (pp. 128–129). And, finally, it goes without saying that if the self apprehends absolute, real being only insofar as it intuitively grasps the durational flow of qualities internally present to consciousness, it follows that the self is perfectly alone, whereas the remainder of “beings,” whether conceptually designated as “objects” or “other minds,” maintain a secondary or derivative status as compared to the reality awarded to the mind by the mind itself.

Our final guide to the complete immanentization of the temporal ego will be Husserl. Indeed, Husserl, through his search for a foundational philosophy, may be said to have reached an absolute loneliness, attained by his phenomenological investigations on temporality, a theoretical solitude curiously comparable to Pascal’s own desperate sense of isolation, which is rather derived through existential feeling and momentary insight. According to Husserl,

Whether convenient or inconvenient, and even though (because of no matter what prejudices) it may sound monstrous to me [the Cartesian “I am”] is the primal matter-of-fact to which I must hold fast, which I, as a philosopher, must not disregard for a single instant. For children in philosophy, this may be the dark corner haunted by the specters of solipsism … The true philosopher, instead of running away, will prefer to fill the dark corner with light.\(^8\)

However, despite Husserl’s well-known commitment to the intentionality principle of consciousness—the idea that the essence of consciousness is to be aware of something, some meaning, other than itself—nevertheless Husserl, in his later work, tended to compromise and, actually, at times, quite abandoned the earlier paradigm in favor
of the reflexive model. Thus, in the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl clearly relies on the traditional view which regards consciousness as reflexive, the bias provided by the modern orientation, which, as we have sought to show, developed a “philosophy of mind” in a new vein by combining reflexivity and temporality, the two virtually related as form to content. In fact, Husserl rather compromisingly depends on Cartesian, Leibnizian, and Kantian constructs when he parades such theory-laden terms as “ego,” “cogito,” “monad,” “apperception,” “transcendental idealism,” etc., before the reader (Fourth Meditation). All these terms imply a reflexive, solipsistic predisposition. And it is in this general context that he announces,

Every imaginable meaning, every imaginable being, whether the latter is called immanent or transcendent, falls within the domain of transcendental subjectivity, as the subjectivity that constitutes meaning and being. The attempt to conceive the universe of true being as something lying outside the universe of possible consciousness … the two being related to one another merely externally by a rigid law is nonsensical. They belong together essentially, and, as belonging together essentially, they are also concretely one, one in the only absolute concretion: transcendental subjectivity.9

Still, the unity and identity of the ego is immanently given (immediately synthesized, constituted) in the ego itself as a continuous flux, a temporal flow (*CM*, §37). And, in point of fact, in the *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, Husserl had previously speculated that the constitutive factors responsible for immanent time could serve as well as a “transcendental clue” (Kant) for all intentional meanings present within the mind (cf. Spiegelberg, op. cit., I, 148). Hence, for Husserl, the lone ego in a priori and synthetic fashion orders, or relates, the temporal flow of consciousness into a meaningful structure of retention-presentation-protention as it appears within the mind. (The past, present, and future together exhibit an a priori synthetic “constitution” similar to the a priori synthetic connection holding between color and extension: “All colors are universally and necessarily [a priori] extended.”) To offer an example, the experience of listening to a song melts, blends,
the “separate” notes into a temporally extended melody (Bergson, Peirce). Indeed, all “transcendent,” “external,” noematic objects-meant, or intended, as (if) existing “other-than” in consciousness, “independently” of consciousness, nevertheless are held together, bound together as an identity, unity, and continuity—of the same meaning—through temporal acts (structures) of the monadic ego, within the self.

“Time is motionless and yet if flows” (CM, §31). What Husserl means by this cryptic pronouncement is that the ego—with its attendant meanings—is not in space, it is not material, physical. By contrast, time as motion (see above), as the measure of motion, presupposes (i.e., is dependent upon or conditioned by) the priority of space. But this causal explanation of objective time itself can be phenomenologically shown to rest on a more primordial constitution, one that can be ascertained by a direct, intuitive “seeing” and that we discover as an immanent temporal flow after we have bracketed or put aside mechanistic, physicalist, behaviorist, and causal scientific prejudices. (In Kant as well, immanent time “precedes” the secondary structuring of time as motion, for to be aware of motion is only possible if I am first, or primordially, conscious of internal time [Critique of Pure Reason, A 31 = B 46].) Ultimately, consciousness is ideal, immaterial, unextended—and alone. And why? Because what is unextended is nonphysical; and the physical implies common or public coexistence, whereas primordial time entails successive apprehension within the individual ego, alone. What follows from this is that the solitary self, with all its accompanying meanings, exists in isolation, in complete separation, through a unique and perfectly personal, subjectively constituted time.

The important conclusion to be derived from the foregoing is that there is a definite tendency in certain philosophers to conceive of men as physically existing together, with others, in space—the external world intrinsically consisting of a public, common, objective realm whereas man, as an individual, dwells alone in immanent time (“the lonely crowd”). I myself am convinced that this prejudice of thought is correct.

The principle of absolute human isolation finds its strongest reinforcement in the discipline of literature, not philosophy,
although to be sure the latter most assuredly provides the required theoretical “justification” (Kantian “deduction”), or the ultimate phenomenological description, which grounds the utter loneliness of man. Consequently, we discover, in the modern literary period, abundant confirmation of a reflexive, monadic paradigm of the self, and, in fact, the novel form itself develops through its growing use of the personal narrative style as the dominant mode of expression (from Montaigne’s introspective Essays to Descartes’s Meditations and on to Defoe’s solipsistic narrative in the diary of Robinson Crusoe). In addition, the narrative method of exposition, especially in its more personal introspective forms, is grounded in its dual commitment to a certain philosophical theory of consciousness, one which stresses as primordial givens (a) conscious reflexivity and (b) immanent temporality. Further, together these, in turn, lead modern and contemporary novelists to regard the individual as lonely, isolated, separated from the other.

Not surprisingly, the role of time in the early novel appears rather simply, naively, unconsciously; it is not taken as either problematic or fundamental. Instead, it is merely assumed that time is objectively, independently real, an eternal background against which the human drama transpires (time as an absolute receptacle or container, Newton). And quite obviously, one can hardly expect Defoe, for instance, to have anticipated Kant, or even followed Leibniz for that matter. But as speculation on philosophical time and subsequently, more narrowly, on human temporality progresses, we uncover a growing involvement with solitary, reflexive consciousness as it is conceptually coupled with the subjective mode of temporality. Closer to our own intellectual period, the clearest example of the thesis I am propounding is offered by the “stream of consciousness” style of James Joyce. Thus, a clear example of temporal internality, time as “inner sense,” passing within the confines of the lone ego—while the external world remains suspended, in Husserlian fashion—appears in the final episode of Ulysses. Molly Bloom represents a classic instantiation of the utter solitude of reflexive awareness, depicted by the author through the “naked candour of self-revelation.” As one commentator puts it,
The general movement of Molly Bloom’s monologue is egocentric—she thinks of herself, her grievances, her youth … All through the monologue we observe her [self-consciously] moving, growing, [temporally] expanding, just as the child’s vision gradually extends beyond [temporality goes beyond, transcends the sheer prison of instantaneity, immediacy] the misty limits of infancy to a wider scope of experience, in increasing circles of [temporal] intellection.17

Indeed, the lucid recognition of the twin aspects of temporal unity and continuity, as essentially constitutive of awareness, I believe, are the principal themes Joyce endeavors to establish when he directs our attention to Molly Bloom as she divests herself, through a purely internal monologue, of her solitary thoughts during the course of the longest unpunctuated sentence in the English language. Her thoughts, with the accompanying imagery, all reach forward and backward in time as they transpire within a purely personal time. Nevertheless, they remain “bound together” within her single, immanent sphere of awareness. Her monadic consciousness expresses itself in one uninterrupted flow as it meanders through the temporal labyrinths of her mind, ceaselessly, continuously. Laying there in the dark, with physical space and all its appearances placed in abeyance, “put out of gear,” phenomenologically bracketed from her field of concern, Molly Bloom unravels the unending ball of her awareness as if it were a thread, a filament of harmony. Her thought becomes not unlike a melody that progresses through certain themes and variations, repeating, modifying, and expanding particular strains. Through Joyce’s style, one phenomenological and literary structure dominates the entire passage, namely, the temporal aspects of unity and continuity, as manifested in the heroine’s nocturnal fantasies. But then sleep presumably intervenes, and consciousness is extinguished, for a while at least.18 We the readers realize that as Molly Bloom thinks, she becomes subjective time. Her states of awareness, with all their ebbs and flows, actually consist of integrated multiplicities of imagery (provided by her time-structured memory), in turn themselves synthesized, bound together by the temporal unity of the stream itself, a reflexive flux of consciousness, continuous—hence the absence of punctuation—as well as single, solitary. It is a stream
in which she is to identify her own thoughts as properly hers and thus grasp and recognize the unity of her own temporal existence.

Let us try to elaborate more clearly the relation between the reflexive style of personal narrative; the recognition of the structure of temporality within the mind; and, finally, both of these as contributing directly to the principle of loneliness in man. What we now wish to demonstrate, then, is the final emergence of a felt quality of absolute temporal isolation, which is intended to signal the special condition of human existence.

Thomas Wolfe is the foremost novelist of loneliness; he is the writer who consciously combines the tripartite constellation of theses alluded to immediately above: reflexivity, temporality, and the feeling of enforced isolation. Actually, Wolfe’s own self-conscious loneliness reaches such profound depths (virtually “below” everyday, naive, frivolous consciousness) in its nihilistic reflexion, as it self-destructively feeds on its own separation from other (self-) consciousnesses, that death itself seems the only possible release. (Perhaps some truths should remain hidden.) Influenced—and strongly attracted—by Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Wolfe went on to develop a highly introspective mode of expression, one which reciprocally intensified his own feelings of aloneness. Thus, his three autobiographical novels (*Look Homeward, Angel; Of Time and the River;* and *You Can’t Go Home Again*) perpetually paint the loneliness of his own unique existence. And as he dwells on these reflexions in intensifying circles, through the reflexive lenses of consciousness, his condition becomes magnified until he becomes consumed by an acute self-awareness of one important idea, the unity and continuity of his hermitic yearnings through time. (Like Hegel’s and Joyce’s, Wolfe’s developing circles of concentration get progressively richer, more concrete, and more comprehensive.)

In *Of Time and the River*, LXXV, Wolfe actually ushers in an impressive and sophisticated (albeit brief) variety of philosophical remarks about time, a rather obvious indication that he was seriously concerned with its epistemological and ontological status. Quite possibly, these interests were first generated in his philosophy courses at Harvard. In general, Wolfe, like Faulkner in *As I Lay Dying*, believes that time “pervades mind and matter alike.” Nevertheless,
he suggests that there are two times; there is a common, objective, public time—the time of America, of rivers and trains. But there exists also a purely personal, individual time, structured by experiences *sui generis* to the monadic ego. And this second species of time is lonely time. In addition, Wolfe intimates that immanent time is probably Kantian and Jamesian in mode.

Time the form of the internal sense, and space the form of the external sense … W. James—Within a definite limited interval of duration [Bergson?] known as the specious present there is a direct perception of the temporal relations. After an event has passed beyond the specious present it can only enter consciousness by reproductive memory [Kant] … Temporal experience divided into three qualitatively distinct intervals: the remembered past, the perceived specious present, and the anticipated future—By means of the tripartite division we are able to inject our present selves into the temporal stream of our own experience … Thus time has its roots in experience and yet appears to be a dimension in which experiences and their contents are to be arranged [structured]. (LXXV)

But Wolfe is a preeminent psychologist and philosopher of loneliness as well as a novelist because, for him, loneliness constitutes the invariable situation of mankind itself. (Wolfe has previously suggested, as Frieda Fromm-Reichmann points out in her article “Loneliness,” that the Book of Job symbolizes the universality of man’s aloneness.) As such, he postulates the fear of loneliness as the basic psychological and mental drive in man, and he dramatizes it through the constant attempt by each of us to escape the bondage of our respective solitude. But, further, according to Wolfe, the avoidance of loneliness is ultimately an impossible goal to achieve, although it remains one to which each of us is dedicated throughout his entire life, from the very dawn of subjective consciousness to its twilight and eventual extinction in darkness, the darkness of a final, absolute “loneliness,” which in the end releases us forever from the struggle within consciousness.
In a passage highly reminiscent of Molly Bloom’s soliloquy, Wolfe describes his sister Helen’s thoughts of loneliness as night’s blackness surrounds her.

A thousand scenes from this past life flashed through her mind now, as she lay there in the darkness, and all of them seemed grotesque, accidental and mistaken, as reasonless as everything in life.

And filled with a numb, speechless feeling of despair and nameless terror, she heard, somewhere across the night, the sound of a train again, and thought:

“My God! My God! What is life about? We are all lying here in darkness in ten thousand little towns—waiting, listening, hoping—for what?”

And suddenly, with a feeling of terrible revelation, she saw the strangeness and mystery of man’s life; she felt about her in the darkness the presence of ten thousand people, each lying in his bed, naked and alone, united at the heart of night and darkness, and listening, as she, to the sounds of silence and of sleep. And suddenly it seemed to her that she knew all these lonely, strange, unknown watchers of the night, that she was speaking to them, and they to her, across the fields of sleep, as they had never spoken before, that she knew men now in all their dark and naked loneliness, without falseness and pretense as she had never known them. And it seemed to her that if men would only listen in the darkness, and send the language of their naked lonely spirits across the silence of the night, all of the error, falseness and confusion of their lives would vanish, they would no longer be strangers, and each would find the life he sought and never yet had found.

“If we only could!” she thought. “If we only could!”
But the poignant glimmer of possible optimism, shining through the opaque obscurity, is quite definitely doused by a prior passage in the same chapter.

What is wrong with people? ...Why do we never get to know one another? ...Why is it that we get born and live and die here in this world without ever finding out what any one else is like? ... No, what is the strangest thing of all—why is it that all our efforts to know people in this world lead only to greater ignorance and confusion than before? We get together and talk, and say we think and feel and believe in such a way, and yet what we really think and feel and believe we never say at all. Why is this? We talk and talk in an effort to understand another person, and yet almost all we say is false; we hardly ever say what we mean or tell the truth—it all leads to greater misunderstanding and fear than before—it would be better if we said nothing.

However, the real reason why we do not say, or communicate, to others what we feel and mean is, as Wolfe himself recognized, that we are even strangers to ourselves—and all that we do know with certainty is that we are alone. And yet this single fact of human existence is paradoxically incommunicable, for we never believe that anyone else is as uniquely lonely as we are, for we imagine that the isolation of the other is not as important or as intense as our own alienation. We exist alone, according to Wolfe; and we are aware of our loneliness through subjective time, lying there, enveloped by the cold blackness of night (external reality), thrust in an alien room (the world), “hearing the sounds of time, dark time” (VII). Loneliness is immanent time.

Whether we contend that discussions in earlier thinkers, concerning self-consciousness, temporality, and loneliness, are to be regarded as having directly influenced later writers (as in the cases of Kant, James, and Joyce on Wolfe), or whether, instead, we restrict our remarks to merely commenting on the similarity between seemingly independent lines of thought (as in the instance of Husserl and Joyce) is relatively unimportant. But what is vital is to notice that both philosophers and novelists became increasingly concerned—either
through mutual interaction or independently—with the related ideas of reflexivity, human time, and existential aloneness.

I now want to append a general remark, which is intended to cut across our previous discussion. It is not, strictly speaking, an integral component of the foregoing, but I believe that it will prove illuminating by placing the prior analysis of time in a more comprehensive historical perspective. The Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century was dominated by a concern with space, matter, and motion. Philosophers even became sanguinely confident that the entire universe—including man’s place and activity in it—could be causally explained as merely a complex interaction among Epicurean atoms, or, as in the case of Descartes, by an appeal to the principle that all matter, in the last analysis, is reducible to divisible extensions and their reciprocal, mechanical interdependence. But on both these models, the essence of diverse material beings is conceived to lie in their spatial coexistence, for the physical exists in simultaneous copresence with its manifold surroundings (cf. Kant’s category of Community and Third Analogy). Time, on the other hand, as philosophers progressively came to realize, by contrast, exhibits a succession, since various times do not and cannot coexist (as objects ideally may be said to do so). Again, arguing by opposed analogy, the concept of space struck thinkers as more “akin” (to use a Platonic metaphor) to the idea of body, whereas time, in contradistinction, was conceived as more similar to mind. The latter connection between time and mind, as we have already seen, soon came under scrutiny in the philosophical investigations of, first Leibniz, then Kant, and subsequently many others. And, in turn, it led toward a “philosophy of mind,” one which held that the fundamental constitution of the mind is defined by an immanent “stream of consciousness,” a flow directly open to introspective insight and phenomenological description (Bergson’s and Husserl’s “intuition”). In addition, the “stream of consciousness” style in literature itself can be interpreted as an attempt to navigate a personal internal river of time, and as each novelist coursed through its waters, charting his own unique direction, he discovered that he travelled the stream alone and lonely.
* An earlier version of this chapter appeared, under the same title, in *Philosophy Today* (Winter, 1978).

1 Cf. B. Russell, *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz* (Allen and Unwin, 1958), p. 97; see also C. A. van Peursen, *Leibniz* (Dutton, 1970), p. 54. The latter expositor maintains that on Leibniz’s theory, the temporal elements and structures within consciousness are not analytically reducible to discrete, separate, distinct moments but rather are constituted by “interfluent phases, as has been argued more recently by [William] James… and Husserl.” In this sense, Leibniz, no less than James and Husserl after him, can be interpreted as expounding a doctrine of immanent time, which identifies time with the temporal flow or stream directly present to consciousness.

2 In fact, one of Kant’s ablest and most sympathetic commentators has contended that “Kant, under the influence of Leibniz, continued to regard reality as composed of monads” (H. J. Paton, *Kant’s Metaphysic of Experience* [Allen and Unwin, 1965], I, 183).


5 Ibid., p. 176. “Duration [i.e., subjective temporality as opposed to objective, spatialized time] is this everchanging multiplicity of interlocking states. As distinct from the spatial, the elements of which are external to each other, its parts interpenetrate and sustain qualitative, internal relation….And this is so because it is a structure or form. Pure change and heterogeneity it is, but the heterogeneity of organic growth, which does not exclude continuity but indeed implies qualitative homogeneity and unity within multiplicity” (I.W. Alexander, *Bergson* [Bowes and Bowes, 1957], pp. 21–22). See also my article “The Simplicity Argument and Time in Schopenhauer and Bergson,” *Schopenhauer Jahrbuch* (1977).

6 Again, the mind, consciousness, and thought are all immaterial and, therefore, essentially unextended, simple; but what is perfectly simple has no quantitative parts; hence it is a (temporal) unity (Leibniz, Kant). In parallel fashion, (temporal) continuity is established because whereas matter, or extension, is inherently divisible, consciousness, being immaterial, is continuous, a flow through time; see Introduction, footnote 1.


10 See again my article, “The Simplicity Argument and Time in Schopenhauer and Bergson.”

11 Cf. my *Achilles of Rationalist Arguments*, pp. 138–139 and note 41; see also my “Simplicity Argument and Absolute Morality,” *Journal of Thought* (April, 1975), p. 130 and note 16.

12 The similarity between Husserl’s immanent temporal flow and James’s “stream of consciousness” has been sufficiently noticed in the secondary literature. For both, consciousness of time exhibits a certain “spread,” “duration,” although it is not a physical or material extension, of course, nor is it to be understood by an appeal to spatial principles or analogies. See W. James, *Principles of Psychology* (Dover, 1950), I, 281–282; Cf. Spiegelberg, op cit., I, 113–115; Sherover, op cit., pp. 438–439. For an excellent discussion of Husserl’s concept of time, see R. Sokolowski, *The Formation of Husserl’s Concept of Constitution* (Nijhoff, 1970), pp. 82–86, 160–161, 167 ff.

13 In the *Cartesian Meditations*, § 37–38, Husserl refers to the individual ego as “constituting himself for himself in, so to speak, the unity of a ‘history,’” through an egological, temporal genesis. Analogously, *Robinson Crusoe*, in a primitive but nevertheless exemplary fashion, epitomizes the essence of temporal human existence. Thus, I am concerned to argue that the modern turn toward complete subjectivity, immanence, self-consciousness, or introspection, initiated by the Cartesian philosophy, has made possible the narrative form of the novel as we know it.

14 See my article “Loneliness,” *Psychiatry*. The paper, along with the articles of Gregory Zilboorg and Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, discusses some hundred or more writers and artists who either themselves instantiate isolation or who express loneliness as a dominant theme in their works.

15 A Bergsonian influence on Joyce, specifically in connection with temporal duration, has been previously recognized by F. Fehr, “James Joyce’s Ulysses,” *Englische Studien*, LX (1925), p. 193; see also W. Lewis, *Time and Western Man* (Beacon, 1957), pp. 84 ff.; and L. Durrell’s introductory note to his novel *Balthazar*.

17 Ibid., pp. 402–403. Both Hegel and Joyce temporally incorporate experiences in expanding concentric circles. Nevertheless, the peripheral limits are always retrievable by the contracting center of awareness.

18 The fact that *Ulysses* is the record of a single day—patterned chronologically after the great Greek tragedies—is a significant clue to the pervasive character of time throughout the book, since it provides a determinate temporal meta-structure as a background against which the "lesser" or minor temporal episodes occur, each transpiring within the definite contextual framework of diurnal time.

The principle of loneliness in Joyce is best illustrated in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Perhaps some influence of "subjective idealism" on Joyce is derived from his fellow Irishman, George Berkeley; see Gilbert, p. 126.

19 The reader may also compare with profit (1) the reflexive thoughts of Molly Bloom with (2) the description of (a) time as an objective river and (b) consciousness as a subjective stream of time within awareness in W. Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* (Modern Library, 1946), pp. 438–439, 443; cf. 444–445.

20 *Of Time and the River*, XXV; see also VII, XIV, XVII, XXX; *Look Homeward, Angel*, Preface and 4; and *You Can’t Go Home Again*, IV, 31. The train (like the river) symbolizes time, for Wolfe, just as the fallen leaf, the solid and impervious stone, the closed door, or the “grain of human dust, an atom” represent loneliness in *Look Homeward, Angel* and *Of Time and the River*. Again, sounds are primarily temporal and colors spatial, and so Wolfe often appeals to metaphors of sound and hearing (particularly listening) in order to convey the impression of loneliness. Cf. *Loneliness at the Core: Studies in Thomas Wolfe*, pp. 27–30, 52–53, 69–70, 112, for discussions of Wolfe’s notion of time and temporal subjectivity.
CHAPTER FOUR
TYPES OF LONELINESS*

Since in both the prior and the subsequent chapters, I argue on behalf of loneliness as a universal theory of human motivation, it seems clear that there are at least two criticisms to be made against my proposed hypothesis. And perhaps it would be strategically appropriate to address myself to them now. First, the same sort of objection could be raised against my doctrine that is advanced against the Hobbesian principle of universal psychological egoism: namely, that if all human actions, without exception, are selfishly, or self-interestedly, motivated, then there can be no possible meaningful opposite to egoistic acts. But every significant proposition must have a meaningful contradictory proposition, otherwise the pertinent thesis cannot be tested in principle. Accordingly, the other party insists that if we cannot admit, or even formulate, the conceivability of factual counter-instances, then there can be no empirical verification of the theory itself.

Nevertheless, I wish to claim that man is not only psychologically alone but metaphysically isolated as well. Now, from saying that all men are lonely, that their very existence is structured by a feeling of estrangement, it does not follow that they continually sense or are aware of their absolute isolation. I am not maintaining that we feel or think we are alone all the time and at every moment. I am convinced that we really are alone, but we are not always conscious of it. This is important because it means that on my account of the affair, there is at least a meaningful (and hence confirmable) actual opposite to loneliness: a sense of “togetherness,” of “belonging” through an interest (when we are “extro-reflecting”), or when pursuing a “cause,” or during a successful love affair, or while enjoying the proximity of intimate friends, etc. Thus, loneliness is in principle empirically determinable precisely because it does have a meaningful
contradictory. In short, the “principle of verifiability” does apply to loneliness (A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*); the presence or absence of loneliness can be tested experientially. When I am with my close friend and we are enjoying each other’s companionship, I am (apparently) not alone or lonely. Whenever a “genuine” feeling of friendship is present, then loneliness is truly muted in consciousness, although it nevertheless serves as a structural (or “transcendental”) condition grounding the very possibility of companionship. As Fichte suggests, the lone ego is posited (structurally) prior to the “other.”

The second objection to my position consists in the simple consideration that many of us, and quite likely all of us at one time or another in our lives, express a need to be “totally” alone. The opposing party holds that if we even once wish to be alone, a counter-instance has been provided to the universalistic doctrine of loneliness and hence it has been disproved. (A single counterexample is sufficient to falsify a universal proposition.) My response to the foregoing criticism is that I grant it—with qualification. It is indeed the case that we sometimes, perhaps often, demand to be alone, left entirely to ourselves, when “the world is too much with us,” so to speak. That is perfectly true and undeniable. But when we do so, it is because we have been momentarily overwhelmed by the chaotic, threatening, disintegrative activity of external reality and we want the time to reunify, to reintegrate our fragmenting selves. We need to pause in order to collect our very selves, to rediscover “who” we are. It is simply a psychological and natural impulse to preserve our cognitive sense of “personal identity,” a required respite which seeks to reaffirm the unity of the self. Between the uncomfortable and shifting poles of chaotic external being and monadic self-conscious unity, the existence of man transpires. And amidst these two extremes, the individual seeks a compromise that at best can only be unsatisfactory by virtue of its difficult balance and antagonistic nature. When we seek “solitude,” this is merely a defensive device to thwart the threat of diffusion, of the self’s evaporation before the overwhelming presence of the “others” as it is assaulted by an impersonal, bureaucratic, industrialized, mechanized society or by violent and traumatic interpersonal relations. (We shall have more to say about these matters in the next chapter.) Nevertheless, no one
ever desires to be absolutely alone, to be a single consciousness in a lifeless universe, to be severed completely from familiar, human surroundings forever.

In this chapter, I have undertaken to challenge a description offered by Professor Rubin Gotesky because his interpretation of positive loneliness directly violates and nullifies my own universalist principle. Consequently, I wish to deny (1a) Professor Gotesky’s claim that there are four distinguishable types of loneliness and further (1b) that there is, as Professor Gotesky holds, a positive, or “sought after,” form of aloneness. Instead, as I shall go on to argue (2) loneliness is always ultimately reducible to the one basic form of despairing isolation.

In an interesting article, Gotesky presents what he considers to be an exhaustive matrix of possible definitions of loneliness, and he differentiates between four kinds of human aloneness. First, there is physical aloneness, which is essentially constituted by spatial and/or temporal separation from others. This species of severance is basically neutral, neither painful nor pleasant. Thus, and quite obviously, each and every one of us is alone in this sense, for we are, ex hypothesis, geographically distant from contemporary individuals, people that we shall never meet or know, men who live in alien lands and dwell in towns we shall never visit. Correspondingly, we are chronologically removed from past and future generations of mankind. That is simply a fact of human existence, a result of our having been thrown into the world at one particular time rather than some other period; in short, it is a consequence of our “facticity” and “historicity.” In itself this causes us no grief; we tend to accept it as a contingent fact, which simply indicates our own unique place and time in the story of the universe. Some of us, of course, may yearn for travel or to have been born in a different age, but this longing seldom becomes so acute as to degenerate into a feeling of loss at being cut off from the (potential) other. Hence the neutral quality of this sense of aloneness.

Secondly, loneliness—in contrast to aloneness—is a state of mind, according to Gotesky, that is essentially conditioned by (a) the feeling that we are rejected by our fellows or excluded from the activities and interests of others, when (b) we desire to be included and accepted by them. This “sense of abandonment” is experienced,
at one time or another, by each of us. It is the feeling of being cut off from the other consciousness and longing for reunification, as in the cases of the lover separated from the beloved, the orphan from a family (Dickens), the individual estranged from God (Augustine), the nonconformist ostracized by his fellows, the “marginal” man alienated from his peers or colleagues, etc. This kind of loneliness is characterized by the author as extremely disturbing; it is a feeling—a quality of experience—that we continually strive to avoid. And although Gotesky does not explicitly emphasize the point, the basic model for this genre of forlornness is consciousness of alienation (Hegel’s and Feuerbach’s “bad” alienation, Marx’s estrangement), man as alienated from other individuals, friends, society, or the divine.

The third perspective in Gotesky’s analysis defines the state of feeling isolated. The peculiar characteristic of this type of felt separation is “the rational recognition that men face conditions of existence in their relation to others which they do not know how to change” (p. 227). Thus, for instance, a black man may feel isolated by professional, political, legal, economic, and social barriers (i.e., by real obstructions) from participating in certain activities that are simply guaranteed to white members within a community. Another example offered by Gotesky is that of a cripple who is excluded from joining in sports because of his physical handicap. These individuals “know the terrible pain of loneliness [isolation], but they accept it [rationally as an unfortunate or unjust condition of their existence], live with it, because they are aware of the necessity of living with it” (p. 227). It is also in other instances, as Gotesky believes, a voluntary penalty, a state of affairs willingly incurred as a condition of success by those who desire to engage in certain lifestyles or by those who wish to pursue particular ambitions. (According to Thomas Mann, for example, loneliness is a necessary requisite for artistic creativity [Faust].) This latter sort of aloneness, then, can be a freely and consciously assumed evil, one which may be accepted by the individual as a means for achieving success, if one expects to struggle toward a special class of goals (e.g., the loneliness of the corporation executive).
Finally, the fourth aspect of separation is solitude, to which Gotesky attributes positive value. Accordingly, he contends, “solitude is that state or condition of living [or working] alone … without the pain of loneliness or isolation being an intrinsic component of that state or condition” (p. 236). It is, for example, the serenity, the “blessedness” attained by sages, like Spinoza, through their respective philosophical reflections and by others through their religious experiences (Buddha, Christ).

The practical, indeed the therapeutic value of the four distinctions, for Gotesky, lies in the fact that it leads him to conclude that man can overcome loneliness, and even isolation, through solitude. Spinoza, for instance, certainly postulated this ideal, since the “self,” as a finite mode, a mere illusion of the imagination, disappears, ultimately dissolving in a state of consciousness which immediately grasps the complete reality of God intuited first as *natura naturata* (passive, nonsentient) and then as *natura naturans* (active). It seems to follow, therefore, that loneliness is not inevitable; it can be transcended. Each of us, Gotesky argues, can free himself from his solipsistic prison.

In my paper “Loneliness,” which appeared in *Psychiatry*, I only underline the negative elements of loneliness and tend to identify aloneness, loneliness, isolation, and solitude (as well as estrangement, alienation, forlornness, desolation, and abandonment). Gotesky’s contribution, it seems to me, has the (apparent) merit of suggesting some desired distinctions which I may have seemed to slur over in my own effort. Nevertheless, I wish to insist that painful loneliness alone ultimately and essentially motivates all our thoughts, interests, and activities and that, furthermore, it is the force behind every one of our aspired relations with other consciousnesses and, indeed, even grounds our fascination with inanimate objects when we seek to escape boredom (i.e., loneliness in its minor form) through hobbies, diversions, amusements, sports, and the like (Pascal, Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer). And I would add that even the artist, for example, who suffers isolation so that he may write his novel does so primarily because he imagines that eventually he will be more than compensated for his sacrifice when his work results in promoting his “fame” (i.e., recognition by other consciousnesses), thereby giving him the
assurance, by others, of his own individual existence—a proof that he is not alone.

My main disagreements with Gotesky’s classificatory scheme, and especially his defense of solitude, center on two separate but connected theses. Accordingly, I wish to claim the following: (1) Ultimately, loneliness is not avoidable, and indeed it constitutes the basic motivational force within all men, without which they would neither act nor desire to act. Thus, desire is always for something other than itself; it is desire for change, a change that impels the self-contained ego to reach beyond itself, toward the other, in an attempt to escape the confines of its own realm of solipsistic consciousness (Hegel). (2) Against Gotesky, who insists that the sense of aloneness was virtually nonexistent before the Renaissance, I have maintained elsewhere and in this study that loneliness and the despair of separation is not a recent or contemporary phenomenon but rather the essential condition that has profoundly characterized Western man’s existential and historical situation since the dawn of awareness and civilization in the Hellenic age and even earlier in the epic saga of Gilgamesh.

Concerning (1), although I would agree that our pangs of loneliness may be intermittently, momentarily alleviated, nevertheless they cannot be avoided for long and never permanently, except by death. Rather, the drive to avoid the sense of abandonment continually motivates human consciousness, even when one is not consciously attending to it. Or, to offer an analogy, if I am dying of cancer, this does not mean that every one of my sleepless thoughts is involved with the dread disease; I can forget the illness for a while, I can disregard it for certain periods of time; and yet, my whole being is permeated, immanently, through and through by an absorption in the malady. It colors my entire existence, even when I am not directly dwelling upon it.

(2) Following Nicholas Berdiaev (as well as many psychologists, notably Alfred Adler, Harry Stack Sullivan, and Rollo May), Gotesky argues that loneliness is a fairly recent concern for man and, as such, confined to modern man (p. 235). For example, Berdiaev contends that
Formerly, men used to live in a comparatively confined space, which prevented them from experiencing a sense of solitude. Today, they are on the whole beginning to live in the great universe, in the midst of immensity, in the perspective of a boundless horizon, which only inspires them with a growing sense of isolation and abandonment. (*Solitude and Society*, Third Meditation, Chapter 1)

According to Berdiaev, then, loneliness comes about when man conceptually shifts “from the closed world to the infinite universe” (Koyrè). But is this plausible? The exiled Greek or Roman fears loneliness and banishment not because suddenly the material world he inhabits has expanded but because he is cut off from his family, friends, and home—all of which consciously reflect his existence.

By contrast, I have argued, in the *Psychiatry* article and the present work, that man (and assuredly Western man) has always felt alone and frightened, from the ages of Job and Oedipus to the times of Nietzsche and Thomas Mann. In opposition to my view, Gotesky finds hope because he conceives of man as not always having suffered from this fear of loneliness. Since man, he intimates, has not always been isolated (been conscious of his separation from his fellows), it seems quite likely that he does not have to feel alone in the present period. And if it is not a necessary condition, it follows that it is a curable situation. Consequently, Gotesky provides us with three possibilities, or fruitful remedies, for conquering loneliness.

A. First, he offers what he terms rapport (we might call it “communication”) as a potential method of overcoming loneliness. And, presumably, what two (or more) consciousnesses would endeavor to share, or to participate in, are mutual feelings and meanings. Now, certainly, I would never deny that we often do communicate—for a moment and in a fashion—in a restricted way with others, but there is a limit, an intrinsic barrier, to adequately sharing or sufficiently communicating with the other consciousness. And this for the following three reasons: (1) As Bergson contends most plausibly, in *Time and Free Will*, our immediate qualitative experiences, especially our feelings, are perfectly unique and hence not translatable or transmissible to others nor even repeatable to our own selves at different times. (2) Conceptual meanings, which
are truly shareable, are so only to a certain limited degree; they are only in part mutual. Thus, a meaning can never convey (not even to the user himself) everything that he intends by it, and certainly his listener would experience a somewhat different constellation of significances within his own consciousness upon hearing the words. (Kafka is a dramatic example of a novelist who, throughout his writings, exploits the continual shifts and ambiguities in meanings and relationships between human beings.) Finally, (3), as many novelists and psychologists have insisted, there is a limit to how well one is able to “know” or “understand” even oneself (Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche, Freud, Jung, Kafka, Conrad, Thomas Wolfe, Malraux, Golding). And it is impossible to communicate to an other what we ourselves do not know. Eventually, then, there will always be a wall between aspiring communicants. And obviously, if doors are even hidden from myself within my own castle of privacy, then I cannot open a passage for you that I do not myself know is there. And should it be alleged that someone else can “understand me better than I know myself” (which is, in fact, absurd), still this could never result in a communication sufficient enough to dispel our mutual sense of separation. For then he enters to meet me within my confinement through a portal that remains strange and unfamiliar to me. Finally, even if the other manages to visit for a moment, he can never stay.³ (Gotesky himself alludes to the distorted gropings and efforts of Swann and Odette in Proust’s Swann’s Way.)

B. Gotesky ushers in a lengthy discussion of friendship in his paper, and although he does not specifically invoke it as a means of transcending loneliness, it is clear that he, like the rest of us, considers intimate companionship as one of the most fundamental strategies that human beings have available to them in their attempt to conquer separation by reaching “outwardly,” toward the other. In discussing companionship, Gotesky seeks to distinguish actual from token and ideal friendship.⁴ But, as it turns out in his article, there is no real difference between actual, token, and ideal friendship, men being what they are. Thus, Gotesky practically reduces them and declares,

Friendship arouses expectancies which usually are not fulfilled. We may have a friend, but not the friendship we
dream of. Constantly he disappoints us; he fails to live up to our wrought image of what he is supposed to be. He fails to be sympathetic when we expect him to be; generous when we are in need; he is absent when we want him around. He may have sound reasons for his apathy, ungenerosity and absence; nevertheless we are disappointed, even sorely disappointed. Yet we cling to our friend and by clinging we experience again and again disappointment, frustration and, concurrently, loneliness (p. 224). We experience a particularly painful kind of loneliness which arises from never being able to share oneself—one’s thoughts, one’s truths, one’s needs—with anyone. We are never able to reveal our true selves. We must always wear the heavy, ultimately unendurable armor of pretense. We must constantly hide from ourselves how much we distrust our friends, we must constantly hide from ourselves the real reason for affirming so lofty a principle of moral action. And to escape these threatening revelations, we must constantly increase the number and the circle of our friends. In the end, we are caught in the walled prison of our loneliness. We can no longer keep going from party to party, from circle to circle. We can no longer continue to increase the number of our friends. Moments of despair arise when we must speak as we feel and demand help from those whose help we have already repudiated in the name of friendship. (p. 226)

But this, of course, is not the victory over, or the transcendence of, loneliness; instead, it is an absolute capitulation to it. A critical phenomenological clue to the corrosive relation between friends is provided by the author himself—“we are never able to reveal our true selves.” Indeed. And why not? Could we even if we wanted to do so? Do we know our “true” self? I doubt it. But if we do not know it, then obviously we have reached an intrinsic and absolute limit to communication, for we cannot share what we ourselves do not possess. Again, for me at least, the conclusion follows that we are isolated by the very essence of our monadic and opaque spheres of awareness.
As opposed to Gotesky, I would venture to suggest that for human beings, within “a moral certainty” or “beyond a reasonable doubt,” there is genuine friendship, and it is based on mutual trust, respect, and affection. When (or if) it exists, it will be found that its sustaining force is the desire on the part of both individuals to feel less lonely; and when (or if) that friendship is betrayed, it shall be discovered that the desire to overcome loneliness was the reason, for we only forsake one friend for the “promise” of a more intense, secure, or lasting relation with another.

C. Finally, as we pointed out above, the writer pleads a case for some kind of constructive or resigned solitude—he calls its achieved state “serenity”—but he woefully fails to be convincing about its alleged positive value. It is not intended to be merely the absence of the feeling of loneliness but rather a good in itself, sought for its own sake. However, as it is introduced, solitude seems to be a compensatory attitude adopted by the mind after it has suffered repeated frustrations in its endeavor to reach out toward others. In this sense, it may be said, that there are no willing introverts, only compulsive extroverts, forced, by frequent defeats, to retreat inwardly and seek solace there.

Whatever he does—in every or almost every instance of aloneness—he will not feel any pain at being rejected by others. Again, he will not suffer because necessity or need forces him to exclude himself from others. His mood in all these instances of aloneness is one of serenity … If men reject him, he can live alone without hurt or desire for those who reject him … He feels no compulsion to conform; and he does what he needs to do to protect himself from the suspicion, anger and hatred of his fellowmen. (pp. 236–237)

Does this sound like something actually positive, or is it rather the resignation of the Stoic sage who has learned not to ask for too much either from the world or from his own existence and rather to be content with less so as not to be disappointed by expecting more?

If Gotesky’s point is instead that we sometimes, even frequently, desire to be alone, to withdraw from the frustration and pain of interpersonal contacts, this is true but beside the point, and it is

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certainly not a counter-instance to the general rule I am propounding, namely that all human desires and actions are ultimately grounded in the attempt to escape our sense of being condemned to loneliness. Similarly, we are not always hungry; indeed, we often feel overly satiated. But this does not mean that we shall not soon expire from starvation if our abstention is prolonged or unduly forced.

Gotesky has intimated—echoing Berdiaev—that loneliness is like dying and “Since no man desires to die, there is no greater experience of pain than that of solitude [i.e., loneliness]” (p. 212). By contrast, I would agree with Schopenhauer, who affirmed in this context that loneliness can be far worse than death, and indeed, as he points out, men have willingly chosen to die at their own hands rather than to undergo the suffering of human isolation. In this sense, loneliness is quite distinct from death; it can cause death, but it is not death itself. However, like death, it is an ultimate experience that we must all—each of us, separately—confront.

* An earlier version of this chapter, under the same title, appeared in Psychology (August, 1977).


2 This is somewhat strange—and rather inconsistent—since Gotesky himself stresses the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise and the myth of the Golden Age of the Titans as both illustrating early paradigms of human loneliness (p. 222).

3 See B. Mijuskovic, “Loneliness and Communication” in Man and His Conduct, ed. J. Gracia (1980). All we “share” is our sense of individuality and isolation.


5 Similarly, the posture of mind encouraged by the “Protestant ethic,” in fostering a radical individualism, culminates in developing a subject who conceives of himself as separated from others by an unbridgeable psychological chasm (see M. Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism [Scribner’s, 1958], pp. 105–108). In turn, this promotes the tendency of Protestants to morbidly concentrate on their extreme isolation and, unless it is buttressed by a constant reaffirmation of God’s presence, it easily degenerates toward self-destruction, a death preferable to loneliness (E. Durkheim, Suicide).
Johann Gottlieb Fichte was a German idealist philosopher who employed a phenomenological method to describe the primacy of consciousness, its activities, and its structures. Now, although Kant’s famous Copernican Revolution had previously maintained that the external world must conform to the patterns of the mind (in this sense Kant reversed the entire history of philosophy, which had claimed that truth could only be found when concepts corresponded to external objects), nevertheless Kant himself, in a significant way, assumed the validity of external experience and then “deduced,” or indirectly inferred, that certain a priori (transcendental) structures in the mind first had to be presupposed, as conditioning factors, if knowledge or experience of the self, objects, and other selves were to be possible (Critique of Pure Reason, B1). Fichte, by contrast, began directly and immediately (hence phenomenologically) with consciousness itself. And this, over a century later, was to be Freud’s starting point as well in his discussion of the “oceanic feeling.” Indeed, in general, after Leibniz, German theorists approached their analyses of reality by commencing with the structures of individual subjectivity, and although it cannot be shown that Freud was directly influenced by these reflections, it seems beyond doubt that he was aware of a prevalent and specific idealist paradigm of consciousness current in his day.

On Fichte’s view—and subsequently on Hegel’s and Freud’s as well—the (absolute) ego first posits itself and then it actively proliferates “outwardly” by distinguishing between itself (self-consciousness) and a realm of “external” objects and other egos. In this regard, Fichte adopts a thoroughly mentalist paradigm of consciousness in order to account for the relation between the self and an opposed and alien “external” reality. A corresponding “philosophy of mind,” albeit without the extreme idealistic prejudices of Fichte,
I believe, was the basis of Freud’s investigations in the province of internal, individual mind. Accordingly, in what follows, I shall outline how first the primitive stage of consciousness, called by Fichte, Hegel, and Freud as the Ego, Being, and the “oceanic feeling,” respectively, develops through an opposition between the self, objects, and other egos into a second stage and further how the subsequent and derivative stage is, in turn, related to narcissism and loneliness.

Now, for the purposes of this chapter, it should be stressed that Fichte, Hegel, and Freud all share in an immaterialist paradigm of awareness. Similarly, all three analyze our knowledge of reality, or more specifically our cognition of the external world, by first investigating and describing immediate consciousness. In this respect, they mutually initiate a welcome quasi-phenomenological approach to reality by starting with the primacy of consciousness and itsthetic structures. Furthermore, all three theorists are committed to the indubitable principle of the unity of individual awareness. This unity itself, as we shall endeavor to show, is grounded in an elementary and primary “oceanic feeling,” which initially betrays consciousness into an illusion of totality and self-sufficiency and only later forces it to realize that, quite the contrary, it exists in a state of isolated aloneness or loneliness. In short, the “oceanic feeling” of oneness is inevitably transformed into narcissism, a condition (or structure) of consciousness that naturally affirms the enforced solitary character of each man’s situation in the world. Finally, basic to all three thinkers is the conviction that only a “mentalist”—as opposed to a materialist—doctrine of the mind can truly describe the unity and individuality of human consciousness. Materialism, with its model of a physical and passive “mind” (i.e., brain) can never, in principle, account for either the unity or the structural activities that indubitably permeate each and every human consciousness. For, according to materialism’s traditional view, matter is inherently disorganized and passive.

As Fichte speculates in the Science of Knowledge, the ego first posits its own existence in an absolutely original way. As such, the ego exists as a completely undifferentiated unity, antecedent to grasping itself as a determinate self, prior to self-conscious apprehension of its own uniqueness in opposition to other realities, “externalities.”
This primary ego, Fichte assures us, is the primordial, absolutely unconditioned first principle of all human consciousness.

The self’s own positing of itself is thus its own pure activity. *The self posits itself*, and by virtue of this mere self-assertion it exists; and conversely, the self *exists* and posits its own existence by virtue of merely existing. It is at once the agent and the product of action; the active, and what the activity brings about … and hence the ‘I am’ [initially] expresses an Act [non-self-consciously], and the only one possible.¹

In this elemental state, the ego just is, it exists. It does not distinguish within its own bounds of consciousness between itself, objects, or other centers of conscious activity. Rather, for Fichte, it is a transcendental condition (in the Husserlian sense) that the nonreflexive ego first be absolutely given, posited as unaware of itself. For only later, genetically and “logically,” can the ego become reflexively conscious of itself as a distinct entity, negating other beings, within its own proper sphere of apprehension. Further,

*To posit oneself and to be* are, as applied to the self, perfectly identical. Thus, the proposition, ‘I am, because I have posited myself’, can also be stated as: ‘I am absolutely, because I am.’ (p. 99)

In order to achieve the level of “empirical” self-consciousness, the ego must posit through its own activity an other, a nonego, in opposition to and in distinction from itself (pp. 104, 122, 261 ff.). Thus only by contrasting its self against the existence—or the positing—of an other object, or an alter ego, can the individual ego forge its own self-consciousness, as it strives to separate its self from the invasion of what is immediately presented within its cognitive sphere. Nevertheless, the positing, the thetic affirmation of the self *and* of the other, both occur within, immanent to consciousness, on Fichte’s idealistically oriented model of the mind.

Thus Fichte, it may be said, manages to introduce a phenomenological starting point, one which is, in principle at least, directly available and open to consciousness. It begins with an absolutely certain awareness, which “can be neither proved nor defined” (p. 93)
exactly because it (the phenomenological starting point) necessarily precedes and presupposes any such secondary and derivative attempts.

Shortly after Fichte, Hegel himself proceeds to exploit this same phenomenological element of his predecessor’s thought. In fact, we discover Hegel, in both the opening sections of the *Phenomenology of Mind* and the *Science of Logic*—the first of which deals with Sense-Certainty and the second with Being, Nothing, and Becoming—launching a description of primordial consciousness as it first manifests itself immediately, without differentiation, within subjective and individual consciousness (Phenomenology) and then philosophic, objective, and social consciousness (Logic). At this earliest of all moments of human apprehension, Hegel insists, consciousness and reality are indistinguishable. Strictly speaking, all that may be said to exist is an amorphous awareness, a consciousness totally oblivious to its own bounds, something more akin to feeling rather than thinking, a sentiment that unconsciously identifies awareness and being precisely because it is a stage of consciousness prior to any such distinction.

[Consciousness], which is at the start or immediately our object, can be nothing else than just that which is immediate [consciousness], [consciousness] of the immediate, of what is … [The consciousness of Sense-Certainty] merely says regarding what it knows: it is; and its truth contains solely the being of the fact it knows. Consciousness, on its part, in the case of this form of certainty, takes the shape merely of a pure ego.²

At this primitive and basic level of feeling-awareness, the infant’s state of mind displays a complete identification of “knowing”—as feeling—and being. Thus, in the initial moments of infantile mental apprehension, (self) awareness and awareness of the intrusive presence of the “other” (perhaps best described as James’s buzzing, blooming confusion of the chaotically given) are inseparably fused, blending into a perfectly unified sphere of consciousness.³ On Hegel’s view, then, the theoretical insight that consciousness and being are ultimately identical serves as the vital truth of Western thought, a truth originally discovered by Parmenides and intermittently echoed
ever since until his own time. It is the principle that awareness and awareness of (something) are the same. And this is the case because elementary consciousness is absolutely self-contained, admitting of no internal diremption, externalization, or alienation.

Being, pure Being—without any further determination. In its indeterminate immediacy it is similar to itself alone, and also not dissimilar from any other; it has no differentiation either within itself or relatively to anything external; nor would it remain fixed in its purity [i.e., abstract universal immediacy], were there any determination or content which could be distinguished within it, or whereby it could be posited as distinct from an Other.4

In like manner, on Freud’s account of the primary stage of infant consciousness, being (reality) and awareness (of being) are indissolubly and integrally united. As we shall see, the source of narcissism can always be traced back to this original “oceanic feeling” which, in turn, is represented by the perfect identification of the infantile ego with the totality of given (i.e., direct), immediate being present to it or within it. This level of awareness constitutes the most primitive stage of undifferentiated consciousness, antecedent to the ego’s distinction of self and a realm of opposed external objects, including other consciousnesses.

Originally the ego includes everything, later it detaches from itself the external world. The ego-feeling we are aware of now is thus only a shrunken vestige of a far more extensive feeling—a feeling which embraced the universe and expressed an inseparable connection of the ego with the external world. If we may suppose that this primary ego-feeling has been preserved in the minds of many people—to a greater or lesser extent—it would co-exist like a sort of counterpart with the narrower and more sharply outlined ego-feeling of maturity, and the ideational content belonging to it would be precisely the notion of limitless extension and oneness with the universe—the same feeling as that described by my friend as “oceanic.” But have we any right to assume that
the original type of feeling survived alongside the latter one which has developed from it? Undoubtedly we have.\textsuperscript{5}

It is my conviction that when Freud appeals to spatial analogies—such as the one offered above concerning the possibility of “two” temporal egos surviving “alongside” each other—in order to describe how mental and psychological states of consciousness coexist, he is aware of their metaphorical character just because for him the mind, in the last analysis, is not spatial but rather “partakes” of an immaterial existence. In other words, I am suggesting that Freud is committed, in part at least, to an immaterialist theoretical construct of the mind, one wherein his earlier physiologic model is quite certainly abandoned.\textsuperscript{6} Similarly, when Freud compares consciousness to the tip of an iceberg, or better yet, when he describes the past and present cities of Rome as all coexisting, simultaneously, in the mind, he can call forth such paradigms precisely because for him the mind is not merely the brain; it is not simply reducible to physical components but rather shares in some significant but unspecified sense, in the ideal, in the purely mental.\textsuperscript{7}

I now hasten to make an important theoretical point. Whether we envision the primitive state of awareness along the models indicated by Fichte (the absolute ego positing itself non-self-consciously); Hegel (immediate consciousness of qualitative Being, and Being as Consciousness); or Freud (the “oceanic feeling,” where the ego identifies itself with the entire universe), the critical consideration in all three of these paradigms is that the stipulated “totality” of awareness nevertheless constitutes a unity, a oneness, an identification of (a) the ego with itself as well as (b) being with consciousness. (It is due to this principle of unity, as we shall see, that the ego, in turn, is alone and lonely.) The premise that although the original, primordial ego is a totality, it is yet an essential unity is perhaps most clearly expressed in a work by Berdiaev. Following Freud rather closely on the issue, the Russian philosopher contends,

Originally there was no line of demarcation between the Ego and the “totality”; later, when the existence of the non-Ego was revealed the Ego developed in contact with it a particularly acute and anguished sensibility. The distinction
often established between the “I” [the “I” as a “me,” an empirical object] and the Ego, the anima and animus [Fichte’s active, spontaneous ego] is a secondary one connected with the Ego’s spiritual growth. The stages of its development are as follows: firstly, the undifferentiated unity of the Ego with the universe; secondly the dualist opposition of the Ego and the non-Ego.8

But, once again, the salient point is that the ego essentially constitutes a unity. Indeed, as Berdiaev would have it,

The Ego may, therefore, be defined as the constant unity underlying all change, as the extratemporal centre that can only be defined in terms of itself ... [I]t determines itself from within when responding actively to all external influences. All Egos resemble each other in that each is unique and distinct. Each Ego is an entity, a world in itself, postulating the existence of other Egos without seeking to identify itself with them.9

Berdiaev refers above to the “extratemporal” nature of the ego because time, he wishes to prove, depends on change, motion. However, without a distinction between at least the self, space, and objects, there can be no awareness of change or motion. Time, as the measure of objects moving through space, and as apprehended by an observer, depends on a transcendental distinction first being reached, differentiating between the self, space, and objects, and then resulting in the recognition of activity. The unity of the ego, the feeling of identity the ego exhibits within its own immanent sphere of aloneness, then, constitutes the ultimate origin of loneliness. Accordingly, the “oceanic feeling,” in its most elemental aspect, is basically to be understood as a sentiment of identification of the self with the all, which only exists and has being insofar as it is present to consciousness. Thus, the “oceanic feeling” precedes any analysis between the ego and the I (or me), consciousness and self-consciousness, self and object, or self and another self. But once the separation is accomplished between, for example, the self and the other, then the “oceanic feeling” develops into narcissism, which exists in all of us in varying degrees. “Original narcissism” is described by Freud as a stage “in which the
childish ego enjoyed [total] self-sufficiency” (Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, VII). Subsequently, narcissism genetically develops into a feeling of unbridled, “unbounded self-love.” But as such, it is a sentiment that can only develop after consciousness has progressed from the stage of the nonreflexive, absolute ego to that of the empirical self, or more specifically, toward the conception of the self in opposition to the remainder of the external world, the latter functioning in this regard as a determinative background. What distinguishes the “oceanic feeling” from narcissism, therefore, is that the latter is an explicit, self-conscious unity in contradistinction to the nonconscious unified totality of the former. Differently put, at the stage of the “oceanic feeling,” there is just “love” or “pleasure”—not pleasure of something but instead just immediate undifferentiated pleasure without an object. At the later and higher level of narcissism, however, there is self-love, love of oneself in opposition to that which is not recognized as constituting the self proper (amour propre).10

In Hegel, the mental activity through which (the consciousness of) particularization, determinacy, or the individualization of subjectivity is accomplished—within the prior and greater framework of the amorphous universal—strictly derives from the active power of the mind to negate, limit, or determine itself. Following Spinoza’s Ethics (and indeed Plato’s Sophist), Hegel announces the principle that “negation is determination.” Hence, the ego actively separates itself from the rest of immediately present conscious/being. And to “negate” the other means to determine one’s self in opposition to objects and alien selves.

The phenomenon of loneliness, then, arises from the intrinsic paradox of human existence. At first, the ego is an undifferentiated totality, an amorphous unity (or perhaps an undulating identity). Next, the ego is more or less violently and rudely disturbed from its omnipotent reveries into realizing—through the intercession of the reality principle—that there are existents beyond its wish-fulfilling, self-fulfilling desires and hence beyond its control; there are entities which are resistant and conceived as external to its smug and self-satisfied province of conscious wish-creations. The result is a growing awareness of the ego’s self in direct conflict with the rest of reality. And yet, the ego longs for reunification with its primeval
condition of conscious/existence. But it is too late. Return means the loss of the ego’s unique individuality, its hard-won “importance” and difference from the realm of the other; return entails giving up the achievements the ego has gained from the external world of the other, namely, that of recognizing, re-cognizing, itself as the doubling of its reverberating self-awareness and hence recognizing its own special particularity, its vital identity and self-consciousness. The ego is alone and it both feels and knows it. To lose its isolation, it must lose and negate its very self. A compromise thus results: To remain alone, master of one’s sense of identity, while at the same time forcing the “other”—whether through the means of fame, power, wealth, glory, or even love, it matters little—to recognize the ego’s desires (Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §Master-Slave).

Finally, according to Gregory Zilboorg, pathological loneliness directly stems from an exaggerated form of aggressive narcissism.

And if the omnipotent baby learns the joy of being admired and loved but learns nothing about the outside world, he may develop a conviction of his greatness and all-importance which will lead to a narcissistic orientation to life—a conviction that life is nothing but being loved and admired. This narcissistic-megalomaniac attitude will not be acceptable to the environment, which will respond with hostility and isolation of the narcissistic person.¹¹

Zilboorg is, of course, alluding to severe cases of aggressive loneliness, but I wish unequivocally to declare that narcissistic loneliness is a universal and necessary structure in all human consciousness and, therefore, a basic and inevitable experience for each of us, separately. As Freud himself suggests,

We suspect already that this narcissistic organization is never wholly abandoned. A human being remains to some extent narcissistic even after he has found external objects for his libido.¹²

I would go a little further in emphasis if not in principle. Narcissism is not abandoned, and never can be, because it is the essential condition of man. And thus each of us, completely alone,
carves from the original fund of consciousness labeled as the “oceanic feeling” our own peculiar, subjective, definite image of a Narcissus that reflects us individually. And the more sharply etched and determinate our image is, the more it stands in stark alienation and opposition to the “other.”

Presumably, in the “healthier” structuring process of individual ego growth, we see that once burgeoning infant consciousness has transcended its indistinct identification with the “oceanic feeling,” it soon discovers that its own ego is genetically constituted by, and develops along with, the ego of a primary other. This other is, in most cases, the mother, who, as an opposite center of consciousness and freedom, generally aids the infant’s ego toward an awareness of its self. Should the mother suddenly disappear for an extended length of time, the resulting disruption in the structuring process and the consequent loneliness can be so severe as to endanger the very existence of the ego and its will for an enlarged consciousness, and its desire to live.

The devastating psychological effects of loneliness in childhood, even in very early infancy, I believe, can be demonstrated by analyzing the “causes,” or conditions, and feelings involved in marasmus. Marasmus is presently rare, but at the end of World War I, it was claimed to be responsible for almost half of the deaths of children under a year old. Consequently, I think, it is valid to infer that any acute or prolonged sense of loneliness resulting by the mother’s absence in the allegedly normal child, cared for by an affectionate and solicitous parent, may easily “produce,” or condition, abnormal “behavior” patterns, actually patterns of consciousness, which may endure and permeate the entire structure of the ego’s awareness as long as it exists.

Marasmus is regarded as a psychosomatic illness that leads to progressive and severe physiological deterioration, frequently ending in fatal results. Its “cause” is almost always the infant’s separation from the mother, accompanied, of course, with an inevitable loss of recognition and affection toward the child. Even at early stages of life, the child requires constant human contact, provided most securely by an other conscious being who cares for the infant and assures him of his existence. Deprived of this reflective, human warmth, the
youngster suffers emotional starvation, concomitant with declining nutritional responses, and he regresses toward the more satisfying stage of the “oceanic feeling.” Should the absent parent reappear, psychologists at once observe a welcome transformation toward health in the afflicted child.

In some cases, for unavoidable reasons like sickness, the mother had to be separated from her child for prolonged periods. The substitute mother available was not always appropriate. In children who had had a good relationship with the mother, such substitution resulted in a progressive condition resembling depression in adults. At first these infants become weepy, showing a conflict between disappointment at the approach of a stranger and the craving for human contact. Later they become withdrawn and reject any approach. Toward the end of the third month the facial expression becomes rigid, screaming subsides, weeping also; and the child often presents eating and sleep disturbances, lies mostly prone in its cot. With the return of the mother, facial expression and general behavior return to normal.13

We may conclude, therefore, that the structure and activities of “other-ego” are vitally important to the formation and preservation of the self-ego. The presence of the other not only provides a context of “reflection” and re-cognition for the self, through the mediating agency of the alien other, but—and perhaps more significantly—it also serves as a guarantee that the self is not abandoned, alone, in a foreign realm of being. Indeed, fantasy in children is probably a method of creating the other, or the presence of a companion awareness, within consciousness.

Nevertheless, eventually, in the course of average development, the severance of the narcissistic self, as distinct from the other, must establish itself. The consequent feeling of estrangement (e.g., when confronted by the loss of the parent-other) will be as profound as when the determinate ego emitted itself from the original, undifferentiated unity of the oceanic feeling.

Clearly, it would be instructive to examine the effects of “sensory deprivation” and “human isolation” experiments on loneliness in
order to determine to what extent the loss of external and social stimuli affects and promotes the sense of loneliness. In his autobiographical account of a polar expedition, Richard Byrd affords us some insight into the experience of loneliness when an individual is removed from what we normally regard as civilization and thrust into an “oceanic,” companionless environment. To be sure, Byrd’s adventure is not a perfect case of sensory deprivation. Thus, for example, (a) the explorer undertakes the venture willingly, at first at least; (b) he is constantly busy with necessary chores, which saves him from continually reflecting on his isolated predicament; (c) he remains in regular daily contact by radio with other members of his expeditionary party at a nearby camp; (d) he is sustained by a strong belief in the presence of God; and (e) his lonely mission derives considerable “meaning” or “purpose”—and hence external relation and security—for him through the recognition of others; indeed, a significant portion of the world is aware of his plight, including the president of the United States, thus providing him with “moral” support. Nevertheless, although certain factors obviously militate against the “purity” of Byrd’s situation, still his story does teach us a great deal about enforced solitude. His diary entry for April 21 reads,

This morning I had to admit to myself that I was lonely. Try as I may, I find I can’t take my loneliness casually. It is too big. But I must not dwell on it. Otherwise I am undone … I seem to be groping in the cold reaches of interstellar space, lost and bewildered. The room is a non-dimensional darkness.14

Indeed, most often the physical conditions symbolic of loneliness are darkness (visual isolation) and monotony (temporal isolation). Hence, we discover the author making the following comments: “Then the darkness rushed in, and I was sensible of the ultimate meaning of loneliness” (p. 170); again, “The brain-cracking loneliness of solitary confinement is the loneliness of a futile routine” (p. 67); or, “This damnable evenness is getting me” (p. 157; see p. 96). Monotony—almost literally a singleness of “tone” or mood—is engendered in the human psyche when the physical surroundings exhibit change without variety (p. 56). Obviously, this aspect of loneliness is closely
connected with the temporality of consciousness. Accordingly, “change in the sense that we [normally] know it, without which life is scarcely tolerable, [is] non-existent” at a polar base, even when it is manned by several individuals (p. 18). For where “there is no growth or change outside, men are driven deeper and deeper inside themselves” (ibid.). But, as Byrd himself suggests throughout his novel, in the end all that counts is human closeness and companionship (although this has to be qualified considerably since the chronicler tells us that a restrictive dual companionship can readily lead to tragic estrangement). Everything else, every other meaning or purpose, is mere sham and pretense, “a romanticized rationalization” (p. 119), a fiction by which we keep ourselves preoccupied lest we confront our desperate aloneness.

Normally, in the course of average human development, the body is primed to expect and depend upon countless stimuli from the outside world as well as to rely upon innumerable social diversions; but once these are denied or successfully thwarted, the individual is thrown into a frightening confrontation with his own self (Byrd, pp. 88–89, 96), and he is compelled to search for meaning at a totally new source: within himself. If this situation is unduly prolonged, I would hazard to guess that either death itself would be preferable or else that severe personality disintegration will result.

In addition to the conclusions indicated in the Byrd experiment, we may also point out that in an article some two decades ago, Woodburn Heron conducted some quasi-sensory deprivation experiments in order to test the effects of prolonged monotony on subjects. After a period of complete isolation, it was found that the patients created fantastic images—often of animals—in order to keep themselves company and to occupy and divert their thoughts so as to reduce the increasing sense of estrangement. It would seem, then, that under certain circumstances, the mind is compelled to actively produce distinct alien visions, as well as sensory objects of relation, if these are not provided by the environment. And further, it seems that this dynamic generation of visual data itself functions as a desperate attempt to avoid solitude.15 Similarly, a fascinating glimpse into the terrifying and deleterious effects of monotony in prison is presented by Christopher Burney:
I soon learned that variety is not the spice, but the very stuff of life. We need the constant ebb and flow of wavelets of sensation, thought, perception, action and emotion, lapping on the shore of our consciousness, now here, now there, keeping even our isolation in the ocean of reality.16

For Burney, we are, each of us, hermitic, insular exiles; we separately populate mental islands of awareness in a sea of being. Without the varying climate of the sea, with its multifarious vicissitudes, the monadic mind would soon disintegrate into its inner recesses, into a “nothingness,” an “absolute as Nothing” (p. 21).

Finally, James Howard recounted the intriguing story of “The Button” to me. It is the tale of a man, condemned to solitary imprisonment, who is confined in total darkness. In order to avoid going insane, he tears a button from his vestments and occupies himself by tossing it repeatedly and searching for it in the obscurity of his tiny cell. One day, he loses it. After an intense and futile search for the button, he is found dead by his captors. And in a corner of the ceiling of his cage, a button is discovered, caught in the webbing of a spider’s net.

* An earlier version of this chapter, under the same title, appeared in the Psychoanalytic Review (1979–1980).

1 J. Fichte, Science of Knowledge, trans. P. Heath and J. Lachs (Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), p. 97. All references to Fichte will be from this work.

2 G. Hegel, The Phenomenology of Mind, trans. J.B. Baillie (Harper & Row, 1967), p. 149. At the very dawn of awareness, “knowledge” and consciousness are identical in much the same way—and because of the same arguments—by which Hegel concludes that the vital truth of idealism derives from the identification of knowing and being through their mutual participation in consciousness. Jacob Loewenberg, in his commentary, Hegel’s Phenomenology: Dialogues in the Life of Mind (Lasalle, IL: Open Court, 1965) characterizes the stage (moment, phase, aspect) of Self-Certainty as “a solipsism of the present moment,” “an impersonation of a subjective or naïve idealist “position” (p. 32) or “a perfect monadic consciousness” (pp. 34, 36, 37). The ensuing dialectical movement, Self-Certainty, he titles “Self-Consciousness and Solipsism” (p. 84).

Hegel’s perspective on loneliness can be reconstructed by consulting Sections 402–408 of his Philosophy of Mind, where he states that it is necessary first to address “why insanity must be discussed before [that of] the healthy, intellectual consciousness” (Section 408, Note). First, however, it’s important to
stress that he is committed to a series of conscious levels from the prenatal, the preconscious, and the unconscious, wherein he refers to the fetus's active relation within “the mother’s womb” in terms of its developing “monadic individualism” (Section 405 and Note 2 and Section 406, Note 3). The initial moment of self-consciousness is essentially animated by a desire for unity grounded in an even more primordial stage of “Freudian narcissism,” as Daniel Berthold Bond informs us (Hegel’s Theory of Insanity [Albany, SUNY Press, 1995], pp. 26, 43, 46, 77).

What this means is that at the level of the soul, the I or self has not yet developed into full conscious awareness of its self and its surrounding world. Indeed, much like Freud’s interpretation of “primary narcissism,” the soul for Hegel does not distinguish between inner and outer at all: the soul is a “differenceless unity” prior to the opposition between interior and external realities (Section 398, Note). The soul is the preconscious state of the mind, “the form of the dull stirring, the inarticulate breathing of the spirit through its unconscious and unintelligent individuality” (Section 400; Berthold-Bond, p. 26).

In turn, at this primitive stage, the desire for unity is grounded in a unity of immediate feeling with an as yet merely potential other. Although Hegel briefly considers melancholy (representing one of the four personality humors) and he connects it to suicide, the essential definition of insanity or madness follows as consisting of a “state in which the mind is shut up within itself, has sunk into itself, whose peculiarity...consists in its being no longer in immediate contact with actuality but in having positively separated itself from it” (Philosophy of mind, Section 408, Note; cf. Berthold-Bond, page 20). It is because of the individual’s unbridled, unchecked freedom that “Man alone has the capacity of grasping himself in this complete abstraction of the ‘I’. This is why he has, so to speak, the privilege of folly and madness” (Section 408, Note). In short, the lonely, unhappy soul retreats inwardly, seeking solace solely within, and thus loses its ability to relate and share in the common world of the other. Hence, according to Hegel, madness occurs when the individual mind withdraws from intercourse with the shared world of others and regresses into its innermost recesses, into the “dark, infernal powers” of unconsciousness and dreams (Section 408, Note). In this condition of “communing merely with its interior states, the opposition between itself and that which is for it—the world or reality—remains shut up within itself” (Berthold-Bond, page 26).

As a parenthetical observation, it is a curious fact that Hegel’s own personal reaction to the existential tragedy of his beloved sister’s, Christiane’s, mental institutionalization (and suicide a year later [1831] after his death) as well as his intimate friend’s, Holderlin’s, schizophrenia remain muted and an utter mystifications in the context of his rational dialectic (Berthold-Bond, pages 54 ff.).

3 Cf. W. James, The Principles of Psychology, I, 488: “the undeniable fact [is] that any number of impressions, from any number of sensory sources, falling simultaneously on a mind WHICH HAS NOT YET EXPERIENCED THEM SEPARATELY, will fuse into a single individual object for that mind....The baby,
assailed by eyes, ears, nose, skin, and entrails at once, *feels* (italic mine) it all as one great blooming, buzzing confusion.”

4 G. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. W. H. Johnston and L.G. Struthers (Macmillan, 1951), I, 94; see also *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E.S. Haldane and F.H. Simson (Humanities, 1968), I, 252–254. The first moment of consciousness is termed intuition by Hegel, since it functions directly; the second stage is characterized as reflection, and it signals the operation of the mediate faculty of the Kantian capacity of “understanding.”


7 Cf. S. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. J. Strachey (Avon, 1965), pp. 648–649, 653. To be sure, Freud himself seeks a via media between idealism and physiology, but the question remains whether or not his paradigm of the mind and its mental activities rather gives the palm to the first model, the idealistic, mentalist one.


10 Freud, no less than Plato, is convinced that myths can provide us with basic insights into the nature of man’s consciousness. On Freud’s theory, the principle of Eros struggles for a unification of the self with an other consciousness. It desires to accomplish a perfect fusion, or immersion, of the self with the awareness of the other. This ideal unity is symbolized in sexual intercourse when we imagine the partner to be dominated and permeated by an identical feeling, or fantasy, as our own. (If, on the other hand, the ego turns from the other for gratification and instead seeks satisfaction by returning to the original “oceanic feeling,” then it would seem that the principle of Thanatos may be said to have brought its destructive forces to bear. And death threatens to become the “ideal” unity.) Thus, Freud contends that “the main purpose of Eros—that of uniting and binding—[consists] in so far as it helps toward establishing the unity, or tendency to unity, which is particularly characteristic of the ego” (*The Ego and the Id*, trans. J. Riviere [Norton, 1962], p. 35). Again, Eros is once more regarded as an intrinsically unifying principle, or force, a mediating agency which essentially seeks unity; see Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, pp. 51–52; *Civilization and Its Discontents*, IV, note 3. We might repeat that Plato’s *Symposium*, and more specifically Aristophanes’s discourse eulogizing human love, offers an erotic means of overcoming loneliness, as Freud himself notes. But perhaps, as a parenthetical remark, we can indulge in some mythical interpretations of our own by citing the legend of Tristan and Iseult as a classic example, illustrating the
futility of separate consciousnesses ever successfully joining through the agency of erotic love. See D. de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World* (Doubleday, 1957), p. 52. *Post coitum omnes animals tristes sunt*—After intercourse, all animals are sad.

11 F. Fromm-Reichmann, “Loneliness,” *Psychiatry* (February, 1959), p. 5. Incidentally, Dr. Fromm-Reichmann, significantly enough, relates loneliness to Freud’s discussion of the “oceanic feeling” at a number of points in her discussion. See also my article, “Loneliness,” *Psychiatry* (May, 1977). Sadism is an obvious attempt to turn the consciousness of the other into an object (Sartre).

12 Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, p. 89.


The assumption of my entire study is that loneliness is the most primary, universal, and necessary condition of being human. This principle, I am convinced, has been plausibly and sufficiently established by various psychologists (Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, Clark Moustakas, and James Howard); philosophers (Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre); and novelists (Hardy, Conrad, and Thomas Wolfe) as well as many others. Thus, according to the “optimistic” interpretation of Moustakas,

Loneliness is a condition of human life, an experience of being human which enables the individual to sustain, extend and deepen his humanity. Man is ultimately and forever lonely whether his loneliness is the exquisite pain of the individual living in isolation or illness, the sense of absence caused by a loved one’s death, or piercing joy experienced in triumphant creation. I believe it is necessary for every person to recognize his loneliness, to become intensely aware that, ultimately, in every fibre of his being, man is alone—terribly, utterly alone. Efforts to overcome or escape the existential experience of loneliness can result only in self-alienation. When man is removed from a fundamental truth of his life, loneliness of individual existence, he shuts himself off from one significant avenue of his own self-growth.¹

A somewhat more pessimistic outlook on the unique isolation of man is announced by James Howard:

Each of us exists within his unique epidermal envelope as a separate thing. No other person can enter that envelope, nor can any of us escape from it. We were born in that enclosure, exist within it, and will wear it as our funeral shroud.²
Indeed, I am convinced that enforced loneliness is the dominant theme of Western civilization. As such, it has been expressed in the art of the early Greek myths, legends, and dramas. More recently, it is becoming an important field within psychology itself. Meanwhile, philosophy, ironically enough, given that the human psyche is one of its major concerns, has lagged far behind in the exploration of this human phenomenon of immanent consciousness.

In the former chapters, I have tended to treat loneliness often from a metaphysical standpoint. I have argued that loneliness is an elemental structure—an activity or force—within the human psyche. But as Husserl himself insisted, metaphysics and phenomenology are not opposed. Consequently, in the ensuing argument, I shall show that the exclusionary stance of the ego is “intuitively evident.” As such it neither requires nor admits of inferential proof. Rather, it is constituted in awareness as a phenomenological given; it is directly, immediately present within “transcendental subjectivity.” Accordingly, what I intend to explore in the forthcoming discussion is the vital connection between the phenomenological method of Edmund Husserl and the turn to the lonely ego. Husserl, in some significant sense—despite his principle of intentionality—represents the culmination of the Cartesian and idealistic principle regarding the reflexive nature of consciousness, more specifically concerning the claim that awareness may, on certain occasions, exhibit a perfect unity between subject and object precisely because the self can intuitively apprehend itself as its own object. In turn, this principle inexorably leads to a solipsistic ego upon which an entire theory of monadic consciousness is grounded. Now, in saying this, I am not claiming that Husserl himself explicitly developed this thematic connection, although he assuredly points in its direction. Instead, I am contending that the phenomenological method, most fully exploited at its very roots, the absolute givens of consciousness, necessarily points toward acknowledging the transcendental structure of human isolation. This phenomenological datum itself, I believe, can be fruitfully explored, described, and investigated by the related disciplines of psychology, literature, and philosophy.

In Ideas I (1913), Husserl stresses the principle of “reflection.” Unlike Descartes, however, he then insists that thought can reflect
on objects within the immanent field of temporal awareness although consciousness cannot grasp the ego itself. The “object,” *noema*, or meaning immediately and absolutely present within consciousness, whether immanently or “transcendently” intended, is always in principle open to phenomenological insight after the bracketing procedure has been performed. Nevertheless, although the ego can reflectively focus on its intentional experiences, it cannot reflexively capture itself; consequently, the subject and the object can never coalesce, unify (so Hume in the section of personal identity in the *Treatise*). It follows that no matter how deeply or how well we accomplish the phenomenological reduction,

> We shall never stumble across the pure Ego as an experience among others within the [temporal] flux of manifold experiences which survives as transcendental residuum … The Ego appears to be permanently, even necessarily, there, and this permanence is obviously not that of a stolid unshifting experience, of a “fixed idea.” On the contrary, it belongs to every experience that comes and streams past, its “glance” goes “through” every actual *cogito* [act] and towards the object. This visual ray changes with every *cogito*, shooting forth afresh with each new one as it comes, and disappearing with it. But the Ego remains self-identical. In principle, at any rate, every cogitation [act structure] can change, can come and go … But in contrast, the pure Ego appears to be necessary in principle, and as that which remains absolutely self-identical in all real and possible changes of experience, it can in no sense be reckoned *as a real part or phase of the experiences themselves*.4

In any case, the concession that the ego is necessary, albeit not open to direct apprehension, nevertheless serves as a welcome shift in Husserl’s thought and actually marks an advance over his earlier skeptical theory of the self formulated in *Logische Untersuchungen*. In other words, in his prior work, as well as in the *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* (1905), Husserl pursues his phenomenological descriptions without implicating transcendental subjectivity, the pure ego. Thus, as just indicated, in *Ideas* §57, note
1, he affirms that previously he “took up on the question of the pure Ego a skeptical position which I have not been able to maintain as my studies progressed.” And, of course, *Ideas* affirms the existence of such an ego. However, as I have sought to suggest, although Husserl repeatedly invokes an act of “reflection” on consciousness itself (*Ideas*, pp. 10, 11, 87, 111, 150, 197, 199, 384), a careful reading shows that this is properly speaking a reflection, the ego itself always receding into the background as it scrutinizes its respective phenomena. Again, the ego cannot catch itself (*Ideas*, pp. 203, 214). Instead, it reflects on objects within its immanent field of attention, but it cannot reflexively—in the strong Cartesian sense of the term—apprehend or intuit itself.

Later, in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929), Husserl expresses a growing tendency toward a genuinely reflexive model of consciousness on more traditional lines.

*An absolute existent* is existent in the form, an intentional life—which, no matter what else it may be intrinsically conscious of, is, at the same time, consciousness of itself. Precisely for that reason … it [i.e., transcendental subjectivity] has at all times an essential ability to reflect [reflexively?] on itself … an essential ability to make itself thematic and produce judgments, and evidences, relating to itself. *Its essence includes the possibility of self-examination*—a self-examination that starts from vague meanings and, by a process of uncovering, goes back to the original self.\(^5\)

And, in the *Cartesian Meditations* (1931), where Husserl undertakes to present a full-blown monadology or egology, the ego is quite obviously given as an immediate and essential component of the *ego-cogito-cogitatum* structure. So here, finally, Husserl definitely summons the traditional rationalist-idealistic model of a reflexive consciousness while abandoning—or at least compromising—his previous paradigm of intentionality. Hence, in this later work, Husserl contends that the ego-pole is just as indubitably given as the object-pole through a process of self-constitution that can be recaptured in consciousness. In fact, in this thoroughly “idealistic” work, Husserl goes so far as to confess that transcendental subjectivity constitutes
the primary datum within human consciousness and furthermore that it is the direct result of the bracketing procedure:

The epoché can also be said to be the radical and universal method by which I apprehend myself purely: as Ego.\(^6\)

Again:

If I keep purely what comes into view—for me, the one who is meditating—by virtue of my free epoché with respect to the being of the experienced world, the momentous fact is that I, with my life, remain untouched in my existential status, regardless of whether or not the world exists and regardless of what my eventual decision concerning its being or non-being might be.\(^7\)

It is my guess that Husserl became progressively thrust toward “transcendental idealism” because of an underlying commitment to what I have termed, in previous publications, the “simplicity argument.” The simplicity argument, very briefly, contends that ideas and states of consciousness are physically unextended, materially nonspatial, and hence immaterial. It follows, since ideas are the sole ingredients of the mind after the reduction has been effected and physical, transcendent reality has been expunged from consciousness, that the mind itself must be immaterial, unextended, “simple.” But a further consequence of this line of argument is that if ideas and minds are immaterial—and yet directly given to consciousness—then the entire physical, material, “compound” realm, the “external world,” can be doubted or suspended because it cannot, in principle, be present immediately to consciousness, since the latter is bodily whereas the former is not (Descartes, Husserl).\(^8\) It is in this spirit of progressively turning inwardly, toward an immanentization of consciousness, that we repeat Husserl’s dictum:

Whether convenient or inconvenient, and even though (because of no matter what prejudices) it may sound monstrous to me [the Cartesian “I am’] is the primal matter-of-fact to which I must hold fast, which I as a philosopher, must not disregard for a single instant. For children in philosophy, this may be
the dark corner haunted by the specters of solipsism … The true philosopher, instead of running away, will prefer to fill the dark corner with light.9

Whereas Descartes initiates the epistemological turn by positing the reflexive certitude of the cogito, Kant instead seeks to establish a transcendental revolution by investigating the indirect conditions of human experience. Husserl, on the other hand, envisions a phenomenological turn. Dissatisfied with Kant’s hypothetical and “psychological” method, as exemplified in the first edition “subjective deduction” (Critique of Pure Reason, A xvii; Ideas, p. 166), Husserl endeavors to describe “the things themselves,” including the meaning endowing acts, the “things” as they are immanently given to consciousness. In pursuing his task, Husserl came to realize that the objects-intended, the noema, were themselves “transcendentally” grounded in noetic acts, immediate a priori structures of synthetic unity. In order to intuitively grasp the noema in their essential completeness, in their evidential fullness, it became imperative to “recede” toward the constitutive, noetic acts that endowed those very meanings with their significances. Finally, it was apparent that the “radiating intentional acts,” the Leibnizian, monadic rays of awareness, had to emanate from some (identical, unitary) source. It merely remained to “uncover” the ego’s hidden existence and christen monadic consciousness as the absolute center of origin. In this respect, Husserl truly returned to a Cartesian principle, but one which also incorporated a Kantian model while recognizing the latter’s limitation. Thus with Descartes, Husserl stressed immediacy; in contrast, in the company of Kant, he dwelt on the complicated structures of consciousness.

Husserl (as Hegel before him) was fond of characterizing the “realistic,” “objective” attitude of both ordinary and scientific consciousness as naive. These attitudes of the mind toward “reality” merely assume that objects exist independently of minds and that material things are what they appear to be, unproblematically. But as Husserl’s theories and methods underwent increasingly sophisticated modifications, he came to elaborate an essentially three-fold structure in consciousness consisting of an ego-cogito-cogitatum (self-activities of self-meanings for the self) constitutive structure, albeit one that
is immediately secured. This irreducible structure of consciousness is eminently suited to serve as a phenomenological pattern for all human existence as well as for cognitive meaning. The self exists alone; it actively struggles to escape its enforced, monadic, solipsistic isolation; it lives in moods of loneliness (Heidegger), feelings of despair, abandonment, forlornness (Sartre); it seeks to bring the alien other into its own sphere of owness by endowing it with a meaning for itself as subject (Hegel). It is the task of phenomenological psychology to explore this solitary—albeit infinitely rich—field of investigation, and it is the duty of the phenomenologist to enlist the aid of those novelists and psychologists who have already commenced and greatly advanced the labor.\textsuperscript{10}

Further, since loneliness constitutes a “transcendental” structure of human existence, loneliness manifests itself in consciousness as an immediately present, directly given a priori synthetic structure, which conditions the very possibility of our being human. In this context, it may be remembered that Kant formerly had declared that “though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience” (\textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, A 1 = B 1). According to Kant, certain a priori synthetic concepts lie at the origin of experience and function as conditions for the very possibility of \textit{temporal} awareness. Kant’s categories, however, in their restricted “pure” sphere of activity, cannot themselves be experienced; they cannot, in principle, be directly given to consciousness. Rather, they can only be indirectly “deduced,” justified as necessary presuppositions without which human experience itself could not (possibly) occur. Although Husserl, like Kant, affirms the existence of a priori synthetic “relations,” or structures, for Husserl these constitutive unities can be directly “seen” and hence phenomenologically described, since they are given as immediate presences to consciousness. For instance, in \textit{Logische Untersuchungen}, Husserl contends that the essential bond between color and extension; sound, pitch, timbre, and intensity; etc. are all a priori synthetic “unities.” Furthermore, there is a “material” a priori synthetic—in this respect, Husserl goes beyond Kant, who had confined his theory to a formal a priori synthetic—that is \textit{objectively} constitutive of the \textit{noema} themselves. In other words, it can be shown that the very natures of color and extension signal
mutually implicative, universal, and necessary relations, which are neither contingent nor “subjective” (in the narrow, personal sense) but instead given within the phenomena themselves and open to intuitive insight.\textsuperscript{11}

Fruitfully combining Kant’s insight regarding the temporal nature of consciousness with his own discovery of a material a priori, Husserl affirms that the temporal structure of consciousness is constituted by an a priori synthetic order of retention, presentation, and protention. Beyond Husserl, the crucial existential relations exhibited between Sartrean temporality, on the one hand, and the in-itself (being) and for-itself (consciousness)—which, on the other hand, are also described as a priori synthetic unities in precisely the same sense as color and shape, or sound and timbre—each constitute, respectively, a unity (\textit{Being and Nothingness}, Conclusion). And I agree with this entire line of conceptual development, which strives to connect essences and existences and moves from idealism to phenomenology and existentialism. In addition, I would go on to argue that loneliness is likewise an a priori synthetic pattern in which the monadic ego may be seen to posit the existence—possible or actual—of an other, a different, an alien consciousness in antithetic, but nevertheless essential, relation to its own existence. This is what I mean when I say that loneliness serves as the primary transcendental ground of human existence (cf. Husserl, \textit{Krisis}, §54b).

The dynamics through which the other is meaningfully created within consciousness is grounded in the freedom of consciousness, the capacity which the mind has of transcending the moment of restrictive immediacy and thereby exploding past the walls of an instantaneous solipsism. Both the idealist and the phenomenological traditions maintain the existence of such a force immanent to consciousness. Thus, according to Kant, the faculty of the understanding is productively spontaneous (A 50 = B 74), since the mind has the ability of producing thoughts (or at least the pure structure of thought) from its own internal resources (A 51 = B 75). In fact, the mind generates relations; it thinks relations into our conscious experiences. The same model of relational productivity appears in Fichte’s conception of the ego freely positing itself as well as an opposing nonego immanently within awareness and, of course, in relation to itself. The power of
free creation in the German idealists at times sounds absolute. Thus, as Hegel comments, man alone has the capacity for insanity because he alone can “freely” (i.e., arbitrarily) will any and every content from the realm of (his) abstract consciousness (Philosophy of mind, §408, note). Thus does willing become wishing and wishing in turn become reality for me, the formerly empty subject of consciousness. (Dostoyevsky, in Notes from Underground, insists that man is even free to deny that two times two is four.)

Husserl’s pure ego exhibits a freedom, a spontaneity, an activity as it theetically posits a sphere of “immediate relations,” (i.e., constituted synthetic unities. Husserl even refers to these syntheses as “creative beginnings” (Ideas, p. 122). And later Sartre, of course, also subscribes to a radical notion of freedom, one which posits existential relations, meanings for the individual. In all of these paradigms of consciousness, there is an obvious appeal to an absolute freedom of awareness, a transcendence that intrinsically seeks to escape beyond its reflexively centered limits. Thus, the monadic, at first unrelated, point of consciousness strives to negate its restricted, empty unity by positing an other in relation to itself, an other which may be either a spatial object or an alien locus of consciousness. Needless to say, the latter entity is more capable of assuring the ego of its own existence through a mutual reflection (mirroring) of the relation, a reciprocal recognition of two egos supporting each other. Man alone, from the beginning sparks of his consciousness, struggles through the freedom of awareness to create something other than himself, an other existent to which he can relate in order to avoid the overwhelming sense of absolute aloneness.

Commentators and Hegelian scholars justifiably have been impressed by Hegel’s phenomenological description of the Master-Slave relation in the Phenomenology of Mind because it provides such a powerful account of the precise beginning of social and political consciousness in man. It may be remembered that whereas Descartes had claimed that the lonely ego can immediately only know itself, through a reflexive act of the cogito, an act of thought which perfectly unifies the knower and the known, the subject of thought with the object of cognition, Kant, by contrast, contended that phenomenal, internal self-consciousness is mutually conditioned by the awareness
of empirical objects.12 Challenging both Descartes and Kant, Hegel puts forth a description—not a discursive proof or a causal analysis—of how self-consciousness is structured, conditioned, or “constituted” by the presence of other consciousnesses. This, as Hegel conceives it, actually occurs through immediate, reciprocal acts of the self and the other. Consequently, without the consciousness of the other, the alien ego, there can be no awareness of the self. All this is “given” directly, within the sphere of the mind, and, hence, can be investigated phenomenologically.

As I suggested above, some extremely insightful interpretations have been displayed concerning what many take to be the key section of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, and I believe that we, in turn, can use these analyses to shed light on the phenomenon of human loneliness. Thus, for example, Alexander Kojève gives a brilliant phenomenological and Marxist (and atheistic) exegesis of the Master-Slave passage, portraying it as the primal pattern for understanding all of human history. According to Kojève, “universal history, the history of the interaction between men and of their interaction with Nature, is the history of the interaction between warlike Masters and working Slaves.”13 More specifically, the moving principle of all human history consists in a dialectical conflict of desires between the master and the slave, each desiring to appropriate the free, self-conscious desire of the other: “human history is the history of desired Desires” (Kojève, p. 6).

In analogous fashion, Jean-Paul Sartre has exploited the Master-Slave paradigm of self-consciousness in order to describe interpersonal relations. Quite significantly, Sartre “sees” these connections as the effort of one free consciousness to dominate the alien consciousness or to turn the awareness of the other into a petrified object, into an unfree thing or being. Hence, as Sartre presents it, I attempt to rob the other of his freedom by denying it, and he reciprocates by threatening my self-consciousness. Sartre graphically illustrates this struggle by means of an example: I am peeking through a keyhole, surreptitiously watching an other being; my gaze has transformed him into an object of contemplation, an unfree being, unconscious of my presence whereas I am conscious of him; accordingly, I manipulate the situation. Suddenly, I am myself discovered by someone behind
me. My freedom vanishes the moment I have been transformed into an object—a voyeur—by the dominant presence of the other. I am no longer in control of the situation; I am no longer master of it, or free. The other, rather, has changed me into a shameful, despicable thing—the sort of man who peers through keyholes (*Being and Nothingness*, Part 3, Chapter 4, “The Look”). In what follows, I shall employ a similar approach in expounding Hegel's Master-Slave relation, but the thesis I shall be concerned to establish is that it can be interpreted as advancing a description of the ultimate and fundamental loneliness of each human being.

As Hegel expresses it, “self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that, and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness”; that is to say, it is only by being acknowledged or “recognized” that self-consciousness exists. Consciousness “in itself” exists abstractly, universally, immediately, intuitively, directly; in this respect, it is comparable, I believe, to Freud’s concept of the “oceanic feeling,” to consciousness prior to the distinction between the inner self and the external world. On the other hand, self-consciousness exists “for itself” (i.e., for a subject) concretely, mediately, indirectly, relationally, and determinately, but only insofar as, and to the extent that, it is reflected by the presence of the alien other—say, at first, the mother. Consequently, in order to exist as a particular self-consciousness, the consciousness of the infant must be “recognized” by the alter ego, the mother. The child’s demands, its desires for gratification, force themselves upon the parent until the mother either acquiesces to them or rebels with hostility against them. Originally, one’s desires must be continually acknowledged, recognized as one’s own, or else the very being, the very existence, of one’s proper consciousness will first be thwarted, then threatened, and finally extinguished. Self-consciousness, therefore, as Hegel informs us, is a “double-meaning.” It means that I know myself and that I am known by an other; it means that the other must exist as a structure of my existence. (Hegel is not agreeing with the behaviorists that I “know” myself in the same way as others know me, or that the access to myself is in principle an external, publicly observable matter. Rather he retains the Cartesian-Kantian model of genuine reflexivity as a legitimate moment of development.) This other consciousness
is posited and recognized as distinct from mine, and I am distinct from it; although I seek to maintain the separation by the moment of negativity, nevertheless, without the other, my own identity would vanish or be meaningless, without significance for me. I need the other to recognize me, I require him to affirm my being; otherwise, I would not exist as I desire. And yet, if the other ego were to dominate me, then I would again be annihilated, or, more properly, I would become a mere object, within the consciousness of the alien ego and therefore no longer an autonomous self. So I strive to cancel the freedom and the power of the other. But I must be careful, because if I am completely successful—and I am the sole survivor of the universe—I will have annihilated or absolutely negated myself, for then there would be no one to recognize me and my narcissistic desires. Hence, a paradox is engendered; I must maintain myself as an individual, and I must do so by conducting a Hobbesian “war of all against all,” or more specifically, a conflict between myself and everyone else. Accordingly, Hegel realizes, as Hobbes never did, that if my struggle is perfectly successful, then in the process, I shall have negated myself, for there would be no one left to acknowledge my human existence. Consequently, through the double meaning of self-consciousness, I must preserve a “spiritual unity in its duplication” (p. 229). Quite obviously, Hegel’s remarks here are directed against Kant’s solipsistic “desert island epistemology,” since for Hegel I can only exist as a spontaneous source of desires insofar as the other has genuine being within my sphere of consciousness. Thus, my desires, in turn, need to be, and indeed must be, admitted by another consciousness in order for the desires themselves to exist significantly. Inanimate objects cannot recognize my desires and wants (nor can they ultimately fulfill my human needs; food, for instance, can merely satiate my animal requirements, not my human ones).

I thetically posit the existence of the alter ego as a necessary condition for my own existence, for my subjectivity (i.e., self-consciousness means consciousness for a subject). But at the same time, I try to control the power of the other by restricting his freedom. This aggressive dynamism found in all human intercourse, of course, constitutes the ubiquitous source of interpersonal problems between
any two egos. Whenever the delicate balance between the ego’s demands on the other self or the other’s demands on the ego become too unequal, then neurotic anxiety manifests itself. By the same token, the integrated unity of the self cannot expand too much at the expense of the other without threatening a dispersion and loss of its own boundaries. Accordingly, “healthy” ego-identity can occur only within the context of a “gently,” or supportively, reinforcing other. The other ego, reciprocally, cannot constantly capitulate to the first ego’s wishes and fantasies without endangering the reality of its own self. If from the ensuing conflict an extremely unequal victory should prevail, then quite likely the entire intra-personal structure would suffer, disintegrate, and, finally, disappear through death.17

Hegel points out that this dialectical “process of self-consciousness in relation to another self-consciousness has … been represented as the action of one alone” (p. 230), as indeed it had in the theories of Descartes, Leibniz, and Kant. Hegel at once proceeds to correct this interpretation, but yet he admits that initially both (a) the self and (b) “the other is likewise independent, shut up within itself, and there is nothing in it which is not there through itself.” In other words, the two selves do indeed exhibit a distinct, separate, solipsistic existence. But—and this is crucial—they are not conscious of it as such. Rather, through the active, free, spontaneous character of consciousness, each strives to transcend, to explode beyond the bounds of his respective field of consciousness toward the consciousness of the other in order to affirm himself by relating to an existence beyond his own individual, hermitic, insular, and self-contained ego. Thus, each one is (1) alone and (2) free. One is free precisely because one is alone, completely isolated in that each initially exists (unconsciously) unrelated to any other conscious being, material entity, or value. And yet the mind frantically seeks to escape its monadic prison of solitude by means, at first at least, of an unconscious desire for relation to “something,” an other, which will lend it relative stability, permanence. (Being generates Nothing as Something.) Further, relation with the other ego (Heidegger’s Mitsein) can only be satisfied if the other is constituted as a reciprocating agency, a reflecting, reverberating, mirroring, recognizing agent (the light of the other as a communicative reflection back toward the originary self). Thus, loneliness is alienation,
estrangement (i.e., unrelatedness). Freedom, on the other hand, although structurally conditioned by aloneness, is manifested as a groping transcendence beyond the reality of isolation; it is an outward reaching toward (momentary) relatedness. When, and if, this outward seizure is temporarily accomplished—and it is never successfully achieved for long—the unity of self-consciousness is effected; and this becomes an integrated or reflexive unity, one that carries the “alien” other back within self-consciousness without destroying the other’s subjectivity, without turning him into an inhuman lifeless object, a thing. However, if this outward grasping movement toward the other meets with repeated frustration or denial, then quite likely psychosis will develop, and the self will be engulfed in unrelated aloneness and a sense of disintegrative, futile freedom, experiencing desires without objective counterparts. Or, as in primarily catatonic or autistic states, it consistently will refuse to struggle for relation with an independent other.

The Hegelian conflict between human, conscious forces is an immediate conflict and therefore an immanent one; it occurs within consciousness, or rather the meaning occurs within consciousness even though the actual battle may be represented as an external, physical one between two men. In short, it is essentially an internal and conceptual antagonism. Thus, Hegel advocates that the fight “is found in consciousness,” since it “is self-consciousness which breaks itself up into the extremes” (p. 230); more specifically, self-consciousness splits into a Fichtean opposition between the ego and an internal alien or alter ego. This, of course, for Hegel, is not to deny that there are physical others, or bodily selves, but rather to stress that the other exists primarily as a conceptual meaning for the self. In any case, the struggle is not for the body of the other—except insofar as that signifies the conquest over his mind (Kojève intimates that the capture of an army’s banner signifies a victory over the opponent’s consciousness, at least in a symbolic sense)—but instead the conflict seeks to subdue the consciousness of the other, the desires of the other (Kojève).

Consciousness finds that it immediately is and is not another consciousness, as also that this other is for itself only when it cancels itself as existing for itself, and has self-existence only
in the self-existence of the other. Each is the mediating term to the other, through which each [directly and immediately] mediates and unites itself with itself; and each is to itself and to the other an immediate self-existing reality, which, at the same time, exists thus for itself only through this [self-]mediation. They recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another.

This pure conception of recognition, of duplication of self-consciousness within its unity, we must now consider in the way its process appears for self-consciousness. It will in the first place, present the aspect of the disparity of the two [into ego and other-ego], or the break up of the [mediating] middle term [i.e., consciousness] into the extremes, which, qua extremes, are opposed to one another, and of which one is merely recognized, while the other only recognizes. (p. 231)

At “first”—logically, psychologically, genetically, temporally—the self is (a) simple, (b) objective, and (c) an absolute existence (pp. 231, 234); it just is, and it is everything because consciousness and being are identical. The other, by contrast, is reached by the transcending mechanism (force) of free negativity (p. 231); negation intrinsically generates otherness, difference, determinateness (Plato’s *Sophist*; Spinoza’s *Ethics*). The other, as a meaning, is generated; he is meaningfully created or endowed by me and for me, the subject. He exists only insofar as I exist and posit him. But he becomes constituted in my sphere of awareness as (a) relational (i.e., related to me); (b) subjective (i.e., internalized within my consciousness); and (c) a dependent existence. Now Hegel’s strategy is to turn this opposition of (1) empty self-independence (the narcissistic ego) and (2) concrete dependence of the other on my consciousness into (c) a mutually supportive inter-dependence, an inter-subjectivity (i.e., a social—as distinguished from an individual—reality).

At the level of mere life, mere animality, this shared recognition between two selves can never occur. (Leibniz: animals perceive or are conscious; but only man can apperceive; he alone is self-conscious). So, two free individuals who have encountered each other both resolve to fight, to endanger their own lives, and to risk
death in an attempt to capture the consciousness—not the life—of the other, to turn the other into a slave. Thus, the meaning of real conscious existence for any two combatants implies that existence is meaningless unless I can subdue the consciousness of the other to such an extent that I am assured he will recognize me but that I will remain free to limit his being (i.e., not fully recognize him as equal) (p. 232). If this moment, stage, or level of interaction is victoriously achieved without one side of the relation completely exterminating the other, then the relation of master and slave is secured, and social mind has dialectically progressed from the category of empty self-consciousness to concrete self-consciousness. In fact, the moment of “personal identity” has been reached. Thus, for Hegel, a “Person” (p. 233) is, or means, an a priori synthetic social category, a concept of spiritual mind, whereas for Kant, it signifies an a priori synthetic moral category of restricted, subjective mind. Consequently, Hegel formulates a social ethic, whereas Kant advocates an individualistic morality of the self judging its worth in relation to the abstract, formal—and thus, for Hegel, empty—categorical imperative. Both of the idealistic conceptions of the two German philosophers are to be contrasted with Locke’s and Hume’s view, in which moral or personal identity is a contingent feature of being human, an accidental trait of “human nature.” In this fashion, Hegel moves methodically from consciousness to life and then to the desires of the ego, desires which can only be satisfied if they are recognized outwardly by the consciousness of the other. This is necessary because by its very nature, a desire is for something other than itself; no desire merely desires itself; this would lead to immobility and death. Thus, desire desires that the other acknowledge it as a desire that demands satisfaction. Differently put, the desire strives to command as master. In this respect, desire is transcendent, spontaneous, and intentional in its outwardly directed thrust.

In an obvious sense, of course, Hegel indicates that the master has successfully survived the frightening conflict whereas the slave has not. But in a subtler and deeper way—and this is what Marx admired about the analysis—Hegel proceeds to show that the master has nowhere to go, since he is what he desired to be, whereas the slave can and does resume his fight for freedom, a fight which will eventually
be successful. Now, without judging the ultimate outcome, it does seem quite clear that the conflict will continue. (I myself would reject—as Freud did—Marx’s and Kojève’s optimistic conclusion that there will be a final revolution, which will destroy once and for all the conditions of alienation in man.) Thus, as far as I can see, the important consideration remains that the conflict is necessary and eternal (i.e., it is an a priori synthetic structure or condition of being human). It continues, however, not so much as a struggle for dominance over an other as a fear of succumbing to loneliness. In this respect, we all sense it through our frequent feelings of “desolation,” “abandonment,” “forlornness,” “anxiety,” “dread,” “loneliness,” “isolation,” “estrangement,” “alienation,” “aloneness,” and “solitude.” Loneliness can neither be eliminated nor long avoided, but it can be understood. We conclude, then, that although it is true for Hegel that self-consciousness is mutually conditioned by the presence of other consciousnesses, that the social structure is an interdependent one, nevertheless, since this dual recognition exists within a framework of combat, it follows, once again, that the ego is forced to regard himself as alone and lonely. And despite the fact that some commentators on Hegel would insist that Hegel’s Master-Slave analysis successfully avoids ontological and epistemological monadic pluralism (Leibniz), still it seems quite clear that what he has described is a psychological solipsism or egoism in which the self is every bit as isolated as in Hobbes.

2 J. Howard, *The Flesh-Colored Cage*, p. 3.
3 Again, in Descartes, of course, the *cogito* can intuitively apprehend itself and there is a perfect unity and identity of the self as object of thought with the self as the initiator of that activity; it is a perfect fusion of the known and the knower. Subject and object thus become one when the mind thinks itself. Unfortunately, in Descartes, this remains a “pure,” empty, merely formal truth, since it is completely devoid of content.
4 Husserl, *Ideas*, trans. W. R. B. Gibson (Collier, 1962), p. 156, italics his. Clearly, in the above passage, Husserl’s pure ego is no less of a presupposition than (1) Kant’s transcendental unity of apperception, in the first edition “subjective deduction” of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (A 107), or, for that matter, even (2) Leibniz’s principle of the unity and simplicity of monadic consciousness, posited in the opening sections of *The Monadology*. 1


7 *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 25; see also p. 66 (§31): “The ego grasps himself not only as a flowing life, but also as 1, who live this and that subjective process, who live through this and that cogito, as the same.” Elsewhere Husserl eulogizes the ego as “the wonder of wonders” (*Husserliana*, V, 75).

8 Husserl’s clearest enunciation of the principle that ideas are not physical, material, that they are not given in objective space, is given in *Ideas*, §49; *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, §57b and *Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man*, in *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy* (Harper and Row, 1965), p. 160.

9 *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, p. 237. Cf. *The Paris Lectures*, trans. and ed. by P. Koestenbaum (Nijhoff, 1964): “The ego is lonely. Notwithstanding his rejection of solipsism, Husserl confesses, in his *Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften*, that the transcendental Ego, which he is, is unremittingly lonesome” (p. LIV; and pp. 4, 10–12, 31–32, 34–35, 38, 39); *Cartesian Meditations*, pp. 3, 30; see *Krisis*, §54b. It is interesting to note that by virtue of the bracketing procedure, Husserl is readily able to exclude the external world from “existence.” Now although Sartre rejects the reductive device, nevertheless by appealing to his own principle of negativity he can exclude objects from consciousness in general. Thus, borrowing Husserl’s model of the intentionality of awareness, it follows for Sartre that consciousness is essentially aware of its own nothingness, i.e., it is “antithetically”—although necessarily—related to the world, and hence the individual is condemned to loneliness as well as freedom.

10 In his famous *Encyclopedia Britannica* article, “Phenomenology,” Husserl himself defined phenomenology as an “a priori psychological discipline.”


12 In Descartes, the existence of “other minds” can only be inferred; it cannot be intuitively apprehended. Thus, “I judge, I infer” that the pedestrians are men and not robots, but I can never know this, since it is only a dubitable inference (Second Meditation). In Kant, the other is a phenomenal unity achieved through a set of judgments.


16 J. Loewenberg, *Hegel’s Phenomenology: Dialogues on the Life of Mind* (Open Court, 1965), p. 85. The rift between the self and the other eventually leads to
the “schizophrenic” or Unhappy Consciousness. Once more, these attitudes of consciousness toward reality are a priori synthetic structures of self-awareness.

17 Novels which vividly depict the disintegrative effects of violent loneliness are Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Arthur Machen’s *The Hill of Dreams*, Herman Hesse’s *Steppenwolf*, and William Golding’s *Pincher Martin*. Again, a medical and psychosomatic approach to the disastrous and often fatal consequences of loneliness is presented in James Lynch’s *The Broken Heart*. 
CHAPTER SEVEN
LONELINESS AND THE POSSIBILITY
OF A PRIVATE LANGUAGE*

The basic motivational and emotional drive (as opposed to the physiological needs for air, water, food, and sleep) in man is constituted by a perpetual but futile attempt to escape his aloneness, his extreme sense of isolation, and to seek companionship with other consciousnesses or at least to achieve a benign forgetfulness from his hermitic condition. It the course of advancing my thesis, I have defended the Cartesian principle of the reflexivity of consciousness and a Leibnizian, monadic theory of awareness while yet seeking to establish a more sophisticated paradigm of apprehension not unlike that provided by Kant’s unity of consciousness—the empirical analogue of the transcendental unity of apperception (i.e., reflexive self-consciousness). In pursuit of my study, I discovered that psychologists, who agree with my point of view in stressing a fear of enforced solitude, correspondingly were led, as I was, to adopt a similar model of the mind as an enclosed entity, one which nevertheless admits the reality of a restricted form of communication with other, different selves. Thus, for example, psychologists of loneliness—such as Erich Fromm (Escape from Freedom; The Art of Loving; Man for Himself); Clark Moustakas (Loneliness); and R. D. Laing (The Divided Self; Self and Others)—all posit a subjectivist, mentalist, and reflexive doctrine of consciousness. Similarly, James Howard, who formulates the most comprehensive and systematic study of loneliness yet, in The Flesh-Colored Cage, contends that man is intrinsically, essentially imprisoned within himself. This conclusion, I am convinced, is unquestionably valid. The problem, however, is that Howard himself betrays a crucial confusion as to whether this entrapment is constituted by the individual’s proper body or by the activities and contents of the conscious subject’s mind. Thus, Howard
refers to the cage that is constituted by our “separate skins” (pp. x, xiii, 3). And he declares,

No matter how closely we make a contact with another person, we do not occupy a single skin, share a nervous system, or achieve identity in [bodily] structure, function, or [physiological] sensation. (p. x)

Each of us exists within his unique epidermal envelope as a separate thing. No other person can enter that envelope, nor can any of us escape from it. We were born in that enclosure, exist within it, and will wear it as our funeral shroud. (p. 3; italic mine)

Howard’s difficulty in advocating this paradigm of “bodily loneliness” is that it is as philosophically unsound to argue that psychological solitude is constituted by “bodily isolation” as it had been formerly theoretically implausible for philosophers to argue that the criterion of personal identity could be established simply by an appeal to bodily identity. But, competing—unconsciously—with the above paradigm of a physiologic, materialistic analysis of loneliness in Howard’s fascinating study is a quite different and indeed conflicting, even contradictory, model of aloneness. The second, and quite opposed, interpretation of human existence offers the reader the opportunity to understand the feeling of isolation by invoking a pattern of consciousness drawn along lines indicated in sympathy with the Cartesian reflexive ego or the Leibnizian self-conscious monad. Consequently, according to Howard, we are cut off from others by our respective “internally experienced sensations” (p. 4) as well as by a personal “internal language” (p.5):

Each of us experiences [mental] sensations privately … In our separate cages, each of us builds a personal and unique intramural language that is fully understood only within that single cage. We have no real mutuality with others of our species or of any other species. We can speak to ourselves, express ourselves, delight ourselves, and delude ourselves—in our own internal language. When we seek to share that
language with another person, we discover that we can only partially communicate it. Our private speech suffers a loss in translation when it is put into the private language of another. (p. 4)

Now, the problem with “accounting for,” “understanding” (not causally explaining) loneliness, by enlisting this second model of a “subjectivity of consciousness”—an archetype which I do share with Howard—is that it depends on the genuine existence of private, personal, perfectly individual, and idiosyncratic internal “spheres” of essentially unique cognition. But the objection is that this purported state of affairs “within consciousness” has already been ably and convincingly criticized by certain philosophers, most notably Wittgenstein and Ryle. However, if Wittgenstein and Ryle are right (which they are not), then it would follow that no one can be lonely in the sense we usually intend to say, “I am alone; I feel lonely.” For, if one is unable to “experience one’s inner and temporal thoughts” privately, one is thereby excluded from experiencing himself as alone. If my sensations, feelings, experiences, and language are—in principle—always and necessarily public, then how can I ever conceivably think of myself as alone? It is as if I were to refer to Central Park in New York as “my park alone.” (In a sense, on the subjectivist interpretation, it is mine alone; it exhibits meanings and feelings that are unique to me.) That, perhaps, would be all right only up to the point that I should try to enforce my claim over the park legally or physically. What real sense could we conceivably make of the meanings of such terms as “aloneness,” “isolation,” “solitude,” “loneliness,” “abandonment,” “forlornness,” or “despair” if, indeed, Wittgenstein and Ryle are correct?

But are Wittgenstein and Ryle right? If I “tell myself” I am alone, am I really to think that aloneness is a meaningful word only insofar as I presuppose a public context and that if I were “really” alone in a room, or in the universe, I would have to wait in order to check my experience with someone else who is there, an obviously self-contradictory requirement? Or that I could never know I was alone when I was alone because I could not have a common language in which I could utter or express my feelings (Philosophical Investigations, §§258–265)? I certainly do not wish to argue in behalf
of solipsism. Nevertheless, it seems sufficiently clear to me that I know when I am alone and when I am not communicating with another self-consciousness.

Wittgenstein and Ryle employ a *reductio ad absurdum* argument, conceptually grounded in behaviorist principles, in order to refute the proponents of the privacy of sensation and language theory. But actually, their condemnation entails a rejection of the reflexive character of thought, held by many psychologists and philosophers to be truly attributable to the mind—a paradigm of consciousness classically postulated by Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, Bradley, Collingwood, H. D. Lewis, and many others. On this latter account, I know I am alone because I can think about my own thoughts and feelings as well as about objects that are intended, meant, to exist “independently” of me. Admittedly, this reflexive, self-conscious model of the mind is perhaps an assumption (although I shall argue in a moment that it is not). But, contrary to Wittgenstein’s and Ryle’s claims, it is no less of a presupposition that all our sensations, feelings, meanings, and experiences are produced from without and can only be recognized through external means and within essentially public contexts and a shared language.

Still, there is at least one powerful demonstration against the behaviorist thesis defended by Wittgenstein and Ryle. The *reductio ad absurdum* of their physicalist dogma is that one cannot possibly distinguish one’s own sensations, feelings, thoughts, or experiences from those of others. For if—as Wittgenstein and Ryle contend—all sensations and feelings are inherently public, because they are all reduced to objectively determined, linguistically shared “meanings,” then no feeling or impression uniquely belongs to me; rather, every and each sensation must be mutually experienced by myself along with others. But if this is the actual situation, how can I ever distinguish (veridically) between myself and you? Is it not instead that, as Kant suggests,

> It must be possible for the “I think” to accompany all my representations, for otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be thought at all, and that is equivalent to saying that the representation would be impossible, or at least would be nothing to me … Only in so
far, therefore, as I can unite a manifold of given representations in one consciousness, is it possible for me to represent to myself the identity of the consciousness throughout these representations … In other words, only in so far as I can grasp the manifold of the representations in one consciousness, do I call them one and all mine. For otherwise I should have as many-coloured and diverse a self as I have representations of which I am conscious to myself. (Critique of Pure Reason, B 131–134)

If the state of affairs which Wittgenstein and Ryle have depicted were to obtain, then not only would it be impossible to differentiate my realm of sensations from yours but, far worse, “me” and “you” would disintegrate into an unconscious, amorphous chaos of “sensibility.” As Kant intimates above, the “self” would evaporate into such radical disunities and discontinuities that consciousness itself would be impossible. It seems to me, therefore, that Kant is right; further, the subjectivist “philosophy of mind” pattern invoked by the few psychologists of loneliness, such as Erich Fromm, Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, and James Howard, is correct; and finally, that it makes sense for someone to be reflexively aware of his solitude and to express his feelings apart from, and without direct or indirect reference to, the existence of others.

Ryle objects that the Cartesian myth of “the ghost in the machine” necessarily entails that “Absolute solitude is on this showing the ineluctable destiny of the soul” (p. 15). Now, although this may seem like a bizarre conclusion to Ryle, I myself am persuaded, that it makes considerably more sense, instead, to concur with a growing number of philosophers, novelists, and even psychologists, in the tradition of Western thought, who testify amply in behalf of the Cartesian principle in their numerous writings. Since it is certainly part of Ryle’s counter-claim that we dwell in absolute and inescapable “togetherness,” that “we” are never, and cannot possibly be, alone in principle (for how could we ever express it if no one is there to correct our language?), then this view of Ryle’s strikes me as patently false. Presumably Ryle would contend that Robinson Crusoe could not have kept a diary, since he could only record events in it that were, ex hypothesi, intrinsically personal and subjective. But I
have read *Robinson Crusoe* , and it was not a meaningless chronicle; and, further, I can readily imagine that the “real” Robinson Crusoe, Alexander Selkirk, could have composed a diary.

In opposition to the subjectivist, individualist interpretation of the mind that I have undertaken to defend in the above, many “scientifically”-oriented psychologists and sociologists would agree instead, I take it, with a Wittgensteinian account of reality in which loneliness is regarded as an environmentally and socially conditioned phenomenon, one that is acquired or learned rather than being innate to human consciousness. Thus, for example, Wittgenstein adopts a position (at least in the *Tractatus* period) reminiscent to that of Aristotle, which posits a correspondence, a “reflection” between language and reality, the latter including social relations (“language reflects reality”). A proposition is true, then, if it corresponds to, or correctly “describes,” an external state of affairs or their complex. But the use of language itself, on this analysis, is a learned response. As such, the “meanings” we use and develop are learned through societal intercourse and interaction. It follows, according to the behaviorists, that the “meaning” of loneliness, as well as its application to the self, is an acquired mode of language-behavior that is conditioned, taught, and transmitted within a social context. As one learns to use the term “isolation” by seeing it employed by others, so one discovers how to apply it to oneself, to refer it to oneself. Loneliness, then, is a “reality” that can only come after social training and the learning of a language.

Now, the ultimate principle behind the Wittgensteinian and naively scientific sociological model of “mental” phenomena is actually grounded in the theoretical premise that language—along with the remainder of the social environment in general—precedes consciousness, that consciousness is merely an “epiphenomenon” of the truly and substantially real, the language-activity. It is precisely this behavioral assumption, I believe, which requires challenging by inverting the model itself. In other words, I wish to claim that consciousness precedes language. 4 This certainly seems to have been the conception of Bergson. For him, consciousness—at unique times, or on certain privileged occasions—permits an immediate grasp, an intuition, of itself as a perfect unity of awareness and being. In
this sense, intuition becomes being. Language, by contrast, distorts, dissects, analyzes, and fragments reality; words and concepts vivisect and dismember being because language is a mere tool of the discursive intellect. Husserl’s opinion strongly resembles Bergson’s. Consequently, according to the famous phenomenologist, all language is mediate, indirectly referential, since it refers to objects by means of signs or noises that are not themselves the reality intended. But intuition, as opposed to language, is cognitively different in principle.

“Seeing” [i.e., phenomenological and eidetic intuition] does not lend itself to demonstration or deduction. It is patently absurd to try to explain possibilities … by drawing logical [and linguistic] conclusions from non-intuitive [mediate] knowledge. Even if I could be wholly certain that there are transcendent [external] worlds, even if I accept the whole content of the sciences [and language] of a natural [naively scientific] sort, even then I cannot borrow from them. I must never fancy that by relying on transcendent presuppositions and scientific [and linguistic] inferences I can arrive where I want to go in the Critique of cognition—namely, to assess the possibility of a transcendent objectivity of cognition.5

Thus, for Husserl, phenomena directly, immanently present to consciousness precede language and can be “intuitively seen” independently of linguistic analysis. Language, then, is secondary and derivative whereas consciousness is original and primary.

Do we have any empirical confirmation that man can possibly think and be conscious without language and words? I think we do, but admittedly it is not much. Nevertheless, perhaps it is sufficient. Again, the evidence derives from the polar expedition conducted by Byrd in 1934. After less than a month and a half of living in utter isolation at an arctic base, the explorer recorded the following words in his diary entry of May 11:

I find … that absence of conversation makes it harder for me to think in words. Sometimes while walking, I talk to myself and listen to the words, but they sound hollow and unfamiliar. Today, for instance, I was thinking of the extra-ordinary effect
of the lack of diversions upon my existence; but describing it is beyond my power. I could feel the difference between this life and a normal life; I could see the difference in my mind’s eye, but I couldn’t satisfactorily express the subtleties in words. That may be because I have already come to live more deeply within myself; what I feel needs no further definition, since the senses are intuitive and exact.6

I am convinced, therefore, that it is quite proper to conclude that man feels himself to be alone, that he is conscious of his isolation before he learns to express this fact in language. Consequently, the structure of self-contained subjectivity and the unity of a personal, identical consciousness may actually be the most basic, phenomenologically given datum of human existence. It is in this sense that I claim each of us is alone. With Augustine and Husserl, we can instruct each of us to “Look within and see!”

*An earlier version of this chapter, under the same title, appeared in the Journal of Thought (January, 1977).

1 See my discussions: “Hume and Shaftesbury on the Self,” Philosophical Quarterly (October, 1971); The Achilles of Rationalist Arguments, Chapter IV, “Personal Identity in the 17th and 18th Centuries”; and “Locke and Leibniz on Personal Identity,” Southern Journal of Philosophy (Summer, 1975). Although both Hobbes and Locke were accused of the “Mortalist Heresy” probably Richard Overton is a better candidate.

2 It would seem that, for Howard, a “private language,” which parallels what Ryle terms the dogma of “a privileged access to one’s own mind,” is a direct implication of the (alleged) fact that our body is our own. Now, apart from the theoretical difficulty, not to say impossibility, of proving the uniqueness of bodily identity, it seems manifestly clear that most, if not all, major thinkers after the seventeenth century (including Descartes, Leibniz, Berkeley, Hume, Kant, Bergson, the “middle” Husserl, etc.), who accept the genuineness of subjective states of consciousness, never argue that enclosed subjectivity follows as a corollary from bodily individuation. Indeed, in Descartes, for instance, the two propositions (“my body is my own” and “my mind is my own”) are so blatantly antithetical (the Sixth Meditation and The Passions of the Soul notwithstanding) that rather the Initiator of the Epistemological Turn posits the reality of a perfectly private, internal realm of apprehension, which exists distinctly and separately from the body.

During a private conversation with James Howard, he expressed the view that his skin barrier was intended as a metaphor, an analogy, and that
he conceived of it “in the same way that I would consider the reflections caught by a mirror, but certainly not the object reflected” (July 8, 1977). Presumably, the object reflected is physical but the image is not. I think this is an appealing and interesting analogy, but still the difficulty remains. For both the mirror and the image reflected, although either may be interpreted as “qualitatively” different from the “external” things they copy or picture, nevertheless remain themselves irreducibly two-dimensional, spatially extended, physical substances. But the problem is, Are the contents or presences given to consciousness material or not?


3 L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, I, §§243–265. Thus, Wittgenstein criticizes such claims as “Only I can (immediately, directly) know I am in pain; you can never know it; you can only (dubitably) infer it.” I follow D. M. Armstrong in interpreting Wittgenstein as a behaviorist.

4 A.J. Ayer has attacked Wittgenstein’s view, regarding the possibility of a private language, in an article, “Can There Be a Private Language?” (reprinted in *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations*, ed. G. Pitcher [Anchor, 1966], pp. 251–266), whereas Rush Rhees and John Cook have defended Wittgenstein on this issue in their papers published in the same collection of critical essays. In any case, my own disagreement with Wittgenstein will be along quite different lines than those indicated by Ayer. See also: G. Ryle, *The Concept of the Mind* (Barnes and Noble, 1949), pp. 25, 60–61, 83, 115, 155, 162, 167–168, 205, 232. Hence, according to Ryle, as far as the mind is concerned, “there are just things and events” (p. 249); this view is behaviorism pure and simple.

5 A number of philosophers who are vehemently opposed to behaviorism and/or materialism have nevertheless maintained the view that language and consciousness are identical, or at least interdependent: that one cannot think without language. This, for example, seems to have been the position of Hegel, and, in a qualified sense, of Ernst Cassirer. But I am suggesting something rather different. I am rejecting the thesis (a) that language precedes self-consciousness; as well as (b) that thought and language are structurally identical; and instead I am claiming (c) that consciousness precedes language, that consciousness can exist without language or words.

Parenthetically, it is interesting to note that certain novelists who emphasize a pervasive theme of loneliness in their writings are persuaded that loneliness can be felt apart from language. Thus, for instance, Jack London, who forcefully dwells on his own isolation throughout his romanticized autobiography, *Martin Eden*, clearly stresses the concept of animal loneliness in *The Call of the Wild* and, especially, *White Fang*.

The Paris Lectures, trans. P. Koestenbaum (Nijhoff, 1964), and see pp. xii-xiii, xlviii; and Cartesian Meditations, p. 71; cf. Philosophy as Rigorous Science in Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy, pp. 95–96.

7 R. Byrd, Alone, pp. 95-96, italics mine. Perhaps it is significant that the author himself admits that he could not write his book until four years after the incidents described. Eventually, then, he later put into words what he had felt and seen and the loneliness he had experienced. And Christopher Burney, after surviving for eighteen months in a German prison, delayed writing his experiences until he was able to sharpen his language tools by social use. Only then could he describe the events that had transpired, in his novel Solitary Confinement, although quite clearly he was self-consciously aware of what was happening to him while it was in the process of occurring. I would, therefore, conclude that language and consciousness are independent and that we may be conscious without the direct or mediate operation of language taking place.
In the preceding chapters, I have argued, on various psychological, metaphysical, and phenomenological grounds, that man is intrinsically alone and lonely. And, further, I have contended that man’s essential estrangement from the society of his fellows, from God, and even from himself is conditioned by the immanent structures of monadic self-consciousness. A paradigm of human existence diametrically opposed to my view is advocated by R. D. Laing. According to Laing, the extreme emphasis on the principle of subjectivity is not only false but even dangerous, since it leads to a distorted notion of reality. Rather, Laing insists that man exists—ideally, at least—as an entity integrated with and among his surroundings. In what follows, I intend to demonstrate that Laing’s “existential” or Heideggerian model is paradoxical and vitiated by internal inconsistencies. Secondly, I wish to intimate that insofar as the discipline of literature is dependent upon immediate, direct, and intuitive descriptions, it may be characterized as providing “phenomenological” insights regarding human existence. And since, without exception, poets and novelists, who dwell upon the loneliness of man, are committed to positing a radically mental subjectivity, I shall venture to claim that loneliness cannot be “understood,” or “grasped from within,” apart from a subjective, and indeed idealist, orientation. In this respect, Laing’s theory—via Heideggerian constructs—equally fails to make sense of man’s hermitic, insular existence as does the reductionist doctrine of behaviorism. Finally, I would suggest—although admittedly it is not a “proof,” nevertheless it does indicate strong circumstantial evidence—that “existential” authors are far more prone to consider the individual as antagonistically related to his environment. Thus, in opposition to Laing, who maintains that man exists as being-in-the-world, my thesis is that each unique human consciousness transpires in separation from its fellows and the world.
In Laing’s influential study, *The Divided Self*, he suggests that both the schizoid personality and the schizophrenic tend to split reality into (1) a Cartesian subject-object dualism, a dichotomy between an internal, immaterial mind and an external, physical body and world; and (2) an opposition between the self, the ego, and “other minds” or selves. In analogous fashion, according to Laing, psychologists and psychiatrists—and this is particularly unfortunate—conceive the personality as exhibiting a fundamental opposition between mind and matter, the self and the “other.” In this regard, the patient and the therapist alike stumble into the same error of separating the individual man from his contextual reality. In the case of the sufferer, this structural severance rapidly encourages the disturbing distortions he experiences, and, in the instance of the diagnostician, it results in his inability to overcome and thereby cope successfully with his subject’s conflicts, since he is unwittingly reinforcing the exact dual schema that is splintering the self.

The words of the current technical vocabulary either refer to man in isolation from the other and the world, that is as an entity not *essentially* “in relation” to the other and in a world, or they refer to falsely substantialized aspects of this isolated entity. Such words are: mind and body, psyche and soma, psychological and physical, personality, the self, the organism. All of these terms are abstracta. Instead of the original bond of I and You [Martin Buber], we take a single man in isolation and conceptualize his various aspects into “the ego,” “the superego,” and “the id.” The other becomes either an internal or external object or a fusion of both. How can we speak in any way adequately of the relationship between me and you in terms of the interaction of one mental apparatus with another? How, even, can one say what it means to hide something from oneself or to deceive oneself in terms of barriers between one part of a mental apparatus and another? This difficulty faces not only classical Freudian metapsychology but equally any theory that begins with man or a part of man abstracted from his relation with the other in his world … Thus, existentially, the concretum is seen as man’s existence, his being-in-the-world. Unless we begin with the concept of man in relation
to other men and from the beginning “in” a world, and unless we realize that man does not exist without “his” world nor can his world exist without him, we are condemned to start our study of schizoid and schizophrenic people with a verbal and conceptual splitting that matches the splitup of the totality of the schizoid being-in-the-world. Moreover, the secondary verbal and conceptual task of reintegrating the various bits and pieces will parallel the despairing efforts of the schizophrenic to put his disintegrated self and world together again. In short, we have an already shattered Humpty Dumpty who cannot be put back together again by any number of hyphenated or compound words: Psycho-physical, psycho-somatic, psycho-biological, psycho-pathological, psycho-social, etc., etc.¹

In contrast to the prevailing metaphysical and metapsychological bifurcation, criticized in the above passage, Laing rather wishes to summon a Heideggerian model of human reality, one wherein man exists as being-in-the-world, through his own body and amid objects, both of which are regarded as ontological extensions of “his” being. Thus, Dasein’s presence in the world reveals itself through moods and work, it achieves expression through tools and the ready-at-hand; etc. Similarly man exists with others-in-the-world (Mitsein). And, hence, only if we can manage initially to avoid the false dichotomization, or fragmentation, of man into the opposing poles of subjectivity and objectivity will we be able to escape sundering human-being into distinct “realities.” Ironically, and indeed tragically enough, then, as Laing emphasizes, when the psychologist methodologically and systematically approaches man in this disunifying fashion, he unconsciously abets precisely the false and distorting paradigm of the self that the schizoid and the schizophrenic have adopted in order to interpret reality to themselves. Instead, the psychologist should regard man as an existence among others, immersed, surrounded, within and by a human field of reciprocating concern; man is with others through care and involvement. As physical objects within a gravitational field manifest different forces and attractions according to their distribution, so man is drawn and repelled by the actual presences that structure his particular field of care. Thus, Laing cautions that unless the psychologist views human-being under the
guise of a comprehensive and integrated model, he will have assumed a wrong and distorted construct of man, a basic false premise, which will prevent any possible understanding of the disordered personality.

Correspondingly, on the patient’s side, according to Laing, “ontologically insecure persons”

Do not seem to have a sense of that basic [Heideggerian] unity which can abide through the most intense conflicts with oneself, but seem rather to have come to experience themselves as primarily split into a mind and a body. Usually they feel most closely identified with the “mind.” (p. 65)

Thus, an insecure individual (usually) manifests a propensity to conceive of himself solely as a disembodied ego. Sometimes, much less frequently, the schizophrenic completely identifies his self with his body. But in either instance, whether he chooses the former extreme or the corresponding one of bodily equation, he only manages to tear asunder the basic and healthy fabric of ontological integration between himself and his world. Severe anxiety is the inevitable consequence of either of these diametrically opposed self-interpretations—the ego as mind alone, the self as body alone. In Laing’s doctrine, then, for instance, to see one’s self as “a pure subject, without any objective [i.e., physical] existence” (p. 95), constitutes a fundamental example of a false and dangerous self system, one which inexorably leads to gross disorientation. For

If man is not two-dimensional, having a two-dimensional identity established by a conjunction of identity-for-others, and identity-for-oneself, if he does not exist objectively as well as subjectively, but has only a subjective identity, an identity-for-himself, he cannot be real. (p. 95)

Isolation, aloneness, anxiety, neurosis, and insanity consequently are inevitably encouraged by the schema of Cartesian ontological dualism, which, in the case of the mental, unavoidably contracts inwardly, resulting in deepening and severe feelings of desperate loneliness. On the other hand, togetherness, companionship, security, stability, and sanity are enhanced by maintaining an integrated outlook
toward reality, where *Dasein* is constituted as a being-in-the-world, as a unity with objective being as well as with, amidst, the being of the other. In this sense, we may say that Descartes represents loneliness, disintegration, and madness whereas Heidegger symbolizes “being with,” integration, and sanity.²

Now, there are at least two major objections to be made concerning Laing’s innovative paradigm of “integrated being-in-the-world” as it is provided by his “existential study in sanity and madness” (the subtitle of his book). The first criticism is that Laing’s own therapeutic model of sanity (the “existential,” Heideggerian one) is vitiated by inconsistency because Laing himself appeals to two competing and conflicting descriptions of man, both of which are paradoxically posited as true. Hence, Laing presents man as both (1) a being-in-the-world and (2) a being separate and distinct from the world and from others, a lonely, estranged being. And yet these are obviously incompatible phenomenological descriptions—really, opposed principles—of man’s situation within the context of a discussion concerning human reality.

Below, I shall draw on Laing’s conflicting notion of the isolated being of man (2). I ask the reader later to compare this second theory with the foregoing quotations from Laing’s study, which delineate a quite different conception of man-in-the-world. Thus Laing refers to “the discovery that we are irredeemably alone … and know that within the territory of ourselves there can be only our footprints.”³ And, indeed, Laing goes so far as to describe man’s isolation as a “genuine privacy” (p. 37). In the case of the schizophrenic, however, this sense of abandonment is intensified to such an extent that he is forced “to recognize all the time his distinctiveness and differentness, his separateness and loneliness and despair” (p. 38). Presumably, then, the retreat into an extreme form of mental isolation is a primary characteristic of schizoid personalities and schizophrenics, whereas the saner attitude of regarding oneself as a being-in-the-world testifies to the presence of an integrated, wholesome, adjusted existence.⁴ Nevertheless, Laing has just admitted that we are, individually, “irredeemably alone.”

In Laing’s doctrine, the schizoid not only feels abandoned and alone but also desperately struggles to relate himself to others
while yet, at the same time, battling against being absorbed into the consciousness, or the existence, of the other. The schizoid, as Laing describes him, feels that his self is a “vacuum,” an “emptiness” (we would say a Sartrean nothingness). Therefore, he desires to belong to something greater than himself, to be related to a being more permanent or stable than himself. For the more centers of reference, “points” of consciousness, or mirrors there are in his mental universe, the better he is able to determine his own existence in connection with, in relation to, those “forces” of existence (Leibniz). This endeavor to reach others produces an intense feeling of anxiety and even despair, a feeling which is itself ultimately structured by his poignant sense of aloneness. Driven further into a self-awareness of loneliness, alienation, and estrangement, the ego seeks unity “outside” himself. But by the same token, if he surrenders himself too completely to the other, he risks a loss of his own identity through engulfment by the other.

He knew of no half-way stage between radical isolation in self-absorption or complete absorption into all there was. He was afraid of being absorbed into Nature, engulfed by her, with irrevocable loss of his self; yet what he most dreaded, that he most longed for. (p. 91)\(^5\)

Thus, as Laing sees it, consciousness is a nothingness; being is a plenum (pp. 31, 91, 142). But what Laing fails to recognize is that this is a Sartrean and not a Heideggerian construct; consequently, it stands in blatant conflict with his own more positive analysis. Laing’s problem, then, is that he naively assumes the two models can be “synthesized” by an appeal to the overarching Heideggerian model of *Dasein*. But this simply will not do, for this is not to mediate the opposition but rather to deny the distinction between the Cartesian and the Heideggerian view, a difference which is powerful precisely because it offers a real choice between two opposed and irreconcilable paradigms.\(^6\)

The self, as Laing admits and indeed stresses in certain passages, is absolutely free either to create comforting internal fantasies or to seek to relate itself to other external conscious and/or material
beings in general. Through the former activity, it (continually) risks the danger of losing itself.

The self, as long as it is “uncommitted to the objective element,” is free to dream and imagine anything. Without reference to the objective element it can be all things to itself—it has unconditioned freedom, power, creativity. But its freedom and its omnipotence are exercised in a vacuum and its creativity is only the capacity to produce phantoms. (p. 89)

Accordingly, Laing concludes,

Now although the self has an attitude of freedom and omnipotence, its refusal to commit itself to “the objective element” [eventually the Heideggerian structure of being-in-the-world] renders it impotent: it has no freedom in “reality.” (p. 89)

I agree that the self is free, radically, spontaneously free; indeed, it is the very essence of consciousness to be an “existent nothingness” that strives to explode beyond its unified, restricted emptiness through its sheer force of transcendent activity. But I would disagree with Laing (and Hegel, whom Laing does not mention in this connection) that this freedom of consciousness is compromised unless the “objective element” is affirmed. Instead, I would venture to speculate that man is free only insofar as he realizes his real condition of existential aloneness and that it is in this context of absolute isolation and freedom that he must learn to master both his opportunities for survival and his meager chances for happiness. In this respect, man is absolutely free to create and refashion, in terms of relations and meanings, both his internal and his external worlds. Once again, I am convinced that the self is free precisely because it is alone; it exists in ultimate independence, unrelatedness (i.e., isolation) from any other being, conscious or concrete, or eternal realm of meaning (e.g., God or a moral world order).

Strangely enough, Laing himself indicates that this is the actual state of affairs in certain key passages in his study. This admission,
however, as previously stated, quite radically compromises Laing’s initial construct of the “integrated self.”

The capacity to experience oneself as autonomous means that one has really come to realize that one is a separate person from everyone else. No matter how deeply I am committed in joy or suffering to someone else, he is not me, and I am not him. However lonely or sad one may be, one can exist alone … [In] the last resort I cannot die another person’s death for him, nor can he die my death. For that matter, as Sartre comments … he cannot love for me or make my decisions, and I likewise cannot do this for him. In short, he cannot be me, and I cannot be him.

If the individual does not feel himself to be autonomous this means that he can experience neither separateness from, nor his relatedness to, the other in the usual way. A lack of sense of autonomy implies that one feels one’s being to be bound up in the other, or that the other is bound up in oneself, in a sense that transgresses the actual possibilities within the structure of human relatedness. (pp. 52–53)

With Sartre, I would agree that man is in reality condemned not only to freedom but to loneliness as well. And, indeed, as I have declared above, the reality of loneliness precedes and conditions—it makes possible, it “transcendently” grounds—the actuality of the freedom of consciousness. Consequently, man is free either to remain in monadic, solipsistic self-relation, enclosed within himself, or to reach out beyond himself toward relation with the other. But, theoretically and strictly reasoning, for Laing, the Sartrean analysis cannot be correct.

Let us conclude, then, that either (1) man is essentially, absolutely alone or (2) he exists as being-in-the-world, and, therefore, not alone. Laing wishes to have it both ways. But these are contradictory theoretical constructs. On my interpretation, man is completely alone; that is to say, his primary ontological condition consists in existing as a separate entity from his fellows. In turn, this structure can itself be described phenomenologically. In fact, Laing himself, at
times, insists that man’s consciousness—hermitic and insular—gives direct evidence (an eidetic intuition) of a Cartesian and Kantian unity; an identity (cf. Laing, pp. 44, 197); and even a continuity through time (p. 109). But, again, this model itself is fatal to his former, Heideggerian principle.

Beyond the unified, identical, and continuous nothingness of consciousness, man has the freedom, if he chooses, to reach past his unity, to transcend himself toward communication with other centers of awareness. Nevertheless, although he clearly possesses the freedom to strive for this goal, he just as surely is doomed never to succeed in his purpose (cf. Laing, pp. 91–92). Thus, try as he would—and we all, each of us separately, try with varying degrees of “success”—man remains alone. In this sense, it might be said that the Leibnizian monad and the naturalistic conception of man as a speck of atomic dust in a meaningless universe at least share the principle that each of us transpires through life alone and that communication is at best a momentary or comforting illusion.

What are the actual dynamics of selfhood? In psychogenetic terms, at first the “self” experiences a feeling of oneness with the entire universe, Freud’s “oceanic feeling” (cf. Laing, pp. 75, 110, 116). Next, the self begins to grope “outwardly.” At this second stage of development, the primary other becomes the mother. She encourages the amorphous consciousness of the infant to relate itself to her and, reciprocally, to forge an identity (a “sense of identity”), a recognition of its own self in opposition to her proper self. If the mother, for whatever reason, withdraws her recognition of the infant, the child’s very existence becomes threatened (p. 118). However, if, instead, a normal and positive relation between the two egos is established, the infant progressively learns to determine, to recognize, his own identity and unity in relation as well as in opposition to others. The child, hence, progresses from the initial stage of an undifferentiated unity of consciousness toward expressing, within his respective field of consciousness, a particular unity of self-awareness, a first-person consciousness. This “second,” more determinate and specific self can only be maintained through an aggressive counteraction maintained against others (Hegel’s Master-Slave conflict for acknowledgment). Finally, given the ultimate origin of consciousness, the self can never
overcome, or transcend, the primordial sense of aloneness, since it is grounded in the primitive, narcissistic illusion of self-sufficiency, the stage of the “oceanic feeling.”

From the preceding discussion follows our second criticism of Laing’s theory of the self. Laing’s doctrine of human existence is wrong precisely because the philosophy of mind advocated by the Cartesian (and Freudian) tradition, which is diametrically opposed to Laing’s view, is basically correct, and personal consciousness is (1) divided from a recalcitrant, inert realm of matter as well as (2) alien to other active consciousnesses. Accordingly, the Cartesian orientation posits the intrinsic isolation of individual consciousness as a direct implication of the “substantial” nature of the cogito, Leibnizian monad, Kantian transcendental unity of apperception, or Freudian ego. In this regard, the rationalist, and later idealist, tradition explicitly supported the following fundamental premises concerning a theory of individual human consciousness. Consciousness—or, more specifically, self-consciousness—is (1) a reflexive, immaterial (hence its aspect of “nothingness”), self-enclosed unity of subject and conceptual “object” and (2) a spontaneous, free activity, struggling to escape its confinement. The principle of the unity of awareness was first clearly and forcefully advocated by Plotinus, simply assumed afterward, and finally later successfully exploited by Descartes, Leibniz, and Kant. Secondly, it seems clear that consciousness exemplifies activity, an activity which manifests itself in either creating relational forms (Kant, The Critique of Pure Reason) or negations, “concrete conceptual distinctions” (Hegel, The Phenomenology of Mind, The Science of Logic; Sartre, Being and Nothingness). Kant designates this activity a “spontaneity” whereas Hegel calls it freedom. In both it means that thought is independent of matter and sensation. But, in Hegel for example, although consciousness is always free to negate any particular being, or even being in general, it is not able to deny itself; at the very least, it always remains implicitly self-conscious. And, in Sartre, consciousness is aware that it essentially exists as a “nothingness” in virtue of its power of negativity. Nevertheless, whether we stipulate a consciousness which is productive of relations, negations, or both, the important consideration remains that these dual functions are unified, or synthesized, by one consciousness and
hence only individual consciousnesses exist. And man is alone and lonely. In short, man is a divided self.

Subsequently, in *Self and Others*, although to be sure Laing explicitly continues to criticize the Cartesian dualism of mind and body, inner and outer, mental and physical, nevertheless he again inconsistently avows that insight into the mind of the other, the consciousness of the other, always remains in principle an inference, a mediate or discursive guess.

One person investigating the experience of another can be directly aware only of his own experience of the other. He cannot have direct awareness of the other’s experience of the “same” world. He cannot see through the other’s eyes and cannot hear through the other’s ears … All one “feels,” “senses,” “intuits,” etc. of the other entails inference from one’s own experience of the other to the other’s experience of one’s self. This presupposes that the other’s actions are in some way a function of the other’s experience, as I know mine to be. Only on the basis of this presupposition, however qualified it may be, can one hazard inferences about the other’s experience from one’s perspective of the other’s action.

Again:

From the standpoint of the reflexive awareness that is regarded as sane, one’s own body-for-self is essentially a private experience, and the body-for-self of the other is essentially inaccessible … [I]t is my impression that most people feel that there is an area of experience which is private in an unqualified sense … It is difficult to understand the self-being of the other. I cannot experience it directly. I must rely on the other’s actions and testimony to infer how he experiences himself.

Once more, all this merely serves to support a Cartesian metaphysics and metapsychology, one which maintains that I can only have direct access to my own mind while I am restricted in my approach to the mind of the other to inference (Descartes) or analogy (Berkeley). It follows, according to Descartes, that I can know that I
think; I am aware of my proper sphere of enclosed self-consciousness, of my own thoughts, for I grasp these immediately, directly, intuitively. But I can only infer, judge, and guess concerning your thoughts and feelings. Thus, as Descartes inquires in the *Meditations*, “How do I know that the men passing by, wearing hats and coats, are not robots; how can I be certain that they are animated by a mind like my own?” And his response is that he can never know it; he can only infer or judge it. This, I submit, is the ultimate formulation of the principle of metaphysical loneliness.

In an interesting paper entitled “The Art of Loneliness,” which was published in *The Ohio Review* (Spring, 1977), Thomas Parkinson discusses a selection of literary figures, numbering among them Rilke, Joyce, Pound, Proust, Eliot, Yeats, Shelley, Matthew Arnold, William Carlos Williams, and Alan Ginsberg. Parkinson initiates his remarks with a key observation.

> Loneliness begins with the recognition of one’s singularity—the fact that a deep communication of that self and recognition by others of its legitimacy is not fully possible … The sense of being a voice in the void—speaking in a vacuum—is unsettling and disturbing. (p. 6)

As poets and novelists have explored reality more deeply, they have discovered the frightening solitude of “the buried genuine self” (Parkinson, p. 6), “the true self” (p. 9), the loneliness of the self’s “existential dark night” (p. 10). This, in turn, has resulted in the realization that, as Matthew Arnold once put it, “we mortal millions live alone” and consequently an Age of Panic has descended upon our souls. I think it is impossible, and indeed quite false, to dismiss the foregoing literary insights. Rather it seems obvious to me that they constitute a vereditically intuitive—or existential—sounding of the true depths of the human soul; they are poetic tendencies that have plunged inwardly toward the very abyss of the being of man. But if this is so, then to propose, as I take it Laing would have it, that the poets and novelists of our time are merely “ontologically insecure persons” (whatever the artistic merit of their metaphors might be) appears to be an unfortunate perversion of their collective testimony regarding our unique and separate human reality. Art, no less than
philosophy, has the right to pronounce on the actuality of man’s existence, and the verdict of art declares that man is lonely exactly because his consciousness, his proper sphere of self-awareness, is separate and distinct from the realm of the other, whether that other be a conscious entity or universal material being, Sartre’s blobby, viscous, nauseating, undulating realm of Being, de trop existing without rational explanation or moral justification.

In another and more comprehensively penetrating study of existential loneliness, *The Seventh Solitude*, Ralph Harper discusses metaphysical homelessness in the writings of Pascal, Kierkegaard, Stendahl, Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche, Proust, and Kafka. As Harper sees it, “There are two sources of solitude and its agony: being cut off from other men and being cut off from God.” For some philosophers, this has constituted a sufficient reason for creating God (see also my *Psychiatry* article). For if God exists, “Man, therefore, cannot be utterly lonely” (p. 3; cf. pp. 72, 77). Harper goes on to relate the awareness of loneliness to the existentialist theme of man as thrown into a meaningless and empty (i.e., arbitrarily related) universe. Without absolute relation or significance, man feels lost and abandoned and yearns for relation to a significant other, whether that other be a reciprocally recognizing consciousness or an abstract invention like Comte’s Humanity or Augustine’s God. And like myself, Harper is convinced that there is a fundamental connection between loneliness and boredom (Ibsen, Proust, Bernanos), indeed, that solitude in its less intense form manifests itself as what we all experience as ennui. In turn, this state of consciousness seems to depend on our reflexive awareness of the “nothingness” of consciousness (Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*). Thus, aware of our own nothingness, we confront a meaningless, impassive universe that cares not whether we exist or not, a realm of material being that offers neither guidance nor solace.

Obviously, the catalog of important works depicting the human predicament of loneliness is endless. For example, we could start somewhat arbitrarily with Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* and go on to cite countless others, including George Eliot (*Silas Marner*); Bronte (*Wuthering Heights*); Dostoyevsky (*Crime and Punishment, Brothers Karamazov, The Idiot*); Hardy (*The Return of the Native, Jude the
Obscure, The Mayor of Casterbridge, Tess of the Durbervilles); Melville (Moby Dick); Dickens (David Copperfield); Jack London (Martin Eden); Thomas Wolfe (Look Homeward, Angel, Of Time and the River, You Can’t Go Home Again, The Hills Beyond); Hesse (Steppenwolf, Demian); Conrad (Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim, Victory, The Nigger of the Narcissus, The End of the Tether, An Outcast of the Islands, Nostromo); Maugham (Of Human Bondage); Mann (Doctor Faustus, Death in Venice); Kafka (The Trial, The Castle, The Hunger Artist, Metamorphosis); Joyce (Ulysses); Machen (The Hill of Dreams); Proust (Swann’s Way); Hemingway (The Sun also Rises, The Old Man and the Sea); Fitzgerald (The Great Gatsby); Steinbeck (Of Mice and Men); Golding (Lord of the Flies, Free Fall, Pincher Martin); Sartre (No Exit); etc., etc.19 All of these works are dedicated to expressing the theme of enforced human solitude, and none of them, as far as I am aware, appeals to a Langian or Heideggerian principle of man as being-in-the-world. Although I grant that a negative proposition cannot be used to support a positive conclusion, still there seems to be some basis for conjecturing that if man is genuinely a being-in-and-of-the-world, then he cannot really be lonely. But that is not only contrary to fact but even to Laing’s own statements.

1 R.D. Laing, The Divided Self (Pelican, 1973), pp. 19–20. All page references will be to this edition. The allusion to Humpty Dumpty recalls the common criticism to Cartesian dualism, namely, that once mind and matter are sundered in principle—what is distinct in conception can exist in ontological separation—we are incapable of reuniting the two substances together again. Independent existence is the traditional distinguishing characteristic of substance in philosophy; hence if the mind can exist in separation from the body, it follows that it is a substance.

2 I have offered Laing’s theory at some length in these quotations because I believe they rather fully capture his positive position via his “existentialist,” or, more properly, Heideggerian sympathies.

3 Laing, ibid., p. 37. The remark concerning the solitary footprints seems to be a literary allusion to Robinson Crusoe, who—in his isolated existence—could only expect to discover his own traces on the desolate island. In the “territory of ourselves,” in our own proper mental realm, the other can never—in principle—tread, although in the physical sphere of material being he is, at different times, either a welcome or a threatening trespasser.
4 Oddly enough, Laing himself cites Kierkegaard as an author who understood “lonely despair,” as a writer who succeeded in describing despair as an existential category of human-being (in opposition to Hegel’s a priori categories of absolute, rational reality). In this context, however, I would point out that the Danish philosopher is much closer to adequately portraying the true condition of man, which is a solitary one, than is Heidegger, and Laing betrays his own therapeutic model when he summons the subjectivist orientation of Kierkegaard. Cf. J. Thompson, *The Lonely Labyrinth*, pp. 12, 15, 43, 45–49, 50, 64–65, 82, 95, 161–162, 173–174, 194.

5 Cf. Laing, ibid., pp. 140, 186.

6 The desire to incorporate the other as unchanged into one’s own consciousness is considered an impossible, and hence irrational, impulse by Sartre. He christens it the Jonah complex, in *Being and Nothingness*. Similarly, in James Howard’s *The Flesh-Colored Cage*, as we have previously emphasized, the author offers two basic strategies in man’s futile attempt to escape loneliness, According to Howard, we either strive to incorporate, or engulf, the other within our selves; or we endeavor to decapsulate, to externalize the self toward a fusion with the other. Howard is convinced that both methods are doomed to failure.

7 Again, see Hegel, *The Philosophy of Mind*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford, 1971), pp. 128 ff. Through freedom, the empty, abstract self has unconditional power to will anything and everything. In this “attitude of consciousness,” the self may be described as insane. The self creates its own self-awareness via material objects when it defines its being either through its own body or the mediation of material “possessions” or activities. “Personal identity” for it then becomes what it “owns”: its goods, property; or its job, social status, reputation; etc.

8 Death is the ultimate fear of loneliness, for some, since each of us, separately and alone, realizes that the world will continue without us after we die; we realize that each of us is unnecessary, inessential to either the being or the welfare of others. And this, of course, makes us feel singularly alone. On the other hand, for some, death is the final release from loneliness, the last extinction of that stubborn monadic dot of consciousness before it is swallowed by darkness (Socrates’s and Santayana’s “dreamless night”).

9 Laing, p. 26. According to Sartre, the consciousness of the individual is entirely isolated from the consciousness of the other; see *Transcendence of the Ego*, pp. 39–40; see also *Being and Nothingness*, p. 299.

10 Consult Chapters 5 and 6 for a more detailed analysis.

11 Consciousness always retains the power of absolute negation, or negative freedom, in the sense that it can deny the “reality” of anything and everything. Through fantasy, “madness,” rationalization, denial, projection, etc., we, each of us, can create and reorder our respective universes and no “external” force can compel us to do otherwise, if we are resolved to deny “conventional reality” at any cost. On the other hand, our “positive” freedom is severely restricted, since it
depends on our ability to master the external world, to force it to conform to our will, to make others do what we will.

12 There is a fascinating description of the nothingness which threatens even the “ordinary,” or the “naive”—to resort again to a Hegelian and Husserlian adjective—attitude of consciousness in Streetwalker, a short essay composed by an anonymous prostitute: “this rootlessness of day as well as night, engendered by possessing only the contents of two suitcases and living as a self-contained unit within four impersonal and alien walls, is in itself an antidote to dwelling on how time is, was, and will be spent. For I am afraid to look clearly on the passing of my time. I fear to look forward, lest I perceive nothing. I shut my eyes to all but the most immediate realities, lest I find in today, too, nothing.” Reprinted in Man Alone, ed. E. and M. Josephson (Dell, 1962), p. 433; see also the editors’ introduction, pages 15–16, for an interesting discussion of Nietzsche’s and Jaspers’s conceptions of the void, of the nothingness which confronts modern man. Cf. J. Thompson, The Lonely Labyrinth, pp. 86, 104, 156, 158–160. The problem with Man Alone, which is in many respects an excellent anthology covering the field of alienation from Marx to James Baldwin, is that all its selections explain the estrangement of man as caused by external circumstances whereas, in truth, loneliness is grounded in transcendental or structural conditions within consciousness itself. The Husserlian epoché itself depends on the freedom to bracket, or negate, the external order.

13 It may bear repeating that the monadic, egological model of human existence is strongly endorsed by Kierkegaard and Husserl, both of whom represent dominant tendencies in the existential and phenomenological traditions, so it is hardly the case that Cartesianism and Kantianism are dead issues in either philosophy or psychology.

14 R.D. Laing, Self and Others (Pelican, 1975), p. 28. This study was published two years after The Divided Self.

15 Ibid. p. 35; see also pp. 26–27 and 174.


18 Consult ibid., especially pp. 12–13, 14, 20–21, 25, 26, 28, 102, 107, 116, 139–142, 144, 152. In both Hardy’s The Mayor of Casterbridge and Tess of the d’Urbervilles, the main characters request to be buried in an unmarked grave, thus punctuating their final judgment concerning a life spent in loneliness.

CONCLUSION

That man is alone is by now, I think, sufficiently clear. Why he is isolated, why he feels so lonely, may not be so certain. In this study, I have sought to discuss both of these issues, although I have, of course, regarded the second question as the more philosophically difficult one. In order to resolve it, I first elected to invoke a rather Kantian device: the transcendental argument. Given that man is lonely, I went on to inquire, What are the conditions, in terms of consciousness itself, which make the experience of loneliness possible and indeed universal and necessary (i.e., a priori)? What is consciousness like, what exactly must the structures of awareness be in order for human beings to be able to sense their own solitariness and to know the meaning of reflexive isolation? What are the transcendental factors (Kant’s “elements” and activities) conditioning the very possibility of loneliness? And now, without repeating my arguments, I wish to reaffirm that my prior contentions concerning the nothingness, transcendence (or freedom), reflexivity, and temporality of consciousness have formed the positive and vital part of my inquiries. Beyond these claims, I also want to emphasize that since the earliest stages of Western consciousness—the Hellenic myths and dramas, the dialogues of Plato, the treatises of Aristotle—the loneliness of the individual has continually found metaphysical and religious expression through prayer, art, reflection, and even fear, and we have each of us realized, as Conrad best said it, that loneliness prevails from the cradle to the grave.

Quite obviously, beginning with the seventeenth century and the advent of the Cartesian Revolution in thought, with its centripetal orientation, the intrinsic isolation of man gained increasing philosophic recognition. Accordingly, philosophically speaking, the absolute loneliness of man has been supported by various methods: the intuitive insights of Descartes and Bergson; the metaphysical a priori reason of Leibniz; the indirect transcendental doctrine of Kant;
the speculative reflections of Hegel; the empiricisms of Shaftesbury, Hume, and Burke; the phenomenological investigations of Husserl; and the existential affirmations of Pascal, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche (after all, what is the will to power but the desire to reach others), and Sartre. That the above various methods and interpretations have all conspired to establish an identical principle, I am convinced, forcefully lends welcome support to the undeniable fact that all men are—separately, monadically—lonely.

Loneliness—the philosophy of loneliness—is just now coming into its own as a serious and distinct field of concern, one which exhibits its own peculiar constellation of problems and answers. And what else touches man so vitally, so personally? What could be more crucial and hence philosophically relevant? What does it matter, for example, whether we formulate a “philosophy of death” if we have failed antecedently to grasp the significance of individual human life, of the existential uniqueness of aloneness?

Finally, I feel constrained to apologize for the rather depressing and distressing portrait delineated in the study. But allow me to finish by extending some hope. Although I sincerely believe each of us is sentenced to loneliness, it does not follow that human existence is not worthwhile. We can escape from morbidly contemplating our loneliness by the strategic maneuver of concentrated extro-reflection. We do not have to remain “within.” (As Descartes recommended, at most we should only radically philosophize once in life; or perhaps, emulating Hume, it is always open to us to emerge from our philosophical closets whenever speculative matters get too psychologically discomforting.) Personally, I believe the greatest antidote to poisonous isolation is true friendship; for me, at least, the fideistic consolation of religion, the shallow camaraderie of Marxist “solidarity,” or the illusion of participating in Comte’s general humanity are far too remote and abstract to afford me much comfort. But beside genuine and intimate friendship, there are other “devices,” including amusements, tasks, travel, sports, sex, scholarship, philanthropy, etc., falling under the genus of extro-reflective activities which successfully promote forgetfulness.

In the preceding, I suggested that the key to the door allowing us to escape our solitary confinement may be provided by Sartre’s radical
voluntarism. But I am also reminded of Leibniz’ conception that god chose this world from an infinite number of compossible universes. Just so, we are, each of us, like gods; our will is infinitely free to choose our own meanings and values in a meaningless universe.

It is often said that in the search for truth, we are all born either Platonists or Aristotelians (Coleridge). (Let it be noted in passing that Plato and Aristotle were firmly committed to the value of friendship.) But the search for truth is not so different from the quest for happiness, and Coleridge neglected to entertain the Sophistic position. For the Sophists, although there is no truth, still there is persuasion, albeit itself based on deception. Much—but certainly not everything—is fair in the pursuit of individual happiness and the flight from loneliness. And so we may all be permitted, and forgiven, if we indulge in some sophistry and self-deception against ourselves. According to the Peripatetics, it is truistically evident that all men seek happiness. But men are only content when they do not feel—or can forget—their loneliness. Admittedly, some ways of extro-reflectively transcending internal confinement are qualitatively preferable to others, but all ways have at one time or another during the history of man and culture promised some relief from that which man fears most: loneliness.
APPENDIX A

LONELINESS: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH*

Ben Mijuskovic

Psychological motivations, reasons why human nature is what it is, principles by which we may “explain,” understand, sympathize, or empathize with other human beings—and ourselves—what a variety of possible principles has been offered by philosophers and psychologists! All men seek happiness, announces Aristotle (Ethics). Just as all men delight in imitation (Poetics) and human beings universally take pleasure in knowing (Metaphysics), in that same sense it may be said that the arche of human conduct or action derives from the self-evident fact that all men desire to be happy. According to Hobbes, each human atom is motivated by self-interest, not to say selfishness, and every individual strives for his own “good” through power over others. Bentham, on the other hand, regards man as under the sovereign twin masters of pleasure and pain, whose dominion extends over the entirety of human conduct. Freud retraces the path of our problematic symptoms to a fund of repressed sexual and libidinal energy, whose fettered strivings result in overt neuroses. Adler employs a Schopenhauerian and Nietzschean “will to power” as a model for understanding a universal feeling of inferiority, whose ultimate origin is grounded in the inadequacy of the infant. And Jung cavalierly splits the human race into the extrovertish and the introvertish, the cosmopolitans and the islanders.

What I have chosen as my concern, in the foregoing, is not a rough survey of conceptions of human nature—whether man is good, bad, or indifferent; a rational creature or essentially a sentient one; whether man’s nature has “ever been the same” or whether “man makes himself,” creatively. Rather, I am interested in what “motivates” man; I am searching for a universal principle through which we may “understand” why man does what he does, why man
is what he is. Obviously, however, the commitment we make in
gard to a theory of human motivation will itself necessarily be
found to entail a corresponding view of human nature. Confronted
with this impressive variety of interpretations, I don’t know if I
am able to offer a comparable general principle, but I shall try. In
a word, that principle is loneliness. Thus, I wish to hold that once
man has satisfied his more obviously physiological and biological
drives and comfortably secured the necessities of air, water, and
food, he then strives to alleviate his desperate loneliness. It is not
so much, then, a fact—correcting Jung, for instance—that we are
to be dichotomized into extroverts and introverts, but rather that we
all begin by aspiring toward human communion and affection and
friendship but that, unfortunately, many of us fail; we who fail are
the frustrated extroverts, the retreating introverts; if we cannot enjoy
the company of others and command from them the recognition we
(abnormally) feel for ourselves, well, then we shall cultivate our own
company.

Consequently, in this study, I propose to discuss loneliness,
solitude, isolation (I regard these terms as synonymous, hence I
shall use them interchangeably) from a variety of perspectives. The
idea on which these different aspects converge, as lines toward a
center, however, remains essentially a meaning-nucleus, a noematic
center (Husserl)—or, to vary the paradigm a bit, what A. O. Lovejoy
referred to as a unit-idea. But in either case, although the concept of
solitude functions in a multiplicity of contexts, and for a variety of
purposes, the idea itself remains essentially the same.

I do not intend—and quite likely I am unable—to offer a
conceptual definition of loneliness, partly, I suppose, because it is a
feeling as well as a meaning. Like Hobbes, Hume, and Shaftesbury,
methodologically, I think that it is something that we can “observe”
if we gaze within ourselves. Just as the manifestations of physical
gravity are externally observable, so I would contend, loneliness, in
the psychological sphere, appears as a gentle force—but also an often
violent one—moving us internally. In what follows, consequently, I
shall treat loneliness as a psychological drive—one whose internality,
or “immanence,” is independent of physiological factors. Thus, we
obviously have a drive, an overwhelming desire or need, to breathe,
to drink, to eat, and to sleep. But my interest in the drive to avoid isolation stems from regarding it as a purely psychological one, not conditioned by environmental or physiological elements. Now this is not to deny that these external factors may be present; or important; or even necessary. I am certain that sensory deprivation experiments, for instance, could result in a mass of data that might parallel or correlate with our assumption and conclusions. Nevertheless, what shall guide our study is loneliness as a mental phenomenon, the self-conscious awareness of isolation, and the model of the self or ego, which I shall assume—as an unargued principle, premise, and paradigm—is basically similar to Descartes’ reflexive consciousness. I wish to put aside behaviorist approaches; I would not deny that, upon certain occasions, I have been the last to discover, for example, that I was lonely, just as I’m generally the last one to discover how stupid I’ve been. As Sartre suggests, I may be the last to discover my antisemitism or my cowardice until I see my “emotion” of fear trickling down my pant leg in a warm yellow stream (The Wall). We do not cry because we are sad, says William James; we are sad because we cry. But although this happens, and, if you must, occurs quite often, nevertheless I wish to insist that this sort of “positivistic” perspective is unintelligible unless it is grounded in a prior, more primordial model of self-consciousness: self-awareness of the meanings of, for example, bigotry, fear, sorrow, and loneliness. We may not always be able to articulate or communicate our feelings, but we must be able to feel our feelings as emotions; we must be self-consciously aware of experiencing an emotion as a meaningful experience. An electrochemical firing or an explosion in the brain and central nervous system is not “a hatred of Jews,” “a sense of panic,” a “recognition of loss,” or “an awareness of abandonment.”

As it will turn out, I shall contend that man is not only psychologically alone but metaphysically isolated as well. Now, in saying this I do not mean that we think or feel we are alone all the time and at every moment; I think we really are, but we are not always aware of it. This is important, for it implies that in my account of the affair, there is at least a meaningful and possible opposite to loneliness, and that is “togetherness” with an interest (when we are “extro-reflecting”); or pursuing a “cause”; or enjoying the proximity
of intimate friends. Thus, loneliness is in principle empirically verifiable because it does have a meaningful contradictory state. When I am with my close friend and we are enjoying each other’s companionship, I am (apparently) not alone.

In what ensues, therefore, I will maintain that whenever a genuine feeling of friendship is present, then loneliness is not present in consciousness, but it, nevertheless, serves as a “structural” (or “transcendental”) condition for the possibility of companionship. As Fichte suggests, the lone ego is posited (structurally) prior to the “other.”

One last remark before we begin. Since I do not believe man (psychologically) is always or necessarily alone (although he really is metaphysically), it follows that I am not particularly interested in cases of extreme withdrawal, those evidenced in catatonic, autistic, or depressive states. Extreme isolation, I am convinced, will lead to “insanity,” and it is quite likely that the sufferer may be nearer to some sort of metaphysical truth in this regard. Nevertheless, I am far more interested in the normal, average, more communicative, and, hence, more reflexive cases of solitude as opposed to those individuals who have totally slipped away into a removed psychosis, an insanity whose very structure, I suspect, is yet closer to reality. Therefore, I have no desire to attempt to describe these “lost souls,” even if it should promise certain insights. I do not have to inspect a flawless or a perfect diamond in order to learn something about diamonds; ordinary diamonds will do.

THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF LONELINESS IN WESTERN CONSCIOUSNESS

Is loneliness really ingrained in the conscious structure of Western man? Perhaps it is only a recent aberration, caused by our alienating (or estranging) technological and bureaucratic society. As such, one could argue, it is not an essential or necessary, universal structure of man’s awareness but merely an unfortunate—but curable—modern distortion. Thus, one might contend that if we were to reflect on the concerns of the early Greeks, we might rather wish to maintain that the presence of loneliness seems to be prominently absent in their literary and philosophic concerns. Hegel conceived of the Hellenic
consciousness as the happy consciousness, bathed in sunlight, openness, warmth, and an inclusive unity—as contrasted with the unhappy consciousness, first symbolized by the Old Testament awareness of man and later by the monastic, estranged consciousness of medieval man. Surely, in the gregarious spectacle of Athenian communal life, we nowhere discover the dark and gloomy specter of individual isolation. Loneliness may unconsciously haunt the obscure, labyrinthine recesses of Augustine’s search for God in the *Confessions*, but where do we read of it in the dialogues of Plato or the treatises of Aristotle? Nevertheless, we might recall, in this context, that Plato’s entire literary life was dedicated to perpetuating, from early manhood until old age, the memory of a friend who had died while Plato was still only a young man. *Timaeus* and *Laws* notwithstanding, the bulk of Plato’s literary production served as merely the external means for maintaining an internal, conscious memory. Plato, who may never have committed his deepest beliefs to writing (*The Seventh Letter*), nevertheless clearly believed that at least the flowing conversational structure of his dramas was the best means of keeping and perpetuating the reminiscences of his spiritual master as if he were still alive. (Indeed, the Greeks believed a man was immortal so long as his friends remembered him.) We may remember also that, for Plato, a condition for our progressing toward truth, beauty, and goodness is that we first become friends; otherwise our conversation will be for naught. Friends share things in common; for Plato this usually translates into a common commitment and respect for immaterial truths held mutually by the “friends of the forms.” Notice how, in the *Republic*, after Thrasymachus’s onslaught against Socrates has dissipated and he assumes the role of a willing listener, if not participant, Adeimantus once more attempts to encourage Thrasy machus to attack Socrates: at that point, Socrates simply says, “leave us alone, for we have become friends” (*Rep.*, VI, 498c–d).

Similarly, we should remember that Aristotle devotes no fewer than two entire books, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, to a discussion of the moral virtue of friendship. One should conclude, I would venture to suggest, that it is not so much a fact that the Hellenic Greeks were not motivated by or concerned with solitude but rather that they concentrated on escaping from it and that they did so, primarily, by
enjoying the values of friendship. And it is in this sense that they regarded man as a social or political animal.

But is it really the case that we have to ferret out the implications of a stress on loneliness in the Greek mind by indirectly approaching it and inferring its existence through the perspective of their emphasis on friendship? Do we not have available some documentation which might serve as evidence for a direct concern with and fear of aloneness? Indeed, I believe we do. It would be difficult to find a more gripping and terrifying illustration of man’s conception of aloneness than *Oedipus Rex*. Granted, the challenge may be raised that Oedipus’s situation was not intended by Sophocles to depict the universal condition of man (Oedipus is special; he is nobler than we are; he is unique). Still, how are we to feel fear and pity unless we are able, at least to some extent, to identify with him? Are we not expected to empathize and sympathize? But obviously, we cannot do so unless we somehow imagine his condition as possibly our own, unless we feel his position as at least implicitly a universal one. (Aristotle insisted that poetry dealt with the universal whereas history was restricted to the singular.)

What happens in the tragedy? Briefly, it symbolizes the powerful quest of a man to plumb to the depths of his own identity. Oedipus had solved the riddle of the sphinx by discovering that the solution lay in the universal consciousness of man as finally arising out of and beyond animal awareness (Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, pp. 219–222). Thus, Oedipus realized that the essence of man in general is the possession of self-consciousness. But he had not (mercifully) achieved the level of his own individual self-consciousness. Oedipus initiates the search whose own goal is himself; he begins the circle which ends with him. (This is what captured Hegel’s imagination in the myth, since, for Hegel, it symbolized the reflexive, circular character of thought; so Plotinus, Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Fichte, Hegel.) In his desperate, driving search, Oedipus pitilessly subjects Tiresias, Creon, Jocasta, and the old shepherd to remorseless questioning. Oedipus’s flaw was a lack of pity; in the end, he turned that vice even against himself by condemning himself to utter aloneness, symbolized by blindness, darkness, self-exile, and self-abandonment. His self-sentence was harsher than even the god had demanded. Thus, Oedipus refers to
himself as “the last man,” a phrase which will find a haunting echo in Nietzsche, the loneliest philosopher. The drama ends with the plea of a formerly powerful man not to have his children taken away from him. What more can we say? Is it any wonder, then, that Thomas Wolfe was convinced that the essence of tragedy lay, not in conflict, but in man’s confrontation with loneliness? The symbolism of forced isolation is carried out repeatedly throughout *Oedipus Rex*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone* by the recurring themes of exile, alienation, homelessness, ostracism, solitary living, entombment in darkness, and explicit references to loneliness. Hegel, of course, believed that *Antigone*, with its conflict of “two rights,” Antigone’s and Creon’s, best stood for tragedy, but I think Wolfe is much more insightful in this regard. (If Hegel were right, tragedies would be fairly rare occurrences.)

With the dissolution of the Greek city-states, of course, the Hellenistic and Roman worlds blundered into a disintegration of the “organic bonds” which had essentially, until then, constituted the “good life” of the earlier Hellenic Greeks. For Plato and Aristotle (the early, individualistically oriented dialogues of Plato notwithstanding [cf. esp. *Apology*; *Rep*. VI, 496b–e]) the “good man” was inconceivable apart from the good polis. The goodness—and happiness—of the individual could only take place within the context of a good society. Later, however, in the Alexandrine period, we suddenly find men fragmented from their fellows. Their subsequent mode of existence, along with a quest for personal salvation, more and more acquires the characteristic of self-contained and unrelated atoms. Consequently, the struggle for happiness came to consist in an increasingly personal battle for self-sufficiency. It is, as George Sabine has correctly remarked, a time during which men were beginning to “make souls for themselves.”2 No longer is self-sufficiency to be grounded in the larger unit of the polis; henceforth, the way to salvation is to be progressively contemplated as a personal and, hence, by implication, a lonely path. In their loneliness, the Stoics advocated a theoretical conception of the universal brotherhood of all men as an ideal in which men could share. (Hegel was to condemn this as a merely futile, empty, abstract ideal.) The Epicureans, understandably more physically restrictive in this regard, proclaimed a dependence on
a few intimate friends (thus mirroring Aristotle’s dictum that the essence of friendship is living in communion). And, finally, the Skeptics, with their own distinctive, nihilistic frustration, not only denied truth but also denied any and all possibility of permanence or constancy, including that of their own selves. But by insisting on their imperious will to disbelieve, the Skeptics, in a strange and ironic fashion, ended by affirming, each separately, the nucleus of their own doubting selves. For through an insistence on a limitless power to deny reality, they ironically managed to establish a total concern with their selves, their powers, and their limitations. What skepticism initiated, then, was an involvement with problems regarding the self, with questions that, if not actually centered on the ego, at least were emerging from a nucleus of “personal identity.” Later, instead of being resolved, these issues were avoided—for the Middle Ages simply took the metaphysical existence of the soul for granted and as unproblematic—and were internalized within the general structure of Western consciousness. The emphasis on the individual soul, however, quickly engendered a subconscious rift between individual man and absolute being. This, in turn, developed into what Jacob Loewenberg, in his commentary on Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, has christened the schizophrenic awareness of monastic medieval man. Indeed, the paradigm itself may be readily extended, chronologically, by portraying it as a symptom which is contemporaneously manifest in all of us who view ourselves—or society—as neurotic rather than recognize that we are not ill but, worse, alone.

With the advance of Christianity, as it moved forward amid the chaos of the prevailing human condition of extreme social and political alienation, or fragmentation, an increasing need developed to alleviate man’s feeling of bondlessness, of abandonment, of desolation. By creating or positing or emphasizing an immutable, eternal, and independent self-conscious being, medieval man managed to discover a vital means of escaping loneliness. For, as early Christian man conceived it, there existed an absolute being with whom one could always communicate, or pray, an external existence whose awareness included every thought of each individual’s consciousness. What more secure or ultimate guarantee could there be that one was not alone? But then, of course, the deepest suffering would result in
conceiving of oneself as estranged, alienated, separated from God, i.e., in thinking of one’s self as absolutely alone or unrecognized, an atom of awareness, an apperceptive monad condemned to a solitary, incommunicable existence (Hegel, *Phenomenology*, “Unhappy Consciousness”). Far better to be a slave, recognized in some sense—even if it were not a fully human one—by a master, than to be a lord without recognition (*Robinson Crusoe*, Hegel’s example). Accordingly, man’s desire, fundamentally and essentially, as Hegel informs us, must be mutually conditioned by other self-conscious selves, with their desires.⁴

Slowly, after the Middle Ages, a shift began in which man sought to alleviate his sense of isolation not by turning toward an absolute, eternal God but rather by turning toward man himself, or more specifically, toward man as an essence, a universal essence (Hegel; Feuerbach’s species-being; Marx’s man as class-conscious). But this change in perspective was not to be accomplished until the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, beginning with Montaigne’s introspective essays, Descartes’s solipsistic meditations, and Hume’s concern with personal identity, progressing to Rousseau’s and Mill’s reflections on individuality and culminating in the philosophy of Comte, who conceived of *le grand être* not as God but as humanity. (It is in this sense that the father of sociology and positivism advocated a religion of humanity.)

THE PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY OF LONELINESS

Amazingly enough, until recently, psychologists have had relatively little to say about loneliness. There is, for instance, but slight mention of it in Freud. The following passage is one of the few discussions he offers.

In children the first phobias relating to situations are those of darkness and solitude. The former of these often persists throughout life; both are involved when a child feels the absence of some loved person who looks after it—its mother, that is to say. While I was in the next room, I heard a child who was afraid of the dark call out: “Do speak to me, Auntie! I’m frightened!” “Why, what good would that do? You can’t see me.” To this the child replied: “If someone speaks, it gets
lighter.” Thus a longing felt in the dark is transformed into a fear of the dark. [1917, p. 407]5

Children are not, at least at first, afraid of death, because they cannot comprehend or imagine what a permanent loss of consciousness might mean. But they are frightened by the dark, long before they begin to understand what death might entail. Children initially simply assume they are immortal and eternal. They are, however, terrified of the dark because it symbolizes aloneness. Thus, they are often afraid of going to sleep at night, not because they fear never awakening again, but rather because they are horrified by the prospect of being conscious and alone.

We do not fear death, we fear loneliness. We are not frightened by the thought that our senses, our awareness, will not operate or exist, for if we were, we would each of us be terrified at the prospect of going to sleep every night. But we are not. Like children, we are not afraid of a loss of consciousness but of being alone, of enduring in an isolated state, often symbolized by a solitude in darkness (Conrad, Heart of Darkness). What horrifies us concerning death is the possibility that our consciousness will continue but that it shall be the only one. We imagine ourselves as a solipsistic awareness, existing alone within a dark (or light, it matters not) universe, wandering the solitary, limitless expanses of space (or blackness) and time, in absolute desolation, the only monad of perception, dumbly reflecting, from darkened windows of awareness, a soulless universe—save for one soul, ours, alone. “One soul was lost; a tiny soul: his. It flickered once and went out, forgotten, lost. The end, black cold void waste” (Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, III). This it is which we (separately) fear; not the mercifulness of an oblivious nothingness, death as Socrates’s “dreamless night” (Apology), but rather the self’s consciousness of “nothingness,” the awareness of our individual aloneness, an isolation not reflected in the warmth and “reflexive light” of another conscious existence.

Incidentally, the symbol of light in the Freud passage cited above represents, I believe, the possibility of communication with another consciousness. Light is a spatial medium and a mediating tertium quid (Plato, Aristotle) “through” or “by” or “in” which we can see that we are not alone; darkness, by contrast, confines us to an inner,
solipsistic temporality. The desire to communicate with another awareness and have it reciprocally assure us of our own existence is but the reverse side of the need to escape solitude. This need arises at the very dawn of consciousness within the individual ego. Indeed, when human affection is withheld from the infant, a condition known as marasmus (Coleman, pp. 130, 665) occurs, and it results in both physiological and psychological symptoms carried throughout the sufferer’s life. It originates simply as the result of depriving the infant of external human affection and response, of withholding conscious recognition of the infant’s existence.

Although Freud’s remarks on loneliness are infrequent, nevertheless he does introduce an intriguing model through which we may approach solitude both as a feeling and as a theoretical construct. In what follows it shall be my contention that every individual human consciousness is permeated by an underlying, primordial, pervasive sense (or structure) of the possibility of aloneness and loneliness. And, of course, the question before us is whether there is in fact any psychological evidence for such a theory. Indeed, I believe there is. For instance, we find Freud himself discussing something very much like this in his *Civilization and its Discontents*; he refers to it there as the “oceanic” feeling. This feeling is, as Freud and a colleague describe it, akin to a “sensation of ‘eternity,’” “limitless, unbounded” (p. 64). For his colleague, this feeling constitutes the source of religion. According to Freud, on the other hand, the oceanic feeling is grounded in the most primitive stage of awareness of the undifferentiating ego (Fichte, Hegel). It is the sensation that the ego originally feels as it experiences itself as a perfect unity with the entire universe, a fusion which excludes any and all distinctions between self and world. In this regard, it is similar to Nietzsche’s model of a feeling of primordial unity characterized by Dionysian states of awareness (*The Birth of Tragedy*, sects. 1, 2). Now, for my own purposes, I should like to maintain that this “oceanic feeling” is actually a sensation of nothingness, albeit one which is almost immediately invaded by the plenitude of “material” being, or at least sensory being, as soon as consciousness wakens. The “self” is conscious but not self-conscious yet. At this initial point, awareness mistakes the fullness of the presentation for itself, and it identifies
itself (incorrectly) not with the nothingness that constitutes the very condition for the given’s appearing at all but rather with the givenness, the otherness. But as consciousness develops toward explicit reflexion, it slowly realizes that the fullness is ephemeral and capricious, a vortical mosaic of sound and color; again, it begins to recognize that the plenitude is a contingent otherness and, hence, unessential; but what remains, what stays as an irreducible medium of awareness, which cannot be dismissed or escaped, is its own stark emptiness. Consciousness then increasingly becomes (reflexively) confronted by its own essential nothingness, a black hole of self-conscious existence. When man grasps his true and essential condition—and insofar as he comprehends it—he becomes desperately lonely, and he will volitionally create any relation, he will will any meaning, which shall afford him an escape from his solitude. And the ultimate evidence of this is in each man’s own consciousness. Look within, for there lies an essential element of reality. “Don’t go abroad. Truth dwells inside man” (Augustine, De vera religione, 39, n. 72).

In a recent study on loneliness, Weiss (1973) undertakes to discuss solitude as if it were a mere disease, like any other. Thus, he declares, “Severe loneliness appears to be almost as prevalent as colds during the winter” (p. 1). Since it is an illness, it follows that it is an unnatural condition, albeit fortunately one which may be avoided. Indeed, the little volume adds a litany of remedies and cures of which the orphaned, the divorced, the aged, and the like may avail themselves in order to abate or conquer their affliction. On this model, loneliness is obviously considered almost as a medical problem. Just as malnutrition is defined as a lack of food, so loneliness is regarded as lack of companionship. But this is some sort of gross distortion of the facts permeating individual human existence. Loneliness is not a medical malady, nor even a sociological one. Rather, as we shall see, it is grounded in the intrinsic nature of man, in his very psychological makeup. I admit, I myself have compared loneliness to a biological drive, but this is not the same as to regard it as an illness. A desire for nutrition, to take an example, is not itself a disease; instead, it is a physiological, structural condition permeating man’s states of awareness. My model of loneliness, in direct contrast to that of Weiss, is clearly more comparable to something like Nietzsche’s
psychological thesis that we are driven by a conscious or unconscious “will to power.”

In a brilliant article entitled, simply enough, “Loneliness,” Frieda Fromm-Reichmann points out that there had been, until the time she was writing, practically no discussion in the field of psychological studies of pathological solitude (1959, pp. 1, 13). The fact that the situation has scarcely improved since the appearance of her paper is a sufficient indication of a glaring deficiency in the disciplines of psychology and sociology. This is not merely a theoretical neglect or oversight but more clearly in the nature of a methodological tragedy. And not because loneliness is a disavowed or an unrecognized illness—like syphilis, a social embarrassment, one which can be cured once it is admitted or diagnosed—for we shall never “cure” it but because by understanding it, we shall be able better to comprehend man, for the truth of man is that he is essentially—metaphysically and psychologically—alone. Sartre speculated that we are condemned to freedom; we are, however, more irretrievably and hopelessly sentenced to utter isolation. Thus, despite psychology’s and sociology’s pretenses of dealing with human conditions and realities, it remains manifestly obvious that they have somehow missed this essential structure of human consciousness as constituted throughout by extreme and intrinsic solitude.

Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, however, is certainly not guilty of neglecting what she terms “disintegrative loneliness,” but which nevertheless clearly parallels my model of man’s isolation. And, as she points out,

The longing for interpersonal intimacy stays with every human being from infancy throughout life; and there is no human being who is not threatened by its loss. (p. 3)

As she goes on to suggest, the extremely unnerving experience of “real loneliness has much in common with some other quite serious mental states, such as panic. People cannot endure such states for any length of time without becoming psychotic” (p. 5). (One is reminded, in this connection, of some of Kafka’s works, such as The Trial and The Metamorphosis.) Fromm-Reichmann, following Ludwig Binswanger and Harry Stack Sullivan, agrees that the “naked
existence,” the “naked horror” of loneliness can be an even more compelling drive than the more commonly recognized physiological needs of man.

Anyone who has encountered persons who were under the influence of real loneliness understands why people are more frightened of being lonely than of being hungry, or being deprived of sleep, or having their sexual needs unfulfilled. (p. 7)

I wish to claim that wittingly or unwittingly, both Freud and Fromm-Reichmann are agreeing with the philosopher Fichte, who had previously theorized that the ego is first conscious—it posits itself—but that it is not aware of itself as such; it is not reflexively conscious. The ego next (temporally or logically) posits a nonego, an-other-than-itself, as a condition of its own recognition, its own self-conscious awareness. Later, in Hegel, the “other,” which mutually conditions the self, is itself a consciousness (“Lordship and Bondage,” in the *Phenomenology*). The self, then, is mutually conditioned by other conscious selves, and one cannot be self-conscious unless there are other self-conscious or social selves in existence (contra Descartes, Leibniz, and Kant). Consciousness of self is only possible through the existence of other self-consciousnesses. Now, this paradigm of the initial state and stage of individual human awareness (the ego positing itself as un-self-conscious) is taken over by Freud in his discussion of the “oceanic feeling.” First there is consciousness as an unconscious, unreflective identification of the ego with the totality of presented being. Slowly, however, with the realization that our desires are not omnipotent, that we are finite and limited, the ego introduces the reality principle, it generates a distinction between itself and the other-than-itself (Hegel’s principle of negativity). This is “healthy” and necessary. It leads to the beginning of a “realistic” separation between (a) a reflexive self; (b) inanimate objects; and (c) other selves, most notably the mother. But

If the omnipotent baby learns the job of being admired and loved but learns nothing about the outside world, he may develop a conviction of his greatness and all-importance which will lead to a narcissistic orientation to life—a
conviction that life is nothing but being loved and admired. This narcissistic-megalomaniac attitude will not be acceptable to the environment, which will respond with hostility and isolation of the narcissistic person. The deeply seated triad of narcissism, megalomania, and hostility will be established, which is, according to Zilboorg, at the root affliction of loneliness. (Fromm-Reichmann, p. 5)

“Sanity” depends on a tricky balance, on maintaining a distinction between one’s self, the external world, and other selves. (As we shall see later, this separateness [Nietzsche’s Apollonian principle] itself leads to the paradoxical, but inevitable, need of man both (a) to be distinct and (b) to belong with others. This is another origin of the tragedy of man.) Disrupt this delicate equilibrium by isolating the individual, and the result is an anxiety which, if enforced or prolonged, will culminate in severe disorientation.

While alone and isolated from others, people feel threatened by the potential loss of their boundaries of the ability to discriminate between the subjective self and the objective world around them. [Ibid., p. 7]

Perhaps the best study on loneliness has just appeared, James Howard’s *The Flesh-Colored Cage*. The ultimate (metaphysical) presupposition of Howard’s thesis concerning man’s essential aloneness is grounded in the author’s conception of man as a self-conscious being, actually the only one in the animal kingdom. (Animals are conscious but not self-conscious—Leibniz.) According to Howard, then, we are enclosed within the envelope of a radical subjectivity (p. ix). We can never completely overcome isolation, but we can reduce it. And we struggle to do so either by “incorporation” or “decapsulation.” We either attempt to bring the other within or strive “to reach out beyond the limits of our cage and contact some creature in another cage. We do this by communication, touch, expression, transcendence, or some other form of [externally directed] act” (p. xi). “We function at any given time between the two strategic poles of complete incorporation of our world, swallowing it all, or complete escape from the boundaries of skin, turning ourselves inside out to join with that which is beyond our direct knowing” (p. xiii). Indeed,
I would agree with this model in exactly this way—namely, that consciousness, I am convinced, has just this sort of double-aspect power; it can look outward, “extro-reflect,” or it can turn within, “intro-reflect,” be reflexively aware of itself. When it performs the latter activity, it is vulnerable to the feeling of loneliness. In one aspect, it struggles to escape; in the other, it is confronted by its tragic essence, its “solipsistic” prison.

As far as insights into radical solitude are concerned, sociology has lagged far behind psychology. In The Lonely Crowd, David Riesman, like Weiss, almost reduces loneliness to an illness, or at least suggests that it is an idiosyncrasy of certain societies. Consequently, he implies in his study that although the inner-directed person and the more predominantly outer-directed person both (often) experience acute feelings of aloneness, this is not the case in the more tradition-oriented societies where the lives of individuals are structured primarily around the multiple-generation family, the tribe, or the community; the latter individual hence exists within a preestablished, meaningful, social life-structure worked out in the context of a basically organically related community or society (Riesman et al., pp. v–vi, 68–69, 373). He, by implication, is not lonely or desolate.

More insightful than the foregoing are some remarks of Erich Fromm’s (1941). Once more, we find some themes we have already repeated: the need for the individual to be related to the world beyond himself is just as compelling as the more readily acknowledged biological drives and “To feel completely alone and isolated leads to mental disintegration just as physical starvation leads to death” (p. 19). But Fromm adds something new as well. Moral aloneness is defined, by Fromm, as the inability of the individual to relate, not necessarily to other human beings, but to values or ideals in general. In this regard, Fromm points out, the monk in his monastery, who believes in God, or the political prisoner imprisoned in a cell, who feels the solidarity of a common cause, is not alone. Indeed, “Religion and nationalism, as well as any custom and any belief however absurd and degrading, if it only connects the individual with others, are refuges from what man most dreads: isolation” (p. 20)
Like Howard, Fromm traces the feeling of extreme solitude to the “fact of subjective self-consciousness, of the faculty of thinking by which man is aware of himself as an individual entity, different from nature and other people” (p. 21). Man, once having achieved the level of individual self-consciousness, once having reached a state of distinct personal identity, suddenly is confronted by his extreme and complete aloneness. But just “as a child can never return to the mother’s womb physically, so it can never reverse psychically, the process of individuation” (p. 30). This is the dilemma of man; he must strive to distinguish his self from the amorphous “field” of awareness experienced at the stage of the “oceanic feeling”; but once that is achieved, he is then confronted by the realization that he no longer “belongs.” And then the futile, quixotic road back to “absolute being” and unity is undertaken, or at least sporadically attempted. In this sense, even the most violent anarchist and political terrorist is desperately involved in a struggle to belong to something more stable than himself.

The only individuals who crave solitude are those who are not condemned to it.

LONELINESS IN LITERATURE, PHILOSOPHY, AND RELIGION

If we really want to show human isolation or loneliness more explicitly and, perhaps, to better understand it, to “intuit” solitude from within, then undoubtedly we should turn to the province of literature and to some of the existential writers.

We certainly find a symbolic allusion to forced solitude as early as Dante’s *Inferno*. Thus, in the last sphere of hell, the ninth, the sufferers are presented as entombed in ice, almost totally unable to touch, to “communicate”—hence symbolically condemned to eternal solitude. Here, in frozen incommunicable agony, are they who, like Cain, were treacherous against those to whom they were bound by special ties (see also Fromm-Reichmann, p. 9). The infidelities of these souls were denials of love (represented by God) and of all human warmth. As they denied God’s love, so are they furthest removed from the light and warmth of his sun. As they denied all human ties, so are they bound by the unyielding ice (Dante, p. 266).
In Balzac’s *The Inventor’s Suffering*, we find the following passage:

Man has a horror of aloneness. And of all kinds of aloneness, moral aloneness is the most terrible. The first hermits lived with God, they inhabited the world which is most populated, the world of the spirits. The first thought of man, be he a leper or a prisoner, a sinner or an invalid, is: to have a companion of his fate. In order to satisfy this drive which is life itself, he applies all his strength, all his power, the energy of his whole life. Would Satan have found companions without this overpowering craving? [Quoted by Fromm, p. 20]

A joy unshared is no joy at all; but a sorrow experienced in solitude is inexpressible anguish. Or, as Gabriel Marcel puts it: “Il n’y a qu’une souffrance, c’est d’être seul” (quoted in Sarano).

Marxist aestheticians maintain that the novel as a literary form had its roots in the alienating structure of modern society, with its attendant growth of economic inequalities. In this sense, the novel quickly evolved into a means of explicitly portraying the ills of industrial society in order to condemn them. With this interpretation, Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* would be a good example of the novel directed toward social protest, as, obviously, are many of Dickens’s works. (Loneliness is symbolized by orphanage in Dickens’s works.) But I should like to suggest instead that it would be at least as illuminating to examine the novel from another point of view and to consider *Robinson Crusoe* as exemplifying the powerful “existentialist” theme of human solitude.12 In this sense, the novel actually ushers in the literary age of subjective concern, of literary introspection and a concern with the self and its relation to others, which was impossible in other previous aesthetic forms of expression.

But it is when we turn to more modern and contemporary literature, armed with our model of man’s innate loneliness, or sense of isolation, that we read with new insight the novels of: Dostoyevsky (*Notes from the Underground*); Hardy (*The Return of the Native*); Jack London (*Martin Eden*); Hesse (*Steppenwolf*); Thomas Wolfe (*Look Homeward Angel, Of Time and the River, You Can’t Go Home Again*); James Joyce (*A Portrait of the Artist as a
Young Man); O’Neill (The Iceman Cometh, Anna Christie, Long Day’s Journey into Night); Camus (The Stranger, The Plague); Kafka (The Trial); the plays of Tennessee Williams; the novels of Graham Greene (The Man Within, The Power and the Glory, The Heart of the Matter); Salinger (The Catcher in the Rye, “The Laughing Man”); or Conrad (Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim, Victory). Thus, for example, Conrad explicitly posits, “the tremendous fact of our isolation, of the loneliness impenetrable and transparent, elusive and everlasting; of the indestructible loneliness that surrounds, envelops, clothes every human soul from the cradle to the grave, and, perhaps, beyond” (An Outcast of the Islands, VI, p. 3; quite often, darkness symbolizes loneliness in Conrad’s writings just as the atom or a closed door signals it for Wolfe). Zilboorg, in his article on loneliness, catalogs the following artists as representing or suffering from psychopathic solitude: Cervantes, Maupassant, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Wagner, Tchaikovsky, Strindberg, Ibsen, Sinclair Lewis.

It may appear exegetically perverse to lump a good novel, like Hardy’s Return of the Native, with a poor one, like Salinger’s Catcher in the Rye, but the only point I wish to make is simply that they are both dedicated to the theme of loneliness and, as such, are classic examples of modern and contemporary literature. Indeed, Egdon Heath and Eustacia Vye symbolize, respectively, natural and human solitude in Hardy’s work; in turn, allusions to Hardy’s romance and its tragic heroine constitute some of the few explicit literary references found in Catcher. Also, it may be remembered that Holden Caulfield’s ambition is to be “a catcher” in the rye (= heath field) assigned the task of preventing (lonely) children from self-destruction, exactly what occurs to the characters in Hardy’s book.

Just as a parenthetical note, it might be interesting to compare the notion of friendship in Plato’s writings with the strong sense of friendship one finds in Kazantzakis’s work Zorba the Greek. In comparisons such as these, I am convinced one would discover an overarching feeling of sympathy and understanding that transcends time, a feeling grounded in the universality of loneliness.

Augustine, even in the Confessions, is not alone; he has God just as Fromm’s hermit had God. But certainly beginning with
the skeptical and introspective essays of Montaigne, at the close of the Renaissance, we begin to see a concentration on the self and, indirectly, unconsciously, on personal identity. Subsequently, with Descartes, not only is the epistemological turn effected but the egocentric commitment is posited which will henceforth haunt Western man and bring him to a more explicit realization of his absolute subjectivity and his metaphysical aloneness (the “egocentric predicament”). In this regard, Descartes merely makes explicit the growing entrapment of Western philosophic thought as it becomes progressively concerned with the problematic relation between an immediately apprehending, self-conscious ego and its (problematic) inferential knowledge of an external world and other minds. Small wonder, then, given this Cartesian context, that Leibniz, engulfed in this growing concern, proceeds to posit an ontological and epistemological monadology, whose only guarantee for the (apparent) interaction between a plurality of intrinsically distinct consciousnesses becomes completely dependent upon an original intervention, a “preestablished harmony,” instituted through the agency of God, the monad of monads. Suddenly, but predictably, a theoretical and moral concern next emerges, with Locke’s discussion of possible criteria for the establishment of personal identity, in the Essay. No longer are the primordiality and the indubitability of the self taken for granted (Augustine, Contra Sceptics). For once Locke assumes command of this voyaging philosophic concern, the problems, embarked upon “doubt’s boundless sea,” become shipwrecked on the shoals of Humean skepticism. This, in its turn, culminates in our own contemporary, monomaniacal anxiety, our concern with “identity crises,” neurotic brooding over “popularity” problems, overemphases on extreme orientations toward “other-directedness,” chronic collective “faddism,” violent and distorted attempts at communications through drugs, fanatic involvements in “political causes,” and so forth.

Should we desire to have the feeling of loneliness described more unambiguously, we could do no better than to consult Pascal and Nietzsche. According to Pascal, man is thrown completely alone into a meaningless existence. And in terror he confronts his own solitude against the background of an infinite and empty universe. The feeling
of extreme isolation and abandonment which we discover in certain exaggerated pathological states is perhaps but the finger within the wound of each of us as we singly realize our radical contingency and metaphysical exile.

En regardant tout l’univers muet et l’homme sans lumière abandonné a lui-même, et comme égaré dans ce recoin de l’univers sans savoir qui l’y a mis, ce qu’il y est venu faire, ce qu’il deviendra en mourant ... j’entre en effroi comme un homme qu’on aurait porté endormi dans une ile déserte et effroyable, et qui s’eveillerait sans connaître et sans moyen den sortir. (Pascal, quoted by Sarano, p. 40)¹⁵

Similarly, in Nietzsche we find that the death of God simultaneously proclaims the utter aloneness of man. The “last man,” in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, really signifies that we are each, separately, condemned to metaphysical solitude, the “Terrible loneliness of the last philosopher!” (Zarathustra the Hermit and Dostoyevsky’s Grand Inquisitor share more than a striking resemblance through their isolation from mankind.)

I call myself the last philosopher because I am the last man. Nobody talks to me but myself, and my voice comes to me like that of a dying person! ... Through you I conceal my loneliness from myself and make my way into the multitude and into love by lies, for my heart ... cannot bear the terror of the loneliest loneliness and compels me to talk as if I were two.¹⁶

Who of us has not felt—if not uttered so eloquently, profoundly and desperately—these sentiments of Nietzsche’s? And even if we have experienced it but once in our lives, why do we think that it is not in truth our primordial condition, which we continually but futilely strive to escape? Why do so many of us persist in viewing it merely as some sort of momentary, monstrous aberration?

Now, we may consider that this sort of extreme psychological and metaphysical melancholy is simply an exaggerated form of monadic hysteria, found in certain unique cases but surely not in saner, more social natures. Perhaps in the distorted mind of a Pascal or a
Dostoyevsky or a Nietzsche we shall uncover such thoughts but never in, say, the healthy personality of a Bertrand Russell. If we believe this, however, it may be illuminating to compare the foregoing with a passage from Russell’s own *Autobiography*.

Throughout my childhood I had an increasing sense of loneliness, and of despair of ever meeting anyone with whom I could talk. Nature and books and (later) mathematics saved me from complete despondency. (Vol. 1, p. 30)\(^\text{17}\)

To be sure, Russell’s reflections on solitude (like Nietzsche’s before him) may still be interpreted merely as *individual* outcries or confessions of personal rage and despair, and consequently one would not seem to be entitled to infer that these same emotions are universally prevalent in mankind. But it’s a simple enough matter to turn to Russell’s own British and Scottish empiricist predecessors in order to discover the general form of the proposition desired. Accordingly, preceding Russell, we find in the English tradition Burke, announcing in no uncertain voice that an “absolute and entire solitude, that is, the total and perpetual exclusion from all society, is as great a positive pain as can almost be conceived... an entire life of solitude contradicts the purposes of our being, since death itself is scarcely an idea of more terror” (*A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, I, xi). Similarly, before Burke, Hume had declared that “A perfect solitude is, perhaps, the greatest punishment we can suffer” (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, II, ii, v). Hume’s own utterances are but profound echoes of Shaftesbury’s statement that “such indeed is man’s natural share of [social] affection, that he, of all other creatures, is plainly the least able to bear solitude” (p. 315). Those eighteenth-century English-speaking writers are obviously stressing the fear of loneliness as a universal structure of human consciousness; given the fact that these same authors were vitally concerned with expounding a “science of human nature,” then the foregoing propositions assume the explicit degree of a general principle and description. Parenthetically it may be added that Shaftesbury’s and Hume’s commitment to the “moral sense” doctrine, a feeling or sentiment or sympathy and natural
affection for others, is simply the obverse side of the desire to avoid solitude.

Now, of course, it could be argued that Hegel’s concept of estrangement (entfremdung)—as opposed to externalization, differentiation, objectification, alienation (entausserung), and even negation—is essentially a model of loneliness. Thus, we speak of man as estranged from God. On a similar paradigm, Feuerbach views man as estranged, alienated from species-being, the self-conscious universal, his fellow man. Marx likewise believes that under a capitalist economic structure, the atomic individual of competitive, civil society is alienated from himself and his fellow men, through modern technology. Certainly, it would seem that these thinkers were well aware of a philosophical, religious, or social concept of loneliness. And, perforce, in one sense I would never deny this. But the model of loneliness which I have sought to introduce is intrinsically a monadic, individualistic one. (Indeed, it is a conflation of Leibniz’s principle of the self-conscious monad and Kant’s emphasis on radical subjective temporality.) Still, in this context, I go beyond Leibniz by emphasis and agree with the Existentialists; man is essentially alone and hence miserable, frightened (Pascal, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre). For Hegel and Feuerbach and Comte and Marx, the suggestion is clearly that man can overcome alienation through a “dialectic” and/or an increasing humanism. (This is not possible or conceivable in my view.) Consequently, Hegel believes, for example, that the principle of the family (abstract unity, wholeness, universality through the feeling of love) versus the principle of civil society (concrete atomicity, particularity, fragmentation through egoism) will nevertheless be reconciled or mediated in the ultimate organic unity of the state. Thus, Hegel discusses estrangement, and Bruno Bauer, Feuerbach, and Marx describe the process of alienation. But, again, it is treated as if it were a disease, something which, eventually, can be overcome, either by an immersion of the self within the “absolute” system, or in humanity, or by a restructuring of the socioeconomic system. But this is not to recognize loneliness; it is to avoid it. (It is truly remarkable that Marx, mercifully and indulgently sheltered as he was by his immediate family and devoted friend, never seems to have pondered that alienation may be ingrained in man himself rather than
in the “system,” which, after all, is merely an “ideological construct” pointing to more fundamental, primordial psychological sources. Simply put, it’s not systems that are lonely, but men, individual men. As Freud complained of Marxism, it’s not systems that are aggressive, but, rather, men.)

SPECULATIVE CONCLUSIONS

The reader, of course, is free to object that I have distorted the facts regarding man’s condition. I can only reply that maybe there are a few of us who are seldom (or even ever) reflectively aware of their forlornness. Man can obviously concentrate his attention for protracted periods of time on hobbies, tasks, family, promotions, vacations; nevertheless, at these moments, I would contend, he is desperately “extro-reflecting,” concentrating in an “interested” manner on external objects or goals. Should he, however, for whatever reason or motive, “intro-reflect,” reflectively dwell on his own consciousness, then I submit he shall discover that all his outward-directed focuses are but efforts to escape a confrontation with his “transcendental” and inevitable loneliness, a haunting nothingness that pervades and structures the basic field of each and every purely immanent consciousness (Howard, p. 15). Then each of us will realize that, in its minor form, loneliness discomforts us as boredom; in its major structure, it results in extreme anguish, when ultimately we are confronted by the possibility of a solipsistic immortality. Indeed, no religious writer, advocating a doctrine of personal immortality, has ever expressed a desire for unique immortality; rather, it is always an afterlife with God and/or other consciousnesses. And when personal immortality is not at stake, and a Plotinian “flight of the alone to the Alone” is contemplated, still, by that very projected immersion of the “self” in the Absolute, the very possibility of loneliness, in principle, is extinguished. In fact, this itself merely seems not unlike Nietzsche’s Dionysian impulse toward a mystical oneness, or a Freudian positing of a Parmenidean Ego manifesting itself as the “oceanic feeling.”

We are born alone and we live alone. Perhaps Thomas Wolfe expressed it best when, in his first major novel, he described Eugene Gant’s dawning consciousness of self:
And left alone to sleep within a shuttered room, with the thick sunlight printed in bars upon the floor, unfathomable loneliness and sadness crept through him: he saw his life down the solemn vista of a forest aisle, and he knew he would always be the sad one: caged in that little round of skull, imprisoned in that beating and most secret heart, his life must always walk down lonely passages. Lost. He understood that men were forever strangers to one another, that no one ever comes really to know any one, that imprisoned in the dark womb of our mother, we come to life without having seen her face, that we are given to her arms a stranger, and that, caught in that insoluble prison of being, we escape it never, no matter what arms may clasp us, what mouth may kiss us, what heart may warm us. Never, never, never, never, never. (Look Homeward, Angel, Ch. 4; compare Of Time and the River, Chs.7, 14, 25, 30.)

Again, the central role of loneliness in Wolfe is powerfully illustrated in the Preface to Look Homeward, Angel. Indeed, it may be said that the theme of human isolation constitutes the essential unifying concept in all his work, a loneliness which Wolfe conceives as enduring within the temporal consciousness of each individual throughout his entire life.

Naked and alone we came into exile. In her dark womb we did not know our mother’s face; from the prison of her flesh have we come into the unspeakable and incommunicable prison of this earth.

Which of us has known his brother? Which of us has looked into his father’s heart? Which of us has not remained forever prison-pent? Which of us is not forever a stranger and alone? [Ibid., Preface]

But lest we think that Wolfe is merely describing a peculiar state of certain individuals, he goes on to make it quite clear that he regards loneliness as the universal condition of all mankind.
Loneliness, far from being a rare and curious circumstance, is and always has been the central and inevitable experience of every man. (*You Can’t Go Home Again*, Book 4, Ch. 31)

And we die alone (Tolstoy, “The Death of Ivan Ilych,” a story that considerably impressed Heidegger; Sartre, *The Wall*; and Malraux, *Man’s Fate*).

Not only are we alone in relation to others, but we are just as inevitably strangers to ourselves. As Hume (at least in certain passages) and Proust argued and showed, respectively, the “continuity” of the self lasts but a brief time. There is reflexive awareness, but anything very much beyond that is either a mere (albeit natural) fiction or a mere remembrance. Thus, if it were possible to split our selves into two persons, or if we could converse with our selves, as we were when we were children, the enormous abyss that separates us from our own selves would rudely shock us into reveries that could only culminate in bewilderment. Who has not revisited a former friend, or even a favorite haunt, and realized that his “self” has changed through time, that the qualitative structure of each present moment is intrinsically unique and unrepeatable (Bergson), and hence that the past is gone forever, irretrievable, irreversible? Certainly, we like to imagine that it is our friend, or the place, that has changed. But is it? We are not only strangers to others but even to ourselves.

Contemporary man has been deeply concerned with problems regarding his individuality, his uniqueness; he desperately searches for his “identity,” and he fears its loss. This frantic search itself, I believe, originates in the *desire* of the ego (Fichte, Hegel, the ego posits itself as undifferentiated desire)—the ego as an empty structure of a unified self-consciousness—to prevent a dispersion back into the “oceanic feeling.” Against this background of an amorphous Nothingness, the ego struggles to maintain its own personal, integrated, unified “nothingness.” If it succeeds to any considerable degree, if it establishes a nucleus or center of identity, in opposition to “the mass,” “the herd,” “the One,” “the they,” “the others,” it suddenly realizes it is confronted with yet a more terrifying prospect—absolute and unredeemable loneliness. And then it (the ego) immediately seeks to achieve some sort of contact through human or even animal affection; through deeds, works, diversions,
and amusements. Consequently, what then occurs is a prolonged, and in almost all cases a lifelong, longing for communication, an attempt at unification, a striving for a mutual sharing of feelings and meanings, between apperceptive (self-conscious) monads, who struggle against inevitable frustration, to complete interaction—even apparent interaction will momentarily appease the self amidst what is in reality a radically disharmonious universe. (But, of course, without Leibniz’s God, there is no real interaction.) The paradox, then, is that we struggle to be our selves, a unique unity of consciousness, against the contingency of transient, mutable being, and against the greater nothingness of an un-integrated awareness, but if we succeed, to any great extent, we are then staggered at the absolute loneliness of our position. We are driven back to the warmth of the crowd, our friends, political, social, and moral causes, the writing of books, the pursuit of fame, each and all of these constituting an attempt at our being assured, by others, that we exist, distinctly, but not alone.19

In its less intense or minor form, as I said, we all experience loneliness as boredom (Flaubert, Madame Bovary; Ibsen, Hedda Gabbrler); we continually feel that we must keep ourselves occupied lest we are forced to confront the “nothingness” that is our own consciousness.20 The dominant element of loneliness that haunts the human psyche, I would contend, allows us to gain a Diltheyan “understanding” or a Bergsonian “intuition” into the striving of: the novelist and his audience; the impulse of radical and reformer alike; the lover and the mathematician; the magazine addict and the athlete; the painter and the stock-manipulator; the performer and the spectator; the student and the professor; the daydreamer and the criminal; the hermit and the tourist; or even the philanthropist and the misanthrope.

Now, the same principle and paradigm of an isolated human existence, which represents the reflexive psyche, testifies also to an accompanying and corresponding model of individual human freedom. As man has being, or exists, alone, so he wills alone, he chooses in utter solitude. Thus, although consciousness is a nothingness, infecting the blobby, massive, viscous body of being, it is nevertheless a nothingness which is radically permeated by freedom, a freedom which desperately, futilely manages to endow
the mind itself with borrowed or purloined meanings, meanings whose “conditional” reality rests on their continual reaffirmation by the will as it lies embedded in subjective awareness. Like Descartes’s God, we conserve a “meaningful” universe at each moment of time by a constant process of free creation. Should we shift our interests, the universe itself would undergo a complete transformation. In this context, and to offer an extreme example, an autistic child may (possibly) become an archaeologist or an astronomer; or his interests may center toward a fascination with extinct reptiles or verge toward a concentration in futuristically oriented science fiction stories.

The Epicurean model of the chance collision of material atoms swerving in empty space may readily be transferred, but only as an illustrative paradigm, to a realm within the mind. Thus transposed, our radically arbitrary choices become a random and discontinuous “passage” through the irreducible temporality of immanent consciousness (Kant, Bergson), a sphere of awareness which is itself characterized by the total absence and negation of spatial metaphors. (The soul is not extended in space although it exists within, nay, it is time—Plotinus, Augustine, Kant, Bergson, Husserl.)

Man is free—futilely, tragically condemned to freedom. For Pelagius, this was a divine gift, for Sartre, a terrifying curse, but in either case, man is radically free. (Thus, according to Sartre, man is always beyond himself in projects; he pro-jects tasks beyond himself toward the future by positing meanings as goals which transcend him.) The idea of freedom is hardly a new theme in Western thought; the entire great moral tradition of the Christian Middle Ages is predicated upon it. The two interesting questions, however, become: is man free (a) when he thinks as he should (Plato, Spinoza; man is free when he self-consciously gives the law to himself—Rousseau, Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Marx); or (b) when he does as he pleases? Shall we adopt (a) a rationalist or (b) a voluntarist model of freedom? And, if the latter, how far does man’s freedom extend; more specifically, is it actually creative in constituting meanings and thereby reality? Obviously, I shall confine my discussion to the second set of alternatives, since I wish to opt for the model of a radical voluntarism. Following Descartes (and Camus’s Father Paneloux), I would agree that man’s freedom of the will is (potentially) infinite,
like God’s (which is actually infinite.)\textsuperscript{21} But in adopting this theory of consciousness, I also wish to interpretationally exploit Kant’s concept of the \textit{spontaneous} transcendental faculties of the productive imagination and understanding (\textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, A 99 ff.; \textit{Critique of Judgment}, sects. 22, 49). God’s intellectual intuition, according to Kant, immediately \textit{creates} “objects” in conceiving them; man’s intuition, by contrast, is, of course, said to be passive—objects must be \textit{given} to it. But, still, the faculties of the imagination and understanding, Kant assures us, both have the power to create from their own internal resources; they are active, originative, generative, productive. What together they produce are the immanent structures of subjective temporality (\textit{Critique of Pure Reason}, A 99 ff.) and the universal principles of order or relations, the categories, underlying empirical meanings. For all consciousness is temporal and judgmental, and, hence, relationally structured.

Through Fichte’s extension of this Kantian theme, we discover that the spontaneity of thought freely posits itself as ego, and an other as a nonego, as conditions for its eventual return to itself, culminating in the attainment of a true and perfectly self-conscious, reflexive freedom (Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx’s social-consciousness, class-consciousness). In Fichte, this results in the productive and practical ego generating an “external world” as a sphere in which it can morally operate; the world then becomes a transcendental, structural condition for the possibility of moral action. For the purposes of our discussion concerning loneliness and a paradigm of voluntaristic freedom, however, we may extend Fichte’s model and emphasize and exploit a basically Feuerbachian concept in the following way. Man’s consciousness, as we stressed above, is a nothingness, but it is one which not only \textit{exists} but exists reflexively, aware of itself and its freedom (at least at certain “privileged” moments). In other words, at certain times, it may become aware of its own emptiness, in violent contrast to the smug, self-contained, self-sufficiency of an opposing matter, sometimes inert, often intermittently heaving and undulating (cf. Roquentin’s “experience” of the roots of the chestnut tree in Sartre’s \textit{Nausea}). This direct contrast between a void of consciousness and freedom, which desires “it knows not what,” and an absolute passiveness (matter), which ignores it, frightens
consciousness. Consciousness desperately seeks then some kindred being which will always be there (eternally) and whose presence is manifest everywhere (infinitely). But this being must respond; it must care about man’s loneliness; it must alleviate his dreadful penalty and burden of individuality by perpetually satisfying him that he is not alone, that he does not exist in vain (i.e., solitary, unrelated, a “useless passion”). In short, this being must be itself self-conscious. Man thus freely creates God, a being who hears his every prayer, for he can converse with God—a consciousness who knows, even “sees” his every act and thought, no matter whether it is wicked or laudable, since the really important thing is not whether one is to be punished or forgiven but rather that one is not abandoned, not left alone, that one not become a solitary atom of consciousness, forsaken to existence among the limitless expanses of space and time. Hell is not suffering, even if it be at the lowest sphere of Dante’s inferno, for at least one then suffers with others. Hell is being condemned totally alone to eternal consciousness, wandering throughout a darkened universe as a solitary monad, with pathetic windows of awareness reflecting the meaningless blackness. (Solipsism is a “wrong” metaphysical doctrine not because it is false but because it is psychologically terrifying.)

The consciousness of man, a relative and finite nothingness, has freely, spontaneously created an Absolute Nothingness, which will guarantee the mirroring or reflection of its (man’s) self-conscious or reflexive thought. Because consciousness exists, and it freely creates or posits meanings (through the constitution, or the positing, of immediate relations), it follows that consciousness thereby originates meanings, “essences”22 In this sense, the ontological argument, although perfectly valid for the individual human consciousness, ironically enough, makes God, at best, a contingent being, while man himself alone is a necessary existence23 but, like the Christian conception of God, infinitely alone.24

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2 G. Sabine, A History of Political Theory, pp. 131 ff., 141 ff. Contemporaneously, according to Hegel, the small Christian association was grounded in friendship between intimates (The Positivity of the Christian Religion sect. 21).


5 A more extended analysis of an essential feeling of isolation, however, is offered by Anna Freud in a paper entitled “Losing and Being Lost.”

6 Interestingly enough, the author herself relates her study, at a number of points in her discussion, to Freud’s concept of the “oceanic feeling.” Compare Freud’s psychological description with Hegel’s metaphorical interpretation of baptism in Hegel’s Theologische Jugendschriften, p. 319.

7 See also Sullivan (1953), p. 290, and Zilboorg (1938).


9 See also Rollo May, Man’s Search for Himself, p. 32.

10 There is a conceptual confusion which runs throughout the book. It is uncertain whether Howard wishes to maintain that the physical body is our cage or whether it is our own reflexive awareness, a position akin to solipsism. Obviously, the second alternative is philosophically by far the stronger and the more defensible of the two themes, although it should not be carried out to a subjectivity so extreme that it would deny the conceivable and actuality of communication between two distinct selves.

11 Again, the model offered is a mixed one; the first implies a physiological container, the second a mental barrier. The basic point, however, is valid.


13 Cf. my article, “Descartes’ Bridge to the External World.”

14 Cf. my writings, “Hume and Shaftesbury on the Self,” “Locke and Leibniz on Personal Identity,” and “Personal Identity in the 17th and 18th Centuries.”

15 See also Pascal, Pensées, sect. 194. Cf. also Kierkegaard, The Concept of Dread, p. 110; Fear and Trembling, passim; and The Sickness unto Death, pp. 102–103.
16 Quoted by Jaspers, *Nietzsche*, p. 56; see also pp. 58 ff., 70, 74, 81, 84–87, 402, 436. As Jaspers indicates, Nietzsche wrote this in 1876, while he was a young professor and presumably surrounded by friends. *Zarathustra* was not even yet on the literary horizon. But, again, this is regarded as a personal fact about Nietzsche himself rather than the representation of the universal condition of mankind. Cf. *The Gay Science*, sect. 50; *The Will to Power*, sects. 985, 988, 993. Actually, Sartre, in “Existentialism Is a Humanism” (W. Kaufmann, ed., *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*; Meridian, 1958), and Camus, in *The Plague*, are much nearer to conceiving it as the essential nature of man per se. Similarly, Wolfe saw the essence of human tragedy in loneliness, not in conflict. In this sense, the tragedy of Oedipus is the tragedy of each man who is reflexively aware of his aloneness.

17 The rest of the passage, cited by Sarano (p. 41), is as follows: “I searched for love ... because it delivers us from this terrible solitude, which leads our consciousness to lean itself, shivering, before the unfathomable and icy abyss of nonbeing.... The loneliness of human hearts is intolerable” See also Russell, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, pp. 4, 43, 51, 64; Vol. 2, pp. 35–36, 234. R. W. Clark’s recent *The Life of Bertrand Russell* stresses the intense affinity between Russell and Joseph Conrad and suggests their mutual understanding of loneliness as its cause.

18 In further support of this contention, I might add that when I researched the entry for alienation in the *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* and the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, I discovered that loneliness is never once mentioned. Again, I take this to imply that I am offering a psychological principle—a phenomenological fact about the individual human psyche—as opposed to a religious or socioeconomic proposition pertaining to man’s structural relation to God and/or other men. Nevertheless, I wish to maintain that although this is a phenomenological datum, it yet points to and supports a monadic metaphysics.

19 Cf. Fromm-Reichmann, pp. 1, 3.

20 I have argued for an immaterialist paradigm of consciousness—awareness as an existential nothingness—in a recent article, “The Simplicity Argument versus a Materialist Theory of Mind.” This model is similar to Sartre’s outlined in *The Transcendence of the Ego* and *Being and Nothingness*, although mine is based on a reflexive model of consciousness whereas Sartre’s stresses an essential element of intentionality. Cf. also my study, “The Freedom of Consciousness.”

21 See my recent article “The Problem of Evil in *The Plague*.”

22 Cf. my paper “The Simplicity Argument and Absolute Morality.”


24 The Book of Job, as Thomas Wolfe insisted, presents one of the earliest but starkest pictures of man’s isolation. Interestingly enough, if it were conceivable to excise all references to God from the Old Testament passages, one would reach
something not very different from Sartre’s conception of the universal situation of man (see esp., Job 19:13–20, 30:28).

In J. W. Johnson’s contemporary spiritual poem, “The Creation,” we find the following lines: “And God stepped out on space, And he looked around and said: I’m lonely—I’ll make me a world” (p.17). The verse, of course, ends with the creation of man. Thus, and for the very same motive, I would claim, man has rather created God. Cf, N. Kazantzakis, *Zorba the Greek*, Ch. 13; D. Turner, *Lonely God, Lonely Man*, pp. 1–13, 41, 48–49. One might say of this little book that is says—or feels—more than it knows.
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In previous publications, I have urged, both on philosophical and phenomenological grounds, that man is intrinsically alone and lonely. I have insisted that each of us is essentially separated from an alien realm of nature, other minds, a God, and that consequently every man is metaphysically and psychologically doomed to an hermitic insularity. This, in turn, engenders a pervasive sense of anxiety, which haunts the individual human psyche. In the present discussion, I wish to show that each man is correspondingly fragmented within himself, self-estranged, and internally separated from his own sense of identity, and that this conflict produces an immanent experience which is at once painful and terrifying. Consequently, I contend in what follows that we are self-alienated because adequate self-knowledge is impossible and that it is unattainable for any one (or a combination) of three (perhaps related) reasons. First, the “self” may be in reality a “disunity,” or, if one prefers, a “unity” of separate selves; secondly, the self, at bottom, may be radically opaque, dark, impenetrable; and/or thirdly, the ego is quite likely permeated by irretrievable unconscious “elements.” But how can we conquer our enforced isolation and reach another person if we cannot even reach or know ourselves? In short, we are even strangers to ourselves as well as to each other. I contend, then, that each of us, separately, stands self-condemned to an inner strangeness, an immanent alienation.

Historically, the Medieval and Scholastic conception of a solitary, monadic soul, created and sustained by the power of God at each moment of its existence, of course, obviously implies ontological separation. For the Christian religious faith, however, God’s perpetual conscious intervention guarantees that each soul shall never be absolutely alone or completely forsaken by God. Accordingly, despite the fact that Christianity posits the perfect individuality of the soul, that self is never wholly abandoned simply because God continually and eternally reflects the existence of each self-conscious
being. Nevertheless, and conversely, estrangement from God is portrayed as the worst of possible evils (Dante, Pascal, Kierkegaard; and see, especially, Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, “Unhappy Consciousness”).

But in the seventeenth century, Locke initiates a major philosophic turn in his search for a necessary and sufficient criterion for the establishment of personal identity. And, more specifically, he revolutionizes the quest by thoroughly neglecting the prior fideistic theological standard, thus placing the inquiry in an entirely new perspective. Very briefly, self-consciousness and memory function in Locke as the twin criteria required for a genuine sense of personal or moral identity. Half a century later, Hume’s penetrating analysis into the philosophic status of the self concludes that there is insufficient rational proof as well as insufficient empirical evidence for affirming the simplicity, identity, continuity, or even unity of the soul, self, or mind. (However, to be sure, the Scottish skeptic insists, on different grounds, that the “self” remains secure as a natural and morally practical fiction.) Even so, Hume forcefully states that the momentary and fleeting impressions immediately present to consciousness actually constitute the only “identity” or “unity,” strictly speaking, which the mind can attain. Consequently, Hume declares “of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement” (*Treatise*, I, iv, vi). Indeed, it further follows, for Hume, that any single mental impression could be, and actually is, a substance, since a substance is traditionally defined as that which exists independently of anything else, so long as it might last. Such a model of singular, atomistically self-contained mental impressions, when it is applied to the realm of individual mind, entails a commitment to transitory, successive, and ephemeral solipsistic states; again, though, this model would necessarily imply that the mind is alone and lonely. Hume’s unconventional philosophical direction, which concludes (a) that the “self” is neither a simplicity, continuity, identity, nor unity, in the classic Western sense, which innumerable authors had assumed it to be, has had its own literary counterpart as we shall see. Thus, at least one writer has gone beyond Hume by declaring (b) that there is really
a multiplicity of distinct consciousnesses within “the mind” and that
the individual is actually constituted by a composition of different selves, which one mistakenly apperceives as the “same” self. On this
account, the “self” is in truth a manifold of selves. In other words,
the separate strands of atomistic components of the Humean “self”
ultimately might not be centered in the same consciousness at all.

Hume’s “bundle theory of the self”—the model of the self
as a fortuitous aggregate or collection of distinct impressions—
as introduced in the section of personal identity in the Treatise,
justifiably has been characterized as grounded in an atomistic
psychology, since it claims, as we previously indicated, (a) that the
human mind consists of a “loose” (i.e., in principle unconnected)
bundle of separate impressions. Now, this position appears, at first,
rather different from (b) the conception of the “self” as a random
group of separate selves. Simply put, the model of (a) the self as a
collection of atomic impressions does not initially seem the same as
(b) the “self” conceived as a chance group of diverse particular selves.
Nevertheless, I would maintain that Hume’s atomistic paradigm of
the human mind may be developed and extended from thesis (a) into
thesis (b). On such a reconstruction of the argument, Hume would
have to confess that since there is neither an empirical nor an a
priori principle of mental unity, the self indeed may be a plurality of
discrete selves, each self enjoying an independent existence, despite
its apparent and contingent association with the other selves. But,
secondly, Hume himself betrays the bundle theory of (a) and draws
a contradictory conclusion (most notably in the Appendix section of
the Treatise), when he suggests that the very recognition of the bundle
as belonging to my consciousness—it is my bundle—indicates that
there must be some sort of unity of awareness since I apprehend the
disparate mental “pieces” as one and all mine, as bound within or
present to one mind (i.e., they are all my pieces of consciousness).
We conclude, then, that (1) if Hume is right about the self as a
bundle of impressions, then it may be the case that it is constituted
as a collection of selves. On the other hand, (2) it remains a difficult
question whether or not there is an ultimate unity of consciousness
for Hume. My own view, as distinguished from Hume’s, is that there
is, and indeed must be, a reflexive unity of consciousness for each
mind (Leibniz, Kant). To determine what properly characterizes this unity is the critical principle to be determined in the present paper. But in both versions, either on interpretation (a) of the “self” as a bundle of impressions or (b) of the “self” as a multiplicity of selves, it follows that the mind is fragmented and that the self is ultimately unknowable.

It is the above Humean principle, (a), and especially its alternate formulation, (b), which I now propose to discuss. And I shall pursue the model of the multiple “self,” (b), outlined above, by turning for support to the discipline of literature. By its very mode of expression, literature seeks to show rather than to demonstrate, to describe rather than to prove, to intuit rather than to explain. Accordingly, I intend to summon a key literary illustration in order to exhibit the paradigm of the fragmented self, fundamentally constituted as a “disunity” of opposed selves, which portrays man as necessarily alone and lonely, since there is no real connection between the selves. The view that the “self” is actually sundered into a radical multiplicity of selves finds clear expression in Hermann Hesse’s novel *Steppenwolf*. As Hesse stipulates,

> It appears to be an inborn and imperative need of all men to regard the self as a unit … In reality, however, every ego, so far from being a unity is in the highest degree a manifold world, a constellated heaven, a chaos of forms, of states and stages, of inheritances and potentialities. It appears to be a necessity as imperative as eating and breathing for everyone to be forced to regard this chaos as a unity and speak of his ego as though it were one-fold and clearly detached and fixed phenomenon … For there is not a single human being … who is so conveniently simple that his being can be explained as the sum of two or three principal elements … [The Steppenwolf, for example] consists of a hundred or a thousand selves … And if ever the suspicion of their manifold being dawns upon men of unusual powers and of unusually delicate perceptions, so that, as all genius must, they break through the illusions of the unity of the personality and perceive that the self is made up of a bundle of selves, they have only to say so and at once the majority puts them under lock and key.\(^8\)
Man is neither single nor a unity; rather, he is a complex of drives, desires, thoughts, ambitions, and fantasies. And for Hesse’s *Steppenwolf*—as for the richest characters in Dostoyevsky’s stories—the multifarious “self” often exhibits inconsistent, and even contradictory, tendencies. Thus, the Steppenwolf, for instance, like the lonely Raskolnikov, is a paradoxical and Nietzschean blend of good and evil, god and beast, reasoner and madman, saint and sinner, scholar and criminal. And, of course, once more, *Steppenwolf* serves as a brilliant dissertation on human loneliness, wherein the picture of the disunified self confirms the same theme of perfect human isolation more precisely expressed in Hesse’s short poem *Im Nebel*:

Strangely we wander in the mist
Lonely is every bush and stone
No tree sees another
Each one is alone
Strangely we wander in the mist
Life shared with none
No man knows his neighbor
Each man is alone.

Pursuing the fruitful impetus provided above by our excursion into the literary field, we discover a fascinating criticism of the Lockean and Humean “positive” notion of the self, conceived as a construction of temporally extended, lineally distributed memories, in William Golding’s *Free Fall*. We recall that both Locke and Hume had argued that the self can reorder its private history by means of inferences based on a chronological restructuring of memories. But Golding completely rejects the alleged continuity as a manufactured or artificial fiction which pretends to exhibit the self as a mere succession of (external) events. As Golding conceives it, the self is not a series of tacked-on memories distributed through objective, phenomenal time. Rather, in more Bergsonian fashion, the self is a present surge of immediate “memory” that is independent of past moments, although “related” to them by the simple fact that consciousness is *concerned* with those specific memories. It is the care accorded to the memories which personalizes them as opposed to any real principle of continuity. So although—obviously contra
behaviorism—an individual is not reducible to the physiological immediacy of the body, neither does he consist of a lineally connected chain of artificial memories, which is anchored in a public, observable self. Instead, as Golding sees it, I am, as an adult, neither temporally contiguous to nor contemporaneous with myself as the child “I” was. Indeed, looking back, I am no longer the same person. What am I then?

I see what I am looking for and why these pictures are not altogether random. I describe them because they seem to be important … They are important simply because they emerge [I care about them]. I am the sum of them. I carry around with me this load of memories. Man is not an instantaneous creature, nothing but a physical body and the reaction of the moment. He is an incredible bundle of miscellaneous memories and feelings, of fossils and coral growths. I am not a man who was a boy looking at a tree. I am a man who remembers being a boy looking at a tree. It is the difference between time, the endless row of dead bricks, and time, the [Bergsonian] retake and coil. And there is something even more simple. I can love the child in the garden, on the air field, in Rotten Row, the tough little boy at school because he is not I. He is another person.9

I can only love subjects that are different and distinguishable from myself, that are not myself. But I just am; I am not a subject to myself except when I am telling a story about a boy, who happens to be “me” (Sartre). That is the child—a different person from myself—that I can love just as I love another being, one distinct from me. And, of course, from the preceding it naturally follows that “We can’t know all about ourselves” (p. 139) and that “I don’t understand myself” (p. 143). For the self is basically a discontinuity as well as a disunity “because each consciousness is a dozen worlds” (p. 249). Since the ego is not a simplicity but instead a multiplicity, not a unity but a disunity, and not a continuity but a discontinuity, we may conclude that there are ineluctable limits beyond which the individual cannot grasp his “personal identity.” In brief, once again, we are strangers even to ourselves.
By contrast, Albert Camus’s *The Stranger* powerfully incorporates, within its brief pages, the dual themes of loneliness and self-alienation which we have been concerned to trace. The protagonist, Meursault, is virtually a human automaton, an unreflective consciousness, at the mercy of physiological events and external circumstances, oblivious of his own happiness and meaning until he is suddenly confronted by death, with its irrevocable loss of self-consciousness. But once compelled to confront the significance of his unique existence, he realizes that human companionship is the only worthy means of salvation from loneliness and that a strand of his mistress’s hair has infinitely more value than all the abstract conception of a priest’s God. And yet it is too late: sentenced to death and having lost any future chance for concrete human affection, all that is left

To be accomplished, for me to feel less lonely [moins seul], all that remained to hope was that on the day of my execution there should be a huge crowd of spectators and that they should greet me with howls of execration.¹⁰

Although the novel provides a vivid illustration of what I have termed self-alienation, being a stranger to one’s own self, Camus’ work, nevertheless, clearly suggests that loneliness can be vanquished by reflexive thought and appropriate action, that estrangement is not a necessary and universal structure of individual consciousness, and that, in time of plague, with its absurdity of suffering, a man can unite with others, thereby exemplifying a common bond with his fellows through their mutual humanity (*The Plague*). This optimistic outlook, I am convinced, is quite mistaken, and it is in error precisely because men are prevented from adequately joining together by their inability even to encounter their own proper selves.¹¹ The mistaken perspective in Camus’s outlook is generated by his commitment to a false Cartesian paradigm of consciousness, one which assumes that a clarity of awareness, at least under optimal conditions, is possible. (The confrontation with death, he suggests, often brings about a lucidity of thought—for example, a clearer meaning of one’s life.) Thus Camus is persuaded that if we rationally, reflexively turn within—and a few of us, for one reason or another, are sometimes impelled to do so, for example, in times of plague, the German
occupation of France, or the threat of death—we shall discover not only the true self but even a clear and distinct idea of its legitimate desire for intimate human companionship. This rationalist conception of perfect self-knowledge and its ideal, I believe, is unrealistic and unattainable. It would maintain that men know who they are, what happiness is, and how to get it, and keep it.

Consequently, in the following pages, I wish to introduce an anti-Cartesian model of the self, although I must hasten to add that I do agree with the basic Cartesian principle of reflexivity. The theory of the ego I shall now introduce is to be contrasted with the previous “multiple” or alienated schema of the self, (b), discussed above, although it shares with it the identical conclusion that the self, in its very nature and at its profoundest depths, is inaccessible and unknowable in principle. Again, the critical implication of the forthcoming paradigm of the mind is that it becomes essentially impossible to fully—or even adequately—know the self and that we, each of us, separately, remain condemned to an inevitable strangeness and an absolute loneliness within the very heart of our own being.

Joseph Conrad’s *The Secret Sharer* (1912) dramatically poses the central question concerning the bounds of self-knowledge within the context of a confrontation with real solitude. For no sooner does the tale commence than we are informed that the main character is a mystery to himself: “And if all the truth must be told, I was somewhat of a stranger to myself.” But in the novel, the master seaman’s involvement with his inner, other, and secret self—symbolized by the fugitive visitor—concludes rather hopefully, for there is a level of true understanding achieved by the “two” men in the end. The optimistic outcome of this short work, however, is completely abandoned in a “companion” story, *Heart of Darkness* (1902), which correspondingly traces the immanent voyage of the soul as it turns within itself, through the dark recesses of self-consciousness. In this respect, it may be said that the earlier work “logically” provides Conrad with the solution regarding the limits of self-awareness broached in the later story.

Perhaps the ablest, and certainly from my exegetical standpoint the most congenial, of Conradian interpreters, Albert Guerard, has described this gloomy book as a Jungian descent into the depths of
the individual soul, a study of dark introspection, a perilous night journey into the center of the ego, and a visit within “the black inward abyss of the self.” *Heart of Darkness* compels us to look “into the deeper regions of the mind,” through those “great dark meditations” of reflexive thought, which, if sufficiently prolonged, will eventually discover within each self “what no other man can ever know.” Thus, the novel depicts an individual’s (Marlow’s and/or Kurtz’s) internal, subjective search for meaning, for self-knowledge, for the truth hidden within the labyrinthine depths of his own consciousness and deceptive heart: “The mind of man is capable of anything because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future. What was there after all … but truth—truth stripped of its cloak of time.”

By its very nature, the inquiry into truth assumes the aspect, and the quality, of a dream—a Nietzschean, Dionysian fantasy—as the reflexive turn of self-consciousness recedes back toward the primitive and unconscious impulses hidden within the domain of the individual psyche. As Conrad expresses it:

> I am trying to tell you a dream—making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream sensation … No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one’s existence—that which makes its truth, its meaning—its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream—alone. (p. 44)

Even granted that we are incapable, as Bergson emphasized, of translating the subtle truth-value of intuition into the hard, brittle precision of an objective, public, and analytic language, still is there not something we may succeed in expressing regarding the idiosyncratic quality of individual human existence? There is, and the truth, simply stated, is that man is terribly alone. This is the reality that Kurtz realized within himself. Of course, the symbol of darkness represents moral evil in the novel, but it stands, much more surely, for enforced isolation, for terrifying loneliness. Thus, Kurtz is desperately alone and lonely: “Is [Kurtz] alone there?” “Yes” (p. 52); “Kurtz wandered alone far in the depths of the forest” (p. 94); “How can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man’s [i.e., Kurtz’s] untrammeled feet may take him into by way of solitude—
utter solitude” (p. 82); “there was nothing either above or below
him … He had kicked himself loose of the earth [i.e., his fellow man
and an absolute realm of value] … He was alone” (p. 112; see also:
A. Gide, The Immoralist). In this sense, Kurtz’s existence transpires
not only within the emptiness of a moral vacuum, symbolized by the
uncivilized jungle, but in the midst of a psychological void as well;
and what he confronts is the utter horror of absolute loneliness: “His
soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within
itself, and, by heavens! I tell you, it had gone mad” (p. 113). His own
self-sentence on his inner vision is to pronounce upon it as “The
horror. The horror” (p. 118). And the horror is simply that each of
us, separately, passes through life alone and lonely. But rather than
recognize, actually re-cognize, this primeval, Orphic truth, we mask
our condition from ourselves by exploiting extravagant false ideals
and by foisting idols of religion, civilization, and humanity—idols of
the tribe and cave in the Baconian sense—anything lest we encounter
the dark visage of our desperate desolation, lest we confront the heart
of darkness which gnaws within, a tenebrousness that is more than a
match for the jungle blackness without.

In an early work, Conrad referred to

The tremendous fact of our isolation, of the loneliness
impenetrable and transparent, elusive and everlasting; of the
indestructible loneliness that surrounds, envelops, clothes
every human soul from the cradle to the grave, and, perhaps
beyond.15

As far as I know, this striking declaration is the author’s most
direct statement of the necessary and universal principle that
loneliness constitutes the ultimate and most terrifying evil which
dwells within the mind of man. And it is so because it consists of
an inextinguishable horror within, one which persists so long as
consciousness itself lasts. It is a fear which devours the very core
of self-consciousness. My hermeneutic conviction, then, is that the
transcendent specter of horror, which confronts Kurtz—ironically
ending the search and journey for truth in reverse Socratic fashion,
culminating in darkness and evil, as opposed to Platonic light and
goodness—is his final realization that he is condemned to an eternal
self-conscious isolation, to an inescapable solitary existence in a dark universe, a sentence from which death would be a welcome relief, if only it were possible. This is “the naked horror of irredeemable loneliness,” to borrow a phrase from Ludwig Binswanger, which Kurtz intuits in his last earthly moments, and it signifies an everlasting desolation even beyond the grave.

The themes of loneliness and personal identity, coupled with the opacity of consciousness, are powerfully interwoven in Golding’s *Pincher Martin*, a novel dedicated to the Crusoean motif of disintegrative solitude. It is, like its famous forerunner, the story of a shipwrecked sailor. Assailed and ravaged by the effects of extreme isolation, the sole character in the work, Christopher Martin, is systematically reduced to a “black centre” of consciousness.¹⁶

The centre cried out. “I’m so alone! Christ! I’m so alone!” … The centre was thinking—I am so alone; so alone!... The centre felt the gulping of its throat, sent eyesight on ahead to cling desperately to the next light and then the next—anything to fasten the attention [of consciousness] away from the interior blackness. (p. 181)

Prolonged and enforced subjection to loneliness directly results in what we would generally call a loss of identity, an identity that is always the product of several factors, including positive social intercourse, grudging mutual collaboration, and even antagonistic recognition between different selves in conflict (cf. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § Lordship and Bondage). Without such intercourse, “personal identity” is reduced below the level of recognition.

How can I have complete identity without a mirror? That is what has changed me. Once I was a man with twenty photographs of myself—myself at this and that … I could spy myself and assess the impact of Christopher Hadley Martin on the world. I could find assurance of my solidity in the bodies of other people by warmth and caresses and triumphant flesh. I could be a character in a body. But now I am this thing [i.e., consciousness] in here, a great many aches of bruised flesh, a bundle of rags and those lobsters [i.e., his “arms” or pincers] on the rock. The three lights [his two eyes and mind] of my
window are not enough to identify me however sufficient they were in the world. But there were other people to describe me to myself—they fell in love with me, they applauded me, they caressed this body, they defined it for me. There were the people I got the better of, people who disliked me, people who quarreled with me. Here [on this island of rock] I have nothing to quarrel with. I am in danger of losing my definition [i.e., identity]. (p. 132)

A great deal in this citation is reminiscent of Sartre’s phenomenological description of Roquentin’s body in *Nausea*. But the important difference between the two writers is that in Golding’s account, even though the intimate attributes of the body or flesh are eventually disowned, and even if the uniqueness of personal memory—the last stronghold of the principle of individuation—is denied, there yet somehow stubbornly persists a pyrrhic center of awareness despite its gross reduction to a mere and murky self-cognition. And it is precisely this “center” or “black point” of monadic consciousness which ultimately and fundamentally constitutes self-conscious existence, even when it is far from being sufficient to establish what we normally in society call “personal identity.”

In Sartre, of course, consciousness would be opaque if there were—which there is not—a transcendental ego inhabiting awareness (*The Transcendence of the Ego*). Sartre rejects the presence of such an ego, partly because he believes consciousness is a translucent nothingness, and hence clear rather than opaque, but mainly because Sartre’s principle of intentionality essentially precludes the possibility of reflexively apprehending any ego whatsoever, Cartesian, Kantian, Husserlian, or otherwise. And yet, it is exactly this reflexive ego which I wish to posit, along with Golding, as a dark, unfathomable, impenetrable center of consciousness.

In the final section of the paper, I intend to deal with the third barrier to self-knowledge, which I proposed above, by considering the possibility that there are irretrievable unconscious “elements” or thoughts residing within the very structures of consciousness. The “philosophy of mind” expounded by Carl Jung, I believe, has certain striking affinities to the dark spectacle of the human soul.
depicted in *Heart of Darkness*. According to Jung, the presence of the unconscious involves, to a marked degree, what he terms a “hypothetical” limit to complete—I would prefer to say, even adequate—self-knowledge, for there will always remain a residue of “truth” intrinsically hidden from the “center of consciousness,” which nevertheless forcefully affects it.\(^{18}\) Despite its complexity, the ego is a center, a principle of unification, binding (or synthesizing, as Kant might have put it) the various activities, structures, and elements of consciousness together.\(^{19}\) Thus, Jung defines the ego as a “continuous centre of consciousness whose presence has made itself felt since the days of childhood” (*Works*, Vol. 8, p. 87; cf. pp. 323–324; Vol. 9, Pt. 2, pp. 3, 6). Does the continuity of the ego, for Jung, establish a “true” sense of personal identity? No, for “it is a fact that in the early years of life there is no continuous memory; at most, there are islands of consciousness which are like single lamps or lighted objects in the far-flung darkness” (Vol. 8, p. 390). And may we not, in our capacity as critics, legitimately doubt if there is anything more permanent even after infancy?

In view of the preceding discussion, I think it is valid to conclude that insofar as Jung’s metapsychological theory depends on the stipulated presence of essentially unconscious factors pervading the mind, it follows that no man can truly know himself; and to that extent each of us, separately, remains self-alienated and lonely.\(^{20}\)

**CONCLUSION**

I began the paper by contending that we are intrinsically marooned from our own selves by the limits of self-knowledge. And we are separated from our selves because either the self is in actuality a disparate collection of egos, a tenebrous and impermeable locus of awareness, or an inextricable interlacing of fundamentally unconscious layers and elements. Since we cannot know our own selves, it necessarily follows that neither can others know us or we them. Consequently, we exist apart from others, alone and lonely. It is possible, as I indicated above, that the conceptual paradigm of a multiplicity of egos within the “self” can in turn be reduced to a deeper level or structure of consciousness. Indeed, I think it can. All that would remain, then, would be a unified, monadic
blackness, sufficiently reflexive to assure us, separately, that we exist as windowless monads (Leibniz), with neither light from within nor from without by which to distinguish anything but the solitary consciousness of our own immediate being in opposition to the mediated, indirect realm of an “alien otherness.”

* This article, now slightly modified, originally appeared in *Psychology*, 16:3 (Fall, 1979), 11–20.

1 According to Erich Fromm, in *The Art of Loving*, “The experience of separateness arouses anxiety; it is, indeed, the source of all anxiety” (Harper & Row, 1970), p. 7.

2 In what sense one may meaningfully, or phenomenologically, intend the consciousness of the “other,” I have discussed in earlier chapters. Thus, although I am assuming the existence of other or alien consciousnesses in this appendix, I do not simply take it for granted.

3 The splintered quality of the self may be approached and established through a variety of methods. In what appears below, however, I shall avoid the Hegelian-Marxist doctrine of estrangement/alienation for two reasons. First, I have already dealt with it at length in other publications; and second, there is the definite (but unexamined) assumption in both Hegel and Marx that estrangement can be overcome, that it is merely a temporary perversion conditioned or caused by the incomplete or distorted structures of ideal (Hegel) or economic (Marx) systems. I disagree, primarily because, as I have argued elsewhere, separation consists of a transcendental structure within the individual psyche itself.

4 In the metaphysical system of Descartes, God not only creates the universe but conserves, i.e., re-creates, it at each new instant of time; and He eternally preserves every single soul as well once it is brought into being. Similarly, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophers often appeal to God in order to avoid a restricted solipsism. In Malebranche, it is an appeal to God’s miraculous intervention; for Leibniz, it takes the form of a divine preestablished harmony; and Berkeley summons the stable order of ideas guaranteed by the conscious presence of God in order to fuse man and God together. Without God, the philosopher of the time would have been virtually a metaphysical Robinson Crusoe.


7 In another context, Hume himself affirms that “A perfect solitude is, perhaps, the greatest punishment we can suffer” (Treatise, II, ii, v).

8 H. Hesse, Steppenwolf (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972), pp. 66–67. I have inverted the order of the passages in order to lend them a more discursive tone. I myself would propose that we are composed of as many “selves” as we have moods. But these moods emanate from a central locus of identity, from a center or a unity of consciousness (see below). For an appreciation of the dynamics of loneliness and personal identity, as they are essentially involved in cases of multiple personalities, consult C. Thigpen and H. Cleckley, The Three Faces of Eve (Fawcett, 1957), pp. 101, 114, 127, 132, 133, 147, 172, 188–189, 209, 210; the connection between the fragmentation of the selves and personal identity is discussed on pages 141–142, 185, and 192; F. Schreiber, Sybil (Warner, 1973), pp. 58, 75, 86, 98, 112, 140, 152, 153, 155, 160, 164, 173, 244, 338–339, 351, 360, 391, 393, 403, 416, 425; the problem of personal identity is considered on pages 16, 170, and 324; and D. Keyes, The Minds of Billy Milligan (Random House, 1981), pp. 66, 105, 133, 136, and 286.

9 W. Golding, Free Fall (Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959), p. 46. Pincher Martin, though written before Free Fall, provides a truer description of the self, as we shall see. Again, both novels are devoted to exploring the sense of loneliness (see esp. Free Fall, pp. 8–12). For a fuller discussion of the self in the context of immanent temporality, consult my paper “The Simplicity Argument and Time in Schopenhauer and Bergson,” Schopenhauer Jahrbuch (1977). Actually, for Bergson “past” memories are transformed into an immediate, i.e., directly present, qualitative surge within consciousness. In short, the “past” can only be recaptured as an intuited present.

10 A. Camus, The Stranger, trans. S. Gilbert (Knopf, 1948), p. 154, last sentence of the book. Better to be detested and yet recognized as an individual than to be indifferently ignored. Camus’s The Myth of Sisyphus is much more symbolically significant in this regard. We recall that as a mortal, Sisyphus for a time was able to cheat death and to trick the god of the underworld, Hades (Pluto) and postpone his journey to the underworld. As a punishment, he was condemned by Zeus to roll a boulder (symbolizing his lonely separation from his wife and friends) alone up a precipice eternally without any help from anyone.

11 Far more successful are Kafka’s descriptions of self-alienation advanced in The Castle, The Trial, and especially Metamorphosis. In Kafka’s stories, it is obvious that the self is hopelessly lost as it blunders about in confusion and obscurity.


personal sense of loneliness, reflected in all his writings, in E. Mannin, *Loneliness* (Hutchinson, 1966), pp. 20–32.

14 Conrad, op. cit., p. 60. Again, “The most you can hope from [life] is some knowledge of yourself” (p. 119).

15 J. Conrad, *An Outcast of the Islands* (Dell, 1962), p. 225. The story is an early one, first published in 1896. Usually, Conrad is content to allude metaphorically to loneliness through the language of symbolism, couched in the imagery of blackness and blindness (cf., *The End of the Tether*). In the above passage, although Conrad mentions transparency instead of opacity, it nevertheless signifies a dark reality because it is a lucidity wherein we view the nothingness and emptiness of our self-conscious existence. Conrad’s only rival in equally stressing both subjectivity and loneliness is Thomas Wolfe; see his major novels and especially “God’s Lonely Man,” in *The Hills Beyond* (Signet, 1968), pp. 145–154.

16 Consult W. Golding, *Pincher Martin* (Capricorn, 1956), pp. 7 (first sentence in the book), 161, 174, 176, 177, 180, 181–182, 186, 188, 194 and passim. In fact, after an intense period of exposure to loneliness, there is, strictly speaking, no such person as Christopher Hadley Martin, but rather simply an obscure center of awareness (pp. 132–133, 161). Robinson Crusoe is actually based on the true story of Alexander Selkirk’s abandonment for five years on an uninhabited island following his own request to be put ashore after an argument with the captain of the vessel. Old Ben Gunn, in Robert Louis Stevenson’s sea adventure *Treasure Island*, probably portrays a fairly realistic account of the seaman’s mental disintegration under similar circumstances. As Pincher Martin “tests” how a solitary person will react to prolonged and intense loneliness, just so his companion novel, *Lord of the Flies*, examines the disintegrative effects of isolation on a group of English choir boys stranded alone on an island. The first book plumbs the intrinsic nature of isolated human consciousness subjected to perfect isolation, and the second study examines human nature and concludes that children, left to their own devices, will produce a Hobbesian nightmare regarding their social interrelationships. *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord of the Flies* have often been compared. Additionally, Arthur Machen’s *The Hill of Dreams* is also a comparable novel exhibiting a Crusoean theme, which describes the extreme loneliness of a young man who feels himself abandoned in the midst of London. His acute sense of isolation finally results in his own mental self-destruction.

Rationalist metaphysicians, like Descartes and Leibniz, previously to Kant, had appealed to a priori arguments in order to demonstrate the continuous and reflexive identity of the person (or soul). Kant, however, in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (A 363 and 363a), turns the tables on the dogmatists by himself arguing that pure reason can just as readily “prove”—it is a priori and synthetically conceivable—that at each temporal instant or moment of consciousness, the mind is a perfectly distinct and self-contained existence. Thus, Kant suggests it is as if a chain of elastic balls were to transfer their entire “motion,” i.e., thought or consciousness, to the next
sphere, without thereby forming a continuity of consciousness: “An elastic ball which impinges on another similar ball in a straight line communicates to the latter its whole motion, and therefore its whole state. If then, in analogy with such bodies, we postulate substances such that the one communicates to the other representations together with the consciousness of them, we can conceive a whole series of substances of which the first transmits its state together with its consciousness to the second, the second its own state with that of the preceding substance to the third, and this in turn the states of all the preceding substances together with its own consciousness and with their consciousness to another. The last substance would then be conscious of all the states of the previously changed substances, as being its own states, because they would have been transferred to it together with the consciousness of them. And yet it would not have been one and the same person in all these states.” Nevertheless, even on this showing, there would remain a disjointed series of (separate) unities of consciousness. (Cf. W. James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Dover, 1950), p. 336 and my *Achilles of Rationalist Arguments*, pp. 115–117.) Kant accepts reflexivity as undeniable but challenges the alleged a priori demonstrability of a continuous self.

17 I am aware that both the logico-positivist and analytic traditions in British and American philosophy regard the postulation of the unconscious as in principle empirically unverifiable. That they do so is itself an assumption, for in point of fact no first principles admit of proof (Aristotle, J.S. Mill). Consequently the principle of truth as residing in empirical confirmability is itself an unexamined first premise and hence in no better position than any other presupposition in science or metaphysics.

18 To what extent Jung posits intrinsically unconscious dynamic processes is a matter of interpretation. In support of my exegesis, I would especially refer the reader to *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, ed. H. Read et. al. (Bollingen, 1960), Vol. 8, pp. 119, 171–172, 310 ff.; Vol. 9, Pt. 2, pp. 4–5, 8–10. Jung claims we infer, we have indirect knowledge of, certain unconscious activities that can never be brought fully to consciousness. Prior to Jung, Leibniz, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche speculated on the existence of unconscious impulses that prevented man from attaining complete self-knowledge. For Freud, in contrast to Jung, it would seem that our unconscious thoughts can be retrieved, at least in principle. Thus, theoretically, through a reconstruction of a chain of causes, we can connect the neuroses with their precipitating events; cf. A. MacIntyre, *The Unconscious* (Kegan Paul, 1958), pp. 17–23.

19 Not unexpectedly, Jung is fascinated by the concept of a monadic center of consciousness, a theoretical model most systematically exploited by Plotinus; but in the Neoplatonic philosopher, the reflexively unified center is rationally clear (when it is not mystically immersed within the One), and hence it affords real insight and self-knowledge. Cf. Jung, *Works*, Vol. 9, Pt. 2, pp. 218–219 and my *Achilles of Rationalist Arguments*, pp. 8–10. By contrast, Freud seems to hold that unconscious conflicts and thoughts are, in principle, retrievable, as when he
suggests, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, that the mind, like the various cities of Rome, may be “archeologically” psychologically excavated since nothing is ever lost within the structures of the mind.

20 The concept of loneliness figures prominently in the psychology of Jung, a loneliness which is classically symbolized in Western consciousness by the Prometheus myth (Works, Vol. 7, 156–157, note 1).
All human beings are lonely, and the desire to avoid isolation constitutes the ultimate motivational drive in human passion, thought, and conduct.¹ Why men are lonely will be the topic of this paper.

The determining factors involved in man’s constant confrontation with loneliness are grounded in two diverse but complementary sorts of influences, which, following a traditional convenience, may be designated as external causes and internal conditions. And although admittedly the lines of demarcation between the two may sometimes appear vague, nevertheless the fruitful insights offered by the foregoing dichotomy are sufficient to encourage me to promote it in the present appendix.

I term a cause external if it (primarily) originates in the environment, physical or social, and if it is in some significant sense objectively or inter-subjectively observable. External causes, then, are essentially physical and entail publicly determinable features which, although they are (at least in principle) mathematically measurable, yet remain contingent (i.e., nonnecessary). By contrast, I define a condition as internal if the dynamic configuration (basically) arises from within the structural activities of consciousness itself. The psychogenetically internal is characteristically mental, indicating that the originating functions emanate from our own individual thought processes. Sociology frequently deals with causes which are basically external and relative, whereas philosophy and psychology usually deal with conditions which are internal and absolute. The latter being intrinsically emotional and cognitive in nature is not amenable to causal explanation or statistical description.
An external cause may be categorized either as (a) personal, private, particular, subjective; or (b) general, common to many or a majority. It can always be altered by a manipulation of the surrounding circumstances and hence loneliness can be reduced or increased depending on the situation. For instance, a child who has lost a pet is lonely, but in most cases, the pet can be replaced and the loneliness assuaged. On the other hand, the contingent fact that a majority of people in a certain society feel economically alienated causes a sense of loneliness among many (Marx). The first example falls under category (a) and the second within category (b). Thus, the personal and general may vary from person to person as well as from society to society. In short, these causes are relative to specific persons and societies at different times and in various places.

By contrast, a condition is (c) individual when it is ubiquitous, when it is present within consciousness at all times and in all places, including the future. The individual conditions of loneliness rule universally and necessarily, unconditionally. For Descartes, the immediate solipsistic certainty of self-consciousness constitutes such a condition. For Leibniz, it is grounded in the monadic unity of consciousness. And for Kant and Husserl, it is established by the unifying a priori synthetic activities of the mind itself. But all four thinkers correctly agree in positing the complete and perfect isolation of individual consciousness. Thus, the personal is not synonymous with the individual. The personal is idiosyncratically accidental and varies radically in each of us, whereas the individual necessarily has the same structure in each and every one of us. Individual conditions consequently involve identical patterns of thought, which we share with every separate and distinct mind. Finally, a condition is termed (d) universal when it is absolutely true of human nature or the human condition. The sense of loneliness conditioned by the realization that we must all die is an example in this final category (d). To be sure, dying itself is a physiological event, a bodily occurrence. Nevertheless, the meaning of death is something we appreciate only insofar as we learn that we share it with others as an absolute condition of our existence. Existential authors have stressed that each of us must die alone, that no one else can die with us or for us (Pascal, Heidegger, Kafka, Malraux, Sartre). Similarly, Irvin Yalom contends that there
are four basic concerns or sources of anxiety for human beings: death, freedom, meaninglessness, and loneliness. And for Yalom, all four are issues which we are forced to face as individuals. This is true. But death, unlike the other concerns, is something that we realize in relation to our universal human situation. After all, one is certain of his own death, not because he has himself experienced it but rather because we “know” or “share” with others death by virtue of participating in a common humanity.

The following chart is intended to serve as an exhaustive matrix of possibilities regarding the causes and conditions of loneliness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXTERNAL AND RELATIVE CAUSES</th>
<th>INTERNAL AND ABSOLUTE CONDITIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PERSONAL, SUBJECTIVE</td>
<td>INDIVIDUAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENERAL, COMMON</td>
<td>UNIVERSAL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted that although any particular example involving either the causes or the conditions of loneliness must fall under this exhaustive schema of conceivabilities, nevertheless any specific analysis is always open to interpretation, reinterpretation, and reclassification.

Obviously, the categories of external, personal and general causes are the most susceptible to influence through environmental alteration. By controlling social or physical elements, loneliness can be directly modified and relevant causal explanations investigated. Conversely, the internal individual and universal conditions cannot be changed; given the structure of reflexive awareness and the very fabric of human nature, they are immutable. Hence, these conditions are intrinsic, unchangeable, for they either involve apodictic patterns of thought, without which self-consciousness itself would be impossible (Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, Husserl) or they force—as opposed to causally incline—us, as individuals and as a species, to experience our selves as isolated, hermitic, insular beings separated from other minds as well as from the realm of unthinking material objects.
In this context, the only consolation that the psychologist and the philosopher can offer is the insight, the understanding, that each of us, separately, suffers from the same affliction. Here the purpose is to lessen loneliness through an understanding of the conditions involved, through a realization that we are all condemned to loneliness as well as freedom (Sartre).

Accordingly, the pain of loneliness which is frequently easiest to alleviate or remove is one which is personal and externally caused. In the situation described above, that of the child and his pet, replacing the pet should (normally) reduce the sense of loneliness. Similarly, if Marx’s goal of a classless society is attainable, then presumably workers would no longer feel alienated from each other by competition and the reified relations of production. On the other hand, as this essay proceeds, it will become increasingly evident that the individual and universal conditions cannot be suspended without at the same time destroying our tenuous hold on sanity itself, grounded as they are in the primary and elemental distinctions between the mind and an external reality (or subject and object) as well as between the self and consciousness of the “other.” In what follows, I shall concentrate my remarks on those I consider to be the most important of the causes and conditions of loneliness.

II

I now wish to discuss four different kinds of separation, alienation, or estrangement. Each of us either must or may consider himself as cut off from (1) nature; (2) other selves; (3) God; or (4) even our own selves.

Separation of self from nature; internal and universal. If we restrict our initial comments to a philosophical context, we discover that ever since Plato’s Divided Line passage in the *Republic*, 509d, Western thought has conceived of the mind as distinct from an independent realm of “objects,” whether these objects are defined as immaterial realities (Forms) or physical entities. Thus, Plato opposes the individual knowing mind, along with its states of subjective consciousness, from a separate order of things (nature) and immutable Ideas. This fundamentally dualistic system is carried
forward by the Christian Middle Ages, which posited a seemingly threefold distinction between a plurality of souls, nature, and God, but in fact the original dualism persisted, since the important dichotomy remained the opposition between the individual soul and an independent reality, material or divine. The scientific revolution of the seventeenth century perpetuated the bifurcation by contrasting the monadic, immaterial mind—whose contents consist of nonextended thoughts and feelings—versus a world of extended material objects always in principle objectively or mathematically measurable. This theoretical dichotomization thus directly results in emphasizing the complete separation of the ego from the natural world. Similarly, the Cartesian revolution finalizes the ultimate ontological break between the mind and the external world. Accordingly, Descartes insists that what can be conceived separately may exist separately; since the mind can be conceived and defined distinctly from the body, it follows that the mind is independent of the body. Each individual mind is thus a separate substance. It further follows that the self can only be certain (i.e., intuitively clear) of its own existence and that it enjoys an immediate and direct “privileged access” to its own thoughts; by contrast, it can only dubitably infer the existence of an external world and other minds. For all I can ever know, Descartes contends, other men may be automatons, clever devices clothed in hats and coats (Second Meditation). Indeed, rather momentously, Descartes’s “epistemological loneliness” is systematically exploited by the subsequent versions of philosophic rationalism (Leibniz), empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume), and subjective idealism (Kant, Fichte). All of these seemingly diverse principles and systems are actually grounded in the absolute integrity of insular self-awareness, and all have mutually conspired in stressing epistemic isolation as the pervasive quality of individual human thought and/or existence. Indeed, together these seemingly different epistemological tendencies, I believe, correctly represent, at bottom, a conviction that the mind is reflexively aware of its own thoughts (Descartes) or at least of what passes within it (Hume). Thus, the various theories agree in positing an immanent and universal condition of loneliness wherein the existence of an external world and other minds can be doubted
while the solipsistic nature of the ego alone remains indubitable and separate.

For the same reason, the antagonistic relation between man and nature posited in the Baconian system inevitably tends to alienate man from the realm of nature. On this scheme of things, man is given the task of conquering nature, of dominating a recalcitrant external realm of objects which stands in opposition to him. Knowledge is power, as Bacon announces: power to control and subjugate nature and force it to comply with man’s needs and demands. On this account, man and nature are adversaries. And even in Hobbes’s more monistic theory, where man is a “part” of nature, nevertheless as an atomic unit he is engaged in perpetual conflict with others of his species, in a “war of all against all.” Thus whereas Bacon describes the struggle as one between man and nature, Hobbes interprets it as a battle between the individual and society.

Separation of self from others; internal and individual. In addition to the philosophical condition of loneliness, we may now turn to another basic aspect, namely, the psychological. Consequently, I wish to discuss a most important internal and individual (as defined above) source of loneliness. Thus, not only the first but perhaps the most pervasive and permanent sense of separation derives shortly after birth. We may conjecture that initially the infant’s ego identifies itself with the totality of reality, that, as Hegel puts it, consciousness and being are the same.5 Freud designates this earliest of all conscious states as the “oceanic feeling,” in Civilization and Its Discontents. It is a stage of indiscriminate unity “wherein the differentiation between self and mother has not taken place.”6 It is also a condition of ‘symbiotic oneness.’ Margaret Mahler refers to this period in the infant’s life as resembling ‘the model of a closed monadic system.’ Again, it is an activity of awareness prior to the distinction between subject and object or self and mother. Mahler describes it as “that state of undifferentiation, of fusion with mother, in which the ‘I’ is not yet differentiated from the ‘not I,’” the ego from the nonego (Fichte). Next comes the sense of separation or distinction as the child realizes, re-cognizes self-consciously, that he and the mother are not really the same consciousness, that they do not possess an identical frame of reference or relation. Ultimately,
the ensuing structuralization process, as delineated by Mahler, “eventually culminates in internalized self-representation, as distinct from internal object representation” (p. 63). In Kantian terms, the mental presence within consciousness assumes the meaning of my self-consciousness only insofar as my self is conceived as existing separately from the cognized ‘object,’ which stands directly in opposition to my self. It is in this sense that Kant declares that self-consciousness is mutually conditioned by the concept of an object. And it is precisely at this stage of awareness—when the self is conscious of the reciprocally conditioning ‘object’—that awareness develops into self-consciousness. Thus, the dynamic activities which promote self-identity are also the very same functions which separate the ego from its initial primordial, amorphous, non-self-conscious unity. At this primitive juncture, loneliness first appears when the child first realizes that his (a) libidinal desires, (b) the mother, and (c) the desired object are different, distinguishable, and often in conflict (pp. 90, 98). It is exactly here that Freud locates that “first great anxiety-state of birth and the infantile anxiety of longing for an absent person—the anxiety of separation from the protecting mother” (The Ego and Id, V). It only remained for Erich Fromm to universalize this proposition into a principle by announcing that “The experience of separateness arouses anxiety; it is, indeed, the source of all anxiety” (The Art of Loving, II).

If we reconstruct the psychogenetic process we have so far traced, we shall uncover two distinguishable stages of early ego development. First, we find the symbiotic state of (conscious) undifferentiated unity, and second, we discover a period of emerging (self-conscious) separation between the ego and objects and then between the self and others. This second state, it should be noted, is essentially an emotive one, not an epistemological one. The child feels different from the object or the mother. For instance, the mother is constituted within the child’s consciousness as a responding, recognizing, and opposing force (Hegel’s struggle between separate consciousnesses for dominance, assertion).

The third and final dialectical transition toward normal ego growth once more is best fulfilled by a Hegelian paradigm. The unfolding ego, now regarding and recognizing itself as distinct from the mother,
apprehends its own existence in relation to the other’s consciousness. Through this relation, it strives to define its own existence. It seeks to achieve self-unity amidst its awareness of difference. It reaffirms and re-cognizes the mutually conditioning structures it has itself created. And soon it realizes a reciprocal sensing and knowing relation between itself and the significant other, the mother. Thus full self-awareness is not only conditioned by an awareness of objects—in which case feral children could be fully self-conscious—but further reflexive consciousness requires the conditioning consciousness of the other self. Again, self-consciousness is mutually constituted as both a meaning and a feeling by the consciousness of the other. Without the identity of the other, self-identity would be significantly incomplete, although not impossible.

The foregoing analysis represents an internal individual condition of loneliness grounded in the ego’s natural progress toward complete self-definition as it separates itself from the surrounding world of inanimate objects and responding others. Should the development of consciousness be arrested or fixated prior to such a completion, extreme narcissism and autism will be the inevitable result, and the lonely ego will seek satisfaction from its isolated state within itself and its own peculiar resources. Actually, the specter of autism haunts each psyche from the cradle to the grave. Not only does it constitute an ineliminable primary structure within awareness itself, dooming us to feel separated from other selves, but it also tantalizingly beckons to us as an ever-present and satisfying retreat, a promising regression to an earlier stage of narcissistic consciousness prior to the frustrations of interpersonal disappointments.

I should emphasize that the philosophical and the psychological conditions are not opposed. In a sense, the former are merely descriptive of the history of mankind, whereas the latter are more properly representative of the history of the individual (Hegel).

Separation of self from nature; external and general. A major cause of man’s growing sense of separation from nature was the astronomical revolution of the Renaissance. The world of the Greeks and Medievals was a closed, familiar, hierarchically ordered sphere of being. It was finite and immutably ordered for all time. Everything had its proper place, and there was a place for everything, as Aquinas
expressed it. Thus, within “the great chain of being,” there were varying degrees of perfection from the highest to the lowest. And within that spectrum of existence, man enjoyed a central position between the best and the worst. He was at the very center of creation and God’s concern. During the fourteenth century, however, a radically new conception of the universe was proposed in the works of Nicholas of Cusa and Giordano Bruno, and suddenly man was confronted with the possibility that he might be merely a trespasser in an alien universe. The new universe was infinite and centerless. It had no definite form, and man lost his preeminent status within it. Man experienced a dramatic sense of loss; he felt abandoned and purposeless. He was violently expelled alone into the limitless expanse of endless space and time, into the dark void of a meaningless universe. This sense of separation was later graphically captured by Pascal as he imagined his soul surviving alone amidst the dark infinity of space, absolutely unrelated to any other conscious existence. The political analogue to the closed and secure medieval astronomical universe, as we shall see, is the feudal social system, which afforded man an escape from loneliness by guaranteeing his position and role within the community. Thus, how the individual interprets his relation to either celestial or political reality directly influences (i.e., causes) his sense of loneliness or of belonging. These causes, in turn, may assume varying degrees of importance at different times and places. During certain periods of history, man has experienced a sense of unity with the universe or the community. At other times, he has felt alienated from the natural order or from other men.

Separation of self from others; external and general. A common cause of alienation in man stems from the contingent, empirical fact that many societies have historically been and currently are organized simply as collections of atomic units. The atomistic society (Gesellschaft) may be characterized as one in which the separate ‘parts’ are conceived as independent of the ‘whole.’ The parts are more real than the whole, and combination into greater units is unnatural and forced. The natural freedom of the individual, which he enjoys in the state of nature, is sacrificed for the sake of security, and society is thus based on a compromise between the best thing in life—to injure others with impunity—and the worst—to suffer injury without the
power to retaliate. Thus, society is grounded in a compromise, and the constituent parts exhibit merely accidental relations with each other. Furthermore, the parts are regarded as qualitatively identical, and they can be exchanged with each other without thereby altering the nature of the ‘whole.’ This model of society was initially formulated by Glaucon in Book 2 of the Republic. Later, the paradigm was amplified by Lucretius and perhaps most systematically exploited by the Social Contract theorists, but especially by Hobbes in the Leviathan, who viewed society as a great artificial man composed of individual men as parts. In Hobbes’s picture, man’s life in the state of nature “is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (Leviathan, I, 13). Since Hobbes’s principle is based on the isolated character of human existence, it follows that even after the institution of the social contract and the formation of civil society, the relations between men remain unchanged. They are forced to lock their chests against their families, bolt their doors against their neighbors, and travel their own countryside armed. Can anyone doubt that such a view of social fragmentation can result in anything other than an increased sense of loneliness?

An historic and classic example of an atomistic society is provided by the Roman Empire, a world too large to unify as an organic whole and hence compelled to rule through the indirect agency of general, impersonal laws. Denied the opportunity to establish living, human relations, man was prone to seek consolation within himself and to strive for personal—as opposed to political—salvation. In fact, it was in this chaotic and fragmented milieu that the personalistic tendencies of Epicureanism, Stoicism, Scepticism, and Christianity all found expression in ideals which were diametrically opposed to the values of the earlier Hellenic polis.9

Both Hegel’s concept of civil society and Marx’s view of capitalism owe their origin to Hobbes’s description of human relations—in or out of the state of nature—as “a war of all against all.” In such societies, the connections between persons are conceived as formalistic, legalistic, or contractual in essence. The effect on man is that he feels as if he transpires in political and social seclusion from the rest of his fellows. Perhaps today, in American society, this state of affairs is reflected in our high divorce rate, the high incidence of
lawsuits, our volatile mobility, and the disappearance of the extended family. America is essentially an atomistic society. (David Riesman’s descriptions of both inner- and outer-directed man derive from this model of society.)

The model of atomistic society, as formulated in political philosophy, has its metaphysical counterpart in the ontological materialism of Thomas Hobbes. For Hobbes, the allegedly “inner” mental world of classic immaterialism is dismissed as self-contradictory on the grounds that all existence necessarily implies bodily or physical being. Hobbes is credited with initiating the study of man as a natural entity no different in principle from other material objects. As bodies are formed through an accretion of atoms, so is man simply the causal result of physical tissues and organs. Correspondingly, society itself is the collective outcome of an aggregate of separate men. But even on this presumably “scientific” and reductive paradigm, it becomes manifestly clear that such a conception of man inevitably entails construing him as a lonely and fragmented individual. Metaphorically, man becomes like an atom, separated from the remainder of his kind. In general, I think, it is fair to conclude that contemporary behaviorists, as well as countless sociologists, have eagerly and uncritically adopted Hobbes’s conception of man, with all its narrow implications. The effect of this supposed “objectivity” has been to regard man as a more or less complicated physical object and to deprive him of any value related to his unique significance as a feeling-thinking being. The further consequence has been the separation of man from his fellows and a rejection of his “spiritual” meaning. (Meanings, after all, are not translatable into tiny electrochemical responses occurring in the central nervous system.) These new Hobbesians transform the mind into the brain and contend that all thought is really sensation. Thus man himself is depersonalized, turned into an object, a thing, a set of conditioned responses to external stimuli, a network of impersonal causes and effects.

Another example of external and general separation from the other is provided by Marx’s concept of alienation. As Marx envisions it, we are cut off from our fellows (as well as from nature and our selves) by the dehumanizing forces of past and current economic production. Closely following Hegel’s Master-Slave passage in the
Phenomenology, Marx paints an image of fragmented man struggling to survive in the midst of anarchic competition. For Marx, however, hope ultimately lies in transforming the economic system and thereby eventually eliminating the conflict between human beings. It is corrupt economic systems, argues Marx, which alienate men from each other. Alter the system and you will change the nature of man.11 (For Freud, of course, it is men who are aggressive, not systems.)

In fact, the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century did tend to sunder men from each other by the mechanism of unbridled competition as well as through the agency of mass technological production. The lifeless, material relations between the workers and the lords of industry, as well as among the laborers themselves, is powerfully depicted in Marx’s account of alienated labor and his description of dehumanized man in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts. Insofar as a great majority of Western countries still operate with the methods and goals of the capitalist system, we may expect men to continue to feel alienated, separated, and lonely. Similarly, the technological and computer revolutions of the present century also serve in promoting the dehumanization of man by transforming his concrete human qualities into abstract mathematical quantities.

The antithesis of the atomistic model is represented by the paradigm of the organic community (Gemeinschaft). In this diametrically opposed, fundamentally biologic metaphor, the “members”—rather than mechanical parts—are conceived as functionally interdependent and harmoniously contributing to the well-being of the entire organism. Just as the various features of a face are different and yet mutually conspire to form the visage, so, analogously, members (or classes) contribute in defining the whole. On this model, members are qualitatively distinguishable and not interchangeable. And the virtue of the individual is inconceivable apart from the good of the community. Hence, the quality of the individual is conditioned by the goodness of the whole, and a man can be good only if the state is good. The Platonic and Aristotelian polis, the medieval manor, the Hegelian state, and the Marxist classless community are alike committed to the lessening of loneliness by promoting a sense of belonging, togetherness. Thus, the primary goal of the organic
community is “spiritual” unification. However, if this end is pursued to the extreme, the outcome is a totalitarian system in which the sense of personal loneliness becomes acute, such as Winston Smith in Orwell’s *1984* or the Savage in Huxley’s *Brave New World*.

*Separation of self from God; external and personal.* Elsewhere I have argued—along essentially Feuerbachian lines—that man has created God as an independent, conscious being for the purpose of assuring himself that he is not alone.\(^{12}\) God symbolizes an external consciousness, who is posited in order to guarantee that man does not exist alone, that there is another being who continually ‘reflects’ him, mirrors his unique existence. Thus, God is conceived as a being independent of and external to individual self-consciousness, a being who is always with us. And for many of us, this is a great source of relief, a remedy against our sense of psychological and metaphysical loneliness. But sometimes, in certain cases, the palliative ironically enough misses the desired effect, and the consequent sense of abandonment assumes tragic proportions. Pascal’s *Pensées* and Hegel’s description of the “Unhappy Consciousness” in the *Phenomenology* both offer stark testimony to the sense of irredeemable separation between finite, temporal man and infinite, eternal God. In addition, the Protestant turn of thought deprived man of the supportive guidance provided by the external and mediating authority of the priesthood. Indeed, the Reformation, by stressing the subjective conscience and the radical freedom of the isolated self, greatly enhanced the religious feeling of abandonment and insecurity. The works of Soren Kierkegaard are eloquently dedicated to just this form of estrangement. Uncertain of his relation to God, man increasingly searched for signs of favor and election and believed he might find it through his work (Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*). Later, still within the sociological context of Protestantism, man, being forced to turn inward, toward the emptiness and radical freedom of the ego, found that his separation from God became not only terrifying but actually life-threatening (Durkheim, *Suicide*).\(^{13}\) This separation is subsequently symbolized by Nietzsche’s haunting proclamation that God is dead, that we can no longer expect to reach or communicate with Him through prayer or confession. In fundamental sympathy with Nietzsche’s prophetic
utterance, Existentialist authors like Heidegger, Kafka, Sartre, and Camus have all echoed this theme of loneliness, of man’s sense of estrangement from God, and they have proceeded to expound the gloomy consequences of this truth. Thus the Existential bias so prevalent in contemporary literature and philosophy has profoundly contributed in depicting the meaningless quality of human existence once it is cut off from its relation to (an absolute) God.

Separation of man from himself; internal and individual. Finally, it remains to append a few remarks about the deepest of all conditions of internal and individual loneliness. Man is cut off from himself; he is self-estranged, self-alienated at the very core of his consciousness, because he is absolutely prevented from reaching his innermost “self.” And this is so because either (1) the self is at bottom opaque, dark, tenebrous, impenetrable (Joseph Conrad, William Golding); or (2) the “self” is in reality a random multiplicity of impressions (Hume) or a radical disunity of separate and opposed selves (Hesse); or, finally, (3) there are, in principle, irretrievable unconscious elements within consciousness preventing the ego from achieving adequate, let alone complete, self-knowledge (Jung).14

III

Admittedly, distinctions between internal and external, mental and physical, absolute and relative, or psychological and sociological may seem artificial, vague, and ambiguous to many readers. And quite likely, some psychologists would prefer to translate the material into the mental, whereas all behaviorists and many sociologists might be inclined to transform the mental into the publicly observable. Indeed, going even deeper into the issues, metaphysical idealists would define the “physical” as fundamentally mind-dependent, and by contrast metaphysical materialists would reduce the psychic into matter and motion. Personally, however, I regard either reductionism as misguided. There are both minds and matter, and although their relation and interaction are profoundly problematic, nevertheless their difference seems manifest and obvious. Elsewhere, I have sought to defend a theory of “contingent immaterialism,” a paradigm which maintains that matter, when arranged in certain peculiar
combinations, creates something quite novel and different from itself, namely mind, an immaterial reality, an existential “nothingness.” Although to be sure, according to this paradigm, it is true that mind “depends” on material conditions, still it does not follow that mind is reducible to or identical with matter, nor that mind is merely the brain emitting electro-chemical responses. In any case, the point I am concerned to make in the present appendix is that despite the vagueness and ambiguity involved in the preceding distinctions, I remain convinced that fruitful insights into the nature and origin, the conditions and causes of loneliness can be established on the basis of the classifications provided above.

* This article, now slightly modified, originally appeared in the *International Journal of Contemporary Sociology*, 21:3–4 (Fall–Winter, 1983).


7 Mahler, op. cit., 48, 111.


14 See Appendix B.

APPENDIX D
KANT’S REFLECTIONS ON THE UNITY OF CONSCIOUSNESS, TIME-CONSCIOUSNESS, AND THE UNCONSCIOUS*

Ben Mijuskovic

I

In what follows, I shall address the question concerning the ultimate premise of the Transcendental Analytic in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. I believe the candidates can be reduced to two dominant but opposing principles, one grounded in immanent time-consciousness and the other in the unity of consciousness. In pursuing this goal, I intend to view consciousness through Leibnizian lenses by focusing on its dynamic activity, continuity, unity, and unconscious aspects. Thus, in the preface to the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant declares that the complexities of the Subjective Deduction “have cost me the greatest labour” in formulating the foundation for his entire epistemological edifice, for his transcendental Deduction of the Categories.1 As he presents it in these early passages, the principle is grounded in the indubitability of (individual) temporal consciousness.2 Nevertheless, half a dozen years later, in rethinking the critical and substantive starting point of his system, he then announces instead that it is rather the transcendental unity of self-consciousness or apperception upon which he will base his entire epistemic foundation.3 In what follows, I wish to support his initial reflections concerning the epistemological status of the temporal nature of consciousness and conclude with what I consider to be a critical psychological consequence about the irredeemable quality of
human loneliness, which I believe follows directly from subjective and immanent time-consciousness.  

But allow me first to start with the key Kantian concept of the synthetic a priori and to draw a distinction between its “logical” use versus its epistemological status as it functions in temporal consciousness. For Kant, the term “synthesis” implies relation, connection, combination between separate and distinct concepts or entities; between subject and predicate terms in a judgment; or between a substance and its accidents. Beyond that, synthesis means unity, binding, togetherness. There are various forms of synthesis in Kant and in a moment, I will discuss some of them.

A priori concepts and judgments are (1) universally true and true in any conceivable universe; (2) necessary, indicating that any opposite assertion implies a logical or real contradiction; and, further (c) pure or nonsensuous.

There are various forms of synthetic propositions displayed in Kant’s writings. Empirical judgments are factual claims, which are contingent and a posteriori: “Konigsberg was the capital of Prussia.” But the important judgments are those containing concepts that are both synthetic and a priori. These may be consciously accessible as subjective conditions underlying thought itself, as in the syntheses of apprehension in intuition, reproduction in the imagination, and recognition in a concept; or they may be objective presuppositions, as in the Deduction of the pure concepts of the faculty of the understanding, which result in the continuity of human experience and/or the transcendental unity of apperception. It is important to notice that the famous cluster of relational syntheses, the categories, are always active, and thus “spontaneous,” sources of relation and hence unity. Insofar as they are active, they necessarily exhibit temporal features. As such, they constitute conditions presupposed as unifying agents in all human experiences, both scientific and ordinary.

By contrast, Kant considers synthetic a priori metaphysical judgments that deal with human ideals and aspirations, particularly the three postulates regarding the conceivable or possible existence of a transcendent God, a noumenal will, and a supersensuous immortality as meaningful but without any temporal referents precisely because
they point to a noumenal realm, which is “outside” or “beyond” the human representations of time and space. Although the above form meaningful concepts, judgments, and arguments, they are nevertheless cognitively vacuous or empty due to their completely nonsensuous content. They are outside the limits of possible knowledge, insofar as the faculties of sensibility (Transcendental Aesthetic) and understanding (Transcendental Analytic) define such limits. Thus, the judgment “The soul is immortal” is both synthetic and a priori but not knowable because it cannot be encountered in any possible experience. Similarly the purely rational, transcendent principles and proofs presented in the Paralogisms, Antinomies, and Ideals and in the Dialectic, as well as the ethical formulations discussed in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, involve no temporal implications. Thus, for example, although the categorical imperative is a synthetic as well as an a priori ethical principle, directing us always to act so that our subjective maxim (the will) can become a universal objective law legislating for all rational beings in any conceivable universe, again, time is not a constitutive feature in this principle. The will and the law are related a priori, and yet there is no reference to phenomenal time in this command or, for that matter, in any of the above concepts, judgments, or arguments for the existence of God, the freedom of the will, or the immortality of the soul.

Obviously, although the category of causality intrinsically involves temporal characteristics, a more instructive insight into the temporal aspects of synthetic mental activities is provided by the example of mathematics offered by Kant in both the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783) and the second (or B edition) introduction to the *Critique* (1787). There are, of course, contemporary philosophers who follow Leibniz and Hume in distinguishing a priori or analytic propositions, consisting of those in which the predicate term is already contained in the subject concept, from synthetic a posteriori or empirical statements, ones in which the predicate term adds a significant and novel element to the proposition—Hume’s “relations of ideas” as opposed to “matters of fact.” Kant, rather controversially however, affirms the genuineness of synthetic judgments a priori in mathematics and geometry. Accordingly, in the *Prolegomena* section titled “How Is Pure Mathematics Possible?” he states that “arithmetic
achieves its concept of number by the *successive* addition of units in time.” Kant is convinced this is the case because math involves a *further* temporal process since “higher numbers” depend on an additional synthetic activity of progressively counting units in time. (Critics have indicated that the sense of psychological discovery is no proof of logical novelty.) For Kant, the computational factor is based on a mental “construction,” and mathematical additives appear to be both synthetic and temporal at once. A nontemporal construction would be a contradiction in terms. Perhaps what Kant has in mind is that if a primitive tribe could only count to the number seven, they would also possess the concept of five; but in advancing to the proposition \(7 + 5 = 12\), the twelfth digit would consist in an additional synthetic, temporal progression. In any case, my point is that in this instance Kant is obviously identifying synthetic activities with temporal processes. Kant is simply making explicit this element of time-consciousness in the operations of mental activity. Clearly, the example must have considerable probative value, since he states it in the *Prolegomena* and retains it in the second edition of the *Critique*.11

Schopenhauer, who agrees with Kant in his identification of synthesis and time, insists “[t]hat arithmetic rests on the pure [a priori] intuition or perception of time” and that this activity is not only synthetic but a priori as well.

It can be demonstrated … as follows. All counting consists in the repeated setting down of unity; merely to know always how often we have already set down unity do we mark it each time with a different word; these are the numerals. Now repetition is only possible through succession, but succession, thus one thing after another, depends entirely on the intuition or perception of time. It is a concept that is intelligible only by means of this; and thus counting is only possible by means of time. This dependence of all counting on time is also betrayed by the fact that in all languages multiplication is expressed by “time.”12

Later, in the introduction to the second edition of the *Critique*, Kant once more reiterates that synthetic propositions a priori are
possible in mathematics because synthesis occurs when combining acts go “outside” or beyond prior numbers, as for example, when we transcend the immediacy of moments in time and “see the number 12 come [i.e., become, progress, develop] into being.”\textsuperscript{13} Synthesis not only “takes” time, it is time, since consciousness is temporally structured in its most intimate and essential nature.\textsuperscript{14}

For the analytic tradition, $7 + 5 = 12$ is simply a tautology, while in Kant’s geometric proposition, “The shortest distance (quantity) between two points is a straight line (quality),”\textsuperscript{15} it is even more difficult to see how this is a synthetic judgment a priori. But I believe the addition example does expose and illuminate Kant’s inner thoughts, and so I have recruited it in the interest of clarification as an instance of the synthetic a priori. However, the salient issue is not whether Kant is right about mathematics or geometric constructions but whether he is correct about the temporal aspects of synthetic acts, which are always relational, discursive, mediate. Certainly, other philosophers have invoked the synthetic a priori with considerable effect and success. Plato summons it in the \textit{Meno} when he analogizes the relation between color and shape as identical to the assertion that Virtue is Knowledge of the Good; Hegel enlists it in his dialectical, essentially temporally structured interplay between Being and Consciousness (all the categories of the \textit{Science of Logic} are synthetic and a priori); Husserl introduces it in describing the eidetic difference between thoughts, as given completely when they occur at all, while, by contrast, objects always appear as essentially restricted to incomplete perspectival aspects; and, finally, Sartre maintains that Being and Nothingness, the in-itself and the for-itself, are inseparably related to each other as color and extension, or sound, pitch, and timbre, are to each other (Conclusion to \textit{Being and Nothingness}).

But Kant is captivated by the temporal nature of consciousness, namely the fact that unlike in space, whose external parts lie outside one another, the elements of time are essentially continuous with each other, and there can be no time without a fusion, a melding of past, present, and future. This insight, I believe, is grounded in the twin Leibnizian theories of dynamism and continuity, the latter expressed in the principle that neither nature nor consciousness makes “leaps,” that not only is there a seamless continuity in the Great Chain of
Being (Lovejoy) but in the “chain” or, more precisely, the stream of consciousness as well. It may be remembered that in Leibniz’s paradigm of self-consciousness, all awareness is essentially temporal by virtue of the fact that the soul is *always* active. Both in the *New Essays on Human Understanding* and *The Monadology*, especially sections 1–21 of the latter, there is an emphasis on the simple, immaterial nature of apperception: its unity, its continuous identity, its (temporal) dynamism, and its unconscious activities. Against the Cartesians and Locke, Leibniz declares, in the *New Essays*, that the soul thinks continuously, since “no substance can lack activity” and that in deep sleep and even in death, each soul remains aware at some minimal level.\(^{16}\)

Later, in exploring the notion of the unconscious, I will go on to contend that there is an underlying and hidden species of thought, of thinking, that is unconscious—or more precisely nonconscious—and creative, since it is productive of internal time-consciousness. Its foundational acts and generative powers are responsible for *all* our “surface” or conscious states of awareness. And if this is so, time-consciousness can only occur if the mind is “simple,” unextended, and immaterial precisely because no materialist, behaviorist, empiricist, or phenomenalist theory—in principle—can account for the unconscious. In other words, for Kant, consciousness itself rests on acts that are *non*conscious and in principle irretrievably so. Thus, the difference between the unconscious acts, in the Freudian sense, and the nonconscious, in the Kantian sense, is that the former are in principle retrievable and the latter are not, even though they are constituted by the very dynamic forces which allow us to think at all.\(^{17}\)

II

As previously intimated, essentially there are two serious applicants for an indubitable starting-point: (a) the unity of self-consciousness and (b) consciousness of time. Both have strong features recommending them. The first position is championed by a number of commentators while the second is defended by Schopenhauer and Heidegger and vigorously advocated by Norman Kemp Smith.\(^{18}\) In this controversy, I am inclined to side with the latter group for five reasons. First, I believe
the position is immune from Hume’s skeptical attack on the self (see below). Second, I am convinced that time-consciousness presupposes the unity of consciousness but not the other way around. Third, the Second Paralogism compromises Kant’s own positive assertions about the unity of consciousness as expressed in the second edition of the *Critique*. Fourth, time-consciousness essentially implies mental, dynamic acts, whereas a unity of consciousness could be immediate and hence nontemporal, but a nontemporal human consciousness is a contradiction in terms. And fifth, I believe the origin of internal temporality is grounded in unconscious acts and there is sufficient textual support for this view, while the unity of consciousness outlook seems to neglect this important factor. Nevertheless, both premises exhibit persuasive advantages and in fact lead directly to a model of self-consciousness as intrinsically monadic, insular, and hermetic; together they condition an image of lonely man, which I find to be ultimately indubitable.

In a previous article titled “The Premise of the Transcendental Analytic,” published in the *Philosophical Quarterly*, I discuss Robert Paul Wolff’s interpretation of Kant’s “transcendental unity of apperception,” which he proposes as the indubitable starting point. I now wish to offer some remarks on its interesting contentions. But let me first start with Hume’s skeptical account of the self, even though it is uncertain whether or not Kant was aware of it, because he certainly provides a powerful answer to Hume.

It may be remembered that Hume presents an empirical and phenomenalist paradigm of the “self” as a construction of qualitatively simple impressions and complex ideas, with both being classified under the generic title of perceptions, which are essentially mental in their nature. These perceptions are ultimately caused by the constant motion of (external) material particles in space with the consequence that the “self” dissolves into a bundle of discrete atomistic impressions, each pursuing the next with, in his famous phrase, an “inconceivable rapidity.” Thus, Hume declares,

> We must separate the question concerning the substance of the mind from that concerning the cause of its thought; … [and] when apply’d to the operations of matter, we may certainly
conclude, that motion may be, and actually is, the cause of thought and perception.\textsuperscript{22}

From this follows Hume’s analysis of the disintegration of the self and his attack on metaphysicians who attempt to establish personal identity based solely on the soul’s immaterial simplicity, unity, and identity. His positive position follows.

But setting aside some metaphysicians of this kind, I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with inconceivable rapidity, and are in perpetual flux and movement.\textsuperscript{23}

But when Hume admits to an awareness of a temporal \textit{succession} of perceptions—which includes both impressions and ideas—he surrenders all that is required for the establishment of personal identity. It is not required that

we are every moment intimately conscious of what we call our SELF; that we feel its existence and its continuance in existence; and are certain beyond the evidence of a demonstration, both of its perfect identity and simplicity.\textsuperscript{24}

All that is necessary in order to establish the genuine presence of a singular self is that there be \textit{some} self-conscious awareness of a passage of time, of a succession of “perceptions,” and that these transitory thoughts be recognized as mine—I am self-aware of their passage—because otherwise I could not be transitionally aware of their migration.

Now we can profitably turn to Wolff’s interpretation and see how he views Kant’s answer to Hume while relying on the concept of the unity of consciousness as his guiding principle. According to Wolff, we can gain an insight into a unified consciousness, and how the various elements are constituted or related to each other within awareness, by recruiting a trick suggested by Franz Brentano [James?]. Let us imagine that we have two pieces of paper on which identical sentences are written. The example Wolff chooses is “The unicorn is a mythical beast.” The first piece of paper is cut into equal
pieces and divided among six men, Jones, Brown, etc., with each conscious only of a single word. The second sheet, however, is left intact and given to a seventh man, Smith. It follows that

Now every word of the sentence is contained in the consciousness of some member or other of the group of six. Similarly, every word of the sentence is contained in Smith’s consciousness. But the two cases are absolutely different, for while in the former it is true that the separate parts of the sentence are contained in some consciousness, they are not contained in the same consciousness, and hence there is no unity of consciousness of them as there is in the case of Smith.\textsuperscript{25}

Wolff then proceeds to comment on the example from William James:

The fact is that one consciousness of twelve words is not the same as twelve consciousnesses of one word each. Following Kant’s terminology, we may characterize the difference by saying that the one consciousness of all twelve words binds them together, or conceives them as a unity.

Accordingly, Wolff concludes that the ultimate and undeniable premise of the first edition \textit{Deduction}, indeed of the argument of the entire \textit{Transcendental Analytic}, in both editions A and B, is the proposition “All the contents of my consciousness are bound up in a unity.” Wolff then continues by citing the critical passage as confirmation of his interpretation, but notice that it is from the second edition of the \textit{Critique}.

\textit{The Unity of Consciousness}. It must be possible for the “I think” to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me which could not be thought at all, and that is equivalent to saying that the representation would be impossible, or at least would be nothing to me.\textsuperscript{26}

Interestingly enough, Kant himself offers a strikingly similar example in the A edition Second Paralogism when he criticizes the
errors of metaphysical psychologists, the pure rationalists. Their argument purports to provide knowledge of a noumenal entity and it is therefore rejected by Kant. At bottom, the real issue for the dogmatists is twofold: the first consideration concerns their negative conviction that “senseless matter cannot think” and the second their related positive contention that the soul, as a thinking substance, along with its intellectual predicates or attributes of separate thoughts, must be immaterial, unextended, “simple,” in order for thought to be possible as a multiplicity in unity. Again, I must be aware that my thoughts are my thoughts and not yours, and unless they are unified in one and the same consciousness, I could not know this.

Kant’s exposition of the metaphysicians follows:

This is the Achilles of all dialectical inferences in the pure doctrine of the soul. It is no mere sophistical play, contrived by a dogmatist in order to impart to his assertions a superficial plausibility, but an inference which appears to withstand even the keenest scrutiny and the most scrupulously exact investigation. It is as follows.

Every composite substance is an aggregate of several substances, and the action of a composite, or whatever inheres in it as thus composite, is an aggregate of several actions or accidents, distributed among the plurality of the substances. Now an effect which arises from the concurrence of many acting substances is indeed possible, namely, when this effect is external only (as, for instance, the motion of a body is the combined motion of all of its parts.) But with thoughts, as internal accidents belonging to a thinking being, it is different. For suppose it be the composite that thinks: then every part of it would be a part of the thought, and only all of them taken together would contain the whole thought. But this cannot be consistently maintained. For representations (for instance, the single words of a verse), distributed among different beings, never make up a whole thought (a verse), and it is therefore impossible that thought should inhere in what is essentially composite. It is therefore possible only in
a *single* substance, which, not being an aggregate of many, is absolutely simple [i.e., immaterial, unextended].

The so-called *nervus probandi* of this argument lies in the proposition, that if a multiplicity of representations are to form a single representation, they must be contained in the absolute unity of the thinking subject.27

The fallacy committed by the Second Paralogism, according to Kant, is that it falsely argues from the merely logical unity of the subject *in representation* to the actual simplicity of the subject in itself.

However, if we compare B 131–132 with A 351–352, we can see that if Kant appeals to Wolff’s interpretation, then the foundational premise of the Analytic, or more specifically the Deduction of the Categories, is grounded in a rational principle embedded, in turn, in a doctrine which assumes that the soul as a substance, along with its predicates, is immaterial, simple, and hence intrinsically unified. In short, our premise is based on a synthetic a priori demonstration arising or following from a noumenal substance and established by an argument from the Dialectic, which Kant explicitly disavows. Kant is well aware here that the rationalists are engaged in two contentions: (a) negatively, that “senseless matter cannot think” and (b) positively, that only a simple, immaterial substance can unify diverse elements in one consciousness. Thus, the impossibility of matter being able to think and the soul’s simplicity are inextricably connected.28 But the mere fact that this *appears* to be a rationalist argument does not mean that it is false. It certainly is the case that separate words are “strung” continuously together in individual consciousness. After all, the example of the diverse men is an empirical one.

Did Kant recognize the compromising nature of these conflicting passages in A versus B and elect to delete the earlier Second Paralogism account because he thought it weakened his position in B 131–132? It is a fact that *both* the first edition Paralogisms and the first edition Deduction were completely recast for the second edition. And yet there is much to recommend the argument from the unity of consciousness.
More recently, a study titled, *The Achilles of Rationalist Psychology*, consisting of some fifteen scholarly articles committed solely to discussing Kant’s Second Paralogism, has been published. The editors, Thomas Lennon and Edward Stainton, present Kant’s proof in the following syllogistic form:

P1: Unification of representations takes place.

P2: Only a simple, unified substance can unify representations.

Therefore,

C1: The human soul or mind is a simple, unified substance.²⁹

Perhaps two comments are appropriate in this connection: (a) presented in this fashion, the “argument” appears to be a tautology; and (b) the “unification,” to which the editors refer, makes no reference to temporal factors. But without the incorporation of temporal synthetic structures, it is difficult to grasp the dynamics involved in the unification. In any case, it is a rich and complex work providing many important insights into the complexities and strengths of Kant’s thought.

III

Some ninety years ago, Norman Kemp Smith proposed that immanent time-consciousness should serve as the ultimate premise of the Analytic precisely because it is *both* indubitable *and* immune to Hume’s objections. Thus, as Kemp Smith argues, whereas Descartes doubts the reality of the external world and Hume questions the metaphysical reality (actually continuous identity) of the self, clearly Hume—as we have shown above—is forced to admit a “running” re-cognition of a *temporal succession* of impressions as they follow each other within the same “medium” of consciousness. Accordingly, Kemp Smith states that our starting point “must lie beyond the sphere of all possible controversy”:

²⁹
we are left with only three forms of experience—experience of self, experience of objects, and experience of time. The two former are open to question. They may be illusory, as Hume has argued … Consciousness of time, on the other hand, is a fact whose actuality, however problematic in its conditions, and however mysterious in its intrinsic nature, cannot, even by the most metaphysical of subtleties, be in any manner or degree challenged. It is an unquestioned possession of the human mind. Whether time itself is real we may not be metaphysically certain, but that, whatever be its reality or unreality, we are conscious of it in the form of change, is beyond all manner of doubt.30

Conceivably, it is open to Hume to contend that “within” a single, immediate frame of consciousness, “one” could be uniquely aware of a qualitatively simple impression, perhaps in the form of a concentrated absorption in a monochromatic shade of blue.31 Could this singular experiment constitute an awareness of time? The answer is certainly that it could not without any consciousness of change occurring within awareness. Could it serve as an instance of a unity of consciousness? Possibly, although it would be the consciousness of a clam. Kant, of course, would reject any such possibility, since all human consciousness entails a mutually conditioning relation between changing representations of the self and a contrasting realm of objects. For Kant, a primary epistemological principle is that the phenomenal self is mutually conditioned by the empirical (concept of the) object.32

In any case, according to Kemp Smith, the Subjective Deduction in the first edition virtually identifies time with the synthetic activities. Hence Kemp Smith’s commentary repeatedly emphasizes the “generative processes” in the creation of immanent temporality.33 It is this spontaneous, creative aspect, this continuous activity that, as we shall see below, is indebted not only to the Leibnizian concept of a dynamic consciousness but also to one whose source lies deep in the unconscious. According to Kemp Smith, these thoughts are more properly termed nonconscious rather than unconscious, as in the psychoanalytic meaning of the term. If so, then we have a continuous span from the nonconscious to the unconscious, then the
conscious or perceptive, and finally to the rationally self-conscious or apperceptive. The nonconscious possibility is signaled by Kant’s following hesitant utterance:

This schematism of our [faculty of the] understanding, in its application to [phenomenal] appearances and their mere form, is an art concealed in the depths of the human soul, whose real modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to discover, and to have open to our gaze.\(^{34}\)

This leads Kemp Smith to claim that the threefold transcendental syntheses\(^ {35} \) not only occur in time but that indeed they are generative of time, and I would further argue that they thus constitute the relatively hidden structure necessary for the unity of self-consciousness. But obviously, since they can be consciously described, the question of their own underlying occult activities arises. In such a case, the “unknown roots” of thought would spontaneously generate, or virtually create, the threefold synthesis of sensuous intuition, productive imagination, and unifying understanding consciously described in A 99 ff. All this would necessarily involve time in a fundamental sense. And, as Kemp Smith comments: “When so viewed, the imagination is virtually regarded as an unknown supersensuous [i.e., noumenal] power.”\(^ {36}\) The imagination on this account functions as a mediating agency between the passive nature of the sensory and the spontaneous activity of the understanding. As we recall, Kant is in this section struggling to hypothetically “deduce,” to epistemologically justify, “how the faculty of thought itself is possible.” Recall that Kant earlier had confessed that the Deduction of the Categories had been the most difficult task in the writing of the Critique and that this “deeply grounded” search had cost him the greatest labor of all.\(^ {37}\)

Further, as Kemp Smith informs us,

The subjective enquiry is mainly interested in the conditions generative of experience, and finds its natural point of departure in the problem by what processes a unified experience is constructed out of a succession of distinct happenings.\(^ {38}\)

In any event, cognition as a unity is a datum of awareness that follows rather than precedes time-consciousness. Speculatively we
can assert that the infant, in some primordial sense, is aware of the *passage* of time through change, of the *feeling* of time through alterations of pain and pleasure, but because of Freud’s “oceanic feeling,” it has no cognitive awareness of the unity of selfhood; it cannot, at this stage, distinguish “the self” from the other, the mother.

For Kant, as previously stated, apperception indicates a form or structure of temporally successive awarenesses, which are reciprocally constituted by a phenomenal self in constant relational opposition to an empirical realm of objects. (This is why Hegel criticizes Kant’s finite categories as incapable of true development.) These two mutually reverberating elements, as representations, reflect against each other. The self thus *becomes* aware of itself through change. Further, the self can only become self-aware through and within the mediating agency of internal time. For Kant, all consciousness is judgmental, and all judgments depend on relations that are forged in and through time (again, the section on the Schematism). Similarly, the relation of substance and accident requires not only an additional mental activity of fusing predicates to a subject but, *beyond and in addition* to those acts, that the mind bind and retain the predicates as attached to the “supporting” concept of an object as it changes in and through time. Although the relation of cause and effect is presented as a conditioning or transcendental one, the fact remains that it can only occur under the condition that the *same* mind and its thoughts are able to *move* from one state of awareness to the next. Although Kant may at times, as in the Aesthetic, argue that intuitions are immediate and passive “givens,” certainly concepts are mediate and therefore temporal.

Before returning directly to Kant’s reflections on immanent temporality, let us offer a general comment, which will help us to contextualize the ensuing discussion. First, Kant assumes that self-consciousness or apperception always indicates a temporally successive (as opposed to a logically or syllogistically “successive”) awareness of a sequence. In a critical passage in the first edition Subjective Deduction, just preceding the threefold transcendental syntheses, Kant announces,
Whatever the origin of our representations, whether they are due to the influence of outer things, or are produced by inner causes, whether they arise *a priori* or being appearances have an empirical origin, they must all as modifications of the mind, belong to inner sense. All our knowledge is thus subject to time, the formal condition of inner sense. In it they must all be ordered, connected, and brought into relation. This is a general observation which, throughout what follows, must be borne in mind as quite fundamental.\(^3^9\)

Once more, William James may serve as a helpful companion in our search for an encounter with the Self. To be sure, fourteen years later, James radically challenged the reality of the self, along with its implicit dualism of mind and matter, in his paper, “Does Consciousness Exist?” (1904). By invoking his doctrine of neutral monism, in which he describes “the mind” as merely the contextual intersection of two independent histories, the autobiography of the person and the continuum of a room, James dramatically eliminates the self as a substance. Nevertheless, a decade and a half previously, James, who had closely studied Kant’s *Critique*, and especially the first edition Paralogism sections, posited an indubitable stream of thought—of consciousness—in his “study of the mind from within” in *The Principles of Psychology*. According to James, in the earlier writing, he insisted that “Within each personal consciousness thought is sensibly continuous.”\(^3^4^0\) Further, quoting with approval Shadworth Hodgson, he announced that “Not to have the succession of different feelings is not to be conscious at all.”\(^3^4^1\) Incidentally, in these passages, James also credits the subconscious with forming a “secondary personality.”\(^3^4^2\)

Further, the advantage in legitimatizing the immanent temporality of (self-)consciousness is that one is able to incorporate *both* (a) time consciousness *and* (b) the unity of consciousness together since, in order to be aware of time, we must be able to hold together, bind, synthesize, the mental activities and meanings of past, present, and future in one and the same “stream of thought.” By contrast, it can be argued that analytic or “innate” propositions may be immediately, directly, intuitively—and therefore nontemporally—apprehended, as, for example, in the proposition that \(A = A\), or even in regard to
the intuitive immediacy of the Cartesian cogito. For Descartes, time is essentially unreal, since it depends on God’s continual interactive agency in re-creating the universe, along with every individual soul, at each moment of time (Third Meditation). Once more, because for Kant, all phenomenal knowledge is relational and synthetic, it follows that it necessarily involves a discursive element, which further intrinsically implies a temporal element or “ingredient.” A thought restricted to sheer or absolute immediacy, as we have already noted, would not be a human thought at all.43

Kant’s reflections on time take on various forms in different sections of the Critique. In the Aesthetic, he presents it as a pure, nonempirical passive form of sensibility, immediately given in consciousness rather than actively thought. It serves as a possible matrix for organizing presented sensations, or “units,” which function as the ideal “material” content of our experiences. In the Analytic, in the Second Analogy, temporal distinctions are presented as critical in drawing a distinction between an objective temporal order and a subjective temporal sequence, as in the example of the house and the moving vessel, since our haphazardly roving perceptions of the house are conceived as if they are grounded in and initiated by the subject while, by contrast, our perceptions of the traveling ship are conceived as if they are founded independently of the observer in the descending motion of the boat itself as it drifts downstream. And still, in the Third Paralogism, Kant seeks to make sure that an argument in behalf of a continuous personal identity, extending all the way into the afterlife, cannot be established on an a priori ground and based on an inference concerning the soul’s immaterial nature. But even in this last and critical context, Kant is not denying that consciousness of temporal activity occurs in the mind—as in his analogy of the separate steel balls—but only that the uninterrupted transmission cannot be demonstrated by pure reason as occurring through the same identical continuous self. Thus, although for Kant the rationalist metaphysician is able to show neither that active states of cognitive awareness are communicated in an uninterrupted, continuous fashion to succeeding states of the same self, as the analogy of the failed transmission of consciousness between separate steel balls indicates, nor whether a real or noumenal transition occurs between elements of the same
self, it is nevertheless the case that each steel ball “experiences” some sense of internal time. Consequently, the Third Paralogism states, “That which is conscious of the numerical identity of itself at different times is in so far a person.” As the italicized phrase indicates, Kant is asserting that there must minimally be some consciousness of “different times” in each temporally finite steel orb. Hence, Kant is not denying that there is awareness of time in each of the metal spheres but only that it cannot be demonstrated rationally, that it extends beyond a brief period of consciousness. In short, pure reason cannot establish that the immateriality or simplicity principle is sufficient to prove either continuous personal identity or the immortality of the soul. Mental change occurs, but cognition is not necessarily attached to a continuous self sufficient to establish either the personal or moral identity required for ethical responsibility or for the immortality of the soul. This permits Kant to refer to “each and all of my successive determinations” in a positive, as opposed to a metaphysical, way; it further allows him to invoke a critical admission that “in the whole of time in which I am conscious of myself, I am conscious of this time as belonging to the unity of myself” (A 362). As James expresses it,

How is this possible unless the Thought have a substantial identity with a former owner,—not a mere continuity or a resemblance … but a real unity?...The ‘Soul’ of Metaphysics and the ‘Transcendental Ego’ of the Kantian Philosophy, are … but attempts to satisfy this urgent demand of common-sense.

It is a patent fact of consciousness that a transmission like this actually occurs. Each pulse of cognitive consciousness, each Thought, dies away and is replaced by another. The other, among the things it knows, knows its own predecessor, and finding it “warm,” in the way we have described, greets it by saying: “Thou art mine, and part of the same self with me.” Each later Thought, knowing and including thus the Thoughts which went before, is the final receptacle—and appropriating them is the final owner—of all they contain and own. Each Thought is thus born an owner, and dies owned, transmitting whatever it realized as its Self to its own later proprietor. As
Kant says, it is as if elastic balls were to have not only motion but knowledge of it, and a first ball were to transmit both its motion and its consciousness to a second, which took both up into its consciousness and passed them to a third, until the last ball held all that the other balls had held, and realized it as its own. It is this trick which the nascent thought has of immediately taking up the expiring thought and “adopting” it, which is the foundation of the appropriation of most of the remoter constituents of the self. Who owns the last self owns the self before the last, for what possess the possessor possesses the possessed.46

The point of all this, of course, is that it is impossible to speak of (self) consciousness independently of the awareness of internal time. In other words, James’ focus here in the Third Paralogism centers on the issue of temporal continuity, whereas in the Second Paralogism his interest lies in the unity of consciousness.

How utterly tortuous and complicated Kant’s views on time are can be appreciated by consulting his comments in the preface to the Second Edition, where he tries to unravel the prior intricacies “concerning the concept [sic] of time” in the Aesthetic and the “false interpretations placed upon the paralogisms charged against rational psychology.”47

In sum, the advantage of legitimizing the immanent temporality of (self)-consciousness is that the former is able to incorporate, subsume, both (a) time-consciousness and (b) the unity of consciousness, since in order to be aware of time, we must be able to bind and hold together, to synthesize the mental activities and meanings of, past, present and future, whereas it can be argued that analytic or identical propositions are, by contrast, immediately, directly apprehended. As suggested above, one could argue that in the statement \( A = A \), there is an immediate unity of consciousness without a temporal factor being involved even implicitly. But for Kant, of course, there is always at least the relation of knower and known and the reciprocating, reverberating process of observed or experienced change between the two “poles.”48

At this point, it may be helpful to draw on a distinction made eloquently clear in a passage from Charles Sanders Peirce, who
came to philosophy as a student of Kant. In the citation below, Peirce distinguishes two elements of consciousness, sensations and thoughts, those that are directly and immediately *apprehended*—and thus virtually “absolutely” transient—from those that are indirectly, mediately, relationally, discursively synthesized or *comprehended*.

[W]e observe two sorts of elements of consciousness, the distinction between which may best be made clear by means of an illustration. In a piece of music there are the separate notes, and there is the air. A single tone may be prolonged for an hour or a day, and it exists as perfectly in each second of that time as in the whole taken together; so that as long as it is sounding, it might be present to a sense from which everything in the past was completely absent as the future itself. But it is different with the air, the performance of which occupies a certain time, during the portions of which only portions of it are played. It consists in the orderliness in the succession of sounds which strike the ear at different times; and to perceive it there must be some [temporal] continuity of consciousness which makes the events of a lapse of time present to us. We certainly only perceive the air by hearing the notes; yet we cannot be said to directly hear it, for we only hear what is present at the instant, and an orderliness of succession cannot exist in an instant. These sorts of objects, what we are *immediately* conscious of and what we are *mediately* conscious of, are found in all consciousness. Some elements (the sensations) are completely present at every instance as long as they last, while others (like thought) are actions having beginning, middle, and end, and consist in a congruence in the succession of sensations which flow through the mind. They cannot be immediately present to us, but must cover some portion of the past or future. Thought is a thread of melody running through the succession of our sensations.49

As the metaphor of the melody indicates, the connecting medium that extends the synthetic process is a temporal one. Music
is intrinsically temporal—and perhaps that is why Schopenhauer considered it as a passage providing ingress into ultimate reality.

To be sure, Kant’s model of self-consciousness, of course, is radically different from Descartes’s noumenally accessible *cogito* in the Second Meditation and much richer than Leibniz’s pure monadic apperception in the opening sections of *The Monadology*. Both the Cartesian and Leibnizian paradigms of consciousness are metaphysically noumenal, transcendent for Kant. Nevertheless, Leibniz’s emphasis on the dynamic aspects of thinking forms an important transition into Kant’s underlying presuppositions as well as his descriptions of synthetic acts.

I now wish to return to my previous claim that the genesis of this temporal factor originates in the nonconscious. In order to fully appreciate this, let us retreat and unravel some pre-Kantian influences. And in doing so, we shall return to a point suggested earlier about the role of the unconscious in Kant. According to Leibniz, the cornerstones of his metaphysical assumptions can be summed up in four essential principles: The simple or immaterial nature of the monad; its dynamism; its temporal continuity; and its unity, by which latter he means the monad’s constant activity. As I argued in my article on the unconscious in Leibniz and Kant, Leibniz believes that God creates each individual soul ex nihilo. Once created, the soul exists continuously. (Only God can annihilate—that is, return to nothing—a soul once created.) Just as Leibniz is pledged to the ontological “Great Chain of Being” paradigm, wherein God creates as much reality as compossible, from the very lowest to Himself, just so he is likewise committed to the “continuous chain of consciousness” assumption wherein monadic consciousness displays a continuous spectrum from the nonconscious to the self-conscious. All this follows from the fact that once created, the soul has at least some activity, for to exist is to be active, and in humans this would include the fetal state as well as originary cellular existence. Following Leibniz, Kant agrees that at least human consciousness involves entities which are essentially active centers of awareness, exhibiting various degrees of extended cognitions from unconscious *petitio percipi* to perceptions of “outward” objects and then on to full-blown self-conscious or reflexive apperceptions. Thus, Leibniz
declares, “I maintain that substances (material or immaterial) cannot be conceived in their bare essence without any activity, that activity is of the essence of substance in general.” This is why Kemp Smith proposes that

Discursive activities are conscious processes and are under our control; the synthetic processes are non-conscious; only their finished products appear within the conscious field.

Again:

Leibniz, it is true, taught the existence of subconscious perceptions, and so far may have seemed to have anticipated Kant’s recognition of non-conscious processes; but as formulated by Leibniz that doctrine has the defect which frequently vitiates its modern [Freudian] counterpart, namely that it represents the subconscious as analogous in nature to the conscious, and as differing from it only in the accidental features of intensity and clearness.

Differing from Kemp Smith, I believe both Leibniz and Kant posited non-conscious activities below the subconscious, else from where would unconscious and conscious acts derive? They are there as soon as God has elected conception to begin in its cellular form.

Again, there can be no dynamic activity apart from time. Kant would have had access to The Monadology and the New Essays, which latter consists of an imaginary (eventually interrupted) dialogue between Locke and Leibniz. This work was of great interest to Kant (as were the controversial Clarke-Leibniz correspondences discussing the metaphysical and scientific nature of space and time). In the preface to the work, Leibniz speculates on a number of critical issues that would have elicited a resonant response from Kant, such as (a) the depiction of the mind as a dynamic, active substance, whose essence is the capacity to live, feel, react, and think continuously; (b) the mind’s power to create concepts from its own internal resources, spontaneously and independently of a world of external matter and passive sensations; (c) the controversy between Locke and Bishop Stillingfleet over the possibility of “thinking matter”; and (d) the role of the unconscious.
In rational human beings, these four factors are grounded in activities that manifest and develop themselves temporally and thereby underscore the difference between the mind and the external movement of matter in space. Thus, the ability of the mind to create the *meanings* of past, present, and future, the denial that materialism can account for the mental, and the ascription of a generative power to the unconscious would have directly impressed and influenced Kant.

Obviously, in principle, we are not in a position to inspect the nonconscious or its processes directly, but we can nevertheless *infer* certain factors to the extent that we can surmise that both the nonconscious and the conscious share in mental activities. For if we grant that the (self-)conscious mind is active, as all rationalists and idealists in fact do, then it cannot be maintained that the nonconscious, as well as the retrievably unconscious, if they exist, could possibly be *inactive*. In brief, an active consciousness cannot arise from an inactive nonconsciousness any more than thought can arise from senseless matter. And it is clear, from the selections cited above, and from his comments regarding the difficulties encountered in the Subjective Deduction, that Kant believes that there is something that lies “beneath,” precedes, and conditions explicit awareness.

For the above reasons, I believe Kant remains committed philosophically to a Leibnizian paradigm of the mind as active and temporally structured.

IV

As previously discussed, there are two quite different roles synthesis plays in Kant. The first is engaged in supporting the temporal structures of human experience as they are expressed in our ordinary and scientific lives. The second function may be termed metaphysical, and it is charged with performing its task among noumenal but meaningful concepts, ideas that are important in ethical, spiritual, and ideal contexts.

In prior publications, I have traced the conceptual history and incidence of a Platonic and Neo-Platonic argument as it has surfaced, and continues repeatedly to arise, in the rationalist, idealist, phenomenological, and even analytic traditions in Western thought.
The form of the proof is fairly straightforward. It begins with the premise that both the soul or mind and its essential attribute of thought are immaterial and therefore unextended, devoid of externally related parts—that is, simple (Plato, *Phaedo*, 78B; Plotinus, *The Enneads*, V, 7). In turn, this assumption has generated and entailed no fewer than seven conclusions: (1) the immortality of the individual soul; (2) the unity of self-consciousness; (3) continuous personal or moral identity; (4) metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical idealism; (5) the freedom of self-consciousness; (6) the “grounding” of conceptual meanings and relations as based independently of empirical sensations and the “association of ideas” principle; and (7) a paradigm of immanent time-consciousness. Because of all this, I think it is fair to say that what I have called the Simplicity Argument has served as the most important premise and argument against metaphysical materialism.54

Kant is deeply involved in the preceding issues, and although he may try to disown them while wearing his scientific garb, he nevertheless is spiritually robed with them in his most secret stirrings. It is not simply that he has denied knowledge in order to make room for faith but rather that idealist, immaterialist convictions continue to shape his arguments at vital turns precisely because he finds them deeply convincing. Hence, although in the first Paralogism, he criticizes the rationalist’s arguments for the immortality of the soul, he remains committed to its conceivable reality in the *Critique of Practical Reason*; although he criticizes the inference for the unity of consciousness in the Second Paralogism, he defends it in the second edition Deduction (B 131–132); although he rejects the third Paralogism argument for continuous personal identity, he advocates for it as a condition of eternal rewards and punishments; although in the Fourth Paralogism he denies the validity of its proof for idealism, he remains a subjective idealist in all his thinking; although he advocates in behalf of a strict physical and psychological determinism in the phenomenal sphere, he insists that freedom of the will is not only possible but necessary for morality. In short, even though Kant is an epistemological conservative, he is intellectually and spiritually dedicated to a set of underlying immaterialist conditions, including a model of the mind which spans a spectrum...
of activities from the nonconscious to the self-conscious. As both Kemp Smith and H. J. Paton have emphasized, Kant in many respects remains under and within the monadic umbrella of Leibniz. Both thinkers believe the soul is active, dynamic, that it expresses itself in a temporal dimension. For Leibniz, not only does the soul continuously think, but just as critically, the soul is apperceptive as opposed to merely perceptive. Self-consciousness is “inward bound,” whereas consciousness is “outward bound.” This reflexive paradigm reverts back to Plato’s definition of thinking as the soul’s internal dialogue with itself, Aristotle’s description of the Unmoved Mover, and Descartes’s cogito. However, it is Leibniz who defines consciousness as a multiplicity in unity through time. And both Leibniz and Kant presuppose a sphere of thought that is unconscious. In effect, what Kant takes away with one hand in the Paralogisms, he restores with his other hand elsewhere.

In this paper, I have endeavored to show that the epistemological status of temporal consciousness is inextricably intertwined with human consciousness from the very start. But whether one agrees that time-consciousness or the unity of consciousness best represents Kant’s ultimate premise, one thing is clear: both principles can only conclude in the absolute solitary, insular, monadic existence of the human soul. Indeed, the Cartesian cogito, the Leibnizian windowless monad, and Kant’s subjective idealism all go in one direction—the utter loneliness of man.55

Finally, elsewhere I have claimed that loneliness, like internal time-consciousness, exhibits synthetic a priori meanings (and feelings) consisting of (a) narcissistic entitlement; (b) hostility toward the self and/or others; (c) anxiety of either the Freudian or existential variety; (d) depression; and (e) a sense of failed communication.56

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2 Ibid., A 99.
3 Ibid., B 131.


6 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A 97 ff.


8 In the idealist tradition, the term “spontaneous” signifies that which is independent of matter and sensation. It signifies that the mind is intrinsically active.


10 Kant, Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, Section 10.

11 See Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, B 15 ff.

12 Arthur Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation, translated by E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover), II, iv, 34–35. See also: Charles Sherover, Heidegger, Kant, & Time (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1971), pp. xi-xii. Cf. Jean Piaget, A Child’s Conception of Time (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971), pp. 54–55. Piaget faults Kant for essentially conceiving time as a form of passive intuition; he is somewhat more sympathetic when Kant views it in “schematic” terms involving the faculty of the imagination (pages 37, 300). In any case, Kant’s method is fundamentally “transcendental” and not empirically genetic, as we shall see.

Edmund Husserl, in The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1966), in section XIII of the Appendix, titled “The Constitution of Spontaneous Unities as Immanent Temporal Objects—Judgment as a Temporal Form and Absolute Time- Constituting Consciousness,” distinguishes between $2 \times 2 = 4$ as meant, as an intentional meaningful object, and $2 \times 2 = 4$ as a process of judging. “Let us consider: instead of directing my glance of attention toward what is meant as such, I direct it toward the judging, toward the process in which it comes to be given to me that $2 \times 2 = 4$. A process goes on… Therefore, we have a spontaneous act of forming, which begins, goes forward, and ends (p. 182)…The judgment here, therefore, is an immanent process of unity in immanent time” (p. 184). See Robert Sokolowski, “Immanent Constitution in Husserl’s Lectures on Time,” Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 24:4 (1965): “The first and most fundamental unification comes from the temporal flow” (p. 536); again, “One of the reasons why immanent objects must be extended
in time is that such extension gives the individuality and unity, which they must have in order to be experienced. An immanent object is individualized, it is made into a determined, distinct unit, only because it fills a certain section of the time flow, because it is constituted in certain temporal phases” (p. 538). I will contend that time-consciousness precedes the unity of consciousness and thus functions as the condition for the latter. This insight first appears in germ form in Leibniz, attains fruition in Kant, and finds its mature expression in Husserl.


14 Aristotle defines time as the measure of physical motion through space; Newton posits time as an independent container, virtually a “substance” or an attribute of God, infinite and eternal; Leibniz offers two rather different models, one which is implicit in his subjective, immanent, and dynamic description of self-consciousness; the other of which is grounded in a relational ordering between monadic perceptions or points, as argued in the Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence; See Robert Paul Wolff, *Kant’s Theory of Mental Activity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 4–8.

15 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 16.


19 See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 352, B 131.


21 The issue of Kant’s possible familiarity with Hume’s *Treatise* is taken up by Kemp Smith in his *Commentary*, pp. xxi-xxvii. I interpret Hume as a phenomenalist, whose thesis is that the “self” and the “external world” are the result of nominalistic constructions of immediate sense data coupled with an imagined psychological belief in the identity of the “self” and “independent” objects.


23 Ibid., 252. Consult, however, Hume’s later admission that there may be a unity after all, Appendix, 633, ff.

24 Ibid., 251.

25 Wolff then quotes William James, who expresses the same point in the following fashion: “Take a sentence of a dozen words, and take twelve men and tell to each one word. Then stand the men in a row or jam them in a bunch, and let each think of his word as intently as he will; nowhere will there be a consciousness of the whole sentence,” *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Dover, 1950), I, 160. The underlying and hidden assumption is always the same: Senseless matter cannot think because matter is essentially composed of distinct parts which intrinsically defy unification; material substances, consisting essentially of disparately composed aggregates, can never constitute a true unity but merely a nominalistic one.


27 Ibid., A 351–352, italics mine.

28 As a parenthetical note, Kant also criticizes the simplicity argument not only in failed demonstrations to prove the unity of consciousness but also in inferences designed to establish the immortality of the soul in A 357 and throughout the Paralogism section in the B edition as well; and he insists that a simple soul could nevertheless be completely extinguished by diminution or “elanguescence”
In brief, the immortality of the soul cannot be demonstrated by pure reason.

29 In their introduction, the editors are kind enough to acknowledge my contribution in the following words: “What remains surprising, however, is that so little work has been done before on the Achilles argument. Ben Lazare Mijuskovic’s pioneering work was the first in modern times to draw attention to the importance of the argument, but aside from the subsequent work he has done…there is little else in print.” Thomas Lennon and Edward Stainton, eds., *The Achilles of Rationalist Psychology* (Springer, 2008), 2.

30 Kemp Smith, *A Commentary to Kant’s ‘Critique of Pure Reason,’* 241, also cf. 242–243. It is this “mysterious” element of time that I claim is grounded in non-conscious activities lying beneath the purview of direct awareness. See Sherover, *Heidegger, Kant, & Time,* 252; cf. 61, ff.


34 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* A 141 = B 181.


36 Kemp Smith, *A Commentary to Kant’s ‘Critique of Pure Reason,’* 77, 265.

37 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* A xvi-xvii.

38 Kemp Smith, *A Commentary to Kant’s ‘Critique of Pure Reason,’* 240.


47 See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* B xxxviii, B xxxix, note a.

48 Although Kant’s categorical relations are dyadic, clearly Hegel goes out of his way to stress triadic ones thus highlighting their clearly temporal quality as, for example, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit’s* initial stages or “moments” of Consciousness, Self-Consciousness, and Reason (1807) as well as in the opening
triad of the *Science of Logic* (1812–1816), which shows the mind dialectically “moving” through the “bloodless dance” of the categories, as they progress through and within Being, Nothing, and Becoming.

49 Charles Sanders Peirce, “How To Make Our Ideas Clear,” in *Essays in the Philosophy of Science*, ed. by Vincent Thomas (New York: Liberal Arts Press. 1957), pp. 37–38; brackets mine. Notice the term “flow” in the quotation, a metaphor which will apply to the “indivisible stream of consciousness,” in James, to the pure duree reelle of immanent time in Henri Bergson (Mijuskovic, 1977), and also to the phenomenological approach of Husserl. See Husserl’s early formative explorations regarding the temporal structures of consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1966), pp. 23, 30–31. Like Peirce, Husserl employs the example of the notes and the melody in order to provide an insight into the fusion of the diverse elements constituting the immanent flow of consciousness. Internal objects are experienced through “temporal profile manifolds” (Robert Sokolowski, *The Foundation of Husserl’s Concept of Constitution* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), pages 82–83, 99, 108. Later, in the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl affirms the presence of “active synthesis” and “active genesis” as embedded in temporal noetic acts (Sections 37–39). Thus, the description of the flow of time serves as a common metaphor not only in Peirce’s and Husserl’s phenomenological orientation but also in the pure duration of Bergson as well. As Professor Sherover indicates, in his second study on time, “Husserl is following the picture of the Leibnizian monad concerning itself, not with ‘reflections’ of the ‘external’ world constituting the content of consciousness, but with the internal structure by which that content is constituted; by ‘bracketing’ such content, it then undertakes to examine the ‘reflecting’ structure itself….One way to approach his analysis, then, is to view it as an attempt to explain a puzzle—how an object which is intrinsically dynamic can retain its continuing identity in a consciousness which is inherently temporal and continually in the process of changing.” Charles Sherover, *The Human Experience of Time: The Development of Its Philosophic Meaning* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), pp. 447.

50 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *The Monadology and other Philosophical Writings*, ed. by Robert Latta (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 397. “Material” here resolves into immaterial simples, unextended monads. Sections 10 and 11 postulate continuous alterations within the monads. On Leibniz and time, see Sherover, *The Human Experience of Time*, pages 106–107, 111–114. Lancelot Whyte writes that Christian Wolff may have been the first writer to fully analyze and appreciate unconscious factors than any previous thinker on the subject. Whyte also credits him with explicitly stating that “non-conscious activities must be inferred from those of which we are conscious.” Whyte then goes on to quote Wolff.

Let no one imagine that I would join the Cartesians in asserting that nothing can be in the mind of which it is not aware…That is a prejudice,
which impedes the understanding of the mind, as we see in the case of the Cartesians.

Insofar as something exists in us than we are conscious of, we must bring it to light by inferences from that of which we are conscious, otherwise we should have no ground to do so [italics Wolff’s]. The Unconscious Before Freud (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1978), pp. 101–102. Kant, of course, was very familiar with Wolff’s work.

51 Kemp Smith, A Commentary to Kant’s ‘Critique of Pure Reason,’ 179.

52 Ibid., 273; cf. xivii.

53 Professor Andrew Brook maintains that “Kant’s models and methods dominated the German-speaking world in the nineteenth century” and further that Freud’s theory of the unconscious is thoroughly Kantian: “Kant thought that a large and in many ways the most important part of the operation of the mind is ‘unconscious’—not open to introspection,” and that “Freud shared Kant’s concept in how the mind can tie experience together, and even used Kant’s term ‘synthesis’ as his name for the process.” In addition, the author credits Freud with an “awareness of the Kantian doctrine of the noumenal base of inner sense.” Andrew Brook, “Kant and Freud,” in Prehistory of Cognitive Science (Basingbroke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 117–118.

Immaterialism: Meaning, Freedom, Time, and Mind (Amsterdam: Gruner, 1979); “The Simplicity Argument and the Unconscious: Plotinus, Cudworth, Leibniz, and Kant,” Philosophy and Theology, 20:1–2 (2008); “The Argument from Simplicity: A Study in the History of an Idea and Consciousness,” Philotheos (2009), 228–252; the last article is an extension and a reply to Thomas Lennon’s and Edward Stainton’s The Achilles of Rationalist Psychology (Springer, 2008), which focuses solely on the “unity of consciousness” argument, Kant’s Second Paralogism in the first edition of the Critique of Pure Reason (1781); Kant calls it the Achilles, the most powerful of all arguments in the rationalist arsenal concerning the doctrines of the soul. See also Michael Bobo, The Simplicity Argument in Twentieth Century Analytic Philosophy: A Study of Roderick Chisholm and Richard Swinburne (Carson, CA: CSU Dominguez Hills, 2010).

The preceding are all entailed by the following underlying principle and proof: “The essential and complete nature of mind, generally speaking, seems to consist solely in thinking, and, as such, it must be unextended, simple (with no parts), and essentially different from the body and therefore immaterial. This was Descartes’ argument in a nutshell, ultimately drawing a strong ontological conclusion (regarding the distinctness of mind and body) from a starting point constituted by epistemological considerations.

As Ben Mijuskovic observes, in this type of argumentation, “the sword that severs the Gordian knot is the principle that what is conceptually distinct is ontologically separable and therefore independent.” Mijuskovic, in locating this form of reasoning in its historical context, also notes the presence of the converse of its inference: “If one begins with the notion, explicit or implicit, that thoughts or minds are simple, unextended, indivisible, then it seems to be an inevitable step before thinkers connect the principle of an unextended, immaterial soul with the impossibility of any knowledge of an extended material world and consequently of the relation between them.” That is, this time an epistemological conclusion (regarding an epistemic gap between mind and body) is reached from a starting point constituted by an ontological consideration (regarding the distinctness of their nature).” The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates, ed. by Joel Block, Owen Flanagan, and Guven Guzeldere (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1979), page 10.

A word of caution is here advisable. Generally speaking, the simplicity premise identifies the immaterial with the unextended, as in the use which we discuss in this essay. However, certain thinkers, like Henry More, the English Platonist, and Isaac Newton believe that the immaterial may nevertheless be extended, as in spiritual and visual apparitions; or as in the Newtonian conception of an absolutely empty space and time. In Plato’s Timaeus, Space, as the nurse or womb of all Becoming, shares with the realm of Forms the essential attribute of immateriality while at the same time, like the physical world, it partakes of the attribute of extension; thus it serves as a tertium quid connecting the two.

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