

**Solipsistic Sin**

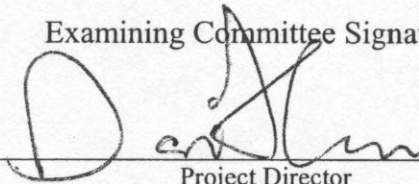
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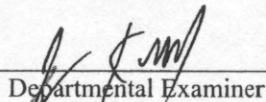
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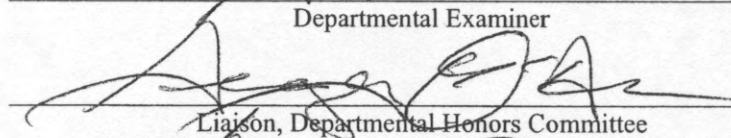
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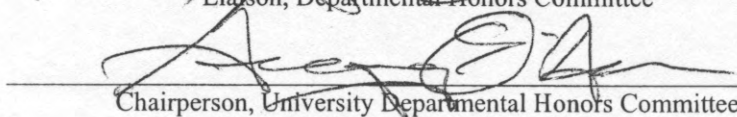
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## **Abstract**

This paper attempts to present a philosophical theory of sin as it is understood in the Christian tradition. Sin is typically conceptualized in terms of particular manifestations, or sinful acts, but sin itself is rather a more pervasive mindset. Conceptualizing sin as a mindset helps to explain why every human being is essentially sinful, regardless of how many particular sinful acts he or she may commit, or how he or she may act toward others. This mindset is explained with the philosophical theory presented in this paper. This mindset is solipsistic, which means that the mindset of sin is related to a failure to recognize the *existence* of others. Traditional solipsism is not the focus, but rather a specific type of solipsism where partial recognition of existence is recognized, but recognition of *subjective existence* is incomplete or inadequate. This solipsistic mindset is inescapable and thus universal to all human beings. It also is capable of explaining how human beings are able to commit particular acts of sin, since *others* are perceived as easily manipulated objects.

## **Introduction**

“The plague of man is the opinion of knowledge.”

- Michel de Montaigne, “Apologie de Raimond Sebond”<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to propose a philosophical theory of sin, but this can be an incredibly complex issue. In fact, a truly comprehensive treatment of the subject is far beyond the scope of this paper. There are many different religious conceptions of sin, and to incorporate all of these into a single, cohesive philosophical theory of sin would be daunting. Instead, a single religious discipline has been selected with its own particular conceptions of the terms involved in the theory; Christianity’s conception of sin will be the focus for this paper because it is the predominant religion in the author’s region and is therefore the most accessible. There is no claim being made that the theory is necessarily only applicable to Christianity’s conception of sin, nor is there any claim that Christianity’s conception of sin is superior to others. There are many interesting applications of the theory of solipsistic sin towards other religious traditions, but again this is simply beyond the scope of this paper. Perhaps future efforts might be devoted to such applications in order to assess the extent to which this philosophical theory can account for sin in a more universal sense.

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<sup>1</sup> Michel de Montaigne, “Apologie de Raimond Sebond,” in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 360.

## **Sin is Solipsistic Doubt**

The Judeo-Christian concept of sin has troubled people throughout the religion's history, and on levels somewhat more intellectual than the seemingly inescapable personal tendency to be sinful. There is, of course, the immediate problem: Why would an omniscient, omnipotent, and good God would have allowed sin, which displeases Him, to exist in this world? There is also the perplexing question of what exactly sin (and ultimately evil) is. After all, as M. Scott Peck noted in his work *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*: "If evil were easy to recognize, identify, and manage, there would be no need for this book. But the fact of the matter is that it is the most difficult of all things with which to cope."<sup>2</sup> If one were to pose the question of what sin is to a variety of Christians, one is likely to receive a unique answer from each individual. It seems that answering the former question might prove impossible unless a suitable answer to the latter is first discovered. The primary task must be to conceptualize sin in general.

It is easy to think of particular acts that are held to be sinful throughout both Judaism and Christianity: adultery, murder, suicide, blasphemy, stealing, etc. The problem that many people have with the Christian concept of sin is that God denotes no degrees of severity between these particulars. Everyone is equally sinful regardless of the quantity or type of particular sins committed. As Peck notes, "Sin is nothing more and nothing less than a failure to be continually perfect. Because it is

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<sup>2</sup> M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 130.

impossible for us to be continually perfect, we are all sinners.”<sup>3</sup> The possibility that it makes no difference in God’s displeasure when an individual commits a murder and when that same individual cheats on a test is counterintuitive. The secular world certainly differentiates degrees of severity for particular transgressions, so why would God not do the same? How can all sins truly be equally displeasing to God unless they share some core, universal element?

If there is some constant characteristic of all sin, then perhaps it is the state of mind from which all sinful acts are generated. Suppose that there is some generally sinful state of mind that is responsible for all particular sins. Furthermore, it is not the particular acts themselves that make human beings sinful, but rather this core mindset that has produced not only the petty cruelties of adolescents but also the atrocities of the Holocaust. This ever-present mindset would explain how a saint could still have a sinful heart, despite having committed few particular sins.

What would the nature of this sinful state of mind be? Though all particular sins are ultimately equally displeasing to God, there were two commandments that were to be followed above all of the others. But this is troublesome because it seems illogical that any two single commandments could stand out as being especially important if all sin is truly equal. This primacy makes sense only if these two commandments are somehow most capable of preventing individuals from committing the majority of particular sins. These two great commandments should therefore help to illuminate the nature of the sinful mindset.

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<sup>3</sup> Peck, 70.

“One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked them, ‘Of all the commandments, which is the most important?’ ‘The most important one,’ answered Jesus, ‘is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”<sup>4</sup>

These two commandments do share something in common: each directs an individual to be concerned with his or her *feelings*, not necessarily *actions*, towards some entity other than his or herself. In fact, the commandments could be almost simplified into an instruction to love the *other*, since this would encompass both God and the totality of humanity. It is the mindset, which can be more universally conceptualized, rather than particular manifestations of that mindset that makes an individual sinful.

It seems then that the failure to obey these commandments is essentially a problem with one’s *mindset* towards others rather than a failure to *act* properly. There is then a distinction between particular sins (such as murder) and the sinful mindset (which does not necessarily require any particular actions). This distinction will be made throughout this paper. The sinful mindset is the subject of this theory rather than particular sins. An individual is sinful according to these two great commandments not when he or she fails to *treat* another (either God or a fellow human being) as he or she should, but when he or she fails to *love* the other. This would leave the sinful individual with only the self to love. “The essential problem of human evil,” says Peck, “is a particular variety of narcissism.”<sup>5</sup> The reason it is a

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<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Barker, *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), Mark 12:28-31.

<sup>5</sup> Peck, 77.

“particular variety of narcissism” and not narcissism itself is because love of oneself is not problematic, it is rather the neglect of the other that is troublesome. This particular variety must focus on the failure to love others rather than the amount of love that one has for oneself as narcissism technically does.

The failure to properly love another may possibly be explained with multiple theories, but only one need to be discovered for this paper. This failure seems like a natural consequence of the philosophy of solipsism. Solipsism is the belief that there are no other entities beside oneself, or: “The view that only oneself exists.”<sup>6</sup> If an individual were to hold this conviction in the traditional sense, then he or she would not believe in the *existence* of any entities, neither fellow human beings nor God. But this traditional sense will be demonstrated to be highly impractical, and ultimately unrealistic. Not many individuals will claim to be traditional solipsists. For the purposes of this paper, then, the solipsist may believe in the existence of others, but this belief will be necessarily tainted with doubt and ultimately will be unsupportable by any conclusive proofs. Essentially, our solipsist will doubt the existence of others, rather than certainly disbelieve in their existence, yet will not doubt his or her personal existence.

When an individual doubts the existence of an other, that individual deprives the other of not only a complete personal identity, but also complete subjectivity and humanity itself. This imperfect recognition of the humanity of the other makes it impossible to perceive the other as an equally subjective entity, since *the solipsist*

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<sup>6</sup> *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 838.

*does not doubt his or her own existence.* The other is therefore capable of becoming more of an object than a person in the mind of the solipsist. Objects, of course, are manipulated to serve our own personal interests without concern for the object itself as an entity. If John wishes to sit in a chair that is placed across the room, then he will move the chair to where he wishes to sit. He will not pay any mind to what might be in the best interests of the chair, or whether or not it wishes to be either moved or sat upon. He may take care not to damage the chair, but only because he does not want to have to buy another chair, not because he is concerned for the chair's feelings. It seems a horrible thought to think that human beings are capable of treating each other as mere objects, and of manipulating each other with as little regard as would be given to a piece of furniture. But this would certainly explain many particular sins in the world.

Futhermore, John may love the practical uses of the chair, or perhaps its aesthetics, but John cannot have a genuine love for this chair, the kind of love one can have for one's own child, for instance, unless John recognizes some subjectivity within the chair. One cannot love purely objective things as one can love subjective entities. There is therefore a direct relationship between the degree to which subjective identity is recognized and the degree to which love is possible. If one's recognition of another's subjective identity is flawed, tainted with doubt as it is for the solipsist, then one's love for that entity will also be flawed. The love that is present may be genuine, but it is imperfect in the sense that it is inevitably accompanied by and infused with this doubt in the other's subjective existence, or

inevitably infused with sin. Of course, recognition of subjectivity does not have to necessitate love, but love is necessarily impossible without it, which means that sin is inevitable without it according to Christ's commandments.

The solipsist will possess a tainted recognition of all entities, and will thus be unable to completely, or purely love any of them, and will therefore always be sinful in his or her failure to completely obey Christ's commandments. Interestingly, since the solipsist does not doubt his or her own existence, a pure love of oneself should be possible. This would explain why God did not have to command people to love themselves. It also explains why the commands were not to love others, but rather to love others as yourself specifically. Love of oneself is a universally accessible standard that informs people how much love they should have for others. Furthermore, God is not sinful because God's omniscience makes it impossible for Him to doubt and thus makes perfect love for human beings possible.

John's mistreatment of the chair was an extreme case, and somewhat unrealistic. Our solipsist does recognize some degree of the subjective existence of others to some degree, for it is as impractical to completely deny the existence of others as it is to completely affirm it. This recognition may be imperfect and tainted with doubt, but there is some recognition of subjective identity nonetheless. John's total objectification of the chair was a hyperbole of manipulative tendencies that are present with any objectification of an entity. Even though others are recognized as having some degree of subjective identity, they are still capable of becoming more object-like than human-like due to an imperfect recognition.

In fact, the necessary presence of some degree of recognition of subjectivity supports the theory that solipsism is the mindset of sin. Consider cruelty for instance. In order for an individual to be cruel to something, the victim must be recognized as possessing some degree of subjectivity. One cannot be cruel to a chair, for instance, unless one recognizes some subjectivity that the chair possesses. The fact that our solipsist does recognize some degree of subjective identity possessed by others allows for the possibility of cruelty, as well as accounts for all of the emotional subjective elements that seem to be present in acts of sin (murders of passion, passionate love affairs, etc...). Total objectification, or a complete lack of subjective recognition of the other is impossible. The solipsist is left with a corrupted, or partially objectified recognition of the subjective identity of the other.

### **Solipsism Must Account for Particular Sins**

If solipsism is to be equated with sin, then it must explain all particular sinful acts. The scope of this paper prohibits such an exhaustive exercise, but a representative variety of particular sins should at least be explained by solipsism. The most appropriate starting point for this test might be the socially heinous particular sin of murder. Many people wonder how a person could be capable of murdering another human being. It is common to vilify the murderer as unthinkably detached from reality, but therein lies the key. These murderous individuals are detached from reality in a particular way; they are detached insofar as their partial recognition of the subjective identity of others. They are capable of objectifying others to the extent that it becomes possible to destroy them with as little concern as any “healthy” person would give to the destruction of an inanimate object, in spite of whatever passion or subjectivity may be present. The particular sin of murder seems unproblematic for the solipsist because it is not a pure human being that is being destroyed. But is solipsism equally responsible for apparently minor particular sins, or even other comparably severe particular sins?

Cheating and lying are deemed less harmful acts than murder in our society, but at their core is a fundamental disrespect for another person, the person who set the rule against cheating or the person against whom the lie is perpetrated. These acts are also explicable by a breakdown in the way that the other is perceived. If one is deemed less human than the solipsist, then the other is not worth telling the truth to when it does not serve the solipsist’s own personal interests. People lie to serve their

own interests, and they do not when they privilege the interests of the person to whom they would be lying. But if this other person is perceived as less human, then his or her interests could never be more important, if even important at all. There would therefore be no restraining mechanism against lying or cheating.

This lack of restraining mechanism against lying and cheating also explains the act of an extra-marital affair. It is possible that the adulterer loves his mistress. But the sin of the affair is to be found in the broken promise to the third person in the equation, the wife. Even if the wife is aware of the affair and is indifferent, the husband is nevertheless disrespecting her by breaking the vows of marriage. He is essentially lying to his wife, and especially to God. The act of an extra-marital affair is the disrespect of the worth of the spouse as well as God, to whom the promise of marriage was made.

Rape can also be explained by the objectification of others. Regardless of whether the rape occurs for sexual gratification or for the display of power, the fact remains that the victim has been used to satisfy the desires of the assailant without having consented to do so. The victim fulfilled an objective role for the rapist and was in all practicality more of an object than a subjective entity due to this lack of consent.

As the remainder of this paper will demonstrate, a complete and perfect defense of this theory would be impossible due to the fundamental limitations of human reasoning. Even a statistician would never expect to find one hundred percent results in any study, because human errors will always be present. These proofs must

suffice as being representative of particular sinful acts, as they represent the most well known particular sins that human beings commit. There are certainly numerous other examples, but the crucial point is to realize that all particular instances of sin that come to mind seem to involve other entities. The individual either sins against other living creatures, fellow humans, or against God.

Is it possible then to sin against oneself? The solipsist does not doubt personal existence, so a pure love of self should be possible, which excludes it from the category of inevitable sin. According to this, as well as the other-directed commandments of Christ, it is not possible to sin against oneself. Even suicide, apparently a purely personal sin, is social in its ultimate pain. Suicide leaves friends and family behind in most cases to suffer, and in all cases God suffers. For it cannot be the physical act of destroying one's own body that is sinful, since sacrifice is justifiable in the Christian tradition. Christ sacrificed Himself, by allowing the crucifixion to occur. But this death was a sacrifice; it was performed in the interests of others. Interests of others were the motivating factor for the self-destruction, rather than selfish motivations (which neglect the interests of others). It is not possible to sin directly against oneself. Sin is always against others, because pain is inflicted upon others. Even if individuals hurt themselves in some way, God is still saddened to see this (and thus God is sinned against), and this is essentially why such actions are always sinful. People may not have a pure love for themselves, but this is an indirect consequence of sinful relationships with others, as this paper will demonstrate, rather than an inward, direct sin against oneself.

If a solipsist perceives an other as less human, then the solipsist will be more willing to satisfy his or her own personal needs with little or no regard to the needs or interests of that other, and will thus be more willing to manipulate that other in order to satisfy these needs. This willingness can manifest in actions that vary in degree of severity, since one could lie to another, or go so far as to destroy that other. If this is so, then the same problem of the concept of sin having apparent degrees has reemerged, and nothing has been accomplished.

But these particular acts are byproducts of the universal mindset of sin. They are not what make human beings sinful. The sinfulness of individuals cannot be ranked by these particulars. The standard is rather the universal solipsistic doubt in the subjective existence of others. Either the belief in the existence of others is perfect or it is tainted by doubt. It is the intent of this paper to show that this belief is always tainted by doubt. There are no degrees of sinfulness.

## Solipsism's Lapse Into Violence

The solipsistic origins of violence will greatly strengthen the theory of solipsistic sin. A critical examination of how exactly solipsism is responsible for violence must begin with a brief consideration of a popular political theory, which is very well described in Francis Fukuyama's work *The End of History and the Last Man*.

“Above all, [Hegel's ‘first man’] desires the desire of other men, that is, to be wanted by others or to be *recognized*. Indeed, for Hegel, an individual could not become self-conscious, that is, become aware of himself as a separate human being, without being recognized by other human beings. Man, in other words, was from the start a *social* being: his own sense of self-worth and identity is intimately connected with the value that other people place on him.”<sup>7</sup>

This need for recognition (which Fukuyama later refers to as *thymos*) seems unproblematic, but it will prove to be the bane of human history...

“But there is a dark side to the desire for recognition as well, a dark side that has led many philosophers to believe that *thymos* is the fundamental source of human evil. *Thymos* initially came into being for us as an evaluation of one's own worth... In a world of thymotic moral selves, they will be constantly disagreeing and arguing and growing angry with one another over a host of questions, large and small. Hence *thymos* is, even in its most humble manifestations, the starting point for human conflict.”<sup>8</sup>

This thymotic desire does not seem initially to support the theory of solipsistic sin, but rather reciprocate it. For if the source of human evil is caused by the failure of others to recognize the value of the self, then there is some sort of reverse-solipsism at work. But the terms “self” and “other” are relative. Simply realize that

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<sup>7</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1992), 146.

<sup>8</sup> Fukuyama, 181.

denying the subjective identity of another will have an effect on the population as a whole; the thymotic desire of the other will be unfulfilled if his or her humanity is inadequately recognized by the solipsist. Thymotic desire is a desire to have one's subjective identity fully recognized by others. The lengths to which an individual will go to obtain this needed recognition are the true source of human misery.<sup>9</sup>

“This man wants not only to be recognized by other men, but to be recognized as a *man*. And what constitutes man's identity as man, the most fundamental and uniquely human characteristic, is man's ability to risk his own life. Thus the “first man”'s encounter with other men leads to a violent struggle in which each contestant seeks to make the other ‘recognize’ him by risking his own life. Man is a fundamentally other-directed and social animal, but his sociability leads him not into a peaceful society, but into a violent struggle to the death for pure prestige.”<sup>10</sup>

This becomes a viable political theory when the individual's *thymos* is projected or extended towards the group or collective to which he or she belongs.<sup>11</sup> Solipsism can easily explain the motivations for the violence of an individual, but it can also now be applied to groups of people and help to explain violence and ultimately sin on a larger scale. But how can solipsism be applied to groups? The answer to this lies in the personal identification with a group. The individual projects his or her own identity onto a group when affiliating with it. The group essentially is not really a group, but a collection of individuals, each really knowing that it is *her* book club, or *his* army. This selfish projection and identification with the group enables solipsistic behavior for many individuals throughout a collective. The *We* of

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<sup>9</sup> Fukuyama, 157.

<sup>10</sup> Fukuyama, 147.

<sup>11</sup> Fukuyama, 171.

the groups is really a collection of *I*'s. Nations go to war in order to gain needed thymotic recognition from other nations. Interestingly, when this happens, the soldier in one army usually acquires an increasingly objectified conception of the soldiers in the opposing army. Those soldiers become less human. In fact, it seems as though this phenomenon is likely to occur among civilians as well. This certainly makes it easier to justify their murders during war.

Solipsism also enables an individual to cultivate personal unhappiness for him or herself by means of his or her sins against others. This can be seen in the aftermath of the thymotic struggle. Fukuyama illuminates this critical point:

“The master and the slave are left unsatisfied for different reasons. The master is in some sense more human than the slave because he is willing to overcome his biological nature for the sake of a non-biological end, recognition. By risking his life, he demonstrates that he is free. The slave, by contrast, follows Hobbes’s advice and gives in to his fear of violent death. In doing so he remains a needy and fearful animal, incapable of overcoming his biological or natural determination. But the slave’s lack of freedom, his incomplete humanity, is the source of the master’s dilemma. For the master desires recognition by another human being, that is, recognition of his worth and human dignity by another human being possessing worth and dignity. But by winning the prestige battle, he is recognized by one who has become a slave, whose humanity was unachieved due to his having given in to his natural fear of death. The master’s worth is therefore recognized by someone not quite human.”<sup>12</sup>

The aftermath of this thymotic contest will not lead to a permanent resolution. The master will soon realize that his subjectivity is not adequately recognized, and the slave will realize the same. The slave is greatly deprived of subjective identity, since the master has inadequately recognized his or her humanity. The master is justified in

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<sup>12</sup> Fukuyama, 193.

treating the slave in any way deemed convenient or fit, according to the extent to which the slave is perceived as less than human. But in doing so, the master has also ultimately deprived him or herself of something very important. There is no other equally subjective entity in the master's world to recognize the master's worth. The master is left with no one to satisfy his or her thymotic desire, and this will of course lead not only to another futile struggle with someone, but will ultimately leave the master unsatisfied.

The master is not to be the only solipsist though. Hegel's well-known dialectic of history should be considered:

“The slave is also unsatisfied. His lack of satisfaction, however, leads not to deadening stasis, as in the case of the master, but to creative and enriching change. By submitting to the master, the slave of course is not recognized as a human being: in the contrary, he is treated as a *thing*, a tool for the satisfaction of the master's wants. Recognition is entirely one-way. But this total absence of recognition is what leads the slave to desire change”<sup>13</sup>

The master's objectified perception of the slave is not only a source of potential particular sins, but it will also be a source of future conflict between the master and the slave. The desire for change that the slave experiences will eventually lead to a demand for recognition from the master, which will compel the slave to revolt, usually violently. The positions of slave and master will thus be constantly reversed. The recognition that one party fails to extend to the other will be reciprocated in due time, upon the exchange of master/slave roles. Solipsism will thus be evenly shared between both master and slave, and each individual will at some point cause distress

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<sup>13</sup> Fukuyama, 194.

directly to the objectified other as well as indirectly to his or herself due to unsatisfied *thymos*. The burden of sin will be fairly distributed.

In fact, the isolation of the self from others is perhaps the ultimate result of sin according to Peck. “All sins betray- and isolate us from- both the divine and our fellow creatures.”<sup>14</sup> By depriving others of full subjectivity, we ultimately deprive ourselves of much needed subjective peers. Human beings are social creatures, as demonstrated by our need for thymotic recognition. There are also numerous psychological studies that indicate that people are unhappy when they are deprived of social interactions, much less the obvious sadness that results from a lack of a relationship with God. Even monks may sacrifice human social interactions when withdrawing from society, but they compensate for this by strengthening their spiritual relationship with God. By objectifying others in an individual’s life, that individual not only enhances the potential for the mistreatment of those others, but also hurts him or herself by creating a very lonely, objective, and cold world. This is not technically a sin against oneself, but it is certainly an unfortunate consequence.

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<sup>14</sup> Peck, 72.

## **The Link Between Community and Sin**

To realize what this lonely world might look like beyond the individual level, this world of solipsistic indulgence, one would probably need to look no further than the United States. In his work *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam has collected an extensive amount of research that suggests that Americans are decreasingly involved in community life and social activities in general. Americans are increasingly opting to stay at home and keep to themselves rather than to go out with friends; in fact, they are five to ten times more likely to stay at home than go out.<sup>15</sup> They are bowling alone, figuratively, whereas they used to bowl in leagues. Many things about American culture offer insight as to why this is happening, but the fact remains that it is happening.

This deprivation of community life essentially will result in a very isolated, solipsistic world. Decreased interactions with other people will give individuals even less reason to recognize the subjectivity of others. If Americans are increasingly depriving themselves of community, then they are indulging in their solipsism. This will facilitate an increasingly objective conception of their neighbors, which will increase the likelihood that their solipsistic doubt will manifest into particular sinful actions. It should follow that America is an increasingly sinful (in terms of particular sins which can vary in number, not in terms of the constant mindset of sin) place in which to live. This of course is a difficult claim to support by purely empirical means, but there is evidence that suggests that America truly is an increasingly sinful

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 96.

place in which to live. America is the epitome of modernity, and Emile Durkheim attempted to demonstrate that modernity is responsible for increasing rates of suicide, which is a powerful indicator of unhappiness, with his work *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. Interestingly, Durkheim linked the rises in suicide rates with the feelings of isolation that individuals experience within modernized society, thus demonstrating the importance of social community for an individual's happiness.<sup>16</sup> More specifically, "Self-destruction is not merely a personal tragedy, [Durkheim] found, but a sociologically predictable consequence of the degree to which one is integrated into society."<sup>17</sup> Suicide rates in America are in fact on the rise.<sup>18</sup> Also, the prevalence of general violence in America lends further support to the notion that America is an increasingly unhappy environment. The amount of gun related deaths in America is astoundingly higher than in many other countries around the world.<sup>19</sup> Certainly this difference cannot be attributed to America's violent history alone. Other countries have equally violent histories, and one need only to flip through any world history book to discover the massive amounts of violence that all nations are capable of committing against one another and amongst themselves. The difference in the rate of gun related deaths is not due solely to the abundance of guns in America. Canada, for instance, also has large numbers of guns available to its citizens.<sup>20</sup> In fact, the reason for America's violence seems to be somewhat of a

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<sup>16</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (Illinois: The Free Press, 1951)

<sup>17</sup> Putnam, 326.

<sup>18</sup> Putnam, 262.

<sup>19</sup> *Bowling For Columbine*, prod. and dir. Michael Moore, 120 min., United Artists, 2002, film.

<sup>20</sup> Moore.

puzzle to those who stop and examine the evidence. The most popular explanation for the amount of violence in America is its violent culture, particularly negatively influential music and movies. But this explanation is insufficient when one truly considers it, since the same movies and music are equally prevalent in other cultures around the world, cultures that also have a comparable number of guns available to its citizens. America certainly has higher death rates from violent crimes than most of its neighbors around the world. But why is this? Might it have anything to do with the shocking decrease in community life that Putnam has noted?

There is ample evidence that social communities are beneficial to the psychological well-being of individuals, but there is also evidence that strong communities have significantly lower rates of homicide.

“A state-level analysis of homicide statistics is illustrative. (Murder rates are generally accepted as the most reliable index of the incidence of crime, the least susceptible to distortion from one jurisdiction to another.) States with more social capital have proportionately fewer murders. This inverse relationship is astonishingly strong- as close to perfect as one might find between any two social phenomena.”<sup>21</sup>

It seems that social community deters murders as well as suicides. So the increasing prevalence of these two particular sins in America may very well be explained by the fact that Americans are increasingly bowling alone.

It is interesting that both murder and suicide can be traced ultimately back to a lack of social community. In fact, it is also interesting that sinning against God can also be traced to a lack of community. Besides the obvious problematic lack of community between an individual with God, religious communities are largely

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<sup>21</sup> Putnam, 308.

responsible for helping individuals maintain their relationships with God. But the religious community for now is of little importance to this project. It is enough to note that one's relationship with God necessarily involves an intimate relationship between two entities. So particular sins against God and one's neighbor can all be traced back to a breakdown in community.

## **Solipsism is Universal as Scepticism**

Everyone is sinful according to the Judeo-Christian tradition. This means that if solipsistic doubt is the sinful mindset, then everyone must be a solipsist. But is this the case, are we all solipsists? Is this solipsistic mindset universal throughout humanity? This seems unlikely upon first consideration, for most would not admit that they doubt the existence of others. But it should not surprise the Christian to discover that this doubt may be hidden from our conscious awareness to some degree, especially since perhaps the greatest feat that the prince of sin perpetrated was to convince the world of his nonexistence. The possibility that we are all solipsists, unconsciously doubting the existence of others, is not totally lost.

This potential may be confirmed by closely examining the nature of solipsism itself. Solipsism is essentially a highly-developed form of scepticism, which basically purports the idea that nothing can ever truly be known untainted by doubt due to the fundamental flaws in human reasoning capabilities. Scepticism can take many forms but in its most exaggerated manifestation, it becomes impossible to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt anything, much less that any entity is real in this world. But this still does not answer the question of solipsism's possible universality. Unless scepticism can be disproved, the beliefs that reason produces will always be tainted with doubt. If this is so, then there can be no proof for the existence of others that is untainted with doubt. Perhaps the best way to prove this point would be to pose the question: "Can you prove to me that your neighbor or that God is real, beyond any doubt? If you can do this, then you are neither a sceptic nor a solipsist." So the real

question is whether scepticism can ever be defeated so as to allow someone to answer this question with a resounding, “Yes I can conclusively prove to you, without doubt, the existence of both my neighbor and my God!”

This whole endeavor seems to be barreling down a rabbit hole, but focus has not been lost. If this solipsistic doubt is the sinful mindset, then it must be universal. It can be universal only if it is impossible to have beliefs in the existence of others untainted by doubt. But this could only happen if scepticism were disproved, since scepticism will always taint any argument for the existence of others with doubt. So can scepticism be conclusively defeated? If it can be defeated, then the argument that solipsism is sin is faulted. An overview of the history of scepticism and essentially the roots of solipsism seems to be in order at this point.

## A Brief Survey of Modern Scepticism

The issue of scepticism existed in ancient thought in the form of Pyrrhonism, but it became a major concern in modern thought around the time of the Protestant Reformation. Ancient sceptical texts were just being rediscovered by Renaissance scholars, and were being used as fuel in the contemporary religious debates. Richard H. Popkin notes this connection:

“With the rediscovery in the sixteenth century of writings of the Greek Pyrrhonist, Sextus Empiricus, the arguments and views of the Greek sceptics became part of the philosophical core of the religious struggles then taking place. The problem of finding a criterion of truth, first raised in theological disputes, was then later raised with regard to natural knowledge, leading to the *crise pyrrhonienne* of the early seventeenth century.”<sup>22</sup>

Martin Luther’s view that all Christians possess the ability to discern truth through the Scriptures without the aid of the Pope was dependent upon mankind’s trust in reason’s ability to yield certain knowledge, or knowledge untainted by doubt.<sup>23</sup> The Catholic Church was able to use the texts of the Pyrrhonists in order to attack reason’s ability to yield certain knowledge without the divine intervention of God (to which the Church alone had proper claim), and thus keep Catholics from leaving the Church along with the rebellious Martin Luther. As Popkin puts it, “By destroying the rational aspirations of mankind through undermining various philosophies and theologies, man’s only recourse would be to faith.”<sup>24</sup> Of course, this would also benefit the steadfast Catholics since the most desirable kind of faith is built upon the

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<sup>22</sup> Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Richard H. Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism* (San Diego: Austin Hill Press, 1980), 24.

ruins of reason.<sup>25</sup> But regardless of whether the Catholic Church destroyed man's ability to decipher undoubted truth without the aid of the Church, it at least instilled some question concerning the source material for that reason. The validity and infallibility of the Scriptures relied upon confirmation by the Church, and without the Church it would be impossible to reasonably trust these sacred texts.<sup>26</sup> The abandonment of faith in favor of reason presented a potentially perilous situation for the Catholic Church. Scepticism seemed to hold some promise of protecting individuals from this danger by forcing them to admit dependency upon the Church, but the issue had yet to be investigated by any contemporary thinkers.

Michel de Montaigne, faced with these very serious religious battles, presented the first modern support of scepticism in his "Apologie de Raimond Sebond."<sup>27</sup> Montaigne begins his work by simply clarifying Raymond Sebond's position that although faith is the primary source of truth, reason can also be utilized to perhaps supplement that faith and strengthen it. Sebond's position was essentially that with "our heart and soul being ruled and commanded by faith it is right that faith should bring to the service of its plan all our other parts according to their capacity."<sup>28</sup> This may emphasize the primacy of faith, but the ambiguous capacity of reason posed a potential threat. So Montaigne does not stop at explaining Sebond's position, but goes on to define the capacity of reason, since he blamed this misunderstood capacity for a great number of the social conflicts that had arisen even in his lifetime.

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<sup>25</sup> Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*, 31.

<sup>26</sup> Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*, 166.

<sup>27</sup> Dan Engster, "The Montaignian Movement," *History of Ideas* 59 (1998): 628.

<sup>28</sup> Montaigne, 326.

“The means I take to beat down this frenzy, and which seems fittest to me, is to crush and trample underfoot human arrogance and pride; to make them feel the inanity, the vanity and nothingness, of man; to wrest from their hands the puny weapons of their reason; to make them bow their heads and bite the ground beneath the authority and reverence of divine majesty.”<sup>29</sup>

After clearly stating his intentions for the remainder of the essay, Montaigne begins to crush human arrogance by first examining the rest of nature, particularly the animal kingdom. He first notes the dependence of our entire lives upon the natural bodies and circumstances constantly around us (physical conditions, moods, inclinations, wills, etc...).<sup>30</sup> Once this relationship had been presented, Montaigne asks for a justification of our arrogance over bodies in nature. “Have we recognized in them some inert, insensible stupidity, we who have no dealings with them except obedience? Shall we say that we have seen in no other creature than man the exercise of a rational soul?”<sup>31</sup>

Montaigne then proceeds to give numerous examples of how humanity is irrational in presuming superiority over the animal kingdom. Organization can clearly be seen in beehives, communication is present in the way that pitches of a dog’s bark can reveal his/her mood, and certain animals have been known to weep or even laugh.<sup>32</sup> In fact, animal behavior is very similar to our own.

“Since animals are born, beget, feed, act, move, live, and die in a manner so close to our own, all that we detract from their motive powers, and all that we add to ours to raise our state above theirs, can in no way proceed from the judgment of our reason.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Montaigne, 327.

<sup>30</sup> Montaigne, 329.

<sup>31</sup> Montaigne, 330.

<sup>32</sup> Montaigne, 331-334.

<sup>33</sup> Montaigne, 345.

It is even noted that these misconceptions have been applied towards other human beings from foreign cultures upon initial encounters. When in ignorance of another culture, Montaigne observed the potential to mistake a foreign version of something familiar for a lack of that something.<sup>34</sup> Language is a good example of this. An encounter with a stranger who speaks a different language may leave one with the erroneous impression that this individual is a savage with no language at all, when it is in fact a language.

Montaigne took his most famous step towards trampling human arrogance in comparing mankind with the animal kingdom. This also indicates his first clear break from Sebond.

“Where Sebond insisted on man’s imperative to act on behalf of all creatures (to contain their differences in a higher archial scheme that man imposes in the name of God), Montaigne insists on showing the ties that link them in a loose webbing of matter, signs, and language.”<sup>35</sup>

In the exposition of humanity’s relationship with nature, Montaigne had already begun to undermine humanity’s attempts at overpowering nature with reasoning capabilities. If humankind is truly so interconnected with nature, then there can be no justification for the exclusive superiority which reason *supposedly* yields to mankind.

Once Montaigne had eliminated the exclusivity of reason to humankind, he then dealt with its purpose. He decided that it does not accomplish anything that one

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<sup>34</sup> Montaigne, 343.

<sup>35</sup> Tom Conley, “A Chaos of Science,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 51 (1998): 940.

would expect of a tool with such a supposedly powerful capacity. Reason has never made human beings happy.

“What good can we suppose it did for Varro and Aristotle to know so many things? Did it exempt them from human discomforts? ... Were they reconciled to death for knowing that some nations rejoice in it, and with cuckoldry for knowing that wives are held in common in some region?”<sup>36</sup>

Montaigne’s rhetorical questions imply his conviction that these philosophers failed to improve their lives in any significant way, in spite of the tremendous impact that they had on Western thought. Their knowledge did not make them happy in the least. “I have seen in my time a hundred artisans, a hundred plowmen, wiser and happier than rectors of the university, and whom I would rather resemble.”<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, Montaigne observed that humankind has not even realized any sort of knowledge through its reasoning.

“That is how, of three general sects of philosophy, two make express profession of doubt and ignorance; and in that of the dogmatists, which is the third, it is easy to discover that most of them have put on the mask of establishing any certainty for us as of showing us how far they had gone in this pursuit of truth: *which the learned suppose rather than know* [Livy].”<sup>38</sup>

The dogmatists are accused of purposefully making their ideas as difficult as possible in order to hide the fact that those ideas are truly vacuous and that their attempts to acquire absolute truth are totally in vain.<sup>39</sup> In fact, Montaigne notes that the immense variety of ideas throughout history is evidence enough that humanity’s reasoning

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<sup>36</sup> Montaigne, 359.

<sup>37</sup> Montaigne, 359.

<sup>38</sup> Montaigne, 375.

<sup>39</sup> Montaigne, 376.

process has failed to arrive at certain, undoubted truth.<sup>40</sup> He furthermore declares that this process can never reveal any true knowledge due human limitations, such as a massive dependence upon personal physical states of wellness (health and moods).<sup>41</sup>

Finally, Montaigne delivered one of the most powerful arguments against human knowledge when he addressed the capabilities of our senses to discern reality. This aspect of scepticism seems to be the most widely addressed of all of the aspects that Montaigne raised. His position was essentially that there is no way of knowing how incomplete our senses are.

“I see many animals that live a complete and perfect life, some without sight, others without hearing; who knows whether we too do not still lack one, two, three, or many other senses? For if any one is lacking, our reason cannot discover its absence. It is the privilege of the senses to be the extreme limit of our perception. There is nothing beyond them that can help us discover them; no, not can one sense discover the other...”<sup>42</sup>

Of course, there are certain senses that we can be sure we lack. Humans cannot sense magnetic fields, microwaves, or radio waves. But there is no way to be sure of how many senses we lack. Although Montaigne gave the specific example of magnetism, we have since discovered that there are numerous things that human beings cannot perceive. The discovery of the electromagnetic spectrum alone shows the severe limitations upon our senses' ability to observe reality completely. In addition to this problem, there is also no guarantee that the senses we do have are accurate.

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<sup>40</sup> Montaigne, 408.

<sup>41</sup> Montaigne, 425.

<sup>42</sup> Montaigne, 444.

“To judge the appearances that we receive of objects, we would need a judicatory instrument; to verify this instrument, we need a demonstration; to verify the demonstration, an instrument: there we are in a circle.”<sup>43</sup>

Montaigne thus had thoroughly undermined the position of the Protestants, and posed a perilous threat if his arguments could not be countered. But he also presented a problem to the secular sciences. Unless someone could counter Montaigne’s scepticism about a spiritually independent human reasoning, then there could be no confidence in the ability of religious and/or scientific investigations conducted by humanity outside of the Catholic Church’s divine influence to ever yield absolute certainty. This presented a pressing dilemma for the intellectualism of early Renaissance thinkers as well as early Protestants. “It was also to be the womb of modern thought, in that it led to the attempt either to refute the new Pyrrhonism, or to find a way of living with it.”<sup>44</sup>

René Descartes certainly was faced with this dilemma, as he was certainly influenced by the writings of Montaigne. He proposed to solve the problem by pushing Montaigne’s scepticism to what he believed to be its extreme limits. “Unless one were willing to pursue the possibility of raising doubts to the end, one could never hope to discover any truth untainted by doubt or uncertainty.”<sup>45</sup> This turned out to be a very interesting method because it began for the first time to reveal what scepticism was really capable of doing.

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<sup>43</sup> Montaigne, 454.

<sup>44</sup> Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, 54.

<sup>45</sup> Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, 179.

Descartes spends his **First Meditation** trying to push scepticism to its limits. He instills the potential for doubting everything that he senses or thinks about the world with his evil deity argument.

“I will suppose that, not a true God, who is very good and who is the supreme source of truth, but a certain evil spirit, not less clever and deceitful than powerful, has bent all his efforts to deceiving me. I will suppose that the sky, the air, the earth, colors, shapes, sounds, and all other objective things that we see are nothing but illusions and dreams that he has used to trick my credulity. I will consider myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, nor any senses, yet falsely believing that I have all these things. I will remain resolutely attached to this hypothesis ; and if I cannot attain the knowledge of any truth by this method, at any rate it is in my power to suspend my judgment.”<sup>46</sup>

With this, Descartes has hinted at the full extent to which the world and our own bodies could be doubted, even though he would only restore his confidence by removing the possibility of the conscious deceiver rather than by restoring mankind’s trust in reason itself. Essentially, this basic supposition does not really focus on the limitations of reason, but rather on the possibility that human senses are deliberately tampered with.

In his **Second Meditation**, Descartes makes the essential observation that he continues to think throughout this doubting process, and that this is something that cannot be removed from him by means of doubt.<sup>47</sup> “*I am, I exist*: is necessarily true every time that I pronounce it or conceive it in my mind.”<sup>48</sup> It is interesting that the first step that Descartes takes is to establish his own selfhood. This is intuitively the most immediate, undoubted truth to an individual. If Descartes is unable to remove

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<sup>46</sup> René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*, trans. Laurence J. Lafleur, (New Jersey: Macmillan, 1960), 80.

<sup>47</sup> Descartes, 82.

<sup>48</sup> Descartes, 82.

the deceiver from his supposition, and thus restore confidence in his perceptions of others, then he would be forced to remain a solipsist. This then signifies the beginnings of the possibility of solipsism.

In a series of logical suppositions that have been heavily criticized since their presentation, Descartes quickly restored the presence of a non-deceiving God, and thus also in logic.

“And the whole force of the argument I have here used to prove the existence of God consists in the fact that I recognize that it would not be possible for my nature to be what it is, possessing the idea of a God, unless God really existed- the same God, I say, the idea of whom I possess, the God who possesses all these high perfections of which my mind can have some slight idea, without however being able fully to comprehend them; who is subject to no defect and who has no part of all those qualities which involve imperfection. And from this it is quite evident that he cannot be a deceiver, since the light of nature teaches us that deception must always be the result of some deficiency.”<sup>49</sup>

The characteristics of this good God make the potential untrustworthiness of human senses logically impossible. But this is insufficient for dealing with Montaigne’s sensory scepticism. Even if Descartes had successfully proven that God is not a deceiver, he still did not prove that human beings have enough sensory abilities to view the world adequately and completely and thus make complete observations about it. It may be possible to obtain partial truth, such as the determination that there is a desk in front of me right now, or that there are light waves hitting my retinas, but these observations are ultimately incomplete. Any knowledge that is derived from them is susceptible to doubt. Montaigne’s supposition that we may lack a few or

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<sup>49</sup> Descartes, 108.

numerous senses has already been proven by the discovery of the electromagnetic spectrum. There is no way of knowing what imperceivable aspects of nature we have yet to discover. This seems to severely impede mankind's ability to develop complete knowledge about the world. The impossibility of having complete knowledge is not the same as scepticism, but the roots of the sceptical dilemma were nevertheless established by this early doubt in the ultimate capacity of human reason. Montaigne's argument against the reliability of the senses is not sufficiently dealt with by the proof of an honest God. Other creatures that have also been created by the same honest God clearly lack senses that we do not.

Descartes provided some of the most famous arguments in support of reason, but were they truly successful? It seems that Protestantism and secular science have both survived the crisis of Pyrrhonism, so perhaps Descartes and others were in fact successful in defeating scepticism. But this is problematic because scepticism continues to exist. In fact, the problem of scepticism has been revealed to be even more pervasive than Descartes had really supposed it to be. Others have pushed the implications of scepticism further, in spite of the apparent victory of Descartes.

It is perhaps easiest to acquire an overview of the history of scepticism after Descartes by briefly examining Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. Each of these thinkers pushed the limits of modern scepticism and left subsequent generations with an increasingly hopeless problem to solve. Locke believed that the qualities of any object could be divided into two separate categories: primary qualities which include extension, figure, motion, rest, solidity, impenetrability, and number (these qualities

exist in abstraction from the object and are a part of the external world according to Locke), and secondary qualities which are essentially things that our body perceives with its five senses like color, sound, taste, smell, and touch, which do not exist in abstraction.<sup>50</sup> The ability to distinguish between these two types of qualities meant that there must be some elements of our perceptions that exist independently of perception, and that there is thus an external world. Berkeley, though, offered a serious challenge to the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, which was actually preserving the possibility for an external, material world.

Berkeley's philosophy of idealism is infamous for pushing scepticism to dramatic possibilities and completely changing the conception of the world without appealing to an evil deceiver as Descartes did. Idealism is of particular interest in this project because "Arguments that cast doubt on the existence or accessibility of a mind-independent world leave us with no lifeline to the presence of others, no defense against the threat of solipsism."<sup>51</sup> Berkeley's introduction to his work *The Principles of Human Knowledge* is built upon the impossibility of abstraction, and thus the impossibility of Locke's distinction.<sup>52</sup> He did not believe that primary qualities could be abstracted or separated without thinking of specific manifestations in particular objects. Motion is used as an example.<sup>53</sup> Berkeley claims that motion cannot be comprehended without a conception of some particular object being in

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<sup>50</sup> Richard Schacht, *Hegel and After: Studies in Continental Philosophy Between Kant and Sartre* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975) 20.

<sup>51</sup> Honderich, 838.

<sup>52</sup> George Berkeley, *The Principles of Human Knowledge and Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* (New York: Meridian Books, 1968) 47.

<sup>53</sup> Berkeley, 52.

motion. The *general* idea of motion is nothing different than the *general* color of red. Both are meaningless without specific manifestations. Locke places each of these qualities into separate categories, but Berkeley completely rejects this classification. Berkeley also uses the abstract idea of a triangle to further illustrate his point.<sup>54</sup> It was accepted by most of Berkeley's contemporaries that the abstract *idea* of a triangle is different from a triangle in reality. Once again, Berkeley claimed that this apparent generality was an illusion since one's concept of the abstract idea of a triangle was in fact nothing but a flux of a wide variety of particularly perceived triangles. The indefinite nature of the flux of particulars tends to confuse one into believing that he/she is experiencing a general, abstract idea of one of Locke's primary qualities for what is in reality a vague variety of specific perceptions.

This abstraction criterion is the fundamental basis for Berkeley's argument.<sup>55</sup> If all of the qualities of objects are dependent upon the senses, then it is not necessary to believe that these objects exist outside of the mind. "Esse est percipi" according to Berkeley (or "to be is to be perceived").<sup>56</sup> In order for something to exist, the only thing that is logically necessary, due to the demolition of Locke's primary/secondary distinction, is that the object be perceived by a mind, or in fact be a mind itself. Berkeley challenges his readers to prove this assertion wrong. The instant that someone attempts to solve this challenge by suggesting an object that is not perceived

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<sup>54</sup> Berkeley, 53.

<sup>55</sup> Robert Muehlmann, "Berkeley's Ontology and the Epistemology of Idealism," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 8 (March 1978).

<sup>56</sup> Berkeley, 66.

or a mind itself, Berkeley notes that even in imagination things are being perceived.<sup>57</sup> “The ‘idealist argument,’ if there is one, is basically the challenge to produce an unperceived object; the manifest impossibility of this is taken to prove the idealist’s case.”<sup>58</sup> This proof negates the justification for an external world or space, since Berkeley demonstrated in his *Works on Vision* that the impression of distance and space is solely a construction of certain perceptions. The proof also negates the justification for objects being constituted of three-dimensional matter in this external space. The world consists only of perceptions (which of course exist only in the *mind* and not necessarily in external space), minds themselves, and God.

Berkeley leaves the deconstruction of the mind for someone even more daring.

“Locke supposedly destroyed the doctrine of innate ideas, but unfortunately he forgot to do the same to the theory of substance. Berkeley destroyed the conception of material substance, but he forgot to do the same to the conception of mental substance. Finally Hume came along and destroyed the conceptions of substance, cause, demonstrative reasoning about experience, proofs of the existence of God, and so on.”<sup>59</sup>

Hume is responsible for pushing scepticism to its limits. He completely removed the ability of man to have reasons for any of his beliefs. Though this should have been a difficult thing to accomplish if Descartes had effectively defeated scepticism. The survival of Protestantism and secular science is not necessarily an indication that scepticism was successfully defeated. It shall be explained soon how

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<sup>57</sup> Berkeley, 67.

<sup>58</sup> Myron Gochnauer, “Kant’s Refutation of Idealism,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 12 (April 1974): 196.

<sup>59</sup> Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*, 44.

these traditions were able to continue in spite of the apparent failure to silence the threat of scepticism

“Descartes at the dawn of modern philosophy, had hoped that, starting with a systematic suspension of belief in everything which is in the least dubitable, he would be able to proceed to erect an edifice of knowledge which would be completely certain and would moreover- as luck would have it- accord with the basic ideas of the world, man, God, and morality adhered to by Scholastic philosophers and theologians, and by ordinary men of common sense as well. By the time of Hume, their hopes seemed to have been dashed from first to last. In Hume’s hands Descartes’ systematic doubt, applied more rigorously than it had been by Descartes himself, led to skepticism with regard to the nature and existence of everything except the actual contents of perceptual experience- and in particular, with regard to the nature and existence of the three objects of traditional metaphysics: the world, the soul, and God. It also led to the view that the concepts of traditional metaphysics are meaningless, to a denial of freedom of the will, and to a kind of conventionalism in ethics.”<sup>60</sup>

This degree of total scepticism, though, is not widely adopted. It at least seems as though most people do not think of themselves as sceptics. “But this skepticism exists and has its devastating results only in the philosophical cabinet when one is considering matters abstractly.”<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, this devastating scepticism has yet to ever be truly defeated. Sceptics have persisted throughout history, and it seems that there is a logical absurdity to the possibility of ever *proving* scepticism wrong, for the only way to prove anything would be to employ the tool of logic, which is the very tool that has been called into question by the sceptical argument. Of course, sceptics also employ the tool of logic, and this presents an impossibility of certainty even of the sceptical position itself. Any attempt to totally

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<sup>60</sup> Schact, 21.

<sup>61</sup> Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*, 275.

disprove or prove scepticism thus ultimately results in a logical absurdity, which is problematic for someone who is relying on logic. The problem remains that not many people would admit to being sceptics, especially upon realizing the extent to which scepticism can affect one's world. In order for solipsism to be the mindset of sin, it must be universal to everyone. So it must be the case that people are sceptical without necessarily realizing it.

But how could people believe themselves not to be sceptical if they truly are? The answer is of course that people are capable of faithfully having beliefs, even if these things are not supported by logic as they are assumed to be. In fact, this is exactly what Hume suggests when discussing the difficulties in being a sceptic. According to Hume, it is nature that keeps people from being sceptics. "Thus, in this area, too, nature compels us to have opinions, though the skeptic shows that we have no basis for them."<sup>62</sup> So it is not reason that defeats scepticism in the end, but rather factors in nature that force us to make commitments to beliefs and actions. If we did not believe that the bear or lion in nature was real, then we would more than likely be destroyed by it. Of course, assuming that the predator is real in order to avoid death may not prove that it is actually real, but for all practicality we will behave *as if* we fully believe in its reality if we do not wish to be eaten like others seem to have been before us. It seems then that people are forced to commit to beliefs based on faith in order to survive according to Hume.

"The natural safeguards which enable us to live are at variance with the proposed suspensive attitude of the Pyrrhonians, and hence, nature

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<sup>62</sup> Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*, 117.

being stronger than Pyrrhonism, the necessary actions which we must perform to live destroy all possibility of being Pyrrhonian.”<sup>63</sup>

It is interesting that Hume not only pushed scepticism to lengths that those before him had failed to conceive, but that he also seems to have found the way to continue functioning in the world despite the apparent impossibility of completely defeating the sceptical position with logic and reasoning alone. Are we to give up on knowing anything about the world because we cannot defeat scepticism? Not exactly; we are able to function because we believe things to be true based on faith rather than on reason. In fact, one would be hard pressed to discover a true pyrrhonist, one who refrains from committing to any beliefs because of his or her fundamental distrust in reason. No one behaves as if scepticism is true. But it nevertheless affects our ways of thinking.

This explains why people may believe themselves not to be sceptics, but it also explains at the same time that no one has really defeated scepticism. Of course, there are individuals who feel as though the issue of scepticism can be solved by sound, conclusive arguments, but these arguments cannot be addressed adequately due to the limited scope of this project. Nevertheless, it seems that scepticism must continue to persist as a philosophical problem because the nature of the problem denies its solution. Reason can simply not defend itself ultimately, no matter how sound the argument appears to be. Conscious ignorance of this sceptical doubt that taints beliefs is also possible, for this doubt can remain hidden and unconscious, only presenting itself when the sceptical problem is consciously addressed. So the

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<sup>63</sup> Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*, 124.

previous question of the universality of scepticism, of solipsism, may now be answered. Scepticism is universal, so no one can ever possess a belief that is completely untainted by doubt. Therefore, solipsism must also be universal if no one is able to have such certain beliefs. Even if people believe themselves not to be sceptical or solipsistic, Hume has shown us that they have not really defeated the issue itself but are living *as if* they had. There is an assumption that scepticism is false, but no real way of proving this with absolute, undoubted certainty. People simply believe in the existence of others based on faith and not reason. The challenge stands for that hypothetical individual to prove to that his or her neighbor or God truly exists, and that there is more to the world than the self. It is impossible to *prove* this, so it is thus impossible to totally escape solipsism. The theory that solipsism is the mindset of sin is strengthened with the satisfaction of a second crucial criterion.

### **Solipsism is Sin! But is Sin the Real Problem?**

Solipsistic doubt satisfies the conditions necessary to be equated with the sinful mindset. It is capable of explaining particular sins, and it is also a condition that is universal among human beings, regardless of our awareness of it. But should this form of scepticism (sin itself) take full blame for all of the miseries in our history? The history of scepticism naturally presents many arguments against trusting in reason, but there is also a strong sentiment throughout the discipline of theology that moreover warns of this trust in reason being dangerous. Judeo-Christian tradition in fact even recognizes that the personal desire to gain knowledge of good and evil is responsible for casting humanity from paradise. Had Adam and Eve been content to faithfully trust God, then humanity in general would certainly have been much happier and more content.<sup>64</sup> Their disobedience can also be traced to a solipsistic disrespect of the wishes of God. They each privileged their desires over those of God, and apparently subjectively inferior entity.

Because of sin, mankind has been fallen throughout our history. There is simply no escaping this fact. The hope that Christianity offers may ease this suffering somewhat for the duration of this earthly life. But the real promise of peace lies in the heavenly realm, not in this world. Becoming aware of God will not cure one of the sinful mindset. Although there may be denominations that would argue with this, the majority of Judeo-Christian thought on the matter focuses on the grace of God and the inevitability of being sinful at heart, regardless of one's religious disposition.

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<sup>64</sup> Montaigne, 368.

Bayle noted that Christians' knowledge of God simply does not check their evil inclinations.<sup>65</sup> It seems as though our history is often only a record of our miseries and wars.<sup>66</sup> This much is obvious, but how is this relevant?

The condition of human misery presents mankind with the opportunity to turn to God for help. This of course would require a leap of faith since we have already practically determined that God's existence cannot be rationalized. But this is generally not what is done according to theologians like Karl Barth:

“The trumpet of conscious sounds; we start with apprehension; we feel the touch of holiness upon us- but at first we do not dream of appealing beyond ourselves for help in our need and anxiety. Quite the opposite. ‘They said to one another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. Let us build us a city and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth!’ We come to our own rescue and build the tower of Babel.”<sup>67</sup>

This is the beginning of the danger that trusting in reason to yield undoubted truths holds. Humanity believes that it is capable of figuring things out for itself, that it can metaphorically (and of course according to Biblical tradition, literally) build a tower to God.

“We have been much too eager to do something ourselves. Much too quickly we have made ourselves comfortable in temporary structures. We have mistaken our tent for our home; the moratorium for the normal course of things.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Pierre Bayle, *The Great Contest of Faith and Reason* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1963), 11.

<sup>66</sup> Bayle, 69.

<sup>67</sup> Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957) 14.

<sup>68</sup> Barth, 23.

We have ignored the universality of scepticism, and of sin, and we have opted for the illusory comfort of carrying about with our lives *as if* we possessed certainty. We have done many things with our confidence in reason, giving little regard to the reality and even gravity of our situation. But in spite of the arguments that the Catholic Church has historically made against reason, religion as a whole offers little hope of escaping its clutches. “Is not our religious righteousness a product of our pride and our despair, a tower of Babel, at which the devil laughs more loudly than at all the others?”<sup>69</sup> This institution will not suffice, for it is prone to the same limitations that prevent us from putting any hope in reason. Religion is in fact a reasonable institution.

Although the social institution of religion is distinct from secular institutions in its

content, they are both spread through generations with the same mechanism of language.

“Language objectivates the shared experiences and makes them available to all within the linguistic community, thus becoming both the basis and the instrument of the collective stock of knowledge. Furthermore, language provides the means for objectifying new experiences, allowing their incorporation into the already existing stock of knowledge, and it is the most important means by which the objectivated and objectified sedimentation are transmitted in the tradition of the collectivity in question.”<sup>70</sup>

The linguistic transmission of knowledge would not present a problem were it not for the limitations of humanity’s intellect. Things must sometimes be simplified if they

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<sup>69</sup> Barth, 20.

<sup>70</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 68.

are to be conveyed at all, and this results in the diminished percent of accurate communication for the population as a whole due to the ignorance of portions of the group.<sup>71</sup> Socialization will thus always fail to communicate ideas fully and perfectly.

It will certainly fail to communicate spiritual sentiments, which are at the source

of every religious institution, according to William James. “James is clearly convinced that personal religious [mystical] experiences are the root of most major world religions.”<sup>72</sup> If this is true, then the institution of religion must certainly have limitations.

“Even the most inspired person who can see, it matters not before what object he finds himself, the original light of the Universe, cannot by the word of instruction transfer this power and dexterity to another.”<sup>73</sup>

It does not matter how intense or genuine the mystical experience of an individual might be, that individual will never be able to adequately communicate it to another. But why is this so? The answer will eventually support the case that the hope that reason can deliver certain beliefs is in fact detrimental to humanity, at least in terms of our spirituality.

When an individual has that initial spiritual or mystical experience, there are certain qualities that the experience must possess if it is truly a mystical experience according to James. One of these qualifications is that the experience be ineffable, which means that it cannot be expressed in language. “The subject of [the mystical

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<sup>71</sup> Berger and Luckmann, 70.

<sup>72</sup> G. William Barnard, *Exploring Unseen Worlds: William James and the Philosophy of Mysticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 38.

<sup>73</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), 122.

experience] immediately says that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words.”<sup>74</sup> It is impossible that humanity could have developed a language that describes a world to which we very rarely have even an extremely limited access. So there is an entire realm of experiences that cannot be expressed in language. This is problematic since language is the most effective method of communication that humanity possesses. Schleiermacher makes the limitations of language concerning religious matters clear:

“But the communication of religion is not like the communication of ideas and perceptions to be sought in books. In this medium, too much of the pure impression of the original production is lost. Like dark stuffs that absorb the greater part of the rays of light, so everything of the pious emotion that the inadequate signs do not embrace and give out again, is swallowed up.”<sup>75</sup>

The danger though is that humanity does not realize the extent of religion’s inability to fully communicate the divine. People participate in religion and believe that it is infallible, as they may of reason, when in fact both suffer from the same limitations. This is interesting, since the two claim to be so opposed to one another. But nevertheless, this belief is ultimately harmful to spirituality.

“Our quest for God cannot be due to the influence of theology and the church, for *theology* and the *church* from the beginning of the world have done more in this particular to narcotize than to stimulate.”<sup>76</sup>

Herein lies the real danger of religion and dogmatic reasoning according to Barth:

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<sup>74</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: The Modern Library, 1994), 414.

<sup>75</sup> Schleiermacher, 150.

<sup>76</sup> Barth, 54.

“It is rather the fact that orthodoxy, and we all, so far as we are in our own way dogmaticians, have a way of regarding some objective description of that element- such as even the word ‘God’ for instance- as the element itself.”<sup>77</sup>

Reason creates the illusion of a certainty untainted by doubt and leaves the individual confused. For there is *some* sort of partial understanding, and unless the individual knows better, he or she will assume that this understanding is adequate. It will be assumed that this knowledge is certain and pure. “Knowledge about life is one thing; effective occupation of a place in life, with its dynamic currents passing through your being, is another.”<sup>78</sup>

So what is to be done then? Reason and religion have the ability to leave people under the false impression that they know God, or even that they are not sinful/solipsistic since they believe that they *know* all others with appropriate subjectivity, when they really only *know about* them objectively (barely recognizing any subjectivity). It is reason that blinds people to their sin and convinces them that they know more than they are capable of knowing, which is perhaps why there have been those who despise reason, and have wished to remove it altogether from faith.

“Faith, for [Bayle], is completely blind, based on no evidence at all, and in direct opposition to what is reasonable and rational. We are led to accept it after seeing that reason always confounds itself. Philosophical analysis tends towards self-destruction.”<sup>79</sup>

It seems that the misunderstanding of reason’s abilities can be a truly undesirable characteristic of humanity.

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<sup>77</sup> Barth, 202.

<sup>78</sup> James, 532.

<sup>79</sup> Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*, 154.

Kierkegaard in fact believed that the abuse of reason could ultimately lead to the destruction of oneself.

“For the attainment of knowledge, an attitude of objectivity is required; and the cultivation of an attitude of objectivity involves the suppression of personality and the transcendence of individuality. And in the attempt to rise above and leave behind one’s individuality and personality, which can be partly if not completely successful, Kierkegaard sees a kind of self-annihilation, to which he objects in the strongest possible terms. Against the tendency to applaud and encourage this development, he argues that men are essentially finite, subjective, particular individuals, rather than unlimited, objective, impersonal knowing minds.”<sup>80</sup>

The self is annihilated if one lacks subjectivity. For according to Kierkegaard one cannot exist without subjectivity, and one cannot possess adequate subjectivity if one spends a lifetime attempting to cultivate certainty. An individual’s solipsistic doubt in the existence of others and the following objectification of others is not something that can be fixed. The condition of solipsism is simply inevitable, and there is no decisive choice, or realization that can be made to escape from it. The issue that needs attention is the illusion of certainty through reason. The pursuit of objective certainty prevents the *others* from being rescued from a state of inadequate subjective existence. Only by recognizing one’s scepticism, and embracing a non-dogmatic faith rather than objective reason, can one cultivate subjectivity and thus existence for the other as well as oneself. One should therefore abandon the pursuit of absolute certain knowledge, or objectivity as much as possible (since it necessarily denies subjectivity) in order that one might rather cultivate subjectivity and therefore humanity for oneself as well as others.

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<sup>80</sup> Schact, 122.

This is the main goal of the theory that solipsism is sin. The *pursuit* of faith and acceptance of fundamental scepticism is different from Hume's position of the individual who believes without a good argument, with inadvertent faith. The theory of solipsistic sin recognizes and embraces faith's role. One must not just live faithfully by accident, for this is inevitable according to Hume, but the goal is to recognize this faith and not fall for the illusion that there are proofs for certain beliefs, untainted by doubt.

But this all paints a rather bleak picture. It has already been noted that it is impossible to escape being sinful. The arguments against reason also seem problematic, at least as they are themselves arguments. This can all certainly become a very confusing web of logic and anti-logic. But there is no need to despair, for there is some benefit to be gained from the highly-imperfect institutions of religion as well as reason. There is some divine beauty in religion.<sup>81</sup> One must simply maintain the realization that reason and religion are both fundamentally limited and therefore incapable of delivering one from the miseries of being sinful or the doubts of scepticism.

We must receive neither our religion nor our ideas in general solely by means of logical examination or by reason. For it is as clear as one can ever expect something to be that reason is a fallible guide.

“Believing that reason itself was a fallible guide and being convinced of the reality of grace which enlightened the conscious and gave a full

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<sup>81</sup> Schleiermacher, 211.

persuasion of the truth without a long and rigorous examination, Bayle could in all honesty subject reason to faith...<sup>82</sup>

We are fortunate to some degree that we are able to function with the full persuasion of the truth, *as if* we knew, because nature would otherwise destroy us, as Hume has noted. So this is an example of grace to some extent and should not be a source of total despair. But the ignorance of its ultimate insufficiency is dangerous as we have seen.

It should be noted that Montaigne himself used reason to arrive at the conclusion that marked the beginning of modern scepticism's attack on reason.

“The articulation of this essay leaves no doubt: Man's ignorance leads him to an inevitable submission to God à la Pascal, but in the meantime Montaigne has written a resounding essay by the very act of which he shows himself superior to the animals and exhibits the prowess of his mind.”<sup>83</sup>

This is a strong point, but it is neutralized with an understanding of the type of scepticism under which Montaigne operates. Montaigne does not abandon reason altogether. He instead makes an argument to limit the potential for reason. For he realizes the problem of disarming oneself of the tool of reason in order to disarm one's enemy of that same weapon.<sup>84</sup> Although it has been established that the absolute certainty promised by reason can be a dangerous illusion, this begs the circular question of how even this notion can really ever be *established* then. One finds that we have arrived back at the problem that Hume observed, which is that no one can really live like the sceptic. Not even the mystical zealot can *totally* abandon

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<sup>82</sup> Karl C. Sandberg, *At the Crossroads of Faith and Reason* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1966), 65.

<sup>83</sup> Marcel Tetel, *Montaigne: Updated Edition* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990), 34.

<sup>84</sup> Sandberg, 3.

his or her reason. There are fortunately those theologians and philosophers who recognize this problem and restore some credibility to the concept of human reason. But this is not to say that there are degrees of scepticism that can be achieved by dependency upon reason. If scepticism refers to an inability to have knowledge untainted by doubt, then one either is or is not a sceptic. There may be degrees to which one may trust reason and live *as if* these doubts were insignificant, but doubt will remain.

C.S Lewis believed that we are forced to depend upon reason for all human knowledge, since we infer the existence of that which is not immediate to our senses (as we infer that we have a brain from seeing one in other humans).<sup>85</sup> This point must be made clear: Although the misunderstood capability of reason has been proven potentially dangerous, reason itself should not, nor can it be, forsaken completely. “Whenever the skeptic argues against a view he is forced to give up his skepticism and to accept something in order to argue. Were the skeptic consistent, he would always remain silent.”<sup>86</sup> The only solution to this problem is for the sceptic to have opinions, but also the realization that there is no rational basis for them.<sup>87</sup> The goal is to rather strictly define the capacity at which reason is capable of operating, just as Montaigne attempted to do when he helped to initially create the modern problem of scepticism. It is not reason in general that presents the problem to humanity, but

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<sup>85</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 23.

<sup>86</sup> Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*, 138.

<sup>87</sup> Popkin, *The High Road to Pyrrhonism*, 129.

certain types of reasoning, types that have forgotten their limitations as human and have lapsed into “self deification.”<sup>88</sup>

“If a dancer could leap very high, we would admire him, but if he wanted to give the impression that he could fly- even though he could leap higher than any dancer had ever leapt before- let laughter overtake him. Leaping means to belong essentially to the earth and to respect the law of gravity so that the leap is merely the momentary, but flying means to be set free from telluric conditions, something that is reserved exclusively for winged creatures, perhaps also for inhabitants of the moon, perhaps- and perhaps that is also where the system will at long last find its true readers.”<sup>89</sup>

Reason becomes problematic only when it leads individuals to believe that they can possess *absolute* certainty. Claims such as this tend to spoil the magnificence of the achievement, or the height of the dancer. The dancer appears to be ridiculous rather than spectacular.<sup>90</sup> The height of the dancer is valid, and valuable, but only insofar as it remains judged by the criteria relevant to height and not something wholly different. For it must be recognized that there is a sort of subjectivity within the act of objective reasoning.

“The point is not to deny objective truth but (1) to insist, with regard to the *what*, that human knowledge can never do more than approximate it and (2) to insist, with regard to the *how*, that the task of appropriation must not be supplanted by the quest for objective knowledge. Hence the following account of truth: ‘*An objective uncertainty, held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness, is the truth, the highest truth there is for an existing person.*’ But this means that all substantive knowledge is a kind of faith rather than sight or sheer presence...”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Merold Westphal, “Kierkegaard and Hegel” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 112.

<sup>89</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 124.

<sup>90</sup> Westphal, 102.

<sup>91</sup> Westphal, 114.

The true beauty of reason does not lie in any hope that it might be perfect, that it might actually enable human beings to obtain certainty, untainted by doubt. The true beauty lies in the fact that thinking is something that human beings do. Reason is something that human beings do, not something in the world that is a purely objective or observable phenomenon. The dependency of this action on an actor in itself demonstrates that there is something beyond objectivity. Essentially, the act of reasoning is itself a miraculous, unexplainable event. “God pierces [Nature] wherever there is a human mind.”<sup>92</sup> Although there is the danger of confusing the objective act of reasoning with the subjectivity of the required thinker, it is this subjectivity that must be our focus. For the cultivation of the subjectivity of the other is the only way that the mindset of solipsism can be restricted from manifesting into particular sinful actions, even if not perfectly restricted.

So reason is not to be totally abandoned, just redefined and limited. This is fortunate, for otherwise there would be no need to read any more of this paper, since there would be no hope of gaining anything at all from its tangled web of logic. The presence of a universal scepticism may seem negated if some reasoning is sound, but limited reasoning is incapable of eliminating doubt, so universal doubt will always taint human knowledge. Objective reason does not hold the potential for absolute certainty, its illusory promised goal. There is only the possibility of living *as if* there is some degree of certainty, but this certainty is therefore ultimately something much more subjective in nature. The delusion that human reasoning can in fact lead to

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<sup>92</sup> Lewis, 61.

ultimate truth is a dangerous idea for many theologians, and an impossible idea for many philosophers. If scepticism can never truly be defeated, it seems therefore also impossible to transform with human reasoning the delusion of obtainable certainty untainted by doubt into an actual possibility rather than the proverbial carrot dangling in front of humanity's hungry eyes.

## **Sin is Inevitable: It is the Pursuit of Certain Knowledge That Must Go**

Solipsism must then be universal among human beings at least on some unrecognized level, even if some people are able to function *as if* they possessed undoubted certainty due to their faith rather than in actual certainty. It also directly affects one's propensity to commit particular sins against others. Solipsism is essentially sin and all of humanity is compelled to subscribe to it, regardless of the amount of faith an individual possesses (and there is always some degree of faith employed since no one really can practically be a total sceptic or therefore solipsist). But in what way is this knowledge helpful? If solipsism is fundamentally impervious, then are we simply to hold the particular manifestations of this mindset at bay, by trying faithfully to believe in the existence of the other? If the mindset is not truly eliminated, then it remains an inevitability that it will occasionally manifest in sinful actions against others. Are we simply condemned to be sinful without any real hope of overcoming this state of mind?

The answer, it seems, is that we are in fact incapable of defeating the sinful mindset. There would be few theologians who would make the argument that sin itself is something that can ever be removed from this world except by divine intervention. Even if the world were to cease committing particular sins, it would not likely be a permanent peace.

“There will be plenty of metaphorical wars- corporate lawyers specializing in hostile takeovers who will think of themselves as sharks or gunslingers... But as they sink into the soft leather of their BMWs, they will know somewhere in the back of their minds that there have been real gunslingers and masters in the world, who would feel contempt for the petty virtues required to become rich or famous

in modern America. How long [the violent need for recognition] will be satisfied with metaphorical wars and symbolic victories is an open question...<sup>93</sup>

Humanity will continue to have sinful minds, solipsistic minds. Eventually, these thoughts would manifest again into actions. The fight against being sinful is not the fight that humanity must wage. But the suggestion has rarely been to give up on the situation and indulge in our sinful appetites, our solipsistic mindset. The real goal is to identify the true danger that is present to us, and the real enemy about which we must worry.

This danger is the ignorant delusion that reason, or even dogmatic faith, possesses the capability to reveal absolute certainty. The goal is to understand the fallacy of this notion, and to forsake any hope that humanity will transcend its limitations and realize objective certainty. Only by doing this will it be possible to cultivate subjectivity, according to Kierkegaard, which is the only real way to achieve existence for oneself as well as bestowing it upon others. This is the only real way to enable the possibility of loving, and of becoming capable of receiving love. Of course, this human love can never be pure since the state of solipsism will never be completely eradicated. But without the presence of sin, of scepticism, there would be no reason to cultivate subjectivity. If objective reason were perfect, then objective certainty would be possible and subjectivity would be unattractive and unnecessary, thus true existence would never be cultivated. The presence of sin is a necessary condition for cultivating true love amongst beings. But again, this is not achieved by

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<sup>93</sup> Fukuyama, 329.

pursuing sin or the destruction of sin. It is rather achieved by cultivating subjectivity, and recognizing and cultivating a faith that never claims to know anything with objective certainty. Do not succumb to the illusion of objective certainty, and the illusion that solipsism is false, because it must exist for every individual on some level. Humanity cannot hope to redeem itself, to conquer sin and destroy evil.

“Although evil is antilife, it is itself a form of life. If we kill those who are evil, we will become evil ourselves; we will be killers. If we attempt to deal with evil by destroying it, we will also end up destroying ourselves, spiritually if not physically. And we are likely to take some innocent people with us as well. .. What to do then? Like the patient, we must begin by giving up the simple notion that we can effectively conquer evil by destroying it. But this leaves us in a sort of nihilistic vacuum. Are we to throw up our hands- to regard the problem of evil as being inherently insoluble? Hardly. That would be meaningless. It is in the struggle between good and evil that life has its meaning- and in the hope that goodness can succeed. That hope is our answer: goodness can succeed. Evil can be defeated by goodness. Then we translate this we realize what we dimly have always known: Evil can be conquered only by love.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Peck, 266.

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