The Legitimacy of the Modern Age

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A Systematic Comparison of
the Epochal Crisis of Antiquity
to That of the Middle Ages

The categories that Descartes provided for the modern age to use in understanding itself, which make him the favored thinker of every account of its origin, are those of methodical doubt and an absolute beginning founded only on itself. Methodical doubt is a cautious procedure; it is meant to be distinguished from the dogmatic negation that already knows what should ultimately be rejected, and must demonstrate that; instead, it restricts itself to regarding all judgments as prejudiced until they have been proved otherwise. This procedure is supposed to be usable by anyone and at any time; the new judgments that it produces exclude the very hypotheses that would enable us to understand why this undertaking is considered necessary and is carried out at a particular point in history.

An absolute beginning in time is itself, in its intention, timeless. Reason's interpretation of itself as the faculty of an absolute beginning excludes the possibility that there could appear even so much as indications of a situation that calls for reason's application now, no sooner and no later. Internal necessity forbids external necessities from playing any role here. Reason, as the ultimate authority, has no need of a legitimation for setting itself in motion; but it also denies itself any reply to the question why it was ever out of operation and in need of a beginning. What God did before the Creation and why He decided on it—where reason was before Descartes and what made it prefer this medium and this point in time—these are questions that cannot be asked in the context of the system constituted by their basic concepts.
The absolute beginning that inaugurates history forbids itself to have a history—and that means to be not only an original postulating but also the answer to a crisis. History exists for Descartes only as the totality of prejudices, or for Bacon as the system of idols, which now find their end, without this end’s becoming comprehensible as a consequence of their earlier acceptance, their fall from power as a consequence of the unbearable of their rule. The characteristic features of self-assertion are concealed so as not to conflict with the evidence of a spontaneous generation; the crisis disappears into the obscurity of a past that cannot have been anything more than a background for the new light.

This self-interpretation directly provokes the countermove of a massive historicism, to which one does an injustice if one excludes it from the rationality of the modern age. The idea of an absolute beginning is in its turn—even if it sees itself as entirely in the service of the system of rationality ultimately be erected—no more rational than any creatio ex nihilo. The restitution of the disavowed ‘historicity’ is in itself not yet a movement against the Enlightenment. But the Romantic rehabilitation of the Middle Ages shows the potential that is latent in this process. The historicization of the beginning of the modern age is transformed into a gesture of reproach, with which the history of its desire not to be history is restored to the epoch, and its derivation is (as it were) imposed upon it as an obligation. The refutation of its claim to an absolute beginning goes on to cast doubt on its historical legitimacy, referring always to the claims in its self-definition and making the suppression of historical dependence an index of the sort of questionable consciousness that glosses over its unjust contents. Historicism seemed to provide an admission of neglected legal titles, which had to be feared by the epoch’s understanding of itself as exhibited in the Enlightenment. Thus the apologia for the Middle Ages at once becomes the construction of a legacy, whose open neglect can only be explained by secret benefit. The historiographical recovery of the Middle Ages, which had originally been a triumph of the historiographical intellect over the distance of historical alienation, succumbs almost as a result of its own internal logic to the service of the category of secularization.

An important additional element is the narrowing of the thematic scope of historical study to the ‘great centuries,’ the stable substance of ‘classical’ formations. This selectiveness had been raised to the status of an obvious, even exemplary, procedure in the study of the ancient world, where the idealization of a humanist canon had bracketed out whole realms of phenomena that did not belong in the picture: those of crisis, disintegration, the disappearance of supposedly timeless ideals. For this procedure, whose practitioners were satisfied to enjoy the view from one summit to another, the break between the epochs was of course unintelligible and took on the character of either pure catastrophe or pure willfulness. The beginning of the modern age, basing itself on its own internal evidence, seemed to destroy in barbaric fashion a meaningful historical context and to spring from an act of pure self-aggrandizement.

The revision of this historical picture has been under way for a long time. The focus of research interest has shifted more and more away from the marked ‘classical’ phases of historical formations toward the zones of transition, deformation, and new formation. This holds for the ancient world just as much as for the Middle Ages. One may wish to speak of the low points of the historical process—but it is here that structures can be grasped that make manifest the historical movement as such. The process that is supposed to become thematic under the rubric of the ‘disappearance of inherent purposes’ [Zusammenhang] and to render the onset of the modern age intelligible as ‘self-assertion’ is initially questionable in regard to its specificity for precisely this and only this context. The end of the ancient world seems to be just as capable of interpretation by means of this category as is the crisis of the Middle Ages. This is why it was necessary to analyze the procedure whose application to the final, Gnostic phase of the ancient world furnished the ground plan of the Middle Ages. But the difference between the a priori [difficulties] that were to be eliminated and the intensity of the questioning that had to be faced requires more clarification if we are to remove the objection that asks, Why didn’t the crisis of the ancient world find its correlate in self-assertion?

Hellenism, with its scientific and technical achievements, can appear to be a sort of ‘impeled modern age,’ which in its very onset was thrown back by Christianity’s breaking in and only got going again with the rediscovery of its texts by the Renaissance. The modern age would then be the normalization of a disturbed situation, taking up once again the interrupted continuity of history in its immanent logical sequence. The Middle Ages would again be a senseless and merely annoying intervening period in the historical process. If I turn a part
of my efforts to the refutation of this thesis, it is not because this reasoning in itself alarms me but because it conceals the singular situation of provocation and self-assertion from which springs the incomparable energy of the rise of the modern age.

I have spoken so far of Gnosticism as the final form of the ancient metaphysical system, in opposition to which patristic dogma consolidated itself. However, Gnostic speculation is not an expression of a disappearance of order but rather of the radical revaluation of an order that was in the process of petrifying. But the patristic polemic, which wants to use the positive cosmos of ancient metaphysics against the demonized cosmos of Gnosticism, nevertheless insists on a genealogy that derives the Gnostic cosmos from the disintegrating classical cosmology of the Greeks. Here one should not overlook that the dependence of the patristic version of ancient cosmology on Stoicism and its emphasis on the cosmos also involved the use of its polemical formulas, especially those aimed at Epicurus. But the arguments for these formulas had to be found, and they are instructive.

Irenaeus of Lyons traces the Gnostic dualism back to the antithesis of atom and empty space in the philosophy of Democritus and Epicurus. The world as it appears is for both Gnostics and atomists something other than what truly exists; but—and this is the distinction Irenaeus passes over—for the atomists it is composed of what truly exists, whereas the Gnostic pleroma [fullness] draws all the predicates of existence to itself and allows the world to be degraded to a mere appearance of nothing, to the demiurge's deception. More important is the asserted equivalence of the transcendent god of Gnosticism and the extra-mundane gods of Epicurus; what they have in common is that they bear no responsibility and care for the world—they do not even sit in judgment and dispense justice for men's deeds. A century later Terullian named Epicurus as the grandfather (patrarcha) of Marcion's senseless and motionless god (immobilitis et stupens deus) and treated that god as contemptible on account of his incapacity for wrath and revenge. The contradiction is evident: the Stoic God of cosmic providence and the Old Testament God of wrath and judgment cannot both be brought into play against the Gnostic god of salvation at the same time.

The instructive value of this polemic in connection with our fundamental questions only becomes evident when we set alongside it a comparison between Epicurus's teachings and the late-medieval conception of God's sovereign freedom to do what He pleases [Willkür-

freheit]. Leibniz pronounced this equivalence. In his exchange of letters with Samuel Clarke in the years 1715 and 1716, Leibniz opposes the connection between Newton's physics and voluntarist theology, which seemed to him to be a necessary consequence of the assumption of absolute space and absolute time. Clarke, basing himself on this position, had rejected the application of the principle of sufficient reason to the explanation of nature. The act of creation was supposed to remain the original fact, which could not be further inquired into and rationally grounded. Leibniz entitles this the "décret absolu moment absolu" [the absolutely absolute decree]. Absolute space had for him precisely the characteristics that exclude a rational origin of reality; there are in it no meaningful differences of quantity and of place, so that it is an aggregate of rational undecidabilities. In the Creation there is for Leibniz only one ac of mere power, the creation of matter as such. He who reduces the concept of God to omnipotence and the will that does what it pleases is logically compelled to see in matter the essence of creation and to reduce everything to matter. Theological absolutism denied man any insight into the rationality of the Creation, which is exactly what Leibniz wanted to open up in accordance with the principle of sufficient reason and by means of the idea of the God Who practices mathematics. That the world is a coherent order becomes, on Clarke's view, a mere assertion, without consequences for human thought. Order is the side of reality that is turned away from us: "For in truth and strictness, with regard to God, there are no disorders... ."

The essence of the dispute between Leibniz and Clarke is the question of how the reality of nature presents itself to man: whether it is dependable and serviceable to him or whether he is merely expected to acknowledge its orderly character without having it confirmed. Leibniz insists that the very order that human reason claims to find in reality embodies the qualities that divine reason had to give to its work. The controversy here is no longer about the problem of the arrangement of the world to suit the requirements of human life but rather about the question of the effectiveness of the human reason that has to assert its own laws as the laws of the world. The rational dependability of the world, the condition of the possibility of all theory, is the remnant of teleological order that Leibniz defends. On the other hand, absolute will, as a metaphysical principle, is the equivalent of the assertion that the dependability of the world cannot be proved and is therefore a mere fact, always subject to revocation at any time.
The high point of the dispute between Leibniz and Clarke is reached when Leibniz asserts the complete equivalence of the system of absolute will and the system of absolute accident, of voluntarism and atomism: "La volonté sans raison seroit le hazard des Epicureens." [Will without reason would be the chance of the Epicureans]. The universe as interpreted by atomism is ruled by the principle of the identity of indiscernibles since the atoms and empty space are defined by the fact that they allow no rational action whatsoever but place reason in a position where all possibilities are indifferent, so that chance becomes the sole principle of reality. The nominalistic God is a superfluous God, who can be replaced by the accident of the divergence of atoms from their parallel paths, and of the resulting vortices that make up the world. The concept of an absolute will is internally contradictory and consequently a chimera, a fiction.

We need not be concerned here that since the time of the Stoics the accusation of "Epicureanism" had become a polemical blow below the belt; here the term is in fact very accurately applied. Just as little do we need to concern ourselves that the position Leibniz constructed in opposing Newton did not save the metaphysics of a world order guaranteed by divine reason. The path forward from this point was determined not by the principle of this critique but rather by one of its side effects, the phenomenalizing of space and time. The instructive thing for us is not the antithesis between Leibniz and Clarke, as such, but rather the principle, employed in Leibniz's analysis of the equivalence of nominalistic and mechanistic explanations of the world, a principle that gives us the key to the reoccupation that was effected in the replacement of the late-medieval by the early-modern type of explanation of nature.

One of the essential, though usually underestimated, phenomena of the beginning of the modern age was the attempt to reappropriate Democritus's atomistic philosophy of nature in the form it had been given by Epicurus and Lucretius. This renewal of ancient atomism prepared the way for the new ideas of matter and motion. But in spite of this function, the process is still understood merely as a piece of 'Renaissance' conditioned by the literary rediscovery of Lucretius in 1417, on account of which it has come to be regarded as a historical datum requiring no further explanation. But the mere demonstration of the presence or reappearance of a source does not explain anything. Renaissances have their genetic logic, and only the exhibition of that logic satisfies the demands of historical understanding. The observation of Leibniz that we have cited, which he made in his argument with Clarke, discloses the structural connection between nominalism as a late-medieval phenomenon and atomism as an early modern one. Both positions regard the origin of the world as an event inaccessible to human rationality. Epicurus had assumed an uncaused divergence of atoms from their parallel straight-line paths in infinite space as the origin from which developed the vortices that gave rise to his worlds; nominalism could provide for all questions regarding the reason and purpose of the Creation only the Augustinian Quis voluit (Because God willed it).

But the systematic interchangeability of the two theses, which Leibniz noted, does not mean that they must be regarded as equivalent in their historical function as well. The primacy of the divine will, which puts rejection of the question in place of explanation, was meant to increase the binding force of the given over men; the basic mechanistic thesis, on the other hand, did indeed remove the origin of the world from the realm of what can be grasped, but it had no 'conservative' implications for the relation of man to nature. On the contrary, it established the material substratum of the world as something meaningless in itself, and consequently as a potentiality open to man's rational disposition. The reoccupation that took place between the absolute will and matter defined the world as that which is precisely not pregiven, as a problem rather than as an established state of affairs. But the question why atomism could have this significance as the successor of voluntarism, but not in its original situation in the ancient world, leads us to a recognition of the irreversibility of this reoccupation: only after nominalism had executed a sufficiently radical destruction of the humanly relevant and dependable cosmos could the mechanistic philosophy of nature: by adopted as the tool of self-assertion.

This prerequisite was not present at the origin of ancient atomism. Epicurus's philosophy is essentially a therapy meant to lessen the human uneasiness caused by natural phenomena, or, more exactly, by the inherited explanations of those phenomena. Nominalism is a system meant to make man extremely uneasy about the world—with the intention, of course, of making him seek salvation outside the world, driving him to despair of his this-worldly possibilities and thus to the unconditional capitulation of the act of faith, which, however, he is again not capable of accomplishing by his own power. After the
classical philosophy of the Greeks, the postulate of ataraxia was still possible, whereas after the theological absolutism of the Middle Ages, self-assertion had to be the implication of any philosophical system. Can these distinctions be substantiated by a comparative analysis of ancient atomism and medieval nominalism? This would lend profile to the thesis that a historical 'answer' like that of the modern age could not have been given to Hellenism, but only later, to nominalism. For this purpose the comparable doctrines on each side will have to be defined more accurately in accordance with their functions within each system.

For Epicurus's gods and for the God of nominalism, there is no ratio creandi [reason for creation], no motive for bringing a world into existence. From this unambiguous shared thesis, however, radically different conclusions are drawn. For Epicurus it follows that no creation whatsoever can be assumed, since no ratio [reason] can be given for the act of creation. This is at any rate the direction taken by Lucretius in attempting to make the argument plausible: He has in mind, as a model of the rational production of a world, the Platonic myth of the demiurge with his prototypical Ideas, and in this connection poses the question where in the Epicurean system of empty space and atoms the gods could have found a model, accessible to intuition, of a world to create. ¹ The logical circle, according to which a world must have already been present from which to read off what could be created—a circle that is also present, though hidden, in the Platonic myth of the demiurge—excludes the idea of creation from the ranks of the rational principles of explanation. The origin of the world is left to chance—though to a chance that nevertheless contains its own guarantees, as will be shown.

The nominalists derive from the same initial thesis a conclusion that is extremely positive for their theological system: Because the Creation is uncaused, because it does not require a preexisting model for mere demiurgic implementation, it demonstrates the radicalness of the groundless will that is the ground of everything; it is the maximum of causality and the first in the sequence of pure acts of grace that constitutes the real theme of theology. God is not, like the Platonic demiurge, the executor of a world plan that is consistent in itself and makes its own uniqueness manifest, and whose ideal status means precisely that any rational being must recognize in it (and accordingly put into effect) the necessary characteristics of a world as such, so that productive and theoretical insight converge on this model. The nominalistic God stands with His work in the widest horizon of noncontradictory possibilities, within which He chooses and rejects without enabling the result to exhibit in any way the criteria governing His volition. Much of what He could create, He does not choose to create—for nominalistic thought, that is the difference between the origin of the world and a process of natural causality, from which the whole of the possible effect always results. ²

This conception of creation is not an incidental piece of doctrine of the Nominalist school but is connected to its philosophical center, to the denial of universals and the assertion of the priority of reality over concepts. It is easy to show this since a realist doctrine regarding concepts, which holds that they possess a binding force as exemplary entities independent of things, is demonstrably incompatible with the strict concept of a creatio ex nihilo. The universale ante rem [universal having an existence prior to things] as that which can be and is repeated at will in concrete things makes sense only so long as the universe represents a finite embodiment of what is possible. The concept of the potentia absoluta [complete, absolute power], however, implies that there is no limit to what is possible, and this renders meaningless the interpretation of the individual as the repetition of a universal. Creation is now supposed to mean that every entity comes into existence from nothing, in such a way that even in respect to its conceptual definition it was not there previously. Only in this way can the possibility be excluded, as William of Ockham argues, that God might restrict His own power by creating a particular entity, because any aspect of other concrete creations that happened to be identical in species with the first could only be imitation and repetition, not creation. Absolute power is original in every one of its creations. It does not recognize the Aristotelian distinction between definite essential form and individuality but produces only what is essentially unique. ³

But these very riches of creative abundance put human reason in the embarrassing position of having to set its economy of classificatory concepts over against the authentic reality as an auxiliary construct that is just as indispensable as it is inappropriate—in the position, that is, of being unable from the very beginning to interpret its theoretical mastery of reality as anything but self-assertion. Thus the denial of universals directly excludes the possibility that God's restriction of Himself to His potentia ordinata [ordered, or ordained, power] in nature too could become comprehensible for the benefit of man and his
reason. Divine spirit and human spirit, creative and cognitive principles, operate as though without taking each other into account. The gratuitousness of the Creation implies that it can no longer be expected to exhibit any adaptation to the needs of reason. Rather than helping man to reconstruct an order given in nature, the principle of economy (Ockham’s razor) helps him to reduce nature forcibly to an order imputed to it by man. God is not economical; He does many things lavishly that could have been done simply and sparingly: “Quia vult, nec est alia cause quaerenda.” [The reason is that He willed it, and no other reason is to be expected].[10] Ockham’s distinction between the potestas absoluta and the potestas ordinata[11] does not alleviate the situation for rationality because although it does imply that once chosen, the ordo [order] will be observed, it does not provide any access to the contents of the chosen order. The potestas ordinata is directly relevant only to the path of salvation, not to the path of knowledge. God’s ‘will’ is supposed to be accessible only through ‘revelation’—faith in salvation is not supposed to be translatable into or exchangeable for faith in the world.

While this may not be a metaphysical dualism of the Gnostic type, it is its practical equivalent ad hominem: the only dependable and trustworthy God is the God of salvation, Who has restricted Himself to His potestas ordinata, like a partially constitutional monarch, but Who, through predestination, still withholds from man’s knowledge the range over which He chooses to be dependable. It is precisely this restriction to those who are chosen that distinguishes the pragmatic dualism of the late Middle Ages from the Gnostic dualism of late antiquity because liberation from the cosmos now is no longer a divine offering open to all men and authenticated by the possession of knowledge. This time there is no consciousness of conditions under which the world could lose its significance for man. The groundlessness of the Creation is indeed dogmatized as requiring an act of unconditional submission, but submission as such is still not a condition of salvation. Escape from the world into transcendence is no longer an alternative for man himself and precisely for that reason has lost its human relevance and historical effectiveness. But recourse to intraworldly composure of the mind, to the secum vivere [self-sufficient life] of Epicurean ataraxia, is also blocked. The method of neutralizing the phenomena and the problems of nature would have been found to have lost its efficacy, if anyone had tried to apply it once more, because its presupposition of the finite and hence completely describable possibilities of natural processes had become untenable against the background of the infinitude of divine power. The dependence of ataraxia on physics could not be reestablished. Only insofar as physics could be thought of as producing real human power over nature could natural science potentially serve as the instrument by which to overcome the new radical insecurity of man’s relation to reality.

Philosophy and science, which, autonomously formulated, offered themselves as means for the removal of this uncertainty about the world, could not in themselves, as pure theory, become “the happiness of their age.”[12] Philosophy not only had to project and provide a foundation for ‘method’; it had itself to become a method of assuring the material adequacy and competence of man’s possession of the world. Nature could not once again be forced to the edge of consciousness, its appearances blunted and robbed of their power; on the contrary, it now became the incessantly pressing theme, which made more and more exclusive demands on theoretical attention. There was no longer any refuge in “the lamplight of the private man.” Knowledge as the endeavor of an individual, as an attempt to grasp a totality of truth as the source of fulfillment, proved to be hopeless. Scientific method, as it was projected by Descartes, provided the procedural regulations for a summoning-up of incomparable theoretical energy, in whose service both individuals and generations were enrolled.

What was no longer possible, or not again possible, can be exhibited directly by a comparison with Epicurus’ intention, which had been to ‘humanize’ the groundlessness of nature as the ground for indifference to it, to remove by means of physics the potency of the drive for knowledge that holds sway within it, and to make manifest by the same means the superficialness of theory as theory. This difference is made especially tangible by the formulation that the young Marx gave to the basic character of the Epicurean philosophy in his dissertation: “... the interesting thing about Epicurus,” he writes, “is ‘how in every sphere he tries to eliminate the state of affairs that provokes the appearance of presuppositions as such and how he commends as normal the state of affairs in which presuppositions are covered up.’”[13] While for Epicurus everything is aimed at blunting and diffusing the problems forcing themselves upon man from outside, in the declining Middle Ages the reverse is the case: Everything works to sharpen them to the most acute form. Although the intention in this, to begin
with and in the first instance, was to bring the pretension to theory to the point of inevitable resignation and thus of submission to faith, nevertheless the immanent dynamics of the situation led to the contrary result, namely, the development of the consciousness that precisely in what was supposed to be sacrificed there lay that which could not, in the interest of humanity, be relinquished.

Comparative analysis of Epicureanism and nominalism leads to another point of apparent agreement in the idea of a plurality of worlds. This idea was to become one of the essential factors in the disintegration of the metaphysical idea of the cosmos, preparatory to the modern age. And the Enlightenment will perform the thought experiment of other and different worlds especially in accordance with its function of criticizing man and his notion that he has a privileged status in the cosmos; the self-assertion of reason, it will argue, requires emergence from teleological comfort, from anthropocentric illusion. But in ancient atomism this thought could not yet achieve what it could after William of Ockham, namely, an exhibition of the world's form as contingent and a demonstration to man, by means of mental variation of the world's actual makeup, of its capacity for and worthiness of alteration.

When Epicurus, like other Greeks before him, speaks of 'cosmos' in the plural, this means that one world eidos [world form, world Idea] is thought of as being realized in arbitrarily many instances. Before Plato and Aristotle gave the sanction of metaphysics to the uniqueness of the cosmos, the idea of the plurality of worlds had arisen among the Presocratics, without yet being given the weight of a dogma. Anaximander had thought of the world on the analogy of the legal system of the Greek polis, and from this analogy there had easily arisen the idea of unities sufficient unto themselves and separated by the no-man's-land of space. “When one leaves the polis, one comes to open country, and after a while to another polis. Thus the idea suggests itself that outside our cosmos, at a greater or lesser distance, other cosmoses are to be found, indeed an unending series of them.”

The atomism of Democritus was the first doctrine to push the idea of the plurality of worlds to the point where it endangered the idea of the cosmos itself: The atoms are not only endless in number but also in the variety of their forms, and there is no longer any reason why worlds of the sort typified by our own should emerge from the vortices of these atoms in empty space. Against this absolute fortiuity of the beginning and the form of the world, Plato set up his combination of cosmology and the doctrine of the Ideas, and Aristotle provided the tradition with the canon of proofs of the necessary uniqueness of the cosmos as the exhaustion of space, matter, and forms. The Stoics perfected the identity of metaphysics and cosmology by making the teleology of nature, as it relates to man, an expression of the providence governing nature. But by this very outbidding of their predecessors, they made a scandal of the uniqueness of the cosmos: The cosmic teleology did not relate to the individual and his claim to happiness; the evil and the suffering in the world could only be justified by means of a teleology of the whole that was hidden and without consideration for the individual.

This is the focus of the opposition of Epicurus, who makes this very question of the potential happiness of the individual man the central concern of his philosophy. A cosmos, a teleology, a providence of which the individual could not feel assured seemed to him to be not only irrelevant to his central question but a hindrance to a form of life that could allow itself neither fear nor hope regarding what the individual could expect from the world. If suffering and evil were interpreted as elements in a 'logic' of reality, elements for which a hidden reason, of whatever sort, had to be assumed, they would make men the bearers of an ordained inequality of their fates and of their share in happiness, an inequality whose supposed meaning could not be regarded with indifference. The worlds of atomistic chance, which Epicurus opposes to the unique cosmos with its powerful sanction, make the external fate of each within them appear as the result of a constellation that is favorable precisely because it is neither 'intended' nor defined and ordained as a 'role.' Chance is the sort of fate with respect to which indifference is possible. The assertion of the plurality of worlds is a sort of cosmological demonstration of the equality of everything that exists in the distribution of what can literally 'befall' each thing in the world-building falling together of atoms. Epicurus's whole physical system passes in review the indifference of nature to man so as to suggest to man that his indifference is, in turn, the precondition of his happiness.

Epicurus makes use of Democritus's atomism, but he changes its function radically: he is not interested in the explanation of natural phenomena but rather in the liberation of man from their supposed significance. Once again, this decisive difference between the physicist and the humanist was stated by the young Marx in his dissertation:
Democritus employs “necessity as a form of reflection of reality,” whereas for Epicurus chance is “a reality that has only the value of possibility,” and the concern in relation to this possibility is not “with the object that is explained but with the subject that explains.” And further: “What is abstractly possible, what can be conceived, constitutes for the thinking subject neither an obstacle nor a limit nor a stumbling block. Whether this possibility is also real is a matter of indifference, because we are not here interested in the object as object. Consequently Epicurus proceeded with a boundless nonchalance in explaining individual physical phenomena... One can see that he is not at all interested in investigating the real causes of objects. He is merely interested in soothing the explaining subject.”

This difference from Democritus also helps to determine the form taken by the thesis of the plurality of worlds. In spite of his rejection of the cosmos of metaphysics, Epicurus unobtrusively holds fast to those of its implications that served (so to speak) to temper the accidental character of the relations between atoms. The sheer fact that under the premises of atomism there was a world at all, not to speak of many of them, caused no difficulty for Epicurus, in spite of its improbability, because he was able to fall back unhesitatingly on a reserve of teleology. Lucretius, who in his didactic poem reports his master’s teachings with a faithfulness that was characteristic of the Epicurean school, describes it as improbable that the innumerable atoms outside our own world should not have accomplished anything.16 There again is the metaphysical proposition that nature does nothing in vain. But just as for Epicurus it is not really accidental that there are any worlds at all, so it is no accident what comes into being when worlds emerge from the atomic vortices. Here Democritus’s extreme destabilizing of the cosmos is retracted in favor of a reassuring dependability. According to Hippolytus’s account, Democritus had taught that the worlds differed in form as well as number and that in some of them there was neither a sun nor a moon, neither animals nor plants nor even moisture.17 This was the logical consequence of the endless multiplicity of the atoms that Democritus assumed. Epicurus’s crucial alteration of the system of the teacher whom he disowns is the assumption of a definite, finite number of forms by which the atoms are distinguished from one another.18 As though it were a matter of course, then, the products of Epicurean accident resemble one another, including the unquestioned matter of course that in each of his worlds there are men.

Fundamentally—and this effect on consciousness must have been Epicurus’s overriding concern—the chaos of the atomic vortices has a reassuring dependability that surpasses the guarantees traditionally provided by the gods. But the freedom from fear that this cosmology imparts must not relapse into admiration of the world, into the original affect of a philosophy that expects the fulfillment of man’s existence to come from outside, from nature. That there is a world is not at all a remarkable fact: ‘Non est mirabile’;19 it is the least surprising—indeed, the ‘natural’—state of affairs, which manifests itself in the plurality of worlds as the ‘ease’ with which they come into being. Man does not concern himself with what is there of its own accord, and in this he resembles Epicurus’s gods, who enjoy their blissful existence in the empty space between the worlds with equally little concern for the course of natural events.20 Epicurus makes current once again the Greeks’ authentic concept of nature, which they conceived of not as a quasi-divine subject, not as a “deus sive natura” (“either God or nature”; Spinoza, not as a power standing over things, but rather as a mode of processes that proceed from themselves, of their own accord. The demiurge, the unmoved mover, the ‘world reason’ had replaced this concept of nature with a supposedly more dependable factor, which allowed the world to be interpreted according to the model of the intentional product of human action. The crucial fact is that Epicurus was able to eliminate and exclude from human consciousness this god laden with care for the world, this deus laboriosissimus (hardest working god), only by building into the world process certain ‘constants,’ by making chaos into a sort of ‘ideal disorder’ and thus, as Kant reproaches the “shameless” Epicurus, “really [deriving] reason from unreason.”21 In Epicurus there is no physical argument for the strict parallelism of the paths of the atoms in infinite space, and the finite variety of the forms of the atoms and of their recurrent combinations is attributed, by an absolute metaphor, to “treaties in nature” (foedera naturae).22 Epicurus’s system is not free from metaphysics, but it rests on the postulate of the metaphysical minimum, which secures the world for man as a cosmos without allowing any binding force over him to result from this.

Such assurances of the dependability of nature would be forbidden to late-medieval theological absolutism. The latter was not concerned with the reality of the world and its significance for human consciousness but with preserving the full range of God’s possibilities. The world
could indeed be a demonstration of the power that had created it; but no reality, however imposing—even if it were less in need of justification than the actual one—could be proof of omnipotence. Here was the common ground of all the paradoxes of Scholasticism: It could not remove from the world anything that was essential to the functioning of the system of proofs of God’s existence, but neither could it commit divinity to this world as the epitome of its creative capacity.

The internal systematic conflict came into the open in 1277, when Etienne Tempier, the Bishop of Paris, condemned a list of propositions that as a whole reflected the conclusions of the thirteenth century’s completed reception of Aristotelian. Three years after the death of the classic author of High Scholasticism, Thomas Aquinas, his acceptance of the Aristotelian proof of the uniqueness of the world was condemned as a philosophical restriction of divine omnipotence. This document marks the exact point in time when the interest in the rationality and human intelligibility of creation cedes priority to the speculative fascination exerted by the theological predicates of absolute power and freedom.

The theological reaction of 1277 had an effect different from the one that was intended; by denying that the created world could be the equivalent of the creative power actualized in it, it opened the sluices to a flood of new questions. The nominalistic philosophy of nature, whose methodical style was to become the free variation of all the previously valid cosmological propositions of Scholasticism, is unthinkable without the support of this decree. But one should not separate this sentence, which condemned calling into question the possibility of a plurality of worlds, from its context. It was indeed meant to exclude the doctrine that this actual world epitomizes what is possible for God; but at the same time judgment was also passed against any doctrine that a universe of infinitely many actual worlds could be equivalent to the self-reproduction of divinity. The solution that Giordano Bruno’s cosmology was to give to this basic question of the late Middle Ages, a solution of which we will give an account in part IV, was excluded: The first cause cannot produce an effect that is equivalent to its own reality. The Middle Ages remained stationed between these two negations and committed to their insoluble difficulties.

To the potestas absoluta [absolute power] there corresponded an infinity of possible worlds, but no infinity of actual worlds was allowed to correspond to it. It was a secondary question whether only one or a plurality of these possibilities had been realized; there were important theological reasons for holding to the factual reality of only one world. But this one world could no longer be rationally justified. The principle of contradiction was the sole limitation on the range of variability of the possible worlds, which could no longer be understood as instances of an eternally constant type. This would have contradicted the nominalistic principle that the repetition of a pregiven essential structure is incompatible with the concept of creation from nothing.

William of Ockham deals with the problem of the possible plurality of worlds, in a context which is just as significant as it is unexpected, in his commentary on the sentences of Peter Lombard. In connection with distinctio 17 of the first book of this standard compendium of Scholasticism, he had to discuss the question whether the grace of the Holy Ghost that is granted to man by God is capable of quantitative differentiation, of increase and decrease. The identification of redeeming grace with the Third Person of the divine Trinity was bound to raise this problem because the attribute of unchangeability of the divine person seemed to exclude any differentiation in the effect of its conveyance to man. The Lombard had nevertheless found a formula that enabled him to hold to the system of differentiated levels of human blessedness. The details of this construction are not of interest here, but the radical considerations associated with them in William of Ockham’s commentary certainly are. They broaden the originally narrowly conceived theological thesis into the very general statement that the operation of divinity is bounded only by the principle of contradiction.

One must call to mind what this premise means. The God Who is subject only to the logical principle of contradiction is at the same time the God Who can contradict Himself, Whose creation does not exclude the will to destruction, Who stands over every present as the uncertainty of the future, in other words, finally, the God Whose activity does not allow us to assume immanent laws and Who puts all rational ‘constants’ in question. The God Who places no constraints on Himself, Who cannot be committed to any consequence following from His manifestations, makes time into a dimension of utter uncertainty. This affects not only the identity of the subject, the presence of which at any given moment does not guarantee it any future, but also the persistence of the world, whose radical contingency can trans-
form it, from one moment to the next, from existence into mere appearance, from reality into nothingness. The human spirit's temporality, its being in time, becomes its crucial handicap. The philosophical penetration of these considerations becomes clearest when one perceives in them the central motivation of Descartes's experiment in doubt in the *Meditations*; this will be shown later.

The impotence of reason, as deduced by William of Ockham from the principle of omnipotence, consists in the inapplicability of the principle of economy to the classical questions of metaphysics: The nature that does nothing in vain is no longer a definition of divine activity, to which the avoidance of detours and superfluous expenditures cannot be ascribed. What is given, the actual world as well as actual grace, is never the maximum of what is possible. The thesis of the possibility of infinitely many worlds is only the equivalent of an assertion of the powerlessness of finite reason.

This was the exact opposite of the Epicurean doctrine, which was supposed to make plausible to man how the processes of the universe could be a matter of no concern to him. The concept of omnipotence excludes, paradoxically, only the possibility that God could ever make everything that lies in His power, that is, an actual infinity. Ockham could not rely here on the argument that this concept was internally contradictory, since God Himself was actually infinite. Here was the boundary drawn by the decree of 1277, which the Almighty could not cross even in order to bring about something free of contradiction, and the crossing of which by Giordano Bruno would signify the end of the Middle Ages and a contradiction to the Middle Ages. This helps to make precise the assertion of the possibility of infinitely many worlds: The Creator had a choice between infinitely many different possibilities, and the unfathomable decision at which He arrived does not commit Him; He can always create more worlds and different ones from those that He has created—but He cannot exhaust the infinite fund of possibilities without reproducing Himself. This 'position' of divine reproduction is nevertheless already 'occupied' in the theological system; it is defined not as creation but as begetting, that is, as the quasi-natural process by which the Second Person of the Trinity is brought forth. One who wanted the totality of possibilities for the world, the exhaustion of everything of which omnipotence was capable, had to make this position free; he had to contradict dogma and become a heretic. Giordano Bruno was to face this unavoidable consequence. And he had to conceive of the world once more as a unity, using the expression 'plurality of worlds' now only in a hyperbolical sense, for the repetition of elementary unities within the totality of the universe.

Thus a fundamental change in the meaning of talk about the plurality of worlds was ushered in. For the Greek atomists there was no significance in the fact that their cosmes were located within the unity of a single empty space; this space separated the individual world formations absolutely; it was the nothingness between them and excluded all real relations. It was (at the latest) Newton's concept of a space through which the action at a distance of gravitation operates that put an end to the unworldliness and physical unreality of space. Space becomes the 'medium' of the unity of the universe as the system of interaction of all the bodies in it. In his early work on the natural history of the heavens, as though with the intention of harmonizing Epicurus and Newton, Kant entitled the universe "a world of worlds" but later corrects himself with the formula "the totality of the so many systems...that we incorrectly call worlds." The interest of the Enlightenment in the question of the plurality of worlds is directed, quite consistently, at the possible plurality of inhabited cosmic bodies, thus understanding 'worlds' as 'cardis.' It is no longer a matter of measuring God against the full range of possibilities but rather of comparing man with what he has made of himself and of the earth, seen as it were from outside. It is not the actual makeup of the universe that is of interest but rather the relativizing of human self-consciousness, the doubt that is generated regarding the uniqueness of what man has produced as his 'world.' The 'other worlds' provide a fictive exotic standpoint for criticism, just like the realms of 'noble savages' in the Enlightenment's travel romances.

It follows from this, in connection with our intended comparison of the difference in radicalness between atomism and nominalism, that the late-medieval doctrine of the plurality of possible worlds has a function completely unlike that of the atomistic plurality of actual worlds: The groundlessness of the factual world, in which man has to live, produces a more intense consciousness of insecurity than the groundlessness that Epicurus had used to negate creation as such. The questions that cannot be asked confront reason with its impotence more pitilessly than those that do not need to be asked.
Intraworldly secession into the idyll of the kepos, the ‘garden’ of Epicurean ataraxia, had presupposed the calm of a situation in which the problematic of the world was alleviated. The garden whose cultivation, in view of a hopeless world, was to be recommended at the end of Candide is a point of grim irony but is not the solution that the epoch found for its inherited problem of the quality of the world. It was not a matter of indifference which of the possible worlds God had in fact created; but since man could not hope to fathom this decision, it had to be made a matter of indifference. The search for a set of instruments for man that would be usable in any possible world provides the criterion for the elementary exertions of the modern age: the mathematizing and the materializing of nature.

The lawfulness of an arbitrarily chosen nature—that was the aprioristic, ‘pure’ science of nature, which, to use Kant’s language, started from the “concept of nature as such” and took as its object the ultimate characteristics of a speciesless matter. For this theory, which (so to speak) anticipated the factual world, it was actually a weakness of ancient atomism that it anticipated the specificity of the phenomenal world in the specific forms of the atoms, so that it knew no ‘pure’ matter. But at the same time the postulate of pure materiality was the ideal premise of an attitude to the world that can be defined by the concept of technicity. According to that attitude, man can make what he wants of the world to the extent that it can be reduced to the characteristics of a mere substrate underlying what man constructs.

A third and final aspect in regard to which atomism and voluntarism, as systems representative of the crises of their respective epochs, are to be compared here is that of their anthropological components. Because Epicureans and nominalists—even though with differing argumentation—deny the teleology of the world, they must at a minimum dispute the privilege that the Stoics had emphatically ascribed to man, namely, that the human existential interest is taken into consideration in the whole of nature. But in his anthropology, as in the rest of his system, Epicurus is entirely uncritical with regard to his own teleological implications. One need only read Lucretius’s description of the original condition of mankind to see how strong were the anthropocentric presuppositions here, and not only by accident, but clearly in connection with the culture-critical tendency of this mythology of the primeval time.

The nature that was not created out of divine providence for man necessarily continues to owe man a great deal; it stands laden with debt before man, who is thus burdened by no responsibility for the bad in it. But this unburdening of man, which forestalls Augustine’s reversal of the relation of debt, must not rob the system of its intended effect by accentuating man’s concern about his own existence. Therefore the theory of the origin of culture has to emphasize that nature holds ready everything that is necessary for man. Auspicious nature is to be thanked, according to a fragment of Epicurus, “because it made what is necessary easily accessible, and what is difficult of access unnecessary.” Thus the groundlessness of nature permits the groundlessness of concern because the ‘cosmos’ is sufficiently powerful even in chance events to let needs and givens intermesh with one another just as the forms of the atoms themselves allow the formation of meaningful, organized configurations. The logic of the materialization of the world is not pushed to its extreme, in which man’s ataraxia would become impossible and everything would depend on his practical energy. But at the same time the intermeshing of nature and need is a critical principle that prevents an Epicurean from regarding nature as mere material: Necessary wants can be satisfied without great exertion and expense, and the satisfaction of natural wants does not leave much to be wished for because nature itself holds ready at hand the wealth with which they can be satisfied; only empty wants find neither measure nor satisfaction in nature. Thus, because Epicurus’s nature provides man with more than it can really provide consistently with his own premises, theoretical indifference and practical unconcern can be combined.

However problematic it may at first appear, the position and rank of man in Epicurus’s system cannot be defined without bringing in his theology. There has been much arguing back and forth about the seriousness of Epicurus’s doctrine about the gods. The first thing to be said is that the doctrine of the gods who take no interest in the worlds is advantageous to Epicurus in argument, in contrast to an unprovable atheism. But beyond that, the form of the gods’ existence is like a model of his philosophical idea of eudemonia. This is the only explanation for the fact that, according to Lucretius, Epicurus’s lost work contained an extensively worked-out theology. It has the function of a positive myth that is oriented toward confirming the human capacity for happiness precisely because the gods are supposed
to be imagined in human form. Cicero has given us the shortest justificatory formula for this, which appeals to the preeminence of the human form and human nature over all others in nature: “Omnium animantium formam vicit hominis figura” [Man’s form surpasses that of every living creature]. For Epicurus the isomorphism between men and gods has the systematic significance of a metaphysical guarantee of what man can be and what he in fact achieves in the shape of the wise man. The man who perceives his possibilities and realizes them lives, as the “Letter to Menoeceus” says, “like a god among men.” And that means above all that he shares the serenity and freedom from care of the gods’ existence. The relation of men to the gods is a sort of mythical reflection, which is accomplished through pure imagery, without any interaction and with no need of knowing of the gods’ reality through experience. Here the wise man can allow himself the emotional state that he must deny himself with respect to nature: admiration. “The philosopher admires the nature and disposition of the gods and seeks to approach them; indeed it is as though he were irresistibly driven to come into contact and intercourse with them; thus it is appropriate to characterize wise men as ‘friends’ of the gods, and to characterize the gods, conversely, as ‘friends’ of the wise.”

That the gods should have human form was a familiar idea in Greek myth; but at the same time the philosophical criticism of myth had found it scandalous. For here the human was at the same time the all too human; it was envy and jealousy, favoritism and capricious meddling with human destinies—the very things that brought human ataraxia and divine bliss into conflict with one another and on the weaker side gave sustenance to the emotions of fear and hope, which Epicurus’s philosophical therapy was meant to get at. Atomic chance was supposed to give man a resting place between mythical caprice and physical necessity. It seems that for Epicurus the philosophical critique of myth had gone from one extreme to the other: The necessity that had taken the place of caprice had failed to save humanity, which was the core of the myth deserving to be saved.

So it is understandable that Epicurus firmly opposes the supposedly ‘purer’ form of Greek religiosity, the deification of the starry heavens, employing his method of neutralizing emotional states for this purpose. It is not certain whether Lucretius accurately represents Epicurus’s opposition to the stellar theology when he says that it was motivated by the danger that the gods might return to the world, the possibility of a relapse in antiquas religiones, into the mythical consciousness of dependence on unlimited powers. In any case Lucretius seems to stand closer than does Epicurus to the ‘Gnostic’ suspicion that the stars could represent powers that are ill-disposed toward man. The cosmic is potentially the demonic, and for Lucretius deliverance from fear lies only in the idea that the influence of all the elements of nature upon one another is limited, that everything has its finita potestas [limited power], that the theological attribute of omnipotence possesses no reality. It is certainly important for Epicurus too to ban from man’s consciousness the influence of overwhelming power; but it is independently important for him to criticize a theology that can mean nothing positive for man, that seeks the divine in the antithesis to what is human and believes that it can find this in the stars, as the region of nature most distant from human mortality and need.

Epicurus’s theology is a representation of the humanly familiar, in which the similarity of form suggests the possibility of the same eudemonia. True, Epicurus’s gods are immortal, but their eternal life is not a necessary condition of their happiness—otherwise happiness would be out of man’s reach. Because the wise man recognizes death as something that need not mean anything to him, he reduces the difference between mortality and immortality to nothing. Here—and this too was recognized as central by Marx in his dissertation—Epicurus breaks with the “view of the entire Greek people,” that likeness to a god was identical with immortality and freedom from need. “In the theory of ‘meteoros’ [atmospheric and astronomical phenomena], therefore, the soul of the Epicurean philosophy of nature appears. Nothing is eternal which annihilates the ataraxia of the individual self-consciousness. The heavenly bodies disturb its ataraxia, its identity with itself, because they are existing generality, because nature has become autonomous in them.” The naturalizing of the stars, their inclusion in the homogeneous contingency and transitoriness of the mechanism of the atoms, sets reason free from its cosmic objectivization, making it an exclusively human, no longer a cosmic, law. Consequently Epicurus fights not only against astrology, as the false relation of nature to man, but also “against astronomy itself, against eternal law and reason in the heavenly system.” The linkage of reason to what is eternal, immutable, and free from need is severed.

But here atomism comes into conflict with the assumptions it had taken over from the tradition of Greek thought: Its unchangeable and
specifically formed atoms were only “the eternal” of the one Being of Parmenides, of Plato’s Ideas and Aristotle’s Forms, “in material form”; they were not the logical consequence of materialization itself, which would indeed have been required for the consistency of the system but not for its function. Epicurus may have believed that the reduction of the imperishable to its minimum in the atoms could guarantee the combination of physical dependability and protection of man’s self-consciousness. Man’s preeminence lies not in an anthropocentric teleology but in the fact that his successful existence has become the sole criterion of the functioning of the system.

Epicurus’s argument, reconstructed, runs as follows:

Because the eternity of the heavenly bodies would disturb the ataraxia of self-consciousness, it is a necessary, stringent conclusion that the heavenly bodies are not eternal. . . . Here Epicurus must have seen the highest expression of his principle, the peak and finale of his system. He alleged that he created the atoms so that immortal foundations would lie at the base of nature. He alleged that he was concerned about the substantial individuality of matter. But, where he finds the reality of his nature—because he knows no other than the mechanical—in autonomous, indestructible matter, in the heavenly bodies, whose eternity and immutability are proven by the belief of the people, the judgement of philosophy, the evidence of the senses—there it is his single effort to draw them back down into earthly transitoriness. It is at this point that he turns zealously against the worshippers of autonomous nature which contains the point of individuality within itself. This is his greatest contradiction.40

A contradiction, one may add, that in the end rests on the fact that Epicurus still stands on the ground of Greek metaphysics, that he still sees the precondition of the fulfillment of human existence in a given quality of nature, and that the human form of the gods, too, is still a piece of ‘cosmos’ for him—of a cosmos that is not, it is true, guaranteed by a superposed Logos but rather by the atomistic substratum.

Thus it is indeed correct to say that “the decline of ancient philosophy is displayed with complete objectivity in Epicurus”; but it is equally correct to add that this decline did not lead to a transition to a new formation of the human relation to the world and of human self-understanding because the only freedom with respect to the world that man achieves in the course of this decline is “the negative movement of being free from it.”41 The atomistic materiality of the world

is indeed sufficient to reassure man regarding his situation in reality, but it is not radical enough to appear to him as a plastic substrate, subject to his mastery and his power of disposition. Happiness is what is left over when nature no longer presses upon man, when it concerns him no more than it concerns the gods in the spaces between the worlds, gods who are free from care precisely because they have no power over the world. “He whose possessions are not sufficient for his needs is poor, even if he should be the master of the entire world.”42

The still undissolved connection between cosmology and anthropology is confirmed by the last systematic element of Epicurus’s philosophy relevant here: the connection between the deviation of atoms at the beginning of a world and the human consciousness of freedom. Once again it becomes clear that man’s possibilities depend upon a minimal set of metaphysical presuppositions. The initial conditions of all the processes in the universe are defined by the fact that all the atoms are traveling in parallel straight lines through infinite empty space. This basic state of affairs is characterized by an extremely rational order and at the same time by sterile unproductiveness. Only on the assumption that individual atoms can breach this ‘order,’ that by minor deviations from their parallel paths they can encounter other atoms and thus initiate the formation of a vortex of atoms, do the elementary bodies even come into contact, in accordance with their affinities, and finally realize a world. The ‘sufficient’ reason for the fact that anything at all comes into existence and everything does not remain in the eternal fruitlessness of the atoms’ parallel paths is as trivial as it could conceivably be.43 To minimize this reason is to minimize the binding character of the world; in this respect Epicurus’s philosophy is constructed in accordance with a logic strictly antithetical to that of the Stoics, who strive everywhere for the metaphysical maximum.

At the same time Epicurus contradicts the mythical dualism of disorder and order, chaos and cosmos. The perfect order of the original stuff falling uniformly through space is powerless to produce anything like a world, unless the tiny aberration enters in, which as chaos starts the playing through of possibilities. The beginning of the world is an infringement of physical necessity [principium quodam, quod facti foedera rumpat] [some beginning which breaks the bonds of fate]. This original event of cosmography is just what man redisCOVERS in himself. It is his ability, as an active being, to introduce absolute beginnings into reality, his libera voluntas [free will], the will that escapes the necessity of causal
antecedents and opposes to them its own measure \textit{haec fats avoka voluntas} [that will torn free from fate]. The principle of the cosmos is realized in man himself; what made the world possible is no foreign and inaccessible metaphysical authority but the very same thing that constitutes man's independence from the world, the core of his consciousness of himself. Far from being an embarrassment for the Epicurean philosophy, the deviation of the atom represents its central systematic principle: liberation from the world by means of explanation of the world, the identity of the minimum of physics with the maximum of human freedom. The rebellion of man against the cosmos is accomplished even here, in the most radical aspect of its foundation, through the principle and with the authorization of the cosmos itself. The living power of spirit (\textit{vivus vis animi}), with which Lucretius in his apotheosis of Epicurus makes the philosophical savior break through the world's walls of flame and step forth into the infinite universe, is nothing but the consistent extension into consciousness of the atom's ability to be irregular, to diverge minimally from its path. The groundlessness of the world, its atomistic indifference to everything that it brings forth and eventually brings back into its unchanging material sum, is taken by man into the philosophical service of the consciousness that is free of the world. But man can do this only in such a way that he discovers that what he achieves is what was there all along, as the remainder of the original event that gave rise to the world.

Man's position in the world is seen in a radically different way by nominalism. In the patristic and Scholastic traditions, various types of answers to the question of the meaning of the Creation had arisen; however, one can recognize an overall tendency, which shows less and less acceptance of the proposition of the Stoicizing patristic authors that the world was created for man's sake. And the other answers can also be differentiated according to the extent to which man participates in the purpose of God's work.

Anselm of Canterbury, with whom the Scholastic program found its first coherent expression, took up in his major work, \textit{Cur deus homo?} (which was completed in 1098), an idea of Augustine's, according to which God created man in order to fill up again the heavenly chasms, which had been decimated by the revolt of the angels led by Lucifer. But this myth was meant above all to explain why the redemption of fallen mankind had become necessary for God, if the purpose of

the entire work of creation was not to be unfulfilled, since all men had forfeited their right to be taken up into the ranks of the angels. The plausibility of this idea for the Middle Ages lay in that God was related only indirectly to an end outside of Himself; the refilling of heaven's choirs was aimed at His own glorification. The \textit{gloria dei} [glory of God] as the embodiment of the final purposes of the world and of man served not only to formulate the mythical figure more abstractly but also to adapt it to the Aristotelian idea of the exclusive self-reference of the unmoved mover as the thought having itself as its sole object. That such an idea of the absolute and its transcendence could achieve such a sustained influence on Scholasticism can only be understood as the repression of the humanistic element of the Christian tradition by its theological 'rigor.' Only when the indifference of divinity toward man had been thought through to the end was theology's immanent logic satisfied. The divinity that is concerned with, and finds satisfaction only in, itself must instrumentalize and mediate any relation to man that its will is thought to involve. In this logic, then, also belongs the modification and crucial restriction of the Stoic world formula: God did not after all create everything for man but rather for those whom He has chosen and redeemed by His grace.

In view of the secrecy of the divine decrees of election and rejection, this sort of teleology no longer means anything, in theory or in practice, for man's consciousness of himself and his relation to the world. The sharper the accent finally placed by medieval theology on the topics of original sin and divine grace, the more precisely it had to differentiate between the lost paradisaic, unmediated enjoyment of the world and the hostile opposition of nature to man's claim to dominate it in his condition of exile from that paradise. Finally, the formula that the Creator had done His work for no other purpose than to demonstrate His power omitted man entirely from the determination of the world's meaning and approached the voluntaristic formulas that closed the sequence of development, formulas whose function was not to answer but to reject the question. The world as the pure performance of reified omnipotence, as a demonstration of the unlimited sovereignty of a will to which no questions can be addressed—this eradication even of the right to perceive a problem meant that, at least for man, the world no longer possessed an accessible order.

The most important consequence of the transition from a general proposition about the teleology of the world for man's benefit to the
restricted assertion of its functioning for the benefit of those who are destined for salvation is that the whole problem falls under the exclusive competence of theology, that the theses proposed for its solution are valid only on the assumption of faith and the potentia ordinata [ordered, ordained power] guaranteed by faith. Philosophy has no access to this security; its considerations stand under the assumption, rendering everything insecure, of the potentia absoluta [complete, absolute power]. This differentiation of premises is indeed strictly observed by the nominalist thinkers, but not by those who had to exercise theological censorship over their propositions and who could not accept the fact that the unbroken transition from the philosophical basis to the theological superstructure had long since vanished.

Philosophy won its autonomy precisely on account of the renewal of the ‘Gnostic’ assumption that the omnipotent God and the God of salvation, the hidden God and the revealed God, are no longer conceivable by reason as identical, and hence can no longer be related to one another for the purposes of man’s interest in the world. The role of the philosopher is defined by the reduction of human certainty under the pressure of the assumption that divine omnipotence cannot have placed any restrictions on itself for man’s benefit. In this circumstance of the role of reason, the elimination of the traditional teleological assumptions has a prominent place. The cosmic preeminence of man had to be put in doubt, or at least rationally bracketed out, because talk of a hierarchy of beings no longer made any sense. Among the propositions of Nicolas of Autrecourt that were condemned in 1346 and that he recanted at the public burning of his writings in Paris a year later can be found the thesis that the precedence of one being over another cannot be demonstrated with evidence.60

This most radical thinker deriving from nominalism drew from the sole limitation of absolute power by the principle of contradiction the conclusion that human certainty as well could be well-founded only by being traced back to the principle of contradiction. Examination in accordance with this criterion had disqualified above all the concept of causality. With that, the Scholastic cosmos as the embodiment of the epoch’s ideas of order had become philosophically questionable. The question of the quality of the world is just as senseless as that of its purpose; Nicolas of Autrecourt is able to reduce it to absurdity with the optimistic formula that this world is the best world since it is composed of equally perfect elements and there is no criterion according to which one could judge another imagined world to be more or less perfect. It is easy to see that this universum perfectissimum has nothing to do with Leibniz’s “best of all possible worlds” since any other arbitrarily chosen world, as sheer fact, would have to receive this predicate. Since the sort of world that in fact exists is supposed to be a matter of indifference to man, it becomes equally a matter of indifference to him whether his knowledge of this world corresponds to its reality, whether what appears to him has its ground in a substance independent of perception: “non potest evidenter ostendi, quin omnia, quae apparent, sint vera” [It is not possible for it to be made known clearly whether everything that appears is true]. But this position no longer has as an alternative the ancient Skeptics’ expedient of positing the realization of human happiness without possession of the truth. For in regard to the question of what brings human existence to its fulfillment, the theological decision in favor of the transcendent status of such fulfillment remains binding, just as much as it excludes general human accessibility. And for this very reason it is neither surprising nor inconsistent that in the end Nicolas of Autrecourt retreats to a minimal theoretical position, that is, a position least affected by the thesis of divine omnipotence.

That position is atomism. The few traces of his work that have been preserved for us provide no basis on which to decide the question whether he drew on ancient tradition or his own reflections led him to reduce all alterations in nature to the changes in position of the smallest bits (congregatio et disgregatio corporum atomismi naturalism). Against dependence on ancient atomism, or at least in favor of its alteration in the direction of a systematically adapted minimal hypothesis, speaks the fact that for him there seems no longer to be a finite variety of specifically classifiable atoms; the appearances of nature are due exclusively to the constellations of a homogeneous material substratum. Although one cannot say that this extreme nominalist thinker formed a school and won influence, still he makes visible with solitary clarity the consequences of nominalism, and in fact in a way that is consistent with the equivalence of voluntarism and atomism asserted by Leibniz in his argument with Samuel Clarke. The radical materializing of nature is confirmed as the systematic correlate of theological absolutism. Deprived by God’s hiddenness of metaphysical guarantees for the world, man constructs for himself a counterworld of elementary rationality and manipulability.
It might be objected that precisely by its emancipation from theology, the nominalistic philosophy renounced the medieval basis capable of supporting the appreciation and proper valuation of man, that the center of gravity of the medieval anthropology did not lie in the teleological propositions deriving from Stoicism at all but rather in the biblical assumptions that, on the one hand, man was made in God's image and, on the other hand, His Son became a man. If it made sense to distribute such historical censures, one would have to tax Scholasticism with its inability to combine systematically the biblical premises of its anthropology and its Christology. Scholasticism always feared the consequences of ascribing to man's maker an obligation for the salvation of what He created, and thus of seeing in the proposition that man was made in God's image something like the motive for the Incarnation.

Avoidance of the premise that God had irrevocably obliged Himself to the only creature He made in His own image, that He had committed himself to satisfying man's need for happiness, led finally to the speculative attempt to eliminate altogether the motivational connection between the Creation and the Incarnation and thus to reintroduce Gnostic dualism in fact if not in the original formulation. Not only could the world no longer be created for man's benefit, but even God's becoming man could no longer refer exclusively to man. In spite of the unambiguous formula of the Nicene creed, that God became man for the sake of man (propter nos homines... homo factus est), there emerges Duns Scotus's peculiar doctrine of the absolute predestination of Christ, which turns the propter nos homines into a propter se ipsam (for His own sake).

If human nature was destined from eternity to be united with divine nature, human history becomes irrelevant to the divine act of will, and the act of grace becomes a mere side effect of an event that would have been in order even without man's need for redemption. How far the theological absolutism of the late Middle Ages had departed from the biblical assumptions can be seen from its anxious efforts to keep the action of its God free from even the appearance of 'reacting' to man's action, to his history and his 'works.'

The biblical God, Who seemed to have involved Himself so passionately in the history of man and had bequeathed to human behavior the whole scale of great affects—anger, revenge, partiality—can hardly be recognized any more as the prototype of the God described in the speculations of Scholasticism. In fact the God of High Scholasticism was already more the paradoxical consequence of all the 'protective measures' taken by Greek philosophy against the caprice of the mythical gods in their intercourse with men—except that this motive of defense had become utterly unrecognizable for Scholasticism (lost, as motives are in every sort of 'scholasticism') when it thought that it could recognize and make demonstrable its own God as that of Aristotle. That it would be unworthy of divinity to have the world as the sum of its interests and that in its exalted self-sufficiency and inaccessibility for everything transitory it could be occupied only with itself, while, as though entirely incidentally and without noticing what it is doing, as the 'unmoved mover,' it also sets the world in motion—this conception from Aristotelian metaphysics could only have been understood within the specific context of the Greek Enlightenment's turning against mythology, the turning that Epicurus had completed (and revoked in one important point, that of its human relevance).

The Christian Middle Ages could not adopt the elements of a concept of God that had been formulated to serve in this front-line position without endangering and finally destroying the substance of the biblical idea of God, the idea of a God for Whom interest in man and the capacity to be affected by human events and actions had been constitutive. When High Scholasticism sought to interpret and systematize the biblical God with the categories of the Aristotelian 'thought thinking itself,' the unmoved mover, the actus purus [pure act], it had to retract each step of the divine interest in man (which, as revelation, was obligatory for it) into the closed reflexive circle of the absolute thought-of-itself and the absolute self-reference of divinity and make the facts of human history appear as too 'trivial' even to serve as 'occasions' for divine action. The divine will, which was unknown to the rationality of Greek philosophy, entered this metaphysics as an erratic principle and was adapted to its schema of self-reference. When the connection between theology and anthropology lay entirely in the willed decision that predestined the Son of God from eternity to become man, then in any case and above all this meant that man and his salvation were no longer the ground of the divine action relating to man and his salvation. For Nicolas of Cusa's struggle, too long overdue, to counteract the internal disintegration of the medieval system, for his attempt to provide something like a mundane and human compensation for theological absolutism and the intensification of metaphysical transcendence,
and thus to give the system new consistency, the point of application had to be precisely here.

At this stage all we can show is the need for such a struggle. Its ineffectualness must then of course become a symptom of the fact that the epoch’s ‘own means’ simply were insufficient to eliminate the disturbances, distortions, and loss of balance of its spiritual structure. The prescription laid down for theology by the received Aristotelian metaphysics, that God’s basic concern in each of His acts can only be with Himself, was also the stronger principle in comparison with the basic theological propositions (unknown to genuine Aristotelianism) of the creation of the world and the redemption of man. In the perfect theocentrism toward which Scholasticism tended, Duns Scotus’s idea (just as central as it is edifying) that God’s relation to the world and to man is to be conceived in terms of love is scarcely uttered before it is bent back into the grotesque circularity of the Aristotelian schema, so that this can only be, so to speak, the detour taken by God’s self-love when He chooses from the totality of men those into whom He causes the love of Himself to flow. Such mediating of no longer admits questioning and doubt whether in this teleology, which benefits only those who are chosen, the latter can still be glad of a precedence whose inner injustice, as a grace they did not deserve in view of those who equally did not deserve to be rejected, is not only admitted and accommodated but actually treated as an expression of the perfected absolutism of divine sovereignty.

The weakness of the logic underlying this conclusion was that it hid from itself in the *propter se ipsum* [for His own sake], as the principle of the theological zeal that had supposedly achieved its object, the contradiction to the *propter nos homines* [for our human sake], which had the binding force of dogma for the system of the epoch. The idea of creation was no longer allowed to guide man’s understanding of himself; the fundamental contradiction between creation and the provision of salvation, first recognized by Marcion and ‘resolved’ in the radical dualism of Gnosticism, had broken out again but was no longer recognized as a contradiction because of the way in which rational questioning had been rendered absurd. The incidentalness of man in God’s dealings with and for Himself eliminated everything that supported the idea that God’s creation of man committed Him, in regard to His Incarnation, to the choice of human nature as the medium of His appearance in the world. On the contrary, this problem was covered

by the standard formula of voluntarism, that He could have adopted any other nature and that He adopted this one only because it suited His pure will.23 This point exhibits most clearly nominalism’s difference from the reassuring function of the Epicurean theology, in which the gods, as beings with human form, lead their blissful lives outside the worlds and represent this life to man as his highest possibility in the realization of philosophical wisdom.

Christian theology also contains, in the form of the God Who became man, a potential for human assurance, to realize which—if one finds the late attempt of the Cusan instructive—would have been its noblest endeavor. Here there was a barrier: The assiduous labor on both the image and the unimaginability of the divinity seemed to be capable of success only at the expense of this human substance. The basic conflict that was never admitted, perhaps was never perceived, but was latent in the Middle Ages was unsurprisingly articulated by Ludwig Feuerbach as the antinomy between theology and Christology. To him the baroque Count von Zinzendorf, the founder of the Moravian Brethren, appeared as a “Christian atheist” and thus the embodiment of that latent crisis, or even of its only possible solution, in accordance with which Christology cannot be anything but “religious anthropology.”24 The focus of such intensive piety and simultaneous joyfulness was the certainty “that God is one with man, and means just as well for him as for Himself”; and Christ was for him “a being corresponding to this love of man for himself,” “man’s own heart and being in a deified and objectified form.” Nothing less than the loss of this location of man in the theological system of reference had come about during the decline of the Middle Ages: the speculative self-renunciation of “anthropological ‘egoism.’”25

Let us not forget that what is written here is not meant as a myth of the “objective spirit,” which plays out its dialectic with and over man. But there are phases of objectivization that loose themselves from their original motivation (the science and technology of the later phases of the modern age provide a stupendous example of this); and to bring them back into their human function, to subject them again to man’s purposes in relation to the world, requires an unavoidable counterexertion. The medieval system ended in such a phase of objectivization that has become autonomous, of hardening that is insulated from what is human. What is here called "self-assertion" is
the countermovement of retrieving the wrong motives, of new concentration on man’s self-interest.

If history, as Schiller remarked in his inaugural lecture in Jena in 1789, must give an accounting of everything man has ever “taken from and given to himself,” then the theological absolutism of the declining Middle Ages can be characterized as the extreme of taking from ourselves, as a self-discard of all preassigned guarantees of a privileged position, established at the Creation, in the ‘order’ of reality. For this loss of order there could no longer be the escape and the solution of late-antique distance from the world. But man’s negation of even the last physical and metaphysical ‘assurances’ of his role in the world, in favor of the logic of the “maximal God,” allows the question of the minimum potential of his self-assertion—the minimum of a potential that had remained unquestioned in the late-antique context of involvement in the cosmos—to pose itself now in its full rigor.

The model of the trains of thought induced in this situation stands before us in Descartes’s Meditations as the reduction of the process of doubt to the gaining of a new absolute fundament in the Cogito [I think—ergo sum: therefore I am]. The provocation of the transcendental absolute passes over at the point of its most extreme radicalization into the uncovering of the immanent absolute. What happens with Descartes for the philosophical foundation of the modern age was formulated with incomparable epigrammatic clarity by Luther in his disputation theses of 1517, in antithesis to Duns Scotus and Gabriel Biel and to the whole system of the Middle Ages, as follows: By virtue of his nature, man cannot will that God should be God; on the contrary, the essence of his volition can only be to be God Himself and not to allow God to be God: “Non potest homo naturaliter velle deum esse deum, immo vellet se esse deum et deum non esse deum.” The God Who had never owed man anything and still owed him nothing, the God Who in Augustine’s theology left to man the entire burden of the blame for what is wrong in the world and kept man’s justification concealed in the decrees of His grace, was no longer the highest and the necessary, nor even the possible point of reference of the human will. On the contrary, He left to man only the alternative of his natural and rational self-assertion, the essence of which Luther formulated as the ‘program’ of antidivine self-deficitation.

Luther’s thesis posits enmity between those who cannot be certain of an election that they can neither earn nor otherwise guarantee and the God Who is not supposed to be there for them. The absolute certainty founded on human thought itself, which Descartes seeks, is not the ‘secularization’ of the certainty of salvation, which is supposed to be guaranteed in faith and its mula faduca [naked trust], but rather its necessary counter-position, which is theologically demanded and (unexpectedly) legitimized by Luther’s thesis. Theological absolutism has its own indispensable atheism and anthropotheism. It postulates as complementary to itself a position that does not want to be postulated in this way, that denies itself this legitimation, of being what is ‘natural’—in the sense of ungraced by God—and not what is rational and humanly necessary, grounding itself in itself. Freedom winds up on the side of godless destruction; in the distribution of roles, as between election and being lost, it is assigned naturaliter [by nature] the opposing part. This dualism is system immanent; it can neither be understood nor accepted unless the presupposed ‘naked trust’ already includes the certainty of salvation, which only the chosen few can possess.

If one proceeds from the assumption that human autonomy can henceforth articulate its positive character only outside the Middle Ages, then it becomes clear that only two fundamental positions remain open to it, if it wants to throw off its supposedly ‘natural’ role: hypothetical atheism, which poses the question of man’s potential under the condition that the answer should hold ‘even if there is no God’; and rational deism, which employs the ‘most perfect being’ to guarantee this human potential—the ‘most perfect being’ that is functionalized by Descartes as the principle of the deduction of the dependability of the world and of our knowledge of it. The double face of the Enlightenment, on the one hand its renewal of a teleological optimism and on the other hand its inclination to atheism, loses its contradictory character if one places it in the context of the unity of the onset of human self-assertion and the rejection of its late-medieval systematic role.

Translator’s Note

a. The author introduced the concept of “absolute metaphor”—as a “carried-over” sense of a term that cannot be fully translated into or reduced to the kind of direct, literal discourse from which it is derived—in his “Paradigmen in einer Metaphorologie,” Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte 6 (1960): 7-142. The term is introduced on p. 9.
The detailed comparative analysis of ancient atomism and nominalistic voluntarism, a voluntarism that at least in the case of Nicolas of Autrecourt shows its affinity to an atomistic physics, was meant to make clear that in late antiquity and the late Middle Ages heterogeneous attitudes to the world were induced. In Hellenistic philosophy there had indeed been various forms of man’s turning away from the cosmos and the ideal of theory, but the severity of the problem of human self-assertion had remained partially hidden on account of the continuing acceptance of the cosmic quality of reality. The overall result of Epicurus’s philosophy can be described as the recommendation of a neutralization of man’s relation to the cosmos. His atomistic physics was not meant to satisfy a theoretical interest in reality but rather to argue for the irrelevance of the physical answers to the shaping of life in the world. Here, in spite of their entirely different epistemological approaches, lay an essential similarity to Skepticism and its ideal of refraining from theoretical assertions. Physical hypotheses were meant to free the phenomenon of nature from its affective reference, and in this respect it did not matter whether a claim was made to explain the phenomenon unambiguously or whether it was to be established for every relevant explanatory hypothesis that it need not influence man in his relation to reality.

However formally similar to early modern natural science Epicurus’s method may appear to be, its function is radically different: It is not meant to objectivize the phenomena but rather to neutralize them.
The immanent intention of objectivization is toward the verification of a hypothesis, whereas neutralization is indeed meant to exclude uncertainties but not to create certainties. The ultimate epochal difference is that Epicurus does not recognize the postulate of domination of nature as the consequence of his consideration of man’s situation in the world, the postulate which for both Descartes and Bacon became the essence of what is perceived as existentially necessary for man. Making men the “maîtres et possesseurs de la nature” (“masters and possessors of nature”): Descartes did not appear to Epicurus as a condition of the possibility of human existence in the world. In other words: In Epicurus’s will to knowledge there was missing something that one could call the “technical implication”—what he wants is to be able to put the phenomena at a distance, not to be able to produce them.

But precisely this ancient way out, into the moderation and unmolestedness of self-possession, was closed during the decline of the Middle Ages; the pressure of putting in question had penetrated too deeply into the makeup of self-consciousness and man’s relation to the world. The more indifferent and ruthless nature seemed to be with respect to man, the less it could be a matter of indifference to him, and the more ruthlessly he had to materialize, for his mastering grasp, even what was pregiven to him as nature, that is, to make it ‘available’ and to subordinate it to himself as the field of his existential prospects. I have been aided in grasping the specific difference in the historical presuppositions by a remark made by Heisenberg in comparing ancient atomism and modern physics: “The statements of modern physics are in some way meant much more seriously than the statements of Greek philosophy.” If this is taken literally, then for the philosophical reader, who is inclined to take the claim of truth as a constant of the philosophical tradition, it is at first glance a provocative assertion; but the more one tries to grasp its possible justification, the more instructive and apt it seems to be. It really is a new sort of ‘seriousness’ that marks the modern will to knowledge and links it to the elementary concern for self-assertion. The characteristic liberality and nonbindingness that one notices in Epicurus’s atomistic physics and that exempts it from insistence on verification is due precisely, as I meant to show, to the intactness of a ‘residual order’ by which the existential problematic of man remained beneficently concealed and theory did not yet need to be made graspable as the instrument

with which to make oneself master of the world. The new seriousness imposed on man by the late-medieval situation consists in the constant and unrelied pressure of confirming a relation to the world that is established within the horizon of metaphysical conditions that leave no way out, neither outward nor inward.

The new exertion that was required in this situation was called by Descartes a laboriosa vigilia, a taxing vigilance. The last section of the first of his six Meditations, in which this expression is contained, provides at the same time the most extreme level of the doubt that it intensifies step by step and from which he derives the necessity for a new and unconditional guarantee of knowledge: this is the level of doubt that follows from the idea of the genius malignus [malicious spirit], that all-powerful and cunning world spirit who is intent on misleading man by appealing to his constitutional credulity—an appeal against which man can at least oppose the one effort inherent in his freedom: his ability to withhold judgment. Descartes’s Meditations have not only the function of presenting a theoretical thought process in which specific difficulties are removed by argument and eliminated once and for all; rather they tend to develop by exercise the habitual attitude of the obfuscatum mens [steadfast mind], the inability to forget how the human spirit is endangered by its liability to judgment and prejugment. The goal of this exercise is a condition of the spirit in which it makes use of its own freedom (mens quae propria libertate uti); it is not the beginning, posited once and for all, of a new philosophy and a new idea of science that by settling a catalog of methodically introduced uncertainties could lay the foundation for a theoretical step forward guaranteed for all future time.

The artificial order of the stages of doubt in the first Meditation strengthens the impression Descartes seeks to arouse in his whole work, namely, that as though with one stroke he had easily put aside the traditional opinions and prejudices (opiniosum eversio) and by himself had methodically created the authentic radicality for his new beginning. The heroizing of Descartes as the founding figure of the modern age has its foundation in his self-stylying effort, in which the historical becomes hypothetical. When Hegel in his History of Philosophy defines the significance of Descartes for the epoch, he accepts this rational authenticity so painstakingly detached from its historical motivation: “The effect of this man on his age and the new era cannot be represented as too extensive. He is a hero who approached the matter
all over again from the beginning and for the first time constituted anew the ground of philosophy, to which it now returned for the first time in a thousand years." The idea of a philosophy free of presuppositions, which knows that it arises autonomously from reason, was prepared by the *Discours de la Méthode* of 1637 and the *Meditations* of 1641 in such a way that the arguments for doubt appear not as an elaboration of the historical situation of reason but rather as an experiment that reason poses for itself under conditions of artificial difficulty in order to gain access to itself and to the beginning it proposes for itself.

Within the context of this experiment of reason with itself, the *genius malignus* appears as a freely chosen exaggeration of the requirements that must be met by reason in finding its new ground in itself. And this formulation is indeed perfectly correct, since after all the nominalistic God is not the *genius malignus*; He is ‘only’ the God who does not enable man to be certain that he is not. The *deus absconditus* and *deus mutabilissimus* [hidden God, most fickle God] who is not committed to kindness and dependability except under the conditions of salvation as defined by revelation could only be taken into account philosophically as if he could be the *genius malignus* in relation to man’s certainty of the world. By transforming the theological absolutism of omnipotence into the philosophical hypothesis of the deceptive world spirit, Descartes denies the historical situation to which his initial undertaking is bound and turns it into the methodical freedom of arbitrarily chosen conditions.

Thus a claim was made to the absolute beginning of the modern age, the thesis of its independence from the outcome of the Middle Ages, which the Enlightenment was to adopt as part of its own self-consciousness. The exigency of self-assertion became the sovereignty of self-foundation, which exposes itself to the risk of being unmasked by the discoveries of historicism, in which beginnings were to be reduced to dependences. The weak point of modern rationality is that the uncovering of the medieval ‘background’ of its protagonists can put in question the freedom from presuppositions of which it claimed to have availed itself as the essence of its freedom.

The artificial latency of the motives in the Cartesian train of thought does not spring from anxiety about originality; rather it is itself an expression of the freedom that does not submit to the conditions under which reason has to prove itself radically but poses them for itself. For even before reason, by means of the certainty of the *Cogito* and the proof of God’s existence, extracts itself once more from the abyss of its doubt, it has assured itself of its elementary freedom not to be deceived necessarily because although the equality of men in their judgmental activity is indeed threatened by the boundlessness of the will, it is also protected by the possibility of refraining from decisive judgment. Reserving assent is the first methodical step of the *Meditations*, the first conclusion that is derived from experience of the undependability of traditional and received opinion, even before the argumentation of doubt is constructed. The ideal of the mind free from prejudice, the *mens a praecipudicis plane libera*, seems to Descartes, on the basis of the Stoic theory of judgment that he employs, to be realizable by an act of decision in favor of indecision; and in this man demonstrates not only his immunity from metaphysical surprise but also the power to be free of historical constraint, to begin his own history afresh at any moment he chooses.

In the *Principles of Philosophy* of 1644 Descartes not only gave this primacy of freedom (as the *cogito prima et certissima* [first and most certain idea] over the certainty of the *Cogito* a more precise systematic expression, but he even described the capacity to abstain from theory as the source of man’s independence from his origin—which is to say, from the ‘quality’ of his God. Whatever man’s origin might be and whatever power of deception might dominate him, there remains this minimum of freedom in the act of withholding assent. A god can prevent man from knowing a single truth, but he cannot himself bring about error, unless man for his part freely runs the risk of being deceived. So man is not free in that he has grounds for his action but rather in that he can dispense with grounds. Absolute freedom would be the readiness and the ability to resign all interest in truth so as not to risk error. The structure of consciousness appears both transparent and at the disposal of its possessor, so that the dimension of prejudice can be suspended. For this approach great disappointments and corruptions were in store, from historicism to psychoanalysis.

Descartes painstakingly effaced and disavowed the traces of his historical background in order to constitute the myth of the radical beginning of reason. In the *Discours de la Méthode* he dated the beginning of his doubt regarding the tradition back to La Flèche and passed over his crucial encounter with Isaak Beeckmann in Breda in 1618; he avoided (at least) any answer to the reproach that his *Cogito* argument
had already been formulated by Augustine, and the question of a possible dependence has remained undecided down to the present. Thus also the argument from the all-powerful God, where the possibility cannot be excluded that He might bring about the nonexistence of that which appears to man to exist, is introduced not as a liability inherited from history but as a constructed factor of uncertainty: Only the conviction of the existence of this God has the pregiveness of an “old opinion” rooted in our thinking, from which a new inference is drawn. The argument for doubt is founded, independently of theological tradition, on two sorts of experience: the experience that occasionally something seems evident to others that to me is evidently false; and the experience of my own error, which at least excludes the interpretation of the assertion of God’s goodwill as implying that He must will that I should never be deceived. A divine will, then, which allows it to happen that I am occasionally (interdictum) deceived, cannot contradict the attribute of goodwill—but why then should the “occasionally” not be able to turn into an “always”? 

The fact that Descartes conjured up with his genus malignus an evil spirit that he could not then get rid of in a respectable and argumentatively solid fashion (as tends to be the case with evil spirits) is due to presuppositions by which he is still entirely bound to the traditional concept of reality. One could summarize these presuppositions as the assumption that reality contains an ‘implication of assertion,’ as though man perceived in the given world an associated claim to be that which it appears to him to be. This assumption allows it to appear possible to Descartes, at the end of his experiment, to ground the reality of the physical world in a metaphysical guarantee of its dependability. The assertoric quality of reality presents itself in the Cartesian doctrine of judgment in accordance with the Stoic schema, insofar as to the given content of a judgment an element of affirmation or denial is added, which reproduces the authentic assertoric sense that is implied in what is given.

In his marginal notations to the Principles of Philosophy, which were concluded in about 1692, Leibniz was to regard this concept of reality itself as the general prejudice that had evaded Descartes in his elimination of prejudices because it was implicit, as a hidden assumption, in his whole experiment with doubt. At the end of his analysis Leibniz not only declares the refutation of the argument from the deceiver God (Whom he entitles an exotica fictio [exotic invention]) to be a failure but holds the argument to be irrefutable because it rests on an exorbitant demand in the very concept of reality it employs.

Leibniz asks what, after all, is meant when in Descartes’s consideration of doubt he speaks of a possible “deception.” The supposed lack of correspondence between our ideas of a nature independent of consciousness and what actually exists in itself need not be deception if it is merely one possible interpretation of these ideas that finds in them a claim to such a correspondence. As Leibniz says, there could be weighty reasons, unknown to us, for a lack of correspondence. This would have no relevance whatsoever for man since our consciousness is neither directed to nor sustained by such a correspondence. It depends exclusively on an immanent structure of harmony in what we are given. The question, then, which for the first time achieves its full clarity in Kant’s philosophy, is that of the conditions of the possibility of this synthetic structure of the given. Thus Descartes’s very concept of reality differs from that of modern philosophy in a way that makes Descartes appear not so much as the founding figure of the epoch but rather as the thinker who clarified the medieval concept of reality all the way to its absurd consequences and thus made it ripe for destruction. This does not prevent it from being the case that Descartes himself inaugurated this epochal turning with his approach to certainty through the Cogito; but he fell short of consistency at the point where he sought for a guarantee of a reality corresponding to our “clear and distinct ideas.”

I have tried to show what it means to say that Descartes transformed the late medieval crisis of certainty into an experiment with certainty, that he represented the necessity of the historical situation as the freedom of self-imposed conditions of ‘exaggerated difficulty.’ But the experiment rests upon the presuppositions of the crisis, in that it constructively intensifies them. From the nominalists’ hidden God, to Whom man cannot appeal for certainty regarding the world because He refuses to perform any ‘function’ for man other than that of salvation, Descartes derives the hypothesis of the deus fallax [deceiver God], the deceptor potentissimus [most powerful deceiver]. Who in pursuit of his intentionally universal deception can not only intervene on the side of the objects but can also have given man himself a nature that even in regard to what it is most clearly given is capable only of error. Nominalism had largely restricted its discussions to God’s partial intervention in the process of knowledge, and more particularly to
the obligatory example of miracles, which directly presuppose the normal workings of nature for their demonstrative effect. It is certainly the case that such considerations did not originally reckon seriously with intentional deception occurring in fact but were only meant to deprive man’s cognitive relation to nature of its unquestioned obviousness and to inspire thankfulness for an unearned prerogative.

William of Ockham states that God owes nothing and cannot owe anything to any being, and neither can He do any wrong. The teleological interpretation of the human striving for knowledge does not support any claim that it should be fulfilled, or even that it should not be deceived. The argument from the natural conformity (conveniencia) between disposition and achievement, between an organ and its successful performance of its function, which had enjoyed unquestioned validity in the ancient tradition of cosmological metaphysics, became questionable when transposed into a metaphysics of creation. It would allow the prescription of a natural order to become an obligation binding on the creative will itself, something that could not be admitted by those who were zealously concerned with God’s sovereignty. In discussing the question whether it was suitable for a soul capable of cognition (anima intellectiva) to be joined to a body like the human one, Thomas Aquinas was still able to insist that such a problem must not be considered from the point of view of omnipotence but rather with regard to the inner conformity of the organ to its function. The system of this conformity also restricted the problem of knowledge: The same relation that subsisted between reason and its bodily instrumentation could also be asserted to hold between organ and object, capacity and achievement. The situation of the even arrangement between man and the world kept the problem of knowledge latent, however much might be said about the manner of functioning of the cognitive apparatus.

One sees immediately that the questions that have been asked since William of Ockham can be simply characterized by their distance from the ancient presuppositions. Ockham may say explicitly that he asserts only supernaturaliter loquendo (supernaturally speaking) the possibility of the miracle of the production of ideas without objects, of the cognition intuitiva (observational knowledge) of a nonexistent object—and indeed as a perception satisfying all the relevant criteria: secundum omnem conditionem—but nevertheless the important thing is not this exceptionalness, without which Christian Scholasticism simply could not have got along with its theological presuppositions, but rather the systematic penetration of such theses and considerations. It is only from this point of view that it becomes possible to characterize nominalism as the system of breaches of system, as the shift of interest and accent onto the miracle, the paradigmatic reduction of the bindingness of nature. It is not the power that could give rise to the world but the power that can give rise to something other than this world that occupies the speculative interest. In the context of the doctrine of creation, the real objects are from the start only secondary causal agents in the cognitive act, the act to which the creator gives an object as though by a detour through created reality; it seems like only a small and harmless alteration, indeed a simplification and shortening of the way, when the object is projected into human knowledge not from its worldly existence but directly from the original ground of its possibility. Quite incidentally, this sort of question also shows that the tendency of late Scholasticism is toward overcoming the causal mediations and indirectness in the world structure of the Middle Ages and that the question of absolute power is already implicitly the question of the immediacy of its operation in every place and creature in the world.

But at the same time it can be seen that such immediacy has a primarily destructive effect on the system’s security and must have this effect as long as immediacy does not mean the present realization of the whole of what is possible. The thesis that the first cause operates immediately is not new as such in William of Ockham; it had already been discussed before him, even in regard to the object of knowledge, in the Scotist school. Certainly the thought that God’s operation might be through two ‘channels,’ and thus the possibility of man’s deception, had not yet come within reach here. The phenomenalism involved in Ockham’s thesis implies only the general indistinguishability of primarily and secondarily effected ideas and not the concrete imputation of a false idea of a particular object, or of an idea of a nonexistent object. Certainly this thesis, which may have been intended as a ‘harmless’ broadening of the concept of what God could do, first received from the censorship of fifty-one propositions of William of Ockham (by the Curia of Avignon in 1326) the accent that kept such propositions from disappearing from the discussion and fostered the assumption that there was a dimension of unsuspected uneasiness behind them. The apprehension of the censors of Avignon is directed
only at the possibility that Ockham’s thesis could also be applied to the other-worldly condition of the unmediated vision of God: Phenomenon and reality would become interchangeable even in the theological limiting case of evidence, in the bliss of absolute truth. Ockham himself provided against this apprehension in the appropriate question of the *Quodlibeta*: the first cause can only produce immediately the effects of the secondary causes but cannot, so to speak, replace itself.16

This apprehension would not be particularly interesting if it did not show where a remnant of absolute certainty was for the time being still sought and needed and how distant the recourse to the absolute fundament of the *Cogito*, the irreducible presence of the subject for itself, still lay. In the discussions of the nominalist school the accent of interest then moved to this question: Assuming the possibility of the immediate action of the first cause on man’s cognitive faculty, what becomes of the certainty of knowledge of nature? This ‘secularization’ of the interest in certainty stands under the same theological premises as the attack on that interest: The undeniable vestige of certainty in the absolute *visio beatifica* (beatific vision) loses its function to the extent that the intensified concept of divine grace renders uncertain the attainability of this absolute evidence, or at least makes it clear that man can do nothing to earn it.

Peter of Ailly, whose influence was to extend into the following century and to reach its high point at the Council of Constance, lectured in 1375 on the sentences of Peter Lombard. In this commentary he says, in opposition to Ockham’s thesis, that for physical objects, on the assumption of God’s general influence and the normal course of nature—that is, excluding miracles—sufficient certainty is to be assumed; so there is no reasonable occasion for doubt, especially not in regard to causality, since otherwise all demonstrations in natural philosophy would be invalid (sic pertinent omnes demonstraciones naturales).17 But the argument that doubt regarding the existence and nexus of the objects of the senses is indeed possible but is not rationally meaningful can only mean that man must presuppose the presence of the conditions under which his self-assertion in the world is possible, that the radicalizing of his questions is bounded by the situation in which all questioning would be meaningless. This follows from the argument (no doubt directed against Nicolas of Autrecourt) that the denial of the principle of causality would upset the explanation of nature. Thus Walter Burleigh had already argued, in opposition to Ockham’s denial of the reality of motion, that to deny this sort of thing is to make the science of nature impossible.18

In this context, that can only mean that metaphysics may not make physics impossible. If, in a world no longer arranged for the benefit of and coordinated with man, knowledge of nature proves to be a condition of the possibility of human self-assertion, then the conditions under which knowledge of nature is possible must be presupposed as given, or at any rate as not open to meaningful doubt. The metaphysical foundation of the possibility of knowledge of nature seems itself to be something that on the given assumptions cannot be demanded because the desired foundation would have to be subject to the same skepticism that created the demand for it. The appeal to the *cursus naturae solitus* (normal course of nature) is not teleological but rather hypothetical, in the sense of a general supposition without which no other hypothesis has any sense at all—a postulate of self-defense, which does not assert the regularity and dependability of nature but rather assumes them as the only possibility left to man. At this point in particular, one must pay close attention to the primary function that is assumed by such a hypothetical universal premise: It defines a minimal condition, which as such is certainly not yet sufficient but at least does not destroy from the beginning all prospect of acquiring knowledge of nature.

At this stage, the correlate of the nominalistic absolutism aimed at the submission and resignation of reason does not yet involve the claim to domination over nature that emerges from the ‘history-of-Being’ [*Seinsgeschichtlich*]; Heidegger] interpretation of the modern age as that age’s pure ‘mode of behavior.’ The “history of Being” [*Seinsgeschichte*] is, of course, concerned with the isolated epochal ‘fact’ that emerges from an impenetrable background and has no need of an accessible historical context. The modern epoch becomes the pure fatality of ‘forsakenness by being’ [*Seinsverlassenheit*], which permits, as a direct result of failure to recognize the ground of history that is not at anyone’s disposal, the illusion that man makes history and that history can consequently be understood through the logic of the questions that man himself raises. Such an approach must either level off the difference between self-assertion and the claim to domination or else interpret the new sense (once it is acknowledged as such) of the demiurgic relation of power between man and reality as a tendency.
(only now achieving adequate formulation) whose cryptic early forms can already be diagnosed in declining Scholasticism.

The "history of Being" excludes the possibility that the signatures of an epoch might be illuminated by reference to the dialogic structure of a reason that is not indeed identical with history, nor even always spontaneously 'active' in it, but is nevertheless 'activatable' by need and necessity, by *aporia* [difficulty] and exogenous overextension. The modern age as an episode of the "history of Being"—more particularly, of forsakenness by being—would bear the stigmata of domination, of the serviceability of theory for technicity, of man's self-production, precisely not as an 'answer' to a provocation (bequeathed to it in whatever manner) but rather as one of the un-'graced' confusions surrounding the "Being" that has been withdrawn and concealed since the time of the Presocratics. In such an interpretation, it is true, the physiognomy of the epoch is not stamped by the dissimulation that, as the 'secularization' of the theological substance, conceals the truth of that substance; but the interpretation itself emerges unmistakably as a product of the secularization of the categories that were developed in the theology of grace. It is not that the contents of the epoch become pseudomorphs of their theological antecedent but rather that the characterization of the epoch's position in history can only be defined as pseudotheology. This characterization gets its orientation from both the temporary and provisional status assigned to the age, as prior to a new and then perhaps final event in the "history of Being"—its turning to *parrusia* [presence]—and the compellingly imposed, negative evaluation of the age, in which mythical rejection by the substitute for divinity, on the one hand, and the arrogance of the subjectivity that is a failure as far as 'authenticity' is concerned, on the other, make up a single integral state of affairs. The epoch appears as an absolute 'fact' [*Faktum*]—or better: as a 'given' [*Datum*] it stands, sharply circumscribed, outside any logic, adapted to a state of error, and in spite of its immanent pathos of domination (or precisely on account of it) finally permits only the one attitude that is the sole option that the "history of Being" leaves open to man: submission. The absolutism of "Being" is in truth only the continuation of the medieval result by other means.

The negative idealization of the modern age in the "history of Being"—which perhaps has only one thing in common with the self-consciousness of the Enlightenment, namely, the capacity to designate

Descartes's *Cogito* as the epochal beginning that lacks any intelligible antecedent—has the methodical advantage of being in possession of an a priori typification of the epoch. What genetic presuppositions underlie Descartes's *Cogito*, in which he shows himself to be the functionary of the latest version of forsakenness by being, is of no interest to the initiate of the "history of Being" because it remains a matter of indifference in relation to the incidence of the epochal meaning from the vertical (which need not always mean "from above"). On the other hand, it interests the historian, from the perspective of the traditional demands of his form of rationality, only to the extent that it contributes to the elimination of the mythology of the absolute beginning and withdrawal into the comforting solidity of what was there all along.

From these points of view it may seem insignificant that while the nominalistic discussion of Ockham's thesis of the possibility of intuition of a nonexistent thing does not arrive at Descartes's *Cogito*, it does anticipate his assertion of the incontestability of man's freedom not to have to let himself be deceived. In the separation of the passivity of sense perception, with which man is delivered up to the external agencies acting on him, and the activity of judgment, with which for the first time he runs the risk of error, the nominalists already saw the narrow solid ground of self-assertion.

Gregor of Rimini attempts a solution of the problem raised by Ockham of the simple sense perception of, for example, a particular color by proposing that the act of perception never justifies more than the limited judgment, "I see this color," and not the more ambitious judgment, "This color exists." The judgment that is thus reduced to its subjective basis remains unaffected by the question of the existence of the perceptual datum. So the possibility of error is localized in judgment only to the extent that the judgment asserts a state of affairs to exist that goes beyond the immanent fact of consciousness, that is, to the extent that it not only states but interprets. For the complex datum of, for instance, a man running, it is still true that God could give rise to and maintain this perception; but here again it is within the power of the subject himself to protect himself from possible error. Only if God could also help to produce the judgment about a non-existing state of affairs would deception become unavoidable. Gregor excludes this possibility, and not indeed only on grounds of the freedom of the subject, but with the express statement that divine omnipotence
is limited by the impossibility of deception: “Quia tunc deus per se et directe me falleret, quod est impossible.” Thus the deception can only be indirect, as the production of a perception, since the responsibility for the error then remains with man in his, so to speak, ‘overshooting’ in the act of judgment. Thus the Augustinian model of theodicy, assigning to man the responsibility for the evil in the world, is held to here also.

Gregor’s basic idea, that man as a being absorbed in and (so to speak) naively interpreting the world of his senses can indeed be deceived, but not man in his judgmental capacity, was to lead to a skeptically tinged discussion of the question of the advantageousness of undisguised truth for man in Pierre Bayle’s article “Rimini” in his Dictionnaire. Bayle, to whom the supposed truth content of the entire tradition appeared as a sum of contradictions, and who saw in the establishment of this contradictoriness the sovereign task of critical reason, is far from being disconcerted by the most radical application of Cartesian doubt. Should not God, he reflects, behave toward man in regard to truth just as a doctor behaves toward a sick person or a father toward his children, toward partners, that is, whom one often deceives (wisely and for their own good) but never degrades? Would men be able to bear the truth if God gave them access to it in its nakedness? Such a reflection, which not only considers it salutary that man should be left to his ignorance but would even be prepared to regard leading him astray as a merciful act, presupposes that no constitutive relation is seen between truth and man’s happiness. This connection had still been indissoluble for late Scholasticism because the definition of the blessed final state of the elect depended on it. One could indeed consider the possibility that God’s sovereignty might withhold the truth from man, but not that man could be privileged and well provided for by this very state of affairs. The skeptic, it turns out, is least able to do without the assumption of an agency that provides for him, whether it be cosmos, God, or nature. For the nominalists, the path of skepticism was blocked precisely because they had destroyed this agency in their theology.

What it means to say that Descartes functions in the self-representation of modern philosophy as the founder of the new claim to certainty based on the absolute evidence of the Cogito can now be more precisely defined. By radicalizing the nominalists’ potestas absoluta into the hypothesis of the genius malignus, he sharpened the doubt surrounding certainty to such an extent that the pragmatic formulas for the self-assertion of reason, such as had been opposed to Ockham’s thesis by members of the Nominalist school, could no longer be sufficient. Recourse to the absolute fundament excludes the pragmatic concession that man does not need to assume anything that would deny him the possibility of acquiring knowledge, and—if one regards it as a way of avoiding a problem that is insoluble in any case—declares it to have been a mistake. For self-assertion a general postulate would have been sufficient, to the effect that any metaphysical assumption could be ignored if it destroyed the possibility of knowledge.

Descartes forced himself to take the further step of requiring that the hypothesis of the general impossibility of knowledge be refuted, so as to win the secure ground on which one could proceed to construct the system of physics and thus in the end the morale déterminé (definitive morality). Thus Descartes did in fact fundamentally define the character and claims of modern thought, not, however, by confronting the tradition with the violence of a radical claim and a new plan but rather by making the implications of theological absolutism crucially more explicit and developing them into such an acute threat that a basis for resistance could now only be found in absolute immanence.

The fact that Descartes only retrieved, on the side of the subject and his need for certainty, what he had advanced on the side of transcendent absolutism becomes evident to us if we look once again at another tendency of nominalist defense against the theological problematicizing of cognitive certainty. In Paris in 1347, forty theses from Jean de Mirecourt’s Commentary on the Sentences were condemned, and thus again one of those catalogs was made manifest from which the extreme consequences of the late-medieval development can be read off as though from a chemical preparation.

Ockham’s initial thesis, with which we are already acquainted, that external perceptions could be produced and maintained by the power of God even in the absence of their object, is described by Jean de Mirecourt as the usual opinion (opinio quae communiter tenetur). In order to demonstrate the consequences of this thesis, the nominalist takes the further step of deriving from the imputation of the theoretical subject that of the moral subject as well: if God, without the cooperation and consent of the subject, can directly produce the latter’s acts of perception and thus bring about error without any lapse on the part of the knowledge seeker, then He could also produce morally repre-
hensible actions, such as hate for one's neighbor and even for God, directly and without the supposed agent being responsible. The unity of the subject, whose psychic acts and capacities William of Ockham himself had already refused to regard as independent and separable (since this would have involved a mistaken realism regarding concepts), excludes the possibility that theoretical certainty could itself be rendered insecure. It cannot, without making moral responsibility equally problematic as a result, since man can no longer be sure of being the author of his actions. Here theological absolutism comes up against one of its boundaries, the sharper definition of which it itself practically demands: God can indeed produce appearances without objects, even appearances of supposed actions of the most sinful kind, but He cannot bring it about that these should constitute acts for which the moral subject can be held responsible.

From the perspective we have now reached, one can say that the introduction of the concept of freedom into the theory of knowledge is an attempt to apply the paradigm of the transcendent incontestability of morality to theoretical self-assertion. A man may be chosen or condemned in the theological sense, destined for salvation or the opposite—but no 'external' agency can make him responsible for such a destiny. No more can he be forced into a theoretical judgment that contradicts his own insight, if the theoretical act, just like the moral one, is nothing but 'the soul itself,' its modus se habendi [mode of self-possession]. Under the enormous pressure of the demands made upon it by theology, the human subject begins to consolidate itself, to take on a new overall condition, which possesses, in relation to ambushed set by the hidden absolute will, something like the elementary attribute of the atom, that it cannot be split up or altered. Absolutism reduces whatever is exposed to it, but in the process it brings to light the constants, the no longer touchable kernels.

The tuum primarium [primary right], the primeval right to self-assertion, becomes comprehensible long before Descartes and Hobbes as the essence of the modern age's understanding of itself—that is, as the anthropological minimum under the conditions of the theological maximum. This beginning does not come about as the formulation of a new concept against an old one, as the constitution of an epoch after the preceding one has been broken off, but rather as the mobilizing of motives toward the definition of an opposing force, precisely while the attack is being intensified; not as the negation of the premises but rather as a condensation under the pressure of their exaggerated power.

Because theology meant to defend God's absolute interest, it allowed and caused man's interest in himself and his concern for himself to become absolute. The position of his openness to theology's claims forced his self-concern to recoupify it. In the theory of knowledge this concern takes the form of the critical rejection of the conception of receptiveness that is basic to the Aristotelian system. For this very receptiveness delivers man up to an absolute power of whose goodwill he cannot be sure. Jean de Mirecourt defended himself against his condemnation in two written apologies. If sensation (sensatio) and knowledge (intellectio) were only qualities (passiones) of the organ of knowledge, he argues, all knowledge would be immediately dependent on God's will since the production of a quality is that of which God is alone and immediately capable (quod deus se solo posset). That would be one elementary, and in fact Aristotelian, explanation of the cognitive process. The other is the interpretation of knowledge as an activity (actio) of the knowing subject, and if this proves to be correct, then an intervention in the act of knowing can only come about if the subject 'cooperates' as a secondary cause. The idea, with which we are acquainted from the Ockhamist controversy, that the first cause cannot (as it were) substitute something else for itself as the object of the beatific vision, is now broadened into the statement that neither can there be any substitute for the secondary cause, as far as its activity is concerned: "Nullam actionem cause secundae possit deus agere se solo..." The author, frightened by his censors, does not dare to make a categorical decision between these alternative theories of knowledge and to express his preference for the 'activity' theory of knowledge as a vera actio animae [true act of the soul]. But even through the language made ambiguous by the circumstances of censorship, he makes it sufficiently evident where his interest lies or where he sees man's interests better served. He would like to attach himself to the second point of view, he says, if he had the courage; however, the reader may choose for himself.

The guarantee that Descartes will seek to found on the most perfect being, which he gains through his proof of God's existence, relates, however, not only to the reality of the physical objects that present themselves through our clear and distinct ideas but also, in order to deal with the full extent of the uncertainty aroused by the process of
doubt, to the propositions of logic and mathematics. This conforms to the voluntaristic presuppositions of his concept of God, according to which even the so-called "eternal truths" are decreed by a sovereign act of the divine will and are thus only valid for the world that God de facto willed. Consequently the guarantee must extend to the non-alteration of this highest decree, so that it possesses final validity for the world and for the thinking rational beings within it, once these are posited. This seems to him to be adequately guaranteed on the assumption of the most perfect being, although the world persists not as a result of the unique act of its creation but only on account of the will that confirms its existence anew at every moment. Thus everything depends upon the weak thread of the proof of God's existence, on which Descartes hung his entire system; and at this very point he has regressed in comparison to the level reached by the late Scholastic critique of the efficacy of the arguments that were developed at the height of Scholasticism. Hence the critical equipment of his solutions does not measure up to the difficulties with which he confronts himself.

The abandonment of the ancient cosmos was completed at the moment when the distinction between possibility and reality ceased to be congruent with the distinction between reason and will, that is, when the act of the divine will no longer related simply to the existence of the world but also related to the universe of truths that hold in it. The infinite plurality of worlds is the horizon of uncertainty for the existing world and for each of its moments, if one cannot deduce from the contingency of the first act of foundation a world course that is minimally consistent in itself and constant by itself. It is evident that there could only have been one secure guarantee for this postulate of the constancy of the world's lawfulness, namely, the coincidence of possibility and reality, the exhaustion of reason by the will, and thus the identity of reason and the will in the world ground. This path will be taken by Giordano Bruno. The nominalists reject it, and the 'effectiveness' of their voluntarism rests on this rejection.

Jean Buridan justifies this with the argument that God could not create an object adequate to His potency because this would imply the assertion that He cannot create anything greater and better than what He has in fact created—and this assertion of exhausted potency 'cannot' not be a possible assertion in regard to Omnipotence. The attribute of infinity destroys the possibility not only of justifying God on the basis of His works but also of giving man the security of a cosmos that—as it was formulated for the Platonic demiurge—must be the best and unsurpassable instance of what is possible as material appearance.

If, then, for nominalism the actual world could not be deduced from the premises of a world in general or from the principle of the best possible world, the radical question arose whether it was necessary or even important for man to know which of the possible world models had been realized in his world, what nature the hidden God has concealed in His creation. But that the hidden truth was a matter of indifference could not in itself signify man's happiness because (as was not the case for Epicurus) for the Middle Ages, in all their phases, no concept of happiness was thinkable that could be defined as the mere elimination of negative factors—pain, the affects, insecurity due to uncertainty. For such a concept of happiness would have made the bliss of the elect in the vision of God into a sort of superfluous addition to a situation, already sufficient unto itself, of freedom from suffering and care.

Thus the possession of truth must continue as the essence of the fulfillment of man's need for happiness; but to the extent that such possession becomes a transcendent gift of pure grace, this-worldliness may be conditioned precisely by the absence and inaccessibility of truth or may distinguish itself, through resignation vis-à-vis the identity of theory and eudemonia, as a purely preliminary condition. The freedom to abstain from categorical judgment in favor of hypothetical indecision presupposes that man does not require certainty in the sense of insight into the plan of creation and the reality lying open before God in order to assert himself in existence. The conditions of the temporal prolongation of existence can be strictly distinguished from the conditions of its fulfillment.

At the same time, the disappearance of the teleological protections that had been part of the concept of nature means that man has to adjust himself to coming to terms with a nature that is not adjusted for his benefit, so as to anticipate the inconsiderateness of natural processes and to make up for the inadequacy of their products by his own production. Hypothesis, which from one point of view is the formal expression of the renunciation of the claim to truth in the traditional sense of adequacy [adaequatio], becomes from another point of view a means of self-assertion, the potential for human production of that which nature makes scarce or does not provide for man at all. To this
kind of theory, which no longer has to provide man's happiness immediately as truth, the *given* reality is more than a matter of indifference only insofar as the theory projects upon it the reality to be produced and checks the latter, once produced, against it. Man's existence in the world now has only a mediated relation to theory.

The absolutism of the hidden God freed the theoretical attitude from its pagan ideal of contemplating the world from the divine point of view and thus ultimately sharing God's happiness. The price of this freedom is that theory will no longer relate to the resting point of a blissful onlooker but rather to the workplace of human exertion. Theory that can no longer be anything but hypothesis has really already lost its immanent value, its status as an end in itself; thus the functionalization of theory for arbitrarily chosen ends, its entry into the role of a technique, of a means, is a process subsequent to the loss of its status as an end in itself. Only one should not allow the imputation to be conveyed that purposes posited by a technical will must play the primary and motivating role for the technical process. What we call the "application" of theoretical knowledge is, as a concrete determinant of the theoretical attitude, sterile; whereas as a secondary actualization of an unspecific potential, it is not only established precisely through the unadmitted disappearance of theory as an end in itself but also serves for the same reason as the ultimate justification for the whole expense of the cultivation of theory. Here the explicit avowals of the power of ancient and humanistic tradition, which asserts the identity of theory and eudemonia, are kept to one side.

The model for the new position of theory in view of the hidden nature of the *deus absconditus*’s [hidden God’s] creation—which cuts us off from the cognitive ideal of Aristotelian physics and cosmology—was provided by astronomy, with its designation vis-à-vis the provision of causal explanations of the motions of the heavenly bodies and in its conception of itself as a mere ‘art,’ the business of which was, by means of constructive auxiliary representations, to render the unknown and inaccessible mechanism of the goings on in the heavens sufficiently calculable to meet the human needs for temporal and spatial orientation in the world.

The idea that for this most sublime object the human spirit had to make do with hypothetical improvisions was canonized in Ptolemy’s *Almagest*, the handbook of astronomy that was authoritative for the tradition. For Ptolemy the hypothetical technicity of astronomy is due to the transcendence of its very object, not to a reservation of secrecy on the part of its author. There is no metaphysical guarantee that this knowledge can be in the strict sense a 'science,’ whose cognitive means would be equal to their task. Man’s imagination, fed by earthly experience, is necessarily and unavoidably limited to the realm in which it originates and must have recourse to its capacity for invention when faced with what is entirely heterogeneous to that experience. The highly artificial character of the hypotheses introduced under these circumstances escapes the criterion of adequacy to the object; ‘method’ emerges as artfulness and self-defense against the metaphysical difference between its object and those of the rest of knowledge; it has the basic character of invention, compensating for a constitutional defect in man, rather than of self-measurement against the given.

Astronomy’s exceptional position in the relation of theory to the world was also familiar to High Scholasticism, and it was not leveled off by the latter’s Aristotelianism. Thomas Aquinas comments on the twelfth chapter of Aristotle’s second book *On the Heavens*, in which the question (the most thorny one for the geocentric system) of the order of the heavenly spheres above and below the sun, and the interconnection of what are presumed to be their motions, is discussed: In order to cope with these difficulties, Aristotle had appealed to the individual animation of each of the heavenly bodies and justified the attempt (motivated by the desire for knowledge) to follow even a narrow path in the midst of the most difficult terrain of appearances and to be satisfied with even a little certainty, regarding this as an expression more of timid restraint than of audacity. Aquinas follows him in this. But looking back on the history of astronomy and on the differences especially in regard to the positions of Venus and Mercury, he distances himself even from the prospect of a little truth. He explicitly leaves open the possibility that the actual state of affairs could be entirely different from what is assumed by astronomy. In another place Aquinas compared the inadequacy of the human spirit vis-à-vis the astronomical object with the unprovability of the theological dogma of the Trinity: as in natural science proofs can be adduced with complete certainty, so it is in regard to knowledge of the unity of God; but the capacity of reason to prove that this unity is composed of three persons can only be compared to the dim prospects for our cognitive capacity in relation to the true construction of the starry heavens.
What had been seen in High Scholasticism as the special case of astronomical knowledge is generalized by nominalism for all knowledge of nature. But this means that astronomy's interpretation of itself as technique, which Aristotle had avoided by means of his formulation of the justification of even the most minimal yield of truth and the exemplary status even of hopeless endeavor—this interpretation penetrates into the theoretical ideal. This does not yet mean that orientation and preservation of man in the world are immediately defined as functions of theory; but it does at least mean that the 'artificial' character of the statements that can be made in the knowledge of nature already moves away from the norm of science (still conceived of in the Aristotelian fashion) and approaches that of the 'liberal arts,' among which astronomy traditionally had its place. From the modern point of view, for which natural science represents scientificness in paradigmatic and fascinating fashion, this may appear disappointing; but within late Scholasticism, it tends to bring about a connection that offered itself only within the Quadrivium of the liberal arts and was already a matter of course for astronomy, namely, the possible relevance of geometry and arithmetic for physics. The process in the history of the sciences that we would nowadays describe as crucial to their becoming scientific, namely, their primary mathematization, is paradoxically prepared for by detachment from the traditional concept of science and objective adaptation to the sphere of the artes liberales liberal arts, in which not only the mathematical equipment lay ready or could be developed but also the tolerance in relation to the truth was attainable that was excluded by the Aristotelian and Scholastic ideal of science.

That man under the conditions of theological absolutism had to live with 'less truth' than the ancient world and High Scholasticism had intended for him and imputed to him proves to be the precondition of a new definition of 'scientificness.' Diminution of the claim to truth and thus of the autonomous dignity of theory first cleared the way for the syndrome of science and technicity, of theory and self-assertion.

Here the process of the justification of man's claim to knowledge meshes with the rejection of the maximal demands posed by the Aristotelian tradition's concept of science. That concept's vulnerability now becomes evident to the extent that it had obscured the element of self-assertion normatively and withheld it from consciousness. "Science comes into being when the gods are not thought of as good," writes Nietzsche in a note from the year 1875. One could also propose this formulation: Science arises when man must give up wanting what is necessary for his mere existence to be sufficient to make him happy, too.
Chapter 2


4. "Vorarbeiten...", Musarion ed., vol. 6, p. 14: "Historical thinking and the natural sciences were decor related against the Middle Ages knowledge against faith, when we now direct ar again against knowledge,..." P. 108: "People became more clever during the Middle Ages... This sharpening of the spirit by the pressure of a hierarchy theology was absent in the ancient world." P. 106: "Science... is coming into being... when the gods are not thought of as good."


10. Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, part One, section 15, Basic Writings, trans. W. Kaufmann, p. 211; Musarion ed., vol. 15, pp. 20-21


Chapter 3

1. Irenaeus, Adversus haereses II 14, 5 (PG, vol. 7, p. 751); "Unbehren autem et vacuam ipsumum a Deocrito et Epicura sumentes, sibi posteritatem aputaverunt... Somertos ergo in hoc mundo, cum silent extra Platonem, in locum qui non est, deputaverunt. Quod autem dicitur imaginationis esse haec eorum quae sunt, non manifestissimae Deocrito et Platonem sentientes edissenturu." V 26, 5 (PG, vol. 7, p. 1195);... et nullam iurem esse judicium dei. Quapropter et alterum quendam excogitatio paterm, neque curantem, neque providentem eorum, quae sunt erga nos, aut etiam consentientem omnibus peccatis.

2. Irenaeus, Adversus haereses III 24, 2 (PG, vol. 7, p. 167); "...cum vero, qui non est, sommiens super humc, ut magnum deum patronum adhucpostivarrem, quem nemo possit cognoscere humano generi communicantem, nec terras administraret Epicura videlicet inventivae deum necque sibi neque aliquis praestans, id est nullus providentian habetem." V 26, 5 (PG, vol. 7, p. 1195);... et nullam iurem esse judicium dei. Quapropter et alterum quendam excogitatio paterm, neque curantem, neque providentem eorum, quae sunt erga nos, aut etiam consentientem omnibus peccatis.

3. Tertullian, Adversus Marcionem IV 4, 14: "deriferit potest deus Marcionis, qui nec frater novit nec uel出入." I 25, 5; "inmombolat et stupens deus"; I 26, 5; "stupidissimam"; IV 4, 3: "deus ille otiosus." Atticus Adversus Valentinianum 7, 4: "sedet... Bryhos istec... in maxima et alitissima quercu, et cito platonico platidu et... stupens divinitus, ut sussit Epicura." In addition to structural equivalence he asserts a dogmatic dependence, as a classic example of the dangers of the reception of philosophical doctrines: "longum est... ostendar haec sententia omnem haereticam daniari, quod omnes ex subodiquasne virtus et philosophise regulis consentent, sed Marcion principalem nunc lielem terminum de Epicuro schola agerit." (Ad. Marcionis V 19, 2) (Bibl. I 25, 8: "si aliquem de Epicuro schola deum adducat solstitialis Christianus teneat, ut quod beatum et incorrupibili si; neque sibi neque alii molestias praestet; hanc enim sententiam runinna Marcion renovet ab ilio loco de severitatis et judiciarios viros." W. Schmid, in his article "Epicurus" in the Religion für Anfänger, trans. and Christian T. H. H. Leopold (Munich: Musarion, 1961), pp. 799-801, to the important, non-Christian, parallel testimony of Plotinus (Enodiai II 9, 15), who sees Epicurus and the Gnostics united in their devolution of the cosmos, though "certainly the thought related primarily to morphological similarity, scarcely to historical dependence." A passage in Hieronymus Commentarius in Isaiam prophetem VII 18, 1) that resembles Plotinus's polemic very closely was already traced back by Harnack to Origen, which according to W. Schmid allows us to regard Ammonius Sakkas as a possible common origin of the "topos": "deut Epicurus non esse praeidentem et voluptatem maximum hominum. Comparative hujus scelerator Marcion et omnes haeretici qui vetus lacerant testamentum. Cum enim recipiant providentiam, accusant Creatorum et assurante in plerisque opibus errasse et non faciebat ut facere deberetur." 4. Clarke's second rejoinder: (Leibniz, Philosophische Schriften, ed. J. G. Eberhardt, vol. 7, p. 881); "In reality, and with regard to God, the present frame, and the consequent disorder, and the following renovation, are as equally parts of the design framed in God's original perfect idea." 5. Leibniz, Philosophische Schriften, vol. 7, p. 374. See his letter to the Princess of Wales of June 2, 1716 (loc. cit., p. 570); "C'est l'erreur de l'inexistence vague ou du decret absolument absolu... Cette erreur encore est la source du vide et des atomes." 6. Loc. cit., p. 374: "Une simple volonté sans aucun motif la mere will is a fiction non seulement contraire a la perfection de Dieu, mais encore charnerique et contraire à l'humanité, incomparable avec la definition de la volonté..." Thus already in the Duces a metaphysicae (1686...). "...Ne faut pas aussi s'imaginer des descripts absolu, qui n'avaient aucun motif raisonnable..." (section 3). And even earlier, 1680, in a letter to Philipp in Hamburg, in the form of an argument against Descartes. "On voit bien que la volonté de Dieu même ne sera qu'une fiction mise pour iluser ceux qui ne s'attacher ne pas assez à apprécier ces choses. Car quelle volonté (bon Dieu) qui n'a pas le bien pour objet ou motif qui plus est, ce Dieu n'aura pas même d'entendement... Mais de dire qu'un tel Dieu a fait les choses, ou de dire qu'elle sont été produites par une nécessité aveugle, Fui vous l'autre, ce me semble" (Philosophische Schriften, vol. 4, p. 283). W. Sabini, Die Philosophie des jungen Leibniz. Untersuchungen zur Entwicklungs geschichte seiner Systeme (Heidelberg: 1909), p. 122, quotes from a letter to Weckropl, the jurist in Kiel, this sentence: "It is not in the power of any being to will whatever it likes (us wenden, us et vel)."


8. William of Ockham, Commentary on the Sentences I 45, 1 M: "Unum Deus positum facere aliquae quae nec frict nec fecit... si esset causa naturalis, vel omnium producet simul vel nulla." Quodlibeta VI 1: "Deus multa potest facere quae non mult facere."

9. William of Ockham, Commentary on the Sentences I d. 2, q. 4, D: "... creatio est simpliciter de nihil, ita quod nihil essentiae vel intrinsecum vel simpliciter praeecessit in esse reali ergo nulla res nec variatia praestat in quacumque indigentur esse minus indivis individus vel novum creatum, quia si ali que res proferre et per consequens non creare, ergo non ali que res universales essentia istorum individuorum, quia si ali, praecesscreret omni indiviso post primum producendem et per consequens omnia producunt post primum
producentum non creantur, quia non essent de nihil. I. d. 85, q. 5, Ex-P: "Ipsa creatura est idea praecepia; ipsae ideae sunt ipsas creatas a deo producibilie; ideae orinatur et interiunt, quia ideae sunt ipsaes creaturas quae orinatur et interiunt."

10. William of Occam, Commentary on the Sentences I d. 14, q. 2, G: "ex hoc ipsa quod voluit, convertentur vel, et non frustra. It is especially true of the way of salvation that God often does things mediatis per plures, which He could also have done mediatis per unius idem (Commentary on the Sentences I d. 17, q. 5, D95). The occasionalism of even the potestas ordinaria is related to the principle of antithetical ontological constitution; the object, subject of the fact that guarantees salvation thus becomes God's credibility itself.

11. William of Occam, Quodlibeta VI q. 1: "Haec distinctio... sic intelligenda, quod posset deum aliud aliud quandaque accipitur secundum leges ordinatur et instituatur a deo et illa dicuntur deus posset facere de potenti ordinata. Aliquam accipitur posse posse omne illud quod non includit contradictionem praecepia, sive deus ordinavit se hic facturum sive non, quia multum potest deus facere quae non vix facere."

12. This formula was applied to the Hermetic philosophers by Karl Marx in the preparatory work for his dissertation (Frühe Schriften, vol. I, p. 104). "Thus, for example, the Epicurean and Stoic philosophies were the happenings of their age; when the universal sun has gone down, the months seek the lamplight of the private man."


16. Lucrètii II 1052–1057: "nulla iam pacto veri simile esse putandum... null aegra illae foris tot corpora material. It becomes clear to what a great extent this thought still lies within the horizon of the sacred cosmos when one sees beside it Kant's comparison between the improbability of the founding leporiform-philosophical concept of explaining anything positive and the improbability of the construction of a world in Epicurus's atomism: "... it seems more likely that Epicurus's atoms, after falling eternally, should suddenly for no reason run into one another, so as to construct a world, than that the most general and abstract concepts should do so in order to explain it" ("Traktat eines Geistesreiders" II 2: Akademie ed., II, p. 559).


18. Diogenes Laërtius X 420: Lucrètii II 513–514: "... factum esse necessitatem materiam quoque finitis differe figuris." See also Marx's dissertation, trans. Lawrence,挥发, second part, 2, p. 89 (Frühe Schriften, vol. I, pp. 49–50): "The statement of Leibniz, that no two things are the same, is therefore turned about, and there are infinitely many atoms of the same form..."

19. Lucrètii II 508.

20. Cicero, De natura deorum I 20, 55 (segment 350 in H. Usener's Epicius, Leipzig, 1887), formulated this central point of Epicurean metaphysics thus: "Ducit enim nos idem qui certa, natura effectum esse mundum: nihil opus fuisse fabrica, tuncque eam esse fictionem, quam versus negatur sit divina posse colleris; ut innumerales natura mundus efficiens sit; eficace, efficiens."

21. For the purpose of presenting the doctrine of his school, the Epicurean Velleius carefully uses the passage just cited from Cicero with nature in the abitative, that is, as a definition of the mode of the world's coming into existence, whereas in his attacks on the Platonic and Stoic cosmogony, he uses nature in the nominative, in order to exhibit the hypostatizing of nature as a metaphysical power. Admittedly, the later Epicureans did not keep this up caution in the use of the concept of nature; even Lucrètus (N 2530) rendered nature independent as divinitus rerum and thus began to efface the difference between Epicureanism and metaphysics.


23. Lucrètii II 500–502: "et quae consuetudinque igni gigantur earum condiiciones et earum et crecent vigere valeant, quantumquum damnam est per tota natura..." A conspicuous example of the 'productivity' of assumptions of conformity is his consideration of the extreme hypothesis for explaining the phases of the moon, according to which these phases could be understood as a process of continuous perishning and coming back into existence of the body of the moon (Lucrètii II 751–766); this would require the assumption of a very exact repetition of the same process of atomic formation—which, however, would not be unusual: "ordine simul tantum multa creantur..." See also Lucrètii I 204: "constat quid possit oriri; I 586–588, II 709: "eadem ratio res terminatur omnis;" III 787: "certum ac dispositionem ubi ubique crescat et inesse" (I 181). Here also belongs the discussion of the question of the possibility of monstrous beings in nature, like the centaur (portenta); Lucrètus denies it with the argument that atomistic nature in particular does not allow one thing to couple with anything else; it is "...nulla res quae ex unico tractori aequale et formae et individui discrimina servent" (V 923–924). See also VI 996–907, where an attempt is made to explain magnetic stones.


25. Grant McCollie, "The Seventeenth Century Doctrine of a Plurality of Worlds," Annales de Science I (1955) 395–406: "... there occurred in 1677 one of the most interesting events recorded in history... the power of God definitely overshadowed the physics of Aristotle.

26. Charteris Universitatis Pontificii, vol. I, p. 545, n. 26: Qua debit causa posset producere effectum si se sequi sit tempore pendens utrum. In this connection, with the liquidation of the ancient cosmos metaphysics, belong also the sentences nos. 48 and 53: Qua debit causa non posset esse causae nuclei, nec potest aliquo de non producere; Qua debit naturae est facere, quae des dicere ut effici donec."

27. William of Occam, Commentary on the Sentences I d. 17, q. 1, L: "quacumque forma posset in anima posset deum idem animam animam animam..." See also the initial question of the doctrine of grace: "...quis enim deus non posset facere tantum caesarum quin posset facere maiorem, non sequitur eam posse facere infinitum...

28. William of Occam, Commentary on the Sentences I d. 17, q. 3, Q: "... frequenter factus deus mediantibus pluribus quod posset facere mediantibus pluriominius..."

29. William of Occam, Commentary on the Sentences I d. 17, q. 8, G: "... omnipotens non posset efficere omne illud quod non includit contradictionem, quia non posset efficere deum..." Also there holds for the initial question of the doctrine of grace: "... quis non deus non posset facere tantum caesarum quin posset facere maiorem, non sequitur eam posse facere infinitum...

30. William of Occam, Commentary on the Sentences I d. 43, q. 1, M: "The created world could be the best of the possible worlds only at the cost of this principle:... probable autem
reputo quod deus posset facere alium mundum melorem istum distinctum specie ab isto, et maxime quod aliquas res distinctas specie, et quod pluralitatem specierum.

30. Kant, Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens, trans. W. H. Hastie Farm Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1968, part I, p. 64 (Akademie ed., vol. 5, p. 255) Critique of Judgement II, section 86 (Akademie ed., vol. 5, p. 442). Giordano Brunoni's distinction between the 'world' as the one universe and "world" as a term for individual cosmic bodies already tends in this direction (Omero melo, ed. F. Fiorenzi et al. (Naples: 1807-1891), vol. 5, pp. 457B). Telescope and microscope, though not the popular thought experiment of the idea of 'worlds' nested within another, best worked out perhaps in the letter in Johann Bernoulli to Leibniz dated November 8, 1698 (Leibniz, Mathematische Schriften, ed. Gerhardt, vol. 2 part 2, p. 548F). "The creatures that we observe under the microscope have not only their own 'world,' with sun, moon and stars, but also their own microscopes, with which they in their turn observe creatures of 'our world' they know nothing; but this is not still the whole story—aren't we ourselves perhaps only microscopic objects for beings who don't imagine that we have a 'world' like theirs? Et enim creaturae per ratio." Bernoulli may have developed his 'conjectures' from a suggestion in the Port-Royal logic L'art de penser (1629) IV 1.

31. Lucretius II 180-181: "... nequeasquam nobis divinitus case creatum/naturam mundi tanta stat praeedita culpa."

32. Lucretius VI 9-11: "nam cum vidisti hic ad victum qua flagitat usus/omnia iam ferme mortalia eae parata/et praebent posse, ut, cum vestraeurus/tumat,..."


34. Cicero, De finibus I 18, 45-46: "Quaum (sc. cupiditatem) ex Ratio est, ut necessariae nec optantes nec impensa expleantur; nec naturales quidem multa desiderant, probant quae ipsa natura divisis, quibus contenta sit, et parabolicae et terminatae habet; ianuam autem cupiditatum nec modus ulius nec finis inventi potest."

35. Lucretius V 51-54 (reading: insuntalibus de diis).

36. Cicero, De natura deorum I 18, 47-48 (= Usner's fragment 552).

37. Philodemus, De duis III (from the translation of W. Schmid, "Epikur"—cited in note 35—p. 754). With the exception of immortality, man is capable of the full eudaimonia of the gods (Usener's fragment 602). On prefixes with respect to the interpretation of Epicurean theology in terms of its systematic function, see Schmid's article, p. 755; and also on the authenticity of Lucretius in connection with this question, p. 762.

38. Lucretius V 82-90; see also V 1204-1240: Gaizing at the heavens awakes in man (nunc) about the powers (immems potestas), to which man can only surrender (ludibrum sibi habere odevet). The weakness of reason (ratioe ostensi) makes it constitutionally liable to such concerns.


42. Epicurus as quoted by Seneca, Ad Lucilium 9, 20 (= Usner's fragment 474): "Sic cui sua non videretur amplitussem, licet eumus mundi dominus sit, tamen nisi est."
theological absolutism and human self-assessment is here seen in the narrow form of moral relief. Talk of the theological maximum and minimum is also found in Kant, Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre, ed. K. Beyer (Halle: Akademischer Verlag, 1957), p. 13, who wants to know what "minimum of theology" is required for "religion" in the practical sense, and contrasts this with the maximum of which "is not necessary for religion in general and is also too strong for healthy reason". "The maximum of theology would be the knowledge that God exists" marginal notation in the Danzig lecture transcript—so radically had the range of the antithesis been narrowed, and indeed for Kant, too, through exclusive reference to the possibility of morality.

55. Luther, Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam, n. 17; Werke im Ausnahm, ed. O. Clemen et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1930–1955), vol. 5, p. 321. In the prehistory of this thesis of Luther below, marginal annotations that he entered as early as 1509 in his copy of Augustinus' "Quaestiones de "Stoicis ignari religiae sunt hodie maxima pars philosophorum" (loc. cit., p. 4).


Chapter 4

1. W. Heisenberg, Physics and Philosophy, The Revolution in Modern Science (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 74. Francis Bacon saw the new "seriousness" in the turning of interest from the extraordinary aspects of nature to its lawful regularities, from the curiosa industria that amuses itself with the luxus naturae, to serva utilitas. Special magical intervention must give way to theoretical, a becoming mastery of reality as soon as one can no longer rely on reality's rhetoric. The extraordinary and quasi abstruse in nature are not to be written off; but rather to be investigated as particularly instructive instances of lawful universalism, the miracula naturae being analyzed as cases of the consensus rerum de forma et de nouum organisum II 27–38; Works, ed. Spedding, Ellis, and Heath, vol. 1, pp. 740–749.


3. As Schopenhauer observed—Parerga I: Sämtliche Werke, ed. W. von Lübben (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1960–1965), vol. 4, p. 13—the function of the proof of God's existence in the Third Meditation is only superficially a continuation of the medieval tradition of proofs, and in its real function it inverts that tradition: Descartes "assumed the reality of the external world on the strength of God's guarantee when, in reverse, he proved the existence of the world only from the existence and veracity of God: it is the reverse of the cosmological proof."

4. Descartes, Meditationes I par. 2; Oeuvres, ed. Adam and Tannery, vol. 7, p. 17: "... non minus accurata ab illo qua non plane certa sunt atque indubitata, quam ab aperte falsae assensionem esse cohibendi..."

5. Descartes, Principia Philosophiae, part I, principle 6: "Sed interin a quoniamque tandem simum, et quantitatis ille (sc. originis nostrae auctoris) sit potens, quantitatis fallacem, hanc nihilominus in nobis libertatem esse experimemus, ut semper ab ipsis credamus, quas non plane certa sunt et explorata, possimus abstinerem; atque ita caverem, ne unquam erreremus." In the contradiction between mens finita and potentia infinita, the evidence of freedom has precedence over all other ideas: "... libertatis autem et indifferentiae, quae in nobis est, non at its conscio esse, ut nihil sit, quod evidens et perfectius comprehendamus" (part I, principle 41).

6. W. Kamlah, "Der Anfang der Vernunft bei Descartes—autobiographisch und historisch," Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie 45 (1961):76. According to Kamlah, Descartes gained from this only assimilated his conception of the res cogitans to his understanding of the res extensa secondarily and that the turning (stylized as illumination) that occurred in the overheated room in the Bavarian winter quarters at Neuberg is only the transition (elevated to its height) of a dialogical stimulus to an act of authenticity that is intended to be exemplary. "That in principle any man 'could' find, prepare, and traverse the whole path of science does not mean that anyone really could do that—but it seduces one into this illusion that Descartes understood what was more, it achieves this seduction by means of an enormous egocentric prejudice" (loc. cit., p. 84).


8. Descartes, Meditationes I par. 9; Oeuvres, ed. Adam and Tannery, vol. 7, p. 20: "Verumtamen infima quaedam est esse meint venit et opina, Deum esse qi potest omnia..." The position of Descartes' proof of God's existence in his overall argument becomes clearer when one observes that it is not the end whose existence needs to be proved; the ontological argument from the concept of God's indispensability because what is at stake there is more than mere existence: it is a specific attribute.

9. This pretended spontaneity is taken at its word when one charges Descartes with having "made man independent through the power of ratio, having torn him out of the links that, in the totality of his spiritual [geistlichen] relations, gave him peace in the being that was more powerful than him."

10. Verumtamen infima quaedam est esse meint venit et opina, Deum esse qi potest omnia... In the Quaestio Concerning Technology, trans. William Lovitt (New York and London: 1971), pp. 159–140—original edition: Holzweg (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1956), pp. 91–92.—"Descartes' interpretation of what it is to be and of truth first creates the presupposition underlying the possibility of a theory of knowledge or a metaphysics of knowledge... With the interpretation of man as substantia, Descartes creates the metaphysical precondition of the anthropology to come... Descartes can be overcome only through the overcoming of that which he himself founded..."

11. Meditationes III par. 4; Oeuvres, ed. Adam and Tannery, vol. 5, p. 36: "... aliquem Deum talium natura indire ponisse, ut etiam circa illa decipere, quae manifestissima videretur..."

12. Thomas Aquinas, Summa theologica I q. 76: a. 5: "Ursum animae intellectiva convenienter tali corpore unitatem. The special concern here is with the objection that it necessarily follows from the materiality of the body that the instrument of the soul is mortal: 'Si quis vero dicat, quod deus ponat hanc res inuestium visum, dicamendum est quod in constitutione rerum naturalium non consideretur quod deus faceret posse, sed quod naturse rerum convenisset...'' But the lack of viability of the argument of conformity conventiential in the Christian context can be seen in the way in which in paradise, according to theology, the body that is mortal 'by nature' immediately had restored to it—"non per naturam, sed per gratias divinae donum—the immortality that it had just lost."
18. William of Ockham, *Commentary on the Sentences* (B. S. 4), 1, q. 1, a. 1, c. 3 (citato per A. Maier, *Das Problem der Evidenzen*, p. 194). “... claudere de evidentia sequentium quod sit conditionata vel ex suppositione syllogicat strane dei influentes generalis et causae naturae soluto nullaque facio miracului talis (en. examinans semel falli) possunt esse nobilissimum evidenteria, sic quid de ipsis non habemus rationalius dubitare. Probatur hoc quia strane dei influentes etc. non stat talia nobis apparere et non sic esse, unde quamvis talis apparentia posses esse ipso obiectis non existentibus perspectum dei absolutum, tamen propter hoc non habemus rationalius dubitare. Nam ex hoc multa inconveniuntur et absurba sequentialur. ... sequitur sequentium quod non possit sufficientibus inferri ex una re alla nec ex cause possit consequi effectus nec contra, et sic percipient omnes demonstrationes naturales.”

19. Peter of Ailly, *Commentary on the Sentences* (B. S. 4), 1, q. 1, a. 1, c. 3 (citato per A. Maier, *Das Problem der Evidenzen*, p. 194). “... motum esse est supponendum a naturali (en. philosophia) tamquam principium cogitionis, et ideo negare motum casus est destruire scientiam naturalis: nec cum negare motum esse habet philosophum naturalis locum.”


22. This thesis also stands on the *list of errors* (article 28), though in a more cautious formulation: “... propter probabiliter potest sustineri cognitionem vel volitionem non esse distinctam ab anima, immo quod est ipsa anima. Et sic sustineor, non oblongo negare propositionem per se notam nec negare aliud, auctoriensem admittunt.”

23. Jean de Mirecourt, *Apologia I* (ed. F. Stegmüller) opp. 45: “Secundum namque (ac opinione) liberos dicere si auderem. Eligite student quos volunt!” In the *Apologia II*, prop. 14, he says he was not speaking of the *potentia absoluta* when he discussed this question: “... alius sensus est, quod de potentia dei absoluta, et de hoc nihil dixi.” However, this is a defensive assertion that is entirely inconsistent with the argumentation that was given. Were, on the contrary, the consideration which I have described as pragmatic—that of the unfitness (insequentium) of the impossibility of certainty—appears, it necessarily amounts to the assumption of the *potentia ordinata*, that is, the assumption that God leaves it up to the things to take their own course. “... sensatio exterior posses causare occultum vel non causare, perier omnia certudo ... sensatio exterior posses conservari naturaliter sine obiecitur, perier omnia certudo ... itinera certificat ... itinera exterior posses conservari naturaliter sine obiecitur.”

24. Jean Buridan, *Quaestiones super libris quattuor de caelo et mundo* 1 q. 17, ed. E. A. Moody (Cambridge, MA: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1942, par. 79: “Vox credo quod non sit possible aliquem ex eorum proportionari potentiae diviniae propter infinitatem illius potentiae.” Buridan takes up the problem again in quostio 122: “Ursum sit dare maximum in quod potentia potest.” In regard to the question whether God could move the heavens more rapidly than they actually move, Buridan considers what Aristotle would have said (par. 99: “The answer: There is an appropriate speed for the motions of the heavens, and this is exactly what is conferred on the spheres by the prime mover. This very accurately conjectured ancient answer conflicts with the nominalist principle of the insurmountable comparative, of which, to be sure, Buridan asserted that although it would not have been acknowledged by Aristotle, nevertheless it is logically subsidiary to his system (sciem autem secundum Aristotelis).” The distinction between what Aristotle would have said and what he would have ‘had to say’ is instructive in what it shows us of the conscious distance of nominalism from the reception of antiquity, even if it is falsely made in this case.


26. Thomas Aquinas, *In Aristotelis libros De causis et mundis II*, lectio 17 n. 450-451; ed. Splatan (Turin: Marletti, 1955), pp. 225f. “... tentum debemus dicere circa istas dubitationes id quod nobis videtur; ita scilicet quod nos reputemus digam esse quod promptitudo hominibus considerendis himmodi questionis, magis debemus impasti verosimiliter, idest honestati vel mo-
Chapter 5

1. Nicholas Copernicus, De revolutionibus orbium coelestium. Praefatio ad Paulum III.

2. Descartes, Principe philosophiae, part 1, no. 28.

3. Descartes, Principe philosophiae, part 5, no. 1.

4. Descartes, Principe philosophiae, part 3 no. 2. The premise of anthropocentrism is admirable, however, as a preoccupation of practical philosophy. "Quantum enim in Ethiscit sit pium dicere, omnis a Deo praperer non facta esse." That which for the Physica consideratio has to be characterized as plane ridiculum et inspexit, has its place in the practical relation to the world, and indeed not only in the ethical sense but also as the principle of the universal right to the use of nature, the rebus extra nos ut fuerit. As the subordinate of human intentions—this is, in its materialization—nature has a service function, which because of the unknowability of pregiven ends is freed of any obligatory restriction.

5. Descartes, Principe philosophiae, part 3, nos. 15-19: "...ipsaque (ac hypothesin) tantum pro hypothesi, non pro rei veritate haberet velim" (no. 19).

6. Descartes, Principe philosophiae, part 5, no. 20.


8. Descartes, Principe philosophiae, part 3, nos. 44,45; part 4, nos. 204,205.

9. Descartes, Gegen, ed. Adam and Tannery, vol. 9, p. 128: "... car si cela se trouve, elle ne sera pas moins utile à la vie que si elle est vrai, parce qu'on en pourra servir en mesure façon pour disposer les causes naturelles à produire les effets qu'on désirera.

10. J. Chr. F. Echeleben, Anfänge der Naturlehre 18, section 759. Lichtenberg, who edited and made additions to the work beginning with its third edition (Göttingen: 1784), left this section unchanged.

11. Robert Boyle (1626-1691), quoted in J. Meier, Robert Boyle's Natural Philosophy (Cambridge, 1907), p. 12 (translated into English). Compare Heinrich Oldenburg's letter to Spinoza of April 8, 1668, Correspondence of Spinoza, trans. A. Wolf (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1920), p. 118: "... that he has made use of the Epicurean principles, which will have it that motion is innate in the particles; for it was necessary to use some Hypothesis to explain the Phenomena;..."