Schmalenbach on Standing Alone before God

A Philosophical Case-Study
in Ontologico-Historical Understanding

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ABSTRACT   This article explores the clarificatory potential of a specific way of approaching philosophical problems, centered on the analysis of the ways in which philosophers treat the relationship between ontological and historical forms of commitment. Its distinctive feature is a refusal to begin from any premises that might be considered "ontologistic" or "historicistic." Instead, the relative status of the two forms of commitment is left open, to emerge in the light of more specific inquiries themselves. In this case the topic in question is furnished by an essay from the early twentieth century German philosopher Herman Schmalenbach, entitled "Der Genealogie der Einsamkeit" (somewhat problematically translated as "On Lonesomeness"). The aim is to show how the import of Schmalenbach's historico-philosophical treatment of certain features arguably central to the spiritual practices and religious beliefs of Christianity can be more effectively grasped when approached in these terms. The first part provides an overview of the key points of Schmalenbach's essay, while the second presents some conceptual-analytic considerations as a basis for exploring relations between ontological and historical forms of commitment as these figure in his text. Some possible broader implications for Christianity and its relationship to modern society are then also briefly sketched.

KEYWORDS   Christianity; Einsamkeit; genealogy; historicality; ontologicality; Schmalenbach, Herman

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1. Schmalenbach's "On Lonesomeness" (*Die Genealogie der Einsamkeit*)

a. Introduction

The German philosopher Herman Schmalenbach is best known for his contribution to the wide-ranging debates that took place in the first half of the twentieth century in the context of German social philosophy, over the significance of Ferdinand Tönnies' distinction between "community" (*Gemeinschaft*) and "society" (*Gesellschaft*).[1] Schmalenbach's contribution, apart from being concerned with determining the implications of that distinction for wider issues pertaining to the social constitution of human life (previously raised by thinkers such as Durkheim and Simmel), sought to explore the deeper social and spiritual significance of connections between these concepts and the features proposed by Max Weber as distinctive of modernity with respect to its historical provenance and problematic character.

Acknowledgment of Schmalenbach's own contribution to these debates has, until now, focused almost exclusively on points made in the course of his arguments in favor of introducing a third conceptual category, that of "communion" (*Bund*).[2] This was intended to stand alongside Tönnies' two basic terms, and thus to enrich the conceptual foundations of the theoretical framework the latter had sought to establish. More specifically, though, it was also meant to shed light on the purportedly explanatory connections involved in Max Weber's controversial thesis, to the effect that the emergence in the West of a distinctive form of culture associated with modern capitalism could be traced back, in some sort of historically explanatory way, to an antecedent development—this being the evolution of certain strands of Protestant Christianity into a particular kind of

1. See Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, trans. Charles P. Loomis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Originally published in German as *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Leipzig: Fues, 1887).

2. See Herman Schmalenbach, "Communion—A Sociological Category," trans. Gregory P. Stone, in Herman Schmalenbach, *On Society and Experience*, ed. and trans. Günther Lüschen and Gregory P. Stone (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 64–125. This article will hereafter be referred to as *CSC*, while the aforementioned volume will hereon be designated using the abbreviation *OSE*. The article in question has also been published in an abridged English translation by Kaspar D. Naegele and Gregory P. Stone, as "The Sociological Category of Communion," in *Theories of Society*, vol. 1, eds. Talcott Parsons, Kaspar D. Naegele, Edward Shils, et al. (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), 331–47. Originally published in German as "Die Soziologische Kategorie des Bundes," in *Die Dioskuren: Jahrbuch für Geisteswissenschaften* 1 (1922): 35–105.

religiously motivated way of life that, according to Weber, exhibited the defining characteristics of an ascetic sect.[3]

In these contexts, the primary significance of Schmalenbach's concept of "communion" was that it amounted to the positing of a further, altogether distinctive category with respect to social ties, groupings, and togetherness, whose cohesive character was taken to be constituted in the first instance neither by an organically evolved mode of everyday collective practical existence, with its embedded (and presumably dependent) beliefs, customs, rituals, and so forth (*Gemeinschaft*), nor through civic agreement on how issues of coexistence between individuals are to be contractually resolved through mutual recognition and normative consensus (*Gesellschaft*). Instead, according to its author, it emerges from the *bare fact* of its protagonists' having undergone a shared affective experience of a certain kind: an experience of collectively felt emotion, brought about by factors that, to the extent that they are amenable to being cultivated at all, are pursued just for the sake of the particular sort of social and interpersonal cohesion which only this collective experience of feeling makes possible.

Schmalenbach went on to argue that the form of ascetic religiosity considered by Weber to have played an essential formative role in the emergence of the modern middle-class cultural mind-set central to capitalism is an instance of precisely this category of social cohesiveness. What has gone unnoticed, however, is that elsewhere Schmalenbach also elaborated his own distinctive account of the philosophico-spiritual origins, evolution, and significance of this same ascetic strain within Protestant Christianity, along with its "communion-based" social character—in the essay "On Lonesomeness" (*Die Genealogie der Einsamkeit*) which is to be considered here.[4] That this has not been duly noted is to be regretted, as what

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3. See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London; Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1930). Originally published in German as *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1920).

4. Herman Schmalenbach, "On Lonesomeness," in *OSE*, 137–54. This article will hereafter be referred to as *OL*. Originally published as a journal article entitled "Die Genealogie der Einsamkeit" in *Logos* 8 (1919). (Page numbers from the latter will also be given here, in square brackets.) This is the only English translation so far available, which is unfortunate as it not only involves substantial abridgments, even omitting in some cases key passages of Schmalenbach's original text, but is also highly unsatisfactory as a translation—particularly from the point of view of grasping the philosophical issues at stake. From this point of view, even their translation of the key term "Einsamkeit" as "lonesomeness" is highly misleading, given its connotations in contemporary American English, which suggest some sort of rather sentimental mood. The general problem with Lüschen and Stone's translations

Schmalenbach has to say about the matter is significant not only by virtue of its intrinsic interest, combined with the exceptional scope and richness of the author's treatment of the historical, cultural, and philosophical issues it raises (and their associated phenomenological and psychological aspects), but also because it suggests that this particular "communion-character" itself has a deep and complex history, both with respect to its sources specifically within Christianity and more generally.

As will emerge in due course, the account in question, when considered from a conceptual-analytical perspective, is not without problems: above all, it raises a set of questions about what background assumptions we should think of ourselves as being entitled to make with respect to the relative status of ontological and historical forms of commitment. Moreover, as I hope to show in due course, there is reason to think that a conceptual clarification of these more far-reaching issues may prove helpful for grasping the import of Schmalenbach's text. And this, in turn, may furnish a basis for thinking of such a process of clarification as constituting a philosophical *case-study* of sorts: a study dedicated to determining, with reference to a given more or less specific domain of concern, what sort of clarification ensues when all general assumptions and prejudices concerning the relative priority of ontological forms of commitment on the one hand, and historical forms of commitment on the other, are suspended pending the actual findings of the domain-specific investigation in question.

b. The Structure and Thematic Content of Schmalenbach's Essay
Schmalenbach's essay can be divided into five sections, each loosely corresponding to a distinct sub-topic within the overall area of the author's

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of Schmalenbach is that the translators pursue a policy of linguistic "domesticization" (i.e., seeking loosely equivalent, but idiomatic and familiar, expressions in the target language at the expense of capturing the form and structure of meaning present in the original source-language text) to the point that it becomes hard to discern the author's original intentions. (I shall, of course, seek to clarify and mitigate many of the resulting difficulties in the course of my ensuing commentary on Schmalenbach's text here.) On the other hand, the fact that this is the only translation available, with the central term "lonesomeness" appearing in its title, means that from the point of view of fostering a wider discussion of Schmalenbach's ideas, it makes practical sense, at least for the moment, to continue to use the term. However, outside of direct quotations from Lüschen and Stone's translation, I will place it in quotation-marks, in order to indicate its status here as a mere placeholder for the perspicuous translation that it still awaits. Owing to these considerations, in the present article reference will be made, where appropriate, directly to the original German text, with all references to the English translation also cross-referenced to it.

concern.[5] The first considers the relationship between "lonesomeness" understood in positive and negative terms, respectively. The next offers some general remarks concerning its relationship to certain developments in Western philosophy. The third focuses on Antiquity, taking in not only the cultural mind-set of the Greeks in its various phases of social, artistic, and intellectual development, but also early Christianity. Next comes a discussion of its relation to the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Lutheran Reformation. Finally, we are presented with an account of the distinctive form that the experience of "lonesomeness" takes in our modern epoch—one centered on its origins in Calvinism, but also taking in such historical figures as Rembrandt, Frederic the Great of Prussia, and—last but not last—Nietzsche. I shall first give a brief summary of each of these.

Schmalenbach begins his treatment of the topic with a discussion of the negative character that we intuitively tend to associate with the experience of "lonesomeness," understood loosely as the feeling of being estranged from one's surroundings.[6] There is, he points out, an obvious contrast with our seemingly primeval sense that the natural way for humans to be is to exist in a state of experienced unity, both with our natural surroundings and (through identification with a close-knit social community) with our fellow human beings (*OL*, 137–8 [62–3]). Given that this is so, it might initially appear as though the experience of estrangement could only be properly thought of as a passing psychological effect, occurring in response to contingently arising external factors. Yet the author goes on to note that even for human beings understood at this level, it is possible to have a powerful and emotionally profound experience associated with one's being alone, either in general terms or in some more specific way—one that nevertheless seems quite independent of one's actual and particular

5. These sections are marked off as such, and given separate titles, in the abridged English translation by Lüschen and Stone referred to here, but in fact there are no corresponding formal divisions in the original German text. Hence they would be more accurately referred to as more or less distinct phases of a single continuous exposition. To be sure, such a division only captures the organizational contours of the essay on the crudest of historico-philosophical levels, yet given the sheer complexity and richness of the ideas being unfolded, it may prove helpful to readers as an initial point of entry into Schmalenbach's text.

6. Schmalenbach uses the German term "Fremdheitsgefühl," which Lüschen and Stone translate as "alienation." However, I myself consider "estrangement" a better translation, given its more spiritual resonances, and because it discourages readers from associating the concept too readily with certain more familiar uses of the term "alienation" in modern social thought—notably in Marxist theorizing.

circumstances. (Such circumstances, he states, may even point in the opposite direction, as when one is in the company of close friends.) In such cases, the experience, which can be intense to the point of being terrifying, seems to come directly from one's very soul, and to be something quite other than a mere *response* to the circumstances in which one happens to find oneself:

> This feeling is not determined by external conditions; it floods spontaneously out of one's very soul and, because of this, does not have, as does "acciden-tal" lonesomeness, the character of the transitory. Lonesomeness is suddenly realized in its essence as an experience appearing in one's consciousness, at times briefly and at times for long periods. Where it is fundamental and, so to speak, essential, it lives permanently in the form of all experiences coloring subconsciousness. . . . This lonesomeness, even if it is not experientially per-manent, has as part of its very character a trait of permanence—something that may consciously appear, disappear, and reappear—a fundamental con-dition which persists forever, and can at best be awakened by external circumstances though it can never be created by them.[7]

This, according to Schmalenbach, calls into question the initial charac-terization of "lonesomeness" as a negation of one's natural state of unity with others and with the world around one. Instead, what the aforemen-tioned experience implies is that "[t]rue lonesomeness occurs despite such natural externalities and is realized only in one's soul. It is, however, pos-itive, because it is more than merely a sense of something missing" (*OL*, 139 [63]). The perception that it corresponds to a *lack* of something (i.e., of something external, or of involvement with absent others) marks, accord-ing to Schmalenbach, a failure to see its grounding in the positive charac-ter of the "I" itself. Hence, "the negative tone of lonesomeness is aroused in the process of emergence into consciousness; it is not basic or funda-mental. In contrast, the positive origin [in the subconscious] bespeaks the true and genuine character of lonesomeness."[8]

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7. *OL*, 138–9 [63]. As is made clear elsewhere, in his essay on the category of "commu-nion" (*Bund*), the notion of "subconsciousness" (*Unterbewusstseins*) functions in a rather specific way for Schmalenbach, which must be distinguished from its more familiar use in psychoanalytical discourse (*CSC*, 258, note 6).

8. *OL*, 139 [63]. Schmalenbach also states that "[t]he soul is on a permanent quest for social cohesion or sharing, although failure of such a quest is foreordained by the fact that one soul can never totally assume the role of any other," and seeks to distinguish "real lonesomeness" from profound states of mourning and self-preoccupation, whose depth of

Schmalenbach nevertheless acknowledges that for "lonesomeness" to be in play at all as an intelligible *form* exhibited by our encounters with ourselves as individuals, a certain cultural situation must already be in place—one amenable to the emergence of "such an individual single-soul feeling" (*OL*, 140 [64]). The positive aspect whose priority he seeks to emphasize thus calls out to be related to a number of different areas of concern: especially, *inter alia*, the issue of the origins and significance of individuality and individualism (in Western civilization), and connections between these and subjectivism. His intention, though, is to largely leave these to be explored elsewhere,[9] and to concentrate just on the *situational* aspect just highlighted, where this is understood as comprising matters pertaining to the intellectual-spiritual context and grounding of "lonesomeness" itself, along with any historical and cultural-philosophical questions prompted by the investigation of this. Even so, for this to make sense, it is necessary that he first consider the general contours of the relationship between "lonesomeness" and certain strictly philosophical currents prevalent within Western culture. In so doing, he aims to make clear just why it is that, in his view, we would be mistaken, were we to think it possible to shed real light on the former by invoking no more than its relations to the latter. That set of auxiliary concerns brings him to the second phase of his treatment of the topic.

According to Schmalenbach, it is indeed tempting to see a parallel between the apparent emergence of "lonesomeness" as a distinctively modern sort of experience and the seemingly quite new conception of the Cartesian ego that marked the starting point of modern philosophy, and which—to paraphrase his own characterization—transposes unmediated reality into the sphere of the individual consciousness, leaving everything else to be inferred from that (*OL*, 141 [65–6]). This, he says, has the seeming attraction of allowing us to translate the experience of "lonesomeness" into something more concrete—a kind of move that naturally carries a certain appeal if one is engaged in "philosophy construed as a metaphysical conceptual scheme" (*OL*, 141 [66]). At the same time, the Cartesian ego, he states, is defined by its relationship to the Cartesian methodology of doubt, relative to which it really just performs the role of a limit-concept. Furthermore, it is predated in antiquity by the subjectivistic theory of value preferences, and the perception-based metaphysics of the individual soul, of the sophists.

negative feeling may make them impervious to the comforts of fellowship, art or religious faith (*OL*, 139–40 [64]).

9. See Herman Schmalenbach, "Individualität und Individualismus," *Kantstudien* 24 (1920).

Schmalenbach, though, rejects the idea that either the absolute scepticism of the sophists or the methodological scepticism of Descartes could be adduced as a plausible basis for the overall "single-soul feeling" that must be regarded as a precondition for "lonesomeness" itself:[10]

> The sophists lived only after the original experience; experiencing it afterward, they used it for their own ends. Skepticism is not a wellspring. It is simply something one can turn around as an argument for the separateness of the soul. It follows subjectivism, but both are, first of all, completely independent of one another. They are autochthonous, although the repetitive historical conjuncture of both may signal the fact that they are in a common intellectual situation. Both are the expression of this situation.[11]

Having established to his satisfaction that it is this broader situation that ought to constitute the focus of interest, Schmalenbach embarks on the remaining phases of his discussion. In these, he sets out a chronologically ordered account of the development of Western culture in respect of those features that, on his broad construal of what is required for an understanding of "lonesomeness," count as most relevant and illuminating. Schmalenbach first notes a number of important precursor-elements of the subjectivism of the single-soul feeling that are observable in the period of antiquity and early Christianity. In Antiquity there was, above all, the shift from epic to lyric manifested in the time of disturbances affecting the Homeric world in the seventh century BC, the emergence of the individual who is tragically isolated from the cosmos by events in Sophocles, and the affirmation of an ideal of the separation of the subject associated with the historical figure of Socrates—as "separated . . . from all ties of tradition . . . and alone with truth in itself" (*OL*, 145 [77–8]). Nevertheless, such elements could not be taken up or developed by Plato or Aristotle:

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10. *OL*, 142 [67]. There is insufficient space here to properly present Schmalenbach's reasons here, except to say that he takes the linkage between "lonesomeness" and the subjectivism that encourages the association with scepticism to lie at the level of an *affective* rather than a *merely* cognitive subjectivism. A central part of his thought here is that this is sufficient to distance it from the sophists, while at the same time this same "lonesomeness" can, on his reading, only be linked to early-Enlightenment scepticism if the latter is viewed from a standpoint already colored by a knowledge of later, more complex philosophical and cultural developments. Hence, what the apparent linkage really reflects are the historical connections obtaining with that which only emerged subsequently (*OL*, 142–3 [67–70]).

11. *OL*, 143 [70]. The German is somewhat more specific here, asserting that "beide in einer gemeinsamen geistiger Gesamtsituation, deren Ausdruck beide dann sind, verwurzelt sein dürften."

> Plato's great soul was, first of all, oriented towards participation, if not in the state or in the realm of the state, then in the objective and rich, enormously elaborated life of ideas. Aristotle was too much imbedded [sic] in the organically created, in the effects in and of material. (*OL*, 146 [79])

Instead, "[t]he religious yearnings of the time finally found their fulfillment in Christianity, where the feeling and consciousness of the single soul were bared" (*OL*, 146 [80]). But this, he emphasizes, cannot be reduced to a concern with recognizing the eternal value of the human soul. It rather reflects something more specific in its significance:

> if not in the teachings and preachings of Jesus, then from the tone of the evangelical accounts (particularly among the Synoptics) and also from Jesus' first historical impact, once can indeed recognize the peculiar, most puzzling emergence and blossoming of something unique—the reality of soul, that is, singular soul—which was never previously acknowledged. (Ibid.)

He also discerns traces of the single-soul feeling in ancient Judaism, with its remote and bodiless monotheistic god. According to Schmalenbach, this religion originally had, as its very essence, the social traits distinctive of what he calls a "communion" (*Bund*):[12]

> This was not only a communion, as usually understood, between selected people and god [sic], but also and particularly a communion among men who were united in their avowal of this one god. The separation of the leader, who is permitted to face or at least hear god on a mountain, apart from the others, does not mean intrinsic nearness to but distance from god.[13]

On the other hand, "lonesomeness," he states, also manifests itself as nearness to God, in the form of Christ's prayer on the cross,[14] and this marks a radically new development for Schmalenbach: the "lonesome" *prayer*.

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12. See the discussion of this concept above.

13. *OL*, 146–7 [81]. The decision of Lüschen and Stone not to capitalize the term "god" in their translation is misleading, since Schmalenbach does not in fact write here from the position of someone overtly committed to a sceptical rejection of religious claims (e.g., about the existence of the deity), even if he tends to approach religious matters from a perspective that treats their significance as being profoundly dependent on an acknowledgment of their historico-cultural situatedness.

14. "My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46, KJV).

Lonesomeness in prayer and lonesomeness before death mean the same, because death is not only an obedient acceptance of a destiny fashioned by god, but also positive submergence in god, as in the death of Socrates, and Sophocles' Antigone, whose deaths were not only mere submission to the law. (*OL*, 147 [81–2])

In the context of Schmalenbach's overall account, the importance of this lies in its enabling us to observe a point of connection linking the various strands previously mentioned, evidenced at a stage *historically prior* to the ensuing institutional synthesis of Christian and Graeco-Roman elements to form official "state-church" Christianity—out of which evolved the medieval Catholic church. Subsequently, in the context of the "tight social structures" associated with this last, each single soul was to be "assign[ed] to an exact and predetermined position in the hierarchical system," and where "[t]his position gives essence to the soul. It is basic to the soul as such" (*OL*, 147 [82–3]).

The consequence, according to Schmalenbach, was that with medieval Christianity "the single soul merged ever more into the big roundelay of the faithful totality."[15] Even so, he notes that the vision of a lonesome soul finding itself directly exposed before God did persist over the course of the Middle Ages thanks to religious mysticism, which distanced itself from the institutional and semi-secular levels of church activity and, in the Catholic Christian context, chiefly took the form of yearning for the adoration. While both the Renaissance (Michelangelo, Leonardo) and the Reformation then furnished negations of one kind or another of the mediating status-hierarchy of the Church, it was only, in Schmalenbach's opinion, the latter, and not at all the former, that was responsible for the subsequent breaking through once more of the theme and consciousness of the single soul—once again as "non-mediating lonesomeness before god."[16]

[I]n the destruction of the church, in the destruction of the mediating principle, lies the essence of the Reformation. . . . The constant contribution of

15. *OL*, 147 [83]. The German phrase "im großen Reigen der gläubigen Gesamtheit" might perhaps be better translated as "into the great round-dance of the faithful totality."
16. *OL*, 148 [84]. One might well question this, at least if one is prepared to look beyond philosophy and the visual arts as being representative of what the Renaissance amounted to. For example, it could be argued that the figure of Shakespeare's Hamlet takes us at least some way in the direction described, albeit in an unconsummated and unfulfilled sort of way. On the other hand, some might argue that this just constitutes evidence that themes distinctive of the Reformation are already incipiently in play in his work.

antiquity to the construction of the Catholic church was quite correctly rec-
ognized as central. Moreover, the characterization of antiquity as depicting
the interdependence of the divine and the secular was also seen quite cor-
rectly. In contrast to this, the Reformation was supposed . . . to be a renewal
of original Christianity.[17]

Schmalenbach is inclined to see the historical figure of Luther as em-
bodying, more than anything else, the Protestant Reformation's rediscov-
ery of the spirit of religious "lonesomeness," and as doing so in terms that
also furnish a central point of reference for understanding the emotional
and cultural sources of "lonesomeness" more generally. In effect, he takes
the case of Luther to epitomize the essence of the experience itself.

> In profane affairs this same man [Luther], the most lonesome in his religious
> ardor, was . . . truly and sincerely sociable. . . . However, in the thick [German:
> *Glut*—my translation] of religious experience,[18] in the terrible dark night of
> the eternally sinful soul, in the sudden ecstasy of underserved mercy, Luther
> is so very alone,[19] like Christ on the cross or on the Mount of Olives—"alone
> with his god." The secular has been shed. No institution, not even of the most
> spiritual kind remains; no friends are left. Only the shivering, freezingly
> anxious, freezingly blessed, single soul is there before god.
>   In this all-encompassing formula, "with one's god alone," we have clar-
> ified in full measure, far beyond Luther, every development of the feeling
> of the single soul. . . . The positive nature of "being alone with one's god"
> creates the genuine lonesomeness of the really individual soul.[20]

Rather than seeing religious mysticism (in the sense of an absolutely
unmediated encounter of the individual with God) as Nietzsche did, as an
outcome of the conjunction of scepticism with a yearning for the other-

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17. Ibid. In the same passage we can read that "it [the Renaissance] did not recognize
the 'lonesomeness' of the soul. Nowhere in the Renaissance does a lonesome soul stand
miserably and silently before the dreadfulness or the sweetness of the infinity to which it
would surrender itself. The present is its primary sphere, and it is here that it passionately
enjoys life."

18. In their translation, Lüschen and Stone simply transpose "Glut" into its nearest-
sounding English equivalent, "glut," which is surely grossly inappropriate here inasmuch
as it signifies a negative excess of something.

19. In fact the original German is significantly stronger here, speaking as it does of
Luther's being "endlessly" or "infinitely" alone ("[D]a ist Luther so unendlich allein," *OL*,
149 [84]).

20. *OL*, 149 [84–5].

worldly that implies a this-worldly lack (so that a constitutive negativity can then be imputed to mysticism), Schmalenbach declares that such mysticism itself provides the positive founding element in relation to scepticism and the other-worldly yearning that Nietzsche associates with it: "The mystic view and mystic union with god are certainly primary. Scepticism is the vehicle [German: *Vehikel*—my translation]."[21]

Schmalenbach, in taking the case of Luther as representative, portrays the experience of being "alone with god" as having the form of an intensifying religious encounter, whose unfolding can, at the same time, strike one as deeply self-contradictory. First there comes a process of detaching the inner core of one's affective being from all engagement with the outer sphere of everyday worldly concerns, where the sense of isolation that results from doing so engenders a heightened sense of one's own empirical status as an individually existing self. Then, as one waits with one's soul thus laid bare (in its separated existence, which one only now experiences fully—albeit only temporarily), there arises a sudden development in quite the opposite direction, in the form of an experienced dissolution of individuality and the boundaries of self into the eternal. Finally, in a still further deepening of its self-contradictory character, one reengages with the very sphere of outer-worldly concern that one had previously been at pains to put behind one, except that this time this sphere itself shows up as permeated by a new and special quality of spirituality, a light infused with the presence of soul, as if it were itself now standing in and reflecting the unmediated presence of God. At this point, Schmalenbach notes, we observe a restoration of some sort of primal relationship to one's surroundings, with all of reality appearing animated, much as one would expect, given the close connections between pantheism and mysticism. Moreover, from here on one finds that in respect of one's interactions with others, maintaining a state of "lonesomeness" now serves

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21. *OL*, 150 [86]. Lüschen and Stone translate "Vehikel" as "mediator," but this surely conveys something that would be more appropriate to the formulation by Nietzsche that Schmalenbach is seeking to reject here. Translating it word-for-word as "vehicle," on the other hand, keeps in play the implication of the original text, to the effect that the mystical may in certain contexts show or express itself *through* (or *as*) philosophical scepticism of one sort or another, without entailing a relation of co-dependency with the latter. In one of the untranslated passages (ibid., 1919: 86), Schmalenbach also seems to suggest that independently of whether or not we are prepared to assert that the scepticism of the sophists was grounded in some sort of single-soul feeling (of the kind operative within "lonesomeness" itself), that single-soul feeling, which certainly did ground some of the more subjectivistically motivated forms of scepticism, definitely itself had its origins in religious mysticism.

to ensure one's openness to the continued experience of this "transfigur-ing all-soulfulness."[22] A significant aspect of this, in turn, is that we have reason to think that cooperation between the faithful in the original Christian communities—where, according to Schmalenbach, some such "lone-someness" would most certainly have been present as a feature of religious practice—brought with it exceptionally strong feelings of closeness towards others, whose particular quality and intensity would not have been known to any other social grouping present in late Antiquity.[23]

Schmalenbach observes that the experience of an unexpected dissolution of the individualized self into the eternal, and of a renewed and transfigured closeness to others following in the wake of this, also naturally reveal themselves to be closely intertwined with human eschatological concerns (which, where personal mortality is concerned, are presumed to involve a final reckoning as one faces death).[24] What is most significant though, is that the phenomenology of the whole experience is taken to necessitate a revision in how "lonesomeness" itself was previously conceptualized, where this will turn out to bring with it important consequences for our understanding of its relationship to the social, cultural, and spiritual developments distinctive of modernity:

> The complete union, the blessed self-sacrifice, self-devotion, harmony in god or death even up to the point where the soul is most alone, show that lone-someness . . . is only a time span, whether of short or long duration, a time span where the soul, in which both eternity and this-worldliness reign, tran-scends the one through the other. . . .
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>   With this we have found the determinants of experienced lonesomeness that contradict the earlier, although provisional, qualifications. Lonesome-ness was conceived [before] as a permanent condition and something es-

22. *OL*, 150 [86–8]. Schmalenbach offers a richly characterized and vivid account of the psychological and phenomenological features distinctive of Luther's experience insofar as the latter is to be considered representative of the religious experience that, for him, constitutes the real source of genuine "lonesomeness." Indeed, from the point of view of the intensity of the description, these passages emerge as the high-point of the essay, making it all the more regrettable (and incomprehensible) that they are mostly omitted from the abridged translation by Lüschen and Stone.

23. Of Luther himself, Schmalenbach writes here that "[He] was granted relationships by the very fact of his being reconciled with God, so one sees in the central religious experi-ence . . . an unutterably touching tone of intimacy, cordial openness and, often, tenderness, that is a distinctive feature of Luther and Lutheranism" (ibid.).

24. Ibid., 1919: 88.

sential [in relation to the affected soul]. . . . Now our fundamental thesis is
that it is a basically transitory state. (*OL*, 150 [88])

At the same time, Schmalenbach regards this experience as containing
within itself the possibility of a certain kind of suspension: the arrival at
"lonesomeness," where this is grasped as being antecedent to some fur-
ther stage of unfolding of the experience, is tantamount to entering upon
a state where emotional intensity feeds of the fact of one's being in a con-
dition of waiting, and this transitional condition can, for the sake of its
sheer intensity, itself be held onto, so that instead of being followed by
an experienced dissolution of self into the eternal, it is rendered quasi-
permanent, and the possibility of dissolution is paradoxically transformed
into a searching, intense restlessness.[25]

Here, it seems, we may already perhaps be encountering the conditions
preparatory (in historical terms) for what Schmalenbach takes to be a dis-
tinctive further shift in the significance of "lonesomeness"—one charac-
teristic of the transition to modern times, whose analytical clarification
represents a task that is crucial from the standpoint of his broader so-
cial concerns (at least as regards the issues mentioned in the introduction
to this section). There are two aspects to this change, corresponding to
two sequentially distinct phases. The first is associated with the internal
religio-spiritual logic exhibited by Calvinism during the period of its flour-
ishing. The second, meanwhile, may be said to have emerged only in the
wake of that same religious movement, as a consequence of its overall
decline as a living form of Christian faith, where this decline neverthe-
less left intact some of its uniquely distinctive features, imprinted on the
structure of the societies in question in the form of largely secularized
psychological and normative cultural tendencies.[26]

Calvinism, Schmalenbach tells us, radicalized "lonesomeness" by turn-
ing it into a form of absolute and principled detachment in the service of
the ideal of "standing alone before God," and in so doing severed it from
the idea of a subsequent experience of reunification with earthly reality

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25. Ibid.

26. Such tendencies are taken by Schmalenbach to have persisted thanks to their increas-
ingly significant role as sources for the internally cohesive character of modern societies,
and their psychological and normative characteristics would, on his reading, lend them-
selves to being analyzed in terms of his own especially coined sociologically category of
"communion" (*Bund*). This, then, is the precise point where issues specific to the article
under discussion here intersect with the concerns of post-Weberian social analysis and
critique, directed towards modern societies. See *OL*, 150–1 [89–90].

tantamount to a spiritual renewal of one's essential contact with the lat-
ter. (The latter had to be rejected, as its dependence on an emotional re-
engagement with earthly reality, seen from a Calvinistic viewpoint, left
human beings vulnerable to corruptive deception by satanic forces.[27])

At the same time, this radicalization involved a significant change in
how the underlying form of the experience of "lonesomeness" was to be
understood:[28]

> Only in modern times do we really have genuine lonesomeness, consum-
> mated in the spirit of union and metaphysically concretized as an absolute.[29]
> We find this absolutistic concretization stemming from broader religious
> concerns in Calvinism. Calvinism . . . produces this unutterable alienation[30]
> and confinement not only as a transitory state, but as permanently main-
> tained, as something methodically cultivated. The extraordinary practical
> talents of the Calvinists, which made his [sic] ethics the spiritual base of all
> modern forms of economics, society, and polity, are, according to Max We-
> ber, not founded in the openness toward the world of the Catholic or even
> the Lutheran, but in innerworldly asceticism. Calvinism prohibits, as evil,
> even the slightest contact of external things with the heart, not to mention
> the soul. Asceticism prescribes only for "proof," with no internal involve-
> ment in mere externalities, and thus it commends systematically methodical
> as well as rational care. This unutterable inner distance towards things is
> even generalized to human beings. . . . If we ask the reason for this pecu-
> liar state of mind, then the answer is here again and explicitly—standing
> before god.[31]

27. *OL*, 150–1[90].
28. *OL*, 150 [88].
29. The German version of this critically important passage reads slightly differently,
speaking as it does not of a metaphysical or absolutistic *concretization*, but rather—
translated word-for-word—of a *metaphysicalizing absolutization* of "lonesomeness" ("und
ebenso metaphysifizierende Verabsolutierung der Einsamkeit"); see ibid., 1919: 89. It is the
move towards treating the experience previously conceptualized as a transitory state as,
instead, a metaphysically posited absolute, that is the focus of concern here, not any idea
of its being transferred from an ideal or other-worldly spiritual realm to a more concrete
or putatively objective one.
30. Once again, taking into account the broader context, with its focus on spiritual affairs
rather than worldly sociality, "estrangement" might be a better translation than Lüschen
and Stone's "alienation."
31. *OL*, 150–1 [89–90]. Here and elsewhere, Schmalenbach suggests that there are also
certain parallels to be noted between Calvinism and Jesuit spiritual practices. See *CSC*, 86,
and *OL*, 152 [92].

The shift from an experience that is transitory but revelatory to something systematically and deliberately cultivated and maintained brings with it a conceptual transformation of how the experience itself is to be construed: one that involves placing it back into the sphere of what are taken to be enduringly permanent features of reality, where such a move is now required in order to fulfill a necessary condition of that experience's being intelligibly invested with the ethico-religious status of an absolute (in the sense of an ultimate reference point for value). Yet, for Schmalenbach, this change brings with it certain other inseparable psychological and spiritual developments which, in turn, have a profound bearing on how we should construe its broader implications for the critical understanding of modernity. This is because

> [s]urrender to god is halted just before the moment of union. The change of the transitory, deeply fatal lonesomeness into a permanent and intentionally controlled state depends on the total disruption of the natural course of experience. In this quality of being essentially interrupted or cut off, which without doubt is a perversion of legitimate connections, we find, despite the religious reasons for the cut off, also the critique that has been advanced by history. To bar any form of religiosity other than that which was ceremoniously conducted for the honor of god had necessarily to lead to the death of that religiosity as such. This is so even if the rituals, having become ends in themselves and because of such fundamental coagulation, have also clung even more tenaciously to enduring existence. . . . The form did not die off together with its religious content, and neither did the ethos of innerworldly asceticism, which is still basic to broad areas of contemporary lifestyles. . . . And lonesomeness, the quality of the single individual soul, because of Calvinism has become a structuring factor in the whole modern texture of life, permanent and even expanding, although its religious basis has long been extinguished.[32]

This persistence beyond its own religious origins and sources of spiritual validation is also linked by Schmalenbach to the fact that "there was

32. *OL*, 151 [91]. The German original specifically picks out the modern work ethos, and the degrading of the special significance traditionally invested in friendship between men, for comment in this regard. (See ibid., 1919: 91.) The general idea that modern society, even in its most overtly capitalistic and consumeristic aspects, is founded on an underlying asceticism, was further explored, of course, in the work of the American sociologist Thorstein Veblen—particularly with his notion of "conspicuous consumption."

a curious amalgam of pantheistic tendencies drawn from other sources in Calvinism from the very beginning":

> It is essentially because of this connection that the experience of lonesomeness, which would have had to disappear with the religious downfall of Calvinism, could survive at all. Even in mere restlessness and in the wandering quest of the soul for belonging, a yearning is exemplified in the mechanized modern world, which is in need of positive nourishment. (*OL*, 152 [92])

What survived and began to disseminate itself more widely as a trait manifested in culture and the arts (notably with Rembrandt) was something whose expression, from that point on, "we meet . . . much more often, although rarely in pure form and very rarely without experiencing its negative quality, which of course is part, but only part, of lonesomeness" (*OL*, 152 [93]).

This observation, which implies a fairly precise genealogical linkage between the negativity associated with "lonesomeness" that was remarked on at the very start of his investigation, and the emergence and dissemination of a secularized and in some ways spiritually problematized form of an otherwise profoundly transformative religious experience, brings Schmalenbach to the final stage of his historical considerations. These focus almost exclusively on the figure of Frederick the Great, but are clearly meant to be exemplary of a wider phenomenon. Indeed, they can be seen as relevant to a wide range of artistic phenomena (and personalities) associated with German culture in its subsequent phases, especially as regards Romanticism, with its elevation of the artist as a heroic or quasi-heroic individual, whose art reveals him or her to be possessed of special personal traits (i.e., "greatness"):

> This negativity . . . did lead (at the very end, and in a strange turnaround as well as confirmation of the original) to a new, but no less genuine, lonesomeness. . . . The historical example is the lonesomeness of Frederic the Great [sic], in whom the disregard for mankind showed only one side, while the other was the burning and insatiable desire for prayer. (*OL*, 152 [94])

While in the case of a monarch, "lonesomeness" may appear to emerge entirely as a function of external circumstances (in this case the social isolation associated with a uniquely elevated rank), according to the author,

the external position need not, under all circumstances, be understood as originating only from without. It can have an intrinsic origin in the existential quality of the personality, which, combined with the external position, would produce lonesomeness and would thus have to be regarded as its positive origin. . . . Thus, in the case of Frederic the Great, the lonesomeness of human greatness can replace the lonesomeness of the throne. (*OL*, 153 [95])

This "lonesomeness" associated with personal greatness, according to Schmalenbach, thanks to its internal spiritual character, nevertheless transcends its connection with the (heroic) individual as someone marked out as different from others, and in this way retains its original universal character as a religio-spiritual phenomenon—one that, moreover, seems to be not at all that far removed from the aesthetic experience of the sublime that figures so importantly in Kant and the philosophical aftermath of his philosophy.

Genuine lonesomeness is so severely limited to the most profound, and simultaneously most impoverished, nakedly vulnerable kernel of the soul, that a consciousness of one's difference from others can hardly prevail. It is even reinforced by a total consciousness that all other souls are, in their ultimate core, just as impoverished, in need of help, and hardly distinguishable from one's own soul. . . . Where the lonesomeness of greatness is concerned, such greatness is built only on the fact that it confronts a newly recognized infinity without an intercessor. . . . Insignificant, inferior men will also experience their insignificance and inferiority as lonesomeness only where it becomes for them a totally ideological symbol of all humanity, as is their insignificance before god or the universe. (*OL*, 153–4 [96])

Finally, we arrive at the figure of Nietzsche. In contrast to Frederick the Great, whose lonesomeness, according to Schmalenbach, remains essentially a "lonesomeness before god" even though he did not believe in the latter, since he longed passionately to do so (*OL*, 154 [96]), that of Nietzsche marks the moment of crisis that we would expect to see erupt, "were this unqualified lack of belief to permit transcendentally oriented lonesomeness to break out with no access to the resurrection of belief." (ibid.) Even so, Schmalenbach insists,

[t]he real basis of this lonesomeness is again an immediate and different "standing before god" and not the fact that others are confronting the same god. Yet this makes the lonesomeness of Nietzsche a totally unique and a

solely negative, deeply frightening experience. God has been replaced by a complete deprivation of his divinity. The lonesomeness of Nietzsche is the lonesomeness of divine nihilism, a nothingness in which Faust also could no longer hope to find a universe.[33]

2. In Search of a Clarificatory Conceptual-Analytic Schema for Schmalenbach's Account of "Lonesomeness"

a. Preliminary Thoughts

The conceptual challenge posed by Schmalenbach's account of "lonesomeness" can, I think, be loosely summed up in a few sentences. "Lonesomeness" first showed up within mainstream Western culture (at least from the point where the latter can plausibly be understood as a more or less stable synthesis of Judeo-Christian and Graeco-Roman elements) as something that we are inclined to construe in primarily metaphysical terms: as *an enduring disposition of the soul.* Then, however, the subsequent advent of Reformation Christianity, centered as it was on the isolated individual's spiritual experience (construed both as an unmediated encounter with the Divine and as issuing forth into a new, spiritually transformed, "lived" relationship to earthly reality), demanded from its adherents a radical shift of understanding (albeit one that harked back to certain pre-Christian elements that had persisted on the fringes of mainstream Christianity). This brought with it the thought that the only way to do justice to the essential spiritual and phenomenological character of the experience in question was to characterize it as *fundamentally transitory.* And this was so, even when its significance was inseparably connected with the thought that what it brings us into contact with remains eternal and universal.

In some sense, it appears that a conceptual reversal took place. The antecedent understanding treated actual episodes of consciously felt "lonesomeness" as merely contingent occurrences within the realm of temporal experience, serving to realize the eternally present possibilities internal to an essentially metaphysico-spiritual understanding—not just of the human soul, but also of its relationship to the cosmos. But the understanding that for some believers (but not others) superseded this antecedent one made our spiritualized contact with the eternal and universal—in the

33. Ibid. The translation here is somewhat imprecise. The closing assertion of the original German actually reads thus: "Gott hier durch völlige Entgötterung ersetz: die Einsamkeit Nietzsches ist die Einsamkeit vor dem gottgewordenen Nichts, einem Nichts, in dem auch Faust nicht mehr ein All zu finden hoffen könnte."

form both of God, and of the world seen anew in the light of our encounter with Him—into something disclosed only *within* the context specifically opened up by a temporally transitory experience.

That there is a challenge to our conceptualizing capacities here is, perhaps, signaled most directly by Schmalenbach's own choice of the phrase "basically transitory state" to characterize the latter.[34] Within the context of Western metaphysics of the sort that entered into lasting association with Christianity (i.e., Plato, Aristotle, Neo-Platonism, etc.), this may well strike us as oxymoronic: after all, we would not normally seek to understand something there in terms of a distinction between what it fundamentally ("basically") *is*, and what it might be considered to correspond to above and beyond just this, where what it fundamentally is happens to be a *transitory state*. Such a formulation runs against the very innermost logic of the metaphysical tradition in question, where fundamental or essential *be*-ing is just that which we take to subsist beneath, and so confer an otherwise unobtainable intelligibility and harmony upon, changes occurring at the level at which it makes sense to talk of such states. Short of substituting a Whiteheadian or Sellarsian ontology of temporal occurrents (events, states and processes), quite alien to the whole spirit of the metaphysical culture of Christianity, for that of entities, essential natures, and beings, it would seem impossible to make metaphysical sense of such a formulation. The best we could hope for, apparently, would be to regard it as symptomatic of our having crossed the threshold into a quite different domain of concern, impervious to anything but the most paradoxical linguistic formulations and presumably inseparably intertwined with religious mysticism.

In such circumstances, faced with the possibility of such a conclusion, it surely makes sense to seek to determine whether there is some other sort of adjustment to our familiar conceptual framework that could be made, which would succeed in making more tangible sense of such a formulation. Such, at least, is the goal aimed at in the considerations that form the remaining part of this text.

b. Ontologicality and Historicality: General Conceptual-Analytic Considerations

The sort of metaphysico-spiritual understanding that allows us to talk of "lonesomeness" as an enduring disposition of the soul may, to be sure, be

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34. In the German version the corresponding phrase is "Ein dauernder Zustand." See ibid., 1919: 88.

construed in a number of different ways. This is bound to be so, given that there are, quite probably, as many distinct conceptions of what such an understanding could amount to in ultimate terms as there are positions about the theological (and / or non-theological) significance of conferring a metaphysically fundamental status on that which we intuitively designate by the term "soul."

Nevertheless, whatever version of such an understanding is embraced or favored, it cannot be denied that all plausible candidates must meet one basic condition, which can be minimally spelled out. (Such terms will, as we shall see in due course, also prove sufficient to form the minimally determined starting point for an analysis of the contrastive relation obtaining between such an understanding and that which, on Schmalenbach's account, came—for some—to supersede it.)

The basic condition in question, we might say, is that all such plausible versions of this kind of understanding possess the distinctive characteristics we associate (at least on a standard and minimally controversial reading of the term) with the thought that, when asserted as true, they correspond to commitments of the sort we call *ontological*.[35]

Ontological commitments, on such a minimal reading, *are just those commitments, of a substantive kind, of which it does not make sense to think that at any point they could change their truth value as a consequence of alterations to the body of empirical fact pertaining to reality in the light of which they are assessed as being true.*[36]

It is enough to state this to see that such commitments play a distinctive role in our engagements with our surroundings, which once again can be characterized in minimal terms by just pointing out that what they do is *frame* our understanding of the actually occurring empirically disclosed realia with which we take ourselves to be confronted.[37] For such commitments to play such a role, it is unavoidable that they should have this

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35. For the purposes of this discussion, and for reasons that should by now be self-evident, we shall assume here a *substantive*, as distinct from a merely *procedural* (in the sense of "formal-ontological"), conception of what it means for ontological commitments to obtain as true: i.e., we shall assume, at some sort of meta-ontological level, that when warranted or true, such commitments—like others—capture, in a substantive and determinate way, *how things really are*.

36. The phrase "pertaining to reality," it should be noted, does not leave room for an epistemological construal of ontologicality, of the sort that would assert that what we cannot think of as changing where ontological commitments are concerned is just our *epistemic access* to empirical facts about reality. On the contrary, it is the facts themselves, *insofar as* they function as truthmakers for ontological claims, that cannot be thought of as changing.

character, which is, essentially, the character of commitments that are at one and the same time both *substantive* and *ahistorical*. We may furthermore note that such commitments are properly thought of as being ahistorical in a way that is not potentially subject to contextual factors such as could be thought of as helping to determine which of our particular commitments count as ahistorical and which not.[38] They are intrinsically immune to historically contingent considerations, so that their purported or actual status as ahistorical commitments cannot be overridden: as such they are *radically ahistorical.*

If the notion of ontologicality requires us to think of some of our commitments as being not merely ahistorical, but radically ahistorical, then we may wonder whether some equivalent radicality-invoking qualification could be invoked in respect of commitments that are *not* ahistorical, in that their truth value is recognized to be, by its very nature, bound up with contingently determined factors or circumstances that are inherently variable over time. But if *all* we intend to denote by the word "historical" is an exclusion from the class of commitments determined to be ahistorical, it is hard to see how this could be the case. Commitments that would be "radically historical" in *that* sense would just be commitments whose truth or falsity, along with the obtaining or non-obtaining of the relevant truthmakers, counted as being *necessarily contingent.* But the idea that something is "necessarily contingent" is, if not paradoxical, then at least conceptually opaque: it involves positing contingency itself as a *necessary*

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37. More specifically, we may say that such framing consists in the gain in intelligibility or intelligible significance that accrues to our encounters with actualia when these are seen in terms of how they stand relative to a background framework of understanding—one that allows us to relate what does or does not actually happen to what can or cannot happen. There is a connection here to the use of the term "framework-proposition" to describe a certain kind of commitment performing a "grammatically" regulative role in relation to our ordinary empirico-factual commitments, encountered in discussions of Wittgenstein's notion of bedrock certainty. However, the conception of a "framework" or "framing structure" of commitment cannot be exactly the same in both instances, since such a framework is here understood to arise *within* the realm of empirico-factual commitment and its truthmakers (albeit at an unchanging level of determination), rather than beyond it.

38. In this respect, ontological commitments are clearly different from bedrock certainties of the sort proposed by the later Wittgenstein, at least as they figure in the context of his so-called "riverbed analogy." See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe and D. Paul (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), § 96–9. Whether the former are legitimately thought of as forming a more thickly/narrowly specified subset of the latter, though, is, I think, an issue worth exploring, but one which lies beyond the scope of the present article.

presence in the world, where this seems to run counter to the very point
of a framing system of commitment, be it ontological in only a loose sense
or specifically metaphysical (and / or spiritual) in its aspirations. Why? Be-
cause it is impossible to see what sort of gain in intelligibility could ever
be derived from doing so![39]

Nevertheless, this does not close down the issue, as all we did here was
seek to derive a conception of radical historicality from the concept of
radical ahistoricality by negation, and given that what interests us here
is the question of the possible relations between two profoundly differ-
ent ways of conceptualizing our spiritual and religious experience, there
is no reason to think that this is in fact an appropriate way to proceed.
(After all, it is not as if Schmalenbach seeks in any way to account for
the new understanding in terms of the thought that it somehow emerged
via a mere process of conceptual derivation or adjustment from what it
purported to have superseded.) We should rather propose, as a quite inde-
pendent point of departure, a conception of the status of the commitments
proper to the contrasting conception, and seek in that context to identify
something equivalent to the distinctions made when seeking to grasp the
nature of ontological commitments in respect of their distinctively (i.e.,
radically) ahistorical character.

Hence, if we are to understand in what sense it could make sense to
talk about a commitment as being *radically historical*, we must first put
forward the appropriate construal of historicality *per se* as it relates to
commitments of the particular sort that we are concerned to make sense
of here. This, in turn, requires us to acknowledge a feature of the model of
religious experience counterposed by Schmalenbach with the metaphys-
ical one—a feature that he, himself, fails to properly acknowledge. This is
its constitutive character as something only intelligible in *ex post factum*
terms: i.e., terms that depend for their intelligibility (or basic import) on
our being in a position to view the experience in question from the spe-
cific *temporal standpoint* associated with our having already undergone
that experience ourselves.

A historical commitment that is temporal-standpoint-dependent in this
ex post factum sense is one that can be understood to be (or not be) rad-
ical, without descending into the incoherence associated with equivalent
claims made in respect of commitments that are *just* contingent (i.e., that

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39. This is, arguably, the problem that afflicts the notion of existential "thrownness" put
forward by the Heidegger in *Being and Time*, not to mention the precursors of this in the
thought of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

are considered historically contingent regardless of whether they are also historically actual or not—as, that is, unactualized past contingencies). To say of a historical commitment of the former (actualized) kind that it is radically historical is to say that it exhibits this *ex post factum* temporal-standpoint-dependent character *intrinsically*—meaning, of course, that it does so just given what *its* particular subject matter has actually "come to be" or "amounted to," or how *it* has "turned out."

While ontological, radically ahistorical understanding has the character of a form of intelligibility associated with framing structures ("frameworks") of understanding, this *radically historical* form of understanding will, by contrast, have the character of a form of intelligibility associated with what are perceived as being the historically fixed outcomes of particular courses of events—ones typically located in the past relative to some given temporal point of reference (i.e., some "now") or other.

A complication ensues, however, once we seek to proffer specific examples of actual cases, more or less familiar or recognizable to us from our own lives and experiences, where these are meant to be illustrative in some general sort of way by functioning as representative examples of what such an alternative category—that of "the radically historical"—could or could not include. The expression "familiar or recognizable *to us*," applied to such examples, if they are indeed to count as radically historical, will have to be understood as employing the first-person-plural personal pronoun ("we," "us," etc.) in a way whose scope of reference is itself fixed by the relevance conditions dictated by this or that particular radically historical outcome. That is to say, given some such outcome, it will be appropriate to include certain persons or groups in the category of those for whom that outcome is relevant qua something radically historical, while excluding certain others. From this it follows that there can be no representative examples of what it means *generally* for something to count as radically historical, given the very meaning of the latter concept. (Put crudely, one person's radical historicality may equate to another person's non-radical historicality, and vice versa.)

To be sure, it may well seem—especially when we take into account the history of Western philosophy—that there is a clear-cut exception to this, in the form of those historical commitments that show up as necessarily internal to a generalized, *historicistic* commitment to the effect that everything, anyway, is in some sense historical through and through—for example, when seen from the perspective of some overridingly human-centered point of view such as is furnished by some varieties of philosophical idealism. This can, to be sure, have the effect of making our entire conception

of reality, and even—if we may be said to have one—of "History" itself, radically historical. Yet, for reasons that are about to be spelled out, it is worth noting that apart from arguably leading to some paradoxical formulations involving the positing of historicality itself as an ahistorically persisting feature of things, it actually trivializes the import of the notion of radical historicality—at least for our purposes.

Historicism, understood as a general commitment to viewing historical phenomena as forming the ultimate underlying level of our reality, on which all purportedly ahistorical phenomena must then depend, makes it follow as a logical entailment that whatever is absolutely fundamental to reality is also historical. (Of course, an entailment in the opposite direction, to the effect that *whatever* is historical is absolutely fundamental to reality, does not follow.) Our aim, however, is to establish a conceptual schema for making sense of the scenario recounted in Schmalenbach's essay, where a conceptualization of the soul as ahistorically fundamental is juxtaposed with a conceptualization of a historically disclosed experience—that of "standing alone before God"—whose world-transformative spiritual significance, for those who have undergone it, requires it to be conceived in terms that entail its irreducibility to any ahistorical mode of intelligibility. Hence, what we actually require is a schema relative to which certain phenomena are allowed to show up as being irreducibly, fundamentally-and-ultimately ahistorical (i.e., "ontological," in our minimal definition of this concept as expounded above), while others are permitted to show up as being irreducibly, fundamentally-and-ultimately historical.

The problem is that this would not be possible, were phenomena of the former sort (i.e., ontological ones) to presuppose, as a condition of their intelligibility, a general commitment to viewing ahistorical phenomena as forming the ultimate underlying level of our reality, on which all purportedly historical phenomena must then depend—a position sometimes referred to as "ontologism" or "ahistoricism," and which is the counterpart with respect to ahistorical commitments of what historicism is for historical ones. And neither would it be possible if phenomena of the latter sort (i.e., radically historical ones) were to presuppose historicism as a condition of their intelligibility.

Thus, for our purposes, the burden of making sense of the contrasting conceptions arising in Schmalenbach's account must be born without any explicit or implicit falling back onto generalized historicistic or ontologistic premises.[40] It must be addressed at the level of a distinction between the ontological (construed as non-ontologistically "radically ahistorical") and the radically historical (construed as non-historicistically so), where what

marks these categories out as different from each other is, as was noted earlier, above all the fact that the former involves commitments whose intelligibility is not temporal-standpoint dependent, while the latter involves commitments whose intelligibility is so (and in specifically *ex post factum* terms).[41]

We may find an intuitive analogue of this differentiation—and of the relation obtaining between that which lies on each side of the contrast it purports to capture—in a certain interpretation of our everyday notion of a *default* understanding. Such an understanding (i.e., a default one) only obtains, on this particular reading of that term's significance, for a given domain on the assumption that the latter is, and continues to be, sealed off from contingently arising events, with this assumption being made unconditionally if it is made at all. Of course, the question of how far such a scenario could be relevant to our real-life experience as human beings is hugely complex and unresolved, but it does nevertheless have clear applications to certain sorts of artificial, or artefact-relative, environment.

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40. This is a significant caveat, given the history of how some of the issues dealt with here have shown up in previous philosophical work. Accounts that seem entirely free of such premises often turn out not to be. For example, probably the most significant and original attempt to theorize the radically historical in modern times is to be found in the writings of Walter Benjamin—especially, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998). Yet the latter's ultimately Kantian approach requires him to posit a *generalized* conception of "the historical subject" as presupposed by *actual* "world-historical" developments. This makes it impossible to think of any of the developments he describes as being *in stricto sensu* irreducibly historical, as they are necessarily in turn predicated of a unitary entity designated by the term "world," which is clearly the subject of tacitly ontological forms of commitment. (Were this not to be the case, the position would collapse into incoherence: if "world-history," for Benjamin, in fact referred to just a plurality of histories, then each would presuppose its own historical subject. We would then have to see him as an early precursor of the contemporary tendency, associated principally but not exclusively with the philosopher Graham Harman, known as "object-oriented ontology," and as denying any role for transcendental subjectivity even while at the same time rejecting any form of empiricistic naturalism. This would clearly be unsatisfactory, given how steeped his thinking is in the conceptual tropes and philosophical commitments distinctive of German Romanticism—especially with regard to the unifying role invested by the latter in the human imagination and related forms of aesthetic sensibility.)

41. For discussion of related logico-linguistic issues as these relate to mainstream developments in analytical philosophy over the last 100 years or so, see Carl Humphries, "Proceduralism and Ontologico-Historical Understanding in the Philosophy of Language," in *Philosophy of Language and Linguistics: The Legacy of Frege, Russell, and Wittgenstein*, ed. Piotr Stalmaszczyk (Frankfurt: Ontos, 2014), 115–38. For an analysis of related issues pertaining to social dependency-relations between persons, see Carl Humphries, "The Family and its Ethos: A Philosophical Case-Study in Ontologico-Historical Understanding," *Rocznik Filozoficzny Ignatianum* 19, no. 2 (2013).

A computer-software program, for instance, taken along with the operations intended to be carried out specifically within it, will normally generate a set of default procedures and settings, but if we look *back* at our past actual use of such programs, we often find that technical upsets and enhancements have resulted in a changed status for some of these. However, the very point of such defaults is that we do *not* think of them individually as *inherently* provisional, since this would undermine our ability to commit ourselves in practical terms to using the program at any given point in time. Rather, we entertain the assumption that a default that has not been overridden will continue not to be so, and—except in cases where we possess the competence to allow probabilistic calculations to influence our reasoning about the future—only surrender this assumption when it is *actually* overridden.[42]

3. Conclusion

Returning now to Schmalenbach's treatment of the philosophico-spiritual and cultural genealogy of the phenomenon designated by the term "lonesomeness," we may first remind ourselves that the deeper import of such an account, at least for its author, was probably intended to reside in its in-

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42. We might say that what does or does not count as a default has been "updated," but if a computer specialist tells us in a non-general way that something "*will* be updated in the future, if and when problems arise," then, from the perspective of the non-specialist, he or she is surely either denying it the status of a genuine default or saying something too abstract to carry real practical significance. If the relevant grammatical operator is "when," then in non-general terms this must refer to a future actuality that is already concretely envisaged, implying that some problematic events have *already* transpired that undermine the default. If, on the other hand, it is "if," then we are talking about a hypothetical future scenario, but the assertion of that as a concrete possibility capable of undermining the default must be already grounded in present reality, so whatever features of the latter serve to ground it will entail that there are already reasons for treating the default as something provisional, and thus as not a real default—on our reading of that term. (On such a reading, a default is something stronger than just a provisional "working assumption," in the sense of a conditional *ceteris paribus* commitment assuming that *if* all other things are equal, *then* our existing understanding of the relevant domain will continue to be valid. We do not think of a default as obtaining in *ex ante factum* temporal-standpoint-dependent terms relative to its being overridden, for this would commit us to the future actuality of its being overridden, which would rob it of its practical validity in the present. Rather, "we" for whom it counts as a default think of it as being unconditionally valid, and "we" for whom something has actually arisen that put its validity into question surrender this unconditional commitment, replacing it with one subject to provisos. Clearly, a great deal more could be said on this particular topic, but to attempt to do so here would be to exceed the scope of the present article.

tersection with the broader themes and concerns of his philosophical and sociological work—and, especially, in any implications it could have for our understanding of the relationship between Christianity (in its various stages of evolution) and the social phenomenon of "modernity."[43]

The analysis just given makes clear that outside of the problematic assumptions associated with ontologism and historicism as general positions in philosophy, the two structures of understanding identified by Schmalenbach must be taken to represent two mutually irreducible, because mutually incommensurable, phenomena. As such, it makes sense of the assertion that, in "metaphysicalizing" or "metaphysically concretizing" the experience that had presented itself to them as a radically historical one, the early proponents of an essentially modern, and soon-to-be-secularized, conception of "lonesomeness" were in fact engaging in a serious misconceptualization. They sought to construe the radically historical as being encompassable by the radically ahistorical (i.e., the ontological—on our proposed minimal construal of the meaning of this term). But this could only make sense against the background of ontologistic premises, and these, in turn, as was argued above, would have been quite at odds with the non-trivial significance invested—elsewhere in central aspects of their own religious (or post-religious) culture—in the radically ahistorical (ontological) and the radically historical themselves. To the extent that such a misconceptualization may be said to have furnished one of the major turning points in the evolution of society towards its present form, that form, whatever its status and its reality for us now, can be said to rest on a conceptual mistake.

At the same time, the richness of historical detail accumulated over the course of Schmalenbach's account as he seeks to relate the developments discussed here to cultural, philosophico-spiritual, and artistic dimensions of human history also testifies to another important feature. This is that,

43. At least, "modernity" as construed by Schmalenbach himself, and by those others—notably Weber and those influenced by him—operating within the same tradition of social thought. Of course, the latter's central claims about the role played by certain forms of Protestantism in the evolution of capitalism continue to be highly controversial to this day. Few commentators now support his claims in their overall original form, or without major qualifications. Nevertheless, the continuing debate amongst social theorists regarding the extent of their validity suggests that at some level, at least, they can be thought of as capturing a significant connection. As such, they might well have rather more of the character of a perspicuously revealing *description* (in Wittgenstein's sense) than that of a causal-historical *explanation*. (This would be in spite of the fact that the latter, couched as it typically is in the methodological assumptions of a quasi-scientific approach, perhaps comes closer to what Weber himself aspired to achieve.)

from practically the earliest accessible stages of the genealogy as it relates to Christianity, the roots of these two forms of religious understanding—the one ontological, the other radically historical—show up as closely interwoven. That is to say, the early cultural forms mentioned by Schmalenbach, in which the concept of individual aloneness first shows up as a reference point for individually revealed spiritual truth, also coincide with critical stages in the historical transition from a myth-based paradigm of ethical and spiritual culture (the Homeric Greeks and their historical equivalents elsewhere) to an essentially metaphysico-political one (the Roman state, reconceived and re-founded in the light of its relationship to Christianity).

This suggests that we should at least take seriously the thought that, when it comes to understanding its innermost structure of commitment, Christianity—at least as it has come down to us today in the West—demands to be comprehended in terms of a *dual-aspect* paradigm of intelligibility. Such a paradigm would lead us to view it as presenting two radically distinct approaches to spiritual and philosophical matters, standing in a relation to one another that makes them mutually irreducible *and* mutually dependent. A striking conclusion would then follow, which is that given how these two approaches have shown up in the light of the conceptual considerations elaborated here, it would not make sense to assert the obtaining of that relation between them in *either* specifically historical *or* specifically ahistorical (i.e., ontologico-metaphysical) terms. With Christianity thus construed, the thought that we should treat the internal (i.e., religiously committed) perspective of its practitioners as being irreducible to any strictly external set of concerns would then require us to draw similar conclusions regarding the issue of how best to conceptualize the connections obtaining at a more general level between Christianity and modern society.

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