

## Isolation

Isolation can be said of many conditions: psychological—the uncomfortable separateness of the lonely individual; social—the separateness of an individual or group from the collectivity to which they belong; the separateness, even, of a nation from the collectivity of nations.

The implication of isolation is characteristically negative, as though being in isolation was inherently a failure. Even an isolated nation—could we take the Faeroe Islands?—suffers from an isolation from the wholeness of productivity its position in the north Atlantic severely limits its supply of seasonal foods.

The ancient Greek notion of wholeness emphasizes and admires a unity which interrelates all parts of a compound. From that perspective, the notion of apartness, to which we refer above in connection with isolation, is a sharp notion of incompleteness. To be apart is by definition to be an island severed from other meaningful parts of reality. Democracy, the dominant discovery of the Greek political world, is a political system in which an underlying consensus of values can be taken for granted from the beginning.

The vibrancy and daring of the ancient Greek political-social world are implicit in the word, *dialogos*, by which the fifth century Hellenes named the basic process of conversation; a process in which two speakers address one another—*dia*, through *lego*, speak—and the upshot of which is that each interlocutor to the dialogue is present both as a listener and as a speaker, at the same time. This closeness of mutual contribution to thought is the rock firmness on which an effective wholeness can build itself. The mutual inter- intelligibility, of the parts of a cultural whole, is the ultimate in the rejection of isolation.