RUCH FILOZOFICZNY
LXXIX 2023 4

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DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/RF.2023.036

Pejorativisation of Solitude. A Narratological Deception?

> Who then is ever alone? – The faint-hearted does not know what it is to be alone, for some enemy or other is always lying in wait for him. Oh, for him who could tell us the history of that noble feeling which is called loneliness!*

The enigma of solitude

The aphorism recalled as a motto, which comes from Nietzsche's *The Dawn of Day*, is intriguing in that it draws attention to a fundamental difficulty in understanding solitude, in the variety of its historical thematisations. It stems from a seemingly too trivial fact to care about, namely the failure (so far) to develop a narrative that could adequately express the subtlety of this phenomenon. As a result of the lack of such a narrative, solitude has remained – surprisingly – an enigma for us to this day, and the discourse about it, including, unfortunately, the scientific one, is overgrown with a thicket of conceptual weeds, idiosyncra-

* Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Down of Day*, transl. Johanna Volz (London–Leipsic: T. Fischer Unwin,1912), 249 aphorism, 236.

sies and myths. Perhaps this is because, as Steven Shapin[1] argues, the academic approach fundamentally misses the world, contrasts with it, loses it. In this context, Barbara Taylor's statement, demonstrating what a challenge it is to study the history of solitude, takes on particular significance. "Of all the human universals – she says – solitude is probably the least-examined, the least-historicized. Birth, death, desire, pain – all have substantial historiographies, but not solitude".[2]

In the spirit of Nietzsche, the London historian confesses that solitude is so subtle that it remains downright cognitively elusive. It is not unreasonable for Taylor to conclude that any – whether historical, philosophical, psychological, sociological, ethnological, literary or theological – analysis of this phenomenon requires its prior universalising conceptualisation. It turns out that already at this – merely preliminary – stage of research we encounter a problem that is as prosaic as it is surprising. What is solitude and, above all, by what cognitive criterion should it be defined? Common sense suggests that solitude is "an emotional response to an absence of other people".[3] However, this laconic characterisation is certainly not enough, simply because "being with others is for many people the most solitary condition of all". Besides, is the classification of solitude as merely an "emotional response" really correct and sufficient? Does it not smack of a revisionary, unauthorised, because narrow, reductionism and functionalism? Does solitude have an exclusively adaptive function; does it remain merely a defence mechanism, automatically activated during episodes of deficit of meaningful contact or communication with others?

The rhetoric of solitude

There has been a widespread practice of associating solitude with isolation, separation, seclusion, secretiveness, introversion, withdrawal, exclusion, privacy, hermitism, an "insular" attitude,[4] misanthropy, etc.

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[1] Steven Shapin, "'The Mind Is Its Own Place': Science and Solitude in Seventeenth-Century England", *Science in Context* 4(1) (1990): 195.

[2] Barbara Taylor, "Philosophical Solitude: David Hume versus Jean-Jacques Rousseau", *History Workshop Journal* 89 (2020): 1, https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbz048.

[3] Ibidem.

[4] This is the term used by Robert Feys. See idem, "Un exposé de la philosophie de Gabriel Marcel", *Revue Philosophique de Louvain. Troisième série* 53(37) (1955): 78.

Following Barbara Taylor, I argue that "none of these are solitude, although some may be a preconditions of it",[5] a component or a sign of it. The rhetoric of solitude is full of unexpected paradoxes. Some, such as John Donne, see it as an extreme anguish. In *Meditation V*, entitled *Solus adest* (subtitle *The Physician Arrives*), part of the 1632 prose collection *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, referring to two recent viral infections, the second of which nearly cost him his life, the still bedridden Donne confesses:

> As Sicknes is the greatest misery, so the greatest misery of sicknes, is solitude; when the infectiousnes of the disease deterrs them who should assist, from comming; even the Phisician dares scarse come. Solitude is a torment which is not threatned in hell it selfe. Meere vacuitie, they first Agent, God, the first instrument of God, Nature, will not admit; Nothing can be utterly emptie, but so neere a degree towards Vacuitie, as Solitude, to bee but one, they love not. When I am dead, and my body might infect, they have a remedy, they may bury me; but when I am but sick, and might infect, they have no remedy, but their absence, and my solitude.[6]

It is astonishing that solitude, which for some evokes despair and anxiety, bringing them almost to the point of losing their minds, is experienced by others – especially, though not exclusively, by religious people (and not always by these, either, as can be seen in Donne's lamentation narrative) – "[…] as a privileged site of intimate connection, an always-accompanied condition",[7] and not only in illness or, more broadly, in borderline states. The most representative narrative for the latter, i.e. for the singers of solitude, is the ode *De vita solitaria* [*The Life of Solitude*] from 1346 by Francis Petrarch, stylized on the model of the Saint Paul *Hymn to Love*.

> Without a doubt, solitude is a holy thing, simple and uncorrupted, and much purer than all other human things[8]. […] To whom will she seek to please, if not to those to whom, having entered into intimate solitude, anything cannot be solitary? She does not want to deceive anyone […]; she does not adorn, she does not cover up, she does not pretend anything; she is completely clean and bare, because she does not care about shows or flatterers

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[5] Taylor, *Philosophical Solitude*, 1.

[6] John Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, *Solus adest*, *5. Meditation*, 13–24 (Cambridge: The University Press, 1923), 22.

[7] Taylor, *Philosophical Solitude*, 2.

[8] Francesco Petrarca, *La vita solitaria*, from a Codex of the Ambrosiana by Antonio Ceruti PhD (Bologna: Presso Gaetano Romagnoli, 1879), Book One, Chapter 23, 81 (translated by P. D.).

> that are pestiferous to souls. She has only God as witness of her life and of all her deeds, and she does not believe anything of herself to the lying and blind populace, and she trusts her own conscience more readily than in it […].[9] […] These are only of the perfect, who I do not know where they are, and if some have been, they have loved solitude, and if any still live, though he surely sails the high seas with this rudder of virtue, nevertheless I think he loves the harbour of solitude.[10]

Dealing with solitude through love

One would have thought that a statement of this kind would be the result of, at best, being aesthete, at worst, insanity. In the commonly held view that has prevailed for generations, it is love that is ultimately the content of human life and its overriding goal, while solitude is merely a burdensome obstacle and unnecessary ballast in the pursuit of that goal. What is forgotten is that even if this kind of prejudgement bears the hallmarks of truth, it simultaneously reveals its narrative deficit. It is expressed in an idealistic-romantic and wishful idea of perfect love and the belief that such love is possible at all, as well as – as if in spite of the facts and in denial of the realities of human fate – that if fate has denied it to others, it will, for some inexplicable reason, generously grant it to us.

It does not take very long for those deceived by this dreamlike narration to become painfully aware that ideal love exists only in novels, in our desires and in our fantasies; that love is, as Erich Fromm emphasises, an art,[11] something incomparably more than the cloying feeling we usually think it is. As such, it requires knowledge, effort, experience, often self-denial, constant work on oneself, a readiness to make various sacrifices, to give up oneself, to be for the other and not only with or, more often, next to the other, with the accompanying expectation that love is simply due to us, not that its inalienable condition is reciprocity, which also presupposes my gift of myself to the other. If love is a gift, or rather, if love presupposes as its condition, and at the same time the test and sign of its existence, the giving of oneself to the other, then it is first and foremost a requirement and not a carelessness. To love, after all, is to give oneself to another. To give oneself is to show care to another. The

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[9] Ibidem, 82.

[10] Ibidem, 87.

[11] See: Erich Fromm, *The Art. Of Loving. An Enquiry into the Nature of Love* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956).

gift of caring is responsibility for another. If responsibility is a form of gift, it requires gratuitousness and is therefore a sacrifice. This is why man, for love's sake, is able to rise above themselves even to the heights of heroism, ready to give the other or for the other their life.

Likewise, the ambivalence inherent in the very basis of the imagination of love, fuelled by narratological deception, is overlooked. The constellation of the cultural imaginarium of love is formed by two fundamental – and, significantly, opposing – elements: the idiom of pathetic love and the idiom of trivialised love. The rhetoric that glorifies love, making it something extraordinary in human life, at the same time makes it impossible. The empty space left by it is filled, therefore, by solitude. In contrast, the rhetoric of trivialised love, reduced to a bundle of short-term narcissistic pleasure, performs, in fact, its caricaturisation. On the basis of such an understanding of love, the addressee is not so much the co-recipient of love as is obliged to be the unilateral provider of this love. This is the expression of the addressee occasional, sometimes one-off usefulness and this is the basis of their equally occasional, sometimes one-off attractiveness. Israeli sociologist at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Eva Illouz, speaks in this context of a "misery of love"[12] caused by a "commitment phobia", either hedonic in origin – "when commitment is deferred by engaging in a pleasurable accumulation of relationships" or aboulic – "in which it is the capacity to want to commit that is at stake: that is, the capacity to want relationships"[13] – is called into question.

Consequently, this realised love, achievable through its desublimation (habituation), too, instead of satiating, intensifies its hunger and heightens disillusionment with its mundane and impermanent state. This hunger for love the eminent Canadian loneliness researcher John G. McGraw used to qualify as loneliness in the strict sense.[14] He shows at the same time that "the English word 'hunger' etymologically derives from an expression meaning pain. Moreover, the modern English verb

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[12] Eva Illouz, *Why Love Hurts. A Sociologial Explanation* (Cambridge–Malden: Polity Press, 2012), 1–17.

[13] Ibidem, 78.

[14] See: John G. McGraw, *Samotność. Studium psychologiczne i filozoficzne*, transl. Andrzej Hankała (Warszawa: Polskie Towarzystwo Higieny Psychicznej, 2000), 18; see also his: "Samotność: głód bliskości/sensu", *Zdrowie Psychiczne* 1–2 (1995): 58–65; John G. Mc Graw, "Loneliness, its Nature and Forms: an Existential Perspective", *Man and World* 28 (1995): 44.

pine is derived from a word used in medieval English to mean pain, namely 'pin'".[15]

In the light of what has been said, it becomes clear that it is not aloneness but love that hurts. Eva Ilouz, demonstrating the existence of a model of love that is as utopian as it is romantic in origin and understanding, as well as trivial because it is commercialised and oriented towards consumption, calls for a reflection on why it is love that hurts and not solitude. For the latter is the resultant of the former. Contrary to a widely held belief, solitude is not the opposite of love, but its reverse, the shadow of the Nietzschean wanderer.[16] Man craves attention, love, closeness, tenderness, acceptance, esteem, sincerity, gratitude and rightly so. However, at the same time, everyone should remember that all these are – to use the title of one book – *Illusions that make it possible to live*.[17] And what roots a person most fully and truly in existence is the restraining, and sometimes violent and brutal, grip of the ring of solitude or loneliness.

In this sense, the aforementioned Fromm is right, claiming that our human striving for love in its deepest and innermost foundations is not affirmative at all, but negative; after all, it is a phobic striving. Strictly speaking, it is not because we desire love – either elevating it or simplifying it – that we perceive and are particularly sensitive to the allure of its autotelic value (thus pursuing it for its own sake rather than for our own sake and our own well-being), but because – if not consciously, as a result of past experiences, then subconsciously – we fear loneliness. It is this atavistic fear that instinctively triggers in us the reflex to seek closeness, understanding and care for fear of the imagined wraiths of unbearable loneliness.

The institutionalisation of loneliness in recent years, such as the Ministry of Sport, Civil Society and Loneliness in the UK in 2017 and the Ministry of Loneliness and Isolation in Japan in 2021, as well as the medicalisation of loneliness, which dates back to the mid-1940s, are based on and grounded in the educational system and cultural influences. Both the medicalisation of loneliness and the medicalisation of it are based on and reinforce the idea that loneliness is, as Aristotle first

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[15] McGraw, *Samotność. Studium psychologiczne i filozoficzne*, 18.

[16] See: Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Wanderer and His Shadow", in: Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, transl. Reginald John Hollingdale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[17] *Złudzenia, które pozwalają żyć. Szkice ze społecznej psychologii osobowości*, ed. Mirosław Kofta, Teresa Szustrowa, 2nd ed. amended and expanded (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2001).

put it, contrary to human nature, so much so that it can only be endured by a god or wild animals. Well, it seems to me that it is more contrary to human nature to inject into people's minds dreams of a love that is either impossible through its narrative over-idealisation or is so trivialised that it is ultimately reduced to flattering one's cheap tastes and satisfying one's downright physiological, egocentric needs. In this way, we collectively and systemically produce a narrative-cultural pressure, under the pressure of which – by succumbing to it – individuals acquire in relation to loneliness a syndrome of learned helplessness, which paralyses them already at the mental level. This, in the most general terms, I have taken the liberty of referring to in the title of my article as narratological deception.

Aristotle's archetype of pejorativisation of solitude

In philosophy, it officially began with Aristotle of Stagira and his statement in the treatise *Politics* of 320 BC (most probably edited by his pupil Theophrastus of Eresos) – the statement that man is by nature obviously "more social [*κοινωνικότερο*] than the bee or other animals living in flocks [*τα άλλα ζώα που ζουν σε αγέλες*]".[18] "The obviousness" of this Aristotle derives from the fact that the

> Man is the only animal endowed with reason [*Ο άνθρωπος είναι το μόνο ζώο με το χάρισμα του λόγου*] […] which exists to express what is beneficial and harmful. This is precisely the exclusive characteristic of man [*το αποκλειστικό γνώρισμα του ανθρώπου*] in comparison with the rest of the animals, namely, that he alone has the capacity to distinguish between good and evil, between what is right and wrong, between what is what is right and wrong [*μόνο αυτός έχει το αίσθημα του καλού και του κακού και του δικαίου και του αδίκου*] and other related values [*των άλλων συναφών αξιών*], and the common sharing of these [*επικοινωνία*] creates the family and the city-state [*δημιουργεί την οικογένεια και την πόλη*]. The city-state is naturally above the family, but also above each of us. The whole necessarily has primacy over the part [*Αναγκαστικά το σύνολο προηγείται από το μέρος*]; for there is no hand or foot if the whole body is dead […].[19]

In a slightly further passage, Aristotle develops and concretises his view, stating that

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[18] Αριστοτέλης, *Άπαντα*, vol. 1: *Πολιτικά* (Αθήνα: Κάκτος, 1993), Book 1, point 3, 1253a (own translation).

[19] Αριστοτέλης, *Πολιτικά*, Book 1, point 3, 1253a (own translation).

> […] it is obvious that the city-state by definition logically precedes the individual, for if one is separated from the whole, ceases to be self-sufficient [*παύει να είναι αυτάρκης*], he will find himself in the same relation [to the city-state – P.D. added] as the other parts to some whole. Whoever, on the other hand, is not capable of living in a community or does not need one at all, because he is self-sufficient [*κι εκείνος που δεν μπορεί να ζήσει στην κοινωνία ή δεν χρειάζεται τίποτα επειδή είναι αυτάρκης*], is by no means part of the city-state [*δεν αποτελεί πόλης*], but is either a wild animal or a god [*επομένως είναι ή θηρίο ή θεός*]. The aspiration of all to such a community is natural [*Η παρόρμηση όλων προς μια τέτοια κοινωνία είναι φυσική*] […].[20]

Aristotle's reasoning is dominated by an organicist and mereological account of the communal form of life, which consequently impinges on the Stagirite understanding and evaluation of solitude. Man as an individual is rapturously part of the overarching and superior whole of society organised into a state. For an individual to be guided solely or mainly by his or her own interests, without taking into account or at the expense of the interests of the state as a whole, amounts – in the Philosopher's view – to an unjustifiable audacity that is a symptom of the most far-reaching dehumanisation, resulting from an anomaly in the capacity for rational judgement and attitude to reality and the demoralisation correlated with it. The gift of reason [*το χάρισμα του λόγου*], which distinguishes a human being from other animals, predisposes the human being to perceive and relate to reality not only through primitive – characteristic of animals not endowed with reason and communicating with each other by means of inarticulate cries [*οι άναρθρες κραυγές*] – sensations of the pleasant and unpleasant [*το ευχάριστο και το δυσάρεστο*], but also by means of an axiological sense [*το αίσθημα*], which makes it possible to distinguish beauty from ugliness, justice from injustice [*του καλού και του κακού και του δικαίου και του αδίκου*].

The human orientation to the world of values shared by rational beings, which stems from their inherent rational nature, makes them more than herd-like beings, because they are oriented towards living in a community based on a foundation of commonly shared values. What therefore predisposes a human being to live in a community of values with other human beings is rational human nature, making them capable of recognising, communicating and living according to values. And

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[20] Ibidem, 1253b. Cf. M. Gołoś, "Arystoteles – zoon politikon", *Społeczeństwo i Edukacja. Międzynarodowe Studia Humanistyczne* 2 (2009): 96 (overall: 95–101).

this is, according to Aristotle, the only natural state of affairs as far as the proper mode of human existence is concerned.

Solitude is, for the Stagirite, not only the logical opposite of community, but its outright negation. Thus, the entire, highly modest, not to say perfunctory, description of it that we find in the writings of the Philosopher – who is clearly not interested in this issue, after all, perceiving it unequivocally negatively and therefore, in his opinion, unworthy of attention – is reduced to highlighting the thesis that there is nothing more contrary to human nature than solitude. For it remains above all incompatible with the logical precedence of the whole in relation to the part, that is, the state community towards the individual participating in it. Besides, the drive to remain in solitude contrasts with the natural aspiration of every human being as a rational being, communicating with others by means of language and guided by an axiological sense, for community (*κοινωνία*) with such beings. This resulting natural striving for a communicative community based on rational values is expressed by Aristotle in the word *κοινωνία*. According to *The Greek-Polish Dictionary* edited by Zofia Abramowiczowna, "*κοινωνία*" is as much as "participation", "community", "society", "union", "connection".[21] Let us note here, referring to the adjective "*κοινωνητικός*", which belongs to the same word family, that "*κοινωνία*" is not only a social creation, but also "socialisation", understood as "the ability to interact with people".[22]

Thus, when Aristotle speaks of solitude, he does not mean merely the trivial affliction of an individual remaining in physical isolation from a physical community, but an intentional (that is, deliberate and purposeful) action. He states this unambiguously in the passage from *Politics* cited above in the words: "Who, however, is incapable of living in community or does not need it at all, because he is self-sufficient […]".[23] The key to understanding Aristotle's bias towards solitude is his concept of the self-sufficiency [*αὐτάρκεια*] of the human being. It can be assured to the individual only by cooperatively being in community with others, which is what reason leads the individual to do. Centuries later, in 1656 in the treatise the *Elements of Philosophy*, this observation would be confirmed by Thomas Hobbes. In it, he mentions that although the name "human being" always refers to the "individual man" as a "physi-

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[21] Zofia Abramowiczowna ed., *Słownik Grecko-Polski*, vol. 2: *'E–K'* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1960), keyword '*κοινωνία*', 685.

[22] Ibidem, keyword '*κοινωνητικός*', 685.

[23] Αριστοτέλης, *Πολιτικά*, Ks. 1, pkt 3, 1253b.

cal body",[24] there is nevertheless – since his nature, in addition to "bodily strength", is also constituted by experience, reason and the passions[25] – "the similitude of the thoughts, and Passions of one man, to the thoughts, and Passions of another".[26] It is not, of course, "the similitude of the objects of the – Passions, which are the things desired, feared, hoped, &c", but "the similitude of Passions, which are the same in all men, desire, feare, hope, &c".[27]

Solitude, therefore, deprives man of the self-sufficiency [*αὐτάρκεια*] necessary for life and development, which no one can provide for himself outside an efficiently organised society. In this sense and for this reason, according to Aristotle, the choice of solitude, whether dictated by an inability to live in community or as a sign of an ability to manage without it, is an expression of the denial of the determinism and purposiveness of human nature, and as such contradicts and degenerates human rationality, communicative abilities and a sense of value. This is why the Stagirite ironically concedes that the self-sufficient in solitude could be, at best, either a wild animal (*θηρίον*) or a god (*θεός*).

Aristotle's irony can be answered with a question: is there really an equivalence sign between solitude and depravity and anarchism, or, alternatively, does such an equivalence exist necessarily and in every case? The position taken by the Stagirite seems, in this respect, highly debatable. Indeed, prolonged solitude, like any condition, situation or circumstance perceived as unfavourable by the individual, can bring them to the brink of despair or rebellion, stimulating them to aggression, which they unleash blindly on others – often those who have done nothing to oppress them. The truth is, however, that nothing threatens the cohesiveness, sustainability and development of society more than how society and the state itself are arranged and run. Solitude is too individual and intimate a matter for any society or state to tremble in its foundations because of it.

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[24] Thomas Hobbes, *Elementy filozofii*, t. 2, transl. Czeslaw Znamierowski (Warszawa: Panstwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1956), 172, 173.

[25] Ibidem; Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive or the Citizen* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts Incorporated, 1949), 21.

[26] Hobbes, *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme & Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill* (Oxford: The University Press, 1929; reprint from 1651), 9.

[27] Ibidem.

Hobbesian demythologisation of socialisation

Such a narrative, although it is still maintained today,[28] found its antagonists especially among philosophers of the modern era. One of the first and – because of the prominent position he occupies on the pages of history – most important opponents of this narrative is the aforementioned Thomas Hobbes. In one of his best-known and most popular treatises immediately following *Leviathan*, although earlier than it and anticipating the subject matter it addresses, in the treatise *On the Citizen*, first published in Latin in Paris in 1642, Hobbes argues against the

[28] By way of example, let me cite a statement by the Irish philosopher Mark Dooley, from his book published by Bloomsbury Academic in 2015, *Moral Matters A Philosophy of Homecoming*, which – like a lens – focuses the belief, repeated for centuries, that "[…] it is a simple truth that human beings cannot thrive where genuine interaction does not exist". See: Mark Dooley, *Moral Matters A Philosophy of Homecoming* (London–New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 4. One of the world's most respected social psychologists, Elliot Aronson, also takes a similar stance, along with a host of other researchers. He expresses this in the very title of his very popular book *The Social Animal*, which he wrote together with his son Joshua Aronson. Chapter one begins with a paragraph that is so typical of this type of work: "As far as we know, Aristotle was the first serious thinker to formulate some of the basic principles of social influence and persuasion. However, although he did say that man is a social animal, it is unlikely that he was the first person to make that observation. Moreover, chances are he was not the first person to marvel at the truth of that statement while simultaneously puzzling over its triteness and insubstantiality. Although it is certainly true that humans are social animals, so are a host of other creatures, from ants and bees to monkeys and apes". See: Elliot Aronson, Joshua Aronson, *The Social Animal* (New York: Worth Publishers, 2008, 10th ed.), 1. Similar statements are made in many other works, such as the 1970 *Social Contract* by the American anthropologist Robert Ardrey. In his view: "Neither Rousseau nor Hobbes in those pre-Darwinian days recognized that the social imperative has always been with us and must be with us till the last human spark goes out. Nor has the social imperative ever so compelled us as it compels us today". See: Robert Ardrey, *The Social Contract. A Personal Inquiry into the Evolutionary Sources of Order and Disorder* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 239. The Polish moral theologian Krzysztof Maj expresses the matter even more strongly in his text entitled *Professor Kępiński Towards Depression*. We read there that "A human being is undoubtedly a living being, which we can confidently describe as animal sociale. This means that they are unwilling to, cannot and should not live in solitude, and therefore must have some kind of relationship with their surroundings". See: Krzysztof Maj, "Profesor Kępiński wobec depresji", in: *Przeciw melancholii. W 40. Rocznicę wydania „Melancholii" Antoniego Kępińskiego – perspektywy Fides i Ratio*, ed. Agnieszka Hennel-Brzozowska, Stanisław Jaromi OFMConv. (Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 2014), 26.

view that man by virtue of his nature is determined to lead a social life. In the first chapter of the first part of this treatise, dedicated to the issue of freedom, he utters words which are significant, in this context, in the second point: "The greatest part of those men who have written aught concerning commonwealths, either suppose, or require us, or beg of us to believe, that man is a creature born fit for society".[29] In the footnote marked with an asterisk to this sentence, Hobbes states, not without reason, that this kind of foregone conclusion is based on the hard-to-overlook fact that "we now see actually a constituted society among men", and that "none living out of it".[30] In this light, he says, denying "man to be born fit for society" may seem "a wonderful kind of stupidity".[31] At long last, however, this is not what it is at all. For it is a self-evident fact, argues Hobbes, that "it is true indeed, that to man, by nature, or as man, that is, as soon as he is born, solitude is an enemy; for infants have need of others to help them to live, and those of riper years to help them to live well, wherefore I deny not that men (even nature compelling) desire to come together".[32]

What actually determines in people the supposedly natural need for association are, in Hobbes's view, purely occasional, casual factors such as the need for benefits or honours, and not, as is commonly believed, bonds of love.[33] First and foremost, Hobbes unambiguously states, we desire honours and benefits, only secondarily the bonds of love. If the bonds of love were indeed a natural and universal principle determining in human beings the social inclinations and the consequent desire to establish communal forms of life, then "one man should love another (that is) as man" and it would be impossible to find a reason "why every man should not equally love every man, as being equally man".[34] "We do not therefore by nature seek society for its own sake, but that we may receive some honour or profit from it; these we desire primarily, that secondarily".[35]

> Manifest therefore it is, that all men, because they are born in infancy, are born unapt for society. Many also (perhaps most men) either through defect of mind, or want of education, remain unfit during the whole course of their

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[29] Hobbes, *De Cive or the Citizen*, 21.
[30] Ibidem.
[31] Ibidem.
[32] Ibidem.
[33] Ibidem, 22.
[34] Ibidem.
[35] Ibidem.

> lives; yet have they, infants as well as those of riper years, a human nature; wherefore man is made fit for society not by nature, but by education.[36]

The socialisation of man, therefore, does not originate and occur by virtue of his nature but is the result of the adaptation of the human species to live under conditions of individual self-insufficiency. It is in the rational interest of the individual, guided by instinct (understood as innate behavioural mechanisms)[37] and the will to survive, in the face of such an unfavourable situation, to co-operate with others in order to preserve their lives and stabilise the conditions for their development. Evolutionarily developed and culturally perpetuated adaptation mechanisms reinforce in people serving this purpose the belief that only remaining in a consolidated group guarantees their successful development, while solitude – understood as prolonged and deliberate isolation from the group – is a fundamental threat to their life and survival. Marcin Berdyszak of the University of Arts in Poznań puts it in an interesting way, speaking in this context of a repressive culture that "appropriates even the unexpected, aestheticises it before it is recognised".[38] It is the culture produced by humans that transforms their natural survival instinct into an artificial "cultural instinct" – artificial "because developed by culture".[39] Thus we ourselves, first subjugating nature, are consequently "subjugated by culture, which prompts, through the 'new instincts' we acquire, how to function within it – it must prompt, since these 'old' survival instincts are useless within it, or rather incompatible with it".[40]

Thus, since solitude is recognised as a disturbance of a culturally produced mechanism of human socialisation, it must therefore be assumed that it is itself a cultural product. Not, of course, in the sense that a culturally educated instinct directs human preferences and abilities to adapt to solitude, but in the way that it programmes us to prefer social forms of life and action, presenting solitude as an important obstacle or threat to them. We are thus educated to see solitude as a social anomaly, a deviation from the culturally sanctioned norm of humans as social beings. Consequently, we become pathologically incapable of understand-

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[36] Ibidem 21–22 (footnote with asterisk).

[37] Jan Łazowski, "Krótka historia pojęcia 'instynkt'", *Sztuka Leczenia* 3–4 (2013): 30.

[38] Marcin Berdyszak, "Sztuczny instynkt kultury", *Zeszyty Naukowe Centrum Badań im. Edyty Stein – Fenomen Wieczności* 15 (2016): 311.

[39] Ibidem, 312.

[40] Ibidem, 312–313.

ing, experiencing and coping with solitude, even though it is one of the inevitable products of social life.

Epicurus of Samos was probably the first who recognised this and highlighted it when he made a critical reference to Greek culture and, more specifically, to Greek *paideia*,[41] a concept which, as Werner Jaeger points out, encompasses such contemporary terms as "civilisation, culture, tradition, literaturę, or education".[42] Kazimierz Pawłowski, an expert on the philosophy of Epicurus at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, argues that Epicurus holds Greek culture responsible – although this remark can be generalized brilliantly by referring to culture as such – above all in its educational dimension, that

> It creates false (false, we should add, because incompatible with physical Epicurean anthropology) social ideals and equally false models of behaviour and attitudes to life, which are determined by social and material status, or, in short, by positions, honours, fame, wealth, etc., which have nothing to do with what human nature and the ontic status of the human being in general predestine them to.[43]

Moreover, "Epicurus accused the same culture of fostering these kinds of attitudes by not preparing people for the opposite states. It does not prepare them to endure poverty, suffering, disease and so-called social humiliation. Worse – it then leaves them in loneliness and humiliation […]".[44] We can thus see that the cultural organisation of social life is conceived in such a way that it does not prepare the socialised individual to cope with difficult situations, does not effectively counteract their social humiliation and generally leaves them with their problems, humiliated in loneliness. The observation made by Epicurus is equally applicable to solitude, the cultural pejorativisation of which consequently produces a syndrome of learned helplessness among people, making it impossible for them to cope effectively with their own or others' solitude.

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[41] Kazimierz Pawłowski, *Lathe biosas. Żyj w ukryciu. Filozoficzne posłannictwo Epikura z Samos* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego Jana Pawła II, 2007), 95.

[42] Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture*, transl. Gilbert Highet, vol. 1, 3rd ed., (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946), unpaginated page before the Foreword. See also: Mikołaj Krasnodębski, "Klasyczna *paideia* jako integralna uprawa człowieka", *Edukacja* 4(163) (2022): 31–32.

[43] Pawłowski, *Lathe biosas*, 95.

[44] Ibidem, 95.

While it is true that personal determinants inherent in the individual contribute to the emergence of solitude in many cases, it is the socio-cultural factors that have an incomparably greater impact on its emergence. It is not without reason that the aforementioned Elliot and Joshua Aronson argue that the most significant factor shaping human behaviour is social influence,[45] because "all human beings spend a good deal of our time interacting with other people – being influenced by them, influencing them, being delighted, amused, saddened, and angered by them".[46]

The respected Polish social psychologist Dariusz Doliński, head of the Social Behaviour Research Centre at the SWPS University in Wroclaw, demonstrates the correlation between social influence and quality of life in his research. In his 2002 work *Social Influence and Quality of Life*, he argues that

> […] a high quality of life involves influencing others. A subject who possesses these skills optimises their chances of achieving various life goals – both everyday and routine, as well as distant in time and exceptional. The influenced individual, on the other hand, is usually perceived as someone with a low quality of life. They are instrumentally used by others, manipulated, deprived of their subjectivity.[47]

The correlation given by Doliński makes it possible to show that solitude arises as a result of either an inability or failure to exert the influence one expects on others, or being subjected to adverse or destructive influence on their part. Undoubtedly, not only the type, quality and intensity, but also the duration of social influence remains decisive for the emergence of solitude and its type, quality, intensity and duration over time. Social influence is realised through a variety of rituals and bonding behaviours (such as, for example, sexual, impressing, conciliatory, caring and nurturing behaviours)[48] and is solidified in the form of at-

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[45] Elliot Aronson, Joshua Aronson, *The Social Animal*, 5.

[46] Ibidem, 7.

[47] Dariusz Doliński, "Wpływ społeczny a jakość życia", *Psychologia Jakości Życia* 1 (2002): 36.

[48] Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt, *Love and Hate. The Natural History of Behavior Patterns*, transl. Geoffrey Strachan (London–New York: Routledge, 2017), chapters 8–9, 129–211; Alicja Kuczyńska, *Sposób na bliski związek. Zachowania wiążące w procesie kształtowania się i utrzymania więzi w bliskich związkach* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Psychologii PAN, 1998), 19–21. Cf. Alicja Kuczyńska, "Styl przywiązania a zachowania wiążące", *Czasopismo Psychologiczne* 7(1) (2001): 7–15. Bogdan Wojciszke, *Człowiek wśród ludzi. Zarys psychologii społecznej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe "Scholar", 2004), 289–292.

tachment styles, including attachment to place, which are established and transmitted through upbringing and everyday social interactions.[49]

Not yet having this knowledge, Hobbes maintains that man is born incapable of social life. The overcoming of this fundamental incapacity takes place gradually, as a result of the education that socialises them, that is, adapts them to it; and even this does not always produce satisfactory results. In any case, Aronson's social influence plays a decisive role here. For although, as Hobbes says, "man were born in such a condition as to desire it [society – supp. P. D.], it follows not, that he therefore were born fit to enter into it; for it is one thing to desire, another to be in capacity fit for what we desire".[50] Solitude is therefore the resultant of this socially shaped human inability to create or maintain mutually satisfactory social bonds, which are the object of natural human desire. Failure in this area triggers an almost automatic sense of retrospective loneliness, especially in the face of objectively unfavourable external circumstances (such as, for example, struggling against insurmountable odds, defeats, crises, conflicts, illnesses, threats, uncertainty of the future) – following on from unsuccessful relationships, or prospective solitude – phobic, experienced in the form of anxiety, occurring at the thought of entering into ultimately probably already unsuccessful relationships or accompanying the current duration of the relationship.

The originality and relevance of Hobbes's position is exposed today by the eminent British political philosopher associated with Cambridge University, Michael Joseph Oakeshott. In a 1975 book entitled *Hobbes on Civil Association*, Oakeshott mentions the following:

> Hobbes stood in contrast to both the rationalist and the "social instinct" ethics of his contemporaries, and was attacked by representatives of both these schools. The rationalists nurtured the doctrines of antiliberalism. And it was Richard Cumberland with his "social instinct" and later Adam Smith with his "social passions" who bewitched liberalism by appearing to solve the problem of individualism when they had really only avoided it.[51]

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[49] Julia Boińska, Monika Obrębska, "Psychologiczne uwarunkowania przywiązania do miejsca: zaufanie społeczne, styl przywiązania i lęk. Badanie longitudinalne w okresie pandemii COVID-19", *Człowiek i Społeczeństwo* 54 (2023): 99–112.

[50] Hobbes, *De Cive or the Citizen*, 22 (footnote).

[51] Michael Oakeshott, *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1975), 67 (116 footnote). Cf. Ian Tregenza, *Michael Oakeshott on Hobbes. A Study in the Renewal of the Philosophical Ideas* (Charlottesville: Imprint Academic, 2003), 90, 96–99; Noel Malcolm, "Oakeshott and Hobbes", in: *A Companion to Michael Oakeshott*, ed. Paul Franco, Leslie Marsh (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylva-

In his work *On Human Conduct*, Oakeshott introduces the interesting figure of the "individual manqué", also called the "botched individual".[52] It imagines the idea of a Hobbesian man who is unfulfilled and unsatisfied in their ambitions, aspirations and expectations (manqué) because they are clumsy (botched), who as much desires comity with others as ultimately proves incapable of it. Oakeshott, however, deepens his understanding by attributing the cause of their social incompetence to their "incapacity to sustain an individual life".[53] The "individual manqué" needs guidance, a sense of common purpose and "warm, compensated servility".[54] The individual manqué can become "the determined 'anti-individual', one intolerant not only of superiority but difference"[55] from him.

It follows, then, that the sought-after reason for the human inability to abide in harmonious community with others is that "many people are ill prepared for the life of individuality",[56] and consequently to solitude, without which it is not possible to flourish and grow in one's own individuality. This is where the socio-cultural pejorativisation of solitude comes from. The systemic organisation of social influence is calculated to perpetuate in individuals an attitude of individual manqué. This is done, above all, in order to make them believe that they have little or nothing of their own and that all their value comes from their conformist adaptation skills, enabling them to adapt uncritically to the demands of social, moral, political and economic life. This is why solitude has remained censored for centuries. The pressure of solitude, which leads to a deeper self-knowledge, a revision of one's own personal identity for greater autonomy and value-based self-creation and self-realisation, is too much of a burden for the masses of anti-individualists, who are socially programmed to receive praise, prestige and numerous benefits from others in exchange for their own servility.

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nia State University Press, 2012), 217–231; Andrew Norris, "Michael Oakeshott and the Postulates of Individuality", *Political Theory* 45(6) (2017): 824–852.

[52] Michael Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 276, 317. Cf. Michael Oakeshott, *Morality and Politics in Modern Europe*, ed. Shirley Letwin (London: Yale University, 1993), 24; Michael Oakeshott, "The Masses in Representative Democracy", in: *American Conservative Thought in the Twentieth Century*, ed. William F. Buckley Jr. (London–New York: Routledge, 2017), 103–123.

[53] Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, 276. Cf. Norris, "Michael Oakeshott", 3.

[54] Ibidem, 317. Cf. Norris, "Michael Oakeshott", 3.

[55] Ibidem, 278.

[56] Norris, "Michael Oakeshott", 3.

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Summary

In this paper, I address the problem of the pejorativisation of solitude in philosophical discourse. By the pejorativisation of solitude I mean giving it a negative meaning. I show that the tendency to the pejorativisation of solitude in philosophy was initiated by Aristotle. He saw solitude as contrary to human nature. This nature is supposed to determine people to form organised communities with others. Only through them the individual is able to survive and thrive. In solitude, one quickly learns how inautarkic is and suffers because of it. Thomas Hobbes was one of the first philosophers to challenge Aristotle's approach. He argued that man strives for community with others not as a result of a supposedly social nature, but because as a child one is dependent and helpless, and as an adult one expects benefits or honours from others. My thesis is that the pejorativisation of solitude is responsible for its negative stereotyping, the formation of prejudices against it and the learned helplessness syndrome, which makes us vulnerable to solitude.

Keywords: solitude, loneliness, pejorativisation, Friedrich Nietzsche, Barbara Taylor, Thomas Hobbes, Michael Oakeshott, individual manqué