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Solitude, self and autonomy

Abstract:

We argue that by thinking of solitude in terms of self-patterns, autonomy, and affordances we get a richer account of why solitude can be either liberating or imprisoning. Practices involving solitude, for better or for worse, will result in changes in the set of available affordances, and this will either increase or decrease the autonomy of the individual. Solitude that results from an involuntary isolation (e.g., solitary confinement) will often involve, not only a decrease in autonomy, but also a decrease in the number and qualities of affordances, and a disordering of the self-pattern. Solitude as a result of voluntary isolation also changes the field of affordances, but seemingly increases autonomy.

Keywords: Solitude, Autonomy, Pattern Theory of Self, Depression, Solitary Confinement.

1. *Solitude*

Solitude has sometimes been regarded as a “healthy aloneness” (Tillich 1963). Religious traditions have often considered the virtues of solitude. From Bernard of Clairvaux to various meditative practices of Buddhism, solitude has been regarded as an important requirement for practice and reflection. William James (2017), in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, associates solitude with the surrender of the self to God. Religious experiences depend on solitude, according to James – they are experiences of individual humans in their solitude. One can also think that solitude is not the surrender of self, but an entering into self more deeply – a turning inward, away from the world. Alternatively, one might consider solitude as an occasion to come into contact with nature, or the world. Heidegger makes of it something like an existential characteristic of human existence insofar as Dasein is an individuated being-in-the-world: “solitariness in which each human being first of all enters into a nearness to what is essential in all things, a nearness to world” (Heidegger 1995, p. 6). For Heidegger, and others, however, one can lose oneself when one is caught up in the crowd.

Solitude may be required for certain practices of thinking. Although many thinkers require collaboration with others, or an immersion in a think-tank environment, many others seek isolation – as Wittgenstein did in

an isolated village in Norway for two years. Whereas Bertrand Russell worried that Wittgenstein might go mad through such a practice, it was a productive period for the latter. In the village, although he was not absolutely alone, he did take long, solitary walks to facilitate his thinking (Modell 1993).

In contrast, being alone is sometimes treated as psychopathological (Cacioppo, Patrick 2008; Durkheim 1952), or as something leading directly to loneliness and depression. Psychologists sometimes attempt to measure the effects of sociotropy, in contrast to any tendency to solitude, and they associate the latter with autonomy. For example, using the Sociotropy-Autonomy Scale (SAS) (Beck *et al.* 1983), researchers have shown that sociotropic individuals, characterized as maintaining a significant concern for close interpersonal relationships or seeking approval and acceptance, are more vulnerable to depression than autonomous, i.e., independent, individuals (Beck *et al.* 1983; Clark, Beck 1991; Gilbert, Reynolds, 1990; Nietzel, Harris, 1990).

Neither solitude nor the feeling of loneliness depends on being objectively alone; one can feel alone even in a crowd, or within the mechanisms of modern institutions. This may be a disorder of individualism – where people may find themselves “enclosed in their own hearts” (Taylor 1989, p. 9). Institutional arrangements may promote a form of social death (Card 2003). Indeed, there may be two forms of social death – the form that comes from social isolation and alienation, and the form that comes from getting lost in the crowd – an anonymity that may arise from bureaucratic or social structures.

On one reading, the difference between beneficial solitude and harmful solitude seems to be the difference between the voluntary and the involuntary. One might think of solitude as a neutral state of existence – neither good nor bad in itself. Yet, enforced or imposed solitude can lead to intense loneliness, depression or even worse (e.g., see below concerning the effects of solitary confinement). If, however, we think of this issue simply in terms of whether someone wills or does not will to be alone, that is, in terms of an individual’s free will or autonomy, it’s not clear how that difference makes such a profound difference to the experience of solitude itself. It is also the case that one might find oneself benefiting from solitude without explicitly willing it. Yet the sense of control that one has over this condition seemingly can make a big difference.

Schulz (1976) has provided an experimental demonstration of the importance of control. He had college students visit residents of a retirement home for a two-month period. In half of these dyads the seniors could decide on the frequency and duration of these visits. In the other half of the dyads the seniors did not have this control. Although the total contact was the same in both conditions, seniors who could decide on the contacts reported themselves as lower in loneliness. They

were also higher in hope and happiness. Non-experimental indications of the importance of control are also available. For example [...] loneliness was greater among respondents who had moved to their present residence because of circumstances rather than choice (Perlman 1988, p. 191).

A possible alternative reading would emphasize the importance of intersubjectivity. That is, the difference between beneficial and harmful solitude is not about the exercise of one's will, but the circumstances of social isolation. On this view we can understand the bad effects of solitude, not by focusing on the individual's autonomous decision or lack of decision for solitude, but on the objective situation. This view would take the isolation *per se* to be doing the work. This explanation doesn't work, however, since, objectively, there is no necessary difference in regard to social isolation between beneficial and harmful solitude. In both cases there is isolation. To push this view one step further, we could think that harmful solitude is, intersubjectively, a double issue. Not only is one isolated from others; most importantly, one is cut off *by* the other – this is a rejection by the other, a failure of recognition, or some motivated shunning. But this just is the aspect of the involuntary – it is not just the isolation that is doing the work, but it's the fact that others have caused the isolation over and against what the individual would want. So we can't understand the bad effects of solitude by focusing on isolation by itself. One is led back to the individual's autonomous decision or lack of decision for solitude.

We can see this, for example, in studies of romantic breakups. Both men and women who are rejected, compared with those who did the rejecting, experienced more depression, loss of self-esteem, and rumination (Hill, Rubin, Peplau 1976; Perilloux, Buss 2008). The fact that the person who initiates the breakup is less distressed than the person who is left is thought to be a matter of the initiator being in control of the event (Fiske, Taylor 1984). This may be complicated, however, by either partner's feeling that they are responsible for the breakup (Gray, Silver 1990). In addition, however, the circumstance of isolation, or lack of it, plays an important role. The availability of alternative partners complicates the experience of distress and the feeling of being alone: "the availability of an alternative lessens the sense of loss for one partner but exacerbates the sense of loss for the partner who does not perceive alternatives as available" (Sprecher *et al.* 1998, p. 792). In addition, partners develop shared friends and the loss may be of both partner and these friends.

We'll argue that even to understand how one's sense of control or agency impacts the good or bad effects of solitude, that is, how such effects relate to autonomy, we need to consider a complex circumstance of self and

social situation. More specifically, we need to think of autonomy as relational and self as a complex pattern.

2. *Self*

How we define self and autonomy, then, will have some implications for how we think about the effects of solitude. Conceptions that take the self to be in some measure socially constituted, and that take autonomy to be relational, may hold different implications than concepts of self that are more individualistic or deflationary. A deflationary conception of self is one that takes the self to be just one thing and nothing more. For example, some philosophers have defined the self as a “self model” generated by neuronal processes, and nothing more (Metzinger 2004); others define it as the more or less abstract product of narratives, and nothing more (e.g., Dennett 1991; Schechtman 2010). Synofzik and Schlaepfer (2008, p. 1511) conceive of the self as purely cognitive, the objective “cognitive representational system with special characteristic self-representational capacities”. Similarly, Witt *et al.* (2013) propose a cognitive model of self, defined as a specific set of core propositional attitudes (beliefs, desires), which have an impact on the identity of the person. Each of these accounts postulates a relatively narrow conception of the self, and a focus on only one or two aspects of self-experience.

In contrast to such narrow conceptions of self, the pattern theory of self (PTS) argues that a self is constituted as a pattern of a sufficient number of characteristic factors or aspects, including embodied, experiential, affective, behavioral, intersubjective, psychological/cognitive, narrative, extended and normative factors (see Table 1). According to PTS, selves are individuated as patterns of characteristic features, no one of which is sufficient for the existence of a particular self. Importantly, the self-pattern is not simply an additive list of factors (de Haan *et al.* 2017; Kyselo 2014), but is composed of dynamically interrelated components in a pattern or gestalt arrangement (Gallagher 2018; Gallagher, Daly 2008). Accordingly, a change in one factor, above a certain threshold, will lead to modulations in the other factors, and in the pattern as a whole. Affective aspects of self-experience, for example, can be modulated by more complex, intersubjective factors that can intensify emotional reaction or contribute to emotion regulation. Self-narratives can reflect other aspects of the self-pattern, explicitly in content, or implicitly in form; they can also operate as coping mechanisms, as happens in some therapeutic practices (Hutto, Gallagher 2017).

<i>Elements of the pattern</i>	<i>Brief description</i>
Embodied elements	Core biological, ecological factors, allowing the system to distinguish between itself and what is not itself – extremely basic to all kinds of animal behavior.
Experiential elements	First-person, pre-reflective, conscious experience, reflecting the self/non-self distinction, manifest in various sensory-motor modalities (kinaesthesia, proprioception, touch, vision, etc.) – including a <i>sense of ownership</i> (the “mineness” of one’s experience) and a <i>sense of agency</i> for one’s actions (Frith, Gallagher 2002; Gallagher 2005; Rochat 2011).
Affective aspects	Affect/emotion/temperament, ranging from bodily affects to what may be a typical affective or emotion pattern (Newen, Welpinghus, Juckel 2015).
Behavioral aspects	Behaviors and actions make us who we are – behavioral habits reflect, and perhaps actually constitute, our character. This is a classic view that goes back at least to Aristotle.
Intersubjective interactions and capacities	Human are born with a capacity for attuning to inter-subjective existence (Gallagher 2008), which develops into a social self-consciousness – a self-for-others (Mead 1913), manifested behaviorally in mirror self-recognition (Gallup, Anderson, Platek 2011), and the neuronal mirror system (Gallese 2014).
Psychological/cognitive elements	Traditional theories of the self focus on these factors, which may range from explicit self-consciousness to a conceptual understanding of self as self, to personality traits of which one may not be self-conscious at all – psychological continuity and the importance of memory are highlighted in the literature on personal identity. This also includes reflective capacities: the ability to reflect on one’s experiences and actions – closely related to the notions of autonomy and moral personhood, including the capacity to form second-order volitions about one’s desires (Frankfurt 1982; Taylor 1989).
Narrative capacities	Although some theorists make the strong claim that narratives are constitutive for selves (Schechtman 2010; 2011), for PTS one can lose the ability to construct a self-narrative (as in cases of dynarrativa) and still remain a self to the extent that other elements of the pattern remain in place.
Extended elements	Including the possibilities presented by physical pieces of property, and various things that we own (James 1950). Not only may we identify with our material belongings, or the technologies we use, our professions and the institutions we work in, but also we are dynamically related to the action possibilities they afford.
Normative factors	Ranging across possibilities presented by the kind of family structure and situation in which we grew up to cultural and normative practices involving gender, race, and economic status that define a way of living and a set or landscape of cultural affordances (Rietveld, Kiverstein 2014; Ramstead, Veissière, Kirmayer 2016).

Table 1: Dynamical aspects of the self-pattern (from Gallagher, Daly 2018).

We can begin to understand the dynamical relations that constitute a coherent self-pattern by looking at instances where various factors in the self-pattern seem to be disordered, or ordered differently. For example, studies of major depressive disorder (MDD) suggest that in depressed subjects, abnormal dynamical synchronies exist between various factors of first-person perspective, bodily/emotional agency and reflective (narrative-related) agency, as measured by dynamical connections across correlated brain areas (Fingelkurts, Fingelkurts 2017).

[Patients with MDD] have abnormal self-related processing, mostly expressed as increased self-focus, excessive self-reflection (rumination) and association of the self with negative emotions [...]. Generally, excessive ruminative self-focus produces such feelings as worry, guilt, shame, jealousy, which may lead to insomnia [...] increased anxiety [...]. Patients with depression showed a higher degree of interoceptive awareness [...] and] distorted body self-image [...] (Fingelkurts, Fingelkurts 2017, p. 30).

Such aspects of selfhood, as these researchers suggest, “are not entities that simply modify something that has its own independent existence, but rather together form a dynamic pattern, that as a whole constitutes a complex selfhood” (Fingelkurts, Fingelkurts 2017, p. 35).

An example of an extreme dissolution of the self-pattern that takes us back to the issue of solitude involves the effects of solitary confinement in prison (Gallagher 2014). Solitary confinement is a practice of imposed, involuntary isolation. The practice of solitary confinement should not be thought of as a way for the prisoner to return into self, as some prison administrators once thought: “The inmate was expected to turn his thoughts inward [...]” – a rehabilitation through isolation with oneself (Smith 2006, p. 456). Such thinking reflects a traditional concept of self as an isolated individual substance or soul that finds virtue in the practice of introspection. If, in contrast, the self is relational in a way that intrinsically involves social or intersubjective relations, then solitary confinement, by undermining intersubjective relationality, leads to a disruption of the self-pattern.

Lisa Guenther (2013), describes the phenomenology associated with solitary confinement, as becoming “unhinged”: prisoners “see things that do not exist, and they fail to see things that do. Their sense of their own bodies – even the fundamental capacity to feel pain and to distinguish their own pain from that of others – erodes to the point where they are no longer sure if they are being harmed or are harming themselves” (Guenther 2013, p. xi). Indeed, the literature suggests a long list of experiences associated with solitary confinement, including anxiety, fatigue, confusion, paranoia, depression, hallucinations, headaches, insomnia, trembling, anger, apathy, stomach and muscle pains, oversensitivity to stimuli, feelings of inadequacy,

inferiority, withdrawal, isolation, rage, anger, and aggression, difficulty in concentrating, dizziness, distortion of the sense of time, severe boredom, and impaired memory (Smith 2006). Smith (2006, p. 441) documents high rates of mental illness resulting from solitary confinement, starting in the 19th century. Charles Dickens, upon visiting prisons in the United States, referred to solitary confinement as a “slow and daily tampering with the mysteries of the brain [...] immeasurably worse than any torture of the body” (Dickens 1957, p. 99; cited in Guenther 2013, p. 18). The phenomenology of solitary confinement reveals symptoms that involve serious bodily sensory/motor problems, derealization, and self-dissolution (or depersonalization).

Bodily sensory/motor problems: trembling, nervous ticks, cringing posture and nervousness, diminished perception (Guenther 2013, p. 19). In contrast to the kind of positive solitude that Heidegger describes in terms of an attunement to the world, in the negative solitude of solitary confinement, as Guenther suggests, “it is precisely at the level of bodily perception, sensibility and affectivity that prisoners find their relation to the world undermined” (Guenther 2013, p. 154).

Derealization: reports from prisoners in solitary confinement reinforce the notion of a derealization and an undermining of their relation to the world.

It becomes difficult to tell what is real and what is only my imagination playing tricks on me [...] the wire mesh on [the] door begins to vibrate or the surface of the wall seems to bulge (Guenther 2013, p. 35; citing Grassian 1983; Shalev 2009).

Phenomenologists argue that the experience of the world as real and objective is directly related to intersubjectivity (e.g., Husserl 1973). In solitary confinement the intersubjective basis of the experience of the world as real and objective is structurally undermined (Guenther 2013, p. 35). These problems with derealization, and with sensory-motor processes, correlate with depersonalization and the dissolution of the self.

Self-dissolution: Christensen, who studied the effects of solitary confinement in Denmark, writes: “The person subjected to solitary confinement risks losing her self and disappearing into a non-existence” (Christensen 1999, p. 45; cited and trans. by Smith 2006, p. 497). Guenther (2013, p. xiii) asks precisely the right question: “How could I lose myself by being confined to myself? For this to be possible, there must be more to selfhood than individuality [...]. Solitary confinement works by turning prisoners’ constitutive relationality against themselves”.

One response to this question – How could I lose myself by being confined to myself? – is that the isolation of solitary confinement isn’t equivalent to the kind of isolation one might find associated with sensory depriva-

tion experiments; rather, it involves the constant reminder that one is cut off from the social world; that one has no access to it. The sounds are still there. You can hear what's going on outside, or in the surrounding social environment, but you are denied access to it. Isolation of this sort, which disrupts an established self-pattern, may explain some of the negative effects of this kind of solitude.

Solitary confinement, of course, may involve extreme circumstances, although it does take different forms in different prisons, so that in some cases the circumstances are not more extreme than some religious practices of solitude, or other types of solitude that might serve scientific or academic purpose. A nuanced discrimination among different types of isolation, e.g., distinguishing between sensory deprivation and solitary confinement, suggests that it is not just the isolation (or the isolation alone) that is the decisive factor. We mentioned above that being cut off or rejected may define a specific form of intersubjective deprivation. Isolation and intersubjective deprivation, however, may disrupt the self-pattern, and thereby contribute to some negative effects. None of this, of course, explains why there could be positive effects of solitude. How can these negative effects not happen in some cases, especially in the kinds of cases that mystics, monks, Buddhists, and others focus on?

3. *Affordance-based autonomy*

We propose that we can understand how solitude works, both in its positive and negative effects, by understanding how it relates to self and to autonomy. The concept of autonomy maps across the numerous factors of the self-pattern. Consider that bodily and experiential aspects of the self-pattern are closely related to action. Action involves the first-person, pre-reflective, conscious experience that reflects, in proprioception and kinaesthesia, a self/non-self distinction, made manifest in a *sense of body-ownership*, and a *sense of agency* for one's actions, combined with affective factors, ranging from bodily affects (e.g., fatigue) to typical emotion patterns. For example, if I am fatigued or hungry, or perhaps sad or depressed, I may not have as much motivation or energy to engage in action – my sense of agency may be of a low degree. The sense of agency typically consists of a compounded experience involving not only pre-reflective experiential aspects (especially aspects of embodied motor control) and the experiential sense of achieving a goal, but also reflective (and narrative) processes involved in intention formation, the facilitation or resistance of the physical environments (extended factors), and the constraints introduced by others and social institutions (normative factors) (see Gallagher 2012). Limitations introduced in terms of any of these factors also impose limitations on au-

tonomy. Likewise, new possibilities introduced by any of these factors can lead to an expanded degree of autonomy.

In contrast to a worry raised by Kyselo (2014), the embodied and action-oriented factors are not divorced from social or intersubjective factors. Indeed, the latter are tightly connected to embodied, interactive practices (Gallagher 2001; 2011). One need only consider, for example, the effects of social (normative) constraints (imposed by either dyadic intersubjective interactions or more statically organized institutional structures) on one's possibilities for action and thus on one's sense of agency (Gallagher 2012). Such social factors both constrain what agents can do and afford avenues for action, as well as affect how agents may feel about their actions.

Moreover, on an enactivist view of social interaction there is always a balanced and partial trade-off between the autonomy of the individual embodied participant and the autonomy of the process that emerges in social interaction (De Jaegher, Di Paolo, Gallagher 2010). On the concept of relational autonomy, an arrangement that maintains an absolute individualism, lacking social recognition, undermines the individual and leads to a self-destruction of a meaningful form of individual or interactional autonomy. Likewise, an interaction that overwhelms individual autonomy undermines the very possibility of interaction (De Jaegher, Di Paolo, Gallagher 2010). This is the idea of an autonomy that is by degree, and that exists for the individual agent only because she is socially situated.¹

Autonomous actions are thus embodied and situated in a world that is physical and social so that intentions often reflect immediate perceptual and affective valences, as well as the effects of physical and social forces and affordances. Notions of agency, intention, and autonomy are best conceived in these embodied and socially situated terms.

On this view, we suggest that one can understand autonomy in terms of physical and social affordances. Indeed, affordances are simply the flip side of autonomy. Because affordances are themselves relational, i.e., affordances are defined not just in terms of (physical and social) environmental arrangements *simpliciter*, but in terms of what an agent is capable of doing in that environment (e.g., based on the agent's skill level), they always imply the self-as-agent, or the autonomous self.

¹ This concept of relational autonomy differs from the traditional notion of autonomy closely connected with traditional conceptions of the individual self. Kant is the *locus classicus* for this traditional view. For him autonomy involves self-sufficiency, self-legislation, or self-determination *via* rational-cognitive decision-making processes. In contrast, autonomy thought of as *relational*, is not narrowly individualistic, but is a characteristic of socially constituted selves, "agents who are emotional, embodied, desiring, creative, and feeling, as well as rational, creatures" (Mackenzie, Stoljar 2000, p. 4; see Christman 2004; 2009).

Sanneke de Haan *et al.* (2013) offer a model of affordances that captures the differences involved in different psychiatric disorders, typical subjects *versus* subjects with depression *versus* subjects with OCD (Figure 1).

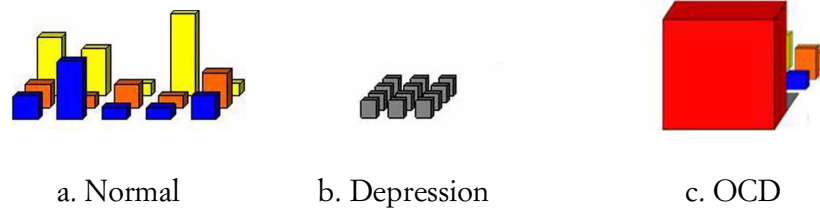


Figure 1: A schematic depiction of different fields of relevant affordances, normal *versus* Depression *versus* Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (from de Haan *et al.* 2013).

They explain this figure in the following way.

The “width” refers to the range of affordances or the amount of action options that one perceives. The “depth” of the field refers to the temporal aspect: one not only perceives the affordances that are immediately present here and now, but one is also (pre-reflectively) aware of future possibilities for action. That is, one may already anticipate the affordances on the horizon. Lastly, the “height” of each of the affordances refers to the relevance or salience of this particular option. The different colours refer to variations in affective allure: something may be relevant because it is dangerous, or rather because it is highly attractive. It is a dynamic field: to the extent that either our concerns or the environment changes, the field of relevant affordances changes too (de Haan *et al.* 2013, p. 7).

We suggest that the number and quality of an agent’s affordances not only reflect a specific self-pattern (that includes, for example, specific skills and inclinations), they track the agent’s autonomy. That is, we can think of autonomy in terms of the affordances available to a particular situated agent, where that situation is both physical and social. A greater number (i.e., range and temporal proximity) and quality (i.e., salience and affective allure) of affordances roughly correlates with greater autonomy, and directly relates to one’s sense of agency. How a particular affordance space might relate to the self-pattern more generally depends in some regard on the kinds of affordances in question. The four dimensions indicated by de Haan *et al.* don’t specify whether the affordances are physical, social, cultural, intellectual or cognitive affordances. Social affordances (their number and quality), for example, will relate directly to the intersubjective aspect of the self-pattern. If, as the result of depression, my intersubjective relations

shrink or become impoverished, both the number and the quality (especially affective allure) of my social affordances will decrease.² We can also consider that salience and affective allure cut across any affordance in the same way that the affective aspect dynamically relates to all other aspects of the self-pattern.

4. *Solitude revisited*

Individuals are typically embedded in social contexts, interacting with others in ways that can enhance or impoverish the control they have over their lives. A relationship with domineering partners may reduce a person's autonomy; a relationship with a supporting partner may increase a person's autonomy. Intersubjective relations, and the normative constraints that come along with those relations, as well as the various extended physical arrangements and affordances of the surrounding world, may limit or enhance our ability to act, and the possibilities that we recognize as actionable. Autonomy, conceived in this relational way, is thus a matter of degree – it can be won or lost, it can be enhanced or reduced by physical, social, economic, cultural factors, including our own narrative practices, and especially our relations with others.

Practices that involve solitude, for better or for worse, will result in changes in the affordance space, which will either increase or decrease the autonomy of the individual. These different phenomena – solitude, affordances, self-pattern, autonomy – are reciprocally related and organized in a coupled system, so that any change in one will elicit a change in the others, or in the system as a whole. Solitude that results from an involuntary isolation will often involve, not only a decrease in autonomy, but also a decrease in the number and qualities of affordances, and a disordering of the self-pattern. The limited affordances that remain may not support the possibility of choice, which is an element of autonomy. This is clearly the case in solitary confinement. Likewise, in social arrangements where one is cut off from others involuntarily (e.g., romantic breakup, divorce) one may experience a decrease in social affordances. Compensatory behavior may involve a substitution of other (e.g., physical) affordances (rejected partners often turn to shopping) if they are available. But it is also possible that such

² Likewise, physical affordances will depend on my bodily condition (any particular condition may rule out some and create others); cultural affordances may depend on my prior history, as well as my learned values, which reflect extended and normative factors in the self-pattern. Cognitive affordances will relate directly to cognitive aspects of the self-pattern – my skills and capacities for memory, imagination, etc.

arrangements may lead to depression, and in that case the affordance space will dramatically change (as represented in *Figure 1, B*), and solitude quickly becomes loneliness.

There is clearly a range of negative effects involved in different forms of solitude, or related conditions, such as boredom, loneliness, alienation, or abandonment. An account framed in terms of affordance-based autonomy can address all such effects. Loneliness, for example, may result from a solitude that is imposed, not by others, but by worldly circumstances and impoverished fields of affordances. For example, researchers on aging have shown that if a person has no access to public transportation and limited access to using an automobile, these limitations can lead to greater loneliness in old age (Berg *et al.* 1981; Kivett 1979; Perlman, Gerson, Spinner 1978). Changes in economic income may also decrease the range and quality of affordances and lead to greater loneliness (Perlman, Gerson, Spinner 1978).

What about the positive effects of solitude? Some people choose solitude, and in doing so they change their field of affordances, and seemingly increase their autonomy. The absence of others, in this respect, does not make autonomy any less relational. Depending on a person's chosen project, others may enhance or subtract from one's autonomy. We see in the history of mysticism and spirituality a valorization of solitude, which at least in some cases is understood as trading an inferior set of affordances (the pleasures of the world) with a superior set (the virtues of the divine). Both of these are contextualized as social, despite the withdrawal from the social world, because withdrawal only makes sense in the context of an ascent or awakening about the existing world and its limits. Whereas solitary confinement keeps one in the social world as an observer but not a participant, spiritual solitude trades the illusion of an adequate social world for one understood as better, truer, and more fulfilling.

When Wittgenstein sought solitude to do his thinking, this seemingly did not subtract from his autonomy. Even if it led to a decrease in some affordances, it likely led to an increase in others, or perhaps an increase in the quality of his intellectual affordances. Perhaps what was afforded was a long-term inquiry that could not be sustained with other interruptions. As Louis Sass puts it,

Wittgenstein seems to have had a recurrent, almost instinctive need for withdrawal, a yearning for solitude and distant places where, it seemed, he might somehow find peace or some kind of redemption as well as escape from the possibility of theatricality or inauthenticity inherent in social life: "I thank God that I came to Norway into the loneliness!" (Sass 2001, p. 111, quoting Wittgenstein).

5. *Conclusion*

There is more to be said about solitude, self, autonomy and affordances. In this paper we have not been able to address in detail different forms of intersubjectivity (e.g., dyadic “I-thou” relations *versus* “we” or collective relations *versus* more impersonal forms). Some kinds of solitude (e.g., solitary confinement) may undermine all forms of intersubjectivity; other kinds may undermine selective forms. For example, we may be literally isolated, but nonetheless feel part of a group just by engaging in the practice of isolation for some purpose. It is also possible, for example, to think about solitude and the role of narrative in the self-pattern – e.g., about how one’s self-narrative might mesh with a religious narrative about solitude, or a narrative about intellectual dedication, or, alternatively, how one’s self-narrative may break bad towards self-blame following separation from a loved one. One’s self-narrative can operate like a window that opens into the self-pattern; it offers a way to map the dynamical relations among the various other factors of the self (Gallagher, Daly 2018). Self-narratives in some sense reflect, explicitly in content, or implicitly in form, all of the other aspects of the self-pattern. In addition they can also be used in therapeutic contexts to address the kinds problems that might result from the negative effects of harmful solitude (Hutto, Gallagher 2017). Also, more needs to be said about cultures that do not seem to foreground solitude as a primary virtue. For example, some African cultures emphasize the importance of community, even at transitional points in life (e.g., coming of age), which involve groups rather than as a solitary reflective moment (Menkiti 2017). We leave these as questions that require further research.

In this paper we have argued that by thinking of solitude in terms of self-patterns, autonomy, and affordances we get a richer account of why solitude can be either liberating or imprisoning. Practices that involve solitude will result in changes in the set of available affordances, and this will either increase or decrease the autonomy of the individual. Solitude that results from involuntary isolation (e.g., solitary confinement) will often involve, not only a decrease in autonomy, but also a decrease in the number and qualities of affordances, and a disordering of the self-pattern. Solitude as a result of voluntary isolation may also change the field of affordances. It

may thereby increase one's autonomy, or at least lead to changes in the self-pattern.³

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