Conclusion

Lifelong learning of aloneness

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Introduction

If a person's life is characterized by the ebb and flow of togetherness (as described in Chapter 1), then this is not experienced passively. People actively *learn* from all the positive and negative experiences of togetherness and of aloneness. By 'learn', I do not wish to sound absurdly optimistic, suggesting that people can always gain from painful experiences. Experience of persistent loneliness may teach us that we have little worth; experience of being trapped in an abusive relationship may teach us despair. Consider these examples:

- A baby can learn to cope with separation from a carer. The lesson may lead to independence, or may lead to anger.
- An adolescent can learn the power of silence. This may encourage a strong sense of self, or it may lead to withdrawal into a lonely isolation.
- An adult can learn from the loneliness of moving to a new city, and it may lead to increased social activity, or to alienation.
- An older person can learn from bereavement to make the most of every moment, or to dwell in the past.

Learning continues throughout a life: learning is, in Hanks's words, 'a way of being in the social world', and not, or not simply 'a way of coming to know about it' (Hanks, in Lave & Wenger, 1991: 24). This chapter considers how solitude, silence and loneliness come and go throughout our lives, and are learned – or lead to other forms of learning – that are important (in positive or negative ways) to what it means to be a person. Such learning of aloneness is as important to those living in close-knit communities (and to those who see social and communal structures as central to their philosophies) as it is to those who live alone (and to those whose social theories focus on individuals and individualism).

This chapter explores the learning of personhood through aloneness and the learning of aloneness throughout life. It draws on the research presented throughout this Handbook as well as other sources, to see how aloneness sits at the centre of so much of lifelong learning. In recent years there has been a massive increase in research and popular books on various aspects of aloneness, and this growing literature helped drive the creation of this Handbook. Researchers have been able to link loneliness, isolation and poor health (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008), and to

link healthy solitude and silence and good health (Moustakas & Moustakas, 2004). There have been research guides to loneliness (Weiss, 1973), to silence (Hägg & Kristiansen, 2012) and to solitude (Storr, 1988), and there have been separate guides from the perspective of psychology (Margalit, 2010; Coplan & Bowker, 2014), public health (Hammond, 2018), education (Stern, 2014; Stern & Wałejko, 2020) and philosophy (Mijuskovic, 2012; Domeracki, 2018). Political moves to appoint a 'minister for loneliness' in the UK (i Newspaper, 2018) and Australia (Wahlquist, 2018) indicate the high level of social concern. But the various fields and disciplines are rarely brought together. This Handbook, therefore, presents research based in schools and higher education (Chapters 3, 4, 15, 16), psychology and therapy (Chapters 11, 12, 18, 20, 21), and care (Chapters 23, 24, 25). The Handbook also brings together disciplines, from philosophy and religious studies (Chapters 1, 2, 9, 10, 17, 22), through historical and cultural studies (Chapters 5, 8, 13), to business studies (Chapter 6), politics (Chapter 7) and languages/linguistics (Chapters 14, 23). In the current chapter, the work is revisited through the central concept of personhood and the approach to understanding the world known as *personalism*. Following accounts of personalism and the learning of aloneness at all ages, these ideas are applied across the spectrum of accounts of people's lifelong learning, from communal to individualist accounts.

Personalism and aloneness

Personalism is 'a philosophical and political movement [that] is antagonistic to both individualism and collectivism and argues for a deeply relational view of the self' (Fielding & Moss, 2011: 48). An early advocate, Mounier, similarly described personalism as a way that avoids the hard individualism of isolated beings and the hard collectivism of merely being part of a larger organization. 'To exist is to say Yes, it is acceptance and membership', he notes, and '[y]et always to assent and never to refuse is to sink in a quicksand' (Mounier, 1952: 47). Hence, '[t]o exist personally means also, and not seldom, knowing how to say no, to protest, to break away' (Mounier, 1952: 47). It is this combination of joining and breaking away that makes personalism such an insightful approach to the role of aloneness in communal and social contexts.

Personalism is not a single theory or philosophy of personhood, but a movement (as quoted earlier), and a way of directing people's attention to personhood. For Rauch, Mounier's personalism is more of a 'pedagogy' than a single theory of persons. Mounier, he says, can better be seen as 'a teacher . . . [rather than as] an academic philosopher' (Rauch in Mounier, 1952: ix). People described as personalists have been influential in religious, educational, psychological, political and philosophical disciplines. Martin Luther King Jr, Karol Wojtyla and Michael Polanyi are described as personalists (Beauregard & Smith, 2016: 9), as are the philosopher Macmurray (Stern, 2012) and the personal construct psychologist Salmon (1988). All have been interested in lifelong learning, in different ways. It is the ways in which personalism addresses individualism and collectivism, and the ways in which it is broadly educational, that are at the centre of this account of aloneness. Yet there is little in the personalist literature that describes positive forms of solitude. I have argued elsewhere how two philosophers described as personalist, Macmurray and Buber, are 'missing' solitude from their accounts (Stern, 2018). Like that account, this chapter attempts to draw on personalist accounts to explore different forms of aloneness in distinctive ways – recognizing the individualist and communal accounts well represented in this Handbook, and starting from the phrase 'alone together'. The phrase was used as the title of Turkle's influential

book on the lack of close online relationships, as '[t]he ties we form through the Internet are not, in the end, the ties that bind', although 'they are ties that preoccupy' (Turkle, 2011: 280). Half a century earlier, Macmurray used the same phrase in a description of how important personal relations are to each of us.

Macmurray describes personal relationships – in contrast to other kinds of relationships including functional social relationships – as characterized by irreplaceability.

> Our personal relations . . . are unique. As husbands or wives, as parents, as brothers, or as friends, we are related as persons in our own right: and we are not replaceable. If I lose a friend I lose part of my own life. This is not a mere poetic metaphor. For we are what we are through our intercourse with others; and we can be ourselves only in relation to our fellows. (Macmurray, 2004: 169, first published in 1956)

Such personal relationships, in turn, make for community of a particular kind, in which people treat each other as ends in themselves, rather than (primarily) as means to further ends. Personal relations are unique, therefore, and are also direct.

> We cannot be related personally to people we do not know. We must meet; we must communicate with one another; we must, it would seem, be alone together. (Macmurray, 2004: 169, first published in 1956)

To be in a personal relationship and therefore to be in a community, this suggests, has to be a matter of direct meeting rather than, for example, having common beliefs or membership of a common organization. We must be 'alone together'. This may mean we must at least attempt to be together in personal relationships notwithstanding our fundamental 'aloneness'. Such an interpretation echoes his biographer's account of Macmurray's post-1945 sense of regret that 'left him, in a deep part of himself – and despite his fabulously good humour and generosity of spirit – locked in a certain unrelievable loneliness' as he 'was banished by historical circumstances from his natural milieu, a fish out of water, an artist without a culture, a believer with no community' (Costello, 2002: 292). Yet there is another interpretation of Macmurray's phrase. Perhaps there is a sense in which he means that we can be together (in a personal relationship with others) even when we are alone, as the personal relationships (our 'togethernesses') themselves make us the persons we are, even when alone. The first, more pessimistic, interpretation of Macmurray's 'alone together' reflects the later views of Turkle (at least with respect to online relationships) and those of contributors to this volume, such as Mijuskovic (Chapter 16) and Domeracki (Chapter 1) (with respect to all of life). The second, more optimistic, interpretation of 'alone together' reflects a more communal approach to life, such as those described in this volume by James and Krakowiak (Chapter 23). Macmurray's ambiguity helps bridge these traditions.

Personalism grapples with what makes a 'person', and this is not always the same as what makes a 'human being'. There are many positions represented in this Handbook, but in the current chapter, 'person' is used rather than 'human being', reflecting a sense of *personhood* that may not exactly coincide with *humanity*. That is, a non-human animal (Morton, 2017), or even plants and non-animate beings, might have elements of personhood. Separating 'personhood' and 'humanity' (and 'humanism') is partly derived from philosophical personalism (Burgos, 2018), as personalists generally assert personhood as distinct from the biological category to which human beings belong. (A number of important personalists were – and are – religious writers to

attribute personhood to God or gods.) But the distinction between personhood and humanity is also derived from various forms of transhumanism and critical posthumanism (Haraway, 2004; Herbrechter, 2013; Nayar, 2018), which argue for the blurring of the boundaries of humanity, and deep ecology (Naess, 2008), which argues for the ethical or political significance of different beings and for at least an 'expanding circle' (Singer, 2011) of ethical significance beyond humanity. An example of the challenge of understanding the aloneness of persons, in a 'personal world' (i.e. a world in which personhood might be ascribed to non-human entities), is the relationship of persons to what is called *nature*. Many accounts of solitude in nature (as Fulford describes in Chapter 4) test what is meant by solitude. Being apart from other human beings can enable being in a more direct relationship with 'nature', a mountain (in the account of Shepherd, 2011), a daffodil (Wordsworth, 1994: 287), a dog (Koller, 1990), or all the teeming life of Walden Pond (Thoreau, 2006). This is one of the reasons that some personalists may 'miss' solitude, as it is so hard to achieve while maintaining a broad sense of personhood.

Buber describes the difference between being an 'individual' and a 'person', attempting to distinguish his views from those of his conversational partner, the psychotherapist Carl Rogers. Being an 'individual' means being unique, but 'a person . . . is an individual living really with the world' (Buber, 1998: 174).

> And *with* the world, I don't mean *in* the world – just in *real contact*, in real reciprocity with the world in all the points in which the world can meet man. I don't say only with man, because sometimes we meet the world in other shapes than in that of man. But this is what I would call a person and if I may say expressly Yes and No to certain phenomena, I'm *against* individuals and *for* persons. (Buber, 1998: 174)

Buber's personalism, like that of Macmurray, bridges the traditions of more individualist approaches (which he ascribes to Rogers) and more communal or in some cases collectivist approaches: it is a bridge and not a simple rejection. Understanding different forms of aloneness is illuminated by such a philosophy. However, it is worth considering the whole spectrum of theories in order to explore the lifelong learning of aloneness.

Learning aloneness

Aloneness and togetherness are experienced differently at different life stages, as people learn and develop over time. Infancy is described by developmental psychologists such as Bowlby in terms of the 'making and breaking of affectional bonds' (Bowlby, 2005, title) and by Winnicott in terms of the child's transition from being 'merged' with the carer to a healthy 'separation' (Winnicott, 1964: 168) – healthy if the child is confident of the carer's return. Both recognized the ambivalence in separation and togetherness as related to the ambivalence of guilt (recognition of one's own wrongdoing) and more broadly of love and hate (which may be directed at the same object). In adolescence and emerging adulthood, the separation and togetherness is more comprehensive, one might say, with adolescents often fighting against their family ties (while usually remaining in the family) and emerging adults often leaving home and creating new families – described by Erikson as typically involving a contest between intimacy (and solidarity) and isolation (Erikson, 1980: 178).

Building on the work of Winnicott, Galanaki (2005) explains how children from a very early age learn not only to be alone, without a carer, but also to be alone while *with* another person.

Aloneness as a 'state of communicative rather than physical isolation' (Galanaki, 2005: 128) is gradually learned in the early years of life as a way to 'simply exist', without feeling the need to communicate or engage. This is an important stage in the development of personhood, she says, and it can be experienced positively, as solitude, or negatively, as loneliness. By the time children reach school age, they are learning from a wider range of adults and from friends. Or, rather, they are learning friendship. Friendship is typically developed alongside a sense of 'choice' and 'freedom'. As Hey describes it, friendship is the 'first practice of the "reflexive" self' and is 'lived by . . . young people as an ontology and epistemology of the self through the "other"' (Hey, 2002: 239). Hey recognizes that this choice brings with it the choice to break friendships, and children's 'making and breaking of relationships, and the ways they use these to distinguish between self and Other' (Epstein, 2002: 149) leads to a consideration of learning the ontology of aloneness. Ollie, aged eight, describes loneliness as experienced 'When I wen't to the part [park] I when't whith some of my friends and they ran away' (in Stern, 2014: 22). The breaking of friendship is one of the most common routes into loneliness, and the absence of friends can also be associated with learning healthy forms of solitude. Within schools, opportunities for solitude are rare yet much sought, by all the children researched in my own project on the topic (Stern, 2014). In this Handbook, Lees (Chapter 2) provides a fascinating count of how the learning in school should include learning *solitude*, as well as learning *in* solitude and silence (Lees, 2012). Cleveland (Chapter 10) provides a therapeutic account of learning silence. As all these authors stress, children and young people are *agentic* in their learning of aloneness: they have a say in the processes, even if they do not have complete control. Bosacki (Chapter 11) provides an account of adolescents' use of silence: the increasing agency of adolescents is what allows them to separate from the families or households to which they still belong.

Adult separation and togetherness are experienced and learned in the making of new families (with young parents, especially after moving house, often reported as the loneliest of age-groups, Weiss, 1973), and in work. Historically, it has been the influence of industrial work, more than family life, on aloneness (in various forms) that has interested researchers. Nineteenth-century sociologists (amongst many others) described the experience of industrial work in terms of alienation or anomie in contrast to togetherness in community/communism or teamwork (Marx, 1964; Marx & Engels, 1970; Durkheim, 1952, 1973; Tönnies, 2001). They provide contrasting views of the value or harm of separation and of togetherness. Littman-Ovadia writes of the 'balanced' adult life made up of '*solitary doing, communal doing, solitary being*, and *communal being*' (Littman-Ovadia, 2019: 1953). Weiss claims that

> [s]ociologists have given a great deal of attention to 'alienation,' by which most mean something like the social or psychological estrangement of an individual from an activity or social form with which he is nevertheless at least nominally associated . . . [t]here seems to be very little overlap between the phenomena considered in discussions of alienation and the experience of loneliness. (Weiss, 1973: 4, but see Stern, 2021)

However, this is in part a matter of scale (as those sociologists describing alienation tended to study the macro- rather than micro-level) and in part a matter of discipline. The emotion of loneliness makes more of an appearance in literature and the arts (Stern, in Chapter 7) than it does in sociological and even psychological research until the late twentieth century. There are some studies of workplace loneliness and connectedness (Stern, 2013; Stern & Buchanan, 2020).

The work of Pirrie and Fang on the important role of the 'quiet professional' (Chapter 15) and Weir (Chapter 5) complements accounts by Cain (2012), Whittaker (2015) and Rufus (2003), all of whom write normative studies of workplace solitude as a healthy (or *at times* healthy) alternative to modern economic forms of constant enforced sociability. How adults can or should experience positive forms of aloneness in homes or workplaces, and how they can or should avoid or mitigate negative forms of aloneness, can be described as learning processes – without avoiding the political and economic dimensions of the experiences. Since 2020, there has been much re-learning of adult aloneness in the workplace and home (which may be the same place), as a result of the lockdown responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. Dubas (Chapter 19) provides a superb account of learning in adulthood that occurs through what she describes as an 'oscillation' between aloneness and togetherness.

Into old age, the experience of aloneness is often of a loss of connection and loss of purpose – as a result of a loss of paid work, loss of family (through moving away and through death), and loss of position in society. And yet, despite popular views of old age as a lonely period of life in contemporary society, it appears to be a time when loneliness rates are not particularly high. There are problems of social isolation – for example as a result of lack of cheap or available transport – but this is not, it seems, accompanied by more loneliness. As Townsend describes it, '[t]o be socially isolated is to have few contacts with family and community; to be lonely is to have an unwelcome *feeling* of lack or loss of companionship . . . one is objective, the other subjective, and, as we shall see, the two do not coincide' (Townsend, in Weiss, 1973: 175). In a major study of old age, de Beauvoir also notes the contrast between old age as 'seen from without' (de Beauvoir, 1972: 21) and old age as 'being-in-the-world' (de Beauvoir, 1972: 315). She describes the 'discovery and assumption' of old age (de Beauvoir, 1972: 315) and in this way stresses how old age, its isolation and its sometimes tenuous connectedness are created and then learned in particular cultures and historical periods. Within this Handbook, there is more on old age in Part III on loneliness than in the other parts, perhaps reflecting – while also going beyond – the stereotype of lonely old age. Chinese traditions of ageing have not been so lonely, so the account by Wong (Chapter 8) is a good example of self-development in solitude continuing throughout a life into 'sagehood', which is positively associated with old age. The accounts of Wray (Chapter 21) on the loneliness of dementia, and of Iwański (Chapter 22) on the loneliness associated with the elderly and with those who care for them, take us into experiences newly learned (such as living alone or living in care homes), and the experience at times of 'unlearning' (through forgetting or losing skills or executive functions), characteristic of many of us in old age. Yet even when facing one's own death or the death of someone close (James and Krakowiak, Chapter 23), there is a tension between the sense of the loneliness of dying and death, and the possibility of having a 'good death' that helps develop the possibility of continuing bonds.

In all these accounts of the lifelong learning of aloneness, are there different patterns represented in those descriptions rooted in more communal and in more individualist approaches to aloneness? Many of the more communal accounts are historically specific – showing differences between different times or different cultures. From the famously historicist account of childhood by Ariès (1996), through the historicism of adults at work in the sociology of Marx (Marx & Engels, 1970), to the historicism of de Beauvoir (1972) on old age, the life course of connection and separation is described as mutable and as subjective as well as objective and

related to particular historical and cultural traditions. However, other authors stress more universal psychological phenomena or philosophical interpretations of persons in society. Solitude, silence and loneliness in more community-oriented traditions and more individualistic traditions should both be noted. Personalism is a way of bridging many, if not all, of these varied approaches. And so it is the range of views, from communal to individualist, historicist to universal, that is the topic of the following sections.

Communal aloneness

For some community-oriented writers, solitude is a challenge and can even be seen as pathological. A good example of aloneness described by a communally oriented theorist is provided by Csikszentmihalyi (2002), in a book on 'flow' which is often read as celebrating solitudinous concentration. 'Of the things that frighten us', he says, 'the fear of being left out of the flow of human interaction is certainly one of the worst' and 'only in the company of other people do we feel complete' (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002: 165). He continues, in a passage that may be intended as more rhetorical than empirical:

> The density of human contacts that great cities afford is like a soothing balm; people in such centers relish it even when the interactions it provides may be unpleasant or dangerous. The crowds streaming along Fifth Avenue may contain an abundance of muggers and weirdos; nevertheless, they are exciting and reassuring. Everyone feels more alive when surrounded with other people. (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002: 165)

Of course, Csikszentmihalyi recognized the 'long tradition of wisdom warning us that "Hell is other people"' and the idea that '[other] people cause both the best and the worst times' (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002: 165). Yet his conclusion is that 'flow' can rarely be achieved, and that the solitude needed is in a sense contrary to human nature – as '[t]here is no question that we are social animals' (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002: 165).

> 'Whosoever is delighted in solitude,' goes the old saying that Francis Bacon repeated, 'is either a wild beast or a god.' One does not actually have to be a god, but it is true that to enjoy being alone a person must build his own mental routines, so that he [*sic*] can achieve flow without the supports of civilized life – without other people, without jobs, TV, theaters, restaurants, or libraries to help channel his attention. (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002: 173, and see also Chapter 13 of this Handbook)

Given the ambiguity of personhood, described earlier in this chapter, it is worth saying once again that what counts as the 'community', and therefore what counts as separation from community, may be interpreted in many different ways. Fulford (Chapter 4) describes solitude in order to engage with 'nature' (sometimes, tellingly, referred to as 'communing' with nature) and Simpson (Chapter 9) describes solitudinous attempts to engage with God or gods. Our whole universe may be described as a single community, as in the deep ecology of Naess (2008), or as a single community and in some senses as a single organism in the Gaia theory of Lovelock (2000). In such models, solitude is entirely relative – such as solitude *from people*, or solitude *in order to* get in touch with community. Those senses of solitude, and of community, are certainly rich in their educational implications. Nevertheless, there are many writers who are community-oriented and who see solitude and silence as either problematic or at best a 'rest' in order to be able to return to the more 'normal' communality.

Loneliness in such accounts is often seen as precisely the absence of the necessary belonging to community. Peterson contrasts 'Loneliness/Avoidance of commitment' with 'Intimacy', describing loneliness as a 'disorder of love', in his categorization of strengths and their opposites (Peterson, in Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006: 45). Peterson's model seems even more inimical than that of Csikszentmihalyi to positive versions of 'solitude' or 'silence'. Yet there are many community-oriented theories that give a much bigger role to 'good' aloneness. Lantieri describes 'schools with spirit' in which '[t]here would be places and time for silence and stillness, to help us face the chaos and complexity of school life yet stay in touch with inner truth and the web of interconnectedness' (Lantieri, 2001: 9). Here, silence and stillness are intended not as an avoidance of connection but as a way to 'stay in touch' with 'the web of interconnectedness'. In a similar approach, also based in schools, Kessler writes of the 'seven gateways to the soul in education' which include 'silence and stillness' (Kessler, 2000: 36). Silence is a 'respite from the tyranny of "busyness" and noise' (Kessler, 2000: 17) and a 'tool for cultivating rest and renewal' (Kessler, 2000: 36). 'Like silence', she says, 'solitude evokes fear in some young people' especially because 'people in authority' use it as punishment, 'but is a rare solace for most' (Kessler, 2000: 49). All the young respondents (aged seven to eight, or twelve to thirteen) in my own research (Stern, 2014) expressed a wish for more opportunities for solitude in school: this was not just wanted by the more contemplative or the more introverted respondents.

Individualist aloneness

More individually oriented writers, likewise, have a whole range of attitudes to the different forms of separation. Hobbes (1968 [1651]) is often described as the model of 'possessive individualism' (Macpherson, 1962), and is positioned by Cacioppo and Patrick as the central figure in the post-Renaissance shift to 'greater isolation' in Europe, exacerbated by 'the rise of Protestant theology, which stressed individual responsibility' (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008: 53–5). Hay writes of the 'lonely European' in a similar vein, also focusing on Hobbes (Hay, 2007: 64–7) and running on to the 'loneliness of Calvinism, and its illustration in Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*' (Hogg, 1978 [1824]; Hay, 2007: 63). Hobbes himself certainly writes of the unlimited appetites of people, albeit the appetite for knowledge is greater than for food or other pleasures (Hobbes, 1968: 124), and without enforced control by an all-powerful government (the *Leviathan* of the title), life would be 'solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short' (Hobbes, 1968: 186). Solitude is a form of suffering and people are by nature individually competitive, so it is fear – fear of solitude and, ultimately, fear of death – that drives all human activities. 'My mother gave birth to twins', he says: 'myself and fear' (Hobbes, quoted in Gert, 2010). (Winnicott and Bowlby might have something to say about the Hobbes household approach to child-rearing.) What strong government can provide is a respite from the battle to survive, a respite in which sociability can be achieved. Hobbes combined possessive individualism with solitude as an evil to be avoided. This, it seems, was translated by writers such as Locke and Hume into liberal political philosophy in the eighteenth century. Locke, for Macpherson, 'starts with the individual and moves out to society and the state, but . . . as with Hobbes, the individual with which he starts has already been created in the image of market man' which is central to 'English liberal theory' (Macpherson, 1962: 269–70).

In Hobbes, and in later liberal theory, 'market man' chooses to engage with society rather than suffer in solitude, and people should be taught to avoid the problems associated with solitude.

Domeracki (Chapter 1) refers to loneliness as a 'virus', but one that seems to be endemic – characteristic of all humanity. It is the sociable Hume who gives one of the strongest defences of sociability and attacks on solitude:

> Celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude, and the whole train of monkish virtues; for what reason are they everywhere rejected by men of sense, but because they serve to no manner of purpose; neither advance a man's fortune in the world, nor render him a more valuable member of society; neither qualify him for the entertainment of company, nor increase his power of self-enjoyment? We observe, on the contrary, that they cross all these desirable ends; stupify the understanding and harden the heart, obscure the fancy and sour the temper. We justly, therefore . . . place them in the catalogue of vices. (Hume, 2010: 1410)

The poet Larkin wrote of longing for solitude, while aware that virtues 'are all social', so if you dislike being deprived of solitude it is 'clear you're not the virtuous sort' (Larkin, 1988: 56). However, the 'market man' liberal model could also be used to *celebrate* solitude. *Robinson Crusoe*, a novel by Defoe (2001) that was inspired by the real life of Alexander Selkirk, describes the shipwrecked hero as building a good life, alone, prior to meeting the only other inhabitant. Marx criticizes the absurdity of such 'Robinsonades', claiming that they are not about a 'return to a misunderstood natural life' but a false and unimaginative conceit used by economists such as Smith and Ricardo to describe an individualism in which a person is wholly responsible for their economic activity, rather than being socially determined (Marx, 1973: 83):

> The human being is in the most literal sense a ζῷον πολιτικόν, not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society. Production by an isolated individual outside society – a rare exception which may well occur when a civilized person in whom the social forces are already dynamically present is cast by accident into the wilderness – is as much of an absurdity as is the development of language without individuals living *together* and talking to each other. (Marx, 1973: 84)

Notwithstanding Marx's criticisms, economists have continued into the twenty-first century using *Robinson Crusoe* to illustrate economic theory.[1]

Individualist approaches to solitude, silence and loneliness are as wide-ranging as the community-oriented approaches. The radical individualist anarchist Stirner (1963) provides a heroic account of the individual against society, in what some saw as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the 'market man' of classical economics. Stirner's was an atomistic view of humanity in which '[t]he egotistic individual' can at best 'inflate himself to the size of an atom' (Marx and Engels *The Holy Family*, quoted in Selsam and Martel, 1963: 311). A much more subtle approach is taken by Wittgenstein, an individualist in the form of a 'solipsist'. He describes solipsism as 'correct' as '[t]he world is *my* world' and 'I am my world' (Wittgenstein, 1961: 57). Wittgenstein's philosophy is seen by some as not only solipsistic but as 'haunted by loneliness' (Floyd, in Rouner, 1998: 79). However, Rée (2019) provides a more 'sociable' account of his life based on Wittgenstein's family letters. The *Tractatus* ends, '[w]hat we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence' (Wittgenstein, 1961: 74), a proposed silence on all matters of ethics and religion – indeed on all further philosophy, as he claimed the book was philosophy's 'final solution' (Wittgenstein, 1961: 4). Yet Rée claims that '[a]s far as [Wittgenstein] was

concerned the fact that ethical and religious attitudes fall outside the limits of articulate thought was not their weakness but their glory' (Rée, 2019: 8) as it points to the ineffable. Much more explicit work on individualism leading to loneliness is provided by philosophers such as Mijuskovic (2012, and Chapter 16 of this Handbook) and Domeracki (2018, and Chapter 1 of this Handbook). For Mijuskovic in particular, 'all men are activated by a fear of aloneness or loneliness – and . . . consequently every human thought, passion, and action derives from this one original, ubiquitous source, or fund, of frightened, psychic energy' (Mijuskovic, 2012: lii). As Koch describes it, 'Mijuskovic's central thesis is as uncompromising as it is extreme: the loneliness of man is "the original primordial fact"' (Koch, 1994: 174), as 'mere awareness of our separate self-existence is, or automatically produces, a kind of ontic loneliness' (Koch, 1994: 181).

Another version of individualism is that provided by Hay (2007), who describes it as distinctive of, and problematic for, Europeans in particular. Hay's account of the 'lonely European' is clearly historicist and culturally specific (and see Wong in Chapter 8 for an account of Chinese solitude). (Hay, 2006, is himself a relational, communal, theorist.) Is individualism a universal human characteristic, or one specific to particular cultures? Mijuskovic's account is of a universal character, while that of Hay is culturally specific. Hay is joined, from a post-colonial perspective (or at least fighting for a post-colonial world), by Fanon. Fanon attacks individualism head-on: after European colonizers go, individualism will be 'the first to disappear', as '[t]he colonialist bourgeoisie had hammered into the native's mind the idea of a society of individuals where each person shuts himself up in his own subjectivity, and whose only wealth is individual thought' (Fanon, 1963: 36). European romantic views of the value of solitude are contrasted by Fanon with African communalism, with colonial powers 'outlawing' communal senses of '[b]rother, sister, friend' and replacing them with the idea that 'my brother is my purse' and 'my friend is part of my scheme for getting on' (Fanon, 1963: 36).

Whether personhood – individually or communally – develops universally or in historical, social and cultural contexts, it is complex in its relationship to different forms of aloneness, and there is no avoiding the sense of aloneness being *learned*. That is an underlying theme of this whole Handbook.

Conclusion: A research archipelago

In Chapter 1, a description of how this Handbook came together described the various contributions to research on solitude, silence and loneliness, from various academic perspectives and practitioner and public policy contexts, as a kind of alliance or *archipelago*. That is, neither a single unified discipline nor a mere topic-related collection of unconnected disciplines. As an archipelago, there is, throughout the Handbook, a sense of how people come to realize their personhood at every stage of their lives through experience of both aloneness and togetherness. Whereas sociability, noise (especially talk) and intimacy are described in every educational, psychological, philosophical and historical account of humanity, accounts of solitude, silence and loneliness are – poetically – left out of the group, silenced, or seen as faults, even vices. Schools promote 'buddy benches' to avoid the horror of childhood solitude (Tan, 2016), and universities convert largely silent libraries into noisy 'social learning spaces' (Bryant et al., 2009). What we present here may not quite be a 'manifesto', in the style of Rufus's *Loners' Manifesto* (Rufus, 2003),

but it is certainly an alliance against the ignoring, underplaying or marginalizing, of research on solitude, silence and loneliness. The Handbook is broadly educational, but it draws on and contributes to numerous professional and practices settings, and a number of disciplines. This time, in this chapter, it's *personal*.

As editors and authors, we look forward to a strengthening of research and of the relationship between research and practice across all these areas. Alone and together, we hope to contribute to a better understanding of solitude, silence and loneliness.