

**Ben Lazare Mijuskovic.** *Feeling Lonesome: The Philosophy and Psychology of Loneliness.* Praeger 2015. 203 pp. \$60.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781440840289).

Ben Mijuskovic is a masterful historian of philosophy. He studied under the eminent Richard Popkin at the University of California, San Diego back in the late 1960s, and is influenced by Arthur Lovejoy's conception of the history of ideas.

This book is the culmination of a great deal of Mijuskovic's previous work, which includes several books and multiple articles. It studies the traditional theory of self-consciousness found in Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Fichte, and Husserl (and anticipated in Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, and Augustine). It attempts to fuse this with a theory of intentionality found in Descartes, Fichte, Brentano, Husserl, and Sartre. And it attempts to connect both of these with a psychological theory of loneliness. It argues against the view that loneliness is temporary, sporadic, and avoidable—a view that characterizes materialism, empiricism, and behaviorism. Mijuskovic argues that loneliness is innate, unavoidable, and constituted by the structure of self-consciousness itself. And he thinks that the psychological drive to escape loneliness is our most insistent motivator and certainly more powerful than the desire for sexual gratification (1-2).

The book contrasts two competing constellations of ideas: on the one hand, materialism, empiricism, phenomenism, nominalism, behavioral therapy, evidence-based practices, and science, and on the other hand, idealism, rationalism, phenomenology, existentialism, conceptualism, insight-oriented therapy, and humanism (8). Mijuskovic moves back and forth examining representatives of both of these paradigms and tries to make the strongest case possible that the latter paradigm is the only one adequate to explain loneliness.

In chapters 2 through 4, Mijuskovic examines the cognitive roots of loneliness and attempts to show that it is a necessary and innate feature of self-consciousness. These chapters contain insightful discussions of Descartes, Locke, Hobbes, Kant, Husserl, and others. In chapter 5, he discusses the psychological roots of loneliness. Besides being a professor of philosophy, Mijuskovic is a practicing therapist, and his book is informed and enhanced by his clinical experience.

Chapter 6 contains a very interesting discussion of loneliness and language. It examines the attempts of philosophers from Hobbes, through Russell, Wittgenstein, and Ryle to focus on language as a way of avoiding a commitment to self-consciousness. Mijuskovic uses Husserl to argue instead that consciousness precedes language.

Chapter 7, in an especially interesting way, contrasts an unconscious with a subconscious. The former, which can be found in Leibniz and, of course, in Freud, is basically a theory of inaccessible memories that under certain conditions are retrievable. The subconscious, on the other hand, is not memory and not retrievable. Rather, it creates the possibility of the unconscious, of consciousness, and of self-consciousness. Mijuskovic thinks a subconscious of this sort is implied in Kant's notion of spontaneity and the reproductive imagination, especially in Kant's section on Schematism. He also finds this notion in Hegel's concept of soul in the *Philosophy of Mind*.

Mijuskovic has enormous breadth. No reader is likely to be familiar with all the philosophers and psychologists he discusses, but all can learn a great deal from this book. I certainly did. The author ends up with a rather solipsistic conception of the self and thus with loneliness as essential to the human condition. He thinks that life is an endless struggle against loneliness and that the best we

can hope for are respites of varying duration and intensity from the distress of loneliness (175). He does think that friendship is one thing that can offer such respite and in this connection he discusses Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus.

It is doubtful, however, that Aristotle would accept the notion that friendship offers a mere respite from loneliness. Mijuskovic thinks that loneliness is innate and necessary. Indeed, at one point he says that it is natural—a part of the human condition (183). Aristotle would go the other way. Friendship, for Aristotle, would be what is natural. For him, human beings are social (or political) by nature.

In the *1844 Manuscripts*, the young Marx, who in many respects is an Aristotelian, holds that other human beings are a part of our essence. We need other human beings. We cannot realize our own essence without them. I cannot realize my potential, I cannot realize my powers and capacities, without depending upon other human beings—for the production of necessities, for technology, for the existence of language, for science, for companionship, and in myriad other ways. For Aristotle and the young Marx, an essence is something that should be realized—and certainly things can get in the way of that realization. An essence can fail to be realized. For Marx, given the alienation characteristic of modern capitalist society, it might even be very difficult for individuals to realize their essence. It might even be the case that loneliness could be close to inevitable. Loneliness might even be normal—it might even appear natural in such a society. This comes very close to Mijuskovic's position, but it is subtly different from it. It holds that loneliness and alienation, no matter how widespread, no matter how common, result from the *failure* to realize our nature. Loneliness is not a *part* of our nature.

Mijuskovic makes a powerful and very persuasive argument for his position, and one learns an enormous amount in following the argument of his superb book, but I cannot, finally, pry myself loose from Aristotle and Marx. I am sure that Mijuskovic would not accept this. He ends up with a very bleak picture of the human condition: 'each of us contains elements that are absolutely inaccessible to the other person no matter how close we may be to them. This dark hidden soul ultimately may be the only conceivable "explanation" for man's ageless violence toward his fellows that persists to this day" (157). The subconscious 'is a surging, insidious force, an indeterminate, unknowable activity. How else to account for wars and holocausts, suicides, act of unbridled aggression, and malicious torture' (164). Mijuskovic further reinforces this with a discussion of loneliness in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Still, my inclination would be to stick with Marx and to insist that all evil requires a specific explanation. It cannot be explained simply as a default, the result of the human condition, the subconscious, or loneliness.

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