



Solitude: A Philosophical Encounter

By Philip Koch

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In Koch's *Solitude*, both solitude and engagement emerge as primary modes of human experience, equally essential for human completion. This work draws upon the vast corpus of literary reflections on solitude, especially Lao Tze, Sappho, Plotinus, Augustine, Petrarch, Montaigne, Goethe, Shelley, Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman and Proust.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In exploring the phenomenon of solitude, Koch dismisses physical isolation and reflection, stillness and balance, as inessential. Freely chosen social disengagement, "the absence of others in one's experiential world," comes closer to the mark. He also differentiates solitude from loneliness (a desire for human interaction), isolation (a sense of separation from others), privacy (freedom from personal invasion) and alienation (a condition of fractured relationships). In solitude one has no encounter with others, even in consciousness or negatively by their absence. After Koch makes these distinctions, sometimes too pedantically, the reader expects him to celebrate solitude. He does defend it against the charges that it is pathological, escapist and antisocial, and he extols its virtues of freedom and creativity, attunement to self and to nature, but his conclusion is more inclusive. Solitude, he asserts, is only one aspect of our being. "The human way leads through both human relationships and inner transcendence"; it involves, in essence, a balance between encounter and solitude. Koch's book is itself illustrative of this because it results from reading the work of others--Goethe, Jesus, Plato, Whitman, Proust, Tillich, Petrarch and many others--as well as disengaged meditations on solitude carried out alone. Overall, Koch has written an excellent study of solitude which is flawed by the banal conclusion that life involves both the self and others.

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From [Booklist](#)

Koch argues against the generally believed notion that solitude is a respite, a time away from others when we can recharge our emotional batteries. And he's definitely at odds with the belief that solitude is a punishment of sorts, thrust upon us by personality or circumstance. Instead, he sees solitude as that "luminous silent space of freedom, of self and nature, of reflection and creative power." To bolster his argument, Koch uses the work of philosophers, historians, and writers, as well as tests such as the Bible, to show what solitude is and isn't, and what being alone can do to and for the individual. Interesting for its literary scope and its conclusions about all the good true solitude can bring us. *Brian McCombie*

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