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Depression, Self-Regulation, and Intersubjectivity

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This paper addresses the phenomenological relationships between affect-regulation and interpersonal experience in psychiatric illness. I argue that a capacity for affect-regulation is inextricable from how one relates to specific individuals and to other people in general. To do so, I focus on a type of experience often associated with depression diagnoses, involving a sense of stasis and inescapability. I show how a feeling of being estranged from other people amounts, at the same time, to a sense of the world as bereft of certain kinds of significant possibility and, by implication, to what we might call an experience of diminished *self*. This, I suggest, can be interpreted in terms of what I call “existential feeling”. I further consider how one might seek to regulate and change one’s felt relationship with the world and other people, despite feeling cut off from others in general and having a pervasive sense that emotional change is impossible.