What is Epistemic Loneliness?

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to elucidate a type of loneliness that is epistemic in nature. It is so, I will argue, in virtue of the fact that it is first and foremost related to our capacities as knowers. This kind of loneliness can be distinguished and hence identified on the basis that it primarily arises in *virtue of*, it is primarily *responsive to*, and *specifically affects* the knowledge-creating, knowledge-accruing *and* knowledge-sharing dimensions of interpersonal interactions. Identifying such form of loneliness, I will argue, makes it so that many issues related to the conceptualization of loneliness, and hence to approaches to loneliness, could be alleviated by this framework that identifies *epistemic loneliness* as a particular, yet common and socially relevant instance of loneliness.

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to elucidate a type of loneliness that is epistemic in nature. It is so, I will argue, in virtue of the fact that it is first and foremost related to our capacities as knowers. This kind of loneliness can be distinguished and hence identified on the basis that it primarily arises in *virtue of*, it is primarily *responsive to*, and *specifically affects* the knowledge-creating, knowledge-accruing *and* knowledge-sharing dimensions of interpersonal interactions. While this paper expands on and provides a conceptual analysis of Creasy's (2023) observations that a) there are distinct kinds of loneliness, b) that certain kinds of loneliness cannot be assuaged by considerations of either sociability or emotional care alone, and c) that certain kinds of loneliness involve a recognition at a deeply personal, hermeneutical, and intellectual level, I will also argue the following:

- That this latter kind of loneliness can be best characterized as *epistemic* loneliness, and

- That many issues related to the conceptualization of loneliness, and hence to approaches to loneliness, could be alleviated by this framework that identifies epistemic loneliness as a particular, yet common and socially relevant instance of loneliness.

1.2.1. What loneliness is not

In this paper I will not attempt to define the phenomenon of loneliness itself. Rich and complex literature across disciplines already exists on what is a hard concept to define (Svensen, 2017) and, notably, to measure (Russell, 1982). Rather, I will work under the assumption that such a phenomenal experience exists, that many of us are capable of feeling it, have felt it, or currently feel it. Furthermore, I will assume that when loneliness arises, it does so in virtue of and has an effect on multiple dimensions of our being. I will also assume that most of these dimensions are integral to our sense of self and hence to our ability to navigate the world (Symons and Alvarado, 2022). These dimensions can be social, emotional, cognitive or—as we will see here—epistemic.[1] Nevertheless, in order to understand the uniqueness of *epistemic* loneliness, we do

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[1] It is important to note here that the cognitive and the epistemic have a strong relationship. In one sense one can say that they are coextensively defined. However, just like other coextensively defined concepts, this does not mean a) that they are synonymous, b) that one can be reduced to the other, or c) that addressing one necessarily implies addressing the other. For example, I can teach you something without affecting the way your neural paths work, and

need to first distinguish *loneliness* from other related concepts with which it is often conflated. As we do so, the distinct character of certain *kinds* of loneliness will hopefully begin to emerge and the ground will be set for us to uncover what epistemic loneliness is.

1.2.2. Is loneliness social Isolation?

Broadly speaking, loneliness is seen as a social problem in more than one sense. For example, it is often seen as arising from certain deficiencies of social behavior or sociability on the part of an agent: going out, talking to people, etc. In short, socializing or the lack thereof. On the other hand, loneliness is also often seen as arising from social obstacles to social goods such as gathering spaces or events. Other times, these social goods necessarily imply the meaningful presence of others: persons, relationships, recognition. Hence, it makes sense to understand loneliness as a kind of social isolation. Afterall, it is a phenomenological experience whose nature is about our relationships, or lack thereof, with others.

Yet, as Motta (2021) notes:

> "Distinctions have been made between loneliness and social isolation, and between loneliness and solitude. Many contemporary researchers acknowledge that loneliness and social isolation are different constructs." (Motta, 2021 p. 71)

Unfortunately, however, as Motta continues, "this theoretical distinction is not always fully reflected in empirical research on loneliness, let alone in interventions to alleviate it" (ibid). This misguided understanding of loneliness as social isolation is engrained in the practice of psychiatry and psychology to such an extent that issues of loneliness are treated as if the main distinction to be of consideration is between *objective* social isolation (OSI) or *perceived* social isolation (PSI) (Piejka et al., 2021).

The omission noted by Motta above persists even in the case of more nuanced understandings of loneliness. Notice as an example the conceptual framework in the quote below:

> "Loneliness has been associated with objective social isolation, depression, introversion, or poor social skills. However, studies have shown these characterisations are incorrect, and that loneliness is a unique condition in which an individual perceives himself or herself to be socially isolated even when among other people." (Caccioppo and Cacioppo 2018 p. 426)

As we can see, there is indeed an understanding of the distinction of loneliness not only from objective social isolation or lack of social skills but also from other more personal phenomenal experiences such as depression and introversion. And there is an acknowledgment that the experience of loneliness can persist even in the presence of others. Nevertheless, the main contrast is made with the fact that there is a *perceived* social isolation even if there is not an

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vice versa I can modify your neurological structures without teaching you anything. Here we can understand the fact that I can teach something to someone as addressing an epistemic dimension of an interlocutor, while we can understand the neurobiological level as a purely cognitive dimension that can be distinguished from the epistemic. (Alvarado, 2023)

objective one. In other words, the framework is still within the paradigm of loneliness that implies or includes *some kind* of *social isolation*. While an account of loneliness as perceived social isolation allows for the possibility of a misperception and hence of an instance in which the person may feel lonely even when not socially isolated, this same view implies that what the person is perceiving when feeling lonely *is* an isolation of a primarily— or at least relevantly— social character. As we will see, this is an unnecessarily reductive limitation on the part of such views. While it may make intuitive sense to think that a fundamental aspect of loneliness is simply *about* the absence of other people, perceived or otherwise, that this is the case is unclear.

It is true, for example, that in a trivial sense most instances of loneliness could be attributed to the absence of others if one does not look past the intuition. Conventionally speaking, for one to feel lonely *it seems like there must be* an absence of others; similarly, it seems like it is primarily the absence of others that *causes* loneliness. In fact, in many cases of different kinds of loneliness it may be that social isolation is an underlying necessary condition. A precondition, perhaps. For example, the absence of others may be the underlying cause that makes someone feel intellectually, emotionally or physically lonely. It is certainly the case that it seems *more likely* that someone may suffer from any of these kinds of loneliness in the absence of contact with people.

However, once one looks past the intuition, it becomes clear that mere social isolation is neither sufficient nor necessary for loneliness to occur.

As noted by Motta above, solitude does not imply loneliness. That is, there can be an absence of others—i.e. social isolation— without loneliness. Hence, not only are these two concepts not the same thing, but they are not even coextensively defined. It is well understood, as the distinction between solitude and loneliness shows, that one can have one without the other, but it is also the case that while loneliness implies a negative connotation, a problem to be resolved, solitude can have positive effects on a person (Long and Averill, 2003). This means that the same phenomenon, namely the absence of others, can bring about completely antithetical phenomenal experiences. If this is the case, then *there must be something else* to each that defines either other than the shared element of social isolation.

Some may object at this point that what is meant by the term 'social isolation' in the context of loneliness, per se, is not the same as the *mere* absence of others. What *is* at play, some may add, is the *meaningful presence* of others, or the (mere) presence of *significant* others. To see the difference between these two categories—i.e. the meaningful presence of others and the presence of significant others— consider the following distinct scenarios, both of which can be said to assuage some familiar instances of loneliness:

a) Next of kin in everyday settings: e.g., routinely sharing breakfast or walks with adult offspring;
b) Meaningful communion with strangers: e.g., shared ecstatic experiences, such as concerts, religious services, or shared trauma such as hostage situations.

In scenario a) we have the mere presence of *significant* others. Just having *someone that means something to us* seems to be of consequence to at least some kinds of loneliness. In scenario b),

on the other hand, we have the *meaningful presence* of others. It is the significant setting shared with *anyone* that matters in this second scenario. This latter scenario aligns with the notion that the significance of the social environment may also play a role in making us feel less alone. This is also in accordance with the view that it is not merely social isolation itself that is relevant to loneliness, but the many sociodynamic considerations that are brought to bear: i.e., familial, linguistic, cultural and economic factors matter. In both the concert and the hostage situation in scenario b), for example, there is a deeper social circumstance at play than the mere proximity of other people. Hence, the argument would go, characterizing views of loneliness that focus on social isolation as reductive, as I did above, constitutes missing their point of paying attention to the social aspects of isolation in loneliness.

Proponents of this type of view may further argue that these social considerations are the opposite of reductive, for it is not just the bodies of people that are absent in instances of loneliness. Rather, it is the '*body politic*' (Meijer & Prins, 1998; Jacobus et al., 2013; Butler, 2017) that matters when discussing social isolation (Neocloeus, 2001). In other words, views that focus on the social isolation aspect of loneliness are acknowledging that it is *the social aspects of the presence of others* that make a difference, and not just *the isolation* from others. After all, one can position humans nearby one another while excluding any hint of sociability with non-trivial, often detrimental, effects on their psyche and behavior (Hancock et al., 2011; Maguire & Westbrook, 2020; 2021). Prisons where inmates are not allowed to talk to one another are an example of this.

These views are partially correct, and I concede: the social aspects related to the presence or absence of others matters when we talk about social isolation. Hence social isolation is not merely the absence of other people. In short, social isolation is not the same as mere physical isolation: intimate and social needs seem to also be at play when the lonely person in such settings has a sense of lacking. And yet, as we shall see below, the view that loneliness or the relevant aspects of loneliness can be *reduced* to a lack of these social needs/goods results in strange outcomes, particularly when speaking about policy, governmental interventions and allocation. These outcomes, in turn, signal that the true nature of loneliness may lie elsewhere. At the very least, we can see that social isolation is not *sufficient* for loneliness to arise. Furthermore, social isolation is also not *necessary* for loneliness either. As many cultural products (e.g., songs, poems, novels, etc.) can attest, a person can feel lonely even in crowds (Weiss, 1975; Jaffe, 2008; Caccioppo et al., 2009). In short, one can be in an active socially inclusive setting and feel lonely *and* one can be socially isolated and not feel alone. This conceptual distinction is something often explicitly acknowledged, as we saw above, by several disciplines interested in the psychological and social phenomena of loneliness, but it is also acknowledged by philosophers of loneliness (Svendsen, 2017; Setiya, 2023 p.41)— even if in practice, implicitly, it continues to be neglected. And yet, if social isolation is neither sufficient nor necessary for loneliness to arise, then this points to the fact that loneliness is only related to social isolation and the social aspects that come with it but is neither dependent nor determined by it.

What role then do social aspects of social isolation play in instances of loneliness? In the following section I argue that they do not play the role they are usually cast to do. In particular, we will see that even if social isolation can be fleshed out as a phenomenal experience related to

loneliness, we should nevertheless be weary of casting what is important in this relation as an issue of social goods.

1.2.3. Is loneliness a lack of social goods?

Recently, philosophers and psychologists, perhaps seeking to speak to the pragmatic and policy-related implications of loneliness, have emphasized that the experience of loneliness necessarily involves "the feeling that certain social goods are missing and out of reach, either temporarily or permanently." (Roberts and Krueger 2021 p.186). In clinical and health policy circles, for example, loneliness is persistently defined as involving a "set of feelings encompassing reactions to the absence of intimate and social needs" (Ernst& Cacioppo,1999). More recently, Räsän (2023), taking such an approach and taking it to its logical conclusion in attempting to flesh out the obviously distinct character of *sexual* loneliness, ultimately makes the issue one of disproportionate allocation of social goods. As a consequence, he suggests a perspective of sexual loneliness that has to be contended with by policy-makers as an issue of *distributive justice*. That is, in their view, it may be an institutional problem to properly allocate such goods. Although it remains unclear what such goods may be in this case, this reading of a specific kind of loneliness as an absence of social goods, and its implications for policy, mediation and intervention strikes me as counterintuitive. As we will see, although my concerns here apply to many different kinds of loneliness, the implications for sexual loneliness arrived at by Räsan provide a stark-enough case to pause and think about the 'loneliness-as-a-lack-of-social-goods' framework. I am not sure, for example, that we should want our social institutions to be responsible for allocating such goods, which I imagine to be mainly either sexual partners or the social settings in which sexual opportunities arise. Maybe Räsan imagines these goods to be something else, perhaps public spaces to diminish social isolation, or perhaps incentives and goods meant to facilitate sexual encounters. Regardless, it is not immediately obvious that sexual loneliness can be reduced to the absence of such goods as one can easily imagine a context in which sexual encounters abound and one is nevertheless sexually lonely, as well as some context in which sexual experiences are few but one is not lonely in this respect.

Whatever is the case, Räsan's question and its possible answer elucidates to me that issues of loneliness may not be merely about social goods. At the very least, there may be other more fundamental aspects of our being at play and addressing this social dimension may only be scratching the surface of what underlies loneliness.[2]

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[2] It is important to also note that calling attention to the 'social' in and of itself—particularly in the context of loneliness—is not a very informative strategy in most cases of interest. At the very least, it does not offer a very robust explanatory resource to understand it or address it. This is particularly the case since "the social" often seems to include too many heterogenous elements: the architectural environment, the nature and depth of interpersonal relationships, the (mis) allocation of goods, the nature of education, power dynamics, etc. While it may be true that some or all of the above contribute to general social isolation in a population, notice that such a broad approach gives little to go on for anyone attempting to design a responsive and responsible intervention, unless, one is of course thinking of a grand social reform project akin to the cultural revolutions envisioned by radically disruptive political movements of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. While it is true that sometimes modifying the environment in which an individual develops can make a difference, and it is certainly true that the environment surrounding a person's daily life can have an impact on their sense of isolation, loneliness is not merely a social affair. Directing someone to reform the sociopolitical dynamics of a hegemonic hierarchical structure or to change the educational system in their country to alleviate their loneliness seems to be at best misguided and at worst a potentially

Interestingly, even when social *isolation* is not the main focus of some accounts of loneliness, the emphasis on the *social* aspect of loneliness persists across disciplines. Although the inclusion of intimate elements in interpersonal exchanges as well as of the dynamic temporality of loneliness are steps in the right direction to account for loneliness of a distinct—e.g., non-necessarily-social— character, notice that the foregrounding of social needs and goods in these definitions serves more as a distraction than as an explanatory element of loneliness. In other words, as we will see below, such a focus on social factor is undermotivated by the actual factors at play in instances of loneliness. Although social factors are indeed part of the picture in many of the instances of loneliness, the role they ultimately play in determining the presence or absence of loneliness may be extremely limited and this means that an unproportionate weight is being allocated to such features. (see footnote 2). Such a focus also functions as an unnecessary conceptual limitation on the part of these accounts, e.g., by focusing solely in the social dimension of everything that has it; while at the same time, these approaches also trivialize some of the terms in their framework, e.g., by interpreting everything as social.

So far, we have established that loneliness, while often underlain by both social isolation or the absence of others, is neither synonymous with nor coextensively defined by these factors. We have also established that considerations around the just allocation of goods provides little explanatory or alleviatory resources in the face of loneliness. And yet, it is clear that, as Rogers and Krueger suggest, loneliness "is an emotion that essentially concerns absence." (2021) In other words, something is missing. What is this absence of if not of bodies, if not of sociability?. Addressing the nature of this absence is the aim of the next section.

1.2.4. Is loneliness a lack of recognition?

So, the question remains: if the absence from which loneliness emerges is not an absence of others, not an absence of sociability, nor that of certain social goods, what is the absence that underlies loneliness of? Both the distinction drawn above between social isolation and loneliness and their relative conceptual independence from one another as well as our analysis of the inadequacy of equating social isolation with the mere absence of others, can seem to imply that if the presence of *people in general* does not matter, then perhaps even the presence of *particular* people may also not matter. And this seems, counterintuitive. As we briefly saw above, sometimes the presence of some *specific* others or the presence of others in some specific circumstances seem to be of relevance. At the very least, most of us seem to share the intuition that some or most kinds of loneliness do seem to be assuaged in virtue of the *meaningful* presence of others or even by the mere presence of *significant* others. If this intuition is right, this means that the presence of specific others or the presence of others in significant circumstances must be of relevance to loneliness. But how do we make sense of this, and what kind of people or presences are absent when we are lonely?

There are few responses in the philosophical literature. Creasy (2024) considers two. In Setiya's evolutionary account of the nature of loneliness, for example, it is the absence of someone for

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catastrophic therapeutic advice. As can be seen in Räsan's work, this is particularly the case when this social aspect of loneliness is understood through the reductively bureaucratic lens of Rawlsian egalitarianism.

whom *we* matter that makes a difference in whether we are/feel lonely or not. This is roughly in accordance with our discussion above: it is not just any other that matters, but rather, it is significant others that do. In Setiya's view those who matter are those with whom we have strong bonds forged through evolutionarily advantageous outcomes: blood relations, tribal relations, etc. (2023 p.41) Notice, however, that there is a subtle distinction here between what Setiya is suggesting and what we discussed earlier. The absence suggested by Setiya is not *just* of a significant other, someone that matters to us, but rather of someone for whom *we* matter as well. This is yet another addition to the possible set of factors related to loneliness: we must be significant others to those that are significant to us.[3]

And yet, loneliness often seems to transcend the presence of such others as well. As Creasy recently elucidated in detail, "just as one can feel lonely in a room full of strangers, one can feel lonely in a room full of friends." (Creasy, 2023). Hence, perhaps what is at play is something else. After all, being a member of a kinship, tribe, or community in general is not merely a matter of being at the right place at the right time and with the right people. Rather, it is also a matter of being recognized by them.[4] Although the psychological literature on belonging is extensive (Mahar et al., 2013), here it only suffices to postulate that a reciprocal recognition of being of the same kind as others —whatever this may entail (Thelen & Lammer, 2021)—seems to be a necessary, even if not a sufficient condition for *not* feeling lonely. It is not enough, one may think, to think oneself as member of a community if such a community does not recognize one as belonging to it.[5] Furthermore, not being recognized as a member of a community which one longs to belong to is enough to make someone feel lonely.

Perhaps this is where a richer answer to our question about what is absent in loneliness lies: at the very least we can say that there is something else besides being surrounded by friends and loved ones at play in certain cases of loneliness, particularly those which seem not to be alleviated by conventional approaches. This leads us to the second view explored by Creasy, that of Hanna Arendt. In Arendt's (1951) view, loneliness is defined as "a feeling that results when one's human dignity or unconditional worth as a person fails to be recognized and affirmed." (as

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[3] One way to understand this addition is by thinking of the most immediately available list of the kinds of things that one often associates with alleviating loneliness in places like retirement homes. Most likely this list includes people, but as extendedly discussed above, it must be people that matter to us and relatedly, people for whom we matter. We can easily imagine a retirement home trying to alleviate loneliness by bringing in random strangers, then bringing people we care about but that do not care about us in the same way, and then bringing someone who genuinely cares about us and who we care for to visit. It seems intuitive to think that while the first two cases may help alleviate some of the aspects of loneliness, it is ultimately the third that has the most potential to fully address it.

[4] In fact, many individuals are taken to belong to groups, communities, etc., even against their own lack of ascription to such identities. This happens when people are wrongly grouped in virtue of stereotypical and superficial features of their appearance but it also happens in the case of forcefully minoritized individuals as when the question of where one "really" is from arises. Importantly, this phenomenon happens even when those involved are looking to be inclusive as this intent often implies a prior othering of the interlocutor regardless of their status or own self-perception.

[5] Although one may very well want to, and wish that a certain amount of will by itself sufficed, one can recognize that this is not automatically the case by simply reflecting on the main motivator for the social movements behind human rights, women's rights, civil rights, gay rights, trans rights, etc. That is, if it was the case that seeing oneself as a member of a community sufficed to belong to such a community, one would not need to spend any effort in a struggle for recognition (moral, legal, etc.).

cited by Creasy, 2023) This is a slightly richer view than Setiya's of what is absent or perceived as absent in the experience of loneliness. As we can see just from the quote above, in Arendt's view there are issues of personhood at stake. There are also conditional clauses concerning an acknowledgement—or rather a failure thereof— not just of a shared human nature but of some properties particular to it, such as dignity, as well. Thus, both Setiya's and—by Creasy's account— Arendt's views on loneliness agree that what is absent in instances of loneliness is a kind of *recognition*. In the case of Arendt, one can postulate that what is missing is an acknowledgment of personhood that preserves social and political dignity (King, 2013; Gaffney, 2016); in the case of Setiya what is missing is the recognition of some sort of communal affinity. However, Creasy significantly distances herself from such views and says the following:

> "These accounts get a good deal about loneliness right. But they miss something as well. On these views, loving friendships allow us to avoid loneliness because the loving friend provides a form of recognition we require as social beings. Without loving friendships, or when we are apart from our friends, we are unable to secure this recognition. So, we become lonely. But notice that the feature affirmed by the friend here – my unconditional value – is radically depersonalised. The property the friend recognises and affirms in me is the same property she recognises and affirms in her other friendships."

According to Creasy's analysis of the views above, certain cases of loneliness are not assuaged merely by being seen as human, or as a person or even as *a* friend. While these recognitions may be preconditions for the possibility of a deeper sense of belonging, by themselves they seem to be focusing on an individual's social dimension. Hence, one ends up being recognized not for *who* one is, but *what* one is: i.e., *a* human, *a* person, *a* man, *a* woman, *a* friend, etc. Although this kind of recognition is something that is worth fighting for and is a good first civil step if it does not exist, this is not what one often thinks about when someone is lonely. In fact, some of these recognitions can lead some to feel lonely, invisible, yet *just another* human, person, friend, etc. One may even argue that in themselves, these kinds of recognition are ultimately equally alienating to those looking to be seen and understood by others. This point is perhaps easier to recognize in some relationships than others— mainly due to certain societal norms surrounding the identification of some relationships and not others. Importantly, in some relationships, particularly those that seem to matter to loneliness, it is easy to see how being merely identified or even recognized in the ways described above could be seen as frivolous or even hurtful. Consider for a moment the implications of someone in an established monogamous and long-standing relationship suddenly being identified merely as *a* partner, or *a* lover rather than *the* partner or *the* lover of their significant other. The same can be said if a parent merely recognized their offspring as human, as persons, as women, as just one of their sons or daughters, etc. Some friendships also seem to require a deeper sense of recognition that goes beyond the social, the political, or the equal. Not all comrades are friends. As Creasy clarifies:

> Otherwise put, the recognition that allegedly mitigates loneliness in Setiya's view is the friend's recognition of an impersonal, abstract feature of oneself, a quality one shares with every other human being: her unconditional worth as a human being. (The recognition given by the loving friend is that I '[matter] … just like everyone else.')"
> (Creasy, 2023)

Thus, while important, these forms of recognition may prove insufficient to address the instances of loneliness that Creasy is attempting to identify. These views, according to Creasy—while hinting at deeper personal aspects of loneliness than the ones in the previous section are nevertheless still stuck at a social level of understanding. They are not necessarily stuck at the same superficial social level as the accounts explored in the previous section (i.e., presence, sociability, institutions, the political, etc.), but they are so at least at a similarly abstract level: the level of the human person, the social person, the social role, the friend, etc. Hence, what Creasy is pointing at here is that both Setiya's and Arendt's views refer to a more general sense of recognition. According to her, this sense of recognition does not always capture what individuals undergoing the phenomenal experience of loneliness understand as lacking or what *is,* objectively speaking, lacking. Both views represent an ethical— and perhaps political kind of recognition applied to all, and not the kind of recognition that can make an individual feel seen in all of their existential uniqueness. As Creasy states, Setiya may be correct in stating that loneliness can result in the absence of love and recognition, yet "it can also result from the inability – and sometimes, failure – of those with whom we have loving relationships to share or affirm our values, to endorse desires that we understand as central to our lives, and to satisfy our needs." (Creasy, 2023) Note that "our" here means the individual for Creasy and not us as a society, species, etc. This latter point is best elucidated by Creasy's own examples of the kinds of loneliness she seeks to capture:

> "the student who comes home to his family and friends after a transformative first year at college; the adolescent who returns home to her loving but repressed parents after a sexual awakening at summer camp; the first-generation woman of colour in graduate school who feels cared for but also perpetually 'in-between' worlds, misunderstood and not fully seen either by her department members or her family and friends back home; the travel nurse who returns home to her partner and friends after an especially meaningful (or perhaps especially psychologically taxing) work assignment; the man who goes through a difficult breakup with a long-term, live-in partner; the woman who is the first in her group of friends to become a parent; the list goes on." (Creasy, 2023)

This list of examples points towards a kind of loneliness that entails loneliness as a lack of communication. Specifically, a lack of communication with others who could recognize not just unique or significant external events in someone's life, but also the accompanying internal— transformed and transform*ing*— thoughts. Furthermore, as we will see below, this recognition is not only of the thoughts themselves but of their implications for the character of the person: i.e., they are not the kinds of thoughts that this person used to have, they reflect a kind of personal development, and they elucidate a contextual depth in relation to the person uttering them that goes beyond the propositions being uttered. In other words, this kind of recognition (or, more precisely in the case of loneliness, a lack thereof) seems to be related to both intellectual and character development. This latter point is echoed by other definitions of loneliness that suggest that richer mental aspects of someone's life beyond just the unidirectional sharing of thoughts and ideas are involved in certain instances of loneliness. Mijuskovic's (2012) work in the philosophy of loneliness, for example, makes a similar point by noting that loneliness is "the self-conscious desire to be positively, *mutually* and *reciprocally* related to another *thinking being"* while we are "unable to relate in this desired fashion" (ibid, italics mine).

As we can see, what is being pointed to as absent in this latter definition of loneliness is an ability to relate to others in a way that meaningfully involves others and their thinking.

Although this latter definition seems relatively straightforward and clear in that it tells us exactly what seems to be at play in these instances of loneliness—namely an inability to relate in a specific way to others— the conceptual richness of some of the notions and even clauses in it merit that we spend some time trying to elucidate their implications. For example, we should look at the pair of qualifications related to the nature of the relatedness at play and its directionality (e.g., mutuality and reciprocity), the appeal to the nature or character of the agents involved (e.g., thinking beings), the fact that the definition involves a desire, an ability (e.g., to relate) and the clause requiring some kind of awareness of both the desire and the inability to fulfill it. For the sake of argument and succinctness, I will not say much about either the desire or the self-awareness implied in Mijuskovic's definition. Instead, I will focus on the other aspects of the definition: mainly the suggested mutual reciprocity amongst thinking beings. Nevertheless, it is important to note that both of these clauses— the clause about desire and the clause about self-awareness— can be immediately problematized by positing the possibility that a person may be lonely in the way defined above, and in the manner Creasy depicts with her examples, without necessarily *desiring* to relate to others in such a manner or without necessarily being aware of their inability to do so. While loneliness is indeed a phenomenological, experiential phenomenon, self-awareness or explicit cognitive engagement with such a condition is neither sufficient nor necessary for it to manifest itself in an individual. In other words, it is perfectly sensible to posit that someone is lonely without them knowing it or acknowledging it. Similarly, one can easily imagine, without implying a contradiction in terms, a person feeling/being lonely and still not desiring to connect with others.

Let us turn to the other terms of interest in Mijuskovic's definition. To begin with, note that while the definition includes clauses related to mutuality and reciprocity—which may make the reader think that the relatedness in question in the definition is symmetrical between the lonely person and those they are unable to relate to— we have to be simultaneously careful of both not reading too much into the fact that the inability in question seems to only apply to/arise from the 'self-conscious' individual; while also being careful to not simply neglect the fact that as an agent-relative (and self-referential) definition, it does indeed only speak of the inability related to the subject while saying nothing about the ability or inability of others to relate to the lonely subject.[6] In other words, loneliness, in this definition, is the awareness *of the lonely person* not being able to relate to others. While it is true that as stated, the ability in question may not refer solely to abilit*ies* had by the subject, it is still the case that it is an agent/subject-relative definition, nonetheless. This subject-relative account of loneliness strikes me as unnecessarily exclusionary given that a subject may be equally lonely to the same degree, or even more so, even if they had the ability to relate to others but others did not reciprocate. In fact, I would venture to suggest that such an agent may be even more lonely given their own capacities in relation to the incapacities or unwillingness of others. A hyper-social person with both desires and skills to connect to others, for example, may find themselves feeling even more alone if they encounter blank or cold stares as they attempt to reach out to others. Not only is this possible, but

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[6] This is, of course, the case, by definition, of accounts of loneliness that are primarily or exclusively derived from the emotive content and experience of a subject. See Rogers and Krueger (2021) for an account of this sort.

it is easy to conceive of several real case scenarios when loneliness arises in virtue of the inability of others to relate to us and not necessarily *our* inability to relate to them. This can happen with parents, partners, friends, etc. Hence, it is important to note that this inability mentioned in the definition could in principle, and as stated, also be fleshed out as an agent-neutral condition —as in the inability may arise in virtue of elements that may affect *any* agent in such circumstances— by referencing environmental elements outside of the lonely agent and which may include features and properties of other agents involved.

Along with 'mutually' and 'reciprocally', I italicized "thinking being" in Mijuskovic's definition because— particularly in the context of Creasy's views— the inclusion of the term is as important as the desire to be mutually and reciprocally related. The inclusion of 'thinking being' signals a conceptual move towards a recognition not merely of someone's circumstances or life events of significance but rather of their uniqueness qua individuals as well as of their complex internal mental and personal processes. Although the significance of the 'thinking being' point may appear obvious to many, it may be important to spend a little bit more time on this qualifier in Mijuskovic's definition. Doing so may further elucidate what it is that Creasy is trying to point us towards in her analysis of loneliness. It is important, for example, that the term 'thinking being' in this context is taken as heavily anthropomorphic. This does not mean that at some point or another this kind of loneliness cannot apply to other agents. It only means that, for the sake of argument, it is important to parametrize our inquiry to identify a common-sense starting point from which to depart. While thinking beings may in principle include alien life-forms, non-human animals, and perhaps even other complex natural or artificial entities, there is nevertheless a deeper point here regarding this particular starting point and this exclusivity that may continue to hold as we expand our inquiry beyond the kind of loneliness particular to humans. Consider the following example. While we may be mutually and reciprocally emotionally related to our pets, and while they may qualify as thinking beings in their own right, notice that the *reciprocity* and *mutuality* does not include much of non-trivial cognitive, intellectual or epistemic features. Of course, the pet needs to be a cognitive creature and not, for example, a rock. And, of course, our pet needs to be able to process information and know certain things: what we smell like, what certain movements indicate, etc. In that very basic sense, a pet can be a cognitive and even an epistemic agent to a certain extent. This is how some of our pets may know when we are in a certain mood or what we intend with certain actions. This is also what allows them to even be trained to recognize certain smells that we know are associated with medical conditions and to convey such to us with specific behaviors (Alvarado, 2022). Nevertheless, this does not mean that they 'understand us' or that we understand them in a meaningful epistemic sense beyond basic signaling of mutually perceptually accessible objects or behaviors. [7] Although this may come as a shock to some pet owners, as a matter of fact, most pets are not capable of understanding even straightforward assertions such as "It is a cloudy day", "I should do the dishes on Wednesday", "These pants don't fit me", "I hear that song everywhere lately" or "Israel has been under attack since its formation". While this point may be

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[7] This reading of course goes away when one is willing to consider epistemic agents capable of epistemic (and not just cognitive) collaboration that are not necessarily human. This can of course include highly sophisticated alien life forms and perhaps certain earthly creatures. But even then, consider the epistemic difference gap between the kinds of saliency that one species responds to and those of another species: a whale may find it hard to be moved by the exquisiteness in Hamlet's metric and plot or by the genial playfulness in the craftsmanship of Bach's 6-part fugue. Similarly, we may not be able to fully engage with the depth and wealth of information conveyed by a bird's song or a dog's full sense smell.

evident in the case of pet tarantulas and goldfish, it applies to more social animals in the mammal world as well. Furthermore, even in the latter cases, while I may recognize my pet by its color, the look on its eyes, the way it moves, the sounds it makes, the smells it has, etc., they may only recognize *me* through one of those senses and not the others or through other senses that we may not share. In fact, dogs seem to mainly recognize not just others but even themselves by smell (Horowitz, 2017). In any case, the point being made here is that there is a non-trivial reason, besides the argumentative strategy, to constraining our discussion to anthropocentric parameters when we consider the 'thinking-being' clause in Mijuskovic's definition of loneliness as we contextualize it in Creasy's views, which point towards a richer aspect of a person's mental life as being at play in such instances of loneliness. Creasy further elucidates this point the following way:

> "without a shared framework, I felt unable to meet my need for intellectual engagement and communicate to my friends the fullness of my inner life, which was overtaken by quite specific aesthetic values, values that shaped how I saw the world." (Creasy, 2023)

There is yet another point regarding the other two italicized terms in Mijuskovic's definition — 'mutually' and 'reciprocally'— that is worth noting before we move on. Putting the concerns about the asymmetry of such relationships above to the side, as is clear from the terms themselves, at the very least, that these two terms also signal that the recognition whose absence seems to be the key element at play in the kind of loneliness described is not merely a one-way recognition. But they also signal that what is lacking in such instances of loneliness is not a lack of recognition after all. As we saw in our extensive discussion so far in this section, and as Creasy notes:

> "What plagues accounts that tie loneliness to an absence of basic recognition is that they fail to do justice to loneliness as a feeling that pops up *not only* when one lacks sufficiently loving, affirmative relationships, but also when one perceives that the relationships she has (including and perhaps especially loving relationships) lack sufficient quality (for example, lacking depth or a desired feeling of connection)." (Creasy, 2023)

Although the recognition may be a necessary precondition for what is absent in instances of loneliness of the kind described by Creasy, this precondition may not be what is *really* missing. Just as we saw in our discussion about social isolation and its relation to loneliness, the fact that recognition is missing in instances of loneliness may only be related to loneliness without being the key aspect of the specific problem Creasy seeks to address.

Hence, what we can draw from this discussion is that even though loneliness may also be related to the absence of a kind of recognition, such recognition is not what is at the center of certain kinds of loneliness, specifically those that Creasy is interested in identifying. What is missing in these cases of loneliness, in other words, is not the recognition but *what may come with it and from it*. Hence the recognition is merely a precondition for the possibility of relatedness but does not in itself constitute it. It is important to note once more, that while some of these causes or underlying conditions/circumstances may be coextensively defined such that you only have the one in the presence of the other (like triangularity and trilaterality) or have some dependence

relationship with one another—say one of supervenience— it is still important to recognize their distinct character.

The move towards defining loneliness as a lack of recognition, whether it is in Setyia's, Arendt's or even Creasy's views, is indeed a move towards a more accurate framework of what is at stake in certain important instances of loneliness. Nevertheless, what Creasy is actually pointing towards is rather a distinct kind of loneliness. Namely a loneliness that is intimately related to our cognitive abilities and our intellectual development. In the next section, I will argue that what is actually missing and what Creasy is ultimately pointing to, even if not arriving at, is the epistemic component of certain kinds of loneliness. Understanding certain kinds of loneliness through this latter lens allows us to better make sense of all the distinctions drawn above. It also allows us to understand that all this time, we may have been missing the mark by simply talking about loneliness in general and that what Creasy is trying to identify is a specific kind of loneliness. A loneliness that is epistemic in nature. [8]

2. A distinct kind of loneliness

By now the discussion above should have at least established the following 3 things:

- That there are distinct kinds of loneliness;
- that distinct kinds of loneliness arise in virtue of absences of distinct kinds of things, and
- that at least one of the kinds of loneliness of interest seems to *correspond to*, *arise in virtue of a lack in*, or *respond to resources belonging to* something akin to intellectual endeavors or stimuli therein.

A further thing to note, and which will be briefly explored further in detail in the section below, is that the kinds of loneliness that Creasy and others seem to want to capture are *not merely* cognitive or intellectual in a strict sense of these terms. That is, while thinking of these specific instances of loneliness as related to such dimension of a person's being is a step in the right direction, we must be cognizant that simply being stimulated cognitively (or mentally) may not be what is missing in these instances. As we saw above, according to Creasy, there are more pressing problems that come with accounts of loneliness that fail to capture instances such as the ones described above— e.g., the young person that returns to their hometown after a lengthy stay abroad only to feel like a foreigner in its streets and amongst her friends and family; the adult who's friends of youth no longer "get them" or know them as they once did, "failing to really *see* us as they used to before." (*ibid*). There is a strong sense that what matters is being understood as a thinking being. But it is also the case that we want to be understood not just as *any* thinking

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[8] It is important to note that some conventional measurements of loneliness do take into account certain notions that approximate this epistemic sense of loneliness. In the history of the measurement of loneliness, for example, you would find measurements that allowed for both positive and negative statements of loneliness, while some of this research was based on measuring both loneliness and belonging combined (and as a unidimensional psychological phenomenon) both of which often included statements such as "I do have friends who understand me" (Bradley, 1969 as cited by Russell, 1982 p.84). Interestingly, unidimensional notions of loneliness, such as Bradley's, were criticized as limited because they would only measure the "psychological aspect of loneliness" (Belcher, 1973 as cited by Russel, 1982 p. 87).

being either: what is absent in these instances of loneliness, or so Creasy argues, is an understanding of our *unique* mental and character features.

It is important to note, however, that given the examples mentioned above, Creasy is not simply trying to capture a loyal obedience, blind admiration, or simply affirmation about some newly found intellectual depth from others. Creasy acknowledges as much:

> "Another way to put it is that our social needs go far beyond the impersonal recognition of our unconditional worth as human beings. These needs can be as widespread as a need for reciprocal emotional attachment or as restricted as a need for a certain level of intellectual engagement or creative exchange" (Creasy, 2023)

This is easily exemplified by postulating a few extensions to Creasy's scenarios. Consider first the student who returns home after a long stay abroad. Consider that they bring with them a novel set of skills and richness of knowledge about certain things in the world after graduating from their studies. Imagine that their friends are in admiration of them for having such knowledge and skills. Imagine they think of them as special and even explicitly recognize them as "the one special person in town capable of X" and they do so by sharing their collective admiration. Imagine this explicit recognition expands to the community such that the town council and the local media fundraise to give this person an endowed chair to impart X to others and finance a publication based on this person's knowledge of X. On the weekends children and curious people stop by their porch to inquire about X. Can this person be or feel justifiably lonely in an intellectual sense? I think so. If so, what is missing?

As attested in countless cases of icons in popular culture, these kinds of recognition can in fact further alienate the recipients by putting them into a pedestal where nobody could reach them. In particular, these kinds of recognition can make the kind of loneliness that we are here trying to capture— i.e., that which is related to our cognitive or intellectual capacities— the more likely to occur. This happens by denying the recipient of such recognition critical engagement with their own decision-making processes and/or by burdening them with an unfair epistemic burden or epistemic surplus: e.g., thinking that they represent their social group simply by belonging to them, giving their voice overinflated considerations, etc. This in itself can constitute an epistemic harm or even an epistemic injustice (Symons and Alvarado, 2022). The recognition as someone intellectually or otherwise special is already intrinsically isolating almost by definition. Hence recognition of this sort cannot be the full story.

Another thing to note is the following. Most of Creasy's examples seem to be of a particular kind and to signal a particular direction in the development of the character of those involved— e.g., the young person that returns to their hometown after a lengthy stay abroad; the adult whose friends of youth no longer "get them" or know them as they once did. Namely, they seem to have a newly acquired understanding of themselves and the world around them. Furthermore, this novel understanding can be characterized as involving a more "complex" or "sophisticated" set of considerations from the part of the lonely subject. They know more now, they are interested in different things now, etc. However, notice that, even if Creasy's examples may include this distinct aspect of intellectual endeavors, such aspect is not necessary for the view that seeks to capture a loneliness that arises in virtue of the cognitive or intellectual dimensions of a person. That is, that the chosen examples happen to include considerations that can be seen as more or

less 'sophisticated' does not matter that much for the point the view is trying to make, namely that there is a distinct kind of loneliness that is strongly tied to intellectual endeavors and the richness of our inner lives. One may postulate the same exact kind of experiences of loneliness that Creasy identifies in a less culturally privileged context or without any particular character development on the part of those involved and get the same results. For example, one may feel alone in this manner not because of what knows or because of newfound knowledge but also for not knowing what others do.

In other words, I take it that a lonely person, in Creasy's sense, is not just looking to be intelligible to others, but to share intelligibility with other *intelligent* beings. But this intelligibility or the content of one's richer inner self need not be about traveling abroad, or learning about existentialism, etc. This same kind of loneliness can be found in the inverse cultural circumstance or experience. Consider someone who has lived in or in close proximity to a farm, has led a life of tending to cattle and crops for almost half a century and who suddenly finds themselves with no one to converse with in the big city about any aspect of their life back home. Consider further that this individual had not changed anything about themselves except their location and cultural context. They too will experience a very similar kind of intellectually related loneliness to the one that Creasy speaks about. Hence, the same kind of loneliness can arise even without the inclusion of so-called "sophisticated" new knowledge or without an agent having undergone an existential character transformation. The point is that, in all these circumstances, one is not able to share certain kinds of knowledge. And one is not able to partake in knowledge-creating activities with others.

Importantly, what is truly missing in the examples above, however, is not recognition, but a certain kind of epistemic peer. Peers do not just learn from us, although they could; they do not just recognize us, although they do. As we will see below, the epistemic dynamics amongst peers transcend recognition and coalesce around a richer range of epistemic opportunities for those involved. Importantly, suggesting a specific kind of peers as a key factor in such instances of loneliness makes it so that the initial examples of seemingly culturally sophisticated character developments—studying abroad, knowing about the birth of French symbolic realism in poetry, etc.— are but idiosyncratically limited exemplars. That is, Creasy's examples seem to point towards the intelligibility of a specific kind of content. They seem to require not just intelligibility but intelligibility about 'intelligent' things. And yet, there is in them an extra component to this intelligibility, namely that such intelligibility be *shared, mutual, reciprocal*. It is this latter point and not the former that I consider essential to the kind of loneliness in question.

Consider Creasy's example above about the transformative experience of the study abroad student that comes back to their hometown to loving friendships. What the student in this example is looking for is not merely the recognition that she is now the type of person that knows about the world and some sophisticated topics. One can say that she is indeed looking to *share* such aspect of her new-found personality, but opportunities to lecture others are not necessarily what this recognition is about. Rather, it is this *sharing* aspect that I want to take seriously in this section, because it seems that what Creasy has identified in these examples is not merely the yearning or the wanting or the lack of the ability to express oneself intellectually nor the ability to be merely recognized and understood as an intellectual agent. Rather what

Creasy has identified in these examples is the lack of the ability to *partake* in intellectual activities with *a certain kind of other:* i.e., a peer. These others are not just any others but others that can do the same things—i.e., share epistemically relevant content at the same level of epistemic engagement—and with a shared understanding that further increases the epistemic opportunities of all of those involved. The other in question is someone that shares intellectual capacities with us, perhaps, but more importantly someone who actively shares whole heuristic frameworks and capabilities with us. Hence, not only would they be able to "understand us" or "see" us but could potentially enrich our epistemic lives just as we would theirs.

Furthermore, while these intellectual activities may be necessarily cognitive or intellectual at some fundamental level— e.g., thinking, processing information, etc.— I propose that they are not merely so. That is, an agent that finds themselves in such a kind of loneliness is not merely lacking cognitive, intellectual or mental stimuli—whatever the latter may be. Solving puzzles with others, being given riddles by others, being interviewed by others, is not exactly what is missing. Though these kinds of activities may play an important part in addressing some such instances of loneliness, notice that they are to the epistemically lonely person what physical therapy after an injury is to the athlete. In such cases one needs to be able to move muscles and bones in a certain unrestricted way, and this requires that one exercises the underlying structure of the body: stretching the ligaments, strengthening the muscles, rebuilding tissue, etc. Often this is done by meticulously engaging each one of those parts of the body until they can do what they are meant to do in the context: support the athletes aims, namely, to deploy their body in an athletic context. Similarly, intellectual activities such as critical analysis, articulation opportunities, etc., may contribute to the overall ability to relate to others epistemically, but the real magic happens when we can deploy these abilities for other higher-level aims: in the case of the athlete, in their chosen arena; in the case of the lonely person, in genuine conversation. In short, intellectual stimuli is not all there is to an epistemically rich life.

I want to suggest that at least some of the issues discussed above can be explained and clarified by positing the existence of a *specific kind* of loneliness that is directly related to our capacities as knowers. That is, a distinct kind of loneliness that is primarily of an epistemic nature. Hence, in this section, I elucidate the concept of *epistemic loneliness*. I argue that many of the points that were discussed above ultimately point to the existence of a kind of loneliness in which the absence of shared knowledge-related or knowledge-apt — knowledge-creating, knowledge-collecting and recollecting, or knowledge-conducive—opportunities with epistemic peers *is* the key factor at play.[9]

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[9] To be clear, although the literature on something like epistemic loneliness is extremely scarce, others have explicitly commented on such a kind of loneliness and identified it as such. Although I will be referring to some of these earlier treatments of the concept in order to motivate some of the analysis, it is important to note that there are significant differences. As we will see in detail below, for example, Rajrah's (2021) notion of epistemic loneliness relies on the sociopolitical aspects of Fricker's concept of epistemic injustice in order to motivate their understanding of this kind of loneliness. This is not necessary, nor will it be relevant in the view developed here. Nevertheless, some details about this conceptualization of epistemic loneliness will be provided below.

2.1.   Epistemic loneliness, a working definition

Epistemic loneliness in short, is the kind of loneliness that arises in virtue of the absence of a subject's ability to create, manipulate, accumulate, correct, corroborate, or share knowledge-related or knowledge-apt content with others in a *mutual* and *reciprocal* manner. Hence, two main conditions arise. A subject S can be epistemically lonely iff their loneliness arises in virtue of

   a) the absence of S's ability (or the absence of opportunities for S) to engage in genuine knowledge-related or knowledge-apt opportunities with others and/or
   b) in virtue of the absence of *epistemic partners*—others who also can and *actually* share or create knowledge-related or knowledge-apt content with S. [10]

The first condition is meant to capture the primary and direct environmental or circumstantial source of this kind of loneliness. As we have extensively discussed above, while the absence of others (significant or not) plays a role in all kinds of loneliness, there are distinct kinds of loneliness that are differentiated in virtue of specifics about their source beyond this basic absence of others. Nevertheless, with these details in mind there are instances that in themselves preclude a certain kind of connection— in this case, epistemic connections. This first condition addresses this latter point while acknowledging that the inability of a subject to engage in genuine knowledge-related opportunities can be in virtue of external factors and not just their own abili*ties* or lack thereof. The second condition, as will be detailed below, is meant to capture that epistemic loneliness requires the absence of a specific kind of other—namely, a specific kind of epistemic peer: *epistemic partners*.

This working definition also has a couple of other very specific terms that are worth elucidating in a little bit more detail. For example, 'knowledge-related' or 'knowledge-apt' content can include propositions and concepts, but it can also include methods, procedures, as well as demonstrative instruments, representational objects or technical artifacts which embody or encapsulate knowledge (Baird, 2004). Some of these could be technical. One could share models, data, forms, or data representations. But gossip, poems, and songs should also be included, as should be evocative gestures and behavior such as suggestive gazes and complicit smiles. All of which seem to embody or transmit epistemically-related content— I qualify epistemically-related and epistemically-apt content as merely '*apt*' or '*related*' in order to preserve the fact that such content can fail to be actual knowledge or lead to actual knowledge. Propositions can be false and hence not directly form part of knowledge itself under a strict JTB model of knowledge, but they may still have epistemically intelligible content and may indirectly contribute to epistemic endeavors.[11] I also have deliberately refrained from using the term 'knowledge-conducive' here for the same reason. A false proposition, for example, may not amount to a knowledgeable claim itself, but it may or may not be conducive to many such

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[10] The emphasis on "do" will become apparent in the section below. Briefly, the presence of a capable but otherwise unwilling or unengaged epistemic peer is of little consolation to an epistemically lonely person. This is why this definition focuses more on epistemic partners and not merely on epistemic peers.

[11] It is possible, for example, to know a falsity even if a falsity itself cannot contribute to knowledge proper under conventional definitions. That is, knowing the true fact that a proposition is false, can contribute to other knowledge claim.

claims. Nevertheless, even if a claim or set of claims is not conducive to knowledge, e.g., because it is meant to deceive or distract, it may have been constructed with such aims, may be alleged to be such, may be made of the same meaningful epistemic constituents (symbols, words, verifiable statements, etc.), or can have similar structures. A formally fallacious argument, say one that affirms the consequent of a conditional to draw an inference, can have a very similar structure to a valid argument such as a modus tollens.

The definition also mentions sharing such kinds of content, opportunities, or experiences. Importantly, as I discussed above, when I refer to sharing, I mean to include something more than being able to pass on knowledge, or to articulate it to others. Rather, I mean this sharing is to happen in a reciprocal and mutual manner: while two epistemic peers can corroborate each other's claims, they should also be able to construct novel claims, epistemic opportunities and experiences together. Note here that although having shared past experiences can often alleviate epistemic loneliness and that epistemic loneliness can often arise from the absence of those with whom we may have past shared experiences, this is also not enough in some instances. Sharing genuinely also involves an engagement with epistemic content in such a way that it acknowledges the epistemic context (i.e., the norms, expectations, level of rigor, etc.) and reciprocates the aims of the interlocutor (e.g., rationality, truthfulness, humor, etc.). Hence, sometimes an interlocutor wants to take a conversation in a new direction or wants to expand on knowledge already shared. If others are unable to do so or to keep up, one may be or justifiably feel epistemically lonely. Note also that this can go either way in terms of sophistication and so it is not merely a matter of erudite superiority on the part of one of the interlocutors. The view above implies that if an agent wants serious analysis of the epistemic content they are sharing in some instance and they fail to engage in an epistemic opportunity with others that share this similar aim, they may be entitled to feel lonely. But similarly, someone may want their epistemic content to not be taken seriously and to be made fun of, etc. When this does not happen and someone takes their utterances too seriously, this agent too can also be or justifiably feel epistemically lonely.

Hence, in a non-trivial manner, epistemic loneliness also includes the absence of others that *can do* and *in fact do* the same kind of sharing, i.e., others who have the ability to create, manipulate, accumulate, correct, corroborate and posit knowledge-related and knowledge-apt content with us and can do so while acknowledging the details of the epistemic contexts defined above. This is clause b) in the definition above. These others are *epistemic peers* (Gelfert, 2011).[12] In this context, and as briefly explained above, an epistemic peer is the kind of epistemic agent with the capacity, the willingness, and the ability *to engage* with shared epistemic content at least at the same level as the level required by the context in which the sharing happened or to the level intended by the interlocutor sharing the epistemic content. Furthermore, an epistemic peer should also be able *to share* epistemic content at least at a similar level as the context or purpose of the circumstances and involved interlocutors require.

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[12] Although there are several definitions of epistemic peers, most of which are derived from debates about genuine disagreement amongst epistemic agents, here I will agree with Gelfert in that the normativity often attached to the definition of epistemic peers in light of their capacity to agree or disagree with others needs not be so.

A possible objection to this latter point of the definition would be to say that given that epistemic peers can differ in what they know and what their foci is, as Cocchiaro (2019) suggests, then epistemic peers as required in the definition of epistemic loneliness above—namely epistemic agents that *can engage* at least at the same level of involvement with shared epistemic content— are simply not a relevant component in instances of epistemic loneliness. At least not as defined.

According to Cocchiaro (2019), for example, one can be an epistemic peer even if one does not share equal capabilities or equal knowledge. So, either we accept that the distinct scenarios above include agents that are not all epistemic peers, and so their inclusion is argumentatively trivial, or one accepts that epistemic peers do not have to operate at the same level or with the same knowledge about the same things. If the latter, then the examples above fail to say anything philosophically interesting regarding epistemic engagement, its relation to peers, and about epistemic peers and the relation of their absence to epistemic loneliness. Furthermore, if the latter is the case, in the context of epistemic loneliness, then any epistemic agent would do, peer or not, to epistemically engage with epistemic content. If so, then the level of epistemic engagement fails to draw any significant distinction and hence the examples above do not represent relevantly distinct cases and should have little bearing with whether or not one feels epistemically alone if what one needs is simply an epistemic peer.

In other words, that someone is or not an epistemic equal does not seem to play as important a role as I am making it to be. One may even accept that epistemic agents and epistemic interactions seem to be at play, but deny that they do so beyond the mere triviality that anything involving loneliness seems to be related to epistemic agents and their communicative endeavors. For example, one may think that what one needs and is lacking in these instances of loneliness that Creasy has identified is merely a capable rational agent, or a capable intellectual companion and that this has little to do with knowledge or any other epistemic consideration beyond their rational capacities. One can imagine a person who is desperately lonely to get into a conversation just wants that: *a* conversation. Not a conversation about anything in particular or a particular kind of conversation. One could also imagine that someone who yearns an intellectually fulfilling conversation just wants that: an *intellectually* fulfilling conversation and not an intellectually fulfilling conversation about a particular epistemic content or a particularly epistemically fulfilling conversation. Afterall, one can have an immensely rich conversation with a capable agent regardless of whether or not one knows much about what each other knows. Often, we find this kind of person to be a rather charming rarity of eloquence and range. That these companions have any knowledge, that this knowledge relates to the lonely person's knowledge or that what they share is such knowledge, seems to be at best orthogonal to the kind

of loneliness, if any, of the kind I am ascribing to Creasy as having elucidated. This is a sophisticated objection. But as we will see below, it misses the mark. [13] [14]

Another objection is that in a trivial sense, every instance of loneliness is already fundamentally epistemic. Only epistemic agents would feel the kind of loneliness we all feel. Feeling lonely is a phenomenological occurrence so loneliness must be something someone experiences. It is implied that the lonely person is lonely qua epistemic agent. Hence, this is all trivial, almost a tautology. By this view, an agent who does not understand that they lack something is not lonely. There is an epistemic condition to loneliness. So, here again, we have another necessary epistemic component at another level but it fails to pick up anything peculiar about loneliness or about a specific kind of loneliness.

However, both of these objections are misguided. The idea here, as stated in condition b) above is that epistemic peers have to be able, willing *and* actively share epistemic content, epistemic considerations, or aims (say clarity, truthfulness, level of involvement, etc.) about epistemic content, in order for them to be relevant to epistemic loneliness in the way the definition prescribes. This is fully consistent with the intuition that having a fully silent (including through non-linguistic behavior) *epistemic peer* may be of little to no use to an epistemically lonely person. But it is also consistent with the fact that if one is engaging with a fully capable and willing epistemic peer that insists on focusing on unrelated aspects of their interlocutor's conversational aims, or that insists on addressing the epistemic content at a different level, one may very well be or justifiably feel epistemically lonely in the way I defined. This in fact proves that one may even be lonely in the face of epistemic peers if they fail to share the epistemic dimension one is seeking to engage at. Under this view, Cocciaro's example does not preclude

[13] As a side note, we should note that there are definitions of epistemic peers (see Cocchiaro, 2019) that permit the possibility of *relevantly different epistemic capacities* (2019, p. 4) amongst epistemic peers on the bases of the *kind of knowledge* each of them may have. A set of epistemic peers collaborating in an inquiry, for example, could include an epistemic agent that is color-blind but shape-gifted and another agent who lacks depth perception but excels in color perception, both of which are trying to assess the results of a given probability problem involving geometric shapes of different colors—e.g., the probabilities that a result is either a black circle, a black square, red square, etc. (Cocchiaro, 2019) According to Cocchiario, these two epistemic agents with relevantly different epistemic capacities can still be peers in the context of such a problem. Allowing dissimilarities of this kind amongst epistemic agents to not perturb the integrity of the concept of 'epistemic peer' seems to preserve an important intuition in the realm of expert practice in multiple domains across industry, academia and science: for example, multidisciplinary collaboration on products, projects, or research endeavors often assumes that one's collaborators are or can be epistemic peers even if their knowledge is quite different from ours. But the deeper philosophical point of this conceptual move is its contribution to the set of possible explanations of how epistemic peers can disagree with each other without necessarily diminishing each other's epistemic status on the course of doing so, a problem with a rich conceptual history in the epistemology of expertise and expert testimony (Gelfert, 2011).

[14] Notice that this move does not resolve the issue of whether one can continue to consider someone as an epistemic peer if the difference of knowledge is distinct in degree but it is about the same issue under consideration. Consider a different problem. It is fair to say that the example given by Cocchiario involves two epistemic agents whose knowledge involves two distinct dimensions. It is not clear whether being epistemically different in this respect entails being epistemically different in respect to other epistemic aspects. In Cocchiario's example it is evident that they are epistemically different in virtue of each epistemic agent lacking the ability to see things that the other could see. Both were assessing visual capacities; both were assessing the same object. Each other knew more than the other with respect to the two capacities they respectively lacked but this says nothing about a differentiation on the basis of distinct degree of knowledge of the *same thing*.

epistemic loneliness. This fact also continues to elucidate why the idea that a rationally capable agent suffices is inadequate. This is exactly what the term "*epistemic partner*" in the definition solves.

Not only do we need others, not only do we need others that know what we know, but we also need others that understand what we know in a way in which novel epistemic experiences, claims and opportunities can be mutually created: an epistemic partner. This includes an epistemic peer, but it must be one that is actively engaged and with which we are epistemically engaged. That is, for an epistemic peer to count as an epistemic peer in instances of epistemic loneliness, it is necessary that we take into consideration whether the epistemic peer *actually* engages with shared epistemic content or *actually* shares epistemic content themselves. While an epistemic agent can indeed be an epistemic peer even if they fail to manifest it, in the context of epistemic loneliness and the absence of epistemic peers therein, actively manifesting the fact that someone is an epistemic peer, through some kind of epistemic transmission, seems like a necessary element to counter such an absence. It is true, however, that in certain instances of severe peer scarcity— from war trenches to POW camps, to instances of culture shock or prolonged cultural isolation— just knowing that someone is or could be an epistemic peer may bring about some solace to an epistemically lonely person. Knowing that someone else knows something akin to what we know, that someone has or has had experiences similar to our own, even if they choose to not share them, can be comforting and may in fact be a factor in alleviating an instance of epistemic loneliness, even if only partially. Note, however, that there is a further important epistemic condition attached to this latter scenario: we have to somehow know, suspect, or infer that this other person is or could be an epistemic peer in order for them to have any effect on epistemic loneliness: maybe we noted their accent and we can tell they speak a language similar to ours, maybe we saw a wound whose unique source we can recognize, or maybe we recognize some behavior as familiar—the way they carry themselves, shake hands, or sit, their haircut, clothes, etc.[15] [16] Regardless of the how, what this epistemic condition requires is that there be a manifestation of some sort from the actual or potential epistemic peer. That is what is needed is a kind of epistemic peer, namely an epistemic partner. Lastly being an epistemic peer can be a matter of degrees and such degrees can vary depending on their level of involvement.

In order to see how the dynamic range between epistemic peers can play out in instances of epistemic loneliness let us consider a scenario where some interlocutors engage with the following set of statements:

> "Remember the old lady who owned the neighborhood store in the Arcoiris, a couple of streets down from my place, Doña Reina? She was actually quite vulgar behind the counter."

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[15] Holocaust survivors, for example, often shared their tattooed numbers with each other. Whereas some military servicemen can tell each other apart due to certain cues in how they carry themselves.

[16] It is important note that some epistemic content may be transmitted by involuntary means. People can know things about us that we intended to keep secret, they can infer things about us to which we said nothing or can be conveyed by us inadvertently.

Now consider the following interlocutors, all of which vary in level of epistemic involvement (EI) with the content of the question and the statements above. Note that the question and the propositions, the epistemic content being transmitted, could be in any language and one could even consider cases where the interlocutors do not share a language:

- (EI0) Someone who does not understand the utterances above.
- (EI1) Someone who does not know Doña Reina, or the indexical elements of the statement.
- (EI2) Someone who knows the indexical elements of the statement but not Doña Reina.
- (EI3) Someone who knows who Doña Reina was (and hence the Arcoiris neighborhood in Juárez, and perhaps even the distance between her store and the interlocutor's home, etc.) but for whom Doña Reyna's uncouthness constitutes new knowledge.
- (EI4) Someone who knew all three and can and is willing to reminisce along.
- (EI5) Someone who knew all three and has further knowledge to add and shares it.

While the discussion above exemplifies an instance in which the epistemic opportunity arises in virtue of knowledge about past events or memories, in order to see the how the difference in agential involvement between the distinct scenarios of epistemic involvement plays out in a more salient manner, we can apply the same reasoning in other contexts that do not include memories, even if they require some background knowledge. Consider for example two interlocutors engaging with the following set of statements:

> "A global similarity-based account of moral supervenience—i.e., an account of an asymmetrical dependence relationship between moral and natural facts that posits *similarity relations*, and not identity relations, across *whole worlds* and not just between local events across worlds as the relationship that holds between natural and moral facts— is the only account of moral supervenience compatible with a naturalist moral realism. This is because a local, identity-based, notion of supervenience—which makes moral facts dependent on just *some* natural facts— produces an unintuitively fickle and discontinuous set of possible moral outcomes across possible worlds. Under global identity-based accounts of supervenience, the problem arises even across worlds that are only distinct in ways that should have no moral relevance, say in the position of a single atom."

Here is another example:

> If X=X and this identity relation is necessary, and if X is such that it is also identical to Y, then X=Y necessarily as well. But is the fact that X=Y necessarily, necessary?

Or this other example:

$$\oint \vec{E} \cdot \vec{dA} = Q_{in}/\epsilon_0$$
$$\oint \vec{B} \cdot \vec{dA} = 0$$
$$\oint \vec{E} \cdot \vec{ds} = d\Phi_m/dt$$
$$\oint \vec{B} \cdot \vec{ds} = \mu_0 I + \epsilon_0 I + \epsilon_0\mu_0 \; d\Phi/E dt$$

For those in the know, this last example provides the fundamentals of electromagnetic theory according to Maxwell. Although I undertook the typing and formatting of these equations and I know about their context, I personally find myself at EI0 in relation to their content. I am not alone when it comes to this kind of epistemic content, namely highly specialized formal methods, the terms therein, and the implications of their dynamics. But this can happen to some interlocutors with even just two words such as the following:

"*Magnum Facere*"

We can explore the distinct levels of engagement that an epistemic agent may have with the epistemic content articulated in all these examples. We can replace 'Doña Reina' and the indexical details in the first example and the relevant gradation of involvement in EI0-EI5 accordingly and hence see the distinct levels of engagement an epistemic peer could have in relation to the epistemic content being shared:

- Someone who understands nothing of what has been said.
- …
- Someone who understands it all.
- Someone who understands it all and can find analyze it, or engage critically with it.
- Somone who understands it and can enrich it.
- Someone who understands it and can compellingly map this to a broader or more fundamental debate.

I do not think it necessary to enumerate the distinct conceptual items that would have to be shared amongst two interlocutors for us to say whether or not they are engaging with the epistemic content in the examples above at distinct epistemic capacities and to say that whatever discrepancy of levels of engagement in their exchanges there may be can sometimes be sufficient for someone to be or to justifiably feel epistemically lonely. It seems to me relatively straightforward that any discrepancy on either aim or level of involvement between potential interlocutors suffices for the genuine emergence of loneliness or the justified feeling of epistemic loneliness. Importantly, this is so *even when there are potential or actual epistemic peers around* if these peers are dissimilar in terms of engagement, aims, or foci.[17] The distinct scenarios above (EI0-EI5) constitute examples of the kind and the degree of epistemic opportunities, or lack thereof, at play in instances of epistemic loneliness.

As briefly mentioned above, often, epistemic loneliness arises relative to the degree of epistemic involvement (EI) one has with the content. Note that the discrepancy bringing about or justifying an instance of epistemic loneliness can go in many different directions. For example, someone who can engage with the shared epistemic content at EI5 may feel alienated in a conversation with someone that *only* understands it at a level prior to theirs. But similarly, someone that is only able to engage at some of the first levels can feel justifiably alienated from someone who understands it at a much more in-depth level. In short, epistemic loneliness can arise when attempting to communicate with others that only engage or that can only engage with the

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[17] This is consistent with the fact that epistemic agents can and sometimes have to be dissimilar even if they are epistemic peers (Cocchiaro, 2019).

epistemic content either at a lower or higher level than we can, aim to, or expect to. This is why the definition of epistemic loneliness suggested here puts such an emphasis on epistemic *partners*. It must be noted that although these latter examples involve a specific kind of epistemic content— namely academic— in order to highlight the issue, the point applies to many kinds of knowledge and very many kinds of epistemic partnerships.

In cases where the interlocutors do not speak the same language— EI0 considered above—the issue would be more immediately evident. Sharing complex epistemic content or epistemic content which requires a complex degree of engagement becomes extremely difficult when there is no shared language amongst interlocutors. So much is clear, not being able to communicate with others may be a sufficient condition for epistemic loneliness to arise. But it should also be clear that it is not a necessary one. Importantly, linguistic isolation is not unique to epistemic loneliness and it only leads towards epistemic loneliness because of the epistemic component that is ultimately missing in such instances and not because of the linguistic obstacle per se. In a simple note, one could say that every linguistic isolation is a potential source of epistemic loneliness, but not every instance of epistemic loneliness is *due* to linguistic isolation.

Nevertheless, there is a significant difference between all the above-mentioned scenarios. In particular, the distinct levels of engagement with the epistemic content may serve to determine when someone counts as an epistemic peer, and more importantly an epistemic partner, in instances of epistemic loneliness. In some of the scenarios considered above—particularly the first one concerning Doña Reina in the Arcoiris neighborhood of Ciudad Juárez— the initial interlocutor is able to share knowledge in the sense of telling a true story about something they know by acquaintance (e.g., EI1-EI3). In some of the other scenarios the receiving interlocutor can partake in knowledgeable exchanges (EI3-EI5). Still at other levels of engagement there seems to be a *mutual* partaking of knowledge: someone knows the exact same thing, even if nothing more or nothing less (EI4). There is a pleasure, a reassurance, a sense of belonging in such instances. That is what one finds in a complicit glance, or in the comfort of reminiscing along with someone else, even in a tacit smirk or a glance directed at those who know what we know. Creasy's examples of loneliness in the sections above, particularly what was lacking in them, seem to be captured, at least partially, by the first four levels of engagement. These are epistemic peers. Nevertheless, there is still an extra level of engagement that goes beyond the intellectual recognition Creasy sought to capture as missing in her examples. In the last level of involvement depicted in the examples above (EI5) we can find not just an epistemic peer but something more like an epistemic accomplice, someone with whom one can create novel epistemic experiences and content that was not there before and in which all parties involved partake. Someone who not only knows exactly what one is talking about but can further contribute to the knowledge sharing and the knowledge creation experience with us and someone for whom we play the same role. It is in this latter scenario that one finds genuine epistemic reciprocity as one can engage with others not just in knowledge-accumulation or distribution practices with other epistemic agents but also in knowledge-creation ones. These are epistemic partners in the way required in our definition of what is absent in instances of epistemic loneliness.

3. Conceptual implications

It is important to note that the definition of epistemic loneliness provided here drastically differs from some of the existing accounts of the same or similar terms. It can also acknowledge and even accommodate some important contributions without being reduced to them. Here it is again. A subject S is epistemically lonely iff their loneliness arises in virtue of

   a) the absence of S's ability (or the absence of opportunities for S) to engage in genuine knowledge-related or knowledge-apt opportunities with others and/or
   b) in virtue of the absence of epistemic partners—others who also can and *do genuinely* share or create knowledge-related or knowledge-apt content with S.

Now, consider the following definition of epistemic loneliness provided by Rajrah (2021):

> "epistemic loneliness could be best defined as a complex phenomenon
> experienced by members of marginalized communities which makes them feel
> that their epistemic premises are systemically isolated as a result of their 'inferior'
> social position. This impedes in their merit as a contributor of knowledge."
> (Rajrah, 2021)

As we can see, there are several elements of Rajrah's definition that overlap with the definitional framework provided in the previous section. In fact, the definition provided here seems to perfectly accommodate some of the features of Rajrah's definition: there is a sense of inadequacy in which the previously (perhaps unfair, as Rajrah's suggests) diminishing of an agent's epistemic status (Fricker, 2007; 2017) contributes to such sense of loneliness. [18] There is a sense of exclusionary isolation from epistemic activities in particular and thus a sense of denial of epistemic engagement. All of these seem relevant to the definition provided in this paper. Furthermore, it is true that socioeconomic factors can indeed be the triggers and sources of such loneliness. Whether or not it has been the case deliberately, these socioeconomic factors can function to isolate people form epistemic opportunities. Of course, while Rajrah's focus is critically engaged in instances that are circumstantially, systematically or deliberately forced upon those most vulnerable, the framework nevertheless accommodates to the fact that in certain instances the factors at play are more complex and these opportunities are self-denied due to

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[18] Although Rajah distinguishes this understanding of epistemic loneliness from Fricker's notion of hermeneutical epistemic injustice— the inability to understand that an unjust diminution of one's epistemic status has happened in virtue of the lack of conceptual or interpretative resources— it is unclear that their understanding of hermeneutical obstacles is not exactly the same as what Fricker is pointing to. While Rajrah signals the one key distinction between one and the other is that in the instance of epistemic loneliness ones is aware of what is absent while in Fricker's concept one is not, this distinction is nevertheless muddled by Rajrah's insistence that "By keeping people oblivious to the scope and extent of what they are missing, loneliness contributes to a cognitive disadvantage in terms of un-intelligibility of socially valuable practices. By removing certain subjects from these shared and valuable social experiences despite their desire to participate, it not only affects their present ability to generate socially valuable meanings, but it also robs them of the opportunity to acquire skills and tastes that would help them to comment upon whether these experiences are valuable at all."

This is precisely the kind of instance and phenomena that Fricker's concept of hermeneutic epistemic injustice is designed to capture/track.

antecedent hermeneutic or testimonial harms and injustices. This happens even if some of us were to qualify and know that we qualify as an epistemic peer that is capable of engaging at the required epistemic level with some shared epistemic content. As Rajrah (2021) puts it:

> "When repeated encounters with hegemonic epistemic practices put one in a disadvantage in terms of sharing of their epistemic values and content, it can make one feel that their thought process is extremely isolated or that nobody else shares the epistemic premises one believes in *even when one should*." (Rajrah, 2021)

Furthermore:

> "as a result of repeated encounters with hegemonic epistemic practices that systemically undermine and exclude knowledge processes of marginalized communities, members from marginalized communities face the risk of this constant devaluation. By focusing exclusively on the experiences and conditions of the dominant majority and refusing to illuminate local knowledge or subjugated knowledge, a resulting epistemic loneliness could also lead to some epistemically abandoned concepts." (Rajrah, 2021)

This last part includes a couple of non-trivial elements that figure in epistemic loneliness. However, that they figure in instances of epistemic loneliness does not mean that they are constituents of epistemic loneliness per se. For example, in the passage above some of the elements of interest to our definition can figure more as either sources or implications of epistemic loneliness. Nevertheless, the definition above seems to be rather a form of social isolation of a group and not necessarily a kind of loneliness. One can even posit that it is a kind of isolation of an epistemic nature, i.e., epistemic isolation. But notice that while epistemic isolation can be a source of epistemic loneliness, they are not identical to one another. In fact, neither necessarily implies the other just like social isolation proper does not necessarily imply loneliness proper as discussed at the start of this paper. Of course, as previously discussed in other contexts, the social exclusion of groups can indeed *lead* to the type of isolation pointed at by Rajrah. But again, they are simply not the same. At first glance, it seems as if what Rajrah's work is ultimately pointing towards is not epistemic loneliness but rather epistemic silencing and epistemic silence (Dotson, 2011).[19] Sometimes, epistemic silencing can take the form of an epistemic harm or an epistemic injustice of the type that comes with certain forms of gaslighting (McKinnon, 2017). And what this means is that what is being captured by Rajrah's framework is rather a certain kind of social isolation in virtue of the unfair distribution of epistemic resources or goods, or the epistemic isolation that results in the unjust diminution of someone's epistemic status. Both could indeed result in epistemic loneliness, but neither *is* epistemic loneliness nor is it constitutive of such.

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[19] Under the framework suggested in this paper, there is a clear distinction between both of these concepts. There can be epistemic silence that is neither a source of loneliness not a harm but rather a voluntary withholding of epistemic content to others. Furthermore, that sometimes this voluntary withholding results in self-harm, as in the case of causing epistemic loneliness, harm to others, or even an epistemic injustice, is an orthogonal fact.

Given these considerations and in the spirit of a charitable interpretation, the kind of epistemic loneliness (if read as epistemic loneliness at all) that Rajrah is thinking of is but *one kind* of epistemic loneliness, mainly one that seems to be caused by either institutional disregard, active and targeted exclusion form epistemic opportunities by the powers that be, by one's socioeconomic status, or by one's own reactionary attitude to such onerous obstacles. These are all possible sources of epistemic loneliness, but they do not constitute a definition nor a framework in the way offered in our discussion. Similarly, while Rajrah's (2021) perspective in the second point above is informed by conventional accounts of epistemic injustice, which emphasize a point of departure that prioritizes perspectives and considerations from socially marginalized epistemic agents, the analysis presented here stems from a broader understanding of both epistemic harms *and* of those agents that can be vulnerable to them.[20] Similar distinctions hold as well from approaches to epistemic loneliness and related concepts in other disciplines (See Chandler, 1975; 1978).[21]

What Rajrah's work serves to illustrate, however, is that epistemic loneliness can and does have—and can be manifested through— non-trivial sociopolitical sources and ramifications. Under the definitions posited here, for instance, Creasy's examples in the previous sections qualify. The trope of the misunderstood teenager also qualifies as a paradigmatic case of epistemic loneliness. So does the misunderstood genius, everybody who has ever felt out of place at a party, and the person who must carry with them a secret. According to Schopenhauer, for example, loneliness was simply "a gift meant for all outstanding minds" (Schopenhauer, 2020, p. 101-103 as cited by Balapashev et al., 2023) In fact, with the definition above in hand and with these few preliminary mentions, it is easy to imagine instances of epistemic loneliness that fit it. There are even memes about it: the character standing by the corner in a party begrudgingly thinking about how none of those having fun and dancing has any clue about his complex inner life, knowledge, [insert niche interest], etc.

On the one hand, many of us have felt this type of alienating unease and distance from others at one moment or another. And many of us can identify that at some points, this alienating distance was in fact in virtue of what we did not know, what we should have known, or what we did in fact know. Not only are we able to identify such loneliness as arising due to issues related to knowledge but we are also able to articulate that the epistemic dimension of our loneliness arose in large part due to how this dimension relates to our integrity, our sense of personal identity and other relevant dimensions of our personal life (Symons and Alvarado, 2022).

On the other hand, some instances of epistemic loneliness can involve a lot more serious knowledge and a severe distance from possible epistemic peers and partners: consider the kind of referential understanding necessary for an epistemic opportunity shared by a two holocaust

[20] To see a broader understanding of epistemic injustice that captures epistemic agency in this broader sense see Symons and Alvarado (2022). This difference also makes the view presented here distinct, though perhaps compatible, with views that seek to make sense of hostilities of epistemic nature (Nguyen, forthcoming).

[21] Nevertheless, it is important to note that views such as these are sometimes closer to an existential understanding of loneliness, in which there is a metaphysical commitment both meaninglessness and purposelessness (McGraw, 1995). Both of which can be understood in a deep philosophical sense (See Arendt, 1951) and in a purely prudential sense (Bolmsjö et al., 2018).

survivors.[22] The sharp contrast between the feeling of inadequacy at social gatherings and the witnessing of horrors beyond description is meant to show the range of cases that this framework can capture and explain. However, it also illustrates that there is a broad range of more common sources of epistemic loneliness. Sometimes a niche interest will do, sometimes a trauma, sometimes a lack of a shared sense of curiosity, sometimes an idiosyncrasy, sometimes a lifestyle. Sometimes this happens only half the day, only some days or in some contexts or not all.[23]

4. Conclusion

In this paper I have provided an analysis that illustrates the facts that loneliness is conceptually distinct from the notion of social isolation, that there are distinct kinds of loneliness and that one such distinct kind of loneliness is directly and particularly related to our epistemic nature. I have also tried to make it clear that many issues related to the conceptualization of loneliness, and hence to approaches to loneliness, could be alleviated by this novel framework that identifies epistemic loneliness as a particular, yet common instance of loneliness.

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[22] The choice of trauma-related scenario here is quite deliberate as the Holocaust is an event in human bellicose history like no other, even other genocides, in the horrors of its deliberative systematicity, transparency, precision, and efficacy. The designed industrialization of extermination of human life had never nor has ever been paralleled.

[23] Notice too that, this type of distance is not merely a failure of communication, a failure of articulation, or even a failure to convey per se, though these elements may be involved. Note further that in the examples given here, an agent may in fact be a sociable person, able to eloquently articulate their inner life and to do so efficiently, and yet fail to do so in the absence of a willing or an able interlocutor. These instances acquire a novel seriousness when understood as instances of epistemic loneliness. But they may nevertheless continue to appear frivolous or inconsequential to some. Afterall, they would note, the misunderstood teenager stage is something that most of us go through and that most of us overcome. In fact, it is something that most of us realize in hindsight to have been mostly a product of our heightened sensibilities of that age. Nevertheless, they can be captured by the concept of epistemic loneliness. They are instances in which desirable epistemic opportunities and experiences unavailable or unattainable.

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