On Axiological Loneliness
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> *"All the lonely people,*
> *Where do they all come from?*
> *All the lonely people,*
> *Where do they all belong?"*
>
> - Lennon and McCartney

1. Introduction

Recently, Alvarado (2024) provided a conceptual framework to individuate and identify a specific kind of loneliness, namely *epistemic loneliness*. According to him, epistemic loneliness arises in virtue of and responds primarily to an absence of *epistemic partners*— i.e., willing, able, and *actually engaged* epistemic peers[1]— as well as the lack of opportunities to engage with such. In this paper I argue that Alvarado's framework and conceptual analysis of epistemic loneliness allows us to identify yet another kind of loneliness, namely one that can only be addressed at an axiological level. As we will see, this loneliness arises in virtue of and is particularly responsive to *value-affirming, value-creating, and value exchanging* circumstances, peers and contexts. Given its source and the factors which have an effect on it (either increase it or decrease it), this kind of loneliness is significantly distinct from epistemic loneliness. As will be shown here, we can have axiologically antagonistic epistemic partners. If this is so, it is possible that one can have epistemic partners, in the sense defined by Alvarado, *and* still be *axiologically* lonely. Axiological loneliness may prove to be even more central than epistemic loneliness already is to a person's social, psychological and personal sense of belonging and hence of well-being.

Although it is often treated as a single phenomenon in public and policy discourse, it is by now well known in academic research—from history to psychology to philosophy— that there are distinct kinds of loneliness (Balapashev et al., 2023; Barclay et al. Eds., 2023). Although their effects may often be the same, and although all may contribute to a decreased well-being in those that suffer them, it is nevertheless important to distinguish amongst kinds of loneliness. As we will see, in some cases, distinct forms of loneliness may not be necessarily connected, except in the sense that they all inlvove a certain absence of others— or opportunities to engage with others with whom to fulfill a particular *yearning*.[2] It is this particularity, however, that matters

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[1] A rich and extensive literature exists about what is an epistemic peer. For a thorough view of how this debate relates to Alvarado's framework please see Alvarado (2024). For the intents and purposes of this paper, the outcomes of such debates are mostly orthogonal to the discussion here except for the fact that whatever an epistemic peer may be, it is something different or distinguishable from an axiological partner.

[2] The difference between peers and actual partners here is subtle but important, since one may be surrounded by others, even those capable of providing what is missing in a particular instance of loneliness and yet have no opportunity to engage with them for one reason or another. Hence contexts and environmental factors play out in

and can make a difference. [3] In some other cases, instances of loneliness may belong to a more general category—say, epistemic or axiological— even if they can be distinguished in virtue of more granular factors—e.g., political, moral, etc.

Identifying kinds of loneliness, particularly in virtue of what they are responsive to and the factors from which they arise, as Alvarado's framework suggests, allows us to better understand the different dimensions of this growing and worrying global phenomena. Importantly, it can also elucidate the kinds of resources most apt to address or assuage it.

2. Distinguishing Kinds of Loneliness and Epistemic Loneliness

Taking Creasy's insights— that "just as one can feel lonely in a room full of strangers, one can feel lonely in a room full of friends" (2023) and that in certain instances of loneliness that involve aspects of deep personal and character growth one may feel unable to meet a "need for intellectual engagement and communicate to […] friends the fullness of [our] inner life" (ibid)— as a starting point, Alvarado (2024) suggests that perhaps what is at play in such instances of loneliness is a kind of loneliness that responds primarily to intellectual and knowledge-sharing endeavors. According to him, "at least one of the kinds of loneliness of interest [in cases such as the ones cited by Creasy] 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."

Yet, Alvarado also acknowledges that this aspect cannot be strictly intellectual. For example, it must be richer than mere cognitive stimulation. According to Alvarado, we must be aware that "simply being stimulated cognitively (or mentally) may not be what is missing in these instances." And, while these intellectual activities may be necessarily cognitive—e.g., thinking, processing information, etc.— at some fundamental level, Alvarado argues, 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." (Alvarado, 2024) In instances of such loneliness—he suggests:

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

Alvarado's framework. Furthermore, notice that the term 'yearning' here is meant to signify that there is a want or a need on the part of the lonely subject. If this want is not there, then loneliness does not arise. It is perfectly fine, in other words, to not have such companions if one does not need or want them and not be or feel justifiably lonely in their absence. Solitude, aloneness, or isolation are not the same as loneliness nor do they imply it.

[3] Although there may be many kinds of loneliness that can be derived with such a framework—i.e. by assessing the particular factors in virtue of which the loneliness arises and to which it is responsive— the particular focus on and primacy of both epistemic and axiological loneliness will be explained in section 4 below. Philosophically speaking, while there are distinct kinds of loneliness and while neither is fundamental to a general sense of loneliness, we can postulate that at any kind of loneliness can be categorized as either epistemic, axiological, or metaphysical in nature.

From this Alvarado infers that the kind of loneliness that Creasy seems to be elucidating could be understood as epistemic loneliness, i.e., a 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. Prima facie, given Creasy's examples of the kind of loneliness she is trying to capture, and given Alvarado's reliance on certain aspects of these examples, it is quite reasonable to conclude that there is a strong epistemic component at play. Consider what Alvarado has to say about Creasy's examples:

> "Consider Creasy's example […] 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 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." (Alvarado, 2024)

Thus, Alvarado concludes 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." (ibid)

As we can see, what Alvarado suggests is that what such instances had in common was the absence of the constituents that ground both hermeneutic resources and epistemic connections: epistemic opportunities, epistemically adequate environments, epistemic peers, and most importantly *epistemic partners*. With this, Alvarado provides a definition: 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. (Alvarado, 2024 italics mine)

Notably, while the absence of *epistemic partners* is key to the definition above, opportunities, environment, instances, etc., must also be considered. This follows from the fact that, as briefly mentioned above, loneliness implies an absence of distinct things, at distinct times for distinct individuals, and not just distinct kinds of people. What this definition provides is a clear understanding that kinds of loneliness can be distinguished in virtue of the factors that bring

them about and/or the factors that have an effect on them—e.g., either by increasing or decreasing them.

3. An Incomplete Distinction

While Alvarado's analysis of Creasy's views is right to distill epistemic loneliness from them, it is nevertheless incomplete in identifying a second, important kind of loneliness that is lurking in the background of her examples. There are some instances in which Creasy's wording seems to be talking about two factors at the same time and not merely about epistemic ones. Consider the following passages:

> "As the result of going through such [transformative] experiences, we often *develop new values*, core needs and *centrally motivating desires*, losing other *values*, needs and *desires* in the process. In other words, after undergoing a particularly transformative experience, we become different people in key respects than we were before." (2023 italics mine)

If after such a personal transformation, Creasy continues, "our friends are unable to meet our newly developed core needs or *recognise and affirm our new values and central desires*" (2023) then loneliness can ensue. These instances make it so that we feel unable to meet a need for, yes, intellectual engagement but, importantly, also unable to communicate to those close to us "the fullness of [our] inner life, which was overtaken by quite specific *aesthetic values, values that shaped how [we see] the world*." (Creasy, 2023 italics mine) This inability to communicate our deep axiological transformation is independent from whether our interlocutor values *us*, or loves us, or recognizes us. For example, while a friend may still recognize and affirm our worth, according to Creasy, they may do so "without acknowledging or engaging [our] particular needs, specific values and so on."

In all these examples, Creasy concludes, loneliness can "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." (Creasy, 2023 italics mine)

In case it was not clear, what I am pointing at here is the consistent reference to values, the things we value, the priorities we now have that we did not have before, the normative perspectives with which we see and navigate the world, understand our place therein, and even conduct our lives. Note that in this context, even desires may be a manifestation of these values.

Values, however, are neither necessarily epistemic in and of themselves, nor are they always epistemic—that is, values are not necessarily cognitive or explicitly known and articulated, nor do they always concern knowledge or knowledge-related tasks, contexts, or content. Hence, this other kind of loneliness that Creasy seems to be pointing towards with examples without fully articulating its nature seems to be, at the very least, a distinct one from the one identified by Alvarado.

These passages elucidate a conceptual confusion throughout Creasy's work that Alvarado failed to capture. This conceptual confusion is one that often arises when people are trying to voice their frustration by saying that someone does not— or no one really— "understands" them. This is something we hear from offspring that are coming of age towards parents and other adults in their surroundings. We also hear it from arguing interlocutors, be it strangers, friends, spouses or siblings. The common denominator for the person uttering the expression is a perceived antagonistic or apprehensive interlocutor. The confusion, however, lies in the fact that in such instances we are deploying an epistemic term such as "understanding" when what we really mean is that the other person may not share our point of view, our preferred perspective or outcome, or our understanding *of the situation*. Notice, however, that it is completely possible to understand someone without assenting or accepting their assertions or the content therein. It is also possible to understand someone in many regards without necessarily sharing or affirming their values.

4. Individuating and Identifying Axiological Loneliness

What is missing in Alvarado's analysis is perhaps the idea that Creasy's work was not just pointing towards a different kind of loneliness but also *conflating two distinct kinds as one*. As briefly mentioned above, this conflation happens when we use the epistemic concept 'understanding' as a placeholder for things that are not necessarily rational, epistemic, cognitive, or intellectual at all: e.g., empathizing, sympathizing, or even agreeing [4], etc. Hence, what the person in Creasy's examples is looking for is not necessarily understanding— though that may be a necessary condition to engage with someone in a more meaningful way. [5] What they are really looking for, as stated without detail by Creasy multiple times, is someone "*to share or affirm [their] values*, to *endorse desires* that [they] understand as central" to their lives (2023 italics mine). This is a completely distinct need from our need to be *understood*, or our need to share or create knowledge. Thus, the loneliness at play is not necessarily an epistemic one.

Rather, given its relation to values, such loneliness is an axiological one.[6]

Given that key aspects of the conceptual analysis here stem from Alvarado's work, perhaps it is best to contrast axiological loneliness with *epistemic loneliness* via a few examples. The following are a few thought experiments designed to distill axiological loneliness from epistemic, political, social, and even other aspects of unvoluntary and undesirable disassociation.

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[4] Notice that assent or agreement can sometimes, albeit perhaps problematically, be achieved by means other than epistemic. (Dretske, 2000)

[5] See Alvarado (2024 p.21) for a thorough overview of the distinct levels and degrees of epistemic involvement required for appropriate engagement with others.

[6] While questions and issues surrounding the study of values have been at the heart of many a philosophical investigation, the conceptual and carefully separated treatment of such as an individuated branch of philosophy is relatively recent (Hart, 1971). Here, we will treat the term 'axiological' as relating to values in general. As we will see below, this may mean that many other specific kinds of loneliness (e.g., political, moral, etc.) may be axiological.

Case 1: The Friends

Imagine two friends that have been so since their formative years and continue to be so throughout their adulthood. Imagine that throughout this relationship and up to the present both have always been in admiration of each other's knowledge, thought processes, deliberations and opinions about political and social issues. Both know that the other one knows their stuff and trusts that they could build new knowledge together in their conversations. At some point in their lives, one continues to hold some previously shared beliefs while the other one begins to change their political allegiances and convictions such that if they used to be radically progressive in their youth, they feel more and more aligned with cautious or reactionary conservatism, or vice versa. Because of their sophisticated critical thinking proclivities such as corrective open mindedness (Symons and Al-Sharif, 2021), they are able to identify their own personal and unjustified attachments to argumentative inferences and are hence able to recognize the sophistication and thoughtfulness of each other's position, without necessarily agreeing with them.[7] Importantly, they still regard each other as the best possible interlocutor in these matters and contexts and seek out each other's perspectives to enrich their own understanding— all the while feeling growingly alone in each other's company *with respect to their core values*, namely a set of commitments to political ideologies.

Case 2: The diplomats

Imagine two top counterpart diplomats with extensive knowledge of both their own and each other's countries (aims, laws, norms, culture, history, territory, language, negotiating leverage, etc.) who nevertheless not only do not share values but whose core personal and national values are antithetical and incompatible to one another. One can easily imagine an instance in which these two diplomats respect and admire each other due to their knowledgeable and principled professionalism. Perhaps, we can even imagine that they are friends or that they, at least, enjoy each other's company to a degree that if one of them retires, the other one would find no reason or pleasure in continuing to do their job. We can also imagine that while they share some values (rational persuasion, professionalism, etc.), a core value of one of them involves not recognizing the existence of the other's country and ensuring the complete disappearance of it by any means necessary. A core value of their counterpart, on the other hand, lies in the proud existence of their relatively newly-formed nation as well as in the defense of its continued existence by any means necessary, including eradicating those that directly threaten this core value. Now, we can also imagine each of these diplomats feeling justifiably lonely *relative to their core values* when in company of their counterpart, in a room full of people like their counterparts, or in a country like that of their counterpart.

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[7] Although there is ample research on the nuances surrounding the possibility of disagreement amongst epistemic peers that may be of relevance to our discussion (See Cocchiaro and Frances, 2021; Cocchiaro, 2024; as well as Alvarado 2024 p. 19-24 and fn. 13, 14, and 17), for our purposes, it suffices to assume that it is *possible* to understand, admire, recognize, etc., the sophistication and thoughtfulness in other people's thought processes, arguments, or deliberations even if we are not compelled to assent.

Case 3: The pacifist

Lastly, imagine a person whose core identity is closely aligned with an uncompromising pacificism. Imagine that in addition, this person sees herself as belonging to a particular political identity relative to their country's politics. Often, this affiliation overlaps with pacifist concerns such that being a pacifist further signals resistance and camaraderie in opposition to the powers that be. This camaraderie often includes friends and family. Now, imagine that the civilian population of this person's country is indiscriminately and brutally attacked in a massacre by a hostile force of a neighboring territory. Suddenly, the country enters a war. Importantly, given the nature of the attack on the civilian population, the political faction conventionally aligned with her in terms of political tendencies but also in terms of her pacifism—which includes family and friends— now supports military retaliation against the territory from where the attackers came from. So, now, the current administration to which she was already in opposition is forgoing pacifism, the opposition with which she identified herself is forgoing pacifism, an even her family and friends are doing so as well. We can now imagine this person to feel justifiably lonely *with respect to their core values*.

5. Defining and distinguishing Axiological Loneliness

Taking from Alvarado's analysis of epistemic loneliness and the examples above, we can more clearly formulate axiological loneliness as the kind that arises *in virtue of* and is *particularly*— exclusively or primarily— *responsive* (i.e., it can be increased, decreased or assuaged relative) *to*

a) the absence of S's ability (or the absence of opportunities for S) to engage in genuine value-constructing, value-sharing, and/or value-affirming opportunities with others and/or
b) the absence of axiological partners—others who also can, are willing to, and *actually* share, create or affirm values with S.

As we can see, this definition and the concept it tracks is significantly distinct from either Creasy's general views of a loneliness that entails a kind of recognition [8], and Alvarado's notion of epistemic loneliness. Contrary to some of Creasy's views quoted above, for example, this definition includes an explicit distinction between value-construction, value-sharing, and value-affirming. This distinction is important because it allows for more nuanced relationships between axiological partners. For example, one may be able to construct, critically engage with, and share (as in exchange) values without either partner necessarily affirming values already present in either interlocutor or themselves. That is, new values may emerge that neither interlocutor had thought about, different values than the ones already had may arise for either of the interlocutors, and by extension, generally existing values or values had by either of the interlocutors may be revaluated as interlocutors engage with each other. This is not just one interlocutor recognizing our amazing inner transformation. Rather, it is a socially dynamic enterprise that is missing.

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[8] To see a thorough overview of why the kind of loneliness at play here, and or in the cases of epistemic loneliness are not, as Creasy suggests a matter of recognition see (Alvarado, 2024 p.)

While the definition above can encompass Creasy-style instances of loneliness due to lack of recognition, it can also account for much richer and complex absences..

Furthermore, this definition also distinguishes between sharing such value-related opportunities, sharing our values in the sense of conveying them, and 'sharing' values in a sense that entails having *the same values*. While this makes this definition more conceptually comprehensive in that it can accommodate and account for seemingly counterintuitive or less common instances of axiological loneliness, it is important to note that it can nevertheless perfectly capture the kinds of more common axiological loneliness that involve *not having* axiological peers that do have our same values or *not being* in an environment that is axiologically familiar (see Case 2 and 3 above).

The examples in the previous section are meant to serve to conceptually differentiate between epistemic loneliness and an axiologically-driven loneliness. However, they also serve to conceptually separate axiological loneliness as a sui generis kind of loneliness vis-à-vis other kinds of loneliness and a vis-à-vis a general sense of loneliness. Before accepting it, however, a few things must still be clarified about the granularity of the definitional strategy laid down by Alvarado and deployed here in order to fully see the implications of these examples.

First, the definition can be easily modified to elucidate many subclasses of loneliness (i.e. political, moral, sexual, etc.). In other words, the general definitional strategy of individuating, identifying and distinguishing kinds of loneliness in virtue of the factors that bring it about and the factors that have an effect on it (reduce it, increase it, or assuage it), allows us to identify specific kinds of factors and then allows us to name a loneliness after their main features. For example, if a loneliness in question happens to arise in virtue of primarily social, political, or moral factors one could easily develop a definition that would identify and individuate a kind of social, political or moral loneliness respectively. While this is in principle not too much of a problem, it would be useful for us to demarcate certain common-sense parameters for such granularity.

Some of these considerations may be on the shallow end, others more profound. For example, while I may suffer from the lack of a thoroughly idiosyncratic kind of peer, perhaps there is little use in developing a full framework to identify it and address it. This definitional strategy, for example, could make sense of views that make loneliness an absence of very specific social goods. For example, it could make sense of Räsänen's (2023) concept of *"sexual loneliness"*, which is posited as a lack of social goods, hence as a possible distributive injustice that falls under the purview of public health policy. While the later conclusion regarding injustice and administrative recourse remains highly contentious, the conceptual work in the definition above allows for such granularity. Nevertheless, perhaps we do not need an account of "spiritual loneliness" for someone who lacks drinking partners. We also may not need to flesh out a framework of "needlework loneliness" for someone who lacks knitting spaces in their city's downtown. This is in part because higher-level definitions and individuation strategies, like axiological loneliness used here or epistemic loneliness used by Alvarado, do a lot of explanatory work and continue to be insightful even in light of more granular possibilities. Philosophically speaking, one may say that they serve to identify a more general kind of loneliness and yet to still map it onto important philosophical categories. Bam (1993), for example, notes that there

are only three most general philosophical sciences: metaphysics, epistemology and axiology (value theory). All inquiry, according to Bam, "may be located in one of these three areas" (1993 p.4).[9] Perhaps we could delineate our work on loneliness along these lines. But it is also because both 'needlework loneliness' and 'spiritual loneliness', as used above, can already be captured by either epistemic loneliness or axiological loneliness. As explained by Alvarado (2024) in another context, specific interests that bring about something like needlework loneliness can be attributed to knowledge-creating and knowledge-sharing factors. What one needs is not just someone to knit next to us, but rather someone with whom we can share, exchange and create methods, ideas, experience, etc. In short, what is needed is someone to share and create *knowledge* with about the craft. Similarly, a genuinely severe, exclusive and meaningful lack *of drinking* buddies can be categorized as an instance of axiological loneliness. This is because what is really lacking is someone to share this priority and value with.

Importantly, the same can be said about instances of loneliness that are individuated in virtue of more mid-range granularity. Consider moral loneliness. To start with, the definitional strategy provided by Alvarado and modified here makes it clear that an inquiry into the nature of *moral loneliness* is not the same as examining the morality *in* or *of* loneliness (Horowski, 2021). That is, the answers to the questions about what constitutes the nature of moral loneliness will not necessarily answer whether or not being lonely is moral, immoral or amoral. It also becomes obvious that we are also not considering whether or not the lonely individual can be a moral person or behave morally (Jiao and Wang, 2018).

Rather, what we are considering here is the kind of isolation that emerges in virtue of a moral factor, i.e., stances, beliefs, etc. For example, considerations or factors that an individual may have or face in relation to an antagonistic social or interpersonal environment. A common narrative trope is that one may feel alone when our principled moral positions lead us to do "the right thing" even when others fail to either see it as such, recognize that we have done such a thing, or abide by it even when acknowledged as such. This can lead to a sense of moral loneliness. In such instances, we feel lonely *because* of our moral stance, considerations, beliefs, etc.

Here, one may be tempted to cite The Pacificist case above. However, it is important to note that while many would be inclined to *only* consider this more heroic— and perhaps relatable sense— side of the issue, note that the same can be said of a villain. Deliberately doing, thinking, or supporting the "*wrong thing*" can also lead to a kind of unvoluntary and undesirable disassociation. Hence, a villain may also be or become lonely considering their moral stances and considerations, and, hence, morally lonely. Notice however, that this type of loneliness, particularly if considered as multidirectional (i.e., that it can equally apply to the hero or the villain), is in fact better captured by the higher-order definition of axiological loneliness above. This is because it is not *the specific view* that brings about the loneliness but *a view, any view, of this specific kind* that does it. Hence, while the The Pacifist case above could be a case of moral

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[9] The interplay between these three categories is of course, the topic of a rich literature in the history of philosophy and in issues related to metaphilosophy, and it would be inadequate to attempt to engage it here. Nevertheless, for our purposes, we can simply posit that some of these more granular individuations of loneliness can be captured and are part of these more general categories.

loneliness, given that a similar case could be built for a counterpart— say a bellicose politician during peace times— the case is also where values, in general, are the key, and hence a case of axiological loneliness.

Notice that the same applies to similar concepts such as *ethical loneliness* (Stauffer, 2015) or political loneliness (Gaffney, 2020). For example, Stauffer treats ethical loneliness from one perspective, namely from the perspective of the loneliness of a political agent in the face of a state/economic apparatus that is designed to alienate them. She focuses on the isolation of political activists and oppressed citizens affected by systemic domination. Similarly, Gaffney makes of loneliness a sort of political alienation brought about by a "neoliberal subjectivity" that separates us from a sense of belonging and from our civic and interpersonal duties towards our communities, even in a hyperconnected world. While these types of analyses are important and can be elucidating, note that the conceptual work in and of itself need not be arbitrarily constrained to one camp or another (e.g., neoliberals, their counterparts, the oppressed or their counterparts). Rather, it can be applied in multiple directions. Not-neoliberal subjects (whatever they may be) and/or oppressors can also be lonely, politically or ethically as defined by these authors. They can be alienated from their communities; they can be affected by systemic domination, etc. This is evidenced by instances in which elites become the targets of distributive reforms. [10] But notice that this latter point—that the powerful may also suffer from alienation that leads to loneliness— can happen even if it is their own doing. That is, oppressors can be unwilling subjects of some of their own frameworks. The "neoliberal" subject, it seems—if we are to trust the literature on the topic— would be an interesting example of such a self-inflicted effect. So, the loneliness at play is not reserved for one camp or the other and it does not arise because one belongs to one camp or the other. Rather, it arises in virtue of belonging to camps, period. If this is so, then the loneliness produced in these instances can be explain in large part by appealing to the political *values* at play on either side. If this is so, then the issue is not merely political, but axiological. The loneliness emerges in virtue of having values that are not shared, are not compatible, cannot be conveyed, or do not have a place to be created or a peer to help create them.

There may be some who would argue that the direction of the fundamentality is the other way around, that is, that the axiological is fundamentally political, just like the social, the moral or the ethical are political. Notice however that this is simply not the case, at least not as far as concerns the political. Interpersonal relationships for example, are not necessarily political, e.g., the love of a mother for her child. It can be easily categorized as biological, psychological, personal, or even social. However, it would require non-trivial philosophical efforts to be able to categorize it as political. First of all, note that the fact that such love may have political ramifications or is the fact that it is embedded in political contexts does not make it so that it is inherently, inevitably, exclusively, primarily, or even remotely political. Love, one may say, does not arise in virtue of, and it is not sensitive or responsive to such factors. If it is, it may not be love but something else. In short, not everything is political, In the context of our discussion and the examples above, notice that it is clear that while the political is necessarily axiological the axiological is not at all necessarily political. Some values are aesthetic, some are moral, some are prudential, some

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[10] See, for example, the history of 19th and 20th century Mexico, Russia, Cuba or China.

epistemic.[11] It is easy to *conceive of* any such values even if a person were to have been raised alone in an island.

As a final point of distinction, there is yet another major general category in conventional accounts of loneliness that prevails in the scarce philosophical literature—and often in the vast psychological literature on the subject— that should be discussed. This category is an *existential* understanding of loneliness (McRaw, 1995).

Here I follow Alvarado's general resistance to these existential perspectives on loneliness, which reduce the phenomenon to an intrinsic, omnipresent, and hence inescapable aspect of the human condition (Bolmsjö et al., 2019). For example, Mujiscovic (1977) writes the following:

> "Types of loneliness are always reducible to one basic type of despairing isolation which ultimately motivates all human thoughts, action, and relationships in the attempt to escape the feeling of being condemned to it. It is argued also that loneliness has always characterized the consciousness of man: It is a permanent condition that may be alleviated but not transcended, because each human ego is unavoidably confined to its own realm of monadic, opaque, and solipsistic consciousness."

As elucidated by Alvarado's (2024) conceptual analysis and implied by many in the psychological literature, some of the assertions in Mujiscovic's quote above are simply not the case (see Bulka, 1996; Sha'ked and Rokach, 2015). Furthermore, existential views that make loneliness an inescapable feature of 'the human condition' risk trivializing the concept and ultimately become uninformative for those that think that loneliness, in general, is a problem, and that something can/ought to be done about it. The first objection follows from two simple facts: first, *sometimes* we are lonely and sometimes we are *not*; and second, only *some of us* are lonely and some of us are not. Hence, loneliness is something that affects only some of us some of the time and not all of us all of the time. If these two facts are true, then two things follow. In the first place, it follows that what we are addressing is not an intrinsic or inescapable phenomenological experience of all humans but rather a contingent phenomenon, one that could in principle even affect members of other species (Cacioppo et al., 2015; Vitale and Smith, 2022). Secondly, speaking to the second objection, this contingency implies the commonsense view that things could be otherwise and that in many cases of interest ameliorative steps *can or ought* to be taken (Cummins and Zaleski, 2023).

Besides being a matter of figurative speech that stems from very specific poetic proclivities of the Modern Era (Barclay, et al., 2023; Worsley, 2024) it is hard to think of loneliness as an intrinsic part of the "human condition." Not only would it be difficult to differentiate it from being and feeling alive simpliciter, but it would also be hard to note what we are lonely relative to or what not being lonely would mean or feel like. Notably, it is difficult to know what exactly

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[11] Importantly, the epistemic partner, as opposed to an epistemic peer, implies at least one— if not several shared values. An epistemic partner is a willing, able and actually engaged epistemic peer. Implied in the willingness to engage comes the recognition, prioritization, attention, the reification, and affirmation, of the—at the very least perceived—mutual value of epistemic content and exchanges.

is missing in the case of existential loneliness. It is not an existentially lonely partner, since we all seem to be "in this together" all the time. It is unclear if the existence of another species of epistemic partner, say an extraterrestrial intelligence, capable of acknowledging their own condition would suffice to assuage this loneliness. We would all just be existentially lonely together, I suppose. It is also unclear that a God that provides purpose and meaning could assuage a loneliness of this sort. We could have meaning and purpose and still be lonely. In fact, sometimes we are epistemically and/or axiologically lonely *because* we have purpose and meaning. Many religious leaders, theologians, and or ascetic followers of what they think are divine purposes are in fact lonely, in large part *because* of their commitment and belief in the latter. Furthermore, it is not clear that an infinite, infinitely loving, equally distributed, and unrestricted God can assuage the ills and needs of finite beings like us (Frankfurt, 2004; Symons and Sanwoolu, 2025). If the rebuttal is to note that the main feature of existential loneliness is precisely that it cannot be assuaged, or that is not responsive to anything given that it is an intrinsic aspect of the human condition, then it is no more of a problem than being alive, which of course, comes with all kinds of undesirable but inevitable consequences.

In any case, even if there was such a thing as existential loneliness—read metaphysical loneliness (McRaw, 1995)— the concept of loneliness treated here is at the same time more quotidian than these existential accounts and *yet of more significance* to both our ordinary life and to policy-making efforts surrounding what seems to be a genuine health and social problem (Surkalim et al., 2022). Given the latter points of our analysis, there seems to be little to nothing to do about this latter kind of loneliness. If this is the case, then we may as well focus our philosophical and psychological attention and efforts on the kinds we can do something about.

6. Conclusion

In this paper I discuss and elucidate a particular kind of loneliness that arises in virtue of, responds primarily to, and can only be addressed at an axiological level: that is, at a level in which fundamental values of a person are at play. This builds on work recently done by Alvarado on distinguishing epistemic loneliness form other kinds of loneliness.

Understanding different kinds of loneliness is not simply a philosophical exercise in distinction-making. Importantly, it allows us to better understand the different dimensions of this growing and worrying global phenomena as well as to elucidate the kinds of resources most apt to address or assuage it. Furthermore, it can also provide clearer responses about questions regarding the possibility of technological mediation in cases of loneliness. For example, while one may think that sophisticated epistemic technologies such as AI could play a role in assuaging instances of epistemic loneliness in elders (Gillath et al., 2023; Symons and Abumusab, 2024), their role in instances of other kinds of loneliness, namely axiological loneliness, is not so clear.

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