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Loneliness and Mood

Thomas J. Spiegel[1]

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Abstract
Loneliness is commonly conceived of as a topic under the purview of psychology. Empirical research on loneliness utilizes a definition of psychology as essentially subjective, i.e. as a first-personal mental property an individual can have. As a first-personal mental property, subjects have, as it were, privileged access to their state of being lonely. Rehearsing some well-known arguments from later Wittgenstein, I argue that loneliness – contrary to an unargued assumption present in several academic engagements – is not subjective in the sense that whether or not a person is lonely does not in all cases hinge on that person's subjective mental states. This becomes apparent when considering cases of alienation from self-knowledge (Moran 2001). Using Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world and being-with I argue that such cases from alienation point towards the notion that loneliness is not merely a subjective feeling, but a categorically different privation of the fundamental mode of being with others.

Keywords Loneliness · Social Ontology · Social Epistemology · Philosophy of Psychology · Phenomenology · Mood

1 Introduction

Western civilization has experienced a process commonly called social atomization at least since the beginning of the 20th century. People spend increasingly more time by themselves and much less time with their family or peers, resulting in something that has been called a "loneliness epidemic" (Leland 2020). Loneliness is a problem. It is one of the most uncomfortable experiences humans can have. It is no coincidence that solitary confinement in prisons is considered deeply inhumane as it leaves some inmates permanently impaired with severe adverse long-term effects (Grassian 2006; Haney 2018). Extreme and prolonged forms of (forced) loneliness can have devastating effects, effecting self-harm or even suicide in its victims. This pertains in particular to extreme forms of loneliness such as those which are often caused by (but not necessarily tied to) solitary confinement. But even cases of loneliness less extreme than those associated with solitary confinement are often experienced as debilitating with possible severe effects on mental and physical health, like cancer, heart disease, depression, alcohol and drug abuse, bulimia nervosa, dementia, Alzheimer, and suicide (Yang 2021, 6 ff.). Overall, loneliness is quite literally a risk factor for mortality comparable to "smoking up to 15 cigarettes per day, obesity, physical inactivity, and air pollution" (Holt-Lunstad 2017, 128). For such reasons loneliness has become a social and political issue with initiatives such as the *British Campaign to end Loneliness* (https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/), for loneliness is as much an individual issue as it is a social issue. It is no wonder then that psychologists have been expending increased efforts researching loneliness.

While studies on loneliness in psychology are often very illuminating indeed, researchers in psychology typically rely on fairly short characterizations of "loneliness" or the term "lonely". One key implication and presupposition of this kind of research, however, is that loneliness is a subjective phenomenon insofar as loneliness is typically conceptualized as being that which patients identify as something 'within' themselves. On the other hand, conceptual reflections on loneliness have been fairly common in the wake of the phenomenological and existential tradition (e.g. Moran 2020), yet only few have addressed the issues of loneliness as researched by psychology and philosophical conceptual work in tandem (cf. e.g. Dahlberg 2007 as an exception). One exception is Roberts & Krueger who suggest that "it

✉ Thomas J. Spiegel
thomas.j.spiegel@gmail.com

[1] University of Potsdam, Am neuen Palais 10, 14469 Potsdam, Germany

may be that it is the objective situation of the chronically lonely person that is best described as lonely, with no implication for the subjective character of her emotional state" (Roberts and Krueger 2021, 200). While I agree with this assessment, this paper seeks to expand on the ontological and existential implications of this assessment.

This paper thus aims to challenge this presupposition of loneliness as an essentially subjective mental property. The main challenge is that there are cases in which we can reasonably identify a person as lonely although that person may lack the subjective feeling of being lonely and thus not report being lonely. Such cases point to the fact that loneliness is something over-and-above merely subjective feelings. In order to further elucidate what loneliness might be (if it is not to be subjective) I am going to employ the Heideggerian notions of being-in-the-world and mood. As a result, loneliness is ontologically speaking not a purely subjective mental property but a way of being-in-the-world or a mood. Conceptualizing loneliness as a mood is not without precedent (Elpidorou and Freeman 2015; Aho 2022; Lindberg et al. 2015). However, it is rarely fully characterized what it means for loneliness to be a mood, and how loneliness being a Heideggerian mood bears on the existing literature in empirical psychology on loneliness. This way of being in the world can affect an individual in a way that expresses itself as the subjective feeling of loneliness (which is the object of research in psychology) due to an absence of others, but loneliness itself is fundamentally a way in which a person relates to themselves and the world. Hence, I do not aim to offer a novel 'definition' of loneliness, but rather argue for a constraint to the effect that any characterization of loneliness ought not to conceptualize it as being a merely subjective state.

2 Feeling Lonely and the Picture of Existential Loneliness

While most will certainly know loneliness by acquaintance, it is however much more difficult to state what loneliness in fact *is*. Similar to how Augustine famously wrote that if he wanted to explain what time is, he would not know how (Augustine 2020, XIV, § 17), loneliness is elusive all the same. But getting a firm grasp on the concept of loneliness is not only of philosophical, but also of scientific interest as psychologists and sociologists investigate loneliness empirically. Yet, most empirical work on loneliness does not engage in prolonged debates on what loneliness is. Since the sheer volume of psychological research on loneliness is staggering, it is simply not possible to provide a fully comprehensive overview of all studies on loneliness. Yet, the perhaps most often cited and influential definition of loneliness in psychology comes from Letitia Peplau and Daniel Perlman:

> "[…] [L]oneliness is the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relations is deficient in some important way, either quantitatively or qualitatively […]. […] [F]irst, loneliness results from deficiencies in the person's social relations; second, loneliness is a subjective phenomenon (it is not necessarily synonymous with objective isolation, so that people can be alone without being lonely); third, loneliness is unpleasant and distressing." (Perlman and Peplau 1981, 31 f.).

Many researchers in psychology have followed this characterization.[1] In an article summarizing recent research, Rokach writes that "loneliness is in essence a subjective experience that is influenced by personal and situational variables" (Rokach 2013, 2). Leehu Zysberg states that "*Loneliness* is often defined as the subjective discrepancy between one's desired and one's (perceived) existing interpersonal relations" (Zysberg 2012, 37). Mund & Neyer state "Individuals feel lonely when they perceive a discrepancy between their desired and their actually experienced quantity and quality of social relationships" (Mund and Neyer 2018, 1; cf. also Mund et al. 2020, 24).

It is further important to note that researchers commonly differentiate supposedly subjective markers of loneliness from objectively determinable factors of social isolation:

> "Living alone, having few social network ties, and having infrequent social contact are all markers of social isolation. […] Whereas social isolation can be an objectively quantifiable variable, loneliness is a subjective emotional state. Loneliness is the perception of social isolation, or the subjective experience of being lonely, and thus involves necessarily subjective measurement." (Holt-Lunstad et al. 2015, 227f).

> "Objective indicators of social isolation—such as living alone and number of social connections—have well-demonstrated links with poorer health outcomes. However, the latest evidence indicates that feeling lonely is also associated with a multitude of poorer health outcomes […]". (Lim et al. 2020, 789)
> "For loneliness as a negative emotion to arise, it requires both the objective existence of social relations

[1] Contrary to this 'mainstream' here is at least one article that distinguishes between perceived and actual loneliness or social isolation (using both terms seemingly interchangeably) (Holt-Lunstad et al. 2015), yet does not draw salient conclusions or inferences from this differentiation.

> and the subjective interpretations and evaluations [of their state of aloneness]." (Yang 2021, 3).

While these characterizations differ in details, they nevertheless represent a consensus about the concept of loneliness. The key aspect is that these researchers think of loneliness as an essentially *subjective feeling* which is to be investigated and – in some sense – measured by operationalizing first-personal testimonies regarding one's felt state of being lonely. This is also reflected in some of the questionnaires used by psychologists, e.g. the relatively authoritative UCLA Loneliness Scale which poses 20 questions to participants, all of which begin with "How often do you feel […]" (loc. cit. Cacioppo and Patrick 2008, 6). Such questionnaires, of course, serve very specific epistemological interests and are not supposed to make ontological assertions, but it is still important to note that the term "feel" emphasizes and cements the notion that loneliness is essentially subjective. And social isolation on the other hand, as much empirical research has it, is an objectively determinable variable which does not necessarily coincide with loneliness such that one can be socially isolated, yet not *be* lonely because one does not *feel* lonely. The key point is that psychologists tend to conceptualize loneliness as a subjective feeling that is 'inward', i.e. ultimately private and only indirectly accessible via inquiring people about their experience and mental state.

This assumption that loneliness is a subjective feeling may seem innocuous to most. After all, the unpleasantness of loneliness is so strongly felt in one's first-personal experience. But this assumption represents and adumbrates a metaphysically laden picture of the world and the way things are. This picture is perhaps nowhere as clearly expressed as in Mijuskovic's *Feeling Lonesome*:

> "My view is […] that *first* loneliness is *felt* and only subsequently *conceptually* recognized as a problem to be overcome and transcended by social interaction. For only *after* experiencing a sense of isolation do issues concerning intimacy, friendship, and all the other strategies of "socialization" follow as "solutions" to the original problem […]. […] This means that loneliness is the *preexisting* concern […] and socialization subsequently follows as the pursued remedy." (Mijuskovic 2015, 14).

He concludes that "all human existence, without exception, is innately lonely" (Mijuskovic 2015, 13). Accordingly, he suggests that the "only possible remedy for loneliness depends on mutual intimacy, which can only be gained through and along a reciprocating path of shared empathy" (Mijuskovic 2021, 19) (which is certainly not incorrect). Similarly, Irvin Yalom writes that "the individual is inexorably alone", a state which he calls "existential isolation" (Yalom 1980, 353).

One might call this notion expressed by Mijuskovic and Yalom a "loneliness first" approach: loneliness is, as it were, a fundamental state, and to escape this state, i.e. as a reaction to it, humans socialize. I do not suggest that Mijuskovic's work is directly causally responsible for the assumption underlying some research on loneliness, but rather that he is great at expressing a certain metaphysical picture that is culturally pervasive and usually held implicitly. Some such metaphysical, i.e. philosophical, picture of mind and its proper relation to the world seems to underlie the assumption that loneliness is essentially subjective. This received image is one in which the metaphysically primordial situation is that humans are essentially self-enclosed, isolated beings, singular minds longing to get into touch with others.[2] Without consciously suggesting it, this picture taken up implicitly or adumbrated by some empirical psychologists researching loneliness, implying that loneliness is the existential *standard*, as it were: metaphysically speaking, the subject is alone insofar as it seems to be entirely for itself; and in case it suffers from this state of being alone, it is *lonely*. Furthermore, this picture suggests that the subject can only escape that status of being alone (*modulo* lonely) by connecting or 'socializing' with others. This picture is indeed one of "existential loneliness" (Moustakas 1961).

This metaphysically laden, existentially charged view follows a vastly influential philosophical tradition between the 'inner' and 'outer' on the one hand and subjective mental states versus objectively shared reality. Such a framework is operative in a number of topics in the philosophy of mind, epistemology, and metaphysics. This framework is perhaps most pervasively expressed in early modern thought, exemplified by thinkers like Descartes, Hume, or Locke. This distinction between subjective loneliness and objective social isolation neatly lines up, for example, with a Lockean distinction between primary ('objective') and secondary ('subjective') qualities of spatiotemporal particulars (even if Locke mainly may have had physical qualities as primary qualities in mind). Pointing out the relevance of this framework is by no means novel. This image as being operative in a number of philosophical systems has been criticized in various ways by a number of important thinkers

[2] This picture of the mind is most likely decidedly Western. For example, Buddhist traditions would disavow the notion of a self that tends to be tied to this conception of the mind (cf. Ganeri 2018). It thus becomes a genuine question whether the concept of loneliness that is employed in psychology and philosophy is culturally invariant. I am unfortunately in no position to give a definitive answer to this question which is why I should state that the statements propounded on this matter here are to be indexicalized as pertaining only to the Western philosophical tradition.

in the 20th century such as Heidegger, Ryle, Wittgenstein, or Rorty. The perhaps most influential way of criticizing this view between a strict distinction between the 'inner' subjective sphere and an 'outer' objective sphere is found in Wittgenstein's 'beetle in the box' thought experiment that is often interpreted as a crucial element for his private language argument. This point is so well-known as part of philosophical lore that it might seem superfluous or tedious to repeat it here, but since it is pertinent for the upcoming argument from self-alienation, here goes once again:

> "If I say of myself that it is only from my own case that I know what the word 'pain' means […]. And how can I generalize the *one* case so irresponsibly? Now someone tells me that *he* knows what pain is only from his own case!——Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a 'beetle'. No one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle.—Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing.—But suppose the word 'beetle' had a use in these people's language?—If so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a *something*: for the box might even be empty." (Wittgenstein 1953, § 293).

Wittgenstein's beetle has been interpreted in a number of different ways, utilizing it for disparate philosophical contexts. This argument (by way of analogy) casts doubt on the tenability of any overly ambitious, i.e. ontologizing, dichotomy between a private 'inner' realm and a public 'external' world that would allow reference to supposedly subjective mental states to be fixed by simply referring to the state, i.e. adjusted for the current context: "What I experience right now, this sensation right here [gesturing to oneself], is what loneliness *is*", one might phrase it. Wittgenstein's beetle suggests that, applied to this context, what loneliness *is* cannot be determined by reports about one's subjective elements of experience which are by their nature inaccessible to others, even if states of loneliness is necessarily felt and experienced by the subject. Hence, the phenomenon of loneliness as a *whole* cannot be subjective in this sense, even if there usually may be a what-it-is-likeness to experiencing loneliness. Rehearsing this Wittgensteinian point is, however, only setting the stage to the more specialized points drawn from the idea of self-alienation in the context of self-knowledge.

3 A Challenge from Alienation

Self-knowledge, at least at first glance, seems to be nigh-infallible; while one can be and often is wrong about states of affairs in the 'outside' world, one's own 'inner' world seems to be wholly transparent through introspection (Jongepier 2020). Yet, there are indeed cases that contradict such a picture. In the discourse on self-knowledge, alienation describes cases in which a person fails to know his or her own mental states.[3] This notion was initially introduced in an effort to criticize views of the self that posit that self-knowledge hinges on a kind of self-observation or introspection; such a requirement, i.e. having to 'internally observe' one's own mental states internally, is akin to being alienated from oneself (Moran 2001; Gertler 2021). Such views that put an epistemic 'roadblock' between mental state and knowledge of that mental state is put into place sometimes assume that an inference is necessary for me to know my own mental state (Cassam 2014). Where this kind of self-transparency does not "obtain, we can say that a person is *alienated* from her own belief" (Boyle 2015, 341).

The debate surrounding self-knowledge is intricate and it is beyond the scope of this paper to take any reasoned stance on it. But the problem of alienation from one's mental state can be utilized to get a problem about the subjectivist conception of loneliness into view. Even if they may not constitute a standard case, there are indeed cases in which alienation from oneself appears to be genuinely happening. For example, if a person does not "know her own anger in a manner indicative of some authority with respect to it, [that person] will […] appear to those who know her well as alienated from herself" (O'Hagan 2012, 292). The idea of self-estrangement is well-established in psychotherapeutic literature, especially psychotherapy in the psychoanalytic tradition, in particular with regards to the psychoanalytical notion of neuroses.

> "[A]n accountant with obsessive-compulsive personality disorder was always concerned that his boss might be angry with him. He secretly resented his boss, and his anxiety about his boss's anger was a projection of his own wish to explode at his boss and tell him what he thought of him. As an unconscious defense, he was obsequious and ingratiating toward his boss to make sure that he could not possibly be accused of being angry with him. […] In other words, the accountant's obsequious style defended against the eruption of his own anger […]." (Gabbard 2014, 35 f.)

[3] As the *American Psychological Association* puts it: "The self-alienated individual is frequently unaware of or largely unable to describe his or her own intrapsychic processes" (APA 2015, 95).

The accountant was experiencing fear but could not feel that he way actually resentful of his boss, or in other words, he was at least partially self-alienated from himself. While such cases of self-alienation seem to be more common with fear or anger, we can consider analogous cases about loneliness by way of thought experiments. Specifically, instances of personality disorders can present cases in which a person is lonely, but is sufficiently alienated from herself (perhaps as part of that personality disorder) to not be completely in touch with themselves in a way that they do not perceive their own loneliness.

Consider Danielle for example. Danielle goes to psychotherapy sessions regularly to combat her depression. As per usual, she reports to her psychotherapist that she recently felt particularly bad despite most things seemingly going well (which is a common occurrence in clinical depression). Upon being asked by her psychotherapist whether she feels lonely, she earnestly denies it. Neither is she currently socially isolated nor would she – upon introspection – report a feeling of loneliness. But the experienced psychotherapist has of course seen such patterns before and is cognizant of the fact that Danielle might indeed be lonely. Over the course of the next few sessions, Danielle and her psychotherapist together talk about and explore more of her past biography and current circumstances. As a result, Danielle comes to realize that the deep sadness she felt all along is in fact rooted in a deep-seated loneliness, revealing to her that depression and loneliness, despite not being always felt that clearly, are internally linked. It is not that her feeling has changed much, but rather that she has understood that she previously misidentified her own mental state as just feeling sad when she was being lonely all along, her sadness just accompanying the loneliness her therapist was able to discern. In a sense she felt indeed sad, but she did not apprehend the loneliness as that which was actually present and was underlying her sadness. Or in other words: she was previously partially *alienated* from her own 'inner' self.

As a second similar case, consider Kateryna who suffers from schizoid personality disorder. People with schizoid personality disorder tend toward self-isolation and are generally less interested or wholly un-interested in social relationships causing them to appear aloof and cold. Kateryna, like many other patients with schizoid personality disorder, experiences herself like an observer of the lives of others and the world rather than an active participant in it. Though generally apathetic, Kateryna is certainly not happy, feeling the nagging lack of social connectedness while simultaneously habitually rejecting others in different ways. She knows that she is psychologically somehow 'deviant' and feels things are somehow 'wrong' for her, but she does not suffer in the same way, say, a clinically depressed person (like Danielle above) suffers. Seeking help, Kateryna has been receiving psychotherapeutic treatment for quite a while, slowly uncovering her condition while struggling to build a relationship of trust to her therapist (which is itself a common complication in schizoid personality disorder). She never reports feeling lonely despite herself detailing her life in a way that discloses her lack of social interaction and her perception of being someone observing the (social) world and not participating in it. Just like in the case of Danielle, Kateryna's psychotherapist helps Kateryna identify that she is lonely (along with diagnosing her as suffering from schizoid personality disorder), making her see that the nagging feeling turns out to be her suffering from loneliness and her inability (caused by her disorder) to effectively combat it. Kateryna was *alienated* from parts of her inner life, most notably her recognizing that she is lonely while not feeling lonely.

Such edge cases of mental illness are useful to disclose something that can remain undisclosed in ordinary experience; in this case the idea that the feeling of loneliness and an actual state of loneliness can come apart. While clinical depression and schizoid personality disorder are indeed mental illnesses and as such deviations from a certain norm of health, it is important to note that many people tend towards characteristics of different personality disorders, e.g. some exhibiting signs of and tending towards the histrionic personality disorder spectrum without being formally diagnosable. As such, cases of being alienated from one's loneliness may not be limited to those suffering from personality disorders or mental illnesses.

4 Loneliness as a Mood

These cases of alienation from oneself pose a challenge to conceptions of loneliness as (exclusively) subjective. This is because they present cases in which a person may actually be lonely (not just socially isolated), but not have the subjective feeling or experience of loneliness.

I want to further suggest that these cases of alienation point towards a deeper point about loneliness *as a phenomenon*. The fact that others may be able to correctly discern that a person is in fact lonely without that person apprehending their own loneliness (qua being alienated from their own 'inner' lives) can help us understand that loneliness is not something purely subjective, but – for the lack of a better word – objective. Some ideas from Heidegger can be utilized to further elucidate the ontological status of loneliness hinted at by the cases from alienation. Someone may hold that the self-opacity Danielle and Kateryna experience just implies that they are alienated from a certain mental state (i.e. loneliness). While this is addressed in more detail below, the following proposal is meant as an invitation to

view the situation differently. What I am offering is a different approach as to why parts of our mental lives are opaque to us. So if the question is, what are they alienated from if not a *subjective* mental state, the answer I aim to develop in what follows is: they are alienated from their own way of being in the world. The picture presented to us by some empirical work in psychology and its philosophical cognates present to us a picture of the world in which the ur-situation of the subject is such that it is essentially cut-off from the rest of the world in a way that it has to first find its way to other subjects. Apart from Wittgenstein's doubts about the 'inner', this is a picture that has been criticized most prominently by Heidegger. Heidegger suggests that when it comes to the self and others, the opposite is true of what the adumbrated Cartesian picture suggests.

Heidegger's conception of *Mitsein* (being-with) suggests that humans (or rather Dasein) are always already together with others. Dasein is always already related to other Dasein "even when one is alone and others are actually absent" (Moran 2021, 111). Being there at all is being-with-other, which presents part of Heidegger's anti-Cartesian impetus (Dreyfus 2013, 146). For Heidegger, being with others is the human *ur-situation*, i.e. an a priori truth about what constitutes human beings. Being-with is equiprimordial to in being-in-the-world (*in der Welt sein*): "so far as Dasein is at all, it has being-with one-another as its kind of being" (Heidegger 1962, 128); being in the world at all is Being-with Others" (Heidegger 1962, 155). This is why Dasein has a "tendency towards closeness" (Heidegger 1962, 140). This certainly does not mean that, as an empirical matter of fact, humans are always together with others or even just in the presence of others.[4] It just means that there is a fundamental sense in which human life is human life together with others.[5] This fundamental sense can be interpreted as a transcendental claim: for there to be such a thing as human life at all, human life has to be essentially characterized as being-with. This means that we do not first have to infer the existence of others somehow (as the traditional problem of other minds would have it); that would be putting the cart before the horse, according to Heidegger. Sociality is an a priori feature of human life; not something that is achieved from the starting point of a solitary individual.[6] Heidegger himself does not exhaustively reflect on what this would mean for loneliness as the opposite of being-with.[7] But by extrapolating we may state that this demonstrates that loneliness – rather than the ontological baseline – is actually the privation of how human life is shaped at its core. Human life is always already social, exceptions to this fundamental sense of sociality constitute merely a privation of this fundamental status. Similar to how a toothache reminds one of the fact that whole, healthy, painless teeth are the normal state, loneliness is accompanied by an experience of suffering that points towards the state of the whole; being "alone is a deficient mode of Being-with" (Heidegger 1962, 157).

This analysis of *Mitsein* as a prior constituent of human life can help us make sense of the cases of alienation introduced above in a way the conception of loneliness as a subjective feeling cannot. To follow Dermot Moran:

> "To say that being-with (Mitsein) is a fundamental existentiale of Dasein is to say that Dasein is always in the condition of being-with others even if there are no actual others in one's environment. Human existence is essentially and inherently social and communal. As Heidegger puts it, in Being and Time § 26, 'being-with is an existential constituent of being-in-the-world' (SZ 125). He goes on to say: 'so far as Dasein is at all, it has being-with one-another as its kind of being' (SZ 128)." (Moran 2021, 111).

If *Mitsein* is an a priori feature of human life and if the privation of *Mitsein* is loneliness, then the ontological status of loneliness cannot be that of a mere subjective feeling; it must be 'objective' in a way that transcends the first-personal sphere in the same way in which the *Mitsein* is not something experienced in a private sphere, but something fundamentally 'out in the open world', so to speak. The cases from alienation demonstrate that it is *the exact opposite*: the human ur-situation is *Mitsein*. We are always already together. For humans the being with others is the standard case. Loneliness is the *privation* of this standard case. Loneliness is therefore not the existential starting point (as Mijuskovic suggests), but the privation of *Mitsein*. As such, loneliness does not have the status of a subjective feeling, but it is a more fundamental *negative categorial*. Since *Mitsein* is a categorical and a priori, loneliness as the privation of *Mitsein* is categorically fundamental and a

[4] But of course Heidegger is thinking in an ontological register. Being-with (*Mitsein*) is thus the a priori transcendental condition that makes it possible that Dasein can discover equipment in this Other-related fashion (Wheeler 2020).

[5] Of course this implies certain 'dangers'. The main difficulty associated with the tendency towards closeness lies with the point that Dasein thus has a tendency to devolve into the Man: "Everyone is the other and no one is himself" (Heidegger 1962, 165).

[6] It is important to keep apart loneliness and aloneness at this point. Heidegger, to my knowledge, does not explicitly distinguish aloneness from loneliness. It is then an open question what the opposite of being-with would exactly amount to. It is not entirely plausible that the privation of being-with is aloneness. This is because Dasein being (factually) alone does not in any manner 'insult' the Dasein als being characterized by being-with. It seems to me rather that the privation of being-with is being lonely.

[7] There are a few remarks in his lectures on the *Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik* (Heidegger 1983, 18 f.).

priori as well. But if that is the case, loneliness is not merely a subjective feeling, but it is part (albeit a negative or privational) part of human existence as such.

Moods are not mere feelings, moods are fundamental ways in which one is open to and relates to the world, a background *Befindlichkeit*. Where feelings can have intentional content, moods are pre-intentional. Moods are a mode of finding oneself in the world. Being in a mood, is not an optional thing or something that sometimes occurs – we are rather always and always already in a mood (Withy 2021, 500). It is also not such that we can choose a mood, it is rather that moods happen to us. Moods are either elevated (e.g. joy, hope) or depressive (sadness, melancholy), or neutral (e.g. indifference). The concrete moods of fear, boredom, and joy are perhaps the most salient for Heidegger. To my knowledge, he does not explicitly mention loneliness as a mood, but it does seem to be on the side of depressive moods (Withy 2021, 501). Heidegger adumbrates that referring to what moods actually are as merely subjective, merely occasional feelings is not doing them justice (Heidegger 1955, 31). Moods are not merely subjective bodily states or 'mere affect', but are inextricable from experience of the world as such. Such existential feelings are "central to the structure of all human experience" (Ratcliffe 2008, 2); they are "not subjective states but existential orientations" (Ratcliffe 2008, 10).[8] In this experience-constituting way, existential feelings are not *about* anything specific, i.e. they do not fall under the purview of traditional accounts of intentionality, but are seemingly logically prior to intentional states. Loneliness thus, if present, *may* be accompanied by certain subjective feelings, but such subjectively experienced feelings are not loneliness as a *whole* phenomenon; loneliness as a whole is something – for the lack of a better word –*in the world*. As a mood, loneliness does not fit a neat distinction between subjective and objective (or 'inner' and 'outer') in the same way the differentiation between, for example, qualia and spatiotemporal particulars allow. But if this is the case, it becomes apparent how the therapist of Danielle and Kateryna as a third party in the examples of the preceding section can identify loneliness 'in' his patients even though the patients do not subjectively feel loneliness in the same way someone would who is more attuned to their own emotional experience. The third party is using his perceptual and conceptual faculties to apprehend something about the way their patient relates to herself and to the world. In those examples, this self-and-world-relation discloses a privation of being-with in his patients, i.e. Danielle and Kateryna being in a state of loneliness while being alienated from themselves in a way that clouds their ability to apprehend themselves as being lonely. In those scenarios, their own self-experience is partially opaque to them, yet the grounds for their experience, i.e. an 'objective' state of loneliness is apprehended by their therapist who is in an epistemically more comfortable and expedient position. We can further bring the ontological status of loneliness as a mood just described into view by contrasting it with other phenomena. For example, loneliness as objective in this sense is different from pain. While the nature of pain is a controversial topic in philosophy, it seems relatively safe to to state that pain is more closely connected with the experience of pain such that it seems – despite being able to momentarily blot out or 'forget' pain – almost impossible to be in pain without having a subjective experience of pain. Just like pain, the nature of beliefs (and other intentional states) is similarly contested. While beliefs may also have components that are not private or subjective in any substantial sense (like their content), it is the fact that beliefs can have content (conceptual or otherwise) at all that distinguishes them from the state of loneliness just described. While subjective states of felt loneliness do have representational content (as suggested by Roberts and Krueger 2021), loneliness as a whole phenomenon is not *about* something or *representing* something in the way that other mental properties like beliefs are. In asserting this, I differ from a more common view according to which moods can have intentional character. The same is true when contrasting loneliness with propositions. While propositions are not merely subjective (cf. as Frege famously demonstrated in *Der Gedanke*, Frege 1918), their ontological status, too, is sufficiently different from spatiotemporal objects which are easily objectively accessible. In an analogous sense, loneliness is not exclusively subjective, yet not objectively accessible in an ordinary sense, but rather a complex interplay between a person's simultaneous self-relating and world-relating.

One may object that it is either unethical or not sensible for a therapist to maintain that a patient is lonely despite the patient adamantly insisting they are merely, say, sad.[9] To elucidate this point further, we can perhaps helpfully adduce a notion of normative realism along the lines held by Iris Murdoch. Iris Murdoch is perhaps most well known for her notion of attention (originated by Simone Weil) as a capacity to apprehend (normative) reality as it is by recentering the object of interest in a manner untainted by one's own self and ego (Murdoch 1994, 2013; Panizza 2022, 6 f. & 87 f.). The idea I propound here is to be understood in an analogous way. Assuming *ex hypothesi*, both Danielle and Kateryna are partially alienated from themselves and their therapist is experienced and attentive, the therapist is in a position to 'see' something about Danielle and Kateryna that they themselves cannot see yet. A detractor might hold that

[8] Ratcliffe makes the case for recasting "mood" as "existential feeling", but for the current context, this difference is largely unsubstantial.

[9] I am grateful to an anonymous referee for bringing this to my attention.

this is paternalistic, but such cases, if benevolent, are more like a friend helping another friend grasping and actualizing their own potential and goodness in a time when that friend is too timid. This is not to say that there may be cases where a bad therapist (or friend) just steamrolls over their patient (or friend). But in good cases of therapeutical relationships, the therapist is epistemically privileged in a way that may allow them to apprehend the patient being partially self-alienated. This Murdochian point also helps substantiate why Danielle and Kateryna are not merely alienated from a subjective state that they just are not aware of (a subjective state of loneliness, as it were). For if that state were simply a subjective experience like the qualia associated with pain, then the therapist would not be able to apprehend the situation they are actually in. But in certain situations, the therapist can look beyond the subjectively held and expressed feeling a patient expresses; by looking at the way Danielle and Kateryna *are in the world*, the therapist can see, in some sense, that they are lonely, but do are not cognizant of it.

5 Conclusion

I started out by detailing the notion of loneliness as essentially subjective in empirical psychological research. I then suggested that this notion is rooted in a particular philosophical framework of the relation of mind and world that consists in a substantive dichotomy between the 'inner' and the 'outer', a framework most prominently featured in the work of early modern thought, especially Descartes and Locke, and brought into the 20th century and beyond in particular through the analytic tradition. I tried to demonstrate that cases of alienation in self-knowledge pose a challenge to such a framework: there are cases in which one may not feel lonely, yet actually *be* lonely in a way that a second person can apprehend better than they themselves can. I have then argued that this feature of our mental lives concerning loneliness points towards the notion that loneliness is ontologically speaking not entirely a subjective feeling but rather, following Heidegger, a privative form of the radical mode in which humans live, i.e. with others. Loneliness is thus, as it were, ontologically speaking a privation of being-with others, a deficient mode in which humans can find themselves. Given this particular status, loneliness is, I suggested, perhaps better understood as a mood rather than a mere feeling. Loneliness is thus categorically different from merely subjective feelings even if the state of being lonely may (even in most cases) be accompanied by a state of feeling lonely.

Returning to the starting point (i.e. research in psychology), the argument presented here may have relevant implications or interpretations. Firstly, empirical psychologists could dig their heels in and provide an argument to the effect that what the second person (the psychotherapist in the examples above) apprehends is not loneliness itself in his patients, but something else. Secondly, empirical psychologists may perhaps simply choose to ignore this argument by rebutting that they are just interested in subjective aspects of mental phenomena in the first place, not their ontological nature. This would definitely be a viable option that upholds and cherishes division of intellectual labour: *you* worry about ontology, *we* worry about investigating the psyche. But a third and perhaps more ambitious interpretation of the argument presented here casts doubt on certain aspects of empirical psychology as a discipline: if loneliness is a non-subjective phenomenon and if empirical psychology cannot investigate the non-subjective nature of loneliness, but only the subjective aspects, then the way the empirical research is set up may be unable to fully investigate its desired object of inquiry. Interestingly then, the difficulty in getting a phenomenon like loneliness into view is not its subjective aspects – some may hold that such 'inner' feelings in others are too difficult to grasp and measure – but it seems that assumptions made by some parts of psychology about the nature of loneliness as a mental phenomenon as subjective prevents them from fully accounting for it. If such a thing is true for loneliness, might analogous things be true for other parts of the mind? This interpretation would grant philosophical thought some kind of foundational role with regards to empirical science (in this case, psychology). And assuming such a foundational role of philosophy has been out of fashion for a while given the strong foothold of different forms of methodological naturalism. This is why such a strong contention that amounts to a deeper critique of empirical psychology would require much more substantial exposition and argument than was presented here. Sweeping claims like that are difficult to support and would in this case require a more thoroughgoing critical appreciation of the different Wittgensteinian ideas only adumbrated here. Such argument cannot be provided in the limited context of this paper and is better left for a different occasion.

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