

# THE POLITICAL CONCERNS OF LONELINESS

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‘No man is an island,  
Entire of itself,  
Every man is a piece of Continent,  
A part of the main.’  
—John Donne<sup>1</sup>

‘You’d be surprised how quickly the mind goes soggy in the absence of other people. One person alone is not a full person. We exist in relation to others. I was one person: I risked becoming no person.’  
—Margaret Atwood<sup>2</sup>

‘It isn’t running away they’re afraid of. We wouldn’t get far. It’s those other escapes, the ones that you can open in yourself, given a cutting edge.’  
—Margaret Atwood<sup>3</sup>

Loneliness brings into question the dualism of the external world and the internal reality of human beings (subjectivity and the world) more sharply. It makes us think about our bodily embeddedness in the world. Loneliness is not merely a subjective response but more importantly, it is a response to the intersubjectivity of the world. Through the lens of Hannah Arendt’s views, first I develop a phenomenology of various lonely states viz., isolation, solitude, loneliness, superfluousness, and virtuality to demarcate them from each other. Then, I proceed to establish how each of them connect with intersubjectivity within a common, shared world and the political conse-

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<sup>1</sup> Donne, John (1624). ‘Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, Meditations XVII’ in *Donne’s Devotions*. Cambridge University Press: 98.

<sup>2</sup> Atwood, Margaret (2020). *The Testaments*. Vintage: 132.

<sup>3</sup> Atwood, Margaret (1996). *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Vintage: 18.

quences of experiencing these states of loneliness. Instead of a negative characterization of loneliness as a subjective emotion of lack/absence/loss<sup>4</sup>, I propose to view loneliness as a response to the intersubjectivity of the human world which calls for political considerations. Instead of approaching the subjectivity and the world as separate, I consider both the internal human experience and the external socio-political world as connected. The experience of the other plays an important role in not just loneliness but all experiences of the ego. It is important to know what triggers the rupture or gap that dislocates the ego from itself ('the two-in-one') in case of loneliness. What makes loneliness a dehumanizing experience is its impact on the capacities of thinking, speech, and action. The critique also raises concerns about democracy at the workplace: to consider how unjust socio-political structures are bound to create social pathologies; how we respond to vulnerable others in the work settings and maintain exceptions about their silence and invisibility with impunity. In the present times, when we are experiencing increasing concern about mental health issues and stress management at workplaces, we also find that the socio-political conditions that form the background for these pathologies take a back seat. We are continuously captivated by a picture of politics that on the one hand celebrates the voices of the vulnerable but on the other hand also consistently undermines them and obscures their agency, which creates them in the first place. The negative experiences of suffering in an already degenerating socio-political system that contribute to our pathological social reality are kept at bay by making its victims invisible, lonely, and superfluous. The importance of uncovering the political concerns of this suffering and making it visible lies in its potential to change our approach to social pathology.

## **1. Solitude, Loneliness, Superfluosity, Isolation, and Virtuality**

Solitude (*Einsamkeit*) and loneliness (*Vereinsamung*) are concerned with the experience of intersubjectivity, i.e., how to *inter-act* with other human beings. Loneliness as a phenomenon emerges whenever there is a lack/absence of a tangible common world and connectedness. It is the nearness to others that is lost in loneliness. However, it is not enough to say that loneliness is merely the absence of a common social world and inter-connected-

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<sup>4</sup> This approach is common among psychologists. Recently, loneliness as an emotional condition of absence has been proposed by Roberts, T. and Krueger, J. (2021), Loneliness and the Emotional Experience of Absence. *South J Philos.* <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjp.12387>

ness and that it can be understood in negative terms only. Instead of a negative characterization of loneliness as a lack/absence/loss, I posit an understanding of loneliness as a response to the intersubjectivity of the human world. Such an understanding has important implications in our understanding of political freedom and democracy concerning situations of exclusion from the socio-political spaces and domination as freedom's other. The tangible common world and interconnectedness are not merely some desired material 'social goods'<sup>5</sup> or subjective psychological needs that can be externally refilled as a cure to loneliness but they express a relationship to the human socio-political world. The condition of absence of a common social world and intersubjectivity is a political question in the sense that it relates to the concerns of freedom, belonging and equality, i.e., an absence of considering another person as an equal fellow human or even a complete human being (as in case of slaves in the ancient times and stateless people); of abandoning her/him from the space of listening and caring. How does everyone in society become unavailable or absent for the lonely? How does the lonely become invisible to others? Although, the other people are still around, and yet they cease to mean in any relationship to the lonely person or one ceases to belong to the world? One is lonely when the important others are not present for any real meaningful conversations leading to a lack of belongingness required to participate in a common world<sup>6</sup>.

Loneliness always refers to a sphere of social intercourse, wherein one is deserted by all human companionship ('abandoned by everything and everybody') whereas isolation refers to reaching an impasse, when the political sphere of a person's life is destroyed. One can be isolated and lonely without being alone. Isolation renders one impotent for collective action, that constitutes one's political agency. It happens during tyrannies when 'human capacities for action and power are frustrated' (Arendt 1994, 474). One can also be isolated and alone but not lonely, i.e., despite the inability to act collectively, one can still act on one's own and create new objects for consumption by the human world. Isolation marks the impotency to act collectively but one can still act individually. Isolated people are powerless by definition. Although the political contacts are broken, yet all contacts are not severed. The sphere of private life and the capacities for experience,

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Roberts, T. and Krueger, J. (2021) in their paper 'Loneliness and the Emotional Experience of Absence.' *South J Philos* write that one of their aims in the paper is 'to highlighting the range and depth of the social goods that may be experienced as absent in this complex emotion'.

<sup>6</sup> How do conversations cease to be meaningful? I shall take up this concern further in the section 4 on conversations with the lonely.

fabrication (work), and thought are left intact. However, isolation in the form of labor<sup>7</sup> disables the presence of others as it disallows even a common material world of objects. This kind of isolation in the form of labor paves the way for loneliness.

In the state of loneliness, one can neither act collectively nor alone. It is the state of uprootedness that is a harbinger of superfluosity, a state of having no place/belongingness in the world<sup>8</sup>. There is no common shared world with anyone, marked by a loss of sense of time and place or any society or hope of being visible/heard by others. Superfluity is the limit condition under which no form of politics is possible as the agency of the superfluous is obscured in the political sphere. It marks a relation of abandonment and how domination is fluidly connected with the social spaces by rendering the superfluous and lonely to invisibility and nakedness of bare life. Loneliness, a social pathology is associated with domination in that it underlines that there is something wrong in the socio-political domain of intersubjectivity. Loneliness alters our reality into a spacelessness and atemporal existence in the experience of the present moment ('now'). It is a breaking up of the lifeworld as a means to illuminate our concrete existence in going beyond the 'idle talk'.

Solitude requires being alone, in the sense of absolute independence. However, loneliness 'shows itself most sharply in company with others' (Arendt, 1994, 476). Solitude opens up doors to thinking dialogue with oneself while still being connected with the human world of others through an imagined community. But it is not the same as isolation, which is the fertile ground for killing solitude. Isolation kills the social connection with other humans when one is not able to see one's reflection in the eyes of others<sup>9</sup>. Solitude is something to be sought but it shouldn't always be found because solitude

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<sup>7</sup> Arendt defines labor as an activity done for preserving biological necessities for self-preservation. Labor is also ascribed to slaves in ancient times. (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7, 83-84)

<sup>8</sup> In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt writes: "To be uprooted means to have no place in the world, recognized and guaranteed by others; to be superfluous means not to belong to the world at all. Uprootedness can be the preliminary condition for superfluosity, just as isolation can (but must not) be the preliminary condition for loneliness. Taken in itself, with our consideration of its recent historical causes and its new role in politics, loneliness is at the same time contrary to the basic requirements of the human condition *and* one of the fundamental experiences of every human life." (475)

<sup>9</sup> However, one can also be physically isolated and socially connected as in the case of the present covid-19 pandemic globally.

can also become loneliness. This happens when all by oneself one is abandoned by one's self. In loneliness, the self disappears and one ceases to be. While the self is intact in solitude and engages in thinking dialogue with oneself; in loneliness, the self disappears due to the lack of affirmation by others, who are equal and trustworthy and one ceases to trust one's thoughts. It brings anxiety and fear. In response to the question of how to *inter-act* with others, solitude seeks a way inwards by engaging with the world through thinking, loneliness seeks a way outwards through collective action/agency which is denied to it. Both are a response to the plurality of the shared human world. Organized loneliness is more lethal than the unorganized impotence of those who are ruled by tyrannical forces.

Virtuality is the disembodied, technological space of mere appearance. A virtual presence/absence creates fragments/manifolds of assembled identities without any wholistic view. Virtuality also creates a specific kind of identity which is non-haptic and disembodied.

These experiences of fragmented temporalities and intersubjective distancing impact the political existence of human beings in a shared common world. Solitude and isolation screen out any external collective action. Loneliness limits the possibility of any individual or collective action. The horizon of possibilities of virtually distanced, disembodied collective and individual actions is also curtailed in being open to manipulations within the digital space of technology and thereby, lacking any space in the real world. These experiences of loneliness/isolation/superfluity/solitude/virtuality result in framing a new form of limited or no political existence in the human world concerning a curtailed intersubjectivity.

## 2. Loneliness and Intersubjectivity

In an ontological sense, human beings exist in a relationship with the world. In this sense, Solitude and loneliness are varied forms of existence in the world. Although, we no longer live in Arendt's description of 20<sup>th</sup>-century totalitarian crisis, the historical ground for fragmentation and atomization of the society, yet we find that the world is increasingly inhabited by large populations of lonely, isolated, solitary humans that remain invisible to one another in their full humanity. Solitude and loneliness emerge as our affinities to the self through our encounter with an other (either a radically different 'other' that invokes solitude or an 'other' who is same enough to abandon the ego to loneliness). It would be a mistake to infer that since loneliness is a subjective experience, intersubjectivity or the connection

with others is inessential to it. The experience of the other plays an important role in not just loneliness but all experiences of the ego. It is important to know what triggers the rupture or gap that dislocates the ego from itself (the two-in-one) in case of loneliness.

Loneliness is not just social alienation but also a self-alienation, namely, that we no longer belong to ourselves too. It is symptomatic of a feeling of no longer belonging to the world and that there is no place for the lonely on the face of the Earth. It leads to a loss of trust in oneself and a loss of confidence in the world. An easy way to avoid the domination of the exclusionary forces acting on the lonely is to find solace within when no place in the world is available to you but freedom from loneliness cannot be achieved either in isolation or solitude. Social or civil freedom from loneliness requires the presence of others who are trustworthy and non-dominating<sup>10</sup>. For a way-out of solitude, the internal two-in-one dialogue needs to stop for which one needs the other for the 'two-in-one' to become one again, i.e., one unchangeable individual whose identity can never be mistaken for that of any other.<sup>11</sup> (Arendt 1994, 476) It happens when the outside world intrudes upon our thinking and curtails the ongoing flow of thought. Loneliness emerges only when one is confronted with an other, who is just like the ego that leaves the ego unchanged. Adrian Costache explains it in very lucid terms:

“... solitude and loneliness ought to be defined as a rapport to oneself through an other. Such a rapport becomes solitude when the other encountered is a radical alterity displacing the ego from the self and subjecting it to a complete transformation (This also explains why solitude is sought after and always takes the form of a re-collection.) And it takes the form of loneliness when the other encountered by the ego is just an other like the self, an other which leaves the ego completely unchanged even though it introduces a gap within itself. In solitude one becomes two-in-one through a third while in loneliness one encounters a same and is multiplied three times. According to this logic being neither alone, nor lonely means arriving through a third person not to a two-in-one or a multiple of one but straightforwardly to a

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<sup>10</sup> In *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*, Philip Pettit views social or civil freedom as “the status associated with living among other people, none of whom dominates you” (Pettit 1997, 66)

<sup>11</sup> In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Arendt writes: “For the confirmation of my identity I depend entirely upon other people; and it is the great saving grace of companionship for solitary men that it makes them ‘whole’ again, saves them from the dialogue of thought in which one remains always equivocal, restores the identity which makes them speak with the single voice of one unexchangeable person.” (Arendt 1994, 476)

two. Being neither alone, nor lonely means arriving to a two through a third.” (Costache 2013, 138)

Arendt makes a distinction between equality and sameness. While equality is a political concept that refers to a normative ideal, sameness implies the similarity of the natural givenness of our biology as human beings. Equality is an artificially agreed-upon political notion. Since humans are different from each other in their social, cultural, economic circumstances, we agree politically to allow everyone the treatment of equality in the public sphere and equality before the law. Political equality allows everyone to express their differences in the public domain whereas the sameness of our biological make-up homogenizes us as humans having the same fundamental needs for survival. In this sense, equality is not opposed to difference but it opposes sameness. Reducing the political space of human affairs to the sameness of life of bare necessities (i.e., the life of *animal laborans*) is extremely dangerous as it extinguishes the space for all differences and plurality and thereby, creates the experience of loneliness.

### 3. Thinking alone

In face of the lack of intersubjectivity, the most affected faculty is that of thinking<sup>12</sup>. We enter alien modes of speech and thought, where there is no common ground for understanding with others and self-understanding. But does loneliness lead to thoughtlessness?<sup>13</sup> The answer to this question lies in the fact that in loneliness we trade our capacity to think for rhetorical and performative speech that barricades any thought. This inability ‘to stop and think’ (Arendt 1978, 4) while immersed in loneliness further frustrates all communication with others. Since there are no strong forces of habit, tradition, common sense, or religion that can bring people together into a fold of any sort of belonging in the present times, there is an increasing yearning

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<sup>12</sup> Arendt writes, “The only capacity of the human mind which needs neither the self nor the other nor the world in order to function safely and which is as independent of experience as it is of thinking is the ability of logical reasoning whose premise of the self-evident. The elementary rules of cogent evidence, the truism that two and two equals four cannot be perverted even under the conditions of absolute loneliness. It is the only reliable “truth” human beings can fall back upon once they have lost the mutual guarantee, the common sense, men need in order to experience and live and know their way in a common world.” (*The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1994, 477)

<sup>13</sup> Martin Shuster takes up this question in his article ‘Language and Loneliness: Arendt, Cavell, and Modernity’ *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* Vol. 20(4), 2012: 473–497.

for a home and belonging among the rootless and lonely people. Any opportunity of membership into any form of a community (even if that involves obeying a certain norm and a logical set of operations) is irresistible for the lonely because it gives a temporary meaning to her/his life. In the absence of intersubjectivity and plurality of our socio-political world, the internal dialogue that one has within the self is the last trace of company. This internal two-in-one dialogue is also the space of solitude in which thinking takes place<sup>14</sup>. It is a secure, private space where active thinking is possible. Often, we seek such solitude in crucial moments in life as this inward journey offers opportunities for discoveries of resources and avenues within us<sup>15</sup> But this internal dialogue after the withdrawal from the socio-political world does not offer any salvation for the lonely. This is because there is an added dimension of suffering along with solitude in the case of loneliness. Thinking under conformism and pressure changes its outcome. One must also note that thinking is not the same as rationalizing. Arendt describes thinking as ‘a kind of action’ which arouses us to kick out of the clutches of mass conformism<sup>16</sup>. It is the force of thinking that draws us out of dark times to act when everyone else is swept away unthinkingly. However, standing apart from the crowd does not imply standing alone as thinking is brought to fulfillment only when one enters the public space for action. Without a free space for speaking, questioning, and answering others, thinking ceases to flourish. Thinking is reduced to a set of logical operations for the lonely. Although one can deliver oneself out of the thoughtlessness of loneliness by the sheer ability to replace it with the illuminating thoughtfulness of solitude, it is not a solution to loneliness as it calls for the presence of others who are equal. In loneliness, both the ability to recognize the plurality of the self within and the plurality of the others in the world are lost simultaneously.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Arendt writes that thinking originates in ‘absolute solitude’ (Arendt 2005, 20-21). Yet, she is skeptical of any thinking that takes place outside the world (any transcendental space or a view from nowhere as they are unavailable to human beings). Although thinking demands separation from the affairs of the world, yet it is always about the talkative and contested spaces of our human world.

<sup>15</sup> Arendt quotes Cato in *Questions on Moral Philosophy* to emphasize this active solitude: “Never am I more active than when I do nothing, never am I less alone than when I am by myself” (Arendt 2003, 99)

<sup>16</sup> “When everybody is swept away unthinkingly by what everybody else does and believes in, those who think are drawn out of hiding because their refusal to join in is conspicuous and thereby becomes a kind of action.” (Arendt 1978, 192)

<sup>17</sup> In the words of Arendt, ‘Self and world, capacity for thought and experience are lost at the same time’ (Arendt 1994, 477).

#### 4. Conversations with the Lonely

All our experiences of the world are mediated through linguistic speech and gestures, signs, symbols which too can be interpreted linguistically. Arendt emphasizes the importance of speech in humanizing the world: ‘we humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be human.’ (Arendt 1995, 25) Speech also concerns the ethical struggles of our life when we try to express ourselves in dark situations where language alienates our experiences off the world. To be impoverished of others also makes us lose our voice and having nothing to say.

Arendt had the stateless person in mind while discussing loneliness. She also mentions the slave in ancient times in this context. Drawing a comparison between the stateless person with the slave, she is of the view that the slave is still exploitable and useful to others for various reasons of labor and work and has some rights (for example, the master cannot kill the slave but nobody will ask questions about the murder of a stateless person), which are completely denied to the stateless person. In the context of precarious work as the contemporary analog to slavery, the position of speech is reserved only for the authority figures while the jobholders need to understand only orders and not speak as any such speech is automatically registered as defiance. They can only make noise or revolt (akin to an *animal laborans*) but the capacity for speech is reserved only for the authority in control. It is a problem of not acknowledging the speech of the other and not considering them as a complete human. The lonely are often speechless for this reason. This idea of leaving the essence of being human (as capable of thinking, speech/*zōon logon ekhon*, and action/*zōon politikon*) untouched, impinges on their human dignity making them superfluous. It is dehumanizing and tyrannical to not allow any political action from individuals.

Speech is not mere talk or content of the conversation but it is the pleasure in the person that makes a conversation meaningful. That is why many people become unavailable for conversations with the lonely because they cease to have respect or trust in them. They no longer stand unto their words. It is hard to take advice from a hypocrite or share your thoughts with someone who makes you feel insignificant or who is snotty enough to think of themselves as all-knowing. The tone of such conversations also implies considering oneself as educating another, of knowing better or being better than the other, which sounds like a play for emphasizing power. Such conversa-

tions are akin to advertising boards, where one is always speaking to a passive audience and do not seek any active participants<sup>18</sup>. Such presumptuous people labor under a false belief of knowing better and considering themselves as the center of the universe. These nuances of conversation are often ignored in considering alienation and how they affect the other. An openness to the world and a space for free speech are the prerequisites for healthy public conversations. Yet, we find that there are very few chances of a meaningful conversation not just for the lonely but even for the non-lonely people, who discourage such attitudes. One may also ask here: What is it that makes pleasure possible in another person? About this, Arendt writes, “Pleasure, which is fundamentally the intensified awareness of reality, springs from a passionate openness to the world and love of it.” Regarding conversations, she also writes: “Gladness, not sadness, is talkative, and truly human dialogue differs from mere talk or even discussion in that it is entirely permeated by pleasure in the other person and what he says.” (Arendt 1995, 15) This feeling of a genuine gladness and pleasure in the fellow humans is amiss in the world of loneliness.

## 5. Agency and Loneliness in the context of Work

Next, I discuss how unequal work relations, precarious employment, everyday experiences of disrespect and micro-aggressions undermine human agency in uneventful ways<sup>19</sup>. Work corresponds to the ‘artificial’ world of man-made things distinct from the natural surroundings. Individual human life is housed in the boundaries of the artificial world of workmanship. Work provides an artificial world that lasts through generations of endless human life cycles and transcends the utility of objects of use. It is a world-building activity. The most important task of the activities of work is ‘to offer mortals a dwelling place more permanent and more stable than themselves’ (Arendt 1998, 152). The activities of human beings can be preserved in lasting things produced by work. Work in this sense also acts as a storehouse for human memory. Work is needed to ease the burden of labor and to preserve the immortality of human actions in things produced by human artifice. The human condition of work is worldliness. Arendt emphasizes the importance

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<sup>18</sup> Myisha Cherry presents a fine discussion on these concerns of conversations in the context of race, class and gender in her book, *Unmuted: Conversations on Prejudice, Oppression, and Social Justice* (2019). OUP.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Schaap discusses ‘how struggles for appearances are limited and shaped by the social conditions within which they are enacted’ in his paper ‘Inequality, Loneliness and Political Appearance: Picturing Radical Democracy with Hannah Arendt and Jacques Rancière’ *Political Theory*, 2020.

of work in the work of writers, artists, poets, historians, etc without which the story of humanity shall not find a place anywhere else:

‘If the *animal laborans* need the help of homo faber to ease his labor and remove his pain and if mortals need his help to erect a home on earth, acting and speaking men need the help of homo faber in his highest capacity, that is, the help of the artist, of poets and historiographers, of monument-builders or writers, because without them the only product of their activity, the story they enact and tell, would not survive at all.’ (Arendt, 1998, 173)

There is no human life without labor, no human world without work, and no freedom without action. The only ground on which Arendt rejects the artificial world of human fabrication is that it is built on a means-end approach (However, she also acknowledges that there are non-utility based products of work as well, e.g., art). This approach threatens the stability of the world of objects as every product is meant for the sake of further ends.

Although our workspaces have changed enormously in the present times engaging with innovation and creativity yet we find that they have not changed much of their social spaces. The problem with the social space of work is that it is modeled on the household, where everyone has one interest and there is no space for disagreements and differences. It unites people together in ‘the form in which the fact of mutual dependence for the sake of life and nothing else assumes public significance’ (Arendt 1998, 46). In the household, the head of the family rules, but in the case of society, the opinion of the majority leads. The dominance of the majority in society implies conformism to a given set of codes and conventions of behavior by everyone. But since it is ruled by no one but all, there is nobody to take responsibility. Arendt herself witnesses this cult formation within academia, which she referred to as the rule of cooperation<sup>20</sup> among intellectuals that can also lead to phenomena such as intellectual bullying. She argues that it is tyrannical to not expect any disagreement and action from individuals. There is

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<sup>20</sup> ‘And cooperation meant that your friends cooperated. The problem, the personal problem, was not what our enemies might be doing, but what our friends were doing. This wave of cooperation...made you feel surrounded by an empty space, isolated. I lived in an intellectual milieu... and I came to the conclusion that cooperation was, so to speak, the rule among intellectuals... I left Germany guided by the resolution that ‘Never again!’ I will never have anything to do with ‘the history of ideas’ again. I didn’t, indeed, want to have anything to do with this sort of society again.’ (Arendt qtd. in Elisabeth Young-Bruhl 2004, 108.)

a gap between belonging and responsibility in the social realm. While everyone belonged to the social realm, there is nobody to take responsibility for.

Privacy or secrecy in the issues concerning work implies a deprivation from an objective relation with others in the public sphere, where one is free to belong or separate from others. One of the outcomes of this deprivation from speaking in the public about workspaces in the present society is the experience of extreme loneliness. It not only deprives people of the external public world but also from the protection of the private, where one could remain prosperous and wealthy. The precarious conditions of academic work whereby individuals are prevented from identifying with their work render them substitutable/replaceable. They are unable to see their work as making any meaningful difference. The social conditions of inequality and loneliness increase vulnerability and compulsive patterns of behavior (the alienating pathologies of work). Impersonal solidarity and self-responsibility fostered by the membership of a profession is an antidote to such alienation. How else do we account for the moral meaning of work? This points to the role of public institutions which should ideally facilitate struggles for equality across social differences yet we find that such institutions fail to nourish any solidarity. Academia is organized to serve only a few while the many remain on the margins.

Arendt writes that the world has entered ‘the last stage of laboring society, the society of jobholders’ [which] demands of its members a sheer automatic functioning, as though individual life had been submerged in the overall life-process of the species and the only active decision still required of the individual were to let go, so to speak, to abandon his individuality, the still individually sensed pain and trouble of living, and acquiesce in a dazed, ‘tranquilized’, functional type of behavior’ (Arendt 1998, 322). We have witnessed the hubris of the technological/scientific mind, which has taken over all means of the world of production. Work has become more demanding and less fulfilling due to the lack of security by professional institutions against arbitrary interference<sup>21</sup>. However, this does not mean that there is a particular dominator, who commands such arbitrariness rather any would-be authority takes the garb of the dominating figure in this situation. The

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<sup>21</sup> This does not mean that security is the only parameter of freedom. In *Statelessness, Domination, and Unfreedom: Arendt and Pettit in Dialogue*, Christian Rostbøll’s writes: ‘The subject that is to be free can appear only in a human world in which others are responsive to one’s actions and opinions. In this way there is a further positive dimension to freedom than mere security and protection, a dimension of intersubjective relationships and human responsiveness.’ (Rostbøll, 26)

dominated has nobody or nowhere she can press the claims, not because she does not have access to any constitutional or human rights but because nobody would listen and care as it has become the normative condition. The academic precariat has no status apart from being a replaceable worker or standing at the brink of the membership in the professional community lacking ‘a right to the statuses and powers that make our freedom secure and allow us to be free to avoid the ills and evils that result from the loss of such a status.’ (Bohman 2008, 203). This view is also encapsulated in Arendt’s conception of natality or the ability to begin anew that acknowledges the possibility of being recognized as someone in an accepting and responsive community<sup>22</sup>. The lack of social status and unfreedom of the precarious worker is not because of an absence of security from domination *per se* but because the social structure is designed in such a way to provide positive privileges to some as opposed the others. It is not that some people can dominate the precarious worker in capitalist societies but what is more important to note is that they also have the accepted right to do so with impunity. It is also a concern for questioning their legitimacy: on what grounds do some have the right to dominate others? The social pathology in the form of loneliness results from such domination which is ‘the product of social structures and institutions, of the capitalist division of labor’ (Rostbøll, 26). Precarious, meaningless employment is not something that people have but it is something that happens to them as an onslaught of a structurally unjust socio-political world. Nobody signs up to be lonely.

This is associated with the larger crisis of capitalism in our present times in addition to racism, casteism, misogynistic and patriarchal tendencies. The widespread loneliness in a mass society where people are deprived of any possibility of a meaningful action exposes them to arbitrary violence as a consequence of being substitutable/replaceable in such a system. The capitalist processes uproot people paving a way for unemployment, loneliness, and homelessness. There is a structural inequality between those who control the game and those who do the bidding.

## 6. Avoiding Loneliness

The point of this critique is to emphasize that human existence has a public dimension that involves others with differences who too share freedom to speak, think and act irrespective of their precarious situations. The way to

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<sup>22</sup> In *The Human Condition*, Arendt explains that beginning ‘is not the beginning of something but of somebody, who is a beginner himself’ (177)

avoid loneliness is paved through a political change in the structural inequalities and injustice that create the vulnerable, precarious conditions of work and also the stateless people. It is important to see the otherwise invisible and vulnerable others as actual people with perspectives and as having knowledge, which can be mutually beneficial for everyone in a healthy society. The solution to the problem of how to overcome loneliness (or how to protect people from internalizing the sense of their superfluity) lies in creating pluralistic spaces for trust and belonging with an attitude of care for the world rather than domination from above. However, as a caution, one should reject a togetherness that is based on the sameness of lonely individuals as it is a breeding ground for totalitarian practices. To combat loneliness, one must also secure the sanctuaries of solitude (a friendship with the self) that cradle thinking in dark and lonely times. Friendship with others is a way of building solidarity to overcome loneliness. Two characteristic features of such friendship are openness to others and plurality. It creates feelings of mutual pleasure and joy rather than pain and suffering. One can also view it as a willingness or fellow feeling to share the joy of being in the company of equals, which is far superior from the pain and suffering of the lonely when lacking this company. The pleasure in the company of others depends on the foreignness of the plurality of our public spaces and not sameness of our biological form.

Arendt criticizes the modern Behavioral sciences which ‘aim to reduce man as a whole, in all its activities, to the level of a conditioned and behaving animal’ (Arendt 1998, 45). The solutions offered by the behavioral sciences to problems of modernity like loneliness and lack of space for excellence in deeds ‘concerns only a possible change in the psychology of human beings—their so called behavior patterns—not a change of the world they move in.’ (Arendt 1998, 49). The social realm removes all differences and insists on equality in terms of behavior and conduct<sup>23</sup>. There is no space for

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<sup>23</sup> Further referring to the inadequacy of psychological approaches to social pathologies, Verovšek quotes Azmanova to point out, ‘once crisis and social pathology become the status quo, the inability of these descriptors to motivate social and political theorizing can lead to a “crisis of critique” (Azmanova 2014: 357)’ (Verovšek 2019, 2).

Loneliness is a social problem that is not discovered by the critic based on a utopian vision of future health but in a system that is already showing objective signs of dysfunction in the present. The crisis of work relations is a moment of action and key decision making that will decide whether we will be able to resolve the problem of loneliness or not. It also decides how we will diagnose this as suffering coming out of a dehumanizing experience at the workspaces and the causes thereof.

individuality and differences in it. One of the characteristic features of the public realm is its individuality. In Arendt's words:

“...the public realm itself, the *polis*, was permeated by a fiercely agonal spirit, where everybody had constantly to distinguish himself from others, to show through unique deeds or achievements that he was the best of all (*aien aristeuein*). The public realm, in other words, was reserved for individuality.” (Arendt 1998, 41)

This *agonal* character of the public realm is destroyed with the rise of the social realm in the modern age. The Public sphere itself becomes a political problem of exclusion and meaninglessness in the present case.

The question of freedom and political power can be phrased in terms of intersubjective involvement and membership and the conditions of non-domination. What does it mean to belong to a plural human community? Is it mere instrumental participation or does it include any intrinsic value to it in appreciating the human capacities to think, speak and act? Although work is not the only way of forming belonging as one can also associate with others outside of work in the political sphere and also instrumentally through the democratic procedure that secures their freedom against any arbitrary domination and decisions. But one can also ask: ‘Can one combat the irresponsibility of the professional intellectual whose inmost tendency is to “[fabricate] ideas about everything” by a contrivance of thought that defers intersubjective engagement?’ (Cuthoys 2017, 2)

## Conclusion

The lonely person implies an enclosed wordless mind and raises questions about meaning and the dependency on other minds for a conception of an intersubjective and shared social reality. Human existence is structurally oriented toward others. Loneliness also brings into question the dualism of the external world and the internal reality of human beings (subjectivity and the world) more sharply. It makes us think about our bodily embeddedness in the world.

The lonely states illuminate our concrete existence. It is the private sphere that illuminates the uniqueness of an individual that is intimately connected with experiences of inequality in the political sphere and discrimination in the social sphere of mass conformism. I have proposed a view of loneliness that is not a negative characterization of the phenomena *per se* marked by an absence but I view this lack as a response to the intersubjectivity of the human world that is a marker of dehumanization and unfreedom. Loneliness

brings forth the question of how to be alone and how to be with others i.e. friendship with the self and with the others. Thinking in solitude unfolds our internal dialogue with the self and leads to the invention of new avenues within which can help us in critical situations in life. Loneliness raises concerns about something going wrong in the political domain. The role of philosophy here is to guide us on how to befriend ourselves in the dialogue with ourselves and to be friends with others to create and repair belonging in an otherwise broken world.

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