

# Do Reasons Expire?

## An Essay on Grief

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My mother died on November 30, 2007 — suddenly and unexpectedly at the age of 55. In light of her death, I immediately experienced intense grief. And this seems as it should be: my reason for grief was that my mother had died, not exactly young, but too young. Indeed, if I had not experienced such grief, something would have been wrong with me. Contrast me with Camus's character Meursault in *The Stranger* who, a day after his mother's funeral, goes to the movies with a new love interest (1942/1988).

Yet now, many years later, I experience hardly any grief at all. This, too, seems as it should be. In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud puts it with apparent simplicity:

[A]lthough mourning involves grave departures from the normal attitude to life, it never occurs to us to regard it as a pathological condition and to refer it to medical treatment. We rely on its being overcome after a certain lapse of time. (1917/1999, 243–4)<sup>1</sup>

In a similar vein, DSM-5, our contemporary standard for classifying mental illnesses, states:

The dysphoria in grief is likely to decrease in intensity over days to weeks and occurs in waves, the so-called pangs of grief. (American Psychiatric Association 2013)

Yet upon reflection, the diminution of grief is puzzling. My grief has passed, almost entirely. But my mother's death has not been undone. Yet if my grief was a rational response to her death, and if her death remains the same over time, then, it seems, I am failing to be responsive to my reasons.

This gives rise to a puzzle: Grief is, plausibly, a response to reasons; the reason for my grief was my mother's death; her death does not change over time; but it is not wrong for me to grieve less over time.

1. I take "mourning" and "grief" to refer to the same emotion — what in German is rendered as "Trauer." My interest is in the emotional experience of grief — paradigmatically of being sad — and not in the practice of grieving.

Yet how could the diminution of grief not be wrong, if my reason for grief stays the same? Do reasons for grief expire?

In what follows, I will first clarify the puzzle. I will then consider four possible responses. Finally, I will argue that the puzzle eludes a solution, but that there are principled reasons for why that is so.<sup>2</sup>

My topic in this paper is grief. However, the phenomenon I am interested in — the rationality of accommodation to a loss and also injustice — arises not just for grief but for many other emotions, including, paradigmatically, anger, indignation and guilt. Here I wish to focus on grief as a case study, and I leave discussion of our emotional response to injustice for another occasion.<sup>3</sup>

### 1. Clarifying the Puzzle

In this section, I would like to make the puzzle I just sketched more vivid and also clarify some aspects of it. What I hope to make plausible is that the puzzle is especially pressing when considered from a first-person perspective — from the perspective of the griever who anticipates the diminution of her grief or someone who reflects upon the diminution of her grief in retrospect. I will also consider why the puzzle might be overlooked and how we are to understand the object of grief.

#### 1.1 *Surprise, Anticipation, Retrospection*

To make the puzzle vivid, I will start by describing how the puzzle initially struck me.

When my mother died and I initially felt intense grief, it seemed to me that I would never fully recover. I was convinced, perhaps naïvely, that my life would always be infused with pain over her death.

2. Although there is a large literature on grief, I take the puzzle I describe to be novel. I discuss some of the literature in what follows. Moller (2007) and Nussbaum (2001, ch.1) have been especially influential in my thinking. Moller (forthcoming), which came to my attention only as this article was going to press, offers considerations that are congenial to the present line of argument.
3. Marušić (in preparation).

However, I did recover. And I was surprised by how quickly this happened and how thorough the recovery was. Yet I'd like to think that this does not reflect a peculiar callousness on my part but is a common phenomenon. Empirical studies have shown that we typically come to terms with others' deaths, and many other misfortunes, surprisingly quickly.<sup>4</sup> Here is how George Bonanno, a leading researcher on grief, puts it at the opening of his book *The Other Side of Sadness*:

The good news is that for most of us, grief is not overwhelming or unending. As frightening as the pain of loss can be, most of us are *resilient*. Some of us cope so effectively, in fact, we hardly seem to miss a beat in our day-to-day lives. We may be shocked, even wounded, by a loss, but we still manage to regain our equilibrium and move on.... [Bereavement] is something we are wired for, and it is certainly not meant to overwhelm us. Rather, our reactions to grief seem designed to help us accept and accommodate losses relatively quickly so that we can continue to live productive lives. (2009, 7–8)

For what it's worth, this is true to my experience. However, it is something that surprised me. I was surprised that only a few weeks after my mother's death, I could lead my life more or less exactly as I did before her death: I hardly missed a beat! I was also surprised that my grief seemed to disappear almost completely — just as Bonanno describes:

The fact is that most of the time, there is no hidden grief. There may be lingering questions about the relationship, or changes wrought by the death may have to be dealt

4. See, for instance, Bonanno *et al* (2005) and the extensive references in Bonanno (2009), as well as the discussion in Moller (2007). However, I do not propose to pursue the empirical question of whether grief really diminishes as quickly as Bonanno and others argue. My methodology in this essay is that of phenomenology not of empirical psychology; hence the focus on the first person.

with, but usually when grief has come and gone, that's it. Even if the anguish was short-lived, most of the time all that means is that the person has managed her or his grief effectively and is moving on with life. (22)

It surprised me that there wasn't hidden grief — or at any rate much less than I initially believed there would be.

This, then, gave rise to a puzzle: In my initial experience of grief, I (naïvely) expected my grief to continue, because I thought of my mother's death as my *reason* for grief. In grieving, it seemed to me that my grief would continue for as long as her death was a reason to grieve — that is, as long as she continued to matter to me. This is why I was surprised at the rapid diminution and the eventual end of grief: I stopped grieving, even though she did not stop mattering to me.

Here is another way to articulate this point: Robert Solomon said that grief is the continuation of love.<sup>5</sup> I think that this captures my experience of grief quite well: I took grief to be a manifestation of my love for my mother. And I thought I would love her for as long as I shall live — or at least for longer than a few weeks. That is why I did not think that my grief would diminish so quickly. But it did diminish, and eventually it ended, and I struggle to understand how that can be, since, I'd like to think, my love continues.

I was surprised by the temporality of my grief, because I hadn't grieved before, at least not in a way that the importance of my loss so clearly outlived my grief. However, I probably should have known better, since there was plenty of evidence about how other people experience loss. For the less naïve, my puzzle will therefore arise differently. It will arise in anticipation of the diminution of grief.

Indeed, it is the anticipation of the diminution of grief that makes my puzzle most vivid. When we anticipate the diminution of grief, it seems to us that, in time, we will no longer care about our loss. Yet this is jarring when we also anticipate the continued importance of

5. As Higgins (2013, 159) reports, Solomon says this in his unpublished lecture "Good Grief." In *True to Our Feelings*, he says, "Grief is ... a way of keeping the love alive" (2007, 74).

our loss. Proust puts it well in a famous passage from *Within a Budding Grove*:

Our dread of a future in which we must forego the sight of faces and the sound of voices which we love and from which today we derive our dearest joy, this dread, far from being dissipated, is intensified, if to the pain of such a privation we feel that there will be added what seems to us now in anticipation more painful still: not to feel it as a pain at all — to remain indifferent. (1919/1998, 340)<sup>6</sup>

When we grieve, the thought that we will stop grieving strikes us as the thought that we will no longer care — that, in time, we will become indifferent to it. This is unproblematic, and even comforting, when we are upset over something that, as we understand, we won't have reason to care about anymore — for instance, the end of a bad relationship or a ruined shirt. But the death of a loved one is different. When we anticipate that the object of our grief will continue to matter — for instance, when we think that we will continue to love the other — the thought that our grief will diminish strikes us as a failure on our part.<sup>7</sup>

The fact that the anticipation of the end of grief, rather than being a source of comfort, is something that we shrink from, illuminates my puzzle: If, in grieving, we understand that our loss will continue to matter, we anticipate the end of grief as a failure to adequately respond to our reasons. I take this to be an insight suggested by Proust

6. Thanks to Richard Moran and Nicholas Riggle for pointing me to this passage. Moller (2007, 312) also discusses the passage. He accepts Proust's point and argues that our resilience in the face of loss is to be understood as a form of blindness to the significance of loss.
7. Preston-Roedder and Preston-Roedder (2017) argue that we have different ways in which we can "stand in solidarity" with the dead loved one, even if we don't experience grief. Even if correct, I think that this view cannot help us make sense of the end of grief. In fact, it seems to me — though I am certain that many will disagree — that these alternative ways of standing in solidarity with the dead are, in effect, attempts to cling to diminishing grief. Indeed, if we had alternative, equally good ways of standing in solidarity with the dead, why should we grieve at all?

(even if it is not quite what he had in mind). However, it is important to note that this insight holds only of cases in which we anticipate the continuation of love. When we don't — when we are upset over something that, we realize, won't continue to matter to us — we may well look forward to a time when we won't have any more reason to grieve. Or, when we experience grief over something that we recognize as not being of value — an unrealized holiday crush, say — we can see the end of grief as a return to reason.

The anticipation of the diminution of grief is, I think, the most vivid way to feel the force of my puzzle. However, there is another way: It is to consider how we could make sense of the diminution of grief in retrospect.

I realize that when my mother died, I had very good reason to grieve. I also acknowledge that today, a decade after her death, I am not wrong not to grieve. But I find it puzzling why this should be so — since it does not seem that her death is any less of a loss.

The main reason why my grief diminished so quickly seems to be that I simply had to move on. Intense grief is hard to bear and is a major disruption to life. If my initial grief had not diminished significantly and quickly, I would have gone to pieces. That is why it makes very good sense that my grief would diminish and that I would be wired in a way for this to be so. The trouble is that this is no reason for grief to diminish, since, at best, it is a reason of the wrong kind.<sup>8</sup> I did not grieve because grieving was somehow good for me. I grieved because my mother had died. Considerations showing that it is good or bad for me to grieve are like considerations showing that it is good or bad to believe something: they may make sense of why someone believes something, but not in a way that renders the belief intelligible to the believer. The goodness or badness of grief has something to do with me, the griever. But my grief was not about me; my grief was my response to my mother's death.

8. See D'Arms and Jacobson (2000, 77) for a point in this vein about grief and Hieronymi (2005; 2013) for an account of the wrong kind of reasons that I find convincing.

My puzzle arises because it is difficult in retrospect to identify the reasons in light of which it would make sense to grieve less. In an effort to explain why we grieve less, we seem to reach for the wrong kind of reasons. That is because the diminution of grief does not seem to be primarily a response to a change in the significance or value of the loss but is, rather, occasioned by the needs of the griever. Yet this makes it hard to understand the diminution of grief as a response to reasons — since the reasons for grief are not provided by the needs of the griever. To compare: If it were shown that we disbelieve something because it is bad for us to believe it, wouldn't this reveal that we are, precisely, not responsive to our reasons?

A similar point applies to a frequent response to my puzzle. People say: As time passes, we have to face life again; we have to attend to our children, do our jobs, and take care of ourselves — and this somehow makes the diminution of grief intelligible. The difficulty with this response is that it seems to appeal to the wrong kind of reasons. The fact that I have to carry on with my life — attend to my children, do my job and take care of myself — is a reason of the wrong kind; it merely shows that it would be important for me not to grieve. Also, it may explain why I experience less grief — why my attention shifts from my mother to other matters — but it does not provide a reason for the diminution of grief. Indeed, it seems that the only reason that would be of the right kind is a reason that would show that my mother did not die after all, or that her death no longer matters as much. But this does not seem to be the case here; my grief diminished, even though I continue to care. But if the loss still matters to me — how could it be all right not to grieve?

### *1.2 Adjustment and Detachment*

I acknowledge that the puzzle I described is elusive. I think that this is so, because there are two reasons that make sense of the diminution of grief to some extent, but not entirely. But because they make sense of the diminution of grief to some extent, they obscure the puzzle.

The first reason is that grief may involve an element of shock or surprise, especially if a loved one's death was unexpected, and this is something that one adjusts to fairly quickly. The second is that over time the dead loved one does lose significance in one's life. Martha Nussbaum brings out both points in her poignant reflections on the diminution of her grief over her mother's death:<sup>9</sup>

When I receive the knowledge of my mother's death, the wrenching character of that knowledge comes in part from the fact that it violently tears the fabric of hope, planning, and expectation that I have built up around her all my life. But when the knowledge of her death has been with me for a long time, I reorganize my other beliefs about the present and future to accord with it. I no longer have the belief that I will see my mother at Thanksgiving dinner; I no longer think of the end of a busy day as a time when I can call her up and enjoy a long talk; I no longer think of a trip abroad as an occasion to buy presents for her; I no longer expect to make happy plans to celebrate her birthday. (2001, 80)

I will still accept many of the same judgments — including judgments about my mother's death, about her worth and importance, about the badness of what happened to her. But propositions having to do with the central role of my mother in my own conception of flourishing will shift into the past tense. By now, in August 2000, it is no longer as true of me as it was in 1992, that "my mother is an important element in my flourishing"; I am now more inclined to accept the proposition, "The person who died *was* a central part of my life," and this judgmental change

9. This discussion is anticipated in Nussbaum's *The Therapy of Desire* (1994, 375–89). See also her recent *Anger and Forgiveness* for the contrast between grief and anger (2016, 126).

itself is a large part of what constitutes the diminution of grief. (2001, 82)

Nussbaum identifies two reasons that make sense of diminished grief: the griever's adjustment to her loved one's death and the griever's gradual detachment from her.<sup>10</sup> And I think that she is right about both. However, I don't think this is all there is.

Here is why, despite Nussbaum's insights, I think that the puzzle persists. Even though the diminution of grief makes limited sense in light of our adjustment to the other's death — especially when the death was unexpected — grief is not primarily a response to the unexpectedness or suddenness of the other's death, but to her death itself. That is why one's adjustment does not significantly bear on whether one has less reason to grieve over time. To the extent that it bears on it, it does so insofar as grief is a response to the time or circumstances of the other's death, rather than to the death itself.

Nussbaum's second point — that over time the loved one matters less to us — may identify a good reason for the diminution of grief. Yet even if it does, this does not seem reason enough. Although my mother's role in my life is very different today than when she died, and even though in a salient sense she matters less to me today than she did a decade ago, my love did not disappear as quickly and as thoroughly as my grief. My grief started diminishing very shortly after her death and its diminution was rapid and complete. Yet I love her more and longer than is reflected in my grief. It is the discrepancy between the duration of grief and the extent to which the loved one matters to us that gives rise to the puzzle — even if we acknowledge that over time the dead do, in fact, come to matter less.

Indeed, it remains puzzling to me why Nussbaum's second point — that her mother plays a less central role in her flourishing — would not constitute a reason for an *intensification*, rather than the diminution, of grief. After all, isn't it a further loss, in addition to

10. I take Nussbaum's saying that some of her value judgments change tense to reflect the fact that her mother comes to matter less.

her mother's being dead, that her mother no longer plays this central role? For what it's worth, I have been struck by the thought that it should be distressing that my mother is no longer a central part of my life — for instance, when she missed the birth of her grandchildren. Why shouldn't this provide further reasons for grief? This is another case in which my experience of grief struck me as incongruent with the reasons in light of which grief would make sense.<sup>11</sup>

### 1.3 *The Object of Grief*

The preceding discussion makes clear that, to understand the diminution of grief, it is important to be clear about the object of grief. Let me clarify how I propose to understand it.

Grief is a response to loss. In the case at hand, my loss is my mother's death. It is to her death that I respond with grief, and it is her death that is the primary object of my grief. (More precisely, it is her *being dead*, rather than the event of her dying). However, my grief may concurrently have other objects, such as the circumstances of her dying, the end of an ongoing relationship with her, or the deprivation to myself. In contrast, in grieving over the breakup of a relationship, the primary object of grief — the loss — is, precisely, the end of an ongoing relationship. This brings out a deep difference between grief over a breakup and grief over a loved one's death. When I grieve in light of a breakup, I grieve *for us* (who no longer have an ongoing relationship), or *for myself* (who no longer has a companion). But when I grieve in light of a loved one's death, I grieve *for the other*.

Nonetheless, it is clear that when we grieve for a dead loved one, our relationship to her matters a great deal. That is because the relationship to the dead at least partly determines the significance of our reasons to grieve. For example, it is in virtue of the fact that it was my mother who died that I have particularly strong reason to grieve — more reason than a friend or a stranger. However, the relationship is not itself my reason; rather, it is that in virtue of which my

11. I am indebted to Faye Halpern for discussion of this issue.

reason has its strength or significance.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, sometimes we have reason to grieve for those to whom we stand in no significant relationship. As an anonymous reviewer puts it: "I might for instance look at a picture of a child's corpse in the arms of a crushed and grieving mother, perhaps in new photos of the aftermath of an errant Hellfire missile attack, and be struck with grief. Would this be unreasonable? I think not, even though the loss is not in any distinctive sense mine." Agreed. No particular relationship to the dead child is required for reasonable grief.<sup>13</sup>

I conclude that grief often, but not always, involves partiality: the deaths of those with whom we stand in close relationships present us with different and more significant reasons to grieve than the deaths of those with whom we don't stand in any particular relationships. However, this does not mean that grief is, after all, about us or about our relationships rather than about those who died. In due course, I will return to this point to consider whether the temporality of grief could be understood by analogy to its partiality.

### 1.4 *Desiderata for a Solution*

I conclude this section by identifying two desiderata for a solution to my puzzle: A solution would explain how, as grievers, we are to anticipate the diminution of grief in a way that makes sense to us — but without invoking the wrong kind of reasons. Relatedly, a solution would explain how we are to understand in retrospect why we grieve less and why we may eventually stop grieving altogether — again without

12. I propose to understand the relationship to the dead loved one as what is sometimes called a background condition for a reason (see Pettit and Smith (1990), Dancy (2000, 127–8), Schroeder (2007, 23–40), and especially Keller (2013)). I hold that Cholbi (2017, 258) mistakes a background condition for a reason with the reason itself when he argues that the object of grief is the relationship to the dead, on the grounds that we only have reason to grieve for those with whom we stand in the relevant relationships.

13. I may simply stand in a basic "moral relationship" to the child in which I stand to all fellow human beings (Scanlon 2013, 90), so that the relationship plays a crucial role after all: this relationship, too, may determine the significance of my reason for grief.

invoking the wrong kind of reasons. Both explanations would speak to the first-person perspective of the (former) griever. In this way, a solution to the puzzle would explain why reasons for grief expire.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. Reasons-Responsiveness

A fundamental assumption of my puzzle is that grief is, in principle, responsive to reasons. In this section I will clarify this assumption and defend its plausibility.

The assumption seems plausible, because our emotions are not conditions that befall us, but they partly constitute our take on the world: In fear, we apprehend something as dangerous, in anger we apprehend something as a wrong, and in grief, we apprehend something as a loss.<sup>15</sup> That is why grief makes sense to us *in light of* something that happens in the world — unlike, for instance, a fever, which we don't experience *in light of* something, despite the fact that, quite like the pangs of grief, it comes and goes. The apprehension involved in grief is reflected in the fact that there is, in principle, something I could discover which would extinguish my grief: In discovering that I hadn't suffered a loss — that my mother wasn't dead after all — I would *therein* stop grieving. In this respect, grief differs from a fever: there is nothing I could discover, such that in discovering it, I would cease to have a fever. This is captured in the observation that when we experience grief, the question of *why* we experience it, posed in the specific sense in which it asks for our reasons, finds application. (I think of this as a variation of Anscombe's why-question.)<sup>16</sup> In contrast, a condition like

a fever does not make such a question applicable: There is no reason in light of which we suffer from a fever — though, of course, there is a reason why we suffer from the fever, an explanatory reason. Hence, the way in which we make sense of grief is different from the way in which we make sense of conditions that befall us.<sup>17</sup>

A related observation — though one I do not take to be as important — is that we criticize or praise others' emotional responses. Meursault, for example, fails to properly respond to his loss, and others disapprove of him for that.<sup>18</sup> However, I do not think that the felicity of criticism or blame is the main rationale for seeing grief as reasons-responsive. It is, rather, the applicability of the why-question, posed in the sense in which it asks for reasons in light of which we grieve.

I hasten to add, however, that the assumption that grief is responsive to reasons doesn't equate grief with judgment. There may well be deep differences between the two.<sup>19</sup> One important difference is that whereas both judgment and grief can be recalcitrant to reasons, the

14. An anonymous reviewer suggests "that there is more to rationality than responding to (apparent) reasons," for instance in considerations of instrumental rationality, rational coherence, and structural rationality. My main reservation is that it is not clear to me to what extent such accounts of rationality speak to the agent's understanding, though I do not have space here to address the issue adequately.

15. See Solomon (1976; 2007), de Sousa (1987), Roberts (1988), D'Arms and Jacobson (2000; 2003) and Nussbaum (2001) for endorsements of the view that emotions are reasons-responsive, though on different grounds.

16. Anscombe (1957/2000).

17. The applicability of the Anscombean why-question also leads me to resist the view of emotions as perceptions (Prinz 2004): The question of why we grieve is quite unlike the question of why we perceive: the former asks for the reasons in light of which we grieve, whereas the latter, insofar as it is intelligible, asks for the point of, say, looking at something.

18. Solomon argues, in light of Meursault's example, that there is an obligation to grieve. He writes, "We are not just surprised when a person shows no signs of grief after a very personal loss. We are morally outraged and think much less of the person" (2007, 75). In contrast, Wilkinson (2000, 296–7) argues that we do not see a failure to grieve as a rational failure and, in light of this, concludes that grief is a non-rational response. I find Wilkinson's argument unconvincing, but I think that only consideration of the Anscombean why-question makes this clear.

19. Maguire (forthcoming) argues that there are no reasons for emotions but that emotions are assessed for fittingness. However, I don't see talk of fittingness as an alternative to talk of reasons. Rather, it seems to me that considerations of fittingness could be understood as a particular kind of reasons. Thus D'Arms and Jacobson write, "Crudely put, considerations of fittingness are all and only those considerations about whether to feel shame, amusement, fear, and so forth that bear on whether the emotion's evaluation of the circumstances gets it right: whether the situation really is shameful, funny, fearsome, and so forth" (2003, 132).

recalcitrance of grief strikes us as less problematic.<sup>20</sup> Richard Wollheim puts it well:

Perhaps, if we are to think of some emotion of ours as altogether rational, we must think of its object as deserving it. But that is neither the norm that our emotions follow, nor one to which we think they should comply. In our emotional life, we do not always feel ourselves to have right on our side. (1999, 115)

I think that Wollheim is correct that in our emotional life, we do not always feel ourselves to have right on our side. We might experience sadness and think that we have no reason to be sad, we might experience fear and know that there is nothing to be feared, or we might experience envy and know that the other's achievement would not really be of value to us. Even more often we might experience an emotion very intensely — strong emotional responses to sports and games come to mind — and take ourselves to be wrong in so doing. But that we do not always feel right does not suggest that we do not aspire, in our emotional lives, to get things right.<sup>21</sup> In experiencing an emotion, we take ourselves answerable for experiencing it, even if we don't think that we have a good answer. Richard Moran sums up the crucial point well:

This is not to say that one normally arrives at one's beliefs (let alone one's fears or regrets) through some explicit process of deliberation. Rather, what is essential in all

20. For discussion of emotional recalcitrance to reasons, see Rorty (1978), Greenspan (1981; 1988), Deigh (1994), Nussbaum (2001, 35–6) and D'Arms and Jacobson (2003).

21. Wollheim (1999) argues that our emotions provide us with an attitude to the world, in contrast to beliefs, which give us a picture of the world. But it seems to me that an attitude is reasons-responsive: the question why to have an attitude clearly finds application. Thus I think that Wollheim's picture could allow that emotions are reasons-responsive, though perhaps not in the same way as beliefs. For a similar view to Wollheim's, which nonetheless takes emotions to be reasons-responsive, see de Sousa (1987, esp. ch.7).

these cases is that there is logical room for such a question, about regret as much as about belief, and that the actual fear or regret one feels is answerable to such considerations. I may confess that my fear is beyond my control and that I can't help being afraid of something where, by my own lights, there is nothing to be feared. But so long as I am to understand my condition as fear of any kind, even irrational fear, I cannot fail to accept the relevance, the force of the deliberative question "Is there anything to be feared here?" (2001, 63)

To apply Moran's thought to the case of grief, I want to say: as long as I am to understand my condition as grief, even irrational grief, I cannot fail to accept the relevance or applicability of the question, "What has been lost?"

How, then, are we to understand the reasons-responsiveness of grief? This is something that I would like to leave open, because I do not think that the puzzle I described depends on the particulars of an account of the reasons-responsiveness of emotions. The puzzle arises on an account, according to which emotions partly consist in judgments, but it also arises on an account, according to which emotions don't consist in, or involve judgments, but the reasons-responsiveness of emotions is simply to be understood in terms of whether the emotion is a fitting appraisal of a situation. On such a view, the question is simply: Why is less grief fitting after a certain amount of time has passed? I also want to leave open whether reasons-responsiveness is to be understood in terms of obligation or permissiveness, since I don't think of these notions as the primary guide to reasons-responsiveness. It may be that grief is always at most permissible and never required (though I did not think of my own grief that way). What matters is that even on a permissivist view, the reasons-responsiveness of grief has a temporal profile. Even if grief is always permissible, it seems plausible that one has reason to feel grief more strongly right after a loss and

less strongly as time passes.<sup>22</sup> Understanding rationality in terms of permissiveness may make the puzzle less pronounced, but it will not address it, as long as the temporal profile of the reasons for grief is not properly understood.

### 3. The Hardline View: Reasons Don't Expire

A first response to my puzzle insists that reasons don't expire.<sup>23</sup> The main rationale for it is the plausible observation that a loss does not cease to be a loss as it recedes into the past. The death of my mother was a loss when it occurred and remains a loss to this day, even as I move on in life. It is not undone by the passage of time, and it is not undone by the many events in my life that have occurred since then, such as the birth of my children. But since this loss is a reason for grief, and since it remains a loss, it remains a reason for grief.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, we can think of this hardline view as the temporal counterpart to Peter Singer's view in "Famine, Affluence, and Morality" (1972) that spatial distance does not affect our intrinsic reasons to aid those in need. Presumably, Singer's view applies to time as well as to space. Our temporal distance to others may limit the ways we can aid them, since it is not possible to send aid to the past, but our temporal distance as such does not seem to affect the intrinsic moral facts, and therefore the reasons that others' plight presents us with, any more

22. Sometimes one may have reason to pre-grieve a loss — though the strength of reasons for pre-grief seems to me to depend on the imminence of the loss and, therefore, to exhibit a temporal profile as well.

23. Agnes Callard has defended a view in this vein in several talks, though she has ultimately come to reject it (Callard, 2018).

24. This may seem especially plausible if there is a close connection between values — such as losses — and reasons: For instance, on a "buck-passing" view like T.M. Scanlon's, for something to be a value is for it to have a particular second-order property — namely the property of having properties in virtue of which we have reasons for certain attitudes and actions (1998, 97). And it seems plausible to hold that something's being a loss consists in having a property that provides us with reasons — such as a reason to grieve. On Scanlon's view, we can use the notion of reasons to explain values. But for present purposes — when we are trying to settle what reasons we have — we could see the explanation as going the other way around, from values to reasons.

than our spatial distance does. Just as *whether* something is a loss or a harm does not depend on *where* it occurs, it does not depend on *when* it occurs. To echo Simone Weil: What's time got to do with it? "Comme si le temps faisait quelque chose à l'affaire?"<sup>25</sup>

On this hardline view, temporal distance matters only insofar as it affords a psychological explanation of our disinclination to grieve losses that have receded into the past. Temporal distance is like spatial distance from those in need as Singer sees it: It explains our reactions but does not justify them.

I think that there is something attractive about the hardline view: It is neat and clear and uncompromising. But I do not think that it can be right. Temporal distance does not merely make us grieve less; in many cases it seems that we are not wrong to grieve less. Indeed, there is something wrong with being *stuck*; there is something wrong with persistent grief. Persistent grief is distinguishable from (statistically) normal grief — and, interestingly, the main criterion is duration. DSM-5 states:

Persistent complex bereavement disorder is diagnosed only if at least 12 months (6 months in children) have elapsed since the death of someone with whom the bereaved had a close relationship. ... This time frame discriminates normal grief from persistent grief. (American Psychological Association, 2013)

Persistent grief is a mental disorder of sorts, though DSM-5 lists it

25. Maurice Schumann recalls Simone Weil saying: "How can we condemn the holocausts which are in preparation or are being perpetrated around us if we don't condemn, or even if acknowledge the holocausts as truths of the faith [i.e. the killings described in the Hebrew Bible] under the pretext that they occurred thousands of years ago, *as if time made a difference to the matter?*" (Kahn, ed. 1978, 25, translation and italics mine). ("Comment pouvons-nous condamner les holocausts qui se préparent ou qui se perpétrent autour de nous si nous ne condamnons pas, ou même si nous reconnaissons comme vérités de la foi les holocaustes sous prétexte qu'ils se sont écoulés il y a un certain nombre de millénaires, comme si le temps faisait quelque chose à l'affaire?"). I owe the reference to Yourgrau (2010, 127). See Yourgrau (2010) for an account of Weil's own suffering over temporally distant harms.

among “Conditions for Further Study.” In contrast, normal grief is not a mental disorder. But if the hardline view were correct, persistent grief would not be a mental disorder but the rational response to a loss.<sup>26</sup>

The conclusion I propose to draw from this observation is that the hardline view offers us an unrealistic moral psychology. The hardline view does not adequately take into account the psychological reality of human grief; it does not adequately take into account how grief is actually experienced.<sup>27</sup> Bernard Williams makes a point in this vein in a side remark in his famous “Moral Luck.” In arguing that the justification of moral approval depends on one’s perspective, Bernard Williams remarks, “This is just one of the ways — *the distancing of time is another* — in which, if the moral sentiments are to be part of life as it is actually experienced, they cannot be modelled on a view of the world in which every happening and every person is at the same distance” (1981, 37, italics mine). Williams’s thought is something like this: If we are to understand the justification of an emotion, we must consider the emotion as it is actually experienced. And since in experiencing an emotion like grief, the temporal distance from a loss matters, whether the emotion is justified depends on its temporal relation to the loss.

I can illustrate my objection to the hardline view through a discussion in Dan Moller’s paper, “Love and Death” (2007, 313–5). Moller asks us to consider two kinds of alien species — the Super-resilient and the Sub-resilient:

[The Super-resilient] are like us except that members have no grief reactions at all to what would strike us as great tragedies.... When their spouses drop dead in front of them, they shrug their shoulders and check what is on television. They ... deny not caring for their loved ones; in fact, investigation reveals that they are willing to walk

26. Wilkinson (2000) argues that normal grief is a mental disorder on the grounds that it is not a rational state. I hold that since normal grief is rational, or, rather, reasons-responsive, it is not a mental disorder.

27. Compare here Wittgenstein’s remarks about hope, deep feeling and grief (Wittgenstein 1953/2003, §583, pt. II, sect. ix).

through fire for their husbands and wives, and generally show tremendous concern before their loss. It is just that afterwards adaptive mechanisms operate so as immediately to extinguish any feelings of distress. (313)

The Sub-resilient are like us except that they never cease caring as deeply for their spouses as at the moment of death; the loss of that relationship is as deeply felt at half a century as it is at half an hour. The bereaved Sub-resilient are consequently extremely unhappy people who feel they suffer from a kind of never-healing open wound. (314)

It seems to me that the Sub-resilient are not the more rational species, as the hardline view would imply. Indeed, I think Moller’s example makes vivid that to assess the reasons-responsiveness of grief, we need a realistic moral psychology — a moral psychology for human beings. We cannot settle to what extent the Super-resilient or the Sub-resilient alien experiences of loss are reasons-responsive. Their experience of grief, if we may call it that, is fundamentally different from ours. We, human beings, grieve for a limited time. If we grieve too little, we are unresponsive to our reasons because we are insensitive. If we grieve too much, we are unresponsive to our reasons because we are stuck. For us, reasons-responsive grief takes time, but not too much.

To say that we need a realistic moral psychology, however, is not yet to solve my puzzle. We still need to make sense of the anticipation of, and retrospection on, the diminution of grief. For instance, when I grieve for my mother, I may know that my grief will diminish with time. I may know that, realistically, this is how things are for a human being like me. But that alone does not help me answer the why-question in light of which the diminution of grief would make sense. It does not help answer the Proustian worry that, with time, I will stop caring for

my mother or that she will no longer matter to me. Why would I stop grieving if I continue to love?<sup>28</sup>

I conclude that the hardline view should be rejected on the grounds that it presupposes an unrealistic moral psychology of grief. Our experience of grief is conditioned by our psychology, our physiology, our history and our social circumstances. And all this somehow also affects our reasons for grief: the reasons-responsiveness of grief seems to be constrained by the psychological reality of grief. But it is a philosophical project to explain exactly how this could be so.

#### 4. Temporality as Partiality

A first attempt to provide such an explanation is to take a cue from Williams's claim that "the moral sentiments ... cannot be modelled on a view of the world in which every happening and every person is at the same distance" (1981, 37). The place and time of the griever, as well as other features of her, seem to play a crucial role in determining her reasons for grief. For instance, I grieved intensely when my mother died, but the deaths of many mothers leave me cold. And that is how it should be: the fact that it was my mother who died, and that I love her, is partly what determines the significance of my reason for grief.

In light of this, we could seek to understand the temporality of reasons for grief by analogy to their partiality: We might think that just as the familial relation between the griever and the dead affects the griever's reasons, the temporal relation between the griever and the dead affects the griever's reasons. Krister Bykvist makes this argument:

How strongly we should react emotionally seems ... to depend on temporal matters. For instance, we think it is fitting that the grief of a lost beloved softens with time. More generally, it seems fitting that the extreme horror we once felt towards some terrible massacre softens with

28. My argument that the hardline view offers an unrealistic moral psychology is indebted to Lucy O'Brien and Douglas Lavin's discussion in "Living Historically" (in preparation). Unlike O'Brien and Lavin, however, I don't take the articulation of a realistic moral psychology to solve (or dissolve) the puzzle.

time. Other things being equal, it is not fitting to feel the same intense emotion towards past sufferings that occurred thousands of years back in the past as we do towards some current suffering of the same severity.

In all these cases, the degree to which it is fitting to positively respond to a state of affairs does not correspond to the degree to which it is good. How strongly one should favour an objectively valuable object depends on the 'distance' between oneself and the object. ... [T]his distance has many dimensions, including modal distance, temporal distance, and 'personal' distance. It is, therefore, all too crude to say that it is always fitting to feel more strongly about a better state of affairs or to be emotionally indifferent between states of affairs of the same value. (2009, 16)<sup>29</sup>

Bykvist's aim, in making his argument, is primarily critical: He seeks to object to views like the hardline view, which see a very close relation between values and our reasons. However, Bykvist's discussion also suggests that the griever's temporal distance to a loss could be understood as akin to her "personal" distance. Perhaps we can conclude that just as I have more reason to grieve my mother's death than you have reason to grieve it, I have more reason to grieve a loss in the present than a loss in the past.

I want to register a phenomenological objection to this proposal. It strikes me that thinking, "It's not my mother," makes sense of why I don't grieve in a way that saying, "She died long ago," does not. Here

29. For a similar argument about blameworthiness, see Coleman and Sarch (2012). Like Bykvist, Coleman and Sarch observe that it is appropriate for blaming and related reactive attitudes to diminish over time, even though the blameworthiness of an act does not diminish, and they argue that this is a problem for "buck-passing" theories of blameworthiness. I think that they fail to see that this poses a deeper problem for our understanding of the temporality of blame, a problem that goes well beyond the buck-passing theories. I discuss this in Marušić (in preparation).

Weil just seems to me to get it right: What's time got to do with it? Why should the mere passage of time make a difference to my reasons?

I think it does not. To show this, I offer the following two examples:<sup>30</sup> First, suppose you are in a car accident with your mother. You survive, but your mother does not. However, you spend ten years in a coma. When you wake up, you are informed that your mother has died. You are not relieved, and have no reason to be relieved, to hear that the accident happened ten years ago. The mere passage of time makes no difference to your reasons. In contrast, if you learn that it was not your mother who died, you will be relieved and, plausibly, you have reason to be relieved.

As a second example, consider Oliver Sacks's harrowing case history of Clive Wearing, an English musician and musicologist, who suffers from, as Sacks puts it, "the most devastating case of amnesia ever recorded" (2007). This amnesia prevents Wearing from engaging in temporally extended activities like grief. Sacks describes a conversation with Deborah Wearing, Clive Wearing's wife, who had written a memoir:

When I asked Deborah whether Clive knew about her memoir, she told me that she had shown it to him twice before, but that he had instantly forgotten. I had my own heavily annotated copy with me, and asked Deborah to show it to him again.

"You've written a book!" he cried, astonished. "Well done! Congratulations!" He peered at the cover. "All by you? Good heavens!" Excited, he jumped for joy. Deborah showed him the dedication page: "For my Clive." "Dedicated to me?" He hugged her. This scene was repeated several times within a few minutes, with almost exactly the same astonishment, the same expressions of delight and joy each time.

30. Thanks to Eli Hirsch for the first example and Jeremy Fantl for pointing me to the second.

Clive and Deborah are still very much in love with each other, despite his amnesia. (Indeed, Deborah's book is subtitled "A Memoir of Love and Amnesia.") He greeted her several times as if she had just arrived. It must be an extraordinary situation, I thought, both maddening and flattering, to be seen always as new, as a gift, a blessing.

Eventually, Sacks concludes:

It has been twenty years since Clive's illness, and, for him, *nothing has moved on*. One might say he is still in 1985 or, given his retrograde amnesia, in 1965. In some ways, he is not anywhere at all; he has dropped out of space and time altogether. He no longer has any inner narrative; he is not leading a life in the sense that the rest of us do. And yet one has only to see him at the keyboard or with Deborah to feel that, at such times, he is himself again and wholly alive. It is not the remembrance of things past, the "once" that Clive yearns for, or can ever achieve. It is the claiming, the filling, of the present, the now, and this is only possible when he is totally immersed in the successive moments of an act. It is the "now" that bridges the abyss. (Sacks 2007, italics mine)

Wearing's deeply distressing case illustrates why temporal distance and "personal" distance cannot be understood in the same way. If we have less reason to grieve over time, it is not because our loss is at a greater temporal distance; it is because we have already *grieved*. Grieving requires something that Wearing does not have — a persistent conception of the past as well as a continued and continuously remembered experience of grieving.<sup>31</sup>

31. This argument should make clear why my puzzle is distinct from Lucretius's puzzle about why we fear death but are unconcerned about pre-natal non-existence. Lucretius's puzzle has to do with the *futurity* of death and depends essentially on the nature of time. My puzzle is not primarily concerned with

This suggests that a realistic moral psychology of grief and the reasons for it will not see the griever's temporal distance to the loss as a crucial feature but rather, the griever's experience of grieving over time — the successful completion of the psychological process of grief.

### 5. The Process View

In this section, I want to consider the possibility that reasons for grief diminish in virtue of our having grieved, that is, in virtue of our completing the process of grief.

It is plausible to think of grief as a process — a process through which we heal from a psychological injury.<sup>32</sup> Alternatively, we could think of grief not as the healing process itself but as a manifestation of it — a manifestation of our “emotional immune system,” which regulates our emotional response to loss.<sup>33</sup> Alternatively, and perhaps even more plausibly, we could think of grief as an experience of a psychological injury concomitant to a healing process: as the healing process progresses, we feel less grief — just as when we heal from an injury, we feel less pain. Either way, the duration of grief would be determined by the duration of the healing process. This would suggest that reasons expire when the healing process is complete.<sup>34</sup>

However, I do not think that a conception of grief as a healing process is the nature of time since it is not through the passage of time alone that reasons for grief expire.

32. This might seem especially plausible if it is held that grief has stages — for instance the five stages posited by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1969): denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. However, see Bonanno (2009, 20–1) for criticism.
33. See Gilbert *et al.* (1998) for an account of the “emotional immune system,” which regulates our response to loss. I owe the reference to Moller (2007, 305).
34. For a more sophisticated view of grief as a process — a narrative process — see Goldie (2012, ch. 3). Here I do not have space to address the details of Goldie's thoughtful account. However, the objection I raise in what follows — that the process view is alienated — also applies to Goldie's view. The objection that a narrative perspective involves alienation goes back at least to Sartre's *Nausea* (1938/2007) and is thoughtfully discussed in Moran (2015).

process can adequately address my puzzle. To think of grief as a healing process involves a distinct kind of alienation: it requires taking a detached, clinical view of ourselves.<sup>35</sup> When we view grief as a healing process, we turn our attention away from our loss, to ourselves. But this distorts the grief. When I grieve, my attention is directed to my loss, not myself. When my mother dies, I think, not, “This is hard for me” but “No! She is dead.” In grief, I am transparent: I am the pained apprehension of loss. But when I take a detached view of grief, and apprehend myself as suffering from a psychological injury, my attention shifts from my loss to — myself. I think about the fact that I am beset by grief. I can then understand my grief as an emotional response to a psychological injury that I have to live with. I can see my grief as posing a problem for me — something I need to cope with or manage. However, this is an alienated view — a view in which I no longer attend to my reasons for grief but to myself.

The process view cannot offer an adequate solution to my puzzle, because if, as a griever, I think of my grief as a process that I am undergoing, I am no longer attending to what my grief is about. I don't attend to the reasons in light of which I grieve, and that is why I do not accurately comprehend why my grief should diminish.

Here is how the point becomes clearest: If the diminution of grief consists in the healing of a psychological injury, then the end of grief is something that we should be looking forward to. The thought that we will heal should strike us as a relief. But this is not how we feel about the diminution of grief, when we anticipate that the loss will continue to matter to us. We don't look forward to the end of grief but shrink from it.

Well, perhaps this is too high-minded. Perhaps we are not pure Proustians, and we do look forward to the end of the pain of grief. Fair enough. However, when we grieve, we don't merely feel pain, and we don't merely, or mainly, look forward to the end of the pain. In grieving, we also apprehend our loss, and insofar as we do, we understand our

35. Here I follow what I take to be essentially Moran's argument in *Authority and Estrangement* (2001).

grief as response to a reason. In this respect, grief differs from a physiological injury: unlike an injury, grief involves understanding. But the process view, at least as considered so far, does not speak to what we understand in grieving. As far as the process view is concerned, all that matters is that we heal; it does not matter whether we are healing from (as it were) a rational psychological injury, nor whether the psychological injury (as it were) continues to be rational. Indeed, this very formulation brings the distortion to light: It makes no sense to speak of injuries as rational or irrational — and so, on the process view, the reasons-responsiveness of grief falls out of the picture.

This is not to deny that the process view contains an insight: When we suffer a loss, we do undergo a healing process. And it is plausible that the duration of grief is reflected in the completion of this process. Someone who is interested in our well-being — a doctor, say, or the HR department in our company, or a bookie — will be interested in how the healing process is coming along: how much we are suffering, whether we can get back to work, whether we will need to invoke FMLA, and so on. And, as griever, we will be interested in these things, too. However, for us, this is not the whole story: for us, our grief is a response to a loss, and the reasons that determine the reasons-responsiveness of grief don't seem to have anything to do with the healing process. That is why, to the extent that we view ourselves as undergoing a process, we become alienated from our grief. This shows that the process view does not provide an adequate solution to my puzzle: it does not adequately address how to anticipate the diminution of grief, nor does it help us understand, in retrospect, in light of which reasons our grief diminished.

The process view leaves us, as it were, in a state of double-vision: As griever, we at once apprehend our loss but also apprehend that we are undergoing a healing process. However, we can't hold both apprehensions together in one consciousness: we can't reconcile these two perspectives.

One might think that this is so because we have worked with too crude a conception of the process. After all, grief involves

understanding in a way that a healing process does not. Perhaps if we could describe the process as itself involving understanding, we could eliminate the double vision. The crucial thought would be that the process of grief is an intelligent process. Perhaps the process of grief is psychological work?

## 6. Grief as Work

In this section, I will consider whether understanding grief as psychological work could explain why reasons for grief expire. Importantly, the view that grief is psychological work is concerned with the emotion of grief, not activities that constitute the activity grieving (such as sitting Shiva). According to the work view, the emotional response to loss is itself best understood as a form of work — a coming to terms with loss.

Here are two prominent formulations of something like the work view. In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud understands grief as the activity of "reality-testing" through which one's libido detaches itself from the "lost object." He writes, "In mourning time is needed for the command of reality-testing to be carried out in detail, and ... when this work has been accomplished the ego will have succeeded in freeing its libido from the lost object" (252). "[W]hen the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (245).<sup>36</sup>

36. Freud repeatedly stresses that he doesn't know the "economic means" by which this work is carried out (245; 255). He offers merely a conjecture: "Each single one of the memories and situations of expectancy which demonstrate the libido's attachment to the lost object is met by the verdict of reality that the object no longer exists; and the ego, confronted as it were with the question whether it shall share this fate, is persuaded by the sum of the narcissistic satisfactions it derives from being alive to sever its attachment to the object that has been abolished. We may perhaps suppose that this work of severance is ... slow and gradual" (255). Bonanno rejects the conception of grief as work, because he objects to Freud's account of grief on the grounds that going through the memories of the dead would perpetuate grief, since it would lead those memories to dominate our consciousness (2009, 17–8). However, I see this as an objection to the particulars of Freud's account of grief as work, not to the general idea that grief consists in psychological work.

In a similar vein, though without the Freudian theoretical commitments, Nussbaum argues,

[T]he experience of mourning is in great part an experience of repeatedly encountering cognitive frustration and reweaving one's cognitive fabric in consequence. I find myself about to pick up the telephone to tell [my mother] what has just happened — and then see before me that image of her lying in the hospital bed, with the tube coming out of her nose. In every area of my life in which she has played a part, I find myself expecting her to appear — and *I then must work* to cut short and to rearrange these expectations. (2001, 80–1, italics mine)

We can set aside the particulars of Freud's and Nussbaum's views for present purposes. We can simply take it that what matters is that grieving is an active process, which takes time and during which we accomplish something: we accomplish the detachment from the person or object we have lost.<sup>37</sup>

A virtue of the conception of grief as work is that it takes seriously the observation that grief is a process that takes time. It implies that, if reasons expire, it is not in virtue of the passage of time alone but in virtue of the activity of grieving, which takes time. However, in light of this very point, one might wonder whether I have made a mistake in framing the puzzle. Perhaps we should ask, not "Do reasons expire?" but rather, "Do we exhaust our reasons?"<sup>38</sup>

37. In her recent *Anger and Forgiveness*, Nussbaum presents a less active view of grief: "[W]orking through grief is something that simply happens as life goes on: new ties replace the old, the world revolves less around the departed person" (2016, 126). However, it seems to me that working through is, precisely, not something that simply happens but something that we *do*.

38. Indeed, something like this lies behind the notion of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* — a very prominent notion in public discourse in Germany (which, via Adorno, who coined the term, goes back to Freud). The German verb

Although there is some plausibility in the thought that grief consists in psychological work, ultimately I think that this is a distorted view. In the end we will be left with the same kind of double vision as on the simpler process view. Here is why.

We think of work as a goal-directed activity that aims at change. But we do not think of grief as aimed at change. More precisely, in grieving, we do not think of our grief as aimed at change — at the detachment from the lost object.

Let me illustrate: When we work in the garden with the goal of clearing weeds from the flower beds, we continue (if all goes well) until the weeds are cleared, and then we stop. Perhaps we subsequently adopt a new goal, or we change our focus altogether. But as we work, the thought that we will work until all weeds are cleared is not, in principle, disconcerting — though we might feel overwhelmed at the sight of an overgrown garden. There is nothing problematic as such about the thought that our work will come to an end once our task is complete. And if grief consists in psychological work, then matters should be the same with grief.

But they are not — as the Proustian observation makes vivid. When we pull out weeds from the garden, then we (quite literally!) remove the reasons we have to be working — the weeds that grow in the garden. However, when we grieve, we don't therein produce a change; we don't remove our reasons to grieve. Indeed, in grieving, "there is nothing which can be done" (Gustafson 1989, 469).<sup>39</sup>

Of course, there is much that we can do when we grieve. We can pay respect to the dead, we can acknowledge our loss, and we can manage our grief. Much of this is done through various activities of grieving — such as sitting Shiva — and various ways of coping. But

"bewältigen" signifies something one would do with a task. *Man bewältigt eine Aufgabe*.

39. Gustafson writes, "the peculiar strength and depth of the feeling of grief might well be explained by the absence of any rational motive force and the absence of associated action" (469). I am indebted to Arden Koehler for the formulations in this paragraph.

these activities are not to be confused with the emotion of grief. These activities may be considered work, but grief, the emotion, is not.

There is a principled reason why this is so: Work, unlike grief, is subject to the will. Thus, we can apprehend the temporal limitations of work, because *we* set them. But we cannot apprehend the temporal limitations of grief, because we don't set them. For example, when we work in the garden with the goal of clearing weeds from the flowerbeds, we will continue, if all goes well, until the weeds are cleared. But that is because we have set out to clear the weeds from the flowerbeds: we have set that as our goal and, in so doing, we have set the endpoint of our activity. Since it is up to us to clear the weeds from the flowerbeds, we can decide whether to do so, when to do so, and for how long to do so.

But whether we grieve, when we grieve, and for how long we grieve is not up to us. In this respect, grief is like belief — a persistent state or activity that constitutes a response to the world, rather than a goal-directed activity that aims at change.<sup>40</sup> Grief is an activity or state that we can apprehend and manage.<sup>41</sup> But the understanding involved in grieving is not goal-oriented and thus does not include a temporal limitation. The end of grief is not an accomplishment, and we do not look forward to it as an accomplishment.<sup>42</sup>

A corollary observation is that if we were to understand our own grief as work, we would take our grief to be responsive to reasons that show grieving worthwhile: When we work, we understand ourselves to be responding to reasons that show our work to be worthwhile. But when we grieve, we do not understand ourselves as responding to reasons that show our grief to be worthwhile. Grieving, unlike working,

40. See Boyle (2011) for an illuminating account of belief as a persistent activity.

41. See Hieronymi (2006) on managerial control.

42. Freud writes, "Why ... after [normal mourning] has run its course, is there no hint in its case of the economic condition for a phase of triumph? I find it impossible to answer this question straight away" (Freud, 1917/1999, 255). I venture to say: Because normal mourning does not aim at an accomplishment, there is no sense of accomplishment at the end of it, and hence no triumph over a job well done.

does not involve apprehending a teleological structure of means and ends — even if, as a matter of fact, grieving is a means to the end of coming to terms with our loss. Grief is neither an exercise of the will, nor is it responsive to practical reasons. Hence, grief is not work.

Nonetheless, there is an insight in the work view. The insight is that grief is (concomitant to) a process through which we come to terms with a loss. But this insight has to be captured differently. Grief is best understood as akin to a judgment with a temporally limited functional role. However, the functional role is not part of the content of grief. The functional role of grief is like the functional role of an over-confident judgment during a race: It contributes to one's ends, because it can help one win the race, but not through the content of the judgment. The functional role of grief — be it detachment from the lost object or healing from a psychological injury — is essentially separated from the understanding embodied in grief.

So we are back to the double-vision: In grieving, we apprehend our loss. And in apprehending ourselves as grieving, we apprehend ourselves as going through a process through which we detach ourselves from the lost object. But we have not found a way to unify the two perspectives. And that, I will now argue, is no accident: it is a structural feature of the consciousness that is involved in grief.

## 7. Ineliminable Double Vision

I think that reasons for grief expire: over time, as we grieve, it becomes not wrong to grieve less. However, I also think that there is no good way to understand this. When we try to understand it, all we find are reasons of the wrong kind.

In this section, I will offer a principled rationale for why this is so. To do so, I will draw on Jean-Paul Sartre's account of bad faith. Sartre famously described two paradigmatic ways of being in bad faith.<sup>43</sup> The first is to treat oneself as an object or, to put it in Sartre's terms, to identify oneself with one's "facticity" — like a gambler who thinks

43. Sartre (1943/1956, pt.1, ch.2). See also Moran (2001, esp. 77–83).

that the fact that he's always abandoned resolutions to stop gambling before shows that he will likely gamble again, because he is, after all, a gambler. The second is to ignore one's facticity and identify oneself entirely with one's freedom — like a gambler who takes his gambling history to be irrelevant to the question of whether he will gamble in the future.

Sartre's concern, in discussing bad faith, is primarily with agency.<sup>44</sup> However, we can readily see that both kinds of bad faith are available with regard to our emotions. We can treat our emotions as objects, too: We do so when we take a theoretical view of them — when we see them as a process that we undergo. In so doing, we disregard our freedom. Of course, this is not the freedom we enjoy in action; it is not freedom of the will. But it is freedom nonetheless, because our emotions don't just *happen* to us but are our responses to reasons, our active take on the world. (Indeed, it strikes me as plausible to see reasons-responsiveness as criterial of freedom.)<sup>45</sup>

Yet we can also exhibit something like the second kind of bad faith: We can disregard the facticity of our emotions. We do so when we take the hardline view and hold that reasons don't expire. The hardline view offers us an unrealistic moral psychology; it does not adequately take into account the psychological reality of human grief. Thus it indulges in an unrealistic sense of freedom.

In light of this, one might think that to explain the temporality of our reasons for grief simply requires an explanation of how we can avoid both kinds of bad faith. But here is where, I think, we encounter a difficulty. Our freedom and our facticity do not allow for reconciliation: On Sartre's view, we cannot comprehend ourselves as freedom and facticity at once. We suffer from an ineliminable double vision: We can apprehend ourselves as free and, therein, attend to the world and respond to our reasons — be it our reasons for action or emotion or belief. Or we can apprehend ourselves as creatures with a

44. This is the topic of Marušić (2013; 2015).

45. See Wolf (1990).

psychology, physiology, history, class and social circumstances, who, as an empirical matter of fact, act, feel and believe in certain ways and for certain purposes — and therein exhibit a kind of alienation from ourselves. But we cannot bring these two views into one reconciled consciousness: whenever we attend to one of them, the other is, as it were, blurry in the background.<sup>46</sup>

Here is how I would articulate this in terms of my experience of grief over my mother's death: The diminution and eventual end of my grief is something that happened to me. There is nothing I understood that made sense of the diminution of grief — nothing such as the realization that her life has been restored or that her death has ceased to matter. I simply stopped grieving. But just as the diminution of grief happened to me, it seems to me that the diminution of the reasons for grief happened to me. I no longer grieve — and this is somehow all right. It would be a mistake for me to suffer persistent grief.

However, even though my reasons have expired, I do not understand their expiration. The temporal profile of my reasons for grief is a fact about those reasons, but it is not a fact I understand in apprehending them. It is, as it were, the backside of my reasons. I don't think this shows that my grief was not responsive to my reasons, nor that my current absence of grief is a failure to respond to my reasons. Rather, it reveals a limitation in the intelligibility of grief — a limitation that is

46. Compare Moran's (2001, 174–5) discussion of the rakehell — an example from a novel by Kingsley Amis: A married man spends an evening with another woman. At the end of the night, he feels shame for his betrayal. But then he comes to see something praiseworthy about his shame: he likes himself for being "rather a good chap for not liking [him]self much" (Moran 2001, 174). However, this very reflection distorts, and indeed changes, his moral judgment as he becomes guilty of self-absorption. This, of course, constitutes a further moral failure — and one that is not lost on the man, which results in his "not liking [him]self at all for feeling rather a good chap" (175). The relevant point, for present purposes, is that the rakehell cannot fully reconcile in his consciousness both the wrong he has committed and his apprehension of the shame he feels for it. On Moran's view, this is because "an emotional attitude constitutes something closer to a total orientation of the self, the inhabiting of a particular perspective" (181).

due to the fact that I am embodied and, so, conditioned by my psychology, physiology, history and social circumstances.<sup>47</sup>

It is instructive to compare the diminution and end of grief to forgetting: Both involve a change of mind. But we neither forget, nor cease grieving, *in light of* a reason. Forgetting, like the diminution of grief, is something that happens to us. And it happens to us for good reasons: we are creatures with a limited capacity for memory and a limited capacity for suffering. But those are not reasons in light of which we forget or cease grieving; they are the wrong kind of reasons to make sense of forgetting or the diminution of grief. Both are limitations of the intelligibility of a change of mind.

### 8. Conclusion: The Unacceptability of Death

If you think about it, the death of a loved one is unacceptable. Grief is our rejection of her death.<sup>48</sup> Grief, put in words, is a passionate, “No!”

This is not to say that our attitude towards death is always a whole-hearted rejection. At least some of the time, we may find relief in a loved one’s death or even welcome her death — such as when someone suffers from a harrowing disease. To say that death is unacceptable is thus not to say that it is unwelcome, nor that we would all-things-considered prefer that the dead loved one live forever. Eternal life is surprisingly unattractive, as Williams has taught us, and arguably our mortality is a condition for valuing the things we value.<sup>49</sup> Rather, to say that death is unacceptable is to register a fundamental objection to the human condition — an objection that is compatible with the affirmation of many other aspects of the human condition, including death

47. It is an important philosophical project, which goes well beyond the confines of this essay, to investigate how these features condition the rationality of our emotions. See especially Rorty (1978) and Wollheim (1999), who emphasize the importance of the history of an emotion.

48. By rejection, I mean the contrary of what Jay Wallace has characterized as the attitude of affirmation (2013).

49. See Williams’s (1973) Makropulos case, and recent discussion by Scheffler (2013).

itself. For, no matter how welcome the death of a loved one may be, it is something horrible.

Death is unacceptable. Nonetheless, we realize that, in time, we will accept all deaths, even if perhaps we don’t fully come to terms with them. And this is somehow all right. It is a good thing that we do, but that is not what makes it all right. I am at a loss to say what does, and I think that there are principled reasons why it is impossible to say it.

How big a problem is this? I think it is potentially immense: Grief is not the only emotion that diminishes over time. So do many other emotions — most importantly anger. We accommodate ourselves to loss, and we accommodate ourselves to injustice. If, indeed, this is somehow all right but we can’t say why, how can we properly come to terms with our past?<sup>50</sup>

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