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## Grief and the Unity of Emotion

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**Abstract:** The nature of grief presents a particular challenge to the view that emotions are unified psychological states. Grief can include all manner of potential ingredients, changes markedly over time, and has temporal gaps. In this paper, I focus exclusively on the relevant phenomenology and show how an experience of grief still amounts to a unified whole. I begin by endorsing the view that grief is a temporally extended process rather than an episode or state. I go on to argue that what unifies this process and singles it out as one of grieving is not -as has been suggested- its narrative structure. Rather, various aspects of grief all involve recognizing and responding to a wide-ranging, dynamic, and singular disturbance of life-possibilities, where recognition and response are inextricable from each other. This disturbance is 'held together' by relationships of non-propositional implication. I suggest that the same approach can be applied to emotions more generally.

### 1. The Ingredients of Emotion

The question of what emotions are is closely related to that of whether and how they amount to unified states. Answers to the former tend to be swiftly confronted by the latter. For instance, suppose we start from two well-known and seemingly conflicting theories of emotion: William James (1884) proposes that they are feelings of bodily changes, while Robert Solomon (1976/1993) instead insists that they are judgments. How we arbitrate between the two depends in part on what is meant by 'judgment', something that Solomon (e.g. 2004a) came to regard in an increasingly permissive way. If the term 'judgment' is applied too liberally, then the claim

that emotions are judgments turns out to be trivially true. Scarantino (2010) therefore objects to what he calls the “elastic strategy”: we stretch ‘judgment’ as much as we need to, until it fits around emotion. When stretched that much, it also encompasses the ‘feelings’ that others contrast with ‘judgments’. Consequently, we fail to distinguish between importantly different aspects of emotion. If we instead acknowledge their distinctness and concede that emotions incorporate both, and perhaps a lot more besides, we are left with the problem I am concerned with here: how they together constitute a distinctive type of psychological state, rather than a mere bundle of other phenomena. Prinz (2004, p.18) thus describes the movement between a “problem of plenty” and a “problem of parts”. The problem of plenty arises when we attempt to accommodate all the different ingredients of emotion, but in so doing fail to account for how they “hang together” and lose sight of the overall phenomenon. The problem of parts then surfaces when we try to tidy things up by identifying those ingredients that are essential. The most plausible answer seems to be ‘all’, taking us back to the problem of plenty.<sup>1</sup> In addition to this, there is the problem of specifying what it is for things to “hang together” in the right way (Dancy, 2014). The players in a football team, the two sides of a coin, the Earth and the Moon, the Morning Star and the Evening Star, and the numbers 1 and 2 all relate to each other in importantly different ways. Likewise, there are many ways in which the constituents of an emotion might be said to “hang together”. So the task is not only to show *that they do* but also *how they do*.

One response is to maintain that the two principal ingredients of emotion are in fact one and the same. Instead of contrasting bodily feelings with world-directed intentionality, one could argue that some or even all bodily feelings have world-directed intentionality (Goldie, 2000, 2002; Ratcliffe, 2005, 2008). Once this is admitted, specifically *emotional* judgments can be identified with emotional feelings, or at least with certain types of emotional feeling. A recent approach along these lines is proposed by Deonna and Teroni (2015). They maintain that different types of emotion consist of different types of evaluative attitude. Fearing and hoping are thus comparable to perceiving and remembering, insofar as they are *sui generis* types of

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier concern, raised by Goldie (2000, p.4), is similar in spirit. He observes how, in seeking to offer accounts of the intentionality of emotion, philosophers fail to accommodate feeling. Yet it is clear that feelings are essential to emotion. So they are “added on” as an after-thought. But this fails to account for how feeling is *integrated* into emotion.

mental state.<sup>2</sup> Next, they endorse the view that emotions involve modes of “action-readiness” (e.g. Frijda, 2007/2013) and propose that a type of evaluative attitude is comprised of a distinctive set of diffuse bodily dispositions. Given that these dispositions are to some degree phenomenologically accessible, evaluative attitudes are inseparable from what could just as well be termed ‘bodily feelings’.

Suppose -for the sake of argument- that something like this is right (and I think it is). At this point, it looks as though we can avoid a game where player 1 says that emotions consist of  $p$ , player 2 says that they instead consist of  $q$ , player 3 proposes that they consist of both  $p$  and  $q$ , and player 4 then asks how, if at all,  $p$  and  $q$  stick together. Instead, we have an identity claim:  $p$  is  $q$ . Even if some or all emotions have additional ingredients, it could be argued that  $p/q$  is sufficient for being in a specifically *emotional* state, and also that a certain type of  $p/q$  is sufficient for having an emotion of a given type. This might well work for some emotions, perhaps even the majority. But, as I will show, it cannot accommodate grief. One option is to maintain that grief is different in kind from most of those psychological states/episodes that are labeled as ‘emotions’. The problem can then be circumvented by conceding that grief is not an integrated episode, while continuing to insist that other emotions are. However, the unity of grief should not be dismissed prematurely and, in what follows, I will show how grief is, after all, an integrated experience. I will add that what applies to grief plausibly applies to emotions more generally.<sup>3</sup> Hence there are no grounds for excluding grief from a more general analysis of emotion, on the basis of its disunity. In fact, by focusing on grief, we can bring to light and analyze an important aspect of emotional intentionality that is not so salient in many other cases. I will refer to this as its *two-sided* structure: how emotional experience of a concrete event or situation is inextricable from a wider disturbance of the experiential world *within* which that event or situation is encountered. Throughout, I am concerned specifically with emotional *experiences* and their unity. So I take for granted that having an emotional experience is (or at least can be) partly constitutive of what it is to have an emotion, although this is not to imply that emotions are exhausted by their experiential qualities.

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<sup>2</sup> This is to be contrasted with the view that emotions are built up from other types of intentional state, such as beliefs, desires, and/or perceptions, and that what makes a type of emotion distinctive is its evaluative content. For instance, one might *believe* that something good has happened or *perceive* something as frightening.

<sup>3</sup> That said, I do not wish to claim that there are no grounds for pluralism concerning the category ‘emotion’. There may well be other good reasons for insisting that some emotions are different in kind for others. The point is merely that my account of grief does not support a case for pluralism.

Why is grief such a problematic case? For one thing, other types of emotion are often integral to grief. For instance, a student of mine offered the example of grieving over the death of her grandfather and, in so doing, feeling anger towards the chair he used to sit on. It seems plausible to maintain that where person A, who is grieving, feels anger towards *p*, person B, who is not grieving, can feel anger of the same quality towards *p*. Given this, it is tempting to deny that the anger is part of A's grief. More generally, we could seek to subtract all the contingent accompaniments of grief, such as other types of emotion with whatever content, and see what is left over. But then we would lose sight of the phenomenon altogether. A person who is grieving might feel hope, despair, sadness, anger, love, gratitude, jealousy, and so forth, where all of these feelings relate in one or another way to the fact that someone has died. There are also wider-ranging feelings of being lonely, lost, confused, abandoned, adrift, cut off from the world, or somehow lacking in ways that people often struggle to describe. When all of this is subtracted, we are not left with a pure grief experience but, most likely, nothing at all.

As an alternative, we could accept that grief is a "complex emotion" (e.g. Price, 2010, p.30). More specifically, it is a complex emotion the ingredients of which include other emotions. But this leaves us with a 'problem of temporal parts'. If an episode of anger can be integral to grief, then grief cannot be a singular, episodic emotion. Even if it is conceded that the same token emotional episode can be of two or more emotional types, a person does not stop grieving when she stops feeling angry. Grief is not only synchronically more encompassing than its constituents; it is also temporally extended in a way that some or all of them are not. It can involve periods of anger, despair, and jealousy, but stretches beyond them. This is consistent with the widespread recognition that grief is not a state or episode but, rather, a process.<sup>4</sup> However, we should surely grant that a grieving person can also be angry about *p*, where her anger is *not* part of her grief. For instance, she might feel angry when someone pushes past her on an escalator. So, how are we to distinguish emotions that participate in a grieving process from shorter-term emotions that are distinct from it and coincide with it for a time?

The problem is not simply that grief *can be* something that lasts for a long period, an observation that applies equally to most 'episodic' emotions, but that it *has to*. In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein (1953/1963, p.174) offers the following remark: "For

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, Colin Murray Parkes (1996, p.7), one of the foremost recent contributors to the study of grief and bereavement, states that grief is a "process" in contrast to a "state".

a second he felt violent pain.’ – Why does it sound queer to say: ‘For a second he felt deep grief’? Only because it seldom happens?’” He adds that feeling grief “now” is somehow analogous to “playing chess *now*”.<sup>5</sup> So, while it makes sense to say that someone felt angry or jealous for a very short time, the idea of ‘episodic grief’ is somehow incoherent. We are thus faced with the following three questions:

1. What, if anything, serves to identify grief as a singular, cohesive process; what ‘holds it together’?
2. What makes something a grieving process, as distinct from other kinds of emotional and non-emotional process?
3. Why is grief necessarily rather than contingently long-term?

In what follows, I will begin by critically discussing a recent attempt to answer (1) and (2), which emphasizes the distinctive narrative structure of grief. I will reject the claim that narrative can do the required work. While acknowledging that narrative often plays an important part in grieving processes, I will suggest that the unity of grief instead consists in what it recognizes, reacts to, and responds to: an all-enveloping, dynamic disturbance of life-possibility. This disturbance has a unified structure; it is held together by relationships of *non-propositional implication*. And this, I will show, gives us our answers to (1), (2), and (3).

## **2. The Process of Grieving**

Peter Goldie (2011, 2012) offers a philosophical account of grief as a distinctive type of temporally extended process. In his words:

Grief is a kind of process; more specifically, it is a complex pattern of activity and passivity, inner and outer, that unfolds over time, and the unfolding pattern over time is explanatorily prior to what is the case at any particular time. ....Perhaps some mental phenomena are primarily processes, and only secondarily can we properly comprehend the mental states and events they are made up of: parts do not even come into view *as* parts unless and until they are seen as parts of a particular kind of process. The process is thus ontologically and epistemically prior to the parts. (2012, p.56, p.61)

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<sup>5</sup> Thanks to Achim Stephan for reminding me about this passage.

What unifies the process and distinguishes it from other types of process is, according to Goldie, its narrative structure. Its parts are held together by the “coherence of a narrative of the process, a narrative of a grieving” (2012, p.61). To be more specific, grief is a subtype of process, called a “pattern”. A pattern is identified by its “characteristic shape”, a shape supplied by narrative (2012, p.62). According to Goldie, central to grief’s pattern is a type of autobiographical remembering that resembles free indirect style in literature - a style of writing that blends at least two different perspectives, usually that of a character and a narrator. Likewise in grief, when past events involving the deceased are recalled, one remembers how things were back then, but in a way that is infused with one’s current perspective, with the recognition of her subsequent death: “we relate to our past in a special way, realizing that things as they used to be, and as we remember them, can never be the same again” (2012, p.56).<sup>6</sup>

I agree that grief is a process. If it is anything at all, then it is temporally extended and changeable; there is no single, constant, essential ingredient that we can track across its whole course. I also accept that narrative has important roles to play. Nevertheless, I reject the proposal that these include the individuation of grief. For one thing, I worry that the proposal is insufficiently specific. When are the relevant narratives formed? Presumably, narration of an emotional episode need not occur at exactly the same time as that episode. This would rule out, as potential ingredients of grief, any emotional experiences that are narrated later. However, if narration can occur afterwards, a principled temporal constraint needs to be identified. The alternative is to accept a scenario where Person A experiences *p*, but *p* is not integrated into the right kind of narrative until twenty years later, leaving the status of *p* indeterminate until then. Conversely, a narrative that does integrate *p* into a coherent whole might be swiftly or gradually replaced by one that does not. However, it is at best counter-intuitive to claim that emotional episode *p*, which occurred at time 1, was part of a grieving process at a later time 2, but was written out at time 3 and thus ceased to be part of the process at time 2 as well.

Without further refinement, a narrative approach is also too accommodating. Bereavement narratives are not ordinarily the products of socially isolated individuals. They

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<sup>6</sup> Goldie (2012, p.62) adds that grief is also “experienced as a process”. This is consistent with many first-person accounts of grief. As C. S. Lewis (1966, p.50) writes, “I thought I could describe a state, make a map of sorrow. Sorrow, however, turns out to be not a state but a process.”

draw on the linguistic resources of a society and culture, and tend to be co-constructed with others, through dialogue and the sharing of stories. So a token narrative can be partly mine and partly ours. And, if narratives are what hold grief together, this applies to grief as well. Perhaps experiences of grief can be shared in this strong sense, but the conclusion is reached too easily. More generally, it seems fairly clear that, where A and B co-construct a single narrative concerning their responses to a given event, this does not always suffice to constitute a single token experience that they share.

Narrative also gives us temporal unity too easily. One advantage of a process-account is its compatibility with grief's temporal gappiness. Even if it is granted that one ceases to *experience* grief during dreamless sleep, it seems wrong to insist that one grieves at times 1, 3, and 5, but not at times 2, 4, and 6. Construing grief as a process is consistent with this intuition. By analogy, we might say that someone is in the process of writing a book, even if she is not currently typing something. However, if narrative is the source of unity, then it could equally be said to unify -in much the same way- any number of disparate events. A narrative can weave two sequences of events together into a meaningful whole, even where those events occur at different times and are causally unconnected. In other words, independent of the narrative itself, they bear no relationship whatsoever to each other.

It is also unclear how a narrative approach might pin down the limits of a grieving process, at least in a non-arbitrary way. I do not wish to suggest that grief has a clear-cut endpoint, or to assume any particular account of what its endpoint might consist of.<sup>7</sup> However, there is a wider problem: that of identifying grief at all, of singling it out from the wider patterns of a life. Solomon (2004b, p.90) regards grief as a "continuation of love" for someone, and Higgins (2013) notes various parallels between the transitions into married life and into widowhood, of a kind that point to a longer-term pattern. Of course, one unified pattern can be part of another unified pattern, but there remains the question of how it stands out as a distinctive part. And, even if it does, there is the further task of specifying what makes it a pattern of type *x* rather than type *y*. Free indirect style, for instance, will not suffice to individuate grief. A similar fusion of contrasting perspectives occurs when reflecting on one's past in the light of any

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<sup>7</sup> This applies equally to the start-point, if it is accepted that 'anticipatory grief', which arises with the recognition that someone *will* soon die, can be an integral part of a grieving process.

significant life event, such as remembering how one used to worry about money, having since won the lottery.

Maybe some or all of these concerns can be satisfactorily addressed by elaborating and fine-tuning the approach. However, there is a further objection, which I take to be decisive: narrative coherence is not *necessary* for grief. Goldie describes grief as a “pattern” with a “characteristic shape” (2012, p.62). But what is that shape? Consider experiences of “complicated grief”, which are said to involve a “struggle to integrate the loss into autobiographical memory”, along with a wider “crisis in meaning” (Niemeyer, 2006, p.141, p.143). Characterizations of complicated grief emphasize, among other things, a *lack* of narrative coherence. Furthermore, some grief experiences may even compromise the *capacity* to give experience a coherent narrative shape. A first-person account by Denise Riley describes an enduring form of grief where the sense of meaningful temporal transition is absent from experience. With this, an appreciation of ‘tense’, which narrative ability more usually takes for granted, is lost: “The struggle to narrate becomes not only an unenticing prospect, but structurally impossible” (Riley, 2012, p.57). Yet it remains case that, during those years, she experienced grief.

More generally, first-person accounts of grief consistently emphasize disruption, discontinuity, and lack of coherence. According to Barthes (2009/2010, p.67, p.95), what is “utterly terrifying is mourning’s *discontinuous* character”, while Macdonald (2014, p.14) writes, “I can’t, even now, arrange it in the right order. The memories are like heavy blocks of glass. I can put them down in different places but they don’t make a story”. Grief is not so much a cohesive pattern as a rupture in life’s pattern, and (some) people plausibly resort to narrative in a distinctive way because things do not make sense. It is part of an attempt -willful or otherwise- to restore coherence.<sup>8</sup> This is perhaps clearest from the remarks of professional authors who describe their experiences of grief (although it should also be noted that reliance on narrative is plausibly more commonplace and/or more pronounced in such cases). For example:

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<sup>8</sup> In thinking through the issue of how grief involves narrative disruption rather than a cohesive narrative shape, I am grateful to Luke Brunning for helpful correspondence. See also his ‘Narrative and Emotional Experience’ (unpublished work in progress) for a good critique of Goldie’s narrative approach.



Writing this book provides a floor under my experience. Having used writing to hold myself erect all my adult life, I am bold enough to believe that I cannot fall because of this word scaffolding that, all invisible, props up my days. (Roiphe, 2008, p.21)

Narrative is thus integral to how many people respond to bereavement.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the *successful* restoration of coherence through narrative is not essential to a grieving process. Neither, for that matter, is the *attempt* to restore coherence. Furthermore, narratives that are formed during profound grief often fail to hang together; they lack a shape that narrated-life more usually has. There is a degree of fragmentation, a sense of having lost one's way.

If narrative cannot unify a grieving process, what, if anything, can? Let us return to Wittgenstein's observation that there is something "queer" about feeling profound grief for only a second. The task is to spell out what this queerness amounts to. Importantly, the temporal parts of a grieving process are not just related to one another in a contingent, causal way. There are also relationships of implication between them. Consider the following two scenarios: (a) person C dies unexpectedly, after which person B grieves for 15 minutes and then dies herself; (b) person C dies unexpectedly, after which person B grieves for 15 minutes and then ceases altogether to grieve. In the case of (a), one could say that B grieves over the death of C, albeit for a short time. Alternatively, one could deny that B experiences grief, given that 15 minutes is insufficient time for an emotional reaction to qualify as one of grief. However, that would lead to a slippery slope: if the first 15 minutes are not grief, then neither are the next 15 minutes, and so on, leaving us with no experience of grief at all. Perhaps the most plausible interpretation is that B *starts to grieve*, in a manner comparable to starting to fall in love, and that the process is cut short. But what about (b)? Suppose B's experiences in cases (a) and (b) are identical for those first 15 minutes. Should we say that, here too, B starts to grieve, but stops abruptly? Let us emphasize that, after those 15 minutes, B really does cease altogether to grieve; there is no delayed reaction, no repressed grief, no refusal to accept that C has died, and no further emotional disturbance of any kind. The experience lasts for 15 minutes and that is it - over. The problem is not that this is unusual but that it seems incoherent somehow. Scenario (a) is unproblematic because it remains consistent with a counterfactual: if B had lived, then B *would*

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<sup>9</sup> Higgins (2013, p.172) similarly observes that "those who grieve make use of stories, which seem to assist the efforts to reorganize their lives". Gilbert (2002, p.223) also remarks, "the need to create stories to make order out of disorder and find meaning in the meaningless is particularly relevant to the study of grief".

*have had* further experiences of a kind consistent with a grieving process. In the absence of exceptional circumstances (such as B discovering that C is not actually dead or B suffering a brain injury that impairs her capacity to experience emotion), it seems that experience  $x$  at time 1 *must* be followed by experience  $y$  at time 2, in order for  $x$  to count as part of a grieving process. This is not to suggest that only a certain very specific experience can follow  $x$ . The claim is more modest than that: some experiences that follow  $x$  are consistent with grief, while others are not.

In (a), the counterfactual points not merely to how things would have gone if B had lived but to how they *should* go in a case of grief. It has been observed that grief and mourning often involve a sense of moral obligation towards the deceased (Solomon, 2004b; McCracken, 2005). For instance, one might feel that seeking to sever one's connection with that person would be disrespectful and wrong (Higgins, 2013). However, the contrast between (a) and (b) also points to something stronger than moral normativity. In (b), it is not just that B grieves or starts to grieve and then behaves in a morally questionable way. Were that so, B's subsequent conduct would remain compatible with a grieving process that started but did not get very far. What is interesting about (b) is its apparent incoherence. B's initial experience *implies* something about her subsequent experience. If we are to think of B as grieving or starting to grieve, then we have to assume that the initial experience will be followed by an experience consistent with it.<sup>10</sup> My task in what follows will be to clarify the nature of the relationship between them. The incoherence of (b), I will suggest, stems not from a single, simple relationship of implication between experiences  $x$  and  $y$ , but from numerous, more specific relationships of implication that unite the various ingredients of grief, both synchronically and diachronically.

### **3. Disturbances of Life-Possibility**

My proposal is that the constituents of grief are integrated in virtue of how they relate to a holistic, wide-ranging, and dynamic disturbance of life-possibility, something that is inextricable from the recognition that a particular person has died. To clarify what is meant by this, let us

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<sup>10</sup> We grieve for those we love. So a further question to explore is whether the same points apply equally to the duration of love. It is at least arguable that they do not and, if that is the case, the asymmetry is a puzzling one. I am thinking specifically of romantic love. Stories of people falling out of love swiftly and announcing, all of a sudden, that "I don't love you anymore" are not uncommon. In addition, it is arguable that one can start to fall in love, only for the process to stop after a fairly short time. A narrative along such lines is easy to construct. For example, an interpersonal process might begin during a first date but end abruptly as one party picks his nose and belches loudly, while professing his admiration for serial killers.

start with the fairly uncontroversial observation that grief involves responding to *loss*, whether it be the loss of a person, one's relationship with her, or both. As I will show, it is not that one first recognizes the loss and then begins to grieve. Rather, various aspects of grief *constitute* the gradual recognition of loss, where recognition cannot be cleanly separated from reaction and response. It is common practice for philosophers to distinguish between the concrete and formal objects of an emotion. For grief, the concrete object might be the death of a specific individual, but the formal object is recognition of loss. We might think of the formal object as something separate from the associated emotion, perhaps something that elicits it. Alternatively, it could be regarded as integral to the emotion. The latter, I will show, is more accurate. Nevertheless, conceiving of 'loss' as a 'formal object' of grief is potentially misleading. It amounts to an abstract, and generic way of referring to an aspect of grief that turns out to be elaborate, quite particular, and fluid in structure: a disturbance of one's world that is inextricable from the acknowledgement that a particular person has died.

There is a two-sidedness to the intentionality of grief. It includes specifically directed intentional states, which have the deceased and one's relationship with her as their objects. However, these same experiences also have a more encompassing, diffuse structure. This is because, in addition to being an entity *within* the experiential world, a person about whom we care deeply is a condition of intelligibility *for* the world within which we encounter her. So full recognition of loss involves explicitly acknowledging her absence from the world and also appreciating that the world now lacks certain possibilities, those that depended in one or another way on her potential presence. The latter is not a simple, singular cognition of whatever kind but something that takes time, something that is central to experiences of grieving.

Grief thus involves a change in how one experiences and relates to the world as a whole. Carse (1981, p.5) describes this as a "cosmic crisis", where we come to "live in a universe that makes no sense", a realm that has "lost its fundamental order". Complementing this, Attig (2011, xxxix) suggests that grief is centrally a matter of "relearning the world"; it is "a multi-dimensional process of learning *how* to live meaningfully again after loss". What is disrupted is a wide-ranging network of assumptions, and relearning the world therefore involves revising these assumptions.<sup>11</sup> As Attig stresses, this should not be construed in an overly cognitive way, in

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<sup>11</sup> Parkes (1996, p.90) likewise observes, "When someone dies a whole set of assumptions about the world that relied upon the other person for their validity are suddenly invalidated".

terms of recognizing that certain propositions are no longer true and updating them accordingly. Rather, it consists principally of a practical adjustment, a change in habitual patterns of activity, experience, and thought. These patterns comprise a background relative to which propositional attitudes with circumscribed contents are more usually entertained.<sup>12</sup>

Those we care deeply about and share our lives with are integrated into the habitual world in all sorts of ways. Importantly, our relationships with specific individuals partly determine what appears salient to us, the kind of significance it has for us, how the various significant features of a situation knit together, and which actions are appropriate in a given situation. We experience and engage with the world in the context of the long- and short-term projects that we are committed to, as well as a wider range of cares and concerns. A project can implicate one's relationship with another person in a range of ways. Some of the concerns that motivate and give meaning to a particular project might be directed towards the well-being of that person. For instance, one might seek to protect her from something, enable or help her to do something, or to make her happy. Other concerns are not 'mine' but 'ours': it is 'we' who pursue this in order to promote shared goals. Granted, there are also self-directed concerns that involve seeking something for 'me' rather than for 'us' or 'her', perhaps pastimes that one finds pleasurable. But these too may implicate the other person; the possibility of telling her afterwards or of her being proud might contribute to the sense that something is worth doing. In addition, relationships with particular individuals contribute to a sense of what is achievable, and thus to the meaningful, practical possibilities that situations offer. One might think in terms of 'what we can do' rather than 'what I can do', but even 'what I can do' often takes for granted the support of another person.

Along with all of this, the wider significance of situations is experienced *as* actually or potentially shared. Experiencing a beautiful sunset with a partner is different from experiencing it without her. And, even when one does experience it alone, one might think of how it would be

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<sup>12</sup> Attig (2011, p.33) states that a grieving process is not itself an emotion, and should be distinguished from emotional experiences of grief that "come over us". However, I find this an odd terminological choice. Better, I suggest, to construe the emotion of grief as temporally extended and as involving a blend of activity and passivity. This is compatible with acknowledging that there are also shorter-term emotional experiences that stand out as especially conspicuous and distressing aspects of it. I am also doubtful of any attempt to draw a clear line between 'grieving' and 'mourning', where the latter is construed in terms of enculturated practices of expressing, communicating, sharing, and regulating grief. This is because such practices plausibly shape the course of a grieving process, even determining -to some extent- how grief is experienced. At best, the distinction between grieving and mourning is one of emphasis.

experienced together, of how she would feel, and about recounting it to her later. Interpersonal relationships also involve revisiting, negotiating, and reinterpreting past events together, forming individual and shared narratives that frame the past and at the same time shape one's practical orientation towards the future, one's sense of what matters. In various ways, relationships also serve to regulate one's emotions and to structure one's interactions with the wider social world (Ratcliffe, 2017, Chapter 6). When all of this is taken into consideration, it becomes apparent how a specific individual can be implicated, in one or another way, in almost all of one's actual and anticipated interactions with the surrounding environment.

Exactly how the experienced world is disturbed by interpersonal loss depends on the nature of the relationship in question, and thus on the kinds of care and concern that are bound up with it. Teasing out the important differences between losing a parent, spouse, child, or close friend in various different circumstances would require much more discerning analyses and, even then, we should be wary of over-generalizing. It is also important to keep in mind the differences between ways of integrating another person into one's world that are consistent with, and partly constitutive of, loving her, and others that are not. A person's routines might be profoundly disrupted by the loss of an accountant or organizational assistant. But the kinds of care and concern consistent with grief are not exhausted by these types of practical dependence.

However, even without a fully detailed analysis, it is clear that profound grief involves a pervasive disturbance of how the world and one's relationship with it are experienced. This is not to suggest that someone dies and that a wide-ranging set of perceptual, cognitive, and practical tendencies is instantly lost. One might accept, propositionally, that someone has died while sometimes slipping into practices that presuppose her actual or potential presence. Hence the fact of loss is not recognized instantaneously. Full recognition involves not just acknowledging the absence of a person *from* one's world but, along with this, a wider adjustment of all those habitual practices and expectations in which he is somehow implicated. When we believe that *p*, desire that *q*, or remember that *r*, we ordinarily do so in the context of a pre-given, fairly stable, and largely coherent world. Where loss involves disturbance of that world, changes in propositional attitude do not add up to full comprehension.

Importantly, grief involves the erosion of a kind of *pre-propositional intelligibility*. Consider an example: "strange to consider that there would be a *home*, now -without my husband- a *home* to which to take his *belongings*" (Oates, 2011, p.65). The 'strangeness' referred

to in this passage involves the situation failing to make sense, in a way that is elusive and hard to pin down. Mundane linguistic thoughts such as ‘I desire to get home’, ‘I will be home at 6 o’clock this evening’, or ‘home is only a two-hour drive away’ all presuppose the possibility of being at home. And, when one utters ‘I am going home’, one does not just mean that one will return to a building in which one lives. ‘Home’ has connotations of security and familiarity. For many people, these are inseparable from a particular interpersonal relationship. So there is a way in which the sentence ‘I am taking home the possessions of my dead spouse’ does not make sense, even though it could be naively interpreted as nothing more than a true proposition. There are connotations of the word ‘home’ that, when uttered in this context, are inconsistent with the act of bringing back the possessions of a dead partner. Other connotations of ‘home’ are retained, thus insulating the utterance from straightforward self-contradiction. Nevertheless, there remains a kind of incoherence.

The loss of coherence is not, first and foremost, propositional in nature, as illustrated by the observation that it is equally at play in perceptual experience. I think it is plausible to maintain that our experiences of entities and situations incorporate various different kinds of significant possibility (Ratcliffe, 2008; 2015; 2017). One might say that we ‘perceive’ possibilities, although -for current purposes- it does not really matter whether or not the relevant experiences qualify as ‘perceptual’. The point is that certain possibilities have an experiential immediacy, rather than being dependent on an inference from experience. For instance, something might appear *as* practically significant in the context of a one-off project. But many of the salient possibilities that we experience as integral to entities and situations are habitual and consistent, rather than occasional. Some of these track established norms and artefact functions, in ways that reflect our relations with other people and the social world in general. For instance, cups appear as things to drink from and pavements as surfaces to walk on. However, others reflect our relations with specific individuals - a dinner table offers the possibility of *our* sitting down to eat and exchange stories together, while a collection of plant pots and a bag of compost offer possibilities that presuppose *our* shared project of tending to the garden. When the relevant person dies, it is still the same table, still the same garden, but it does not offer what it once did; it does not have the same practical meaning. This loss of possibility is non-localized. Possibilities offered by entity *x* relate to those offered by *y*, and so forth, as in the experience of being ‘at home’. So there is a wide-ranging erosion of coherence. Central to this is the recognition that

various relationships of implication no longer apply, such as ‘if  $x$  is used to do  $y$ , then  $z$  can be achieved’. One can no longer use  $x$  to do  $y$ , in order to achieve  $z$ , because the intelligibility of  $z$  was dependent on  $C$ , and  $C$  is gone. This can envelop any number of activities and pastimes, such as cooking dinner for us, getting home in time to see  $C$ , and so forth. It is not something that one comes to comprehend in a principally propositional way. One’s surroundings look different; activities feel different; and assertions seem hollow, even somehow contradictory. Drained of their usual significance, situations are lacking in structure, and even words are dislodged from their usual contexts of use.

Overall, this amounts to a non-localized sense of being somehow cut off from a consensus world: “Planes still landed, cars still drove, people still shopped and talked and worked. None of these things made any sense at all” (Macdonald, 2014, p.15). One can still comprehend and engage in social routines, just as one can still go ‘home’, but they no longer have the same significance. One can talk about them, watch others go about their business, and go through the motions oneself, but a previously taken-for-granted system of significant, practical possibilities is absent from one’s experiences, activities, and words.

Hence the full recognition that a particular person has died is not exhausted by a set of propositional attitudes. It demands a wider recognition, a disturbance of the more usually presupposed world within which one has thoughts and perceptions with specific contents. In other words, recognizing the deaths of those we care deeply about involves recognizing them not only as privileged entities within the world but also as conditions for that world. As C.S. Lewis (1966, p.12) writes, “the act of living is different all through. Her absence is like the sky, spread over everything”. This two-sidedness is exemplified by the frequently reported discrepancy between explicit recognition that someone has died and retention of a system of expectations that continues to allow for his potential presence.<sup>13</sup> Conflict between linguistic belief and a wider-ranging sense of conviction is sometimes expressed in terms of knowing something but not believing it, not fully or not quite believing it, or being in a state of disbelief. Without an associated alteration of the habitual world, propositional acceptance is experienced as incomplete and conflicted. The truth of  $p$  is explicitly endorsed but also in tension with a world into which  $p$

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<sup>13</sup> Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012, p.85) emphasizes how grief can involve preserving to some degree a ‘practical field’ that continues to allow for the potential presence of the deceased, and thus failing to fully acknowledge the death, to integrate it into one’s world.

is not yet integrated: “I know certainly that my brother is dead, that he killed himself, and at the same time such a thing is inconceivable, inexplicable, and unknowable to me (in the clear and distinct way that Descartes sought anyway)” (Dunston, 2010, p.165). Given that the full realization of someone’s death involves disruption and revision of a wide-ranging system of habitual expectations and practical meanings, it can take a considerable time:

And it wasn’t until we were standing on Queenstown Road station, on an unfamiliar platform under a white wooden canopy, wasn’t until we were walking towards the exit, that I realised, for the first time, that I would never see my father again. (Macdonald, 2014, p.106)

The various different aspects of grief all ‘hang together’ insofar as they are integral to this unified, dynamic disturbance of life-possibility, whether they involve tension, conflict, disorientation, unintelligibility, strangeness, attempting to impose coherent narratives, revising projects, or adjusting what were once pre-reflective systems of practical anticipation. This disturbance is as singular as the person who has died. As for propositional belief, it would be wrong to say simply that it is or that it is not a constituent of grief. Grief involves certain *ways* of entertaining propositional beliefs, where they are experienced as lacking, in tension with something. Beliefs of this kind, like other aspects of grief, are partly constitutive of grief because they are integral to the recognition and negotiation of a wider-ranging disturbance of possibility.

We are now in a position to say what is wrong with case (b), introduced in the previous section. To start grieving is to begin to recognize the loss of a condition of intelligibility for a habitually accepted world. Ceasing to be affected by the death after 15 minutes implies an intact world. So case (b) involves the preservation of a world in the face of something that implies its collapse. Grief does not involve instantaneous, complete recognition of loss. But starting to grieve implies at least something about what is to come. A scenario where one ceases to grieve after 15 minutes, returns to a fully intact world, and continues to acknowledge the death is incoherent. There is a simple analogy here with perceptual recognition. It is coherent to say ‘he started to recognize the tiger in the bushes, but then he died’, but not to say ‘he started to recognize the tiger in the bushes, but there was no tiger in the bushes’. Once we see that recognizing the death of C involves acknowledging not just the absence of something from a world but also the loss of a condition for that world, we see that (b) is incoherent, at least without



qualifying references to extenuating circumstances, or an appeal to something along the lines of repression or denial. Otherwise, it involves recognizing something and at the same time failing to do so.

I suggest that this same two-sidedness applies to emotions more generally. What distinguishes emotional intentionality from non-emotional judgment is that the former, but not the latter, involves intentionally directed experiences within the world that are also perturbations of the world. More profound emotions concern potential or actual changes in life-possibility, of a kind that do not merely affect one's life in an episodic, circumscribed way. Grief thus stands out as an especially salient example of emotional intentionality, of how one and the same experience can be directed at something -or someone- specific, concrete, and localized, and yet at the same time be more diffuse and wide-ranging.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, it can be added that, in more subtle ways, the context within which we experience, think, and act is always in flux, and that this is where other, more mundane emotional experiences come in.

#### **4. Judgments and Feelings**

To further clarify the position that grief, and other emotions too, centrally involve disturbances of life-possibility, I will return to the old debate between 'feeling' and 'judgment' theories. My account of grief is at odds with the view that emotions are evaluative judgments, and also with the view that they are feelings. It is equally at odds with the conciliatory view that they are felt evaluations. For grief, at least, all such approaches are too synchronic and atomistic. Grief is a longer-term process, which involves not only feelings or evaluations with one or another content but also tensions between attitudes and types of attitude, such as propositional belief and habitual ways of experiencing and interacting with the world. It is not simply the belief 'C is dead' that contributes to an experience of grief but the *way* in which the belief is entertained, the

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<sup>14</sup> Consequently, we might say that emotion has its own 'logic', distinct from that of belief, desire, and other kinds of intentionality. Montague (2009) argues that emotion has distinctive "inferential sensitivities". She emphasizes how emotions are especially sensitive to the framing of situations. For instance, being happy that you have won, in a competition where there is only one winner, does not imply being happy that everyone else has lost. Believing that only you have won, in contrast, does involve believing that everyone else has lost. I suggest that what makes emotional intentionality distinctive is its duality or two-sidedness; the salient change in life possibilities is winning, rather than everyone else losing. Patterns of emotional inference tracks how situations are framed because emotions are *constitutive* of a dynamic, changing frame in the context of which we might believe that *p* or desire that *q*. Unlike Montague, however, I do not think we need to postulate a form of emotional intentionality that is wholly distinct from both sensory phenomenology and cognitive phenomenology, at least not if the two are conceived of in the right way.

hollowness of it, the tension with systems of expectation that remain integral to the experienced world, the process of ‘sinking in’. Even so, much of this is consistent with the writings of at least two influential ‘judgment’ or ‘cognitive’ theorists. Solomon contrasts emotional judgments with propositional attitudes, maintaining that the former are active judgments, ways of experiencing and engaging with the world:

*...emotions are subjective engagements in the world...I now want to stress more than I have before the idea that a judgment is not a detached intellectual act but a way of cognitively grappling with the world. It has at its very basis and as background a complex set of aspirations, expectations, evaluations (‘appraisals’), needs, demands, and desires... (2004a, p.77)*

Importantly, he also states that emotions are *constitutive* judgments, meaning that they are experienced as integral to the world, as opposed to being attitudes adopted within the context of a pre-given world (Solomon, 1976/1993). One might quibble over whether and to what extent emotions involve ‘active’ judgment, and grief involves a blend of passive receptivity and active negotiation. However, Solomon’s emphasis on interconnected, constitutive ‘judgments’ is consistent with what I have said about non-propositional implication in grief.

Nussbaum (2001) similarly endorses the view that emotion is a matter of ‘judgment’. In so doing, she discusses her own experience of grief in some detail. Grief, for Nussbaum, is an “upheaval” of thought, something that impacts on one’s “whole cognitive organization”. More generally, she says, emotions are “judgments about important things, judgments in which, appraising an external object as salient for our own well-being, we acknowledge our own neediness and incompleteness before parts of the world we do not fully control” (2001, p.19). So, on this account, emotions do not simply constitute the experienced world. Rather, they involve its disturbance. And this fits in better with a conception of emotions as identifiable episodes/processes, which stand out against our wider experience of the world. They do not constitute the everyday world - they act upon it, change it, re-shape it.<sup>15</sup>

One might think of a ‘judgment’ as something with a specific content, and thus as distinct from a wider disruption of intelligibility. However, Nussbaum characterizes judgment in a way

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<sup>15</sup> That is how I conceive of ‘emotions’ here; they are *perturbations* of greater or lesser magnitude. However, if we consider ‘affects’ and ‘feelings’ more widely, it could be further argued that the phenomenological context upon which emotions act is affectively constituted as well (Ratcliffe, 2008; 2015).

that seems closer to the latter. She remarks that reason is “dynamic”; it “moves, embraces, refuses” (2001, p.45). She also maintains that the emotional upheaval is the recognition of something: “The recognizing and the upheaval belong to one and the same part of me, the part with which I make sense of the world. The upheaval *is* the recognition” (2001, p.45). So neither recognition nor upheaval involve adopting propositional attitudes with circumscribed contents, at least not in a way that is to be contrasted with a disturbance of our habitual, bodily immersion in the world. It is as whole organisms that we grieve:

...we are not left with a choice between regarding emotions as ghostly spiritual energies and taking them to be obtuse nonseeing bodily movements, such as a leap of the heart, or the boiling of the blood. Living bodies are capable of intelligence and intentionality. (Nussbaum, 2001, p.25)<sup>16</sup>

However, my discussion of grief is equally consistent with William James’s view of emotions, once we take his various writings into account rather than restricting ourselves to the 1884 essay. In brief, emotions for James are neither non-intentional bodily feelings nor intentional feelings directed solely at the body. Rather, it is through our feeling bodies that we experience our surroundings as mattering in various different ways. Furthermore, our most fundamental sense of the world and our relationship with it consists, for James, in a kind of pervasive, intra- and interpersonally variable *feeling* (Ratcliffe, 2008).<sup>17</sup>

Hence one might worry that my position is -with a little bit of conciliatory work-compatible with what just about everybody else has said about emotion, often in explicit

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<sup>16</sup> My account also complements aspects of other well-known approaches. For instance, De Sousa describes emotions as “patterns of salience among objects of attention, lines of inquiry, and inferential strategies” (1990, p.196). Similarly, we might agree with Roberts (1998) that emotions incorporate “concern-based construals”, ways in which things appear to us through the lens of our various concerns, and with Döring (2007) that they involve “affective perceptions” of our surroundings that have motivational force. But what Nussbaum gets right is the dynamism of emotion. What we have here are not just concerns, patterns of salience, or affective perceptions, but short- and long-term processes that involve recognizing, reacting, responding, adjusting, compensating, changing, and so forth.

<sup>17</sup> My account is similarly compatible with certain other approaches that emphasize the felt, bodily nature of emotion. For instance, Frijda proposes that emotions are states of “action readiness” involving “action tendencies” that are felt. He adds that “situational meaning structures are...lawfully connected to forms of action readiness” (2007/2013, p.5). See also Deonna and Teroni (2015). In particular, I am sympathetic to the approach of Slaby and Wüschner (2014), which seeks to capture insights common to both feeling and judgment theories. Emotions, they suggest, are “acted-out engagements with the world” rather than mere *reactions* to situations. To register something emotionally is to be drawn into a situation in one or another way, and it is through these emotional “engagements” that we experience value. So emotions are not isolated judgments or synchronic, discrete feelings. Instead, they are “temporally extended episodes involving a person’s entire comportment in and toward the world” (pp.212-3).

opposition to one another. Consequently, it is too permissive - a victim of the “elastic strategy”. However, the principal problem with various different approaches is not that they take emotions to be judgments, feelings, or whatever else. The problem involves construing emotions as exclusively *within-world* phenomena: feelings and/or judgments directed at entities, events, and situations within a pre-given experiential world. There is a failure to explicitly acknowledge the two-sidedness of emotion. For example, when something threatens you within a world, it also threatens the integrity of the world within which you encounter it. Once this two-sidedness is recognized, along with the associated process-structure, it does not really matter whether we opt to talk in terms of feelings, judgments, appraisals, evaluations, or affects. What matters is that emotions involve a kind of intentionality different from that of a within-world attitude with a circumscribed content.

With respect to grief, I concede that many questions remain unanswered. For instance, there is that of whether one can ‘grieve’ over the loss of a job, a home, a divorce, or a limb, or over the death of an animal in the same way that one grieves over the death of another human being. There is arguably something quite distinctive about experiences of interpersonal loss (Ratcliffe, 2016). We might also wonder whether and how ‘anticipatory grief’ differs in kind from experiences that occur after someone has died, and whether a singular grieving process can indeed begin before the person’s death. In addition, there are the difficult questions of how typical grief differs from complicated grief, whether the latter differs from traumatic grief, and how any of these differ from depression of one or another kind (Ratcliffe, in press). Hence what I have said requires fine-tuning, in order to further clarify the scope of various claims. Even so, it suffices, I think, to show how grief hangs together: it is unified insofar as its various constituents involve recognizing and responding to a singular, albeit wide-ranging disturbance of life-possibility. This is not to say that the boundaries between experiences that form part of a grieving process and those that do not are crystal-clear. They are surely not. But, by analogy, one can identify a cloud, a village, or an anthill as a singular entity without any difficulty, while acknowledging that its boundaries are indeterminate.

When it comes to determining the temporal limits of a grieving process, there is similarly no need to insist on clear-cut times at which grief begins and ends. I am also sympathetic to the view that grief usually involves negotiating and to some extent *retaining* a relationship with the deceased, rather than ultimately *letting go* of it altogether:

One's realistic expectations regarding interaction with another person are irreparably altered by that person's death; but one's sense of identity continues to be constructed in part on the basis of one's relationship to that person. (Higgins, 2013, p.173)

Nevertheless, a 'continuing bond' with the deceased need not amount to continuing grief.<sup>18</sup> And we could conceive of a grieving process as something that subsides when a system of meaningful life-possibilities is revised and its integrity largely restored. We can thus talk of 'coming to terms' with loss, without identifying this with 'letting go'.

As for whether and how grief differs from other types of emotion, these differences concern the *nature* of the disturbances in question, the kinds of significant possibility that are disrupted. There is more to be said here, but it seems plausible that certain individuals are integrated into our lives to a *degree* and in a *way* that nothing else is (or, at least, nothing else usually is), that relations with people involve kinds of concern that are specifically interpersonal, and that the loss of someone we love therefore involves a kind of world-disturbance that is both exceptionally profound and qualitatively distinctive.

This same approach can be applied more generally, so as to accommodate most of those phenomena routinely referred to as 'emotions'. Emotions, and only emotions, involve apprehending potential and actual perturbations in patterns of significant possibility, of a kind that are experienced as integral to the world.<sup>19</sup> These perturbations are inseparable from encountering a concrete object of emotion within that world. Emotional disturbances of the world hang together in relationships of mutual implication and involve a form of intentionality that is dynamic, bodily, and practical. They can amount to minor, episodic wobbles or to more pronounced, pervasive, and long-term disturbances. For instance, anger at a passing incident on

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<sup>18</sup> For detailed discussions of what has been termed the 'continuing bonds' approach to grief, see Klass, Silverman, and Nickman (1996) and Valentine (2008).

<sup>19</sup> It can be added that "existential feeling" (Ratcliffe, 2005, 2008, 2015) has an important role to play too, distinct from that of emotions. While emotions involve recognizing and engaging with potential and actual disturbances of life-possibility, existential feeling determines the kinds of mattering that one is open to from the outset, and thus the kinds of perturbation one is susceptible to. However, profound emotions can also alter existential feeling, and grieving processes can include changes in existential feeling. In other words, grief does not just involve changes in what appears significant and how; it also impacts, to at least some degree and for some time, on the *kinds* of significant possibility that one takes as integral to the world. All of this needs to be spelled out in more detail. Another issue to consider is whether we need a further account of certain 'moods', as distinct from emotions and existential feelings.

the street is less profound than anger about losing a job that has been central to one's life for twenty years. Failure to recognize the double-sided structure of emotional intentionality risks over-simplification, especially when it comes to more profound emotions such as grief. In seeking to understand the various experiences that together constitute a grieving process, one cannot take a stable sense of being rooted in the world for granted. To do so would be to trivialize its impact on a life.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Having remarked earlier that a narrative account of grief gives us a strong conception of 'shared emotion' rather too easily, I should at least note -in passing- that my own approach turns out to be consistent with the view that the boundaries of a token grieving process can be interpersonally diffuse. Some philosophers have argued for the strong view that there can be "numerically single experiences that are nevertheless given to more than one subject" (Krueger, 2013, p.510), that a token emotional experience can be *ours* rather than yours or mine, thus amounting to a kind of "phenomenological fusion" (Schmid, 2014). Others reject such strong conceptions of shared emotion (e.g. Salmela, 2012). What I have proposed is compatible with the view that a single grieving process, or at least parts of it, could be interpersonally shared, but without requiring that a single token *experience* be split between two or more people. I have already acknowledged that a singular emotional process includes temporally discontinuous experiences. What holds them together is a unified disturbance of life-possibility. The same point could be applied to the spatially discontinuous experiences of two or more people, at least in cases where 'we loved that person together', where our commitments, cares, and concerns were focused around her to a considerable degree, and where the gradual recognition of loss involves close interaction, co-regulation of emotion, and the construction of shared narratives. Independent of any claims concerning the nature of shared emotion, it should also be acknowledged that experiences of grief are interpersonally, socially and culturally shaped and regulated (e.g. Parkes, Laungani, and Young, eds, 1997), as are emotions more generally (Diamond and Aspinwall, 2003).

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