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Grief: Putting the Past before Us

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Abstract*

Grief research in philosophy agrees that one who grieves grieves over the irreversible loss of someone whom the griever loved deeply, and that someone thus factored centrally into the griever's sense of purpose and meaning in the world. The analytic literature in general tends to focus its treatments on the paradigm case of grief as the death of a loved one. I want to restrict my account to the paradigm case because the paradigm case most persuades the mind that grief is a past-directed emotion. The phenomenological move I propose will enable us to (1) respect the paradigm case of grief and a broader but still legitimate set of grief-generating states of affairs, (2) liberate grief from the view that grief is past directed or about the past, and thus (3) account for grief in a way that separates it from its closest emotion-neighbor, sorrow, without having to rely on the affective quality of those two emotions.

If the passing of the beloved causes the grief but is not what the grief is about, then we can get at the nature of grief by saying its temporal orientation is in the past (the event of the passing), but its temporal meaning is the present and future—the new significance of a world with the pervasive absence that is the world without the beloved. The no-longer of grief is a no-longer oriented by a past (that which is no longer) that is referred a present and future (that which is a no-longer understood as not now as it once was). Looking at the griever's relation to time can tell us much about the pain and the object of grief, then. As the griever puts the past before himself with a certainty about this world “henceforth,” a look at the griever's lived sense of the finality of the irreversibly lost (1) liberates grief from the tendency in the literature to be reduced to a past-directed emotion, (2) accounts for grief's intensity, its affective force or poignancy,

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and thus (3) enables us to separate grief from sorrow according to its intentional object in light of the temporal meaning of these emotions.

Keywords: Husserl, grief, sorrow, phenomenology, absence, emotion, memory, future

What is a griever's relation to time? What can this tell us about the pain and the object of the emotion of grief? Despite what some may consider continental philosophy's obsession with lived-experience and time (and even perhaps a morbid preoccupation with death) we have to look to analytic philosophy to find a small but sustained literature on grief. Grief theorists might include William Lyons, Donald Gustafson, Martha Nussbaum, Robert Roberts, Robert Solomon, and Carolyn Price.¹ These researchers agree that one who grieves grieves over the irreversible loss of someone whom the griever loved deeply and that someone thus factored centrally into the griever's sense of purpose and meaning in the world. The analytic literature in general tends to focus its treatments on the paradigm case of grief as the death of a loved one with the exception of Solomon, who admits "treasured objects" or objects of profound sentimental value for the agent suffering the loss.² If we wish to describe the experience of grieving, we should not restrict the loss to which grief responds to a loss of that which one possessed (especially a person) and thereby presuppose what we intend to describe.³

A good account of grief should accommodate a range of states of affairs that extends to the loss of all things we deeply desired, even if we never possessed them or even if our relation fundamentally changes though the thing remains. To the loss of persons or treasured objects

¹ Carolyn Price mentions this list in her essay, "The Rationality of Grief," *Inquiry* 53, no. 1 (2010): 20–40.

² Robert C. Solomon, *In Defense of Sentimentality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 80. Henceforth cited parenthetically as S.

³ Solomon claims "grief has its measure . . . the right amount of grief speaks well of a person and his or her caring about others. Too little or too much grief points to a less than virtuous personality, either callous and uncaring or hysterical and overly dependent. (In either case, narcissism is often a plausible candidate as an explanation.) Thus we might say, as Aristotle did not, that grief is a genuine virtue" (86). Solomon derides people who grieved the death of princess Dianna. While one might want to claim that an adult should not grieve the passing of a pet goldfish while a young child could grieve such a loss without reproach, the experience of grief is grief even when the griever is perhaps out of line for grieving about X or grieving too vehemently or too lengthily or not vehemently or lengthily enough about some legitimate grief generating state of affairs. Questions of fit and warrant are secondary issues, however, for the grieving agent is grieving whether or not philosophers would not accept what the griever deems a serious loss.

admitted by the analytic literature we could add the following sample of life events that demarcate (sometimes positive) changes where something of oneself or something for oneself is lost irrecoverably, irreversibly: Graduation from high school or university causes grief of loss of childhood; the teenager can grieve the lost puppy-love and the jilted or divorced lover grieves the loss of the relationship even though the former partner is still alive; the athlete holding back tears during the retirement press conference grieves the loss of his primary passion and source of identity; anyone retiring from any career or losing a once in a lifetime opportunity can grieve over that which for various reasons will not and cannot again present itself (e.g., 1986, Shea Stadium, game 6, world series, Bill Buckner); as the Disney/Pixar film, *Up*, reminds us (beyond the loss of a spouse) great grief even can follow from something that seems to be either a miscarriage or the news of infertility and the loss of the possibility of having children, and so forth.

Nevertheless, I want to restrict my account to the paradigm case, because it is the paradigm account that I think most persuades the mind that grief is a past-directed emotion. Moreover, the analytic literature makes a proto-phenomenological appeal to the effects of grief against which I would like to contrast my account. The phenomenological move I propose will enable us to (1) respect the paradigm case of grief and a broader but still legitimate set of grief generating states of affairs, (2) liberate grief from the view that grief is past directed or about the past, and thus (3) account for grief in a way that separates it from its closest emotion-neighbor, sorrow, without having to rely on the affective quality of those two emotions.

I do not want to dispute the claim of the past as a necessary feature of grief or that grief certainly can refer to the past; griever characteristically dwell in the past with their memories or wishes, and on first impression this gives grief the reputation of being past-directed. The irreversible, irrevocable, unalterable loss of someone that one loved deeply certainly *causes* grief. But, developing a distinction introduced by Anthony Steinbock's recent work, *Moral Emotions*, I want to claim that while the past event or the event of the beloved's passing marks grief's temporal orientation, the temporal meaning or significance of grief, however, is not about the past.⁴

Steinbock carries this distinction throughout his work. I shall use it to carve out something like the difference between an event in objective time, on the one hand, and the subjective apprehension of that event, on the other hand—that is, temporal orientation and temporal meaning, respectively. Insofar as

⁴ Anthony J. Steinbock, *Moral Emotions: Reclaiming the Evidence of the Heart* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014), 15.

this is the case, I take this distinction itself to build on the notion introduced by Husserl that the modes of time-consciousness are not themselves temporal but modes of appearance⁵ and, as such, make it possible that, as Brough nicely glosses Husserl, “what the flow of time takes away . . . the consciousness of time restores.”⁶ While the level of absolute time-constituting consciousness will not factor into my account of grief, it forms the basis from which the meaning of grief, for the griever, can yield an account of the pain of grieving and the object of grief, understood according to the way that griever takes (intends) time with respect to the beloved’s passing.

The temporal meaning of grief, I shall argue, is about the henceforth—this absence forward from that past event, the event of the passing, that causes grief. If the passing of the beloved causes the grief but is not what the grief is about, then we can get at the nature of grief by saying its temporal orientation is in the past (the event of the passing), but its temporal meaning is the present and future—the new significance of a world with the pervasive absence that is the world without the beloved. The no-longer of grief is a no-longer oriented by a past (that which is no longer) that is referred a present and future (that which is a no-longer understood as not now as it once was).⁷ Looking at the griever’s relation to time can tell us much about the pain and the object of grief, then. As the griever puts the past before himself with a certainty about this world henceforth, a look at the griever’s lived sense of the finality of the irreversibly lost (1) liberates grief from the tendency in the literature to be reduced to a past-directed emotion, (2) accounts for grief’s intensity, its affective force or poignancy, and thus (3) enables us to separate grief from sorrow according to its intentional object in light of the temporal meaning of these emotions.⁸

⁵ Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893—1917)*, translated by J. B. Brough (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1991), 333/345.

⁶ J. B. Brough, “Translator’s Introduction,” in Husserl, *The Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, xxiii.

⁷ Though the past is always no longer (e.g., it is no longer Wednesday on Thursday), the “no longer” is not always merely the past, for some “no longer” are a henceforth, for example, “I no longer love you,” “we no longer offer happy hour,” “I can no longer play basketball competitively,” or “John is no longer with us” (whether he has moved onto a new company or a new dimension).

⁸ I hope it is clear that my appeal to the temporality of grieving does not entail the familiar psychological notion of the stages of grief as they unfold over time and as grief manifests differently across such stages. My account describes how the griever intends the world after the death of his beloved and the way in which the world appears to that griever. Focused on the intentional structure of grief in light of its temporal modes, my account likewise differs from Peter Goldie’s account of the narrative

Before beginning these analyses, I want to make one clarification. A reader might already note with normative concern that the proposed account of the intentional structure of grief according to its temporality may seem excessively self-absorbed. That is an understandable concern for which I ask the reader's indulgence. Grief certainly entails the loss of the other in the paradigm case and a good account of grief should not lose the other or even put the lost beloved too far to the margin of the experience. But grief is necessarily self-involved. She is gone and I remain and I miss her and all of this affects my well-being, precisely because my well-being was so profoundly and intimately bound up with her and her meaning to and for my life. To the extent that her loss affects my well-being, I hope the reader can see that the other factors deeply into the account that I shall present, for she fashioned me in profound, meaningful, and irreplaceably singular ways.⁹

structure of grief. Goldie mentions the future dimension of grieving, which I shall quote just now, but he does not focus on that moment as it relates to the essence of grief, choosing instead an account that, as I see it, philosophically ratifies the psychological stages: "now remembers it *as* the last time she saw her husband, walking around the corner with hanging shoulders, so that, because of what she now knows, the memory of that day is itself infused with the portent of the terrible future that the earlier experience did not have. In this way, autobiographical narrative thinking can reveal or express both one's internal and external perspective on one's tragic loss, so that these two perspectives are intertwined through the psychological correlate of free indirect style. Grief is indeed replete with memories. But grief involves not just memories of particular experiences; it also involves memories of general events, and these can be especially poignant given that the remembered general event can no longer be experienced as it used to be. For example, you remember those holidays in France together, and the trips to the beach with the rest of the family, knowing now that they cannot be repeated as they used to be. Or you remember the general event of his coming home from the office as he usually does, knowing now that he no longer will, for *this* time, this particular remembered time, unlike all the others, is the *last* time. Now, just this kind of thinking is highly characteristic of narrative thinking about grief, whether one's own grief or that of another person. Grief is a kind of pattern that, as I mentioned earlier, takes a characteristic shape, and accordingly the capacity of narratives to incorporate and make sense of general events is especially important here. . . . The narrative of a grieving will thus reveal how the pattern of grief unfolded over time in a characteristic way." *The Mess Inside: Narrative, Emotion, Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 66.

⁹ Thanks to Jeff Yoshimi for pushing me to admit, explain, and defend this feature of the account I am suggesting. This does not address all of his good concerns, but, here, I think I am close to Martha Nussbaum's account of eudaimonistic accounts of emotions and of grief in particular, in *Upheavals of Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). On pages 44 and 52, she writes of grief and the emotions in general: "Internal to grief itself must be the perception of the beloved

Toward a Phenomenology of Grief in the Analytic Literature

Three features characterize the analytic literature on grief. First, analytic thinkers usually take grief as an intense and painful experience of irrevocable loss the paradigm case of which is the death of a loved one. Second, these thinkers largely reflect the ordinary belief that grief is a past-directed emotion focused on the lost loved one. Third, such philosophers usually engage in a vibrant debate about the rationality or irrationality of grief, the conclusion to which depends on whether or not the philosopher construes the grieving agent as desiring or merely wishing that the beloved had not died. The distinction between a desire and a wish on the grounds that the former is stronger than the latter seems to save grief's rationality. But Gustafson, himself an analytic philosopher, claims that this move runs afoul with the need to distinguish grief from sorrow. Although the belief/wish distinction is widely accepted in the grief literature, it does not save grief from irrationality but sets it apart from sorrow in its irrationality, insofar as sorrow and grief differ in their intensity or feeling or what it feels like to grieve or have sorrow.

Gustafson, whose work advances the established paradigm case of grief as the response to the death of a loved one, sets up grief's irrationality this way: "grief is irrational in this respect. . . . S knows and believes that N is dead. S has feelings of loss, pain, anger, and the like at the loss of N. And importantly, S desires that it not be the case that N is dead. . . . Thus, S's desire is inherently irrational, in that it is recognizably unsatisfiable . . . on S's own understanding of it."¹⁰ Other grief theorists accept the assumption regarding the rationality of desires that guides the claim about grief's irrationality. But they reject the assumption that a griever in fact desires something that cannot be achieved—that is, the deceased's resurrection or that the deceased not be deceased. The griever, they propose, merely wishes that things were different. Robert Roberts, for instance, offers the following tempered version of the griever's desire in his defining proposition, "X to whom (which) I was (am) deeply attached and who (which) is irreplaceable, has been irrevocably taken from me; would that X could be restored to me."¹¹ On Robert's view, the

object and of her importance. . . . [The] most important thing . . . that lies deep in ancient eudaimonism but that is never explicitly recognized[.] Emotions contain an ineliminable reference to *me*, to the fact that it is *my* scheme of goals and projects. . . . It is not just the fact that Betty Craven has died. It is the fact that Betty Craven is *my mother*. In short, the evaluations associated with emotions are evaluations from *my* perceptive . . . they contain an ineliminable reference to the self?"

¹⁰ D. Gustafson, "Grief," *Nous* 23, no. 4 (1989): 457–79, esp. 464; quote from 466. Henceforth cited parenthetically as G.

¹¹ R. Roberts, *Emotions: An Essay in the Aid of Moral Psychology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 263.

grieving agent seems resigned to the facts and yet, because of his profound love, wishes that things were otherwise—"would that it were so."

Carolyn Price's somewhat recent contribution to the analytic grief literature recognizes that Gustafson anticipated the objections to grief's irrationality, the alternatives to grief's supposed irrationality based on a distinction between desiring and wishing, and the problem with these alternatives.¹² Gustafson argues that the desire/wish distinction may blur the lines between sorrowing and grieving. In instances where the lover may be said to desire the restoration of the deceased spouse and, for example, the brother of the lover may be said to wish for the restoration of the deceased, Gustafson notes that "desiring that not-P in the face of P's recognized truth and wishing the same are . . . indistinguishable with respect to minimal truth conditions" (G, 473). Both intentional states take the same object, and when they do desiring and wishing that the deceased not be deceased amounts to the same "belief contrary desire" (G, 473).

Gustafson's search for a clear account of grief that can establish its difference from sorrow (granting the assumption that the wish/desire distinction cannot do so) brings him to a proto-phenomenology of grieving and sorrowing. He appeals, that is, to the affective dimension of grief and sorrow—"what it feels like"—or the subjective, felt experience of these emotions. He thus concludes, "Obviously, the distinction [between grief and sorrow] has to be in experience rather than the objects of these attitudes or in the accompanying action. And surely this is where the difference lies. What it is like to longingly want something that is not attainable is not what it is like . . . to wish that the world were other than it is. The intensity of feelings, depth of despair over the loss of hope, the global character of the feelings of pain over the fact which occasions the attitudes are all among differences" (G, 473). Price concurs and cites as further "evidence" Robert Solomon's claim that "One might wish that someone had not died and feel sorrow for the loss, but grief involves the turmoil of an impossible desire . . . and the persistent demand that it not be so" (S, 85). For Price, "it is hard to see how a wish, no matter how fervent, could generate an intense distress and restless searching characteristic of grief."¹³

This seems intuitively correct, but such a conclusion is not so obvious and surely is not where the explanatory or phenomenological difference lies. The appeal to a proto-phenomenological feel seems meant to establish that grief's desire for the impossible will be more agonizing than sorrow's wish for the same impossibility. But we cannot pry grief apart from sorrowing according to its affects or felt experience. Analytic and phenomenological

¹² C. Price, "The Rationality of Grief," 23.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 24.

authors alike (for example, Daniel Farrell and John Drummond) agree that the same emotion in different agents can appear across different affective conditions and that the same emotion in the same agent at different times can produce different affective conditions.¹⁴ Moreover, the appeal to affects seems to leave unaddressed an account of what motivates these supposedly more or less intense affects in grief and sorrow, respectively. I take issue with Gustafson's claim that "the facts which occasion the attitudes are all among the difference," and think the depth of commitment to the deceased conditions the agent's reaction and ensuing desire or wish that she not be deceased. If that assertion is true, it not only has the benefit of mitigating the worry that accounts of grief are overly self-regarding or overly self-concerned. But it also implies that any distinction between these emotions falls back upon the depth of commitment to that which has been lost, and not the ensuing desire or wish with its more or less intense feeling about the deceased, for the depth of commitment produces the attitude of desire or wish. An interesting impasse thus arises in the analytic treatment of grief: analytic accounts of emotions tend to clarify the emotions conceptually in light of the objects they intend or, less frequently, according to their affects, but both approaches fail for different reasons.

To provide an account of grief that can pull it apart from sorrow, I want to suggest a different phenomenological move that starts from a realization that the cause and the object of grief are not the same. Just as my Suzie's affection for James causes James to become the object of my jealousy, the passing of my beloved (to stick with the paradigm case of grief) causes, but is not the object of, my grief, since her absence is the object I intend when I grieve (it is her as lost). The move I propose would consider how grief and sorrow relate to the passing of the beloved and how grief takes a more global object—specified according to its temporal significance in the present and the future—not found in sorrow (in the case where grief and sorrow react to the loss of someone). I am proposing what we might call the temporality of grieving or, how the griever takes the experience temporally. How this person's passing affects the meaning of time conditions the affects as those of grieving or sorrowing. What we shall see is that sorrow, unlike grief, need not put the past before itself in the present *and* the future. There is a sense in which the belief that I shall never see her again is sad for some but disruptive and disorienting for others (e.g., the griever). The past will pass for the one who feels sorrow over the deceased; the one who feels sorrow will feel it now for what has occurred. The griever, however, puts the past

¹⁴ D. Farrell, "Jealousy," *Philosophical Review* 89, no. 4 (1908): 527–59; J. Drummond, "Feelings, Emotions, and Perceiving the Truly Valuable," *Modern Schoolman* 86, nos. 3–4 (2009): 363–79.

before himself, sees the loss of his beloved as a henceforth in a swath of absence that pervades a new world in which this past now conditions, limits, and fundamentally reorients the griever's present and future. The difference between grief and sorrow is phenomenological; namely, it has to do with how the griever takes the present and future in light of the event of the passing or the way the present and the future appear to the griever. The difference between grief and sorrow is not located merely in the "feeling" or "what it is like" (although typically we can expect the difference in intensity to which Gustafson appeals); rather, it is located in the temporal meaning of these responses as conditioned by the depth of the agent's commitments to the lost beloved. The object that grief and sorrow intend in these similar instances will be viewed quite differently based on the temporal meaning of that absence for the agent and this difference will explain the different affective intensities of grief and sorrow.

As these grief theorists do not take the temporality of grieving into account, they ultimately focus on the loss and on the past and conclude that grief is "characteristically focused on the past rather than the future."¹⁵ The most phenomenological of these authors, Robert Solomon, seems more inclined to commit or reduce grief to the past. He writes, "It is obvious that grief is suffering brought about by the recognition of loss . . . Grief is dominated by the idea that someone, the beloved, is no longer there. He or she is *missing*. Grief is noticing, painfully, that he or she is *not there*. Thus the phenomenology of grief is almost inconceivable without a phenomenology of memory because, to say the obvious, grief refers the present to the past, the past remembered" (S, 80). But I think things are the other way around with grief. *Grief refers the past to the present and the future, rather than the present to the past*. After all, in grief, I experience what has been lost as a loss in the present and a loss that I cannot recoup henceforth in this life (in the future). Solomon, perhaps in a way that justifies rather than suspends the natural attitude, seems to prop up the folk psychological attitude in his description of grief and its referral to or focus upon the past. While it is trivially true and, as Solomon admits, exceptionally obvious to say that grief depends upon the past, it is equally obvious to say that grief is not *about* the past. We capture the poignancy of grief—its intense distress and restless searching—according to its regard for the present and the future in light of the finality of the beloved's passing. The griever sees in the present and the future a swath of absence as conditioned by how he construes the temporal meaning of this past event (that is the event of this passing) as a world no longer with X henceforth—hopelessly and irreversibly—and thus feels pain in the present.

¹⁵ C. Price, "The Rationality of Grief," 36.

From one way of looking at the grief theorists, their accounts gesture beyond the affective quality of grief (as a way to separate it from sorrow in certain instances) toward a different phenomenological dimension when they offer descriptions of grief that would move accounts of grief beyond the tendency to categorize grief as past-directed.¹⁶ Of what I have just called the temporality of grieving, Price gestures toward an account of grief's present and future temporal meaning as she highlights the "searching characteristic of grief" along with the "longing" characteristic that she seems to accept from Gustafson's description of the feeling of grief or what it is like to grieve. Robert's defining proposition reveals the temporal meaning of grief as the present insofar as grief refers to "the X to whom (which) I was (am) deeply attached." And Gustafson's own description of the intensity of grief implies a certain way in which the griever discloses the future—as a "depth of despair over the loss of hope"—and a certain way in which the griever discloses the present—according to grief's "global character" of pain in his experience of the *loss*. The global character is spatiotemporally global, as I shall unpack in the next section. It is because of this present and future sense of the world as no-longer with X, because of the event of the passing, that the spatiotemporal apprehension of the absence in the present will arise with its poignancy. The temporal meaning of grief is present and future conditioned by its temporal orientation in the event of the passing and thus painful in the present.

Time and the Object of Grief: Liberating Grief from Past-Directedness

We can rethink grief's relation to the past without losing its relation to the past. Sticking to the paradigm case, an event of the death of the beloved must have occurred and come to pass. There is obviously no grief without a memory of the lost beloved someone or something. I cannot grieve if I do not recognize and appreciate deeply the one lost. I certainly must remember X and the world with X in it in order to contrast it with the world that now and henceforth appears *as* a world with X absent that I surely now evaluate as painful, deficient, and unlikable. But Solomon's platitudinous remark, that grief "refers the present to the past, the past remembered," creates two problems. First, it suggests that the object of grief is in the past somehow, in the memories; second, this account of the intentional directedness of grief

¹⁶ One might say that the very concern with paradoxical desire of grief that wants to have the loss "repaired," "restored," or "resurrected" points to the futural character of grief—though that is not quite what I have in mind below.

seems to apply this dependence on the past to any perceptual, evaluative, judicative act in the present. I will treat these in order.

The confusion that generates the belief that grief refers the present to the past—the past remembered—perhaps stems from the colloquial equation of the past with the “no longer” and the future with the “not yet.” But from the vantage point of the new present that is for the griever the world *as* a world that no longer has X in it, a world henceforth no longer with X, it seems that the temporal meaning of the “no longer” here is in the present and the future, even if the temporal orientation of the “no longer” is (in) the past. The no longer that is understood as the past is the cause or temporal orientation of the grief that is about the “no longer” *as* a henceforth never again—the not now as formerly. For the griever, the significance of X “no longer” being in this world is a view of the present and future as no longer offering what the world once did. It is not the memories that grief conjures of the beloved, but the way grief intends the present and the future regarding the loved and lost someone that triggers the memories. In short, the memories are not what grief is about; grief is not past-directed. The act of memory characteristic of the behaviors of grievers reveals but one expression of grief, and I will return in the next section to consider further reasons why grief should not be understood in a way that gives too much weight to its behavior or its temporal orientation in the past.

This idea that grief refers the present to the past—the past remembered—not only misleads about the object of grief but presents a condition of grief that is much too broad. Here is a way to consider a “referring of the present to the past” that has nothing to do with grief: To decide between the two beers that I’m considering with my dinner requires that I retain the flavor profiles of each in accordance with the time in which the sips occur one before the other in the extended present that is my evaluation of them alongside that of my entrée. Here is another “referring of the present to the past” that has nothing to do with grief: To say that you look tired today requires that I remember what you look like typically, or yesterday and in days past.¹⁷ These examples demonstrate that loads of experiences are incomprehensible without memory and that referring the present to the past and the past remembered are two quite different intentional acts. The first example is a past within a full, unfolding present and is not an act of memory; the second example, which mirrors the structure of grief’s past orientation as Solomon presents it, requires an act of memory in order to compare the present and the past (more precisely an act of recollection).¹⁸ To make this point differently, in the living-present that

¹⁷ Robert Sokolowski, “The Method of Philosophy: Making Distinctions,” *Review of Metaphysics* 51, no. 3 (1998): 515–32.

¹⁸ Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, no. 50.

is the hearing of the end of a sentence, the passive act of retention withholds from the past, with a different temporal index, those past moments of the sentence related to the present that are the end of the sentence in the complete process of hearing the sentence. Referring in the present to my college graduation, on the other hand, the act of memory takes the past *as* remembered, revives a now no longer, a former now, with a different temporal index that refers in the present to a past as a past now remembered. If we want to get a clearer account of the phenomenon of grief, we cannot reduce grief to the past—the past remembered—and we cannot, in turn, reduce the phenomenon of absence in grief to the past.¹⁹

If, in grieving, I get out of my memories and face the world in which X is no longer, I see an absence of a different kind—an absence not reducible to or about the past but caused by the past. If the griever is looking around his home, for example, he may see X's belongings henceforth *as*, to use from Nussbaum's moving description of the death of her mother, "strange relics that seemed to me not to belong in the world anymore, as if they should have vanished with her life."²⁰ Assuming she is referring to a book, that book appears *as* strange, because it appears henceforth *as* without its owner. In a phenomenological sense, it is less that the book should have vanished when Nussbaum's mother passed away and more that *that* book *as* Mom's-book *has* vanished and now appears as the corpse of a book or a mere corporeal object that appears without (the) meaning or significance (Mom's-book). To the griever, the book presents the absence; that was Mom's book but is not now and never will be again. What appears is an absence in the present and henceforth *as* a void, an emptiness, a hole in the world, an absence that is a real phenomenon, a phenomenon of absence in this now and henceforth that is as real as a hole in one's sock, which is nothing (but really quite something).²¹ Due to Mom's now permanent absence, the griever now sees that absence—her absence—throughout the world or globally (for at least as long as he or she grieves).

This does not mean that grief is a mood, for grief takes as its object the absence of the deceased. The absence is the phenomenon or object of grief.

¹⁹ In remembering, I revive a formerly perceived or lived-through event. I bring the past to life again and transcend the here and now. I see that person and myself in a different temporal index and hence *as* past from the here and now. I make the absent present again in its absence and in a way that respects its absence as absence with its appropriate temporal index. See Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), chap. 5.

²⁰ M. Nussbaum, *Upbeavals of Thought*, 20.

²¹ I have to thank Brian Davies for this example of the hole in the sock that he uses in a very different discussion to illustrate the notion of evil as a privation of goodness.

There are spatial absences, for instance, she is not here in the chair in which she used to sit each night, which is of course also a temporal absence in the now. But there are also equally, if not more poignant, moments of temporal absence that say that she will no longer—never again—sit in that chair. And that temporal absence, the meaning of which is future oriented, generates the pain of grief in the present, for she is not just missing but lost—henceforth. Contrary to Solomon and the seemingly standard view of the intentional directedness of grieving, grief refers the past to the present and the future—puts the past before us—and not the other way around. It is the realization that the person is lost now, henceforth, that makes for grief’s poignancy, and we can work out this idea by contrasting the mode of absence most appropriate to grief—that is, the mode of the lost—with other modes of absence.

Grief’s Object and Temporal Meaning: Putting the Past before Us as Present

Turning sometimes toward grief’s temporality, Solomon claims that the griever notices the loved someone or something as “*missing* . . . noticing, painfully, that he or she is *not there* . . . [an] absence . . . more poignant, noticeable, than any presence” (S, 80). Here is a spatiotemporal sense of the meaning of grief in the present. Yet Solomon’s poeticizing leaves vague an important phenomenological difference between two modes of absence—the missing and the lost—that we can distinguish according to their temporal meaning. The difference is in the (evidence) of the things themselves (in their being and the way they give themselves) as lost or missing. That is, things that are missing and things that are lost give themselves differently, appear differently.

We can start by noting that we miss “missing things” differently than we miss “lost things,” because things that are lost can be said to be missed but things that are missing cannot (at least not yet) be said to be lost. An agent that regards someone or something as missing or lost regards the present or future differently according to the way the missing and the lost manifest the present and future. A modality of uncertainty characterizes the absence of the missing but not the absence of the lost. Sticking to the paradigm case of grief, the lost denotes an absence of someone or something once possessed but now no-longer and henceforth never again can be possessed, whereas the missing denotes the possessed now out of my possession but that perhaps could be found or had once more. Something once possessed but now declared missing is not definitively and irrecoverably absent; taking something *as missing* implies the possibility, or reasonable hope of recovery that discloses how the missing refers in the present to a future viewed as attainable, which can motivate further searching.

That absence (which the agent declares as lost in the paradigm case of grief) reveals that lost someone as no longer attainable or recoverable. The lost refers the past to a present and to a non-realizable future because the lost is hopelessly locked by and in the past. The lost puts the past before us in the present with a very different meaning about the future than does the missing. The dead are gone, lost, henceforth never to return, so we should resist Solomon's poetical but imprecise view that "grief is dominated by the idea that someone, the beloved, is no longer there . . . is *missing*" (S, 80). Undoubtedly, the griever misses the deceased beloved but the deceased is not missing but lost. As Roberts notes, to "miss someone is also to construe oneself and one's surroundings as characterized by the absence of that object of attachment and to do so with some discomfort. . . . One wants to 'see' the . . . beloved and the desire often motivates action."²² No absence taken as a (case of something) missing is an absence taken as a (case of something) lost in the way that the death of the beloved is.²³ The missing person or thing is absent from my present situation but may in some future be present again—and the temporal meaning of the missing entails in the present an attitude of openness to possibility, which is a view of the future that motivates one in the present to search. The temporal meaning of the missing implies an attitude of hope in the present for a return in the future. Seeking implies in the present the hope that grief cannot accommodate (in this life).

The person who sorrows may miss the deceased but it will not result in the grief that says she is lost to me. The temporal meaning of grief, as present and future, is not a searching for the missing. And it is not a sorrowing, although it is an agonizing. Grief is a reaction to that which is no longer being that which is irrevocably lost. The griever apprehends the loss as it concerns how he must live now and henceforth, from this fundamental point of reorientation occasioned by the past (the event of the passing), but not about the past. Indeed, the poignancy of grief—its affective intensity—is the henceforth that is the realization not that she is now missing but that she is lost, gone, irrevocably. The temporal meaning of grief, in relation to the lost, is agonizing in the present because there is no hope in the future. In sorrow, regarding the death of another, we do not hope for a future in this life when we might see them again, because our commitment to them was not of this type—namely, they did not factor directly into my well-being as bound up with them. The temporal meaning conditions the affects that disclose the evaluation of the deceased (lost) such that they are less intense in sorrow than in grief. As grief puts the past before us, what grief is about

²² R. Roberts, *Emotions*, 263.

²³ Though I grant obvious cases of missing persons surely causing grief, I am trying to stick to the paradigm case of grief.

and what produces its intensity and poignancy, is the finality of the absence of the beloved henceforth.

Solomon sometimes describes the temporal meaning of grief as this henceforth, when he describes grief as “noticing, painfully, that he or she is *not there*. . . . An absence can be more poignant, more noticeable . . . than any presence” (S, 80). This view of grief reveals how grief puts the past before us, but it does so in a way that not only restricts that which is before us to the here and now but also obscures the difference between the modes of absence in the missing and the lost.²⁴ What conditions the poignancy of this absence, and characterizes the emotional response to it as grief or sorrow, depends on whether the agent (1) construes the absence as missing or lost, with the relation to the future that those notions entail, and (2) how the agent, if he construes that absence as lost, relates to the lost, regarding whether or not that loss bears on the future for the emotional agent, which is, in turn, conditioned by (3) the depth of commitment one has to the deceased who is lost—if there is no profound attachment to the lost, then that absence does not bear on the agent’s future, and vice versa, thus, contrary to Gustafson’s claim, setting a difference between sorrow and grief, respectively, according to their objects.²⁵

²⁴ Rather than pursuing the various manners of absence characteristic of the phenomenon of grief in how the grieving apprehends the world—for here his claim identifies a now, a present, the phenomenological correlate of which is the spatial/physical absence—Solomon loses the present and futural temporal meaning of grief by collapsing the absent into the past when he concludes, “Thus the phenomenology of grief is almost inconceivable without a phenomenology of memory” (S, 80). The absence in sorrow or grief over the missing or lost is certainly more poignant and noticeable than some presence.

²⁵ One might sorrow over the missing with the same temporal orientation as one grieves over the lost and perhaps with the same affective intensity but not the same sense of the future. (As a half-thought, this may be why the sorrow of homesickness may have the affective intensity or poignancy of the loss of a family pet but not that of a family member.) There was a past event that resulted in an absence in the present. How I am committed to or attached to seeking the absent determines its temporal meaning of my relation to the missing as sorrowful in the present and yet as hopeful in the future, which suggests an absence by which I am less profoundly affected or something about which I may be sorry but not profoundly affected. The intensity of affect in grief or sorrow differ insofar as the view of the present and the future differs in each. In this instance, the sorrow is motivated by and oriented in the past moment that is the loss of the now missing (beloved) but it need not come with a sense of an irrevocable loss and indeed the temporal meaning relating to the missing refers to the present in discomfort yet toward the future with a hope or optimism.

Grief entails the past to the extent that the event of the passing is its temporal orientation. For example, she is no longer, but her being no longer means for me a no longer henceforth—an impossibility of the “we” as I go forward. Grief does not intend the past except as an expression of grief in the act of memory.²⁶ The griever sees his future from the present such that the beloved never will again be here or there—present and future. The common expression of sympathy or condolence in the English language, “I’m sorry for your loss,” gets this right, since it recognizes the absence as present for the griever—and indeed the griever’s future present.

We now can return to consider some additional phenomenological reasons why we might say that grief does not even depend upon memory or the past remembered. I do not only mean that we can and do grieve a present, or a future, that we believe likely will, but has not yet, come to pass (for example, as when we worry about a loved one undergoing a serious surgery, or being treated for a serious illness). However, my account of grief could accommodate such “anticipatory” grief in which we do not know what to expect, and in which we agonize in the present over imagining the worst future in anticipatory grief. The pain of grief accompanies the present realization about a future grasped with certainty *as* a future world without X. The pain of grief is not just that X is not here in the present—as “Pierre is not in the café.” The pain of grief is that X is not here in the present *as* henceforth never again to be here. It is this finality, it is this knowledge of the future as unalterably without X, that causes grief in all its poignancy. If someone alive is not here in person, but we have reason to believe we will see them again, then we do not grieve, even if we are sorry. But if someone for whom we care deeply (such that they factor centrally into our well-being) is here, or not here, and if we have reason to believe we will never see that beloved person alive again, then we grieve, since we can imagine that time to come. My wife, I think, grieved each time we left her grandmother who lived outside of Paris. She grieved twice before she grieved one last time. And each time it was grief over someone still alive and not yet irrevocably lost, but nevertheless reasonably believed to never be seen again, since she would be lost before we would return. She imagined, in a mode of expectation, her grandmother justifiably as no longer existing, or as soon to be deceased, and the affects that well up indicate grief, and no mere sorrow—and certainly not mere sentimentalism, insofar as that future imagined seems reasonably anticipated. This is perhaps

²⁶ As Solomon’s own example implies, before he reduces absence to the past—the past remembered—the absence that grief apprehends is an absence in the now, an absence in the present and henceforth, which means he should have said that grief notices that he or she is *not here* spatio/temporally and will not be *there* again temporally (instead of not here).

why we say things such as, "I never expected her to live this long." This reaction is not the kind of sorrow that she expresses when her mother leaves San Diego and returns to New York, which sorrow has its discomfort; rather, it is a sorrow that is adjusted by the hope that consoles her despite her sorrow, a hope that grief excludes. Sorrow can have a very different apprehension of the future because it can have a very different sense of expectation.

More to the point of why we should resist the reduction of grief to its behavior or experience—and yet not lose the ability to accommodate that feature of grieving—is that we are not grieving about the memories themselves, because the memories themselves are not lost. In fact, the memories themselves are not painful (even though the griever might feel pained that the memories are henceforth all she has left). One way to bring the point into greater relief is to contrast grief to one of its characteristic modes of expression—namely, regret. I think the moments of regret that often accompany grieving are likewise founded on this futural meaning of grief. Regret, properly speaking, is both caused by a past action (or failure to act) and takes, as its object, that past action (or failure to act) in a modalized, memorial act. Regret is both caused by and about the past act or failure to act; the act or failure to act in the past marks both the temporal orientation and the temporal meaning of regret. Grief, in contradistinction, is not a past-directed emotion in this sense, and when the griever regrets, that regret is an expression of grief. What the griever's regret expresses is motivated by the present and futural temporal meaning of grief. When a griever regrets not having spent enough time with X, or not having cherished X, or not having told X one last time that he loved her, his regret emerges only because the normal possibility to execute such actions has been disrupted—permanently—as of the loss—henceforth. Such regret in grief is not regret properly speaking, but is an expression of grief and grief's apprehension of the world in the now *as* "now and in the future" a world that henceforth no longer offers these possibilities. Moreover, we can and do grieve—precisely as a part of the grieving process—the lack of memories we have about that profoundly loved, but now irreversibly lost, X. In this instance, grief is not at all about the present referred to the past, but rather about the inability to remember enough about the past as the past causes more grief (perhaps guilt, as Solomon I think rightly suggests) (S, 86).

In short, remembering is an expression of grief and not that about which we grieve. It is in this sense, and only in this memorial expression of grief, that grief intends the past; grief intends the past expressively, but is not about the past. Thus, it is easy to see why it is commonly thought that grief is past directed: so much of what the griever does is remember or attempt to remember. But that very effort implies the meaning of the present and the future sense of grief, insofar as the effort to generate the memories

reflects the griever's attempt to hold fast before the henceforth and reflects an unreadiness to put the past before oneself; nevertheless, that very process of remembering the deceased reveals a griever who has implicitly put the past before himself precisely insofar as he otherwise would not exert himself thusly. The pain of that taking of someone *as* past in memories is grounded in the henceforth—that is, in the realization that that loved someone or something can only ever be had henceforth in the particular mode of absence in the past, because that loved someone or something henceforth never again will appear except *as* past. Without the sense that we never again can “see” the loved someone or something (except *as* past); without the sense that the future is a future without exception as a world no longer with the beloved, there is no grief. In this sense, the temporal meaning or significance of grief is the present and the future oriented by the past event—the event of the passing—that is henceforth before the griever.

Griever's Temporal Meaning: Putting the Past before Us as Future

Outside the refuge of the temporally indexed past world of memories, the griever experiences this world, this life, here, now, henceforth as a world that no longer has X in it.²⁷ The griever grieves when seeing the world *as* a world no longer with X only on the condition that he profoundly loved X, and takes X as lost, which thereby gives full meaning to this absence now, in the present, as painful. This relates to the way the future manifests in the notion of the lost, in the paradigm case of grief. The world given to the grieving agent *as* a world no longer having X in it is certainly the world in which X has been lost to the agent. But it is also (crucially) the world given *as* bereft of X for all future times (in the griever's life). Regardless of the behaviors and expressions of grief, the griever experiences the impossibility of “seeing” X again *as* impossible, *as* an unrealizable desire. It is the finality, the certainty of it being impossible to see them again in this life that makes grief grief and turns the griever's present, whenever he is not dwelling in the refuge of memory, into a poignant swath of absence. The *how* of the givenness of the world for the griever is the world given now *as* bereft of X, or no longer having X in it. This is a world where the “no longer” points to the future and not the past—that is, the world is not just a world where X no longer exists (i.e., is past)—but it is also a world *as* a world no longer with X, now, at present,

²⁷ That alone, however, does not constitute grief. The present mode of the griever's world is not just the world *as* not having X in it. That description alone reflects something like hunger or injustice or waiting or disappointment (or even relief when something tormenting us goes away).

and in the future. Indeed, the world given to the griever, *as* a world not having X in it, appears with such resonance, poignancy, or intensity because it is a world given *as* now never again having X in it or *as* now henceforth no longer having X in the future.

The experience of the world *as* no longer having X in it is obviously not like an experience of some task construed *as* impossible. The griever does not take the impossible *as* impossible in the way that we take time-travel, or coming to the end of *pi* as impossible.²⁸ Both sorts reveal hopelessness, of course, but in these latter examples there is no emotional connection or commitment (unless we manipulate the scenario to include, in a contrived way, a person intently committed to these endeavors—which would, in any case, probably produce disappointment in the end, but not grief). These more ordinary senses of taking the impossible *as* impossible do not include, as does the paradigm case of grief, the loss of something that was loved and to which one was committed and therefore possessed and now has lost and henceforth will never have again. As the unnamed man claims in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, "the never to be differs from the never was."²⁹

That the meaning of grief is rooted in the griever being directed toward the future can be seen in a way as most pitiable, if we realize how ordinary is the future directedness of grieving. The griever intends the future just as one intends any ordinary mode of expectation. What expectation expects is something *as* actual, not *as* possible. Expectation thus lives the experience "as actually going to occur."³⁰ As a matter of the flow of time, expectation is just a reliable belief characterized as a straightforward and unbroken taking of the future—that is, a seeing with a thorough look, *ex-spectare*, the taking of which renders the future closed.³¹

Grief, in the worst sense, has its extraordinariness, of necessity, converted into ordinariness, or folded into our ordinary orientation to the future, in expectation. This seems like a calamity of life, one of life's great cruelties—that grief should be so utterly ordinary. But if the griever is reconciled to the loss of that profoundly loved X, his grief always lives in expectation, always has his expectations fulfilled. In a world *as* a world without X henceforth, Pierre will not be at the café—ever, again. It is not Pierre's present absence at the café that is at issue in grief. In disappointment or anger or worry or sorrow, Pierre is absent in the sense of missing, as not having turned up. In grief, Pierre is absent in the sense of lost, as never again to turn up. The difference between sorrow and grief over the deceased also rests on the future in this way. The former will

²⁸ A. Steinbock, *Moral Emotions*, 187.

²⁹ Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 27.

³⁰ A. Steinbock, *Moral Emotions*, 163.

³¹Ibid.

neither hope for nor expect anything because the deceased does not bear intimately on the sorrower going forward, and this because the deceased did not figure centrally and profoundly on the well-being of the sorrower (i.e., she was not that important to him). The latter, too, will not hope, but he will not hope because he expects to see the absence of his beloved everywhere, for as long as he grieves. His view of the future is lived as closed—as he expects—just as my view of the future, in the mode of expectation, is lived as closed insofar as I expect there to be presents under the tree on December 25 and income tax returns to be filed on April 15. Indeed, the griever knows that his expectation will be fulfilled with more certainty than I expect these events, or others, such as that the postman will arrive in the early afternoon, or that my car will turn over when I need to head to work tomorrow, or even that Monday will follow this Sunday.³² Of all these forms of expectation, the griever is most certain to have his expectations fulfilled—that is, he does not just live this experience as actual rather than possible, but he lives this experience as actual because its opposite is actually no longer possible.

The griever's expectation that Pierre will not be at the café will be fulfilled even before (and then, of course, when) the griever arrives at the café. The café, in turn, will appear to the griever not as a place of pleasure, joy, and refuge (presuming it was those things previously), but one of misery, suffering, and affront. The café will appear *as* a café without Pierre, forever, and will be a particular reminder of the new world that is a swath of absence, indeed, a swath that will range to all places familiarly lived with Pierre, whose absence will even make the home seem as empty as the book that indicated to Nussbaum the absence of her mother. The expectation *that* this is a world *as* no longer having X motivates that sense of an absence that pervades the present everywhere. As Augustine writes, "Whatever I looked upon had the air of death. My native place was a prison-house and my home a strange unhappiness. The things we had done together became sheer torment without him. My eyes were restless looking for him but he was not there. I hated all places because he was not in them."³³ To be a bit loose phenomenologically, what is pitiable is that the griever will be disappointed in having his expectation fulfilled—or, to put it differently, there is no empty-intention in grief because the object of grief is always an empty-intention that we know will be in principle unfulfillable (at least in this life). In grief, our expectation is *always already* fulfilled.

The griever's world reduces to mere expectation, whereas it formerly may have been dominated by expectation without excluding anticipation.

³² Ibid.

³³ Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by Frank J. Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2006), IV/4: 9.

This shift occurs because there is no longer an openness to the future regarding the world without X. Anticipation, at least as I understand it in the ordinary language sense of the English expression, conveys less certainty than expectation, and at least does not live with a closed sense of regard toward the future. If protention is a prefiguring, it is not a predicting or saying in advance in the way that expectation does not just surmise or prefigure but *says* something in advance about what the future will be. The saying in expectation need not be explicit or propositional, but it is a saying with certainty. Anticipation is like a prefiguring and like an expectation insofar as it lives in a more determinate mode than the former (protention pre-figuring) but a less determinate mode than the latter (expectation pre-dicting). Anticipation, as an action of looking forward to without a determined sense, is lost to the griever, paradigmatically with respect to the deceased. Anticipation has a sense of preparing for or forestalling something that differentiates it from the strong belief that something will happen or be that way. As a taking possession beforehand, or ahead of time, anticipation lives in openness or indeterminateness such that we can say, "I didn't anticipate having to use my umbrella" or "I don't know what to expect, but I'm really anticipating tomorrow's party," or "so-and-so is expecting," but not anticipating. But Pierre will never show up at the café; the griever cannot anticipate it (not in and for this life, anyhow). Such is the reduction of the world for the griever to a swath of absence that always remains fulfilled as an unfulfillable, empty intention. Perhaps this is why grievers often say that it "just doesn't seem real," although the loss is lived as actual, rather than merely as possible, even if it does not seem that way. In grief, there is nothing to anticipate, until time does its work again as Augustine notes, "Time came and went from one day to the next; in its coming and its passing it brought me other hopes and other memories, and little by little patched me up again with the kind of delights which had once been mine, and which in my grief I had abandoned. The place of that great grief was slowly taken . . . by the seeds from which new griefs should spring . . . At any rate, the comfort I found in other friends . . . did much to repair and remake me. And it was all one huge fable, one long lie."³⁴

Epilogue

The griever, seeing the world as a world in which his deep love finds its object no longer, puts the past *before*, in front of, himself. If there is an object that grief takes, it is the absence of the beloved henceforth. One could perhaps take my suggestion that we can capture grief by accounting for its temporal

³⁴ Ibid., IV/8: 13.

meaning or significance on analogy with a thrown projection. As thrownness denotes a full awareness of those uncontrollable and limiting conditions into which we have been born, we might consider grief a second thrownness in which we once again enter the world anew—and wailing. To avoid confusion, perhaps we should speak of grief in this analogy as a “tornness” that denotes the lover/griever’s full awareness of the uncontrollable circumstance of finding oneself torn from a central and profound source of meaning that he’d fashioned through her, with her, and in her (his beloved). This torn-griever must remake his concerns in a new set of uncontrollable and limiting circumstances. As thrownness denotes the full ontological category of human life wherein one finds oneself enmeshed in a pre-structured world of meaning that is beyond one’s control and yet with which one must tarry, the “tornness” of grief could suggest being thrown back into that pre-structured world in which meaning must once more be constituted anew in light of the fact that the griever has been torn from the world that the griever fashioned and cultivated through her, with her, and in her. This would mean that “tornness” arrives with a more acute awareness and intensity than that found in thrownness. One finds oneself as “thrown” in a world in which nothing is yet lost even if all is limiting; but the griever finds himself as “torn” from his familiar world and at once thrown back into that pre-structured world where all again is limiting but now the limits emerge from the loss of someone deeply loved, the loss of the central and profound source of meaning now no-longer. The griever lives a life in a world in which he needs once more to make his way after having had removed from his world of fashioned commitments the one though whom, in whom, and with whom he had fashioned those commitments. The temporal meaning of grief that clarifies the object of this emotion and explains its characteristic painfulness and poignancy is the henceforth—“the temporalizing that temporalizes itself as a future which makes present in a process of having been.”³⁵

³⁵ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward S. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 401.