Proleptic Grief

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Grief gives rise to a puzzle that is as much emotional as philosophical. If the fact that a loved one has died is a reason to grieve—at times, intensely and disruptively—that fact is permanent. It never goes away. Should we then grieve forever?

Thankfully, most of us don't. According to empirical research, more than half of those who lose a partner or child are "emotionally resilient," rebounding after two or three months; others adapt in a year or eighteen months; only a small proportion experience prolonged or chronic grief.[1]

In one way, the news is good: "most bereaved people get better on their own, without any kind of professional help," writes the psychologist George Bonanno. "They may be deeply saddened, they may feel adrift for some time, but their life eventually finds its way again, often more easily than they thought possible" (Bonanno 2009: 24). In another way, it's disturbing. Does our resilience mean that we no longer value the life of the one we've lost or that we never really did? Two months after his mother died, the critic Roland Barthes asked himself, in *Mourning Diary*: "Does being able to live without someone you loved mean you loved her less than you thought… ?" (Barthes 2009: 68)

That these facts are philosophically puzzling has been recognized in recent work on grief.[2] But what exactly is the puzzle? And what would count as a solution? Meditating on his own experience of grief, Berislav Marušić asks how it can be rational for grief to fade, if love does not: "Plausibly, I grieved for a reason—that my mother had died. Her death did not change over time. However, it was not wrong

[1] See Bonanno, Moskowitz, Papa, and Folkman 2005; Bonanno 2009: 6-8, 70, 96.

[2] See Moller 2007, Marušić 2018, and Marušić 2022.

for me to grieve less over time. Yet how could the diminution of my grief not be wrong, if my reason for grief did not change?" (Marušić 2022: 3)

But Marušić is puzzled, too, by how things seem to those in grief, a perspective from which, he argues, grief's diminution appears irrational or unloving:

> In my initial experience of grief, I naïvely expected my grief to continue, because I thought of my mother's death as my *reason* for grief, and it seemed to me that my grief would continue for as long as her death continued to be such a reason—that is, as long as she continued to matter to me. This is why I was surprised at the rapid diminution and the eventual end of grief: I stopped grieving, even though she did not stop mattering to me. (Marušić 2022: 6)

As we will come to see, these puzzles are not the same. One is about reasons, rationality, and grieving over time; the other prompts Marušić to complain of "double vision" (Marušić 2022: 24).[3] The first is solved by giving an account of grief on which its rationality is essentially diachronic. But the second puzzle is elusive. We can bring it into focus, I'll suggest, by appeal to what Richard Moran has called "relations of transparency."[4] Double vision turns in part on a pragmatic problem posed by grief's opacity, through which the rituals of mourning are a guide—and in part on the practice of determining how to feel in a circumstance by imagining oneself in it and gauging one's response. This method prompts a kind of proleptic grief that is systematically misleading. I end with more radical forms of proleptic grief, explaining the illusion that, if all we love is transient, nothing really matters, and the idea that we should grieve the future death of those we love much as we would grieve them when they die.

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[3] As far as I can tell, neither puzzle corresponds to either of the two—"metaphysical" and "psychological"—distinguished by Schönherr 2022. The former appeals to love in the past, not the present; the latter concerns the speed with which grief diminishes, not the fact that it diminishes at all. It is at times unclear in Moller 2007 which of the various puzzles is at stake.

[4] See Moran 2002: Ch. 2.6, building on Edgley 1969: 90 and Evans 1982: 225.

I

We can state the puzzle of grief's rational diminution as an inconsistency:

(1) If A loves B, the fact that B has died is by itself sufficient reason for grief.

(2) This reason is strongly insistent: when A learns that B has died, A should grieve for B.

(3) When A has grieved for B, there comes a point at which it is no longer true that A should grieve, even though he still loves B.

(4) The rationality of grief is a function of love and the reasons for grief.

If the rationality of grief is a function of love and reasons, and the fact that B had died is by itself insistent reason for A to grieve, when A loves B, then A should grieve for B as long as he still loves her, contradicting premise (3). I'll argue that we must deny the antecedent: in particular, premise (4).

The puzzle is framed in the idiom of "reasons" and "rationality" which may seem off-key in relation to grief, the negative emotional response to loss. But to say that there are reasons for grief is just to say that there are facts in light of which it makes sense to grieve, good answers to the question "Why are you grieving?" understood in terms analogous to Anscombe's (1963) question "Why?", applied to intentional action. It's not an implication of this analogy that emotions are subject to direct control in the way intentional actions are, only that they are subject to assessment in light of their responsiveness to apparent facts. Some are reluctant to call this form of assessment "rationality"; they speak instead of emotions as "apt" or "fitting" in light of one's beliefs.[5] But the latter phrasing could

[5] See, for instance, D'Arms and Jacobson 2000.

suggest a merely permissive normativity, whereas it's part of our puzzle that we *ought* to grieve the death of those we love.

There is a need for care in interpreting this claim. Premise (2) would be implausible if it said that the moment A learns that B has died, he must be intensely sad and that something has gone wrong if he is not. It may take time to absorb B's death; and grief is not, in any case, a static condition of sadness. People in grief feel sorrow, yes—but also anger, guilt, fear, and moments of lightness as well as depth. The anger may be objectless or the guilt irrational.[6] The fear may be quixotic, directed not at the future but the past. "I am suffering from *the fear of what has happened*," Barthes wrote, six months after his mother died (Barthes 2009: 122). And in the wake of trauma, there are those who make jokes.[7] Grief is not a single emotional state, but manifests in different feelings at different times. Grieving is something we *do*, if not deliberately—as we perform, deliberately, the rituals of mourning—then in the way we scar when we suffer a bodily wound.

The truth in (2), therefore, is not that A should be in a definite mental state at a definite time—feeling sad on coming to know that B has died—but that he should grieve, over time, in the aftermath. This complicates but need not contradict claim (3), that there comes a point at which it is no longer true that A should grieve. The complication can be framed as a pointed question. If one can grieve without being in a state of deep sorrow, why not say that we should grieve forever—but the form our grief should take shifts over time? Early grief is more intense, as a rule, but even having grieved, one might contend, there are thoughts to which we should respond with sadness. Grieving isn't something one completes, once and for all, and if we say that A no longer grieves for B, when years have passed, we register a difference of degree, not kind.

Does this mean that (3) is false and that the puzzle disappears? I don't believe it does. Whether the shift in how we ought to grieve is a difference of degree or kind, the paradox remains. On one description, A should begin to grieve when he learns that B has died, but having grieved enough, it is

[6] On the complexity of grief, see Bonanno 2009: 34.

[7] On the prevalence of laughter in bereavement, see Bonanno 2009: 38-9.

no longer true that A should grieve. That is how the puzzle is stated above. On another description, the way that A should grieve B's death is different when he learns that B has died than it is much later on, though A should never cease to grieve. As shorthand, we might say that A should grieve intensely at the start but need not grieve that way forever. Both descriptions clash with the premise that if A loves B, the fact that B has died is by itself insistent reason for grief, assuming that the rationality of grief—not just whether one should grieve, but how intensely—is a function only of love and the reasons for grief. We get a similar clash even if B's death is a merely sufficient, not insistent, reason to grieve, so long as the way in which it's rational to grieve shifts over time.

It is this premise—that B's death suffices, by itself, to justify grief—that deserves most scrutiny. The claim is not that death is the *only* reason for grief.[8] In my view, grief takes many forms, among them "relational grief," which marks a fractured relationship, grief at the harm that befalls someone who dies, and grief at the sheer loss of life.[9] These griefs may interact and coincide, but they are not the same, and they respond to different reasons. That B has died is one of them.

A critic might object that reasons for grief can be unified under relational grief. Thus, Michael Cholbi holds that the "deaths of others merit grief to the extent that those deaths disrupt our autobiographies" (Cholbi 2022: 32). What justifies grief is "that *one's relationship with the deceased cannot continue in precisely the same guise it had when the deceased was still alive*. … [Because] those for whom we grieve are those around whom we have constructed our expectations for how we hope our lives will go, we grieve for the relationships that their deaths transform" (Cholbi 2022: 55-6). This view could account for grief about a breakup, and how it differs from the grief of the bereaved, by contrasting the kind of shift involved in a "completed" relationship—one that has ended, though the other half survives—with the shift involved when a relationship is "archived" by death.[10] It could also account for the rational diminution of grief. If the reason for grief is that a relationship has been

[8] The discussion in Cholbi 2022: Ch. 2 is marred by the tendency to assume the definite article.

[9] For a similar taxonomy, see Marušić 2022: 55-7.

[10] The terminology is due to Scheffler 2016: 205-6.

disrupted, then a move towards a new, more distant but unimpeded relationship would eliminate that reason. Grieving might thus effect a shift in the reasons for grief that explains why it is no longer true that A should grieve, even though he still loves B.

But relational grief is not the only kind. When we heard that the Chair of my wife's old department at the University of Pittsburgh had died, we were upset for days. He was a wonderful person, and he played an important part in our lives: but for his intervention, we might never have found jobs in the same place. But our meaningful relationship with him was never close and it was wholly in the past; it was not disrupted by his death—we didn't expect to see him again—and whatever we did in grieving him, it was not primarily concerned with a shift in the vestigial relationship that survived. We grieved for him and for his absence from the world—not for our relationship with him.

There is an ethical point here that applies to grief in close relationships, too. The point is that, while relational grief is not exactly selfish—it is not just about the harm I suffer when you die—it is self-referential. When I grieve the disruption of our relationship, I am grieving for us and what we had. There is nothing wrong with that. But it is not all I grieve. For I also grieve, more selflessly, for *you* and what you've lost: a form of grief that may depend on our relationship, or on my love for you, but whose reason does not include me, even in part. An extreme case: in permanent exile, I might grieve the total disruption of my relationship with a friend who is still alive; years later, when I learn that they have died, and grieve their death, this grief is non-relational. It's about the loss of, and to, my friend, not my relationship with them.

It is non-relational grief that is at issue in our puzzle. Or to make one last distinction, it is grief about the sheer loss of life—which is distinct from grief about the harm of dying. The two come apart in Annie Ernaux's memoir, *I Remain in Darkness,* a book named for the last words her mother wrote, suffering from Alzheimer's, before she was moved to the hospital in which she died. As he mother's life deteriorates, Ernaux wishes it would end:

> I hand her an almond bun; she can't eat it on her own, her lips suck wildly at thin air. Right now, I would like her to be dead and free of such degradation. Her body stiffens, she strains to

> stand up and a foul stench fills the atmosphere. She has just relieved herself like a newborn baby after being fed. Such horror and helplessness. (Ernaux 1997: 70)

Even so, she is "overcome with grief" when her mother dies. "That's it. Yes, time has stopped. One just can't imagine the pain" (Ernaux 1997: 71). For Ernaux, love fragments: she wants the best for her mother, to be "free of such degradation" and so to die; and yet she grieves, not just, I think, for the relationship wrecked by death, but for her mother's life. Whether it harms them or not, that someone ceases to exist means the loss of an irreplaceable value, a dignity that demands respect and warrants love.[11]

The subject of premise (1), above, is grief at the sheer loss of life—though there is a puzzle, too, about death's harm. For neither loss is diminished by grief: the dead stay dead, their lives cut short, and neither time nor tears will make that better. We could *explain* our relative equanimity, when months or years have passed, by saying that months or years have passed, or that we've gone through grief. But these aren't *reasons* to be less upset by someone's death. They are not facts in light of which it makes sense not to care so much about their loss. Nor is it part of your reason for grief, when you learn about the death of someone of you love, that you only just found out, or that you have yet to grieve. Non-relational grief is not about you. When you love someone, the fact that they are dead may not be the only reason to grieve—your relationship matters, too—but it is sufficient, all by itself.[12] Premise (1) is true.

One way to bring this into focus, and to see its implications, is to think about cases in which belief diverges from reality. Suppose that A loves B and learns that B has died. It doesn't matter what A thinks about his grief. Perhaps he's duped somehow into believing he's already grieved for B; still, if he hasn't grieved in fact, he should. And when A has grieved for B, there comes a point at which the fact that she has died no longer calls for grief, even if A thinks, duped once again, that he yet to grieve.

[11] For this conception of love and respect, see Velleman 1997 and Setiya 2014.

[12] For arguments in a similar spirit, made at greater length, see Marušić 2022: Chs. 2-3.

What matters to the rationality of grief—or how intensely one should grieve—is not what one believes about the progress of one's grief, but the emotional reality of grief itself. At the beginning, the belief that B has died should be enough, alone, to initiate grief; yet even as A still loves B, he need not grieve forever.

The moral of this puzzle—and the key to a solution—is that grief's rationality is not a function just of love and the reasons for grief, but of grief's evolution over time, so premise (4) is false. Marušić calls this "the fact that emotions are forms of embodied reason" (Marušić 2022: 101). At least, grief is. It matters to whether and how one should grieve whether and how one has grieved so far. Grieving is something we do whose rationality depends on how it unfolds in someone's life. It is essentially diachronic.[13]

II

The puzzle of grief's rational diminution can be solved in theory, then. But perplexity remains. In the midst of grief, it can seem to one—as it does to Barthes and Marušić—that one should never cease to grieve. This impression defies the resolution of the puzzle in section I. Looking forward to the end of grief, one is at best ambivalent: conceding that the end of grief is not irrational—and hoping for it, perhaps—but at the same time unable to shake the sense that it will involve a failure to respond to the reality of loss. There is something paradoxical in grief.

For Marušić, the fact that the "reasonableness of [accommodation to grief] is not comprehended in the comprehension of the reasons for our emotional response" means that "we face irreconcilable double vision. The double vision arises from the fact that we cannot apprehend, at once, the object of our emotion together with empirical facts about the emotion, such as the fact (if it is one) that grief is a process" (Marušić 2022: 24). But what are these competing visions? And why are we

[13] Oded Na'aman makes a similar claim, though he suggests, I think mistakenly, that Marušić disagrees, contending that the puzzle can't be solved (Na'aman 2021: 149). What misleads Na'aman is the rhetoric of "double vision."

subject to them? Why can't we apprehend, at once, the fact of someone's death and the fact that grief is an embodied process—the first a reason for grief, the second relevant to its rationality, but not a reason? So long as our apprehension of the second fact does not distort its rational significance, misrepresenting it as a reason, why should our vision blur?

Marušić argues that the misrepresentation is on the other side: grief obscures the truth about itself. "When we grieve," Marušić writes, "the thought that we will stop grieving strikes us as the thought that we will become indifferent to the dead. Anticipating the diminution of grief is thus anticipating a failure of love" (Marušić 2022: 8). Why do things strike us this way? The closest we get to an answer in Marušić is this:

> I think of reasonableness without reasons as involving a certain failure of comprehension. … What is essentially surd is that the subject cannot identify reasons in light of which accommodation would be reasonable. Instead, the agent seems to be in a position to identify reasons in light of which it is unreasonable. (Marušić 2022: 105)

There are two claims here. One is about rational unintelligibility: a "failure of comprehension." We will return to it below. The other is about how things seem to someone in grief. According to Marušić, when A grieves the death of B, it seems to him that the fact of death is, by itself, decisive reason to grieve, so that it would be unreasonable for grief to fade. No wonder he anticipates with alarm a future without grief. What could explain his impending unresponsiveness to reason, if not obtuseness, self-deception, or the end of his love for B? A does not want any of those things.

But the proposal is unsatisfying. There's something right in this phenomenology of grief. But as it stands, it is too simple to explain the facts. If the claim is that, when grieving for a reason, one sees that reason as unconditionally decisive, it gives us no way to account for prospective double vision. Marušić quotes a passage from Proust:

> Our dread of a future in which we must forego the sight of faces and the sound of voices which we love and from which today we derive our dearest joy, this dread, far from being dissipated, is intensified, if to the pain of such a privation we feel that there will be added what seems to us now in anticipation more painful still: not to feel it as a pain at all—to remain indifferent… (Proust 1919: 339-40; quoted in Marušić 2022: 9)

Anticipating the death of his loved ones, Proust's narrator recoils from the expectation that grief will come to an end. But since he is not grieving yet, we can't explain why this strikes him as problematic by appeal to how things seem to those in grief.

Marušić might shift focus, appealing to love instead of grief. The thought would be that, when you love someone, it appears to you that their death must call for grief. But this implies that things will always seem this way, so long as you still love them—and as Proust predicts, they won't.

Whether we appeal to grief or love, there is a deeper complaint about the idea of double vision, which is that we don't have any explanation yet of why we should be subject to illusions of this kind. It's one thing to say that there is a "certain failure of comprehension" in grief about the loss of life, since its diminution is not a response to any change in the facts that are reasons for grief. It's another to suggest that grief's eventual absence should seem to us unreasonable—yet another to account for when and why it does.

At times, Marušić formulates the double vision claim as one about attention: "in grieving we can either apprehend our loss," he writes, "or we can apprehend ourselves as undergoing a process of detachment from the lost object. But we cannot do both at once: as we attend to one thing, the other recedes into the background" (Marušić 2022: 95). But again, this seems off-track. That B's death is, all by itself, sufficient reason for A to grieve—that the reason excludes the fact that A just learned or has to yet to grieve—does not mean that A's focus of attention, as he grieves, cannot extend beyond B's death. Nor does it explain why such attention would specifically compete with knowledge of grief's rational diminution, not thoughts about anything else.

When we look for precedents for embodied reason, the mystery only deepens. Marušić suggests that rational patterns of grief might vary from life-form to life-form, imagining "Super-resilient" aliens who never grieve at all and "Sub-resilient" aliens who grieve forever.[14] He contends that "the reasonableness of grief for members of these two species is different from the reasonableness of grief for a human being" (Marušić 2022: 66). Suitably fleshed out, his thought coheres with a neo-Aristotelian approach to practical reason, on which the standards of rationality are sensitive to the kind of creature one is. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle seems to make this point by imagining rational fish: "Now if what is healthy or good is different for men and for fishes, but what is white or straight is always the same, anyone would say that what is wise is the same but what is practically wise is different."[15] For contemporary Aristotelians like Michael Thompson and Philippa Foot, practical rationality will not, in general, be a function of reasons and mental states alone, since it depends on one's embodiment as a kind of living thing: a rational fish, as it might be, or a human being.[16] Still, there's no cause to predict any kind of double vision on the neo-Aristotelian view: no reason to fear that responding to reasons will compete with understanding why they count as reasons, thanks to facts about human nature that are not involved in the reasons to which we respond. A virtuous person acts on the ground that she made a promise, or that someone is in need, not on the ground that it's human nature to do such-and-such; but she is not in any way precluded from acknowledging that the grounds on which she acts amount to reasons because human nature takes that form. Why should it be any different with grief, where the reason to grieve is B's death, but its status as a reason turns on facts about the unfolding of grief that are not themselves reasons?

[14] The beings are adapted from Moller 2007: 313-5.

[15] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1141a22-24 (Ross and Brown, 2009: 108). That Aristotle thinks of practical wisdom as life-form-relative is contentious. Some read Aristotle as an anti-foundationalist, treating any "explicit mention of human nature" in Aristotle's ethics as "a sort of rhetorical flourish, added to a conclusion already complete without it" (McDowell, 1980: 19).

[16] See Foot 2001; Thompson 2008: Part One; Thomson 2013; and for my version of Aristotelian ethics, Setiya 2012: Ch. 4 and Setiya 2024.

III

We can make progress with this question if we go back to a simpler observation that emerges from the puzzle in section I. Marušić writes:

> My view is that *we cannot identify reasons in light of which* the diminution of grief would be reasonable, because there are no such reasons. Rather, there can be a change in reasonableness without a change in reasons. Because this is so, there is no way to understand accommodation in terms of reasons—and there is, therefore, in our emotional life something essentially surd. (Marušić 2022: 111)

That is my view, too. When you begin to grieve for someone's death, you grieve for an insistent reason: that they've died. That is perfectly intelligible. Later, when you've grieved, the fact that they are dead is not a reason in light of which you should still grieve, although you may. This, too, is intelligible. But there is no reason for the *change* in how you feel.[17] You may be able to explain why it's rational—or not—but you can't make sense of it by giving reasons. For the fact that was a reason hasn't changed.

This opacity poses problems for those in grief. How can you ensure that you grieve someone's death the way you should? Not by tracking the reasons for grief as they shift over time: with non-relational grief, they don't. If you are lucky, your grief will evolve in a rational way without your intervention. You'll respond differently to the fact of someone's death in proportion to its rational significance, as determined by the progress of your grief. But how can you know if that is happening? And what if it doesn't?

It is, I think, the absence of reasons for diminished grief that makes the rituals of mourning so essential. The practices by which we process grief, in private and in public, fill the rift that reasons

[17] It's possible Marušić would resist this way of putting things: at one point, he stresses that his puzzle is not about "changes in emotion" but emotions themselves; but it's not clear to me that there's a substantive disagreement here (Marušić 2022: 28).

leave. They do so not by giving reasons to grieve in one way or another, but through activities of self-management that bring our attitudes into line with the shifting significance of the reasons there are.

At the same time, practices of mourning help resolve the indeterminacy of rational grief. It's not just that we human beings differ from the Super- and Sub-resilient. It's that there is no one way we should grieve. The rituals of mourning vary from place to place and time to time, and many forms are adequate to grief. To mourn according to tradition is to participate in a practice one of whose functions is to regulate grief so that one grieves as one should. An adequate tradition must fulfill this function, but since there are many patterns of grieving that are compatible with grieving as one should, there is a range of adequate traditions. What's more, because the function of a practice need not be an aim of individuals engaged in it, one can mourn without intending to manage one's grief. One's intention is to honour the dead, which is a function of the practice, too. In this way, mediation by a practice keeps the project of self-management at arm's length.

Still, there is a degree of alienation in relating to oneself this way. Grief eludes a certain form of rational control: because its rationality is not a function just of love and the reasons for grief, knowledge of the facts that constitute reasons is not enough to tell you how to grieve. Grief's evolution over time is a not a shifting response to shifting reasons. So, if one hopes to direct it, one has to do so by non-rational means: self-management is a rational response to the rational opacity of grief.

Opacity and the alienation of self-management do not quite amount to double vision. But the problem of knowing how to grieve is a clue to grief's paradoxical nature. The other clue lies in the "relations of transparency" explored by Richard Moran.[18] Such relations hold between apparently disparate questions—as it might be, worldly, psychological, or normative—one of which is answered by answering another. In connection with belief, there are three questions: whether *p* is true, whether I believe *p*, and whether I should. Any one of these might be thought transparent to any other. Do I determine what is true by determining what I should believe? Or is that overly intellectual? Do I self-

[18] See, again, Moran 2002: Ch. 2.6, building on Edgley 1969: 90 and Evans 1982: 225.

ascribe beliefs by asking what is true? Or what I should believe? If I conclude that *p* is true, or what the evidence supports, do I conclude, as well, that I believe it?

Different thinkers give priority to different questions. I won't try to resolve their disagreements or propose a general thesis of that form. Nor, unlike Moran, am I concerned with knowledge of our mental states. Instead, my thought is that, often enough, we determine what to do, or think, or feel in a given circumstance by imagining ourselves in that circumstance, responding in imagination, and treating our response as how one should respond in the circumstance imagined. This is not the only way to answer normative questions: one can engage in ordinary reasoning from premises one accepts; one can imagine or suppose that *p* without imagining it "from the inside," as one might imagine or suppose that one is dead without imagining being dead. But the method is quite familiar. If I am wondering how to feel and what to do if my house is robbed, I make-believe that my house has been robbed and simulate my response. I imagine being horrified and conclude that this emotion is apt. I imagine calling the police and the insurance company, and then step back, forming the belief that this is what I should do in that circumstance. In effect, I treat the question of what to do as transparent to the question of what I imagine myself doing, implicitly assuming that I'm rational.

The method of projective imagination is a good one, as a rule. It is especially fruitful in cases—unlike the robbery—in which it's hard to predict how we will feel without imagining the situation. The problem is that, because grief's rationality is not a function just of love and belief, or of other mental states I can imagine myself into, this approach is systematically unreliable—even for those with who are perfectly rational. The method is to imagine oneself in a given circumstance, to respond in imagination, and then to treat one's response as a guide to how one should respond. If I love B and I make-believe that B has died, then if I am rational, I'll respond with simulated grief. Stepping back, I'll conclude that, in that circumstance, I should grieve for B—which is true. But the method is insensitive to history. If I am wondering whether, after grieving for several years, I should still grieve, I'll imagine that B has died and that I've grieved her death for several years. If I am rational, however, I'll still respond with simulated grief. To imagine having grieved is to make-believe that I have, and so to simulate the rational effects of that belief. But, as we saw in section I, the belief that I have grieved

should make no difference to my grief: that I have already grieved is not a reason not to grieve. The rationality of diminished grief is a function not of believing that one has grieved for B, but of actually having grieved. If I haven't grieved for B, I should not be reconciled by the belief that I have; instead, I should continue to grieve. Likewise, if I haven't grieved for B, and I imagine grieving her death, I should not be reconciled by the imagined fact that I have already grieved; instead I should persist in imagined grief. (In general, one should respond to the make-belief that *p* by imagining φ-ing just in case one should to respond to the belief that *p* by φ-ing.) It will thus seem to me that, even if I've grieved already, I should still grieve.

Why is the method of projective imagination limited in this way? Not because it is limited to make-belief in the sense of propositional imagination. There is a difference between imagining *that* I am sad, in the sense of imagining that this fact obtains, and imagining *being* sad by imagining myself in the emotional state of sadness.[19] But there is no analogue of the latter for having grieved, which is not an emotional state but a fact about the history of one's emotions. I can imagine being in a certain state or phase of the grieving process—perhaps I imagine feeling angry or guilty—but the fact that I have already grieved can figure only as the object of propositional make-belief.[20] When it shows up in this way, it has no rational power to diminish my imagined grief, any more than the belief that I have grieved has the rational power to diminish grief. That's why it seems that I should grieve forever.

Of course, I know that this conclusion isn't true. But an illusion to the contrary persists. This is the source of double vision. When one asks how one should feel after one has grieved for years, the method of projective imagination delivers the result that one should still grieve—regardless of whether one believes one should. This is not a failure but a manifestation of rationality. If you love B and haven't grieved her death, you should respond to the belief that she has died with grief, even if you mistakenly

[19] This is related to Moran's (1994: 104) contrast between "hypothetical" and "dramatic" imagination; but if hypothetical imagination is mere counterfactual supposition, then even the propositional make-belief I am considering is dramatic. My point is that, within dramatic imagination, we should distinguish making-believe that I have or have had some emotional state and simulating that state in imagination.

[20]. This is true, at least, when my imagining is short-lived. I am open to the possibility that, by engaging in extended make-belief, one could simulate an emotional process, coming to a more reliable verdict on how one should feel after going through it—but only with sustained emotional and imaginative work.

think you've already grieved. Likewise, if you love B and haven't grieved her death, you should respond to the make-belief that she has died with simulated grief, even if you imagine having already grieved.[21] The method of projective imagination therefore tells you: "Even if you have already grieved B's death, you should still grieve." Once you've actually grieved for B, it's different. You need no longer grieve her death, or respond to her imagined death with simulated grief.

This theory captures the complex pattern of impressions that we mapped in section II. It's not just that, while you grieve B's death, your reason strikes you as decisive. It strikes you the same way in prospect, as it did Proust's narrator, who recoiled from the prediction that he would cease to grieve. But the appearance lapses in the wake of grief, as Proust also predicts. The account explains why grief's diminution is not just opaque or unintelligible to us—since there is no reason for it—but why it seems unreasonable in prospect and in grief, even though, as we assumed in section I, we know it isn't. The illusion turns on treating the question of what I should feel as transparent to imagined feeling, through the method of projective imagination.[22]

IV

Grief's double vision turns on a kind of proleptic grief: anticipating how we'll feel in a future circumstance by imagining ourselves into it, responding with imagined grief, and treating this as a

[21] That you know it's rational not to grieve, in the imagined circumstances, is irrelevant. Just as grief is unresponsive to beliefs about its rationality—telling yourself you shouldn't grieve is utterly ineffective—so simulated grief is not responsive to the make-belief that one should not grieve. If I make-believe that B has died, that I've grieved her death for several years, and that I should no longer grieve, I should still respond with simulated grief.

[22] This method fails whenever rationality depends on factors we can imagine only from the outside, as objects of make-belief. Thus, neo-Aristotelians should predict a persistent illusion that practical reason is absolute, not relative. When I ask how a rational fish should act, I'll imagine I'm a rational fish; but if I'm rational, my response will mirror how a human being should respond to the belief that he's a rational fish—not the way a rational fish should respond. The method of projective imagination systematically ignores the ways in which practical rationality depends on the kind of creature one is, not just on one's mental states. If it gives the impression that reasons can't be life-form-relative, the impression is one we should not trust.

guide to how we should feel. In this case, the guide is deceptive: it's an illusion of make-belief that we should grieve forever.

But there are more radical forms of proleptic grief. Consider that, in grief, one may become depressed or anhedonic, unsusceptible to pleasure or indifferent to the world. If one treats the question of what matters as transparent to the question what one cares about, it will seem that nothing matters. In proleptic grief, one can generate this impression before the fact. Imagining the death of everyone I love, I respond with imagined grief, a grief so deep and all-consuming that, as I imagine being in it, I find myself imagining indifference to everything. If I treat the question what would matter in that circumstance as transparent to the question what I would care about, using the method of projective imagination, it will seem to me that, if everyone I love were dead, nothing would matter. In neither case—active or proleptic grief—is the impression one gets reliable. Instead, they are one source of a persistent philosophical illusion: that the transience of all we love is an argument for nihilism, or something near enough.[23]

Proleptic grief need not involve illusion, though. We saw in section I that if A loves B, that B has died is a fact in light of which A should grieve. It is not part of this reason that he only just found out, or that he has yet to grieve—it's not about him—although it matters to the rational significance of B's death whether A has grieved for B. But wait! When I believe that B has died, isn't the content of my belief the proposition that B's death precedes this very belief? After all, that is the condition under which my belief is true. So it's about me, after all.

The short answer is: no, my belief is not about me. What I believe when I believe that B has died could be true even if I didn't believe it or take any attitude towards it. But the long answer is more complex. According to so-called "B-theorists" about time, reality is fundamentally tenseless.[24] In a sense that may be difficult to pin down, there are no facts about what is past, present, or future—McTaggart's temporal "A-series"—only "B-series" facts about before and after. While we can't spell out

[23] For perplexity about this inference, see Nagel 1971: 717-8.

[24] A classic discussion is Mellor 1981, drawing on McTaggart 1908.

the content of a tensed belief—like the belief that B has died—in tenseless terms, the only facts involved in making it true are the tenseless facts that B dies at time *t* and that *t* precedes this belief. More generally, tensed thoughts involve a special way of thinking about times by way of one's relation to them—as when I think it is now raining, and *now* picks out the time at which I am thinking this—not further facts omitted from a tenseless description of the world.

Compare first-person thought. We can't spell out the content of the first person—as in the belief that I am KS—in third-person terms.[25] But that doesn't mean that a third-personal description of the world is incomplete. First-person thought involves a special way of thinking about someone by way of one's relation to them, not a domain of fundamentally first-person facts. It may be difficult to pin down the notion of fact or reality at issue here but an implication is that one would not miss anything about the nature of first-person thought if one characterized it in terms of the relation it exploits in thinking about someone, together with third-person facts.

Similarly, for the B-theorist: one would not miss anything about the nature of tensed thought if one characterized it in terms of the relation it exploits in thinking about times, together with tenseless facts. (A-theorists complain, obscurely but plausibly, that this omits an aspect of reality uniquely captured by tensed thought: the objective present.) What are the implications of the B-theory for grief?

I've argued elsewhere that first-person thought falls under the following constraint:

> HARMONY: Where a subject thinks about an object in virtue of standing in a certain relation to it, that relation must accord with the rational significance of the corresponding thoughts. (Setiya 2015: 466)

The idea behind Harmony is that, in describing the relation by which a subject thinks about an object, we aim to characterize the nature of the corresponding thoughts and hence their role in the subject's

[25] I argue for this in Setiya 2015: 456-8.

rational psychology. Thus, according to Gareth Evans (1982: §6.4), when we use perceptual demonstratives—*this glass*, *that building*—we think about an object in virtue of a perceptual relation or information-link that enables us to locate and re-identify that object in egocentric space. This fact accords with the rational significance of the corresponding thoughts, which play a role in guiding bodily movement through that space. Likewise, for Evans (1982: §6.3), to think about a location as *here* is to think about it in virtue of more general dispositions to acquire information about it by perceptual means and to engage with it through bodily movement. This accords with the role of such thoughts in intentional action. When I think that something is here, it makes sense to attempt, or to avoid, perceptual or bodily interaction with that object. Evans may be wrong about the specifics of *that* or *here* but he is right to focus on relations that play these roles.

For the B-theorist, however, the only difference between thinking, tenselessly, that B dies before time *t*, and thinking, at time *t*, that B has died—in other words, that B is now dead—is that in the latter case, one thinks about *t* by way of one's relation to it, namely: its being the time of this very thought. But then it's unclear how, consistent with Harmony, the rational significance of these thoughts could differ. If our subject were relational grief, or the effects of grief on me, it might be rationally significant that I am thinking about B's death after it has taken place. That is when my autobiography is disrupted. But if we focus on grief at the sheer loss of life—which is about B, not my relation to B—how can it matter to the rational significance of B's death that it precedes my belief? I don't see that it can. If the belief that B has died should initiate grief, so should the tenseless belief that B dies before time *t*. And since I already know that B dies before 2200, I should already grieve.

In drawing out this implication of the B-theory, we come close to a notorious argument by Arthur Prior:

> One says, e.g. "Thank goodness that's over!", and not only is this, when said, quite clear without any date appended, but it says something which it is impossible that any use of a tenseless copula with a date should convey. It certainly doesn't mean the same as, e.g. "Thank goodness the date of the conclusion of that thing is Friday, June 15, 1954", even if it be said then. (Nor,

> for that matter, does it mean "Thank goodness the conclusion of that thing is contemporaneous with this utterance". Why should anyone thank goodness for that?) (Prior 1949: 17)

Prior's point is, in part, that tensed beliefs are not equivalent to tenseless ones: their content can't be paraphrased in tenseless terms. The standard B-theoretic response concedes this, distinguishing the belief that a migraine is over from the conjunctive belief that the migraine occurs before time *t* and that *t* is the time of this belief, but resisting metaphysical implications.[26] The former belief may be about time *t* but in thinking it, one thinks about that time by way of one's relation to it, not by thinking about one's belief.

But Prior makes a second claim in parenthesis, that the rational significance of the tensed thought is distinct from the rational significance of its tenseless counterpart. If this involved a violation of Harmony, a challenge to the B-theory would remain: there would be more to the nature of tensed beliefs that B-theorists can allow.

On reflection, it's not clear that Prior is right. Why shouldn't it accord with the rational significance of the belief that a migraine is over—which differs from the rational significance of the belief that the migraine ends at time *t*—that *t* is the time of this belief? Given that relation to *t*, it doesn't make sense to anticipate a headache or look for painkillers. Why shouldn't it accord with the rational significance of the belief that my relationship with B is over—which differs from the rational significance of the belief that this relationship ends at time *t*—that *t* is the time of this belief? It's only then that it makes sense to do the work of altering my relationship with B.

I don't mean to say that these claims are unproblematic, only that there is a distinctive problem with grief at the sheer loss of life. It's here, in particular, that relating to a fact by thinking about it afterwards seems rationally insignificant. If what counts is B, not my relationship with B, how can it matter whether, in thinking about the fact that B dies before time *t*, I do so by way of my relation to *t*—its being the time of this very thought—or not? If, in 2200, I were to learn that B has died, I should

[26] See MacBeath 1983 and Mellor 1983.

begin to grieve. But I already know the tenseless fact that that B dies before 2200. For the B-theorist, the second thought differs from the first only in referring to the year without exploiting my temporal relation to it; but non-relational grief was never about me. Thus, Harmony requires the same response: I should begin to grieve B's death before she dies.

One can resist this line of thought in either of two ways. One can reject the B-theory, holding that there's more to the belief that B has died than believing that B dies before time *t* by way of a special relation to *t*: the tensed belief asserts a further fact. Or one can accept the B-theory, concede that the temporal relation between B's death and my thought is rationally insignificant, and maintain Harmony by denying that I should grieve in light of either tensed or tenseless belief. That would be revisionary: it would amount to denying the second premise of the puzzle about grief's rational diminution, that the fact that B has died is an insistent reason for grief.[27]

Yet if the argument above is sound—if the B-theory is true and we should grieve the dead—the implication is equally radical: that we should already grieve for everyone we love. It doesn't follow that we should grieve forever. If the emotional reality of having grieved makes a difference to the rationality of grief, then when we've grieved the deaths of those we love, it will be rational to grieve no more. Presumably, one should also grieve one's own impending death—and having grieved, accept one's mortality. Proleptic grief, for the B-theorist, is a kind of therapy we are rationally required to undertake, and where *post facto* grievers turn to practices of mourning, those who grieve *ex ante* may rely on spiritual exercises of the sort proposed by Buddhists or Stoics.

One could do this even as an A-theorist. We may not be required to grieve proleptically, according to the A-theory, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't, or that we can't. This therapy is an option. Still, it's hard to know why we would do it, if we needn't. If we're lucky, and the A-theory holds, we won't have to grieve for everyone we love, since we'll be outlived by some of them; and it doesn't take luck never to have to look back on one's own death.

[27] For a related thought, attributed to Einstein, that appeals to eternalism vs. presentism, not B-theory vs. A-theory, compare Sweeney 2021.

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