

# Of Grief and Mourning: Thinking a Feeling, Back to Robert Solomon

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## Abstract

The paper considers various ruminations on the aftermath of the death of a close or loved one, and the processes of grieving and mourning. The conceptual examination of how grief impacts on its sufferers, from different cultural perspectives, is followed by an analytical survey of current thinking among psychologists, psychoanalysts and philosophers on the enigma of grief, and on the associated practice of mourning. Robert C. Solomon reflected deeply on the 'extreme emotion' of grief in his extensive theorizing on the emotions, particularly in his essay 'On Grief and Gratitude', commenting that grief is 'often described as a very private, personal emotion, characterized by social withdrawal and shutting oneself off from the world' (2004: 73). While dialoguing with the spirit of Solomon by way also of a tribute to his immense insights, the paper engages in critical reflections on recent thinking in this area elsewhere – notably, in Heidegger, Freud, Nussbaum, Casey, Gustafson, and Kristeva – and offers a refreshing critique toward an alternative to the received wisdom.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This essay had its genesis in a spiel I was asked to present by Bob Solomon at the launch of the volume *Thinking About Feeling*,  
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in the University of Texas, Austin; I was to speak on my chapter 'Perturbations of Desire' in the collection. This was circa December 2002, shortly after a personal tragedy that engaged me intensely in this hermeneutic of the raw feelings I was undergoing, which also had me re-think the hitherto abstract theorizing on the emotions. I learnt a lot discussing this essay as it evolved, with Bob Solomon and Kathleen Higgins; I am grateful to Kathleen for including it in a publication that honors Solomon's profound legacy, in the special issue of *Sophia* on Robert C. Solomon and the Spiritual Passions (2011, 50/2: 281-301), which she guest edited. It is presented here with some revisions. And my gratitude also goes out to: Shannon ('Ravenswood'), Nina Rühle, Joseph Prabhu, Chris Chapple, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak; the Bilimoria- Chauhan-Parmar clans; the Sharma, Singh, Giborees, Kelvin & Tuttle, , Komesaroff, Lovell, Boston, Charlesworth, Hutchings families; Jayant Bapat, Rashmi Desai, Steffie Lewis, Rich & Denis, Peter Wong, Greg Bailey, Patrick Hutchings Esq, Joe Loizzo, Robert Thurman, John Koller, Sue Ren & Xing Xiang, Ian Weeks, Max Charlesworth, caring colleagues and staff at Deakin and Melbourne Universities, at NIAS, NIMHANS, SSRI (Bangalore); J. N. Mohanty, Shivesh Thakur, H.H. Dalia Lama, Jay Garfield, Hope & Stephen Phillips, (the late) Hazel Rowley, Ed Casey, Sridhars (Stony Brook), Sridhars (Bangalore), Brahmaputra, Mahboob, Ammas (Parthi), Chris Zvokel, Patrick Olivelle, David Carr, Laurie Patton, Thee Smith and friends in Emory, Ganga-Vidya-Vikram, Tinara Benson, Devi-Rasa, Maya; *Sophia* workers: Natassia Kaufman, Serena O'Meley, Amy Rayner, Sherah Bloor, Sara Kerr,; Maxine Therese, Panayiota Karnis, (late) Selva Raj, (late) Jagdish Sharma, Surabhi, Elizabeth Ann Kaplan, Hugh Silverman, Peter Smith; and last not least (*presentia in absentia*) Renuka M. Sharma also contributed to my understanding and coming to terms with this more challenging of creaturely emotions. Of course, there have been other interlocutors, support-givers, and carers, in parts of the world too numerous to name here, whose insights, questions and wisdom, have added succor to the arduous journey. To be sure, an inner journey that never does really have an end-point: one is always 'On The Way', as Heidegger reminded us poignantly in the context of Dasein's ontic-ontological quest for meaning of

## Troubled Passions and the Dark Night of Gloom

*No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I  
am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid.  
The same fluttering in the stomach, the same  
restlessness, the yawning. I keep swallowing . . .*

(C.S. Lewis, 1976: 1-3)

This paper presents a novice's reflections (with a delicate personal touch) on the aftermath of the death of a loved one, discussing the process of grieving and mourning, with a comparative focus, i.e. straddling across continental, cross-cultural and analytical

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being, non-being and self-actualizing authenticity. I have journeyed through this 'thrownness' that I found myself unwittingly confronted by, with the same philosophical-cum-spiritual passion that I have and despite all do remain engaged in my other intellectual pursuits.

philosophical treatments. I shall also indulge the reader in a couple of anecdotal narratives, personal communications, and poetical musings to illustrate how grief is viewed, and how it affects its sufferers, from somewhat different cultural perspectives. This will be followed with an attempt at an analysis and survey of some current thinking among psychologists, psychoanalysts, and philosophers on the enigma of grief, and on the associated praxis of mourning. Since Robert C. Solomon (beloved Bob) was concerned to make his own reflections on the 'extreme emotion' of grief in his extensive and groundbreaking theorizing on the emotions, particularly in one of his last books, *True to Our Feelings* (2007), and in his chapter 'On Grief and Gratitude' (2004)—close to a period when he has also thinking deeply about death and perhaps his own mortality—I shall be taking this opportunity to dialogue with the spirit of his thinking on this challenging subject—

matter. Solomon comments that grief is 'often described as a very private, personal emotion, characterized by social withdrawal and shutting oneself off from the world' (2006: 73). Indeed one's wishes when struck by an experience of death of someone very near and dear are as W. H. Auden (1976) describes in his moving poem:

*Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,  
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,  
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum  
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.*

*The stars are not wanted now; put out every  
one,  
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun.  
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;*

*For nothing now can ever come to any good.*

All these things seem unnecessary now; in colloquial terms their 'use-by- date' is over and Nothingness has come to be.

Couldn't the world and speeding motorists just stop for a moment to notice—as the hearse moved towards the crematorium after the last rites—that the cosmos, nay Existence (*sat, ens, esse, eksistere*) itself, has come to a grinding halt? Its underbelly of the inseparable Non-existence (*asat-ca-sat, nihili*) has emerged triumphant against traditional Brahmanic wisdom and promises (its *ab-solutum*); perhaps the Buddhists, Jains, and nihilists have it right. It is as one beholds in *bardo*: existence is just another appearance, an illusion, a mirage, emptiness all around. The Pascalian wager (bet) I had gratefully placed—staked on game-theory determined probability against the nihilationist condition (unclinically termed

cancer)—has now been lost; we are returned to the cascaded parade of ‘all souls of the faithful departed’. ‘Where the hell is God or gods?’(Leonard, 2010).

“*So this is the end, my friend, love of my life?*” – the first words that came to my mouth as I had held her still warm-hands minutes after the fatal moment—echoed resoundingly in the defiant darkness that had slowly been enveloping the earthly horizons and the terrestrial realms, and inwardly too (Masel 2011).

*Betake thee (deceased) to the lap of the earth  
the mother, of earth  
Far-spreading, very kind and gracious.  
Young dame, wool-soft unto the guerdon-giver,  
may She preserve thee from Destruction’s  
(Death’s) bosom.*  
(*Rig Veda*, X, 18; Funerary Ritual, *antyeshti*,  
incantation).

*gate gate pāragate pārasaṃgate bodhi svāhā*  
(gone, gone beyond the other shore – of  
suffering – well-gone), (Prajñāparamita mantra,  
*Heart Sūtra*).

*And when the mind was freed from death*  
*it became the moon (candra).*  
*So having gone beyond death,*  
*the moon now shines up there. (Bṛhadrāranyaka*  
*Upanishad 2.5.7, Olivelle 1996)*

*Beautiful face, mind heart*  
*The dark/Shadow...*  
*The waking in brightness*  
(‘Obituary’, Hutchings, in Charlesworth 2003).

The rituals that many of the ancient (perhaps so–  
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called 'primitive as well as 'civilized') traditions bring to the last rites, honoring the deceased in a gesture of sending the parting 'soul' onto its yonder journey, tend to ease if not blunt the devastation and the avalanche of sensations and feelings that continue to flood the body and mind – as if for one unending eternity – of the survivors. But this reprieve may not last too long. Associated with the gloom of grief is a series of unsettling sensations and feelings: not least, an arresting sense of hopelessness, loss, fear, anxiety, wrath, if not indignant anger, a 'collapsing of the house of cards', a throbbing of the heart in deep pain, swallowing, tightness in the chest, and perhaps also in the stomach that has all but lost its usual appetite, and insomnia. Because of the intensity and insufferable 'jab of red-hot memory' whence all this "common-sense" vanishes like an ant in the mouth of a furnace (C. S. Lewis, 1976), followed by doubts about what one is

actually feeling, sometimes denying the obvious only to be hit with wave upon wave of discomfiture, tears and inexplicable sensations in various parts and organs of the body, grief is often said to be the most negative of “negative” emotions—though Solomon seeks to de-emphasize this presumed polarity between positive and negative emotions. His argument “is not that there is no such thing as valence . . . but rather that there are many such polarities and oppositions” (2007: 171).

(And so in a moment of confessional guilty grief:)

*‘Why did I not see her pain and agony more consciously?  
How could I have been, my beloved, so self-possessed?  
Whose is the blame here?’*

In that vein, taking upon oneself the responsibility for the woeful pain of the other even as the person is passing, C. S. Lewis (1976: 62) perspicuously compares his pain with that of the deceased (in this instance his own dear wife) while she struggled through her illness,

being stricken down by cancer. 'It comes in waves . . . and it goes in waves.' Lewis goes on to describe an experience he later had, as he puts it, inside his mind, and one of immense intensity, but absent of any intentionality or motivation or trigger for action. He valued it not for the probabilistic evidence or any quantification of the lessening pain it might provide, but for its intellectual quality and unemotional character; he notes:

Just the impression of her mind momentarily facing my own. Mind, not 'soul' as we tend to think of soul . . . just intelligence and attention . . . Certainly the reverse of what is called 'soulful'.' Discounting the presence of any voice, message, re-union . . . rather 'un-love': 'I had never in any mood imagined the dead as being so -well, so business-like. Yet there was an

extreme and cheerful intimacy. An intimacy that had not passed through the sense or the emotions at all' (Lewis 1976: 62).

The chilling idea that emotion could be absent had repelled him; but now he is at peace with it—with the ghost of his own mind as the other mind—his will is back, he is a rational man again. So it might seem.

A harrowing anecdote from my own experience in the last mystifying moments brings out Lewis's reflection here rather poignantly, namely that emotions could be at abeyance momentarily, and one is overpowered by the sense of the sheer intellect of the receding other that does not stop being the strong presence it always has been, as well as continuing the intimacy. When my philosopher colleagues arrived at the hospital to find me tearless and in a frantic state by the bed where my just deceased beloved lay, a calmness and

peaceful demeanor shrouded her otherwise long fatal battle with a cancer (of the fiercest endometrial ovarian variety). I was—as described to me later—unselfconsciously *livid*, like Nietzsche’s madman (who came down from the mountains with a lit lantern in broad daylight, looking for God upon being given the unexpected news ‘God is Dead!’) or as if suffering from stage fright, but nonetheless loquacious for that:

‘We had been talking since this morning, and just moments ago before I left the room we made plans to go abroad again . . . to India actually, where our to-be-adopted child [from an orphanage in Bangalore] awaited ‘the picking’ and bringing back home. How could [the] *mind and language* simply vanish: just like that? That’s bizarre! . . .’

(Someone dares to mention on an incoming phone-call:) 'Regarding her *matti* (funeral) . . . sorry, but we cannot come for it.' 'Whose funeral, baba? Who has died? (Turning toward the nurses:) 'What do you mean, *she has passed*, passed to where?' The nurses seemed terribly anxious to whisper into my ears 'She's gone; she just passed as you walked out the door . . . there is no pulse . . . look closer, the eyes are not responding'.

'Hummmm, bloody hell, what has pulse to do with consciousness? . . . look here, her eyes are focused on me and we are talking as we have been all morning . . .'

The somber voice of one of my colleagues standing across chipped in: 'Young man, you are asking metaphysical questions'.

'Goddamn-it, what else should I be asking . . . doing? Singing "*Old Aquinas*"?

'You should be crying', another sermonized ever

gently.

‘Crying? I have not known tears in all my life!’

‘You will . . . and you will see her.’

‘Good grief, I see her, there she is, *here!*’

My interlocutor could be said to be anticipating the surge of memories and paradoxical desires verging on an occult aspect, ‘as if those memories and details might be used to “conjure up” the lost one, as in a séance or an invocation’ (Solomon, 2004: 85). In a dream, I hear, ‘It is natural (for one) in the physical state to mourn’, echoing Krishna's sermon to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* (2.11): ‘but grief (*śocya*, grieving, lamentation) is for oneself not for the departed . . . have resilience; you have work yet on earth's platform . . . attending to tasks and bodily health, with diligence and self-love . . .’

As if prophetically, some weeks later in a dream or

two I am reflecting,

‘You mean I should be loving myself; a self that is hanging on in threadbare smithereens . . . a self negated?’

(Still in the twilight state I hear) Tring–tring tring—the cell phone goes off:

‘Honey, remember to bring me organic pasta from the supermarket, the one I like . . .’

‘Okay, I will . . . but hang on, aren’t you supposed not to be . . . well . . . alive, no?’

Another night, like the owl of Minerva, the dream–voice whispers Hermes’ message to me:

*‘Let us get up and leave the hospital beds now.’*

*‘But what will people think, you’re supposed to*

*be dead?’’*

*‘Who cares what people say . . . I am here with you, am I not? Here take my hand—can’t you feel the warmth?’*

A Buddhist monk and Indian sadhu may well identify with this sentiment, or *vedana*, which I go on to briefly discuss. But as I argue shortly, drawing on Solomon, grief is not all about sentimentality either. It is more a moral episteme entangled with a deeper emotional response than might be thought. It may even be more, as one moves to consider variations to this theme cross-culturally and in psychoanalytic wisdom.

The Sanskrit terms *śocya* [pitiable] or *duhkha* (Pali *dukkha*) [suffering] are not specific enough to cover the deep sense of loss, (*kampāva*) and pain of mind (*sanvegaya*), and sorrow (*kalakirima*)—from *kala* [time] and *kriya* [completed action; ‘termination of time’],

that is death] (Obeyesekere, 1985: 144). Here folk psychology proceeds through legends or parables, a famous one of which is that of the mustard seed, which goes like this: Kisā Gotamī's first and only child died in infancy. Distraught with pain and grief, she went from place to place seeking some medicine to resurrect her child. She eventually came to the Buddha and asked the sage whether he could revive the dead child. The Buddha said that he could if only she would bring a mustard seed from a house in which death had not occurred. Elated, Kisā Gotamī's went from one house to another seeking the impossible mustard seed. She soon came to the realization that her own personal grief is simply a part of a larger universal problem of suffering . . . in this recognition lay her redemption.

In Indian traditions (Jain, Hindu, and Buddhist) the stark reminder that a deceased person is to be sent onwards to her own journey and that she may be reborn

in another body—even possibly in the same—household—is intended at the same time to help one to cathartically confront one’s grief and be consoled that all is not lost and that one could, perhaps should in due course, be ready to move on—with life’s sojourn here and its spiritual trajectories being preparation for the eventuality of one’s own demise as well (Gielen, 1997: 52–71).

In the Jewish tradition the principal mourners withdraw indoors from public life for a set number of days, a sharing of the grief of the living, in an observance known as Shivah. It is obligatory to formally mourn (not necessarily to grieve). There are prescribed rituals associated with an almost ascetic existence; one refrains from domestic chores, as well as entertainment, driving, work, and other mundane preoccupations. The recitation of the Mourner’s Kaddish, lighting of candles, and sharing of food

brought by family members and other visitors occur as well (Heilman, 2001: 21; Alpert, 2010: 25–40).

In some cultures, wailers are paid (indeed handsomely compensated like our professional therapists) not only to join the mourners in expressing their remorse and sorrow, but also to take part in other practices. In the highland village of Kaluli in Papua New Guinea, an elaborate commemorative ritual involves dancing around a bonfire in the middle of the night, ending with the enraged survivors leaping up and stamping a burning torch on the shoulders of the hired dancers. The intensity and scope of the ritual performance permits the mourners or the survivors to let their repressed anger, rage against the gods and righteous indignation at the gratuitous loss to surface from the soul, in all its dark shades, and to be thereby 'cleansed, cleared and purified' (Lutz, 1985).

And there is anger . . . why did you die on me?  
Couldn't you have lived on, like everyone else we  
know? Is that you David? The cats are fine . . .  
What is it like being dead? (Stephanie Lewis on  
David Lewis—conversation in Princeton)

Renato Rosaldo the anthropologist, describes his experience at the site of the fatal accident overlooking the body of his lifeless wife, Michelle Rosaldo, at the bottom of a 65-foot sheer precipice: 'I felt like in a nightmare, the whole world around me expanding and contracting, visually and viscerally heaving.' He found himself embattled by 'rage, born of grief'; and he began to understand the force of anger that is possible in bereavement (2004: 167-8).

Months later, someone whispers . . . 'You getting over the sorrow ok? Seeing a counselor, getting professional help?' 'You must stop worrying "*Why she*

*die?*” You[r] ki’ney–lever no’ functioning well . . . brain over–working all [the] time. Yu’needa som’acupun’ure’ ‘Not your fault.’ ‘Heal yourself.’ ‘She’be right, mate.’ It seemed almost obligatory, a grid–like pattern to follow, set stages one supposedly goes through:

You must be on stage three now . . . displaced anger, irritability.

Open to a few possible goals, testosterone count coming up . . . you must be strong and resilient, my friend, life must go on; you’ve got responsibilities . . .’

‘I’m rather finding it more helpful splitting my time between the streets of the East Village (in New York)—“*going mad in anonymity*,” and mostly solitary in my retreat by beachside Venus Bay (outside Melbourne), as also sequestered

stoically in our village home, research enclaves, ashram retreats and Ayurveda clinics by the holy rivers and towns up and down the Indian subcontinent (after the last rites with the ashes got completed). *Sacrifice sacrificing itself to sacrifice.*'

This latter “escape” route is somewhat reminiscent of the ‘twice-phoren’ sojourn of the uncontrollably cantankerous Indian character in Salman Rushdie’s moving novel, *Fury* (2001). One Professor Malik Solanka is the ingenious inventor of masked “dolls” that debate philosophical imponderables and scientific verities and engage in fiendish feuds on multi-mediated web-channels. One fine day, with his immense dividend earnings intact, he stealthily flees his stable suburban home, leaving behind his loving wife and a young son, and a cozy job in Cambridge University. The

philosopher, of great esteem to the popular audience in the U.K., decides to “black-out” in New York, “the *seductive World-City*” of expanding and contracting *māyā*, that he much loves and resonates with at some deep level, but is disdainful of its horrendous pretensions —devoured gullibly by upper-Manhattan’s mechanized, rudderless selves—and its scary politics laced with theo-babbling fundamentalism. He is burdened by a double-dose of wrath and indignation in the altered states of America. ‘Those whom the gods would destroy they first make mad’ (184). The rupture he sought from his now all but buried pasts—erstwhile in Bombay, followed by in the U.K.—drove him toward a schizoid frame of mind, and he struggles to unearth the mysterious forebodings within his soul. Hoping to overcome his faults and foibles and to retreat from his darker, counterfeit self, the self of his dangerous fury, through renunciation, through ‘*giving up*’, he falls into

new and more grievous denizens of fury and other demons within.

Or as Rusdhie's narrator exquisitely captures in non-prosaic psychoanalytic flourish the sinews of the catastrophic perturbations gyrating within,

Malik Solanka who had latterly become conscious of the inexplicable within himself, had been firmly of the prosaic party, the party of reason and science in its original and broadest meaning: *scientia*, knowledge. Yet even in these microscopically observed and interminably explicated days, what was bubbling inside him defied all explanations. There is that within us, he was being forced to concede, which is capricious and for which the language of explanation is inappropriate. We are made of shadow as well as light, of heat as well as dust.

Naturalism, the philosophy of the visible, cannot capture us, for we exceed. We fear this in ourselves, our boundary-breaking, rule-disproving, shape-shifting, transgressive, trespassing shadow-self, the true ghost in our machine. Not in the afterlife, or in any improbably immortal sphere, but here on earth the spirit escapes the chain of what we know ourselves to be. It may rise in wrath, inflamed by its captivity, and lay reason's world to waste (Ibid 128-9).

We are a sign that is not read  
We feel no pain, we almost have  
Lost our tongue in foreign lands.  
(Friedrich Hölderlin, in Heidegger, 1977b: 359)

Fast-forward to a nimble apartment on Rue B in the East Village (when not on the LIRR to Stony Brook): I left behind Melbourne, hounded, mystified, overwhelmed (or rather underwhelmed) and brought 'to the knees', that woefully lonesome wandering and wondering went on intermittently for some good four long years (in between teaching at local universities and wide reading). Whence also I reluctantly submitted to analysis and 'healing' therapies (thanks to recurrent advice). Especially insightful were the regular weekly sessions on the couch, as it were, with an astutely gifted psychiatrically-trained Buddhist psychotherapist on the upper East-side (Manhattan). He had me work through, among various modalities besides 'talk' therapy, Atīśa's 'Seven-Point Mind Training' and Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, interspersed with yoga, long hours of meditation, visualization and introspective contemplations. This would be followed by peregrinations, mostly in Central

Park, so as to find some 'direction home' or for a little solace and company, taking long strolls along Riverside, by the Hudson, with my friend and erstwhile colleague Hazel Rowley (whose untimely *gate gate pārasaṃgate* in 2010 in New York simply exacerbated the residual grief. Hutchings, 2011:313), Needless to say, of course, much more came up in the sessions than just the numbing melancholia of bereavement, especially, to note a few such tropes, issues of childhood, overbearing parental expectations and their own domestic turmoils, sibling relations and rivalries — hence early-life traumas. Additionally there surfaced signs of mendacity, a plethora of follies, particularly combativeness, self-defensiveness, obsessive compulsive reactions, aggression, bashful hostility, judgmentalism, temperamental moodiness, obfuscations, being strung-out, forgetfulness, impermeability, alleged emotional abuse, and relationship difficulties. Not to mention

certain inane suspiciousness, insecurities, lashing out with blaming accusations, criticisms and empty words (even against those who brought care, love and new relationship opportunities). There were also signs of various deficiencies—such as the capacity for compassion, empathy, vulnerability, gratitude, openness, humility, or being able to be present to the moment. Alongside were symptoms of a dysfunctionally asinine mind, embodiment dissonance, sexual disorientation, mild addiction, and the failure to come to grips with my own oblivion to the vanishing present – a veritable drama of absurdities. Every act and gesture of surrounding persons seemed to become calculated occasions for antics and foibles of the petty ego and the confrontational, mystifying intellect, confounded by confusion and baneful unmindfulness, overseas jaunts and long absences in elusive pursuits, especially during the drawn-out process of the other’s illness. Nothing

was any longer what it appeared to be; and the hitherto buried psychic traces (*samskāras*, or *kleśas* [hindrances], those of the sedimented crusts of karma itself) would spill over or become enmeshed in the embodied (or more aptly, disembodied) state one is blindly walking around in, or insufferably clinging onto meanwhile and living through day-to-day regularity (rather irregularity).

Why was it necessary in attempting to deal with the present grief to delve so deeply into the inexplicable psyche and early childhood issues? Because, as I came to understand later in dialogue with another psychotherapist: ‘Oftentimes when a person suffers a major loss in adulthood, they are unexpectedly confronted with unresolved earlier grief and losses from their childhood. The extent to which they were able, or unable, to fully grieve and process those earlier losses impacts their ability to fully meet, experience, and process the present grief. It is not unusual, therefore,

for latent feelings, unresolved emotional traumas, and maladaptive emotional responses and behaviors to surface during periods of extreme loss and grief' (Tinara M. Benson, personal communication).

### **The Work of Mourning and Grieving**

*Grief shows in the face.*

—Wittgenstein

I should now like to offer some theoretical reflections.<sup>2</sup> Following the painful or unacceptable loss

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<sup>2</sup> Here I have been greatly assisted (indeed guided) by very helpful and poignant responses (virtual summaries) to the read draft version from Edward S. Casey, to whom I am most grateful. Some of the paragraphs in the theoretical reflections are cited verbatim, in places without quotation marks, if in

of a loved and/or esteemed one, both grief and mourning are undergone. While grief is the more immediate response, an episodic act or experience, mourning, it is noted, is a state, whether a state of mind or state of collectivity. The feeling of grief is experienced as 'acute emotionality that is insistently conscious; while mourning need not be conscious at all: hence its many vicissitudes, including those of hating the lost one', being angry with them, or identifying with him or her intensely (Casey, personal communication). There may be no conscious recognition of this state as mourning until a close friend or an analyst points this out; thus the variety of ritualistic enactments, almost underscoring the difficulty of mourning—or as Derrida would say, 'the impossible mourning that nonetheless remains at work'

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a talking-paper of this nature one can assume and exercise this indiscretion.

(2001: 95), and thus its tendency to be unconscious, which makes way for its public performance with others, or by their intervention in the mourning process.

Often however, the experience of grief—or even the absence of it—is viewed more in pathological terms than as one of the regular everyday emotions because it seems so out of the ordinary. Philosophers have not refrained from asking if ‘normal grief is a mental disorder?’ (Wilkinson 2000). Solomon nevertheless avers that this is a misguided question: ‘If grief were simply a negative reaction to a loss, or even a physical condition that (it has often been pointed out) fits the definition of a mental disorder, a medical illness, this would be incomprehensible.’ (2007: 75) On the contrary, like anger, righteous indignation, and wrath, grief is ‘a strategy for engaging with the world,’ despite the denials and obsequious self-obsessions. A closer survey of the symptoms of grief reinforces Solomon’s view. Thus, Eric

Lindemann describes the more general symptomology of grief, thus:

The picture shown by persons in acute grief is remarkably uniform. Common to all is the following syndrome: sensations of somatic distress occurring in waves lasting from 20 minutes to an hour at a time, a feeling of tightness in the throat, choking with shortness of breath, need for sighing, and an intense subjective distress described as tension of mental pain. The patient soon learns that these waves of discomfort can be precipitated by visits, by mention of the deceased, and by receiving sympathy . . . Another strong preoccupation is with feelings of guilt. The bereaved searches the time before the death for evidence of failure to do right by the lost one. He accuses himself of

negligence and exaggerates minor omissions. In addition, there is often a disconcerting loss of warmth in relationship to other people, a tendency to respond with irritation and anger, a wish not to be bothered by others at a time when friends and relatives make special effort to keep up friendly relationship. These feelings of hostility, surprising and quite inexplicable to the patients, disturbed them and were again often taken as signs of approaching insanity. Great efforts are made to handle them, and the result is often a formalized, stiff manner of social interaction (cited in Lamm 2000: 142-3).

Mourning, although somewhat formalized in modern cultures, nevertheless, seeks to extend the grief to a more shared burden of feeling in the larger community or collectivity; the role of narration in mourning

ineluctably takes us into the intersubjective sphere as well. Hence there are both personal and collective locations, especially of mourning, if not of grief itself. And as Solomon points out, in cultures that are less individualistic and more socially connected, grief is a tightly communal and shared experience. 'The logic of grief is entangled with the social structure of mourning, and the peculiarity of grief as I will describe it is that the mourning is minimal' (2004: 75); although perhaps not so minimal, as the anthropological work of Catherine Lutz (1985) demonstrates.

Psychological anthropologists no longer consider emotions to be mere private, psychobiological phenomena; they are substantially mediated by culture. Jenkins and Karno have argued that,

a culture provides its members with an available repertoire of affective and behavioral responses

to the human condition, including illness. In addition, it offers models of how people should or might feel and act in response to the serious illness of a loved one. This may involve anger and hostility in one context or sadness and sympathy in another (1992: 9–21).

As much as one would like to emphasize the cultural (extra–personal) dimension, the collective repertoire and resources thereof, over the intrapsychic processes, the internal (inward–tending) dimension, that acutely personal festering of the ‘dark night’, should not be overlooked (as it often is in reductionist and behaviorist psychologies, that overwhelmingly focus on the external symptoms and environmental stimuli or triggers at the expense of the deeper intentionalities, emotional and mental challenges), and for which a balanced spiritual response may be more apposite.

'Indeed', notes Edward Casey, 'we cannot keep them apart, especially in mourning, given that virtually every state of mourning is at least interpersonal—minimally, between the lost one and the survivor—but also ramifies into larger social and political groupings. An even more concrete transition is made when there are expressive gestures mediated between affect and the law, and the 'empathic projective identification' encircles the outlying world of indefinite pluralities right up to the level of the state or the nation (thus, 'A National Day of Mourning', or a Week or a Month, 'The World Mourns Today').

The quick theoretical reflection here is that there are both cognitive and affective aspects to mourning, just about throughout the process; however, there are differential emphases on the two dimensions in any given or particular case, as the anecdotes also well demonstrate. Thus, when I mourn, I must believe certain minimal things: that someone or something has

departed forever, that there is no possible or adequate replacement for this loss; that my life has become that much more empty, etc.' 'By the same token, however', as Casey draws out well the implication here, 'I feel the loss within; I not only notice it, I react to it emotionally.'<sup>3</sup> I will say a little more on the distinguishable but inseparable status of these two dimensions as the epicenters of mourning in the final section. Meanwhile, the appearance of the loaded negativity associated with this emotion may have escaped us. So the question this raises is important to pause for.

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<sup>3</sup> The quotations here are the response (plus personal communication of Edward Casey to the first draft of my paper, presented at the Stony Brook–Manhattan conference on "Living with Grief: Coping with Public Tragedy" in 2003.

**The Analytic of ‘Moral Emotion’ vis-à-vis ‘Grief  
Pathology’**

*I don't mind dying - I just don't  
want to be there when it happens.*

— Spike Milligan

*We are too late for the gods,  
And too early for Being.*

— Martin Heidegger

Just what happens when one is brushed by death?  
Heidegger answers that there is a deep anxiety that one is  
poised to becoming “nothing”, the challenge of “nullity” of  
any and all being, hence being-ness, as one is “thrown-

toward-death”, which is always a possibility; so too for the other who now fully bears witness to this truth (1977a: 108). There is a practical affirmation of the finitude of one’s being, of the inauthenticity of existence, that the illusion of immortality has been totally shattered: what other illusion (read Hindu *māyā*) remains? The metaphysical fear of death that one experiences for the other is also at the same time, and perhaps as for Solomon, the real challenge here (1998:17). It is a reminder of one’s own, albeit temporarily submerged, fear of dying, and not of the suffering part of it. The first-person fears are inextricably mixed up with the loss felt in the dying of the second-person, whose presumed fears and suffering at the hands of indiscriminate agent of death now become my burden also.

Hauntingly, with the onset of death of another, there is a reminder, impossibly, of one’s own death, as if remembering a future memory—as when a ‘wake’ for my

friend with a terminal prognosis Murray of Venus Bay, is held where each of his 200 friends and family members recalls the good times they have had with him over the decades and what each would miss when Murray finally succumbs to the claws of death. Murray even organized his own funeral with the help of his dear friend, Effie, and narrated in his 'swan song' the choice of the coffin, the location of the burial site, the rites he prefers, the celebrant he has prepared for the sacred occasion, and what brand of beer would be distributed at the reception. (It was not unlike the dream Gabriel Garcia Márquez narrates of organizing his own funeral, 1993.) This seemed like a sanguine gesture and an humane acceptance of the inevitable; the difficult and painful thought of the passing of someone so close as Murray is to the village folks (and indeed to me) was made part of everyday reality, though their 'mate' is still very much with them (although one of their number, Brian, passed

on prematurely in the interim.)

Still, why is it that grief is so often looked upon as a 'negative' and undesirable emotion—even as one of the 'basic' emotions (along with sadness)? Why is it that the color black, darkness, and two-dimensional shades of colorless and timeless surrounds are so overwhelmingly associated with mourning and the funerary rites? The *Mahābhārata's* list of negative emotions includes grief, alongside anger and sorrow (Bilimoria 2003). But why is grief looked upon as suffering in the way that sorrow is? Most approaches in folk psychology are all too readily disposed to deal with grief by healing one speedily of the malaise, 'the shocking blow', the physical pain and mental burden. Often many Westerners who help the bereaved, as Rosenblatt observes, hold to some notion or other of 'grief pathology'—for example, grief that is never expressed; that goes on too intensely for too long;

that is delayed; that involves delusions, that involves threats to others, that involves self-injury (Rosenblatt 1997:41). Grief pathologies, like grief, may suggest a human universal, but what is forgotten is that symptoms of grief vary from culture to culture. Thus, Rosenblatt cites three instances that point to the differences: a mother in Cairo suffering from a seven-year depression over the loss of her child is really not perceived in her culture to be behaving pathologically.

A bereaved Balinese who seemingly laughs off a death is also behaving appropriately by the standards of her culture; in another society, a person who is possessed by spirits of the dead may be in line with what is entirely understandable and quite common in bereavement in her own society (Rosenblatt

1997:41).

Yet philosophers have waxed ambivalent on grief's nature and especially its relation to other emotions and affects, and to morality, and indeed to the cooler rationality or *primacy of intellectualization* (rephrasing Stocker 2003: 144). Thus, Robert Solomon, in a paper read in Melbourne, also questions why this paradigm case of emotion is often listed (though typically as sadness) as one of the "basic" emotions and a "negative" and (thus) undesirable one? Instead, he wishes to argue that 'Grief is a moral emotion . . . It is for this reason that grief is not only expected, as the *appropriate* reaction to the loss of a loved one, but in a strong sense *obligatory*, and much more.'

But grief is not merely "normal" or "natural," for it would pass the test for a "duty" in the Kantian

scheme of things. *Some feelings are obligatory*, and this is because they are deeply embedded into the fabric of our moral lives (Solomon 2004: 75–78).

I think that what Solomon wants to underscore here is that grief should not be looked upon as a disease or mental aberration and reduced to the clinical picture of the suffering—or limited to the overly mystical picture of a ghostly presence (as in C. S. Lewis's account above). His basic argument is that there are deep—and deeply felt—moral (hence the dedicatory gesture) and reflective dimensions to grief directed toward the loved one who has been lost. Without love there would be no grief; the greater the love, the greater the grief. The other important distinction Solomon makes 'is that one does not suffer *from* grief, but rather one suffers grief'.

That grief is a painful and undesirable emotion is obvious, but then it is not as if the feelings of grief are themselves painful . . . It occurs in our lives in unwanted circumstances, and its very presence means that we have suffered a serious loss (Solomon 2004: 80).

But there is a peculiarly unique value to this emotion, which, as I read Solomon and much of the cross-cultural literature—e.g., those in Buddhism, explored by our Melbourne-based Sri Lankan colleague, Padmasiri de Silva—‘is not only measured by the circumstances that prompt it, and it might just be that grief is the most desirable and in that sense “positive” emotion in a tragic situation’ (80).

We may press on the notion of moral obligation for a while, inquiring as to its congruency with grief, and ask: whose obligation is it? How far does the circle

stretch out, as it were? Shall we assume also that it is a 'right' reciprocally demanded by the deceased, or by the social milieu; but so also in the sense of a 'rite' entailing the entitlement to be able to perform or trump a claim to that privilege? And whose right? Whose grief counts? Why not that of Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, who too made no effort (as did Hamlet) to symbolize the death of her husband? (*Hamlet* Act I, scene ii.; Solomon, 2004: 76-77) Indeed cultures vary as to who has the obligation or right to grieve, 'who is defined as the principal mourner, and who is seen as experiencing the most loss with a given death'. As Rosenblatt (who observed small scale societies reports):

One cannot, for example, assume that a new widow or widower feels the rights, obligations or feelings of a principal mourner for a deceased

spouse. One cannot assume that the person wailing most loudly or supported most attentively by others from her or his culture is a close relative of the deceased' (1997: 41).

In one reported incident at a funeral, after a mourner with no apparent relation to or even acquaintance with the family fainted while wailing loudly did it come to light that she was the covert mistress of the suddenly collapsed deceased, whom he had been supporting materially along with a mix of offspring from her previous marriage and possibly their own bigamous de-facto relationship. Her wailing could be interpreted as her bold attempt at seeking attention to her suffering and at the same time staking a claim in the "family loom", which she indeed did in due course of time; whenceforth she won a sizeable share of the deceased's

estate.

Likewise, in some cultures, wailers are paid to enact mourning for the immediately affected but somewhat emotionally at-sea family members. As Solomon notes himself, such a position confuses grief with mourning, which is an expression of grief and is often embedded in a complex social structure (as anthropologists have keenly observed everywhere). Where mourning is minimal and institutionalized (i.e., cut short to a few hours and attendance at service that is more or less by 'invitation'), a sense of obligation marks the occasion; but in cultures, such as those of the Maori or Aboriginal Australians, where funerary ceremonies can continue for three or more days, mourning is woven into the everyday life as part of the communal affective-fare. Even so, a distinction has to be made between a gesture expected or considered to be *appropriate*, and an act done as a matter of *duty* or out of a sense that

it is *obligatory*. The latter might reflect a deeply social genealogy of these emotions, which carry out social mandates as it were (Casey, response, personal communication).

But let us dwell a little longer on the larger moral claim: the test of “duty” (*Pflicht*) or the categorical imperative. There is lot at stake here: first is the suggestion that grief is not simply a set of primitive physiological sensations, raw feelings, pain; that it is not like anger, sorrow, depression; even that it is not just the ‘episodic attack’ is in the brain (as mental disorders and pathologies are thought to be); instead, it has a different, albeit a propositional structure (that-p). This suggestion comes from Don Gustafson’s essay, one of the rare few on this subject in analytical philosophy (1989). Gustafson’s argument is that grief necessarily includes a desire contrary to the belief that the lost beloved is lost, while sorrow involves only a wishing and

not such a desire (Solomon's phrasing).

I wish to draw caution to this position by questioning some of the presuppositions underpinning the premises in respect of their universalism or essentialism/realism, if not the stultifying aridity, and coherence overall. I will draw instead from psychoanalytical and cross-cultural ruminations for my skepticism. I wish to move the analysis towards the completely affective state, and bring into the picture melancholia, unconscious processes, and bodily impact to draw or trace out the inexpressive a little further.

Bob Solomon was among the early proponents of a Pure Cognitive Theory in which emotions were analyzed solely in terms of beliefs, desires and other intentional states, claiming that emotion is an 'evaluative (or normative) judgment, a judgment about my situation and/or about all other people' (1976: 186). If one interprets 'cognition' or the cognitive as being evaluative,

as Solomon did in his early views, then this is what marks the emotion of grief as much as it would other emotions. The intense evaluative judgment or 'appraisal' element here would include increasing references to an agent's desires and goals—or their frustration. Since then philosophers such as William Lycan, William Alston, Roland Alan Nash, and to an extent Martha Nussbaum, among others, have insisted on the bodily disturbances—'unthinking energies'—and perturbations of non-intellectual mentation processes (Nussbaum's 'thought') in the agent so that experiences such as trembling, blushing, perspiring, pangs, throbs, tingles, burning and other sensations, adrenalin secretions, increase in heart and respiratory rates, alterations of blood flow, changes in blood pressure, digestive processes and other neurological symptoms are not excluded: indeed, these would be fundamental structural markers of emotional response. And this is evidenced not just in human

beings with their quaint sentimentality, but apparently also in other animate creatures, in animals<sup>4</sup> (and ancient cultures believed this to be the norm among deceased ancestors, angels and gods/goddesses as well). This also gives warrant to the idea that grief involves a much larger tapestry, as it were, in its processing than, say, in the more short-fused emotions such as anger or even moral indignation. Grief is not something that can be ‘talked through’ and resolved intellectually, as when parties come to understand that

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<sup>4</sup> Witness, for example, self-grieving of dog Devi, and grief on the face of Rasa, baby-dog, and their carers, honored with canine last rites:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGBsWIIRep4>;

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5d0iN4COY78>.

Cf. *Bhagavadgītā* I.28–31

the anger and rage, or a flurry of accusations based on jealousy, were actually a result of some gross misreading of signs or cues or earlier interaction between them.

Solomon is right in emphasizing that grief is not a fleeting emotion, and that therefore the phenomenological structure of cognition (the cognitive act) is not expansive enough to contain, so to speak, the protracted space in which grief 'happens' and demands its process. Thus 'the process of grieving is the process of coping with that impossible desire and intolerable loss' (2004:85). And to that end there is an inexorable reflective, contemplative, introspective, introjective and even deeply meditative structure (if one needs to continue to use the cognitive model) to the process. Solomon is right about the reflective and dedicatory qualities of grief, meaning that the surge of feelings (sensations, emoting) is marked by a deep sense of

care, gratitude, reverence, honoring, commemorating, celebrating, and still an unrequited longing, a resilient desire for it to be otherwise than the loss so deeply felt.

Importantly, there is in this expression of grief a moral *reciprocity*, if not also the moral responsibility or blame (hence guilt) one is overcome with, the sense that somehow one was oneself implicated in the cause of the death, which in turn compounds the sentimentality of loss. To have the courage amidst this turmoil to be able to face the issue and stare deeply without even as much as a blink at the fathomless reach of death that has brought about this loss through the imagined (or real at the moment of the death) eyes of the beloved—not unlike the ceaseless gaze into a beloved’s living eyes—this courage is considered to be a quasi-virtue (like valor in the face of tragic assault or aggression, in the Aristotelian sense). That is Solomon’s point.

I wish to take up each of the stages I discern in the

welling up of this emotion, following Solomon, while drawing from the Indian tradition. Thus, I have argued elsewhere that in Indian theories the body is the *locus classicus* of feelings, sentiments, and affects (Bilimoria 2003: 214–6). And I illustrate this from the opening scene in the *Bhagavadgītā*, where a despondent Arjuna presents a first-hand report of his state-of-being on the battlefield as he encounters the prospect of the impending death of his kith and kin: his body is overwhelmed with sensations of feelings described as quivering, shivering, giddiness, nervousness, heaviness of breathing, weakness of his limbs, hair standing on end, and swallowing (1.28–30).

Martha Nussbaum, in her essay ‘Emotions as Judgments of Value and Importance’ (1997)<sup>5</sup>, much like

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<sup>5</sup> See Solomon’s comment in his review of Nussbaum (poignant for his critical retraction, siding with the so-called Adversary): ‘. . . can you make all of the

the early pre-repentant Solomon and Gustafson, considers the emotion of grief to be a form of judgment—about important things—involving judgments in which we acknowledge our neediness and lack of self-sufficiency or incompleteness before those elements that we do not fully control. And this view by her own account is a modified Stoic or neo-Stoic position,

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evaluative judgments that supposedly constitute the emotion and nevertheless not have that emotion? I have come to the conclusion after many years that the Adversary (now reinforced with some powerful studies in neurobiology) must be reckoned with, and that my old, rather ruthless line between those cognitive features of emotion that are essential and those non-cognitive features of emotion that are not essential was (in the context of the time) heuristic and is no longer so. (Nussbaum insists on necessary and sufficient conditions in her study, p. 62.)' (Solomon 2002: 900).

wherein the ‘unthinking bodily movements’, powerful and constitutive as they are, are not considered sufficient to render them an emotion; this is done by the more intelligent cognitive component. Nussbaum reinscribes judgment into this capitulating state by bringing in features or markers of intentionality (object-directedness with or without a defined causal relation to the unthinking-perturbations), beliefs (ways of “seeing that” or very complex objects), and *value* (2001: 189). Objects of emotion are valued for their importance, and are items of concern; hence their welfare holds significance—in terms of the agent’s flourishing and happiness.

So the *necessary* and *sufficient conditions* for emotion (although not identical) are relevant beliefs (of which there are three, to be indicated below) and perceptions; the rest of the features—the non-belief, non-thinking features, as Nussbaum calls them, or the

objectless wandering feelings of pain and/or pleasure, are relegated to the *constitutive* parts— even while she wonders aloud; ‘What are they like if they are not about anything?’ (The three beliefs are: that the suffering is serious; that the person does not deserve the suffering; and that the possibilities of the person who experiences the emotion are similar to those of the sufferer [Nussbaum 2001: 62]). And so the jab in the stomach and sensations of being ripped by slivers of glass at the news of her mother’s impending death—like Arjuna’s inner tears—are recastable in plain-language propositional terms:

My mother has died. It strikes me, it appears to me, that a person of enormous value, who was central to my life, is no longer there. It feels as if a nail has entered my insides; as if life has suddenly a large rip or tear in it, a gaping hole. I

see, as well, her wonderful face—both as tremendously loved and as forever lost to me. The appearance [and this is the crux of her argument] in however many ways we picture it, is propositional: it combines the thought of importance with the thought of loss, its content is that this importance is lost. And, as I have said, it is evaluative: it does not just assert, “Betty Craven is dead”. Central to the propositional content is my mother’s enormous importance, both to herself as well as to me as an element in my life (Nussbaum 2001: 197).

According to this view, then, the judgment is the grieving (it does not just precede or follow it): this is the upheaval. Encounters with death and the attachments to the dying or deceased (the intentional objects) come in a variety of forms, differing even in kind — from death of a

pet animal, to that of a spouse one identifies strongly with (perhaps more deeply than with a parent), to the passing of bodhisattvas and gods; the rawness and intensity of the responses, the amorphous, involuntary and pre-linguistic sense of lack, the dissonance and ambivalences of the will, indeed vary also in proportion to attachment schemata and one's ill-disposition, or unpreparedness, or the absence of symbolization in the moment, as the case of Hamlet well illustrates. I think it not unfair to quip that 'if the emotion of grief is judgment-laden, then Nussbaum's account itself is heavily theory-laden.' In other words, the judgment-ladenness of emotions had already figured as fore-structure/fore-grounding in her general theory of emotions, which she imports into her account of grief after the initial shock and the emblematic response to the traumatic news. Hence she is able to set aside all those troubling, disturbing, physiological, neurological,

'the insufferable animal' or demonic bodily sensations and biological symptoms that psychologists, healers, acupuncturists, folk counselors of various persuasions, animal nurses, and *Fürsorgenden* [carers] worry about, particularly if these are not recognized and acknowledged for their significance as necessary constituents of the emotion (or whatever category they slot grief into). It is curious that none of them think of treating the symptomology just in terms of beliefs and judgments (as the sufficiency principle). Perhaps the state of being belief-contrary —“I wish she had not died”—is excepted, since it can be a focus of therapy, but it is mainly understood as a disaffective signifier of denial which is also there in melancholy and sorrow. Perhaps too they do think, with Nussbaum's adversaries (*pūrvapakṣins*), that the unthinking markers are indeed the sufficient elements of grief and that the belief-propositional ingredients are constitutive or rather

supplementary. The massive ramblings of her tome apart, what Nussbaum has ended up with is rather close to the Hybrid Cognitive Theory that has been around since the late 1980s, in which perception and belief-state still maintain a hegemony or are called the 'paradigm case', but in which nonpropositional contents are not excluded, though these are viewed as the 'messier' side of emotion, linked to its own specific evaluative continuum and affective contents. (For example, see the work of Don Gustafson (1989), Ronald Alan Nash (1989), and Dan Moller (2007). The slight exception is the perspicuous underscoring of resilience and caring by Moller.)

By contrast, a somewhat more sophisticated view is presented in Ronald de Sousa's cognitive alternative account, in which context is given more importance than the contents of emotion, with context weighing heavily on the body's responses in a behavioral (not

physiological) mode in a participatory social environment, in which others are co-conspirators in the cultivation of our emotions (see, again, Solomon 2004). But where is there the context for cultivation of grief in the cases I have cited and in the numerous folk accounts where people find themselves bowled over by life's movements unannounced, or in a state of utter unpreparedness and confusion by a meteor- or steamroller-like, inexplicable, indeed ineffable, phenomenon?

Occasionally vociferous charges are directed at the pathologically dissociative "cognitive" theory of emotion for excluding affect as an essential element of emotional experience which satisfies grief's conditions of reciprocity, reparation, empathy, compassion, and *Sorge* [care] and is not limited merely to rational or intellectual movement. This charge has been led by Michael Stocker and Peter Goldie, but it has been a central tenet of psychoanalytical theories since Freud.

Some argue for the middle way view that cognitive theory can and ought to include affect—not an implausible and unreasonable compromise, but its coherency has yet to be persuasively argued for and tested. This is where Solomon has ended up also, more or less, with his dehistoricized, prudential affective phenomenology of grief. Not much is new here at all. Nevertheless, the battle lines remain drawn along these sharp cleavages, and it is quite plausible that further empirical research—in cross-cultural anthropology, psychology and psychoanalysis, with its forays into the unconscious, an aspect of consciousness not much theorized in analytical philosophy—will veer closer to the so-called adversarial position, or somehow sever this false disjunctive theory-choice. There are some serious reasons for thinking this.

Nevertheless, something in the tussle, as it were, between the emergent 'Evaluative versus Devaluative'

divide on the theoretic plane, might be resolved if we condescend to acknowledge that surely grief and mourning involve a quite peculiar sense of evaluation to the extent that the bereaved wishes to honor the missing person by saying, in effect, that the person, now all but lost to their world, is worth this very affective response. This is Casey's concession here, with the qualification that this valuation of 'the degree or kind of worth is here conditioned by circumambient social structures, e.g. family hierarchies and other forms of collective units, including ideologies and entire social imaginaries'. The point is well taken. However, the issue really is whether the evaluation is already part of that emotional response or is it a supplement to it, or indeed a response to this precursive emotion.

Given the current theoretical impasse as described it might be helpful to turn to treatments of empathy in tandem with the Heideggerian concept of *Sorge*, or care

(concern and solicitude), where the focus is on the phenomenological structure, i.e., the noematic content, rather than on the cognitive or nomological ramifications of the ego-reified experience: the *that* (*suchness*, in Buddhist terminology) of the experience, rather than the “I am having experience that.” (Sharma 1993, 1993a). Here, comparable to Kant’s suggestive notion of the ‘sublime’, the transcendental of all experiences, as a free-standing aesthetic category (that could be evoked by mystical or occultist encounters as well, including impending death), grief is traced as having the potential of an a priori disposition—albeit, not so much in terms of an abstract conceptual category but more as a soft-wired ‘ready-at-heart’ physiological response in all those spaces Hume had marked out for the work of sympathy upon the news or first-hand experience of a close-one (or a very significant human figure) passing to the beyond.

## The Sublime Melancholia of Mourning

The Raven<sup>6</sup>

*Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak  
December,*

*And each separate dying ember wrought its  
ghost upon the floor. Eagerly I wished the  
morrow . . .*

*'Prophet!' said I, 'thing of evil! – prophet still,  
if bird or devil!*

*By that Heaven that bends above us – by that  
God we both adore*

*Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the  
distant Aidenn,*

*It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the  
angels named Lenore –*

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<sup>6</sup> This sorely woody poem (excerpted here) describing Edgar Allen Poe's melancholia at loss of his beloved Lenore, was first published in 1845.

*Clasp a rare and radiant maiden, whom the  
angels named Lenore?*

*Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.'*

*'Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!'*

*I shrieked upstarting –*

*'Get thee back into the tempest and the  
Night's Plutonian shore!*

*Leave no black plume as a token of that lie  
thy soul hath spoken!*

*Leave my loneliness unbroken! – quit the  
bust above my door!*

*Edgar Allen Poe*

In his essay on 'Mourning and Melancholia', Freud  
(1986: 243) begins by talking about the affect of  
mourning [and I am here citing Charlie Shepherdson for

a more succinct summary]:

‘In the face of a death, the work of mourning brings with it a certain affective state.

Accordingly, the word for mourning “Trauer,” designates not only the activity of the mourner, but also the disposition or grief that accompanies it’ (2007: 58).

Freud is really interested in melancholy for which grief serves as a contrasting foil for his theory; and much philosophical and psychoanalytic literature has focused on melancholy as a depressive syndrome (Radden, 2000).

In the lover’s mourning, the loss of a loved one results in a loss of the capacity to adopt any new object of love; while in a lover’s melancholy (as in the wider

range that Shakespeare samples out, rather playfully), the source of the condition eludes the depressive sufferer. In its structural behavioral contexts there is expression of the same elements of guilt, exhaustion, absentee love-object or lack, exhibiting Sartre's nauseating absence, abyss as Nothingness, the Heideggerian "thrownness-onto-death" and a kaleidoscopic folding-in of the (Humean) regularity of sight, of time, if not of space also, and all associations, causally marked and free. Indeed, the Cartesian extensions of the senses and of the Nyāya mind (Descartes' 'self' that thinks) recede and become grossly in-tensions, in-turned; there is occlusion of the eyes and vision too, a rather palely hued two-dimensional world-space and a sense of the vaguely meaningless presence of existence hanging over its own frayed or shattered edges and, as it were, lingering on—like an infracted and now dead bit of skin that refuses to fall off the old sore—with no real

sense of continuity or futurity. After much that is screened out by this flatness, what hovers around in ghostly perturbations is this uncanny, unmystical irreality, disturbingly so ('Why doesn't the world stop, can't they see my life and vision just have?'). If one has never had a 'mystical experience', this condition would serve as a neat counterfactual: contradict this state and imagine the totally contrary in all possible worlds save this one, and one would sense what the mystic claims to experience as her mind, sense and intellect and 'soul' (which too is bereft in the state in question) soar outwards into seemingly multiple or expanding dimensions.

In melancholy, by contrast, the ego is said to have been split, and there is self-reproach and self-loathing (one part turning on the other), symptoms of neurosis, sometimes over-excitement followed by macabre and chilling withdrawal (the social context of

grieving or mourning has been elided), and the agent causally links the source of the debilitating will, the pain and free-floating anxiety, to external conditions of dissatisfactions. There is desire to continue the relationship of love, but the love-object has vanished; in melancholy, again, the relationship so much desired is evasive in the absence of a clear grasp on that desire, let alone the love-object. And this compounds the *duḥkha* as one fails to register what one is attached to; and yet the pervasive sense—the ‘feeling’—of attachment has not worked its way through, and even less so when there is a collective melancholia, in which the already detached-attachment is passed on from one generation to another—as in the case of the horrors of the Partition of British India into two nation-states, or the Holocaust.

*The thought of suicide is a great source of  
comfort: with it a calm passage is to be made*

*across many a bad night.*

—Friedrich Nietzsche

I think it instructive to set out this contrast, but then also to ask at what point grief frays into melancholia, as surely the intentional object of loss, the lack, the absence that makes its presence felt more in dreams and daydream memories, in mirrors of time, gradually vanishes, leaving the unfocussed, restless ego not much to clutch onto but its own dis-esteemed subjectivity. The once reconciliatory voice of the other turns into slashing commands; the persisting amorous phantasies are interrupted by alien/unidentified hosts vying for the agent's love, unleashing symptomatic *jouissance* of pain/pleasure in a sadistic mix (intoxicant addicts will recognize that condition all too well); a hitherto morally neutral disposition turns into moral masochism, self-reproach of a more damaging, even

self-castrating or suicidal (*sallekhana*) kind, and so on. Karl Abraham, following Freud's work, concluded that the agent succeeds in establishing the lost loved person in his ego, while the melancholic has failed to do so (Klein, 2000: 307), and that the two conditions are not vastly different from each other in kind, even though melancholy—other than perhaps in the scholar, *à la* Shakespeare—is often diagnosed as a pathological condition, and grief not so, or not so frequently, unless it seems excessive (as in the case of the Italian woman returning to the hospital ward where her husband had died, and wailing days-on-end well after the funeral and the wake were held). Melancholy is a paradigm case of an affective state.

I believe, it is also instructive to look closely at the therapeutic situation, what in some cultural contexts would be called the rituals surrounding mourning and healing, to discern the imaginary of grief as affect, for

hardly any folk culture is hide-bound by an excessively cognitivist approach to the phenomenon of grief—not even that of behavioral and Skinnerian psychologists. If anything, the complexity of this affect is acknowledged in therapeutic efforts, as well as just how ignorant, occluded human beings in general remain about this most enigmatic and pervasive of emotional experiences (Unlike love or *Eros* it does not set in at a more or less calculated or expected time-line: it is unanticipated, by and large.)

Some cognitivist work on depression is more likely to shed light on grief than abstract philosophical analysis, it would seem; although called cognitivism, medical psychologists have worked to describe emotions associated with depression following loss. A sequential schema is used, although it is not always causally linear, but more associative. Aaron T. Beck shows that first there is the precipitating event, in some

form of “loss” experience; the awareness of this experience causes cognitive states; these states, in turn, effect negative mood states; eventually, physiological reactions ensue. The awareness part is the belief state that initiates the psychological causes of other aspects of depression. Beck differs from philosophical “cognitivists,” who posit that the beliefs involved in emotions such as depression are not causes but constituents of those conditions. The adversarial position says that it is affects, not beliefs, that are intrinsic constituents, and these are not just the cause or the consequence of belief–state dissonances experienced by the sufferer. A person’s feeling of sadness is not merely *because of*, but also *over or about* his or her loss, they insist. The belief states are intrinsic to the experience of depression, and part of how we identify it as an experience of that kind (Beck 2000: 317–23).

The separation of belief states from affect is a very poignant contention here and one that one must go through if the empirical data Beck draws on and the growing psychoanalytic arguments are anything to go by. To be sure, the belief state and especially the distorted evaluations, overvaluations, hasty and inaccurate conclusions, logical errors, and indeed belief contrary at the onset of grief, etc., are not undermined or marginalized. Denials, negative view about the world, oneself, the future, and a sense of the futility of motivating oneself indeed form the *cognitive triad* (which itself is a way of suggesting that at the theoretical level we need to go beyond the usual dyads or binaries we have become so accustomed to: “Okay, if you are not feeling well and dejected, you must be depressed. Is your blood–pressure alright?”). To that end their causal–trigger–role is underscored and, as it were, moved out of the way just when non–intelligent energies begin to

move and swamp the agent's psychic, neurological and physiological constitution. It is hard to see how numbness could possibly embed a belief state, except perhaps in some dormant or distorted sense. Disbelief might be reported, as it often is, but this is mistakenly translated or interpreted by certain cognitivists as belief-contrary states that persist as constituent of grief. "Proposition makes way for affect to do its work" might indeed be a more apt adage.

Following Freud, Julia Kristeva brings out something of this in commenting on the difference between melancholy and mourning, thus:

If temporary sadness of mourning on the one hand, and melancholy stupor on the other are clinically and nosologically different, they are nevertheless *supported by intolerance for object loss and the signifier's failure to insure a*

compensating way out of the states of withdrawal in which the subject takes refuge to the point of inaction (pretending to be dead) or even suicide. (1989: 10)

The concealed aggressiveness or anger toward the lost object, revealing the ambivalence with respect to the object of mourning—it rejects, dejects, becomes nothing and in becoming nothing engenders a descent into the wasteland of pathos anguish, violence—these feelings are not reducible to primary intellectual determinants. They are not perceptions or even on a par with perceptions, but rather like drives and desire with which these are metonymically connected as the dis-satisfying conditions; they are better understood as being part of affect rather than read propositionally or rationally. One can do something rationally about weakening of will—correct it

or prop it up again, use a walking stick—but that is not invariably available for even mildly depressive states. Imagine a gunshot received by the agent: this will evoke a startling response—a sudden jerk of the body. Amplification of the immediacy of the discrete affects evoked in an encounter with the death of loved one is felt across the body by means of correlated sets of facial-muscle, blood-flow, visceral, respiratory, vocal, and skeletal responses. The immediate behavioral response is also imprinted with this analogue.

Virginia Demos and Samuel Kaplan comment, rightly I believe: ‘The biological importance of this amplifying function of affect is to make the organism care about quite different kinds of events in different ways’ (1986). The affective resonance in similarly presented stimuli (e.g. memory and items of the object lost around the house) evokes more of the same affect in a feedback loop. Affective resonance is a prominent element in empathy,

what Hume called sympathy (the arousal of similar emotive states in one observing signs of sadness or sorrow in another), and what in Buddhism is refined as compassion. In grief, the structuration is expanded somewhat diffusedly to encompass a sense of loss (the feeling of shock and horror) with belief contrary or the cognitive trigger, to constitute a rite of reciprocation: an offering, an exchange, a gift, so that the pain of the severance of the agent from the love object is felt, acknowledged and fully experienced while also letting go of the love object in the recognition that its return is impossible, that the loss is forever, and that time which trundles along indiscriminately will both remind one and cover over the dreadful effect. That sort of wisdom underpins the rites and ceremonies. A baby cow-seal sheds a tear when its mother is suddenly trapped and snatched away by New Guinean sea-hunters for their next communal meal. Of course, this is a built-in

biological or mammalian code–response in animate creatures as a survival–evolutionary strategy; but it is also an emotional experience, an affect, where its expression comes with certain signifiers, cognitive, bodily, physiological, and unconscious (manifest, at least in us, in dreams and aggressiveness and depression).

A ‘soul to soul’ eulogy for a couple’s three–and–half–year old son, offered at the funeral by Tinara Benson, brings together some of the elements of grief in a more positive and sagacious light:

Grief lets us know that we are alive, that we are human, that we have loved. There is an eternal river made up of all the tears that have ever been shed through all the ages. All the grieving mothers and fathers, children, spouses, lovers and friends have all in their time contributed

their tears to this river. All of us in our own time are called upon to add our tears to this river.

None of us is exempt. It's not fair, and we don't have to like it or want it. What we can do is hope for the grace to add our tears willingly. That when it is our turn and we are called to grief, that we have the courage, the faith, and the support, to stay open to the pain, open to the loss, open to the love, and even grateful for the ability to feel it all (personal communication; cf. Masel 2011; Leonard 2010).

This, it seems, is only part of the story of the enigma, and it embellishes more than clinches anything very novel in the stories we do have in philosophical literature. There is neither any sort of spiritual or philosophical epiphany at the end of this questful inquiry and journey.

Philosophers, too, are not immune from the need for

therapy at some point or other in their social or worldly life—it catches up with us all. As Socrates reminded Celebes (in *Phaedo* 61), even the wisest are moved to grieve; but philosophers seem less troubled at the prospect of facing their own dying and death if they ‘apply themselves in the right way to philosophy’, whatever that might be. Then only and truly can one proclaim, ‘There shall be no mourning’, again, as Lyotard reminded his audience in anticipation of his death, and as Derrida en-acted out this *self* deconstructing affect (akin to the Bodhisattva’s no-self stasis, as he, I believe, saw it) when he too passed beyond by disallowing the social-collegial (not to say, the State-sponsored, as in Sartre’s case) final performative of public mourning. (At least he gestured toward that, for mourning was, silently, rather widespread; see *NY Times* 2004). I have not withheld myself in that way because of the different cultural ambience and because of the phenomenological

angst toward fathoming the shock, tear- and fear-fully.

### **Unconcluding Remarks**

This paper, as should be obvious, was evoked by an incident in my personal life for which I was least prepared. As a philosopher I had hardly given any thought to this particular emotional state even while I was writing on the more exotic and aesthetic, if not somewhat less troublesome, plethora of recognized emotions and feelings known in the Indian tradition with Renuka Sharma, whose seminal work on empathy I much admired and learnt from. For this I would also often engage in conversations with Robert (Bob) Solomon, who had a particular interest in cross-cultural critique of the passions and emotions, even as he wrote in the area largely from his more familiar ground of Western philosophy and psychology. But being (as irrepressibly

experienced by most dear ones) archetypically a thinking, conceptual, intellectual 't-wit', I entirely lacked any empathic understanding at the subtler level of feeling-states (i.e. paradigmatically emotionally) of what it would be like to be, as it were, struck like a lightning bolt unawares by the more enigmatic of what otherwise is seen as a "negative" emotion, or a hard one at least. Philosophical literature disappointingly yielded very little to go by, especially in the analytical tradition, which perhaps suggests that philosophers don't always think about everything that may be of significance, or as deeply and unprejudicially as would be their calling toward such troubling human predicaments. I had to turn to psychology, psychoanalysis and cross-cultural anthropology, not to speak of poetry and certain mystical and spiritual writings as well.

In the space I allowed myself for this chapter, I have done little more than present vignettes of different

perspectives and reflections that have emerged across the board. Of course there is a considerable amount of literature in the therapeutic and healing-hand areas, but apart from their phenomenological and often anecdotal value, it proved too difficult to extract a decent and consistent theoretical hermeneutic from this area. The field is still fraught with uncertainties and mysteries yet to be fathomed.

Once again I was guided by the insights of Bob Solomon. However, Solomon continued to look at all emotions from within the framework he had established and was comfortable working within, namely the pure cognitive model—from which he nevertheless got to *affect*, while my thinking went from affect to the cognitive, and back. (Hence the sub-adage in the title: ‘Thinking back to Robert Solomon’.) Of course, Solomon toned down the excessive requirements of the cognitive model in which belief and evaluative judgment, along with intentionality,

would play a defining role, and he did not see grief in the same way as the other greater advocate of the propositional character of grief, namely Martha Nussbaum. Instead, Solomon chose to emphasize the quasi-Kantian *obligatoriness* of grief. But this too may be a perspective from within the Western culture, informed by quasi-Enlightenment philosophy (despite his own Nietzschean predilections). Again, this began to sound rather too categorical, for taking on something as one's (surprisingly sudden) duty requires an element of calculative thought and deliberations about utility, consequences, the force of the authority, even the rights of the subject toward whom the emotion is directed.

As Hamlet's father's ghost pointed out, it is unbecoming for someone to feel empathy and grieving for another to be a mere obligatory act, though obligation might apply to certain forms of public mourning, as I explain. The evidence from the ground, as it were,

discloses a process much more impromptu, and even to an extent spontaneous, in its response, unself-consciously proceeding without much awareness or sign of it being a cognitive act, or even that it is as clearly intentional. I veer towards alternative theories that underscore “unthinking energetics” of feeling-states, that accord a minimalist intellectual content and allow the analogues from experiences of the aesthetic and erotic sublimates to find commonalities here. In constructing this argument to the best explanation I found myself drawing liberally from psychoanalysis, feminist continental thinkers, and Indian philosophy of aesthetics. And yet as I moved contingently towards the end of this inquiry, I could only confess that much conceptual work still remains to be done on grief, and to a lesser extent on mourning.

*Syllogistic sūtra for a requiem*<sup>7</sup>

Love of Life

Death of Love

Life in Death

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<sup>7</sup> This śloka summarizes the contour of this inquiry.

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