

# Anticipatory-Vicarious Grief: The Anatomy of a Moral Emotion

Somogy Varga and Shaun Gallagher\*

## ABSTRACT

Grief is often described as characterized by a particular emotional response to another person's death. While this is true of paradigm cases, we argue that a broader notion of grief allows accommodating forms of this emotional experience that deviate from the paradigmatic case. The bulk of the paper explores such a nonparadigmatic form of grief, *anticipatory-vicarious grief* (AV-grief), which is typically triggered by pondering the inevitability of our own death. We argue that AV-grief is a particular moral emotion that serves a unique function and is indissolubly linked to the practical identities of human agents. An agent's AV-grief is about the harm that occurs to individuals whose practical identities depend on the agent.

The nature of grief, its symptoms, course, and its place in human life have stimulated many philosophical, psychological, and anthropological investigations. As a particularly distressing but inescapable feature of human lives that affects human beings regardless of how much they have made their peace with finitude, grief solicits philosophical exploration. It is perhaps surprising that there is no unified framework for understanding grief (Nesse 2005), and no consensus on even what paradigm cases of grief are. One problem is surely related to the relative inconsistency that characterizes the usage of the relevant terms in the literature. Because *bereavement*, *grief*, and *mourning* have often been used interchangeably, it is important to make some initial stipulative clarifications. A's *bereavement* refers to the fact of A's having lost B to death; A's *grief* describes A's predominantly emotional response to B's death; while A's *mourning* refers more exclusively to A's behavioral manifestations of grief, which typically include participation in certain communal rituals and customs (for a discussion, see Zisook and Shear [2009]).

While the paradigm case may be roughly defined as a predominantly emotional response to another person's death, a full comprehension of the nature and experience of grief requires taking into account cases that do not unambiguously display the characteristics associated with the paradigm case. Grief need not involve someone dying. A can grieve the loss of B, when A realizes that her previously important interaction with B has now become impossible due to the quick progression of B's

\*SV: Aarhus University; University of Johannesburg, SG: University of Memphis; University of Wollongong

Alzheimer's disease. This is perhaps why some have stressed that grief is linked to the irrevocable loss of another's personhood (Roberts 2003; Kristjánsson 2018, ch. 7). While this is true in many cases, the loss of another's personhood need not be involved. Parents looking at pictures of their now grown children often report feeling grief over the loss of the special relationship they had with them while young children. An abandoned lover can grieve for his beloved who is now happily married (Solomon 2004, 77). Moreover, ordinary language permits uses in which grief is felt towards entities whose status as persons is in question, like fetuses and nonhuman animals like pets, but also towards entities that are clearly nonpersons, like a forest or home destroyed by an earthquake (Roberts 1992). People described themselves as grieving over the burning of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris in 2019. While it is true that some of these cases might involve a covert attribution of personhood (to pets, for example), it is difficult to see how this could explain the entire range of such cases.

If death and the loss of personhood drop out of the picture as necessary features, then *responding to a loss* of opportunities or facets of one's own life seems to be the only constant characteristic throughout emotional experiences which people ordinarily refer to as experiences of grief. This leads to a broad understanding of grief, which can accommodate instances in which individuals report experiencing grief over, for example, the loss of a limb (Pfefferbaum and Pasnau 1976; Wilson 1977).<sup>1</sup> It can also accommodate a case in which A reports experiencing grief for the loss of some central motive that has functioned as a driving force and as constitutive feature of A's identity. As Kelly (2016, 158) notes, anyone losing a rare opportunity "can grieve over that which for various reasons will not and cannot again present itself." But it is important to note that the loss of opportunities has to involve some sense of *irreplaceability*. In the case of interpersonal relationships, A has to understand B as irreplaceable, such that if A's grief over the loss of B would be neutralized by the presence of an indistinguishable replica of B, then A would not be undergoing grief.

There are however two forms of grief, described as such in the literature, that compel us to reconsider and adjust this broad understanding of grief, especially the sense in which a responding to a loss of opportunities is the only constant characteristic. These forms of grief are:

1. *Anticipatory grief*. Grief can be triggered both by losses that have occurred and by merely anticipated losses. This can take two forms. Witnessing the prolonged suffering of a loved one from a terminal disease often leads to what psychologists call "anticipatory grief" (Sweeting and Gilhooly 1990). Such grief may in part be about present losses (the loved one's cognitive and emotional capabilities, sense of identity, hopes and plans, etc.) caused by the progressing disease, but it is predominantly about the future loss that the impending death will cause. While anticipatory grief refers to grief experienced by individuals facing the death of a loved one, the grief experienced by individuals facing their own impending death is referred to as "preparatory grief" (Kubler-Ross 1997; Periyakoil et al. 2002).

2. *Vicarious grief.* We sometimes undergo *vicarious* (or what some consider to be empathic) emotional experiences, in which A experiences an event or state of affairs as emotionally relevant to B, not to A (Nanay 2013, 153–62; see de Vignemont and Jacobs 2012). When A sees B committing a social *faux pas*, or being in an embarrassing situation that threatens B’s social integrity, A might feel *vicariously embarrassed for* B, although B is not feeling embarrassment. In a similar way, psychologists have argued that it is possible to experience grief through imaginative or sympathetic participation in the experience of another person (Kastenbaum 1987; Rando 1997). As Rando (2002, 59) puts it, “vicarious grief refers to grief stimulated by someone else’s loss.” Although vicarious grief typically involves more psychological responses than behavioral or physical ones, and is generated by another individual’s loss who is the actual mourner, the authors emphasize that it is genuine grief. There are two types. In Type 1, the losses are entirely vicarious, such that A merely feels how it must be to be in B’s position. In Type 2, Type 1 experience is paired with a sense of personal loss to A, experiencing shock in response to B’s loss or a destabilization of basic assumptions about the world because of the loss.

A broad understanding of grief that allows for anticipatory and vicarious forms might run the risk of overstretching the concept, because the loss of opportunities in some of these cases is merely anticipated or felt for somebody else. We acknowledge the risk and the fact that there will be contestable borderline cases, but emphasize that the broad notion avoids collapsing the distinction between grief and sadness or sorrow: it accommodates nonparadigmatic cases that are consistent with professional uses of “grief,” while still excluding some problematic lay uses. For instance, it excludes cases in which people report grieving over the loss of certain material possession like money.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, we wish to explore such a nonparadigmatic form of grief that we will refer to as *anticipatory-vicarious grief* (AV-grief), which is at the intersection of anticipatory and vicarious grief. Very briefly, AV-grief is the experience an individual undergoes when pondering the inevitability of her own death, without necessarily being affected by a current disease or experiencing the death of another. The experience makes salient the inevitability of one’s own death, but it is typically experienced as a low-grade (i.e., nonoverwhelming) emotion characterized by a menacing presence of a future harm through loss, although there may be brief times when the emotion is overwhelming. Like anticipatory grief, AV-grief anticipates some future harm. But while it is certainly an emotional state that is somehow associated with the struggle to cope with mortality, AV-grief is *vicarious* because the anticipated harm and “theft” of future possibilities is linked to the perspectives of those who will feel grief when we die.

As our inquiry will reveal, AV-grief neither anticipates harm to the griever caused by her own future nonexistence, nor does it have the kind of adaptive function that many suppose anticipatory grief has, which is to help gradually embrace life without the one who will be lost.<sup>3</sup> Instead, it will be argued that with respect to its vicarious nature, AV-grief is about the anticipated harm that A’s death would cause others who

stand in a particular relationship to A and who display specific vulnerabilities with respect to A's welfare. On our view, AV-grief is a *moral emotion*; it is about the anticipated harm that A's death would cause others with practical identities entangled with A's. Unlike anxiety that merely temporarily severs A from the world, AV-grief also motivates A to *deliberatively engage* her commitments from the perspective of those A profoundly cares about. While anyone might fear their own death, the experience of AV-grief is reserved for individuals with profound relationships to others that reflect mutually entangled practical identities.

### 1. GRIEF AS AN EMOTION

The status of grief as an emotion is contested. Some argue that grief is not an emotional state, but rather an emotional process. Others maintain that grief is better understood as an emotional breakdown rather than an emotion. Addressing these lines of thought helps us locate our position.

Some philosophers argue that grief does not designate a single and clearly delineated emotional state. Rather, grief is a temporally extended *emotional process* (Goldie 2011) or composite (Price 2010) that involves a number of distinct emotions, evolves over time, and perhaps even exhibits a narrative structure. Conceptualizing grief in this manner has a number of advantages. It is able to account for different emotional experiences that occur during grieving. For instance, as a part of A's grief that responds to the loss of B, A is likely to feel regret over not having developed an even more profound knowledge of B. A's dwelling on memories of B may be entangled with regretting not having made the kind of memories that would withstand the erosion of time. But A might also experience the dwelling on memories about B as positively valenced. For instance, when Augustine describes his grief, he describes his entire world as overshadowed by a deep sense of grief while adding that he "had no delight but in tears" that had taken the place of his lost friend (Augustine 2006, 60). Moreover, grief as a temporally extended emotional process is compatible with the relatively popular stage theories, according to which grief involves several stages such as denial, bargaining, anger, depression, and acceptance. Although these theories have not been able to account for individual differences with coping and adjustment (Zisook and Shear 2009), the process itself is favorably understood in terms of a pattern that involves different affective and cognitive states united by a family resemblance, without a constant ingredient that is essential at any particular instance. As Goldie (2011) has put it, the unfolding pattern over time is ontologically and epistemically prior to its parts.

Approaching grief as a process that involves differing constellations of emotions rather than a single emotion is useful, but here we follow Solomon (2004) and Kristijanson (2018) who hold that grief can be an emotion and a process involving a complex constellation of emotions. Kristijanson (2018, 129) urges us to "accept that the term 'grief' can serviceably be used to label two distinct things, one an emotion and the other a complex process, and that it is futile to debate which use is more appropriate, as both may serve useful functions." In addition, we recognize that grief is not normally considered to belong to the set of basic emotions, and if one thinks that emotions are short term in nature, then emotional processes like grief, love, and

jealousy might not qualify as emotions at all. But if one thinks that emotions are not necessarily short term, then it is not clear that grief cannot refer both to an emotion and a process.

For our purposes in this paper, we will mainly talk about grief as an emotion and focus less on grief as the overall process. But it is worth noting that as an emotion, grief can be in the foreground of experience, or in the overall experiential background within which events or situations are encountered (see [Ratcliffe 2017](#)).

## 2. GRIEF AS A MORAL EMOTION

Another way to contest the status of grief as an emotion is to argue that it is stripped of purpose, involves no coherent desire ([Gustafson 1989](#)), and is rather an emotional breakdown that can perhaps even indicate a condition that warrants medical attention. Yet, even if grief involves painful disruptions, focusing on diminished functioning risks overlooking the importance of grief as a valuable *moral emotion* (like sympathy, gratitude, and compassion) that displays a number of moral aspects.<sup>4</sup>

Grief is intertwined with the norms of intimate relationships and is at least to some degree linked to a conception of desert. Grief is expected of a virtuous person who has lost a loved one while anticipatory grief is at least socially accepted as an appropriate reaction.<sup>5</sup> In general, if A has a sufficiently profound relationship to B, then not only is A vulnerable to loss and grief, but the norms of intimate relationship would dictate that A *ought* to be vulnerable in this way. Conversely, if A failed to experience grief about the passing of B, if A proved unexpectedly resilient to the loss, this could be taken either as an indication that the relationship was not very profound, or that A was in some way morally deficient.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, if A took a drug immediately after B's passing knowing that it neutralized grief and replaced it with joy then A could be seen as failing to properly honor B or the relationship to B. The expectation that A *ought* to be vulnerable in this way and that A somehow *owes* B properly grieving her death indicates that A's grief is tacitly understood as doing at least some justice to the deceased ([McCracken 2005](#)). Such considerations have led some philosophers to think that desert is the moral value that grounds grief ([Kristijanson 2018](#), 138). But whether or not this is always the case is not clear. People sometimes respond with grief to the nonviolent death of a brutal mass murderer without being able to offer justifications for their grief as an appropriate response to an undeserved event. Nonetheless, in most cases, the assumption seems to be that the dead person somehow deserves our grief, which is why some have maintained that grief is a virtue when it is experienced in regard to an appropriate target, and might even qualify as Kantian duty ([Solomon 2004](#)). This leads to questions about the kind of individuals or objects that qualify as appropriate targets. Limiting the question to human beings, our thesis is that appropriate targets are those who *crucially and irreplaceably matter for the practical identity of the griever*.

## 3. GRIEF AS A MORAL EMOTION TIED TO PRACTICAL IDENTITIES

“Practical identity” refers to a person's first-personal perspective and normative self-conception. Our practical identities are the descriptions under which we value

ourselves, and that specify for us reasons, commitments, obligations, and a sense of self (Korsgaard 1996, 2009). Our practical identities provide direction to our lives and serve as sources of normative commitments. Although some aspects of one's practical identity such as some intimate relationships are not really matters of choice, reflectively endorsing or disapproving these aspects leads to developing self-conceptions that carry normative authority for us. Attachment to some of these people *crucially* matter to our practical identities, such that we respond to their loss with grief and existential disorientation. If A's practical identity is tied to B in this manner, then the death of B (or a dramatic change in B brought about for instance by dementia) is a loss that will not only trigger grief in A, but might also challenge A's practical identity. One could go further, and argue that A responds with grief to B's death if A relied on B as a contributor to A's flourishing (see Nussbaum 2001). But it is critical to bear in mind that it is possible for A to respond with grief to B's death even if B has not contributed to A's flourishing. B could crucially matter to A's practical identity even if B has not contributed to A's flourishing.

It is important to add that while A's grief is a response to the loss of something crucial to A's practical identity for which a relationship with B was vital, this loss is not reducible to the loss of the various goods that B now no longer offers to A. If this were the case, then if A obtains these various goods from a different provider, A's grief should come to a halt. This however would lead to the objectionable conclusion that grief is very much comparable to an experience of inconvenience. Instead, the conclusion must be that A's undergoing a state of distress in response to B's death would not amount to grief if A did not entertain a relationship of attachment with B which has become not just crucial, but also *irreplaceable* to A's practical identity.

But in order for B to function as an appropriate target who crucially and irreplaceably matters for the practical identity of A, there need not be an intimate relationship between A and B, at least not in the usual sense of the term. Reflecting about the scope of grief, Cholbi (2017) notes that grief occurs between individuals who are intimate with one other in a bidirectional manner (friends, spouses, siblings, etc.), but can be unidirectional, such as in the case of public figures. For example, A might be shocked, saddened, and lamenting the passing of Burt Reynolds, who died in 2018. But A's state would only qualify as grief if A had developed some kind of a profound attachment to Burt Reynolds. Moreover, for A's affective response to qualify as grief, Burt Reynolds had to function as something like a beacon in A's life, such that A's attachment to the actor was not only of significant value to A, but a crucial part of A's practical identity. A could respond with genuine grief to the death of Burt Reynolds because the actor's actions and practical identity had been perceived by A as furthering projects, commitments, values, or perhaps even an entire normative outlook on the social world that is constitutive of A's practical identity. At the same time, A has to understand Burt Reynolds as irreplaceable, such that if A's grief would be neutralized by the appearance of a qualitatively indistinguishable replica of Burt Reynolds, then A would not be undergoing grief. Of course, while this relationship has to be *unique*, it does not necessarily involve mutuality. A could respond with grief to the passing of Burt Reynolds, even if Burt Reynolds had never known A existed.

Comprehending grief as a moral emotion tied to practical identities has a number of advantages. First, it is consistent with the fact that grief cannot be entirely other-regarding, such that A's grief over B's death is essentially nothing more than some deep form of sadness that A feels for the loss of opportunities suffered by B. After all, B's death may trigger grief in A even if everybody involved acknowledges that B actually benefits from dying. Instead, it appears that A's grief over B's death is more about some loss suffered by A, and one way to formulate what this loss amounts to is to think about its effect on A's practical identity. Second, it explains how people can respond with grief not just to the deaths of individuals close to them, but also celebrities and public figures whom they have never met. Third, at least in part, it explains why grieving persons often report existential disorientation and a sense of losing identity. If B was somehow crucial or *irreplaceable* to A's practical identity, then B's death will likely unsettle it.

Overall, as a moral emotion, grief can make salient the norms of intimate relationships and desert, and unveil attachments that are essential to the practical identities of human agents. Highlighting the link between grief and practical identities means, in the first instance, that grief can help us gain awareness of facets of our practical identities. But also, importantly for our aim to explore AV-grief, it can help us gain awareness of the extent to which our practical identities are entangled with the practical identities of others.

#### 4. AV-GRIEF AND ANTICIPATED HARM

With these considerations in mind, we may now return to AV-grief. Is A's emotional experience, which makes salient the inevitability of A's own death in an upsetting way, correctly characterized as a form of grief? At least initially, it would seem that it is not, because it is not a response that is in any way linked to an occurred event of death. However, this does not prevent AV-grief from qualifying as grief. After all, this lack is something that AV-grief has in common with anticipatory grief, which is widely thought to be correctly labeled as grief. But even so, one might still stress that A's anticipatory grief requires an expected interruption of a relationship with B, who is irreplaceable to A's practical identity. However, A's AV-grief is obviously not about the anticipated ending of B's life, but about A's own death.

Dealing with this issue in a satisfactory manner requires investigating the kind of anticipated future loss and harm that is at play. For this, assume that A is healthy, does not expect to descend into dementia, thinks that it is a bad thing to die, and hopes to avoid it for as long as possible. When A experiences AV-grief, whose future loss and harm is at play? Given that grief involves loss and harm, it seems that there are only few possibilities here. A's AV-grief can be about the anticipated harm to A, about the anticipated harm to B, or both. In the following, we argue that the first possibility can be rejected (which would also imply that the third possibility can be ruled out).

Like standard anticipatory grief, AV-grief is about a future event, but not the anticipated ending of someone else's life. It would seem that A's AV-grief must be about A's anticipated nonexistence and the harm it causes to A. But this view runs into a problem. If nonexistence in itself were harmful, we would have to accept the

implausible view that A's past nonexistence (preceding A's coming into existence) is harmful to A. In addition, according to an influential line of thought that can be traced back to Epicurus, neither A's state of being dead nor any posthumous event occurring to A can affect A. A cannot be causally affected by an event while A is non-existent. Although A's dying process itself can affect and harm A while it occurs, A's death cannot.

In reply, an opponent might object that this view is only supported on the assumption that harm requires incurring pain. If one thinks that harm can consist in being deprived of goods, then A's death and posthumous events can be harmful because they deprive A of goods that A would otherwise have obtained. A's death will unquestionably thwart projects and commitments that were at the center of A's practical identity, and A's death in some sense robs her of being able to see her children grow up. Nonetheless, there are at least two ways to respond to this objection. One might accept this notion of harm, but point out that on this notion, A's death may also benefit A by preventing other incurring evils to A. Moreover, for the objection to work, it would have to be shown that more life would be good for A. But showing this would require comparing A's actual welfare to the welfare A would have had if A had not died. Making such a comparison however runs into difficulties. If an event or state of affairs benefits or harms A, there has to be a particular time *t* at which this occurs. If A's death can be said to harm A by depriving A of goods, then there must be a time during which A is harmed (for a discussion, see Luper [2019]). It is however uncertain whether there can be such a time, since A no longer exists.<sup>7</sup>

This leads us to the second possibility. One may accept the conclusion of the previous argument that A's AV-grief is not about anticipated harm to A, but hold that it is unwarranted to conclude that there is no harm at all. Instead, one might point out that as long as A's activities offer goods that are important for the practical identities of others (for instance, A's children, friends, and loved ones), as long as A's undertakings promote values that benefit others, there will be a genuine loss that harms others. More precisely, the thesis is that A's AV-grief is about the *anticipated loss and harm that occurs to individuals whose practical identities depend on A*.

One could object that such a tight relationship is not necessary, because it is possible for A to undergo AV-grief relating to B, even if A will never get a chance to know B, and B is unlikely to learn about A's existence.<sup>8</sup> Suppose that A's ex-partner, upon leaving A, realizes that she is pregnant with A's child B. She chooses to raise B with another person, and never mentions A to the child. A knows about B's existence, but there is no interpersonal relationship between them, so B's practical identities do not depend on A in any way. Accordingly, it could be argued, A could experience AV-grief when contemplating his own death in relation to the life of B, perhaps due to the realization that their practical identities will never be entangled.

We think that A's emotional experience in such a situation might best be described as sadness. As long as the child is unaware of A's existence, A's death will not cause harm to the child. So while A might feel sadness over the fact that his practical identity will not be entangled with that of the child, the emotion would not qualify as AV-grief because there is no anticipated harm. In a similar way, A might feel sadness for a distant nephew who desires to develop a relationship to A, but will be

prevented from doing so due to A's death. Because of the superficial relationship between A and the nephew, the anticipated loss and harm to the nephew is not profound, and it is unlikely that A could feel more than some sort of sadness. The nephew is not particularly vulnerable to A's death and his practical identity does not depend on A.

A's experience of AV-grief for B requires that B's practical identity depends on A, but in most cases, the dependence relation is bidirectional, such that there is a *mutual entanglement* of A's and B's practical identities that gives rise to vulnerabilities for both parties. For example, consider the case described in section 3, in which A's practical identity depends on Burt Reynolds, who functions as something like a beacon in A's life. Consider two occasions on which Burt Reynolds ponders his own death. On the first occasion, his thoughts involve his child, with whom he is close such that their practical identities are clearly mutually entangled. Based on what we have said so far, we can see how this episode might well trigger AV-grief in him. On the second occasion, he ponders his own death and thinks of his career and some of his fans. He remembers A, with whom he had a brief interaction (in 1978 when he received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame), but whose fan letters convince Reynolds that he plays a defining role in A's life. In this situation, he recognizes that his death will mean a loss for A, perhaps unsettling A's practical identity, but it is very unlikely that Reynolds is able to mobilize more than sadness. Contrasting these two occasions, it seems that at least in typical cases, A's AV-grief is about the harm to B, where A's and B's practical identities are mutually entangled: B's practical identity depends on A and A entertains a profound attachment to B such that A's practical identity also depends on B.

### 5. THE EPISTEMIC VALUE OF AV-GRIEF

If it is true that AV-grief is about the anticipated harm to others whose practical identities are mutually entangled with one's own, then this raises questions about the kind of function that it might serve. In contrast to anticipatory grief, with which AV-grief shares the anticipatory structure, AV-grief does not have the kind of adaptive function (to help gradually embrace life without the lost one) that many attribute to standard anticipatory grief. As we shall see, this does not mean that it does not serve an adaptive function. The point is merely that such an adaptive function is not straightforwardly self-directed: A's adaptation to A's future nonexistence would be pointless, because there will be no A needing to adapt to the loss. If AV-grief serves a function, it must be a different one. Indeed, we want to argue that grief serves an epistemic function and contributes to cognition. Paradigmatic grief and AV-grief can be understood as epistemically valuable experiences that promote self-knowledge in different ways.

First, we could say that grief can lead to *recognitional insight*. Basic emotions like fear straightforwardly signal the relevance of events or states of affairs to the agent's concerns (Frijda 1994), offering defeasible reasons to believe that something is dangerous, but also revealing a *concern* (perhaps for safety and bodily integrity) that is crucial for the emotion itself. Such emotions are epistemically significant in that they alert the agent without much cognitive effort to objects and events of interest to the

agent. But they can be unreliable in at least two ways (Brady 2013, ch. 4). They can fail to alert me to the presence of objects and events that are relevant to my concerns (for example, fear might fail to draw my attention to danger or might alert me to harmless objects), or they can alert me to the presence of objects and events that are relevant to concerns that I ought not to have. In the latter case, for example, fear is unreliable “when it draws my attention to groups of Asian men but not groups of European men, since ethnicity is not important in my circumstances and as such should not be salient for me” (Brady 2013, 153). The emotion may be unreliable because it alerts to something that does not merit the agent’s attention.

The recognitional insight offered by other emotions is slightly more complicated, rendering salient more profound *commitments* that shape the agent’s practical identity. This is something that grief shares with a number of more complex emotions. Consider, for instance, guilt. If A feels guilty over having lied to B, depending on the conditions under which it occurred, then A’s emotional experience helps A recognize her commitment to being truthful by making it phenomenally salient. If A does not feel guilty over having lied to B, then A’s emotional experience makes salient to A her lack of such commitment. Likewise, A’s grief makes salient and brings to the foreground A’s evaluation of an event or state of affairs in light of her commitments. The epistemic value in question stems from the emotional experience offering evidence to recognize what A values and how those values would require A to feel and act. Conversely, when these experiences are somehow distorted, they deprive agents of such insight.

Second, in contrast to standard forms of grief, AV-grief can also offer a unique possibility for *structural insight*. AV-grief does not decisively settle the question of the normative significance of its object, but temporarily suspends the normative force that stems from the commitments that form practical identities, offering insight into the structure of human agency and its operating conditions. To further unfold this point, it is helpful to consider that, much like anxiety, AV-grief can lead the agent to experience detachment from her practical identity. Such detachment reveals something about the structure of practical identities, about the fact that their normative force is unable to withstand breakdown, and about the need to adjust to finitude in order for one’s practical identity to gain immunity to the sort of collapse that leaves the agent paralyzed. Successfully navigating the suspension of engagement offers a more refined comprehension that can assist self-reflection.<sup>9</sup>

## 6. THE MOTIVATIONAL AND MORAL VALUE OF AV-GRIEF

Focusing on the epistemic value of AV-grief clarifies what is revealed in this experience. We have said that many emotional experiences offer epistemic reasons for adopting beliefs and signal the relevance of events or states of affairs to the agent’s *concerns*. Fear provides reason to believe that something is dangerous and reveals a concern for bodily integrity that is crucial for the emotion itself. In contrast, AV-grief signals the relevance of events or states of affairs to the agent’s *commitments* that are fundamental to the agent’s practical identity. Also, in contrast to emotions like fear, it does not settle the value and significance of these commitments, but instigates further *deliberative engagement* with them.

Unlike fear, AV-grief has the practical value of offering motivation for deliberative engagement with the projects crucial for the agent's practical identity. Rather than simply assigning normative significance connected to an anticipated loss, AV-grief motivates further interrogation of commitments of which A might only have peripheral awareness. Of course, other emotional experiences might move us to rethink our concerns. For example, experiencing fear may lead us to rethink whether we're overly concerned about our safety and to ultimately reject the concern that grounds this fear. But in such cases, unlike in the case of AV-grief, the route from the emotional experience to revising the concern is not direct, but mediated by cognitive states. In contrast, AV-grief promotes a particular insight into practical identities by capturing the attention of the agent and directly motivating her to unearth and engage the commitments that elicit the emotional experience. Thus, AV-grief temporarily severs us from the grip of our practical identities but invites further inquiry and the probing of reasons that bear on whether our practical identities reflect who we ought to be, and to what we ought to be committed. Somewhat like anxiety, it instigates examination of the adequacy of our underlying commitments and motivates the search for reasons that speak in favor of our motives. But, while anxiety tends to "individualize," AV-grief, like grief more generally (Gallagher 2018), provides a sense of the relationality of our practical identities.

Importantly, in a unique manner, such *deliberative engagement* not only epistemically orients the agent, but instigates a probing that emphasizes the perspective of those with whom the agent's practical identity is mutually entangled. When probing reasons for whether or not we ought to have certain commitments, we examine the marks that we leave on other's lives, perhaps paying most attention to the lives of those, who, like our children, didn't have an active choice in having mutually entangled practical identities with us. Such attention provides the opportunity to rethink commitments in light of what we owe to others who are vulnerable to our deaths. Continuing down this path, will we have lived in a way that outweighs the harm that our deaths will cause to those with entangled practical identities? This probing helps realize whether we live up to the norms inherent in our caring relationships such that we will be worthy of the grief that our death will cause. If it is a part of the function of A's AV-grief to mitigate future harm due to A's nonexistence, then the deliberative engagement it entices must aim to reduce the harm to those whose practical identities are entangled with A's.

Overall, AV-grief makes salient the possibility of one's death and the grief that it would cause in other particular human beings. Unlike the way in which anxiety "individualizes," AV-grief orients the agent by revealing more profound *commitments* that shape the agent's practical identity and motivates the agent to *deliberatively engage* these commitments. In this respect, the fact that AV-grief helps keep our own death in mind can be a good thing—good in an ethical sense in that it allows us to realize the value of others and our responsibility toward them.

## 7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The paradigm case of grief can be understood in terms of an emotional response to another person's death. But comprehending the nature of grief requires taking into account nonparadigm cases, which do not involve someone dying, and not even the

irrevocable loss of another's personhood. Without overstressing the concept, such a broad understanding of grief can accommodate instances in which individuals report experiencing grief over the loss of a limb, or a significant opportunity. Moreover, it can accommodate the fact that grief can be triggered by merely anticipated loss.

In this paper, we have addressed *AV-grief*, a nonparadigmatic form of grief that is typically triggered by considering the inevitability of our own deaths. The aim was to show that AV-grief is not simply an emotional state that is associated with the struggle to cope with our own mortality. When an agent undergoes AV-grief, her experience is not about the anticipated harm to herself caused by her own future nonexistence, nor does it display the same kind of adaptive function that standard anticipatory grief does. Instead, being about the anticipated harm that A's death would cause others whose practical identities are entangled with A's, AV-grief is a moral emotion that motivates deliberative engagement with our commitments from the perspective of those we profoundly care about. Fear of or anxiety about one's own death is possible for everyone, but AV-grief can be experienced only by individuals who entertain relationships to others that reflect mutually entangled practical identities.<sup>10</sup>

#### NOTES

1. In comparative studies of the reaction to loss of a limb and the death of a loved person, researchers found a large number of similarities: tendencies to avoid reminders of the loss, profound feelings of bereavement, vivid visual memories of what has been lost, and a sense of the persisting presence of what has been lost (Parkes 1975; Maquire and Parkes 1998). What one loses is a part of oneself, and a variety of possibilities to engage with environmental affordances. It is not clear, however, that, as Parkes (1973) has claimed, experiencing grief for the amputated limb may have some beneficial effects with regard to phantom pain (see Katz and Melzack 1990; Fisher and Hanspal 1998).
2. Losing money might lead to the permanent loss of a unique opportunity. However, grief in such cases is not about the money, but about the loss of the opportunity.
3. We should add that there are conflicting findings in the literature about its adaptive function. However, some of the conflicting findings can be explained by the conceptual confusion of "forewarning of loss" and "anticipatory grief" (Reynolds and Botha 2006). Moreover, Reynolds and Botha (2006) cite a large number of studies suggesting some positive adaptive effect. Such findings make it at least likely that there is an adaptive function, which is enough for our purposes here.
4. There are, of course, a number of other aspects that we cannot discuss here. For instance, moral norms also dictate that we refrain from speaking ill of the dead.
5. The connection to the moral realm can also be indirect. Besides helping A to adapt to the inevitable loss of B, A's anticipatory grief increases the felt strength of the connection to B and perhaps a sense of duty to (desire to) remain at B's side.
6. See Gallagher (2018) for discussion of this issue with reference to Camus's *The Stranger*.
7. One could perhaps argue that death can harm A in a timeless fashion, such that there is no time  $t$  at which A is worse off than A would have otherwise been. But removing the time constraint from harm risks allowing something like the existence of eternal harm.
8. We thank an anonymous referee for pressing us on this issue and for suggesting this example.
9. Such structural insight is not unique to AV-grief, but can also characterize anticipatory grief.
10. We would like to thank Andreas Elpidorou and an anonymous reviewer for their constructive comments, which helped us to improve the paper.

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