

The Rationality of Emotional Change: Toward a Process View

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Not only actions and choices, but also attitudes are subject to normative standards. From belief and desire to envy, admiration, grief, amusement, and lust — we evaluate, criticize, disown, and endorse attitudes. In this sense, such attitudes can be rational. Furthermore, it is thought that the rationality of these attitudes is related to the fact that they are *about* an object or *directed* toward it. It is said that such attitudes can succeed or fail to be fitting, suitable, or appropriate with respect to their objects. They are therefore known as *fitting attitudes*.

Recent philosophical discussion of fitting attitudes has revolved around two main issues. The first is the *explanatory issue*: whether, at the most fundamental level, the fittingness of an attitude is explained by the value of its object or, as the so-called fitting attitudes theories of value maintain, the value of an object is explained by the attitude that is a fitting response to it, or, finally, both the fittingness of an attitude *and* the value of its object are explained by one's reasons.¹ Second, there has been much debate about a related issue, known as *the wrong kind of reason problem*: how to distinguish facts that make an attitude fitting or appropriate to its object from facts that seem to give us reason to entertain the attitude but do not make the attitude fitting.

In this essay, I wish to reinvigorate a third issue, which might as well be called a non-issue because philosophers seem to be in general agreement about it—namely, how do rational attitudes evolve over time? I will argue that the answer to this question that is commonly presupposed by philosophers is mistaken. The answer I propose instead constitutes a significant departure from the current understanding of the rationality of attitudes in general and of emotions in particular.

Consider the following scenario. Walking down a dark alley at night, I notice a shadow of a large animal appearing from around the corner. I stop dead in my tracks, paralyzed with fear. A moment later, I sigh in relief and embarrassment: the lights of a passing car made a tiny mouse cast a long, intimidating shadow. My fear rationally fades as I recognize that there was no danger. Now suppose some other shadow in fact belongs to a bear. Fear seems fitting as a response to a

¹ So, in addition to the question of whether value is analyzable in terms of fittingness, there is a question about whether fittingness is analyzable in terms of reasons (see Schroder 2010; McHugh and Way 2016; Howard forthcoming).

bear in a dark alley. And yet if the bear carries on without noticing me and disappears around the next corner, my fear may rationally diminish. In this version, my fear diminishes not because there was *never* any danger, but because there is *no longer* any danger. Finally, suppose there is a bear and he does not walk away but rather stops and looks right at me. I know that if I keep still the bear is more likely to leave me alone, but my fear makes me tremble. I *should* overcome my fear and keep still, not because my fear is not fitting—on the contrary, it is perfectly fitting given that I am engaged in a staring contest with a bear—but I have other reason not to succumb to my fear. I have reason concerning the consequences of my fear; specifically, concerning the prospects of my survival.²

This admittedly crude account of my fear of a bear in a dark alley is meant to illustrate three ways in which an affective attitude may rationally change or diminish. Either I realize that what seemed to call for a certain affective attitude does not in fact call for it; or the attitude is no longer called for; or the attitude is called for but there are other facts that count against entertaining it. In each of the three cases, changes in the rational status of the attitude are due to real or perceived changes in the circumstances that initially called for it. According to a common picture of rational change in affective attitudes, these are the only three ways in which an affective attitude can rationally change. Of this picture, I make four claims.

First, I show that this is indeed a widespread conception of rational change in affective attitudes, which guides, in particular, recent views about backward-looking emotions, such as grief, regret, resentment, and anger. Second, I argue that this common conception is mistaken: an affective attitude may rationally change due to its history alone, independently of changes in the circumstances that initially called for it. More specifically, I argue that some emotions are *rationally self-consuming*: the longer they endure the less rational they become. Third, I argue that the common conception of rational change in affective attitudes rests on the mistaken assumption that fittingness is synchronic, that is, that what affective attitude it is fitting for one to have at a time does not directly depend on one's affective attitudes at other times. And, fourth, I offer a diachronic alternative according to which what affective attitude it is fitting for one to have at a time sometimes directly depends on what non-instrumental process it is fitting for one to undergo. In conclusion, I

² Note, with regard to this last scenario, that it is not merely the case that I have reason to suppress *the expression* of my fear; I have reason to quell some of fear's constitutive components, such as the urge to flee. This is why I seem to have a prudential reason not to fear the bear. I thank Barry Maguire for pressing me to clarify this point.

make a few speculative observations about how the new picture of rational change in attitudes that I propose here might bear on central issues in recent discussions of fitting attitudes, such as the explanatory issue and the wrong kind of reason problem.

1. Backward-Looking Emotions

Emotions are commonly understood as a category of attitudes: they are affective attitudes that, unlike mere moods or feelings, are directed toward an object. This is, in any case, how I will understand the term in what follows. In recent years, philosophers have struggled to explain the rational diminution of certain backward-looking emotions, such as grief, regret, anger, and resentment. Each of these examples warrants a full paper, but here I will only mention them briefly to call attention to the common thread that connects them.

Consider the duration of grief following the death of a loved one. While psychiatrists consider prolonged grief pathological, some philosophers have recently been puzzled by the diminution of grief. Given that grief is warranted by the death of a loved one, which does not change with time, why should it be fitting to grieve less over time? How might the diminution of grief be justified if the reason for it stays the same? Berislav Marušić argues that this puzzle eludes a solution (Marušić forthcoming), while Dan Moller argues that as long as we continue to love the deceased, it is never fitting to recover from grief (Moller 2017). Though there might be prudential and even moral reasons to overcome one's grief, there remains, according to Moller, a powerful reason to persist in grief. A failure to grieve is a failure to appreciate the loss of the deceased.

Regret raises similar worries. Jeff McMahan (2005), Liz Harman (2009), Jay Wallace (2013), and Kieran Setiya (2014) have all discussed cases in which there seems to be a rational lack of regret about decisions the agents themselves judge unjustified, bad, or wrong. One of the most discussed cases in this context is Derek Parfit's case of the young girl's child (Parfit 1984). A 14-year-old girl decides to have a child though she has decisive moral and prudential reason not to. And yet many think that her subsequent lack of regret is warranted. Harman and Wallace argue that a shift in the young girl's attachments—specifically, her love for, or relationship with the child—gives her reason not to regret her unjustified decision; Setiya claims, more radically, that we have reason to prefer the existence of anyone who co-exists with us, whether or not we have a special relationship with the person; and McMahan argues that, in non-moral cases, a change in attitude can be justified by a change in the agent's personal values and commitments. It is not

always clear with regard to each of these accounts whether the explanation is meant to establish that the lack of regret is fitting or merely that there are strong reasons not to regret despite the fact that regret remains fitting (I will return to this point shortly.) However, on either interpretation, these theories seem to imply that in the normal cases of regret, where attachments and personal values do not change and no person comes into existence, rational regret persists.

Finally, Pamela Hieronymi (2001) articulates a challenge for accounts of forgiveness. Forgiveness is generally understood as the rational (if non-voluntary) forgoing of warranted resentment. Hieronymi asks: Given that resentment is warranted by a past wrong, as well as by the moral accountability of the wrongdoer and moral standing of the victim, and given that these facts do not change, how can the diminution of warranted resentment be *rational*? Hieronymi's solution shifts the object of resentment from the past wrong itself to the threat that emerges from it. Resentment, according to Hieronymi, is a protest against a present threat created by a past wrong. Genuine forgiveness is warranted when the threat is removed—through apology, for instance—and there is nothing more to protest. Agnes Callard, by contrast, maintains that when one suffers a wrong one has “reason to be angry forever,” but may rationally cease to care about the wrong done to one once it is acknowledge as such by the wrongdoer and the moral relationship is restored (Callard 2017).

These different authors seem to be grappling with distinct instances of the same general problem. I want to better understand the problem and the assumption that gives rise to it. This task is complicated by the fact that the different accounts employ different normative notions or interpret the same notions in slightly different ways. Therefore, I will now introduce a unified terminology that I will then use to recast the claims reviewed above, articulate their common assumption, and describe the general problem the assumption gives rise to.

In an important paper, Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson distinguish between, on the one hand, the fittingness or correctness of an emotion to its object and, on the other, its overall rational justification—whether it is what to feel, all things considered (D'Arms and Jacobson 2000a, 72). While an emotion can be fitting in the sense that it properly presents its object as having certain evaluative properties, the emotion might nevertheless be unjustified overall. For example, a cruel joke might be amusing and therefore amusement would be a correct or fitting response, but there might be moral reason not to be amused and this reason can render amusement morally

inappropriate or unjustified overall. It is clear why I am laughing at the joke, or what is amusing about it, but it is wrong to be amused. By contrast, the story of my sad childhood might not be amusing quite apart from any moral consideration. In this case, amusement is not (or not only) unjustified but unfitting: it does not make sense as a response to the story of my childhood. The same point is sometimes put in terms of the right and wrong kind of reason for an emotion of a certain type.³ I have a right kind of reason not to be amused by a joke when the joke is not funny and a wrong kind of reason not to be amused when the joke is offensive, though many believe that both right and wrong kinds of reasons can be genuinely normative reasons against being amused and, as such, good reasons.⁴

Now, an account of the rational change or diminution of an emotion can appeal to *fitting reasons*, which may impact not only the overall rational justification of the emotion but its fittingness, or it might appeal to *extraneous reasons*, which do not impact the fittingness of the emotion but may impact its overall rational status.⁵ We might have extraneous reasons to overcome fitting grief, Dan Moller concedes, but he insists that we continue to have fitting reason to grieve as long as we love the deceased. Hieronymi, by contrast, wants to explain how resentment that was once fitting may cease to be so given a relevant change in its object. The basic distinction is between explanations of the rational change in attitude as a change in the fittingness conditions of the attitude and explanations of the rational change in attitude as a change in considerations external to the fittingness of the attitude. Only an extraneous reason explanation insists that the change in attitude, though justified overall, remains in some important sense rationally flawed because unfitting. Fittingness explanations, by contrast, attempt to justify the change in attitude by locating a shift in

³ It is a substantive claim that the distinction between right and wrong kind of reasons aligns with the distinction between reasons that make an attitude fitting and reasons that can only justify it overall, but this alignment is widely accepted and it strikes me as very plausible. For more about why it is the case that the two distinctions align in this way, see (Howard Forthcoming).

⁴ Some have argued that moral flaws in jokes and comedies are inevitably comic flaws (Gaut 2007), but the distinction between right and wrong kinds of reasons stands. For instance, even if a morally inappropriate joke is not funny because morally inappropriate, the health-related benefits of laughter would provide another example of a wrong kind of reason to laugh at the joke (though, again, that laughter is healthy may be a good wrong kind of reason to laugh, one that genuinely counts toward the justification of laughter). Nevertheless, some philosophers are wrong-kind reason skeptics, i.e., they deny that wrong kinds of reasons can be normative reasons (Skorupski 2010; Way 2012). For them it is even more pressing to find an account of fitting change in attitude because on their view there cannot be a rational change in attitude that is not a change in fittingness.

⁵ Maguire (2018) argues that fitting reasons are importantly different from reasons for action. I will not rely on these differences in what follows and any instance of “fitting reasons” can be replaced with “facts/considerations that make fitting.”

the facts that made the attitude initially fitting.

It should further be noted that fittingness explanations of rational change in attitude can focus on changes in the facts that give fitting reasons for the attitude or on changes in the background conditions in virtue of which these facts give fitting reasons for the attitude. The idea is that various facts can be part of the rational explanation of the reason to ϕ without being the reason, or part of the reason to ϕ (see Dancy 2004, 39-40; Schreoder 2007, 27; Scanlon 2014, 48). The fact that I love Helen does not itself give me a reason to grieve for her, but it is a background condition that explains why her death gives me a (fitting) reason to grieve for her. Similarly, the fact that you and I stand in a moral relationship does not give you a reason to resent me, but it is arguably a background condition that explains why the fact that I harm you without justification gives you a reason to resent me.

A change in the fittingness of an attitude might be due to a change in the fitting reason for the attitude or due to a change in the background conditions for the fitting reason. If the fitting diminution of resentment is due to the neutralization of the threat that is its object, then in this case fittingness changes due to a change in reason. Alternatively, if the fitting diminution of grief is due to the waning of one's love for the deceased, then in this case fittingness changes due to a change in the background conditions. When I use the term "fittingness conditions" or "facts that determine fittingness" I lump together the background conditions and the fitting reason, both of which play a role in determining the fittingness status of the attitude. The term "rational conditions," on the other hand, refers to all facts that contribute to the rational status of the attitude, including extraneous facts, such as facts about the moral and prudential implications of entertaining the attitude, which might not touch on the fittingness status of the attitude.

We can now use these distinctions to articulate the presumption common to different accounts of backward-looking emotions and the general problem this presumption gives rise to. The presumption, which I will call *the presumption of fitting endurance*, maintains that the duration of a fitting affective attitude is determined by the duration of the facts that make it fitting in the first place. So the duration of the conditions that make ϕ -ing at t_1 fitting (where t_1 is the first moment of ϕ -ing) determines the fitting duration of ϕ -ing. The problem that various accounts of backward-looking emotions grapple with is to explain why the diminution of an emotion might be fitting given that the initial conditions of fittingness seem to endure. While some philosophers concede

that the emotion remains fitting and offer an extraneous reason explanation of its rational change, others insist on providing a fittingness account that would explain why the emotion not only rationally but fittingly diminishes. They therefore try to identify a relevant change in the circumstances to which the attitude was a fitting response.

Notice that the presumption of fitting endurance relies on the assumption that the fittingness of an attitude *at a time* is determined independently of its occurrence at other times. To see this, suppose a set of facts, C, makes φ -ing fitting at t_1 and that φ -ing does not occur prior to t_1 . The presumption of endurance holds that the duration of C determines the fitting duration of φ -ing and that C might not change. So whether φ -ing continues to be fitting at t_2 depends on whether C continues to hold at t_2 , and in cases of backward-looking emotions it normally does, or so the thought goes. However, one difference between φ -ing at t_1 and φ -ing at t_2 is that at t_1 the agent *begins to φ* while at t_2 the agent *continues to φ* . In other words, the history of this instance of φ -ing necessarily changes between t_1 and t_2 : at t_1 the beginning of φ -ing is not part of the history of the attitude, but at t_2 it is part of its history. If C includes the history of this instance of φ -ing, it *necessarily* changes between t_1 and t_2 . But according to the presumption of endurance, C *might* not change between t_1 and t_2 . Therefore the presumption of endurance entails that C does not include the history of this instance of φ -ing. So the fittingness of φ -ing at any time, t_n , is independent of facts about the agent's φ -ing at prior times (t_{n-m}). Put simply, the prior occurrence or absence of the attitude itself is not part of the fittingness conditions for the attitude; the fittingness of an agent's φ -ing at each moment is determined independently of facts about whether the agent φ -ed at other moments. In the next section I claim that this is often not the case.

2. Rationally Self-Consuming Attitudes

It is a striking fact about the accounts we reviewed that none of them even considers the possibility that whether an attitude is (or continues to be) fitting might depend on its history. This lacuna can be traced back to the paper in which D'Arms and Jacobson originally draw the distinction between considerations of fittingness and extraneous considerations. They claim that considerations of fittingness can be divided into considerations of *shape* and considerations of *size* (2000a, 73-75). An emotional episode is unfitting in shape when it presents its object as having certain evaluative features the object in fact lacks; it is unfitting in size when it is disproportional to the evaluative

features of its object. Regret, for instance, is unfitting in shape if its object is not regrettable (no reason to cry over spilt milk if the milk is still safely in the bottle,) and it is unfitting in size if it is disproportional to the significance of its object (the milk is spilt, and that is regrettable, but there is no reason to cry because *it is only milk*).

But there is a third kind of considerations of fittingness that goes unmentioned by D'Arms and Jacobson, namely, considerations of *length*. What is the duration of a fitting emotion? Perhaps regretting the spilt milk is fitting for a moment, but surely it is not fitting to regret it all day long. A moderately funny joke warrants amusement, but it may be unfitting to be amused by it all week. Similarly, we may plausibly raise substantive questions about the fitting duration of an emotion: is it fitting to grieve longer those who were closest to us? Does it matter for fittingness whether my resentment is brief and intense rather than prolonged and moderate?

Considerations of length lend plausibility to the idea that some attitudes, and particularly some emotions, are *rationaly self-consuming*. Whether an emotion fittingly persists might not only depend on the persistence of the conditions that made it fitting when it first occurred, but on the fitting evolution of the emotion over time. The fact that I have been amused by a funny joke all day long can make the dissipation of amusement fitting; the fact that I have resented an offense for many years can make a decrease in my resentment fitting; the fact that I have regretted my mistake can make a diminution in regret fitting; and, similarly, even when intense fear is appropriate as a first reaction to danger, fear may fittingly decrease to make room for other attitudes, such as a forward-looking intention to neutralize the threat. Thus, the fact that an emotion has persisted for some time might itself render its continuation unfitting. Like fire, which can be the cause of its own expiration, it is part of the rational structure of certain attitudes that they consume themselves: the longer they endure the less fitting they become. For it is the fact that you have had the fitting response to some event for some time that makes that very response less fitting.

It might initially seem implausible that the past existence of an emotion is itself a fitting reason for its diminution. The reason for one's resentment, whether intense or mild, is the injustice done, not facts about the history of one's resentment; similarly, a year after the death of one's beloved, the reason for one's lingering grief remains the death of the beloved and does not include facts about the process of grieving one has undergone (see Marušić forthcoming). But these observations are compatible with the claim that the past existence of the emotion is part of its

present fittingness conditions. I propose that in cases of rationally self-consuming emotions, the history of the emotion is part of the background conditions that explain why the fact that made the emotion fitting in the past no longer makes it fitting, or no longer makes fitting the same intensity of emotion. That I resented the injustice for a long time might be part of the rational explanation of the fitting diminution of my resentment without being the *reason* for my current resentment. The reason for whatever resentment I still harbor remains the injustice done to me; it is a reason for milder resentment because I have already resented the injustice intensely in the past.

Compare explanations of rational partiality. We mention the fact that a person is the parent of the winner in the competition in order to explain why the person's joy and pride are fitting. Were the person unrelated to the winner, the win would not give the person a fitting reason for such intense joy and pride. But in both scenarios the facts about the win itself are the same. Similarly, we cite the history of a rationally self-consuming attitude to explain why the fact that once made it fitting no longer does so. In both cases a relevant change in background conditions accounts for a change in fittingness while the facts that give the fitting reason remain unchanged.

The phenomenon of rationally self-consuming attitudes is compatible with explanations of rational change in attitude that appeal to various other fittingness conditions. For example, even if resentment requires, say, an apology, in order to fittingly dissipate, the fact that resentment is rationally self-consuming explains why it is unfitting to offer an apology too soon after the offense took place and why a reluctance to accept an apology after considerable time has passed can seem unfittingly resentful. In both cases, resentment does not run its rational, fitting course.⁶ Thus, the phenomenon of rationally self-consuming attitudes does not conflict with fittingness accounts that appeal to changes in facts independent of the attitude; it complements them. Moreover, positive and forward-looking emotions, too, may be rationally self-consuming. The joy we feel upon being offered the job we wanted may fittingly diminish with time while the relevant facts about the job and our judgment and expectations of it remain unchanged.⁷

⁶ Pamela Hieronymi writes about the process of forgiveness: "the one wronged might face two distinct tasks: first, achieving the stance of readiness-to-forgive, and second, actually forgiving. Demanding the second before it's *appropriate* can prevent a person from achieving the first" (Hieronymi 2001, 554, my italics). Hieronymi's choice of words here is significant. It is not merely that demanding forgiveness before it is *possible* can be counterproductive, but that demanding forgiveness before resentment has run its *appropriate* course can be counterproductive.

⁷ This is compatible with empirical research, cited in Moller 2007, that shows that both good and bad life events tend to have a short-term impact on our subjective well-being. See Brickman, Coates, and Janoff-Bulman 1978, and Suh, Diener, and Fujita 1996.

The phenomenon of rationally self-consuming attitudes points to a more general fact, namely, that whether an attitude of an agent at a given time is fitting may depend on the agent's attitudes at other times. But, as we saw in the previous section, the conception of rational change in emotion presupposed by many philosophers precludes this possibility. I believe rationally self-consuming attitudes provide a powerful counterexample to the common conception of rational change because the phenomenon is pre-theoretically intuitive. But if that is true, why have philosophers overlooked this phenomenon?

3. The Synchronic View

I believe philosophers have overlooked the phenomenon of rationally self-consuming attitudes because they are attracted to the idea that fittingness is synchronically determined. Let me explain what I mean. *The synchronic view of fittingness* (henceforth, the synchronic view) holds that what affective attitude it is fitting for one to have at a time does not directly depend on what affective attitudes one has at other times. The view allows for indirect dependence—i.e., it allows that facts that determine fittingness at a time themselves depend on the agent's attitudes at other times. For instance, the fittingness of my fear of the bear in the dark alley *indirectly* depends on my intention to walk down the alley to begin with. However, the synchronic view rules out the possibility that facts about an attitude's fittingness at a time depend on facts about the agent's attitudes at other times *when all other fittingness-making facts are equal*. Whether I feared the bear a moment ago is not relevant to whether fear is fitting right now given that all other fittingness-making facts—such as the danger the bear poses to me—remain unchanged.

While the synchronic view is explicitly endorsed and argued for by some authors who write about the rationality of belief (for example, Hedden 2015), it is rarely made explicit in the literature on the rationality of affective attitudes. What might explain the implicit popularity of the synchronic view is that it follows from a more narrow view about fittingness that many find compelling, namely, *the object view of fittingness* (henceforth, the object view). The object view holds that what affective attitude it is fitting for one to have at a time directly depends only on facts about the object of the attitude at that time.⁸ Since, on this view, only facts about the object determine

⁸ Note that the object view of fittingness is about *all* fittingness-making facts, not only fitting reasons. It therefore differs significantly from the view that right-kind reasons (which, I am assuming, are equivalent to fitting reasons) are “object-given.” The view that right-kind reasons for an attitude are object given reasons—i.e., they are reasons that bear on the object of the attitude—leaves room for the possibility that the background conditions that enable the object-given

fittingness at a time, the view entails that fittingness at a time does not directly depend on one's attitudes at other times, which is what the synchronic view says. However, unlike the synchronic view, the object view rules out the possibility that fittingness at a time directly depends on things other than the object of the attitude. Thus, the object view holds that at any moment t_n , the fittingness of any affective attitude F in response to X is fully determined by X 's properties at t_n .⁹ For example, the fittingness of my fear in the dark alley is fully determined by the relevant properties of the object of my fear at that moment (the shadow belonging to a bear, the bear being dangerous, etc.)

It follows from the object view that the fitting *duration* of an affective attitude F in response to X is fully determined by the properties of X *over time*. For example, an object view of fear might hold that X is fittingly feared only when and as long as X poses a danger. The attitude that is assessed for fittingness at the given time is the only attitude that warrants consideration and the distinction between an agent's first response to the object, the agent's later response, and the agent's enduring response falls out of view.

I believe that it is because D'Arms and Jacobson presuppose the object view that they do not mention fittingness considerations of *length*. If they assume that fittingness always and only directly depends on the object at a time, then they might be led to assume that the fitting length of an attitude—the fitting continuation of the attitude over time—directly depends on fittingness considerations of shape and size at each moment.

To be sure, D'Arms and Jacobson—as well as other philosophers who implicitly adopt the object view—acknowledge in passing that in addition to the object's properties, other background conditions are also relevant to the fittingness of an attitude.¹⁰ For example, they write:

reasons do *not* bear on the object. This possibility is ruled out by the object view of fittingness. So the object view entails the view that right-kind reasons are object-given, but the latter does not entail the former. For a description and criticism of the view that right-kind reasons are object-given, see Schroeder 2012. For a helpful overview of the different attempts to give a theory of the right/wrong kind reason distinction, see Gertken and Kiesewetter 2017.

⁹ "Properties of X at t_n " should not be understood so broadly as to make the view trivially true: every fact could be in some way related to the object as its property at a given time. For instance, it is true of my laptop right now that it exists in a world in which Hitler came to power in Germany in the 1930s. Without getting too fancy, I will say that properties relevant to my definition of the object view are those properties that we would plausibly associate with the object at a time. There is of course room to debate how to draw the distinction between properties that are plausibly associated with an object at a time and those that are not, but the view should work with any answer we wish to plug in as long as the distinction is granted.

¹⁰ Dan Moller is another example of a philosopher who seems to reluctantly concede that fittingness directly depends on more than the object itself. Moller acknowledges that a change in background conditions might explain a change

To think the tiger fearsome is to think fear at it appropriate, but only when the tiger is nearby and on the loose—not, for instance, while you sit reading this article. Similarly, some act of lying may be wrong, but it is appropriate to feel guilty about it only if it was your lie (or you were otherwise responsible for it). (D’Arms and Jacobson 2000b, 729).

Having acknowledged the existence of background conditions, D’Arms and Jacobson immediately add: “We will assume these qualifications throughout” (ibid.) Fittingness can be seen as wholly determined by its object at a given time only when the relevant background conditions are presupposed. But, as I have already suggested, there might be substantive questions about what *are* the relevant background conditions. And besides, as long as there are background conditions that pertain to facts about the agent it is not true that the fittingness of an attitude at a time directly depends only on the properties of its object.¹¹ So why do philosophers tend to abstract away from facts about the agent’s relation to the object and insist on the object view of fittingness?

The object view may seem unavoidable if we model our understanding of fitting attitudes on our understanding of true beliefs. Consider D’Arms and Jacobson’s following explanation of fitting attitudes:

Emotions present things to us as having certain evaluative features. When we ask whether an emotion is fitting, in the sense relevant to whether its object is ϕ , we are asking about the correctness of these presentations. The relevant considerations, then, are just those that count as evidence for the evaluations an emotion presents to us. In this respect, the fittingness of an emotion is like the truth of a belief. (D’Arms and Jacobson 2000a, 72)

The truth value of belief is always and only determined by its object. Whether a belief is true at a given moment directly depends on its object—a proposition—and not on things other than its object, such as the agent’s beliefs at other times. Thus, if it is now true that the sun is out, then my belief that the sun is out is true and remains true only when and as long as the sun is out. If the model of true belief is carried over to fitting attitudes, then fittingness, too, would seem to directly depend only on its object.

in fittingness: “If we become sufficiently different people it may no longer make sense to conceive of someone’s death (years ago) as a loss to us ... To the extent that condition is not met, however, there will indeed be a gap between our response and our loss as long as the loss persists and our response does not.” (Moller 2017, 12).

¹¹ As I mention in fn. 9, if we allow relational properties into the story, any background condition can be parsed as a relational property of the object, e.g., the property of being the agent’s beloved, the property of being the agent’s wrong action, or the property of being a threat to the agent’s well-being. But the point I am making in the text stands, namely, that the fittingness of attitudes is partly determined by facts that pertain *to the agent*.

The model of true beliefs leads D’Arms and Jacobson to worry about cases where affective attitudes are not responsive to fittingness considerations (D’Arms and Jacobson 2009). We would probably not be amused by a funny joke upon its eleventh retelling; our amusement might also be preempted by our despondent mood, by our moral judgment, by social circumstance, or by our identification with or alienation from the person who is the target of the joke. According to D’Arms and Jacobson, such obscuring factors explain what they call *the instability of affect*. As a result of this instability, they claim, it is often the case that our affective attitudes do not correctly present the value of their objects even by our own lights. On their view, amusement by X is always the *correct* or *fitting* response to the fact that X is funny just as a belief that p is always the correct or true response to the fact that p is true.

However, when we say that a belief is true we refer to its propositional content, not to the correctness or fittingness of entertaining the attitude itself. Indeed, the fact that a belief is true does not settle its fittingness. It might be fitting to forget a truth if, for example, it is insignificant, like the truth that I had a sandwich for lunch on June 14, 2008. Similarly, it might be fitting not to entertain a significant metaphysical truth about grounding relations when I am about to cross a busy street; this truth is crucially irrelevant in this context. Finally, I might come to have a true belief through flawed reasoning or psychological manipulation; in this case, too, the belief is not fitting.¹² That a belief is true does not imply that it is always fitting, though perhaps it implies that there are *some* occasions on which it is.¹³

Now consider amusement. While we tend not to be amused by a joke upon hearing it for the eleventh time, it is also the case that being amused by a joke for the eleventh time can be *unfitting* (just as it can be unfitting to be amused by a moderately funny joke for too long.) Or, more modestly, it might be true that indifference in response to a funny joke is fitting upon its eleventh retelling even if it is not fitting upon first hearing it. To say that a joke is funny is not to say that it is always fitting to be amused by it, though perhaps it implies that it is *sometimes* fitting to be amused by it. I therefore suggest that what D’Arms and Jacobson call “obscuring factors” are in some cases fittingness considerations and what D’Arms and Jacobson consider a fitting attitude is only

¹² For a recent account of diachronic norms for belief that emphasizes belief formation, see Hlobil 2015 and Podgorski 2016.

¹³ Compare Gertken and Kiesewetter (2017): “On the face of it, the set of propositions that are credible or worthy of belief does not seem to be co-extensional with the set of true propositions.” (12, n. 39)

occasionally fitting. Accordingly, *the instability of affect*, which, on D'Arms and Jacobson's object view seems to conflict with facts about fittingness, can be seen, on a non-synchronic (i.e., diachronic) view of fittingness, which takes into account the agent's attitudes at other times, as *the responsiveness of affect* to changing fittingness conditions.

Of course, it is possible to reject the object view and still uphold the synchronic view. Jay Wallace, for instance, seems to presuppose the synchronic view and reject the object view in his account of the case of the young girl's child. Recall the crucial details of the case: though the young girl's decision to have a child at age fourteen was prudentially and morally unjustified (by hypothesis), we think she may rationally come to celebrate the decision or, at the very least, cease to regret it. Wallace claims that "to understand the evolution of the young girl's attitude without supposing either that she changes her mind about the relevant normative questions [i.e., without supposing she now believes her decision was justified] or that she acquires responses that are inconsistent toward one and the same state of affairs" we must recognize the relevant change in the young girl's "deliberative situation," namely her new, loving relationship to her child (Wallace 2013, 90). This relationship gives her new reasons she did not have before. Given her new reasons, "the young girl will naturally affirm and celebrate the existence of her child, cherishing her daughter and her daughter's role in her own life" (ibid).

On one possible reading, Wallace offers an extraneous reason account of the change in the young girl's attitude. Though regret remains fitting, new reasons give her strong, wrong-kind reason not to regret and to affirm her past decision. So the young girl's lack of regret is akin to one's cold reception of a funny but morally objectionable joke: in both cases the attitude is not fitting but rationally justified overall. According to another reading of Wallace's view—one that strikes me as more plausible—the fittingness of the young girl's regret changes without a change in the object of regret due to a change in relevant background conditions. The new relationship with her child constitutes a significant change in fittingness-making facts. On this reading of Wallace, fittingness can depend on facts about things other than the object of the attitude, so the object view is false. However, the account is in line with the synchronic view because it does not appeal to the young girl's attitudes at other times to explain the fittingness of her present affirmation of her past decision.

But the synchronic view must also be rejected. Just as the fittingness of amusement seems to directly depend on one's attitudes at other times, so does the fittingness of regret. It matters for our assessment of the young girl's present attitude whether she had regretted the choice in the past and, more generally, how she has responded to her past decision until now. I submit that, all else being equal, the young girl's present lack of regret would plausibly seem less fitting if she had never felt even a tinge of regret. Her past attitudes are important not only because of how they may have determined other fittingness-making facts, but because they are themselves fittingness-making. So it is plausible that not only the young girl's present relationship to her daughter but also her past regret bears directly on the fittingness of her present attitude. If this is true, then we have another indication that the synchronic view is false: what attitude is fitting at a time can directly depend on one's attitudes at other times.¹⁴

Someone might object at this point that I am misunderstanding fittingness. Fittingness, the objector would insist, refers to the specific evaluative properties an attitude attributes to its object at a given moment. If belief attributes 'truth' to its object then belief is fitting when its propositional content is true; if amusement attributes 'funniness' to its object then amusement is fitting when its object is funny. So, the objection continues, even a belief in an insignificant fact, such as a belief about what I had for lunch ten years ago, is fitting if true; and if a joke is funny, then even upon the eleventh retelling of the joke amusement is fitting. The point of fittingness-talk is to allow for a normative assessment of attitudes that is limited in scope and defined by specific evaluative interests; I have been packing too much into fittingness, the objector might say. To protect the narrow evaluative scope of fittingness from encroachment by other evaluative and normative considerations, we should preserve the synchronic view. My whole line of argument may therefore seem to misconstrue the idea of fittingness rather than expose a common misconception of it.

However, this response assumes that what evaluative features an attitude attributes to its object at a given time does not directly depend on one's relation to the object and, more specifically, on one's attitudes at other times. But, as D'Arms and Jacobson acknowledge, fear seems to correctly present the tiger as fearsome only if the tiger is near the agent and on the loose, not when the tiger is an example in a philosophy paper. And I have been arguing that the history of the agent's response to the object is similarly relevant to whether an attitude correctly presents its object's

¹⁴ I elaborate on regret in general and on Wallace's account in particular in "Regret and Repair" (unpublished, draft available upon request.)

evaluative properties. To laugh at a funny joke upon its eleventh retelling might betray a failure to appreciate what is funny about it; to resent a wrong for too long might reveal a failure to properly appreciate the significance of the wrong; to grieve a friend's death and recover too quickly might cast doubt on whether one appreciated the tragedy at all.¹⁵ In short, it is a mistake to assume that we can have a good grasp of the evaluative content of an attitude independently of its relation to the agent's mind over time. The fitting duration of an emotion may be explained by its broader diachronic context, which includes a properly evolving response to one and the same object with one and the same relevant set of evaluative properties.

4. A Diachronic View

This brings me to my final claim. I have argued that the synchronic view is false, now I wish to argue for a specific diachronic view according to which the fittingness of an attitude sometimes directly depends on the non-instrumental process of which it is a part. Start with *the general diachronic view of fittingness* (henceforth, the general diachronic view), according to which what attitude it is fitting for one to have at a time can directly depend on what attitudes one has at other times. The general diachronic view follows from the rejection of the synchronic view, however, it allows that fittingness is sometimes synchronic, that is, that the fittingness of an attitude at a time is sometimes independent of one's attitudes at other times. The view also allows that in those cases where the fittingness of an attitude at a time directly depends on one's attitudes at other times it *also* depends on other facts, say on facts about the object of the attitude or about one's relation to the object. As such, the general diachronic view is inclusive: it simply negates the exclusive thesis of the synchronic view, that fittingness never directly depends on an attitude's history.

A rationally self-consuming attitude is diachronically determined because the fittingness of such an attitude at a time directly depends on whether and how long the agent has entertained the attitude in the past. But rationally self-consuming attitudes are only one primary example of rational change that is assessed by a conception of an attitude's fitting evolution. There are, in addition, *rationally self-augmenting attitudes* as well as *rational emotional transitions*.

Consider, first, rationally self-augmenting attitudes. These are attitudes that rationally intensify and deepen the longer they endure. It is arguable, for example, that love is such an

¹⁵ Attribution of a true belief to a person at a given moment might similarly depend on whether the person fittingly relies on the true propositional content in thought and action over time.

attitude, as well as enjoyment from engagement in a valued activity and attachment to a place of residence. It is unfitting to love a person I met last week in the same way one might love a person one has known for many years. No matter the special chemistry we have or how well we understand each other, the fact that we are recent acquaintances itself seems to imply that certain emotions toward one another would not be fitting. Similarly, one's growing enjoyment of a valued activity such as lap-swimming, or philosophizing, or appreciating art, is plausibly self-augmenting because its fittingness directly depends on one's history of engagement in the activity. The same is true of the kind of attachment we have toward the place we call "home". To fittingly feel toward a place what one often feels toward one's home, it is not enough to know many things about it and wish very much to return to it, one must have resided in it for some time. The fittingness of our feelings of attachment to our home directly depends on our history.

Rational emotional transitions occur when one attitude is fittingly replaced by another. At first we are excited but then we might *grow* weary or bored; we view someone as no more than a friend but then *fall* in love with her; we are distressed by a new predicament but then *reconcile ourselves* to it; we can laugh or cry and then *calm down*. To understand and assess the fittingness of such emotional transitions we must appeal to the history of the agent's attitudes. In all the aforementioned cases—those of rationally self-consuming attitudes, rationally self-augmenting attitudes, and rational emotional transitions—the fittingness of an attitude at a time directly depends on *the fitting process of which the attitude is a part*. Therefore, a plausible diachronic view appeals to the fittingness of processes.

Processes are often contrasted with continuants. While continuants *endure*, processes are said to *perdure*. The traditional way of drawing the distinction is by reference to whether or not the whole has temporal parts. Continuants do not have temporal parts; they exist in their entirety at each moment; they endure. Processes have temporal parts; they exist in their entirety only over time; they perdure. A different way of drawing the distinction, argued for by Hofweber and Velleman, refers to whether the identity of the whole is fully determined at every moment of its existence (Hofweber and Velleman 2010). Thus, a mental state, such as a conscious experience of a red cube, endures because its identity is determined at every moment at which it exists. In contrast, consider the process of writing a check: "What there is of this process at a particular moment—the laying down of a particular drop [of ink]—is not sufficient to determine that a check is being written, and so it is not sufficient to determine which particular process is taking place..."

(14). On either view of the distinction, we can see that self-consuming attitudes, self-augmenting attitudes, and emotional transitions, are fitting as part of diachronically fitting wholes—i.e., fitting processes.

Consider the case of anger. Agnes Callard argues that anger in response to a wrong is properly understood in the context of an impaired moral relationship. Though the wrong will remain unchanged, the moral relationship might be amended and therefore anger may rationally recede (Callard 2017). Put in my terms, though the fitting reason for anger persists, the background conditions change once the relationship is repaired and therefore anger fittingly diminishes. This strikes me as plausible. It means, however, that the fact that anger is rationally self-consuming is only part of the explanation of its fitting diminution. Anger is properly understood as part of a fitting process of moral repair, a process that has various stages, and includes not only the attitudes, thoughts, and actions of the person who was wronged but also those of the wrongdoer, as well as interactions between the parties, such as offering and accepting an apology or asking for forgiveness and granting it. Given that it is partly constituted by sequences of attitudes and emotions, the process of moral repair also includes self-augmenting attitudes and emotional transitions.

To be sure, the synchronic view can account for the dependence of fitting attitudes on a kind of process. On Pamela Hieronymi's view, for example, resentment is a protest against a present threat that originated in a past wrong (Hieronymi 2001). If the relevant threat is to be disarmed so as to make forgiveness fitting, a certain process must unfold. Perhaps the person who was wronged must come to entertain a psychological state that would allow her to listen to the wrongdoer's apology and expression of contrition. In this way, the fittingness of forgiveness in the present might depend on the past attitudes of the person who was wronged. But in this case fitting forgiveness only *indirectly* depends on the attitudes of the victim at other times. The psychological change brings about the conditions that make forgiveness fitting. The process is not essential to fittingness, but instrumental to it. So a synchronic process view must be clearly distinguished from the kind of process view that I am proposing.

For this purpose, distinguish between instrumental and non-instrumental processes. An instrumental process aims at an end-state defined independently of the process itself. If the end-state is to have a cake, then the process might involve baking a cake or walking to the store to buy one, depending on which means better serves the desired end-state. By contrast, a non-

instrumental process aims at an end-state defined by the process itself.¹⁶ To be the winner of a game of basketball, to obtain a PhD, or to have a friend, is to have gone through processes of certain kinds.¹⁷ Of course, historically defined end-states have a-historical features: there are various ways to get a trophy, possess a diploma, or have a drink with Charlie. But for these things to count as winning the game, having a PhD, or having a friend, they must have the relevant history. That is to say: they must have been brought about in a certain way.

To illustrate the difference between the two kinds of processes, consider grief. On an instrumental view of the fitting process of which grief is a part, the end-state of the process might be a return to the bereaved person's emotional and functional baseline (see, for example, Bonanno 2009). Grief is then construed as a step along the way to such a recovery and the fitting duration of grief is determined by its efficacy in bringing about the desired end-state. However, on a non-instrumental view of the fitting process of which grief is a part, the end-state of the process is historically defined by the relevant stages. So if one were to return to one's emotional and functional baseline without passing through the valley of grief, so to speak, then one would not arrive at the fitting end-state of the process *even if there is no other difference between one's current state and the fitting end-state of the process*. On the non-instrumental process view, we cannot skip stages in the process because the end-state is defined by the path we take to get to it. On this view, to determine the fitting duration of grief we must determine the fitting process in which grief is embedded, its different stages, and the way in which the different stages relate to each other so as to form a coherent whole.¹⁸

¹⁶ We find a useful analogy to the distinction between instrumental and non-instrumental processes in John Rawls' distinction between, on the one hand, perfect and imperfect procedural justice and, on the other hand, pure procedural justice. The required outcome of perfect and imperfect procedural justice can be specified independently of the procedure that brings it about. Perfect procedures are *guaranteed* to bring about the required outcome while imperfect procedures are only *likely* to bring about the required outcome. For example, a procedure of criminal justice, which aims to convict the guilty and only the guilty, cannot guarantee success but might be sufficiently reliable and therefore count as a procedure of imperfect procedural justice. However, pure procedural justice obtains when there is no criterion for the right outcome other than the execution of a correct or fair procedure (Rawls 1971, 86). For example, when applied fairly, a gambling procedure renders its consequences legitimate, whatever they are.

¹⁷ Although some processes are more clearly defined than others, such as getting a PhD in comparison to forging a friendship. For the view that friendship entails a relationship with a certain kind of history, see (Kolodny 2003).

¹⁸ I make a preliminary attempt to answer these questions in "Grief, Narrative, and the Continuation of Love by Other Means" (unpublished, draft available upon request). In this paper, I build on Peter Goldie's narrative account of grief (2012) and argue that grief is properly understood as part of a love story. Grief, I argue, is occasioned by a conflict between remaining devoted to the deceased and finding the world meaningful in the absence of the deceased. The anguish of grief is to a large extent a reflection of this conflict and the impossible predicament it creates for the surviving lover. Grief may only diminish with the resolution of this conflict, which comes about when the person in grief finds

This is not meant as a conclusive argument but as a preliminary sketch of where the rejection of the synchronic view might lead us. The idea that what attitude it is fitting for one to have at a time can directly depend one's attitudes at other times suggests that the fittingness of an attitude at a time can directly depend the fitting process of which it is a part. Furthermore, the fact that the fittingness of one's attitude at a time can *directly* depend on one's attitudes at other times suggests that, in the cases where it does, the fitting process of which the attitude is a part is a non-instrumental process. Finally, once we consider the fitting, non-instrumental processes in which emotions are embedded, we may be able to better describe and understand the evolution of our fitting emotions over time as well as the standards by which one emotion takes the place of another while, in a crucial sense, continuing it.

5. Conclusion: Implications of the Process View

In conclusion, recall, again, the bear in the alley. It is plausible that fear is fitting as a first response to danger, but it is also plausible, I think, that fear is fitting as part of a fitting process that is itself a fitting response to danger. Fear and alarm might be fittingly replaced, for instance, by resourcefulness and an intention to disarm the threat. As the bear stares at me, my fear is replaced by cool headedness and I stop trembling. The justification for the change in attitude need not resort to extraneous reasons. Both my fear and my cool headedness might be part of a single diachronic response that attributes certain evaluative features to its object, namely, the dangerous bear that is standing in front of me. My cool headedness in this case presents the bear as dangerous just as much as my fear does. Our substantive normative view of the process of which fear is a part determines how we draw the distinction between fitting reasons and extraneous reasons in this case.

On the basis of this sketch we can make some preliminary observations about the implications of my diachronic process view for the two main debates about fitting attitudes mentioned at the very first paragraph of this essay—the explanatory issue and the wrong kind of reason problem. The explanatory issue primarily concerns the attempt to give an analysis of value in terms of fitting attitudes. The idea is that the value of swimming in the lake might be explained by the fittingness of a desire to swim in the lake; the value of a joke might be explained by the

new means of devotion compatible with the beloved's permanent absence. The anguish of grief is not a means to discovering new forms of devotion but a crucial element of what makes the new forms of devotion fitting.

fittingness of amusement in response to it. Some think that fittingness itself is best explained in terms of reasons, so the fact that swimming in the lake is refreshing gives me reason to swim in the lake, which makes my desire to do so fitting, which explains the value of swimming in the lake. Now, if the fittingness of my desire to swim in the lake directly depends on the fitting process in which this desire is embedded (whatever that process may be,) then fitting attitudes accounts of value should, in some cases at least, be replaced by *fitting processes accounts of value*. For instance, the evaluative properties of the bear in the alley would be explained by the process that fittingly ensues upon encounter with the bear, a process which includes fear among its essential stages, but much else besides.

A fitting process account of value might also shed light on the wrong kind of reason problem. The wrong kind of reason problem emerges from the observation that some facts can count in favor of an attitude without making it fitting and without indicating that the object of the attitude is valuable. A reason not to fear the bear given by the fact that doing so might lead to my death would normally be considered a wrong kind of reason because it counts against fear but not against the fittingness of fear. The question is how to draw the distinction between right and wrong kinds of reason for an attitude.¹⁹

But if the fearsome properties of the bear are explained by a fitting process composed of various attitudes, then, as suggested in the brief sketch above, both one's fear and one's cool-headedness can account for what is fearsome about the bear and therefore be fitting responses to the fearsome properties of the bear. Considered synchronically, one and the same fact can be a right or a wrong kind of reason; which one it is depends on whether and how it bears on a response to the object that unfolds over time. Thus, a view that maintains that the fittingness of attitudes directly depends on the non-instrumental processes in which they are embedded might help us distinguish between right and wrong kinds of reasons.

¹⁹ This is a general challenge, but those who wish to reduce value to reasons face a further problem: they must draw the distinction between right and wrong reasons without relying on the notion of value. For a clear distinction between the two problems, see Gertken and Kiesewetter 2017.

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