12
MEMORY AND EMOTION

Ronald de Sousa

Truly, though our element is time,
We are not suited to the long perspectives
Open at each instant of our lives.
They link us to our losses: worse,
They show us what we have as it once was,
Blindingly undiminished, just as though
By acting differently, we could have kept it so.

'Reference Back', Philip Larkin

Taylor and Francis
Not for distribution

At the highest level of biological generality, we can discern a rough functional analogy between the most primitive tropisms and the most sophisticated human emotions. Both serve to detect and respond differentially to situations that affect the well-being of an organism. Similarly, elementary changes are perpetuated through time in the most primitive organism as well as in explicit individual memory. Thus, in the words of the psychologist Nico Frijda, emotions 'can . . . be traced back in evolution to elementary principles of being alive', notably *autonomy*, arising from autopoiesis (Varela et al. 1974), a capacity for *detection* or perception of relevant cues, guided by a set of *concerns* (Frijda 2016: 610). While the 'concerns' of bacteria might seem too remote to mention in the same breath as human emotions, the term draws attention to the parallel between sophisticated emotions and wants on the one side, and the needs served by tropisms towards nutrients or away from threats, on the other. Similarly, a common function is served by memory and by the mere preservation of an acquired change in the simplest organism. Memory and emotion together embody fundamental enabling processes of natural selection: differential success, among a variety of possible processes or behaviours, and the preservation of successful forms or strategies.

Such a broad biological perspective obviously leaves out all interesting peculiarities and differences. By being too inclusive about what falls under the label we are likely to 'reduce the term memory to a meaningless designator' (Klein 2015: 2). And the same goes for emotions. Tropisms are not emotions, any more than the effects of phylogenetic antecedents are literally memory. Frijda conceded that 'emotions . . . do not . . . reflect a unitary function' (2016: 618). Neither does memory. We need to look more closely at how emotions and memory intertwine as their complexity culminates in the ways they function in human life.

The personal and the subpersonal

Following Endel Tulving (1972, 1985), psychologists distinguish between *procedural*, *semantic*, and *episodic* memory. The first, characterized as 'anoetic' because it does not require consciousness, consists in an acquired ability to exercise a skill. That includes the ability to *say* something, so procedural memory is presupposed by semantic memory, which is the retention of knowledge. Semantic memory is 'noetic', i.e. it can normally be brought to consciousness, but the circumstances of its acquisition are lost. Episodic memory is 'autonoetic': it takes itself to be knowledge of the past. As such, it could be viewed a species of semantic memory of which the differential is that its content can be located from a given perspective within a temporal frame.

There are obvious and intimate links between memory and emotion. In Proust's famous madeleine experience (Proust 1966: 48), a present experience seems to bring back a past time. It brings a deep and initially inexplicable feeling of joy that is not, at first, attributed to specific past events. Marcel's search of the origin of his present feelings uncovers not only episodic memories but also a feeling of their pastness in a first-person perspective. They are memories *par excellence*, and some have suggested that only full-fledged episodic memories should count as true memories (Klein 2015); others, however, have urged that semantic and episodic memory form a single natural kind from which only procedural memory should be excluded (Michaelian 2015). Both about memory and about emotion, we can ask what exactly each is most helpfully regarded as comprising.

Disputes as to what should count as a natural kind are common on the somewhat unsettled border between philosophy and science. There are clear cases where what appear to be the same kind are really two. Nephrite and Jadeite have very much the same properties for carvers and collectors, who refer to both as jade. But they are as different as Ca2(Mg,Fe)5Si8O22(OH)2 is from NaAlSi2O6. That matters for scientific purposes, because chemical composition is conventionally regarded as defining a substance's identity. But for some purposes it may be irrelevant. In psychology and in philosophy, where we are often interested in functions at different levels of analysis, what counts as a natural kind is not so clear (de Sousa 1984).

Taylor and Francis
Not for distribution

Accordingly, some have denied that emotions form a natural kind (Rorty 1980; Griffiths 1997), while others have insisted that they do (Charland 1995). Who is right depends on why you want to know. In the useful terms introduced by David Marr (1982), are we asking about the computational, the algorithmic, or the implementation level? The biological perspective favoured by Frijda invites us to take an interest both in what is the same, at the computational level, and what is different at the level of algorithm and implementation. Like Aristotle's distinction between matter and form, Marr's levels are relative: a process implementing a certain algorithm could itself define a task implemented by some lower level process. Relative to the biological goals I began with, procedural memory is a mechanism of implementation; but relative to the way it is effected in the brain, it can be thought of as a function requiring an algorithm for its implementation. Some such multilevel complexity characterizes common conceptions of emotion among psychologists. Klaus Scherer, for example, has defined an emotion as 'an episode of interrelated, synchronized changes in the states of all or most of the five organismic subsystems in response to the evaluation of an external or internal stimulus event as relevant to major concerns of the organism' (Scherer 2005).[1] Scherer's characterization leaves out an essential feature of all but the simplest of our affective responses: that they are pervaded by memory at both the personal and the subpersonal levels. The emotions we have names for – fear, anger, jealousy, sadness, and so forth – effectively rehearse paradigm scenarios that have a narrative structure and call forth more or less pre-packaged responses. That typically involves a narrowing of attention: emotions determine patterns of salience among objects of attention,

lines of inquiry, and inferential as well as practical strategies (de Sousa 1987: 196). Procedural and semantic memory are always involved, and sometimes, when we are explicitly experiencing an emotion targeting a past time, episodic memory is involved as well.

One consequence of these close links between emotions and memory is that the scripts and scenarios in question have to be *learned*. The exploration of that aspect of emotion that links it specifically to memory was highlighted by Freud, who thought it likely that the learning in question takes place mostly in early childhood. Viewed in this perspective, an adult's repertoire of emotions consists largely in paradigm scenarios, the dramatic structure of which was acquired in infancy and rehearsed with only limited adjustments in later life. Insofar as this speculation is correct, the construction of emotional episodes must include all three types of memory, including the sort of retention most remote from standard episodic memory, where the subject has no awareness of the original episode. Whatever their status as natural kinds, the close imbrication of all three kinds of memory in relation to emotion seems to count against segregating conscious episodic memory from the other ways in which the past influences the future.

A useful perspective on the shaping of our repertoire of emotions by our past is afforded by looking at what we might mean by 'semantic memory' if we took it literally, as referring to our knowledge of language. Our knowledge of the meaning of words requires us to know *how* to use them. So this part of our semantic memory directly involves procedural memory. But how did we acquire it? No two speakers of English had exactly the same sequence of experiences in the first years of life. Each one of us, therefore, has become proficient in our native tongue in idiosyncratic ways. Except for the odd word acquired on some memorable occasion, we generally have lost all episodic recollection of the occasion on which we first learned it. Some misunderstandings between native speakers of the same language can be expected as a result of generally undetected differences between their idiolects. Subtle differences may arise between two speakers' prototypes (in the sense of Rosch and Lloyd 1979) for common words. We can speculate that the specific circumstances in which we first learned to speak of 'airplanes', 'apricot', or 'assignation' influence the connotation of those words, if not their Fregean sense and reference. Resulting differences between idiolects are often trivial. But a more poignant (fictional) example is provided by Kundera's 'Dictionary of Misunderstood Words', in which the two protagonists differ radically in the valence they associate with a number of emotionally charged words. (Kundera 1984:96).

Taylor and Francis
Not for distribution

Some effects of past experience are confined to the subpersonal. Mere familiarity, even when unconsciously induced, can determine preference (Zajonc 2000). Emotional and behavioural responses can be influenced by irrelevant associations, set up by post-hypnotic suggestion. Thus subjects who were caused to associate disgust with an arbitrary word, such as 'take' or 'often', passed harsher moral judgements on the protagonist of a story when it included the innocent word. (Wheatley and Haidt 2005).

Ever since Bartlett's experiments on the transmission of folk stories (Bartlett 1920), it has become clear that episodic memories are not retrievals of unchanged memory traces. They are imaginative constructions, produced on the basis of acquired 'schemata' similar to paradigm scenarios for emotions. Allocating the scene to a specific time in the past requires an additional element, which Bertrand Russell identified as a 'specific feeling or sensation or complex of sensations, different from expectation or bare assent in a way that makes the belief refer to the past' (Russell 1921: 186). As Jérôme Dokic has argued, however, that feeling is better interpreted as a subpersonal meta-cognitive feeling specific to episodic memory (Dokic 2014). It is akin to a feeling or rightness or the feeling of knowing includes a 'de se' attribution (Perry 1979); that is, it is interpreted by the subject as referring to her own experience. Like other meta-cognitive feelings, it is not necessarily conscious as such, neither is it necessarily veridical. This can be

illustrated by Penfield's experiments with direct stimulation of the temporal lobes. Subjects thought they identified 'flashback' memories; but further investigation established that they were 'reconstructions or inferences rather than actual memories . . . one patient, for example, said upon stimulation that she suddenly saw herself as she had appeared in childbirth, and that she felt as if she were reliving the experience' (Loftus and Loftus 1980).

The schemata on the basis of which both memories and emotions are constructed make use of specific experiences and cultural assumptions about 'normal' events and responses. This becomes particularly clear in certain pathological cases, when patients confabulate elaborate accounts of adventures they supposedly underwent, while actually being locked up in hospital. Those confabulations clearly derive from beliefs about what someone might be expected to do, rather than events actually experienced (Hirstein 2005).

Joëlle Proust has argued that *feelings* form a natural kind even if emotions don't. They are not necessarily affective, but typically are positively or negatively valenced. At the most elementary level, they motivate something like approach or avoidance, and more generally function to guide behaviour and monitor performance. To that end, 'they carry non-conceptual information about how much one's present condition deviates from the expected condition. From a functional viewpoint, they form a natural kind insofar as their function is to indicate a comparative outcome through a dedicated embodied experience' (Proust 2015: 6). The monitoring function, in particular, involves an important class of meta-cognitive feelings, such as a feeling of rightness, a feeling of knowing, or a feeling of familiarity. These resemble emotions in that they are sometimes valenced; they also both influence and result from appraisals. Unlike emotions, however, they require neither a propositional object nor even any faculty of conceptualization.

Among those meta-cognitive or 'epistemic feelings' (de Sousa 2008), the feeling of familiarity is particularly intriguing, in that it appears to involve both a perceptual and an affective component, subtended by different brain pathways. When dissociated, these result in strange symptoms like those of Capgras syndrome.

Taylor and Francis
Not for distribution

In his original case description, Joseph Capgras described a patient who claimed that her husband had been replaced by impostors, or 'sosies'. When her delirium was particularly acute, she asserted that between 1914 and 1918 over two thousand doubles of her daughter had appeared, each one 'neither completely different nor perfectly identical to the last'. 'In short,' Capgras concluded, 'Mme de Rio-Branco sees resemblance everywhere while failing everywhere to see identity. So strictly speaking there is no problem with recognition; there is instead what we might call an identification agnosia' (Capgras 1923: 13).

Capgras's own interpretation of the phenomenon sees it as stemming 'not strictly speaking from a sensory illusion but from an emotional judgment' (Capgras 1923: 14). This posits an affective pre-condition on the recognition of close family or friends. More recent treatments of the illusion have traced it more precisely to a disconnect between cognitive and affective associations. Elisabeth Pacherie summed up this idea as follows:

> On this model, face recognition involves two information-processing pathways: a ventral visuo-semantic pathway, that constructs a visual image that encodes semantic information about facial features and is responsible for overt recognition, and a dorsal visuo-affective pathway responsible for covert autonomic recognition and for the specific affective response to familiar faces (the feeling of familiarity) . . . Capgras syndrome might be a mirror image of prosopagnosia [the inability to recognize faces (see Sacks 2010)], with the affective pathway damaged but the visuo-semantic pathway intact.
>
> *(Pacherie 2008: 108)*

The Capgras illusion, then, seems consistent with the view that ordinary recognition of intimates is constructed on the basis of meta-cognitive feelings as well as other more complex emotions. Further illustration of the inextricable collaboration of the personal and subpersonal elements of memory and feeling is provided by post-traumatic disorders. Dissociated traumatic memories sometimes appear to be transmuted into 'somatoform' or bodily symptoms. In these cases, explicit memory and normal emotional response are replaced by apparently organic symptoms such as back pain, fatigue, headaches, or other unexplained pains. These frequently baffle medical practitioners, because they do not admit of any organic diagnosis.

One hypothesis to explain this is that the somatoform symptoms result from a disturbed inner representation of others' negative attitude to the subject's desire for closeness (Landa et al. 2012). This hypothesis was supported by interviews that followed the Relationship Anecdotes Paradigm (RAP) to explore remembered episodes of emotionally significant interactions. The RAP protocol can be regarded as operationalizing the Freudian concept of transference. By measuring the extent to which the emotional needs of a subject have been met in the past, it provides insight into some of the paradigm scenarios that govern a subject's expectations in social and intimate interactions (Luborsky and Crits-Christoph 1998). Landa found a high correlation between somatoform symptom formation and an unmet need for closeness in past interactions with significant persons (Landa et al. 2012: 414).

The RAP paradigm again illustrates the mutual imbrication of different levels of emotions and memory. Nostalgia, the pleasure of recollection, and the pain of grief all provide further illustrations of the narrative structure of both memory and emotion. In some sequels of emotional trauma, these functions are disrupted in revealing ways. In addition to somatoform symptoms, patients suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) commonly exhibit disruptions of perception, a decrease in attention coupled with increased arousal, and 'altered cognitive schemata and social apprehension'. The disruption of those schemata makes it impossible for memories to cohere into a story of the sort normally associated with conscious episodic memory (van der Kolk and Fisler 1995: 507). When memories lose their narrative structure, then so does the associated emotion. Declarative memories of the traumatic event are missing: 'No subject reported having a narrative for the traumatic event as their initial mode of awareness (they claimed not having been able to tell a story about what had happened)' (van der Kolk and Fisler 1995: 517). Their memories took the form only of somatosensory flashback experiences: 'These flashbacks occurred in a variety of modalities: visual, olfactory, affective, auditory, and kinesthetic, but initially these sensory modalities did not occur together.' By contrast, 'when people have day-to-day, nontraumatic experiences, the sensory elements of the experience are not registered separately in consciousness, but are automatically integrated into the personal narrative' (van der Kolk and Fisler 1995: 519). However, the mechanisms responsible for serious pathology in those who have suffered complex traumas in crucial developmental phases of childhood operate in normal people as well. Anyone might worry about the extent to which their current emotional responses might misperceive their present target, because they rest on an unconscious identification of that present person with a figure of one's distant past (Freud 1915).

Taylor and Francis
Not for distribution

In short, memories of emotionally significant events affect our present emotional dispositions in both strange and familiar ways. When I read and am moved by a poem, for example, I might occasionally link the resulting emotion to a specific event in my own life: *Ah yes, that is very like the way I felt when . . . .* But when that happens, I might well feel that the association is not so much a help as a kind of pollution of the poetic experience. Nevertheless, the impact of poetic language is highly personal. Emotions also affect semantic memory: I may respond intensely to one Shakespeare sonnet and be left quite indifferent by another; yet there may be no explicit

memory triggered by the sonnet that moves me. If so, it seems reasonable to infer that some past event that I cannot recall has influenced the words' current connotations.

Any object identified by perception is categorized in terms of associations with past events. These can be explicit, constituting episodic memories which are typically tinged with emotional significance. There is evidence that unless an experience arouses some sort of affect, it will not be transferred to long-term memory at all (Goor et al. 1982), and also that experiences with negative valence are better remembered (Kensinger 2009). One can think of this as a mechanism of relevance built-in by natural selection. If I witness something about which I could not possibly care one way or another, there is no need to clutter my memory with it; if is pleasant, remembering it is less important than if it is unpleasant.

What should we forget?

Sometimes, an experience is so unpleasant that one might want to forget it. Memory serves us in many ways. But like other legacies of natural selection, it has its dark side. Sometimes it brings pain or intrudes in disturbing ways. Should we then strive to forget?

Everyone has had experiences one would rather forget. We may be embarrassed to remember some faux pas, or wish away the memory of a disturbing scene. Nietzsche thought forgetting was not a defect but a necessity: 'there could be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hope, no pride, no present without forgetfulness' (Nietzsche 1967: 35). Indeed, there is evidence that our minds are automatically geared to forget unpleasant facts. In his original experiments on the transformations of memory representations, unpleasant or shocking details, as well as those that were merely unfamiliar in the context of a subject's social environment, are frequently omitted when people attempt to reproduce a story (Bartlett 1920: 36).

Taylor and Francis
Not for distribution

The protagonists of the movie *The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* each decide to resort to Lacuna, a technology that promises to erase all memories of a particular person. They do this because their love affair is painful. That, at least, is the obvious motive. Troy Jollimore has offered a more subtle reason: namely that one might want to forget a former lover to make room for a new one. 'The reality of one's previous passion must be downplayed, minimized, even altogether denied so that one may clear one's slate in order to make room for a new and genuine passion for someone else who is yet to come along' (Jollimore 2009: 45). This rather heartless form of romanticism nicely illustrates the way we construct our memories to fit ideologies of emotion, which we interpret as laws of human nature. The very phenomenology of being in love, in fact, induce a 'denial of reality' in the form of a conviction that one can only genuinely love one person in a lifetime (Jollimore 2009: 41).

At the movie's end, the protagonists have learned of the erasure of one another's memories. After some hesitation, in full consciousness of the likelihood of repeated disaster, they agree to start over. This poses a conundrum similar to the one presented in Nietzsche's thought experiment of the Eternal Return (Nietzsche 1954: 101). In that famous passage, Nietzsche suggested that the right attitude to an experience is to affirm it – to welcome the thought that this very moment will recur again and again forever. From this and other texts, Jollimore extracts a complex thesis of 'Nietzschean affirmation', of which the most daring is that one cannot pick and choose among the moments that have proved causally necessary and sufficient to bring about an existing situation. In affirming a moment, one affirms one's whole life. To do that, one 'must accept that something that has shameful or evil roots, or that will end in annihilation, failure, or pain, can nevertheless be fully and wholeheartedly endorsed as good in the present moment.' (Jollimore 2009: 51).

Affirmation, then, is an attitude that takes place in the present, and brings its object from the past into the present. Implicit in the Nietzschean moral Jollimore draws from *Eternal Sunshine*,

is the thought that unpleasant memories should not be erased. We should, instead, 'affirm' the errors in our past, as part of affirming the present and our resolve to live.

But there is an alternative to forgetting a past event, namely, *regretting* it. Is what one regrets the same as that which one would rather forget? The question plays on a certain ambiguity in the word 'regret'. One can regret something good because it has ceased to be. This kind of regret consists in wanting to retrieve something that is lost: it represents, in Janet Landman's striking phrase, 'the persistence of the possible' (Landman 1993). One can also regret something bad in the sense of wishing it had never existed. Both forms of regret are *factive*, meaning that one cannot logically regret, in either sense, something that never happened. But as Dorothea Debus has shown, this does not mean that the emotion of regret (or any other past-directed emotion) in itself constitutes a memory, either of the event itself or of the emotional response it aroused at the time (Debus 2007). Rather, the present emotion is an attitude to the past event and possibly also to the original emotion. It can distance itself from that past emotion or even be antithetical to it, as when one feels ashamed at having been unkindly amused by someone's misfortune (Debus 2007: 762). Just as an ordinary memory is always a re-construction, so an emotional memory is always a re-evaluation.

Can such a re-evaluation be correct or incorrect, rational or irrational? To answer this question is to uncover an asymmetry between emotions of anticipation and emotions towards the past. In the next section, I will suggest that while it is plausible to regard some future-oriented emotions as more rational than others, it is difficult to find compelling reasons to ground norms of rationality applicable to past-oriented attitudes. Specifically, I shall argue, there is no need for 'global' affirmation or regret.

Taylor and Francis
Not for distribution

Norms of regret

A certain tradition in philosophy insists on the gap between fact and value. Within any standard emotion, there is a similar gap between the cognitive ground on which it is based and the attitude it represents. The attitude is specific to the emotion's formal object (thus *fear* is an attitude essentially focused on the *dangerous*); but the instantiation of the formal object is never *entailed* by the underlying facts of the situation (one might believe a situation dangerous without experiencing fear). To be sure, it would seem 'unintelligible' for someone to regard the random killing of a child with amusement rather than indignation, but the (in)appropriateness of either attitude does not follow logically from the description of the facts. That is, at least, a logically defensible position in line with Hume's famous quip about the logical consistency of preferring the destruction of the world to the pricking of my finger (Hume 1978: Bk II: iii, 2).

In practice, we regard some emotions as more rational than others, and view many situations as calling unequivocally for one emotional attitude over others. That is the rationale for the project of Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) (Ellis and Joffe-Ellis 2011). REBT is inspired by the Stoic motto that one should not care about anything we cannot change. Its main goal is to achieve greater realism and rationality in behaviour, but it also aims to achieve *axiological* rationality. Axiological rationality pertains to valuing, as strategic rationality pertains to action and epistemic rationality to belief. Like those other modes of rationality, axiological rationality is guided by meta-cognitive feelings of rightness, or doubt, or of knowing. Just as feelings of pastness can stick to an imagined scenario, so a feeling of appropriateness can stick to an attitude.

When we are thinking of the future, it makes good sense to recommend some attitudes as more rational than others. Here is an example inspired by Plato's *Philebus*. Call it the 'Philebus principle' (PP): '(PP) A *pleasure of anticipation* should be proportional in intensity to the *anticipated pleasure* it relates to' (de Sousa 2011: 13; original emphasis).

Although it might seem odd to think of Plato as a Darwinian, (PP) makes good biological sense. The intensity of your pleasure of anticipation is likely to determine the tenacity of your present motivation. If your present pleasure is uncorrelated with the future pleasure it motivates you to pursue, then your present motivation will bear no settled relation to your future satisfaction.

Some attitudes to the future, then, seem more rational than others. And some emotional responses to the past may be directly relevant to what we decide to do in the future. Complex emotions, no less than the meta-cognitive feelings discussed by Joëlle Proust, serve to orient our attention appropriately for what lies ahead. So do the memories of our immediate and distant past. Again, memory and emotion work together. Forward-looking emotions prepare us for imminent action. It is difficult to imagine what it would be like to plan for the future if you had no attitudes, positive or negative, to various possible outcomes of actions. Merely being able to discern possibilities requires a sense of the continuity of the immediate past – what was I about to do? – with the present (what am I doing?) and the future (what am I now planning to do?). Without episodic memory, the future, like the past, is a blank: '. . . the lack of conscious awareness of personal time encompasses both the past and the future' (Tulving 1985: 4). The grim imprisonment in the Now which afflicted amnesics such as Tulving's patient K.C., Milner's patient H.M (Milner et al. 1968), or Clive Wearing (Wearing 2005), shows how meaningless the immediate future is without an immediate past.

In sum, a memory may afford me a way of thinking of myself in the present; that in turn can modify my intentions. But the memory's influence on the future will likely be only a general one. A memory is less likely than a forward-looking emotional attitude such as fear or anger to trigger a specific action. When it does, that may serve to differentiate one specific emotion from another: if I merely *regret* something that cannot be fixed, nothing follows about what I should plan to do. By contrast, if what I feel is *remorse*, I may well be driven to some specific act of contrition. Walking to Santiago de Compostela, perhaps.

Taylor and Francis
Not for distribution

Regret and remorse carry different implications for the future, though both are backward-looking. In either case, however, like Joel and Clementine in the *Eternal Sunshine* movie, I might be moved to want to get rid of them. That is just one way that a meta-level emotion will often come to complicate the meaning of my past. In some cases, rather than walking to Santiago, I may be moved to stamp out the superstitious attitude that caused me to feel I had sinned in the first place.

How should we decide between those alternative responses? Can we justify any principle of rationality pertaining to past-directed emotions in themselves? Or can such a principle be derived only from the attitude's relevance to the future? In some cases, it seems we can have emotions that are purely backward-looking, and concern matters about which we can no longer do anything. If we consider such backward-looking emotions on their own terms, without any prudential motive deriving from their bearing on future behaviour, it does not seem that any justification can be found for advocating one attitude over another.

Yet many poets as well as philosophers have expressed the opposite conviction. Consider, for example, Dante's expostulation: 'There is no greater sorrow / Than to recall our time of joy / In wretchedness' (Dante Alighieri 2000: V-118–120). Against that, the French poet Alfred de Musset accuses Dante of 'insulting sorrow', urging us rather to regard remembrance of happiness as 'truer than happiness': 'that fleeting instant was the whole of your life, not something to regret!'; you should regret instead 'your nights without hope and your days without light' (Musset [1850] 1957: 409). Countless other texts in literature enjoin specific attitudes to the past. When, for example, is it appropriate to feel regret?

I have in the past argued that we can rationally regret what we missed out on when getting our first preference – providing that what we regret cannot be regarded as included in what we

did get. Only if the option that I didn't choose belongs to another kind of value, as judged by the qualia that made it the object of desire, can I reasonably regret it. (de Sousa 1974). Tom Hurka has attacked the value pluralism implicit in that argument. Hurka argued that a monistic view of value is compatible with a diversity of qualitative experiences, some of which might be desirable as such even though the value they conferred on the experience is the same (Hurka 1996). For my part, I still fail to see why I should regret some aspect of an event unless that aspect was what I valued about it. Thus if two things differ only in the quantity of the same value, it doesn't seem to make sense to regret the lesser when I got the greater. But it now seems to me that the dispute is idle: I no longer feel I can endorse the idea of rational regret in either form.

Spinoza says that who regrets is 'twice unhappy or twice impotent' (Spinoza 1985: IV-54). We are impotent to change the past; so an inability to control our unhappiness about it is just another form of impotence. By contrast, Jay Wallace has recently argued that painful retrospective emotions should be endorsed as 'symptoms of valuing' (Wallace 2013:25). Who is right?

Jay Wallace advocates 'unconditional affirmation' in something like the Nietzschean sense discussed in the section above. He construes affirmation as the contrary of regret. For Wallace, regret is viewed as rational in virtue of its essential connection with valuing; but while one's values may dictate regret of specific actions now deemed wrong, 'all-in' regret should be precluded by 'unconditional affirmation' of everything that was causally responsible for my life as it is now.

Is Wallace right to *recommend* the choice of affirmation *as opposed* to a contrary attitude of 'all-in regret'? I suggest that there is no rational answer. Wallace's main argument rests on an analogy between backward-looking emotions and intentions: '. . . preferences regarding past states of affairs could be thought of as a special kind of conditional commitment, where the relevant condition is contrary to fact.' (Wallace 2013: 56). This is far-fetched. For it is not just by accident but by necessity that those conditions will never be satisfied. The counterfactuals presupposed by Wallace's analogy become mind-boggling. Suppose for example that I regret the Tohoku Tsunami. I must suppose

Taylor and Francis
Not for distribution

> . . . first, that the film of time might be unspooled, taking me back to March 11, 2011, when the tsunami occurred . . . second, that there is something I might then have done to bring it about that the tsunami did not lead to loss of life and property . . . further . . . that there was some mechanism in place that could have been deployed . . . and that it was in my power to activate the mechanism.
>
> *(Wallace 2013: 64)*

In forming intentions for the future, we typically ignore the chaotic nature of life. In actuality, we can never reliably foresee the long-term consequences of our choices. Precepts of prudence are feeble but better than nothing. But when considering the past, our predicament is much worse. About the past, choosing a preference requires us to make counterfactual suppositions that admit of no non-arbitrary standards of correctness. All four of the counterfactuals in Wallace's thought experiment, for example, are pure fantasy. No cognitive basis for a rational emotional response exists. Hence the hope of finding a rational solution to the question of whether the past justifies all-in affirmation or regret is idle.

In short, nothing requires me to arrive at any 'all-in' verdict about the past. I can remember certain *facts* or *aspects* of events with pleasure, while deploring others. No requirement of consistency can be defined for attitudes to the past.

Conclusion

Memory feeds our present emotions, the very structure of which are rooted in the past. And our emotions give memories their point. Their mutual entanglement takes place at different levels of analysis, and it is effected in a variety of ways, including mechanisms of monitoring and control that work at the subpersonal micro-level. These may be shared or homologous with devices that control simpler organisms. Other mechanisms consist in declarative memory and complex emotions. Conversely, emotions both select and colour the view we take of our past. Our emotions are composed of memories, and our memories are shaped by past and present emotions. Memory, we might say, would be empty without emotion, and emotion blind without memory. But however much we would like to set out rules governing attitudes to the past, I conclude that any such rules would be arbitrary. Since it is a function of emotion to control the relative salience of different modes of perception and information, our meta-emotional attitudes cannot be justified in any non-circular way. To advocate a certain attitude to the past, whether it be affirmation, or regret, is itself simply to be captured by just another arbitrary emotional attitude. Nothing requires us to be choosing between totally unfathomable worlds.

Note

1 The 'five organismic systems' in question comprise characteristic neurophysiological processes, cognitive content emerging from appraisals, conative dispositions or 'action-tendencies', subjective feelings, and characteristic facial expressions.

Taylor and Francis
Not for distribution

Further reading

Dokic, Jérôme. 2014. "Feeling the Past: A Two-Tiered Account of Episodic Memory." *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 5: 413–26.

Elaborates on the role of a meta-cognitive feeling of knowing in episodic memory.

Kensinger, Elizabeth A., and Daniel L. Schacter. 2014. "Memory and emotion," in *Handbook of Emotion*. 3rd edn., Michael Lewis, Jeannette Haviland-Jones, and Lisa Feldman Barrett (eds). New York: Guilford Press, pp. 601–17.

An up-to-date survey of research on the modes of influence of emotion on the character and quantity of information remembered.

Proust, J. (2015) "The representational structure of feeling," in T. Metzinger and J. Windt (eds), *Open MIND*. Frankfurt am Main: MIND group.

Argues for a pervasive role of feeling, understood as involving a non-conceptual component affecting motivation, in cognition and memory.

References

Bartlett, F. C. (1920) "Some experiments on the reproduction of folk-stories," *Folklore,* 31(1): 30–47.

Capgras, J. (1923) "L'illusion des 'sosies' dans un délire systématisé chronique," *Bulletin de la Société clinique de médecine mentale,* 11: 6–16. Retrieved from www.bium.univ-paris5.fr/histmed/medica/cote?epo1250.

Charland, L. C. (1995) "Emotion as a natural kind: Towards a computational foundation for emotion theory," *Philosophical Psychology,* 8(1): 59–84.

Dante, A. (2000) *Inferno*. R. Hollander and J. Hollander (eds.), New York: Anchor.

de Sousa, R. (1974) "The good and the true," *Mind,* 83: 534–51.

de Sousa, R. (1984) "The natural shiftiness of Natural Kinds," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy,* 14: 561–80.

de Sousa, R. (1987) *The Rationality of Emotion*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, a Bradford Book.

de Sousa, R. (2008) "Epistemic feelings," in Brun, G., Doğuoğlu, U. and Kuenzle, D. (eds), *Epistemology and Emotions*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

de Sousa, R. (2011) *Emotional Truth*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Debus, D. (2007) "Being emotional about the past: On the nature and role of past-directed emotions," *Noûs,* 41(4): 758–78.

Dokic, J. (2014) "Feeling the past: A two-tiered account of episodic memory," *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, 5: 413–26

Ellis, A. and Joffe-Ellis, D. (2011) "Rational-emotive therapy," in Corsini, R. J. and Wedding, D. (eds), *Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy*, Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Freud, S. (1915) "Observations on transference love," in Tyson, A. and Strachey, J. (eds), *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. 12, London: Hogarth Press, pp. 157–73.

Frijda, N. (2016) "The evolutionary emergence of what we call 'emotions,'" *Cognition and Emotion,* 30(4): 609–20.

Goor, P., Olivier, A., Quesney, L. F., Andermann, F. and Horowitz, S. (1982) "The role of the limbic system in experimental phenomena of temporal lobe epilepsy," *Annals of Neurology,* 12(2): 129–44.

Griffiths, P. E. (1997) *What Emotions Really Are: The Problem of Psychological Categories*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Hirstein, W. (2005) *Brain Fiction: Self-Deception and the Riddle of Confabulation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Hume, D. (1978) *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd edn. revised with notes by L. A. Selby-Bigge; P. H. Nidditch (ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hurka, T. (1996) "Monism, pluralism, and rational regret," *Ethics,* 106(3): 555–75.

Jollimore, T. (2009) "Miserably ever after: Forgetting, repeating and affirming love in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*," in Grau, C. (ed.) *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, New York: Routledge, pp. 31–60.

Kensinger, Elizabeth A. (2009) "Remembering the details: Effects of emotion," *Emotion Review,* 1(2): 99–113.

Klein, S. B. (2015) "What memory is," *WIREs Cognitive Science,* 6: 1–38.

van der Kolk, B. A. and Fisler, R. (1995) "Dissociation and the fragmentary nature of traumatic memories: Overview and exploratory study," *Journal of Traumatic Stress,* 8(4): 505–25.

Kundera, M. (1984) *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. New York: Harper and Row.

Landa, A., Bossis, A. P., Boylan, L. S. and Wong, P. S. (2012) "Beyond the unexplainable pain: Relational world of patients with somatization syndromes," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease,* 200(5): 413–22.

Landman, J. (1993) *Regret: the Persistence of the Possible*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Loftus, E. F. and Loftus, G. R. (1980). "On the permanence of stored information in the human brain," *American Psychologist,* 35(5): 409–20.

Luborsky, L. and Crits-Christoph, P. (1998) *Understanding Transference: The Core Conflictual Relationship Theme Method*, 2nd edn. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Marr, D. (1982) *Vision*. San Francisco, CA: Freeman.

Michaelian, K. (2015) "Opening the doors of memory: Is declarative memory a natural kind?" *WIREs Cognitive Science,* 6: 475–82.

Milner, B., Coricin, S. and Teuber, H.-L. (1968) "Further analysis of the hippocampal amnesic syndrome: 14-year follow-up study of H.M.," *Neuropsychologia,* 6: 215–34.

Musset, A. D. (1957/1850) "Souvenir," in *Poésies Complètes*. Paris: Pléiade, pp. 404–9.

Nietzsche, F. (1954) *The Portable Nietzsche*. W. Kaufmann (ed., trans. and intro.). New York: Viking Press.

Nietzsche, F. (1967) *On the Genealogy of Morality*. M. Clark and A. J. Swensen (trans. and notes). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.

Pacherie, E. (2008) "Perception, emotions and delusions: The case of the Capgras delusion," in Baynes, T. and Fernandez, J. (eds), *Delusions and Self-Deception: Affective Influences on Belief Formation*. Hove: Psychology Press, pp. 107–26.

Perry, John (1979) "The problem of the essential indexical," *Noûs,* 3(1): 3–21.

Proust, J. (2015) "The representational structure of feeling," in Metzinger, T. and Wundt, J. (eds), *Open MIND*. Frankfurt am Main: MIND group.

Proust, M. (1966) *Swann's Way*. C. S. Moncrieff, and T. Kilmartin (trans.). New York: Vintage.

Rorty, A. (1980) "Explaining emotions," in Rorty, A. (ed.), *Explaining Emotions*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Rosch, E. and Lloyd, B. (eds) (1979) *Cognition and Categorization*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Russell, B. (1921) *The Analysis of Mind*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Taylor and Francis
Not for distribution

Sacks, O. (2010) "Face-blind: Why are some of us terrible at recognizing faces?" *New Yorker,* August 30: 43–9.
Scherer, K. R. (2005) "What are emotions? And how can they be measured?" *Social Science Information,* 44(4): 695–729.
Spinoza, B. D. (1985) "Ethics," in Curley, E. (ed. and trans.), *The Collected Works of Spinoza,* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Tulving, E. (1972) "Episodic and semantic memory," in Tulving, E. and Donaldson, W. (eds), *The Organization of Memory*. New York: Academic Press, pp. 381–402.
Tulving, E. (1985) "Memory and consciousness," *Canadian Psychology,* 26 (1): 1–12.
Varela, F., Maturana, H. and Uribe, R. (1974) "Autopoiesis: The organization of living systems," *BioSystems,* 5: 187–96.
Wallace, R. (2013) *The View From Here: On Affirmation, Attachment, and the Limits of Regret*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Wearing, D. (2005) *Forever Today: A Memoir of Love and Amnesia*, London: Corgi.
Wheatley, T. and Haidt, J. (2005) "Hypnotic disgust makes moral judgments more severe," *Psychological Science,* 16(10): 780–84.
Zajonc, R. B. (2000) "Feeling and thinking: Closing the debate over the independence of affect," in Forgas, J. P. (ed.), *Feeling and Thinking: The Role of Affect in Social Cognition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 31–58.

Taylor and Francis
Not for distribution