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On being attached

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Abstract We often use the term "attachment" to describe our emotional connectedness to objects in the world. We become attached to our careers, to our homes, to certain ideas, and perhaps most importantly, to other people. Interestingly, despite its import and ubiquity in our everyday lives, the topic of attachment per se has been largely ignored in the philosophy literature. I address this lacuna by identifying (a type of) attachment as a rich "mode of mattering" that can help to inform certain aspects of agency and emotion. First, drawing on insights from Ancient stoicism and developmental and clinical psychology, I suggest that the relevant form of attachment involves a felt need for its object and a particular relationship between the object and the attached agent's sense of security. I then argue that these features serve to distinguish the attitude from the more philosophically familiar notion of caring. Finally, I show that recognizing this form of attachment as a distinct mode of mattering has important implications for understanding grief.

What matters to us is no small matter. Among the many persons and objects with which we interact, some hold a particular kind of meaning to us and for us. My fiancé, my career, my favorite park, and certain personal values, for example, do not have the same status for me as just any old person or object that I happen to

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encounter. These persons and objects *matter* to me, and insofar as they do, they have the potential to impact the direction and quality of my life.

Theorists often explain the type of mattering at issue in terms of *caring*. Harry Frankfurt, for example, describes caring as "the indispensably foundational activity through which we provide continuity and coherence to our volitional lives," (1999, p. 162) and in the same work, he suggests that without loving, which he identifies as a *mode of caring*, "life for us would be intolerably unshaped and empty" (p. 174). David Shoemaker refers to caring as "the great motivator," explaining, "What we typically, upon reflection, are motivated to do, in any given situation, depends ultimately on what we care most about with respect to that situation" (2003, pp. 90–91). According to Agnieszka Jaworska, caring about an object "imbues the object with importance," and the importance in question, "can function to support stable intentions, plans, and policies concerning the object, to keep the agent on track, and thus to weave the web of unified agency" (2007, p. 561). As these theorists make plain, caring has significant implications for emotion, agency, and well-being.

Caring, then, has rightly received a great deal of attention in the contemporary philosophy literature. Another related, but distinct mode of mattering, however, has not fared as well. What I will call "security-based attachment" has been largely ignored by philosophers.[1] In this form of attachment, the agent experiences a particular object as a felt need, such that her senses of well-being and general competence suffer without it. Unlike caring, this attitude is largely self-focused and marked by an integral connection between its object and the agent's felt security. Security-based attachment, though, has its own role to play in elucidating emotions, agency, and well-being. In this paper, I identify and articulate the key marks of security-based attachment, and I argue that this attitude can illuminate both the specific types of relationship that undergird warranted grief and the particular brands of affect and agential impairment characteristic of grief's phenomenology. In other words, as I will show, philosophers' inattention to the phenomenon of security-based attachment is hardly benign.

The paper proceeds as follows. In Sects. 1, 2, 3 and 4, via a series of attachment vignettes and the employment of insights from both ancient Stoicism and certain segments of developmental and clinical psychology, I put forth a view of security-based attachment. In Sect. 5, I distinguish security-based attachment from caring. Finally, in Sect. 6, I argue that attending to this distinction allows us to illuminate important aspects of grief.

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[1] While attachment has received relatively little attention among philosophers, the phenomenon does play important theoretical and practical roles in developmental and clinical psychology, family law, and education. I devote some discussion to the first of these topics in later sections. Though I do not discuss the significance of attachment in family law or education, attachment is an important factor in adoption and custody decisions (Main et al. 2011) and in the development of pedagogical styles in early education (Bergin and Bergin 2009). My thanks to an anonymous reviewer from *Philosophical Studies* for prompting me to highlight these roles here.

1 Attachment: the cases

In everyday discourse, we often use the term *attachment* to describe our emotional connectedness to persons and objects. Consider the parent who describes her child as attached to a certain toy, or the neglected spouse who complains that her husband is overly attached to his career. Or again, the therapist might explain that her patient is attached to one, but not all, of his siblings. To be sure, attachment has an important and ubiquitous presence in our lives. Surprisingly, though, the topic of attachment per se does not have much of a presence in the contemporary philosophy literature.[2] Here, I address this lacuna by identifying a particular group of characteristics as one form of attachment and illustrating how those characteristics constitute an interesting, unique, and fruitful source of philosophical inquiry.

The brand of attachment in question will ring familiar to most, as it is instantiated across a variety of relationships and contexts that we frequently inhabit. To see this, consider the following vignettes:

> *(1) Loving Leslie.* Leslie and Thomas have been married for 30 years, and their bond is very strong. Leslie thinks of Thomas frequently, hopes that his business meetings go well, worries if he forgets his umbrella on a cloudy morning, and though she cares little for sports, takes joy in the success of his fantasy baseball team and his good showing at the local golf course. She refers to Thomas as her "rock." When upset, she turns to him for emotional support. Leslie feels much better—indeed more capable—when he is nearby. In fact, when they are separated for long periods, even while she spends significant time amongst friends, her physical health often seems to suffer.

> *(2) Running Riley.* Riley is an avid runner. He reads running magazines, participates in internet chat groups for runners, and delights in planning his morning run each day. He carefully chooses a scenic route, picks out the perfect shoes for the terrain, and selects the music playlist that will best enhance his running experience. When Riley runs, he feels free and empowered. And when he misses his morning run, he often becomes uneasy, noting that he doesn't feel "quite together." When he has a tough day, Riley often feels the need to go for an additional evening run in order to "regain his bearings." No other exercise or activity will do.

> *(3) Blake's Blanket.* When Blake was 18 months old, his mother bought him a fluffy, red blanket. Now two, Blake rarely goes anywhere without it. It's the first

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[2] To my knowledge, there has been no sustained analysis of attachment in the philosophy literature. Theorists, however, have employed the term in discussions of emotions (Moll et al. 2008; Roberts 2003; Solomon 2001; Brentlinger 1989), psychopathy (Kennett 2002; McGeer 2008; Watson 2010), and the tension between certain relationships and the moral demand for impartiality (Herman 1991; Feltham 2011). In the first chapter of *Value, Respect, and Attachment*, Joseph Raz (2001) does not clearly define attachment, but he offers some interesting insights on how attachment relates to value and personal meaning. In *Emotions*, Robert C. Roberts (2003) suggests that attachment plays a role in certain emotions, and he describes it variously as liking (p. 130), caring (p. 143), and as "a special kind of concern" that is "especially relevant to one's self-concept" (p. 260).

thing he looks for when he wakes. He refuses to let his mother wash it—insisting that it's *his* and he likes it how it is. When scared or hurt, he clutches the blanket especially close, and if it is not nearby at the time of his fear or injury, he is downright inconsolable. Once, his mother offered him a virtually identical blanket instead, but he vehemently rejected it. On his first day of pre-school, Blake stood shyly in the corner, refusing to interact with the other children until his mother retrieved his blanket from the car.

(4) *Obsessed Olivia*. Olivia works for the local grocer, along with her co-worker, Tim. Though they've only spoken briefly, Olivia often fantasizes about lengthier interactions with Tim. She watches him while working, invents reasons to be nearer to him, and even hangs around the store on her days off just to be close by. Olivia covertly took a picture of Tim, explaining that when she doesn't see him for a while, she becomes depressed, but looking at his photo helps her get through the day. Upon learning of his intent to apply to an out-of-state college, she sabotaged his application claiming that she "needs him around" as he's the only thing that can keep her going.

Admittedly, what is perhaps most striking about these vignettes are the *different* relationships featured among them. Leslie loves Thomas. Riley has a passion for running. Like many toddlers, Blake has developed an affinity for a soft, cuddly object. Finally, Olivia's feelings and behaviors are pathological; she is obsessed with Tim. Despite their differences, however, I want to suggest that all of these cases exemplify a particular form of attachment. In other words, whatever else is true of these vignettes, the main characters are all *attached*: Leslie is attached to Thomas, Riley to running, Blake to his blanket, and Olivia to Tim. Now the task at hand is to specify those features *in virtue of which* the attachment relations obtain.

2 Attachment and felt necessity

Thus far, I have suggested that each of the primary vignette characters is attached to some person or object. Yet, the question remains: What is it about their respective relationships that warrants the label of attachment? In other words, what does it *mean* to be attached? Over the next three sections, I provide an answer to this question. I will begin by highlighting a pair of characteristics that I take to be (partially) constitutive of attachment: characteristics that have been associated with attachment at least as far back as the ancient Stoics. Let me explain.

Though the ancient Stoics do not clearly define attachment, theorists working in this tradition are well-known for admonishing their followers against it. This admonition follows naturally from the fact that an important ideal in the Stoic conception of the good life is *apatheia*, commonly translated as "freedom from passions."[3] *Patheia*, derived from the Greek *pathos*, does not represent passion in the term's ordinary sense, but rather it incorporates both the notions of feeling and suffering.

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[3] See for example Keith Seddon's (2005) introduction to *Epictetus's Handbook*.

Many passages in the Stoic corpus reflect high praise for apatheia. Among the most popular examples is Cicero's expressed approval of Anaxagoras in his *Tusculan Disputations*. Cicero writes, "Anaxagoras, on receiving news of his son's death, was reported to have calmly observed, 'I was already aware that I had begotten a mortal'" (Cicero 1887, 3.30). Similarly, Epictetus instructed,

> Whenever you are getting attached to someone, don't let it be as though they're something undetachable - but more as if you had a jar or a crystal goblet, so that when it breaks, you'll remember that it's that sort of thing and not be upset… In the same way, remind yourself that the person you love is mortal, not one of your own possessions, something given to you for the present, not undetachably nor forever, like a fig or a cluster of grapes, in the due season of the year - and if you hanker for that in winter, you're a fool. If you long for your son or your friend like this, at a time when that has not been given to you, rest assured: you are hankering for a fig in winter.[4] (Epictetus 1983 3.24)

In denouncing attachment, I take it that neither Cicero nor Epictetus mean to advocate the abolition of all *cares*. Recall that *apatheia* indicates the absence of passion (*patheia*), not caring. Presumably, both would maintain that a father should care about his son. However, they would also maintain that a father ought not to subject himself to undue suffering by desiring his son's presence when it is no longer attainable.[5] On the terminology I favor, we might say that the ancient Stoics mean to discommend "patheiac desires," desires that subject one to suffering when left unsatisfied.[6]

The ancient Stoic view highlights two important elements of the kind of attachment that I'm concerned with: First, such attachments are characterized in part by strong desires concerning the attachment object, and second, we are prone to suffering when we are deprived of our attachment objects.[7] Notice that this coupling

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[4] The term translated as "attached" is a conjugated form of "prospaschein" (προσπάσχῃς). This is a compound word, consisting of the prefix "pros-" (meaning "toward") and the verb "paschein" which has the same root as the noun "pathos" (the state of "feeling" or "suffering").

[5] This echoes Dirk Baltzly's point (2010) when he writes "…the view that one should be 'apathetic,' in its original Hellenistic sense, is not the view that you shouldn't care about anything, but rather the view that you should not be psychologically subject to anything—manipulated and moved by it, rather than yourself being actively and positively in command of your reactions and responses to things as they occur or are in prospect."

[6] This notion, or something like it, also seems to have purchase in certain strands of Buddhism and Daoism. The earliest Buddhist teachings held that all life is suffering because we are attached to, or desire, worldly things, and such attachments inevitably lead to suffering. See for example, the *Dīgha Nikāya* (DN 31, 5; DN 34, 2.2, 4). Zhuangzi, one of the earliest exponents of Daoism, argued that in order to achieve a tranquil mind, one must be delivered from attachments (Graham 1981). The Daoist view of attachment is similar to that of the Buddhist's. Both Buddhists and Daoists equate patheiac desires with suffering, and while Buddhists view relief from suffering as an end in itself, Daoists take issue with attachment because the emotional disturbance caused by patheiac desires interferes with the achievement of internal tranquility and harmony with the universe (Kupperman 2007, p. 121).

[7] One might think that any desire, if sufficiently strong, leaves one prone to suffering. As Frankfurt (1999) pointed out, however, many of our desires—even strong ones—seem to pass without much note. This typically occurs in cases in which we do not feel as though we will be harmed in any way by going without the desired object.

of features is present in each of the vignettes. Leslie desires Thomas's active presence in her life, and when they are separated for prolonged periods, she begins to feel unwell. Riley wants to run, and when he cannot, he tends to feel unbalanced or unsettled. Blake seeks to hold and cuddle his blanket, and when it is not on hand, he is easily agitated and upset. Olivia craves interaction with Tim, and when the prospect of such interaction is threatened, she is beset by frustration and sorrow.

These two elements, the desire and the ensuing distress when the desire is left unsatisfied, bring to the fore the sense of *need* integral to attachment. Roughly, to need something is to be such that one would be, in some sense or another, harmed without it.[8] One can, of course, be wrong about what one *actually* needs. I might need something and fail to realize it, in which case I might have no desire for it whatsoever. Or again, I might feel as though I need something when I, in fact, do not really need it. In the latter case, I nevertheless experience the object as a *felt need*. The experience has a powerful conative structure. I feel drawn toward the object, and typically, I have strong desires concerning it. In virtue of (what I feel as though is) my need for it, I am tugged this way and that.

Generally, we experience our attachment objects as *felt needs*. This does not imply that we are, in every case, (all things considered) better off with than without our attachment objects. Yet, part of what it means to be attached to an object is to have strong desires concerning it and to feel as though one would suffer some measure of harm without it. One might be attached to a remorseless, abusive spouse, for example. All things considered, the spouse detracts from the attached party's actual well-being; yet, even while she fears being near him, insofar as she is attached, she will desire certain kinds of interaction with him, and in an important respect, feel *worse* when that interaction does not occur. This brand of ambivalence might explain why some people continue to remain in abusive or otherwise deleterious attachment relationships. Even when one's attachment object is inimical to her well-being, there is a sense in which she just doesn't feel all right without it.

Experiencing someone or something as a felt need is a central feature of the form of attachment at issue in this paper. This, however, is not the whole of it. In attachments of the relevant sort, one's felt need for an object involves a particular kind of desire and a particular kind of harm when that desire is left unsatisfied. Let's begin with the desire.

3 Engagement with a non-substitutable particular

On my view, attachments involve a relatively enduring desire for engagement with a non-substitutable particular. A similar desire has been associated with attachment before. To see this though, we turn not to the ancient Stoics, but to contemporary developmental and clinical psychologists.

After volunteering at a school for maladjusted children in the late 1920s, British psychologist John Bowlby hypothesized a link between early family relationships

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[8] See for example Frankfurt (1999) and Wiggins (1998).

and subsequent emotional disturbance and deviant behavior in children. Over the next 60 years, he, along with his colleague Mary Ainsworth, pioneered the development of what is now called "attachment theory."[9] According to attachment theory, between 6 and 24 months of age, infants develop a special bond with their primary caregivers. This bond is characterized in terms of a set of evolutionarily adaptive behaviors that serve to provide the infant with a sense of security. As Bowlby explains, the attached infant attempts to remain in close proximity to her primary caregiver, treats her as a "secure base" from which to safely explore unfamiliar surroundings, seeks her out for protection as a "safe haven" when threatened or hurt, and protests separation from her—e.g., via clinging, crying, and other displays of distress (1969/1980).

Interestingly, though infants learn early on that many different individuals (e.g., daycare workers, other relatives, etc.) are capable of tending to their basic needs, the pattern of attachment behaviors enumerated above is directed specifically toward the primary caregiver. Furthermore, the bond tends to remain even when the primary caregiver is inept at properly caring for the infant. Once attached, even while she accepts some care from others, the infant continues to *need* her specific attachment figure(s)—no substitute will do. Even while being provided for by others, prolonged separation from her primary caregiver typically results in severe distress. In Ainsworth's words, "…an attachment figure is never wholly interchangeable with or replaceable by another…" (1991, p. 38).[10]

From the above picture, it is clear that on the Bowlby–Ainsworth view, attached infants desire proximity to a specific, non-fungible person.[11] Much like the infant primary-caregiver bond, attachments of the type I aim to illuminate here involve a desire for *something like* proximity to a non-substitutable particular individual. Recall the vignettes. Leslie seeks to be near Thomas and also to receive a kind of support that he alone can provide her. In an admittedly very loose sense, Riley desires to be nearby when running is taking place, but of course, more specifically, *he* wants to be the one doing the running. For him, no comparable activity or exercise will do. Similarly, Blake longs to be near—and to cuddle with—his blanket. He rejects all attempts to replace it, even with a virtually identical one. Finally, Olivia enjoys being near Tim and is ultimately after a deeper sort of interaction with him—conversation, more

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[9] For more on the development of attachment theory, see Ainsworth (1969) and Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980).

[10] For more on this point, see Bowlby (1969, pp. 308–309), Bretherton (1991, p. 19), Weiss (1991, p. 66), Mikulincer and Shaver (2007, pp. 57–58), Cassidy (2008, pp. 12–15).

[11] Notably, while psychologists have traditionally tended to reserve the term *attachment* for the infant-primary caregiver bond, the Bowlby–Ainsworth model has been, with some modification, extended to adult romantic partnerships as well. See for example Hazan and Shaver (1987), Rholes and Simpson (2004), Brumbaugh and Fraley (2006), Hazan et al. (2006), and Mikulincer and Shaver (2007). Even Bowlby, himself, though essentially concerned to investigate the infant-primary caregiver bond, suggests that attachment extends across one's lifespan, taking the form of romantic relationships and other pair bonds in adulthood (1980). Views on which childhood and adult *friends* sometimes function as attachment figures are now more common in the psychology literature, though this domain of attachment has received little attention compared to infant-primary caregiver and romantic relations (See Mikulincer and Shaver 2007, esp. chp 1–3). It is far rarer to find attachment-theoretical frameworks that countenance inanimate objects and ideas as genuine attachment objects.

intimate physical contact, etc. And here again, it is clear that she seeks such interaction with Tim in particular; directing her affections toward another unfortunate coworker instead is simply not an option for her.

Importantly, the above descriptions reveal not only certain similarities between (the desires at play in) the Bowlby–Ainsworth model and the type of attachment I am concerned with here, but they also reveal subtle differences. First, notice that the non-substitutable particular in the Bowlby–Ainsworth model represents a *person*, i.e., the primary caregiver. As the vignettes suggest, however, the type of attachment at issue in this paper extends not only to persons, but to inanimate physical objects (Blake's blanket) and even to ideas and activities (Riley's running).

Arguably, the two types of attachment also diverge on precisely *what it is* that the attached party wants from (or with) the non-substitutable particular. For example, Bowlby and Ainsworth emphasize the infant's tendency to seek *proximity* to her primary-caregiver. As I indicated above, the vignette characters all desire "something like" proximity to their attachment objects, but it seems more accurate to say that they desire *engagement* with them.[12] For Leslie, Riley, Blake, and Olivia, simply being near their respective objects and persons isn't quite enough. Leslie wants to share her life with Thomas. Blake wants to hold his blanket. Olivia desires, *inter alia*, to converse with Tim. And while the notion of proximity to running seems strained, engagement with an activity seems far less so. Riley engages with his attachment object—the activity of running—by doing it, i.e., by running.[13]

4 Attachment and security

Above, I used the Bowlby–Ainsworth model to help explain the desire defining of (the relevant sort of) attachment: it is a relatively enduring desire for engagement with a non-substitutable particular. I will now show how this model can also help to elucidate the specific types of harm and benefit to which we are subject in light of our attachments. Ultimately, I suggest that the attached party's sense of *security* undergirds the relevant types of harm and benefit.

Recall that Bowlby and Ainsworth employ the notion of security to explain the infant-primary caregiver bond. On their view, the infant engages in a specific pattern of behaviors toward her primary caregiver in order to maintain or restore her felt security. As it is not a univocal term, at first glance, it is not clear what phenomenon they mean to pick out by "security." On the one hand, they sometimes seem to point to something akin to *safety*. In fact, Bowlby explicitly associates "security" with a

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[12] Interestingly, attached infants typically seek more than mere proximity as well. Everyday experience—and even particular aspects of the Bowlby–Ainsworth model—seem to suggest as much. Infants want their primary caregivers to hold and play with them. They search for cues that it is okay to explore new environments, such as the mother's reaffirming "Go ahead—it's okay" gesture. They want to be picked up and comforted by their primary caregivers when feeling threatened or hurt. Also, a desire for engagement, as opposed to mere proximity, is especially salient in adults' attitudes toward their attachment objects. Attached adult romantic partners, for example, desire sexual contact, conversation, and other sorts of playful or otherwise stimulating interaction with one another.

[13] Likewise, one can engage with an idea—e.g., the concept of infinity—by contemplating it.

"feeling of safety" (1969, p. 374; 1973, pp. 182–183). To be sure, "security" often connotes safety, and this understanding of the term seems particularly apposite in the case of attached infants. Infants want to be near their primary caregivers, in part, because being close by allows them to feel safer. And they use their primary caregivers as secure bases and safe havens in order to mitigate potential or actual threats to their safety. This understanding also makes sense of the phenomenology and etiology of attachment behaviors in infants. Generally, an awareness (suspicion, feeling, etc.) of danger triggers and intensifies an infant's attachment behaviors, and as such behaviors often conduce to securing safety against predators and other threats, they tend to increase reproductive fitness.

On the other hand, there are understandings of security that are *not* restricted to the simple notion of safety, and sometimes, Bowlby and Ainsworth point to those as well. Ainsworth, for instance, drawing on the term's etymology, suggests that a good working definition for feeling secure is being "without worry" or "free from insecurity" (1988, p. 1).[14] In the same paper, she also speaks approvingly of a conception of security that she gleaned from Bowlby's later work: security as "an 'all is well' kind of appraisal of sensory input," or "an 'Okay, go ahead' feeling" (ibid). This conception of security, while not unrelated to feeling safe, calls to mind a richer affective experience.[15]

To see this, consider how other psychologists have described security. Abraham Maslow characterized security as a "syndrome of feelings," that includes, *inter alia*, feelings of "being at home in the world," "emotional stability," "self-esteem," "self-acceptance," and "courage" (1942, pp. 334–335). William Blatz, in developing his "security theory," identified security as "the state of mind which accompanies the willingness to accept the consequences of one's acts…" (1966, p. 13). According to Ainsworth, Blatz, who had been her dissertation advisor, "seemed to equate feeling secure with feeling competent or effective" (1988, p. 1). Drawing on these views, security might be construed, roughly, as a feeling of confidence in one's well-being and in one's ability to competently navigate the world. As I will show, it is *this* sense of security, as opposed to the notion of mere safety, that explains the particular type of harm—and relatedly, a particular sort of benefit—that we are subject to in light of our attachments.

While an infant might feel simply unsafe when separated from her attachment object, as we get older, we develop richer senses of self that can be upset in more complex ways. For instance, an adult undergoing extended separation from her attachment object might feel as though she is "out of sorts," "off-kilter," "no longer all of a piece," and so forth. Likewise, engagement with an attachment object might allow her to feel as though "she is on solid ground," or more competent. These descriptions, while admittedly colloquial, are not vacuous; rather they capture something very real about the emotional lives of human beings.

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[14] Security is derived from the Latin "se-" + "cura," and literally translates as "free from care."

[15] Bowlby may mean to capture no more than a feeling of physical safety here, but as will be clear, I use the term in a broader sense. I also leave room for the possibility that the sense of security at issue in this paper does not substantially differ from that of the Bowlby–Ainsworth view.

Let's return to the vignettes. Notice that in each case, prolonged separation from the attachment object results in the agent feeling significantly worse off and less competent to get along in everyday affairs, i.e., *less secure*. Leslie, for example, becomes anxious, even to the point of physical illness, on account of Thomas's extended absence. Riley feels uneasy and "less centered" when he hasn't run for a while. Without his Blanket nearby, Blake becomes easily frightened and unable to engage with others in new environments. And when denied the opportunity to interact with Tim, Olivia feels impaired, unmotivated, and depressed.

Conversely, by engaging with the relevant person or object, Leslie, Riley, Blake, and Olivia each experience a sense of *increased* confidence in his or her well-being and in his or her ability to navigate the world—in other words, an increased sense of security. Leslie, for example, doesn't simply feel better when engaging with Thomas, but she feels "more together"—as though she is "on stable ground." Likewise, running *empowers* Riley, allowing him to, among other things, "regain his bearings" in the face of adversity. Similarly, Blake clutches his blanket especially close in order to feel okay again when his safety is threatened, and when he has it in hand, he feels more enabled to explore unfamiliar surroundings. Finally when engaging with Tim, Olivia feels more capable—as though she is "better equipped" to face her daily activities.

We are now in a position to succinctly articulate the core features of the relevant sort of attachment. (I) The attached party has a relatively enduring desire for engagement with a non-substitutable particular. (II) The attached party suffers a reduced sense of security upon prolonged separation from the object or even at the prospect of such separation. (III) The attached party tends to experience an increased sense of security upon obtaining the desired engagement with her attachment object. These features represent the key marks of what I will call "security-based attachment."

5 Security-based attachment and caring

Above, I represented security-based attachment as capturing a *narrower* range of relationships than the ancient Stoic (patheiac desire) conception of attachment and as *broader* in scope than the Bowlby–Ainsworth model. I now return to the notion of caring with which I began this essay to examine its relationship to security-based attachment.

Theorists have offered a variety of accounts of caring. For example, Frankfurt claims that caring about something is "substantially equivalent" to regarding it "as important to oneself" (1999, pp. 155–156). For Frankfurt, caring about an object "consists in the agent having and identifying with" a higher-order desire that her first-order desire for the object "not be extinguished or abandoned" (p. 161). According to Shoemaker, caring involves an emotional vulnerability on the part of the carer and certain "desires to act on behalf of the cared-for object, for example, to protect it or contribute positively to its maintenance or development" (2003, pp. 91–92). Jaworska suggests that caring is "best understood as a structured compound of various less complex emotions, emotional predispositions, and also

desires, unfolding reliably over time in response to relevant circumstances" and she identifies as typical components of caring: "joy and satisfaction when the object of one's care is flourishing and frustration over its misfortunes; anger at agents who heedlessly cause such misfortunes; pride in the successes of the object of care and disappointment over its failures; the desire to help ensure those successes and to help avoid the failures …" (Jaworska 2007, pp. 560–561). Jeffrey Seidman adopts much of Jaworska's picture, adding that caring also involves the disposition to see the object of one's care as a source of reasons for action and emotion (2008, p. 12). While these views diverge on some points, theorists generally agree that caring involves a kind of emotional vulnerability to how the cared-for object is faring and certain desires to promote the object's flourishing.[16]

As illustrated in the vignettes above, one can and often does, *care about* one's attachment objects. Doubtless, Leslie cares about Thomas. She desires to promote his well-being, is joyous when he thrives, and is upset when he does poorly. Notice, too, that Riley seems to care about his running. He would become fearful were he to suffer some injury that threatened his ability to run, hopeful that the injury would quickly heal, and relieved to learn that it would have no lasting impact on his running. To be sure, oftentimes individuals care about their attachment objects. Importantly, though, this is not always the case. It seems that one can be attached to an object or person without caring about that object or person at all.

Recall *Blake's Blanket*. One reason to suspect that Blake doesn't care about his blanket is that, at 2 years old, he likely lacks the cognitive capacities required for caring. Recall that on Frankfurt's view, caring involves higher-order desires. Jaworska posits that one must have "the concept of importance" in order to care (Jaworska 2007, p. 561). Seidman suggests that one must be able to see the object of care as a source of reasons. Given these requirements, Blake might not be *cognitively sophisticated* enough to care. Yet, even if we set aside this worry, there is still another reason to doubt that Blake cares about his blanket.

Recall that caring involves a kind of emotional vulnerability toward how the cared-for object is faring. As Shoemaker puts it, "…in caring for X, I am rendered vulnerable to gains and losses—to emotional ups and downs—corresponding to the up-and-down fortunes of X" (Shoemaker 2003, p. 91). While Blake likely does have some affects that track the condition of his blanket (e.g., sadness upon the blanket's destruction), those affects center more on Blake and the comfort that he derives from interacting with the blanket than on the condition of the blanket itself. For example, he is not concerned if the blanket is tattered and filthy, as long as it continues to provide *him* with comfort.

For a stronger illustration of this point, consider *Obsessed Olivia*. Olivia's concern for Tim as a separate entity is indirect at best; her primary focus is on herself. She attends to him not for the purpose of ensuring his well-being, but her own. What is really important to Olivia is not Tim or his good, but the way in which

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[16] While Frankfurt (1999) specifically stresses the *non-emotive* features of caring, in an earlier work, he does tie the notion of vulnerability to caring. He writes, "A person who cares about something… makes himself vulnerable to losses and susceptible to benefits depending upon whether what he cares about is diminished or enhanced" (1982, p. 260).

engagement with him fulfills specific desires of *hers*. She is content to see him do poorly, as long as his ill fortune does not prevent her from getting what she needs. More egregiously, she is even willing to *actively thwart* his good when it suits her purposes. Thus, it seems infelicitous to characterize Olivia's attitude toward Tim or Blake's attitude toward his blanket as caring.

It is not only possible to be attached to some object without caring about it, but one might also care about an object without being attached. To see this, consider Riley's relationship to his sister, June from Juneau. Suppose that Riley, who lives in California, doesn't connect with June very often. Both siblings have busy lives and have little time to engage with one another. Riley genuinely wishes June the best and looks forward to catching up with her on holidays. Furthermore, if he were to learn that June were experiencing difficulties, Riley surely would be concerned. While he cares about his sister very much—more, for example, than he cares about running—we would be remiss in describing Riley as *attached* (in the relevant sense) to June. Riley is neither drawn to June in the same way that he is drawn to running, nor does he experience her as impacting his security in the way that running does.

The above examples highlight important differences between security-based attachment and caring. Caring, unlike security-based attachment, need not involve any essential connection between its object and the agent's felt security. Also, notice that caring about another person or object is typically viewed as an other-regarding attitude. In fact, caring, at least as we often employ the term, seems to focus on the good of the cared-for object for that object's *own sake*. Riley cares about June in just this sense. Security-based attachment, on the other hand, needn't have this feature. As *Blake's Blanket* and *Obsessed Olivia* illustrate, a security-based attachment can be predominantly, or even wholly, self-regarding. This can be explained by the type of need integral to security-based attachments.

Recall that we experience our attachment objects as security-based *needs*. The phenomenology of needing another is typically self-focused, and needing someone (or something) in order to retain or restore one's felt security makes it especially so. As psychologists have noted, security enjoys a kind of primacy over many other human needs. Consequently, when an agent's sense of security is sufficiently compromised, she will tend to focus solely on restoring it, often to the neglect of other needs and other persons.[17] In other words, security-based attachments are in an important sense, about, or for, one*self*. We don't need our attachment objects for their sakes, but for our own. And this point is a significant one. Even while Leslie cares about Thomas very much, insofar as she has a *security-based attachment* to him, her attitude toward him cannot be entirely selfless. Rather, in virtue of being attached to him, her attitude has an ineluctably self-focused dimension. She cares about him for his sake, but she is attached to him for hers.[18]

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[17] See, for example, Bowlby (1969/1982, esp. chapter 12), Collins et al. (2006, p. 153), and Mikulincer and Shaver (2007, pp. 16–14).

[18] This isn't to say that attachment plays no positive role in caring. Attachment psychologists have suggested that the "security-enhancing" features of interaction with an attachment figure can serve to facilitate and promote caregiving behaviors, empathy, and emotional attunement with others (see, for example, Schore 2003; Collins et al. 2006, p 163; Mikulincer and Shaver 2007, pp. 69–70).

Thus far, I've suggested that while security-based attachment and caring, can, and often do, co-exist within the same relationship, these phenomena can come apart. But might security-based attachment be synonymous with caring in a *qualified* sense? To explore such a possibility, consider Bennett Helm's view of caring. For Helm, to care about an object is to find and imbue worth within that object as a result of its being the focus of one's rationally interconnected pattern of emotions (2009, p. 44). While he, like many of the theorists noted above, describes the relevant emotions as tracking how the cared-for object is faring, he also notes that one can care about an object "under a certain description." He claims that someone might care about a pitcher *only* as a tool for holding and pouring water. If the pitcher is damaged in some way that does not impact its ability to contain and dispense water, that particular damage need not affect the carer's emotions in any way (2009, p. 44). Analogously, we might suppose that Blake cares about his blanket only *qua* "Blake's security-provider." A similar story might be told for Olivia's attitude towards Tim. Insofar as Blake and Olivia are aware of the features of their attachment objects that conduce to increasing their respective senses of security, they likely do have emotions that track these features. For example, suppose that Blake's blanket enhances his sense of security partly on account of its particular scent. Should it lose that scent, he would likely be upset and hope very much that the blanket somehow re-acquire it. Or again, imagine Olivia experiences Tim as important for her security (partially) on account of his resemblance to her dad. Her emotions will fluctuate depending on whether he undergoes changes that increase or reduce his likeness to her father. In these respects, one might say that Blake and Olivia "care that" their respective attachment objects have certain security enhancing qualities or "care about" their attachment objects *specifically as* security-providers (for Blake and Olivia respectively).[19] Thus, on at least some notions of caring, the vignettes do not rule out the possibility that security-based attachment (typically) involves some type of care for the attachment object.

Importantly, though, even if we accept this possibility, security-based attachment is not synonymous with, or adequately captured by, the notion of caring—even in the aforementioned qualified sense. One can care about an object specifically *qua* security-provider without being attached to that object. Let me explain.

Suppose, for example, that Olivia has a kitten, it tends to provide her with an increased sense of security when she is feeling low, and she cares about it only in this regard. Say, for example, that the kitten's fur has a particular texture that sometimes makes her feel more secure when she strokes it. She is happy insofar as it

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[19] I have no strong objection to using the term "caring" in this way. One might suppose—though, to my mind, it seems something of a stretch to do so—that Blake sees the *blanket* as better (and not just Blake) only insofar as it has or lacks those features that pertain directly to his security. Relatedly, one might subscribe to a weaker conception of caring than the one that I articulated above—one that is more conducive to a purely "instrumental" attitude toward some object. Again, I have no strong objection to this usage, though I think there are reasons to preserve the distinction between this attitude and the richer sense of caring about an object for its own sake. For example, intuitively, we would think, should he find out about Olivia's nefarious plotting and she pleaded, "Please don't be mad—I only did it because I care so much about you," Tim would be quite right in responding "You don't care about me. You only care about yourself!"

has this feature and would become unhappy if it were to lose it. If the kitten were to have a disease such that it would be better off without its fur, Olivia might refuse to have it shaved because it is better *qua her security-provider* that it retain its fur. Now, suppose further that the pleasant security feelings with which the pet provides her are sufficient neither to undergird strong desires to interact with it nor any significant distress upon prolonged separation from it. This isn't difficult to imagine; after all, she might have access to other objects which enhance her security just as well. So while she desires that the kitten "fare well" *qua* her security-provider and she is emotionally sensitive to how it's doing in that regard, she does not experience the animal as *necessary* for her felt security. Olivia, for example, will feel blue when (and because) her pet becomes an inadequate security-provider, but this does not imply that she will feel off-kilter, less competent, or as though her overall well-being is threatened on account of not being able to interact with it. In other words, Olivia's caring about her kitten qua security-provider does not entail an attachment to it.

6 Attachment, caring, and grief

In the preceding section, I emphasized two key differences between caring and attachment. The latter, unlike the former, contains a large self-focused dimension and an essential connection between its object and the agent's felt security. Here, I will argue that by attending to these distinctions, we can both identify nuanced varieties of grief (or grief-like responses) and illuminate how caring and attachment each make important but distinct contributions to the affects and agential impairments that are commonly associated with grief.

Grief is a distressed response to a loss. In order to constitute grief *proper*, however, the loss must have particular features. The griever, for example, must construe the loss as undesirable and permanent—features which help to distinguish grief from similar attitudes such as sadness and the phenomenon of "missing an object or person."[20] Typically, though not invariably, grief occurs in response to the death of an individual. Many theorists posit that grief has an additional feature: that in order to be an *apt* response to the death of another, the grieving agent must stand in (or have stood in) a particular relation to the deceased. This point has considerable intuitive force.

Suppose, for example, that in today's paper, I read the obituary of a young artist who died violently and unexpectedly. Suppose further that though I had no personal connection to him, I become deeply saddened upon learning about his death. While I might be aptly characterized as feeling bad for him or depressed about the state of affairs that permits such tragedies to occur, labeling my experience as grief seems inappropriate here. Were I, for example, to attend the young man's funeral and break down sobbing during the eulogy, my tearful display would likely evoke confusion and disdain from those who were actually close to him. His death, after

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[20] See for example, Roberts (2003), Solomon (2004), Bonanno et al. (2008), and Gustafson (1989).

all, is not *my loss* to grieve. Because I do not stand in the requisite relation to him, my grief would be, on some accounts, unintelligible, irrational, or perhaps even morally impermissible.[21]

The question, then, is how to characterize the requisite relation. The philosophy literature on grief points toward a possible answer. According to Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, grief "expresses the irrevocable loss of someone very close and of great value to us" (2000, p. 467). In a recent work, Michael Cholbi explains that "…a given person's death invites grief only for certain others," and he suggests that grief is an apt response to the death of "a loved one or intimate" (n.d.-a, p. 14). Robert Solomon names love as "a precondition" of grief (2006, p. 74). Love, of course, represents a kind of caring, and notably, theorists have identified grief upon the loss of a person or object as one of the emotional responses constitutive of caring.[22] Given this, it might seem that *caring about someone or something* is what explains and licenses grief upon the permanent loss of that individual or object.

To my mind, however, caring—even when it takes the form of love—may not be adequate to fulfill this role. This point is thrown into stark relief when we take into account that some non-caring relations are able to explain certain (what are commonly taken to be) central features of grief better than some relations of love. To see this, consider the typical profile of the grieving individual.

While some aspects of grief appear to be primarily other-regarding and likely track the griever's care for the lost object, others aspects of grief seem to lack this feature. The former category includes such things as ruminations on the deceased's misfortune in having died and desires to commemorate or honor the deceased, e.g., by completing her projects, contributing to causes that she believed in, or looking after her surviving relatives.[23] These measures might aim at promoting the deceased agent's well-being (to the extent that such a thing is possible). Other aspects of grief, however, focus on the griever and *her loss* far more than on the misfortune of the deceased. In fact, the phenomenon as a whole is often regarded as largely self-focused.[24]

In addition to feelings of sadness and longing for the lost person's return, grievers often report feeling fearful, inadequate, confused or disoriented, anxious, and incapable of action. C.S. Lewis, whose wife had recently died from cancer, observed, "No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the

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[21] See Roberts (2003) for more on the intelligibility point and Cholbi (n.d.-a) for more on the connection between the rationality of grief and the griever's relationship to the lost person. Robert Solomon (2004) suggests that one might not have the *right* to grieve absent an intimate connection between oneself and the deceased (p. 82). One might suppose that it is possible to have the relevant connection to someone without ever having met her. Think here of the masses who (seemingly) grieved over John F. Kennedy's death. I remain agnostic about whether such cases reflect actual grief.

[22] See for example Jaworska (2007, p. 561) and Helm (2009, p. 60).

[23] See for example Solomon (2006).

[24] The idea that grief is, in some sense self-regarding, has been noted by a variety of theorists including, Ben-Ze'ev (2000), Solomon (2004, 2006) and Cholbi (n.d.-b). Notably, upon revisiting his "grief notes" shortly after his wife's death, C.S. Lewis confessed, "They [Lewis's notes] appall me. From the way I've been talking anyone would think that H.'s death mattered chiefly for its effect on myself. Her point of view seems to have dropped out of sight" (1961, p. 17).

sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness… At other times it feels like being mildly drunk, or concussed" (1961, p. 3). He later compares grief to "suspense," explaining, "It [grief] gives life a permanently provisional feeling. It doesn't seem worth starting anything. I can't settle down…" (p. 33). Colin Murray Parkes writes of the bereaved person, "For a long time she will have to watch what she thinks and what she says; nothing can be taken for granted anymore. The familiar world suddenly seems to have become unfamiliar, habits of thought can let her down… she may lose confidence in herself" (1998, p. 92). Parkes suggests that someone in such a state may come to feel "very unsafe." Jane Littlewood remarks that grief often involves a kind of "anxiety," stating that many bereaved persons suffer from "a persistent sense of being unsafe in the world" (1992, p. 42). Littlewood also comments on the *confusion* associated with grief, explaining, "People who have been bereaved may find it difficult to concentrate, prioritize or otherwise order their thoughts. Tasks which were relatively simple to perform prior to the death may become major obstacles or be perceived too difficult to cope with" (1992, p. 45). This amalgam of feelings results, not merely from being unable to further promote the interests of an object of care, but in large part from having been stripped of an essential source of emotional support—a source of confidence in oneself and one's ability to navigate the world.[25] In short, many of the self-regarding aspects of grief seem to track the griever's loss of felt security.

Recall from the previous section that one example of caring is represented by Riley's attitude toward his sister, June. Riley loves, but is unattached to, his sister— he is content to go without direct contact with her for extended periods of time, and their rare interactions do not impact on his sense of security. Riley clearly *cares* about June; he is disposed to experience the requisite pattern of emotional responses to changes in her well-being. Let's suppose further that as he cares for her very much, he spends significant time promoting her interests. He regularly sends care packages to her home. In conversations with other relatives, he frequently inquires about how she is doing and what he might do to improve her circumstances. And when visiting new places, he spends extra time looking for gifts that she might enjoy. Given that Riley cares about June, he would be deeply saddened at her death. He thinks June a wonderful person and that death would be a terrible tragedy to befall her. What's more, given that he is invested in her welfare and many of his actions and thoughts are centered on promoting her interests, upon her death, he would be forced to undergo a painful reallocation of emotional and volitional resources. Now he must reorganize his priorities, learning to redirect the time and energy that he formerly put towards promoting June's well-being into other things that matter to him.

While Riley would experience some other-regarding elements of grief (sadness at June's misfortune, a continuing desire to promote her interests, etc.…), we would not expect him to experience many of grief's *self*-regarding components. In fact, it

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[25] Psychologist Robert Weiss suggests that a central aspect of bereavement is the "removal of relational supports for the bereaved person's functioning" (2008, p. 39).

is unclear how he could. Many of those components relate to one's felt security, and June neither contributes to, nor would her death detract from, this aspect of Riley's well-being.[26]

To consider another example, imagine a woman who loves her grandson and sees him regularly but remains unattached to him (in the relevant sense). In other words, she doesn't experience her interaction with him as something that she *needs* in order to increase or maintain her felt security. If her grandchild should die, even while she would be very pained at his death, we would have to acknowledge that her response would lack some features commonly associated with grief. She likely would not feel "unsafe," anxious, or like a less competent agent on account of his death.

In contrast, consider Obsessed Olivia's would-be response to Tim's death. Though she does not care about Tim, her response to his death would look remarkably similar to many paradigmatic cases of grief. She would feel off-kilter, as though she was no longer "all of a piece," unsafe, unconfident, and so on.

Or again, imagine that Leslie's brother—let's call him Narcissistic Norm—has a security-based attachment to his girlfriend, Wanda. Norm and Wanda have lived together for years. Norm regularly seeks out Wanda for advice, relies on her for emotional support, and feels and functions better when Wanda is around, but he is too self-involved to be concerned with her flourishing (except, of course, insofar as it *directly* impacts him). Norm becomes anxious and upset when Wanda takes trips without him, and should they become permanently separated, he would be very distraught. Here, again, though Norm doesn't really care about Wanda, should she die, his response would certainly resemble grief in many respects. Norm would feel out of sorts, as though he'd lost his bearings—as though he could not get along in the world as well. This suggests that security-based attachment, rather than caring, might better account for this facet of grief.

Philosophers have not recognized the role that security-based attachment plays in explaining certain of grief's important features. And psychologists, who often do employ attachment-theoretical frameworks to explain grief, typically conflate attachment with caring.[27] These oversights are understandable given that in many, if not most cases, an agent grieves the loss of someone (or something) that she is both attached to and cares about. As I have argued, however, these phenomena can come apart, and recognizing this point allows us to delineate different types of grief (or grief-like responses).

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[26] While feeling *aimless*—as when an agent can no longer direct her actions toward promoting the interests of a (greatly) cared-for object—might seem relevant to one's felt security, this feeling differs from the disorientation one feels upon losing an attachment object. Losing a cared-for object might make one less certain about *where* to direct one's agency, but losing an attachment object makes it more difficult to exercise one's *capacity* for agency. Losing one of my ends is not the same as losing one of the resources with which I pursue and set ends in general. I am indebted to John Martin Fischer for this way of cashing out the distinction.

[27] John Bowlby suggested that grief in adults often mimics the emotional and behavioral profile of infants reacting to long-term separation from their primary caregivers (Bowlby 1980). The Bowlby–Ainsworth model of attachment has been very influential in accounts of grief in the psychology literature. See, for example, Parkes (1998) and Weiss (2008). Attachment theorists, including Bowlby, have tended to equate attachment with caring or love (see Bowlby 1969, p. 201; Bowlby 1980, p. 40; Parkes 2006, p. 5).

Given the preceding discussion, we can discern at least three different relations that would give rise to grief or something very much like it: (1) cases in which one both cares about and is attached to the deceased, (2) cases in which one cares about, but is not attached to, the deceased, and (3) cases in which one is attached to, but does not care about, the deceased. The responses in these cases would look quite different, and I will not endeavor here to determine whether (2) and/or (3) should qualify as "genuine grief." I take it that merely showing that these are live questions is sufficient to reflect the importance of security-based attachment. Importantly, depending on the relation in which one stands to the object of loss, one's affects and agency may be damaged in different but perhaps comparably significant ways. This reveals something interesting, not only about grief, but about the natures of both security-based attachment and caring.

In sum, security-based attachment is an important mode of mattering—one that represents a particular way of keeping oneself together, and when things go poorly, a particular way of falling apart. Although I have only explored one direct implication of this phenomenon, there are doubtless others. Recognizing attachments of this kind and the roles they play in our lives has the potential to inform important aspects of agency and emotion.

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