Depression, Guilt and Emotional Depth

MATTHEW RATCLIFFE

Durham University, UK

Abstract: It is generally maintained that emotions consist of intentional states and/or bodily feelings. This paper offers a phenomenological analysis of guilt in severe depression, in order to illustrate how such conceptions fail to adequately accommodate a way in which some emotional experiences are said to be deeper than others. Many emotions are intentional states. However, I propose that the deepest emotions are not intentional but ‘pre-intentional’, meaning that they determine which kinds of intentional state are possible. I go on to suggest that pre-intentional emotions are at the same time feelings. In so doing, I reject the distinction that is often made between bodily feelings and the world-oriented aspects of emotion.

I. Introduction

Talk of ‘emotional depth’ is fairly commonplace. For example, someone might report having a deep ‘feeling’ or ‘sense’ of dread, anguish, remorse, compassion, contentment, unease or love. The term is often used in a comparative way - a feeling might be described as deeper than love, regret or shame, or as deeper even than words can express. In this paper, I will first sketch a phenomenological account of ‘emotional depth’. Then I will further develop and support it by reflecting upon the experience of depression. People with depression frequently complain of deep feelings of dread, despair and hopelessness. For instance, in describing the depression he experienced after the onset of blindness, John Hull remarks that “the deepest feelings go beyond feeling. One is numbed by the feeling; one does not experience the feeling” (1990, p.168). Amongst other things, sufferers tend to report unusually deep feelings of guilt, and these will be the focus of my discussion. I will offer an account of what it is that gives guilt in depression its depth, an account that can be employed to understand emotional depth more generally. No doubt, my analysis will not apply to all everyday talk of emotional depth, and ‘depth’ is not the only term that might be used to convey the aspect of experience I describe. For current purposes, ‘emotional

1 Correspondence Address: Matthew Ratcliffe, Department of Philosophy, Durham University, 50 Old Elvet, Durham, DH1 3HN, UK. Email: M.J.Ratcliffe@durham.ac.uk
depth’ is a term of art that tracks many but not all everyday uses. I will start by explaining my use of this term.

II. Emotional Depth

To recognise only those emotions that are directed at states of affairs within a pre-given world is to overlook much of the phenomenological structure of emotion. Whenever we experience such an emotion, we already find ourselves in a situation. By this, I do not just mean that we experience ourselves as occupying a contingent spatiotemporal location but also that we already experience things as significant to us in a range of different ways. We seldom, if ever, experience a situation in a wholly impartial, detached fashion. Entities present themselves as enticing, functional, relevant to our current projects, threatening, urgent, interesting, offering pleasure, and so on. These broad categories of ‘mattering’ encompass a range of further subcategories. For instance, not everything is threatening in quite the same way, and a threat might be avoidable, unavoidable, determinate or indeterminate, imminent or distant. Other people appear to us as significant in further ways, as offering potential friendship, companionship, humiliation, conversation, assistance, approval and disapproval. All of the ways in which things and people matter to us are at the same time kinds of possibility that the world presents us with. For instance, the practical significance of something is a matter of what I and/or others can or should do with it or items of its kind, and how something threatens me reflects what might happen to me, to my projects, or to those whom I care about. Even when we are not undergoing conspicuous emotional episodes, our experiences of situations are shaped by the many ways in which things matter to us, by the kinds of possibility that they offer.

An appreciation of the significance of something can take the form of an explicit judgement, perhaps arrived at by means of explicit deliberation. But significance is also something we experience. Of course, one could offer a stipulative definition of ‘experience’ that excluded it. However, any attempt to describe what is phenomenologically accessible to us should surely respect the fact that people and things are frequently encountered as mattering to us in one way or another, rather than first experienced and only afterwards judged to matter.² (In the final section, I will argue for the more specific claim that certain bodily feelings are at the same time ways in which aspects of the world appear significant. Thus an appreciation of
significance need not involve a post-experiential judgement; we can feel the significance of things.)

Different kinds of emotion are associated with different kinds of significance. For instance, fear is tied to danger or threat, grief to a certain kind of loss. The kind of mattering associated with a kind of emotion is sometimes referred to as the ‘formal object’ of that emotion. There is debate over what the relationship is between an emotion and its formal object. For instance, perception or cognition of the relevant formal object could be construed as a causal prerequisite for an emotion or, alternatively, as integral to that emotion (see e.g. Teroni, 2007). I favour the latter view. However, regardless of precisely how one conceives of the relationship between emotions and their formal objects, it is plausible to maintain that anyone incapable of experiencing things as mattering in some way will also be incapable of the associated kind of emotion. This is not a causal dependence but a dependence of sense. And the point not only applies to what we might call ‘classical emotions’. For example, a world bereft of all sense of practical significance would be a world in which many different kinds of experience and activity were impossible. We could not encounter things as useable, functional, useless, appropriate or inappropriate for a task, needed, inadequate and so on, and there could be no projects or goals. The range of emotions - and intentional states more generally - that we are able to adopt is thus dependent upon the kinds of significant possibility that we are open to.

By appealing to the example of guilt in depression, I want to suggest that not all emotions are intentional states associated with how a particular state of affairs matters to us. Deeper emotions shape the kinds of significance we are receptive to. They are ‘pre-intentional’, by which I mean that they determine what kinds of intentional state it is possible to have. A deep emotion could be presupposed by the possibility of a given type of intentional emotion or, alternatively, render it impossible. Take fear, for example. Heidegger, in Being and Time, distinguishes being afraid of something from ‘fearfulness’. By the latter, he means having a sense that the world incorporates certain kinds of significant possibility, such as being threatened or in danger. His ‘fearfulness’ is - in my terms - a deep emotional state, as it is presupposed by the intelligibility of intentional states of the kind ‘fear’: “Fearing, as a slumbering possibility of Being-in-the-world in an attunement (we call this possibility
‘fearfulness’ [“Furchtsamkeit”], has already disclosed the world, in that out of it something like the fearsome may come close” (Heidegger, 1962, §30, p.180). An emotional state that did not incorporate the relevant kinds of significant possibility and thus rendered fear impossible would be similarly deep. This is not simply a matter of compatibility or incompatibility. Suppose my being happy about $p$ precludes my being sad about $p$, and vice versa. The incompatibility here is mutual - neither emotion can claim greater ‘depth’ than the other. But the relationship between fear and an experiential world lacking any sense of the possibility of threat is different. It is not content-specific; the deep emotion precludes the possibility of my being afraid of anything - it is ‘fear’, rather than ‘fear of $p$’ that is lost. Hence, whereas a token instance of sadness might rule out a token instance of happiness, a token deep emotion rules out a type of shallow emotion. And it does so by rendering it unintelligible rather than simply by conflicting with it.

I do not want to claim that all types of emotion have deep and shallow forms. Guilt is one that does, but others may be uniformly shallow or deep. It is also worth noting that standard taxonomies of emotion fail to capture many - perhaps most - kinds of pre-intentional emotional experience. As Heidegger (1962, §29, p.173) emphasises, the space of significant possibilities in which we find ourselves need not itself be phenomenologically conspicuous (although it can be). Hence it is not merely something that philosophers and others have neglected to categorise but something that often goes noticed. However, as Heidegger appreciates, it does become salient when disrupted in certain ways. Even then though, its many variants are often not expressed in terms of familiar emotion categories. Heidegger uses the term ‘Stimmung’ to refer to this aspect of experience, often translated as ‘mood’. But most deep emotional states are not referred to as moods either. People more often talk of a kind of feeling. The world can feel significant, insignificant, alienating, unsafe, unreal, unusually real, homely, strangely unfamiliar, and so on, and these pervasive feelings shape all of one’s emotional responses (Ratcliffe, 2008). Many descriptions are more elaborate and/or metaphorical, and people often complain of being unable to communicate this aspect of experience. Depression narratives are a good illustration of this. Many authors refer to the difficulty or impossibility of describing the experience (e.g. Shenk, 2001). There are also frequent references to experiences that are like familiar emotions but at the same time somehow deeper and thus quite
different: “there were no words to explain the depths of my despair. I didn’t understand it myself” (Brampton, 2008, p.18). A range of variably elaborate metaphors are appealed to. For example, “I felt like I’d been found incompetent and fired from my life” (Steinke, 2001, p.64). And we often find lengthy descriptions of an experience, rather than simple statements of the kind ‘I had feeling p’. Hence the study of deep emotional experiences is complicated by the fact that people often lack the words to adequately describe or even reliably refer to them.

Given that pre-intentional emotional experience is seldom described in terms of established emotion categories, I have proposed elsewhere that we adopt the technical term ‘existential feeling’ instead (Ratcliffe, 2005, 2008). However, given my emphasis on guilt, I retain the more familiar term ‘emotion’ in this paper. In the case of guilt at least, we have a familiar kind of emotion with both shallow and deep variants. This makes our task somewhat easier, as we are not required to start by pinning down an emotion category that has so far eluded classification. I will first offer some remarks on the nature of guilt. Then I will illustrate, support and elaborate my account of emotional depth by showing how the onset of severe depression involves a range of inextricably linked deep emotional changes, and suggesting that guilt in depression needs to be understood in terms of these changes. It is not an objectless emotion or a generalised emotion/mood that encompasses a substantial number of objects. Rather, it is integral to a shift in the overall structure of experience, in the sense of belonging to a significant world.

III. Guilt
What is guilt? A fairly standard approach to any kind of emotion is to consider the respective contributions made by bodily feelings and intentional states, and then to suggest that what distinguishes it from other kinds of emotion is the distinctive contribution made by one, the other, or both. It seems clear that feelings have some role to play in guilt, as a person can recognise that she has done something morally wrong and that she is deserving of punishment without feeling any guilt. But this does not imply that the emotion of guilt consists entirely of feeling, dissociated from judgement. It is arguable that a kind of cognitive judgement is what distinguishes guilt from a range of related emotions, such as shame and regret. Guilt is sometimes claimed to involve internalising and thus accepting moral judgements concerning
one’s actions, which are made by actual or imagined others (e.g. Elster, 1999, pp.152-3). Shame, in contrast, need not be associated with moral transgression. For example, a person might feel ashamed of aspects of his appearance that are morally inconsequential and also beyond his control. Regret can likewise concern all sorts of non-moral acts and omissions. Various other criteria have been proposed for distinguishing guilt from shame and other emotions. For instance, Blackburn (1998, pp.17-19) suggests that guilt is associated with “reparation” and shame with “concealment”. Another possible criterion is that guilt is directed towards the irrevocable effects of one’s deeds. One might compensate for those effects, with varying degrees of success, but the deeds themselves cannot be undone. To quote Viktor Frankl (1973, p.90), “guilt is responsibleness without freedom – without freedom, that is, except for the freedom to choose the right attitude to guilt”. In contrast, the causes of shame can often be removed (for example, by weight loss, staying away from people who make you feel ashamed or getting a better job).

However, none of these criteria apply to every instance of guilt, and counter-examples can always be found. Seemingly irrational guilt is commonplace, where strong feelings of guilt persist alongside the judgement that one has done nothing wrong. For example, there is ‘survivor guilt’, where someone who survived an event feels guilty about having done so when others did not. In addition, people sometimes feel free-floating or “diffuse” guilt, which is not clearly associated with a particular act or omission (Roberts, 2002, p.233). A person might also feel guilty about something that nobody else regards as a moral transgression, and guilt feelings frequently lead to concealment rather than an urge towards reparation. The deeds about which one feels guilty are not always irrevocable either; someone might feel guilty about a habitual behaviour or ongoing activity rather than a specific event and, in such cases, she can stop doing it. In addition, guilt and other emotions like shame sometimes occur together, in response to the same actions and events, which makes them hard to disentangle (Blackburn, 1998, pp.17-19; Stocker, 2007).

To further complicate matters, there seem to be various different kinds of guilt. For instance, feeling guilty about an act or omission is not the same attitude as feeling that one is guilty. Although I might feel guilty about something, feeling that I actually am guilty of it requires an additional acceptance of guilt, as guilt feelings are consistent
with doubt over one’s guilt. However, not all guilt is ‘guilt about’ something. Another variant of guilt is feeling that one simply is guilty, independent of any particular act or omission, as though there were a moral flaw in one’s being. Here, the person “reproaches himself in general, as if his very existence is an offense as well as any particular action” (Solomon, 1993, p.259). This type of personal guilt is different from the kind of diffuse guilt where one feels guilty about something but does not know exactly what. There is a further distinction to be drawn between experiences of contingent guilt and irrevocable guilt (where the latter generally involves the feeling of being guilty, rather than feeling guilty about something). When one feels that one has become guilty due to some deed, the recognition that things could have been otherwise remains and a sense of contingency thus attaches to the guilt. Similarly, one might feel that one’s existence is contingently flawed, that there is hope of redemption. Irrevocable guilt, in contrast, involves the sense that being guilty is part of one’s essence; one could not have been otherwise and could therefore never be otherwise. (I also grant that there may be in-between cases, such as feeling that one has become guilty but that this guilt is now inescapable.) Hence we can make at least the following distinctions:

1. Feeling guilty about something specific
2. Feeling guilty about something but not knowing what
3. Feeling that one really is guilty of something specific
4. Feeling guilty
5. Feeling irrevocably guilty

I do not seek rigid criteria for distinguishing every one of those emotional experiences that we might call ‘guilt’ from those that we might call ‘shame’, ‘remorse’, ‘regret’ and so on. In referring to guilt, I emphasise features such as a focus upon past deeds, recognition of certain effects of those deeds as unchangeable, an awareness of estrangement from others, a sense of having done wrong or being intrinsically flawed, and an anticipation of being harmed or punished. But our phenomenology is unlikely to map neatly onto distinctions made by natural language, and the practice of offering criteria, counter-examples and then further criteria could happily go on forever. So my quarrel is not principally with criteria that are invoked to distinguish kinds of emotion (although an understanding of depth may well aid in the individuation of
emotions). I am happy to leave the boundaries blurred. What I will challenge though, by drawing on first-person accounts of the experience of depression, is the commonplace view that all emotions are to be understood as intentional states of one or more kinds (such as perceptions, factual beliefs and evaluative judgements), bodily feelings, or a combination of these. The assumption that there is nothing else on the menu tends to constrain the scope of philosophical enquiry from the outset, in a way that precludes an understanding of emotional depth. Although types of guilt 1, 2 and 3 (above) are all intentional states, I want to suggest that types 4 and 5 are deep forms of guilt, 5 being the deepest. They do not take the form of world-directed intentional states, experiences of the body or a combination of the two. Rather, they are pre-intentional, and characterised by a distinctive change in a person’s sense of what is possible. This change, I will go on to suggest, is constituted by feeling - many kinds of feeling are not simply ‘experiences of the body’.

Feelings of type 5 guilt often occur in severe depression (of the kind that is referred to as ‘endogenous’ or ‘melancholic’ depression, or as a variant of ‘major depressive disorder’). Many sufferers report a sense of all-pervasive guilt, which causes considerable suffering and is sometimes singled out as the most troubling symptom. For example, Rowe (1978) quotes several interviewees who suffer from depression and complain of guilt. One states that the depression itself is “a sign that I’m not what I should be” (p.39), and another complains, “I feel I am suffering more than a murderer is suffering. In the end a murderer forgets and it all goes away from him. […] I know I’m not the only one that suffers from depression, but it’s my guilt – it’s worse than the depression” (p.173). Talk of ‘guilt’ usually features alongside a host of related terms, including ‘inadequacy’, ‘shame’ and ‘damnation’. “Self-hatred” is very common (e.g. Rowe, 1978, p.215), as is worthlessness (e.g. Styron, 2001, p.3).

It is common practice in the clinical literature to distinguish between state guilt and trait guilt, where the former is an occurrent feeling and the latter a disposition towards that feeling. State guilt is especially common in severe depression, as compared to healthy control subjects, and is also found more frequently in depression than in chronic illness more generally. Trait guilt is also very common in those who are either suffering from depression or highly susceptible to it (see e.g. Ghatavi et al., 2002). This is not to suggest that guilt symptoms are specific to depressive illness. However,
they are especially prevalent in depression, as compared to other psychiatric and non-psychiatric illnesses, and there is also some evidence to suggest that they are not culture-specific (see e.g. Stompe et al., 2001). In what follows, I will focus on what would probably be termed “state guilt”. However, the distinction between psychological states and traits does not really capture what I am attempting to describe, as the deepest kind of guilt is neither experienced as a contingent psychological state nor manifests itself as a disposition towards some such state, but is instead experienced as an all-encompassing way of being.

IV. Phenomenological Changes in Depression
The descriptions of depression found in autobiographical accounts are woven into idiosyncratic life narratives in many different ways, and are no doubt unreliable in many respects. However, much the same core themes crop up in almost every case, and are described in ways that are remarkably consistent, giving considerable weight to the overall body of testimony. It is these consistent themes that I focus on here. One of the first symptoms of depression often reported is an inability to find happiness in anything. It is not just that specific things cease to make the person happy in the way they once did. Instead, “happiness” is no longer part of one’s emotional repertoire. For example, William Styron (2001, p.14) describes “a sense that my thought processes were being engulfed by a toxic and unnameable tide that obliterated any enjoyable response to the living world”, and Andrew Solomon (2001, p.19) similarly says, “the first thing that goes is happiness. You cannot gain pleasure from anything. […] But soon other emotions follow happiness into oblivion”. It is kinds of emotion that fall into “oblivion” rather than their instances; it is not a matter of no longer being happy about $p$, $q$ and $r$ but of gradually losing the sense that anything in the world might offer happiness. Also consistently reported is a diminution or loss of the experienced practical significance of things. This loss amounts to a sense of being oddly cut off from them - they are historically familiar but have lost their practical familiarity: “My kitchen looks peculiar, as if it is both intensely familiar and yet a room I scarcely know” (Brampton, 2008, p.29). Even more troubling is the loss of emotional connectedness to other people that features in almost every account. The loneliness that sufferers describe is not a contingent form of isolation that might be remedied by a change in social circumstances; one feels irrevocably estranged from the rest of humanity. Elizabeth Wurtzel describes herself as “a stranger in town and on earth”
(1996, p.142), and Tracy Thompson writes, “I wanted a connection I couldn’t have. […] The blankness might not even be obvious to others. But on our side of that severed connection, it was hell, a life lived behind glass” (1995, pp.199-200). Absolutely central to depression is the need for a kind of interpersonal relatedness that at the same time presents itself as impossible:

Much of depression’s pain arises out of the recognition that what might make me feel better – human connection – seems impossible in the midst of a paralyzing episode of depression. It is rather like dying from thirst while looking at a glass of water, just beyond one’s reach. (Karp, 1996, p.14)

Impossibility is a consistent theme in descriptions of depression. Pleasure is impossible; meaningful action is impossible in a world bereft of significance; interpersonal connection is irrevocably lost. To add to this, almost everyone reports having had the enduring conviction that recovery from depression was itself impossible. Styron (2001, p.58) reached a stage where “all sense of hope had vanished”; Brampton (2008, p.1) similarly felt she had “no hope of ever making it back to that place I called life”; and Solomon (2001, p.54) remarks upon how clear it seemed “that my real life, the one I had lived before, was now definitively over”.^15 Again, the complaint in its most extreme form does not seem to be a loss of some or even all intentional states of a given kind, but loss of the kind itself. It is not ‘feelings of hope’ that are gone but a sense of hope that is presupposed by the possibility of hoping for anything.

Hope, practical significance and interpersonal connection are not just gone; they are often sorely missed. There is a deep and painful feeling of absence, an awareness of the loss of possibilities. This awareness is not merely a matter of remembering that one used to feel something and not being able to imagine feeling it again, although sufferers do also report that. The loss is very much a part of the experience; the absence is there. We might appeal to various analogies in order to understand this. One can feel sick without comparing one’s current predicament with the feeling of good health. The experience is intrinsically unpleasant; something feels ‘not right’. Alternatively, consider the experience of a numb arm or leg – as you attempt to use it, there is a feeling of numbness, an awareness of something missing. The painful
‘feeling of not feeling’ in depression similarly seems to have a bodily phenomenology, perhaps involving certain habitual, bodily expectations being constantly experienced as ‘unfulfilled’ due to the absence of those feelings that would have constituted a sense of fulfilment.

Not all kinds of mattering are gone from experience though. Depression is almost always twinned with a kind of discomfort, anxiety or dread, where the world as a whole takes on the form of an imminent threat. For example:

There is something in the future which is coming…. I am afraid it will suck out my core and I will be completely empty and anguished. (Thompson, 1995, p.47)

At that time ordinary objects – chairs, tables and the like – possessed a frightening, menacing quality which is very hard to describe vividly in the way that I was then affected. It was as though I lived in some kind of hell, containing nothing from which I could obtain relief or comfort. (Patient quoted by Rowe, 1978, pp. 269-70)

The sufferer is not anxious about particular things that she might or might not be able to do something about. Instead, all experience is shaped by threat or - at least – by a sense of her surrounding being inescapably oppressive. Hence an appreciation of there being possibilities before which one is passive remains. Indeed, when the environment is no longer experienced as something to be acted upon, a sense of passivity becomes all-encompassing, and it feels overwhelming or suffocating rather than neutral.

The metaphor of imprisonment is often used to describe depression, and it is easy to see why. The sufferer is irrevocably isolated from others, cut off from all sense of practical significance, and faces a future that takes the form of an all-enveloping threat before which she is powerless. World experience as a whole is akin to a form of incarceration. One of the most famous statements of this appears in Sylvia Plath’s semi-autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar:* “wherever I sat – on the deck of a ship or at a street café in Paris or Bangkok – I would be sitting under the same glass bell jar, stewing in my own sour air” (1966, p.178). Solomon (2001, p.66), recalling Plath, describes the experience as like being “encaged in Lucite, like one of those butterflies
trapped forever in the thick transparency of a paperweight”, and Styron (2001, p.49) compares it to “the diabolical discomfort of being imprisoned in a fiercely overheated room”. The theme of being enclosed crops up in nearly every report; the sufferer is trapped behind a wall or a sheet of unbreakable glass, stuck in a hole, or wrapped up in some material (Rowe, 1978, p.30). This enclosure is always oppressive, like drowning, suffocation or inescapable darkness (Karp, 1996, p.28).

The recurrent themes of imprisonment, darkness and being trapped do not convey a loss of physical space but instead, I suggest, of possibility space. Our experiences ordinarily include a sense that things could be otherwise in significant ways. Hence they also incorporate a sense of their own contingency, an appreciation that one’s current view on the world does not encompass all that the world has to offer. In depression, there is a loss of the possibilities that would have allowed the sufferer to appreciate the contingency of her predicament. There is no sense that things could be otherwise in any consequential way. Hence the depression itself is no longer experienced as a transitory state, a way of feeling, but as something from with recovery is impossible, a way of being from which there is no escape. This also amounts to a change in the experience of time. Without any practical orientation towards salient future possibilities, the dynamic between past, present and future that people generally take for granted is replaced by a predicament that seems eternal:

When you are depressed, the past and future are absorbed entirely by the present moment, as in the world of a three-year-old. You cannot remember a time when you felt better, at least not clearly; and you certainly cannot imagine a future time when you will feel better. Being upset, even profoundly upset, is a temporal experience, while depression is atemporal. Breakdowns leave you with no point of view. (Solomon, 2001, p.55)

Depression does not involve loss of the sense of time but a change in the structure of temporal experience. Future possibilities remain but only in the form of an imminent threat before which one is helpless. All experience is shaped by the feeling of passively waiting for some unknown and all-encompassing threat to be realised. The phenomenologist and psychiatrist Eugene Minkowski (1958, pp.132-3) points out that our days are ordinarily distinguished from each other in virtue of how each day fits
uniquely into a coherent, purposive life structure. Without any sense of purposes and projects, without things that are done and other things that remain to be done, every day starts afresh, no different from the last one. As there is nothing to distinguish one day from the next, there is no way of locating the impending threat within the context of a long-term temporal framework. Hence it is experienced as forever imminent but never realised.17

V. Deep Guilt in Depression
Deep guilt, I suggest, is integral to the form of experience I have just described. Why guilt? The future is no longer a dimension of possibilities for activity, and there is no hope of relief from this predicament. Experience therefore dwells in the past, in a domain of deeds that are fixed, where no acts can be compensated for. Coupled with this, there is inescapable and painful isolation from others, and the future appears only as something that oppresses and perhaps threatens. Feeling guilty about something likewise involves:

1. A focus upon past deeds
2. Recognition of the effects of those past deeds as unchangeable
3. Estrangement from others, in whose eyes one has done wrong
4. Anticipation of being harmed or punished

The difference is that, in many cases of severe depression, the sufferer does not feel guilty about anything in particular. Instead, experience as a whole takes on the form of irrevocable guilt:

One awful thing about my depression was the tremendous sense of guilt that I was unable to attach to any memory, or action or any part of myself. I was all feeling at that time and no thought – not real thinking, only a slow-motion kind of guilty rumination. Certainly I had no hope that the future would bring me relief, let alone happiness.
(Patient quoted by Rowe, 1978, p.270)

Whereas object-directed guilt is one of many emotional attitudes that one might adopt towards one’s various deeds, guilt in severe depression envelops all experience. It is pre-intentional; it limits the range of intentional states that one is able to have. Hope,
pleasure, interpersonal connection, curiosity, goal-directed action and a host of other ways of experiencing things are gone. The space of possibilities that remains is similar in structure to shallow guilt. Just as a token feeling of guilt over deed $p$ involves not feeling pleased about $p$, not being able to do $q$ rather than $p$, not feeling connected to others in virtue of $p$, deep guilt involves the absence of these types of emotion from experience as a whole. Intentional guilt is localised and usually focussed upon something specific. The world continues to offer other kinds of possibility. But deep guilt is a shape that constrains the scope of all possible experience. Everything is experienced through the guilt, and kinds of emotion that are incompatible with guilt are no longer possible.\textsuperscript{18}

An important part of the puzzle is still to be solved though. Why, when the sufferer is confronted with an irrevocable past, is the response to this one of guilt rather than, say, pleasant nostalgia or utter indifference? Minkowski (1958) provides us with the bare bones of an answer. He points out that, as with perceptual experience, the way memories are experienced involves a sense of the significance of events. For instance, when we are pleased about something we have done, it appears to us as something to be built upon, pointing to possibilities for improvement and development. Good memories are often, if not always, structured by a sense of where one is going, what one still aspires towards, what one would like to happen again. Guilty deeds on the other hand are closed, completed, estranged from our aspirations. The only future possibilities they point to are acts of reparation, which do not further develop what was done but instead attempt to compensate for something fixed and unchangeable:

Once an error is made or a bad action committed, it remains engraved in the conscience, leaving palpable traces; from this point of view, it is static and a backward glance is enough to uncover it. On the other hand, the only remains of positive accomplishments or good acts is in the fact that we can do better in the future; such acts are really no more than bridges that we cross in our attempts to improve. (Minkowski, 1958, p.138)

The experienced completeness of a guilty deed is thus its estrangement from where one is going. However, one might object that all sorts of memories are utterly removed from our current pursuits and yet we are indifferent to most of them. The
analysis therefore requires further refinement. First of all, we need to restrict ourselves to episodic memories, such as ‘I first went to school at the age of four’. These are to be distinguished from non-episodic factual memories, such as ‘the Empire State Building is in New York’, and from memories of word meanings. (According to current terminology in psychology, non-episodic factual memory and memory of word meaning together comprise “semantic memory”.) Then a further distinction is needed between impersonal episodic and personal episodic memories. An impersonal episodic memory involves recalling an event in a way that is not self-involving. So recalling a past event that one might have seen reported on the television news would be impersonal, whereas remembering one’s first day at school would be personal. However, remembering where one was when one heard a major news story and remembering how one was affected by that news story would be personal memories.

Although we might well be indifferent to many semantic and impersonal episodic memories, it is doubtful that we are ever completely indifferent to personal episodic memories, other than perhaps in those cases where we adopt a detached, third-person attitude to past deeds, recalling them in much the same way that we might recall the deeds of someone else. So let us restrict ourselves to the category of personal episodic memories that are remembered in a first-rather than third-person way. To remember something in this way and at the same time experience it as closed, not related to any significant possibilities, is quite different from remembering a trivial, insignificant event that occurred in a television programme. The content of the programme was never integrated into one’s life in the first place and so is not something that one could feel alienated from in the same way.

What would personal episodic memories be like if all sense of there being possibilities for significant action were absent from experience? All past deeds would take the form of closed, irrevocable occurrences. The possibility of one’s past taking on any other form would be gone and all recollection would have the same structure as guilty recollection. Of course, guilt is not the only negative attitude we can have towards our past deeds. But even regret involves a sense that things might have been otherwise, and depends upon there being values and aspirations that remain unrealised – we regret something in relation to something else that we value. So it is not just that
one’s past would appear as ‘bad’; it would more specifically approximate the structure of guilt.

A feeling of deep guilt, I suggest, just is this configuration of possibilities (I will explain how it can be a ‘feeling’ in Section VII). It cannot be adequately characterised in terms of a collection of intentional states directed at things in a pre-given world, accompanied by altered awareness of one’s body. It is a transformation in how one finds oneself in the world, in what is usually taken for granted as a backdrop for the various ways in which things can be experienced. Deep guilt involves a loss of the conditions of intelligibility for certain kinds of intentional state, and this is what gives it its depth. There is no hope, no practical significance, no pleasure, and there cannot be. When you feel guilty about something, you can still contemplate feeling otherwise, and you do not feel guilty about plenty of other things. But, in the case of deep guilt, no alternatives to guilt present themselves. When a person is judged to be guilty of something, there can be a cycle of guilt and retribution. She is blamed by others for doing wrong and thus alienated from them. Her associated feelings of guilt can ultimately help lead to recognition of wrong-doing, followed by reparation and redemption. Hence ‘healthy’ guilt can be part of a process (Bennett, 2002). Deep guilt in depression is different. The loss of future possibilities amounts to an absence of the possibility of redemption; the guilt is inescapable. It is not experienced as a contingent feeling that can be overridden by some course of action. In the absence of any conceivable alternative predicaments, it appears essential to one’s being. For the sufferer, there is no possible world in which she is not guilty or will one day not be guilty.

The depressed person can assert ‘I believe that I will not feel guilty one day’, just as she can assert ‘I will recover’, ‘there is hope’ or ‘things will get better’, and she can also explain what is meant by these assertions. But being able both to put a tick next to a sentence and to define the relevant words does not amount to a capacity for genuine assent; one cannot summon up a sense of what the world has to offer through words alone. If a person cannot even remember or imagine what it is like to experience hope in relation to anything, then genuine conviction with respect to the proposition ‘I have hope in relation to p’ is impossible for any p. The same applies to statements such as ‘I might not feel guilty one day’ and ‘I might recover’. One cannot
entertain the possibility of recovering or feeling not guilty; one can say the words and state what they mean but there remains a sense in which these possibilities are unintelligible. Caution is required here though – there is a fine line between what is intelligible to the person and what is not. She can sincerely assert ‘it is possible that one day hope will return to me’. However, she can only make sense of this as the abstract possibility that some individual without capacity \( h \) might come to have capacity \( h \), an individual that happens to be her. She cannot envisage this as a possibility in the context of her own life, as something that ‘might actually happen to me’. Sincere assent to certain other claims, such as ‘I think I might get better one day’, requires that they be understood in this kind of engaged way, as possibilities for oneself rather than as possibilities relating to some entity that currently lacks some characteristic. A person cannot believe the proposition ‘things will get better for me’ if she has lost the sense that any state of affairs could be significantly different from the current one in the required way. Similarly, a person afflicted with deep guilt cannot think of herself as ‘possibly not guilty’.

Alternative interpretations that appeal to shallow forms of guilt are incompatible with the kinds of experience that sufferers routinely describe. For example, Roberts (2001) maintains that depression “leaves one’s evaluative outlook intact”, on the basis that depressives “normally suffer a great deal from their lack of ability to pursue their values. Strong painful feelings of guilt are extremely common in depressives” (2001, pp.43-4). However, testimony suggests that the sufferer’s ‘evaluative outlook’ can shift quite considerably. For example, people often report being self-absorbed and indifferent to the well-being of others: “When you are in it there is no more empathy, no intellect, no imagination, no compassion, no humanity, no hope” (patient quoted by Karp, 1996, pp.24-5). The guilt that people complain of is not an intentional state directed at a series of omissions that are appraised in the light of intact values. It is a profound shift in the overall structure of experience, in the kinds of significant possibility that are available. In fact, patients frequently describe their predicament as that of being in a different world, forever cut-off from the place to which they used to belong. For Styron (2001), it is something outside the bounds of everyday experience, “a form of torment so alien to everyday experience”, somehow like “drowning or suffocation” (pp.14-15). A patient quoted by Rowe (1978, p.269) remarks, “I awoke into a different world. It was as though all had changed while I slept: that I awoke not
into normal consciousness but into a nightmare”. And Brampton (2008, p.171) describes it as “like living in a parallel universe but a universe so devoid of familiar signs of life that we are adrift, lost”.

VI. The Depths of Guilt
Not all emotional experiences can be categorised as belonging to one or the other of only two levels of depth – intentional or pre-intentional. Pre-intentional emotions, as I have defined them, determine whether or not intentional states of a given kind are possible, but I do not wish to suggest that all pre-intentional emotions are equally deep. There is also a sense in which intentional emotions might be said to vary in ‘depth’. Consider the hope that $p$. Loss of some hope contents will affect a person more ‘deeply’ than loss of others. For instance, losing the hope that I will achieve something of worth today is not as ‘deep’ as losing the hope that I will do something of worth at some point in my life. The reason for this is that one content encompasses the other – it is further reaching and the impact its loss has upon one’s life is therefore greater. Pugmire (2005) offers a sophisticated account of emotional depth or ‘profundity’ that incorporates this kind of content dependence. For Pugmire, emotional profundity depends – amongst other things – on how significant the emotion’s content is to a person, “on how much of a person’s life is affected by what evokes the emotion” (2005, p.43). However, I reserve the term ‘depth’ for a different kind of dependence relation: deep emotions determine the kinds of intentional emotion that are amongst one’s possibilities, in a way that is independent of content. For example, there is perhaps a deep form of hopelessness that involves loss of the possibility of hoping, a “despair” that Steinbock (2007, p. 446) refers to as a loss of the “ground of hope”. An instance of hopelessness with content C makes hope directed at anything encompassed by content C impossible. But a pre-intentional or ‘deep’ emotion determines whether a kind of emotion is possible or impossible, regardless of content. Deep despair is pre-intentional – it removes ‘hope’ full stop.

There is nothing wrong with using the term ‘depth’ to refer to content-based dependence instead. Indeed, I suspect that everyday talk of emotional depth encompasses both. However, the two kinds of depth are quite different and it is important to distinguish them, which is why I restrict my own use of ‘depth’ to the pre-intentional. Even so, this allows for various different levels of depth. For instance,
a loss of practical significance in depression might apply primarily to one’s own possibilities, with a sense of things as significant to others remaining intact. In this case, it is still a kind of intentional state that is gone (‘any $x$ appearing practically significant to me’), rather than a kind of intentional state with a certain content (‘some $x$ appearing practically significant to me’). But the loss is deeper when any sense of anything being significant for anyone is gone. Depression does not always involve such a radical loss of practical significance, although it can do. For example, Brampton (2008, p.249) recollects how, during the process of recovery from depression:

It took me a long time […] to understand, or to re-understand – why people do things. Why, in fact, they do anything at all. What is it that occupies their time? What is the point of doing? […] During my long morning walks I watched people hurrying along in suits and trainers. Where was it they were going, and why were they in such haste?

In contrast to this, the deepest guilt is exclusively self-directed. This is not to say that the experience takes the form ‘I am guilty and others are not; they have possibilities that I lack’. Rather, deeper guilt involves a more profound sense of estrangement from all other people and thus of its being ‘my’ guilt. ‘Our guilt’ is not as deep, as it presupposes the possibility of communion with at least some people. Hence a kind of estrangement that is partly constitutive of guilt is not as complete. ‘Our loss of practical significance’ is compatible with ‘my but not our guilt’, as a common loss of significance does not require any sense of community between people, whereas shared guilt does. We are guilty together, whereas a loss of practical significance simply happens to afflict others too; it does not presuppose a relationship with them.

Perhaps, in some cases of shared guilt, the guilt is still deep enough to be experienced as irrevocable. However, there are also shallower forms of being guilty where some sense of significant future possibilities remains and so, therefore, does the appreciation that one could be otherwise. But a sense of the past as complete, as largely dissociated from what possibilities one does have, still ‘weighs one down’, taking the form ‘I am not what I should be’. This kind of guilt (which is still ‘pre-intentional’, as it shapes all experience) has the potential to drive action. Indeed, some
of the most creative, committed people may well be afflicted by it. According to Heidegger:

Freedom is only to be found where there is a burden to be shouldered. In creative achievement this burden always represents an imperative and a need that weighs heavily upon man’s overall mood, so that he comes to be in a mood of melancholy. All creative action resides in a mood of melancholy [Schwermut] (1983, §44, pp.182-3)

However, it is presumably a short step from here to irrevocable guilt. An increasing sense of the past as fixed, of oneself as irredeemable, is at the same time a limitation upon one’s future possibilities: ‘I cannot rectify that’; ‘nothing I can do will change this’. As the burden of a guilty past builds up, the future constricts still further. So there is a fine line between a deepening feeling that ‘I am guilty’ and a sense that ‘I am irrevocably guilty’. 26

Deep guilt can be interpreted and expressed in different ways. There is an especially noticeable connection between the kind of guilt found in depression and themes that are central to a number of different theistic and non-theistic religions. Indeed, some have gone so far as to argue that guilt is central to all world religions (Westphal, 1984). It is certainly a recurring theme in Christianity. In addition to Original Sin, there are many accounts of inescapable worthlessness and inadequacy before the Divine, of being somehow less than one ought to be. Guilt is construed as part of one’s essence, sometimes as something that cannot be surpassed. A guilt that we all share is not as deep as the deepest kind of solitary guilt, as the former presupposes a communion with others that the latter denies. So the guilt of communal religion is shallower than the deepest guilt that can arise in depression. However, religious thinkers have no doubt endured deeper forms of guilt too, a sense of utter estrangement from all humanity, accompanied by a relationship with God that takes the form of worthlessness and passivity before a source of all-encompassing dread and awe. One indicator of depth is, presumably, the extent to which one holds out hope for redemption.

Deep guilt in depression, whether or not it is associated with a religious narrative, is not something that strikes the guilty person as in need of justification, as it is not an
attitude adopted within the world but a way of being in the world. However, even though the sufferer cannot herself assess the epistemic worth of this guilty way of being, the question remains as to whether she is irrational and, if so, according to what criteria. Of course, it could be maintained that guilt in depression arises due to biological pathology and is therefore best regarded as epistemically unreliable. However, even if deep guilt is always a symptom of pathology (and this is debatable), something causally associated with pathology need not itself be pathological. The deepest forms of guilt are so crippling that, on pragmatic grounds, it is difficult to regard them as intellectually respectable. However, this does not apply so obviously to shallower kinds of being guilty, to a feeling of worthlessness before some higher being or to a constant sense of having failed to live up to one’s potential. Might it indeed be morally and more generally instructive to approach the world through a deep feeling of worthlessness or at least humility in relation to the possibility of something greater, accompanied by an aching sense of responsibility? Better this, perhaps, than the kind of self-congratulatory humanism that is exemplified by numerous statements of ‘what human beings have achieved’.

VII. Deep Guilt and the Feeling Body
I have referred throughout to the feeling of deep guilt, but the question remains as to why a shift in experienced possibilities should be associated with a distinctive kind of feeling. I will conclude by sketching how a change in bodily feeling and a transformation in the sense of what is possible can be one and the same. The dogma that all bodily feelings are just experiences of bodily states is, I suggest, without phenomenological support and should be rejected. I acknowledge that some feelings are indeed intentional states, and I show how these can have either the body or something other than the body as their primary object. However, I add that there are also pre-intentional or deep feelings.

The inextricability of bodily experience and the experience of possibilities is a consistent theme in the work of various phenomenologists. For example, according to Merleau-Ponty, we do not simply experience our bodies as more or less conspicuous objects of experience. The body also operates as a framework through which we perceive the world, and a sense of one’s body is at the same time a sense of worldly possibilities (1962, pp.326-30). Sartre similarly claims that the body manifests itself
as the significant possibilities that the world has to offer: “the world as the correlate of the possibilities which I am appears from the moment of my upsurge as the enormous skeletal outline of all my possible actions” (1989, p.322). His well-known discussion of shame is an especially good illustration of how changes in bodily feeling can at the same time be changes in the experience of possibilities. When I am absorbed in a project, directed towards the actualisation of worldly possibilities, my body is that through which I am aware of the world rather than a salient object of awareness. In shame, the body becomes conspicuous and thus disrupts this absorption. Sartre makes clear that shame has a felt, bodily phenomenology. It is “an immediate shudder which runs through me from head to foot without any discursive preparation” (1989, p.222). The ‘shudder’ is at the same time an experienced loss of my possibilities, which amounts to a sense of being an object before the gaze of another person. ‘Feeling’, in this case, is not just bodily. It is through our feeling bodies that we direct ourselves towards the possible, and so a change in bodily awareness is a change in the possibilities one is presented with.

Drawing on Sartre’s account of shame, Thomas Fuchs suggests that guilt in depression similarly involves a ‘corporealisation’ of the lived body that is inextricable from a change in the overall shape of world-experience. I think his proposal is along the right lines. Almost all autobiographical accounts of depression draw attention to the intimacy of changes in bodily awareness and world-experience, suggesting that the two are inextricably linked (Ratcliffe, 2009). However, Fuchs assumes too clear an opposition between the lived body (through which we experience the world) and the corporeal body (which appears as a conspicuous object of awareness, thus disrupting our projects and alienating us from the world). He maintains that “primordial or lived bodiliness is a constant outward movement, directed to the environment from a hidden centre, and participating in the world” and that corporeality is a matter of its being “paralysed or stopped” (Fuchs, 2003, pp.225). But everyday experience seldom involves effortless participation in the world. We routinely meet with impediments to activity, which might take the form of dangers, obstructions, uncertainties, things that require effort, interpersonal confrontations, and the list goes on. In such instances, the body or parts of it become conspicuous to different degrees and in different ways. Furthermore, not all bodily conspicuousness is a matter of unpleasant alienation. Consider the pleasure of being massaged or
caressed, or the feeling of stepping into a hot shower after a long day working outside in cold weather. There is interplay between bodily conspicuousness and inconspicuousness throughout everyday life and there are many different kinds of conspicuousness. As a correlate of this diversity, it is not just about having possibilities or losing them but – importantly - about having or losing different kinds of possibility.

There is every reason to suspect that bodily feelings are varied enough to facilitate various different kinds of alteration in the space of possibilities. Many and perhaps most kinds of bodily feeling are relational; experience of the body is inextricable from experience of other things. For instance, consider touching something, where perception of one’s hand seems inextricable from perception of the smoothness of a surface. One does not perceive the hand and also perceive the surface. Rather, the feeling hand is that through which one perceives the surface (Ratcliffe, 2008, Chapter 3). As Sass (2004, p.134) puts it, a feeling can be the “tacitly inhabited medium of an attitude” towards something, rather than an object of experience. A relational feeling need not manifest itself in a specific bodily location. Some involve a “general bodily sensitivity to the world”, rather than a localised experience (Slaby, 2008, p.434). Consider feelings such as balance and disorientation, which are experiences of the body and, at the same time, of one’s relationship with one’s environment. There is also plenty of neurobiological evidence to support the view that many feelings are relational, as opposed to being perceptions of bodily states that are merely associated with externally directed perceptions (Northoff, 2008). After all, it would be odd, to say the least, for an organism that spends almost every moment of its waking life interacting in some way with its environment to perceive its body and its environment in complete isolation from each other, and only afterwards to somehow match the two together. 29

Even such paradigmatically bodily experiences as pain arguably have a relational phenomenology. Minkowski (1958, p.134) suggests that a feeling of pain can at the same time be a change in the experience of possibility: it “opposes the expansive tendency of our personal impetus”, letting the world impose itself upon us instead, “making us suffer”. So it is “an attitude toward the environment” rather than a feeling with an exclusively internal phenomenology. If something like this is true of at least
some forms of pain, then there is a fine line between the ‘psychological pain’ of depression and other kinds of pain that are allegedly ‘bodily’ rather than ‘psychological’. Indeed, it is interesting to note that many accounts of depression indicate that a transformation of the world is inseparable from a form of pain. To quote Styron (2001, p.49), “the gray drizzle of horror induced by depression takes on the quality of physical pain”.

For the most part, feelings are implicated in certain concrete possibilities being more salient than others, such as ‘that entity is harmful’ or ‘that entity is enticing’. However, I want to suggest that there are also pre-intentional feelings, which determine the kinds of possibility that are available to us. Deep guilt, I propose, is a kind of bodily feeling and, at the same time, a transformation of the possible. Hence it does not depend upon any kind of judgement (moral or otherwise) regarding one’s deeds. Although deep guilt can be and often is interpreted and explained in moral or religious terms, this is not required for the feeling of being guilty. However, I do concede that conceptual judgements, including moral judgements, are integral to many experiences of intentional guilt. Many intentional emotions are not simply ‘states’ or ‘episodes’ that appear and then disappear. They are processes that evolve over time, where feelings and thoughts affect each other in intricate, dynamic ways (see Goldie, 2000, p.144). Intentional guilt often takes the form of a lengthy process of estrangement and reintegration, where changes in feeling are regulated in part by narratives constructed around one’s deeds by oneself and others, which incorporate moral judgements and the like. It is not a static emotional ‘state’ consisting of two separable ‘components’, but a complicated temporal process. It is likely that certain forms of pre-intentional guilt are also shaped and reshaped by how we understand them (although I do not think the conceptual dimension is essential to the experience of guilt in these cases). But this does not apply to the deepest form of guilt. As this guilt is experienced as irrevocable, the dynamic process of estrangement and redemption that characterises other kinds of guilt is not among one’s experienced possibilities. The guilt becomes a way of being from which escape seems impossible.

**VIII. Conclusion**

In this paper, I have offered a phenomenological analysis of guilt in depression in order to cast light upon an important but philosophically neglected feature of human
emotional life: ‘depth’. I have argued that (a) the deepest forms of emotion are not intentional but pre-intentional, meaning that they determine which kinds of intentional state are possible, (b) there are several different levels of emotional depth, and (c) the distinction between bodily feelings and the world-oriented aspects of emotion should be rejected in the cases of both intentional and pre-intentional emotions. Although I have focused mostly upon guilt, I have also indicated that my account of depth applies more generally.

Acknowledgements: I am grateful to Peter Goldie, Jonathan Lowe, Nick Zangwill, two anonymous referees, and audiences at Durham University (March, 2009) and a meeting of the International Society for Phenomenological Studies (July, 2009) for very helpful feedback on earlier versions of this paper. My research was supported by a joint UK Arts and Humanities Research Council and German Research Foundation grant for the project ‘Emotional Experience in Depression: A Philosophical Study’, and by a Durham University Christopherson-Knott Fellowship.

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(Oxford: Oxford University Press).


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1 Cataldi (1993) and Pugmire (2005) similarly suggest that not enough attention has been paid to the topic of emotional depth.

2 In fact, the entire phenomenological tradition acknowledges this aspect of experience (see, for example, Husserl, 1973; Heidegger, 1962; Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

3 Several philosophers have recently argued that emotions involve perceiving things to be significant. See, for example, de Sousa (1990, Chapter 7), Deonna (2006) and Goldie (2007).

4 I adopt a phenomenological conception of intentionality throughout, treating it as a directedness that is integral to experience. In recent years, intentionality has been reinvented by some philosophers as a non-phenomenological relation of ‘aboutness’. There is no philosophical disagreement here; it is just a terminological matter. I am using the term in its traditional sense and they are using it to talk about something else.

5 See also Strasser (1977, Chapter 7) for a distinction between “pre-intentional” and “intentional” feelings. Accepting this distinction does not require rejecting the view that intentionality is the ‘mark of the mental’. The pre-intentional can be construed as part of the structure of intentionality.

6 See, for example, Stocker and Hegeman (1996, p.285) for the claim that guilt involves attribution of responsibility whereas shame need not.

7 There are also more mundane cases of irrational guilt. For example, Elster (1999, p.151) says that he feels guilty when friends travel a long distance to see him and it rains throughout their stay.

8 See Stocker (2007) for a comprehensive discussion of the various criteria that have been proposed for distinguishing guilt from shame. He concludes that they all fail but retains the view that shame and guilt are importantly different, maintaining that the relevant criteria have yet to be found.

9 See Ratcliffe (2008, Chapter 1) for a survey of recent accounts of emotion that appeal to intentional states, bodily feelings or a combination of the two.
I do not wish to suggest that this kind of guilt occurs in every diagnosed case of melancholia or that it is specific to melancholia. All my argument requires is that this kind of experience does sometimes occur in depression.

See also Fuchs (2003) for a good discussion of the experience of guilt in depression.

However, see Radden (2009, Chapter 9) for the view that the prominence of guilt symptoms is historically and culturally variable.

There is the methodological concern that most such narratives are written after an episode of depression rather than during it. Hence testimony may be unreliable. However, many accounts incorporate letters or other writings that were composed while depressed. One might also worry that people with depression have cognitive impairments that make self-reports unreliable. However, the fact that descriptions offered during an episode of depression and following recovery are generally consistent counts against this objection too.

The term ‘anhedonia’ is often used to refer to this. However, happiness encompasses more than just hedonic pleasure.

Although I accept that descriptions of depression are influenced by social and cultural factors, I very much doubt that the themes discussed here are just artefacts of a common literary heritage. In any case, they are certainly not exclusive to accounts by professional writers. Others report much the same thing. For example: “It was like being inside a very, very thick balloon and no matter how hard I pushed out, the momentum of the skin of the balloon would just push me back in. So I couldn’t touch anybody, I couldn’t touch anything. And I know in my head I loved my husband and kids but I couldn’t feel anything at all. My emotions were completely dead. And I was just very frightened. It was the most frightening, terrifying experience, and it looked like it was an unending one.” (Interview with a fifty-year-old woman on: healthtalkonline.org/mental_health/Depression, accessed 23/10/2008.)

See Wyllie (2005) for a good survey of work on phenomenological psychopathology of time.

This transformation can be interpreted in terms of what Heidegger calls “thrown projection” [geworfener Entwurf] (1962, §31, p.188). According to Heidegger, we are ‘thrown’ into the world, meaning that we find ourselves in a place that is not of our own making, where things present themselves as significant to us in a range of ways. Inextricable from this is the way in which we ‘project’ ourselves towards some of the significant possibilities that the world offers, understanding both ourselves and the things around us in terms of possibilities that we seek to actualise. Depression, one might say, is a transformation in the structure of ‘thrown projection’, where various kinds of possibility are removed from the world into which one is ‘thrown’, along with the possibility of purposively pursuing anything at all. Passively waiting for some threat to be realised replaces the usual orientation towards future possibilities. See, for example, Tellenbach (1980) for an account of severe depression that draws on Heidegger.

Given that deep guilt involves a loss of future possibilities, it is closely associated with a sense of deadness or of impending death (Fuchs, 2003). To be confronted with an irrevocable past and a future that consists only of an all-encompassing threat is characterised by many as the unpleasant feeling of being about to die. For instance, Solomon (2001, p.28) says that “what is happening to you in
depression is horrible, but it seems to be very much wrapped up in what is about to happen to you. Amongst other things, you feel you are about to die” (Solomon, 2001, p.28). Kaysen (2001, p.43) similarly describes depression as “a foretaste of death. It’s a trip to the country of nothingness”. Others report feeling as though they had died or even believed that they were dead: “I was certain, quite certain, that I was already dead. The actual dying part, the withering away of my physical body, was a mere formality” (Wurtzel, 1996, p.19).

My position here is consistent with the more general view that “autobiographically past-directed emotions” consist of current emotional responses to remembered events rather than remembered emotions (Debus, 2007). One remembers one’s past activities through the deep guilt, and therefore cannot summon past emotions that are incompatible with guilt.

One could define ‘guilt’ in such a way as to exclude what I call ‘deep guilt’. But deep guilt is often referred to by people as a form of guilt”, and is structurally similar to shallow guilt. So I continue to call it guilt. But denying its status as ‘guilt’ would not affect my central argument: it is still a deep emotional state and therefore serves to illustrate my account of what gives an emotion its depth.

See also Fuchs (2001) for the view that a sense of irrevocable guilt is bound up with changes in the structure of temporal experience.

Fuchs (2003, p.239) describes the predicament as follows: “The melancholic is so identified with his guilt that he is guilty per se; this corresponds to an archaic, undifferentiated self-perception. He feels like being the center of a ‘guilt-world’, in which everything becomes a sign of his omission. There is no forgiveness, no remorse or reparation in the future; being guilty comprises his total being”.

The situation is analogous in some respects to the oft cited example of the congenitally blind person’s conception of the colour red. Seeing red is not part of her life, among her possibilities.

I conceive of ‘emotional depth’ phenomenologically, and it is not a causal notion. What a person takes to be impossible is in fact possible, and a predicament that seems irrevocable can be altered. The depth of an emotional state is not an indicator of its degree of susceptibility to various kinds of causal influence.

The irrevocability of deep guilt is different from the certainty that might be associated with shallower guilt. In the latter case, one can entertain the possibility of one’s not being guilty – one just knows that one is guilty. But, in the former case, one cannot entertain the possibility of any such alternative and so the sense of certainty arises in a different way.

Heidegger (1962, Division Two, II) claims that guilt is an unavoidable correlate of our freedom. A being that directs itself towards the possible will inevitably fail to actualise certain possibilities; we are never all that we could be. What he calls the ‘call of conscience’ reveals our ‘guilt’ to us - our having failed to realise possibilities that are now lost. Heidegger’s ‘guilt’ does not correspond to any of the kinds of guilt I discuss here. It is the structure of experience that is presupposed by the possibility of feeling guilt about something. What I have called ‘deep guilt’ is an alteration of that structure.

There is much controversy over whether depression should be a ‘medical’ or a ‘moral’ concern (see, for example, Graham, 1990; Martin, 1999). I associate the diagnosis of severe depression with a kind
of ‘existential predicament’. But doing so is compatible with there being a biological complaint in some or all cases, and I do not deny that medical intervention can be appropriate.

28 See also Stanghellini (2004) and Fuchs (2005) for statements of this view.

29 See also Goldie (e.g. 2000; 2009) for the view that not all feelings are experiences of bodily states.