

GRIEF WORLDS

A STUDY OF
EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE

Matthew Ratcliffe



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1 Introduction

All of us who care for others and live long enough will experience grief during our lives. However, despite grief's ubiquity, what it is to *experience* grief remains poorly understood. So, in this book, I set out to investigate the phenomenology of grief: what do experiences of grief consist of, how are they structured, and what can they tell us about the nature of human experience more generally? Grief experiences differ from one another in many ways and are influenced by various factors, including age, gender, social background, culture, earlier life events, one's relationship with the deceased, the circumstances of the death, other aspects of one's situation at the time of the death, and level of social support. Although I acknowledge the diversity of grief throughout, my aim is to identify features that are common to most or even all experiences of grief.

One might wonder why grief is a suitable topic for a specifically *philosophical* enquiry. I identify three main reasons. First of all, by studying grief in detail, we can learn a great deal about the nature of human emotional experience, about what emotions are and what they do. Second, a consideration of grief also casts light on a wider range of philosophical issues concerning the nature of human experience. The third, and principal, motivation for this study is that the experience of grief is inherently puzzling. Many of those who experience grief struggle to comprehend and articulate it. As I will show, the relevant aspects of grief lend themselves to philosophical and, more specifically, *phenomenological* investigation.

A consistent theme in first-person accounts of bereavement is that grief involves a profound alteration in the experience of self, world, and other people, of a kind that is hard to make sense of or convey to others who have not themselves had such an experience. One can know that someone

has died but somehow not believe it, experience that person as absent and yet somehow present, and be confronted with the dissolution of a familiar world that one previously took for granted. Another prominent theme in first-person accounts is finding oneself curiously disconnected from other people. *Their* world carries on in the usual ways, but one is adrift from it, cast out into a strange and often isolated realm. Descriptions such as the following are offered frequently, especially during the early stages of grief:

I feel as though I no longer belong in the world. Everything continues to happen as before, people carry on enjoying themselves, going out, being with friends, and I am looking through a window at them like some urchin from a Dickens novel. (#62)

The surrounding world gets on with life while mine stops, implodes and falls apart. (#87)

You are in a grief bubble looking out at normality. (#104)

Everything feels different looking at it from the perspective of being on my own, and it feels somehow wrong that everything keeps going while my own world has fallen apart. (#123)

What is it to experience oneself as estranged from a shared world in this manner, to have one's own world fall to pieces, to know full well that something has happened while at the same time finding it somehow impossible, for everything to feel wrong? These are among the questions to be addressed here.

The testimonies quoted above were acquired through an online survey of grief experiences, which I designed and conducted with colleagues in 2020–2021 as part of the project “Grief: A Study of Human Emotional Experience.” Participants were invited to provide open-ended, free-text responses to twenty-one questions concerning the experience of grief. We received 265 responses in total, which I will draw on throughout the book. In the chapters that follow, all numbered quotations were obtained via this study. (Further information concerning the study design, questions asked, and responses quoted here is provided in the appendix.) In drawing on these testimonies, my aim is not so much to provide evidence for general claims that I make about the phenomenology of grief. Rather, I seek to show how first-person descriptions of grief can raise philosophical issues and guide philosophical enquiry, to illustrate certain philosophical points that I make, to identify some of the ways in which people articulate specific aspects of grief, and to indicate the kinds of first-person accounts to which my analyses are intended to apply. At no

point do I take this body of testimony to reflect the full diversity of how grief is experienced and described.¹

In reflecting on these survey responses and on a range of other first-person accounts, I will show how philosophical—and more specifically phenomenological—enquiry can enhance our understanding of grief experiences. In addition, I will show how we can obtain philosophical insights with much wider applicability by studying grief. These concern the structure of human emotion, the sense of possibility, what it is to experience someone *as* a person, the relationships between linguistic thought and emotion, and various ways in which the structure of human experience depends on relations with other people. I will also identify some similarities between the experience of grief and phenomenological enquiry itself, with implications for how we conceive of phenomenological research and its limitations.

I am writing primarily for an audience of academic philosophers, including phenomenologists and philosophers of mind, psychology, and psychiatry. Some will have a particular interest in grief, while others will be interested in larger philosophical issues that arise in connection with grief. However, my discussion will also be of relevance to a range of other researchers and practitioners, whose work concerns grief or emotion more generally. In addition, it is my hope that this material will help people to better understand their own experiences of grief. After all, grief is often said to be bewildering, difficult both to comprehend oneself and to communicate to others:

There are no words in the English language to actually explain how the grief feels or changes. (#87)

It's hard to put into words how devastating it feels and how alone and empty. Words don't explain the feeling. You're torn apart totally. (#45)

The intensity of loss is so hard to describe—I'm not sure that I can begin to do it justice. (#69)

I find everything about grief difficult to put into words. (#125)

All of it is baffling. (#159)

Before proceeding further, I should make clear how the term “grief” is understood in what follows. By “grief,” I mean an emotional response to loss (which, as we will see, also involves recognizing, responding to, and adapting to loss). I am concerned specifically with the *experience* of grief and

will sometimes employ the term “grief” as a synonym for this. However, that is not to suggest that grief per se is exhausted by its phenomenology. Although one might further distinguish passively experiencing grief from actively *grieving*, I regard the difference as one of emphasis. There is a singular phenomenon involving a combination of activity and passivity, which can be described in both ways.

Grief is thus distinct from having suffered a bereavement. While bereavement involves losing someone we care about, grief is a matter of responding emotionally to what has happened. A further distinction can be drawn between grief and mourning. Grief concerns an individual’s emotional experience, whereas mourning (at least as sometimes conceived of) involves acting according to socially and culturally prescribed norms surrounding bereavement.² Hence, there will be instances of grieving without mourning and mourning without grieving. Nevertheless, as the discussion progresses, we will see that a clean distinction does not apply to the majority of cases, given that the unfolding of emotional experience is inextricable from engagement with the surrounding social and cultural environment.

Throughout the book, I focus primarily on experiences of loss involving the death of a person, but much of what I will say about grief in the context of bereavement also applies to other forms of loss. The term “grief” is often employed to refer to experiences of loss more generally. For instance, someone might be said to grieve over the loss of a home or a job. I have no wish to restrict how we use the term “grief.” Indeed, I will suggest that there are important structural similarities between experiences of bereavement and other forms of loss. Broader uses of the term can therefore succeed in identifying a distinctive form of experience, as opposed to a disparate assortment of experiences (Varga and Gallagher 2020; Richardson et al. 2021).³ Nevertheless, I also want to emphasize something that is distinctive about *personal* forms of loss and, in particular, bereavement. For that reason, other than where I am explicitly addressing non-bereavement losses, I employ the term “grief” in a more specific way, to refer to emotional experiences stemming from bereavement.⁴

Experiences of grief vary considerably, depending—in part—on the nature of one’s relationship with the deceased. Some of my observations and claims will apply more naturally to certain kinds of bereavements than others, most often to the loss of a partner. There is the concern that what applies in this case may not apply in the same way to bereavements in general. Furthermore,

the circumstances in which people experience grief differ in all sorts of other important ways as well. So, we should be careful not to overgeneralize. Nevertheless, my overall aim is to develop a unified phenomenological approach toward grief, focusing on aspects of grief that are puzzling (to philosophers and to people more generally) and open to phenomenological investigation. I seek to identify broad types of phenomenological change that are common to most or even all instances of grief, while at the same time acknowledging and accommodating grief's diversity (although the focus throughout is on "deeper" or more "profound" forms of grief, where phenomenological changes are especially pronounced). Thus, even where I provide examples or make points that are representative of only certain bereavements, I do so in the course of developing phenomenological analyses that are broader in scope. The discussion is organized around two principal themes. Chapters 2–4 address how grief affects one's experience of and relationship with the *world* as a whole, with an emphasis on grief's dynamic and temporally extended structure. The remainder of the book focuses on the distinctively *interpersonal* character of grief—how those who are grieving relate to the living and the dead. As we will see, both aspects of grief encompass considerable variety.

I started thinking about the temporal structure of grief after some long conversations with the philosopher Peter Goldie that took place—if I recall correctly—in late 2010 or early 2011. At the time, Peter and I had both become interested in grief, but for different reasons. I was working on the phenomenology of depression and wondering how grief might resemble and differ from depression. Peter's interest lay in challenging a widespread tendency to conceive of emotions as brief episodes. His article on the topic, "Grief: A Narrative Account," had either just been published or was shortly to appear. In addition, he had recently completed a book manuscript, *The Mess Inside* (Goldie 2011, 2012).

Philosophical discussions of emotion tend to focus on short-lived responses to entities, situations, events, or facts. Once this emphasis on emotional *episodes* is established, attention then turns to what those episodes consist of, what roles they play, when they are appropriate or justified, how they relate to their objects, how many types of episodes there are, what the appropriate criteria are for distinguishing between types, and so forth. For instance, Jesse Prinz (2004, 3) begins his discussion by emphasizing "emotion episodes" and their various "components." The tendency is even more

pronounced in certain scientific circles. For example, the psychologist Klaus Scherer (2005, 697) defines an emotion “as an episode of interrelated, synchronized changes” that respond to “the evaluation of an external or internal stimulus event as relevant to major concerns of the organism.” He adds that these changes involve a number of different organismic subsystems and that the burden all of this places on the organism means that emotions can be sustained only for very short periods of time:

Given the importance of the eliciting event, which disrupts the flow of behavior, all or most of the subsystems of the organism must contribute to response preparation. The resulting massive mobilization of resources must be coordinated, a process which can be described as *response synchronization*. . . . Their duration must be relatively short in order not to tax the resources of the organism and to allow behavioral flexibility. (Scherer 2005, 701–702)

Grief, as Peter recognized, is more plausibly construed as a temporally extended process. But what kind of process is it, what constituents does it have, and what makes it a unified whole rather than just an assortment of temporally scattered episodes? As well as answering such questions, Peter wanted to further investigate how things would look if we stopped conceiving of human emotions primarily as short-lived episodes and instead adopted grief as an exemplar for thinking about emotions in general. However, he died in October 2011. One of the things I try to do in this book is follow that path and find out where it leads. I am sure Peter would not have endorsed everything that I say here. Even so, while I have been thinking and writing about grief, he has remained a consistent philosophical presence.

In maintaining that grief is a *process* of some kind, I do not endorse the more specific view that it follows a standard trajectory in “normal” or “typical” cases. We might think of the well-known five-stage model of grief, set out by Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005), according to which grief involves denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and, finally, acceptance. That model is often dismissed by critics, largely because grief experiences seldom follow such a neat sequence of steps. In fact, however, Kübler-Ross and Kessler do not endorse anything so rigid. As they write, these stages “were never meant to help tuck messy emotions into neat packages” and there is no “typical response to loss” (Kübler-Ross and Kessler 2005, 7). Thus, although thinking in terms of stages is intended to help us conceptualize grief, the hypothesized stages do not comprise a normal or predictable temporal pattern. It would be better to think of the model in terms of its utility for one

or another theoretical or practical purpose than as something to be deemed straightforwardly true or false. Nevertheless, it is not a conceptualization that I seek to promote here.⁵ Instead of attempting to determine whether various phenomenological changes fall into stages, I am interested in *what* those changes consist of, in better understanding their nature. This inevitably involves considering how they relate to one another as well, at particular times and also over time, but not to the extent of individuating and ordering discrete stages of grief.

To address what a grief process consists of and how it amounts to a cohesive whole, I turn first to the phenomenological *world* of grief. Those who are grieving often report having lost something that they previously took for granted, something fundamental to their lives. For example, here is how Jacqueline Dooley (2019) describes the impact of her daughter's death on her relationship with the world as a whole:

Her death pulled the rug out from under my life. It shattered my understanding of the presumed natural order of things. It left me with the dilemma of trying to make my way in a world that made absolutely no sense to me.

What is it to have one's understanding "shattered" in this way? What is it to be faced with a "world" that no longer "makes sense"? One important point to acknowledge is that the phenomenological effects of bereavement are nonlocalized. We might think of grief as an experience that is elicited by and directed at something quite specific: the event of a death, a person's being dead, or one's never seeing that person again. It can therefore be contrasted with diffuse feelings or moods that lack a specific intentional object. However, although grief is surely concerned with and somehow directed at the death of a particular person, it also has a more enveloping structure. In his famous memoir, *A Grief Observed*, C. S. Lewis describes this as follows:

At first I was very afraid of going to places where H. and I had been happy—our favourite pub, our favourite wood. But I decided to do it at once—like sending a pilot up again as soon as possible after he's had a crash. Unexpectedly, it makes no difference. Her absence is no more emphatic in those places than anywhere else. It's not local at all. I suppose that if one were forbidden all salt one wouldn't notice it much more in any one food than in another. Eating in general would be different, every day, at every meal. It is like that. The act of living is different all through. Her absence is like the sky, spread over everything. (1961/1966, 11–12)

Diffuse experiences of absence and loss are not uniform and unchanging; they are equivocal, dynamic, and often riddled with tensions. Especially in

the early stages of grief, one might know full well that someone has died and endorse the proposition "Person A is dead" with unwavering confidence. Yet there remains another sense in which one does believe it at all: this can't be happening; it's not right; it's impossible; it doesn't make sense; it's not real; she will come back. In seeking to understand the nature of this and other, closely related experiences, I suggest that it is helpful to locate them within the process structure of grief. Localized and nonlocalized experiences of tension, conflict, negation, lack, absence, unreality, and being cut off from a shared world are integral to a longer-term process of recognizing and responding to someone's death.

But why can recognition of what has happened not occur in an instant? As we will see, fully comprehending that a person one cares about deeply has died is not merely a matter of confidently endorsing the appropriate propositions. It also involves coming to reconcile the structure of one's experiential world with an explicit acknowledgment of loss. A world that operated as a presupposed backdrop to one's experiences, thoughts, and activities may have come to depend on that person in all manner of ways. Established projects, habits, commitments, and pastimes that shape how the surrounding world is experienced all presuppose the person, in ways that render them unsustainable or even unintelligible in the face of loss. For instance, where goal-directed projects are built around doing something *for that person* or *for us*, associated activities cease to make sense. However, an experiential world is not something that can be revised instantaneously; it often takes a great deal of time. It is in this, I will suggest, that the *unity* of grief is to be found. A grief process is unified to the extent that the life disturbance it negotiates is unified. And a life disturbance is unified to the extent that a human life involves patterns of implication that bind together various values, projects, commitments, habits, and relationships.

By studying the world of grief, we learn important lessons about the phenomenology of emotion more generally. It is commonplace for philosophers to distinguish emotions from moods, on the basis that (a) emotions have specific objects, while moods have either very general objects or no objects at all, and (b) emotions are short-lived episodes, whereas moods tend to last for longer periods. For example, being scared of the barking dog differs in both respects from being in a bad mood about everything all day. However, by conceiving of grief as a unified emotional experience and also a longer-term process, we acknowledge a third option: being temporally extended

but changeable. Importantly, grief also calls into question the entrenched distinction between specifically directed emotions and more diffuse affective experiences. In so doing, it reveals something that is central to the structure of emotional intentionality, although seldom acknowledged. Grief is specifically directed, but it also envelops how we experience the world as a whole. I will propose that this “two-sided” structure is what distinguishes characteristically *emotional* experience (at least, those forms of emotional experience that consist of episodes or longer-term processes) from other types of intentionality.⁶ Phenomenologically speaking, what happens is that we encounter or receive news of an event or situation against the backdrop of a preestablished experiential world. At the same time, we *recognize*—in a way that needs to be spelled out carefully—that this same event or situation has potential or actual implications for the world within which it occurs. In the case of grief, although something is encountered *in* a world, it also undermines that world and is experienced *as* undermining it. This tension is key to understanding experiences of unreality, disconnection, disbelief, and the like.

One way of putting it is to say that the person who has died is no longer an entity within one’s world but remains as a condition of intelligibility for that same world. So, although the person’s irrevocable absence from the world might be explicitly acknowledged, things still look much as they did when he was alive, in ways that are inconsistent with his absence. I will show how the relevant aspect of experience can be further analyzed in terms of the various *significant possibilities* that we experience as integral to entities, events, and situations—the ways in which things *matter* to us. Whether something appears relevant or irrelevant, pressing or unimportant, safe or threatening, and so forth is partly a reflection of one’s idiosyncratic life structure—one’s values, projects, pastimes, commitments, habits, and expectations. And that structure can come to depend in various ways on a relationship with a particular person. We do not experience our surroundings perceptually and only afterward assign one or another type and degree of significance to what we experience. More often, how things matter is experienced as integral to them: they *appear* immediately relevant, urgent, threatening, or enticing. It follows that, when someone dies, we can be confronted by the fact of the death and, at the same time, by the persistence of a world that continues to include that person and our relationship with them.

To appreciate the phenomenological structure of grief, and of human emotion more generally, it is essential to acknowledge the dynamic relationship

between these two “sides” of experience and how it unfolds over time. However, this is something that has been eclipsed by the tendency to take a short-lived experience with a clearly delineated intentional object as an exemplar for thinking about emotion.⁷ Many such episodes involve actual or potential events that affect one’s life structure only in superficial and fleeting ways, as when one feels angry with a rude shop assistant or happy to find that a café is open. Given this, the world side of the experience is not so conspicuous. In other instances, the potential or actual impact on one’s world is more profound, as when someone is said to be sad about losing a job to which they were committed or worried about receiving a diagnosis of serious illness. Nevertheless, there remains a tendency to focus on localized experiential contents and neglect how they relate to the world within which they arise.

I will argue that the two-sided structure of emotional experience is not captured by established distinctions, such as that between “cognition” and “affect” or “thought” and “feeling.” The same aspects of experience are describable in terms of their bodily phenomenology and in terms of judgment or thought. For instance, in emphasizing the dynamism of grief, one of the things we discover is that many “feelings” have an anticipatory structure. But this same structure is equally integral to the phenomenology of linguistic thought, rendering straightforward contrasts between feeling and thought unhelpful here. The fact that emotional experience does not respect such distinctions is one reason why it can be difficult to comprehend and articulate. Another reason is that it can involve the disruption of something more usually presupposed by linguistic thought, an aspect of experience that is not ordinarily an object of reflection at all but a backdrop against which reflection takes place.

The temporal organization of grief is to be conceived of in terms of its two-sidedness and vice versa. I will suggest that grief incorporates (but is not exhausted by) the task of reconciling the two sides, by coming to inhabit a world consistent with the death. This involves experiencing and navigating numerous conflicts between a world that was and the reality of one’s current situation. There are also closely related tensions between the world of others, which carries on in a manner that is largely oblivious to what has happened, and one’s own world, which has come to an end. Another important aspect of the experience, to be distinguished from both of these tensions, is a peculiar sense of indeterminacy and of lacking direction. This

is not simply a matter of finding oneself in one structured world, in contrast to another such world. Rather, the old world is experienced as gone and nothing has replaced it yet. Consequently, structures that would ordinarily render one's actions appropriate to a situation and also elicit certain actions are curiously lacking. This extends to the phenomenology of thought as well. It is not merely a case of not *knowing* what to do, what to say, or what to think. Norms that might otherwise have specified how to proceed or at least provided guidance are absent, amounting to an experience of being lost. This can even envelop linguistic meaning, adding to the challenge of comprehending and articulating one's grief.

So far, I have only introduced the first of my two principal themes: the world of grief and its relationship to grief's process structure. This might suffice to account for some experiences of loss, but it does not serve to identify what is distinctive about *personal* loss. Granted, the integrity of one's world may come to depend on a particular person, but it could equally depend on a job, a home, or certain bodily abilities. Nevertheless, having come to appreciate the two-sided, dynamic structure of grief, we are better equipped to address the second theme of this book: the *interpersonal* phenomenology of grief. The impact of bereavement demonstrates the extent to which the structure of a human life can come to depend on relationships with particular people. As Thomas Attig (2011, xlvi) writes, "Our selves are by their nature social, permeable, and interdependent. This makes us vulnerable to the loss of wholeness and to the pain and anguish which bereavement entails." This interdependence is partly a matter of how our projects, habitual activities, and pastimes implicate other people. But it is important to tease this apart from something quite different, something highly elusive that is equally central to how we experience and think about the world and ourselves: the sense of connection with a particular person.

In the book *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes describes his repeated attempts to "recognize" his mother, who had recently died, in numerous photographs of her. Although he could differentiate her from other people easily enough, he could not "find" her. Eventually, Barthes discovers his mother not in an accurate image of her features but in a photograph of her as a child that somehow captures her, enabling him to "discover" her. What he sees in the photograph is her "kindness," consisting in an overarching "air" that cannot be reduced to any combination of more specific details (Barthes 1980/2000, 66–109). What is this "air"? I will propose that

it consists in a sense of relational possibilities involving a particular person, an openness to being affected by her in a unique way. Essential to the relevant experience is a receptivity to novelty and spontaneity, to having one's own world shaped by that person in ways that cannot be fully anticipated. Being presented with an accurate image or description sometimes conflicts with this openness, replacing it with something determinate and inflexible that fails to convey *who* someone was.

Even after a person has died, we can continue to be affected in ways that add up to a sense of *that person* or even to an experience of *being with* them. Furthermore, we can seek to rekindle, retain, and transform this sense of connection. Drawing on the "continuing bonds" literature, I will show how such experiences—and also their absence—contribute to the phenomenology of grief in important ways. As with other aspects of grief, it is a mistake to think of them in terms of localized, determinate experiential contents. Instead, the sense of being with a particular person is often manifested primarily in ways of experiencing and engaging with the surrounding world. For example, going for a walk *with* someone may involve relating to our surroundings and finding things significant in ways that differ from when we are walking alone or with other people. Such experiences, I will suggest, consist in a dynamic sense of possibilities, something that is inseparable from being affected in a particular way by a particular person. This is importantly different from the manner in which projects, habits, and pastimes continue to presuppose a person. And it is something that characterizes our relations with the dead, as well as the living.

In acknowledging this aspect of interpersonal experience, we come to appreciate how experiences, thoughts, and activities are shaped and also *regulated* by relations with other people, both the living and the dead. While accepting that someone is irrevocably absent from our world, we might still experience that person's "air." With this, the person continues to affect how we experience the world, in ways that contribute to our engagement with loss. The novelist Julian Barnes (2013, 103) thus writes, "The paradox of grief: if I have survived what is now four years of her absence, it is because I have had four years of her presence." Something that distinguishes bereavement from most other experiences of loss is that it frequently involves losing someone who would otherwise have shaped and regulated one's response to loss.⁸ Nevertheless, the person who has died may continue to play that role, at least to some extent. So again, a particular person is both an entity

within one's world and at the same time a condition for that world. But this diffuse, dynamic sense of what it is to be with a particular person is importantly different from experiencing the world through the lens of specific projects, pastimes, and values that continue to implicate the deceased.

I will show how this distinction helps us to identify and better understand some of the ways in which our relations with other people, both the living and the dead, contribute to emotion regulation in grief, shaping how experiences of grief unfold over time. The temporal structure of grief, I will suggest, is not attributable solely to internal psychological processes but also to processes that are interpersonally and socially distributed. Grief's course is phenomenologically inseparable from interactions with particular individuals and with the social world as a whole, a point that also applies to our emotional lives more generally. To illustrate how grief processes are interpersonally and socially regulated, I will reflect on some first-person accounts of grief during the COVID-19 pandemic. These identify a number of different ways in which grief experiences and their course over time were affected by social restrictions imposed during the pandemic. In so doing, they illustrate how the structure of human emotional experience is inseparable from interpersonal relations, which themselves arise against the backdrop of an organized social world. This is not at all evident when we attend instead to abstract examples of fleeting emotions, along the lines of "B is happy about *p*."

It follows from all of this that the trajectory of grief is fragile. Furthermore, it is plausible to maintain that differences between "typical" and "pathological" forms of grief are partly—perhaps largely—attributable to interpersonal and social factors. By this, I do not mean simply that features taken to be indicative of pathology are sometimes *caused* by interpersonal and social situations. Instead, I will argue for the stronger claim that these features are partly *constituted* by certain ways of relating to other people and to the wider social world.

Much of my discussion in this book is not explicitly situated within the phenomenological tradition of philosophy. Nevertheless, in line with a substantial body of work in that tradition, I emphasize the need to acknowledge an experiential world that is more usually presupposed and overlooked. I further suggest that grief can bring to light aspects of experience that are not readily available to explicit reflection, in a manner resembling phenomenological enquiry itself. Especially relevant to my discussion is the work

of French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Although he had little to say about grief specifically, the topic resonates with his broader thinking in several ways. For instance, the indeterminacy that is magnified in grief corresponds to a central theme in his various writings. Furthermore, the experience of grief turns out to be structurally similar to Merleau-Ponty's own method, which involves ways of attending to phenomenological disturbances in order to make explicit and analyze the underlying structure of experience. The parallels even extend to the operation of philosophical language and how it can differ from using words within the context of a stable, taken-for-granted world.

The chapters that follow pursue these lines of thought in much the same order as they are set out here. Chapters 2–4 address what we might call the *self-oriented* aspects of grief, how bereavement affects *one's own* experiential world. Many of my points in these chapters are not specific to bereavement and apply equally to other forms of loss. Chapter 2 elaborates on the two-sidedness of grief, its process structure, the tensions between propositional acceptance of loss and a world that continues to presuppose the deceased, and what it is that unifies an experience of grief. Chapter 3 then develops a bodily perspective on these aspects of experience, focusing on the phenomenology of emotional *feeling*. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, I investigate, in depth, the structural similarities and differences between experiences of grief and adjusting to the loss of a limb. On the basis of this, I conclude that other people can contribute both to a sense of one's abilities and to how the surrounding world is experienced, in ways that are structurally similar to and inseparable from the contributions made by one's own bodily capacities. The chapter also considers the *pain* of grief, proposing that we think of this in terms of an injury to the self. In chapter 4, I adopt what might seem to be a more *cognitive* perspective, in turning to the themes of indeterminacy and linguistic experience. However, I show how feeling and linguistic thought share a common anticipatory structure. This is something that cannot be captured in terms of a distinction between cognition and affect. Again, Merleau-Ponty's work proves helpful here, especially the contrast between what he calls "language" and "speech."

The emphasis of chapters 5–8 is on the distinctively *personal* phenomenology of grief, including how grief is concerned with what has happened to someone else, rather than just one's own world. Chapter 5 considers so-called bereavement hallucinations and develops an account of what it is to

experience the *presence* of the deceased. This, I suggest, is a matter of being affected in ways that are uniquely associated with a particular person, something that involves a dynamic experience of possibilities. Chapter 6 turns from perceptual experiences to interpersonal relations. I begin by discussing “continuing bonds” approaches, according to which people who experience bereavements tend to renegotiate their relationships with the deceased, rather than ultimately “letting go” or “moving on.” I argue that the contrast is not so clear as it might seem. This sets the scene for a discussion of what grief is *about*, what its *object* is. I argue that it is a mistake to think of personal loss in terms of the subtraction of something concrete from one’s world. Instead, the experience of loss consists primarily in a sense of certain possibilities having been extinguished: one’s own, those of the deceased, and others that were shared. The object of grief is not simply a death, the fact that someone is dead, or the loss of a valued relationship. It is a *loss of life possibilities*, something that is compatible with other, more concrete descriptions of grief’s object.

Chapter 7 introduces the topic of emotion regulation and focuses specifically on how grief is shaped by relations with other people, both the living and the dead. Grief, I suggest, is regulated by processes that are interpersonally and socially distributed. Chapter 8 builds on this, to address the themes of grief’s appropriateness and how we are to distinguish typical or healthy grief from psychopathology. The forms of experience associated with labels such as “complicated grief,” “prolonged grief disorder,” and “disenfranchised grief” are, I suggest, best understood through a perspective that emphasizes the process structure of grief, along with its dependence on interactions with particular individuals and a wider social world.

Finally, chapter 9 steps back to reflect on some structural similarities between grief and phenomenological enquiry, by returning to Merleau-Ponty. The convergence between what phenomenology sets out to study and what is glimpsed through profound grief leads me to identify a limit to phenomenological thought, a point where we depart from the familiar to such an extent that the phenomenological prerequisites for linguistic thought are lost.

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