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By

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ABSTRACT

In *Being and Time* Martin Heidegger explores the role that death plays in our lives and consequently the impact that the death of others has on the lives of those around them. Since Heidegger understands our existence to be structured by our being toward death and our being in the world with others, the impact of death on society will inevitably play a significant role.

In this thesis I investigate the disconnect that exists between the traditional literature on death and mourning as developed by theorists like Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and others and the experiences of mourners themselves. I argue that the disconnect that exists points to and deep seated confusion about the death of the self and the death of others

I identify some of the striking commonalities in the experiences of mourners and the lack of recognition of these experiences in the traditional literature. I also examine the role of traditional mourning practices and the impact they have on the mourners experience.

I maintain that collectively we are profoundly confused about how to deal with the deaths of others, and the lack of modern western mourning practices is evidence of this. However, I believe that individually, we have some understanding of how to approach the death of another, and that this becomes evident when we are forced to experience this loss. I argue that a Heideggerian understanding of death and mourning more accurately represents the experience of the death of others and, if endorsed, would allow for a more personal experience of mourning because of Heidegger's unique understanding of the role death plays in our lives and the significance of other people in our lives.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Mark Robert Adams who encouraged me to love philosophy, who taught me so much, and whose death made me realize that this kind of investigation was valuable. We miss you very much.

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INTRODUCTION

In *Being and Time* Martin Heidegger argues that death is fundamental to the constitution of our existence. He argues further, that death is an experience that we cannot comprehend because once death has occurred we are no longer there. As such we lack a true understanding of death and consequently of our lives as a whole. He maintains that because of this lack of understanding, the experiences we have of the deaths of others are the only *objective* access we have to death. In addition to understanding our lives to be fundamentally constituted by our inevitable deaths, Heidegger also believes our existence to be constituted by our relationships with others. For this reason, he also acknowledges that the death of others has a profound impact on those left behind. Death is arguably the most complex aspect of our existence.

As mortal beings we struggle with the thought of our own death as well as the deaths of others. Most societies prescribe practices to be followed by those in mourning.[1] In our modern Western culture these prescriptive mourning practices often fail to accurately assess the impact of a death on the members of the remaining society. This is because our practices primarily function around allowing (or perhaps forcing) society to return to a state of normalcy that existed prior to the death. This is a problem because it fails to consider the possibility that mourning may be, for some, a life-long process. This is because the death

[1]Ashenburg notes: “The Hopi in Arizona bury the body without ceremony and have no public gathering, but they are unusual.”(53)

of someone close alters the way the remaining individual's life will carry on, not simply in the immediate future but continuously throughout their lives.[2] As a result of this societal oversight and resulting practices, when a death occurs, we are all too often left without any real understanding of how to respond to death and how to deal with our feelings about the death of another.[3] In light of our overwhelming unpreparedness for the deaths of others in our modern Western world, and the struggles we have as a result, it seems imperative that we illuminate our relationship with death. Only once we are able to understand our own responses will we be able to encourage others to do the same.

I believe that contrary to much of the criticism he has received, Martin Heidegger has much to offer on the topic of death and the struggle we have with our own mortality, and that of others.[4] Despite its obvious inevitability, death remains a shadowy afterthought of our human existence and one that we struggle with, and quite often against. We all know that we will die, we all acknowledge that our deaths will happen and that the circumstances surrounding our individual deaths will be out of our control. And yet when we experience the deaths of others we become acutely and personally aware that death is the most

[2] Note that I am not claiming that this is the 'best' way of dealing with the deaths of others. I intend to avoid value judgments on mourning practices in this thesis. Rather, this is an observation about the *experience* of mourning itself, based on mourners own accounts.
[3] While dealing with the death of another is a personal matter, societal customs and norms will inevitably impact the way an individual attempts to handle the loss.
[4] See Paul Edwards, *Heidegger and Death*.

tragic aspect of human existence and we are often entirely unprepared for the experience and are often at a loss as to how to respond[5].

Heidegger is not the only theorist to consider death the most significant thing about us. In his book *Death,* Todd May argues that "what makes death the most important thing about us [is] its ability to negate every other element of our lives." He also cites our awareness of our impending death as contributing to the significance death has in our lives, noting that the fact we know we will die means that death plays a more significant role in our lives than it does for other mortal creatures who are unaware of their mortality.

Despite our own personal unpreparedness when death strikes, we have historically responded to the deaths of others with a number of well established cultural practices. At bottom, these practices seem founded on a recognition of our complex relationship with death, and they function to commemorate the life of someone who, in dying, has left us behind. I intend to show that the understanding that Martin Heidegger articulates of death and of the experiences living people have of the deaths of others in *Being and Time* touches on some fundamental aspects of our relationship to our own death and the grief we endure when we experience the death of another.

[5] While it could be argued that in certain circumstances death might not be tragic; such as in the case of an individual with ALS, death, strictly speaking, is still a tragedy. A disease so severe that relief can only come from death is undeniably tragic, this does not, however, make death itself less tragic. The radical removal of an individual from a world in which they have meaningful relationships with others is tragic regardless of his or her personal circumstances prior to their death.

My thesis is an examination of the Heideggerien account of death and an illumination of the contribution Heidegger can make to our contemporary conception of death and our contemporary approaches to the deaths of others. I show how personal accounts of the experience of the death of others, as described by mourners and observers of mourners, represent an account of the experience of death very much in line with Heidegger's understanding.[6] Among the many things that death is, it is above all else an element of human experience, and the one, perhaps, that we most struggle with.

If I am correct that much of the human responses to death – the rituals we create and the behaviours we typically show – are as Heidegger maintains, evidence of our struggle for an authentic existence[7], then an "appropriate" response to death is not something that can be prescribed. Rather, it is a unique and personal experience that shows itself in the face of the death of another and as a response to that death. I believe that Heidegger's articulation of death in *Being and Time* most accurately reflects our true relationship with death and the fundamental struggle we have with it. Rather than providing an answer to how we should deal with death and mourning, which Heidegger tends to avoid doing, he argues that we "always already" have an understanding of death. He maintains that this is evident in our response to the death of others (however veiled). And

[6] It is important to note that my focus is not on the biological conceptions of death or the ethical problems associated with death. My focus in this thesis is our response to the deaths of others. It is this area where I believe Heidegger's understanding is most relevant.
[7] Heidegger's conception of authenticity will be explained in greater detail later.

rather than attempt to dismiss this struggle, Heidegger identifies it as a component of our everyday existence[8].

Heidegger's unique understanding of death is the result of his complex understanding of our lives. He sees our existence as one in which we are thrown into a world and where we are "with-others". Being in the world is signified by the term "*care,*" and "because Being-in-the-world is essentially care, Being alongside the ready-to-hand could be taken... as *concern*, and being with the Dasein-with of Others as we encounter it within the world could be taken as *solicitude*."[9]

Heidegger distinguishes between our existence as it is characterized by being in the world and as it is characterized by our relationships with others and by our relationships with things. It is the relationships we have with others that for Heidegger makes the experience of the deaths of others so complex. This relationship is more complex than our relationship with things and is as essential to our experience as being in the world.

According to Heidegger, as mortal beings, we are marked by our being towards possibilities which we have yet to actualize. The final and most fundamental of those possibilities is our inevitable death. I believe that Heidegger's account of our relationship to our own death and his explanation of

[8]The understanding we "always already" have is implicit in how we deal with the deaths of others. It is an understanding that we may not necessarily be aware of and it is not something we have explicated or fleshed out for ourselves. Heidegger maintains that it is from this understanding that we must begin our investigation into the experience of the deaths of others and what this experience means for us; it is in examining how we 'always already' deal with this experience that we may come to understand what this experience means for us on the whole.

[9] BT 237. H 193.

how we respond to the deaths of those to whom we are close identify and validate the complexities we encounter in dealing with death.

Some theorists argue that there is no need for ritualized practices surrounding death. Katherine Ashenburg notes that practically speaking there is no need to deal with the dead through ritual. Despite the lack of practical need the fact remains that ritualized practices have continued across time and cultures, changing minimally but maintaining similar form and attention to detail. This seems to indicate that while there may be no practical need for rituals after a death has occurred there is a need for mourners to participate in celebrations, and rituals surrounding the death of those close to them. This shows that the rituals that we develop have more to do with those who remain after the deceased has passed on than they do with the deceased themselves; the rituals are less for the dead than they are for the mourners.

Heidegger also acknowledges the need for mourners to perform rituals in the wake of a death as a way of dealing with the tragic reality of the death. This is again, a reflection of the unique relationship that humans have with one another, a relationship which is founded on our existence as Heidegger understands it. In addition, Heidegger is aware of the unique value of mourning. He notes that the experience of the death of another is a personal experience and one that those who have not had the experience simply cannot understand.

There is also an epistemic privilege that comes from the experience of the death of another. The experience itself is uniquely different from any other

experience that we have and the epistemic authority gained from the experience gives individuals a unique understanding of what it means to lose someone. An individual who has never experienced the death of someone close simply cannot know the significance of this experience the way that someone who has had this experience can. The loss of someone you are close to is a life altering-experience. Individuals who have had this experience speak to their unique situation and the inability of others who have not had the experience to understand the impact of the loss.

Heidegger understands the experience of the death of others. Unlike many theorists who argue that there is a specific way to mourn effectively, Heidegger maintains that while mourning rituals are necessary and may follow particular forms, mourning is a uniquely personal experience and one that only those who have had the experience can understand. The loss itself is indicative of the relationship we have with others and for Heidegger, this is what makes the loss so significant and impossible to understand until it has been experienced. Heidegger also makes a number of observations that show he recognizes the unique situation of mourners. As I show, the accounts made by mourners of the experience of the death of another, echo much of what Heidegger says in *Being and Time*.

According to Heidegger, death alters the relationship we have with the deceased but does not destroy the relationship. This is because the relationship we have with people is grounded on the concept of care, rather than one of

concern.[10] This feeling is echoed in the accounts of mourners. Both children and adults indicate feeling that the deceased is still with them and that their relationship is ongoing. By this, they do not mean that the two-sided relationship they once had remains, but rather that the connection that they had to the deceased persists beyond the death. This means that they still think about the deceased when making decisions and often consider the deceased's wishes and hopes when they make plans. This is especially significant when an individual has a close relationship with the deceased.

In this way, while the deceased is no longer in the world, their existence, as it impacted others in life, continues to impact those close to them after their death. Their life has ended, but the impact they have on others continues. This is what Heidegger means when he claims that the relationship between the deceased and those who remain persists beyond the death of an individual. The claim that a relationship can persist with someone who is dead seems, at least initially, problematic, however, when examined in light of Heidegger's complex understanding of our relationships with others, the fact that they are strong enough to persist beyond the death is less contentious.

Heidegger discusses varying modes of being in the world and relating to the world. These modes he describes as authentic and inauthentic. Inauthenticity is grounded on authenticity, and refers to a false or self-deceiving way of understanding our existence. To be authentic is to understand our life as being in

[10] This distinction will be explained in further detail later.

the world and as being structured by our mortality. According to Heidegger, to be inauthentic in our lives is to deny our own death or to falsely assert death, by saying that “one dies” as opposed to “I die”. This false affirmation means attributing death to an anonymous nobody, rather than owning it as something that will happen to you. This is because for Heidegger our death plays a fundamental role in our daily existence.

Since we can be inauthentic with regard to our own death, when we deny the inevitability of our own end, we can also be inauthentic in how we grieve the deaths of others. Inauthenticity in the face of the death of others happens when individuals fail to appreciate the inevitability of the death of the other as well as the significant impact that that death has on those who are left behind. Authentic grieving does not refer to a specific correct mode of mourning.

According to Heidegger and various accounts of mourners, how one grieves is uniquely personal. However, Heidegger would argue that there are certain elements that are essential for an individual to authentically deal with the death of the other. These elements include accepting the finality of the death and the significance this has for those who remain, as well as acknowledging the fracture in the human community that results from the death of one of its members. Acknowledging these elements means both that that the mourner is aware of the inevitable nature of death, and of the complex relationship between individuals, the two elements that structure our existence as human beings.

CHAPTER ONE

DASEIN DEATH AND MOURNING

Heidegger refers to human beings as ‘Dasein’, and in his investigation into the meaning of Being he concludes (or perhaps merely assumes) that Dasein is the entity most worthy of investigation as a crucial preliminary to any inquiry into the meaning of Being. According to Heidegger, to investigate Dasein’s existence we must attempt to gain a comprehensive understanding of Dasein. He questions whether it is possible to have a complete understanding of something that is still existing. Heidegger concludes that it is impossible for individuals to gain complete understanding about their being because during an individual’s life they are continually experiencing and accomplishing things; as long as an individual is alive there is always something still outstanding for them. Once death occurs and there are no more possibilities of experiencing, the entity could be said to be “complete”. However, this itself is problematic because once individuals have died we no longer have access to them. This leads to another problem of conceptual understanding.

According to Heidegger, since our existence as Dasein is marked by a being-towards-possibilities that we have not yet achieved, we are constantly running-ahead-of-ourselves such that we are being-towards-the-end of our existence. Death, for Heidegger, is the final experience, but at the same time it is an experience we have no knowledge of. This is because before it happens we

have no idea what it is like and at the moment it happens we are dead. For this reason we have no experience about what it is to die, and therefore grasping our own individual existence as a whole is impossible. The potential impossibility of understanding our Being as a whole lies in the complexity of Dasein's relationship to his or her own death and the experience of the death of others

Even though Dasein can never experience wholeness due to our inability to experience and comprehend our own death, Heidegger examines what can be understood through experiencing the death of others. This limitation, according to Heidegger, is what makes the experience we have of the deaths of others "more impressive".[11] It is the closest we can come to a true understanding of our own death. Yet the experience of the death of another is not particularly helpful with regard to gaining a true understanding of death, because when we experience the death of another we can only ever experience being 'there-alongside' the individual who is dying. However, despite the inability to gain any true insight into the actual experience of death, the experience we have of the death of others can help us understand certain elements of our existence.

Explicating the Structure of Dasein

According to Heidegger, our existence is one marked by a thrownness into the world in which we are in an immediate relationship with the things around us. The immediate way in which we engage with the things around us is what

[11] BT, 218 H, 238

Heidegger calls ‘ready-to-hand’. The engagement we have with these items, according to Heidegger, is one of concern. Our relationship with other people, contrarily, is one characterized by solicitude. This is because we are thrust into the world in immediate and complex relationships with other people, the engagements we have with others are different and more significant than the engagement we have with other things. In order to understand what Heidegger means when he talks about our death and our experiences of the deaths of others it is essential that we understand the kind of existence that Heidegger sees us as having. For this reason, in the following section I will attempt to provide a comprehensive exegesis of our existence as ‘Dasein’ as Heidegger understands it.

In part I of Division Two of *Being and Time*, Heidegger connects Dasein’s “Possibility of Being-a-whole with Being-towards-death”, and addresses the potential for understanding Dasein completely. Our existence, as implied by the term Dasein, is “Being-there”. While the term “Dasein” and the term “human being” have the same denotation, they have largely differing connotations. Heidegger uses the term “Dasein” because it more accurately encompasses our existence as Heidegger understands it. Heidegger explains that Dasein’s existence is one in which an individual is ‘thrown-into-the-world’. By this, Heidegger means that individuals are thrust into an existence in which they are immediately engaged with their environment, the ‘equipment’ they use, and other people. The relationship we have with others is best understood when contrasted

with the engagement we have with things. Heidegger's distinction between the ways we engage with things in our environment as distinguished from the ways in which we engage with other Dasein is extremely important to his understanding of grief.

Constitutive of our existence as Dasein is "being-in-the-world". We are, in every instance, thrust into an existence in which we are immediately in the world. We are also, according to Heidegger "being-with", meaning that we are thrust into the world along with others. Heidegger states: "Being-in-the-world... stands for a *unitary* phenomenon".[12] He says further that "Being-in is a state of Dasein's being".[13] "The expression 'bin' is connected with 'bei' and so 'ich bin' ['I am'] means in its turn 'I reside' or 'dwell alongside' the world, as that which is familiar to me in such and such a way".[14] When Heidegger refers to being-in-the-world, he does not mean "in" in a spatial sense but rather "in" as "derived from innan—'to reside', 'habitare' 'to dwell'".[15] "'Being alongside' the world in the sense of being absorbed in the world'".[16]

According to Heidegger, then, we exist in a fully engaged relationship with the world around us, one that represents more than a mere physical representation of that world. Heidegger emphasises our immersion in the world to illustrate the significance this immersion has on our existence. For Heidegger the world in which we live is not simply an environment in which to interact. The

[12] BT, 79
[13] Ibid.
[14] BT, 80
[15] BT, 80.
[16] Ibid. *Aufgehen*

environment in which we exist structures our being and colours the way we view ourselves.

Given that we are thrust into the world and are in an immediate relationship with it, we are also thrust into relationships with others. The relationships individuals share with one another are extremely significant to their overall existence. According to Heidegger:

> The Being of Dasein means ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in-(the-world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world). This Being fills the signification of the term *"care" [Sorge*].... Because Being-in-the-world is essentially care, Being-alongside the ready-to-hand could be taken in our previous analysis as *concern*, and the Being with the Dasein-with of Others as we encounter it within-the-world could be taken as *solicitude*. Being alongside something is concern, because it is defined as a way of Being-in by its basic structure—care.[17]

In our existence in the world and our relationships with others we have different modes of existence and different ways of relating to the world in which we live. We can relate to the world in an authentic or an inauthentic way. "Dasein", Heidegger states, is "an entity which is in each case I myself; its Being is in each case mine".[18] However, our being-with constitution can present problems when individuals attempt to distinguish their own being-oneself within that construct. Our being-with-others can, and often does, take over. The self

[17] BT, 237.
[18] BT, 150.

gets 'covered up' by the others as a result of its absorption in the world.[19] To describe inauthenticity further Charles E. Scott states:

> Usually people appear to concern themselves with what most others around them show concern for: the details of ordinary life and the values that indicate normalcy and acceptability in a given environment. Heidegger calls this kind of normalcy "everydayness". There is a type of anonymity in it.... [I]f I see myself the way others see me, if I go along to get along, I make choices as though I were not my own life.[20]

Scott notes that "it is not hard to be inauthentic".[21] Everydayness refers to the way we typically comport ourselves toward the world. We represent ourselves as the larger majority would have us represent ourselves, and in so doing our individuality gets closed over and hidden away. To live authentically Dasein must attempt to be-oneself and identify oneself as "I". Timothy Stapleton in his article "Dasein as Being-in-the-World", when referring to authenticity notes,

> "'Authentic'" (*eigentlich*) and 'inauthentic' (*uneigentlich*) contain the german root *"eigen*" (own) and Heidegger says explicitly that he chose them precisely for that reason. I can be my *own* self or not be my *own* self only because this self is mine in the first place."[22]

[19] BT, 168.
[20] Heidegger*, Key Concepts*, 58-59.
[21] Ibid, 59.
[22] Ibid, 54.

Heidegger and Death

In addition to our being-in and being-with we are also fundamentally constituted by our being-towards-death. When we exist in the world engaged with others we do so as a being that has possibilities that lie ahead of it. We exist towards those things which lie ahead. This "not-yet," which exists until a Dasein dies, Heidegger argues, "has the character of something *towards which* Dasein *comports itself*.... *Death is something that stands before us -- something impending*".[23] To explain what he means when he says our death is impending, Heidegger distinguishes it from an impending storm. For Heidegger, death is distinctly impending in a way that nothing else can be impending. Unlike a storm or the remodelling of a house or the impending of a friend coming to visit[24] death is not impending in the sense that these events, which are encountered environmentally, are there-with-us. The impending of death is different from impending in this sense because it is not something that is ready to hand and readily available for us. Death is not a stoppage of a fulfilling or a perishing.[25]

As individuals we are not complete until there is nothing left for us to do. According to Heidegger the only point at which we will no longer have anything that lies ahead of us is when have died. Our death, however, is one of the possibilities we have to achieve. Death is the final possible experience that an

[23] BT, 293-294.
[24] BT 294 H, 250.
[25] BT 289-291.

individual will have. Paradoxically, however, it is also an experience that no individual can actually be there for.

Now that we understand our existence to be structured by our immersion in the world in complex engagement with others, the role that death plays in that existence becomes clearer. Death has devastating implications for the Being of Dasein. It is in some sense the pinnacle experience because it brings together all elements of our existence in a complex way. Our experience of death is multifaceted. It is (1) our ownmost possibility; (2) an experience which cannot be outstripped; and (3) non-relational. As a result of death being our ownmost possibility, that which cannot be outstripped, and non-relational it is also (4) distinctly impending, and (5) transitional.

An essential aspect of our existence in the world, according to Heidegger, is the fact that we are with others in the world. As a result of our interconnectedness, individuals are able to stand in for one another in certain circumstances. We are able to be represented by someone else. Death, however, is the one situation in which we are unable to have someone else represent us. No one may take our deaths away from us, no one may die for me so that I do not have to, and no one may stand in for me when it is my time to die.[26] It might also be argued that dying is not the only situation in which no one

[26] Paul Edwards argues against this claim in *Heidegger and Death: A Critical Evaluation*, he maintains that there are circumstances in which one individual can stand in for another in their death. He refers to examples in history where individuals have been forced to go to death for another individual. "In these cases the hostages did not in fact die in the place of the people they represented, but they easily might have done so. In principle a substitution of this kind is entirely possible" (12). Heidegger addresses this concern arguing that someone can go to their own

can stand in for us because likewise I cannot have another go to prison for me. However, this is an inadequate analogy because it is possible for someone to stand in for us for a prison sentence, unlike in death. While the individual who stands in for you by going to prison may not necessarily take your prison sentence away, that is, you may still have to go to jail, it is possible that they may prevent you from having to go. This is not the case with death. While someone may be put to death for you, just as someone may go to jail for you, this does not take your own death away. It may mean you do not have to die now, but the individual who dies, dies his or her own death, not yours. You will still have to die your own death[27]. As Heidegger states, "Dying is something that every Dasein itself must take upon itself at the time. By its very essence, death is in every case mine, in so far as it 'is' at all".[28]

For Heidegger, death cannot be outstripped *(überholen*) because "Being towards this possibility enables Dasein to understand that giving itself up impends for it as the uttermost possibility of its existence".[29] In facing death we

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death for another but in that case while the act may be symbolic the individual who dies is dying their own death, they have in no way prevented the other person from dying. They may have prevented that person from dying in that particular instance but they have not, in any way, taken the other's dying away from him. Edwards maintains that the latter claim, while true is trite (13). I believe that Edwards' claim that Heidegger fails to offer anything but a trite statement of fact or a grammatical truth is the result of a reductionist view of Heidegger's concept of death. Death as our ownmost possibility is to be understood within the overall context of being-towards-death within which it holds greater significance.

[27] It could be argued that death is not the only 'event' in which no one can stand in for you. Giving birth presumably provides another example of a situation when one individual cannot stand in for another. In another paper I question this claim. However, for the purposes of this thesis I contend that death is at least one (and likely only one of two) circumstances in which no other individual can stand in for you.

[28] BT, 284. H. 240.

[29] BT, 308. H. 264.

accept it as that which we are ultimately being-toward. “Death is the possibility of the impossibility of Dasein”.[30]

Death is non-relational (*unbezügliche*) meaning that “in death Dasein is cut off from relations with others”.[31] When individuals die they are removed from any further relations and experiences with other people.

Death is impending for Heidegger in a complex and intense way. Death lies before Dasein in a way different from the way a storm may be impending or the remodel of a house is impending.[32] It is impending as the “possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there”.[33] It is a happening that lies before an individual as the final act which will be its radical removal from the world.

> When Dasein reaches its wholeness in death it simultaneously loses the being of its ‘there’. By this transition to no-longer-Dasein (*Nichtmehrdasein*), it gets lifted right out of the possibility of experiencing this transition and of understanding it as something experienced.[34]

According to Heidegger, death is what ‘completes’ an individual while simultaneously destroying any possibility the individual has, due to Dasein’s essential constitution of being towards *possibilities*. The end of possibilities is the end of Dasein.[35]

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[30] BT, 294, H. 251.
[31] BT, 294. Footnote 4.
[32] BT, 294 H. 250.
[33] Ibid.
[34] BT, 281. H. 237.
[35] While I use the term ‘complete’ this term would itself be problematic for Heidegger due to the fact that while Dasein may be complete in the sense that it has nothing left to do, it is also destroyed.

The destruction of Dasein, however, is not the destruction of the entire entity that once constituted Dasein. When death happens it is not the case that there is simply nothing left. According to Heidegger, "When someone has died, his Being-no-longer-in-the-world (if we understand it in an extreme way) is still a Being... [It is] that remarkable phenomenon of Being which may be defined as the change-over of an entity from Dasein's kind of Being (or life) to no longer Dasein".[36]

As we have seen, Dasein is thrown into a world in immediate relations with other Dasein. It lives life running ahead of itself toward possibilities it has yet to achieve and because of this there is always a "not-yet" to Dasein's existence. As such, we cannot grasp Dasein in its entirety while it is still alive, because this not-yet means that there is always something "*still-outstanding.*"[37] That which is still outstanding gets resolved when Dasein dies because at the point of death Dasein no longer has anything that lies ahead of it.

Experiencing the Death of Others

As mentioned above, according to Heidegger, when individuals die they "get lifted right out of the possibility of experiencing this transition." "But," notes Heidegger, "this makes the death of others more impressive. In this way a termination *(Beendigung*) of Dasein becomes objectively accessible". This passage raises several questions regarding the nature of the experience of death

[36] BT, 281 H. 238.
[37] BT, 286

itself: what is given over to us in experiencing the death of others that may contribute to our understanding of Dasein? When one Dasein ends and those who are left behind reflect on that life, are they fully able to grasp that individual in its wholeness? Do the accomplishments and actions of an individual in life, as well as the legacy the individual leaves behind allow others a comprehensive understanding of that Dasein? Or is there something in the life of Dasein that is essential to his individual being that those who remain are unable to reach or understand? These are difficult questions to answer. The connection that the death of another has to the death of oneself is not immediately clear. There is no question that the death of another person has a profound impact on someone who experiences it. But it is not immediately clear what this experience can offer with regard to insight into the experience of the death of the self, or what significance this experience has if the insight it can offer is minimal.

There is no question that we are always 'on the outside' when experiencing the death of others. This is what Heidegger is concerned with when he claims that in this experience death becomes "objectively accessible". It is only objectively accessible because what occurs when we experience the death of others is at best second-hand and at worst is only a terrible experience that offers us no insight into our own death.

As we have seen, our existence is structured by our death and our being-towards that death in the duration of our lives. Despite this, however, we still lack a true understanding of what death means. We are unable to understand what

happens when death happens. Epicurus was not incorrect when he said that, "death, the most frightening of bad things, is nothing to us since when we are, death has not come, and when death has come, we are not".[38] For this reason, Heidegger recognizes that the experience of the deaths of others is the closest we can come to having any true understanding of our own death.

Death is an individual's ownmost possibility which cannot be outstripped; it is non-relational and distinctly impending. This informs us about the significance of death to our lives.[39] Indispensible to this significance, however, is how death, so categorized, affects our existence and how it colours the way we look at the world. As we saw previously, we can relate to the world in an authentic or an inauthentic way.

For Heidegger, death is more than simply that which simultaneously completes and destroys Dasein. Death, because it is our ownmost possibility, affects the way we comport ourselves toward all other possibilities, leading up to the pinnacle possibility of death. An authentic existence is one in which, as individuals, we recognize that death is our ownmost possibility and recognize that we too will die. This authentic way of relating to death is opposed to an inauthentic understanding of death when we either flee in the face of death, or falsely assert the truth of death by saying that, of course, "one dies". This is a feature of our existence being taken over by the "they".

[38] Epicurus letter to Menoeceus; in *Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Eminent Philosophers,* Book 10; section 125.

In fleeing in the face of death we ignore the reality of death and the significance of death to our lives. We simply choose not to consider it as a possibility for us at all, let alone grapple with the truth that it is our most significant possibility. By fleeing in the face of death we do not own our death nor do we affirm the death of others.

A false affirmation of death, on the other hand, involves admitting that "one dies"; in asserting this, however, we are inauthentically asserting the truth of death. We have removed death from ourselves and have instead affirmed its significance for an 'unknown' nonexistent "one". "One" as a referential item for Heidegger signifies a nameless, faceless nobody. Asserting that "one dies" is in effect like saying that nobody dies, which is an obvious self-delusion.

As I have shown, Heidegger has a unique understanding of our life and our death and how these elements affect our everyday existence. This understanding maintains that we cannot fully understand our own existence because we are not able to be observed in completion until we die. Also constitutive of our existence is being in the world--absorbed in the world--and in constant interaction with one another. In addition to being absorbed in the world we are also constantly striving toward that which we still have left to accomplish.

We are, however, perpetually perplexed about our existence because of the fact that we are never 'finished' so to speak, and the moment that we become 'finished' we are simultaneously destroyed. This state of perplexity is not

something that we need to avoid nor is it something that we need to resolve. Rather it is simply a perplexing fact of our existence.

Heidegger also notes that the relationships we have with other people are different than any other kind of relation. Humans have such complex and emotional relationships with one another that the way they care for and deal with one another is different than the way we deal with anything else in our environment.

Heidegger shows that we can relate to the world in an authentic or inauthentic way. If we live authentically we can acknowledge these difficult and perplexing elements of our existence and engage with them on our own. To be inauthentic, then, we need only to ignore the unique and complex elements of our existence and anonymously follow the mindless flow of thought of the masses.

The ability to live authentically is also intimately connected to how we view our death. If we deny our death, that is, if we deny that we will die, we deny an aspect of our lives that structures our existence – this is living inauthentically. Authenticity, then, involves acknowledging one's own demise and the role it plays in our daily existence. Death for Heidegger, as I have shown is significant in our lives because it is the time at which, as beings, we are 'complete', in the sense that there is nothing still left to be done and at the same time, we are destroyed; we are removed from a world in which we can experience and interact.

The death of others allows us to see this removal in a unique way. We can see the removal of our friends or loved ones. We cannot, however,

understand what this loss means or signifies for them, we can only ever know what this loss means for us, as outsiders, simply there alongside our dying friend.

On Mourning

Since Heidegger understands a key feature of our existence to be the relationships we have with one another, it follows that the radical removal of an individual will inevitably have a profound and irreversible impact on the lives of those who knew that person. As such, Heidegger seems to understand the need for mourners to perform particular rituals in order to deal with the impact of a death.

It could be argued that my concern for the death of others, on Heidegger's account, is merely a selfish attempt to gain some insight into my own death (Heidegger himself acknowledges this possibility). Indeed, it seems plausible that a Heideggerian interpretation of our response to the death of others might be concerned with identifying what insight they can provide into the truth of my death; however, the evidence provided by mourners about their experiences and responses to the death of others tells a different story.

Activities that mourners engage in recognize the significance that individuals have to one another and the interconnection of human relationships. They are evidence that the death of one person can fracture a wider community, as well as fracturing the existence of individuals who knew the deceased. When someone dies the lives of those who knew him will be forever changed. To express it as Heidegger would, our existence, which is structured by our being-

with others, is then at least partly structured by a being-no-longer-with this person whose life was uniquely interconnected to our own. Mourning practices recognize that when an individual dies, his death, while it severs the relationship that the living have with the one who has died, does not entirely destroy the relationship.

Heidegger writes that when death happens there is a transition to a *Nichtmehrdasein* and that the relationship with the deceased is no longer an interactive one, but that it is still more significant than the kind of relationship we have with present-to-hand objects. When Heidegger argues that the deceased is still something more, he is not referring to an after-life, or any kind of spiritual existence. Rather, the deceased is still significant to the individuals who knew him in life and whose existence remains wrapped up in the existence of the decedent. When examined in this light it seems less contentious to say that the relationships we have with individuals, even when dead, are still something more than the relationship we have with impersonal things we encounter in the world.

Heidegger refers to mourning practices as evidence that the relationship we have with others is unique. There is a wide range of ways that people go about mourning. The way that an individual deals with the grief one experiences at the death of another will be coloured by the way that one relates to others in life as well as the way one comports oneself to the world. The *way* one individual is being-with and being-towards is evidence of who that person is. It is easy to comport oneself inauthentically toward the world, caught up in an existence that

the world has devised for me, rather than one that I have devised for myself. Because, as I showed, authenticity is also directly connected to the way one comports oneself toward one's mortality.

Just as one can inauthentically comport oneself to the world, one can also inauthentically engage with the death of others. We can inauthentically engage with others in life. We struggle to deal with their death in the same way that we struggle to deal with them in life. Our lives are complex, interconnected webs of relationships with people. To remove one person from that web immediately severs all contact between that person and the others and, as a result, alters the existence of everyone else from that point on.

The relationships we have with others impact who we are. It is only because of relationships with other people that individuals can become husbands, wives, parents, and friends. When someone has a child or gets married his life is significantly impacted, both in daily activities and in how he self-identifies. When an individual's life has been so profoundly altered by the introduction and continual presence of another person, the removal of that person from that involvement will affect the individual who remains. Just as the other's existence altered ours in life, so too will their death impact our continued existence.

This impact is something that Katherine Ashenburg is acutely aware of. The absence of a significant other who had existed alongside the lives of those close to him or her will undoubtedly alter the world of the individual. When

children lose a parent, their world as they knew it is profoundly and irreversibly altered. Their existence as they knew it is gone and the life that they now have is different.[40] The same is true of people who lose a spouse or a child. Their life as they understood it no longer exists. While this is true of all individuals who lose someone close to them, it is perhaps most observable in children, because of the innocence of their actions and their words. Children are also less guarded in their descriptions.

Traditions in Mourning

In her book *The Mourner's Dance: What We Do When People Die*, Katherine Ashenburg weaves together the story of the death of her son-in-law with various descriptions of cultural and religious practices surrounding death. Ashenburg focuses on her daughter's responses to the death of her fiancé and the similarities that emerge between the practices performed by her daughter and those prescribed by various cultures. Throughout the book, Ashenburg identifies many common themes in various practices of mourning. Many of these traditions, while they take on various forms, reveal that there are aspects of our responses to the death of others that remain constant in any practice of mourning.

Ashenburg, who was concerned about how her daughter Hannah would go about mourning the loss of her fiancé given the lack of traditional rituals in her modern western upbringing, was surprised by her daughter's almost instinctual

[40] The impact of the loss will reflect the nature of the relationship prior to the death.

responses to her fiancé's death. Many of these responses bore a resemblance to many heavily ritualized cultural practices:

> [I]n the weeks after Scott's death, something began to impress itself on me. All by herself, as if instinctually, she was designing practices that more traditional cultures had institutionalized as part of their mourning process. Some of her handmade customs involved carving out times and places in which to remember Scott in a particular, recurring way. Just as older societies paid close attention to the mourner's retreat from society, Hannah wrote the rules for her own balance of seclusion and company.[41]

Ashenburg came to realize that even without a traditional model to follow and in the absence of prescribed practices, her daughter developed her own methods of mourning. And these methods in many ways mirrored traditional practices. "Traditional mourning customs almost always involve a timeline." Hannah too, had developed her own. She had decided that six months after Scott's death, the day after they were scheduled to be married, she would move her engagement ring from her left hand to her right.. "I remember thinking that the Victorians, those expert mourners, would approve of this girl".[42] Ashenburg recalls an evening with friends during which Ashenburg became infuriated by a friend's harmless behaviour, until she realizes that the friend "was simply not in

[41] Ashenburg, 3.
[42] Ibid.

mourning... [and] for the time being, [she] was on a different track".[43] Ashenburg describes the path that her interest in Hannah's actions had sent her down as

> A pilgrimage among mourners... to see the tangible traces of grief: the days of the dead, the keepsakes, the ceremonies, the mourning clothes, the graveyards... [Ashenburg] started not with [the mourners] inner feelings of the bereaved but with their actions – the mourner's dance, as I came to think of it.[44]

In a chapter entitled "Bustle in a House" Ashenburg discusses the time immediately following a death. This aptly titled chapter addresses the wide range of practices that occur in the interim between the time when an individual dies and the time when he is 'laid to rest'. She refers to the common practices performed on the body after a death, traditionally in the home, and representative of the transition those in the house are undergoing. She speaks of tasks performed in "the awkward passage between life and death".[45]

Ashenburg also recognizes the tendency of mourners to vocalize their loss. As she states, "The Jews call the day or so between death and burial the 'wailing time.'[46] This term refers to the period during which mourners lament the death of their loved one. While traditionally wailing and chanting have been seen as natural, and in some cases even necessary, in our current western culture we do not wail much if at all and if we do it is typically in private. This is evidence of

[43] Ibid, 4.
[44] Ibid, 5.
[45] Ibid, 14.
[46] Ashenburg, *Mourner's Dance*, 32

how such expressions are reinforced or discouraged by a culture.[47] As Ashenburg notes, "In the Laws, Plato sensibly allowed that 'either to ordain or to prohibit weeping for the dead is unseemly', but he drew a line at hired mourners and loud lamentations outside the house".[48]

There is a general tendency to voice one's grief. There seems to be an inherent recognition that lamentation (of some sort) must occur as part of the 'grief work' that humans engage in to deal with a loss so severe. Ashenburg notes that for the Jews, traditionally, most public lamentation happens during *aninut,* "the tense, tightly circumscribed period between death and burial. The 'wailing time' is ostensibly dedicated to the dead, but it's also a time of great indulgence for the mourner... the mourner is considered too raw to be comforted".[49]

In chapter three Ashenburg discusses the ritual of the funeral, making the important observation that "from a practical point of view a funeral is unnecessary." Despite this fact, with very few exceptions, almost every cultural group has a "leave-taking" ritual for the dead.[50] Our modern funeral, however is fairly recent, and prior to Christianity all but the elite were sent off with a minimal (though still some) ceremony. There are varying justifications for why we choose

[47] Ashenburg, *Mourner's Dance*, 33.
[48] Ibid, 34.
[49] Ibid, 48. It is significant to note that Ashenburg focuses often on Jewish traditions. However, I don't believe that this is an indication that Jewish traditions or even that the Jewish act of mourning, is advanced or that Jewish people know better how to handle the deaths of others. Instead I believe it is simply that Jewish seem to recognize that grief is complex and that mourning is necessary and given their recognition of this, they prescribe behaviours and practices that mourners can engage in.
[50] Ibid, 54.

to send off the deceased the way we do, but one unfaltering element is that of ritual. Our responses to the deaths of others have consistently been steeped in ritual. "The anthropologist Victor Turner sees ritual as the action that reintegrates a disturbed social group after a crisis. The medieval rites for the dead were designed to knit an unravelled community.... In the medieval mind, the rites for the departed served both the living and the dead."[51]

Ashenburg refers to this aspect of mourning as "the celebration" and sees it as fulfilling an important role, both in the respect it shows to the dead as well as what it does for those who remain. A celebration will, hopefully, recognize the significance of the deceased's life and the value it had for those who survive. In doing this it will recognize the impact of the loss of this individual on those who knew him. The celebrations, which generally speaking begin sombrely, gradually become more joyous:

> No doubt it is part of mending the tear in the social fabric but it must be hard for close mourners. Not every part of a mourning ritual is designed for every mourner.... Being sad together is no bad thing. It is, after all, a necessary part of how the group separates from the body.[52]

When reflecting on her own experience at the funeral of her son-in-law Ashenburg recalls seeing Scott's brothers standing at the lectern preparing to eulogize him. She remembers thinking that they were to be his groomsmen in his

[51] Ibid, 55.
[52] Ibid, 73,77.

wedding to Hannah. This is particularly significant, I believe, because it emphasizes the significance of the relationships we have with others and how the relationships, whatever their significance in life, will characterize relationship we have with the individual in death. To Ashenburg, Scott was the man who was to marry her daughter. This relationship lives on in the way she mourns him, even when Scott does not.

Ashenburg also addresses the final resting place of the deceased. The ways that we choose to deal with the physical remains of the decedent are also closely connected to the relationship we had with them in life. Often times, burial locations or disbursal of cremated remains are indicative of the ways people attempt to keep the deceased with them. She refers to an example of a wife who kept some of her husband's ashes in her locket, "I always have him here with me".[53] Other times, however, we are unable or unwilling to keep the deceased with us.[54] Ashenburg makes reference to another man who, though he had cared for his father in life, couldn't handle the thought of being responsible for his ashes and gave them to a friend to dispose of.[55]

It is important to note that these examples are both from the western world, where there is no particular 'correct' method of dealing with the deceased's physical remains and there is generally little if any contact with the deceased body. This is particularly true when compared to the Japanese, who participate in

[53] Ibid, 79-80.
[54] I believe this to be the case primarily with regard to difficult relationships in life.
[55] Ibid, 80.

the cremation of their dead, watching the body burn, and then personally transferring the remaining bones to the urn with chopsticks. Ashenburg refers to a Japanese woman who married and moved to the West. When her father-in-law died she felt as though something was missing because she never saw his dead body. There is something about seeing a person's dead body that acts as a concrete reminder that that individual has lost the "there" of his "being-there". Keeping this in mind, Ashenburg notes that there are people who believe their cultural rituals to be the best. There are others, however, who do not wish to mourn in the traditional way.[56]

In chapter five Ashenburg discusses the experiences of mourning when the funeral is over and when, in the west, the mourner is left largely alone to navigate his or her existence in the new absence of the deceased. She contrasts this western tradition, in which post-burial rituals are few with other cultures, which "cushioned the mourner's return to the world. [with] a gradually diminishing series of customs and ceremonies [designed to] ease his loneliness and aimlessness."[57] Shiva is the week-long period after the Jewish funeral in which close family members congregate in the home of the deceased and are attended by guests. Those who are participating in Shiva traditionally do not host the guests and are not even required to acknowledge their presence. Traditions of this sort are typically a mixture of indulgence and prohibition. Individuals do not

[56] Ibid, 83.
[57] Ibid, 116.

concern themselves with normal duties and they receive company, but certain joyful activities and fineries are forbidden.

As a therapist, Joyce Slochower examined her own experience of Shiva. "She believed that the mourner in the first days has a powerfully diminished capacity to be involved in the world of real relationships or activities.... Ultimately his task will be to accept that his living relationship to the dead is over while he builds a new, internal relationship with the beloved."[58]

Ashenburg, in making observations about Hannah's response to Scott's death, noted that she closely resembled someone sitting Shiva. "She resented any conversation that was not about him".[59] After the seven days of Shiva is complete the family leaves the house for the first time to walk around the block. "Weakened and diminished they rejoin the world and walk a short but real distance".[60]

Traditions like Shiva, particularly when compared to our modern western approach to the time after burial, are evidence of the differing approaches that we can and do take to deal with the death of others. How society thinks we should mourn has transformed over time. But "mourners have rarely lacked for guidance, if not rules. Often the rules were unwritten and unspoken, simply imbedded in customs".[61] In certain societies lengthy expressive mourning is expected. In others mourning is expected to be as swift as it is silent, but these cases are,

[58] Ibid, 121.
[59] Ibid, 125.
[60] Ibid, 131.
[61] Ibid, 132.

generally speaking, exceptions. For the most part "a culture attempts to moderate the mourner's feelings, neither denying grief nor luxuriating in it".[62]

Ashenburg refers to comments that Sulpicius makes to Cicero after the death of his daughter. Sulpicius urges Cicero to look at Tullia's death in light of the recent civil war in Rome. Ashenburg notes that the reminder that death comes to all or that it is part of the cycle of life is no consolation for the loss that is experienced when someone close to you has died. Across time, societal approaches to death have waivered from believing that the sadness experienced when someone dies should be expressed for the tragedy it is, to insisting that since the deceased will go to be with God in heaven there is no need to be sad and that expressing grief is unnecessary. The transition in our approach to death can be shown, as Ashenburg highlights, through much of the grief literature from the 17th century onward. A poignant example is a letter written to the parents of a young boy who died at age four. A minister friend writes to the family:

> It would be impertinence to remind you of any of the trite arguments of consolation... It is all very well to be told how he has been saved from the sorrows and perils of earth. You wanted to see him *upheld amid* the perils of God's grace, doing a brave, true-hearted man's work in *this* life, and then receiving his reward up yonder. It is easy to say that he has 'only gone on before.' You wanted him as a companion *here*. It is a grief – terrible loss which I can only imagine.[63]

[62] Ibid, 133.
[63] Ibid, 143.

This is an unusual response to the grief that the parents are experiencing. The minister shows an acute understanding of the severe impact that the death must have had on the family. The family friend makes no attempt to downplay the loss but only acknowledges that the death of their son is an inconsolable loss, the likes of which he cannot understand. In this vein Ashenburg notes that one way or another grief must find expression. That expression, however, can take many forms, as Ashenburg shows when she juxtaposes her daughter's attitude of profound solicitude with the attitude of Scott's mother, which was more traditional. Ashenburg also refers to Elizabeth Mehren, who, after the death of her daughter claimed she belonged to "the club that no one wants to join." Ashenburg states that there are no strict guidelines for appropriate conduct in mourning. There is a place for solitude and a place for "cleaning house", a term Mehren uses to refer to ridding one's life of the people who expect you to "get over" the death and move on.[64] I believe Mehren's reference to 'the club no one wants to join' is apt because it is undeniable that no one wishes to join this club, and it is also a club that no one is able to leave because the life of an individual before her experience of the death of another is never the same after it.

Ashenburg touches on an important aspect of our mourning process, and identifies a number of key features about the way we mourn. A cultural endorsement of a particular mourning practice might structure the way it is done; however, a cultural dismissal of it will not necessarily prevent people from

[64] Ibid, 155.

mourning their loss in ways they find meaningful. What I take this to mean, then, is that some people need to lament their loss, and others do not. Certain people wish to keep the remains of their loved ones near them, others cannot handle the thought of it. This is the case regardless of whether or not one's culture chooses to endorse or dismiss this kind of activity. The traditional mourning rituals that Ashenburg describes are in stark contrast to the modern North American approach to the death of others. What once was understood as a profoundly complex experience that altered our very existence and was cause for great sadness has been relegated to the sidelines of our existence by our modern western culture. We have, it would seem, been left alone in our grief to fend for ourselves.

Ashenburg makes an extremely significant discovery. She notes that there is very little research that conclusively demonstrates that one particular mourning practise produces a better outcome than any other. But, "the truth seems to be that as long as a culture supports the individual mourner in its particular traditions whatever they are, the result is more likely good than bad".[65] Those who have experienced the death of someone close need to mourn this loss. They needn't however mourn it in any specific way. Some individuals choose to employ traditional mourning practices and find these helpful. Others do not, however, and must find other ways to mourn. There are common recurring features of mourning and this is because, like anything else in life, human beings are similar

[65] Ibid, 16.

in some ways and dissimilar in others. Certain people mourn intuitively, others mourn instrumentally.

The way you mourn the loss of someone close will be coloured by the relationship you had with this individual in life, as well as the way you typically comport yourself toward the world. Given the broad range of ways in which people mourn Ashenburg is correct in her claim that as long as our particular societies support mourners, in whatever practices they employ, the result "is more likely good than bad".

As Heidegger notes, the way an individual comports him-or herself toward the world is evidence of who that person is. This includes who they are with regard to their being-towards their own death as well as their being with one another. Similarly Ashenburg notes that the ways individuals care for one another in life will colour the way they care for them in death.

Ashenburg discusses the tendency of mourners to engage in particular mourning practices. She notes that her concern for her daughters ability to properly mourn for her fiancé's death subsides when she realizes that Hannah is developing her own mourning practices, some features of which correspond with our current western models while others resemble practices from other cultures or religious traditions.

Hannah's methods were often different from the methods of her fiancé's mother, often spending time alone or with only a few close friends, and not engaging much with the outside world. Scott's mother on the other hand,

mourned by putting her son's affairs in order and taking care of funeral arrangements. Ashenburg discusses the importance of funeral practices, and of burial practices and location. She acknowledges that not all parts of the mourning process are designed for every mourner.

Hannah participated in traditional Catholic mourning practices but some of her behaviours were reminiscent of a different way of grieving. Ashenburg's observation that no one mourning practice is better than another and that what matters is that the mourner feels supported in his or her mourning, is perhaps the most notable observation for my purposes in this project. If, as Ashenburg notes, no specific ritual best addresses the loss of an individual, but some kind of ritualistic practice may indeed be necessary for mourners, then it seems clear that some of our previous assumptions regarding the nature of loss may be incorrect.

CHAPTER TWO

THOSE LEFT BEHIND

Children and Mourning

The book *Children and Grief: When a Parent Dies* by William Worden presents the findings of the Harvard Child Bereavement Study. The study followed 125 children through two years of their mourning for a deceased parent. Children were compared with a control group of non-bereaved children to see how the children adjusted to the loss and how this adjustment showed itself in the child's experience of the world. The study found that there were considerable variations in the ways that children coped with the loss. Some of the ways that the children coped were altered by the nature of the death itself, the rituals surrounding the death (and the child's involvement in and preparedness for those rituals), as well as how the surviving parent responds to the death. Variations were also seen based on the age and gender of the child and the gender of the deceased as well as the surviving parent.

Despite these variations, the study noted common behaviours exhibited by many of the children in an attempt to cope. Worden maintains that children who "have achieved a coherent mental representation of the important attachment figures, such as parents" and an understanding of the finality of death have the capacity to mourn the loss.[66] He notes that some theorists argue that "it is not

[66] Worden, *Children and Grief*, 11.

necessary for a child to have a realistic concept of death in order to grieve".[67] Whatever the process that children undergo it is undeniable that children respond to the death of a loved one.

"Grief" as Worden uses the term refers to the personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings had by the children. "Bereavement" refers to the adaptation to the loss, and "mourning" is the path by which children reach bereavement.[68] Worden maintains that there are four "tasks" that children must resolve (to some extent) in order to adapt to the loss.[69] They are to (1) accept the reality of the loss; (2) experience the pain or emotional aspects of the loss; (3) adjust to an environment in which the lost is missing; and (4) relocate the dead person within one's life and find ways to memorialize the person.

Just as adults typically do, the children studied had different responses and ways of performing these tasks. Some chose to do it together with family, with friends, or alone. The way that the surviving parent responded to the loss also influenced the child's response.[70] Many of the children's behaviours also seemed related to whether they lost a mother or a father.

The Boston study on child bereavement also found that the rituals surrounding the death and the child's preparedness for, and involvement in,

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[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] The term task is problematic because it implies specific things that people *need* to do. This is illustrated by the fact that Worden refers to them as needing to be "resolved". I believe this is a misrepresentation or a misunderstanding of what these actions actually are. Rather than required work, I believe the actions are evidence of typical practices that individuals, specifically children, engage in in an attempt to cope with the extreme significance of the loss.
[70] Worden, *Children and Grief*, 19.

these rituals also impacted the child's mourning process. The funeral is an important ritual for children because it allows them to begin to comprehend the reality of the loss (one of the four tasks Worden identifies), as well as enabling the child and surviving family members to honour the life of the deceased. The study found that the older the children were when a parent died the more able they were to attach meaning to the ritual. Almost all (95%) of the children studied attended the funeral.

A particularly interesting element of the Boston study is that 2 years after the death the interviewers asked the children, if they could redesign the funeral, what they would change, if anything. Half of the children could describe how their redesigned funeral would look. This is particularly interesting as it allowed the children, in an inadvertent way, to indicate how that ritual would have more accurately met their needs. The study found that the children who were able to redesign the funeral were also those who were less likely to exhibit disturbed behaviour.[71]

The fourth "task" that children typically perform is relocating the deceased. This task requires the children to comprehend the fact that the dead are no longer in the world with the child. Worden maintains that the children need to locate the deceased in a specific place somewhere else. Most of the children indicated that their parent was in heaven regardless of their family's religious

[71] Ibid, 27.

beliefs.[72] In the process of relocating the deceased, children often reach out to the deceased parent, seeing him or her in dreams or imagining them giving advice. Children also reach out to their parents by attaching to what Worden refers to as "transitional objects." Most (77%) of the children held on to something belonging to the dead parent.[73]

Worden refers to one child who kept his father's little-league pin, and another girl who kept some of her father's shirts and often wore them around the house.[74] The study found that these items were kept close by the bereaved shortly after the death, noting one boy who wore his father's baseball cap everywhere, including when he was asleep (4 months after the death). At a year after the death the cap was on the child's bed post and at two years it was in his closet.[75] Worden refers to these items as "transitional objects" rather than "linking objects," which Volkan termed them[76], indicating that they were used to keep the mourner living in the past. Rather, Worden maintains, transitional objects "are seen as connecting one realm of experience with another"; he believes this description more accurately represents the experience the children had.[77]

[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid, 30.
[74] Ibid, 31.
[75] Ibid.
[76] As noted by Worden, 30.
[77] Worden, *Children and Grief*, 30.

Worden maintains that children develop an ongoing relationship with the dead. This is referred to as "constructing."[78] Worden maintains that constructing is what occurs instead of "letting go," which has often been used to describe the process of mourning. Letting go suggests that children must passively acknowledge and accept the non-existence of the relationship so that they can then 'move on'. The idea of mourning as 'letting go' misunderstands the process, according to Worden. Constructing involves "renegotiating the meaning of the loss."[79]

Involving children in the rituals of death, such as the funeral, solidify the truth and finality of the loss; however, even with that concrete reminder, Worden found that children typically still reconstruct the meaning of the death and construct a new kind of relationship with the deceased. This occurs in connection with relocating the deceased in a specific place but no longer in the world with the child, and remaining attached through transitional objects.

When one parent dies and another survives changes in the bereaved child's home environment are inevitable. The Boston study examined changes at four months, one year, and two years. They found that children experienced changes in their home situations, in their relationship with peers, and in their ability to communicate about the loss. Children reported feeling different from their peers. One comment made by a 16 year-old boy makes this point all too clearly: "You hear kids, like, say that they hate their parents and stuff. It's like you

[78] Ibid, 33.
[79] Ibid.

don't know how much you love them until you lose them."[80] The majority of children claimed that their friends had no idea what it is like to lose a parent.[81]

The study examined the most common emotions expressed by the children over the two-year span. The most commonly expressed were sadness, anxiety, guilt, and anger. Most of the children cried, though how often they cried varied. Incidents of crying were connected to the crying behaviour of the surviving parent. Another significant trigger for crying was missing activities shared with the deceased parent. One child stated that not having his father around was "like being deserted".[82] Children also experience anxiety concerning their own safety and the safety of the surviving parent. They also experienced guilt, more about things they wish they had (or had not) said to the dead parent than about the death itself.

The child bereavement study also found that experiencing the death of a parent can alter a child's self-perception and self-efficacy.[83] "We found that bereaved children believed they are less likely to be able to effect change than their non-bereaved counterparts."[84] Low self-efficacy was linked to how the child's surviving parent responds to the death. "Because coping behaviour is learned it is not surprising that children's belief in their ability to effect change is

[80] Ibid, 51.
[81] I think this observation by the children is important. It shows the children identifying themselves as belonging to the club that no one wants to join, and distinguishing their knowledge of this tragic phenomenon in a way that others, who have not experienced it themselves, simply cannot grasp.
[82] Worden, 57.
[83] Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her ability to effect change in the world.
[84] Ibid, 70. Worden notes that this is possibly more of a reflection of the direct impact of the surviving parents coping skills on the child rather than the direct result of the death. Even this though, is still indirectly the result of the death.

related to the surviving parent's coping style and their parents perceptions of their own ability to cope."[85] The type of death also affects how children respond. Surprisingly, children whose parent died a sudden death showed a better-developed concept of death.[86]

The Boston study found that the relationship that the parent had with the child prior to his or her death significantly impacted the child's response to the death. The most significant impact was how strong the relationship was with the parent or how ambivalent the child felt about the relationship prior to the death. They also found, as expected, that the age of the children affected the child's response. Preadolescents (ages 6-11) have a less developed ability to understand the death. Adolescents (ages 12-18) have some other "tasks" to engage in due to the already complex range of development that occurs in the adolescent years.

The Boston study sought to assess the children's understanding of death and in particular certain concepts related to death; specifically, irreversibility, finality, inevitability, and causality.[87] Surprisingly the study found that the non-bereaved counterparts had a better developed understanding of these concepts with the most pronounced differences in the concepts of causality and finality.

Worden notes that, "one wonders if bereaved children would not allow themselves to believe in finality to the fullest extent because they were struggling

[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid, 74.
[87] These four concepts developed by Smilanski, 1987, noted by Worden , 174- 175.

to relocate the deceased parent in their lives."[88] I believe this realization on Worden's part to be undeniably true. Imagine a scenario in which you are told that the most important person in your life is gone, someone whose existence has been so interconnected with yours that you cannot envisage your existence without him or her in it. Now attempt to comprehend the idea that his or her absence from your life is absolute, inevitable, and most tragic of all, final. In this light it seems much less surprising that a child (or any recently bereaved individual for that matter) would have a misconstrued sense of finality. This is not to say that the children, or any bereaved individual would be unable to accept or understand the loss[89], but rather, that the impact of the loss is so severe that the fact it is final, and perhaps inevitable is simply too hard to comprehend in its entirety. I'm not even convinced that this is necessarily a bad thing. It could be argued that but for this altered sense of finality the overwhelming tragedy of the situation might be too much to bear.

The Boston study focuses exclusively on the experience of children in the case of parental death. Worden looks at how this compares to the loss of a sibling as well as the loss of a parent through divorce. While there were similarities with respect to how children dealt with the absence of the parent, there were certain responses that were specific to the death of a parent. Worden notes that some of the struggles apparent in a divorce are not apparent when a

[88] Ibid, 94.
[89] I wish to note here the sharp contrast between the misconstrued sense of finality that Worden refers to and the inability to accept the loss that Kubler-Ross claims exists.

parent dies. The loyalty struggles that often emerge when parents divorce and children feel they must choose between one parent or the other are not present when a parent dies. Children who lose a parent to death are also less likely to develop reunion fantasies. This indicates that while bereaved children may have a less developed sense of finality, they do, in some sense, grasp that a parent who has died will not return in the way that children who have lost a parent through divorce may hope for.

In addition to the analysis of the typical responses of children to the death of a parent, Worden also offers ways in which adults can attempt to meet the needs of grieving children. Surprisingly, Worden's suggestions are less about what people should encourage children to do and focus instead on validating whatever feelings the child wishes to express. First, it is important to note that Worden claims that most children who lose a parent to death do not need any professional grief counselling; however, he notes that they "obviously suffer and have much to cope with."[90]

Worden acknowledges that like adults, children all grieve differently; for this reason there is no one way to aid all children in their grieving. There are, however, certain universal guidelines to follow. Children need to be given information as accurate as possible. If they are told of the death in abstract ways or if information is left out, children will fill in the gaps with their own fantasies,

[90] Ibid, 139.

fantasies which can be worse than the truth. Worden also places emphasis on the need for children to be listened to and have their feelings validated:

> Children need to express their thoughts in their own way.... What the deceased parent was to one child can be different from what he or she was to another. These differences in relationships depend primarily on the age and gender of the child and the parent's expectations for that child.... Such differences in personality and in relationship will make for varying expressions of grief.[91]

Worden acknowledges that just as children's personalities differ as well as do their relationships with their parents, so too will their mourning differ. He is careful to note, however, that regardless of what feelings children express or do not express, and regardless of the feelings they have, children must be validated in their feelings and included in the rituals.

As Ashenburg did, the Child Bereavement Study found that there are a variety of ways in which people grieve the loss of someone close to them. Particularly interesting is that even children who lost a parent grieved very differently. They did, however, share certain common behaviours. All children, regardless of age, experienced some form of grief. The study found that, just as they were for the adults, the rituals were useful for most of the children, though how they responded to the rituals varied from child to child.

[91] Ibid, 143.

Worden also found that most children held on to items belonging to the deceased parent. As noted above, they also found that the children renegotiated their relationship with the deceased and as a response to the death of their parents children typically underwent four separate, but connected "tasks": (1) Accepting the reality; (2) experiencing the pain; (3) adjusting to a world in which the deceased is missing; and (4) relocating the dead person and memorializing that person. While all children typically engage in these activities, how they chose to engage in them varied based on their personalities, whether they lost a father or a mother and how their remaining parent responded to the death.

The Child Bereavement Study acknowledges that a child's environment inevitably changes with the death of a parent and that children are aware of these changes. The study also notes that the children all seemed aware that the changes in their environment that resulted from the loss of their parent would persist throughout their lives. That is, the children all seemed aware that many of the changes in the environment that come from being orphaned will not pass in time and instead will linger throughout their lives

The children in the study, though all from a modern western culture, grieved in different ways. The observations made by the Worden, though conducted differently than the research conducted by

Ashenburg, identifies many of the same tendencies in the way individuals respond to the deaths of others, as well as highlighting some of the common misconceptions. Both the Child Bereavement Study and Ashenburg acknowledge that all people grieve differently, that rituals are important for those who remain as a way to memorialize the deceased, and that whatever their mourning practices, individuals need to feel supported in their mourning.

Death is one of the most paradoxical aspects of human existence, paradoxical because it is complex and simple at the same time. Death is simple in that it is the cessation of our lives; complex in that our lives are complex and interconnected, and the end of one life has a profound impact on the lives of those who remain. For this reason death is a problem not for the dead but for the living. It is the subject of medical, psychological, and educational discourse and yet we are still ill at ease with the thought of our own death, and we are still, I believe, largely unprepared for the death of others.

The above mentioned claim by Epicurus that "death is nothing to us since when we are, death has not come, and when death has come, we are not,"[92] may in fact be true. However, while it may be true that death is nothing to us once we are dead it is not the case that death is simply nothing to us. For those who have experienced the death of a loved one, death is all too real. So while death

[92] Epicurus letter to Menoeceus; in *Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Eminent Philosophers,* Book 10; section 125.

may be nothing to the deceased, it is something to those left behind. Perhaps the most formidable obstacle to any investigation into how we experience the death of those close to us is the fact that grief is a uniquely personal experience; a tragic experience, no doubt, but a personal tragic experience.

It seems that those who have never lost someone close to them simply cannot understand the impact that this kind of loss can have. This may, on the face of it, seem like an unjustified and perhaps even rash claim. However, those who have experienced great grief often mention that those around them lack an understanding of what they are going though. As we saw in the child bereavement study, children claimed that their friends and other family members simply did not understand. This is also evidenced when Ashenburg claims that there is no other experience in the world comparable to that of losing someone with whom you had a close relationship. And since this is the case it does not seem so problematic to argue that those on the outside of the mourning experience simply cannot grasp what the experience itself is.

In light of the observations made by these mourners it seems that there is something to be said for the epistemic insight that this experience can have with regard to death. Individuals who have lost someone have some kind of epistemic authority over those who have not when it come to understanding the effects and

the process involved in dealing with the death of another. This is not insight into death per se, but rather into mourning.[93]

Authentic Grieving

As I have shown, varying mourning practices reflect the relationships individuals have with one another. As a result of the complex relationships people have with one another the way individuals mourn the deaths of one another will reflect those relationships. According to Heidegger, we can have authentic and inauthentic modes of being towards the world around us. And just as we can authentically and inauthentically relate to the world and other people within that world, so too can we relate authentically and inauthentically to those who have died. We struggle to deal with the deaths of those we care about just as we struggled to deal with them in life.

There is no one way to mourn. What people need to do in their mourning is individual, and encouraging one specific mourning process would facilitate inauthentic mourning. An inauthentic mode of relating to the world, as we have seen, is one in which the "I" gets taken over by the "they". Inauthentic mourning, then, is characterized by individual mourning being taken over by group thought. This happens when particular mourning practices are assumed to be the correct mourning practices and are prescribed as the correct modes of mourning.

[93] Heidegger considers the insight that experiencing the death of others could provide into our own death, but ultimately determines that this insight is minimal, if it exists at all. The loss suffered by the mourner is entirely different than the loss, if any, that is experience by the deceased.

As Ashenburg shows, from a historical perspective many cultures have wavered between endorsing lengthy mourning practices and encouraging mourning to be in private and brief. Historically we have not always agreed about how individuals should deal with grief. That we have not always agreed is less a problem than the fact that despite this inconsistency we still do not hesitate to prescribe whatever mode of mourning we currently champion.

Ashenburg maintains that grief must be expressed**.** By this she means that grief must be spoken to others and shared aloud**.** She makes this observation in light of the lack of expression shown in our culture. As she notes, "We do not wail much, as a society, and there is plenty of evidence that shows how effectively such expressions of emotion are culturally reinforced or discouraged."[94] Ruth Davis Konigsburg, on the contrary, argues that death need not be witnessed to be healed.[95] These positions which are in contrast to one another illustrate the differences in grieving methods and how they are perceived.

The assumption that these are in opposition to one another presupposes that one specific kind of mourning practice is correct. As I have shown, this assumption is false. For certain individuals, grief may indeed need to be expressed. For others, however, it needn't be. This is because people will respond differently to the deaths of others just as they respond differently to other experiences and other people.

[94] Ashenburg, *Mourner's Dance,* 33.
[95] Konigsburg, *Truth about Grief*, 30.

Inauthenticity is essentially internalized groupthink, and any ideal promoted by a group functioning by way of groupthink can ultimately be traced back to an idea created by an individual to meet a particular need. If we select one particular mourning ritual (Shiva is a particularly interesting example), we can see how a shirt torn above the heart, or a low sitting chair could speak to the need of an individual mourner. Ritualistic practices that we employ are developed first as our individual responses to death and only ritualized when performed by large numbers of people across time. The Victorian era of mourning is an interesting example of how this ritualization occurs.

The intense mourning practices that Queen Victoria and the rest of the country practiced in the years following Prince Albert's death were not randomly chosen acts. They served a purpose, not for the entire country, of course, but for Victoria the rituals met the needs she had as a mourner. That they become routine practice for all of England was simply the result of the queen's prestige. Victorian era mourning, then, is not evidence of an ideal, or an over-extravagant approach to mourning. It is simply Victoria's mourning amplified and made into a cultural norm. She, as an individual mourner, felt the need to perform a great number of things in order to express her grief. The fact that she was the queen is what made these behaviours culturally normative.

The most notable example of recent prescribed mourning practices are the five stages of grief put forward by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross in her book *On Death and Dying*. In this book Kubler-Ross argues that there are four stages of

grief that every individual must pass through in order to reach the final stage of acceptance. These five stages in order are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and lastly, acceptance. According to Kubler-Ross, individuals go through these stages in order to come to terms with their own death, as well as the death of another.

In a recent work, Ruth Davis Konigsburg takes issue with Kubler-Ross' five stages, arguing that they have been misapplied and are not actually supported by any psychological studies. Despite the unnecessary polemical tone of Konigsburg's *book The Truth about Grief: The Myth of Its Five Stages and The New Science of Loss*, she makes one poignant observation. The five stages were originally developed to address an individual's coming to terms with his or her own death. They were only later applied to coming to terms with the death of another. Konigsburg notes that, according to her co-author, David Kessler, Kubler-Ross equated coming to terms with one's own death to coming to terms with the death of another, "She didn't make a distinction between one's own dying and grieving the loss of someone else, because dying is grieving itself. It's grieving the life you're never going to have. She saw them as fluid."[96]

Kubler-Ross maintains that in order to come to accept a loss all individuals must pass through these four stages. She acknowledges that the stages are fluid

[96]Davis Konigsburg, *The Truth about Grief*, 9. This claim is problematic for the reasons that Davis Konigsburg identifies in that there fails to be sufficient research to link these two experiences. In addition, it is problematic in that it does not coincide with the human experience. As will be explored in more detail later, we cannot fathom our own removal from the world in the same way that we can the removal of someone else. These two experiences are incomparable and cannot be assumed to be the same experience.

and that individuals do not necessarily pass through the stages one after the other. She also maintains that reaching one stage does not preclude the possibility of retreating to previous stages. However, Kubler-Ross insists that these five stages represent human grief and mourning.

One observation made by Konigsburg, and further evidenced in the child bereavement study and by Ashenburg, is that bereaved individuals do not struggle to accept the death of a loved one the way that Kubler-Ross assumes. Most bereaved individuals, even children, do not typically deny the death of a loved one. They may struggle to accept that the individual is no longer able to be with them, but this is not, strictly speaking, the same as denying that the death has occurred. Konigsburg notes that most individuals experience what can more aptly be described as pining for the lost loved one, more than denying or being angry at the death.[97] For those who lose someone they are in constant contact with it is hard to imagine how one could not accept the death. That individual, who had been so rooted in one's everyday existence, is no longer there. The idea that we can delude ourselves into denying the absence, or thinking that this absence is anything but final, seems to me unlikely. I suspect, with Konigsburg, that the denial expressed by dying patients is entirely different from the pining expressed by mourners.

Perhaps one of the most interesting and yet controversial claims that Heidegger makes with regard to mourning is that individuals can continue to have

[97]Ruth Davis Konigsburg, *The Truth about Grief*. 10.

a relationship with the deceased. This seems, by all accounts, contrary to any kind of effective mourning practice. He maintains that the relationships we have with others in life do not end with the death of those people. Individual lives will end there is no doubt about that. Still, the relationships we had with the deceased do not dissolve the way their physical bodies do. Instead, according to Heidegger, the relationships we have with people are transformed by their death. On the face of it this claim seems problematic, but when examined in light of the experiences and behaviours of mourners in their attempt to reconcile the death it seems less contentious. Heidegger states:

> In such Being-with the dead, the deceased himself is no longer factically 'there'. However, when we speak of 'Being-with', we always have in view Being with one another in the same world. The deceased has abandoned our 'world' and left it behind. But in terms of that world those who remain can still be with him.[98]

Relationships with the Dead

To some theorists the idea that individuals who are engaged in healthy mourning practices can maintain a relationship with the dead seems entirely counter-productive. Most theorists and psychologists argue that healthy mourning rituals involve accepting that the deceased is gone and with that comes removing the attachment that mourners had for the dead when they were alive.

[98] BT, 282

For this reason individuals who maintain an attachment to the dead are often described as being unable to accept the death or unable to move on. This I believe is mistaken. The way Heidegger understands death allows for, and perhaps even promotes, the idea of an ongoing relationship with the deceased. There is no question that this relationship is different than the relationship that existed between these two people prior to the death and different from any kind of relationship between living people. Heidegger explains the relationship that the living have with the dead as one in which only one individual can 'participate' in any real sense of the word.

Reinventing vs. Reinvesting: Internalizing the Deceased

Unlike Freud, Bowlby[99] and others claim, the goal of mourning is not detaching the emotional investment from the deceased and reinvesting that investment in someone or something else. Few mourners, if any, regard themselves as reinvesting the attachment they had for their now deceased loved one in someone or something else. That is neither how love works nor how grief works.

In his book *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis discusses the feelings he experienced in the wake of his wife's death. Particularly interesting is his description of the reinvention of his wife in his mind. In describing the changing relationship that he had with his dead wife, and the alarm that the change created in him Lewis writes:

[99] As noted in *Atkins, Death and Desire*.

> I can feel the slow, insidious beginning of a process that will make the H. that I think of into a more and more imaginary woman. Founded on fact, no doubt, I shall put nothing fictitious (or I hope I shan't). But won't the composition inevitably become more and more my own? The reality is no longer there to check me, to pull me up short, as the real H. so often did, so unexpectedly, by being so thoroughly herself and not me.[100]

Lewis discusses how he reinvents H. in his mind, knowing that the person he creates is his own distorted version of her and not the true her. He is aware that this image "is a puppet of which you hold the strings."[101] Lewis acknowledges that the relationship he has with the new image of his wife, made up of the memories he chooses to save, is distinctly different from the relationship he had with his wife. He expresses sadness at the thought of it, noting that the real H. was "something very close" but "unmistakably other... in a word, *real*", and this image of her is his own creation, "little flakes of me, my impressions, my selections, are settling down on the image of her."[102]

The kind of relationship that Lewis describes maintaining with the memory of his wife does not seem quite as problematic in this light. It could be argued, however, that this isn't a relationship at all but simply the memories, and one cannot, strictly speaking, have a relationship with memories. I believe this to a mistaken view, however. As Lewis, Ashenburg, and others note, the image that

[100] Lewis, *Grief Observed*, 17.
[101] Lewis, *Grief Observed*, 20.
[102] Ibid, 17-18. My italics.

one carries of the deceased person is static. While it is true that the deceased no longer have anything left to do and there is nothing more for them to become, who they were prior to their death does not get left behind in the lives of those who remain.

Children in the bereavement study reported wishing to do well in school or succeed at sports so their deceased parent would be proud of them. These children maintained an ongoing relationship with the memory of their dead parents. I believe this act of bringing the deceased along with them is what Heidegger means when he states that "the deceased has abandoned our 'world' and left it behind. But in terms of that world those who remain can still be with him."[103]

In this way while the deceased is no longer 'being-there' with us, he or she is "still something more" in that we are able to keep him or her with us through the cultivation of memories and so on.

Keepsakes

In addition to developing mental images and idealized memories of the deceased, as we saw in the child bereavement study, individuals often attach to certain physical things that keep the mourner with them. Children in the study often took articles of clothing or small objects that belonged to the deceased. Initially after the death these items had intense significance and are kept close at

[103] BT 282

all times. As time passes these items are retained but are relocated to special places rather than always being on or near the mourner, and as more time passes these items get placed in storage; they do not usually, however, get destroyed.

Ashenburg discusses the role of these types of objects. She notes that certain items lend themselves more readily to becoming keepsakes and mementos. Ashenburg's daughter Hannah kept a lock of her fiancé's hair in her locket in addition to wearing an article of his clothing every day. "[S]he was not ready to let him go, partly because his death had been so sudden and partly because, like every death, it was so final."[104]

Ashenburg illustrates some historical examples of keepsakes and mementos, some similar to Hannah's and others radically different. The most unique example she provides is not of an object but of a space:

> A Vancouver family kept their teenage son's room intact for some years, and their daughter and their son's friends used it as a teenagers' gathering place. When they decided the time had come to redecorate, they invited friends and family to a farewell ceremony for Jess' room. They were given pencils and asked to draw pictures and write letters to Jess on the walls of his room. When everyone had had his or her say on Jess's walls, they shared a meal and began repainting.[105]

[104] Ashenburg, 246.
[105] Ashenburg, 249.

No doubt to some mourners and non-mourners alike, the thought of keeping a deceased individual's room intact for years might seem like an unhealthy mourning practice. However, the role the room played, as well as the situation surrounding how the family chose to reinvent the room seems, on the contrary quite healthy. The room served as more than a transitional object, it was a transitional space, space in which individuals who had been close to Jess in life could still have a way to feel close to him in death. When they had all relocated Jess in their lives as someone no longer able to be there, they were able to repaint and re-appropriate their transitional space.

Worden also addresses the role of what he refers to as "transitional objects" as opposed to "linking objects," and indicates that their purpose is to aid the child in repositioning the deceased in the mourner's life. These objects "are seen as connecting one realm of experience with another."[106] After a while the objects may need to be 'used' less frequently or may not need to be present all the time for the mourner, not because the mourner no longer mourns, nor because he no longer misses the deceased. Rather, it is because in time the mourner has successfully relocated the deceased as a solid memory and no longer an individual who can be here with us.[107]

[106] Worden, 31. See Volkan, 1981.
[107] This is not to be confused with acceptance. Few mourners express an inability to accept the loss. Many mention that the loss is often so significant that they can't but accept it. An eventual coming to terms with the being-no-longer-in-the-world of an individual so significant to your life is different from accepting that their death has torn them away. That they are gone is what is accepted. That you must live without them is what takes time to comprehend.

Lewis describes something like this himself. "Suddenly at the very moment when, so far, I mourned H. least, I remembered her best. Indeed it was something (almost) better than memory; an instantaneous unanswerable impression."[108] He makes an interesting observation that also emphasizes the unique epistemic position of the mourner: "How easily I might have misjudged another man in the same situation. I might have said, 'He's got over it. He's forgotten his wife', when the truth was, 'He remembers her better because he has partly got over it.'"[109] Lewis, at this point, has reinvented the memory of his wife. The lifting of his intense sorrow had provided him with a clearer mind with which he was able to relocate her in his life and at some level, come to terms with her in that new role.[110]

Being with those who are no longer able to be there

If we accept Heidegger's view that one of the essential features of our existence is that we are closely connected to those around us, then it is not hard to imagine how the radical removal of an individual from the relationships that he or she was engaged in will have a profound impact on those left behind.[111] If it

[108] Lewis, 39.
[109] Ibid.
[110] I want to note here that the reinvention or relocation of the deceased in their new role in the lives of mourners is not the point at which the mourner no longer mourns or no longer pines to experience the individual again. I believe that for some people this pining will always exist, at some level, it is simply the best that the mourner can do in order to keep the deceased with them. This is by no means the end of mourning. Simply one step in the exhausting process of living in a world in which the deceased is not present.
[111] I assume this claim without thoroughly justifying it, however, given the social nature of human beings, I don't find thins a particularly contentious claim. Heidegger is certainly not the only

were the case that we could simply detach the feelings and attachments that we had to certain individuals, and reattach or reinvest those feelings and attachments in someone or something else, then the attachments themselves couldn't have been that significant to begin with. And most people engaged in relationships with others would disagree with that.

C.S Lewis highlights the significance of these relationships and in impact of the loss of this attachment. When describing the initial response to the separation he feels from his wife Lewis states, "We were setting out on different roads. This cold truth, this terrible traffic-regulation ('You, Madam, to the right – you, Sir, to the left') is just the beginning of the separation which is death itself. And this separation I suppose, waits for us all."[112] The separation that Lewis refers to here highlights both the significance of the loss and the impact that the absence has. It becomes clear here, that this kind of relationship cannot simply be reinvested in another person or object.

Of all the human experiences, the death of someone you love, while the most certain, is also the most tragic. It is a loss that brings us face to face with the possibility of the impossibility of the self. We cannot fathom what the absolute annihilation of self is. It is impossible for us to imagine a world in which we don't exist. We are first-person observers and we cannot remove that perspective and maintain a purely objective view of the world.

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philosopher who assumes that a fundamental aspect of our existence is that we are in the world with others.

[112] Lewis, 14.

We are often forced, however, to live a life without individuals who, prior to their death, we could not imagine our lives without. Unlike the death of the self, however, when the death of another happens we are brutally forced to deal with the void that that individual's death has made in our lives. Grief is the realization and the reaction to the death, and mourning is the practice we engage in to overcome the debilitating sadness that overwhelms us.

Grief is a great divider of people because those who have experienced it have joined the club that no one wishes to join, the group of people who can understand the severity of that kind of loss, and those who do not belong to the club simply cannot grasp it with any true understanding. The cultural practices highlighted by Ashenburg, the feelings expressed by the children in the child bereavement study, as well as the recollections made by Lewis all identify similar modes of grief. They also showcase a number of different mourning practices to deal with that grief.

Ultimately grief is a multifaceted human experience that expresses itself in a multitude of ways. The mourning practices that individuals employ in order to handle their grief are as varied as the expressions of grief itself. While particular practices may be adopted and endorsed by particular cultures, this does not mean that these mourning practices are "correct" or even, for that matter, any more effective than others. For some individuals grief must be expressed, for others it needn't. For some mourning is best served in solitude, for others in company.

Whatever our methods of mourning are, they are our response to a radical change in our lives, a change perpetrated by the loss of someone whose existence was uniquely intertwined with ours and without whom our lives will be radically different. Even when this individual is no longer with us, his or her death does not remove who he or she was or the role he or she filled prior to his or her death. Our mourning practices must ultimately seek to relocate that individual in our lives such that we are still able to be “with” him or her.

CHAPTER THREE

A HEIDEGGERIAN CONCEPTION OF MOURNING

The Ethical Dimensions of Death

As I have shown, the current literature has confused us about how we should feel and respond to the deaths of other people. Kubler-Ross suggests that we should go through specific emotional states to respond to the death of others, just as we would in preparation for our own death. Davis Konigsburg argues against this claim and insists rather that mourning needn't be a lengthy, involved process and instead can be swift and simple if the mourners wish it to be so.

This contrast in opinions is disconcerting at the very least and points to a deep-seated confusion about the nature of our grieving processes. Given the claims I have offered above and the divide shown in the arguments made by theorists, we can see that our entire approach to the process of mourning must be re-thought.

These confused theories about grief and mourning point to a broader problem: a misconception of how we should feel about death more generally as a larger society; and, more personally, how we should feel about our own mortality.

This fundamental confusion is further evidenced by the ethical literature on death and dying.[113] In his book, *The Troubled Dream of Life*, Daniel Callahan argues that advancements made by modern medicine have negatively transformed the way we think about dying. He argues that with the technology now available to prolong life, we have deformed our deaths to such an extent that they have become "wild". Callahan uses the term "wild" to contrast with the "tame death" of early modern times. As explained by Philippe Aries in *The Hour of Our Death* the tame death is characterized by an awareness that it is coming, by a recognition that it is an act of nature and it is accepted with resignation.[114] According to Aries, a tame death has three features: it is familiar, simple, and public. It was familiar in the sense that it occurred to people of varying ages and was a more routine part of life. It was simple in that the circumstances surrounding the death were not complex and rather than happening in the hospital happened at home with family. It was Public in that it was an event that was not exclusive to the family but was rather an event participated in and performed by the public.

Callahan claims that with the advent of modern medicine we have attempted to subordinate death to our will by demanding that we should die on terms that we decide. He maintains that we have attempted to prolong life by taking control of our medical treatments to such an extent that death happens

[113] While my focus in this thesis is not on the ethical or moral aspects of death I think it is pertinent to at least mention this literature in passing as it represents the most focused on literature on death and dying. It also further illustrates my claim that all current literature surrounding death and dying is conflicting.

usually only when all life saving measures have been exhausted and usually only once people have lost most of their faculties. He also claims that as a result of much of this technology we can no longer distinguish merely being ill from dying because until all possible options fail, we refuse to 'give up the ghost' and accept that someone is dying. Technical advancements have enabled us to 'manage' death rather than recognizing it as something natural, and as an event that is destined to occur.

In *Aging, Death, and Human Longevity*, Christine Overall argues for the opposite claim than the one that Callahan endorses. Overall claims that on the topic of end-of-life ethics there are primarily two positions: apologism, which maintains that our lives are long enough and that attempts to stave off death are misguided; and prolongevitism, which maintains that we would benefit from and it is not unreasonable to want, a longer life span. Overall categorizes Callahan with the apologists, while she endorses a prolongevist position

Overall examines both positions and concludes that an apologist position has unacceptable consequences for individuals. She maintains that death is an evil that robs individuals of all possibilities of experiencing life. For this reason it is only natural that we should fear death and wish to extend our lives as long as possible. She maintains that the loss of experiencing is particularly harmful for those individuals who are not afforded the same opportunities as others; for example, she claims that individuals in marginalized groups are often robbed of more experiences as a result of their disadvantaged position. Overall believes

that for this reason it is valuable goal to attempt to prolong the lives of individuals so that they may have an opportunity to experience things that a shorter life would not afford them.

Both Callahan and Overall offer compelling arguments for their conclusions about death, and both positions may have merits. They are, however, undeniably opposed to one another. This opposition shows that in addition to being confused about the nature and process of grief and the appropriate response to the death of others, we are also fundamentally perplexed about how we should feel about our own death. We are unsure whether we should fear it or embrace it, and whether we should wish to live longer or merely accept death when it comes, with resignation.

While the ethical questions surrounding death are peripheral to those of grief and mourning and secondary to the fundamental questions that Heidegger asks regarding the significance of death and its impact on the living, they emphasize the problematic nature of death and show that it extends to all aspects of our inquiry into the meaning of death.

Heidegger Contra Traditional Death Literature

What is particularly interesting about what Heidegger says about our experience of grief is that it flies in the face of most of the traditional literature[115]

[115] By traditional literature I am referring to authors such as Kubler-Ross and others who, while they differ in their understanding of death and grief all maintain that there are specific modes of grieving. Heidegger contrarily, investigates the human experience of mourning to determine what insight this experience can provide to the human experience more generally.

on death and dying. Heidegger's descriptions of the way we deal with the prospect of our own morality and the experience of the mortality of others is entirely different from those proposed by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and others, who maintain that there tend to be specific modes of grieving. Heidegger, on the other hand, makes no such claims about the way we deal with the death of others. Rather, he examines the role that death plays in our lives more generally and questions what insight that might provide into our experience of the death of others.[116]

Heidegger's account of the way we die and the way we deal with the impending inevitability of our own death and the deaths of others is contrary to the claim that Kubler-Ross puts forward in her book *On Death and Dying* and later in *On Grief and Grieving*. She maintains that grief over one's impending death and the death of others follows five specific stages, and she argues further that these five stages associated with preparing for one's own death are transferable to the experience of the death of another. According to Heidegger, how people deal with the death of others is intimately connected to how we view our own mortality; it is not, however, something that can be prescribed. Heidegger also acknowledges that while these two experiences are connected to one another, they are entirely different experiences, as he notes that we can only ever be there alongside the individual who is dying, and this is distinctly different from the experience that the dying person has.

[116] BT 281 H. 238.

Kubler-Ross argues that the five stages of death and grief are fluid, but they are the foundational elements of the grieving process and as such most, if not all, mourners pass through denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Heidegger's account does not presume that all or even most mourners pass through any such stages; rather, he believes that the relationship between the deceased and those who are left behind, as well as the authenticity of the individual (as it speaks to their appreciation of their own death), will affect the way that people grieve the loss.

Heidegger's account of death and grief also disagrees with the slightly unusual position put forward by Ruth Davis Konigsburg, which maintains that rather than putting too little emphasis on death (as Kubler-Ross argues), our current Western culture places too much emphasis on it. She argues that we emphasize the mourning process to such an extent that mourners are made to feel cold and uncaring if they do not feel a particular way for a particular period of time. Davis Konigsburg focuses primarily on widows, noting that they are encouraged to mourn for their husbands for the remainder of their lives. Those who re-marry early after the death of a spouse may even be assumed to have loved their husbands less than they ought to have. Davis Konigsburg's book *The Truth about Grief* is designed as an attack against Kubler-Ross's often uncritically followed model and seeks to unmask what she believes to be a false and misleading account of grief.

The inconsistency that exists in all areas of investigation into the meaning and ethical and moral aspects of death, points to a deeper problem. If, as a society, we are unsure of how we should feel about the nature and circumstances of death, and we are fundamentally and profoundly confused about the appropriate response to the deaths of others, perhaps the problem is less one of identifying which of these theories offers the most comprehensive answer, than it is recognizing that such an answer may be neither possible, nor necessary.

As noted above, in *Being and Time* Heidegger emphasizes the perplexities of our existence and states that rather than seek to provide superficial answers to all of these complex aspects, we ought rather to engage these questions in a meaningful way. Engaging with these questions involves considering what insight these perplexities can provide in and of themselves rather than attempting to resolve them. For some, this undoubtedly seems like lazy philosophy. However, when it becomes clear, as I hope it has, that the methods we have employed thus far have proven fruitless, and have, it seems, further confused us and only led us astray, it seems only logical to attempt to look at the problem through a different lens and from a different angle.

The Heideggerian approach I am proposing here, and the one that has been the aim of this thesis to illuminate, is one which focuses on examining the impact that death has on us as Dasein, and rather than attempt to provide answers to the questions that thus far we have been unable to answer, instead

engage in a meaningful way with the questions that arise as a result of this investigation.

As mentioned above, whether or not individuals are culturally directed in their mourning or not, we do mourn[117], and when left to our own devices we develop for ourselves meaningful ways of remembering and memorializing our dead. This suggests, that, as Heidegger proposed, we "always already" have some concept of what death means for us as beings who are uniquely and complexly connected to one another. The concept of death that we "always already" have is something that is not readily available for examination, but is something that we seem to make use of without being entirely aware that it is there.

Heidegger examines death in the role it plays in our lives. He examines this from the perspective of individuals facing their own death and from those experiencing the loss associated with the death of another. Heidegger identifies the responses individuals typically have when experiencing the death of another but he does not attempt to explain why these behaviours take place or which among them offer the most support for the bereaved. This is, I believe, because no such truth exists. If the accounts that I have surveyed of mourners have anything to offer to this investigation it is, at the very least, proof that no one mourning practice is any more effective than another, and above all else, that

[117] While it could be argued that not everyone mourns, the literature suggests, and I maintain that while mourning takes on a variety of forms, everyone deals with the death of another by way of some kind of mourning practice.

individuals must mourn the loss the best way they see fit, how they choose to do so is coloured by how they nurture their relationship with the deceased in life.

To understand the full force of what Heidegger has to offer to the questions surrounding death and the human experience of it, it is best to examine his contribution in light of the personal accounts of death and mourning that have been a large focus of this thesis thus far. In this final chapter I show that the personal accounts described by the children in Worden's study, as well as the personal experience described by C.S Lewis, and the cultural traditions described by Ashenburg are closely connected to the descriptions of death and mourning in *Being and Time*. I believe that while Heidegger's account of mourning is opposed to the accounts of mourning described by Kubler-Ross and others, it is closely connected to the accounts we get from examining the experience of mourners.

Dispelling the Myth of "Letting Go"

Worden's study was conducted on 125 children from 70 families, aged 6 to 17, in the two year period following the death of a parent. The deaths ranged from natural and accidental to suicide and homicide. Among the most striking observations made by Worden and his team, is that children maintain an ongoing relationship with their dead parent. The fourth of the "tasks" children tend to

engage in after the death of a parent involves the children "finding a new and appropriate place for the dead in one's emotional life."[118]

This process as identified by Silverman (1992)[119] has five dimensions: 1 making an effort to locate the deceased; 2 experiencing the deceased; 3 reaching out for a connection; 4 remembering the deceased; and 5 attaching to the deceased through transitional objects.[120] Children typically "located" the deceased in heaven, though some identified a more abstract, unnamed place, yet still choosing a specific location. Children also continued to experience the deceased, often feeling watched by their dead parent, and endowing them with attributes of the living, such as hearing, seeing, and feeling.[121] Children also experienced the deceased in their dreams.

According to Worden, children also reached out to the deceased, sometimes speaking to their dead parent. He notes that since the cemetery is the last earthly contact we have with the dead, often the children went there to speak to their dead parent. Some children even fe

lt that their parents were able to respond to them, though how they did and what their responses were often vague.

[118] Worden, 26. See Worden, 1991. I think it is important to note here that while Worden may have hypothesized how the children would have responded, his observations did not presuppose much about the children's individual grieving processes. Some of his observations were surprising to even his staff and while some of the children responded as expected many of the children responded much differently than expected.
[119] As noted by Worden.
[120] Worden, 27.
[121] Worden, 29.

Interestingly, Worden also realizes that children attach to their dead parent through what he refers to as “transitional objects”. These are traditionally items that belonged to the dead parent. The behaviours exhibited by the children in Worden’s study are closely connected to many of the behaviours and cultural and religious traditions Ashenburg discovered. Ashenburg also notes that hair has historically played an important role as a keepsake through various cultures because it was something that came from the body and associated with the personality.[122]

According to Ashenburg, most if not all cultures have endorsed some kind of keepsake of the deceased, while they have taken many forms, “momento moris” (a reminder that death comes to all) have always existed. Most interestingly, in our western culture, is the above-mentioned story of the Vancouver family who kept their son’s room intact for a number of years so their daughter and son’s friends could use it as a gathering place.

Ashenburg’s observations show that it is not only children who attach to the deceased through objects; indeed, it is a commonly practiced element of the grieving process. This is not the only similarity, however, between Worden’s and Ashenburg’s analysis, though the others are admittedly more subtle. Ashenburg also shows that culturally we tend to locate the deceased in a specific place, which is, of course, most obvious in the religious traditions which subscribe to the idea of heaven and emphasize an afterlife. As Todd May notes, our belief in an

[122] Ashenburg, 251.

afterlife is one of the ways that we cope with the possibility of our death and the deaths of others:

> Take the standard view of Christianity. When you die, you are assigned to heaven or hell (or in some cases purgatory) based on the life you've lived... In having an afterlife, you survive your own death. It's not just the survival that is the point here. It's also that it is *you* who survives it... The upshot of this is that there is a continuity between three stages of your existence. The first stage is your existence here on this earth, your life in the mundane sense. The second is your existence after you die but before you are judged. The third is your existence after you are judged.[123]

As May shows, the concept of locating the deceased in a specific place is neither new nor specific to the children in Worden's study. As a culture we have consistently created beliefs and circumstances which allow the deceased to be in a specifically identifiable place, a place where we may imagine them continuing some aspect of life. That this location is in heaven, often presumed to be high above in the sky, is also no coincidence. It enables the bereaved to believe that the life that the deceased has after death involves, if not entirely revolves, around those who remain. This is ultimately what we believe when we talk about the deceased watching over their loved ones from heaven.

Adults also experience the deceased. However this is more readily evidenced in personal accounts than in the broader cultural literature. Hannah took specific time out of her daily life in the months after Scott's death and used this time to remember him and their experiences together. While this is slightly

[123] May, 12.

different than the experiencing done by the children in Worden's study, it is no doubt still an attempt by the living to continue to experience their dead loved one.

Ashenburg also found that we exhibit behaviours and develop practices identifiable as reaching out for a connection to the dead. Ashenburg notes that prior to the use of funeral homes the deceased was laid out at home in the parlour for the time between the death and the funeral. It was often during this time that individuals tended to speak to the deceased. The time after the death but before the funeral offers an opportunity for those who remain to say good-bye to the deceased and make any final reconciliation, as Ashenburg notes:

> In the case of difficult relationships, death apparently ends the possibility of resolution. But just as people often ask a corpse for forgiveness, they sometimes make one last, post-mortem attempt at reconciliation. That too is a kind of transition. The dead body is no longer the other person in the relationship, but it still looks like that person. And it may "listen" better than the person could in life.[124]

While openly talking to a dead loved one is, in today society, less acceptable, the evidence suggests that humans do still have an urge to connect to the deceased in the way that they did when they were alive. Reaching out to the deceased also exists after the burial.

As Ashenburg notes in "Final Destination", the cemetery has special meaning for the mourners because it is a place they can go to be near the dead and in some sense take care of them as they did in life. She refers to the Fingland family, who consistently visited their son's grave, decorating it for

[124] Ashenburg, 15.

various holidays and maintaining it. While some individuals viewed this behaviour as unusual, the Finglands insisted that it is simply a continuation of the care they showed for their son in life.[125] Regardless of whether this is normal or abnormal, it is most certainly an example of reaching out to connect with the deceased.

The evidence that individuals remember the deceased is much easier to come by and is much less contentious. Few people would argue that after loved ones die we simply forget about them. When loved ones die we continually find ways to remember them. While in modern western culture we do not typically engage in lengthy mourning, it is still quite common to keep pictures of our dead loved ones and tell stories about their lives as a way of remembering who they were and the contributions they made to our lives. The example Ashenburg provides of Hannah choosing to go to a coffee shop once a week with a photo album full of photos of Scott and to sit there for a period and dedicate that time to remembering him is one of the specific ways in which we can actively choose to remember the dead. Even without this active trying, however, our actions show how we continually remember those who we love, and who die and leave us behind. The primary focus of Lewis's book *A Grief Observed* is how the memories of his wife pervade every aspect of his life. This is of course more prominent in the initial months after the death, but her memory persists over time.

[125] Ashenburg, 113.

The way we remember the deceased differs, but that we remember them is an undeniable fact.

These personal accounts show that the suggestion that those who remain "let go" of the deceased and the pain associated with the loss after time is mistaken. As Heidegger wrote:

> In such Being-with the dead, the deceased *himself* is no longer factically 'there'. However, when we speak of "Being-with", we always have in view Being with one another in the same world. The deceased has abandoned our '*world*' and left it behind. But *in terms of that world* those who remain can still *be with him*.[126]

There is no doubt than when those we care about die we lose much of the relationship we had with them in life. We are no longer able to carry on conversations with that person, or communicate in any way and have them actually respond. They no longer exist as physical beings and as such we cannot watch them age as we do, or see them accomplish new things. This, however, does not mean that our relationship with that person is over. As I have shown with the personal accounts of mourners, the relationship we have with those who die undeniably changes, but some kind of relationship persists[127].

As Heidegger explains it, in death we lose something about us that makes us Dasein, and as such the relationship we have with the deceased is with a

[126] BT, 282. H, 238.

[127] While the relationship cannot be an interactive one, the relationship itself does persist and is not illusory. The relationship persists through the memories that those who remain have of the deceased and in how the absence of the deceased structures the lives of those who remain. In this way the deceased is "still with" the living.

being, that is no longer Dasein but is "'still more' than just an item of equipment, environmentally ready to hand, about which one can be concerned."[128] This distinguishes our relationship with the dead from our relationship everyday items in our world. As previously mentioned, according to Heidegger we relate to objects around us with concern and we relate to other people with solicitude. Though our relationship with the dead is a different one than with the living, it has characteristics that more closely resemble our relationship with living beings than our relationship with things. As Heidegger states further, "In tarrying alongside him in their mourning and commemoration, those who have remained behind are with him, in a mode of respectful solicitude . Thus the relationship-of-Being which on has towards the dead is not to be taken as a concernful Being-alongside something ready-to-hand."[129]

Our relationship with the dead, then, persists not because of an unhealthy attachment or an inability to get over the hurt of the loss, but rather, because the relationships people have with one another are distinct from the relationships we have with any other thing, and as such when others die, we can no longer relate to them as to someone alive, but we can relate to them as still more than a mere object, as someone we cared about in life and remember in death. In doing this those who are left behind maintain an altered but meaningful relationship with the dead, one that is founded upon the relationship they had in life. As Ashenburg writes, "Because the dead are still dead, and will always be dead, our relationship

[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.

with that fact and with them goes on forever. Sometimes the relationship seems to persist almost unchanged over many years."[130]

Like the claim that individuals must eventually let go of the deceased, the assumption that individuals in time get over the loss is an unfortunate misconception. These two mistaken claims, while closely connected, refer to two separate and distinct claims letting go of the deceased, which I have just discussed, and getting over the loss, which I will focus on now.

Dispelling the Myth of "Getting Over It"

Despite the claims made by Kubler-Ross and Davis Konigsburg, that in time individuals begin to heal from the sadness of the loss and "get over" it, the accounts of mourners disagree. Rather, they suggest that the process of grieving the death of a loved one alters your existence permanently. While life may return to normal in the sense that regular activities resume and life begins to make some sense again, the life you had prior to the death of someone you cared about is not the same life you live after the death. Since our experiences shape who we are, it seems logical that this kind of experience would alter our existence.

According to C.S. Lewis, in his book *A Grief Observed*, while the hurt may lessen with time, it will not lessen to the extent that it is forgotten. In describing the impact that his wife's absence had on his life in the months after her death,

[130] Ashenburg, 288.

Lewis remarks: “The act of living is different all through. Her absence is like the sky, spread over everything.”[131] While he makes this claim to show that her absence was not especially painful in one situation or another, but rather in every aspect, it also points to the longevity that pain associated with this absence can have. If, in every aspect of your life, you are reminded that your loved one is no longer with you, this is not something you are likely to get over. Your life, which was largely characterized by the relationship that you shared with that person, is entirely different from a life that is characterized by the absence of that person.

As Heidegger states, “Dasein is essentially Being with others... The kind of Being which Dasein possesses [is] Being with one another.”[132] Given that our existence is founded largely upon the fact that we exist with others in the world and, as a result, develop strong relationships with those people, it seems natural that the removal of others by death will alter the life of those left behind, and not merely for a time, but rather for the remainder of their lives. This is not to say that the pain of the loss will last forever, but rather that just as the existence of that person in our lives altered how we chose to exist in the world, the removal of that person from our world will alter it as well.

Perhaps the most poignant claim that Lewis makes with regard to the significance and longevity of grief is his comparison of it to an amputation:

> To say the patient is getting over it after an operation for appendicitis is one thing; after he’s had his leg off it is quite

[131] Lewis, 30.
[132] BT, 281. H, 237.

> another. After that operation either the wounded stump heals or the man dies. If it heals, the fierce, continuous pain will stop... He has 'got over it'. But... he will always be a one-legged man. There will hardly be any moment when he forgets it. Bathing, dressing, sitting down and getting up again, even lying in bed, will all be different. His whole way of life will be changed. At present I am learning to get about on crutches. Perhaps I shall presently be given a wooden leg. But I shall never be a biped again.[133]

I believe this analogy is extremely apt. The comparison of the mourner to the amputee shows just how uniquely the experience of mourning affects those who are forced to endure it. It also shows the lasting effect that grief has on those who are left behind.

Lewis acknowledges that with the passage of time the bereaved begins to 'feel better'. This, however, is not equal to 'getting over' the loss that those who are left behind have suffered. As I have shown, when people lose someone close to them, their life is structured by that death, as it was structured by the deceased in life. The woman who identified with being a wife now identifies as being the widow, the husband the widower, and the child the orphan.

The roles that define how these individuals self-identify are dependent on the individuals who are obliged to play those roles. The wife is only a wife if she has a husband, and a son or daughter is a son and daughter of his or her parents. These roles are altered when the counterparts die. However, they are altered in a way that does not dissolve the roles as though they never existed, but rather alters the identity of the individual to indicate how the relationship has

[133]Lewis, 45-46.

changed. The wife becomes the widow, the husband the widower, and the child the orphan. When her husband dies, the wife does not revert to the person she was prior to becoming a wife; rather, she becomes the widow, the woman whose husband has died. The son or daughter becomes an orphan for the same reason. From that point on their lives will be characterized by fact that a parent has died.[134]

The significance of this change is extremely important because it highlights not only how the relationship is altered, but also, how the individual's experience of the world will be forever altered. When a woman becomes a wife her life is altered by that relationship, she will never again be unmarried even when her husband dies, instead she becomes the woman whose husband has died and her experiences of the world will reflect that change. As the man who has his leg amputated is aware of the fact that he will never again be a biped, so too the widow and orphan will never again be the wife or the child of a living parent.[135] Thus, the distinction made between healing from an operation for appendicitis and healing from an amputation is an apt comparison because it illustrates how one may heal from the tragedies associated with experiencing the death of other, but that the loss will remain with them throughout the rest of her life.

[134] This is particularly noticeable in children as the status of "orphan" carries with it a particular shock and awe value that other terms lack, this, I believe, is the result of the tragedy associated with experiencing such a tragic event, and losing someone so important at such a young age.
[135] While I am aware that widows remarry, it is true that the widow will never again be the wife of her deceased husband.

Heidegger does not explicitly state that the loss suffered by those who are left behind will remain with them. But, given his understanding of who we are, and the importance he sees our relationships with others as having for our lives, it strikes me as a logical progression and not a foolish leap to assume that the role that others have in the fundamental constitution of our existence is one that cannot be destroyed by death. It is something that is undoubtedly altered when the relationship changes into one with another Dasein to one with a Being no longer in this world. While the deceased may no longer be an active participant in our lives, we are able to maintain them as passive participants through remembering the deceased and by "tarrying alongside him in our mourning and commemoration."[136]

Falsifying the Emotional Stages of Grief

Thus far I have focused on what the personal accounts of grief and mourning have to show about the experience of the death of others. I would now like to highlight some of what the personal accounts lack in order to show some of the misconceptions in much of the psychological and philosophical literature to date.

As I have shown, the five stages of death as articulated by Kubler-Ross are tenuous at best, when applied to the experience of grieving. Few, if any, of the individuals whose personal experiences I have described mention

[136] Bt, 289. H, 238.

experiencing any, let alone all, of these symptoms. As Davis Konigsburg aptly notes, the application of these five stages to grief, rather than in preparation for one's own death was a secondary observation. When speaking to Kubler-Ross's co-author of *On Grief and Grieving*, David Kessler, Davis Konigsburg asked what additional research had been done to connect the five stages to grief, Kessler notes:

> She didn't make a distinction between one's own dying and grieving the loss of someone else, because dying is grieving itself. It's grieving the life you're never going to have. She saw them as fluid.[137]

While the experience of preparing for one's own death might be described as grieving the life you are never going to have, that kind of grief is distinct from grieving the loss of someone else.

Heidegger acknowledges that the two experiences, while connected, are entirely different and do not engage individuals in the same way. In preparing for one's own death an individual must ponder what it will be like to no longer be able to be here.[138] In dealing with the death of another an individual must adjust to a world in which their loved one is no longer able to be there.

> The authentic Being come-to-an-end [*Zuendegekommensein*] of the deceased is precisely the sort of thing which we do not experience. Death does indeed reveal itself as a loss, but a loss such as experienced by those who remain. In suffering this loss,

[137] Davis Konigsburg, 9.
[138] Paul Edwards argues, contra Heidegger, that the assumption that we cannot imagine what it will be like to be dead is unfounded and that it might actually be possible to imagine what it would be like. While I disagree, I do not take issue with this here, rather, my focus is on distinguishing what it would be like to ponder one's own death from experiencing the death of another.

> however, we have no way of access to the loss-of-Being as such which the dying man 'suffers'.[139]

Here Heidegger distinguishes between experiencing one's own death and experiencing the death of another. The loss one suffers as a result of the death of another provides no insight into the death of oneself – the loss is simply incomparable. Contrary to Kubler-Ross's claim, the grief of one's own loss of life and grief over the loss of another are not fluid. They are entirely distinct experiences, each offering its own insight into the human condition, but not providing insight into the other experience. The death of another does not provide insight into the death of the self and the death of the self is not suffered the same way as the death of another.

Another common misconception and a point of contention surrounding Heidegger's account of death revolves around the relationship between dying and grieving. This is the claim, which I will turn my focus to now, that when individuals die, they always die alone.

The Truth of Dying Alone

In *Being and Time* Heidegger claims that when people die they always die alone. Paul Edwards takes issue with this assertion, claiming that when people die surrounded by family support and love we cannot say that they have died alone. He maintains that unless one is physically alone one cannot be said to die alone. He argues that the way Heidegger and other existentialists have used the

[139] BT 282. H, 239.

term 'alone' in this context is ambiguous.[140] While this accusation may not be entirely baseless, when examined in light of the other claims Heidegger has made with regard to death and grief Heidegger's usage of the term seems clearer. As mentioned above, Heidegger is careful to distinguish between the experience of dying and the experience of the death of others, and as I just showed, neither experience provides insight into the other. Heidegger maintains that it is simply impossible to have any concept of what it is like to die. The loss suffered by those who remain is entirely different. So while it might be the case that an individual dies surrounded by family love and support, there is still a sense in which that individual is alone. This is true in the most obvious sense at the moment that the individual dies, the 'point of transition,' if it can be described in such a way', as well as during the period leading up to the death, when the individual is dying and those around him are not[141]. He is having an entirely different experience than those who are around him. This experience, as experienced by the mourner, is most aptly described by C.S Lewis when he writes:

> We were setting out on different roads. This cold truth, this terrible traffic regulation ('You, Madam, to the right – you Sir, to the left') is just the beginning of the separation which is death itself. And this separation, I suppose, waits for us all.[142]

[140] Edwards in *Philosophy and Death*, 29.

[141] While there may be other experiences which are private I do not believe that there are other experiences which are so irrevocably private. This becomes more obvious when viewed in light of the fact that death involves a transition to a being no longer able to be there and that this is something that no living being can have any understanding of.

[142] Lewis, 14.

To claim that this separation happens instantaneously, and that when someone dies surrounded by family and friends they are not alone, that it is only when they are dead that they are alone, misunderstands the nature of the relationships individuals have with one another. Such a claim is also not confirmed by the behaviours exhibited by the bereaved. If this is what we truly believed, would we continue to care for the dead after they have died?

Paul Edwards takes issue with this claim made by Heidegger in, I believe, a very superficial way. He claims that the use of the term "alone" while never used by Heidegger, but used by other Heideggerian's writing in English holds true to what Heidegger is referring to when he claims that death is a "non-relational possibility".[143] The assumption that Heidegger is referring to the physical state of one's dying fails to recognize the depth of the significance death has on our lives and is based on a superficial reading of *Being and Time*.

The inaccuracy of this accusation becomes clearer when we examine a section of Being and Time in which Heidegger emphasizes the non-relational possibility of death,

> The non-relational character of death, as understood in anticipation, individualizes Dasein down to itself. This individualizing is a way in which the 'there' is disclosed for existence. It makes manifest that all Being-alongside the things with which we concern ourselves, and all Being-with Others, will fail us when our ownmost potentiality-for-Being is the issue.[144]

[143] Edwards, *Heidegger and Death*, 6.
[144] BT 308. H 263.

Here is becomes clear that when Heidegger refers to death as non-relational he does not mean that that the process of our dying happens when we are alone. The difference here is the difference between claiming that we alone die our own deaths and claiming that we die alone. This claim is closely related to Heidegger's claim that no one can take another's dying away from him or her. It is not inaccurate then, to claim that death is non-relational and that in dying a person must do so alone.

In this chapter I have identified some of the ways that the traditional literature is in conflict and I have shown how this conflict points to a more deeply rooted confusion concerning the human experience of death. While peripheral to the focus of this thesis I examined how the ethical literature concerning what we should think about our death is also in conflict. Christine Overall and Daniel Callahan have contrasting opinions on how individuals should feel about their own death. Overall who argues that it is a legitimate and worthwhile desire to have a longer life, and Callahan who claims that our lives are long enough and the wish to extend our lives serves only to dehumanize and institutionalize our dying.

Similarly, Kubler-Ross and Davis Konigsburg are in direct conflict with one another with regard to the nature and duration of grief. Kubler-Ross maintains that grief over the death of another and grief about one's own impending death is, in effect, the same experience and as such follows the five stages of grief. Davis Konigsburg contrarily maintains that applying the five stages of grief is inaccurate

and only serves to alienate the large groups of individuals who do not identify with this process of grieving.

I have also identified how Heidegger's conception of death, which sees it as an essential aspect of our existence and his conception of grief which examines the experience of death in light of the relationships we have with others and the impact of our dying on our experience of the world more generally.

In addition, I have illustrated within this chapter that the experiences of mourning as described by mourners do not coincide with the experience as described by either Kubler-Ross or Davis Konigsburg. Instead these experiences emphasize the superficial nature of these claims. Mourners do not experience a "letting go" of the deceased. Nor do they experience anything related to "getting over" the loss. Instead mourns find that the loss of someone impacts their existence much the way their life had.

Lastly, I have attempted to show the validity to Heidegger's claim that all people must alone die their own death. While this particular claim seems fairly easy to refute, this is because refutations of this claim hinge on a conception of alone that fails to understand the depth of Heidegger's understanding of death and the role it plays in our lives more generally.

Conclusion

I have been arguing that our current models for grief and mourning fail to capture the true nature of the experience. I maintain that they miss some of the fundamental aspects of the human condition and fail to grasp the significance of human relationships. As a result, their conception of how we grieve misses the mark. I have also argued that Martin Heidegger's unique understanding of both death and human relationships provides him with a conception of grief that more accurately reflects the experience itself.

The intention of this project has been to highlight the extremely complex nature of the human experience of grieving and to illustrate the problems associated with our cultural attempts to compartmentalize it. I have highlighted the disconnect between the traditional death and grief literature, spearheaded by psychologist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and the actual experiences of mourners as illustrated by Katherine Ashenburg, William Worden, C.S Lewis and others. I have shown that in addition to the disconnect between the literature and the experiences, there are also wide ranges in the ways that mourners grieve.

Heidegger's understanding of mourning and grief derive from his complex understanding of the human experience and his belief that our own death and our relationships with others are a fundamental aspect of our existence. Given Heidegger's understanding of our existence as Being-towards-death and Being-with-others it is a natural progression in his thought that the deaths of others will have a profound and lasting impact on our lives. In *Being and Time* Heidegger

makes no attempt to prescribe an appropriate mode of grief, nor does he attempt to define or compartmentalize the experience. Instead, Heidegger identifies the role that death and the role that the relationships we have with others play in our lives more generally and from that he determines the impact that the death of others will have on our lives.

Heidegger's approach to death and mourning more accurately represents the human experience than does the traditional literature on grief. There are several aspects of the human experience of mourning that illustrate how accurate Heidegger's understanding of mourning is. Mourners experience the deceased after death, often carry mementos, sometimes indefinitely, and most strikingly they do not seem to get over the loss, instead the loss of the deceased shapes the lives of the living in the same way the existence of the deceased shaped their lives while alive.

Perhaps the most poignant and unusual claim that Heidegger makes that is echoed by mourners is that those who remain can still continue to have a relationship with the deceased. As Heidegger claims, those who are left behind "can still be with him". This claim flies in the face of the traditional literature which functions on the belief that the remaining individuals let go of the deceased and learn to live without them. Heidegger is aware of the unique relationships people share with one another and knows that the radical removal of one person from a relationship will have a lasting effect on those who remain. As such he maintains that the being who has died, while no longer a Dasein, is still something more

than a mere item of equipment with which we interact. As such, we can still relate to the dead individual in a way that is different from the way we interact with other “things” in the world around us.

I have argued further that Heidegger’s conception of authentic vs. inauthentic modes of existing impact the way one grieves. Just as one can inauthentically comport themselves toward the world such that they fail to own their own death and instead attribute death to some unknown “one”, so too can one inauthentically engage with mourning if they fail to acknowledge the tragic fact that someone they have cared about has died. This is not to say that one way of mourning is more or less authentic than another. As I have shown, Heidegger does not attempt to prescribe particular mourning practices. Rather, what distinguishes authentic and inauthentic mourning is the individual’s ability to acknowledge the death.

Perhaps one of the most compelling insights that Heidegger can provide to death and grief literature is that the problems that we engage with when considering modes and aspects of grief is that there may be no clear answer to this perplexing aspect of our existence. It may in fact be the case that we have to it is impossible to fully comprehend what it means to be human because as long as we are existing we are incomplete and at the moment we might be said to become completed we are simultaneously destroyed.

Perhaps rather than glossing over this real problem as many have, we ought instead, as Heidegger argues, engage with this phenomenon and consider

what insight this perplexing element of our existence itself might offers us in our investigation. We might also then examine the perplexities of grief through the same lens, and, rather than attempting to explain how the process itself ought happen, we can examine the myriad of ways in which it does happen and ask what kind of insight this might provide into the human experience of death and grief. Perhaps the question ought not to be how should we grieve? But rather, what does the fact that we grieve, in the way that we do, show us about what it means to be human? And perhaps the questions and not the answers offer us the most information.

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