



## Grief As Self-Discovery

Reading and Resources

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### Part I. What is Grief?

***How We Grieve: Relearning the World*** by philosopher, Thomas Attig. (Oxford University Press, 2011).

- This text is a philosophically-inclined guide for those reflectively navigating grief for themselves or for loved ones. It is a quick and approachable read with sufficient explanation for the every-day reader who wants to better understand the components of grief and the foundations of its process. He addresses many of the classic models, analyzes their pros and cons, and provides his own model for “healthy” grieving.
- He utilizes several descriptive examples, making the faceted situations of grieving easier to grasp. He also compares “healthy” to “unhealthy” ways of grieving, providing a better understanding of when to check in on a struggling friend or family member.
- In many ways, Attig’s approach inspired my creative synthesis. I borrowed some of his examples in order to depict grief’s presentation. I also expanded on his idea of grieving as “Relearning the World,” by describing not only how grieving affects our relationships towards environments but also how it affects our own identities. He introduces unhealthy grieving as “Extreme grief,” which I re-introduced as “Antigrief,” for clearer discussion and identification. Finally, he described the tension exhibited by social individuals who want care, comfort, and love amidst a sense of abandonment and turmoil; I significantly workshopped this with mentors and repositioned the tension as a “Preconscious” expectation. Whereas Attig addresses the social importance of grieving, I more deeply delved into the individual growth.

**“Taking to Heart: What Choice Do We Have”** by Jennifer Church, *The Monist*, vol. 85. No. 3, pp. 361-380.

- This academic journal article is short (19 pgs) but dense. It is not for the faint of heart (or brain), but it can be understood by all lovers of wisdom, amateur or professional, with a little time and patience. Her examples, particularly about jury members, are relatable and easy to grasp.
- This article describes two ways we utilize knowledge – belief and acceptance. Acceptance, as used by jury members, requires organized arguments with determined conclusions (facts, etc.). Moreover, things we accept can be isolated to particular contexts, like a courtroom, in ways that do not have to impact our lives outside of those contexts. Beliefs, however, are context-invariant; they very much impact our thoughts, emotions, and actions – usually without us being aware of them because they do not require an evaluated argument.
- I applied her description of belief to grief in order to articulate grief’s impact on our world orientation.

**“Pain and Beauty,”** a keynote lecture given by German Gestalt therapist, Frank M. Staemmler, at the Italian Gestalt Therapy Conference in December, 2011. [Article Link](#).

- This lecture is very approachable for those interested in psychological and philosophical perspectives of emotions. It can be easily read in approximately an hour.
- Staemmler’s descriptions of communal versus individual emotions and their relationships to pain and beauty catalyzed my reflections on grief’s unique importance for navigating our personal hopes and expectations.

***The Buddha’s Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love, and Wisdom*** by Rick Hanson, Ph.D. and Richard Mendius, M.D. (New Harbinger Publications, 2009).

- This book is a great foundational text for those curious about the intersection between neuroscience and emotion. It affirms the healing connection between reflecting on particular emotions and experiences in order to strengthen restorative brain pathways.
- The possibility for growth from pain and suffering proposed by this text helped my articulation of Attig’s third component of grief – Pain/Anguish. In a larger way, it also sculpted my approach in that painful (traditionally “negative”) emotions have the potential to be catalysts of great personal growth in a medically corroborated way.

***The Art of Being a Healing Presence*** by grief counselor, James E. Miller. (Willowgreen publishing, 2001).

- This very short but reflective book can be read within two hours. While it could be helpful for anyone to read, it is particularly addressed towards an audience of caregivers or companions of those grieving. It provides an analysis of what it means to be a present space for emotional healing and includes many contemplative quotes for personal reflection.
- This was the first text I read in preparation for the workshop. It contributed to the reflective, emotionally present mindset for how to approach grief in a community of grievers!

**“Hello, this is Automatic Antigrief? What problem can I solve for you today?”** by critical communications professor, Jenna Hanchey. [Article Link](#).

- Published in the scientific journal, *Nature*, this fun piece of speculative fiction made a fascinating entrance into my inbox after I had presented the idea of “Antigrief” to David and Marisa. It only takes 10 minutes to read!
- It is a personal dialogue, presenting a scenario about a daughter who struggles between grieving and ignoring her grief when she can interact with an artificial simulation of her mother!

## **Part II. What does Grief do for us?**

### ***Aristotle’s Physics***

- In Book 1 of *The Physics*, Aristotle introduces the concept of motion as a connection between potentiality and actuality. This inspired my model of **grieving as a motion for processing, moving from potential to actual emotional progress.**

#### **Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" (*Republic*, Book VII)**

- This philosophical icon found yet another application in the experience of grieving! I presented the ascent from the Realm of Becoming into the Realm of Being as a model for understanding the motion of grieving in which philosophers intensely navigate through grief-filled memories and places in order to embrace illuminating self-knowledge and stability.
- Plato's explicit statement about returning to the Cave after experiencing the light developed my model as a continual cycle in which grievers revisit each stage with a slightly new and informed perspective. This was a critical development from Aristotle's concept of motion which does not as explicitly require "return."