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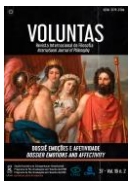

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Entrevista

Experience and Affectivity: An Interview with Matthew Ratcliffe

Experiência e Afetividade: uma entrevista com Matthew Ratcliffe

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1 INTERVIEW INTRODUCTION

Matthew Ratcliffe is Professor of Philosophy at the University of York and one of the leading figures in the contemporary philosophy of emotion, phenomenology, and philosophy of psychiatry. His work has had a major impact on the understanding of affective experience, particularly through his influential theory of existential feelings - a notion that has informed not only philosophical debates but also interdisciplinary research in psychology, psychiatry, and mental health studies. Ratcliffe's books include *Feelings of Being* (2008), *Experiences of Depression* (2015), *Real Hallucinations: Psychiatric Illness, Intentionality and the Interpersonal World* (2017), and *Grief Worlds* (2024), as well as numerous articles on topics ranging from emotional experience and interpersonal understanding to feelings such as hope, loneliness, grief, and trust.

In this written interview, conducted for *Voluntas: Revista Internacional de Filosofia*, Matthew Ratcliffe responds to a series of questions proposed by Flavio Williges and Róbson Ramos dos Reis, both researchers in the philosophy of emotions and affectivity at the Department of Philosophy of the Federal University of Santa Maria, Brazil. The

interview has two main aims: first, to offer an intellectual portrait of Ratcliffe, highlighting his philosophical influences, methodological approach, and personal perspective on his work; and second, to explore the genesis of his central ideas, the development of his thinking, and the broader relevance of his contributions to philosophy and our understanding of mental life and human experience. The conversation touches on Ratcliffe's enduring interest in emotions and affectivity, his investigations into the nature of consciousness and existential feelings, and broader questions concerning the aims of philosophical inquiry and its interdisciplinary potential. The interview was developed in the context of ongoing academic collaboration and reflects a sustained engagement with Ratcliffe's work and its broader philosophical significance.

In this introductory text, we outline the contours of what is arguably the central concept in Ratcliffe's philosophical thought - namely, the notion of *existential feelings*- and offer a brief indication of the most recent directions in his research.

Ratcliffe described existential feelings as affective states that amount to "ways of finding oneself in the world" that permeate and reveal the totality (internal and external; body and mind) of our experience as being in a certain way (Ratcliffe, 2008). Taken this way, existential feelings make up a background for every 'encounter' with entities in the world, both theoretically and practically. As he puts it, as a way of finding oneself in the world, existential feelings do not simply "consist in an experience of being an entity that occupies a spatial and temporal location, alongside a host of other entities". Instead,

> Ways of finding oneself in a world are presupposed spaces of experiential possibility, which shape the various ways in which things can be experienced. For example, if one's sense of the world is tainted by a 'feeling of unreality', this will affect how all objects of perception appear. They are distant, removed, not quite 'there' (Ratcliffe 2005, 47).

These affective orientations form the foundation of Ratcliffe's account of human experience, shaping the pre-intentional structures through which the world is disclosed

to us. The technical term *"existential feeling"* designates a phenomenological category that encompasses a wide variety of instances - many of them described only through metaphorical or bodily expressions, rather than through reference to specific intentional objects. Despite their diversity, existential feelings constitute a sense of reality and belonging that underpins human experience, enabling the differentiation of intentional modalities such as perception, memory, imagination, thought, and belief. Drawing on the phenomenology of horizon-intentionality in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, Ratcliffe proposes that existential feelings are best understood as ways of experiencing types of possibilities. These possibilities are embedded within a universal horizon, dynamically structured by anticipatory and fulfilment patterns that govern how potential experiences unfold. In this sense, existential feelings correspond to distinctive modes of receptivity to possibilities, typified by dimensions such as interpersonality, agency, intersensory perceptuality, and significance.

When this affective background becomes disrupted, such as in cases involving a loss of meaning, a sense of estrangement, or the feeling of not belonging, it is not merely particular contents of experience that are affected, but the very structure that enables the world to appear as familiar, coherent, or significant. As a result, existential feelings are not merely of theoretical interest; they are central to understanding the conditions of possibility for both ordinary and disrupted forms of subjectivity. By shaping the field of possibilities through which experience is structured, they offer a privileged entry point into the comprehension of mental health disorders. Through the phenomenological analysis of such experiential breakdowns, it becomes possible to describe how existential feelings function implicitly as the affective conditions of possibility for being-in-the-world, shaping both how we are involved in the world and how the world is disclosed as a space of potential meaning and action.

Although the concept of existential feelings is arguably Ratcliffe's most influential contribution to the philosophy of emotion and the phenomenology of affectivity, it by no means exhausts the philosophical significance of his work in the affective domain. Ratcliffe has also written extensively about depression (2015), anomalous auditory

experiences (2017), grief (2023), loneliness (2023), trauma (2014), and, more recently, ways in which emotional experience incorporates a sense of self (2024, 2025a, 2025b, 2026).

In his recent work, Matthew Ratcliffe offers a compelling phenomenological account of how emotional experience is intimately bound up with a dynamic, affectively structured sense of self. Departing from conventional frameworks that treat emotions as discrete episodes directed at external objects, Ratcliffe emphasizes that many forms of emotional experience involve a pre-reflective and temporally extended self-relation. According to him, the self is not a static, introspectively accessible entity, but rather a shifting evaluative orientation: a background web of cares, concerns, habits, projects, and interpersonal commitments through which the world is encountered as emotionally significant. Central to this view is the notion that emotional experience is inherently anticipatory and indeterminate. We do not simply feel in reaction to what has already occurred; we feel in relation to what is unfolding, what is unresolved, and what threatens or promises to alter how things matter to us. This anticipatory structure reveals that emotional life often involves not only the evaluation of particular events, but also a more diffuse sense of one's own coherence, vulnerability, and openness to change. Ratcliffe calls attention to forms of affective experience, such as feelings of "something not having sunk in," being "haunted" by the past, or sensing that "one cannot go on as before", that resist easy categorization within the taxonomy of standard emotions or moods. These feelings reflect tensions or instabilities within one's evaluative orientation itself, rather than responses to external events alone.

In this framework, feelings related to the self are not merely emotions *about* the self (such as guilt or pride), but feelings *of* the self, modes of experiencing the self as fragile, disoriented, or in transition. These affective experiences disclose discrepancies between how one has lived and how one is now situated, often surfacing as unresolved traces of past events that continue to exert a disruptive presence. Emotional haunting, in particular, exemplifies this phenomenon. Rather than being reducible to reflective memory or narrative recollection, haunting involves a felt sense that something from

the past remains at odds with one's present orientation. It gestures toward a possible reconfiguration of selfhood, yet one that remains affectively delayed or resisted, often because its integration would destabilize one's current way of being.

Through these analyses, Ratcliffe enriches our understanding of emotional life by foregrounding affective experiences that register the instability and plasticity of the self. His account challenges atomistic models of emotion and instead highlights how emotions are embedded in a temporally unfolding and often fragile self-relation. By attending to how feelings both disclose and destabilize our practical and existential bearings, Ratcliffe offers a novel perspective on the emotional foundations of selfhood, one that is indispensable for grasping how we change, endure, and sometimes falter through time.

In recent years, Ratcliffe's ideas have sparked growing interest across Latin America, especially in Brazil, where his writings are frequently included as required reading in university courses related to philosophy, psychology, and psychiatry. His influence continues to expand, encouraging deeper interdisciplinary dialogues around the experiential structure of emotion and its disruptions.

We hope this exchange offers readers a deeper sense of his intellectual path, the concerns that animate his work, and the broader significance of his contributions to our understanding of emotion, subjectivity, and human experience.

2 INTERVIEW WITH MATTHEW RATCLIFFE

2.1 *What was the philosophical environment like when you were a student? Who were the thinkers that influenced you most?*

My philosophical studies began in October 1991, when I joined Durham University, UK, as an undergraduate student studying for a BA degree in Philosophy and Psychology. At the time, philosophy in the UK was predominantly analytic in approach. And it still is, although there is now more engagement with work in the phenomenological tradition than there was back then. I began studying for my degree during what was supposedly the

"decade of the brain". So, there was a great deal of philosophical and interdisciplinary interest in the topic of consciousness (and also intentionality). I was drawn in by all this, and one of the first philosophical books that I read from cover to cover was Daniel Dennett's *Consciousness Explained*. Dennett's work affected me at the time. Some of his arguments struck me as plausible, but the conclusion they led to was one that I found profoundy unsettling—am I really just the central character in some sort of narrative cooked up by my brain? Looking back, I have a lot of respect for Dennett's work, although I certainly wouldn't endorse that sort of position.

As a student studying both Philosophy and Psychology, I also became interested in cognitive science. As my degree progressed, I knew that I wanted to pursue postgraduate study but felt torn. On the one hand, I was fascinated by the approch of David Marr in his book *Vision* and also found the contrast with J. J. Gibson's ecological approach to perception intriguing. On the other hand, I had fallen in love with Sartrean existentialism and wished there was some way of pursuing both. Eventually, I did find a way, but it took me a while.

2.2 *You've worked extensively on phenomenology, emotions, and existential feelings. What initially drew you to this area?*

Having completed my BA degree at Durham, I studied for an MPhil and then a PhD degree in History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Cambridge. For some reason, I had become interested in the problem of reconciling the existence of apparently *normative* biological functions with a larger scientific picture of the world (something I took to require the rejection of a certain kind of *naturalism*). I spent my MPhil year thinking this was a matter of great importance, so much so that I carried on pursuing the topic as a PhD student. However, during my PhD studies, I also started to explore the phenomenological tradition of philosophy and was increasingly drawn in by it. If I recall correctly, what got me started was someone telling me that Heidegger had some interesting things to say about how we encounter the functionality of things, which might turn out to be relevant to my work on function. (They were referring to a

well-known section of *Being and Time*, where Heidegger introduces the contrast between *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit*). That then led to my discovering Husserl, and subsequently Merleau-Ponty.

Independently of all this, I became interested in Philosophy of Emotion, partly because intellectual interest in emotion was growing rapidly at that time (the late 1990s) and the topic had become quite visible in Philosophy. Around then, I also read Antonio Damasio's book *Descartes' Error* and started to see potential connections with Heidegger's conception of mood. Thinking about these connections then prompted me to consider various forms of anomalous experience, including certain delusions, and how we might cast light on their nature by turning to the phenomenological tradition. A key moment for me was being invited to give a talk to a philosophy group run by psychiatrists at the Maudsley Hospital in London. I discovered then that psychiatrists were also interested in such philosophical issues. Furthermore, it became even clearer to me that phenomenology had a great deal still to offer.

2.3 *How would you describe your philosophical evolution? Were there key moments or figures who shaped your thinking?*

As you can see from my response to your previous question, I never really set out to join the ongoing conversation between phenomenology and psychiatry. From a fairly young age (probably around 16), I knew that I wanted to explore philosophy in my first degree and perhaps beyond. And, by 2005, I had started to settle into the kind of philosophical work that I do now. But, up to that point, my intellectual path was driven by a mixture of interest and contingency. I would move from one thing to another and then—sometimes—come to see connections between areas of enquiry that had initially seemed far apart.

I've been fortunate to have many brilliant philosophical interlocutors over the years. When it came to exploring interactions between phenomenology and cognitive science, my conversations with Shaun Gallagher, Daniel Hutto, and others proved invaluable. I learned a great deal from my participation in meetings of the International

Association for Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences and other events involving the same crowd. In the early 2000s, this area of interdisciplinary research was very new—filled with fresh ideas, novel ways of thinking, and intellectual excitement.

From 2006, I was also fortunate to be involved in a series of projects on emotion and feeling, based in Germany, through which I came to know Achim Stephan, Jan Slaby, and others who were working on emotion and feeling. As for philosophy of psychiatry and the phenomenology of illness, those I have learned a great deal from include Louis Sass, Jennifer Radden, Havi Carel, Fredrik Svenaeus, Joel Krueger, and Rachel Cooper. But there are many, many others that I could mention as well.

Turning to key moments, I would have to single out the day when I stumbled on the idea of "existential feeling". It was something of a *eureka* moment for me, one that I still remember clearly. I had been invited by Giovanna Colombetti (another philosopher from whom I've learned a lot) to write something for a special issue of the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* on the theme of "emotion experience". I remember waking up one Saturday morning with a terrible hangover, having guzzled strong lager in a Durham pub the night before and then drunk a bottle of wine when I got home. Although I felt dislodged from everything and the surrounding world appeared strangely unfamiliar and distant, I realized that I needed to start working on the paper. So, I set off to my office in the Durham Philosophy Department, my head pounding and my world suffused with a sense of guilt, menace, and unreality.

My initial idea for the paper was to challenge the view that bodily feelings can have only the body as their object. I wanted to argue that we also have a more pervasive felt relationship with the world as a whole. I thought that a good title for this would be "The Feeling of Being" but worried that someone else might already have come up with it. So I typed those words into Google in order to check and was immediately struck by the diversity of "feelings" that then appeared on the screen before me. The majority of these seemed to be variants of a non-localized felt experience of belonging, familiarity, and reality, rather than descriptions of what you might call *standard emotions*. I realized that there was a vast, complex domain of affectivity here that had barely been

acknowledged, let alone investigated. I spent the rest of the day exploring this further and making notes. The eventual outcomes of this were my 2005 paper, “The Feeling of Being”, followed in 2008 by my book *Feelings of Being*.

2.4 *You were a friend of Peter Goldie and even acknowledged him in one of your books. Could you share more about your friendship and his influence on you?*

I think Peter and I first met in 2006, when we both attended a workshop organized by Achim Stephan and Jan Slaby as part of their Volkswagen-funded “Animal Emotionale” project. After talking at this and subsequent events, Peter and I started corresponding on a more regular basis. I also invited him to several events that I organized at Durham University. Most of these were associated with two projects that I was co-leading, on “Emotions and Feelings in Psychiatric Illness” and, subsequently, “Emotional Experience in Depression” (the former funded by the AHRC and the latter by an AHRC-DFG grant). I was influenced at the time by Peter’s ongoing work on emotion, much of which I was sympathetic to. I also liked Peter a great deal. He was a gifted and independent-minded philosopher, with a wonderful (sometimes naughty) sense of humour, as well as a refreshingly low tolerance for bad philosophy and other forms of intellectual silliness.

Not long before his death in 2011, Peter had become interested in the topic of grief, something that he took to be neither a brief emotional episode nor an enduring mood but—more plausibly—a multifaceted, temporally extended process. He was wondering what our wider conception of emotion might look like if we took grief as our exemplar for understanding emotional experience in general, as opposed to brief episodes along the lines of “John is scared of the tiger” and “Sue is happy that the sun is shining”. At that time, I had also become increasingly interested in the topic of grief, partly through my work on depression and—more specifically—the issue of whether and how the phenomenology of grief can be distinguished from that of depression. Peter and I shared quite a few conversations on these themes.

In the years since Peter died, I have done a lot more work on grief, including my recent book *Grief Worlds* (MIT Press, 2022). As I state in the book's introduction, Peter has remained a continuous philosophical presence along the way. One of the things I try to do in the book is take up his challenge to think of emotionality through the lens of grief and see where we end up. I think we arrive at an interesting place.

2.5 *Are there other philosophical friendships that have been particularly significant in your career?*

There are lots of philosophers who have not only influenced my philosophical development but also become good friends, including those I have already named. Two others whom I really ought to mention are Jonathan Lowe and Martin Kusch. I first met Jonathan when I joined Durham University as an undergraduate student in 1991, and we stayed in touch after I completed my degree. When I returned to the Philosophy Department at Durham as a Lecturer in 2002, Jonathan and I became close friends. Our friendship lasted until his death in 2014. On paper, Jonathan and I are very different philosophers—he worked primarily in analytic metaphysics whereas I have always been much closer to the phenomenological tradition. However, this apparent gulf never impeded our philosophical conversations (often in the pub on a Friday after work), and we always agreed on who the bad guys were.

Someone else who has been a teacher, colleague, and friend over the years is Martin Kusch. While I was a PhD student at Cambridge, Martin helped me get to grips with the phenomenological tradition, and I tutored on his phenomenology course. After we both left Cambridge, we remained in touch. Some years later, I became Martin's colleague at the University of Vienna, where I was Professor for Theoretical Philosophy from 2015 until 2018. We co-authored one paper during that period ("The World of Chronic Pain: A Dialogue"), remain in touch, and have tentative plans to do some work together on the philosophy of language, addressing the theme of *the unsayable*.

2.6 *In a conversation, you mentioned that William James is one of your favorite philosophers. What draws you to his work—whether in psychology, his theory of emotion, or his broader view of life?*

Yes, if I had to pick a single favourite philosopher, I would probably end up saying William James. However, I struggle to identify any number of explicit philosophical claims or arguments that have led me to that evaluation. It's more a matter of style, of how James exudes inquisitiveness and openness while also refusing to distinguish his philosophical perspective from the concrete realities of experience.

When it comes to the topic of emotion, James's work is much wider-ranging and more interesting than what we find in the famous 1884 article, "What is an Emotion?", which is often taken to set out his position in full. There are wonderful insights into the nature of emotion, feeling, and temperament in many of his other writings, including *Pragmatism*, *The Will to Believe*, and *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

James also offers lots of intriguing remarks on how philosophical and religious convictions coalesce out of a felt sense of one's relationship with the world. In my view, much of this work points to a singular, coherent position, which rejects simple oppositions between the likes of "bodily feeling" and "cognition". Furthermore, it is a position that has much in common with that of certain phenomenologists, including—I maintain—Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. To see this, I think we need to bring together aspects of James's pragmatism with an interpretation of his later radical empiricism. I do at least some of the required work in my recent article "Emotional Sinking In" (*Inquiry*, 2025).

2.7 *Besides philosophy, is there something else you feel deeply fond of or truly appreciate? Nature, perhaps? Art, music?*

Over the years, I have found it harder and harder to separate philosophical thought from the practice of living. So, I'm not sure that I ever really succeed in escaping from philosophy, at least not fully. But spending time with my wife, Beth, and our children, Samuel and Thomas, is more important to me than anything else. I also like going for long walks along the coast, in and near Tynemouth where I live. I occasionally

stop to explore the rockpools, and I enjoy watching the colony of grey seals sitting on the rocks beside St Mary's Lighthouse in Whitley Bay. In addition, I listen to music, especially while on the train home from York. I recently rediscovered Siouxsie and the Banshees, a brilliant band that I listened to a lot in my youth, and I've always enjoyed listening to Kate Bush. I have even taught my dog, Ziva, to sing along to *Wuthering Heights* and *Hounds of Love*.

2.8 *Your work is well-known in Brazil. Have you received similar interest and positive feedback from scholars and readers in other parts of the world? Have you had opportunities to engage with discussions about your ideas in different academic and cultural contexts beyond the Anglo-Saxon world?*

Yes, I have had some feedback from other parts of the world. For instance, I gather that there is some interest in my work in Japan. And, over the years, I've had conversations with philosophers based in many different countries. But, for the most part, my interactions with other researchers have been situated within—as you say—the Anglo-Saxon world. I'm very glad to know that there is growing interest in my work in Brazil and elsewhere in South America. I am also curious to learn more, to meet with some of those concerned, to share different perspectives, and to learn from and support one another.

To date, a combination of three things have put me off travelling more often, so as to talk at length with colleagues based in other parts of the world. When my children were younger, I was very reluctant to leave them for prolonged periods. However, the two of them are now 15 and 17 years old. So, they can either manage without me for a while or come with me. Another reason is that I've had a consistently high workload for many years. In addition, I've become increasingly anxious about long-distance travel, and with good reason. Most of my recent trips have been marred by severe flight disruption and/or other serious problems. It is much easier to just stay at home. Even so, I know I should make more of an effort, and I look forward to working with colleagues in Latin America in the near future.

2.9 *Your work often bridges analytic philosophy and phenomenology. Do you see yourself as primarily belonging to one tradition, or do you resist such categorizations? And what are your thoughts on these divisions within our field?*

The distinction between so-called "analytic" and "Continental" (including phenomenological) philosophical approaches is well-known and also much-debated. Regardless of how we conceive of such distinctions, I've never really thought of my own work as falling squarely on one or the other side. Most of what I do is rooted in the phenomenological tradition, and involves engaging with work by Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty, and others. At the same time, though, I've found it really helpful to draw on techniques and insights from analytic philosophy in order to sharpen points, make new distinctions, and set out my own position as clearly as possible. In addition, I often write in ways that are more typical of so-called "analytic philosophers". My work also involves dialogue with a number of scientific disciplines, with psychiatric practice, and with literature. So, all in all, I wouldn't really classify myself as belonging to one philosophical *tradition* as opposed to another. I would add that different topics and issues are better addressed in different ways—I don't adopt the same kind of philosophical style for everything. For instance, the first half of my book *Real Hallucinations* is much more analytic in style than my previous book, *Experiences of Depression*.

In certain contexts, I'm sure it is helpful to identify someone as an "analytic" philosopher, in contrast to some other kind of philosopher. And the term "phenomenology" can be employed so as to identify (a) a philosophical subject matter, (b) a general area of philosophical enquiry, and/or (c) a specific philosophical tradition inaugurated by Edmund Husserl. In all three of these uses, the term is often used in an informative way. However, I don't think it's especially helpful to nitpick over which characteristics do or do not identify one as an analytic philosopher, Continental philosopher, phenomenologist, or whatever. Such talk is better regarded more loosely, and also pragmatically—it can serve different purposes in different contexts of discussion. Furthermore, whether or not I get on with another philosopher and

appreciate their work doesn't depend on such distinctions; there are many different ways of writing good philosophy.

2.10 *In many philosophical approaches, consciousness is often treated as a unified phenomenon—something with a stable or singular nature. If I understood you correctly, in a previous conversation you mentioned your view that consciousness is not an entity with a unitary essence, but rather something that manifests through different modalities—such as the consciousness of perceiving, feeling, or thinking. Could you elaborate further on this perspective?*

I seldom use the term "consciousness". In line with the phenomenological tradition, I tend to refer instead to the structure of experience. And I certainly wouldn't construe this as an "entity" with a singular essence. I think that what you may have in mind here is a position that I set out in my 2017 book *Real Hallucinations* and elsewhere. It runs roughly as follows: When I perceive, remember, imagine, or anticipate something, I ordinarily have a pre-reflective sense of which kind of intentional state I am in—whether I am perceiving rather than, say, imagining. Drawing on various sources, I argue that the sense of being in one type of intentional state rather than another is not just a matter of their differing characteristic contents. For example, it is not just that something resembles the content of an auditory perception more than it does that of an auditory imagining. In fact, some people describe "hearing voices" where the experiences in question bear little resemblance to hearing someone actually speak but are still taken to emanate from a source external to oneself—to be the objects of a perception-like experience. In contrast, others report experiencing something that is very like a real voice but is not experienced as emanating from elsewhere—it seems to come from themselves. The question thus arises as to what the sense of being in one kind of intentional state rather than another does consist of.

In the book, I further argue that what has been termed the experience of "minimal self" (our most basic sense of being a singular, unified locus of experience) is inextricable from and—to a large extent—constituted by this ability to distinguish the kinds of intentional experience we are having. A being that had no sense of its

perceptions as distinct from its memories and imaginings could have no sense of occupying a specific location in space and time. There would be no singularity or unity to its perspective. Indeed, the structure of experience would break down altogether.

I go on to show how certain kinds of experience, including some of those associated with diagnoses such as “complex posttraumatic stress disorder” and “schizophrenia”, can be understood in this way. They involve wide-ranging changes in one’s sense of being in one kind of intentional state rather than another, changes that are inextricable from the sense of self and from one’s relations with other people. I develop an analysis according to which such changes originate in disturbances of the anticipatory structure of experience. Modalities such as memory, perception, linguistic thought, imagination, and pre-reflective expectation have distinctive *anticipation-fulfilment profiles*. For instance, we can move between our memories in ways that perceptual experience does not permit, but memory is still constrained in ways that our imaginings are not. Widespread disruption of these anticipatory profiles blurs our sense of them as distinct from one another. In particular, I suggest that disturbances of our relationship with the social world can disrupt the structure of perceptual experience, such that its distinctness from other modalities becomes less clear.

The overall position is quite a complicated one, and the whole book consists of a single, sustained argument for that position. It is for this reason, I suspect, that *Real Hallucinations* has received less uptake than my other four books. With the benefit of hindsight, I would probably have given it a different title (so as to make the focus on *self*-experience more explicit) and simplified the argument of the first few chapters.

2.11 *Your analysis of existential feelings—as a sense of reality and belonging—is based on the theory of horizon intentionality (as developed by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty). According to this view, a universal horizon includes not only types of possibilities but also a dynamic structure of anticipation. You also introduce a helpful distinction between modes and styles of anticipation. Do you think a systematic and empirical investigation of these styles of anticipation is plausible? More specifically, do you believe that the styles through which we anticipate possibilities can be studied using current phenomenological methodologies in qualitative research—such as microphenomenology, the phenomenological interview, or Phenomenologically Grounded Qualitative Research? Finally, do you think a systematic study*

of horizon intentionality in children and infants is feasible? If so, what kind of methodology might be appropriate for investigating existential feelings at such early stages of life?

That's right—in my book *Feelings of Being*, I start from Husserl's claim that our sense of *what* something is, and also our sense *that* it is present to us, are constituted by a structured horizon of possibilities involving that entity. Although Husserl emphasizes possibilities for ongoing perceptual access, I have focused instead on *significant* possibilities—how objects, events, and situations matter to oneself and to others, and also the distinctive ways in which other people matter. A change in existential feeling, I maintain, is a change in the kinds of significant possibilities that we are receptive to.

Much of the work that I have done since then is—at least as I understand it—a systematic investigation of just the kind that you propose. For instance, my follow-up book, on the phenomenology of depression, developed a more discerning analysis of the kinds of possibilities that pre-reflective experience is sensitive to. Equipped with that analysis, I was then able to distinguish several different kinds of *existential change* that are consistent with a psychiatric diagnosis such as major depressive disorder. *Real Hallucinations* took the analysis a step further, by showing how such changes can be understood in terms of the anticipation-fulfilment structure of experience. In my most recent book, *Grief Worlds*, I again sought to distinguish various different kinds of changes in our sense of the possible, as well as different ways in which we experience possibilities as *lost*.

Of course, these are principally *philosophical* studies rather than empirical investigations. However, we can't do the empirical work without an appropriate interpretive framework (which I think we can assemble via critical engagement with themes in philosophical phenomenology). And we won't be able to refine, elaborate, revise, or corroborate our interpretive framework unless we also engage with the realities of experience—with relevant evidence.

So, how should we go about addressing the diverse realities of experience? There are no short-cuts, no easy paths. On the philosophical side, there is an ongoing need to

keep reflecting on and questioning our assumptions and interpretations. Here, I think, a critical, distinctively *analytic* philosophical perspective can be especially helpful. As for empirical evidence, we can and should draw on all manner of contemporary and historical sources, including memoirs, numerous other reports of first-person experience, scientific studies of various kinds, literary fiction, our own first-person experience, psychiatric literature, interview data, our interactions with others, and cross-cultural comparisons. One approach that I have found especially fruitful is conducting qualitative on-line surveys in order to obtain hundreds of detailed first-person accounts of grief, depression, and voice-hearing.

Why think that such an approach will prove reliable? In fact, we do not have to put in a great deal of effort in order to interpret a wide range of testimonies in terms of changes in the *experience of possibilities*. The theme comes up time and time again, often quite explicitly. And, as our interpretive framework develops, we find ourselves able to develop interpretations of experience that are increasingly discerning and compelling.

Moreover, those who have lived through the kinds of experience associated with grief and various psychiatric diagnoses often tell me that these analyses capture their experiences in ways that they find highly illuminating, helpful, and even emancipating—giving voice to something they have struggled for some time to comprehend and articulate. If one wants to be sceptical about the whole enterprise, I think one will have a hard job overturning such an extensive and diverse body of evidence or rejecting an emphasis on the phenomenology of possibility that resonates with so much testimony.

As you note, various different—and more specific—methods have been proposed for pursuing qualitative phenomenological research. My own approach remains a distinctively philosophical form of enquiry rather than an empirical application of phenomenological ideas. But I certainly wouldn't want to dismiss what others are doing or to identify one approach to empirical phenomenological research as the single correct way to proceed. Rather, I think we should welcome a plurality of methods while continuing to hold all of them up to critical scrutiny.

When it comes to phenomenological research involving very young children, I confess that I am not entirely sure how to proceed. However, I would reiterate the need to draw critically on a plurality of methods and empirical findings, rather than searching for a single correct approach that manages to do everything. And I am at least confident that very young children will not experience existential feelings of quite the same kinds as most adults. One reason for this is that experiences of the surrounding world, relations with others, and the sense of time will be structured in different ways. Adults, but not young children, tend to inhabit a world shaped by numerous interrelated projects, spanning periods that range from minutes to many years. As this might suggest, a first step in addressing existential feeling in childhood is the suspension of assumptions of phenomenological commonality. And I've suggested that this first step also applies to our wider efforts to understand other people's experiences, as set out in several articles and chapters that I published on the topic of empathy.

2.12 *How did you find your philosophical voice? Was there a moment when you felt you had fully come into your own as a thinker?*

I'm not sure that I've ever "fully come into my own". Even now, my sense of what I'm doing and why I'm doing it keeps shifting and faltering, such that I can't bear to read what I wrote a few years ago and don't know quite how to make philosophical points that will be central to my next book (*Feeling Haunted: A Phenomenology of the Emotional Self*, currently in preparation and under contract with MIT Press). However, if I had to identify a point when I found a distinctive, cohesive philosophical voice, it would be while I was developing the concept of existential feeling between 2005 and 2007. Lots of themes that I had been working on or at least thinking about crystallized around that concept—my work on interpersonal experience, emotion and feeling, delusion, the sense of reality, and the phenomenology of possibility. Even so, my subsequent books are all associated not only with developments of this and other ideas but also with qualitative shifts in my philosophical perspective. For instance, over the years, I've

placed increasing emphasis on the irreducibly *dynamic* structure of human experience, especially the themes of anticipation and indeterminacy.

2.13 *Your work explores Heidegger, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Wittgenstein, among others. How has engaging with these thinkers shaped your own perspective?*

That's a big question, and one that I find hard to answer. I have visited and revisited these thinkers so many times over the course of nearly thirty years. Each time, I have glimpsed something new, related to their work in a slightly different way, and introduced something new into my own philosophical perspective.

That said, I can look back and identify what—for me—were a few key steps. My early work on emotion, feeling, and mood owed a lot to Heidegger's discussion in Division One of *Being and Time*. In particular, my initial account of existential feeling drew on Heidegger's conception of "mood" [*Stimmung*]. However, it was analyzing existential feeling in terms of what Husserl calls the "horizonal" structure of experience that enabled me to address the relevant phenomenology in a more discerning way—to analyze differences and changes in existential feeling in terms of experienced access to various interrelated kinds of possibilities. I remember arriving at that approach while reading Husserl's passive synthesis lectures (published in English as *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*). Merleau-Ponty became a more prominent influence later on, in *Real Hallucinations* and, especially, *Grief Worlds*, where the interrelated themes of indeterminacy and bodily anticipation are more explicit.

As for Wittgenstein, I came to the view that many—but not all—of his remarks on certainty (in *On Certainty* and in *Philosophical Investigations*) complement and further illuminate Husserl's conception of basic certainty as a kind of background orientation within which certainties and doubts with more specific contents arise. I also think many of Wittgenstein's comments point towards the anticipatory structure of experience. Certainty, of the kind that Wittgenstein often has in mind, is in my view a matter of pre-reflective, unquestioning, bodily expectation. If you read my recent papers "Emotional Sinking In" (*Inquiry*, 2025) and "On Losing Certainty" (*Phenomenology and the Cognitive*

Sciences, 2024), you'll hopefully be able to see why I take there to be considerable overlap here between Wittgenstein, James, Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty. This conception of certainty is probably the main thing I've drawn from Wittgenstein, although his numerous remarks about all sorts of things (for example, the duration of grief) have prompted various other thoughts as well.

2.14 *What's your writing process like? Do you have a routine?*

It depends on what I am trying to do. If I am writing a substantial article, chapter, or monograph, I always rely on lots of *scaffolding* rather than just launching straight into the writing. What I tend to do first is write a draft abstract, just to demonstrate to myself that I know (a) roughly what I am trying to do, and (b) the steps by which I hope to do it. After that, I start making notes underneath the abstract, which follow the anticipated course of my discussion. As these grow more elaborate, I introduce tentative section breaks and headings. After that, I look through sources that I expect to be relevant, consult big bundles of handwritten notes as well (which I make whenever I read philosophy), and start adding a list of references at the end of the piece. At this stage, I also insert any quotations that I plan to include in the finished paper. With a book, things are slightly more complicated – I do this for every chapter before I start writing drafts. In addition, I complete the bibliography and prepare a provisional table of contents that includes all chapter headings and subheadings.

Once I've reached that point, I tend to run through my notes several times, moving material around, identifying and addressing potential problems and objections, and rethinking—to varying degrees—the overall content and structure of the piece. Following this, I sit there procrastinating for a few hours (or days, if it's a book) until I can finally summon the ability to start writing. It usually takes me a further five days or so to produce a full first draft of a substantial article or chapter. Once I've completed this first draft, the remainder of the process tends to be a lot easier—it's just a matter

of reading through it from beginning to end and revising it as I go. After around seven rounds of revisions, I start to feel vaguely confident in what I've written.

I think the reason I do so much preparatory work before trying to write a first draft is that I'm quite an anxious writer, prone to long periods of self-doubt where I feel—regardless of how many times I might have done this and found that it all came together eventually—that what I am writing is awful or that I'm incapable of completing the task at all. Mapping the whole thing out beforehand helps to mitigate that feeling—it makes the task ahead less daunting.

2.15 *How would you say the field of philosophy has changed over the past few decades?*

I'm not sure really. I don't think there is a singular field. Different things happen in different areas of philosophy and in different parts of the world. Of course, some topics and areas have become more popular and others less popular. For instance, lots of philosophers seem to be excited about "epistemic injustice" at the moment and keep finding it everywhere. There also seems to be a lot more variety out there than when I started, which I take to be a good thing.

However, in the UK at least, I think the overall intellectual environment has worsened over the last twenty years or so. For one thing, there are almost no philosophy jobs advertised at the moment. I feel very sad for all of the gifted young people who have finished their PhDs and already produced some excellent philosophical work but have little chance of securing academic employment.

The whole ethos of universities has also shifted over the years. I still have a vivid memory of setting off to work back in 2002 or 2003 and thinking to myself just how strange it would be to dislike my job or doubt the worth of what I was doing. At that time, it just seemed obvious to me that thinking philosophically and teaching others to do so were ends in themselves, social and cultural goods that were in no need of further justification. In subsequent years, UK universities have come increasingly to resemble profit-making businesses, albeit businesses with very restricted income streams, which

are highly regulated by national government, and sometimes managed by people with little idea of how to run a business.

Often, after a week of moving from one meeting to the next in order to address how we might boost student recruitment, raise external research income, prepare for the next "research excellence framework", and produce research that generates "impact" outside of academia, I struggle to shake off a sense that the sole purpose of philosophical research is to further such goals. And that really eats away at the meaning and worth of what I'm doing. Philosophical thought rests uneasily with a climate of constant financial pressure, shifting student "markets", incessant monitoring, drives towards standardization, and greedy, profit-hungry journal publishers. More generally, I worry that a sort of collective disorientation is increasingly taking hold within universities, fueled in part by wider global upheaval—we're not quite sure what we're all doing anymore or why we're doing it. On a more positive note, I suppose phenomenological thought is at least well-placed to interrogate such phenomena.

2.16 *What keeps you going—what really drives your work?*

I would love to say that what motivates me more than anything else is curiosity or fascination, accompanied by a desire to do good or achieve something enduring and worthwhile. That's part of it, of course. But I am also driven by an unpleasant and pervasive feeling of restlessness, anxiety, and unease. Often, this involves a sense of obligation and anticipatory guilt—there is something that I ought to be doing and, if I don't do it, that will somehow amount to dereliction of duty.

I have never quite figured out why I feel like this, how I might get rid of such feelings for more than a few hours at a time, or whether there are healthier ways of doing the kind of philosophical work that I do.

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