Love, Death, Grief

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Imagine losing a long-term partner or spouse. Suppose you grieve at first, but after a month or so you’re pretty much back to normal. Of course, you haven’t forgotten about your partner; but the loss doesn’t really hurt anymore. Yet another month later, you find a new partner and life is good again.
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**The Downside.** There is an intuition that your quick recovery simply doesn’t *fit* the magnitude of the loss.

**My Goal Today.** Casting this downside in terms of *fittingness* is not a good idea.
An Alleged Discrepancy

Resilience

Grief’s Fitting Persistence – fittingness vs. ATC rationality

Fittingness and Values

Metaphysical Claim

Psychological Thesis
The Alleged Discrepancy

The Discrepancy
After losing a loved one, most people experience less grief than would be rationally fitting.
The Alleged Discrepancy

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An alluring analysis in terms of fittingness

Grief’s Natural Attenuation
Due to their natural resilience, most people grieve very little as a result of losing a loved one.
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Grief’s Fitting Persistence
Grief remains fitting or appropriate even after it is attenuated by natural resilience.
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After losing a loved one, most people experience less grief than would be rationally fitting given the magnitude of the loss. ❌

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Due to natural resilience, most people grieve very little as a result of losing a loved one. ✓

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► My Claim for Today. There is no such discrepancy, because grief’s fittingness is not problematically persistent.
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Grief’s Natural Attenuation – resilience

▶ Emotional Resilience. Emotional resilience is “the ability of adults in otherwise normal circumstances who are exposed to an isolated and potentially highly disruptive event such as the death of a close relation or a violent or life-threatening situation to maintain relatively stable, healthy levels of psychological and physical functioning as well as the capacity for generative experiences and positive emotions.” (Bonanno 2005, 827)
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Summary of Findings. “[M]any, and sometimes the majority, of bereaved individuals exhibit only short-lived grief-reactions and a relatively rapid return to baseline. [...] The relative absence of grief symptoms and the continued ability to function adequately following the death of a close relation do not appear to reflect denial or pathology but rather an inherent and adaptive resilience in the face of loss.” (Bonanno 2005)
Grief’s Natural Attenuation – resilience

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▶ **No Counseling.** Psychological counseling does not explain quick recovery.
Grief’s Natural Attenuation – resilience

Biological Mechanism. Resilience seems to be biological mechanism.
Grief’s Natural Attenuation – resilience

- **Biological Mechanism.** Resilience seems to be biological mechanism.

- **Self-interest.** Resilience serves the self-interest of the bereaved.
The Discrepancy

The Discrepancy – Fittingness Formulation
After losing a loved one, most people experience less grief than would be rationally fitting.

An alluring analysis in terms of fittingness

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Due to natural resilience, most people grieve very little as a result of losing a loved one.

Grief’s Fitting Persistence
Grief remains fitting or appropriate even after it is attenuated by natural resilience.
X Grief’s Fitting Persistence X
Grief remains fitting or appropriate even after it is attenuated by natural resilience.

Why would someone say that? Isn’t it plainly good when people don’t suffer more than they absolutely have to?

▶ Fitting reasons for grief seem persistent.
What are **fitting reasons**?
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- Anger fits goal frustration (roughly)
- Surprise fits the unexpected
  
  **Grief fits the death of a loved one**

- Note: fitting reasons are specific.
What are **non-fitting reasons**?

- **All things considered reasons**
  - Hedonic reasons
  - Moral reasons
  - Anything that might rationalize having an emotion.

- **Example – Evil Torturer.** Suppose an evil torturer promises to let you go if you admire him (Howard 2016).
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- **Example – Evil Torturer.** Suppose an evil torturer promises to let you go if you admire him (Howard 2016).

  All things considered, you have reason to admire the torturer.
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- Example – Evil Torturer. Suppose an evil torturer promises to let you go if you admire him (Howard 2016).

  All things considered, you have reason to admire the torturer.

  But the torturer is not admirable. Admiration is not a fitting response.
Resilience vs fitting reasons. Resilience serves a person’s self-interest. Resilience does not seem sensitive to fitting reasons for grief.

When brute natural resilience alleviates grief in a person, it does so for the “wrong reason”; i.e. a person’s self-interest. The fitting reason for grief (i.e. a person’s death) seems to persist.
Recap

The Discrepancy – Fittingness Formulation
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An alluring analysis in terms of fittingness

Grief’s Natural Attenuation
Due to natural resilience, most people grieve very little as a result of losing a loved one.

Grief’s Fitting Persistence
Grief remains fitting or appropriate even after it is attenuated by natural resilience.
Grief’s Rational Persistence – values

- Importance of values. Fitting reasons depend on values.
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- **Example – the vase**
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- **Value Condition.** A person’s death is only a reason to grieve, if the bereaved stands in some relevant personal relationship to the deceased (e.g. love relationship).
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  **Example.** “I feel fear as the neighbor kid throws a ball that comes perilously close to smashing a vase” (Helm 2009, 58). My reason for fear, in this case, is the fact that the ball came close to destroying my vase. *However, this is only a reason for me, if I care about my vase in the first place.*

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Grief’s Fitting Persistence – metaphysical thesis

Grief remains eternally fitting or appropriate even after it is attenuated by a powerful biological mechanism. This is true because all the constituents of fitting grief are located in the past and are, thus, unchangeable.
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Grief remains *eternally* fitting or appropriate even after it is attenuated by a powerful biological mechanism. *This is true because all the constituents of fitting grief are located in the past and are, thus, unchangeable.*

- **Past Fitting Reason.** The death of a person. ✅
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“Even if it turned out that we undergo intense distress for a few years rather than a few months, the question of whether we have reason to regret the attitudes toward a lost spouse that resilience instills would remain. [...] And, as I have argued, there are such reasons, though these reasons may be outweighed by other considerations; all things considered most of us might not wish to be significantly less resilient than we are.” (Moller 2007, 315)
“Even if it turned out that we undergo intense distress for a few years rather than a few months, the question of whether we have reason to regret the attitudes toward a lost spouse that resilience instills would remain. [...] And, as I have argued, there are such reasons, though these reasons may be outweighed by other considerations; all things considered most of us might not wish to be significantly less resilient than we are.” (Moller 2007, 315)

“Over time, as we grieve, it becomes not wrong to grieve less. However, I also think that there is no good way to understand this. When we try to understand it, all we find are reasons of the wrong kind.” (Marušić 2018, 16)
Metaphysial Claim – epistemic reasons

Epistemic Reasons for Grief
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“It is hard to envision someone being fully capable of recognizing a good or a bad without the appropriate emotional responses. In fact, there is powerful empirical evidence to suggest that without emotional responses we find it so difficult to recognize value that we cannot make even elementary decisions that require us to see one option as better than another.” (Moller 2007, 311)
Moller’s argument – objection

▶ ‘Not a Fitting Reason’ Objection. Recognizing a certain value is not a fitting reason for grief. Consider this example, a modification or *Snow White and the 7 Dwarfs* ...
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The prince finds Snow White whom he presumes dead. He was in love with Snow White all along, but, having been distracted by his royal duties and liberties, doesn’t fully realize how much she means to him. Only the shock of presuming her dead may be the necessary wake-up call for him to realize just how much she means to him.
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Grief fits the death of a loved one. Epistemological merits are merely valuable side effects.
Moller’s argument – objection II

Grief and Importance
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“An important feature of importance is thus that the concept has a counterfactual dimension; my supposed importance to as baseball team can be undercut by what happens after I leave it. […] Evidence that we care for our lovers while they live is not undermined by facts about what happens after they die, but the same is not rue of importance.” (Moller 2007, 309).
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▶ Objection. Importance entails extended grief, it doesn’t make it appropriate.

▶ Against the Metaphysical Claim. The idea that once earlier love to the deceased makes grief fitting is implausible.
**Grief’s Fitting Persistence – psychological argument**
Grief remains fitting as long as the bereaved continues to love the deceased. In most cases, the bereaved continues to love the deceased even after grief has been attenuated by natural resilience.

- **Past Fitting Reason.** The death of a person. ✓

- **Value Condition – present love.** How much a person still loves the deceased (post-mortem). ✓
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- **Love Without Grief.** For fitting and actual grief to diverge, grief has to subside while one’s love for the deceased remains unchanged.
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**Love without Grief?** Can you love a person despite not grieving for their death?

... yes
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▶ In typical resilience cases, grief is *simply* attenuated; it is *not* replaced with some other strong emotion of concern.

▶ **C-odependence.** In cases of co-dependence between an emotion and the constituents of the emotion’s fittingness, there are limits to how much actual and fitting grief can diverge.
Conclusions

▶ **Fittingness.** The alleged discrepancy between actual and fitting grief is not captured by the discrepancy between actual and *fitting* grief.
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- **Self-justification.** Since fitting emotions depend on values, some emotions might have a self-justifying quality, since these emotions may *affect* a person’s values.
Thank you!