

# Love, Death, Grief

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An Alleged  
Discrepancy

Resilience

Grief's Fitting  
Persistence –  
fittingness vs. ATC  
rationality

Fittingness and Values

Metaphysical Claim

Psychological Thesis

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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.

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## The Discrepancy

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An alluring analysis in terms of fittingness

## **Grief's Natural Attenuation**

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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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- ▶ **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)

- ▶ **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)
  
- ▶ **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)

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- ▶ **No Counseling.** Psychological counseling does not explain quick recovery.

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

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- ▶ **Self-interest.** Resilience serves the self-interest of the bereaved.

## **The Discrepancy – Fittingness Formulation**

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## ✗ Grief's Fitting Persistence ✗

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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.

# Grief's Fitting Persistence – fittingness vs. ATC rationality

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What are **fitting reasons**?



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.

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.

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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**

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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)

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“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)

## **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)

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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.

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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. ✓
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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.

- ▶ **Love without Grief?** Can you love a person despite not grieving for their death?

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- ▶ **Unmitigated Love without Grief?** Can your love for a deceased person remain unaltered while grief subsides?

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## Grief's Fitting Persistence – psychological thesis

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Imagine, somewhat dramatically, a species of “super-resilient [aliens]. When their spouses drop dead in front of them, they shrug their shoulders and check what is on television. They remarry as soon as they are able to find another mate, often within weeks” (Moller 2007, 313). These aliens care about their spouses while they are alive; they generally “show tremendous concern” (Moller 2007, 314). Yet these feelings are immediately extinguished after their spouse's death.



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- ▶ **Tentative Thesis.** The absence of grief is incompatible with unmitigated love, unless grief is replaced with an alternate form of emotional concern.
- ▶ In typical resilience cases, grief is *simply* attenuated; it is *not* replaced with some other strong emotion of concern.
- ▶ **C-odpendence.** 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.

- ▶ **Fittingness.** The alleged discrepancy between actual and fitting grief is not capture 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!**