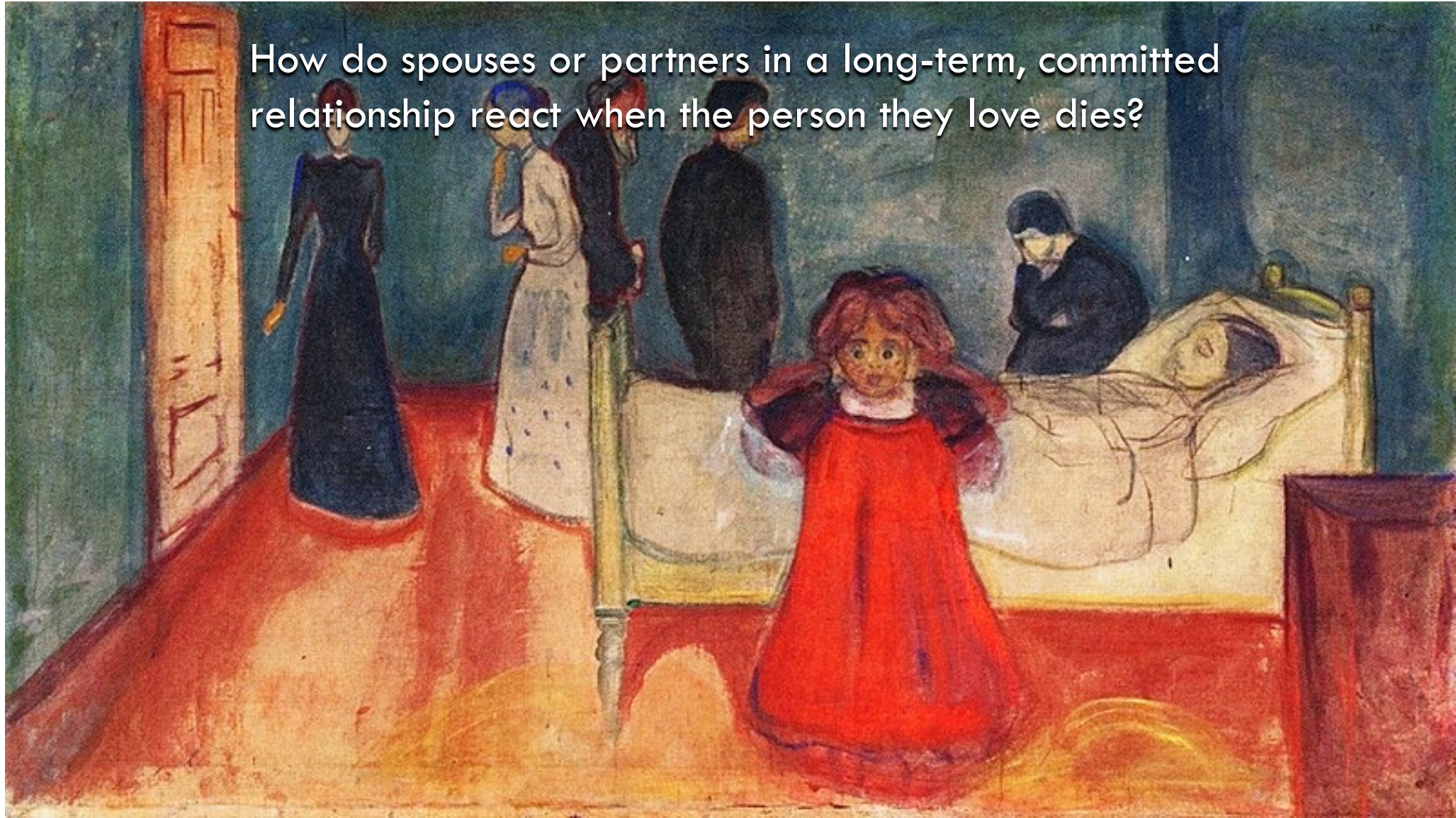


LOVE AND DEATH

Michael Hannon

How do spouses or partners in a long-term, committed relationship react when the person they love dies?



RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF LOSS

Only short-lived grief reactions. Rapid return to our “emotional baseline”.

Almost 50% of people do not show even mild depression after two months.

10% experience a dramatic increase in subjective well-being following their loss.

Remarry within 2-3 years.

Loss of a loved one is not an agonizing blow with long-lasting and significant impact.

This is true cross-culturally.

EXCEPTIONS TO THE RULE



WE SUCK AT 'AFFECTIVE FORECASTING'

Affective (Hedonic) Forecasting

Refers to predictions of how we'll feel about future emotional states.

- What we imagine to be **catastrophes routinely turn out to be only minor blips** that we quickly overcome.
- We are also wrong about things like **winning the lottery, which tends not to produce as much happiness** as we predict.



ADAPTATION: THE GOOD NEWS

Psychological distress is contrary to our interests, so recovery is to our benefit since it facilitates a rapid return to a healthy emotional baseline.

There is less misery in the world than we thought!

We have an **'emotional immune system'**.

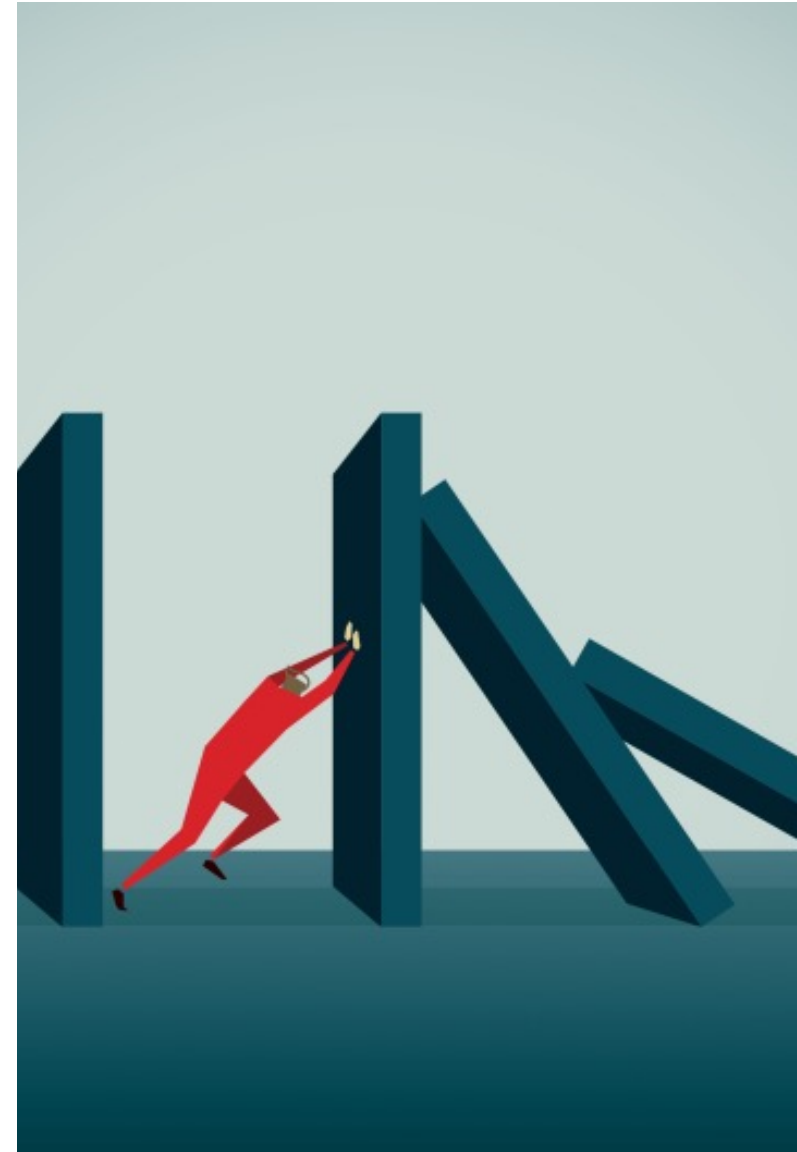


RESILIENCE AND VALUE

Resilience makes us uncomfortable.

We want those we love (and who love us) to be deeply affected by our absence.

We judge people who display comparatively little grief.



DO WE REALLY CARE ABOUT ANYTHING?

Skepticism about value:

1. We don't feel much grief from the loss of X.
2. If we don't feel much grief from the loss of X, then we never really cared about X.
3. Therefore, we never really cared about X.



WE DO CARE ABOUT THINGS!

It seems implausible to say that nobody really cares about anything.

There is evidence that we do care about things:

- Making sacrifices for others
- Feeling pain in the face of their misfortune
- Willingness to protect those we love (i.e. risk one's own life)
- Desire to advance their interests

It's wrong to say that what it is to care deeply about something is (only) to be disposed to suffer deeply following its loss.



SO, WHY DOES RESILIENCE BOTHER US?

It's **not** that we never cared about the person.

What's regrettable is this:

The person we lose isn't as **important** to us as we thought.

(Also, we aren't as important to others as we think.)

IMPORTANCE AND FUNGABILITY

“Our **importance** to an organization like a baseball team or Congress is great when we make an enormous difference to its operations, **when our absence wrecks havoc**, and when we are unique and irreplaceable in what we do.”

“Conversely, claims of importance are inflated when it turns out that nothing we do really matters or that a year’s leave of absence would go unnoticed, and we **could be easily replaced.**”

Importance has a counterfactual dimension.

A REASON FOR REGRET

We are **deluded** about our general condition.

To the extent that we care about being aware of our general condition, we have grounds to regret even adaptive syndromes which impede that awareness.

ANOTHER REASON FOR REGRET

Resilience renders us **unable to register fully the significance of our losses.**

Our reaction to staggering loss is utterly incommensurate with its value. Our response does not reflect its preciousness to us.

THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS

Do emotions have a role analogous to sense organs for us?

- Emotions are part of the means by which we *perceive value*.
- Without emotional responses, it is difficult to recognize value.

E.g., psychopaths

- Unable to grasp the moral significance of their victims.
- Unable to grasp whether certain things *really matter*.
- Yet they have normal cognitive abilities.



PROUST

“Our dread of a future in which we must forego the sight of faces and the sound of voices which we love and from which today we derive our dearest joy, this dread, far from being dissipated, is intensified, if to the pain of such a privation we feel that there will be added what seems to us now in anticipation more painful still: **not to feel it as a pain at all—to remain indifferent.**”



SUPER-RESILIENT

They have **no grief reactions** at all to what would strike us as great tragedies.

- 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 can, often within weeks.
- They claim to care for their loved ones;
 - they are willing to walk through fire for their partners;
 - they generally show tremendous concern before their loss.
- But their adaptive mechanisms immediately to extinguish any feelings of distress.





SUB-RESILIENT

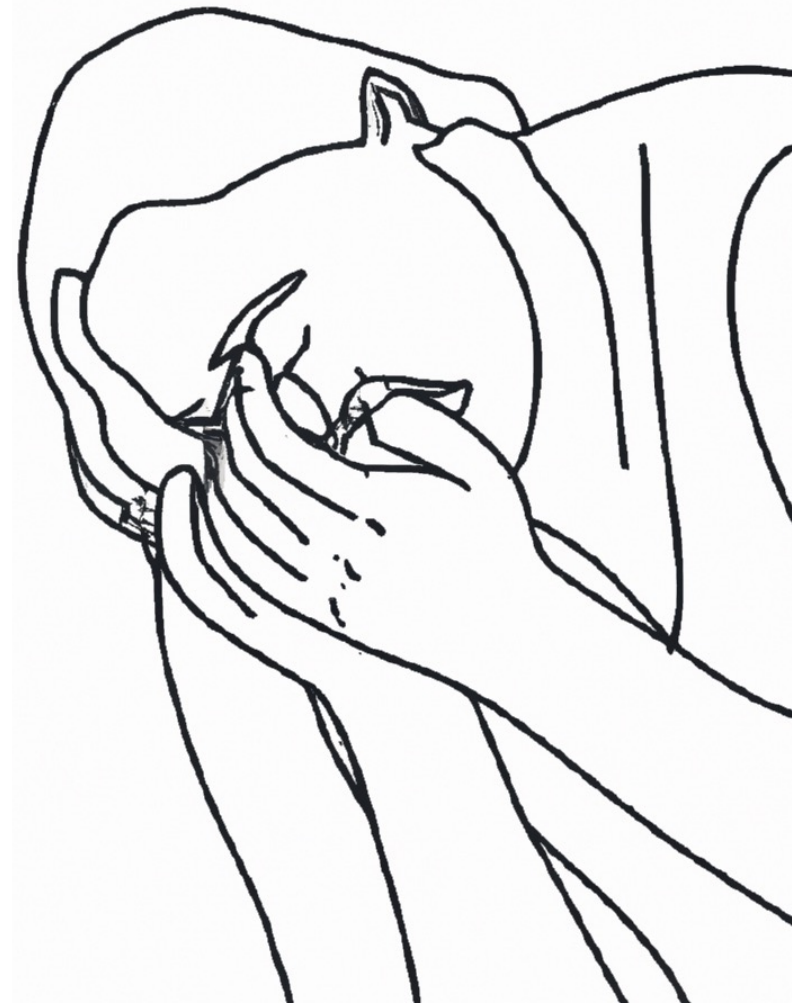
They **never cease caring** as deeply for their spouses as at the moment of death.

The loss is felt as deeply at half a century as it is at half an hour.



WHY DOES GRIEF SEEM LESS “FITTING” (OR RATIONAL) OVER TIME?

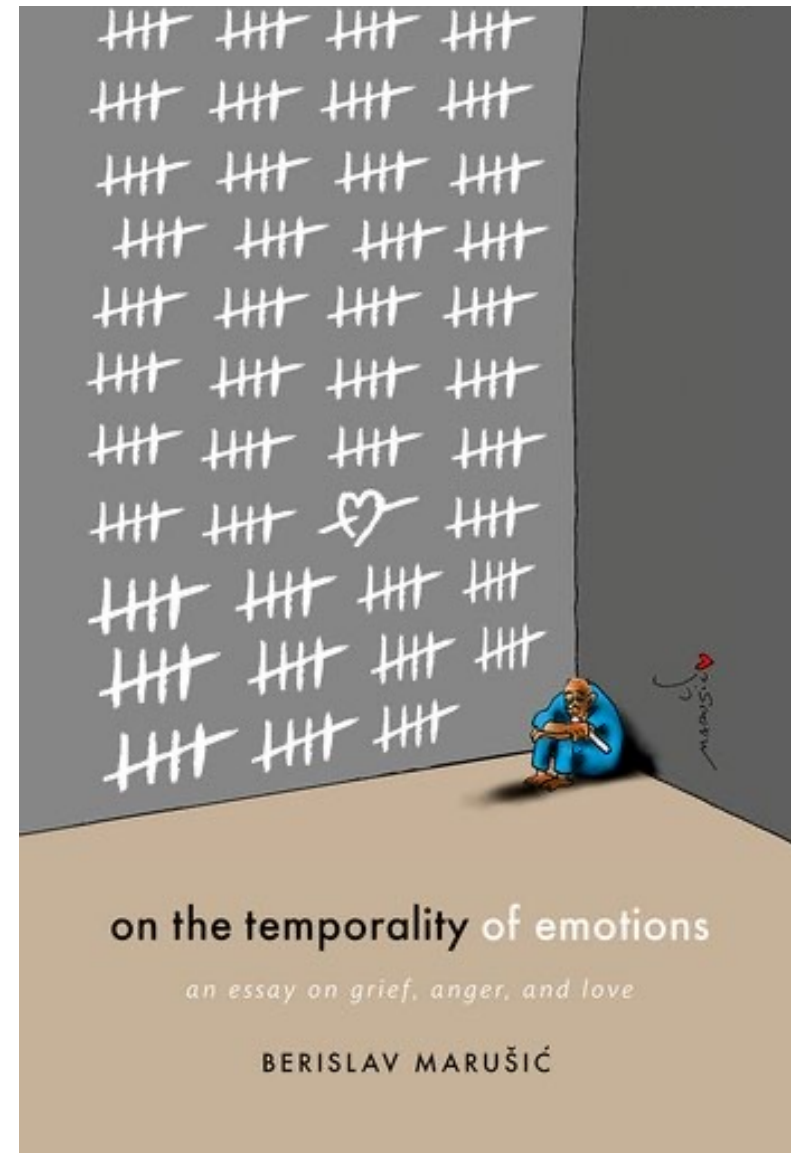
1. Grief is **forever** fitting.
2. Grief’s fittingness **decreases as we love the person less**.
3. Grief may eventually cease to be fitting **alongside the continuation of love**.



OPTION 1:

GRIEF IS FOREVER FITTING

- The reasons for grief **never expire**.
- I grieve because my mother is gone, but **her death has not been undone**.
- A loss **does not cease to be a loss** as it recedes into the past.
- The passing of time may provide a psychological explanation for why we grieve less, but it doesn't justify our reactions.



OPTION 2:

GRIEF'S FITTINGNESS DECREASES AS WE LOVE THE PERSON LESS

- Grief is often seen as the continuation of love.
 - If we didn't love the person, we wouldn't grieve.
- Grief is fitting bc it depends on our relation to the deceased.
 - The stronger the bond, the more fitting it is to feel grief.
- If we gradually love the person less, then less grief seems fitting.
 - It would be rational to grieve less as we discontinue our love.
- Plausibly, the deceased person loses significance in one's life over time.



OPTION 3:

GRIEF MAY CEASE TO BE “FITTING” ALONGSIDE THE CONTINUATION OF LOVE

- Why is it fitting for grief to diminish if you still love them as much?
- As time passes, we have to face life again; we have to attend to our children, do our jobs, etc.





UTILITARIANISM

PURSUING HAPPINESS AT ALL COSTS

FUTILITARIANISM?

Is the utilitarian model of well-being totally misguided?

THE PRESUMPTION OF EFFECTIVENESS

Utilitarians think there are policies and actions that will make a significant difference to utility.

Significant moral choices are made based on differences in utility, so those differences in utility should be significant.

But it looks like **the presumption of effectiveness is false.**



AN ARGUMENT AGAINST UTILITARIANISM

1. Utilitarians propose as the criterion of moral choice that the option be selected that will most increase overall utility.
2. However, nothing one does is going to make much of a difference to anyone's utility.
3. So, utilitarianism is deeply misguided.

THE SECOND PREMISE

Why think that nothing one does makes much of a difference to anyone's utility?

If good fortune strikes, you will be briefly elated. But as you become accustomed to your new situation, the elation will wear off.

We can bring about temporary changes in one's "hedonic tone", but there is little one can do to make people more or less happy.

GETTING INTO COLLEGE

A major life goal.

But after a week or so of celebration, you are back on even keel.

Getting admitted to (or rejected by) university may make an enormous difference in **how well the prospective student's life is going**, while making relatively little difference to **how she feels**.



TWO TYPES OF HAPPINESS?

Narrow Happiness

Your changeable, day-to-day mood: whether you're stressed or blue or feeling emotionally sound.

Broad Happiness

The deeper satisfaction you feel about the way your life is going.