Love and Death: The Problem of Resilience

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Abstract

The strongly resilient are able to quickly get over the loss of their beloved. This is not an entirely attractive capacity. In this paper, I argue that it is appropriate to be distressed about the fact that we might, quickly or slowly, get over the death of our loved ones. Moller argues that the principal problem with resilience is that it puts us in a defective epistemological position, one where we are no longer able to appreciate the significance of what we have lost. Although I think this is a genuine concern, it does little to capture the source of our dismay at the prospect. The problem is not that not caring will make us blind to our beloved's past importance, but that we simply will no longer care for our beloved. The source of our dismay is captured nicely in a passage from Proust that Moller cites but quickly dismisses in two separate papers. My goal here is to defend something akin to the Proustian view that resilience amounts to a death of self.

Introduction

In an equally disturbing and insightful paper, "Love and Death," Dan Moller explores the significance of some revisionary empirical research on mourning.[1] Everyone seems to know an old married couple that re-enacted the plot of E. M. Forester's example of a minimal story: "The King died and then the queen died of grief." My maternal grandparents followed the pattern. In her late 60's my grandmother died of a sudden heart attack and then, within months, my grandfather developed brain cancer. I don't think he made it a year and day without her.

For some time, I've thought that this pattern provides the strongest argument for marriage. There's something beautiful about the fact that two people can come mean so much to each other that they simply cannot go on living in the absence of one another. An Epicurean might find this cause for avoiding such attachments, since they make us

[1] Moller (2007).

vulnerable. As the movies teach us, no gangster is safe with a wife and child, or even a cute Beagle puppy. And no one, it would seem, is safe with a long-term spouse. Rather that conceding the Epicurean's point, however, their immature obsession with security gives us good reason to avoid these skittish individuals, not for avoiding love, however perilous it may be.

The eye watering ending of *Make Way for Tomorrow* (McCarey, 1937) depends on the well known horror of separation. At the end of the movie an old couple is forced to part company. They are no longer able to care for themselves. The problem is that none of their selfish children are willing to put them both up in the same household. As a result they have to move in with two different children who live far apart. Near the end of the movie they say their goodbyes in a train station. We know that their parting will be as sudden and permanent as death, if not fatal itself. Separated, both will likely die of grief.

We are all familiar with this scenario. However, according to the empirical literature Moller cites, most people seem to recover very quickly from the death of long-term spouse, on the order of just a couple of months. The previously bereaved report high levels of subjective satisfaction on a variety of different metrics. From what the surveys tell us, most people appear to simply get over their loss as a spider might respond to the loss of one of its hundreds of offspring. What should we make of this?

Now, I must note that I simply don't believe much of the empirical work on this topic (or much else from empirical psychology). The simplistic survey methodology adopted by most of the studies likely reveals very little. People continue to be active and respond to surveys saying that they are happy. Sure. But the researchers fail to see that someone might be grieving without being hopelessly depressed. Moller acknowledges

that the surveys don't do a good job at tracking grief: “Even when subjects report relatively little psychic trauma, they do sometimes report grieving for a substantial length of time, though this reported grieving appears to have little connection with measures of happiness or subjective well-being (and thus does not correspond, perhaps, to grief in the way it is usually understood)."[2] I think this concession undermines the significance of the findings. All we know is that grief doesn't seem to require clinical depression.

Further, although the apparently resilient might seem to be over the death of their loved ones as if they were of little importance, no one asked how much they would be willing to sacrifice to have them back.[3] I bet most would risk the travails of Orpheus. Hence, I find the empirical results questionable. What it shows is unclear, at best. But what we do know is that most people don't die of grief, although the risk of death increases significantly. Regardless, they do seem to get on with their lives. And many, it appears, seem to be in good spirits very soon. For future reference, I'll simply call this "strong resilience."

As Moller notes, the empirical issue is not whether the resilient do indeed exist, but merely how widespread they are. Hence, I won't take further issue with the studies here. Like Moller, I'm interested in the significance of the resilient. Is their ability to merrily get on with things something that we should celebrate, or, to the contrary, does it expose our abject shallowness, our inability to care much about anything?

In what follows, I argue that it is appropriate to be distressed about the fact that we might someday get over the death of our loved ones, and I try to explain why. Moller argues that the principal problem with resilience is that it puts us in a defective

[2] Moller (2007, p.304)
[3] Chris Grau pointed this out to me in conversation.

epistemological state, in a position that compromises knowledge and understanding, one where we are no longer able to appreciate the significance of what we have lost. Although I think this problem is real, it does little to capture the source of our dismay at the prospect. The problem is not that not caring will make use blind to our beloved's past importance, but that one day we might no longer care for our beloved. The source of our dismay is captured nicely in a passage from Proust that Moller cites and quickly dismisses in two separate papers. My goal here is to defend something much like the Proustian view that resilience amounts to a death of self.

Two Extreme Views on Resilience

i. Cynicism

Consider an extremely cynical view: Strong resilience reveals yet another ugly truth about humanity. It exposes our selfish lack of concern. Those who quickly get over the death of a spouse simply didn't care much about their spouse in the first place. We can see that this is the case if we think about what it is to care.

Most plausibly, to care about someone or something is to be invested in its good such that one is emotionally vulnerable in regard to it, disposed to be motivated to promote it, and to see it as important.[4] Caring seems to manifest itself in emotional, conative, and cognitive ways. The nature of care is most efficiently revealed by its role in our emotional lives. Attributing cares or concerns helps make sense of the rational

[4] It is out of scope to defend each of these conditions. Trianosky (1988) argues that one's "refined pleasures" have both cognitive and affective modes. He defends a desire theory. Arpaly's (2003, pp.84-7) compelling account of care captures these three features. Mayeroff's (1971) classic account emphasizes the promotion of the cared-about. Smith (2005, p.244, n.14) suggests that "certain patterns of awareness are themselves partially constitutive of caring about something."

interconnectedness of our emotions. We are not emotional wrecks randomly bouncing between states of fear, anger, hope, and sadness. No, our emotions, both prospective and retrospective are connected by our cares. We fear when something we care about stands to be harmed. We are angry when an object of concern is culpably harmed. We feel hope when it stands to benefit, and happy it if fairs well.

Standard emotions take objects. We are afraid of a snarling dog. The dog is the target of the emotion. We evaluate the dog as dangerous. We can call this (the dangerous) the formal object of the emotion. In addition, to make sense of an emotional state we must identify a focus. The focus of an emotion is the object that stands to be effected by the target. We only feel fear if we care about the focus. We don't fear that a snarling dog will chew up an old log. But we do feel fear if we think that the dangerous dog might chew on our arm or on our child. We care about our arms and our children.

Our emotions depend on what we care about.[5] In general, standard emotions essentially involve evaluations of the way something we care about stands to be or has been affected.[6] It is incoherent to think that someone could care about something and not be prone to feel fear when it is threatened, or hope when it stands to flourish.

The embittered cynic, to use Moller's label, thinks that the prevalence of strong resilience in response to the death of one's beloved exposes our base egoistic nature. If

[5] Roberts (1988) forcefully defends a similar view. Helm (2009) defends a related claim about concern. Shoemaker (2003, pp.91-93) argues that we can only make sense of our emotions in light of our cares. All three appear to accept a dispositional account of care. Jaworska (2007) thinks of care as something of a complex emotion.

[6] As many have noted, emotions seem to require that one care about that which was or stands to be affected by the object of the emotion. For instance: Taylor (1975, pp. 400-401) notes the connection, as does Stocker (1996, p. 175). Solomon (1980, p.276) argues that emotions are personal and involved evaluations. Taylor (1985, pp. 59-62) argues that emotions reveal what we value, what matters to us. They are import-ascriptions. Roberts (1988, pp. 1888-189) claims that emotions are grounded in concerns. Shoemaker (2003, pp.91-93) argues that emotions are conceptually connected to cares. Helm (2009, pp. 5-6) notes that emotions have a focus, a locus of concern. Strangely, in his comprehensive and influential taxonomy of the objects of emotions, De Sousa (1999, ch.5) leaves out the object of our concern. He uses "focus" differently, to refer to the focus of attention: ex., the snarling dog's menacing teeth.

someone gets over the death of a spouse in just a few months, we have excellent reason to think that they never really cared much about their spouse in the first place.

Our emotions require cares. But it works both ways. We have little reason to think that someone cares if they lack the emotional response that corresponds to the situation. Consider fear: If someone says that they care about their car more than anything, but the prospect of it's destruction by street gang doesn't elicit the least bit of fear or anger, then, other things being equal, we have good reason to think that they are disingenuous. They might think that they care about their car, but it turns out they don't. You needn't be a Freudian to that that we can discover what we care about by the way we respond emotionally. Consider a more familiar example: Someone may not think they resent their sibling, but their anger at their brother's success suggests otherwise.

The embittered cynic thinks that things work both ways. Not only can we learn about what we care about from our emotional responses, we can learn that we don't really care about some things as much as we might think we do. This is precisely what we learn about those who exhibit strong resilience. If just three months after your death, your spouse of thirty years has moved to a seaside town and is sunning on the beach mid day, running the boardwalk in the afternoon, and chatting up women at the local Tiki bar at night, we have good reason to think he didn't really care about you all that much. Further, the putative prevalence of strong resilience gives us good reason to think that we, too, might not care much about anyone but ourselves.

Although the embittered cynic makes a compelling case, we should resist adopting this view. The cynic defends two distinct positions. (1) The first is that the strongly resilient never really cared much about their spouses. (2) The second is that the

prevalence of these types gives us good reason to think the same about ourselves. The second claim rides on both the truth of the first claim and the truth of an empirical claim about how common strong resilience is in similar populations. If we have reason to doubt either, we have reason to doubt the second claim. Without delving further, since I don't think that the empirical research is compelling, I don't feel distress at the possibility that I don't deeply care about my wife. But we can put this aside. The second claim, that we should doubt that we really care, is in doubt because the first claim is suspect. We needn't revisit the empirical literature to see why.

As Moller argues, the fact that some people might be able to spring back remarkably quickly from the loss of a long term beloved does not show that they never cared. To come to that conclusion, we would have to know what they were like before the loss. If we find that the resilient survivor was willing to sacrifice a great deal for his beloved, if he was deeply saddened by her ailment, if he feared for her when in peril, if he was attuned to her well-being, if he was motivated to fulfill her needs, then we have excellent reason to think that he did indeed care abut her. It might just be a strange fact about human psychology that people are sometimes able to recover quickly from great losses. Hence, the mere fact of resilience is not enough to confidently reach the cynic's conclusion. Although it suggests that the resilient no longer care much for their former beloved, it does not suggest that they never did.

ii. Cheerful Optimism

Seeing that the cynic is too quick to reach the most pessimistic conclusion available, those of sunnier dispositions might be tempted to come to a more optimistic assessment

of strong resilience. The cheerful optimist holds that strong resilience is an unqualified good. It's not just a quirk of human psychology, it's a feature. Consider your own death: Would you want your spouse mourning indefinitely, donning a black veil, wearing hair shirts, practicing life-long celibacy, and weeping all her waking hours? Of course not. No one would wish such a fate on someone they love. We want those we love to be happy. If our beloved turns out to be strongly resilient, then great; she will be happy.

Once again, although there is something compelling about the optimist's view, I doubt many can play along for long. Think back to the example of the widow beach-comber who stalks the Tiki bar by night. Imagine that when he moved to the coast, he threw away all of his wife's belongings and burnt the photo albums. No point dwelling on the past. He's pretty damn happy, except for the fact that the college girls won't give him the time of day. Now, I don't think that many of us would be happy to learn that our spouse would be carrying on like this. Of course, we will be dead when he's carousing. But that's beside the point. We aren't worried that we will be upset by his behavior; we just don't like that he'd act like this.[7] Or, more specifically, we don't like what his behavior suggests about our relationship and the depth of his concern.

The beach comber is an extreme. Burning the photo albums is a bit much. He clearly isn't paying due respect to the importance of his wife. But a much milder form of resilience is still disturbing. Imagine a less extreme scenario pertaining to your own life. . . . See what I mean.

There's something disturbing about strong resilience that isn't captured in the optimist's view of things. Although the cynic may go too far in one extreme, the optimist

[7] It's common to get this confused. For instance, Lucretius makes this mistake systematically. He seems to think that we are saddened by thoughts of being sad after we are dead.

goes too far the other way. The truth, as the cliché holds, lies somewhere in between. Certainly resilience is good in some ways, but it doesn't appear to be an unqualified good. So what exactly is the problem? What accounts for our dismay?

. . .

At this point, it's important to recognize that there are two questions here. One concerns the source of our dismay at the prospect of our beloved's resilience in the face of our own death. The other concerns the discomfort we feel when they reflect on the possibility of our own resilience in response to the death of our beloved. In what follows, I will mainly focus on the second, that concerning our own possible resilience. Of course, our first thought when we are asked to consider the loss of our beloved is that they are dead. But when we are asked to consider our own possible resilience, we have an additional worry. So, the question at hand is, Why do many of us find the thought of our own resilience disturbing? Further, we can ask, are we right to feel this way?

Moller on Resilience

Moller argues that the principal problem with resilience is epistemic -- it concerns knowledge or understanding. He think that resilience makes it difficult, if not impossible, for us to fully appreciate the value of our previous relationship. The resilient person's lack of concern makes it hard for them to see things as they did when they used to care about the deceased.

> Part of what being the vulnerable creatures of flesh and blood that we are means is that we are subject to staggering losses in the form of the deaths of those we love, and yet our reaction to those losses is utterly incommensurate with their value, especially after the first month or two have passed. The good of a happy relationship with a lover is one that we value more highly than almost any other, and yet when we lose that good, our response over time does not seem to reflect

> its preciousness to us. Resilience thus seems to deprive us of our ability to care about those we love to their full measure after they are gone, and so deprives us of insight into our own condition.[8]

Moller's view might seem a little opaque at first, but it becomes clear if one thinks about the role of the emotions in understanding value. Moller adopts a view that is expressed a few times in the philosophical literature, but only somewhat vaguely explained.[9] The core idea is that some kinds of value cannot be understood without emotional responses. Partly, what it is to appreciate the significance of some event is to feel it — to feel the significance. We assume that those who feel nothing have yet to accept their loss. They certainly do not understand the significance, at least not yet.

We frequently make use of this notion of understanding. It is not knowing-that and it is not knowing-how, it is something different—a matter of understanding the felt significance of a situation. Imagine asking someone if they understood the enormity of some genocide, battle, bombing, or other horrific event. In reply they say, sure, and spin off a few statistics. We ask: "Isn't it just awful to think about? It's incomprehensible." A reply that, "No, it is perfectly comprehensible: x number of people died," misses the point. As William James notes, in such a case the person has a mere "a cold and neutral state of intellectual perception."[10]

Similarly, consider someone who is completely unmoved at the death of a friend's child. It is incoherent to say: "I understand how horrible it is to lose a child, but it just doesn't sadden me one bit." Either they do not care, or they simply do not understand. This is not merely a matter of knowing how it feels to lose a child. It is a matter of

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[8] Moller (2007, pp.310-311)

[9] The account of understanding I offer moves far beyond what Moller (207, p.311) endorses. The expansion and any accompanying blunders are my own. I develop a similar view in Smuts (2011b and 2013).

[10] James (2003, p.70).

understanding the significance of the loss. Of course, in extremes one may be overwhelmed, moved into a nearly affectless state, but before this extreme, one cannot even approximately understand the loss of a child without feeling pity or grief. The same goes for things that happen to us. Understanding the significance of things that matter to us sometimes requires feeling profound sadness.[11] It is not that the emotion is merely *indicative* of our understanding; rather, it seems that having the emotion is *part* of the understanding itself.

This notion of understanding is admittedly underdeveloped. Unfortunately, I am unsure how to make the idea much clearer. In less controversial terms, one might describe the kind of understanding at issue as a form of *appreciation*. Cheshire Calhoun argues that emotions help one gain an "evidential" (as opposed to a merely "intellectual") grasp on one's beliefs.[12] One might know some fact or another, but not appreciate it. Coming to appreciate a descriptive fact is a process of understanding its implications and becoming ready to deploy it in future thought. We should expect something similar to be the case with evaluative facts. Most plausibly, painful emotional responses can be instrumental to evaluative appreciation. But I am not entirely happy describing the kind of understanding at issue as a merely mode of appreciation. I think something stronger can be said, namely, that emotional reactions are sometimes constitutive of evaluative understanding.

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[11] Blum (1980, pp.173-178), Nussbaum (1994, ch.10; 2001, ch.1,IV; and 2003), Oakley (1992, pp.50-51), Stocker (1996, pp.183-184), Taylor (1985, pp.61-62), and to some extent Williams (1973, pp.225-227) make similar suggestions. Starkey (2008) provides a rare sustained discussion of the issue. He defends the claim that the emotions are required in order to achieve certain kinds of understanding. Similarly, Oakley argues that "having certain emotions may sometimes be necessary for understanding some features of the work, such that an appreciation of these features would be beyond an unemotional person" (p.50). It is unclear if he adopts an instrumental model as does Starkey.

[12] Calhoun (2003, p.242-244).

Once again, imagine learning that a dear friend has lost their only child in a tragic accident. Not having ever lost a child, you nevertheless might be able to draw on how it feels to lose a close friend or relative. But having never experienced grief, it would extremely difficult to understand what she is going through. And a total lack of emotional response at news of her loss would likely render you incapable of understanding what she is going through. Yes, a robot might know that she is "sad," in the inverted commas sense -- the way a psychopaths might know that hurting others is "wrong." But a robot can't appreciate sadness, much less the importance that a child has to a parent.[13]

The strongly resilient are much like robots in regard to their past relationships. The underlying problem for the resilient is that they no longer care. Their lack of concern precludes the kinds of emotional responses that are required to appreciate the value of their previous relationship. Hence, according to Moller, the major problem here is one of understanding. The problem with resilience is an epistemic problem. The resilient just can't appreciate the value of their past relationships.

Although I think there is much to Moller's account of the problem of resilience, and I agree that it does put the resilient in a defective epistemic position, I cannot accept the view that this is largely what is driving our unease. It is tempting for philosophers to think that epistemic problems loom largest, but I think that Moller has both mistakenly assessed the significance of the epistemic problem and failed to identify the primary source of our concern when we mull over scenarios involving strong resilience. Instead, I think the core problem with resilience is identified by Proust in a passage that Moller considers and dismisses in two different articles.[14]

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[13] If functionalist about the mental suggest otherwise, then so much for functionalism.
[14] Moller (2005, p.283; and 2007, p.312)

Proust on Resilience

In *Remembrance of Things Past*, part II, *Within a Budding* Grove, Proust worries about his possible resilience, not after the death of his beloved, but after a possible loss of love. His worry, like ours, is prospective. A resilient future is not one that we look forward to with unqualified enthusiasm. The question is why.

I want to try to figure out Proust's answer by looking at his text. But, before we look at the text, a brief methodological note is in order. The Proust quote below is from a work of literature. Although it is packed with philosophical ruminations, it is not designed to be a maximally consistent philosophical text advancing a position on some issue. It's role is to be suggestive and provocative. Accordingly, we should be careful of hastily dismissing bold overstatements and literally reading metaphors. The charitable will inherent the rewards of literary insight.[15]

Here's Proust on resilience:

> 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; for then our old self would have changed, it would then be not merely the charm of our family, our mistress, our friends that had ceased to environ us, but our affection for them would have been so completely eradicated from our hearts, of which today it is so conspicuous an element, that we should be able to enjoy a life apart from them, the very thought of which today makes us recoil in horror; so that it would be in a real sense the death of the self, a death followed, it is true, by resurrection, but in a different self, to the love of which the elements of the old self that are condemned to die cannot bring themselves to aspire.[16]

[15] To be clear, I'm not claiming that Moller has been uncharitable, only that we must be diligent in guarding against an occupational hazard of philosophy.
[16] Proust (1985, p.722)

Although Moller deserves credit for recognizing the relevance of this passage, he fails to fully appreciate Proust's suggestion, hastily dismissing the sentiment as fanciful:

> Although Proust may be right that we sometimes fear losing our affection more than losing the relationship, his diagnosis concerning 'the death of the self' seems somewhat forced and fanciful. We may have reason to avoid certain types of profound changes to the kinds of people we are -- changes in our religious orientation or our deepest ethical and political commitments are candidates -- but surely the degree of our affection for someone we now love does not rise to that level. We may indeed 'recoil in horror' at the thought of becoming an idolater worshipping false gods or a sadistic paedophile, but Proust seems to exaggerate our reaction to the prospect of losing interest in our beloved.[17]

Moller dismisses the Proustian view too quickly. Although there worry maybe somewhat exaggerated, I think that Proust has identified the most important source of our prospective dismay. If we reconsider the passage from Proust, it should be clear that he is onto something of great importance, far greater than a mere epistemic defect.

When we imagine our own possibly resilient future, many of us do indeed recoil in horror. We don't just want our beloved to grieve, we want to grieve if we were the one to survive. It's not merely that we want to grieve; more importantly, we don't relish the prospect of getting over the loss of our beloved. To get over the loss of someone who means so much to you is difficult to imagine. What would you be like absent such an important concern? It's almost as if we would be a very different person. This is not to say that we would be numerically distinct. Far from it. Rather, the qualitative difference is so great that we would be "a different person" in the colloquial sense. Not only would we be different, the difference is not one that can be attractive from our current vantage point. Some changes are so radical, we cannot welcome their prospect. Loss of love for our beloved is one of them.

[17] Moller (2005, p.283).

This all might still sound a bit high concept. But I think it can be made more concrete. Perhaps the best way to elaborate is in reference to what Bernard Williams calls categorical desires.

Categorical and Contingent Desires

In "The Makropulous Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality," Bernard Williams draws a distinction between two types of desires, categorical and contingent desires.[18] Although the distinction is difficult to draw with much precision and Williams overestimates its importance, the difference is significant. It can be drawn in general terms that help shed light on our general motivational structure.

The paradigm of a categorical desire is, what existentialists call, a project -- a large, life structuring goal: to write a novel, raise a family, build a home, pursue a career. Stated with less philosophical baggage, categorical desires are the kinds of desires that give us reason to live; they propel us forward, so to speak. This is vague, but the notion can be made more perspicuous in contrast.

Contingent desires, in contrast to categorical desires, are desires that are contingent on our being alive. If we are living, we might as well live well, have some whiskey, eat a steak, make love, enjoy the mountains. But these aren't the kind of desires that can propel most people forward for very long, at least not without threatening depression. The gym/tan/laundry life might be fun for a summer, but it doesn't provide much lasting satisfaction. Eventually, many of us will grow tired of a life devoted to simple hedonistic pleasures.

[18] Williams (1993b).

To mark the contrast with a cliché, apart from chefs, self-described foodies, and some food professionals, most of us eat to live, not live to eat. Eating well does not serve as a good categorical desire, whereas, writing a book on regional Chinese cuisine could serve this role. Although it is difficult to mark the contrast with greater precision, the distinction should not be altogether unfamiliar for those living outside of abject poverty.

The categorical desires that we adopt structure our lives. They are both reflective of and definitive of our character. In some important sense, our categorical desires make us who we are. Again we are not be dealing with the philosopher's notion of personal identity here, but it is no less important. When we are getting to know who someone really is, to a large extent, we are learning about their categorical desires, we are learning about what makes them tick.

This is all vague and more suggestive than is ideal, but it has a point. I note the distinction between categorical and contingent desires because I think it helps make sense of the sentiment we find in Proust. Most plausibly, our fundamental cares are either best thought of as categorical desires or as playing a similar role in our lives. A radical shift in categorical desires or in what we care about results in a radical change in who we are, a "death of self."

Williams on Immortality

Some might think that radical changes in our categorical desires, the kind that resilience bring included, might render our future live not worth living. In his reflections on immortality, Williams suggests as much. Happily I don't think the Proustian account of

the problems with resilience forces any such conclusion on us. To see why, it will help to see the central problem with Williams' argument.

Williams argues that immortality of a roughly human kind would be undesirable. His argument is best presented as a dilemma. Either one's categorical desires stay roughly the same throughout eternity, or they change. If they stay the same, we will become hopelessly bored as our desires are eventually satisfied or frustrated. However, if our categorical desires were to evolve, the prospect surviving into the distant future would cease to be attractive. Imagine, for instance, that you were to become a child killing Nazi in three hundred years. The change needn't be so repulsive. The problem is the same either way. It's hard to be attracted to a future self who shares none of our core concerns. Hence, Williams concludes, immortality is undesirable.

Williams dubs the form of immortality where one's categorical desires change the "Tiresias model," referencing the blind prophet of Thebes who lived as a man, a woman, and as a man again. Echoing a Proustian sentiment, Williams says that Tiresias is not a person, but a phenomenon: "Teiresias cannot have a character, either continuously through these proceedings or cumulatively at the end (if there were to be an end) of them: he is not, eventually a person but a phenomenon)."[19] He lacks a character, a self, in the Proustian sense.

Although Williams has identified some curious features of immortality, his argument is unconvincing. For unexplained reasons, he seems to think that our lives would have to be attractive from our present view into the indefinite future in order to be worth living. But this standard is far too demanding. It would imply that most if not all ordinary lives are not worth living, since from the prospective of our childhood selves,

[19] Williams (1993b, p.94)

our adult lives are unattractive, or that from the prospective of our young adult selves, our golden years appear repulsive. Wordsworth wrote that the "child is the father of the man." Indeed. But the man might nevertheless be a complete stranger to the child, an unattractive stranger at that.[20]

Hence, William's main criticism of what he calls the Tiresias model of immortality fails. It fails because it implies that any significant changes in our categorical desires makes our lives not worth living. This is clearly wrong.

Worth Living but Unattractive

Radical changes in our categorical desires and fundamental concerns do not always render our lives not worth living. I don't think that the Proustian view has this implication, but it is nonetheless disturbing to think that some concerns which are so central to who we are now might be gone in the future. Such a future doesn't, in fact it can't, seem attractive from our present vantage point. It might be worth living. It might be a future good for us. Again, that's beside the point. There is no need to deny this possibility to see that a resilient future is rightfully undesirable from our current vantage point.

When we contemplate the prospect of our own resilience, we aren't worried that it will be bad for us. Our dismay is not primarily a kind of self-concern. Rather, it's a not wanting to become who we might become. The fact that this might not be bad for us is irrelevant to the appropriateness of the distress. Our dismay is roughly akin to that of a young boy who can't imagine ever wanting to kiss a girl. The present thought of lip

[20] Fischer (1994) and Smuts (2011a).

smacking makes his skin crawl. It's hard for the boy to imagine that he's ever want to do that.

This might sound fanciful. One might worry that attributing this source of concern suggests that we are all as insightful and delicate as Proust. But clearly we are not. Nor need we be for my explanation to be viable. Proust is able to articulate our sometimes troubling relationship with out past and future selves. His worry rings home precisely because it highlights something about our actual experience. We are nascently aware of the way in which we change, the way in which memory fades and the past and our former selves become inaccessible. This is enough to drive our dismay at the prospect of resilience. We need not be fully cognizant of the thoughts that drive our emotional reactions.

The brilliance of the Proust passage cited above is that is helps us see that our relationship with the past is much like our current relationship with the future, in fact, our relationship with out future selves can be even more troubling. Reflecting on our current indifference to what our former selves loved, Proust writes:

> Within us, rather, but hidden from our eyes in an oblivion more or less prolonged. It is thanks to this oblivion that we can from time to time recover the person that we were, place ourselves in relation to things as he was placed, suffer anew because we are no longer ourselves but he, and because he loved what now leaves us indifferent. In the broad daylight of our habitual memory the images of the past turn gradually pale and fade out of sight, nothing remains of them, we shall never recapture it.[21]

Occasionally, a place, a smell, some subtle change in lighting, can bring back something akin to the feeling of a previous attachment. For most, these moments are brief and rare, much like the blink of an eye in *La Jetée* (Marker, 1962). They are made possible by our

[21] Proust (1985, p.692).

present indifference to what used to matter. We couldn't experience a temporary reawakening otherwise.

It is by reflecting on our current indifference to past concerns that we are able to imagine the prospect of future retrospective indifference to our present concerns. Once again:

> 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; for then our old self would have changed, it would then be not merely the charm of our family, our mistress, our friends that had ceased to environ us, but our affection for them would have been so completely eradicated from our hearts, of which today it is so conspicuous an element, that we should be able to enjoy a life apart from them, the very thought of which today makes us recoil in horror.[22]

Although radical changes can be exciting, one cannot love what one loves now and welcome future indifference. That would involve an emotional contradiction so great as to our current concerns hollow. Since we cannot welcome the loss of our concerns, if they are genuine concerns, we cannot, at least not wholeheartedly or even the least bit enthusiastically, welcome a future without them. Only someone alienated from their affections, someone who, say, wished they could get over the abusive boyfriend to whom they are magnetized, could welcome an indifferent future. For the rest of us, resilience is necessarily disturbing. As Proust puts it, resilience amounts to a death of self, whose resurrection must be unattractive from our current vantage point.

Conclusion

There is reason to doubt the prevalence of strong resilience. We should probably also be skeptical about what we can infer from those who appear to be exceptionally

[22] Proust (1985, p.722).

resilient in the face of a great loss. For much of the discussion above, I assume that it would be correct to say of those who exhibit strong resilience that they no longer care for their former beloved. This might be wrong. Surely a high level of resilience is compatible with an ongoing deep love for the deceased. Perhaps most people don't ever stop caring, not even the strongly resilient.

It's hard to not to think that there is something deeply adolescent about Proust's worry. Who but a flighty teenager ever stops caring about those they love deeply? A song by the *Magnetic Fields* captures the problem nicely:

> Well, my heart's running 'round like a chicken with its head cut off
> All around the barnyard, falling in and out of love
> The poor thing's blind as a bat, getting up, falling down, getting up
> Who'd fall in love with a chicken with its head cut off?
> It ain't pretty.

Nevertheless, there is something deeply unsettling about the prospect that resilience does indeed require an attenuation of care. Many of us find the thought of no longer loving those who we care about deeply disturbing. And it's much more disturbing than Peter Pan's fear of puberty. I've tried to explain why.

Moller thinks the central problem is epistemic. Although resilience isn't as tragic as full blown memory erasure, it is troubling. Given their lack of concern, resilient future people will have trouble understanding who they are now, troubling understanding the importance of their current relationships. This is a worry that Proust recognized when reflecting on his present indifference to his past concerns. But I don't think it is the driving our prospective dismay at the prospect of a resilient future. The trouble stems from the prospect of someday not caring about what we care about now. Unless we are alienated from our current concerns, this is something we cannot find attractive.

One cannot enthusiastically endorse the loss of significant concerns that one currently wants to have. We can only welcome radical changes if we are alienated from our contemporary concerns. For those of us who don't want to stop loving our beloveds, a resilient future is necessarily unattractive in at least one significant respect. The more significant our love, the less attractive a resilient future must become, and the closer it amounts to a death of self. Proust identifies the rightful source of horror that we feel at the possibility of future indifference to the present beloved.

From these Proustian reflections, we can hazard a rule in the logic of love: To enthusiastically welcome a future where one does not love what one now loves wholeheartedly is incoherent. Such a future is necessarily, at least somewhat, unattractive.

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