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REGULAR PAPER

Beyond Agent-Regret: Another Attitude for Non-Culpable Failure

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Imagine a moral agent with the native capacity to act rightly in every kind of circumstance. She will never, that is, find herself thrust into conditions she isn't equipped to handle. Relationships turned tricky, evolving challenges of parenthood, or living in the midst of global pandemic—she is never mistaken about what must be done, nor does she lack the skills to do it.

When *we* are thrust into a new kind of circumstance, by contrast, we often need time to practice discernment, new forms of compassion, different kinds of courage, or whatever else conditions call for. Whereas our imaginary agent has the native capacity to act rightly, we need to *practice* skills and habits appropriate to new circumstances. Unfortunately, practice usually takes the form of on-the-job training—it is hard to cultivate the skills of an excellent parent, for example, until we actually are parents.

On-the-job training has an obvious drawback: mistakes are basically guaranteed. This paper focuses on errors that (a) cause harm to others, and that (b) we make non-culpably because our skills are (understandably) not yet up to snuff. What attitude should we take towards these significant-yet-non-culpable failures?

According to much moral philosophy, non-culpable failures call for *agent-regret*. My aim is not to discredit agent-regret; it does serve an important moral function. Rather, my aim is to complicate a too-simple picture. If we take seriously our need to practice moral skills—such as discernment, new forms of compassion, different kinds of courage, or whatever else new conditions call for—we will have reason to cultivate an attitude I call *stoic determination*.

§1 explains how we practice new moral skills. It focuses on Stohr (2019), which gives us a framework to understand the mechanics of moral practicing, and, thereby, to understand the predicament of an agent who does not yet have the skills or habits she needs. §2 is an extended interlude that illuminates the limitations of agent-regret. Some kinds of non-culpable mistakes, §2 argues, call not for agent-regret, but an attitude I call *stoic determination*. §3 returns to the predicament of on-the-job

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training: an agent fails because she (understandably) does not yet have the skills or habits to succeed in new conditions. Such an agent, it argues, should cultivate stoic determination alongside agent-regret.

1 Practicing Morality: Fictive Selves and Moral Neighborhoods

Most moral philosophy is an exercise in *critical morality*: it aims to uncover the truth about what morality requires, no matter how difficult, demanding, or contrary to practice the truth happens to be. That is a worthwhile task. Recently, though, there is renewed interest in another worthwhile task. Call it *practical morality*: philosophical reflection about how ordinary, fallible agents might become morally better than they are now. And among works of practical morality, Stohr (2019) stands out.

Drawing on Aristotle, Kant, Confucius, and a wealth of contemporary philosophy and psychology, Stohr argues that *fictive selves* are the key to moral improvement. A fictive self is a practical identity that is better than our current self in a way that we have reason to care about. Fictive selves are aspirational.

> My fictive moral self is a representation of myself both as I want to be and as I want others to interpret me. It is a self I put forward not just in my imagination, but also in my social interactions…. In enacting my fictive moral self, I act as a better version of myself, with the aim of becoming more like that better self. (Stohr 2019: 94)

According to Stohr, moral improvement (such as becoming a better parent) isn't something we achieve all at once through a singular act of will. Rather, we 'try on' the identity we aspire to, and thereby practice thinking and acting like the fictive self we hope to become. Improvement thus involves a form of play-acting—we act as though we are better than we currently are, hoping that the act takes root.[1]

It is worth lingering over this point. The difference between an excellent parent and a bad one goes beyond the different actions they perform. Excellent parents have different patterns of thought and attention. When they take their children to movies or other attractions, they often notice their kid's experience just as much as they notice the attraction itself. When they argue—with a significant other, perhaps—they are at least as worried about setting an example for the little ones watching their every move as they are about gaining the upper hand. When they vent frustration, they aren't just getting the latest debacle from work off their chest; they are trying to show their kids how to acknowledge life's aggravations without getting carried away and cranking at the innocent bystanders sharing their orbit.

Becoming an excellent parent—for lots of us—involves a shift in settled and sometimes unconscious habits. Stohr's recommendation is that we develop (with outside help; more on that below) an aspirational identity, a necessarily rough idea of what we would be like if we had the patterns of thought and attention we

[1] Stohr's account draws significantly from Callard (2018) and Velleman (2009).

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currently lack. Then, we practice being that person and make course corrections along the way. Over time, the new habits, practical deliberations, patterns of attention, and the like become less and less alien. Our actual selves begin to line up with our fictive selves.

Our fictive selves, on Stohr's account, need not constitute a permanently fixed target. New-ish parents, for example, might aspire to keep their little ones entirely away from screens, processed foods, and added sugars—only to discover that such stringent, inflexible demands get in the way of other things the good parent values. Good parents typically want their children to make friends and socialize; but that will often mean visiting someone else's house, where screens, processed foods, and added sugars are not banned. Stohr writes,

> My outlook on what it means to be a good parent, and hence the ideal of parenting to which I am aspiring, is constantly shaped by the experience of trying to live and act as a parent…. [I enact] various versions of fictive parenting selves with the aim of working out an aspirational parenting identity. (Stohr 2019: 96)

So fictive selves are provisional targets. They are, moreover, not targets we reach all on our own. Stohr's account is highly attuned to the role others play in our moral development. When we present ourselves to others as, say, good parents, we set up networks of reinforcement and accountability. As for reinforcement: it is psychologically easier to see ourselves as good parents, and to act as such, when others recognize us in that role. Our self-conceptions are often influenced by the way other people see us. As for accountability: others' recognition of us as good parents can function as a reminder to (or, depending on the details, even a demand that) we live up to our fictive selves. Stohr refers to these networks of reinforcement and accountability as *moral neighborhoods*. Good moral neighborhoods are arguably essential—and clearly instrumental—to the process of becoming our fictive selves.[2]

To sum up: Stohr's view, broadly speaking, is that we get better at morality in the same way that we get better at just about everything else. We practice. The power of her account lies in providing a framework that usefully describes the structure of practicing. For now, the rudiments will have to do: we improve by enacting fictive selves; enacting a fictive self is a kind of play-acting; and we rely on good moral neighborhoods to keep us on track. Whether we are trying to become excellent parents, excellent teachers, or trying to partially remake ourselves because the demands of our spousal role have shifted (one of my grandfathers, for example, had to figure out how to be a husband to a partner steadily losing her faculties to Alzheimer's), we learn by doing. We practice.

[2] My description of Stohr's account omits one concept she spends time developing: *moral front regions*. Moral front regions are physical-social spaces in which we put forward the fictive self we are aspiring to. I'm including mention of moral front regions for the sake of completeness; I'm relegating that mention to a footnote because the term is not essential for the arguments in this paper and I don't want to multiply terms unnecessarily.

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Now, imagine confronting a novel kind of circumstance. You pick an appropriate (but distant) fictive self, join a supportive moral neighborhood, and then practice being the self you aspire to. The good news is that you are steadily closing the gap between your actual self and the fictive self you need to become; the bad news is that you err along the way. The really bad news is that some of your mistakes cause harm to others. In the wake of such non-culpable harms, what attitude should we have?

2 Agent-Regret and Stoic Determination

A common answer, following Williams (1981), is *agent-regret*: when we non-culpably cause harm, we should feel agent-regret. This section aims to complicate that too-simple picture. Some non-culpable failures call for a different attitude: *stoic determination*.

This section distinguishes two kinds of non-culpable failures by focusing on the normative demands they give rise to. Some non-culpable failures obligate us to apologize and make tokens of reparation; others obligate us to hone whichever deficient skills lead to our failure in the first place. The argument here in §2, which is broadly pragmatic, is that agents who non-culpably fail should adopt an attitude that facilitates the right response. When our non-culpable harms call for apologies and tokens of reparation, we should feel agent-regret. When they call for practice—the honing of whichever deficient skills lead to our mistake in the first place—we should feel stoic determination.

Can a non-culpable harm call for both attitudes? In the wake of failure, can an agent be obligated to make apologies/reparations *and* to practice? Yes (there will be more on this in §3). Here in §2, however, I need to make the distinction between agent-regret and stoic determination as clear as possible. So, using Wojtwicz (2019) as a foil, I will draw a stark contrast between the accident of Williams's lorry driver and Roberto Baggio's missed penalty in the final of the 1994 World Cup.

2.1 Williams's Driver vs. Baggio: A New Job for Agent-Regret?

Williams imagines a driver who, despite taking all reasonable precautions, kills a child. It would be a mistake for the driver to feel guilt—guilt, as Williams thinks of it, is reserved for culpable failures and the driver hit the child "through no fault of his" (Williams 1981: 20). At the same time, the driver shouldn't regret the child's death in the same way a bystander would. The child died as a result of the driver's agency. Whereas a bystander regrets *the fact that* a bad outcome has occurred, the driver should regret *his role* in bringing about that outcome. Agent-regret is personal in a way that bystander regret is not.

Wojtowicz (2019) is a fascinating attempt to extend agent-regret from Williams's lorry driver to a different case: Roberto Baggio's infamous penalty kick in the 1994 World Cup. When that tournament came around, Baggio was arguably the best forward in soccer. In 1993, he won the Ballon D'or—an annual award given to recognize the world's best player. An accomplished penalty kick taker, Baggio *still* holds

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the Italian league record for the highest conversion rate. But in the final of the '94 World Cup, his prowess let him down.

After ninety minutes of regulation play plus extra time saw Italy and Brazil tied, the final headed to penalty kicks. Brazil took the lead. When it was Baggio's turn to shoot, Italy badly needed a goal—a miss would hand Brazil victory. Baggio studied before the game. He knew that Brazil's goalkeeper always dove preemptively—to the left or right—when defending a penalty kick. So, Baggio did the smart thing. He kicked the ball straight down the middle, towards the space Brazil's goalkeeper was acrobatically vacating. But something went wrong. Maybe he leaned back just a little too far, or maybe he scooped the ball just a little more than he intended. Baggio's shot sailed harmlessly over the goal and sealed Italy's loss.

Wojtowicz (2019) argues that Baggio should feel agent-regret. One element seems obviously apt: like the driver, Baggio's attitude should reflect his personal involvement. Whereas a fan might feel bystander regret, Baggio's miss is the result of his own agency. But agent-regret is an attitude for *non-culpable* failure. Why think Baggio's miss is not a culpable mistake?

Wojtowicz's answer is that human skills are fallible, no matter how finely we hone them. Having skill at X simply does not guarantee success at X. Now, if X is trivially easy—'sipping coffee from a mug without spilling,' say—failure rates among the skilled will be very, very low. If X is 'converting a penalty kick under high pressure,' they will be higher. But the normative evaluation of failure, argues Wojtowicz, should be the same in both kinds of cases. Human skills *just are* fallible. Over a long enough time interval, the occasional misfire—whether it results in spilled coffee or a missed penalty kick—is every bit as unavoidable as the child in Williams's example. The driver's bad luck consisted in the child's unexpected presence at the most inopportune time; Baggio's bad luck consisted in his well-honed skills misfiring at the worst possible moment.

It is tempting to think, "Well, if he had just practiced a bit more, Baggio would have had better skills and he wouldn't have missed. So he is exactly culpable for his mistake." But I join Wojtowicz in finding the tempting thought unreasonable. Soccer games can be lost in *so many* different ways: one might hit a game-breaking pass slightly off-target, miss a crucial tackle, become too tired to make a necessary run, or fail at the tactical, X's-and-O's challenge of reading the game. A player's job is to be *broadly* prepared. For Baggio, that does include being ready to take penalty kicks. But the record-setting conversion rate he established over the years—paired with the fact that he researched the goalkeeper's tendencies before the game—is excellent evidence that his penalty kick preparations were not slack. For all any of us know, attempting to further refine his already world-leading penalty kick skills would have been a waste of valuable practice time, time that would be better spent working on something else. So Wojtowicz's diagnosis seems initially plausible: both the driver and Baggio have to contend with a bad outcome resulting from their own agency and for which guilt would be out of place.

Initial plausibility notwithstanding, I think Wojtowicz's diagnosis is mistaken. Subsection B argues that while Baggio will surely feel some form of regret over his miss, agent-regret would not be apt. Subsection C argues that alongside whatever sort of regret he feels, Baggio has reason to cultivate stoic determination.

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2.2 Making Amends, Making 'Amends', and Agent-Regret

Mackenzie (2017: 98) writes, "agent-regret should be understood not as an isolated emotional reaction, but rather as one component in a larger social practice that helps us navigate our way through bad moral luck." I will assume that Mackenzie's dictum is correct; I will use it to argue that Baggio's regret is not agent-regret.

Start with a few widely-endorsed points about our practices of making amends for wrongs: wrongs are not merely harms; they are harms that convey a disrespectful message. As Murphy (1988: 25) puts it, an act of wrongdoing says, "I can use you for my purposes … I am here up high and you are there down below." Therefore, our practices of making amends have to accomplish two things. We not only need to (a) compensate the victim for whatever physical or material damage we have caused (insofar as that is possible), we must (b) retract the disrespectful message our wrongdoing expressed. It is a commonplace that in the context of making amends, apologies and reparations have expressive power: when all goes well, they admit that we disrespected the victim, communicate that we never should have done so, and show that we are serious about doing better in the future.

We need practices of making amends because wrongdoing can set us at odds with each other, undermine cooperation towards important goals, and ruin valuable relationships. Pettigrove (2012: xi) begins by describing the plight of a man who, despite being "easy to talk to" and "fun to be around," loses relationship after relationship because he eschews our practices of making amends. When someone in his social orbit commits a moral wrong—and they all do, eventually—he simply ends things. However, wrongdoing is not the *only* kind of harm that can set us at odds, undermine cooperation, and ruin relationships. Sussman (2018: 792) rightly notes that we can fall into these "deep forms of conflict with one another through nothing but bad luck." Williams's driver ran over the child through no fault of his own, so the significant harm he causes does not express the disrespectful message that is definitive of wrongdoing. Still, the driver is liable to find himself at odds with the child's parents much as he would have been if he had killed the child through fully wrongful negligence.

The point is that conflict, whether it stems from wrongdoing or bad luck, is a practical problem. Call the ameliorative responses we make in the wake of wrongdoing *making amends*. Call the ameliorative responses we make in the wake of bad luck *making 'amends'*.[3]

On the surface, making 'amends' looks a lot like making amends. Imagine that there is a throng of people crowding a hallway; you need to pass through; and while trying to pick your way through the almost randomly moving crowd, you bump into someone. Given that you have not caused any significant material or physical harm, making 'amends' amounts to apologizing—your job is simply to assure the bump-ee that you meant nothing by it. If the bump-ee drops her stuff, making 'amends' amounts to apologizing and then helping her gather her belongings. If you split her

[3] Please don't read anything overly significant into the scare quotes. I just need to distinguish between two sets of practices.

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lip, you owe an apology and whatever medical assistance you can provide—"So sorry, it was an accident; please let me get you a Band-Aid from my bag."

When non-culpable failures result in a really significant harm, truly setting things right may be impossible. Still, most of us feel that we have an obligation to do what we can. That is the situation Williams's driver finds himself in: he cannot restore the child he has killed, but he should apologize to the parents, help pay for the funeral (if he is able), or make other contextually appropriate responses.

But while making 'amends' and making amends often look superficially alike, there is an important difference. Whereas the process of making amends aims to *take back* a disrespectful message, the process of making 'amends' aims to give the victim (and any onlookers) a reason to interpret events such that there *is no* disrespectful message in the first place. Deliberately harming someone, or harming someone out of culpable negligence, conveys that the victim is down below; part of the reason we make 'amends' is to show that we meant to convey no such thing. In the context of making 'amends,' apologies and tokens of reparation—"So sorry, it was an accident; please let me get you a Band-Aid from my bag"—are, in part, an attempt to combat moral misunderstandings.

It is finally time to apply Mackenzie's dictum that agent-regret be understood as "one component in a larger social practice that helps us navigate our way through bad moral luck." In a slogan, I think guilt is to making amends as agent-regret is to making 'amends.' Guilt serves two important functions. First, it motivates wrongdoers to do the often hard-and-humiliating work of accepting responsibility for their wrong and trying to make things right. Second, an appropriate expression of guilt assures the victim (and onlookers) that the wrongdoer is truly sorry. Similarly, agent-regret serves two important functions. First, it motivates us to compensate people we harm non-culpably. Second, an appropriate display of agent-regret gives victims (and onlookers) a reason *not* to see our actions as expressions of disrespect.[4]

[4] While I endorse Mackenzie's pragmatic, social-practices approach to understanding agent-regret, this may put me adds with some of her more specific claims. Mackenzie suggests that when we feel agent-regret over non-culpable harms, we should acquiesce into the "bad guy" role—Williams's driver, for example, should offer himself up as a target for the parents' hate. Mackenzie's reasoning is that having a concrete target may help the grieving process along. I suppose it might. But it also might not. Hate can corrode moral character; some never quite recover from the corrosion; and the parent who is corroded *because he hates someone who doesn't deserve it* is tragic figure. Depending on the details, I worry that playing the bad guy will be less like emotional aid and more like setting a trap for the victims of bad moral luck. Moreover, I worry that offering oneself up as the 'bad guy' is in tension with giving the parents reason to see the incident as a non-culpable harm rather than an act of wrongdoing. I may also disagree with Sussman's more specific claims, but for different reasons. Sussman (802-3) claims that bad luck puts people in a moral state of nature. If the kid in Williams's example "happened to be carrying a good disintegrator gun, she would be entitled to use it on the truck if this were the only way to save her life," while the "truck driver [may permissibly] draw his own disintegrator in an effort to preempt her attempts at what he knows to be completely justified self-defense." For Sussman, practices of making 'amends' help us exit this state of nature and reestablish normal moral conditions. Sussman's view is *prima facie* plausible in dramatic, high-stakes examples like that of Williams's driver. But it seems overblown to suggest that we have entered a moral state of nature when we bump folks in a crowded hallway. We do sometimes view the people who bump us with suspicion; but I doubt that we would see ourselves as engaged in a self-interested struggle largely unconstrained by morality. Sussman's view may lack generality.

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Now back to Baggio: Wojtowicz argues that agent-regret is appropriate for Williams's driver and for Baggio—both have to contend with a bad outcome that stems from their own agency and for which guilt would be out of place. However, we are now positioned to see a key difference. The driver has an obligation to make 'amends.' The parents need to make decisions about which attitudes they should cultivate towards the driver, about whether to seek punishment, and about how they will try to put their lives back together. They cannot make those decisions rationally if they are stuck understanding the incident as a case of culpable wrongdoing. The driver owes the parents a competent expression of agent-regret because he needs to assure them that there is no disrespectful message to retract, even while the harm is grave.

Baggio, by contrast, does *not* have an obligation to make 'amends.' It may be initially reasonable for the bump-ee in the hallway to wonder whether your actions constitute disrespect—"If he knows that he is likely to bump people, spill their belongings, and split their lips, why doesn't he slow down?" So too, it may be initially (and maybe for a while thereafter) reasonable for the parents to wonder whether the driver's actions constitute disrespect—"If he thinks folks around him matter, why doesn't he drive more carefully?" But it would, by stark contrast, be strange to think that Baggio's miss constitutes disrespect for the teammates and fans he disappointed. If Baggio had placed a bet against Italy's winning, or was in the habit of blowing off practice and showing up to games unprepared, his miss may have expressed disrespect to fans and teammates. But given the actual facts of the case, the reasonable conclusion is that he missed by sheer bad luck.[5] I can't see how Baggio's miss tells anyone that they are down below.

Now, I am not denying that Baggio's miss calls for a degree of regret. But if Mackenzie's dictum is true—and I'm assuming it is—agent-regret must be understood as a part of our practices of making 'amends.' Baggio's regret, while crushing, plays no role in those practices. It needs to be understood differently. Ultimately, I don't think it should be a surprise that there are several different forms of regret. Compare: People with sophisticated palates use a wide range of concepts to capture the richness of their taste-experience. Human beings fail in myriad different ways, to a wide range of degrees, and in countless different contexts; we will arguably need many varieties of regret to capture the richness of our failure-experience.

2.3 Practice and Stoic Determination

There is another important difference between Williams's driver and Baggio. Think about trying to explain why the bad outcome occurred. The driver can—and should—point to unpredictable, almost one-off circumstances. As I am imagining the case, the kid just happened to be in exactly the wrong place at exactly the wrong time. Baggio's penalty, by contrast, occurred under rigorously standardized conditions: the distance to goal was the same as always, the ball wasn't misshapen,

[5] Many thanks to the anonymous referee who helped clarify my thinking on this point.

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and the turf was immaculate. No one jumped out unexpectedly at the last possible second. The driver failed because of non-standard, virtually impossible conditions; Baggio did not. This difference means that whereas Baggio's miss calls for further practice, the driver's accident does not.

Why doesn't the driver's accident call for practice? Realistically, succeeding in one-off, virtually impossible conditions is not something we can get better at. Again, as I imagine Williams's driver, he made no 'driverly' error. There is nothing in particular he can practice to make similar accidents less likely in the future—it was just sheer, brute bad luck. Even if we imagine that he could have avoided the child if he just happened to scan his eyes to the right instead of the left, it's still not clear that the incident calls for practice. There is no guarantee that scanning his eyes to the right would be the correct move the next time around. And if he practices scanning his eyes every which way, attending to all the details he can, cognitive fatigue may well increase the likelihood of future incident. Drivers need selective attention. Williams's driver—again, as I imagine the case—was appropriately employing the kind of selective attention that typically results in safe driving.

The driver could, of course, have a bad habit or lackluster skill that didn't play a causal role in the accident. If he does, and if the relevant bad habit or lackluster skill is likely to cause harm in the future, he should probably practice. But the point here is that the accident itself does not call for practice, in the sense that it does not indicate a 'driverly' failure that needs to be fixed. It is consistent with all the details of the case that the driver's skills are impeccable and that his only responsibility, following the accident, is to make 'amends.'

Baggio's case is different. Whereas succeeding in one-off, virtually impossible conditions is not something we can get better at, Baggio can get better at taking penalties. Given his already-lofty skills, he will not see the kind of large-scale improvement that relative novices can expect from practice. But unless Baggio's skills are already maximally honed (if that is even possible), he can still get a little better, and thus be a little less likely to suffer the kind of misfire that dashed Italy's 1994 title hopes. Whereas it isn't clear what exactly the driver could be practicing to guard against similar incidents, Baggio can watch the game tape and figure out whether he leaned back too far or whether he scooped the ball too much. It is *not* consistent with all the details of the case that Baggio's skills are impeccable.[6]

So: Different kinds of failures call for different kinds of responses, and different kinds of responses are in turn best facilitated by different kinds of attitudes. In the wake of failure, therefore, we have reason to cultivate whichever attitudes facilitate the appropriate response. Williams's driver needs to make 'amends;' he has reason to cultivate agent-regret because competent expressions of agent-regret are central to

[6] I still think, with Wojtowicz, that Baggio is not culpable for the deficiencies in his penalty kick skills. Admitting that Baggio can get a little better at penalties is not the same thing as admitting that his preparations for the '94 World Cup were inadequate. The fact that one can get better in the future is not by itself evidence that one's past preparations were slack. Again, his remarkable conversion rate—paired with the fact that he studied the goalkeeper's tendencies before the game—is excellent evidence that Baggio spent enough of his limited practice time on penalty kicks.

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that process. But Baggio needn't make 'amends.' He, *qua* player, needs to practice. What attitude, or attitudes, should he cultivate?

A form of regret (though not agent-regret) might be part of the overall answer. Regret is painful, and the desire to avoid it can be a powerful motivator. But relying too exclusively on regret to motivate practice does not seem like a promising strategy. First, practice will itself be tedious and frustrating. It will mean taking the same shots over and over and over again. There can, admittedly, be a kind of satisfaction in stepping up to the penalty spot and nailing shot after shot; but boredom is realistically inevitable. And as for frustration, the thirtieth shot will sometimes go awry, even though one seemingly took the very same approach that worked the first twenty-nine times. Second, and building on the first point, the tedium and frustration of practice simply cannot guarantee success. The great strength of Wojtwicz's argument lies in recognizing that human skills are inescapably fallible. Baggio will miss another penalty during a game. So he has a choice: he can subject himself to the rigors of practice, knowing full well that he will eventually suffer the pains of regret anyway; or, he can spare himself the rigors of practice *and* the pains of regret by opting out of penalty kicks altogether.[7]

Practicing skills—at least relatively difficult ones—is not like taking steps that lead steadily towards a perfected, durable end state. It is more like raking leaves on a windy day: our skills improve with effort, they are never perfect, and they start getting worse when we stop working. Given the nature of his task, Baggio would be well-served—and thus has practical reason to cultivate—an attitude that combines a determination to become as skilled as possible with a dispassionate acceptance of the fact that our skills are always fallible. Call that combination *stoic determination*. Whereas agent-regret is broadly speaking painful, stoic determination feels like a combination of resignation and hope. It is like resignation inasmuch as we expect to fail again eventually. It is like hope inasmuch as we are also looking forward to an imagined success.[8]

Now, to finally wrap up §2: Different kinds of failures call for different kinds of responses. Wojtwicz argues that agent-regret is apt for Baggio just as it is for Williams's driver—both, after all, have to contend with a bad outcome that results from their own agency and for which guilt would be out of place. But in the wake of their respective failures, the driver and Baggio have very different obligations. The driver should make 'amends,' and competent expressions of agent-regret are central to that process. Baggio has no 'amends' to make. His miss calls for practice. I don't deny

[7] Of course, opting out of penalties altogether is liable to bring on a different set of regrets—at backing down from a challenge, at missing out on the accolades he would have garnered from converting penalties, and so on. Still, the general point stands: as a motivational strategy, relying too exclusively on regret entails a significant downside. It means doing lots of unpleasant work to avoid the sting of regret and, eventually, getting stung anyhow.

[8] An anonymous referee asked if stoic determination might also be important when there is no recent failure: "Can't one think 'I've done well this time, I need to do well again, keep it up!'?" I think the answer is 'Yes'. Stoic determination facilitates practice; it is likely useful whenever practice is needed. But in this essay, I am focusing specifically on responding to failure.

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that *some* form of regret would be apt. But whatever sort of regret he feels, Baggio has practical reason to cultivate stoic determination.

3 Reconnecting to the Main Thread

§1 closed with a hypothetical: Imagine confronting a novel kind of circumstance. You pick an appropriate (but distant) fictive self, join a supportive moral neighborhood, and then practice the skills and habits you need to become the self you aspire to. The good news is that you are steadily closing the gap between your current and fictive selves; the bad news is that you err along the way; the really bad news is that some of your mistakes cause harm to others. What attitude should one have towards those harm-causing mistakes?

The juxtaposition of Williams's driver and Baggio in §2 was tailored to neatly separate practical needs: the accident was a bizarre one-off that did not reveal a deficiency in the driver's skills, so it calls only for the making of 'amends'; Baggio's mistake conveys no disrespectful message, so it just calls for practice. But in the kind of case we are imagining here, we confront both practical demands. Our situation is a hybrid of Williams's driver and Baggio. Like Williams's driver, we find ourselves thrust into circumstances that guarantee failure, albeit by a different mechanism. The driver faces circumstances that are impossible for anyone; we face circumstances that are impossible for us, given the limited skillset we (understandably) have to work with. We need to make 'amends' to assure the people we hurt that we meant to convey no disrespectful message. But also, like Baggio, we need to practice. We need to hone our moral skills so that we can avoid such failures in the future.

Why should we make 'amends' when we err because we find ourselves confronting circumstances that require a moral skillset we haven't yet had the chance to develop? For all the reasons canvassed in §2. Making 'amends' is important because we need to communicate with our moral peers. There is a risk that the innocence of our mistake will not be obvious to the people we hurt, so it is important to give the victim information about what kinds of reactive attitudes to direct our way. Nor is the innocence of our mistake always obvious to third parties who have a legitimate interest in knowing whether we are basically decent people struggling to develop new skills or whether we need to be watched more carefully.

One might object: "Making 'amends' to communicate with our moral peers is probably important when the relevant peers don't know us all that well. But, surely, making 'amends' isn't so urgent if the victim can already vouch for your good character." I think the objection is just plain false. Moral character can change over time. Sometimes, from an outsider's perspective, changes are startlingly quick. Loving spouses can become self-centered and callous; caring parents can become brusquely authoritarian. If I non-culpably harm someone close to me, and then fail to make 'amends', the victim might find herself wondering if my character is changing for the worse. Or, perhaps, she finds herself wondering whether she has been seeing me in an unrealistically rosy light all along. The point is not that morality gives victims license to go overboard and start

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questioning our basic human decency over every little thing. The point is that the need to communicate by making 'amends'—and thus the need to cultivate appropriate agent-regret—does not, as a general matter, dissolve when we know each other well.

But when we fail because we do not yet have the skills of our fictive self, we will also need stoic determination. Here, once more, is Stohr's (2019: 94) description of enacting a new fictive self.

> My fictive moral self is a representation of myself both as I want to be and as I want others to interpret me…. In enacting my fictive moral self, I act as a better version of myself, with the aim of becoming more like that better self. (Stohr 2019: 94)

The skills, habits, and perspective of the better self develop only with practice. Return to the parenting example to make the point concrete: the process of becoming an excellent parent is not a singular act of will. When we argue with a significant other, most of us have to learn to be at least as worried about setting an example for the little ones watching our every move as we are about gaining the upper hand. Arguing, like *so many* actions, takes on new significance in the context of parenting. And it takes practice to become the sort of person who sees new significances. Insofar as stoic determination facilitates practice, we have reason to cultivate it too.

4 Conclusion

The infallible moral agent we imagined the introduction seamlessly handles whatever novel circumstances she finds herself confronting. Relationships turned tricky, evolving challenges of parenthood, or living in the midst of global pandemic—she is never mistaken about what must be done, nor does she lack the skills to do it. When *we* find ourselves in novel circumstances, by contrast, we often find ourselves needing to practice the moral skills of a distant fictive self. This need for practice, I have argued, makes a difference to the attitudes we should cultivate. Agent-regret is not enough. We also have reason to cultivate stoic determination.

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