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The Most Basic Regret

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Abstract

I argue that there are grave wrongs that call for the most basic regret on the part of the wrong-doer. Following Bernard Williams, I characterize 'basic regret' as regret about a past action or decision that refutes one's ground projects and thereby renders one's life meaningless. I then consider whether recovery from fitting basic regret could ever be fitting. The possibility of fitting recovery, I claim, depends on a fitting process of moral repair, of which basic regret is an essential element. The paper takes as its point of departure a fact that I find both disturbing and perplexing, namely, that I no longer experience the most basic regret about grave wrongs I committed as an Israeli soldier in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

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Some seventeen years ago, I committed serious wrongs. I should not have committed these wrongs. I have not denied committing them nor did I resume my life as if I had never committed them. On the contrary, the wrongs I committed had a profound impact on my life. My actions—my moral failures—set me on a life course different from the one I would have followed otherwise. Today, I affirm my life, shaped as it is by the wrongs I have done. I find meaning in my relationships and pursuits, my hopes and devotions.

This essay is prompted by the worry—the anxiety, really—that had I fully appreciated the wrongs I committed, I would have been unable to affirm my life in this way. Although there was a time when I experienced the most basic regret—that is, I was thoroughly alienated from the life I had lived due to the wrongs I had done—I no longer feel in my gut the yearning for a different life. My life is mine, again, though my past wrongs remain unchanged. Does the fact that I am no longer under the grip of fundamental regret imply that I am failing to fully acknowledge and take responsibility for my actions? While I describe my actions in harsh words, do I not, at the same time, approve of them, given their essential role in determining the life I cherish and would not trade for another?

What follows is meant to shed light on the ethics of failure—anyone’s failure, not just mine—by considering how we might accept our failures while fully acknowledging them as such. As I will go on to describe them, my particular actions may seem unusual in their severity and poignancy (though whether they are is a matter of context,) but I believe many, perhaps most people, if they are minimally self-reflective, bear the cross of their own failures. It is a silent, private load that looms over us as we go about our daily business; it threatens to undo us by draining that which gives meaning to our lives. We who acknowledge our reason for basic regret, seem to face a dilemma: on the one hand, we may willfully forget our past and thereby deceive ourselves about what we had done and misconstrue the lives we’ve led, and on the other hand, we may fully acknowledge our past and thereby condemn ourselves to alienation from the persons we have become. No matter which horn of the dilemma we embrace, the meaning we wish to uphold seems to slip away. Truthfulness seems impossible. Thus, in the end, I hope in this paper to say something useful about the possibility of forgiving oneself, by which I mean, accepting one’s present without forgetting one’s past.

Having a concrete, real example at hand is crucial for our appreciation of the significance of regret. I begin the essay, in section 1, by describing in some detail the serious wrongs I committed. Then, in section 2, I argue that judging that I committed these serious wrongs commits me to regretting them. In section 3, I argue that the kind of regret I should experience insofar as I rationally judge that I committed these wrongs is what Bernard Williams calls *the most basic regret*. In section 4, I consider how can fitting basic regret come to a fitting end. I claim that fitting basic regret is part of a process of repair that is itself fitting in response to my past wrongs. The fact that I no longer feel basic regret is compatible with having undergone the fitting process of repair and therefore compatible with properly acknowledging my past wrongs. Whether I actually did undergo a process of repair is a question for another time and place.

1. What I Did.

Recent philosophical literature on the limits of regret resorts to a peculiar pool of examples. Some are examples of decisions about when to procreate (Parfit 1984, Wallace 2013, Setiya 2014, Velleman 2008), others are examples of decisions about having or treating children with disabilities (McMahan 2005, Harman 2009, Setiya 2014, Wallace 2013), and yet others concern

decisions made for the sake of life projects (Williams 1981, Wallace 2013). I begin this essay with an example that does not fall under any of the above categories; an example of a straightforward moral wrong. The example I will consider is a specific, real case, with which I am personally familiar. It concerns wrongs I committed as an Israeli soldier while enforcing military occupation in the West Bank.

The point of describing my own case in some detail is twofold. First, I hope to disentangle the issue of the justified diminishment of regret from other complex issues in ethics, such as the non-identity problem, the ethics of procreation, and questions about disabilities. These types of cases are meant to raise special questions about regret: they are often examples of bad, wrong, or unjustified decisions or actions that result in something good, valuable, and properly cherished. However, much the same questions about regret arise in more common instances of wrongdoing. The diminution of regret is normal and often fitting even in cases of everyday mistakes or—as in the example I am about to discuss—cases of serious wrongs that do not obviously lead to any valuable result; in this regard, the stylized examples are quite ordinary. While the distinctive features of the stylized examples rationally impact the agents, they are not essential for the rational diminution of regret. Second, armchair discussions of hypothetical or distant cases often invoke our intuitions about what *we would like to say about regret* rather than *what regret is like*. By describing my own, real case, I hope to make vivid the stakes involved in the issue at hand and gain insight into the workings of regret—not as I would like it to be, but as it is.

Consider, then, the following case. In the early 2000s, I was a conscript soldier in the Israel Defense Forces. I spent a considerable amount of time patrolling roads, hills, neighborhoods, and villages; inspecting vehicles; riding (and sleeping in) armed vehicles and Humvees; raiding houses in search of weapons; managing permanent checkpoints and setting up temporary ones; guarding and living in outposts made of assemblages of trailers and concrete blocks; standing in tall guard towers, hours on end, overlooking dirt roads that sprawl over yellowish, green fields. It was a normal military service of an Israeli combat soldier in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Just under 3 million Palestinians live in the land west of the Jordan river, the West Bank, an area that was conquered by Israel from Jordan in 1967 but was never officially annexed to Israel (except for east Jerusalem and the neighboring villages.) Israel's rule in these territories is

commonly known as the Israeli Occupation and the territories themselves are known as the Occupied Palestinian Territories (or, simply and ominously, the Territories.) Officially temporary, the Israeli Occupation has been ongoing for almost 52 years with no end in sight.

The Palestinian residents of the West Bank are not Israeli citizens. Though most of the Palestinians are formally represented by the Palestinian Authority (PA), the PA lacks the resources and standing of an independent state and is dependent on Israel in almost every way. The PA's authority, inasmuch that it has one, extends only over areas with large concentration of Palestinians, not over the whole of the West Bank. However, Israeli forces move freely everywhere in the Territories and have the final word regarding Palestinians' movement in and between villages and cities. Israel also controls much of the funding of the PA, as well as the water and electricity supply in the Territories. Thus, West Bank Palestinians are effectively, if not officially, under Israel's complete control. The Israeli military, together with the Israeli Secret Service and other governmental agencies, oversees compliance with Israeli rule. Israel does not purport to serve or protect the interests and needs of Palestinians. Moreover, Israel has been expropriating growing chunks of Palestinian land. Israeli citizens who settled the West Bank, with the encouragement of Israeli governments, often invade and take control of Palestinian property. They do so against Israeli law, but their actions are tolerated and enabled by Israeli institutions.

Palestinian compliance is achieved through sheer intimidation. Houses are randomly raided in the middle of the night for no apparent reason; checkpoints that separate villages and cities shut down for hours and are usually congested; a convoluted system of permits makes it very difficult for Palestinians to travel. Settlers' violence also contributes to this regime of fear. Israeli settlers routinely harass their Palestinian neighbors: poison their wells, burn their orchards, attack their livestock, and assault them physically with clubs and stones. Soldiers normally do not defend Palestinians from the settlers; they offer the settlers protection. (In past waves of Palestinian violent resistance, settlers have been a primary target of Palestinian militants.)

More generally, soldiers may use force against Palestinians for no apparent reason and are very rarely held accountable. When I was a soldier, we punished anyone who seemed rebellious to us and used our force and weapons whenever we felt threatened, disrespected, or challenged. The thought that any civilian might pose a threat to us blurred the distinction between civilians

and combatants to the point of obliterating it. To “punish” an individual or group of people, we most commonly kept them waiting in the sun, or in the cold night, often blindfolded and handcuffed, for as long as we saw fit. Other times we gave them tasks, like singing or dancing, or taking off the wheels of their cars and putting them back on again. We confiscated their cars, or IDs, or slapped them around. We pointed loaded guns at them. Humiliated them in front of their sons and daughters, husbands and wives, parents and grandparents. Occasionally, Palestinians were murdered by soldiers.¹

I witnessed such events, sometimes taking part in them myself, other times merely allowing them to happen. It might seem difficult to comprehend, but such occurrences made sense to us. The Territories seemed like an utterly foreign reality, and yet one to which we were all bound to succumb. Without the minimal degree of trust that makes civil life possible, violence seemed like the only way to keep order. The Occupied Territories are a rule of terror and impoverishment that, until this day, effectively sustains the status quo by infusing daily life with brutality. We had power, in a sense, but we were also helpless and terrified. The fear we spread stared back at us through the eyes of our victims. We didn’t realize it at the time, but this was our job: to create fear and be afraid.

Fear is meant to keep Palestinians from resisting Israel’s rule and, more importantly, from working together to achieve their shared goals as a community—primarily, the goal of self-rule and independence. Fear, in other words, is meant to block Palestinian freedom, a freedom viewed by Israel as a risk it cannot afford. The possibility of Palestinian violence has eclipsed all other considerations, to the effect of denying all Palestinians the opportunity to live a decent life.

I was part of this rule of terror; I should not have been. I participated in a fundamentally corrupt regime, a regime that cannot be justified as a form of self-defense and which in any case undermines the moral and physical existence of my fellow-citizens, my society, and my country. But I was not *merely* a part of this regime (every Israeli citizen and, to some degree, every American tax payer, is part of this regime.) For the many individual Palestinians who passed through my checkpoints, for the families whose homes I raided and whose cars I inspected, for the

¹ According to B’tselem, an Israeli Human Rights organization, between April 2011 and December 2015, 121 Palestinians were killed in the West Bank by Israeli soldiers. Only in one of these cases a soldier was convicted. For more information: http://www.btselem.org/accountability/military_police_investigations_followup

children who saw me patrolling their streets on their way to school – for them I was a face of the regime. Not *the* face, but another face, another soldier. As I determined who may and may not pass through my checkpoint, I *was* the Israeli occupation. Some wished to pass through my checkpoint to go to another village or to a city further away; some were on their way to work, to school, or to the university; some asked to be let through to visit family or see a doctor; sometimes a group of people were on their way to a funeral, or a wedding. (Once, I remember, there was a couple, a day after their wedding, on their way to their honeymoon. They were almost turned away because a soldier misplaced their permit. Just as they were about to leave, heartbroken, we noticed the permit on the floor, underneath the desk. They were let through just as casually as they were turned away a moment earlier. I remember being struck by our indifference to their fate.) For those waiting for hours in line, under the scorching sun, only to stand before me and await my verdict, which they would have had no power to dispute – for them I was the living, breathing embodiment of Israel’s military rule and the denial of their right to exist as human beings with meaningful lives.

2. Do I Regret It?

Do I regret terrorizing civilians? I do, of course I do. How could I recall a face (an actual, specific face) of a person who was terrorized by me (by *me*) and not regret it? How could I genuinely and rationally believe that I terrorized people if I did not regret it? Or, to make explicit the moral content of “terrorized”: how could I genuinely and rationally believe I wronged people if I did not regret it? At the very least, it seems to me, we would normally (and properly) doubt either the sincerity or the rationality of a person who claims she had done something horrible while being completely indifferent to the fact she purports to report. My regret is the corollary of my judgment that I did wrong; lack of regret on my part would indicate the absence of such judgment or else a failure of rationality.

Richard Moran discusses the relation between an agent’s judgments and the attitudes to which her judgments commit her. Considering the case of belief, Moran argues that insofar as a person is rational, she conforms to the Transparency Condition, that is, she can report on her beliefs by considering nothing but the content of her beliefs (Moran 2001, 84). Conversely, when we report on our beliefs we are normally understood as reporting on their content. “I believe it is three o’clock,” is not normally interpreted as a person’s report on her psychological state, but on the

time of day. Moran explains: “in ordinary circumstances a claim concerning one’s attitudes counts as a claim about their *objects*, about the world one’s attitudes are directed upon” (92). Insofar as a person conceives of herself as a rational agent, her awareness of her belief is awareness of her commitment to its truth, “a commitment to something that transcends any description of [her] psychological state” (84).

The question ‘Do I regret the serious wrongs I committed as a soldier?’ seems to me rationally transparent to the question ‘Did I commit serious wrongs as a soldier?’, just as the question ‘Do I believe it is three o’clock?’ is, from my point of view, transparent to the question, ‘Is it three o’clock?’. Insofar as I am rational, I answer the question about my belief by answering (nothing but) the question about its content and, similarly, I answer the question about my regret by answering nothing but the question about *its* content. My regret is to my moral judgment as my belief is to my factual judgment.

To be sure, Moran argues for the Transparency Condition as an account of self-knowledge—an account of how one knows what one believes—and as such Moran’s account has faced some criticism. But here I am concerned with the separate idea, namely, that judging *p* true rationally commits one to an attitude with regard to *p*. If *p* is a claim that it is raining outside, then judging it true commits one to believing it is raining outside, but if *p* is a claim that one did wrong then judging it true commits one to regretting it. Therefore, to fully and rationally recognize the wrongs I committed is to regret them as such. And my point is that regret, in this context, is not merely a belief that I did wrong, but a qualitatively distinct affective attitude, which we can very roughly describe as a form of suffering or anguish.²

Since the Transparency Condition is a requirement of rational agency, it is a requirement we may fail to meet. Moran discusses familiar therapeutic contexts in which the analysand becomes aware of beliefs and other attitudes in a way that fails to satisfy the Transparency Condition.

The person who feels anger at the dead parent for having abandoned her, or who feels betrayed or deprived of something by another child, may only know of this attitude through the eliciting and

² Christine Korsgaard notes: “Someone who recalls failing to do what she was obligated to do *will* experience pain, and that is what remorse and regret are. The mind’s authority does not depend upon the experience of the negative moral emotions, but it absolutely implies it.” Korsgaard 1996, 151.

interpreting of evidence of various kinds. She might become thoroughly convinced, both from the constructions of the analyst, as well as from her own appreciation of the evidence, that this attitude must indeed be attributed to her. And yet, at the same time, when she reflects on the world-directed question itself, whether she has indeed been betrayed by this person, she may find that the answer is no or can't be settled one way or another. So transparency fails because she cannot learn of this attitude of hers by reflection on the object of that attitude. (Moran 2001, 85)

The failure of transparency that concerns me in this paper is the converse of the failure described above by Moran. The moral anxiety I described at the outset is not invoked by the realization that I regret terrorizing civilians while finding no reason for regret, but by the worry that I do *not* regret terrorizing civilians while finding ample reason for regret. Compare the latter to a failure to believe something we judge we have conclusive reason to believe. For example, a failure to believe the likelihood of an already ongoing catastrophic climate change or a failure to believe the rise of tyrannical forces in the United States. We may recognize that these statements are backed by conclusive evidence and yet fail to adjust our attitudes and dispositions in ways that warrant the attribution of belief. We might say that we fail to “internalize” these truths. Or, put in terms proposed by Moran, we can say that we sincerely *avow* these propositions and thereby commit ourselves to their truth but our conduct and attitudes suggest that we do not in fact believe (Moran 2001, 89). In such cases, there is an agential failure because our attitudes express a judgment that is incompatible with our avowal.

I said that I regret my actions; I am not unresponsive to my judgment of the past. But this is not sufficient to assuage my initial anxiety. Even if a rational agent reports on her beliefs by considering nothing but their content, and reports on her regret by considering nothing but *its* content, there remains an important question about what these attitudes amount to. Regret manifests itself differently in different circumstances. The agent who committed the regrettable action regrets it differently from the person harmed by it, and an uninvolved bystander regrets differently still. All three parties may judge that the action was wrong and hence regrettable, but the same judgment calls for qualitatively different experiences of regret in each, depending on his or her relation to the regrettable action.

Moreover, one and the same judgment may express itself differently as the person's relation to the object of the judgment changes. Consider your own reaction to my description of my actions as a soldier. Perhaps before you begun reading this paper, you already judged that someone who served in the Israeli Occupation committed serious wrongs. Maybe, knowing

something about my past, you even made that judgment about me in particular. But you may not have been rationally compelled to have any affective reaction to the actions you judged wrong. Your judgment might have been impersonal: a judgment about such an action (terrorizing civilians,) or about a person like me (a former Israeli soldier,) or about me in particular but as a stranger. However, if the above description of what I had done has served its purpose, you are now somewhat less indifferent to the wrongs I committed. These wrongs and the people involved in them were made slightly more real by my description, more concrete, and more relevant to you. This means that now, having read my description, your judgment of the wrongs I committed may rationally elicit an affective reaction that was not called for before. Your judgment has not changed – you still judge the actions wrong for the same reasons – but its significance has. Your perspective on the actions in question has shifted, if ever so slightly, and so did the rational emotional manifestations of your judgment.

For similar reasons, the agent’s relation to the victims of the action—his relation to those who were wronged—also plays a crucial role in determining the rational expression of the agent’s judgment. It is one thing to know of someone who was wronged, another to witness someone being wronged, and yet another to be the one who committed the wrong. Thus, a person who fails to properly regret the wrongs he had committed may fail not only to fully recognize that *he* (i.e., the very same person) had committed wrongs, but may also fail to fully recognize the reality of those he had wronged, his victims. Indeed, sometimes the reality of our victims as distinct individuals only dawns upon us with the dawning of regret. In this I agree with Raimond Gaita that “remorse is a recognition of the reality of another through the shock of wronging her just as grief is a recognition of the reality of another through the shock of losing her” (Gaita 2004, 52).

The anxiety I mentioned at the outset is not about whether I regret my actions at all—I do. Rather, I worry that I do not regret them in the right way: whatever regret I still feel seems negligible in comparison to the gravity of my wrongs and the devastating regret I felt in the first years following my military service. I worry that my present regret is not *fitting* to its object, not because the object is not regrettable but because it calls for a far more intense form of regret.³

³ The idea of fitting emotions has been gaining philosophical currency in recent years. Emotions, it is now commonly thought, are evaluative presentations of their objects, and specific emotions are presentations of specific evaluative properties. When an emotion correctly presents its object it is said to be *fitting*. D’Arms and Jacobson argue there are fittingness considerations of *shape* and *size* (D’Arms and Jacobson 2000). An emotional episode is unfitting in shape

3. What Kind of Regret is Fitting?

What kind of regret is it fitting to feel about terrorizing people in the West Bank? Bernard Williams describes decisions that may leave a person with a peculiar kind of regret, a “fundamental” or “most basic” regret. Such decisions, according to Williams, are made in the interests of a project the agent is identified with “in such a way that if it succeeds [the agent’s] standpoint of assessment would be from a life which then derives an important part of its significance for him from that very fact” (Williams 1981a, 35). Gauguin, in Williams’ well-known example, made such a decision when he deserted his family for the sake of his pursuit of painting. On Williams’ reading, this decision was retroactively justified for Gauguin by his artistic achievements. Had Gauguin failed, the same decision would have left him with the most basic regrets. His life would not be meaningful or significant for him anymore, and this failure of meaning would be due to his own decision to desert his family and devote himself to painting and due to his own inadequacy as a painter.

Ground projects, as Williams understands them, give a person a reason for living (Williams 1981b, 13). The loss of a ground project does not imply that the person would have to commit suicide, “but he may feel in those circumstances that he might as well have died” (ibid). And while his main examples are primarily of lives the significance of which is carried by a single project—such as the lives of Gauguin or Anna Karenina—Williams notes that “in general a man does not have one separable project which plays this ground role: rather, there is a nexus of projects, related to his conditions of life, and it would be the loss of all or most of them that would remove meaning” (ibid.) So talk of a failure of *a* ground project relies on the simplifying assumption that the meaning of the life in question is wholly dependent on this distinct and well-defined project. Normally, however, basic regret is warranted by a failure or loss of various projects and commitments so as to make the meaning of one’s life unsustainable.

when it presents its object as having certain evaluative features the object in fact lacks; it is unfitting in size when it is disproportional to the evaluative features of its object. Regret, for instance, is unfitting in shape if its object is not regrettable (no reason to cry over spilt milk if the milk is still safely in the bottle,) and it is unfitting in size if it is disproportional to the significance of its object (the milk is spilt, and that is regrettable, but there is no reason to cry because it is only milk). I am suggesting that my regret about the wrongs I committed in the Occupied Territories is unfitting in *size*: it is far too small, so to speak.

But what does it mean to say that a person's life is not meaningful or significant for her? The life of the failed Gauguin would continue to be meaningful in the sense that every person's life is worthy of respect and (arguably) love. The life of the failed Gauguin would also be meaningful as a story of a person's failure. Indeed, Williams' other example is Anna Karenina, whose failure is so meaningful as to sustain one of the greatest novels ever written. Basic regret, however, implies a failure of meaning in a different sense. It involves the agent's sense that her life does not have *a meaning she can live with*. The point is not a medical one: we can and do live with basic regret, even if it could sometimes kill us. Rather, the idea is that for the agent to accept the meaning that her life has due to her regrettable decision—for her to accept that *this* life is *her* life—would be a form of self-betrayal. The person she has become is unacceptable to her, and her basic regret is expressive of her inner resistance to it. Though any resistance would be futile now that her failure is a settled fact, suffering is the last resort of the agent's integrity. It is in this sense that her life is not meaningful *for her*: the gap between her reality and her defining commitments is irreconcilable and her pain is an expression of her continued awareness of this gap.

The above characterization of the lack of meaning expressed in basic regret is far from satisfying. We may ask: what constitutes the self whose protest is declared through regret? What are the commitments that are the source of this protest and what explains their authority? Though these and related questions are worth asking—and they have been asked and given elaborate answers by various philosophers, from Nietzsche to Susan Wolf—I will not pursue them here. Instead I hope that what I do say is enough to allow the reader to recognize what I take to be the phenomenon at stake.

It is also crucial for basic regret that the lack of meaning that it registers is a result of the agent's own decision in a way that is not merely coincidental but essential to the project the decision is meant to serve (Williams 1981a, 26). Williams concedes that an unpredictable accident might result in the failure of Gauguin's project of becoming a great painter, but he maintains that such external failure would not render Gauguin's decision itself unjustified. The decision could only be rendered unjustified by subsequent failure if Gauguin fails *on his own terms*. For instance, if Gauguin fails because he lacks what it takes to be a great painter. Only then the project is not

merely *negated* but *refuted* (27). Basic regret, then, is warranted when the agent's own decision non-coincidentally causes a failure of meaning for the agent.⁴

There is still more that we can say of basic regret in comparison with other forms of regret. Basic regret is a species of agent-regret, which is regret that an agent feels towards his or her past actions and choices (27). Agent-regret, however, is not merely regret that happens to target one's own actions as its object; it is a qualitatively distinct kind of regret that involves a sense of responsibility appropriate only to the agent who, voluntarily or not, caused the failure, harm, or loss in question.⁵ To experience agent-regret is to take oneself to be personally implicated as the source of the regrettable action. In Williams' famous example, the lorry driver who, despite due diligence, runs over a child, experiences fitting agent-regret. In this regard, basic regret is a species of agent-regret, for it too relates to one's own actions in an essentially first-personal way. However, basic regret differs from *localized* agent-regret, which does not implicate the significance of the agent's whole life. My regret about not working on my paper yesterday need not spread to my goal of writing the paper, nor to other projects and commitments I have, not to mention the significance of my life overall. Even remorse, which is, on Williams's taxonomy, agent-regret directed toward one's *voluntary* actions and which has a particularly moral flavor, may not implicate the agent's whole life in the way that basic regret does. A person might properly feel remorse for voluntarily breaking a promise, but such remorse does not normally threaten the agent's sense that his or her life is significant.

Nevertheless, Williams should allow, I believe, that not only decisions made in the interest of life projects can result in the most basic regrets; decisions that have other purposes might also drain our lives of significance by refuting (rather than merely negating) our projects. For example, a failure to resist temptation can be viewed as refuting one's devotion to God or to one's beloved. And it is not far-fetched to understand Abraham in the story of the binding of Isaac as being forced to choose which relationship to refute: his relationship to God or his relationship to his son. God, on this reading, is the jealous lover who pressures the beloved to refute his other love in order to

⁴ There is a question about how to draw the distinction between external and internal failure, or between a failure that is coincidental to one's project and one that is non-coincidental, but we need not pursue the matter here.

⁵ Some have doubted that there is a qualitatively distinct form of first-person regret that applies to both voluntary and non-voluntary actions. Wallace (2013) argues that instead of agent-regret we should speak of personal regret: regret that stems from one's attachments but not necessarily from one's own actions and choices.

establish exclusivity.⁶ Disobeying God and murdering one's son are actions that do not merely put an end to a relationship but retroactively undo it: they expose the relationship as lacking the meaning it once seemed to have. So whether basic regret is called for might depend not only on the goals or consequences of decisions but on the nature of the decisions themselves.

Despite his undeniable success as a painter, Gauguin might have been overwhelmed by basic regret for abandoning his family, having realized that his success as a painter cannot redeem his life given his profound moral failure, a failure that was at the heart of his pursuit of painting.⁷ To be sure, Williams grants that Gauguin is "open to regrets for what he has done to others" but claims that Gauguin's success offers him a perspective from which something could be said in support of the decision (38). But even if something could be said for the decision, is it enough to secure the meaning of Gauguin's life? Part of the matter here might be the suspicion that no single project can alone secure the meaning of a person's life.

According to Williams, Anna Karenina, unlike Gauguin, suffers the most basic regret precisely because *nothing* supports her decision to leave Karenin: "What she did, she now finds insupportable, because she could have been justified only by the life she hoped for" (27). We can grant that there are cases in which the successful project that makes one's life significant carries some weight against the wrongs done in its name, and surely there are moral wrongs that do not warrant basic regret, and yet I contend that there are also instances in which the success of the project is entirely spoiled by the wrong that brought it about.

In Émile Zola's novel, *Thérèse Raquin* (Zola 1868/1992), Thérèse and Laurent decide to kill Thérèse's husband, Camille, who stands in the way of their love. They carry out their plot to drown Camille, and not only are they not caught, they are hailed for their supposed attempts to

⁶ Moshe Halbertal (2012) offers a similar reading of the binding of Isaac, according to which God suffers from "the rich spouse predicament": being unable to determine whether Abraham loves Him for Himself or values Him instrumentally, God attempts disambiguation by rendering Abraham's devotion to Him thoroughly self-destructive.

⁷ Jay Wallace argues that since the valid moral complaints of Gauguin's family members continue to have standing after Gauguin's success, these complaints continue to count strongly in favor of Gauguin preferring that he should not have made the decision to leave them after all. If Gauguin cannot "all-in regret" the decision which was necessary for the life he now affirms—i.e., if he cannot prefer overall to have decided otherwise—then he should find himself in a predicament of "deep ambivalence," realizing that his lack of "all-in regret" cannot withstand rational scrutiny. In other words, basic regret is fitting in this case: though he cannot do so, Gauguin should regret abandoning his family in a way that undermines his ability to affirm his life on the basis of his success as a painter (Wallace 2013, 169-185).

rescue him. They marry, free at last to consummate their love. But their love is doomed. The most basic regrets drive them mad, destroy their relationship, and, eventually, lead them to suicide.

We have here a decision made in the interests of a project the success of which is meant to render the agents' lives significant. As in the case of Williams' Gauguin, the decision is successful in the sense that it achieves its intended goal. And yet the morally corrupt nature of the decision, and the agents' realization that their decision was morally corrupt, deprives the success of its intended significance and ruins the lives of the agents. Success is entirely spoiled by its wrongful instruments. Whatever else we say about the ugly demise of Thérèse and Laurent, it reflects their recognition that morally corrupt decisions and actions may deprive subsequent accomplishments of the significance they would have had otherwise and infect the lives of their perpetrators taken as a whole. As such, Thérèse and Laurent's basic regret is a fitting response to the gravity of their actions.

Drawing on the case of Thérèse and Laurent, I propose that basic regret can be a fitting response to *moral contamination*. Most conceptions of meaningful life include not only goals but boundaries: cheating can spoil the meaning of victory, lying can spoil the meaning of friendship, exploiting can spoil the meaning of charity. Although, as some have argued, there might be genuine conflicts between morality and our commitments to our loved ones and life goals (Wolf 2012), there are times where disregarding morality for the sake of a ground project is forbidden even from the point of view of the project it is meant to serve. Gauguin's desertion of his family might be unjustified from the point of view of his life as a painter if being a great painter implies being a morally decent person. Of course, many may doubt such implication, but even if Gauguin indeed becomes a great painter by wrongly deserting his family, and the value of his achievement is not tainted, still the meaning for his life might be spoiled by the wrong he committed.

Moreover, even when the wrongful act is *not* done for the sake of a project it can still undermine it or the meaning it is meant to secure. Treating others with basic moral decency is plausibly seen as a condition on the meaningful pursuit of many different life goals and relationships. Therefore, the wrongness of a specific action, decision, or choice, can be so serious as to spread to other regions of the agent's life, eventually leaving the agent no perspective from

which her life seems supportable. Experiencing robust alienation from one's life as a whole—experiencing one's life as meaningless—can be fitting due to the wrongs one had done to others.

There was a time when I hoped that by moving on with my life I could leave behind what I had done as a soldier. But not long after I completed my military service and resumed my life as a citizen, I came to realize that my actions as a soldier have implicated my life as a whole. The moral significance of those actions was not confounded to the period of time I served in the West Bank nor to the projects and attachments I had at the time. And although, unlike the actions of Williams' Gauguin, or Thérèse and Laurent, I did not commit those wrongs for the sake of a project that would render my life significant, any understanding of my life as significant seemed to me to preclude committing such wrongs. In other words, my actions as a soldier preempted any morally decent life I could have had. The thought that whatever life I lead would be tainted by profound moral indecency gave rise to the most basic regret: a sense that my own actions made me a person I cannot possibly live with. The reason for this basic regret was not a failure to meet some abstract moral ideal or principle—though I surely failed at that, too—the reason was the particular persons I terrorized. Although their faces and voices have since blurred in my memory (and perhaps they were never distinct), their presence as individuals is still vivid in my mind.⁸

Williams does not say very much about this way of being, about the phenomenology of living with the most basic regret. My sense is that harboring such fundamental regret involves, in its most extreme, an experience of one's life as wholly unbearable and a sense that one's continued existence is as wrong and insufferable as the very decision or action that rendered it so. The present is hostage to the past: forgetting is impossible and wrong, so is hoping, and both can only deepen one's betrayal of morality and of oneself. One feels that to truly know and understand the significance of the fateful decision or action is to be unwilling to live with oneself. And yet suicide might seem a mere evasion, an extreme form of forgetting and a perverse mutation of hope.⁹ To exist in this way is to experience one's life as a life that has not yet ended but can no longer be lost: a life without significance that will perish in moral silence.

⁸ I have in mind here Michael Thompson's distinction between 'merely monadic' norms and 'bi-polar' norms. Violating merely monadic moral norms means committing a *wrong*, but violating bi-polar moral norms means *wronging* another person (Thompson 2004).

⁹ But as the case of Ajax suggests, in the wake of complete failure suicide might also seem like the only honorable option left. It is a mistake to dismiss this possibility too quickly. I return to this idea at the end.

What should we think of the prospect of recovery from this dark state of mind? If certain wrongs or disastrous decisions call for the most basic regret, what should we make of those who emerge from their appropriate basic regret to find meaning in their lives? Is it ever possible for a person to *fittingly* affirm her life—that is, to find it meaningful and worth living—despite having made decisions or having done actions that condemn her to the most basic regrets? And how must we conceive of regret if we are to allow that its appropriateness might vary with time while its object, the regrettable decision or action in the past, will forever remain unchanged?

4. Can There Be a Fitting End to Fitting Basic Regret?

I no longer feel the most basic regret. I no longer experience my attachments, relationships, and pursuits as meaningless due to my past wrongs. But how might I justify my recovery, given that my basic regret was warranted by the wrongs I had done to others? Indeed, my basic regret seemed fitting due to my realization that my life will forever be tainted by my actions. So how might it now be fitting to leave my wrongs behind, so to speak? It seems that my psychological well-being comes at the price of moral self-deception; I have struck a Faustian bargain of sorts.

Note that this problem generalizes. For any attitude that is appropriate or fitting to its object, we may ask: how might there be a fitting change to the attitude if its object remains unchanged? The same question has been discussed recently with regard to grief and resentment (Moller 2007, 2017; Marušić 2018; Hieronymi 2001; Callard 2017). “It is unclear,” says Dan Moller, “why the fact that ten years now interpose between my mother’s death and the present should make it more fitting for me to feel very little in relation to what remains the loss of someone who meant (and means) as much to me as anything in my life” (Moller 2017, 13). Even with regard to a kind of regret that is milder or more localized than basic regret, we may ask whether it can appropriately diminish with time given that its object remains frozen in the past (Harman 2009; Wallace 2013). Thus, an answer about recovery from basic regret should be understood in the context of a more general problem about the rationality of emotional change.¹⁰

Bernard Williams suggests at one point that basic regret about one’s refuted projects may continue only for as long as the agent’s thoughts and feelings are still essentially formed by the

¹⁰ See <redacted>.

same failed projects. The agent might “form new projects in the course of unsuccess itself” (Williams 1981a, 30). New projects would presumably make the agent’s life meaningful once again, after the previous ones failed to do so. This account of recovery seems to follow from Williams’ view of justification, according to which a decision is justified for an agent if and only if it is derivable from the agent’s subjective motivational set (Williams 1981c). Basic regret is grounded in the agent’s *present* subjective motivational set, which renders the past decision unjustified, but the agent’s present motivational set might change and the normative status of the past decision would change with it.

But even if one rejects Williams’ view of justification, and insists that the past decision remains unjustified independently of the agent’s new projects, one might still maintain that the reason for basic regret dissipates once new projects come along. Jeff McMahan, for example, argues that a person can judge an event bad for her and later judge the same event good for her without any inconsistency (McMahan 2005). This is possible, according to McMahan, because the different judgments may be indexed to different sets of personal values or ‘evaluational frameworks’, neither better nor worse than the other. On this view, a couple who judges that it would be worse for them to have a disabled child might experience regret (if not basic regret) upon finding out that they are about to have a disabled child, but this regret would justifiably vanish if later on they adopt an alternative evaluative framework according to which it was better for them to have the child. The same event ceases to be regrettable due to a change in the agents’ commitments.

While seemingly plausible, such an account of recovery from basic regret is in fact self-defeating. It is essential to basic regret that it involves viewing one’s future as meaningless due to one’s past action. Otherwise, basic regret collapses into *localized agent-regret*, which does not threaten one’s sense that one’s life is meaningful. But if the refutation of one’s project can be overcome by the adoption of new projects, then the refutation of the project does not warrant viewing one’s future as meaningless (unless one has independent reason to believe one will not adopt new projects in the course of “unsuccess”.) Regret here would be like a painful sensation: my present pain does not condemn me to a life of pain, so as bad as it might be I can at least in principle retain the hope of future relief. If new projects can relieve one’s regret about a failed project, then the refutation of one’s project does not warrant basic regret and therefore the adoption

of new projects cannot provide a solution to basic regret. In other words, if basic regret could be fittingly overcome by the adoption of new projects, we might as well remind Anna Karenina that there are other fish in the sea.

The source of the difficulty with Williams' view is that while it maintains that basic regret is warranted by the failure of one's current projects due to one's past decision, the content of basic regret ties one's present projects and past decision to one's life taken as a temporally extended whole. Thus, basic regret is not merely an expression of a synchronic failure of meaning, such as the experience of having a meaningless day of watching bad TV; it is an expression of a diachronic failure of meaning, such as the experience of having a life structured around failed pursuits. Therefore, basic regret casts its net beyond one's past and present to circumvent the various possibilities of the future; it involves the sense that one's present is meaningless because one lacks a meaningful past and future, and one has failed to live a meaningful life overall.

In an essay about exile, Jean Améry makes the following observations about meaning in the life of the young and the old:

The young person grants himself that unlimited advance credit that the world around him usually allows him too. He is not only who he is, but also who he will be ... But the credit of the person who is aging depletes. His horizon presses in on him, his tomorrow and day-after-tomorrow have no vigor and no certainty. He is only who he is. The future is no longer around him and therefore also not within him. He cannot plead change. He shows the world a naked present. But he can exist nevertheless, if in this present there harmoniously rests a "once was." Ah, you know, says the aging person, whose present is without a future but contains a socially undenied past – ah, you know, here you see perhaps only the simple bookkeeper, the mediocre painter, the asthmatic who is arduously panting up the stairs. You see the one that I am, not the one that I was. But the one that I was is also still part of myself, and there I can assure you on my honor that my mathematics teacher placed great hopes in me, that my first exhibition received brilliant reviews, that I was a good skier. Do please include that in the picture you are forming of me. Grant me the dimension of my past, otherwise I would be quite incomplete. (Améry 1980, 57-58)

Améry claims that not only past achievements, but even past potentialities may render the present meaningful. And he goes on to argue that for those, like Améry himself, who had been expelled from their society and culture by the Third Reich, the past with all its actual and possible achievements was nullified. Once a person is denied any standing in the society that produced her, the achievements of her youth no longer carry any significance. And even if one can rebuilt, so to speak, as did those who, in Améry's words, "had long since made lucrative business with clothing

and dishes in New York or Tel-Aviv” (59), the gaping black hole of the past would not easily loosen its grip.

Meaning in life depends on the possibility of properly connecting our past, present, and future into a coherent whole that we may accept as our own. When we are robbed of our past— as was Jean Améry as well as many other refugees, then and now—or when we fail to address our past, to make sense of it and respond to it appropriately, then we cannot find meaning in our present and future commitments, valuable as they might be in and of themselves.¹¹

While a person in the grip of basic regret might very well acknowledge the possibility of forming new projects in the future, future projects must seem meaningless to her. From the perspective of an agent’s basic regret, future projects are no more than future attempts at self-deception, resulting from her inability to bear the truth of her life-failure. To restore meaningfulness and recover from basic regret, it is not enough to find new projects; one must find new projects in a way that connects one’s past, present, and future as a coherent whole that one may properly relate to and find worthwhile. And it is not only that doing this seems impossible in the wake of one’s failure to realize the meaning one has aspired to, but that a fitting response to one’s failure might very well involve a reluctance to consider the possibilities of the future.

The question that occupies me in this paper is not whether I lived my life in a way that connects my past wrongs to my present and future in the appropriate way; rather, it is the more modest question of how can it even be rationally possible to find my life meaningful while holding that my basic regret was warranted. Showing that fitting basic regret can fittingly come to an end would not give us a full account of what is required for the fitting ending of basic regret, nor would it answer the question of whether my basic regret in fact fittingly came to an end. But once I

¹¹ Peter Goldie discusses the way traumatic experiences are resistant to *emotional closure*, which involves being able to look back *in the right way* on one’s past life from one’s present external perspective: not just seeing the causal connections, and making sense of why one then thought, felt, and acted as one then did, but also making an external evaluation and having emotional responses that one feels are the appropriate ones to what happened. It is in this sense that, in remembering something, one sometimes asks oneself how one should think and feel about what happened, realizing perhaps that an answer is not readily available, and will not be forthcoming until one can see the past in what we rightly call ‘the proper perspective’. (Goldie 2012, 71 italics in original)

Goldie follows Kierkegaard in distinguishing passive *memory* from active *recollection*. Recollection involves not mere remembering but the sorting out of a proper perspective on the past. In the text, I follow Goldie in suggesting that unless we successfully recollect our past we cannot find meaning in our present and future.

establish the possibility of a fitting end to basic regret I would be in a better position to reflect on what is involved in such a transition and therefore in a better position to assess my own case.

Consider, for comparison, the issue of the duration of grief, which has attracted philosophical attention recently. In the last few decades, empirical psychologists have argued that many bereaved individuals exhibit little or no grief and that these individuals are not cold and unfeeling or lacking in attachment but, rather, are capable of genuine resilience in the face of loss (Bonanno, et al., 2002). The most decisive and striking finding is that people typically recover from grief within two to three months (Bonanno 2005; Fetterman, Peterson, and Gilewski 1991). George Bonanno, a leading figure in the so-called ‘new science of bereavement’, writes that “bereavement is something we are wired for, and it is certainly not meant to overwhelm us. Rather, our reactions to grief, seem designed to help us accept and accommodate losses relatively quickly so that we can continue to live productive lives” (Bonanno 2009, 7-8).

Unlike most empirical psychologists who write on the subject, some philosophers have found the claim that we are resilient to loss disconcerting. One reason to be troubled by resilience is that a quick recovery from grief might seem to exhibit a deficiency in the relationship with the person who died. For example, Dan Moller considers the argument that resilience to loss shows that the deceased was relatively unimportant to us: we do not *need* the deceased to go about our lives and we easily find a replacement (2007). Another argument is that quick recovery constitutes a form of desertion, a failure of solidarity with the deceased (E. & R. Preston-Roedder 2017). Yet another line of argument, offered by Aaron Smuts, maintains that what is most troubling about resilience is the thought that we will cease to care about an individual we currently care about very much (Smuts 2016).

Erica Preston-Roedder and Ryan Preston-Roedder address these worries persuasively, though here I only have space to briefly recount their claims (E. & R. Preston-Roedder 2017). They argue that a quick recovery from grief is compatible with two crucial ways in which the deceased was and is important to us. First, even if we can function without our loved one, our loved one might have had a crucial impact on the kind of person we are. Second, we may view our loved one as irreplaceable in his or her particularity even if his or her contributions to our general well-being can be achieved in other ways, or with other people. Resilience is therefore compatible

with the importance we attribute to the deceased. They also argue that when someone returns to her functional baseline shortly after her beloved's death, she need not desert her loved one or cease to care. Rather, she may adopt some of her beloved's projects, continue to pursue projects she and her beloved once pursued together, and take up projects that serve to commemorate her beloved (E. & R. Preston-Roedder 2017, 109). Although the short duration of grief *might* reveal various flaws in the relationship, it does not entail such flaws and it is compatible with having had a fully committed loving relationship.

One might worry that if the above arguments in defense of resilience are successful, then they are too successful. They do not only remove our reason to persist in grief, they might raise doubt about our reason to grieve at all. Grief often involves a reluctance to let go of one's anguish (recall Moller's lament about the diminution of his own grief for his mother.) But given that we have other means by which to address the loss of our loved one, how can such holding on to grief be justified? Indeed, why should we not avoid the anguish of grief altogether (via medication, for instance)? Thus, the arguments in defense of resilience seem to lend support to a more radical conclusion: the normative rejection of grief no matter its duration. If a normative defense of resilience is to leave room for a normative defense of grief, it must explain not only why recovery from *grief* might be fitting, but why recovery from *fitting grief* might be fitting. How is it that our love for the deceased can call for *temporary* grief?

The same question arises with regard to basic regret. It is plausible, for example, that I can properly recognize my past wrongs by committing to projects and causes that address the wrongs themselves or the political conditions that enabled them. As with other wrongs, an appropriate response might also involve making amends, apologizing, and taking care to avoid and prevent such wrongs from recurring. But taking such measures would not render regret redundant. Indeed, regret on the part of the wrongdoer is plausibly seen as a necessary condition for warranted forgiveness (Griswold 2007, chapter 2). Furthermore, like the person who is overwhelmed with grief, in the grip of basic regret one's future seems entirely meaningless. But it is difficult to see how such an attitude can be justified given that other, future-oriented reactions can take its place.

A possible answer can be gleaned from the insight that, like a fitting response to loss, a fitting response to one's past wrong involves various emotions, thoughts, and actions. This

suggests that no single emotional state is uniquely fitting in response to such dramatic occurrences; instead, what is called for is a combination of reactions, and particularly a combination of reactions that unfold over time. The puzzle about the diminution of basic regret relies on the assumption that the fittingness of basic regret is independent of the agent's attitudes at other times. I have been assuming that if basic regret fittingly presented the wrongs I committed in the years following my military service, then it must continue to be a fitting presentation of these wrongs. But if basic regret is fitting as part of a fitting process of moral repair, then it is only one element in a fitting sequence of reactions. Indeed, it might even be argued that if I wallowed in basic regret until this day, without taking other attitudes and actions to address what I did, my basic regret would cease to be fitting: it would not be a correct presentation of the wrongness of my past actions. The fitting process of which basic regret is a part accounts for its fitting occurrence, duration, and diminution.

Again the comparison with grief is useful. It has been argued that grief is properly understood in the context of one's relationship with the deceased (Norlock 2017). Grief is *dedicated* or *owed* to the deceased (Solomon 2004; McCracken 2005), it is an expression and continuation of love (Westlund 2018), and it involves a process by which one revises the terms of one's relationship with the deceased (Cholbi 2018). This relationship view stands in stark contrast to the view that the process of grief aims at detaching the libido from the lost object (Freud 1917/1957), or that grief diminishes as the deceased becomes less important to us (Nussbaum 2001). Against these views, the relationship view maintains that the fitting diminution of grief does not require the cessation of love, but its continuation: grief diminishes when one replaces one's devastating anguish with new ways of sustaining the memory and significance of the deceased. The fitting end of grief does not come by 'letting go', but by 'carrying on'. Similarly, basic regret might be the necessary first stage in a process of forging new ways of living in accordance with the significance—to oneself and to others—of one's past wrongs. Such a process of repair would not undo the past but it can shape the future in light of it.

To be sure, what I have said of the process view does not yet explain how basic regret might be compatible with finding one's life meaningful once again. The worry might take the form of a dilemma. Basic regret involves seeing one's life (its past, present, and future) as meaningless. So if a meaningful life is possible in the aftermath of such grave wrongs, then basic regret is misguided; however, if basic regret is warranted, then one's life cannot be made meaningful again.

I believe the process view can lead us out of this dilemma. Note, first, that to view one's life as meaningless is not simply to judge it so, but to be *committed* to its meaninglessness. The commitment to the meaninglessness of one's life is entailed by the commitment to the refuted projects the success of which would have rendered one's life meaningful. In the moment following such a grand failure or grave loss, meaninglessness is the last remnant of a lost source of meaning; it is all we have left. Therefore, in fitting basic regret, one does not merely perceive or experience one's life as meaningless, but is *invested* in its meaninglessness. Continuing to experience life as meaningless feels like a last duty we must comply with. This is why one's future recovery seems not merely as a mistake but as a further betrayal, an additional refutation of one's already doomed projects.

Since basic regret is our only way to comply with an obligation, finding or creating another way to comply with it makes it possible to permissibly forgo basic regret. The process of repair of which basic regret is a first stage involves forging new meaning that is, at once, faithful to one's past projects and cognizant of their failure. At some point in the course of unsuccess, one might find a way to reconcile the possibility of meaning with one's commitment to the failed projects. Such reconciliation is not obviously possible, but when it is, meaninglessness and anguish cease to be the only vehicles of the past. A meaningful life becomes possible again as a legitimate form of relief. We do not let go of our past, we carry it on.

Such a process is probably subject to elaborate agent-relative standards. I have not said much about these standards, but I believe they can be made explicit, at least to some extent, upon reflection on our practices and considered judgments. Furthermore, as should be clear by now, undergoing such a process of repair plausibly involves being, at times, oblivious or resistant to it. This is reasonable, I think, because there is no single perspective on one's life that is appropriate throughout the process. There might nevertheless be a fitting movement between different perspectives, some intensely focused on the past and others open to the future. In this way, the process view accommodates as part of a single fitting response to one's past wrongs attitudes that would otherwise seem incompatible.

All this is not to say that the past can never bring the present to a halt. Here are the opening paragraphs of an article by Gene Weingarten, which appeared in the Washington Post in March 8,

2009:

The defendant was an immense man, well over 300 pounds, but in the gravity of his sorrow and shame he seemed larger still. He hunched forward in the sturdy wooden armchair that barely contained him, sobbing softly into tissue after tissue, a leg bouncing nervously under the table. In the first pew of spectators sat his wife, looking stricken, absently twisting her wedding band. The room was a sepulcher. Witnesses spoke softly of events so painful that many lost their composure. When a hospital emergency room nurse described how the defendant had behaved after the police first brought him in, she wept. He was virtually catatonic, she remembered, his eyes shut tight, rocking back and forth, locked away in some unfathomable private torment. He would not speak at all for the longest time, not until the nurse sank down beside him and held his hand. It was only then that the patient began to open up, and what he said was that he didn't want any sedation, that he didn't deserve a respite from pain, that he wanted to feel it all, and then to die.

The charge in the courtroom was manslaughter, brought by the Commonwealth of Virginia. No significant facts were in dispute. Miles Harrison, 49, was an amiable person, a diligent businessman and a doting, conscientious father until the day last summer -- beset by problems at work, making call after call on his cellphone -- he forgot to drop his son, Chase, at day care. The toddler slowly sweltered to death, strapped into a car seat for nearly nine hours in an office parking lot in Herndon in the blistering heat of July.

Miles Harrison's statement, that he does not deserve a respite from pain and that he wants "to feel it all and then to die" should, I believe, be understood not as an indication of a pathology but as an ethical claim about the only appropriate response to his horrendous failure. His death wish may be compared to the drive behind mortal self-sacrifice, such as Mohamed Bouazizi's, the Tunisian street vendor who set himself on fire in December 2010 and whose death put in motion the massive uprising known as the Arab Spring. Theirs seems to be a refusal to find new meaning in life due to one's loyalty to a meaning that can no longer be lived. Such refusal may be quite reasonable in certain highly unreasonable circumstances. And yet, at other times, there might be a fitting way to carry on. It is the duty of those of us who have failed to live up to our most fundamental commitments to reflect on the possibility, shape, and substance of repair rather than assume repair is impossible and therefore disown the future or disregard the past.

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