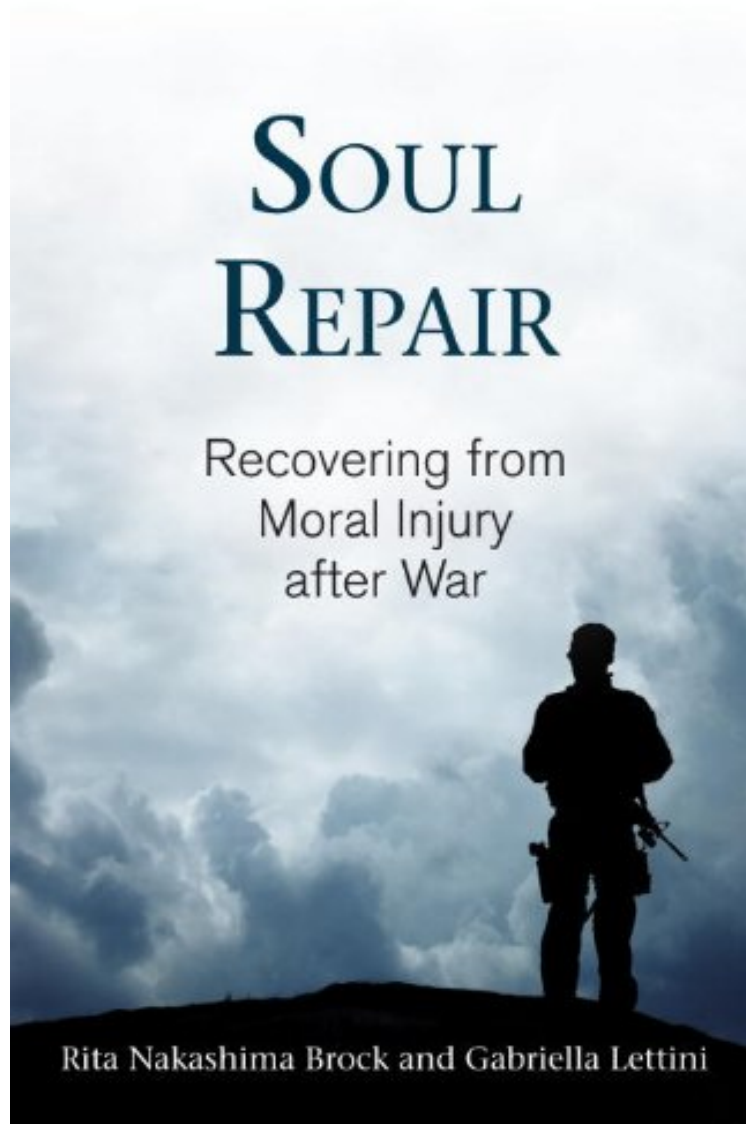


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Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War

Rita Nakashima Brock, Gabriella Lettini

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Rita Nakashima Brock, Gabriella Lettini : Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Moral wounding... for those who can not trust helpBy Innocent BystanderThis is really conceptual ground breaking.... perhaps it needs expansion and refinement. Anyone who has worked with veterans has recognized that a huge amount of energy goes into simply trying to build trust. And that trust may slip away from one encounter to the next. It like each conversation is the first one. Plowing the same ground again

and again. The trust factor just doesn't stick. I sent a copy of this to a beat cop in a big dirty city with lots of homeless veterans. His street experience convinced him that "they don't want to be helped". He transferred out of the assignment - it was too painful he said. I sent the book because it is a matter of trying to help someone learn to trust again. Some Veterans are stuck in their own Good Fridays, betrayal of trust that shakes the core. Moral wounding actually comes in lots of forms... the trusted relative who sexually abuses, the officer who arrests someone because he can, the guy who spends years in prison until DNA gets him his freedom. This is a ground breaking book --- the merit of which will only come when it is expanded to a discussion of the many forms Moral Wounding takes. I have given copies of this book to social workers who have struggled to serve the morally wounded, the rape victim, the battered wife who can't get a restraining order, the veteran who really wants to sleep under the bridge because he does not trust the shelters. Betrayal of trust by people who are responsible for your safety, and basic well being --- cripples the ability not only to seek help but also to remain in healing helping relationship. To explore moral wounding in a non-military context consider *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Authors express their clear liberal views in this book. By Fallon Wysomierski This book is written by a liberal author, with liberal characters, and every person listed in this book is completely 100% against the Vietnam and Iraqi wars. There are many statements made which can not be backed up with any kind of references, such as: "during his time at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1988, he witnessed the training of Iraqi officers in Saddam Hussein's army and the sale of weapons, conventional and chemical, to Iraq." (p4) Apparently the author believes our government sold chemical weapons to Iraq in 1988, but again, no references to support this claim. This is one of many claims made by the author to support her anti-Iraqi and Vietnam war stance. The book is more about the anti-war characters (which follows 5 characters in detail) and why they hate the war as opposed to mentioning how to find recovery from moral injury. There are some good nuggets in this book, without a doubt, but I wish it was focused more on the moral injury subject as opposed to the author's disagreement with our current wars. 17 of 18 people found the following review helpful. The moral implications of war on returning veterans By Dave LI've read a number of books about the trauma suffered by war veterans as research for my new novel, *Along the Watchtower*. Many are deeply moving, with real discussion and interviews about this critical topic. *Soul Repair* is no exception. But it takes a very different and important approach, viewing the emotional damage caused by war not just as an illness to be treated, but as moral injury. Moral injury is a term the authors use for the fragmentation of our moral sense after we are sent off to war. What damage is done when a society that has given us our ideals, tells us we are going to war to uphold those ideals. And then we discover just the opposite--that we are asked to do what in our deepest being we feel to be morally wrong. The question is an important one and not asked frequently enough, perhaps because of the political implications (is it a just war?) or perhaps because by asking it, we're compelled to question the concept of war itself. This is a discussion worth having. Unfortunately, the presentation is not as focused as it could be. The prose style is too unstructured and occasionally rambling, making its arguments less compelling than they might otherwise be. I'd recommend this book to anyone interested in the traumatic effects on war veterans, and especially the friends and relatives of veterans who returned questioning "why we were there?"

The first book to explore the idea and effect of moral injury on veterans, their families, and their communities. Although veterans make up only 7 percent of the U.S. population, they account for an alarming 20 percent of all suicides. And though treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder has undoubtedly alleviated suffering and allowed many service members returning from combat to transition to civilian life, the suicide rate for veterans under thirty has been increasing. Research by Veterans Administration health professionals and veterans' own experiences now suggest an ancient but unaddressed wound of war may be a factor: moral injury. This deep-seated sense of transgression includes feelings of shame, grief, meaninglessness, and remorse from having violated core moral beliefs. Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini, who both grew up in families deeply affected by war, have been working closely with vets on what moral injury looks like, how vets cope with it, and what can be done to heal the damage inflicted on soldiers' consciences. In *Soul Repair*, the authors tell the stories of four veterans of wars from Vietnam to our current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan: Camillo "Mac" Bica, Herman Keizer Jr., Pamela Lightsey, and Camilo Mejia; who reveal their experiences of moral injury from war and how they have learned to live with it. Brock and Lettini also explore its effect on families and communities, and the community processes that have gradually helped soldiers with their moral injuries. *Soul Repair* will help veterans, their families, members of their communities, and clergy understand the impact of war on the consciences of healthy people, support the recovery of moral conscience in society, and restore veterans to civilian life. When a society sends people off to war, it must accept responsibility for returning them home to peace.

Soul Repair is an eloquent, deeply human reminder that war is not just what takes place on a distant battlefield. It is something that casts a shadow over the lives of those who took part for decades afterwards. The stories told by Lettini and Brock are deepened by what the authors reveal about the way the tragic thread of war's aftermath has run through their own families. —Adam Hochschild, author of *To End All Wars*; "Those you

send to war may come home with souls unclean and hearts drowning in bitter mistrust. But the need for purification after battle has vanished into the blind spot of our culture. We neither offer it to returning veterans, nor remember that for whose sake, in whose name, our soldiers went to war; need purification with them. Potent challengers of conventional thinking, rich in heart, those who speak here are voices you will not forget.

—Jonathan Shay, MD, PhD, author of *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming*

—James H. Cone, author of *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*; *Soul Repair* is stunning, just beautiful.

Riveting. This is not just a breakthrough book, it is a breakthrough moment, the kind of work that makes history shift and emotions adjust. It restores balance and reclaims life.

—Amir Soltani, author of *Zahrar's Paradise*

Eloquent and unflinching discourse on war's problematic moral core.

—Publishers Weekly

About the Author: Rita Nakashima Brock is research professor and codirector of the Soul Repair Center at Brite Divinity School, Ft. Worth, Texas. She is the author, with Rebecca Ann Parker, of *Proverbs of Ashes* and *Saving Paradise*. She lives in Oakland, California. Gabriella Lettini is Dean of the faculty and Aurelia Henry Reinhardt Professor of Theological Ethics and Studies in Public Ministry at Starr King School for the Ministry, Graduate Theological Union. She lives in Berkeley, California.

From the Hardcover edition.

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From the Introduction: To violate your conscience is to commit moral suicide.

Rev. German Keizer Jr., Colonel and Chaplain, U.S. Army, Ret. After we send men and women off to war, how do we bring them home to peace? Obviously distraught, the three people huddled, whispering to each other while they waited patiently at the end of a long line that had formed after Rita's lecture on moral injury in Houston, Texas. When the two women and the man finally reached her, they said they were from a United Methodist Church. Their words tumbled out on top of each other: "You don't know how much your lecture meant to us . . . We didn't know how to help him . . . The suicide was such a shock . . . The whole church is heartbroken . . . We wish we had known about moral injury . . . It makes so much sense . . . Maybe we could have helped him." The group's distress was raw and urgent. Their description was disjointed, as if their jumbled memories had not come into focus. When they realized that Rita was puzzled, they filled in some of the details. They explained that the suicide of a young veteran, deeply beloved in their church, was unexpected. The whole church community was reeling and struggling to understand how it had failed him. He was a hero to so many, they said, that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) had sent crisis counselors to a national gathering of veterans meeting at the time of the suicide. After the group explained the impact of the suicide on them and their community, one of the women said, "We want to learn more about moral injury. Our community needs this information. We couldn't save Clay, but maybe we can help save others." Within days of Rita's lecture in April 2011, national media sources reported Clay Warren's story. He was a twenty-eight-year-old former marine corporal who earned a Purple Heart serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. He had been active in a suicide-prevention program for vets. Since 2009, he had been a model to other veterans of a successful return home. He married and started college in California; he advocated for veterans' rights and worked in disaster relief. He was being treated for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Then, his marriage ended, he left school, went into treatment for depression, and returned to Houston where he got a job and an apartment in Sugar Land, Texas. On March 31, 2011, he bolted himself in that apartment and shot himself. Over a thousand people attended his funeral. Veteran suicides average one every eighty minutes, an unprecedented eighteen a day or six thousand a year. They are 20 percent of all U.S. suicides, though veterans of all wars are only about 7 percent of the U.S. population. Between 2005 and 2007, the national suicide rate among veterans under age thirty rose 26 percent. In Texas—home of the largest military base in the world and the third-highest veteran population—rates rose 40 percent between 2006 and 2009. These rates continue, despite required mental health screenings of those leaving the military, more research on PTSD, and better methods for treating it. Veterans are also disproportionately homeless, unemployed, poor, divorced, and imprisoned. The statistics, however, do not disclose the devastating impact of war on veterans' families and friends, on their communities, and on other veterans.

The journey home to peace is perilous after war. We can make it less lonely and lethal. The veterans' stories that unfold in this book describe a wound of war called "moral injury," the violation of core moral beliefs. The stories reveal the lifelong struggle of veterans to live with its scars, the impact on their families, and the various ways our society can support the recovery of those who experience moral injury. Moral injury is not PTSD. Many books on veteran healing confuse and conflate them into one thing. It is possible, though, to have moral injury without PTSD. The difference between them is partly physical. PTSD occurs in response to prolonged, extreme trauma and is a fear-victim reaction to danger. It produces hormones that affect the brain's amygdala and hippocampus, which control responses to fear, as well as regulate emotions and connect fear to memory. A sufferer often has difficulty forming a coherent memory of a traumatic event or may even be unable to recall it. Symptoms include flashbacks, nightmares, hypervigilance, and dissociation. Our ability to calm or extinguish fear and process emotions is often impaired by trauma, and a previous history of emotional trauma or a brain injury can make a person more susceptible to PTSD. Dissociative episodes can put sufferers back into experiences of terror and make them lose a sense of the present. They can feel unreasonable fear in ordinary situations or startle at sounds that mimic

battle. They may experience a compulsive need to retell stories of terror, to reenact them, and to transfer past fear-inducing conditions to the present. With PTSD, memory erupts uncontrollably and retraumatizes the sufferer, which can make retrieving a coherent memory nearly impossible. Clinicians have treatments for PTSD, and such therapies are crucial for those diagnosed with it. The moral questions emerge after the traumatizing symptoms of PTSD are relieved enough for a person to construct a coherent memory of his or her experience. We organize emotionally intense memories into a story in the brain's prefrontal cortex, where self-control, planning, reasoning, and decision making occur. The mind creates a pattern from memory fragments stored in various places. Emotions are essential to moral conscience, but until people can construct enough of a coherent narrative to grasp what they did, they cannot evaluate it. The brain organizes experiences and evaluates them, based on people's capacity to think about moral values and feel empathy at the same time. Marine veteran and philosopher Camillo Bica used the term moral injury in his war journals from Vietnam, and, from the perspective both of warrior and of moral philosopher, he has explored the agony of this inner judgment against himself. Moral injury is the result of reflection on memories of war or other extreme traumatic conditions. It comes from having transgressed one's basic moral identity and violated core moral beliefs. Moral injury names a deep and old dilemma of war. The moral anguish of warriors defines much literature about war from ancient times to the present, such as the Greek Iliad and Indian Bhagavad-Gita, both war epics; the Hebrew Psalms; and modern novels and films, such as *Catch-22*, *The Deer Hunter*, or *Matterhorn*. We see discussions of moral injury in current memoirs of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In *Packing Inferno: The Unmaking of a Marine*, Tyler E. Boudreau, a veteran of Iraq and former Marine officer, reflects on the apparent inability of societies to learn from works of art and history about the torture that war inflicts on the souls of veterans. He concludes that societies have understood war only as much as they really wanted to learn about it and its deeper meaning. Not everyone was so unable or unwilling to understand, Tyler notes. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf portrayed the suicidal anguish after World War I of Septimus Smith as if she were a veteran herself. Tyler reflects on her perceptive depiction: She was just a writer. That tells me, if nothing else, that the information was there. The capacity to know existed. It wasn't beyond human understanding. They weren't too primitive. If Virginia Woolf knew about combat stress, everybody else could have known, too. They did not know because they didn't want to know. Still, not even Tyler could face telling the truth about war. After he left the Corps, he worked as a Casualty Assistance Calls Officer (CACO), which required him to call the parents of wounded Marines. He could not bring himself to call soldiers' families and report honestly that, among the wounds they suffered, "your boy is coming home with a broken heart." Never once was he able to say it, and he regrets it still that he did not. Moral injury results when soldiers violate their core moral beliefs, and in evaluating their behavior negatively, they feel they no longer live in a reliable, meaningful world and can no longer be regarded as decent human beings. They may feel this even if what they did was warranted and unavoidable. Killing, torturing prisoners, abusing dead bodies, or failing to prevent such acts can elicit moral injury. Handling human remains can be especially difficult; for example, in 2004, Jess Goodell served in the Marine Corps' first Mortuary Affairs unit in Iraq, which required her to recover and process remains of fallen soldiers, including drawing their outlines where they had fallen, filling in missing parts in black. In her memoir, *Shade It Black: Death and After Iraq*, she describes the devastating aftermath of this work of facing death every day. Seeing someone else violate core moral values or feeling betrayed by persons in authority can also lead to a loss of meaning and faith. It can even emerge from witnessing a friend get killed and feeling survivor guilt. In experiencing a moral conflict, soldiers may judge themselves as worthless; they may decide no one can be trusted and isolate themselves from others; and they may abandon the values and beliefs that gave their lives meaning and guided their moral choices. Recently, Veterans Affairs clinicians have begun to conceptualize moral injury as separate from PTSD and as a hidden wound of war.