

# Moral Injury and Beyond

## Understanding Human Anguish and Healing Traumatic Wounds



Edited by Renos K. Papadopoulos

‘The concept of moral injury draws attention to the ways in which violence can not only wound body and mind but also attack our sense of meaning, coherence, solidarity, and belief in a just world. The thoughtful and heart-felt essays in this collection explore moral injury from diverse psychological, philosophical, social, spiritual and religious perspectives, enlarging our view of the impact of violence far beyond the common trope of trauma. Anyone concerned to address the human costs of violence will find much to deepen and enrich their understanding and response to some of the most challenging existential predicaments we face.’

**Professor Laurence J. Kirmayer, MD, FRCPC, FCAHS, FRSC, James McGill Professor & Director, Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry, McGill University, Canada**

‘This stimulating compilation of different but complementary perspectives on a persistent aspect of the human condition sheds light on the full extent of damage and suffering experienced, individually and collectively, and reveals deeper understandings of harm and possible repair. The insights and applications are of interest in fields well beyond those of the contributors.’

**Professor John Packer, Neuberger-Jesin Professor of International Conflict Resolution; Director, Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa, USA**

‘This volume testifies eloquently to the urgent need for scholars and practitioners across disciplines to join forces and use all the resources at their disposal—from the medical to the theological—in a common quest to address the deeply complex and mounting reality of moral injury in the contemporary world. A timely collection on a pressing topic.’

**Dr Alexis Torrance, Department of Theology, University of Notre Dame, USA**



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*Moral Injury and Beyond: Understanding Human Anguish and Healing Traumatic Wounds* uniquely brings together a prominent collection of international contributors from the fields of psychiatry, psychology, philosophy, theology, military chaplaincy and acute crisis care to address the phenomenon of moral injury. Introduced in the 1990s to refer to a type of psychological trauma, experienced especially by soldiers who felt that their actions transgressed the expected moral norms, this innovative volume provides a timely update that progresses and redefines the field of moral injury.

The ten ground-breaking essays expand our understanding of moral injury beyond its original military context, arguing that it can fruitfully be applied to and address predicaments most persons face in their daily lives. Approaching moral injury from different perspectives, the contributors focus on the experiences of combat veterans and other survivors of violent forms of adversity. The chapters address thought-provoking questions and topics, such as how survivors can regain their hope and faith, and how they can, in time, explore ways that will lead them to grow through their suffering. Exploring moral injury with a particular emphasis on spirituality, the Early Church Fathers form the framework within which several chapters examine moral injury, articulating a new perspective on this important subject. The insights advanced are not limited to theoretical innovations but also include practical methods of dealing with the effects of moral injury.

This pioneering collection will be an essential resource for mental health practitioners and trainees working with people suffering from severe trauma. Due to its interdisciplinary nature, it will be useful not only to those academics and professionals engaged with moral injury but will also be a source of inspiration for any perceptive student of the complexities and dilemmas of modern life, especially as it interfaces with issues of mental health and spirituality. It will also be invaluable to academics and students of Jungian psychology, theology, philosophy and history interested in war, migration and the impact of extreme forms of adversity.

**Renos K. Papadopoulos**, is Professor in the Department of Psychosocial and Psychoanalytic Studies, Director of the Centre for Trauma, Asylum and Refugees at the University of Essex, UK, and Professor at the Antiochian House of Studies, USA. He is a practising clinical psychologist, family psychotherapist and Jungian psychoanalyst as well as a trainer and supervisor.

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# Preface

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This book is based on papers presented at an international symposium on “Forgiveness and Healing in the Face of Moral Injury” that I organised in May 2015 at the University of Essex, UK. The event was sponsored by the John Templeton Foundation in collaboration with the same university, bringing together a diverse group of interdisciplinary academics and practitioners from philosophy, theology, psychiatry, psychology and history, to discuss and link together ideas and findings around the central theme of moral injury.

Accordingly, this book is the product of a most productive collaborative effort. I am very grateful to all the chapter authors for their generosity and exemplary patience in assisting with my editorial comments, as well as to all those individuals and organisations who kindly provided them with the required permissions to include copyrighted material in this publication.

This present volume would not have been possible without Mary Ann Meyers, the John Templeton Foundation’s Senior Fellow and the director of the “Humble Approach Initiative”, the foundation programme under whose aegis the symposium became a reality. She was an enthusiastic supporter of my initial proposal for that event and, in her characteristic humility, tact and efficiency, she attended to every single detail of its organisation and then, subsequently, of the publication of this book. I am deeply indebted to her for her guidance throughout this project, for her enormous experience, wisdom and magnanimity. Special acknowledgement is due to the late John M. Templeton Jr, MD, a paediatric surgeon, who was the president of the Foundation at the time and who embraced and encouraged both the symposium and the publication of this book. For many years he was intensely involved in the care of children with traumatic injuries at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia.

I thank my University Department for all their support, especially Debbie Stewart for her assistance with organising the international symposium.

I am also grateful to Susannah Frearson and Heather Evans, the editorial staff at Routledge, for their substantial support, patience and sound advice, as well as to Rosie Stewart and the production team at Swales & Willis for their efficient and competent assistance.

My family, my wife, my children and grandchildren have always been a source of strength for me and I thank them most sincerely for bearing with me during my absences whilst working on this book. Finally, these acknowledgements cannot be complete without expressing my deep gratitude to my special friends in Essex for all their support.

Renos K. Papadopoulos  
University of Essex

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## About the contributors

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**Renos K. Papadopoulos, PhD**, is Professor in the Department of Psychosocial and Psychoanalytic Studies and Director of the Centre for Trauma, Asylum and Refugees, as well as a member of the Human Rights Centre, the Transitional Justice Network and the Armed Conflict and Crisis Hub, all at the University of Essex; also, he is Honorary Clinical Psychologist and Systemic Family Psychotherapist at the Tavistock Clinic. He is a practising Clinical Psychologist, Family Therapist and Jungian Psychoanalyst who has spent most of his professional life training and supervising these three types of specialists. In addition, he is Professor at the Antiochian House of Studies in the USA. As a consultant to the United Nations and other organisations, he has been working with refugees, tortured persons and other survivors of political violence and disasters in many countries. He lectures and offers specialist training internationally and his writings have appeared in 15 languages. Recently, he has received an award from the European Family Therapy Association for his lifetime “outstanding contribution to the field of family therapy and systemic practice”, won the University of Essex’s Best International Research Impact award, and also has been awarded by two Mexican Foundations for his “exceptional work with vulnerable children and families in Mexico”.

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University Press and SVS Press, including an edition and translation of the fragments of Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, setting them in their historical and theological context (OUP, 2011), a full study of St Irenaeus: *St Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity* (OUP, 2013), and most recently a new critical edition and translation of Origen's *On First Principles*, together with an extensive introduction, for OUP (2017), and a study of the Gospel of John (OUP, 2019); he has also published various works aimed for a more general audience, such as his more poetic and meditative work entitled *Becoming Human: Theological Anthropology in Word and Image* (SVS Press, 2013). He is currently working on a new edition and translation of *On the Making of the Human Being* by Gregory of Nyssa and a new edition and translation of the works of Irenaeus.

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**Harold G. Koenig, MD**, Dr Koenig completed his undergraduate education at Stanford University, his medical school training at the University of California at San Francisco, and his geriatric medicine, psychiatry and biostatistics training at Duke University. He is board certified in general psychiatry, and formerly boarded in family medicine, geriatric medicine and geriatric psychiatry. He is on the faculty at Duke University Medical Center as Professor of Psychiatry and Associate Professor of Medicine, is an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Medicine at King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and in the School of Public Health at Ningxia Medical University, Yinchuan, China. Dr Koenig has over 500 scientific peer-reviewed academic publications, nearly 100 book chapters, and more than 50 books. His research has been featured on many national and international TV programmes (including ABC's *World News Tonight*, *The Today Show*, *Good*

*Morning America*, *Dr. Oz Show*, *NBC Nightly News*) and hundreds of national and international radio programmes and newspapers/magazines (including *Reader's Digest*, *Parade Magazine*, *Newsweek*, *Time*). Dr Koenig has given testimony before the U.S. Senate (1998) and U.S. House of Representatives (2008) concerning the benefits of religious involvement on public health. He is the recipient of the 2012 Oskar Pfister Award from the American Psychiatric Association.

**Romano Mådera** is Professor of Moral Philosophy and Philosophical Practices at the University of Milano-Bicocca. He studied philosophy at the University of Milan and sociology at the Milan's School of Sociology. Before his present appointment, he taught at the University of Calabria and at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. He is a practising Jungian analyst. He founded the Open Seminars in Philosophical Practices, which has programmes in several Italian cities, as well as Philo: The Advanced School for Philosophical Practices in Milan and SABOF (*la società degli analisti filosofi*), an association that promotes the use of biographical analysis as a philosophically nuanced method to search for meaning in life experiences that transcend the ego. His books include *Identità e feticismo* (1977); *Dio il Mondo* (1989); *L'alchimia ribelle* (1997); *Carl Gustav Jung: biografia e teoria* (1998); *L'animale visionario* (1999); (with L.V. Tarca) *La filosofia come stile di vita* (2003), which was translated into English as *Philosophy as Life Path. An Introduction to Philosophical Practices* (2007); *Il nudo piacere di vivere* (2006); *La carta del senso* (2012); and, most recently, *Una filosofia per l'anima*, (2013) Its English translation: *Approaching the Navel of the Darkened Soul: Depth Psychology and Philosophical Practices*.

**Robert Emmet Meagher** is Professor of Humanities, Hampshire College, Amherst, Massachusetts. With degrees from the University of Notre Dame and the University of Chicago, he joined the Hampshire College faculty in 1972. Prior to that, he taught religious studies at Indiana University and the University of Notre Dame. He has also held visiting chairs and professorships at numerous colleges and universities, including Trinity College Dublin and Yale University.

He has offered workshops on the translation and contemporary production of ancient drama here and abroad, and has himself directed productions at such venues as the Samuel Beckett Centre, Dublin and the Nandan Centre for the Performing Arts in Kolkata, India. Across many years he has served in a range of veteran-focused programmes aimed at understanding and healing war's inner wounds and since 2010 has directed a Veterans Administration literature seminar.

His publications include over a dozen books, as well as original plays and numerous translations of ancient Greek drama, most recently: *Herakles Gone Mad: Rethinking Heroism in an Age of Endless War*; *Killing from the*

*Inside Out: Moral Injury and Just War*; and (co-edited with LTC Douglas A. Pryer, US Army, retired) *War and Moral Injury: A Reader*.

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Sherman has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Woodrow Wilson Center, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council for Learned Societies, the Mellon Foundation, the American Philosophical Society, the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, and NYU's Center for Ballet and the Arts. In 2005, she visited Guantanamo Bay Detention Center as part of an independent observer team assessing the medical and mental health care of detainees. She is a frequent contributor to the media in the U.S. and abroad. Her work has been featured in the *NY Times*, *Washington Post*, *LA Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Independent*, *Time* and *Newsweek*. She has appeared on many radio/TV programmes, including NPR and BBC.

Sherman holds a BA from Bryn Mawr College, a PhD from Harvard, and an MLitt from the University of Edinburgh. She has research training from the Washington Center for Psychoanalysis. She taught at Yale before teaching at Georgetown.

**Rev. Vasileios Thermos, MD, PhD**, is a graduate of Medicine (1981) and Theology (1986) at Athens University, where he earned his PhD in 1997. He practices Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in Athens. In 1986 he was ordained and since then he has been engaged in training programmes for clergy in Greece and the USA.

He has been a Visiting Scholar at Harvard Divinity School (1996–97) and a Visiting Research Scholar at the Institute of Medical Humanities of Texas University (2014). Some of his books and articles have been translated into

English, French, Russian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Spanish, Italian, German and Finnish. He is the editor of a journal in Greek (*Psyches dromoi: Ways of the Soul*).

A masters thesis on his scholarly work was written by Peter Kazaku at the Theological School of Balamand University, Lebanon, in 2004, and was published in 2013 by Peter Lang publications. Since 2013 he teaches Pastoral Theology and Pastoral Psychology in the University Ecclesiastical Academy of Athens, where he is now an Associate Professor.

In 2017–18 his essay *The Paradox of Mental Health Care and Spirituality: The Culture of Extreme Individualism as a Mediator* was awarded a prize by the Jean-Marc Fischer Foundation in Switzerland.



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# Introduction

*Renos K. Papadopoulos*

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Human pain and suffering, in their multiple variations, have never been the exclusive domain of one particular discipline. As long as human reflections have been documented, throughout history and even prehistory, persons from all walks of life have been expressing their views, in various forms, on the wide variety of painful predicaments people find themselves in, as part of everyday living. Homer, in both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, developed astute observations about many nuances of human anguish, especially when one is exposed to severe forms of adversity. Philosophers, theologians, novelists, sociologists, anthropologists, historians, even economists, politicians and many others have been delving into the subtleties of the troubled and wounded human psyche. Yet, in recent times, with the emergence of discrete specialisations, psychology and, in particular, psychiatry seem to have become the predominant disciplines that claim unique expertise in addressing human turmoil.

The effects of these specialisations have been considerable. Accordingly, now, not only do experiences of human distress tend to be formulated as disorders and, in short, human suffering confused with ill health, but the significant contribution of all other approaches also tends to be overlooked. The hegemonic concept of “trauma” has become emblematic of this skewing domination. How much is “trauma” part of an overall existential upheaval and how much is it a mere expression of a disturbed or even diseased mind?

Psychiatry, as a medical speciality with its rational methods of assessment and treatment, has been providing credible ways of dealing with certain facets and manifestations of human distress, especially those states of anguish that result from the consequences of wars, domestic violence, sexual abuse, forms of involuntary dislocation and even exhausting professional caregiving in extreme situations. For several decades, the paradigm of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has been dominating the professional as well as the wider societal discourses that have been dealing with these phenomena.

Then, gradually, uneasiness began to arise, as the distorting effects of the excessive dominance of psychiatry became increasingly apparent. People were becoming aware that the complexities and subtleties of these phenomena could not possibly be grasped from an exclusively psychological or psychiatric perspective. It was in the context of this climate that the concept of “moral injury” was proposed, with the explicit intention of expanding the range of viewpoints used to comprehend, at least, one particular class of these excessive forms of human pain and hurt. The argument was simple and convincing: when one is exposed to violence, especially as a perpetrator, it is not only one’s mental health that is affected but also one’s sense of morality and ethical sensitivities. Accordingly, it was observed that persons exposed to such devastating events were experiencing not only psychiatric difficulties but also negative consequences within their very moral sphere. Therefore, the early theorists of moral injury not only drew from their psychiatric expertise but were also inspired by the Homeric insights into his *Iliad* heroes’ painful war experiences.

Once that expansion began, it made perfect sense to question whether the implications of these distressing experiences are limited to only the psychiatric and ethical ones. Surely, a person’s entire being tends to become deformed in some way when he or she is exposed to violent forms of extreme inhuman acts, either as a passive recipient or as an active perpetrator. Under these adverse circumstances, it is not only their psychiatric and moral spheres that are impaired but also their human values, their socio-political sensitivities, their spiritual, aesthetic, creative and other facets of their humanity.

The ten chapters of this book address precisely this expansion by focusing predominantly, but not exclusively, on the dimension of spirituality. Using a unique point of departure, each chapter develops insights that extend our understanding of these experiences of soul-wrenching upheavals.

Although the concepts “moral injury” and “wounds of conscience” were initially applied to the experiences of combat veterans, there is plenty of evidence that they are also of relevance to the experiences of other people who have been exposed to a wide variety of forms of adversity. Perpetrating, witnessing or suffering severe forms of violence can shatter one’s core beliefs about human nature, society and even God. To put it simply, these experiences make people lose God or find God. This means that the phenomena that this book addresses, as well as the conceptual and professional tools used to comprehend and heal them, are of daily relevance to almost every human being. Therefore, this book is written not only for health professionals and for those interested in spiritual wellbeing but also for a much wider readership, as it addresses the subtleties of fundamental phenomena that every person faces today, with varying degrees of intensity

and clarity. More specifically, the book is also of direct interest to other academic disciplines in the humanities and social sciences as well as to professionals and workers in many settings dealing with human anguish.

Our world today is gripped by at least three main groups of catastrophic events: the seemingly unending forms of violence, atrocities and terrorism that are associated with conflict, political instability and war; the incessant adversities (of various types) that create streams of involuntarily dislocated persons seeking safe havens away from their homes; as well as the frightening and multifaceted impact of climate change. Despite their obvious differences, all these phenomena can also be understood as forms of *hubris*, i.e. outcomes of various expressions of human arrogance that, ultimately, have self-damaging effects. The original meaning of *hubris* is a blasphemy against the divine order. Any hubristic action represents not only a violation against the human and wider ecological stability, but it also damages the moral fabric of individuals and groups, impacting on their values and ethical code. Following this understanding, it would not be without justification to claim that all three groups of current catastrophic occurrences produce forms of moral injury. This means that the subject matter of this book is of vital importance in enabling us to grapple with the complexities of many manifestations of human anguish that we all face today.

The chapters in this book do not follow any particular logical sequence. Each one of them represents a unique contribution, rooted in its own intellectual tradition. Although some chapters can be clustered into sub-groupings, each chapter can be read and appreciated in its own right. Nevertheless, all of them, as a collection, articulate a fairly comprehensive and coherent new perspective on moral injury.

The opening chapter sets the epistemological foundations of the book by developing innovative observations about the complexities of the processes that lead to the pathologising and medicalising of human suffering. Proposing that there is an implicit hierarchy of the type of pain that human beings prefer and are also capable of tolerating, it identifies an oscillation between focusing either on morality or on injury when engaging with phenomena of human anguish. The chapter concludes that inappropriate epistemologies lead to erroneous ways of conceptualising these phenomena, excluding positive and renewing effects that can also emerge from being exposed to adversities.

The following two chapters focus on war-related moral injury. Chapter 2 addresses its subject matter from a philosophical perspective whereas Chapter 3 takes a clinical/therapeutic approach. Drawing on another source of classical antiquity, Sherman returns to the war experiences of the Trojan War heroes, this time Sophocles's *Ajax*, in order to develop perceptive observations about guilt and shame in relation to moral responsibility, and then relates them to the remedial function of self-empathy. The