

Soul Repair: After Moral Injury is hosted by Dr. Susan Diamond and Dr. Rita Nakashima Brock. And is produced by [Studio D Podcast Production](#).

Episode 2: A Pandemic, Hate-Crimes, Murders, and an Insurrection: Have We All Got Moral Injury Now?

Continuing the conversation begun in Episode 1 with their four guests, hosts Rita and Susan invite them to reflect on how the multiple catastrophes since January 2020 have led to new, far-reaching applications of moral injury well beyond the impact of war on veterans. They explore the richness of the term and its power in focusing on suffering that needs addressing, and they also raise cautions about dilutions of its meaning from overuse or misapplications of it.

Hosts:

Rev. Rita Nakashima Brock, Ph.D., is Senior Vice President for Moral Injury Programs at Volunteers of America (VOA) and a Commissioned Minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Capital Region. She is a former professor and academic administrator and co-author of Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury After War. An online, one-hour moral distress-relief program at VOA is open to the public at www.voa.org/rest.

Rev. Susan Ward Diamond, D.Min., is Lead Pastor of Florence Christian Church, Florence, KY, and was ordained as a pastor in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in 1990. She has served on a number of boards and leadership roles in the denomination, including moderator of the church. She is author of The Daily Grind: GOD with Your Coffee. Her daily blog, “Thoughts for the Day,” can be found at pastorsusantfd.wordpress.com.

Guests:

Dr. Aristotle Papanikolau, Professor of Theology and Co-Founder and Co-Director of the Orthodox Christian Studies Center at Fordham University

Dr. Brian Powers, U.S. Air Force war veteran and Assistant Professor, Vann Fellow in Christianity and the Armed Forces, and Executive Director of the International Centre for Moral Injury at Durham University, UK

Rabbi Nancy Wiener, Founding Director of the Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Center for Pastoral Counseling; Dr. Paul and Trudy Steinberg Distinguished Professor in Human Relations at Hebrew Union College and Jewish Institute of Religion

Dr. Joseph Wiinikka-Lydon, Senior Research Analyst, The Intelligence Project, Southern Poverty Law Center and formerly Lecturer in Religion and Assistant Director, Center for Principled Problem Solving and Excellence in Teaching at Guilford College

Resources:

Elizabeth Svoboda, "[Moral Injury Is an Invisible Epidemic That Affects Millions](#)," Scientific American, 09/19/2022.

For online Moral Distress Relief: www.voa.org/rest.

SOUL REPAIR_E2_Transcript

Susan [00:00:02] This is Soul Repair: After Moral Injury where we bring to light a misunderstood trauma.

Rita [00:00:09] In each episode, we will walk together through the labyrinth that is moral injury which is our human reaction to harm.

Susan [00:00:20] This wound to the soul is often experienced through feelings of grief, remorse, shame, outrage and despair.

Rita [00:00:29] Whether you've experienced moral injury, hope to help someone who has it, or want to learn more and advocate for others, this is the place for all of us.

Susan [00:00:40] Join us as we seek pathways to bring light, healing and peace into the labyrinth journey of Soul Repair After Moral Injury. Rita, it's great to be with you again as we are moving into episode two, a two-part episode from the beginning of our podcast, Soul Repair: After Moral Injury. So glad we're together again.

Rita [00:01:05] It's wonderful to be here. Just really looking forward to the conversation today. We have some really outstanding guests who are professors or teachers of moral injuries, so they're passing it on to new generations of thinkers and religious leaders and people in general who are taking their courses where they are teaching. And we're really thrilled that they all agree to be together. It's a very diverse group of partners in this conversation. So, we're hearing from a lot of different perspectives about what is moral injury? How does your way of thinking about it define it, and where do you really think it might be going? What needs still to be done in the process of explaining moral injury and so people can understand it and where the research is taking us in terms of deeper knowledge of it. The four guests that were also in episode one, the conversation was so rich, we wanted to keep going with it. Telly Papanikolaou otherwise known as Aristotle in a formal way, but we call him Telly and he is a Christian Orthodox theologian. We also have Brian Powers, who is a Presbyterian minister and theologian. We have Nancy Wiener, who is a Jewish thinker and professor of pastoral theology, and we have Joseph Wiinikka-Lydon, who is a philosopher who thinks about moral injury in terms of philosophical categories like virtue. And so, this is that conversation. In the last two years, and especially I think the last 18 months, we've seen almost a media firestorm around the use of the term moral injury. Given the pandemic, and especially in the U.S., the death of George Floyd and the insurrection at the Capitol, there have been sort of mass experiences in the culture of these harmful disruptions that are just shocking to people. So, we've seen articles on moral injury and practically everyone who suffered anything during this pandemic. But it began, I think, with a

focus on healthcare and what was happening to health care workers at the beginning. So, we've had now, if you mark the 2009, Brett Litz essay as a sort of early point in the post-Shay discussions after Shay, but now with Brett Litz and his team, the work on moral injury has multiplied every year in volume and expansiveness. So, I wondered what you thought of the ways it was now being used. Is it now like the pandemic? Everybody has it, but there are different levels of severity or is it overused? And should it really be reserved for contexts like war or mass devastation? I think it's an interesting conversation to have because it's been such a powerful term in naming something across religious traditions, across cultures that somehow has captured something that has not been quite seen sharply as now is being seen. I know, Brian, you had some reservations. Why don't we start with you around this issue of definitions?

Brian [00:04:26] Yeah, I knew that was going to come to me first given the history. Certainly, coming at it from the perspective of a veteran, I think initially when I started working with this and even having conversations with Joe and other folks at Emory where I did my doctorate too, I did feel the need to be a gatekeeper on this for military and moral injury as something that was the primary way in which it's experienced. And certainly, the more I study it, the more I've come to see that sure what is experienced in a lot of these other contexts is absolutely moral injury, particularly in the pandemic in the UK. Particularly you see it among NHS, the National Health Care Service workers. That is a little bit more tightly bound group, I think, than it is in the US. In America contracts or healthcare's a little more bifurcated. But what I do think I'm kind of coming around to eventually is after the Litz era, I think what's happened, is that the discussion of moral injury is almost bifurcated into two primary categories, which we'll see it talked about in terms of betrayal-based moral injury, kind of referring to the Shay understanding and then perpetration-based moral injury, which is really based more strongly on the Litz definition. And what I find, particularly as it moves forward, is that that distinction becomes problematic to me. Particularly as you're trying to define what is moral injury and what isn't. And to me, what it comes down to sometimes is that moral injury is distinctly different than the simple experience of regret. And I think that can be a consequence of this perpetrator seeing it as a perpetrative injury, that if I have done something that just violates my own moral code I feel bad about it. And that's moral injury. I think there's a more complex understanding of agency in this, so that if we see it where it occurs, it occurs where people really have some kind of heavy personal, moral or responsibility buy-in to a cause or an effort or some kind of code. And then when that trust in that institution is broken as a part of moral actions, it makes sense that we experience a violation of our capacity even to trust in those institutions to uphold moral values or of those social values themselves. And I think acknowledging that those are the kind of contexts that happens primarily can be maybe one way back of recognizing it's not everywhere, it's not everything. We do have to have some general results where we have a commitment to that social trust that's violated. And you see that obviously in the most acute sense in the military where that commitment of one's own responsibility, of honor, of really self in an almost totalized way goes towards the military cause for the time that one's in. And I think for that reason, it remains the model par excellence for how this happens simply because those things exist in extremity there. That's the way I've come around to see that. And I think the way that gets at that perpetration betrayal difference is, it really is all betrayal whether it's perpetration directly or not. And that's where I think that category starts to break down.

Rita [00:07:56] The sharp distinction between agency and non-agency breaks down, I think, around the questions of moral injury. And I think one of the interesting things is that way that Shay goes in the direction that Litz goes in relation to the veteran populations they were serving. So, you have Shay working with a lot of draftees and you have the Litz team working with people who enlisted. I think that might also be part of that distinction. Nancy, I know that that conference you held had a sort of very explosive thing happen around a professor at the seminary in relation to moral injury.

Nancy [00:08:39] Yes. The conference happened to follow on the heels by a couple of months of the death of somebody who had been a key figure at the seminary. And when the obituary appeared and was very florid in its praise, evoked a wide range of responses from people who had been abused by the former faculty member. As I mentioned at the conference, we decided that what we wanted to do was have a panel of people who were looking at ways in which, within the Jewish community and beyond the Jewish community, moral injury had been perpetrated or suffered. We had somebody from the Women's Rabbinic Network speak about the ways in which women have experienced different degrees of moral injury. And this gets to my understanding of what moral injury is, which is I'm very taken by the spectrum that's been part of the discussion over the last number of years of moral discomfort, moral distress, moral injury, and that all of these are ways of understanding that the soul has been profoundly impacted by something that's been going on, but it isn't always moral injury. Something can cause deep moral distress but not be as profound a rupture as moral injury is. And therefore, the ways that we respond and the needs of the individual or the community are different depending on the severity. And all of it still has a moral element to it such that the need to address the fundamental values that the person had held and help the person rebuild a sense of having a moral center again is still part and parcel of what's needed. I'm also very taken by Litz's outline of the fact that you can be the perpetrator, the victim, or even somebody who's observed something and suffer as a result of any of those positions, and the centrality of the sense of betrayal. One of the other presenters at our conference spoke about the ways in which the rise of anti-Semitism in our country right now is having a profound effect on the ways in which we as Jews are perceiving our place within American society and a sense of betrayal based on the promises of the Constitution etc., of our having a place in this world as all other citizens do. There are ways in which right now we are looking at a world in which people are groping for language for the ways in which they're suffering that is not physical and not wholly psychological. And for me, that seems to be the way that moral injury as a concept is having such deep resonance right now. And that in order for us to as a society really have a term that will continue to have meaning and not become a catch all, we still need to be working on refinement and recognizing that during the COVID crisis we definitely have had people who have found it as a lifeline, but who are not really suffering fully from moral injury but deep moral distress. And over time, I trust that that's going to work its way out. And we'll figure out how, as those who are immersed in this field, will be using the terminology and recognize that the way it's used on the street may be different, which is true for many, many complex concepts.

Rita [00:13:07] Yes. Thank you. I relate to what you're saying about the Jewish community and antisemitism. As an Asian-American, my community has also been deeply impacted by the massive rise in hate crimes against Asian-Americans, that it just sort of came out of nowhere. Maybe it had always been there, but not in the magnitude that they are. And there's a lot of pain

and suffering around that as well. Joe, you speak from the perspective of someone who came at this-- and I came to it through military veterans as well--so you're the one person who has a sort of different way in. And how do you understand moral injury in relation to the ways it's been used?

Joe [00:13:48] Yeah, no, it's really difficult because it's happening so quickly. And I think, Nancy, you mentioned something that I've thought about and written about and talked about, which is this reaching for language. We're not really given languages of devastation necessarily. I mean, they're there, but it's not one of them necessarily, one of the registers that we're trained to talk in or part of our development as we grow older. I think people reach for languages and images and narratives to start processing and orienting around this. And I think that's what we see with moral injury. People have grasped this and I think they've grasped the two because the discussion of trauma-- when this original critique of moral injury-- trauma doesn't fully do it, at least the discourses that are usually there. Of course, there are people who push back and argue about that, but there's something about that "moral;" it kind of hits something, whether someone's speaking in a soul language or different languages, it starts to invite in different registers, right? The theological. The poetic, which is wonderful, which is wonderful. And to what Brian says, I really agree. I think that it's kind of an-- I don't know if it's an academic fallacy, but it's certainly an academic tendency where we're trying to find the definition. And I've hung out and played the part of a moral philosopher for a few years. That's very much what moral philosophy is about, right? It's concise concepts development, right? Not the only thing, but very much there. And I think actually what we need is something different. I think we need definitions of moral injury. I think we need approaches. I think we need languages and images of it. Because I think what all of this has been signaling is not necessarily the importance of moral injury as a concept or that isn't important. It's also showing a kind of poverty of language to talk in these ways. And so, I think moral injury needs to be a beginning. And then you have fields like theology, philosophy, literature, art that can be engaged. One of the things that I'm most uneasy with the definitions and how they're doing this, is the focus on the research in clinical language. Which I don't want to put that aside because it's important. People who are engaged in that are trying to help people in real time and in front of them. I don't want to be a psychology hater or clinical hater. As somebody who has benefited from such things in my life, both as a researcher and a person, I wouldn't want to do that. But I do think that there is an institutional inertia in some disciplines, such as psychology, which is so big and so well-funded, it doesn't necessarily have to listen to others. It can be kind of internal, unfocused. What I see more broadly in the culture is that people are taking this, using it, deploying it out of those spaces. And that's always very messy. But what my hope is, is that it really is showing that there is an impoverishment of this language. We do have to start looking at moral injury maybe as a range that needs more language. Because there does seem something very different from somebody who feels they've committed a grievous harm in the course of war and somebody who's just seen something. They're connected, I think. But I think especially in that original Litz article, they were kind of compressed all together. I think there's been a lot of compression. I think what this shows us is that we have a great deal of work to do in moral injury being a start of language. And then one more thing and I'll pass it on. Also trying to figure out what moral injury-- how it relates to other things, like in nursing ethics, moral distress and residue, Bernard Williams has the idea of agent regret. There's a lot of other languages around there that people are learning. I

think there's a great deal of work to do to see what's being duplicated and of how these can be put together in a generative way.

Rita [00:18:32] Thank you, Joe. So, Telly, I know you've been sort of engaged right now in some of the struggles in the Orthodox community around what's happening in Ukraine. But how do you understand moral injury in relation to how it's being used currently?

Telly [00:18:48] Well, my initial connection with it is with violence. And I understand the question against oppression. I think the discussion is good. I think there is a danger of it being so diffused that then it comes to mean nothing, quite honestly. There is a sense in which it emerged to identify something that PTSD could not. So, the initial diagnostic category was PTSD. So, I mean, it emerged to indicate a cluster of symptoms in a state of being that is like PTSD, but not quite the same thing. And I think that maybe we should just ground ourselves in that initial moment. For me, the key is the violence piece. And I think I do want to honor perhaps the diagnostic distinction anyway, because perhaps that might mean various approaches or different approaches to helping people who are suffering in particular ways in relationship to particular experiences of violence. But I can see violence affecting you through committing violence, through seeing violence, through having experienced violence in one's body, in one's psyche. I could see moral injury emerging from all those particular kinds of experiences. I wrote an article *What Is Moral About Moral Injury?* I mean, we haven't really talked about that. Shay had a particular idea of morality and that shaped what he called moral injury. And it's really interesting in some sense because these embodied experiences somehow are intersecting with more theoretical debates about what is morality? Is it the anthropological? Is it utilitarian? Is it virtue...so on and so forth? I think Joe and I agree, of course, that virtue has something to do with it. Maybe let me reframe it a little differently rather than me sort of judging where do I stand on the various ways in which it's being used? Again, I think this piece on violence is key, and in that sense, it could extend to minoritized communities that especially are themselves where violence is much more prone to happen and much more prevalent. Perhaps if we reframe it in some sense in asking ourselves this question of what are we all thinking about, how are we defining morality? We're talking moral injury, but how are we defining morality in such a way that we fix what's being injured? And again, just to reiterate what I said at the beginning, virtue in some sense is just really interesting to me because virtue is not a sort of badge of honor concept. It's a formative concept. It's a relational concept, something which for me they're defined as states of being. I see them as momentum, quite honestly. And various kinds of momentum that if they're all kind of in a-- to use another psychological term-- flow, can lead to a way of being in the world. And violence disrupts that. So perhaps I'm being a bit reductive. But my own focus is on that violence piece and how virtue can be understood as a way of making sense of that.

Rita [00:22:25] I've often used the word harm. There can be forms of harm as devastating as violence. But I think a very extreme amount of harm has to be involved in some way. I think the sense that it's a relational concept is also crucial because you don't have a personal moral system. You have an interconnected moral system because it's how you relate to the world. I think this was in response to something that Joe said, but J. Irene Harris, who's a clinician at the Minneapolis Veterans Affairs Clinic there, did an evidence-based study of veterans who had been diagnosed with PTSD, which is the earlier way of talking about what happens to people in

war. And she divided a group of them into two and had one group do group therapy with a clinician on top of their PTSD treatments. And then she had another group meet with a chaplain for eight weeks, for 2 hours a week, where they talked about things like God and evil and forgiveness and remorse and all of the things that we talk about when we talk about moral injury. And at the end of that study, what they found was that the group that had met with the chaplain had better outcomes for their PTSD treatment than the group that did group therapy. So, there's something I think that made that difference. Maybe this residue that is moral injury it's not just a psychological problem. It has some spiritual dimension to it. And that study is a 2018 essay that was published by Harris. Building spiritual strength is the program that she created with the chaplains. Given this sort of squishiness that I would say or this fecundity, actually, I think the ways that we are all grappling with moral injury is it has to do with it being both a rich term and a relatively new term that has clearly identified something that needed to be identified. So, in your own work, where do you see the future of it going? Where are you pushing your energies toward in working on moral injury? Brian, you're starting a new center. Why don't you start? Lead us off again.

Brian [00:24:59] Sure. Yes, in the autumn again we're launching the International Center for Moral Injury here at Durham. It's really a digital center, so it's a hub to join a lot of things together hopefully online and create one of the things that it's going to do among several different ones. One of the aims is to actually create resources for pastoral care givers and those doing this kind of thing for working with moral injury, because I think particularly over here those are really impoverished. And also, though there are people doing great work, it's how to bring a lot of things together and kind of make sure that they're identified and shared as widely as we can. But the ultimate goal, again, of getting help to folks who are suffering from moral injury. I think to piggyback on what you're just saying there, there's part of recovering from moral injury that I think is recognized even in most of the literature and across, I should say, the clinical dimension as well, is that there is-- whether we call it a spiritual dimension or a loss of meaning or something in that realm-- that there is a need to build a framework of meaning that people can live into again and can explore their own experiences. For me, moral injury does kind of sit at this critical place too where as a concept has a capacity, I think, to hold together people who are caught in, as Telly says, this act of violence which is certainly at its heart. Whether we say it in different ways, whether bystanders, whether those perpetrating it, whether those who are receiving that violence in ways that kind of transcend the normal binaries to do that, in this sense, I think Jonathan Shay is underappreciated in the language he uses for moral injury, which is actually the moral injury is present when there's been a betrayal of what's right by a person in a position of authority in a high stakes situation. He doesn't identify who suffered that moral injury. In that sense, I think there is a recognition that it holds this space in which those who suffer it, systematic disenfranchisement from different groups of people who suffer that violence to their very sense that there is accountability and justice in the world. Tons of communities feel that way in different parts of the world and different societies. At the same time, there are people in the military who have a much more active agency in buying into what they're doing on the other side of violence who suffer moral injury at the same time over what they're doing. And I think as a concept, it has the capacity to hold things together in a rare moment, in a very polarized world where it's much easier for us to think about things in terms of right and wrong and almost in terms of tribal identities. I think it has, again, that power of, okay, wait a minute; let's have a moment where we recognize this. Because as our colleague Zachary Moon says,

when it's experienced by the wielder of violence, when you have an honest to God moral injury, it's not somebody whose moral system is failing, it's somebody whose moral operating system is working well. They're experiencing normal moral emotions to some really horrific acts and being put in some really horrific situations. But I do think there's a significant danger that in flattening some of these terms, it's going to get weaponized again, essentially, and that we're going to look at-- and you can already see this, I think, developing in some of the discourse that there's a sense of a priority of sympathy for moral injury and that those who are experiencing that perpetrative moral injury are going to get assigned blame and again in undoing the entire thing. For me, that's why the sense of betrayal is key because it holds the whole thing together. There's a betrayal on both sides of this, of the agency, and it's experienced differently. And if we can obtain both of those, it's moral injury. That's a key to getting it. But I think it's holding that space so that we can understand frameworks of meaning in ways that can work also. For me, a lot of the theological concepts I'm working with are really kind of re-narrating the Christian tradition in some ways through the lens of moral injury. Currently kind of fascinated with the idea that if we approach even the passion and resurrection narrative from the perspective of moral injury, there's moral injury all over the place that you discover in this and in this narrative. Particularly in this sense from looking at the idea of penance and building back. How do we use this concept that has so much troubled baggage over the years? Certainly, recognize that upfront. But at its core, if it represents something turning to a new identity, then just the figure of Peter in the gospel narrative as somebody who's himself betrayed Jesus profoundly at the cross and then has this marvelous opportunity to turn the corner in John 21 and the breakfast at the beach narrative, where Jesus asks him three times to affirm again who He is. There's a sense that that involves such a turning into a new person and a recovery and a moving forward that I think there's really profound concepts like that, that can be applied in new ways with those far wiser in pastoral care than myself that actually work with folks, but that aren't vocalized within the tradition. So, from my perspective, it's a lot. It's trying to pull out some of those concepts from the Christian tradition and certainly from my own reformed background that I think are deeply resonant.

Rita [00:31:00] So interesting. It reminds me of the fact that in the first depiction of the passion narrative in images that still exists in a church is 5th century in Ravenna, Italy, Saint Apollinare Nuovo. There are 13 scenes that begin with the Last Supper and end with the road to Emmaus story. And the crucifixion isn't in the sequence of 13 images. He's carrying his cross and then there's a resurrection image. But there are three or four of the 13 scenes are related to betrayal which leapt out at me when I looked at it. So, I think your instinct about the moral injury permeating that narrative is even in the earliest images of it about betrayal. It's just fascinating. Telly what do you think? Where is this going to go?

Telly [00:31:56] Well, I think what I would like it to go-- and I'm under no illusions I'm going to single handedly change the culture of the military. But where I would like it to go is for there to be a sense of how virtue plays a role in forming soldiers for combat. And the military does a great job of that quite honestly. And it's important to really identify to some extent how it is that-- at least from narratives that I've heard-- that there are military personnel that often really want to go back to combat situations mainly because of the community, their purpose, the commitment. All these various kinds of things which, if we look at them, are manifestations of virtuous communities of a kind. What the military doesn't get at, which ancient cultures get-- and of course that book by Sebastian Junger, *Tribe*, I mean, sort of indicates this, but there's a sense

in which the military doesn't get, that the American culture doesn't get. You can't train someone to be in community for certain situations and to have fit communities like that and then all of those are thrown back into the wonderland of individualism. It just doesn't work. I really don't like critiques of modernity that overemphasize all of these negative aspects. I have very little patience for these critiques of liberalism-- both theological and philosophical. But I will say this, the one thing they do get right-- but you don't have to go down that path-- is this hyper-individualism in our culture. You're on your own. You're out of violence, you're going to be fine. Get a job and be happy. You're feeling bad. It's your fault. I don't mean to be hyperbolic. It's absurd. It really is on the level of absurdity to take someone, put them in this communal structure, see what's happening, see what they can do, see what they're capable of, see how committed they are, see the bonds of intimacy and trust that are formed and then throw them back into-- I call it the wonderland of individualism. It's really the desert of individualism. Grasping for water. What I would like to see is some-- maybe this and many other issues in the world affecting us not least of which is climate change, think about formation. Think about virtue as a relational category. Think of practices of formation. Think about ways we can just rethink our entire culture in terms of-- and I'm not calling for us to go back to the village. I'm not idealizing world situations. I'm not trying to do that. I'm just trying to get us to realize the importance of communal formations somehow. And at the very least, the military needs to understand that and they don't. At the very least, they need to understand that what ancient cultures knew is that we need some plan here of re-forming. We need some kind of transformative process here. We need something. We can't just throw them back. Then it gets caught up with budget and money and other things and it's really unconscionable to some extent. Again, for me, the idea of virtue plays that particular kind of role. So, that's what I would like to see.

Rita [00:36:09] Yeah, I think you're onto something there. I was reading a study about adult friendships and something like 13% of adults 50 years and under have not one single close friend, which says something about what you are saying about this.

Telly [00:36:30] That's something about our culture.

Rita [00:36:32] Definitely. I agree with Joe that psychotherapy and clinical work is really valuable. I've also benefited from it myself, but it operates on a transactional model of unilateral disposable relationships. So that the clinician is not allowed to make themselves vulnerable and be real with the client. Their job is to fix the client as much as possible, and the client is the one making themselves emotionally vulnerable and opening their wounds to some person that's going to help them. So, it's a medicalized model. But once they're fixed, they're not allowed to see the person again. The relationship has a very strong terminus after the therapy is completed. And then I think that that's one of the limits in relation to something as profound as moral injury, which if it is a real breach in your love system, the only antidote is love.

Telly [00:37:34] I mean, James Baldwin knew that back early in his career and that we should somehow know his Fire Next Time is all about moral injury and so I think just to throw out a reference, I think that we can grasp on to it.

Rita [00:37:51] Right. Nancy, where do you think this is going?

Nancy [00:37:56] I move in the same direction that you're moving Telly which is somehow we need to get back to a sense of being a collective and not a group of individuals, and that is something that our religious communities value and foster. And really in many ways we are the ways in which the frameworks of meaning that people utilize are first articulated and supported and encouraged so that people can own the values that the community has and feel that they belong. And that when they're feeling that they're moving away from them or they've been breached in some way, that the community is the reinforcement for you're not alone in feeling the horror or distress that you're experiencing because of a breach, and that there's a sense of a collective that is committed to living in and creating a world that upholds those values. The thing that I've really been thinking a lot about is I am a pastoral caregiver and I teach people who are going to be pastoral caregivers. And so, the question for me becomes how do we provide support and care throughout a lifetime, through the times when things feel stable so that people know what ground they're standing on. How do we recognize and be available when people are feeling that they're on shaky ground? And what do we do when there's been a rupture? And how can we be prepared and responsive in ways that are positive and healing. And where there is a way not only for the individual to express their needs and have them met, but where, as members of the clergy, we can also be keeping an eye out on the other people who are being affected by the imbalance that that individual is feeling. So that unlike the therapist who can only respond to the person who reaches out to them, we have the possibility of saying, I know that this individual is suffering deeply. I'm going to reach out to their family. I'm going to reach out to the other people that I know who are part of their circles and just say, I'm here, the community is here. You don't have to be going through this by yourselves. And your own distress and discomfort and anxieties are very real because none of us function solely in a vacuum. And those types of messages are not heard because of the individualism and are not honored even by the people who are feeling them because they are living in a society that says back up, you should be able to handle this. And those are all things that I think are very much part of the caring of the soul and the soul repair that we can be a part of. One of the other things that I see as a real challenge for all of us who are committed to this work right now is how much of the literature so far is really embedded in Christian concepts and Christological language. And that in order for this to be open and communicating what it can to people who are not Christian, we really need to be working on the ways in which language and cultural idioms are more expansive. And where they can be more inclusive and open up the possibility both for people who are not Christian and people who are not as bound to any specific religious tradition can feel that they can benefit from what we're all learning and where this field can be going. And that's going to take a real conscious effort on all of our parts and a real acknowledgment of what the limitations are of where we are right now to be able to be as much as we have the potential to be.

Rita [00:42:41] Thank you for that. It's very inspiring thinking about in those collective ways. It makes so much sense. Joe, where do you think this is going?

Joe [00:42:54] I don't know. I'd be hard pressed to know where it's going and kind of say, again, like Telly was saying where I hope it was going just because I'm awful at prognostication in my own life. Well, just picking up what Nancy said, I think one of the big challenges is going to be people who are not religiously affiliated. And this goes back to what Telly was saying about just-- at least the United States-- our culture. That there can be a bit of a wasteland. But I was watching this show Heart Stopper on Netflix, and not that that has to do anything with moral

injury, but you look at everything on social media and it's about queer love and youth. How many people are suffering because of the show? Because it's a joyful show and they're realizing they never had such joy and they're reaching out because they don't have anyone to engage with them on it. You see this desperate reaching out to try like...I've had this experience; I've had this opening up. So, they don't have those communities. Actually, quite a few queer people have been betrayed by their own communities. So, it's doubly difficult then to have those contexts in which that can happen. I wanted to just say that I agree with that. I think that's going to be a very important place. I think just to kind of say some things that people said, looking at moral injury as relational and more of an ecology, which you get if you actually listen to people who have such injuries, who've experienced such things. They speak of the other people who were there. I would really like to see, Brian, you talked a bit about looking at theology through moral injury and kind of like not as a side show, but putting it, centering it. And I would really love to see this happen, this kind of going away from the pastoral side. But in war studies and political theory, I think that instead of saying like, oh, there's also more injury, that's accidental-- well, I don't know if accidental is the right word. But it's going to happen to different people in kind of an accidental way. It's just part of war. I think we need to start looking at war as first and foremost a moral laboratory that transforms people and transforms societies. No matter whatever the agendas are, whatever else is there, I don't think we fully-- especially in the United States, which makes quite a bit of war--we don't really reflect on just how incredibly transformative it is, right? In a way that it's a laboratory where the designers and the scientists don't actually have much control after a while. We can see this now happening in Ukraine. So, when you unleash war, you unleash a great deal of uncertainty. And kind of connecting to that, I think that in addition, we needed to expand our language and concepts, we have to look at the way that moral injury really affects transitional justice and peace building. How if people really can't trust, looking at the Bosnia case, you know somebody can't trust others. Also, a transformation has happened to the imagination. That's another piece I'm kind of thinking about with this. People can't imagine futures anymore. They can't imagine living with certain people anymore. That's really, really difficult if you're engaged in transitional justice and peacebuilding. I think it's foundational. And piggybacking on Brian, there's a book by JM Bernstein on I think it's Terror and Dignity. And he talks about moral injury. It's not the same injury. It doesn't come from the discourse that comes from Shay and then from Litz. It's that moral philosophical discourse that is based in Bishop Butler, his ethics a few centuries ago, and that Jean Hampton and others looked at, it's more in terms of like indignity harms. There is some overlap there, but one of the things that he does in my reading of the book, is he's trying to reshape political theory around human vulnerability that's so much in this liberal political order. He's actually saying it's built up to protect people from certain vulnerabilities. And he brings in actually torture and rape as these two important things that happen to people. He uses the word of devastation. It devastates their world. And looking to politics as if we can ground it in moral vulnerability, and I think this vulnerability study is putting it in conversation with moral injury and looking at what people go through...their vulnerabilities, trying to rethink political theory from that, not from sovereignty, not from these other concepts. So, I guess it's kind of a political theology, but not quite all this other stuff. And it goes to what you were saying Telly about there's something very important about this connects to politics. And they're important things out there that we need to protect. And I think that we need to inform through these experiences that people have had, because at least the moral injuries that we've been talking here are deeply political contexts. And I think that needs to really start being reflected in and start having an impact on the way we think of politics,

the way we think of our relations and how we do things. I know that's a lot, but I really feel like as the people are saying, I think it's a really, really critical term because whenever it's thrown in any discourse or any discipline, I think it messes with some preconceived notions about the person, society, politics. I think that's a good thing, and I would love to see more of that.

Rita [00:49:18] Thank you, Joe. That was a wonderful summation of some of the ways in which we live by deceptions that we can control our lives and our environments and our relationships. In fact, we're deeply vulnerable to all the chaotic forces of life and evil and harm without a whole lot of protection, actually, except maybe our moral conscience. Thank you all for this very rich and wonderful conversation. I think it's certainly stimulated in me all kinds of stray thoughts about, oh, that's a great thing to pursue in that. We didn't get to one final quick question I had and I don't know that we need to answer it. And Shay is sort of the ur-text, I think, for most of us who think of moral injury as beginning with Shay's work. One of the things he was very concerned about in his work was preventing moral injury, and he really firmly believed it could be prevented with moral leadership in the military. I think the Litz definition doesn't go to prevention at all, but there's also a move to try to create an actual diagnosis for moral injury so it can be studied and measured to see if there are prevention measures that help. I think the way we've been discussing it, it's a much richer concept than that. It's way beyond any single system or study or research to create a prevention method for it. It's really something that just comes with being human in a chaotic universe. So, thank you all very much. This is going to be a wonderful way to send us forth thinking more deeply about moral injury.

Susan [00:51:07] Wow, this was amazing. It was so informative and so much to think about as we're reflecting on what is the definition of moral injury. I'll be quite honest with you, Rita, as things were happening in the last couple of years, it was my tendency to just say, "Oh, that's moral injury." And our speakers today really helped me to consider deeper interpretations and deeper definitions. And I know you've done work on this because for some, moral injury is a specific kind of thing that takes place. So, can you walk us through that?

Rita [00:51:47] We all have moral conflicts, as I said at the first episode, and we try to resolve them in some way. They may bother us for a while. Sometimes we can shake it off and say, well, that's life. But moral injury is when something weighs your soul down so much, whether it's a lot of moral distress, that accumulates and you break, or whether it's something cataclysmic that happened that you cannot make sense of that just is so disturbing to you that it haunts you profoundly. And so moral injury is quite profound as a form of suffering. And I think it's profound for several reasons. One is that when you have a break in your meaning system, it affects all of your relationships to reality and you're trying to patch back some way of being in the world that can make sense to you. And that is a very difficult task if what happened doesn't make sense to you or it makes you feel like you're a horrible person, that is profound. But it's also not a disorder because shame or guilt or sorrow or even cynicism and anger in relation to something really awful is an appropriate response to something awful, not a disordered way of thinking about reality, but you really have to accept what happened to you. You can't just fix it, make it go away. It's never going to not have happened to you. I think the ways that our guests have been thinking about it and defining it are so helpful because it can easily get watered down. It's a way the word trauma sometimes is used for every bad thing that happens. Trauma is a profound kind of harm. And moral injury is a profound kind of moral suffering. Because the

good part of you, the part of you that is what connects you to love and meaning is fighting with your experience. It's not happy with you. It's not happy with reality. It's not happy with the systems you're in, relationships that happened to you that broke. I think all four of our guests have really helped us get our arms around the profound quality of moral injury, not only in an individual life, but in the world in which this person now has to function and all the relationships that person is in.

Susan [00:54:17] And this was so important for us in these first two episodes to get grounded on that as we move into the next episodes where we're actually going to be having guests who have experienced moral injury for themselves. So, I am very much hoping that our listeners will continue to stick with us. The next episode that's coming up will be with healthcare workers, especially nurses and physician's assistants. We have one medical assistant that was a veteran in Iraq and Afghanistan. We want to make sure that we hear their stories. And so, Rita, I'm really looking forward to this for the next few times, but especially next episode, episode three, which is going to be on healthcare workers.

Rita [00:55:10] Yeah, I'm really looking forward to that one too. I want to say that if you've been listening to this and you feel like you might be on the edge of moral injury, you're feeling a lot of moral distress, as I think many of us are because of the pandemic we're going through, there are sources that Volunteers of America has that you can access online. They're free and open to the public. So, we have one at www.voa.org/rest that's as Volunteers of America. [Voa.org/rest](http://www.voa.org/rest). That's an hour online with other people who want to support each other going through moral distress and moral injury. You can go to that URL www.voa.org/rest and you will see a schedule of one-hour groups. And these are facilitated by people who understand and experience moral distress and moral injury themselves and are wanting to help other people process. You can go there and look at a schedule. There are a couple of groups for veterans only, so if you're a military veteran, you can do those groups or you can just join one for the general public. And 82% of the people who filled out the survey said they felt much calmer and less stressed when they left the group. So, we think it works at least to help us get through all of this and maybe process deeper stuff later. We also have one for first responders. That's a separate section and that is www.rest4firstresponders.com. And you can go there and you can see we have times all over the place in that program because we know a lot of first responders work weird shifts and hours and so we invite you to try it; just see if an hour of it is helpful to you. You can show up at every session if you need it. A lot of people do return. Some people are very regular and come once a week and all the groups are confidential. No one actually has to know you visited. I know for some people that's important because we know that what we're doing is introducing concepts that people may recognize in themselves for the first time. And it's really important to have a place where you can talk about that and, say, "Oh my gosh, I think this is what's wrong with me," or "This is how I'm feeling. Oh my gosh, this isn't a word for something that I didn't know how to process because I couldn't identify it." Those sources are there and they're in the show notes if you didn't write the links down. I hope you join us next week because we have another amazing conversation for you.

Susan [00:57:55] Soul Repair: After Moral Injury is hosted by me, Dr. Susan Diamond.

Rita [00:58:00] And me, Dr. Rita Nakashima Brock.

Susan [00:58:03] And is produced by Studio D Podcast Production.

Rita [00:58:07] You can listen to Soul Repair anywhere you get your podcasts, and if you'd like to support the show, please subscribe, leave a review and tell everyone you know about Soul Repair.

Susan [00:58:18] All you have to do is open up the podcast app on your phone, look for soul repair and click the plus button in the top right, then scroll down until you see ratings and reviews and tell us your thoughts.

Rita [00:58:31] Thanks for listening. We hope you join us next time.

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