**Moral Injury**

The Pastoral/Spiritual Practitioner may well meet people experiencing moral injury. I suspect there is a parallel, with the Pastoral/Spiritual Practitioner sometimes having their own experience of moral injury.

**Quotes from some of the literature**

It is generally agreed that PTST and Moral Injury can both occur ‘first hand and by association’ and that some people show little impact while some suffer greatly.

(Healy 2015, p32)

PTSD is largely founded on fear, but shame drives moral injury

Moral Injury can ’lead to loss of meaning and faith’ (McDonald,2017, pp15-17)

Research reveals that ‘trauma inflicted by another human has a more far reaching effect upon the survivor than that which is caused by nature’ and that when there is malicious intent the survivor can feel more persecuted, unsafe and confused. The experience can be vivid, forgotten or disconnected when it is outside one’s previous experience (Healy 2015, p34-39)

‘We should be wary about spreading the construct of moral injury too thin; one isn’t morally injured by regretting a cutting remark to a friend, or by feeling a vague social responsibility for military actions taken in one’s name.’ (McDonald 2017,p23)

At the same time … ‘there is not a hierarchy of suffering’…when trauma or catastrophic loss is experienced (McDonald, 2017, p22)

There seem to be **two main approaches** to understanding Moral Injury: Their differences are based on the concept of agency. The following is a summary from McDonald’s book.

1. **Jonathan Shay** describes moral injury occurring when a legitimate authority significantly betrays ‘what is right’ and thus morally wounds a subordinate. Shay uses stories of Achilles and Odysseus, as well as Vietnam veterans to illustrate this.

He notes that trust is destroyed when shared ideals are violated and this can result in loss of meaningful personal narrative.

Outcomes can include ‘ruined relationships, substance abuse, crime, incarceration, loss of will to live’.

**Prevention** measures include: ethical use of power; unit (*or community?)\** cohesion, training.

**Healing** occurs only by ‘moral and social therapies’ (*or care?*)\* ie in community

(McDonald 2017, pp15-17)

1. **Brett Litz, William Nash, Shira Maguen and others** have a newer approach which focuses on the **s*ubject*** role of the person in their own wound – moral injury occurs as a result of the person’s own violation of their moral code.

‘…the lasting psychological, biological, spiritual, behavioural and social impact of perpetrating, failing to prevent, or bearing witness to acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.’

Dissonance and inner conflict result – and this is seen as a sign of moral health.

**Healing –** evil needs to be acknowledged, but recognized as not ultimately defining the person, and thus can be incorporated into an understanding of the acceptable ‘imperfect self’

Failure to do so can be crippling and may need a multi level strategy for recovery.

McDonald quotes Litz as suggesting the following steps for recovery:

1. ‘An unconditionally accepting therapist (*or Spiritual Carer?\*)*

(b) ‘Imaginal dialogue with a benevolent moral authority’

(c) ‘Attempts at making amends’

(d) ‘Reconnection with communities and loving relationships’

(McDonald 2017, pp15-17)

‘…an individual may feel responsible for a morally impermissible act carried our in their name…even if they had no knowledge of these acts being committed’ On learning of the act ‘because of their particular affiliation with the. … organisation the individual regards themselves as “guilty by association”. ‘ Understanding how the person views themselves – as agency or liability- determines rehabilitation processes which can bring healing. (Neilson in Frame 2015, pp 140-141)

Tom Frame notes that it is now accepted that moral injury can be experienced without PTST; that suffering is usually less recognized when it is not physical; and that for long periods after such injury ‘the individuals’ normal ways of coping are often rendered impotent’.

Further he states that an environment containing toxic ideas and poisonous imperatives can cause moral injury.

He also notes that difficult questions raised are a sign of maturity rather than a sign that the person can’t cope. He affirms ‘that that life is complex, insight rare, and wisdom is precious’ (Frame 2015, pp1-17)

A military chaplain noted that while his faith gave strength and resilience it also posed difficult questions about good and evil; that easy answers and slogans did not offer healing. (Swinburn in Frame, 2015, pp79-93)

Dobas states that moral injury involves a ‘corrosion of moral emotions’. He draws a distinction between those troubled by what they have done or witnessed (moral trauma) and those untroubled by what they have or have not done, but who should be troubled (moral degradation). (Dobas in Frame, 2015, pp126-134)

Beard says Moral Injury is not a disorder but a normal response to extremity and draws a distinction between ‘moral injuries about the self and moral injuries about the world’ (*or about the faith community?)\**  (Beard, in Frame 2015, pp112-125)

‘Mercy, healing and movement toward the divine occur when…the aggressor is compelled to speak the truth of his or her experience and the community is compelled to listen...there is pain (in this) but not endless pain. (Yandell, in McDonald 2017, p148)

Frechette and Boase, note ‘ “immediate reactions to trauma” are transcultural, while models for healing are bound more closely to context’ (McDonald 2017, p31)

Coleman stresses the importance of ritual and ceremony for reintegrating a person; enabling the person to speak candidly and conscientiously about what they have done and witnessed and how this has left them feeling. (Coleman, in Frame 2015 pp205-219)

Sacred text ‘…are often instrumental in constructing the moral identities that are damaged in moral injury’ (McDonald 2017, p13)

*How might they be instrumental in the healing process?\**

\* *my questions*

**Reflection questions**

1. What questions arise for you?
2. What, if any, are you own experiences with moral injury?
3. What are your experiences within supervision concerning moral injury?
4. What might be the implications of this concept for supervisors

**Bibliography**

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