

# Robert Emmet Meagher, Forward by Stanley Hauerwas and Afterword by Jonathan Shay, *Killing from the Inside Out: Moral Injury and Just War*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014, 161 pages, \$22.00.

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[1] Moral injury often occurs when warriors witness or participate in an act so radically contrary to their values that the bottom drops out of their moral universe and their feelings of shame and guilt are so deep that their sense of self-worth is virtually destroyed. Some would distinguish this from PTSD that usually results from something that has been done to one though the two conditions may be woven together. In any case, moral injury is the reality Meagher focuses on. In doing so, he joins a growing number of concerned observers who have only recently recognized the phenomenon. As Meagher wants us to know in the chapters that follow war and moral injury have always been with us throughout history. It is only recently however that it has been identified by psychologists, psychiatrists, and therapists. Jonathan Shay, MD, PhD, who wrote the Afterword, is often credited with having first defined moral injury. For Meagher, quoting the mother of a veteran who committed suicide, moral injury is the kind of wound that “kills you from inside out.” (5)

[2] The reality of moral injury is the evidence that forms the basis of his critique of just war theory. As he says in the Preface, "The aim of this book is, then, to pull up from its roots, the just war tradition, to reveal its deadly legacy, and to point to a future beyond just war." (xx) That future will not necessarily be beyond war for sometimes evil must be resisted. A case in point is the actions of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Albert Camus, two men of conscience, who each resisted the evil of the Third Reich. What must be pulled up by the roots is the understanding of just war thinking that justifies war and killing without admitting that killing is always evil even when unavoidable. The reality of moral injury forces us in Meagher's estimate to face the truth of that claim and, he hopes, this will ultimately lead to the renunciation of war altogether. The need to deal with war and moral injury is all the more urgent today given the fact that modern warfare in both World Wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is more horrific than the wars at the time of just war theory's development.

[3] Meagher believes that the past can walk us into the present. He starts that journey with ancient Greece and the *Iliad*, specifically the epic battle between Achilles and Hector. In the *Iliad* and in Hector's last reflections before being killed by Achilles he sees the connection between sex and war that he wants to develop in this chapter. Once having sexual intercourse, one is no longer a virgin and life is never the same again. Once having been in battle the warrior is no longer a military "virgin" and will never be the same again. In both lovemaking and war making there is a desire at the base of it. So also there is a certain element of power in the sexual act of penetration as there is in the thrust of spears. Making love and killing are both orgasmic he contends and driven by passion and desire that easily turns to hatred as exemplified by Achilles' fellow warriors driving their spears in the body of the dead Hector. The connections between sex and violence are not new but his discussion of them serves to remind us that humans' innate capacity for lust can be operative in both love and war.

[4] Chapter Three raises the question of human responsibility and accountability. Using the tragic story of Oedipus, Meagher introduces the idea of "metaphysical crime." As distinguished from moral crime or legal crime, metaphysical crime can just happen to you as it did to Oedipus without any conscious or willful culpability. For ancient Greece such crime produces a pollution that must be purified ritually. In war metaphysical crime often happens to warriors. The result can well be more than guilt (legal guilt is rarely an issue in war he claims); it can bring about shame: "Guilt carries the weight of having done something evil, whereas shame's burden is that of having become evil, to the core." (45) Shame even more than guilt is at the heart of moral injury for many. It mirrors pollution. Jesus however showed little regard for ritual purity. In Christ there is forgiveness, even as he forgave his unknowing executioners. Moreover, it is what is within the person that matters in Jesus' teaching not what comes out of his mouth. It is what is in the heart that counts. This he believes leads us to the question of whether a Christian can go to battle or to bed without sin (here as in the previous chapter

war and sex are paired as pivotal experiences). At this point, it seems we have shifted rather abruptly for the sort of "metaphysical sin" often at the heart of victims of moral injury to the question of moral sin.

[5] For Meagher, during the early years of Christianity under imperial Rome the entanglement of sex and violence is clear in terms of the parallel attitudes taken toward both by the theologians of that day. War may be necessary and sex may be necessary but both are tainted and corrupting. "The clergy are to be without taint, without sin, without pollution, which means that they are to be both celibate and nonviolent; for only the virgin and the pacifist bear true and perfect witness to Christ." (59) Tertullian and Origen were famous for their opposition to military service on the part of Christians, though Origen recognized the emperor's need to protect the realm by military force.

[6] With the conversion of Constantine and the emergence of Christian Rome the outlook changes and we have with Ambrose and Augustine the development of just war thinking. With it comes a change from the strict observance of the Sermon on the Mount sanctions against violence and admonitions to love one's enemies. Instead the critical distinction between what is done and the inner disposition of the doer. It is the disposition that determines whether something is sinful and this is critical to the logic of just war and the possibility that one might participate in war without sin. One wonders if the emphasis Jesus placed on what is in the heart that counts hasn't undergone a revision far different from Jesus' message. As Meagher reports, we have an echo of this in the testimony of one time United States Naval Academy ethicist Shannon French's account of the distinction between murder and killing that was so important to the midshipman. Being trained to kill as agents of the state is not murder; murder is done with malice.

[7] With Medieval Christianity the primacy of intent is maintained; one can have sex and go to war if the intent is right. Aquinas joins Ambrose and Augustine in promoting just war theory as the lesser of two evils and we have the holy wars of the Crusades. Meagher notes -- and this is an important note -- that these early architects of just war theory may well have intended it to limit war. This is a view that I firmly endorse. He also observes that there is ample evidence that Augustine and Aquinas shared a moral presumption against war and considered it a tragic last resort. Meagher wonders however if just war theory could ever have and has ever really been effective in limiting war. This is an argument that John Howard Yoder has also made in his pacifist critique of just war theory. Meagher also raises the question as to the possibility of both sides of a conflict claiming just cause, an eventuality that Erasmus thought to be very likely!

[8] The last major figure in the historical development of just war thinking is Hugo Grotius, a lawyer not a theologian, who, though deeply opposed to war, sought legal restraints on the horrors of war. He did not think this would come from the preaching of pacifism. Yet, Meagher notes that for Grotius, "Legal war is not and likely never will be just war." (126)

[9] Meagher believes in his conclusion that just war theory has been proven by his argument to be a dead letter. The intentions of its framers were to limit war but war has far exceeded any imaginable limits. Moreover, the church's decision that sin is located in intent – known to God alone – provides scant basis for condemning killing in war. However, he concedes that it is hard to imagine a world without war in the foreseeable future. A critical point in facing this reality even as we work and hope for better days is to confront the fact that it is easy for our population to be complacent about war when only 1% of the population is directly involved or affected. Bringing an end to the all-volunteer military services and reinstating the draft he believes can be an effective hedge against the readiness to go to war. In the end, he says, peacemakers like war makers must be ready to give up their lives for peace.

[10] Meagher has written a passionate attack on just war theory and raised the concerns of moral injury in the process. His reflections on the historical development of the church's theology and ethics in the matters of war and its analogous ambivalence in matters of sexuality need to be taken seriously. Certainly his point that there is an unacceptable divide between the military and the public is of critical importance and one that has been raised by any number of critics in recent days. This gap is in part responsible for the failure to adequately appreciate the needs of those suffering the wounds of moral injury and other injuries of war. However, the fact is that just war theory remains embedded in the official legal and ethical doctrines of the armed services even though its effectiveness in modern warfare and the age of terrorism has been questioned for reasons other than those chosen by Meagher. Certainly, the emphasis on last resort is at least what the church's witness should stress as a consistent and insistent voice for measures that make for peace. Indeed, the just war principle that war be declared by a legitimate authority should remind us that in a democracy all of us are implicated in that decision and responsible for its consequences.

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