INSTRUCTOR: Rita Nakashima Brock, Ph.D.

PREREQUISITES: D. Min. student status

**WORKING DEFINITION OF MORAL INJURY:**
Moral injury is a response to traumatizing experiences when the existing core moral foundations or faith of a person or group are unable to justify, contextualize, and integrate those experiences so that meaningful relationships, hope for the future, and human flourishing can be sustained. It occurs in relation to experiences of extremity, moral ambiguity, and life threat. It results from committing, witnessing, imagining, or failing to prevent acts or events that violate foundational social and ethical taboos. It manifests in moral emotions such as shame, guilt, remorse, self-condemnation, self-loathing, and despair. It can result in anger at authorities, God, or self, and a sense of betrayal; in broken trust and alienation; in grief, poor health, and social isolation; and, in extreme cases, suicide or violence. Most research on it has focused on veterans, especially those who have experienced war, but it is not limited to a military experience.

**DESCRIPTION OF CONTENT:**
Through extensive reading, intensive reflection and writing, and discussion, this seminar will examine the concept of moral injury as a heuristic for understanding moral conscience, personal agency, and the moral emotions in experiences of violence, trauma and oppression. We will explore precipitating experiences and contexts that can lead to moral injury and how to recognize its emergence. We will investigate issues such as toxic leadership, the relationship of individual actions to systems that offer limited choices and the meanings of victim and perpetrator in such contexts, and the implications of professional choices that lead to moral injury. We will also interrogate the limits of the therapeutic model its psychologizing of moral injury and the negative moral emotions. Finally, we will explore how communities can take responsibility for the aftermath of war and violence.

We will examine various pathways to recovery and soul repair, including the power of the arts and ritual, the role of communities, and theological, ritual, and spiritual implications of understanding it.

The goals of the seminar include being able to understand and use:
- Multiple understandings of moral injury and their implications,
- Research on how human beings develop and maintain moral conscience and how the reshaping of desire can damage it,
• Theological possibilities for understanding moral injury and integrating it into professional work,
• Strategies for developing spiritual resilience in individuals and communities,
• Creative ways for communities to address and support soul repair.

NOTE: PLEASE DO ALL THE REQUIRED READING BEFORE THE CLASS BEGINS. The subject matter of this course will require listening deeply with openness and compassion to experiences that may be emotionally difficult to hear. We will all need to be attentive to how we are responding, and, if necessary, to exercise self-care and respect for our own and others’ limits. While all education is a process of risk, courage, and engagement with others and with ideas that may be challenging and unsettling, understanding moral injury in ourselves and others is a hard-earned process, but it is also lifesaving, life-giving knowledge.

Required Texts (to be read before class starts):

The essays below (used with permission) will be available by email to registered students. These will be sent as soon as the instructor receives the emails of enrolled students.


Other required texts and films:


ONE ADDITIONAL BOOK OF YOUR CHOOSING, FROM THE LIST BELOW, OR FROM THE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF BOOKS LISTED AT https://www.brite.edu/programs/soul-repair/resources/#books

Course Pre-Assignment: PREPARE THIS ASSIGNMENT AND BRING IT TO CLASS ON MONDAY MORNING:

1. For each of the required readings and videos, write a 100 word paragraph that summarizes your understanding of the author’s key point. Then write a 250 word response to the key thesis of the writing, your reaction to it as you read it, questions you’d like to ask the author, and your overall feeling about it. Bring these to class.

2. Select one of the following works to read, write a 200 word summary of its key ideas and a 500 word evaluation of it in relation to the other readings. One from this list or https://www.brite.edu/programs/soul-repair/resources/#books:


**Class Procedures:**

Written assignments and reading are required before the class starts—this work will lay the foundation for our week together. A substantial time will be spent in discussing and reflecting on the readings both in small groups and the class as a whole. In addition, the instructor will provide additional information through short lectures, followed by discussion. Finally, the class will hear from veterans via Skype, and Iraq veteran Michael Yandell, a doctoral theology student at Emory University, will present to the class on Thursday morning.

A final reflection paper, to be completed after the course ends, will be due no later than June 1. To prepare for this final paper, it is recommended that you spend around 30 minutes at the end of every day of class free writing about what you experienced and understood. Free writing means you do not pay attention to mechanics spelling or grammar but write (or type) continuously for 30 uninterrupted minutes, forcing yourself to write without stopping. This task can be done in the evening or the next morning.

**Grading Procedures:**

- Pre-Seminar Written materials 40%
- Class Sessions 40%
- Final Reflection Paper 20%

**COURSE SCHEDULE (This outline is provisional and may be adjusted as we proceed through the reading material):**

**Monday:**

9:00-11:45 am Introduction to the course, introduction of class members, opening ritual

Introduction to moral injury part I, discussion of Soldiers of Conscience

1:00-5:00 pm Introduction to moral injury part II, discussion


**Tuesday:**

9:00-11:45 Moral Injury and Trauma, discussion of Invisible War, van der Kolk. Conversation with Kristen Leslie via Skype
1:00-5:00 Strategies for recovery, Brock (2017), Ozawa-de Silva
   Conversation with Lisa Dunster via Skype
   Conversation with Michael Nguyen via Skype

Wednesday:
   9:00-11:45 Moral Injury and Theology, discussion of Brock (2015),
               Papanikolaou, Powers,

   1:00-2:30 Moral Injury and Interpreting Texts, Yandell, Rambo
               Discussion with Shelly Rambo via Skype

Thursday:
   9:00-11:45 Discussion with Michael Yandell

   1:00-5:00 Discussion of Minister
               Lecture on what moral injury offers as a heuristic beyond war and veterans

Friday:
   Tying up loose ends from course conversations about assignments and new
   content during the week.
   Discussion of community responsibilities and strategies for where this goes in
   your professional work or DMin. Project.
   Discussion of final paper.