

Nancy Sherman  
*Afterwar: Healing the Moral Wounds of Our Soldiers*  
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*Afterwar* is, in a way, the third volume of a trilogy that began with *Stoic Warriors*, Nancy Sherman's first exploration of the moral lives of soldiers. In *Stoic Warriors* Sherman argues that Stoic values and practices, which are deeply embedded in military culture, are double-edged because they augment the capacity to endure the devastating hardships of war yet they also diminish the emotional lives of soldiers (Sherman 2005). *The Untold War* is the second volume of this trilogy and in it Sherman explores the moral anguish that accompanies the experience of war and the reasons soldiers do not readily talk about their experience of moral doubts and dilemmas but rather tend to hide behind a Stoic armor (Sherman 2010). In *Afterwar* Sherman argues that among the serious burdens that accompany soldiering are the moral injuries it results in. The sources of moral injury are multiple but what all moral injuries have in common, according to Sherman, is the experience of intense inner conflict that leads to a loss of trust in "the goodness of humanity" (8) or at least one's "own basic goodness" (79) and so one's ability to meet the basic normative requirements that a decent person should be meeting.

The feeling of lost trust in goodness that Sherman describes is a generalized feeling. But among the strengths of *Afterwar* are Sherman's descriptions, which at times are very graphic, of soldiers' exposure to death, injury, and destruction, and her weaving of these descriptions with an analysis of specific instances and forms that the distrust of goodness takes. Some such forms are resentment at others and anger at self or others, as well as survivor's guilt. Following a fairly standard philosophical understanding, Sherman analyzes these feelings as reactive feelings or attitudes, which she describes as attitudes that "call self or other to account and demand an appropriate response" (18). Sherman goes beyond the standard understanding of which feelings count as reactive by including trust and empathy, which she believes can be both other-directed and self-directed. Both not only have the call-response structure that is typical of the negative reactive attitudes, they also signal a hope that is fundamental to healing from moral injury since the loss of trust in goodness easily leads to despair, which Sherman believes can help explain the suicide rates of military personnel.

As a matter of course, soldiers do not betray each other's trust—to the contrary. The guilt that soldiers feel is either a variant of survivor's guilt that is rarely justified by anything

that could be objectively described as betrayal, or guilt about the hurts and harms one has caused or facilitated as a soldier, which is not necessarily objectively justified because it too did not involve betrayal. Sometimes, though, soldiers do betray themselves and sometimes they betray other soldiers. In the case of women soldiers, as well as in the case of some men, Sherman notes, sexual harassment and sexual assault, as well as racial harassment and racial assault, constitute betrayal. Underlying this kind of betrayal, Sherman believes, are sexist and other "systemic biases" (107) that are reinforced by the lack of and inappropriate response along the chain of command. Sherman is extremely critical of the biases and argues that the moral injuries that soldiers suffer due to actual betrayal require for their healing a rebuilding of trust that includes institutional changes.

Sherman is not the first to look at the moral injuries sustained by soldiers. In his 1994 *Achilles in Vietnam*, Jonathan Shay offered an analysis of moral injuries sustained by United States military personnel who served in the Vietnam War by comparing their experiences with those of Achilles and his fellow Homeric warriors (Shay 1994). Shay already argued for what by now is the accepted position on the moral injury of soldiers, which is that although it may and is even likely to be co-present with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), it is different from it and requires a different approach to recovery. Though Shay has continued to develop his ideas about moral injury further, Sherman does not engage with his work. Instead, Sherman's starting point is work in clinical psychology by Brett Litz and his colleagues, who reignited interest in moral injury with their paper "Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans" (Litz et al. 2009).

Since 2009, the subfield of trauma studies that focuses on moral injury has grown, and Sherman's *Afterwar* contributes to this subfield by bridging between psychological and philosophical discussions of moral injury. Sherman weaves the two together, using each to correct the other and using her interviews to correct both. But the use of experiential reports is tricky, and granting them a certain kind of authority may be problematic. Problems of this sort surface for Sherman when she uses experiential reports to set aside a debate regarding the personal moral responsibility of soldiers for their fighting on the unjust side of a war. The soldiers whom Sherman interviews think about their moral responsibility in terms that tend to stop short of questioning the justice of a war and the implications for active soldiering of an answer to this question. For Sherman this is reason enough to not bring the question up and to accept, at least as a matter of practice rather than principle, the traditional division between *jus ad bellum* (the justice of war) and *jus in bello* (justice in war).

There are powerful arguments against this tradition but also for it, and I suspect that Sherman sets the whole debate aside not merely because that is what her interviews suggest is best. *Afterwar* conveys to its readers a sense of normative urgency. Sherman wants moral repair for United States soldiers (and because her argument is general, then by implication for other soldiers as well), and she believes soldiers deserve it. There is evidence that, when questions about the justice of war are addressed to soldiers (as they were during the Vietnam War, for example), they add to and further complicate the moral injuries of soldiers. This does not mean that the questions should not be asked but,

according to Sherman, it is not the role of soldiers to ask them, though usually some soldiers do ask them. It is the role of civilians to ask the questions, and they should not burden soldiers with them. Rather, they should direct them to elected politicians, ultimately the people responsible for sending soldiers to war.

Sherman believes that civilians have a "sacred moral obligation to those who serve" (3). And from her perspective, the obligation to those who serve is not changed by questions about the justice of the war in which a soldier was morally injured. What this obligation entails is not merely a "thank you." Most important, it entails empathy, at least in the sense of imaginatively being in the world from the perspective of another. In the case of civilians in their relation with soldiers with moral injuries, this means that the civilian is not protected by the distance between civilian and military culture, perceives the moral anguish that the morally injured soldier suffers, and embraces it.

Sherman argues not only for civilian empathy for soldiers but also for soldiers' learning to have self-empathy. Her discussion of self-empathy exemplifies some of what is best about *Afterwar*. Borrowing from and building on Aristotle's idea of self-friendship, Sherman takes self-empathy as suggesting "a minimal measure of goodwill and compassion" (95) toward the self. She makes sure to point out that soldiers earn the right to self-empathy since it offers a counterweight to their moral injuries. Self-empathy, therefore, is not self-indulging. Self-empathy is, according to Sherman, also different from self-forgiveness, which she believes is not probable in the case of moral injury because the difficult conflicts that underlie moral injury are not likely to be "completely resolved" (101).

If the conflicts cannot be completely resolved, the wounds that constitute moral injury cannot be fully healed, and the moral repair a morally wounded soldier may achieve would necessarily be fragile. Although she is aware of this, Sherman is optimistic about what is possible if self-empathy takes place in an empathetic, inclusive moral community: a peace with self and others that is good enough. I am less optimistic than Sherman, perhaps as a function of my own moral injuries.

I read *Afterwar* cautiously, afraid of encountering psychological triggers. Because of these triggers, I have doubts about my negatively critical responses to some of Sherman's positions and arguments. For example, I find Sherman's trust in empathy uncomfortable. In part this is because empathy feels intrusive. In addition, and perhaps less idiosyncratically, where Sherman sees potential for incredible moral transformation I see a fickle, context-dependent response that differentiates between us and them, and as a result I do not know how inclusive empathy can be. Empirical work by Mina Cikara and her colleagues shows that people respond empathetically to members of their own groups, though especially when their suffering is caused by members of out-groups and that the suffering of out-group members is responded to either strongly negatively, or if they are distant others, indifferently (see Cikara et al. 2014). Cikara and her colleagues do not give up on empathy. But Paul Bloom, based on his and other colleagues' empirical work that examines the mobilization of empathy in atrocities against out-groups, does argue against empathy (Bloom 2014).

Bloom argues that caring kindness, the response one would want to moral injuries, need not be grounded in empathy but can be grounded in nonempathetic compassion, which involves concern and love and motivates helping behavior but without the mirroring of the other's suffering, and so does not cause empathetic distress. If caring kindness of this sort is a good second- and third-person response to moral injury, self-directed caring kindness of this sort should also be a good first-person response to one's own moral injury. What I am suggesting is that perhaps even in the case of a response to self it may be better to have something other than empathy.

Sherman is aware that the idea of self-empathy can get into conceptual trouble because an empathetic response to one's own moral injury would in a sense double it. This is not an outcome she wants, and she therefore revises the idea of empathy in order to limit this outcome. But that changes the meaning of empathy quite drastically and it seems to me that an alternative like Bloom's, which leaves the meaning of empathy unchanged and yields the kind of outcomes that Sherman wants for soldiers with moral injury, might be better.

My concerns and disagreements with Sherman notwithstanding, I think that feminists and especially pacifist feminists should read not only *Afterwar* but also *Stoic Warriors* and the *Untold War*. Sherman is right to call attention to a civilian–military cultural divide in the United States with consequences to both civilians and the military. Feminists and especially pacifist feminists tend to be critically distant civilians in relation to soldiers. There is nothing wrong with critical distance. However, I believe that in most cases, a critical distance that is at the same time kind, caring, and concerned with the moral lives of soldiers is preferable, and it cannot be achieved without engagement with the stories soldiers tell and authors like Nancy Sherman.

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