

# It's the Poetry!!

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The Role of the Emotions in the Development  
and Treatment of Moral injury





Moral Injury!

I believe, sometimes,  
that death in war is  
merciful, and those who  
die more fortunate than  
we who are condemned  
to survive as penance for  
the sacrilege of war  
(Camillo Mac Bica, 10)



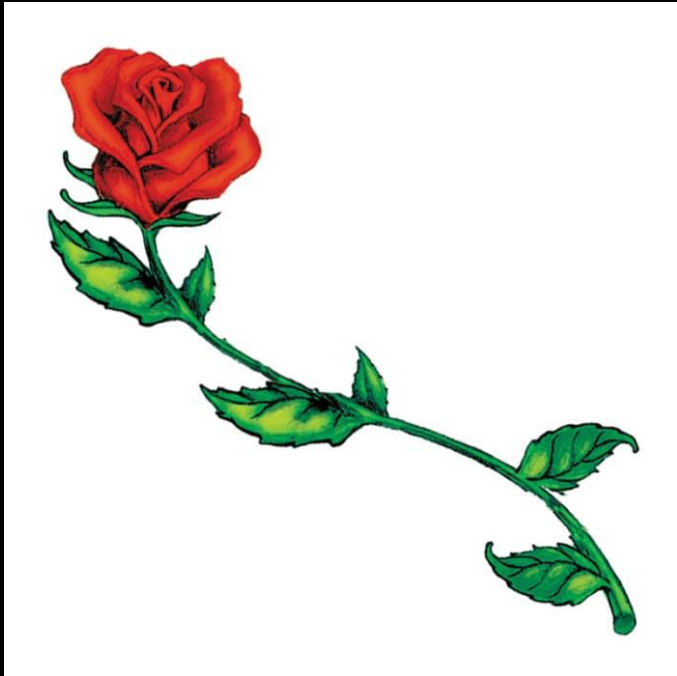
*“One Shot, one kill, it’s  
what I do...”*

*And he weeps for he knows  
What the news anchor  
Will never Understand  
That with each shot,  
He dies a little too.*

(Mac Bica)



## The Rose



Mac Bica

I remember once in another lifetime,  
Noticing a lone rose rising  
Defiantly from beneath  
The rubble of a destroyed city  
North of Danang.

It had no business being there  
Adding color to the drabness of war,  
Beauty to the ugliness of destruction,  
And the hope of life when life held nothing  
But suffering and death.

It was a contradiction  
And created confusion  
Amidst the clarity of killing to survive.  
...I stepped on it.

There are no flowers in a war zone  
Nor color, nor beauty, not hope.

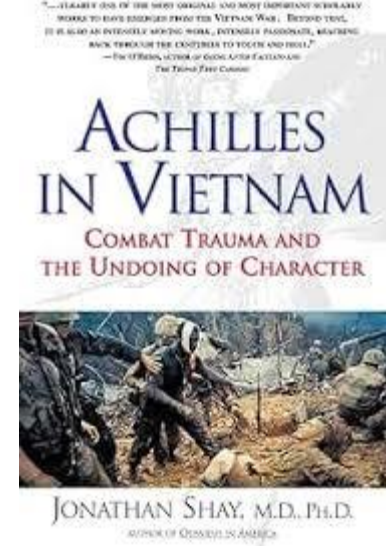






# Moral Injury!

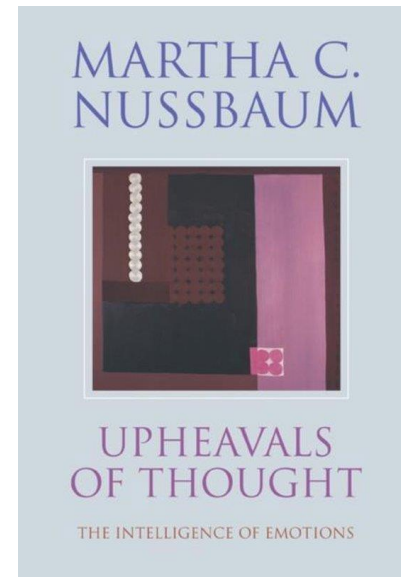
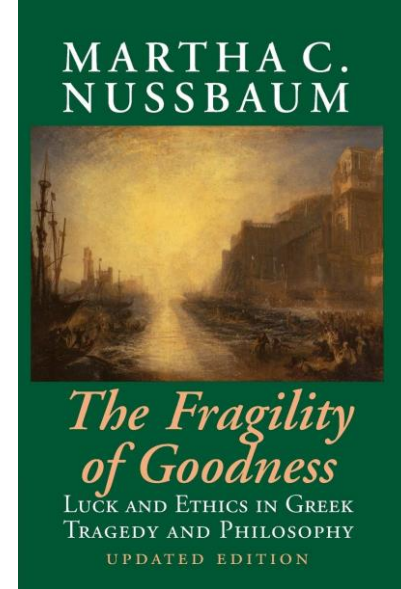
- Jonathan Shay (1994 and 2002) First Used the Term
  - Violation and betrayal of “What’s Right” by those in authority in high stakes situation
  - Impairs or destroys the capacity for trust
- Bret Litz (2009)
  - “Events in which a person perpetrates, fails to prevent, bears witness to, or learns about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs...”
- U.S. Veterans Administration
  - “...A construct that describes extreme and unprecedented life experience including the harmful aftermath of exposure to such events. Events are considered morally injurious if they transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.”
  - Often mistaken for PTSD, identified by the presence of guilt and shame.



# Back to Basics: Jonathan Shay

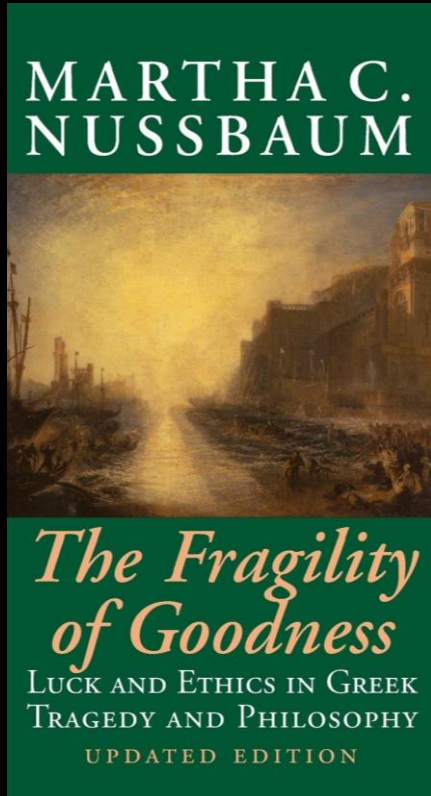
In his 1994 and 2002 works, Shay made the important connection between Homer's writings and modern war and demonstrated that the human response to the experience of war is timeless.

- The destruction (undoing) of moral character through the experience of combat
  - Resulting in PTSD and moral injury
  - The result of **betrayal** by authority figures
  - Bad moral luck
- Leaned heavily on Martha Nussbaum's, *The Fragility of Goodness*

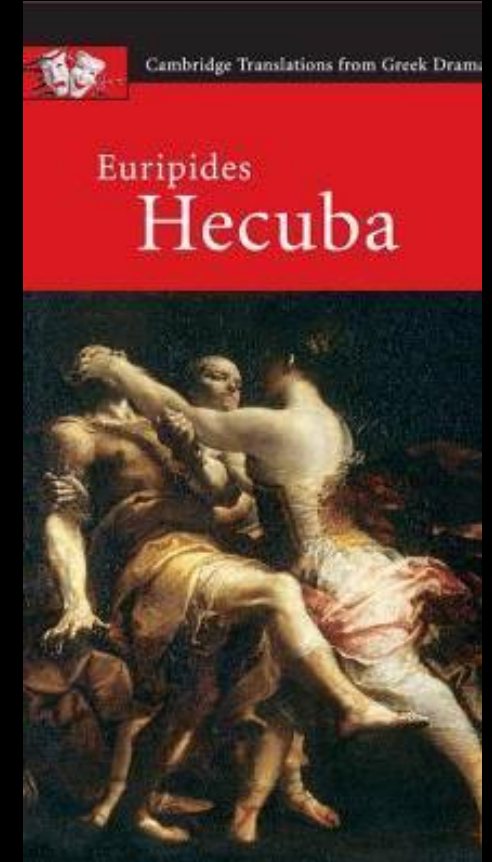




# Nussbaum and Hecuba



- Nussbaum - focuses on Aristotle's view of Eudaimonia and mature character, stable due to:
  - Training and experience
  - Stable Environment
  - Finding the mean between extremes
  - Focuses on the role of the **emotions** in gaining wisdom
- *Eudaimonia* (human flourishing) “thus, the “goodness” of the title should be understood as the ‘human good’ of eudaimonia, rather than as ‘goodness of character’ (Fragility, xiii).



# Hecuba and the Destruction of *Eudaimonia* via **Emotion** (Retributive Anger)



- Written in 424 BC, takes place at the conclusion of the Trojan War, before the Greeks depart Troy
- Wife of Priam, king of Troy. She is taken into captivity, her daughter Polyxena is sacrificed, and her son, Polydorus is killed.
- She had entrusted his safety to King Polymestor of Thrace, a trusted ally.
- Nussbaum focuses on:
  - this **betrayal** of Hecuba's trust
  - Her Retributive Anger (emotion)
  - Her descent into vengeance.
- She descends into bestiality, no better than a "wild dog."

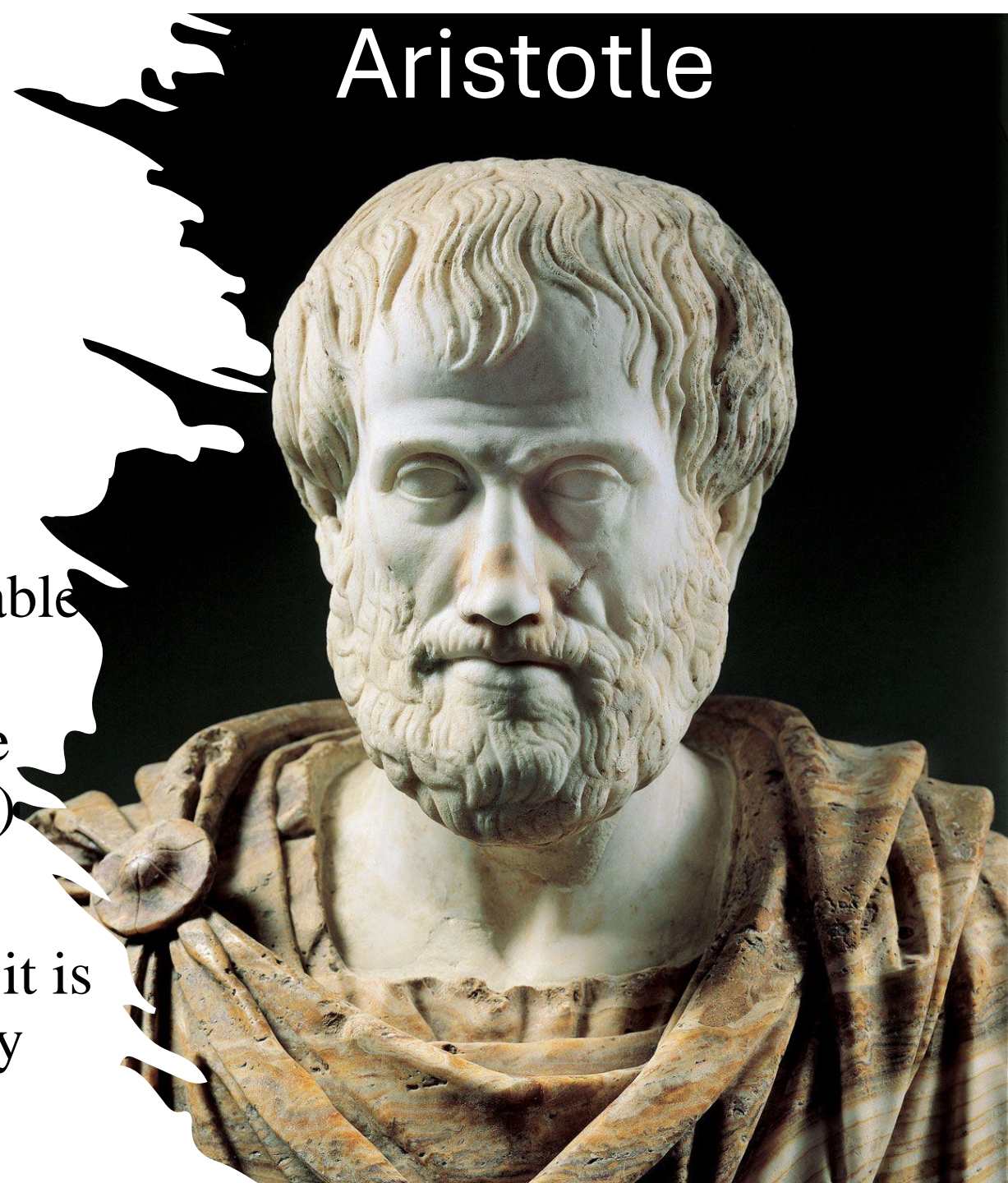




## Practical Wisdom - Emotions Working Together with Reason

- Emotions are...
  - Responsive to training
  - Constructive in moral motivation
  - Responsive intentional elements, capable of flexible ethical development
  - Emotions...well trained, lead or guide reason in the situation of choice. (307)

“It is not that we cannot do without them: it is that they are well equipped, (when properly developed) to do well by us.”



# Emotions and Reason: The Conflict

- Aristotle: “...the emotions in inform us about matters of ethical significance. In connection with the tragic poets, Plato’s Phaedrus, and Aristotle’s ethical views, I speak often of a cognitive role for the emotions... The tragic poets maintained... that powerful emotions, prominently including pity and fear, were sources of insight about the good human life. (Fragility, xv – xvi)
- Plato denied this, developing a view of ethical understanding that separates intellect as much as possible from the disturbing influences of sense and emotion. (Fragility, xv)
- The Stoics, “...emotions are bad guides and should be completely removed from human life.” (Upheavals, 298)
- Cognitive Science: Cognitive processes are essential for regulating emotions, allowing us to manage and modulate our emotional responses (CPT).
- Jonathan Haidt: The superiority of the emotions (intuition) over reason (Neo-Humean)



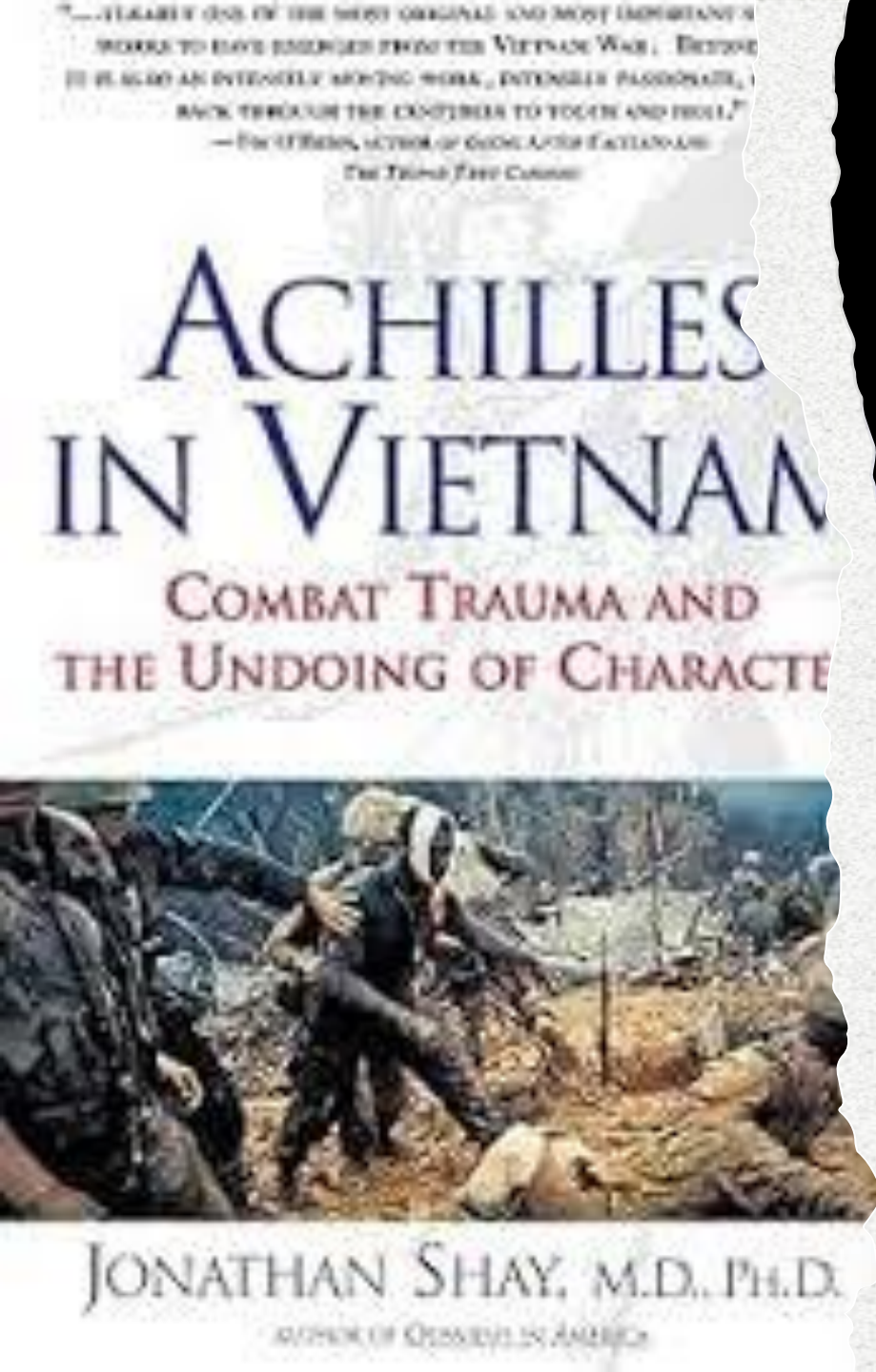
# ~~~~~ Haidt: The Elephant and the Rider

This model reverses the Platonic ordering of the psyche, placing the emotions firmly in control of the temple of morality, while reason is demoted to the status of un-humble servant  
(Haidt, 2003, p. 876)

Nussbaum - “Shay I like, Haidt, not so much.”







# Back to Shay

- He doesn't address the subject of the emotions in his discussion of Vietnam Vets and their experience of PTSD and Moral Injury
  - No mention of the word “emotion” in the index
  - Does refer to “emotional numbing” as a symptom of PTSD
- Why Not?
  - Suppression of emotion essential to survival in combat (2002, p. 39)
  - Soldiers don't have emotions, take a stoic approach to them, that any emotion weakens reason and virtue (2002, p. 108-109)
  - Often, when they return from war, they suppress their emotions as they are so “out of control.”
  - Yet all soldiers (sailors, Marines, airmen) have emotions.
  - Focus is on the cognitive, rational



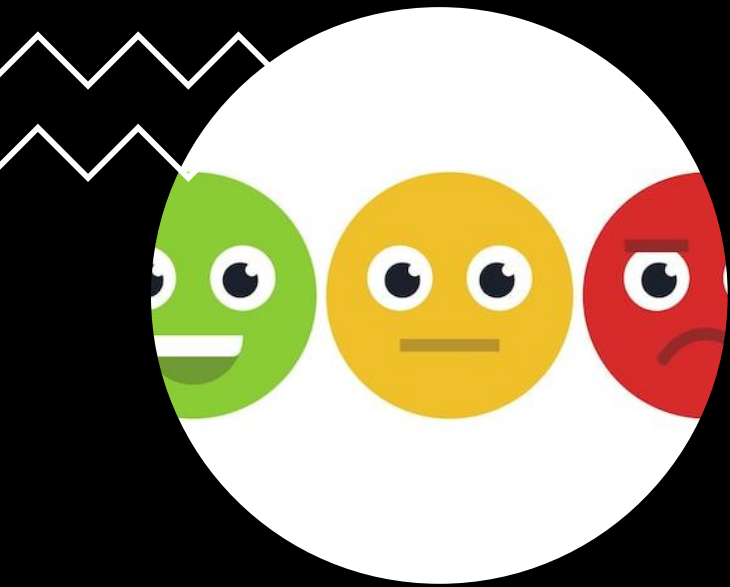
“It’s not an easy  
course, it’s not  
designed to be.  
We’re not here to  
get you in touch with  
your inner child.”

James Mattis

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Military Culturally  
a Stoic  
Organization





Emotions will be  
expressed, one  
way or another

## Dissonance: Reason vs. Emotion = Moral Injury

- The **emotional** response to betrayal by authority figures
  - I trusted them, they betrayed my trust
- The **emotional** response to violating our moral principles that result in the death of enemies, comrades or innocents (see Dallaire, Bica)
  - The laws of war say I'm not responsible but...
  - My priest says I don't need absolution but...
  - How can I forgive myself (even though God and Priest forgave me?)
- The **emotional** response to experiencing loss of life, human carnage
  - The Dead weigh heavy on the hand and the heart... (Studdert Kennedy)
  - It is deeper, in your soul, but it is real, physical pain... People who mourn one death can feel incredible pain. Multiply that feeling by eight hundred thousand and imagine the weight of that. (Dallaire, 115)

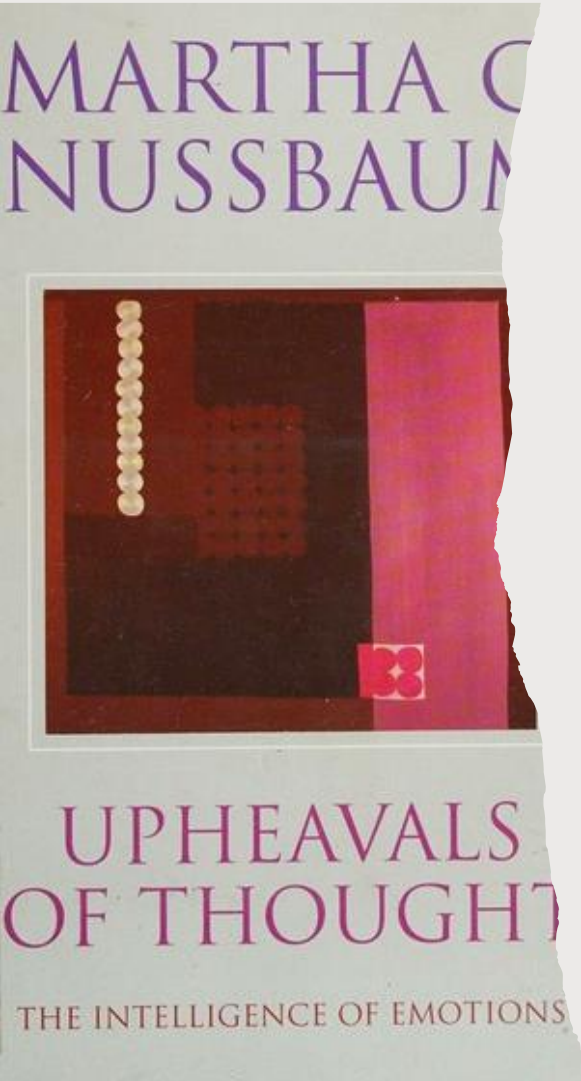




# Honor/Compassion

Restoring honor to the enemy is an essential step in recovery from PTSD...the veteran's self respect never fully recovers as long as he is unable to see the enemy as worthy. (Shay, Achilles, 115)

As I have argued, compassion cuts through the dehumanizing strategies that are frequently enlisted in the service of cruelty of many kinds. It thus qualifies the motive to take revenge and forges an alliance among all human beings. (Nussbaum, Upheavals, 395)



*“I suppose some Fritz went courtin’  
In the gloaming’ same as me,  
And the old world turned to heaven  
When they kissed beneath a tree...”*

## Rehumanizing the Enemy (25-48)



1. The soldier's thoughts move to the enemy, a man with a wife and children like himself.
2. No longer a "Hun" "Fritz" or a "Bosche"
3. A positive moral move, rehumanizing an enemy that has been dehumanized in order to justify their killing.
4. Soldier reflects the enemy had fallen in love, married, enjoyed a May evening with his wife, .
5. "But it makes no bloomin difference, Boche or Briton, 'ome is 'ome.


*“Struth I wish e’d stop ‘is lookin’,  
and shut up ‘is bloomin eyes,  
Cause I keeps on seein’ Richard,  
When I whacks ‘im and ‘e cries.”*



## Intrusive Memories, Cascading Emotions

1. As he considers the humanity of the enemy, he suddenly experiences an unwanted memory
2. The face of his own son reminds him of the young German soldier he had killed.
3. When we “rehumanize” the enemy, we may feel a cascade of emotions at the realization of the impact of our actions.
4. May increase the intensity of the emotions accompanying moral injury: guilt, regret, remorse or shame.





# Human Dignity: Scientific Materialism Natural Law Imago Dei

- The mechanistic view of life, Humans are evolved animals
- We all know it's wrong to kill another human Being
- To kill a human is to violate something sacred.
  - Most fully accounts for the damage done by moral injury (in my mind).
  - An emotional, innate response (“with each shot, he dies a little bit, too” (Bica)).



# Human Dignity: Imago Dei

“If it is true that a human is made in the image of God, If it is true that life has a transcendent source, then harming a human being would have a transcendent impact, pain experienced by a human being would matter at a transcendent level...”

Dr. Amy Orr-Ewing, speaking on Lewis's *Problem of Pain*

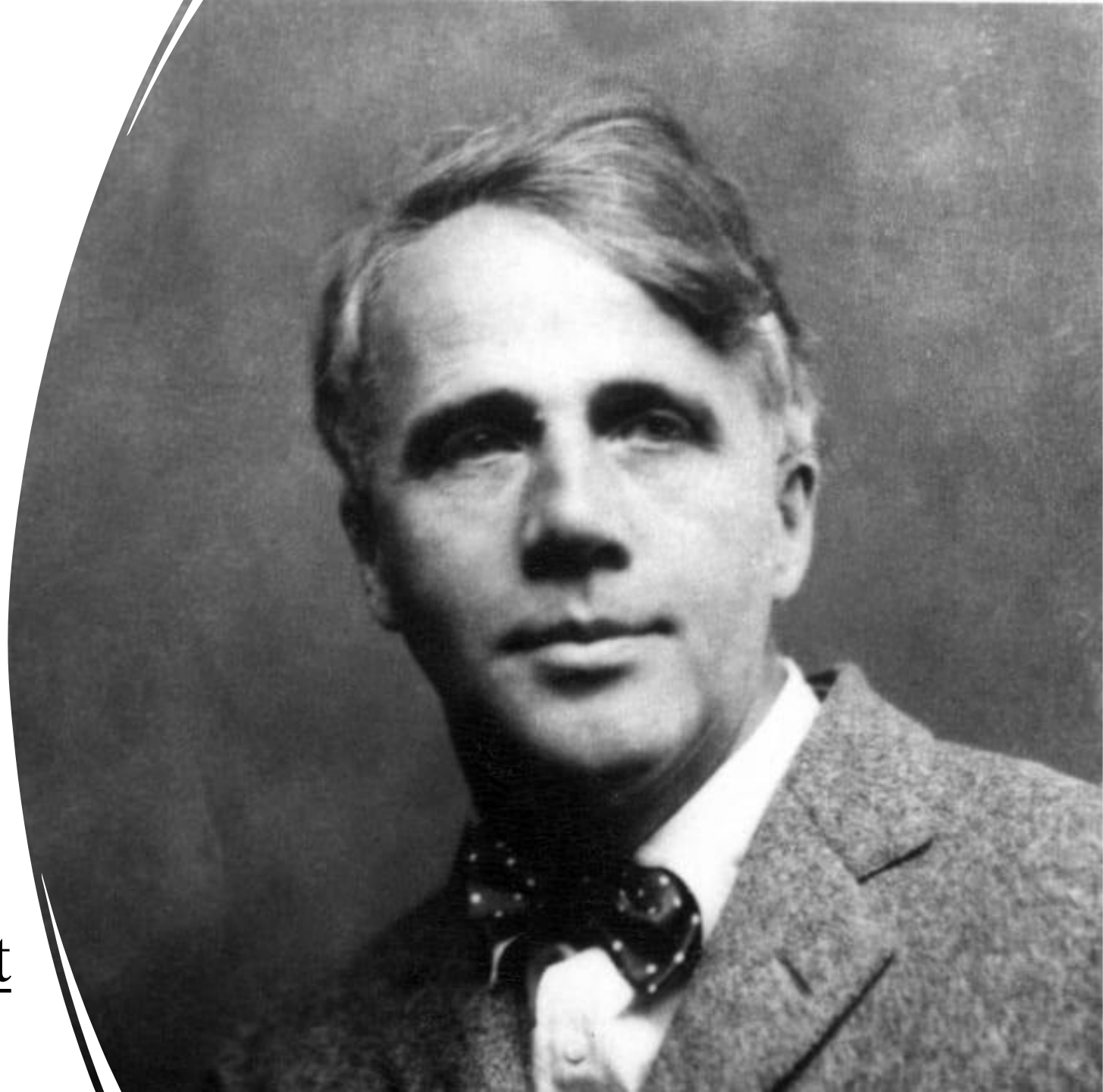


# Poetry?!

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*Poetry is when an  
emotion has found its  
thought, and the  
thought has found  
words.*

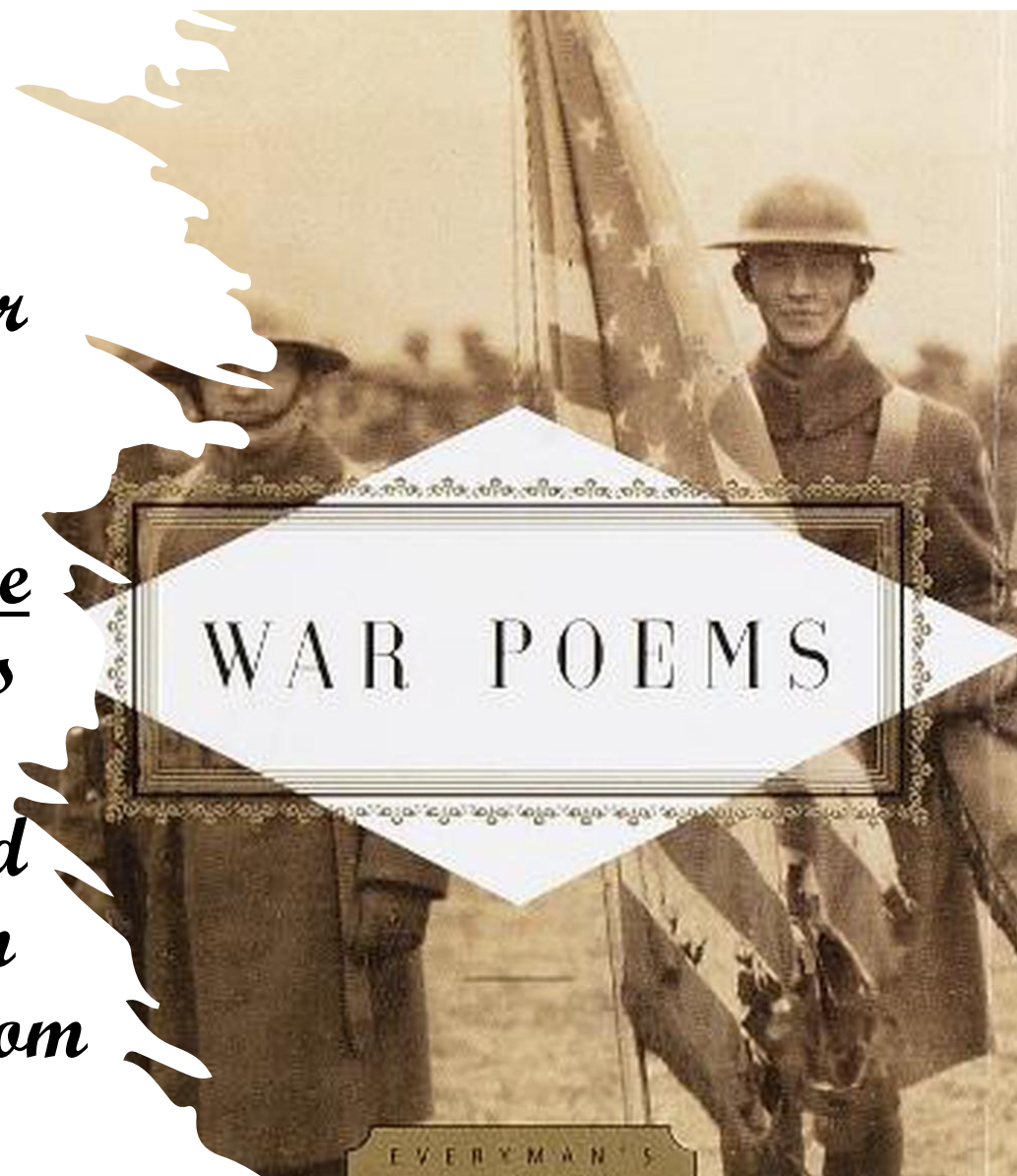
Robert Frost





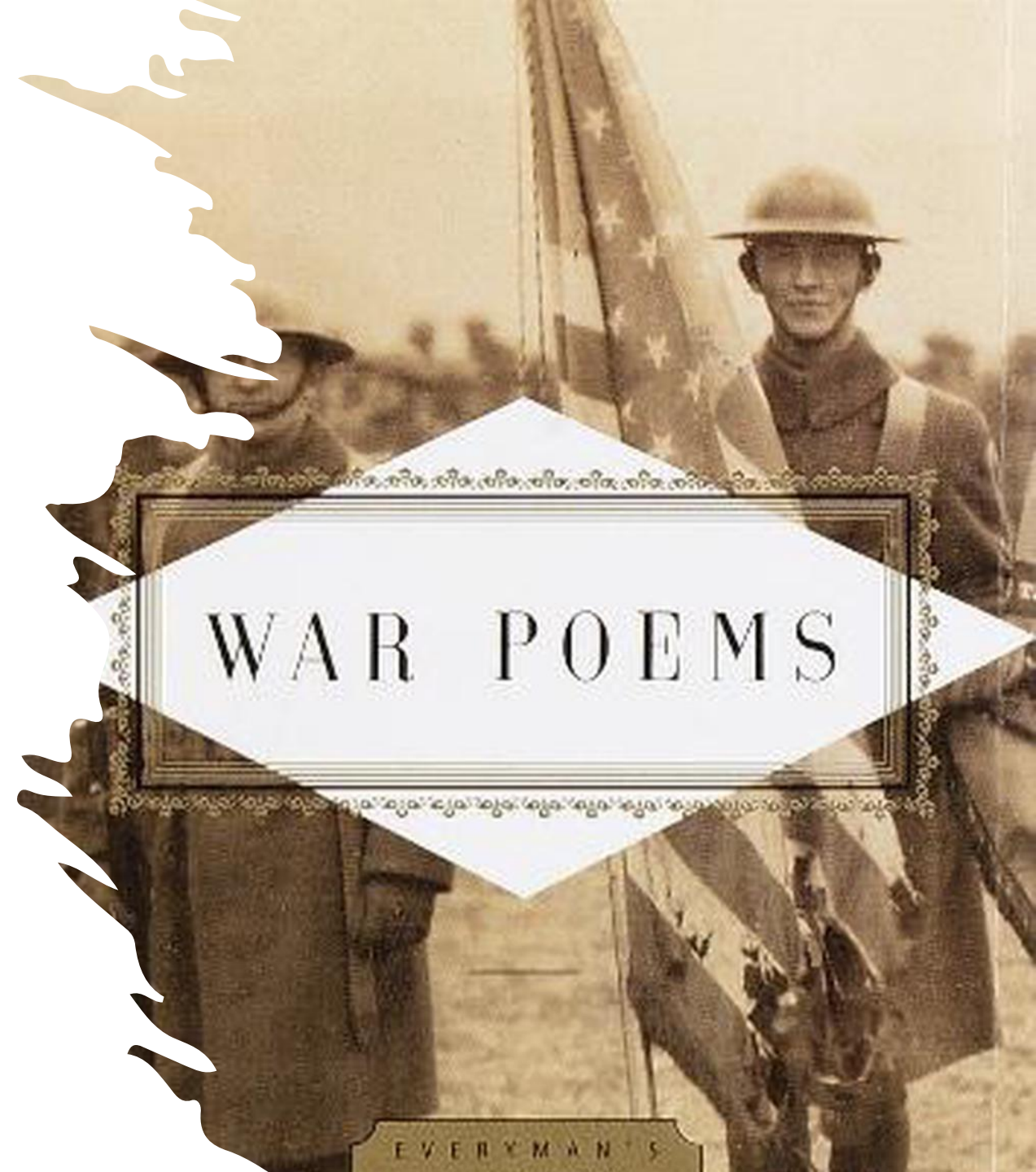
# Poetry!!

*“Writing poetry can help untangle and organize your thoughts and feelings... Our emotions can feel overwhelming, and when you start writing about what you’re experiencing you create a little bit of a safe distance. So, there’s you—the person who’s writing. And then there’s this thing—an emotion, such as fear, anxiety or grief, and it’s on a piece of paper, and that alone can help it feel smaller and more tolerable. From there, you get to control the story you tell about it.”*




# Enduring Nature of War Poetry

*“War never changes... Poetry... can also be a way to say: There’s no way to explain what you’re going through, but you’re not alone.”*



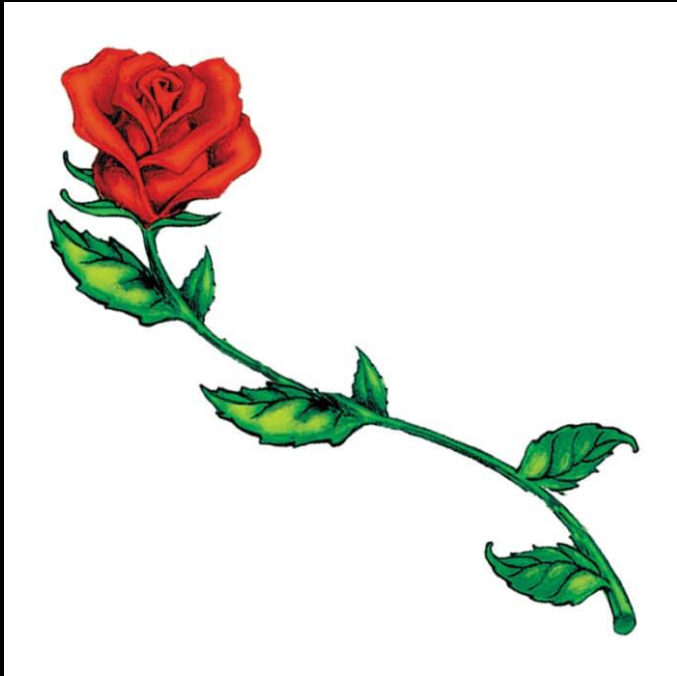


# Take-Aways

- Emotions Play an important role in developing moral injury
  - The Stoic culture of the military increases the likelihood and magnitude of moral injury
  - One's religious viewpoint may also increase the possibility of moral injury.
  - The concept of Eudaimonia may serve as a wholistic measure of moral health.
  - Poetry serves as one outlet for the emotions relating to moral injury and may serve as an element in its treatment.
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## The Rose



Mac Bica

I remember once in another lifetime,  
Noticing a lone rose rising  
Defiantly from beneath  
The rubble of a destroyed city  
North of Danang.  
It had no business being there  
Adding color to the drabness of war,  
Beauty to the ugliness of destruction,  
And the hope of life when life held nothing  
But suffering and death.  
It was a contradiction  
And created confusion  
Amidst the clarity of killing to survive.  
...I stepped on it.  
There are no flowers in a war zone  
Nor color, nor beauty, not hope.



# Extra Slides

## French Nocturne (Monchey – Le- Preux)

Long leagues on either hand the trenches spread  
And all is still; now even this gross line  
Drinks in the frosty silences divine,  
The pale, green moon Is riding overhead.

The jaws of a sacked village, stark and grim,  
Out on the ridge have swallowed up the sun,  
And in one angry streak his blood has run  
To left and right along the horizon dim

False mocking fancy! Once I too could dream,  
Who now can only see with vulgar eye  
That he's no nearer to the moon than I  
And she's a stone that catches the sun's beam

. . . . .

What call have I to dream of anything?  
I am a wolf. Back to the world again,  
And speech of fellow-brutes that once were men  
Our throats can bark for slaughter: cannot sing.

C.S. Lewis, 1919





# Death in Battle (C.S. Lewis)

Open the gates for me,

Open the gates of the peaceful castle, rosy in the West,  
In the sweet dim Isle of Apples over the wide sea's breast  
Open the gates for me!

Sorely pressed have I been  
And driven and hurt beyond bearing this summer day,  
But the heat and the pain suddenly fall away,  
All's cool and green.

But a moment ago,  
Among men cursing in fight and toiling, blinded I fought,  
But the labour passed on a sudden even as a passing  
thought,  
And now, alone!

Ah to be ever alone,

In flowery valleys among the mountains and silent wastes  
untrod

In the dewy upland places, in the garden of God,  
This would Atone!

I shall not see

The brutal, crowded faces around me, that in their toil have  
grown

Into the faces of devils – yea, even as my own –  
When I find thee,

O country of dreams!

Beyond the tide of the ocean, hidden and sunk away  
Out of the sound of battles, near to the end of day,  
Full of dim woods and streams

# Addressing Moral Injury

- Multiple Modalities Essential
- Certainly Medical Doctors, Psychologists, Pastors,
- Engage the body, mind and spirit, and emotions
- The U.S. Navy CREDO Weekend
  - Engages the emotions with music, poetry
  - Follows a Death, grave and resurrection progression
  - Participants are guided by graduates of the program who are trained in emotional support
  - Recommended for anyone going through grief, loss, trauma (moral injury?).



## Missing – Believed Killed (On reading a mother's letter)

'Twere heaven enough to fill my heart	It were enough; but death forbids.
If only one would stay,	The sunset flames to fade,
Just one of all the million joys	The velvet petals of this rose
God gives to take away.	Fall withered – brown – decayed.

If I could keep one golden dawn,	She only asked to keep one thing,
The splendour of one star,	The joy light in his eyes;
One silver glint of yon bird's wing	God has not even let her know
That flashes from afar;	Where his dead body lies.

If I could keep the least of things	O grave, where is thy victory?
That make me catch my breath	O death, where is thy sting?
To gasp the wonder at God's world	They victory is ev'rywhere,
And hold it back from death,	They sting's in ev'rything.

**G.A. Studdert Kennedy,  
1919**



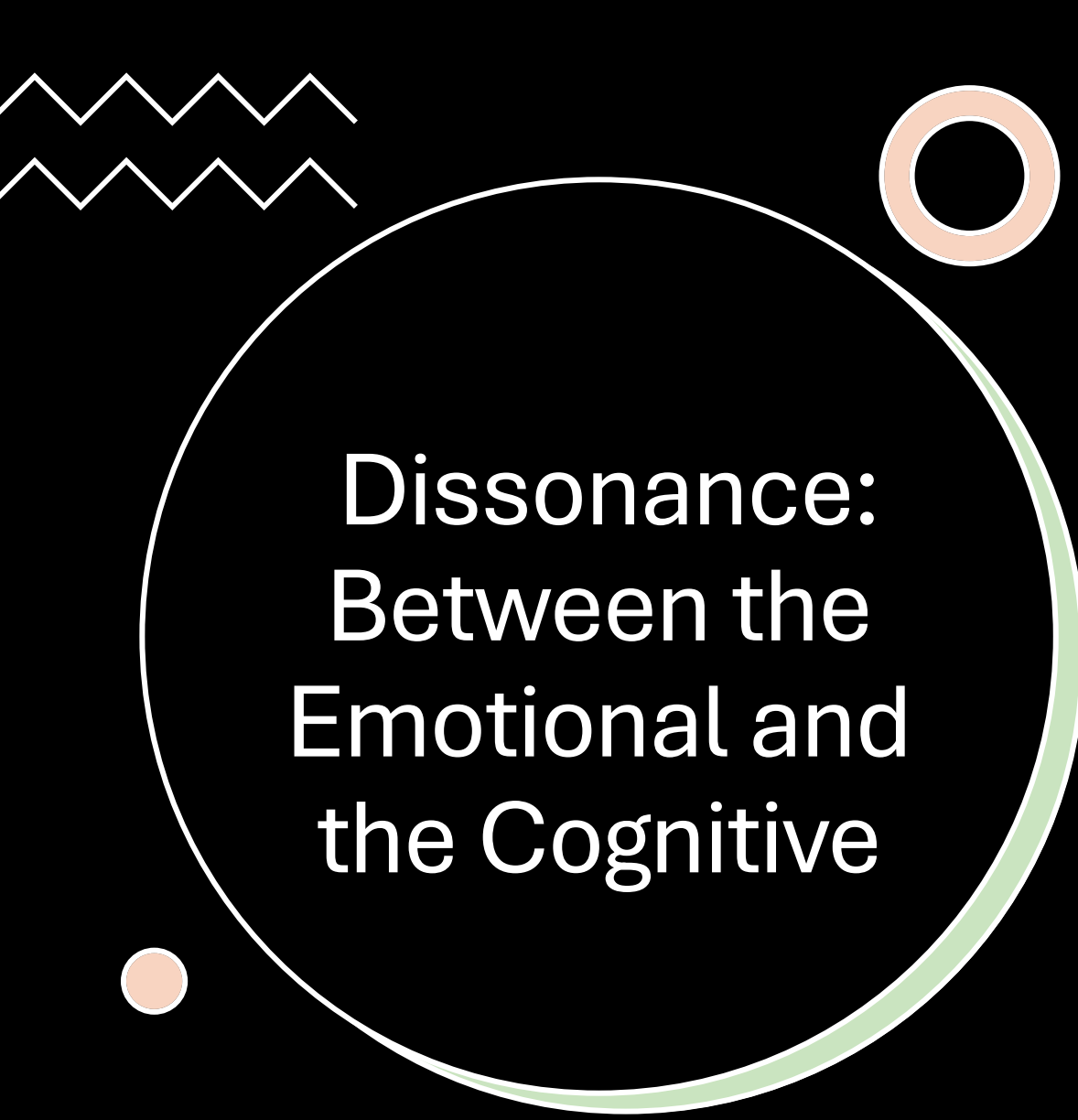


# Hecuba's Descent



“The events of this play show us that the annihilation of convention by another’s act can destroy the stable character who receives it. It can, quite simply, produce bestiality, the utter loss of human relatedness and human language... The play shows that the person of noble character is, if anything, more open to this corrosion than the base person, because it is the noble person, not the base, who has unsuspectingly staked a world on the faith and care of others.” (417)





# Dissonance: Between the Emotional and the Cognitive

- The rational sense is that our actions are legal, right and acceptable
- Our emotional/intuitional sense tells us what we have done is wrong, even reprehensible
- The basis of the feeling that my integrity, soul, self has been destroyed, split, lost.
  - Result is shame, guilt, etc.
  - The overwhelming sense of moral “dirtytness”
  - The root of inability to forgive self

