Postscript

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The contributors to this volume all agree that uniformed men and women are affected inwardly by their experience of deployed operations. In addition to physical injuries there is clear evidence that returning personnel have a range of unseen wounds. Some have experienced a traumatic event which leaves a particular imprint on their mind. The causes and consequences of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are the subjects of detailed inquiry and continuing research as both chapters dealing with psychological perspectives make clear. In many descriptions of PTSD the emphasis has been on the consequences of an unwarranted overload on the natural human fear response although newer definitions suggest PTSD is about much more than fear.

Although the concept of PTSD and its application to a category of unseen wound is less than forty years old, it is apparent from the chapters dealing with historical perspectives that a number of men who returned from the Great War were traumatised by what they had seen and heard. The sights and sounds of 1914–18 did not end with the signing of the Armistice and the cessation of hostilities. For some men, the war continued for years. The battleground shifted from Turkey or France to their own minds as they re-lived campaigns. Their principal legacy was an inability to forget the horrors of 'modern' warfare and the collapse of human civilisation. Some had been taken to the edge of a swirling abyss of unrestrained violence and seen the human face of evil; others had encountered a cauldron of conflicting values and competing visions that revealed the absurdity of human politics. They had seen collective madness 'up close and personal'.

Behavioural science has advanced considerably since the 1920s when traumatised veterans were something of an embarrassment to their family and friends and the emerging disciplines of psychology and psychiatry struggled to explain the causes of shell shock, let alone develop protocols for its treatment. The current definitions of PTSD and readily available and effective treatments have provided considerable help those suffering from the disorder. Nevertheless, the range of unseen wounds sustained by

uniformed personnel goes well beyond PTSD. But because PTSD receives so much media attention, there is a growing belief among an uninformed public that PTSD affects all deployed personnel, that PTSD is the only unseen wound sustained by deploying personnel and that PTSD accounts for every change in a veteran's mood and behaviour. This mistaken belief is causing angst among some behavioural scientists because overstating the explanatory power of PTSD unrealistically raises expectations of what practitioners can achieve. Some psychologists appear keen, however, to embrace PTSD as the cause of every post deployment behavioural change and to continue to search for further treatments.

American perspectives dominate public perceptions of the effects of recent conflicts on returning personnel, and this has a distorting effect. The over-expansive claims of some writers in the United States distract specialist research into the actual experiences of non-American personnel who share none of that nation's cultural neuroses. Americans led the campaigns in Kuwait, Afghanistan and Iraq, fought these wars in their own particular way (relying on 'extraordinary rendition', 'enhanced interrogation' and dehumanising detention), produced a great many more veterans than its operating partners (perhaps by a factor of fifty) and provided an enormous pool of returned personnel for research projects. But the Australian contribution to, and experience of, these campaigns was very different. Those differences have not received the attention they deserve among the very small number of local studies. In fact, the vast majority of literature on PTSD is derived from the United States and deals predominantly with American veterans. There is no doubt that research into PTSD has led to treatments that have been enormously helpful to trauma-affected returning personnel. But to describe every unseen wound as a form or variant of PTSD is seriously mistaken.

Of the many other unseen wounds sustained by uniformed personnel during deployments, interest has naturally returned to the incidence of moral injury. I use the word 'returned' because there is evidence in ancient texts that war was considered a morally alienating experience, irrespective of whether it was an offensive or defensive campaign, and that returning warriors needed to undergo a moral cleansing after their experience to recover their moral self ahead of re-entering a moral community. The thought that deploying personnel might incur some form of moral injury is unsurprising.

In fact, it is rather obvious. The thought that someone might be unaffected by killing other human beings and destroying their property, that someone would be indifferent to a personal encounter with civil chaos and endemic poverty (such as in Somalia), political violence and political ‘gangsterism’ (such as in Cambodia), is actually more surprising. In fact, it is worrying. The idea that observing the outcomes of genocide and ethic cleansing might not distort a person’s faith in humanity is almost impossible to believe. But a person can be affected by these experiences without suffering from a mental disorder in need of treatment. Our society expects them to be affected. The interpretation of their experiences and their integration into a personal narrative has become critical to our understanding and appreciation of moral injury. It may be, for instance, that the effects of their experiences become the foundations not just for personal maturing but a fuller and more candid account of what it means to be human in the twenty-first century. We need to consider the possibility that some returning personnel may have a better developed sense of what is important in life and why, than those who send them or welcome them home.

This book’s chapters offering ethical perspectives on moral injury demonstrate the need for clearer definitions and closer attention to the words used to describe a range of human feelings and emotions. Indeed, they begin with the ‘standard’ although competing definitions of moral injury proposed by the psychologists Jonathan Shay and Brett Litz and show that they are unclear and imprecise. They are, of course, what they are: first attempts at defining something complex and nuanced, hence their attempts are partial and provisional. Philosophers have shown where their work is contradictory and confused, where concepts have been conflated and possibilities have been overlooked. Part of the problem for both Shay and Litz is their desire to connect or relate their definitions of moral injury to PTSD, reflecting their prior disciplinary commitments. They have come to moral injury without, I could suggest, an appreciation of agendas that disclose a number of personal preferences and prejudices. In their haste to find answers they have spent insufficient time analysing the questions and then attempted to universalise the particular by implying the American experience is (or ought to be) everyone’s experience. The contributors to this book have shown that a person need not experience trauma to be morally injured. A person can have sustained moral injury and PTSD and

there will be some with moral injury and no symptoms of PTSD. They are not synonymous.

Where Shay and Litz appear to have found common ground and where their views are shared by many of the contributors to this book is the importance of the relationship between the uniformed person and the state, the society, the service and themselves. This makes the experience of military people considerably different to that the civilian police, customs and border protection officers, and emergency services members. Shay and Litz claim that a sense of betrayal is integral to moral injury and the prime implement of wounding. While some might think this notion is overstated, if the focus is on the outcome – alienation – then disagreements over the cause matter less. Those who profess a moral injury express a sense of alienation from the people, the organisations, the communities and even the values that once afforded them a sense of identity and imparted a sense of destiny. The morally injured often have an impaired relationship with the state (represented by political authority), with the service (represented by the command structure), with the society (represented by the media) and with self (represented by idealised values). It is within this series of relationships, relationships that previously conveyed a sense of worth and purpose, that the morally injured person asks questions about why they were sent to undertake tasks that were poorly understood that left indelible marks that were hardly imagined among people who barely seemed to care.

If there is one element that is common to the definitions that have been offered and one thing that distinguishes military personnel, it is the relationship between moral injury and meaning making: what am I to make of what has been done to me and what I myself have done? Every attempt at meaning making begins with the reason for the deployment. Was it necessary and why was I there? Attention naturally turns to the state and the service. The Defence Force is, in a sense, the country’s possession but it is the servant of the government – the ruling political party – which sees the Defence Force as an instrument of public policy in pursuit of the national interest. The political leadership discern this national interest against a set of criteria that are often not disclosed. The notion that the Defence Force simply exists to defend the nation is an inadequate and flawed understanding of the place of the military in most Western societies. It is a servant of government to be used as the government chooses within legislative constraints and

limitations. This reality when understood and personally experienced can have a deflating effect on uniformed men and women, especially if they feel their deployment is more about party politics than national security. The 1982 Falklands War was, some argued, more about improving the political fortunes of the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher than asserting British sovereignty over a far-flung and insignificant colonial possession. Relocating the Falkland Islanders to Britain in relative affluence would have been immeasurably less expensive than the effort required to re-take them. Others countered that the deployment was necessary to preserve international rule of law and the priority of diplomacy, and that these things do not have a price tag.

Of course, nations seldom have just one reason for sending their uniformed personnel abroad. A combination of factors and influences bear upon such decisions. A deployment might further diplomatic, economic, legal and humanitarian objectives. Each can be a valid reason for using a nation's armed services depending upon the context, of course. But it is sometimes difficult for governments to explain why force is needed or why men and women in uniforms are required. They may want to protect intelligence sources, to preserve diplomatic goodwill, to obscure longer-term priorities, to overcome legal complexities or to avoid political opposition. This does not mean that governments are always deceiving their constituents, but they are sometimes constrained from being entirely open or candid about why the 'military option' is being pursued. While some would contend that half-truths are half-lies (an observation that is often too glib), the point being made here is simply that governments have confidences they must preserve. To disclose everything about a nation's interests can be imprudent and even reckless.

Decisions to deploy uniformed personnel abroad are always subject to political rhetoric. Elected leaders who make such decisions know every action will have domestic political consequences and international diplomatic ramifications. The complaint is not that governments always tell lies and can never be trusted to tell the truth but that the interactions between nations are so complex, and the conduct of diplomacy so complicated, that most governments say too little rather than too much about why they are doing what they are doing. Governments tend to under-explain rather than over-explain their intentions and understate rather than overstate their objectives in relation to international affairs. While those unfamiliar with the conduct of government will lament

the failure of government to take the people into its confidence and to be frank about what it wants to do and why, there are valid reasons for being circumspect about using the Defence Force that breach no moral code and defy no ethical principle.

In the midst of this complexity are the uniformed men and women who have pledged to obey the lawful directions of those in authority. As servants of the government they are not entitled to refuse lawful directions notwithstanding their own convictions and beliefs. They must fulfil the government's directions unless those directions are inconsistent with domestic law, international law or the laws of armed conflict. It does not matter that they think the nation's involvement in an armed conflict is politically motivated or poorly conceived or that participation in a peacekeeping mission is diplomatically driven or practically useless. They must do as they are directed without comment or complaint.

In my observations of uniformed people over thirty years, the vast majority of young uniformed men and women do not think very long or very hard about the missions they are given. They trust senior commanders to 'do the right thing' and tend to give the incumbent government the 'benefit of any doubt' in relation to the legality, practicality and morality of their mission. Some readily confess they have no interest in forming views on government decisions because, they feel, the rhetoric is impenetrable and their first responsibility is to comply. They have decided to be politically disengaged and will do what they have been told to do and leave dissent to others. For the greatest part, most Western governments are content to have their uniformed men and women politically disengaged because Western politicians have seen what political engagement with the military looks like in Egypt, Thailand, Panama and elsewhere. Western governments do not provide political education and there are no political officers embedded in operational units. The docility of most Western military establishments might prevent political interference and preclude political intervention but it might also mean that uniformed officers are more inclined to be silent when they should speak.

But when uniformed men and women, even those professing no interest in domestic politics, arrive in another country some may feel they are implements, tools and weapons of their governments. Their outlook changes, opinions begin to emerge and politics starts

to matter. This transformation of outlook becomes highly personal when a deployed person is placed in harm's way and their injury or death become a possible consequence of government decision making or something that those they loved and cared about do not value. At the point when someone could be personally damaged, they become engaged and start to think about what they are doing, why they are doing it and whether they really are sufficiently committed to a mission that they are willing to give their life in its cause. While it is often said that soldiers live for their country but die for their mates, the fact remains that every deployed person confronted with the prospect of injury or death has, at some level, made an assessment of the point and purpose of their mission and decided they are willing to accept the prospect of pain and suffering. Whereas they could remain neutral and impassive about their service during peacetime training, they cannot avoid taking a stand when they are deployed. They need to have a view about the value of their mission and the manner in which it is being conducted because no amount of money or promise of medals will compensate them for permanent disability or death.

Long after deploying there will be assessments and judgments of the mission's objectives and achievements. In noting that Australians are still talking about the Gallipoli campaign (and whether it could ever have been successful) and the Vietnam Conflict (whether it was a war worth winning), every deployment will be the subject of conversation and perhaps some controversy for decades. Those deploying will settle on their personal assessment of the objectives (whether they were clear, concise and compelling) and their judgment of the achievements (whether they were worthy of the their time, talent and trouble). If the mission was poorly conceived and badly managed, if the goals were essentially symbolic and the outcomes effectively superficial, those deployed are likely to feel they were manipulated and mistreated. They might become angry with those who deployed them and bitter towards those who led them. These emotions will be highly inflamed and deeply internalised if they have experienced or witnessed the worst expressions of corrupted human nature: hatred, malice and spite in the forms of physical cruelty and sadistic violence. Does the introduction of a political system, such as participatory democracy, redeem the deaths of innocent children, women and men? Is the death of a colleague a sacrifice or a waste when the objectives of the mission were so vague or imprecise that success was never a possibility? In the absence

of convincing answers, deployed personnel may well be directing, probably unjustifiably, their feelings of anger, mistreatment and betrayal at their officers and NCOs.

A deployed person does not need to see ‘guts and gore’ to be deeply wounded when they believe they have been manipulated or mistreated by those they trusted; they do not need to observe first-hand atrocities like genocide or ethic cleansing to have their sense of right and wrong disrupted and their conscience badly injured. Meeting those who have committed such acts, and encountering their victims, is sometimes enough to lead a person to decide that the world is evil and humanity is corrupt, and lose trust and abandon hope. They might conclude: such a world is not worth defending; such a species is not worth protecting. Conversely, they could persuade themselves that the world is the venue for a cosmic struggle between good and evil in which the cause of good was specially entrusted to them and the persistence of evil is evidence they failed. If only they had done more; if only they had been more diligent. For others, a different kind of realisation dawns: the people I am told to protect are neither my family nor my friends. I do not know their names and their faces are unfamiliar. This is not my country and will never be my home. Why should I die for them and for this place? One of the reasons that moral injury may be more prevalent in the modern era is that deployments are a long way from home and it is difficult to see the connection between these activities and the defence of one’s own family and home. Indeed, some deployed personnel may see themselves as nothing more than state-sponsored mercenaries being paid to fight a war that has little to do with them or what they value in life.

Ideas and insights about right and wrong are the products of political, social, cultural and spiritual reflections. They may be inconsistent and incoherent when taken together but they are sufficiently organised and operative to lead a person to make judgments about whether something accords or conflicts with what they deem to be moral or immoral acts. If a person is directed to act in a manner that conflicts with their sense of right and wrong; if they find themselves compelled to act in the face of wrongdoing but do nothing; if they acted with the best of intentions but find their actions led to the worst of outcomes; it is very likely that the individual’s sense of self will be adversely affected. Why? Because the principles that gave point and purpose, and meaning and direction to their life, have been denied or violated in such a manner and to

such a degree that they are alienated from themselves and estranged from the world. The person finds they are now living with a stranger in an alien environment. Such a person needs to be reconciled with themselves and relocated in the world. They need a new story that makes sense of what they have done and a fresh account of the world and their place within it. That story and that account might be drawn from art, drama and literature or from history, philosophy and theology. Helping the morally injured to narrate their own life appears to be the foremost emerging challenge.

There are three areas of future research arising from this book. The first is establishing the Australian experience of moral injury (both its nature and extent) and comparing that experience to those of the nation's major operating partners – Britain, New Zealand, Canada and the United States. It is possible that such research will confirm suspicions: that country of origin and dominant culture has a direct bearing on the experience of moral injury.

The second area is exploring the relationship between the individual uniformed person and the state and the society. In the context of uncertain loyalties and unstated expectations, the relationship between the state and the society needs to be reformulated in a document that sets out duties and responsibilities, obligations and entitlements given that moral injury resides within personal narrative. There is good reason to be fearful that uniformed men and women could see their service in mercenary terms. The fact that a number of uniformed people have become 'civilian security contractors', a group formerly known as mercenaries, shows such fears are not unreasonable.

The third area of research is the structure and content of post-deployment reintegration into family and the community including public commemorative activity. For more than a century, annual commemoration has arguably been the foremost public 'interpretation' of the Australian experience of armed conflict. Until relatively recently, Anzac and Remembrance observances presumed community familiarity with concepts such as contrition, repentance, forgiveness and absolution to help distinguish commemoration from celebration. But as Australian public culture has drifted away from religious affiliation and been supplanted by a deliberately secular strain of humanism, the structure of commemorative services has changed, the object of such gatherings has been

altered and the language has lost much of its previous texture. These activities have also moved from the private sphere to government control which has shaped their tone and tenor in ways that need to be examined.

There is much more to be known about moral injury despite its existence throughout time. This book and the further inquiry that it suggests is propelled by a common concern for those who have been affected by their uniformed service. It is also an expression of esteem and respect. There are many people who want to assist. They want to know how best to do so. May this book serve that end.