



Achilles in Vietnam

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Shay argues that Homer's representation of the combat experience includes important insights that have been overlooked by mental health professionals. Clues to the dynamics of combat trauma applicable to veterans of our recent wars can be gleaned from the travails of Achilles. Conversely, the testimony of Vietnam War combat soldiers can inform interpretation of the *ILIAD*. Beyond the symbiosis of these fields of investigation, Shay is concerned with character itself—not character as the consequence of an author's art of characterization, but the essence of personality and personhood. IT is not just what we call "sanity" that is at stake, but something more profound.

Shay tasks us with meeting our moral obligation to those we send to war. That obligation includes caring about "how soldiers are trained, equipped, led, and welcomed home." The costly, devastating character changes associated with PTSD can be prevented or reduced by demanding that our military take a number of steps. These include protecting unit cohesion, valuing griefwork, avoiding the encouragement of berserking, eliminating intentional injustice as a motivational technique, respecting the enemy's humanity, and acknowledging (rather than denying) psychiatric casualties. Shay gives special attention to the role of narrative in the necessary communalization of grief.

Short of ending warfare as our way of solving problems, Shay calls upon us to assert our own humanity in ways that lessen the damage we do to our own people. He is asking us to refuse complicity in the kind of betrayal that robs individuals and society of physical and moral well-being. Shay's voice is informed and impassioned. *ACHILLES IN VIETNAM* should be required reading for all present and future government and military leaders. It is a valuable and inspirational text for all citizens.

Sources for Further Study

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