

THE TRAGIC AND THE METAPHYSICAL IN PHILOSOPHY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

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This article elaborates a claim, first introduced by Wilhelm Dilthey, that metaphysics represents an illusory flight from the tragedy of human finitude. Metaphysics, of which psychoanalytic metapsychologies are a form, transforms the unbearable fragility and transience of all things human into an enduring, permanent, changeless reality, an illusory world of eternal truths. Three “clinical cases” illustrate this thesis in the work and lives of a philosopher and two psychoanalytic theorists: Friedrich Nietzsche and his metaphysical doctrine of the eternal return of the same, Sigmund Freud and his dual instinct theory, and Heinz Kohut and his theoretical language of the self. It is contended that the best safeguard against the pitfalls of metaphysical illusion lies in a shared commitment to reflection on the constitutive contexts of all our theoretical ideas.

Phenomenology lets metaphysicians heal themselves.

—Lee Braver

The contemporary analysis of human existence fills us all with a sense of fragility, with the power of dark instincts, with the suffering caused by mysteries and illusions, and with the finitude shown by all that is living, even where the highest creations of communal life arise from it.

—Wilhelm Dilthey

Philosophical thought has an inherently meta-physical structure. This means that it is at one and the same time a thinking of the mortality of the thinker and a thinking of the immortality of that which is thought.

—Francoise Dastur

It has long been known that ancient ontology works with “Thing-concepts” and that there is a danger of “reifying consciousness.” . . .

Why does this reifying always keep coming back to exercise its dominion?
—Martin Heidegger

The recoinning of Becoming as [a] being [entity] . . . is the supreme will to power.
—Martin Heidegger

The first Western philosopher to examine systematically the relationship between the tragedy of human finitude and the ubiquity of metaphysical illusion was Wilhelm Dilthey (1910). As is elegantly reconstructed by de Mul (2004), Dilthey's life's work can be seen as an effort to replace the Kantian *a priori*—the timeless forms of perception and categories of cognition through which the world becomes intelligible to us—with “life categories” that are historically contingent and constituted over the course of a living historical process. There is a tragic dimension to Dilthey's historical consciousness, in that it brings out the “tragic contradiction between the philosophical desire for universal validity [the metaphysical impulse] and the realization of the fundamental finitude of every attempt to satisfy that desire” (de Mul, 2004, p. 154). Dilthey's recognition of this tragic contradiction leads him to elaborate a hermeneutic phenomenology of metaphysics. Dilthey's historical reconstruction of the development of metaphysics aims at no less than its “euthanasia.” Although he holds that metaphysical desire is inherent to human nature, what he seeks to unmask are the illusions that this ubiquitous desire creates. Metaphysical illusion, according to Dilthey, transforms historically contingent nexuses of intelligibility—*worldviews*, as he eventually calls them—into timeless forms of reality. Anticipating Heidegger (1927), Dilthey holds that every worldview is grounded in a mood regarding the tragic realization of the finitude of life. The metaphysicalization of worldviews transforms the unbearable fragility and transience of all things human into an enduring, permanent, changeless reality, an illusory world of eternal truths.¹

The later Heidegger, following Dilthey, gives a powerful account of the historicity of metaphysics. As is masterfully outlined by Thomson (2005), Heidegger in his later philosophizing seeks to illuminate the great metaphysical systems of Western philosophy as objectifications of epochs in the historical unfolding of Be-

ing (*Sein*), of the intelligibility of entities as the entities they are for us. In this vision, the foundationalist systems offered by Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Descartes reify the way entities showed up in their particular historical epochs of intelligibility, as manifestations, respectively, of the eternal immaterial ideas, of primary and secondary substance, of the thoughts of God, and of the subject–object bifurcation. And, according to Heidegger (1954), Nietzsche’s metaphysical doctrine of the eternal return of the same captures the way entities as a whole are intelligible in our technological era as meaningless resources to be calculated, stored, and optimized in the quest to conquer the earth. The metaphysical impulse is grasped by the later Heidegger as a relentless tendency to transform the *experience* of the real—how entities are intelligible to *us*—into a reified vision of the REALLY real.² He pictures himself as the initiator of a postmetaphysical “second beginning” in the history of Being, in which all metaphysical entities would be expunged, and he formulates Being as such (*Seyn*) as an inexhaustible and unknowable source of all intelligibility (Thomson, 2011). But in his notion of an inexhaustible source, do we not see Heidegger himself succumbing to the seemingly irresistible metaphysical impulse in the face of radical finitude (Stolorow, 2011, chapter 9), the inevitable succumbing that Dilthey contends is inherent to human nature? We (Atwood & Stolorow, 1993) have illuminated a similar reifying and absolutizing tendency at work in the creation of the various metapsychological systems in psychoanalysis.

Elaborating further some ideas introduced in our earlier effort to deconstruct “the self” of psychoanalytic self psychology (Stolorow & Atwood, 2012), we seek here not the broad historical contexts of this metaphysical impulse but rather its source in the experiential worlds of thinkers themselves, whether philosophical or psychoanalytic.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE AND ETERNAL RECURRENCE

As our first example of how metaphysical illusion transforms the tragic finitude and transience of human existence into timeless forms of truth and reality, we turn to the philosophy and life of

Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche is a particularly interesting example, because he sees much of his philosophizing as an effort to *overcome* Western metaphysics, which he views as variations on Platonism—the world comprehended as a realization of the eternal Ideas or thoughts of God. Contrary to Nietzsche's self-interpretation, Heidegger (1954) regards Nietzsche as the metaphysician *par excellence* of our age of technology.³ In Heidegger's interpretation, Nietzsche is the last Western metaphysician, whose "fundamental metaphysical position" (p. 5) supplants that of Plato and Christianity. This position, claims Heidegger, is captured in Nietzsche's famous doctrine of the eternal return of the same—"of the unconditioned and infinitely reiterated circulation of all things" (Nietzsche, 1908; quoted in Heidegger, 1954, p. 5). This doctrine is an assertion about how "beings [entities] as a whole" (p. 5) are to be grasped in the modern technological world.

In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche (1882) writes for the first time about his doctrine of eternal return:

The greatest burden.—What would happen if one day or night a demon were to steal upon you in your loneliest loneliness and say to you, "You will have to live this life—as you are living it now and have lived it in the past—once again and countless times more; and there will be nothing new to it, but every pain and every pleasure, every thought and sigh, and everything unutterably petty or grand in your life will have to come back to you, all in the same sequence and order. . . . The eternal hourglass of existence turning over and over—and you with it, speck of dust!" . . . If that thought ever came to prevail in you, it would transform you, such as you are, and perhaps it would mangle you. (quoted in Heidegger, 1954, pp. 19–20)

Heidegger asks rhetorically, did this terrifying and burdensome thought of eternal return come into being historically "because all prior burdens had abandoned men and gone up in smoke . . . [and] all things have lost their weight" (p. 23)—because, in other words, a disenchanted technological world devoid of any ontic *logos* has lost its normative significance? In the technological world, we alone, in our "loneliest loneliness," decide the normative weight that beings will have.

The poetic language of the thought of eternal return seems beautifully to capture the nullity and groundlessness of our exist-

tence—"you . . . speck of dust!"—endlessly recurring, with no divine goal or purpose, no preordained order or meaningfulness: "God is dead." "The collective character of the world is . . . to all eternity—chaos" (Nietzsche, 1882; quoted in Heidegger, 1954, pp. 66, 91). With the thought of eternal return, tragedy begins, where tragedy is understood as affirmation of the terrifying, of "the uttermost 'no'" (p. 30). "Tragic knowing realizes that 'life itself,' beings as a whole, conditions 'pain,' 'destruction,' and all agony" (p. 61).

For Heidegger's Nietzsche, the thought of the eternal return of the same is a countermovement against the "danger of dangers" (p. 157)—the predisposition to nihilism wrought by the decline of Platonism, including its Christian variants, in the technological world. It is "the watershed of an epoch become weightless and searching for a new center of gravity" (p. 159). In Heidegger's account, Nietzsche fully immersed himself in the experience of European nihilism—its weightlessness, meaninglessness, and valuelessness—and then interrogated it and, with the thought of eternal return, ultimately overcame it. The thought of eternal recurrence "summons us" (p. 174) to make a decision, to take a stand on existence, to assume the responsibility of creating value.

Nietzsche's metaphysics is a relational ontology in which beings "are represented as interwoven in one vast nexus of Becoming" (Heidegger, 1954, p. 84). The world in which we stand is one of "perpetual Becoming" (p. 89), flux, and chaos. This representation of the totality of beings as chaos is supposed to achieve an inversion of Platonism, a definitive disenchantment of the world, an expunging of the eternal, the permanent, the unchanging. But does not the thought of the eternal return of the same—that is, the idea of "*permanent* becoming" (p. 109)—undo this very achievement? "The thought of eternal return of the same *fixates* by determining *how* the world essentially *is*" (p. 129), as seen in a God's-eye view. Eternal return "freezes the eternal flow" (p. 145) and brings "redemption from the eternal flux" (p. 146). "Being is injected into Becoming" (p. 147), permanence into impermanence. The doctrine of eternal return stamps becoming, flux, and chaos with the "emblem of eternity" (p. 201). For Nietzsche, such stamping or "recoining of Becoming as [a] being . . . is the su-

preme will to power” (p. 202). It is “*the permanentizing of Becoming into presence*” (Heidegger, 1961, p. 156).

What would lead a thinker to adopt the permanentizing of becoming, the eternalizing of change, as his fundamental metaphysical position? Such a doctrine would seem to combine an embracing of finitude with a flight from the very finitude that has been embraced. Heidegger (1954), like Nietzsche before him, stresses “the essential involvement of the thinker in the thought” (p. 98), so let us look very briefly at Nietzsche’s life history and personal emotional world for some clues.

Arnold and Atwood (2005) have elaborated a psychobiographical account of the interweaving themes that circulated throughout Nietzsche’s emotional life and philosophical work, eventuating finally in his madness. According to their account, the watershed event in his development was the death of his beloved father, a revered Protestant clergyman, when Nietzsche was four years old. The death of his father was a trauma that shattered the young Nietzsche’s emotional world and left him in a state of psychological chaos and fragmentation prefiguring his later psychosis, much as, according to the philosopher Nietzsche, the death of God had left Europe in a dangerous state of nihilism and groundlessness. As a boy, Nietzsche strove to overcome his emotional devastation by trying to *be* his lost father, adopting a sermon, even Zarathustrean manner. This countermovement, in which his emotional world became restitutively enveloped in an image of his dead father, is vividly captured in a dream that he dreamt soon after his father’s funeral and which he reported in a youthful autobiography (Nietzsche, 1858):

I dreamt that I would hear the same organ-sound as the one at the burial. While I was looking for the reason for this, suddenly a grave opens and my father, dressed in his shroud, climbs out of it. He rushes into the church and after a short while he returns with a little child [obviously the young Nietzsche] in his arms. The grave opens, he enters, and the cover sinks down again on the opening. (p. 12)

Arnold and Atwood (2005) aptly describe the world of Nietzsche’s dream as “a curved space surrounding a black hole in being” (p. 245). Nietzsche’s restorative effort to be his father con-

tinued throughout his life, always circling back to the nothingness he was trying to overcome. In his later autobiography, *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche (1908) wrote tellingly:

My father died at the age of thirty-six. . . . In the same year in which his life went downward, mine, too, went downward: at thirty-six, I reached the lowest point of my vitality—I still lived, but . . . like a shadow. (p. 122)

I am merely my father once more, and, as it were, his continued life after an all-too-early death. (p. 228)

His father's all-too-early death confronted young Nietzsche prematurely with the finitude of human existence and the indefinite certainty of death and traumatic loss. Nietzsche's counter-movement was to permanentize his dead father in his own selfhood, but, tragically, in so doing, he recurrently and endlessly circled back to his own psychological annihilation. The thematic parallel to his doctrine of the eternal return of the same, the countermovement through which he sought to overcome European nihilism, is striking. The permanentizing of transience, the infinitizing of finitude, the circular ordering of chaos, the ending that goes on forever—does not the doctrine of eternal recurrence poetize a crypto-Platonic evasion of human finitude probably as old as humankind's capacity for abstract thought? Nietzsche's fundamental metaphysical position gives us a compelling metaphorical window into the phenomenology of human finitude and of the endless human struggle to overcome it through metaphysical illusion. Even Heidegger, as we noted earlier, could not in the end resist the lure of the metaphysical impulse.

THE TRAGIC AND THE METAPHYSICAL IN PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY

George Klein (1976) claims that Freud's psychoanalytic theory actually amalgamates two theories—a metapsychology and a clinical theory—deriving from two different universes of discourse. Metapsychology deals with the material substrate of experience and is couched in the natural science framework of impersonal structures, forces, and energies. Clinical theory, by contrast, deals with

intentionality and the unconscious meanings of personal experience, seen from the perspective of the individual's unique life history. Clinical psychoanalysis asks "why" questions and seeks answers in terms of personal reasons, purposes, and individual meanings. Metapsychology asks "how" questions and seeks answers in terms of the nonexperiential realm of impersonal mechanisms and causes. Klein sought to disentangle metapsychological and clinical concepts, retaining only the latter as the legitimate content of psychoanalytic theory. For Klein, the essential psychoanalytic enterprise involves the reading of disclaimed intentionality and the unlocking of unconscious meanings from a person's experience, a task for which the concepts of the clinical theory, purged of metapsychological contaminants, are uniquely suited. Klein's proposals for a radical "theorectomy" for psychoanalysis have significantly influenced such contemporary thinkers as Merton Gill, Roy Schafer, and those, including ourselves, who have sought to rethink psychoanalysis as a form of phenomenological inquiry.

Expanding on Klein's distinction, we might characterize psychoanalytic clinical theory as emotional phenomenology and psychoanalytic metapsychology as a form of metaphysics, in that it postulates ultimate realities and universal truths.⁴ We think this division is characteristic of all the major psychoanalytic theories—they are mixtures of emotional phenomenology and metaphysics. Emotional phenomenology embodies the tragic, in that emotional experiencing is finite, transient, context dependent, ever changing, and decaying. Metapsychology evades the tragic by means of metaphysical illusion. Phenomenology/metapsychology is a trauma-driven binary insofar as finite human existing, stripped of sheltering illusions, is inherently traumatizing (Stolorow, 2011).

SIGMUND FREUD AND THE INSTINCTUAL DRIVES

In our original psychobiographical study of Freud, conducted in the mid-1970s and incorporated into *Faces in a Cloud* (Atwood & Stolorow, 1993), we traced the origins of his metapsychology back to the defensive operations through which he restored and preserved an idealized image of his mother in the wake of early, rage-

filled experiences of emotional trauma and disappointment in his relationship with her. We wrote:

We have attempted to demonstrate that Freud's wish to restore and preserve an early idealized image of his mother ran through his life like a red thread. . . . In particular, . . . the defensive operations which Freud employed to protect the idealized vision of his mother from invasion by a deep unconscious ambivalence conflict fatefully left their mark on his theory of psychosexual development and its central metapsychological reifications, in which the sources of evil were internalized, hostility was displaced onto the father, and the split-off bad maternal image was relegated largely to the psychology of the girl. (p. 59)

We will not repeat this account here. Instead, our aim is to show that Freud's metapsychological theory of the instinctual drives is actually a form of metaphysical illusion through which he sought to evade the experience of finitude and existential vulnerability.

That Freud's metapsychological theory of instinctual drives is a form of metaphysics is explicitly reflected in some of his remarks (Freud, 1937) linking his theory to the metaphysical thinking of the philosopher of ancient Greece, Empedocles (born 495 B.C.):

. . . the theory of Empedocles which especially deserves our interest is one which approximates so closely to the psycho-analytic theory of the instincts that we should be tempted to maintain that the two are identical, if it were not for the difference that the Greek philosopher's theory is a cosmic phantasy while ours is content to claim biological validity. At the same time, the fact that Empedocles ascribes to the universe the same animate nature as to individual organisms robs this difference of much of its importance. (pp. 245–246)

What was Empedocles' theory that was nearly identical to Freud's ideas about the instinctual drives? It was the notion that the cosmos is ruled by a conflict between two immense, antagonistic forces, one leading to growth and integration and the other to decline and fragmentation:

The philosopher taught that two principles governed events in the life of the universe and in the life of the mind, and that those principles were everlastingly at war with each other. He called them

philia (love) and *neikos* (strife). Of these two powers—which he conceived of as being at bottom ‘natural’ forces operating like instincts . . . —the one strives to agglomerate the primal particles of the four elements into a single unity, while the other, on the contrary, seeks to undo all those fusions and to separate the primal particles of the elements from one another. (1937, p. 246)

The two fundamental principles of Empedocles . . . are, both in name and function, the same as our two primal instincts, *Eros* and *destructiveness*, the first of which endeavours to combine what exists into ever greater unities, while the second endeavours to dissolve those combinations and to destroy the structures to which they have given rise. (1937, p. 246)

So Freud saw in early Greek philosophy a conception replicating in all important respects the dual-instinct theory that dominated his thinking about human nature from the writing of “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920) to “Analysis Terminable and Interminable” (1937). What purpose and meaning can we discern in his postulating the existence of two primal drives, *Eros* and *Thanatos*, universally determining the course of human events?

We envision this purpose as one of attempting to free the human being from what we call “the unbearable embeddedness of being” (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992, p. 22), accomplished by a transposing of the most decisive issues in a life from the world of our shared existence to a sphere of interiority—the intrapsychic realm, in which drive energies undergird and determine the course of human events. Insofar as the vicissitudes of subjective life are directed by such internal dynamics, the fate of the person escapes the world of relations with others: the world of loving and hating, of joyful union and devastating loss, of faith in the beloved and the bitter pain that comes when bonds of trust are broken by betrayal and abandonment.

Let us seek insight into the personal context of Freud’s thought in this connection by focusing on a specific instance of Freud’s way of transforming his own vulnerabilities and painful reactions to an experience of shattering disappointment in his relationship with one of the great loves of his life—Wilhelm Fliess. Fliess had served through the late 1890s—Freud’s most creative years—as a muse and beloved friend, providing indispensable support and encouragement as Freud worked on his self-analysis

and on foundational ideas of the whole psychoanalytic system. The passionate bliss of their mutually sustaining idealizations of one another, however, was traumatically ruptured when Fliess incompetently performed a minor surgical procedure on one of Freud's patients (Emma Ekstein) that nearly ended the patient's life (Schur, 1972; Atwood & Stolorow, 1993, chapter 2). Freud reacted initially to the near-tragedy by denying his friend's culpability and trying mightily to hold on to his formerly absolute trust and faith. Soon however the pain became unbearable, and he terminated all contacts with Fliess and reportedly (Jones, 1953) refused to speak of the matter to anyone for a number of years. His silence appears to have been associated with an emotional distancing from the separation and the suffering accompanying it. Freud's manner of handling his own emotional reactions is interestingly reflected in his brief references to his former involvement with Fliess in letters to Ernest Jones and Sandor Ferenczi.

There is some piece of unruly homosexual feeling at the root of the matter. (quoted in Jones, 1953, p. 317)

A piece of homosexual investment has been withdrawn and utilized for the enlargement of my own ego. I have succeeded where the paranoiac fails. (Brabant, Falzeder, & Giampieri-Deutsch, 1993, p. 221)

Freud's objectification of his deep love for his former friend is shown in his speaking of "some *piece* of unruly homosexual feeling" in the letter to Jones, and by the reference to "some *piece* of homosexual *investment* . . . *utilized* for the enlargement of my own ego" in the letter to Ferenczi. In Freudian metapsychology, the entity that is divisible into "pieces," is "invested" in objects or images thereof, and which can be "utilized" by being redeployed from objects into the ego, is of course the *libido*: the psychosexual energy flowing forth from the inborn drives of human nature.

What happened to Freud's heartbreak in the face of the disaster with Fliess, a catastrophic disappointment that, in view of Freud's former absolute trust and faith in his friend, also called Freud's own emotional judgment severely into question? We believe he turned away from the deep wound in his heart by interiorizing the dilemma, making it over into a struggle with his own

homosexual libido. Trying to overcome the unbearable sense of loss by imagining a “re-investment” of the shattered love into his own ego—into the interior of his personal sense of “I”—interestingly mirrors the interiorization project of Freudian metapsychology as a whole.

The ultimate triumph of the interiorizing impulse in Freud’s theory unquestionably lies in the idea of the death instinct, in which the sense of mortality with all its anxieties became transformed into a drive of our most essential nature: “The aim of all life is death” (Freud, 1920, p. 38). Freudian metapsychology interiorizes, objectifies, and universalizes dimensions of human emotional experience that otherwise leave us as victims of intolerable vulnerability. His theorizing thereby seeks an escape from the agony of human finitude and is a form of metaphysics.

HEINZ KOHUT AND THE SELF

Let us turn now to the dialectic of the tragic and the metaphysical as it shows up in Heinz Kohut’s (1977) psychoanalytic psychology of the self. Kohut’s prodigious contributions to clinical psychoanalysis pertained to a dimension of emotional phenomenology—the experiencing (note the verb) of a sense of selfhood. The theoretical language of self psychology with its noun, “the self,” reifies the experiencing of selfhood and transforms it into a metaphysical entity with thinglike properties. “A self” has two poles, ambitions and ideals, joined by a tension arc. It can be cohesive or fragmented. It can be enfeebled, but, in psychoanalysis, it can be rehabilitated. Sometimes it even has the characteristics of a human agent (Atwood & Stolorow, 1993, p. 186), as when it seeks selfobjects (more entities) or, when fragmented, it somehow performs actions to restore its cohesion.

What is wrong with this reifying theoretical language and why does it matter clinically? In his early groundbreaking paper on empathy and psychoanalytic theory, perhaps our favorite of all his works, Kohut (1959) defined the domain of psychoanalytic investigation as, although he did not use these words, *emotional phenomenology*—that which is accessible to empathy and introspection. As happened with the “psychoanalytic phenomenology” that we first

outlined skeletally in 1976 (Stolorow & Atwood, 1979; see also Stolorow, Atwood, & Orange, 2002), Kohut's early phenomenological emphasis led him to a form of contextualism. To us, Kohut's (1971, 1977) lasting and most important contribution to psychoanalytic clinical theory was his recognition that the experiencing of selfhood is always constituted, both developmentally and in psychoanalytic treatment, in a context of emotional interrelatedness. The experiencing of selfhood, he realized, or of its collapse, is context-embedded through and through.

What does theoretical talk of "the self" do to Kohut's hard-won clinical contextualizations? In effect, it undoes them! "A self" as a metaphysical entity with thinglike properties is ontologically (i.e., in its Being or intelligibility) decontextualized, much as the Cartesian mind, a "thinking thing," was ontologically isolated from its world. A thing remains the selfsame thing that it is whether it is with you or with one of us. Reifying and transforming the experiencing of selfhood into an entity, "a self" with an "intrinsic . . . nuclear program" (Kohut, 1984, p. 42) or "basic design" (p. 160), strips such experiencing of its exquisite context-sensitivity and context-dependence—the very context-embeddedness that it was Kohut's great contribution to have articulated!

What might be the psychological purpose served by such substantializing, decontextualizing objectifications? Like Freud's metapsychological reifications, might they not serve, through metaphysical illusion, to evade a dimension of the tragic familiar to anyone who has experienced an emotional-world-shattering loss (Stolorow, 2007)—the tragic dimension of human existence that we described in the previous section as the unbearable embeddedness of being?⁵ The objectification of the experiencing of selfhood serves to render stable and solid a sense of personal identity otherwise subject to discontinuity, uncertainty, and fragmentation. A phenomenological-contextualist viewpoint, by contrast, embraces the unbearable vulnerability and context-dependence of human existence.

Kohut (1977) described man as seen through the lens of his psychology of the self as a "Tragic Man [who] seeks to express the pattern of his nuclear self [but whose] failures overshadow his successes" (p. 133). It is our view that Kohut's concept of tragic

man misses the tragedy residing at the heart of human existence as such, prior to the formation of any nuclear program of ambitions and ideals—namely, the tragedy of human finitude itself and the inevitability of decay, death, and loss—tragedy not so easily evaded since the decline of Platonism and the “death of God.” The question of whether one’s program of ambitions and ideals is grounded in an authentic owning up to human finitude or an attempted illusory evasion of it cannot be meaningfully addressed within the framework of Kohut’s psychology of the self with its metaphysicalization of the experiencing of selfhood.

CONCLUSION

If the metaphysical impulse seeking an escape from human finitude is itself, as Dilthey maintained, a universal, what then are the implications for the future of psychoanalytic theory? Can there be a truly metapsychology/metaphysics-free framework of understanding that dwells exclusively in the realm of emotional phenomenology? In our earliest thinking on the matter (Stolorow & Atwood, 1979, chapter 6), we gave an affirmative answer to this question, offering a series of proposals for a psychoanalytic phenomenology that would devote itself wholly to the study of human subjectivity and dispense with the experience-distant reifications and universalizations that have haunted psychoanalysis since its inception.

As our ideas have evolved over the decades (Atwood & Stolorow, 1984, 1993; Orange, Atwood, & Stolorow, 1997; Stolorow & Atwood, 1992; Solorow, Atwood, & Orange, 2002; Stolorow, Brandchaft, & Atwood, 1987), however, it has become apparent to us that we, too, have not escaped the metaphysical impulse. The concept of the intersubjective field—central in our theorizing for many years—itself shows a tendency to become objectified and universalized. Accordingly, we have tried to think through the embeddedness of this idea in the personal and collaborative contexts of our work together (Atwood & Stolorow, 2012) and thereby to transcend its potentially limiting influence on efforts to understand still unexplored realms of human experience. Metaphysics, arising as a response to the tragic finitude of our ex-

istence, cannot be permanently transcended, and there will accordingly never be a psychoanalytic theory that is completely metapsychology-free. The answer to the dilemma this poses for our discipline, however, lies in a shared commitment to reflection on the constitutive contexts of all our theoretical ideas, including the idea of context itself.

NOTES

1. Two of the earliest examples of metaphysical illusion were Plato's vision of a realm of changeless, eternal, immaterial ideas (which in Augustine's philosophy became the thoughts of God) that ordered both the cosmos and the human soul, and Aristotle's conception of time as an infinite succession of nows, both notions covering over the tragic finitude of our temporal existence.
2. A sharp distinction can be made between the primary consolidation of the sense of the real in early childhood and the hypostatization of structures of experience that are otherwise threatened with dissolution. In the former, one sees the progressive attainment of a vital subjective sense that the world is enduringly substantial and permanent, which is a cornerstone of psychological development. In the latter—exemplified by psychotic delusions (Atwood, 2011), by articles of fanatic, dogmatic religious faith, and by the certainties of metaphysical philosophy—traumatically shattered organizations of experience are transformed into absolute truths having universal validity.
3. Throughout this article, we draw heavily on Heidegger's interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy. The Nietzsche we present is largely Heidegger's Nietzsche.
4. In our early work (Atwood & Stolorow, 1993) on the subjective origins of psychoanalytic theories, we noted, "Metapsychology resembles metaphysics in that it preoccupies itself with absolutes and universals" (p. 4). From our psychobiographical studies of the metapsychological systems of Freud, Jung, Reich, and Rank, we concluded that, in each case, through the metapsychological reifications "each theorist's solutions to his own dilemmas and nuclear crises became frozen in a static intellectual system that, to him, was an indisputable vision of . . . reality" (p. 175). To this early understanding we are now adding the claim that such metapsychological systems *are* forms of metaphysical illusion that seek to evade the tragedy of human finitude.
5. Kohut himself experienced at least two world-shattering discontinuities in the course of his development—one brought about by the impact on his family life of World War I and his father's enlistment and becoming a prisoner of war during Heinz's infancy, and the other resulting from the destruction of his world by the Nazis when he was a medical student in Vienna (Strozier, 2001).

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