
Psychoanalytic Versions of the Human Condition

*Philosophies of Life and
Their Impact on Practice*

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Chapter Twelve

The Cure of Stories

*Self-Deception, Danger Situations, and the
Clinical Role of Narratives in Roy Schafer's
Psychoanalytic Theory*

Paul A. Roth

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

As Paul Roth suggests, Roy Schafer has been one of the most provocative and philosophically sophisticated theorists in recent years. Although deeply lodged in the orthodox tradition in terms of his acceptance of what he calls Freudian "storylines"—the infantile psychosexual and aggressive conflicts that he thinks are the basis for an analysand's problems in living—Schafer has nonetheless rejected classical metapsychology, the theoretical superstructure of Freudian psychoanalysis. The main problem with metapsychology, according to Schafer, is the tendency for metapsychological explanation, in both its mechanistic and anthropomorphic variants, to deny or underplay the role of the analysand's intention, volition, and responsibility in favor of deterministic interpretations. For Schafer, says Roth, experience is always an active construal, never just a passive reflection of a determining external reality, hence Schafer's "reformulation of Freudian metapsychology into 'action language.'" In contrast with Freud's "premodern language of mind," says Schafer, the main principle of action language is that all human experience should be designated by verbs in the active mode and understood as "actions," as "intentional or goal directed performances" "for which the analysand accepts some significant measure of responsibility." Only in this way will

we "unquestionably require there to be a specific author of the action in question."

Schafer, while remaining in the Freudian tradition in terms of his acceptance and clinical use of Freudian "retellings," has developed a "narrational" account of the self, a "psychoanalysis without psychodynamics," as he has described it. It is this theory of the self, says Roth, that helps illuminate a crucial philosophical problem that challenges psychoanalytic theory. The challenge was best formulated by Sartre: how to conceptualize a unified self without postulating a metaphysical splitting of the self, and a splitting of the nature in which a self can be conscious of itself. Says Roth, "insofar as psychoanalytic theory speaks of an unconscious, and, in particular, a self that is deceived as to its own (unconscious) motives, then psychoanalytic theory doubles the epistemological dualism deriving from Hume and Kant. For now the self cannot only not be an object to itself, it both is and is not aware of itself." Schafer's thoughtful reflections on the problem of self-identity and self-deception, says Roth, resolve these problems and lead him to conceptualize psychopathology and psychoanalytic treatment in a novel manner.

As Roth indicates, Schafer's notion of the self can be described as "the self-as-storyteller about who one is" or, in the words of Schafer, "the self is a kind of telling about one's individuality." This view, argues Roth, has the advantage of relinquishing Freud's effort to formulate a physics of the mental and puts in place instead a unified person who is acting and doing. This is Schafer's move away from Freud's motivational mechanisms driven by instinct, in which the person is more or less passive, to what Roth calls an existential/humanistic view that stresses the individual's agency. People are "authors of their existence," Schafer says. Psychoanalysis, according to Schafer, must reject Freud's "Newtonian idea of psychodynamics" and adopt "a thoroughly non-mechanistic, non-organismic language," a language of reasons, not causes.

For Schafer, psychopathology is in part conceptualized in terms of "disclaimed actions." That is, there is no confusing splitting of the self as in conventional psychoanalytic explanations of self-deception; rather, he acknowledges that "people can be unaware of the reasons for their actions." Disclaimed actions, says Roth, are a fundamental form of self-deception inasmuch as individuals speak

of themselves as not in control of their desires and behavior. Schafer, influenced by existentialism, is here talking about the evasion of responsibility for one's feelings, thoughts, and behavior. The goal of Schaferian psychoanalysis, says Roth, is to help the analysand "reclaim" these happenings as his actions.

Roth then raises a most important question regarding Schafer's view of self-deception, namely, why does a person's narrative cause him pain? If individuals create their own meanings, why do people feel discomfort with the meaning they have placed on their actions? These questions are crucial to understanding Schafer's view of psychopathology, formulated in part in terms of what he calls "danger situations." Danger situations are the noncognitive personal constructions, rooted in one's preverbal or traumatic past, that are inaccessible or overwhelming such that they cannot be articulated. It is through these inchoate experiences, these unarticulated storylines, that a person defines and constructs experiences. Thus, says Schafer, "a neurosis is created and arranged and protected. It is, correlatively, the construction of danger situations and the construction of emotional action to take in these situations."

Schaferian psychoanalytic treatment, says Roth, is "the cure of stories." It consists of clarifying, in terms of a psychoanalytic narrative, what the analysand is doing, and to make sense of it in terms of unconsciously defined and disclaimed danger situations. The therapeutic task is to identify and "deconstruct" the interpretation given experiences that are thematized in terms of one's particular unconscious danger situations. Psychoanalytic interpretation expands the conceptual resources available to the person to make his behavior intelligible and to take responsibility for it. Says Roth, "Words free not by magic, but by providing new shape and form through which to construct, analyze, and articulate experience." Schafer's narrative thus offers us a somewhat different version of the human condition than Freud, Kohut, and Klein, three "masternarratives," as Schafer calls them. As Roth says, paraphrasing Schafer, "if Freud offers us the narrative of 'the taming of the beast within,' Kohut narrates according to 'the discovery of the self within,' and Klein postulates the 'mad person within raging about,' Schafer's narrative concentrates on the enhancement of responsibility, from 'self-as-victim of unknown psychic forces' to 'master in one's own house.'" (P. M. and A. R.)

Talk about the self or self-identity invokes a number of interrelated philosophical puzzles. A key puzzle concerns the fact that, *contra* Descartes, there is no pure or simple *cogito* that one apprehends. Hume famously put this as follows: "For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, . . . I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception" (Hume, 1988, p. 252) No *particular* perception turns out to be the perception of *oneself*. There are available only congeries of perceptions that one speaks of as related to a single self. Call this the "no-self puzzle": what is the nature of the self who is conscious but not also an object for that consciousness?

Kant extended Hume's insight by arguing that the existence of a unified consciousness is necessary for there being a self. If one could not identify experiences as one's own, one would lack a basic prerequisite for self-identity. But the unity that makes self-identity possible must be constituted *prior to* experience, for, as just noted, no particular experience provides the experience of a self. Rather, Kant observed, the thought that an experience is mine accompanies our experiences. "Through this I or he or it (the thing) which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of thoughts = X. It is known only through the thoughts which are its predicates, and of it, apart from them, we cannot have any concept whosoever" (Kant, 1933, A346/B404). The senses in which the self is constitutive of but not an object in experience creates what one commentator terms "epistemological schizophrenia" (Todes, 1967, p. 166) with respect to the nature of self-knowledge. A radical dissociation seemingly exists between the self as knower and the self as known. Even more, one has no "privileged access" to the knowing self; we know who we are only through experience.

To appreciate the relevance of such questions about the self to psychoanalytic theory and practice, one need only consider, for example, how these issues bear on the critical notion of self-deception. Self-deception, in one form or another, constitutes a *raison d'être* of psychoanalysis. Analytic work aims to identify and bring to consciousness motives, intentions, and meanings involved in one's own actions of which one is, in some sense or other, unaware. Without a coherent account of self-deception, psychoanalysis is a cure for which there is no identified disease.¹

Self-deception implies that one does not have available to oneself the meanings and intentions of one's actions and experiences. Thus, the dissociation noted by Hume and Kant between the self as unified con-

consciousness and the self as object of knowledge is reproduced in psychoanalysis as a split between the knowing subject and that subject's understanding of his or her own actions. Moreover, the epistemological split arises with particular force and significance within the theoretical framework of classical psychoanalysis inasmuch as what is "hidden" from view is not just the self as unity, but one's own motives and intentions as agent. In order to generate an account of self-deception, psychoanalytic theory must double the split that philosophers acknowledge.²

But further splitting (that is, beyond that of the pure and empirical self) leads only to theoretical incoherence regarding the notion of the self. Positing an unconscious does not avoid the epistemological and metaphysical necessity for having a single self of whom all the various conflicting parts are true. Without a unified consciousness, self-deception would be impossible. For if there is no such unified self, then who is it that is deceived?³ In order to have even prima facie plausibility, psychoanalytic theory must provide an account of self-deception that respects the unity of the knowing subject.⁴ In this respect, the cogency of a theory's notion of self-deception represents a key test of its plausibility.

In what follows, I explore aspects of the "narrational" account of the self advocated and developed by Roy Schafer. Schafer's narrative theory of the self commands attention, I suggest, because of the particularly cogent solution it offers to the problem of self-deception and the general question of self-identity. In this connection, I indicate how Schafer, through his formulation of a philosophically sophisticated account of how self-deception is possible, creates in turn a distinctive vision of the "analytic attitude." That is, I indicate how Schafer's account of the self and self-identity determines his approach to treatment.

Somewhat ironically, my reconstruction of Schafer gives less pride of place to what Schafer himself considers his main theoretical innovation—the reformulation of Freudian metapsychology into "action language." My account underscores, rather, how the narrativist perspective provides a well-articulated theoretical framework for identifying and dealing with "danger situations." Danger situations are experiences that are perceived as threatening and that, by virtue of how the experience is subjectively interpreted, trigger patterns of defensive behavior. That is, the key achievement of Schafer's theory, at least on my telling of it, lies in his development of the notion of a danger situation and how he uses this to link to a theoretically cogent concept of the self that is clinically useful for the task of the analysis.

More specifically, the narrational view, as I present it, shows how the narrative construction of the self provides, for the analytic situation, a way of literally giving voice to the analysand's concerns. In an analysis of danger situations, one is reaching back to a time when adequate words were not available to express or give shape to what one, at that age and time, experienced. Schafer's clinical theory emphasizes the role of analysis in giving words to and a narrative structure for the character of danger situations. It highlights as well how and why the process of articulating the partially or wholly inchoate past is best analogized to story construction and is not to be thought of as the recovery of a past with some intrinsic or determinate meaning. The therapeutic function of narratives I term the "cure of stories."⁵

Moreover, an understanding of the constructed nature of the psychoanalytic narrative helps explain how tales told to and from the couch have therapeutic effect. The narrational notion of the self provides a particularly plausible and theoretically elegant explanation for the therapeutic efficacy of psychoanalysis.

In outline, my reconstruction of Schafer's view traces the connection between self-identity, narrative, and the nature of psychoanalytic therapy. First, I indicate that Schafer explicitly endorses what I shall term an existential vision of human existence. Whatever significance or meaning there is to human life must be created by people themselves. People do this by forming a narrative, a storyline by which they organize and explain their actions, if only to themselves. It is Schafer's underlying existential vision of how meaning is conferred to human action that gives narrative the particularly central role it has in his overall account of therapy.

This leads to the second point, which concerns why, given Schafer's initial views on the existential origins of meaning, people come to disown or disavow their actions. That is, Schafer needs an analogue to Jean-Paul Sartre's famous notion of *mauvaise foi* (bad faith) in order to explain why people disown actions without involving himself in a convoluted notion of a split consciousness, which he otherwise rejects.⁶ Appreciating how Schafer reconciles the accounts of self-identity and self-deception helps reveal the critical importance of his notion of "danger situations."

In the third section I indicate how, in view of Schafer's account of danger situations and his existential view of meaning, the cure of stories is possible. Psychoanalytic stories help cure, the argument goes, by providing a thematic and narrative structure to early, often inchoate experiences and re-

active patterns that otherwise unknowingly control one's life. Psychoanalytic dialogue offers to analyse the possibility of articulating, and so reinterpreting and perchance changing, their reactions to life situations. In brief, psychoanalytic stories cure by breaking the interpretive grip imposed on how one lives by early fears and associated ongoing patterns of reaction.

In an essay reviewing psychoanalytic concepts of the self, Lewis Kirshner (1991) correctly notes that Schafer rejects the type of self that is presumed by the self psychology of, for example, Kohut. As Kirshner remarks, "Following Schafer, it can readily be seen that hypostatization of a presumptive entity inside the mind, a 'self,' may lead to a mystification of analysis, in which the quest for self-realization or actualization takes on an absolute quality, and pursuit of a 'true self' evokes the mirage of psychic perfection" (p. 164). More generally, Schafer frequently and characteristically locates his own position by contrasting it with the idealizations of the self he finds in Kohut's writing, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, with the view of the self as born mad and destined to remain so he attributes to Melanie Klein.⁷

In addition to rejecting those theories, which invest individuals with an essential or core natural self, Schafer distances his view as well from the mechanistic and positivistic conception of psychoanalysis on which Freud relied. To the contrary, Schafer identifies psychoanalysis with humanistically oriented inquiry. One consequence is that human beings, no longer seen through mechanistic and reductionistic lenses, are understood as agents, that is, authors of their own acts. A second is that psychoanalysis itself is perceived as more akin to history than to, say, physics or even biology (Schafer, 1978, p. 6). It is by developing the parallels between historiography and psychoanalytic theory as narrativizing projects that Schafer proposes to break psychoanalytic theory of the positivist legacy bequeathed it by Freud.⁸

Schafer's humanist/narrativist turn leads him to focus, as well, on the philosophical problems surrounding understanding the self that were discussed above.⁹ On the one hand, Schafer maintains that any cogent theory requires that the unity of the self be respected. Following Hume and Kant, he sees no theoretical alternative to this. He concurs with them, as well, in viewing the unified self as only a formal and not a substantive concept. There is no intrinsic self waiting to be born. Yet, on the other hand, he recognizes the need to provide an account of how psychic conflict is possible that avoids the pitfalls inherent in the notion of self-deception noted earlier.

Schafer reformulates the Kantian split self distinction as one between the self-as-agent and the self-as-object (e.g., Schafer, 1968, p. 80). The self-as-agent (the "I") is the narrator/synthesizer of the self-as-object ("me"). "A thought does not deal with anything, for it is not an agent. It is the thinker of the thought who is the agent. It is the thinker who deals with things. . . . The self is a kind of telling about one's individuality" (Schafer, 1978, p. 86).¹⁰ The view of the self-as-storyteller about who one is has the virtue, as Schafer insists throughout his writings, of doing away with Freud's attempt to formulate a physics of the mental. It puts in place instead a unified person who is acting and doing (1978, p. 102).

Schafer uses the term "narrative" broadly but with sufficient consistency that there is no difficulty in identifying the family resemblances among the activities he groups under this term. The generic feature of narratives is that they offer ways of characterizing (human) action over time. Terming these tellings "narratives" emphasizes that the descriptions offered are human constructions, not reports of what occurs *sub specie aeternitatis*. In this respect, narratives "create" truth; descriptions of human actions are not true or false *simpliciter*, but relative to a narrative/context.¹¹

It is especially important to emphasize that narrative is not an alternative to truth or reality; rather, it is the mode in which, inevitably, truth and reality are presented. We have only versions of the true and the real. Narratively unmediated, definite access to truth and reality cannot be demonstrated. In this respect, therefore, there can be no absolute foundation on which any observer or thinker stands; each must choose his or her narrative or version. Further, each narrative presupposes or establishes a context, and the sentences of any one account attain full significance only within their context and through more or less systematic or consistent use of the language appropriate to the purpose. (Schafer, 1992, pp. xiv-xv, 114).¹²

One author's one's life, in the relevant sense, to the extent that one has the categories or concepts in which to do so. However, there is a twist. On the narrative account which Schafer develops, one constructs narratives about oneself working *selectively* from one's experience. "An author of existence is someone who constructs experience. Experience is made or fashioned; it is not encountered, discovered, or observed, except upon secondary reflection. . . . The introspecting subject extracts from the plenitude of potential experience what is wanted. . . . Introspection does not encounter ready-made material" (Schafer, 1992, p. 23). What is se-

lected from experience as relevant to one's narrative is a matter of, so to speak, authorial discretion.

Although one works selectively from experience in authoring a view of oneself, one need not always draw consistently from experience, or tell only one tale about oneself. Schafer's narrativist version of the Kantian conception of the self demands formal but not thematic unity.

I suggest that the analysand's experiential self may be seen as a set of varied narratives that seem to be told by and about a cast of varied selves. And yet, like the dream, which has one dreamer, the entire tale is told by one narrator. Nothing here supports the common illusion that there is a single self-entity that each person has and experiences, a self-entity that is, so to speak, out there in Nature where it can be objectively observed, clinically analyzed, and then summarized and bound in a technical definition [W]e analysts may be said to be constantly dealing with self narratives—that is, with all the storylines that keep cropping up in clinical work—such as storylines of the empty self, the false self, the secret self, and so on.

(Schafer, 1992, p. 26)

Authors are articulators. Analysands are authors who employ a special theory and vocabulary; they differ from those never exposed to psychoanalysis only in the vocabulary with which they are provided.¹³

What marks Schafer as a latter-day existentialist is not only his view that each of us constructs the meaning of our actions, but also his particular way of crafting a theoretically satisfying account of the self. The charge that psychoanalytic theory lacks any such satisfactory account is found, for example, in Sartre's exposition of the notion of *mauvaise foi* (bad faith) (Sartre, 1966, p. 56–86).¹⁴ The problem, Sartre contends, is that psychoanalytic theory requires not just a metaphysical splitting of the self, but a splitting of the nature in which a self can be conscious of itself. In particular, insofar as psychoanalytic theory speaks of an unconscious, and, in particular, a self that is deceived as to its own (unconscious) motives, then psychoanalytic theory doubles the epistemological dualism deriving from Hume and Kant. For now the self cannot only not be an object to itself, it both is and is not aware of itself.

But this additional splitting, Sartre goes on to complain, is inconsistent on the face of it. For, he insisted, there must be a self who is the author, and not just the subject, of self-deception. And that self just is oneself. Who else could it be? But, then, in what sense is oneself deceived?¹⁵

While rejecting the Freudian notion of the unconscious, Sartre also recognized the need to explain self-deception. Some of his remarks, in

fact, point to a more satisfying theoretical solution to the problem. In an apt and striking phrase, Sartre refers to the unified consciousness that is deceived as an instance of a "mystery in broad daylight." We can be mysteries to ourselves, for example, in cases where our own behavior puzzles us. This mystery is possible, Sartre speculates, because "this possession is deprived of the means which would ordinarily permit *analysis* and *conceptualization*" (Sartre, 1966, p. 699). The suggestion, I take it, is that what makes for inaccessibility is not a mind divided against itself, but a lack of conceptual resources to make sense of what one is doing.

Schafer's concern is to answer the foregoing conundrums regarding the self—to answer the question of how self-deception is possible—in a way consistent with his move toward humanism and away from mechanism. This concern drives his well-known reworking of Freudian metapsychology in terms of "action language." "Action language" is a way of viewing analysands that takes them to be agents, not mechanisms subject to impersonal forces over which they have no control. Schafer characterizes the purpose as follows: "The project . . . is one by means of which psychoanalysts may hope to speak simply, systematically, and nonmechanistically of human activities in general and of the psychoanalytic relationship and its therapeutic effects in particular" (1978, p. 7). More specifically, action language accepts the apparently paradoxical view that there is no splitting of the self (as the notion of self-deception appears to require) but people can be unaware of the reasons for their actions. This failure of awareness stems, however, not from some convoluted conception of the mind whereby one part "hides" or "deceives" the other.

From his existentially influenced perspective regarding the meaning of action, Schafer puts the problem of how self-deception is possible as one of learning why analysands typically disown responsibility for or control of their desires and behavior. Schafer terms such denials or disownings "disclaimed actions." The act of disclaiming is, for Schafer, the fundamental form of self-deception inasmuch as individuals, in disclaiming actions, speak of themselves as not in control of themselves. "It is the defining feature of psychoanalytic interpretation to retell certain crucial happenings as actions. . . . One may say that, through analysis, disclaimed actions are narratively transformed into acknowledged or claimed actions" (Schafer, 1981a, p. 4).¹⁶ The problem posed by the fact that people disclaim responsibility for their own actions is the problem of how one could not know, or not control, what one is doing.

From the analysand's perspective, the problem appears as one of dissociation from his or her own actions, a failure to identify the actions taken as his or her own. "[W]hen patients present symptoms as afflictions or happenings, as by definition they must, psychoanalysts on their part understand them to be disclaiming certain intricate actions that they are performing unconsciously" (Schafer, 1981a, p. 19). The goal of psychoanalysis, on the Schaferian perspective, is to help the analysand "reclaim" these happenings as actions, that is, as doings under the person's control.

In this passive way of regarding their own agency, classical psychoanalytic theory too readily conspires. The usual mode of constructing an analytic story, Schafer complains, permits analyst and analysand to construct an account of the patient as a creature of instinctual drives or as a mere spectator with regard to his or her wishes, desires, and intentions.

Drives appear to be incontrovertible facts of human nature. Even the most casual introspection delivers up a passive picture of the self being driven by internal forces. It might therefore seem perfectly justified to distinguish being driven from wishing, in that wishing seems clearly to be a case of personal action. The distinction is, however, untenable. It takes conscious and conventional testimony of drivenness as the last or natural word on the subject; but to do so is to ignore the proposition that introspection is itself a form of constructed experience based on a specific narration of mind.

(Schafer, 1981a, p. 36)

But why, Schafer asks, countenance narratives in which "the subject tells himself that he is passive in relation to a drive rather than that he is a[n] . . . agent?" (Schafer, 1981b, p. 37). Schafer rejects, then, both the science and the morality that the narratives countenancing moral passivity presume. Instead, he seeks to show that "people are fantasizing whenever they disclaim action. That is to say, they are imagining their selves or their minds as spatial entities, existing in a split up and split off way" (1983, p. 243). The notion of the split self, then, is morally as well as theoretically undesirable.¹⁷

Emphasis on the primacy of the individual as agent is a classic theme in existential thought. The narrativist perspective introduced by a Schaferian analyst invites analysands to see themselves as akin to the "unreliable narrator" of contemporary literary theory, that is, someone who is "relating" the story to the reader, but whose perspective is also shown, by other plot devices, not to be totally trustworthy.

[T]he analyst listens and interprets in two interrelated ways. First, the analyst retells what is told from the standpoint of its content, that is, its thematic coherence. . . . The specific content then becomes merely illustrative of an unrecognized and probably disavowed set of attitudes that are held by the analysand who is shown to be an unreliable narrator in respect to the consciously constructed account. Ultimately, the unreliability itself must be interpreted and woven into the dialogue as an aspect of resistance.

(Schafer, 1981b, pp. 38-39)

What makes them "unreliable" in the relevant sense is that the analysands do not see themselves as the authors/agents of their own actions.

Against, then, both the mechanistic view of the psyche inherited from Freud and the analysands' own narratives of bondage to unknown forces, Schafer constructs a conception of the self within psychoanalytic theory that empowers the self by creating a narrative structure by which to reclaim responsibility for, and therefore control of, disclaimed actions. "An essential feature of analytic insight is the increasingly limited use of self-narratives of the sort that amount to flagrant disclaimers" (Schafer, 1983, p. 249). Indeed, a defining element of the analytic enterprise is the analyst's insistence on eliminating the analysands' perceived tendency to split their thought into those within their control and those not so controlled.

Recall that, for Schafer, no action has a preordained meaning. The meaning is supplied by some interpretive context or other.¹⁸ In this regard, the crucial assumption of the narrational perspective, the one I have labeled from the outset its existential assumption regarding meanings, is that people are seen "as continuously selecting, organizing, and directing a neurotic existence" (Schafer, 1983, p. 145). The fundamental virtue of the Freudian interpretive context, he maintains, is that it provides a transformative account, one that offers the opportunity for alternative understanding of one's own action via a different vision of one's experiences.

[O]ne must bear in mind that these constructions both presuppose and further the process of changing the analysand's point of view of himself or herself in relation to others; that is to say in the interpretive circle, the significant observation, memories, insights, and modes of feeling that are made possible by the Freudian constructions also document and extend these very constructions. Under the influence of the psychoanalytic perspective, the analysand not only begins to live in another world but learns

how to go on constructing it. . . . It is a world of greater personal authority and acknowledged responsibility. (Schafer, 1978, p. 25)

In part, reinterpretation enhances self-control and responsibility by being able "to identify a network of intelligible actions where none was thought to exist" (Schafer, 1976, p. 127). A reinterpretation of experience, in turn, allows one to perceive new options for behavior or breaks the grip of interpretations unwittingly applied.

However, Schafer's reworking of the concept of the self in this way creates a problem, namely, why is not the existential self infinitely plastic? If meaning is of one's own creation, why should a person not be perfectly content to assign any significance whatever to his or her actions? What creates a discordance or a need to deny one's own actions? The narrational notion of the self must be shown not to lead to the untenable consequence that one can make of one's life story whatever one wants.

The preceding account of the self poses at least two important problems. First, how is it possible, on Schafer's narrational view, for someone to disclaim or disown actions, much less to be mistaken about which actions are in his or her control? On the existential view he endorses, the meaning of actions is the interpretation given to them. Hence, there is no mistake, it would seem, that one could make about the understanding of one's own actions. A second, and deeper, question challenging the plausibility of the Schaferian narrativist strategy is why someone's narrative should cause him or her pain. Why, if meaning is created, do people come to feel discomfort with the meaning they have placed on their actions?

Schafer confronts these problems directly. With regard to the first question, concerning how one could possibly be "wrong" in interpreting one's own actions, Schafer readily admits that the "correction" analysis offers is evident only after the analytic perspective is accepted.¹⁹ What recommends the psychoanalytic perspective is its capacity, if properly applied, to alleviate the puzzles and problems an analysand's own narrative has led him or her to encounter.²⁰

Answering the second question brings us to Schafer's crucial theoretical notion of danger situations. Although building in his characteristic fashion on Freud's own work,²¹ Schafer expands and develops this notion in a way that makes it central for his version of psychoanalytic theory. For Schafer, as for Freud, a fairly limited range of situations constitute the main danger situations infants and children initially face. What is critically important is understanding that "all later dangers in psychic

reality are considered to be derivative of these early ones" (Schafer, 1992, p. 37). The psychic reality is that in which a person lives, or, perhaps, with which a person lives.

There are two fundamentally important aspects of danger situations so understood. The first is that they are, Schafer insists, noncognitive. They are noncognitive because they refer, by and large, to experiences that either were preverbal or outran or overwhelmed any conceptual resources available for articulating the experiences.

The meaning of danger situations is, one might say, a bodily meaning, a "gut" reaction to events. The "recognition" of a situation as a danger situation, in other words, rests primarily on its affect.²² They have this conceptually rudimentary or inchoate status because danger situations represent responses to very early experiences.

Once we develop our explanations in a universe of meanings rather than forces, we cannot avoid viewing the person as the interpreter of circumstances and needs, that is, as the definer and assigner of meanings. Danger situations are thus personal constructions, and whether or not a person constructs a danger situation will depend on his or her conceptions and estimates of self relative to circumstances. It also follows that, strictly speaking, the earliest traumatic situations, starting with birth, are not situations at all in that they refer to noncognitive events. A newborn cannot conceive situations, and physiological stress or disequilibrium is not yet a situation.

(Schafer, 1983, p. 99)

A situation, of course, is not created out of whole cloth. From the dawn of mental activity, each person takes into account necessity and accident, but he or she can only do so in phase-specific and individually characteristic ways. However much one agrees with others in certain "objective" respects, and however limited and directed one may be by bodily makeup, maturation, and the conditions and language of one's upbringing, one may still be viewed as authoring one's own life. . . .

. . . But my thesis applies to more than the construction of a situation. It applies as well to the actions of the person in the situation thus defined. For an essential aspect of maintaining the nonbehavioristic orientation of psychoanalysis, of its concern with psychical reality or unconscious fantasizing, is to remember always that what to an outside observer might look like identical items of behavior may mean different things to different agents or to one agent at different times. Here we come directly to the way in which the concept of action is integrally related to the concept of situation.

(Schafer, 1983, p. 100)

The patterns represent modes of coping developed during early developmental stages. Because the patterns were established before one could conceptualize what one is doing, a result is that what the pattern is, what triggers it, and what fears it connects with remain unarticulated. That which was never articulated is, for all intents and purposes, inaccessible to discursive understanding.

Through these acquired senses of certain situations as threatening, a person defines and constructs experiences. Even though these modes of understanding are initially wholly or partially inchoate, they set the themes for how experience is understood. Hence, they may be termed part of an analysand's own narrativizing practice.

Once we develop our explanations in a universe of meanings rather than forces, we cannot avoid viewing the person as the interpreter of circumstances and needs, that is, as the definer and assigner of meanings. Danger situations are thus personal constructions, and whether or not a person constructs a danger situation will depend on his or her conceptions and estimates of self relative to circumstances. (Schafer, 1983, p. 99)

According to Schafer, "What we call a derivative or compromise comes into being in the terms of, and by virtue of, a narrative strategy. The analysand uses the storyline to develop ever new opportunities for repeating and perpetuating unconsciously maintained infantile psychosexual dilemmas and dangers. And these prototypes are themselves narrativized" (1983, p. 271). The point about the psychic reality of a danger situation is that these are constructions that individuals put on their experience. Indeed, "[m]ore than construct these fantasies, the analysand constructs actual situations which, psychically, verify and justify imprisonment" (Schafer, 1983, p. 270). It is pointless, and besides the point in any case, to argue that, "objectively," no danger exists.

This determines the second of the crucial features of the notion of a danger situation. This is that the therapeutic task, from this perspective, is to identify and "deconstruct," so to speak, the interpretation given particular types of experiences.

We say we diagnose psychopathology; however, by the word pathology we refer to that which one suffers, thereby implying passivity and affliction. But . . . it is wrong to think that a neurosis befalls one. A neurosis is created and arranged and protected. It is, correlatively, the construction of danger situations and the construction of emotional action to take in these situations. (Schafer, 1983, p. 111)

If by a diagnosis we refer to what someone is doing, then we may designate a psychoanalytic therapy in comparable action terms. In the case of neurosis, the service we render is inappropriately called the cure of pathology. Rather, we should say it consists of clarifying what the "patient" is doing, and to make sense of it in terms of unconsciously defined danger situations.

(Schafer, 1983, p. 112)

For Schafer, identifying and addressing such situations define the analytic encounter. That is, what makes danger situations seemingly inaccessible to consciousness is not some intrapsychic happening that leaves individuals, Humpty-Dumpty-like, with split psyches needing to be put back together again. Rather, on the account owing to Schafer, the problem is that the experiences defining danger situations elude conscious understanding because they belonged to a time when words were not adequate to characterize the fear, or no words were available at all.

[I]t is largely on the basis of these unconsciously perpetuated infantile and fantastic dangers that analysands fear the prospect of changing and "getting well." For when they first become analysands, and for a very long time afterwards, they envision "getting well" only as a full actualization of those infantile danger situations. If, as we believe, they have developed their disturbing modes of functioning as static accommodations to such dangers, why should they risk changing and "getting well"? The analyst cannot empathize too strongly with this desperate, locked-in position.

(Schafer, 1983, p. 70)

The threat of analysis, on this perspective, is that one must confront something dreaded but unknown, at least to words.

In this context, the analyst and analysand are engaged not in reconstructing the past, in the sense of stating what happened inasmuch as, in Schafer's view, this is literally impossible. It is impossible because the analysand has, *ex hypothesi*, no terms or concepts in which the past experience, whatever it was, could be expressed.

The point is that psychoanalytic interpretation expands the conception of actions and that this expansion is an essential constituent of insight. Insight combines both the old and the new. The new comprises all those conceptions of life-historical actions, relations, and situations that the analysand may never before have defined as such. . . .

. . . Absurdity enters at the point where one ascribes this retrospective designation of the action to the early infantile mind Put in historical perspective, there is far more to an action than could have entered into its creation at the moment of its execution. It is the same as the effect of a new

and significant literary work or critical approach on all previous literature; inevitably, fresh possibilities of understanding and creation alter the literary past. (Schafer, 1978, p. 21)

What is available is just the viscera, the reactions to some element that defines certain experiences as danger situations (Schafer, 1981a, p. 28). Because the pattern of responses to danger situations reflects only a rudimentary grasp of what is feared and why, people experience their own reactions to such situations as alien to themselves. Such actions may result from no intentions or motives that one can clearly articulate

The important point is that a pattern of responses emerges in an attempt to cope with perceived threats to oneself. These patterns manifest themselves as other, later-life events are construed in terms of the early, prototypical danger situations. Psychoanalysis, in turn, provides the words—and so allows us to bring to consciousness—by which to characterize and systematically comprehend what we are reacting to when we react in particular ways. How this is thematized in the analysis is not a discovery, but a creation of a new narrative, one with, hopefully, therapeutic efficacy.

So when, throughout his writing, Schafer emphasizes that no description has pride of place, this is because, at least in part, it is only in the present that the analysand can give a manageable shape to the past. “My special point is that, within the analytic method, accounts of the past and the present become increasingly dependent on one another; more exactly, neither account is finally conceivable without the other” (Schafer, 1981a, p. 40). This is why Schafer dismisses debates about “evidence” for interpretations as “meaningless” (1981a, p. 40). The psychoanalytic narrative—the putting into words in a particular causal sequencing—is the conferral of a special and theoretically created meaning, namely, a psychoanalytic meaning. “[T]hrough redescription, the same action has undergone a number of narrative recontextualizations and so has had multiple meanings conferred on it” (1981a, p. 42). Thus, Schafer freely acknowledges, key psychoanalytic concepts such as regression do not represent pure recall of the past. Rather, they stand as “a new mode of constructing experience and, as such, it is a mode of reconstructing the experience of the past in radically new ways” (Schafer, 1981a, p. 47).

Psychoanalytic narration confers meaning by recontextualizing experience, and not by the recovery of some past and determinate memory context with an already (but unconsciously) articulated structure and affect. This is why Schafer insists that psychoanalytic interpretation is not re-

ductive with regard to past experience, but thematic and organizational, “no different in principle from any sophisticated thematic analysis of literary texts and historical data” (1981a, p. 49). Contrary to those who would insist that the narrativist strategy does not dignify the analysand’s actual experiences with the title of “reality,” Schafer insists that what primarily matters is a person’s “second reality,” his or her life’s experience as narrativized by that person.²³ The visceral interpretation given experience is what matters. Analysands live unarticulated storylines. Their own narratives are lost to them, due not to some strange mechanism of repression, but to the fact that the available conceptual resources were (prior to analysis, anyway) inadequate to bring them to discursive awareness.

In an earlier work, I argued that accounts like Schafer’s narrativist view are interestingly and importantly analogous to Thomas Kuhn’s famous discussion of the role of paradigms—exemplars—in the natural sciences (Roth, 1991a). In particular, I maintained that experience, once narrativized, became a personal paradigm or template for interpreting all later experience. This is partially right. However, my earlier account did not give proper emphasis to the way danger situations possess an importantly unformed but psychologically persistent character akin to habits. By assimilating later experiences to the prototype, such habitual interpretations construe some situations as danger situations. By appreciating the role of danger situations in creating what may be termed affectual paradigms, we can appreciate how the narrativist strategy nicely connects experiences early and late to patterns of self-understanding, emotional pain, and therapeutic relief.

Past experiences do not exist somewhere in conceptual space, awaiting rediscovery. When Schafer insists, throughout his extensive *oeuvre*, that thought represents a type of action, his point, I take it, is that we must not fool ourselves about the origins of the meaning that experience has for us. The interpretation is by us, and so represents an action, a doing on our part. The rub is that the action may be largely reflexive, insofar as it is in response to a danger situation, and so not “present” at a conscious, that is to say, articulatable, level.

The cure of stories is possible, then, because the analytic process possesses the potential to rethematize those interpretations given previous experience that held one unwittingly in their thrall. Words free not by magic, but by providing new shape and form through which to construct, analyze, and articulate experience.

Among its many potential accomplishments, psychoanalytic interpretation prepares or assists the analysand to be independently and regularly self-correcting or less self-deceiving. Through interpretation, it reduces the separateness of the prototypic danger situations of childhood in terms of which, unconsciously, the analysand has continued to construct experience. It also familiarizes the analysand with her characteristic, hitherto unconsciously employed repertoire of defensive activities. . . . It does so in order to help her recognize signs that she feels endangered and is already beginning to respond defensively in a way that now she mostly does not want. (Schafer, 1992, pp. 43-4)

Again, there is an extremely close parallel here between Schafer's vision of how stories cure and Kuhn's account of paradigm change, an account Schafer echoes by speaking of the analysand as living in a different world (Schafer, 1978, pp. 24-25).²⁴

In formulating a notion of the core self as the constructor of narratives about the empirical self, we come full circle. The problems about the self and self-deception with which this discussion began permit an appreciation of how Schafer's analytic attitude resolves the sort of problems about the self to which psychoanalytic theory is prone. Agency resides not in the power of a thought—there is no mental physics—but in the narrativizing template applied to experience. "The self is a kind of telling about one's individuality. . . . [T]he self is a regulated mental action, a telling rather than a teller" (Schafer, 1978, p. 86). How experience affects us depends on how, in part, we integrate it into our own ongoing understanding of ourselves and the world.

Psychoanalytic interpretations permit the possibility of change by making visible the generic features both underlying and triggering one's reactions, that is, why certain experiences are perceived as threats. Such interpretations alter one's narrativizing strategy about danger situations by providing an articulated pattern of understanding that better befits the person one has become.

The psychoanalyst continues to define the psychoanalytically familiar conflictual themes and to trace the same sorts of infantile origin of these themes, though perhaps he or she does so more lucidly now owing to a clearer conception of what it is possible to say coherently. The important task of the psychoanalyst is to decide on those psychoanalytic descriptions of problematic actions and situations that are the most illuminating and potentially the most conducive to beneficial personal transformation.

(Schafer, 1978, p. 97)

The unconscious ceases, on this view, to be some mysteriously split off and inaccessible realm. If we identify the unconscious with the tendency to interpret ever more nuanced and complex life experiences as a species of a previously defined danger situation, self-deception is no more mysterious than any other pattern of behavior to which we are habituated, and no less real or controlling.

Self-deception has its basis, in other words, in the fact that there is a continuity of self from our earliest infancy to our present stage. This continuity carries with it the fact that later narrativizing strategies do not so much replace earlier ones but simply overlay them with words. What Schafer calls the "adultomorphism" of experience involves just this unwitting accretion of later narrativizing strategies on infantile ones.

Adultomorphism is involved, for example, when reference is made to infantile feelings and fantasies. . . . But the analysand's infantile modes and contents of experience can only become analytic data in formulations that necessarily recognize and enhance the analysand's "observing ego" or "mature psyche." One may, therefore, say of analytic interpretation that, far from unearthing and resurrecting old and archaic experiences as such, it constitutes and develops new, vivid, verbalizable, and verbalized versions of those experiences. Only then can these new versions be given a secure place in a continuous, coherent, convincing and up-to-date psychoanalytic life history. This is the history that facilitates personal change and further development. (Schafer, 1983, pp. 189-90; see also pp. 222-24)

I have emphasized that the origin of many of the disclaimers we issue is to be found partly in the infantile "bodily ego" or sensorimotor antecedents of thinking in words. What distinguishes this infantile mode is its concretized and animistic rendition of psychological activity. . . . As body-centered beings, we corporealize our mental actions from the first; the learning of ordinary figurative language facilitates and consolidates this apparently unavoidable way of constructing experience.

(Schafer, 1983, pp. 242-43)²⁵

Understanding ourselves is comprehending a vast and complex process by which life experiences are selectively assimilated into some general pattern for making sense of things. These patterns originate in infancy and, however obscure to the discursive beings we become, are never extinguished from our narrative repertoire. But insofar as analysis brings the noncognitive under the sway of the cognitive, it amounts to a type of conceptual/interpretive revolution.

The unconscious is not a lost realm of experience; it comprises, as

Sartre hinted, unconceptualized yet habituated patterns of action. Combined with the assumption that it is the person who gives meaning to his or her actions, this opens the possibility for providing new meaning, new ways of dealing with a world that, at least, transcends near instinctual, habitual modes of reacting. "For what has also changed is the analysand as life-historian, as maker of sense, as definer and designer of possible futures. I have described what amounts to a cognitive revolution on the part of the analysand" (Schafer, 1983, p. 191). The self is and remains a unity. The difference that psychoanalytic intervention may make concerns only the resources available to the self *qua* narrator with regard to organizing and understanding experience.²⁶

An analyst, in helping analysands give voice to what were previously habitual, influential, but unrecognized patterns of action, is not making a discovery of some psychological *terra incognita*, but is giving shape to what previously had none. In this respect, an analyst is more like an astronomer charting constellations in the night sky by which one may guide oneself through what would otherwise be a journey without sign or marker. Just as a constellation is simultaneously fashioned from "real" elements but is also a fabrication on the part of the astronomer, so too is an analyst's narrative real and fabricated. We need not compromise its use, for this sort of case, by calling it a fabrication. Without it, experience has no shape or coherence, and so offers no guide. With it, one has important and stable signposts by which to navigate.²⁷

"Danger situations" define the analysand's world and mark the route which the psychoanalytic narrative must chart to effect a cure—a relief from one's neurotic misery. I have sketched how Schafer remains faithful both to the existential dictum that humans create, rather than find, meaning in their lives, and to the psychoanalytic credo that it is the meanings of which we are not aware, but repetitively relive, that imprison us.

NOTES

I would like to thank Stephanie Ross, Roy Schafer, Marilyn Wechter, and the editors for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

1. This is, at least, Schafer's view as I understand it and one with which I am in deep agreement. As Schafer observes, "The idea of unconscious mental processes is the foundation of psychoanalytic theory." He goes on to add that what is of psychoanalytic moment is the discrepancy that arises between events understood at the conscious level and how these are comprehended at the un-

conscious level. "[T]he point to emphasize is that, typically, the versions of events that are told unconsciously do not conform to those told consciously" (Schafer, 1981a, p. 6).

2. There is "doubling" at least with respect to the process of interpreting and integrating experiences as one's own. The notion of self-deception, that is, implies the integration of experience into at least two different organizing accounts; similarly, there is a doubling as well of intentions, motives, and desires. I argue below that there cannot be a doubling of the transcendental self.

Put another way, Kant and Hume still leave us with an image of a person as a unity with respect to understanding his or her experiences. A notion of self-deception shatters this unity. Freud may be read, some suggest, as changing our self-understanding by forcing the notion of a unitary empirical self to give way to competing and conflicting selves, all of whom "are" the person. For a development of this theme, see Rorty, 1986.

3. For related reflections on these problems and their relevance to psychoanalytic theory, see Krischner, 1991.

4. I leave aside here questions of the nature of multiple personality disorder, and the issue of whether or to what extent individuals suffering from it lack, in some interesting sense, true self-identity.

5. The notion of narrative invoked here is imported by Schafer from debates in the philosophy of history. There, as in the version of psychoanalytic theory championed by Schafer, narrative explanations are contrasted to explanatory structures favored by positivists. The contrast is between explanations that mimic the form of explanations in the natural sciences and those that have a story-like form. For a somewhat minimalist, but quite adequate, definition of narration, see Schafer, 1981a. I have elaborated on issues surrounding narrative as a form of explanation in a number of places. For some references, see Roth, 1988, 1991a, 1991b.

6. The *locus classicus* here is Sartre, 1966, esp. pp. 82–86.

7. Typically, Schafer locates his own view via triangulation with respect to Freud, Kohut, and Melanie Klein or Merton Gill. See Schafer, 1981b or 1985 for characteristic exercises in this way of situating himself. For purposes of understanding the notion of the self, the contrast could be put in terms of alternative narrative lines. If Freud offers us narrative of "the taming of the beast within," Kohut narrates according to "the discovery of the self within," and Klein postulates the "mad person within raging about," Schafer's narrative concentrates on the enhancement of responsibility, from "self-as-victim of unknown psychic forces" to "master in one's own house."

This characterization of Schafer's view is my own. In correspondence, Roy Schafer indicates that, regarding Kohut, he (Schafer) primarily thinks that "his [Kohut's] theory lacks the scope and depth and therapeutic efficacy of some other approaches." With regard to Kleinians, he suggests that his account is more congruent with theirs than my quick summary might suggest.

8. Schafer's account contains a number of interesting and important points of congruence with the work analyzing the parallels between historiography and literary theory expounded over the last twenty-five years by Hayden White. Although Schafer is clearly familiar with White's work and occasionally even acknowledges it (see, e.g., references listed in Schafer, 1981a), he cites White much less often than one might expect. There may be, behind this, some issue of who deserves credit for the development of the importance of literary tropes for historiography. Compare, in this regard, Schafer's 1970 essay, "The Psychoanalytic Vision of Reality" (Schafer, 1976), and White's important introduction to his magisterial work, *Metahistory* (1973).

A very readable, intelligent, and comprehensive introduction to the vagaries of narrative theory can be found in Martin, 1986. Martin is particularly good at locating both Schafer and White in the context of their respective disciplines and relative, as well, to the larger debates regarding the nature of historical explanation, which form the philosophical background for much of what Schafer and White do. Martin nicely presents the issues that make plausible the constructivist and literary approach to history championed by the two. As Martin observes, with respect to accounts of historical and psychoanalytic narrative, "at present we have no standards or even suggestions for determining how the connections between events in fictional narratives might differ from those in history" (1986, p. 73; see, more generally, pp. 71-80).

9. These discussions occur in many of Schafer's work. For a characteristic instance, see Schafer, 1992, pp. 21-26.

10. In *Language and Insight*, (1978), Schafer employs a distinction between "person" and "self" that is similar to Kant's contrast between the pure and empirical selves. See, e.g., p. 87.

11. I have developed and defended this view elsewhere. In particular, see Roth, 1988, 1991a, 1991b.

12. A word of caution is in order here. There are schools of thought that call themselves "existential psychoanalysis," but it would be a mistake to identify Schafer with these thinkers, for reasons Schafer himself cogently provides in several works (see, e.g., Schafer, 1976). As he explains it in that work, Schafer's existentialism is, in part, a reaction to what he correctly perceives as Freud's mechanistic conception of the psyche, a conception that permeates Freud's metapsychology. Against this, Schafer maintains that "identity is phenomenological, existential, and intentionalistic at its core" (1976, p. 114).

13. Schafer offers at least two different formats involved in the thematizing (or, one might say, following Hayden White, emplotting) experience. One mode is formal, the other substantive. What I call the formal mode Schafer discusses as alternative visions of reality. See, e.g., "The Psychoanalytic Vision of Reality" in Schafer, 1976. The substantive mode is discussed in Schafer, 1967, esp. p. 153.

14. For Schafer's explicit recognition of this concept and the challenge it poses to psychoanalytic theory, see, e.g., Schafer, 1981a, p. 17 n. 7.

15. See. For example, Schafer's remarks on self-deception in Schafer, 1976, pp. 234-45.

16. Regarding the centrality of the notion of disclaimed actions to Schafer's general, nonmechanistic reformulation of Freudian theory, see, e.g., Schafer, 1978, pp. 73-77. It is crucial, as well, to the ultimately unitary theory of the self that Schafer seeks to construct. See, e.g., Schafer, 1983, pp. 142-43, 241-49.

17. This criticism of the moral orientation of classical psychoanalysis flows from Schafer's position that this orientation is less psychologically functional than Schafer's preferred alternative. Schafer does not assume that some one moral outlook is objectively correct.

18. See, in particular, Schafer's essay "The Psychoanalytic Vision of Reality" (Schafer, 1976, pp. 22-56).

19. It would be appropriate here to distinguish, following Schafer, between an analyst's primary and secondary reality. The primary reality is the world as one initially experiences and understands it. The analytic situation creates, Schafer maintains, a "second reality" within which this primary interpretation is challenged and a new mode for interpreting and understanding experience is developed. Analysis is a process of learning to reinterpret experience and making this interpretation one's own, i.e., one's primary interpretation. I discuss this at greater length in Roth, 1991a.

20. See, e.g. Schafer, 1983, p. 244. I argue (Roth 1991a) that Schafer's account of the different realities, and what prompts one to change between them, closely and importantly parallel Thomas Kuhn's famous discussion of paradigms, anomalies within paradigms, and the process of paradigm change discussed in his now classic work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970).

21. See, e.g., Schafer, 1992, p. 37. For the central role that Schafer assigns this notion in his own reworking of Freud, see Schafer, 1983, chap. 7, esp. p. 96.

22. This is not to claim that it is by affect alone that one identifies danger situations as being of a particular type or otherwise individuates them.

23. See "The Psychoanalytic Vision of Reality" (Schafer, 1976).

24. For detailed development and discussion of the parallels between Kuhn and Schafer, and the implications for the understanding of psychoanalysis, see Roth, 1991a, esp. pp. 190-96.

25. See also Johnson, 1987.

26. As Schafer rightly insists, this account does away with the stock distinction between explanation and understanding. See Schafer, 1976, pp. 210-11. This is a central theme I develop in Roth, 1991a.

27. The question of what is real and what is a narrative construction in one's life is, like analogous questions in the philosophy of science, a vexed issue. My astronomy analogy is meant to suggest why the distinction between "the real"

and "the constructed" is yet another dualism we can do without. I have attempted to develop a defense of this view in a number of essays. See especially Roth, 1991b.

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