

The Logic of Ambiguity: A Buddhist Perspective on the Experience of Time in PTSD

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ABSTRACT

While recent work on trauma provides insight into the first-person experience of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Aristotelian propositional logic, which underlies Western paradigms of thought, contains implicit ontological assumptions about identity and time which obscure the lived experience of PTSD. Conversely, Indian Buddhist catuskoti logic calls into question dualistic and discursive forms of thought. This paper argues that catuskoti logic, informed by Buddhist ontology, is a more fitting logical framework when seeking to describe and understand the first-person experience of PTSD, as it allows for ambiguity, non-duality, and polysemy.

Keywords:
Post-Traumatic Stress;
Disorder;
PTSD;
Trauma;
Buddhism;
Nagarjuna;
Logic;
Catuskot;
Non-Duality;
Temporality

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Individuals who suffer from PTSD experience temporality in complex ways. For example, someone suffering from PTSD is often simultaneously aware of both the present and the past, or certain of both her safety and possible endangerment. Ultimately, individuals report feeling both present and absent. While symptoms fall along a continuum, with “flashbacks” to the traumatic event occupying one extreme, often individuals diagnosed with PTSD find themselves living in both the present and the past simultaneously. This paper seeks to provide a window into this experience by questioning ontological assumptions about time.

Recently, a relational understanding of selfhood has become a convincing area of research within psychology. Models that contest the self as atomistic and self-sustaining have been praised in both psychology and philosophy. Continental phenomenologists have emphasized the non-dualism of mind and body, and self and world. Such trends reveal a growing interest in challenging reified, essentialist modes of thought. I argue that a similar re-thinking is needed in order to understand and articulate the first-person experience of temporality. Presuppositions about truth and validity can be traced back to fundamental axioms in Aristotelian logic and ontology, which often operate unquestioned. A fundamental re-thinking of ontology is needed in order to grasp the non-dualistic experience of time. Buddhist traditions are valuable resources with which we can rethink presuppositions about time. I argue that Indian Buddhist ontology – as well as its modes of articulation which date back to

the 2nd to 3rd centuries – offers patterns of thought that can counter these essentialist tendencies.

From its inception in the late 19th century in Europe, psychoanalysis has long underscored that the past infiltrates the present and the unconscious is not clearly separable from the conscious mind; this notion of non-dualism is not new. PTSD, in that it contains a blurring of the boundary between past, present, and future, is an extreme example of how the self-experience of time cannot be adequately captured in discursive terms.

Psychologists Judith Herman, Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, and Robert Stolorow, offer valuable descriptions of the way in which trauma transforms one’s experience of time and the perception of one’s own safety. Their accounts speak to the complexity of lived experience of PTSD without reducing it to dichotomous thinking. By putting their analyses of first person experience of PTSD into conversation with Buddhist ontology and logic, I aim to further illuminate how essentialist presuppositions about time and identity obscure a deeper understanding of a first-person experience of PTSD. Beyond highlighting how fundamental Aristotelian assumptions about truth and ontology tend to presuppose a univocity of meaning and operate with either/or thinking, this investigation will reveal that the human being is not just a being-in-the-world, but a historical being without boundary, capable of maintaining a polysemy of perspectives across time. To this end, two key Buddhist concepts, interdependent co-origination and *catu ko i* logic will be used as lenses through which we can more deeply understand

the first-person experience of PTSD as they do not conform to a univocity of meaning. Lastly, Buddhist philosophical notions will be employed to reveal how healing and true autonomy require embracing and integrating the past trauma with one’s experience post-trauma rather than merely dismissing or releasing the past.

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Nāgārjuna, and a Non-Essentialist Concept of Time

In order to conceptually capture the lived experience of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) one must wrestle with its many contradictory and ambiguous elements. A diagnosis of PTSD includes an achronological experience of time wherein the patient loses the continuity of forward progressing time; indeed, the past intrudes on the present, causing the individual to straddle multiple realities. Buddhist ontology seems to provide the polysemous logic necessary to capture frequent symptoms of PTSD. In order to support this claim I will first provide a brief overview of the disorder.

The DSM-V: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

The DSM-V outlines a cluster of symptoms that may follow a traumatic event and indicate PTSD which include intrusion symptoms tied to the event, “persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the traumatic event(s),” negative thoughts and mood changes, and “marked alterations in arousal and reactivity.” Intrusion symptoms include persistent memories, dreams, and/or “flashbacks” of the traumatic event as well as disturbing psychological and physiological responses to “external or in-

ternal cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event(s).” Changes in arousal include “irritable behavior and angry outbursts (with little or no provocation), ... reckless or self-destructive behavior, hypervigilance, exaggerated startle response, problems with concentration, [and] sleep disturbance.”

Most basically, PTSD entails a blurring of the boundary between the past and the present; the past “intrudes” on the present and is relived in the present. However, this blurring is by no means unique to PTSD; human experience by nature lacks clear barriers between the past and present. A basic premise of psychoanalysis is that past events, especially significant or traumatic ones, continue to exert influence in wide-ranging, largely unconscious ways including current perceptions about the world and oneself, expectations for the future, desire, etc. One could reasonably claim that the present is interpenetrated at all times by the past. However, if we maintain certain presuppositions about truth and falsity, it’s difficult to capture the ambiguity of time as we are then committed to drawing sharp distinctions between concepts (e.g., A or not A, true or false, past or present). In this form of thinking, the past would be clearly separable from the present.

Ancient Greek Logical Presuppositions

Aristotle’s influence can hardly be overstated. His prolific corpus inspired intense study from late antiquity to the Renaissance; even today scholars continue to draw from his philosophical work. His belief that philosophy was primarily concerned with substance, being, and logic shaped centuries of philosophical reflection. Aristotle was interested in codifying human reasoning in order to secure that the claims we make about the world, across disciplines, are sound. Central to this objective was his investigation of “fundamental principles of demonstration” in *The Metaphysics*.

In Book Gamma 3, Aristotle theorizes that “the most secure of all principles” is

the law of non-contradiction, – sometimes referred to as the law of the excluded middle – i.e.: “It is impossible for the same thing at the same time both to be-in and not to be-in the same thing in the same respect.”¹ This law governs rationality. Indeed, Aristotle calls this principle “the ultimate root of all demonstration – it is its very nature to be the principle of all other axioms.”² More specifically, Aristotelian propositional logic asserts that contradictions are fallacies: something is either A or not A, true or false. A cannot be both itself and not A at the same time.

In order to provide a persuasive example of the principle, Aristotle alludes to a human being’s incapacity to possess opposite beliefs at the same time about the same object. As we will see, this latter point is indeed possible in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, as articulated by the second century Indian monk Nāgārjuna. Aristotle argues that the principle of non-contradiction allows for the possibility of language; if it were denied, language and even thought would be impossible. Vasilis Politis emphasizes that Aristotle’s claims about logic are inseparable from his overall project in the *Metaphysics*. The principle does not only govern how things appear to the subject, it is also “true of the things themselves and of things without qualification.”³ Language lines up with reality, for Aristotle, and there are only two possibilities, i.e., “is” or “is not,” or “true” or “false.”

In order to understand Buddhist non-dualism, it is useful to contrast it with the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction as the perspectives, with regard to truth claims, are fundamentally opposed. Furthermore, for the purposes of this paper, it’s crucial to bring to light essentialist assumptions about time that may be operating unquestioned. Given the prevalence of Aristotelian propositional logic in European and American scholastic traditions, it is unsurprising that its basic premises about truth and identity can be witnessed in psychological models and diagnoses. Diagnostic

guides, like the DSM-V, are built upon parsing symptoms and demarcating disorders. Generally speaking, patients must have a certain cluster of symptoms for a specified duration of time in order to receive a particular diagnosis. The law of non-contradiction is thus present in specifying whether or not the diagnosis in question applies to the individual.

However, despite this example of either-or thinking with regard to diagnoses, the overall discipline of psychology certainly acknowledges the reality of non-dualism in lived experience. As stated earlier, at the most basic level, psychological discourse takes non-dualism seriously in that it upholds the non-duality of time in which the past encroaches upon the psyche’s present. Furthermore, analysis reveals that lived experience often contains simultaneous contradictory beliefs and desires. So, by referring to Aristotle’s law of non-contradiction, I am not asserting that psychological discourse is governed by Aristotelian propositional logic. Instead, I merely hope to draw the reader’s attention to problematic presuppositions present in an Aristotelian world view, and by extension, demonstrate the relevance of a non-Aristotelian ontology to the depiction of PTSD. More broadly, I aim to illuminate the first-person experience of time in PTSD by juxtaposing two very different perspectives of truth and ontology. We will find that the Indian Buddhist author, Nāgārjuna problematizes dualistic thinking and provides the philosophical resources with which we can sufficiently capture the fragmented perception of time operative in PTSD.

Buddhist Ontology and Epistemology: Interdependent Co-origination and the Two-fold Truth of Form and Emptiness

One of the foundational doctrines in Buddhism is the idea of no-self (anatman); i.e., the theory that there is no enduring core self. Instead, existence is shot through with impermanence; change is the only constant. This is common knowledge for anyone who is minimally acquainted with Buddhist ideas. Less well

1. Ibid, 88 1005b.

2. Ibid.

3. Vasilis Politis, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Aristotle and the Metaphysics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004) 128.

known is the teaching of interdependent co-origination (Skt. *pratītyasamutpāda*), which provides the ontological background to the concept of no-self. It states that everything that exists is the result of causes and conditions; sometimes translated as “dependent arising,” it signifies that identity is dependent; that is, beings are created and sustained by beings outside of themselves. Fundamentally, there is only relation; there is no separate existence. All beings are conglomerations of relation with nothing essential or enduring at their core. The well-known Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh explains this notion elegantly:

Just as a piece of paper is the fruit, the combination of many elements that can be called non-paper elements, the individual is made of non-individual elements. If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud there will be no water; without water, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, you cannot make paper... So we say, ‘A sheet of paper is made of non-paper elements.’ A cloud is a non-paper element... Sunshine is a non-paper element... if all these elements are taken out, it is truly empty, empty of an independent self.⁴

When applied to human identity, interdependent co-origination signifies that there is no clear separation between the environment and the person; individuals lack core-like essences. Furthermore, if we consider this notion with respect to the human experience of time, we see that each moment is inextricably tied to the past and the future. The implication of this ontology is the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness, or *sunyata*: there is no singular present. While the notion of emptiness is often misunderstood nihilistically to mean nothingness, in actuality, emptiness signifies the lack of intrinsic essence. In other words, while we may draw arbitrary divisions between moments, ultimately such divisions are illusory. Of course, when it comes to PTSD, it may be psychologically beneficial to demarcate

past and present; however, to truly step into the lifeworld of the person suffering from PTSD, we must endeavor to see the experience as it unfolds to the individual.

The second Buddhist doctrine that is relevant for our purposes is the twofold truth of form and emptiness. There are two levels of knowing in Buddhist thought: the first corresponds to our everyday way of knowing the world where we make distinctions between ourselves and others, the sidewalk and the road, Buddhist teaching, and non-Buddhist teaching. Such a lens is conceptual; it relies upon demarcating beings. The *Prajñāpāramitā Sutra* refers to this first way of knowing as “form.”

While the reader now “knows” what is meant by interdependent co-origination, this is mere conceptual knowledge, or form. The Buddhist practice path, conversely, is a non-conceptual way of knowing referred to as seeing the world through the lens of “emptiness.” It entails realizing Buddhist teachings, like interdependent co-origination. This distinction between “form” and “emptiness” is found in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sutra*, and merely re-articulated by Nāgārjuna, as we will see in the next section. While our ordinary way of perceiving experience conceptually represents a form of conventional truth, Buddhist practice can lead to ultimate truth wherein reality is perceived through the lens of emptiness, i.e., without the concept of essence or separately existent beings.

The doctrine of the two-fold truth frees one to make statements at the conventional level that are true while they are simultaneously false at the ultimate level. Conventional knowledge is useful in that distinctions are necessary for communication. However, attachment to conventional knowledge, according to Buddhist thought, can obscure the ultimate truth, which is that everything lacks intrinsic essence, including human identity and time. If one isn’t careful, it’s easy to idealize the “ultimate” truth; after all, it is in some senses the goal of

Buddhist practice. However, a more apt characterization of Buddhist practice is coming to realize that any type of attachment – even the attachment to the ultimate truth of interdependent co-origination – must be renounced. With respect to time, conventionally we demarcate the past from the present. However, with respect to ultimate truth, they remain inseparable.

Knowledge of these two fundamental Buddhist doctrines: interdependent co-origination and the twofold truth of form and emptiness, sets the stage for grasping a non-dualistic middle path which embraces contradiction. The first is an ontological claim about identity while the second concerns both ontology and epistemology, or the possibility of knowledge. If one sets aside Aristotelian ontological assumptions about identity and time, a new ontology and logic must take its place. In the next section, I argue that Nāgārjuna’s ontology, expressed through Buddhist *catuskoti* logic, is a fitting logical framework when seeking to describe and understand the complexity of first person experience of PTSD in that it allows for polysemy, ambiguity, and non-duality.

Nāgārjuna and the Logic of Ambiguity

Nāgārjuna (c. 150 CE) was an Indian Buddhist master credited with founding the early Madhyamaka school of Mahayana Buddhism. While many fantastical hagiographies exist, little is known of his life apart from legend. His most influential work is the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, *The Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way*.⁵ This work was meant to be a commentary on the *Prajñāpāramitā Sutra*, a principal Mahayana Buddhist scripture referred to above.⁶ A commentarial tradition arose and today a vast amount of secondary literature exists. Contemporary Buddhist scholars are drawn to Nāgārjuna’s work due to his use of a form of logic, called the *catuskoṭi*, as well as his radical skeptical claims about the possibility of true statements about reality.

4. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1987), 51-52.

5. Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2009) 63-64.

6. Geshe Tashi Tsering, *Emptiness: The Foundation of Buddhist Thought*, 5th volume (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, Inc, 2009) 19.

Consistent with canonical Buddhist teachings, which aim to remove delusory views which cause suffering, Nāgārjuna's chief interest was in dispelling mistaken views, principally the notion of essence (Skt. *svabhāva*). While he mentions his desire to guide Buddhist followers towards nirvana through his teaching, he is simultaneously critiquing the views of rival Buddhist schools and arguing for the superiority of his understanding of Buddhist scriptures. More specifically, Nāgārjuna took issue with non-Mahayana schools of his day, which held that reality consisted of dharmas, "infinitesimally small particles that are the real building blocks of the phenomenal world."⁷ Nāgārjuna denied the existence of dharmas and indeed any form of independent, substantial existence (*svabhāva*).

While often read as a nihilistic skeptic, I, and a number of other scholars, hold that Nāgārjuna actually intends to both critique certain philosophical doctrines and assert his own.⁸ He aims to achieve a "middle path" between the extreme views of annihilationism, the notion that nothing exists, and eternalism, the idea that only permanent essences exist. He systematically employs *catuskoti* logic in order to reject all possible assertions that arise from either of these two worldviews. This form of logic translates to "4 positions or corners:" namely: A exists, A does not exist, A both exists and does not exist, and A neither exists nor does not exist.⁹ This logic is employed by Nāgārjuna in order to exhaust all logical possibilities and ultimately demonstrate that all arguments that purport to represent "truth" about reality fail when they are subject to analysis. His project is tied to efforts to dispel the notion of essence because assertions about reality, when propositional, have a fixed and restrictive quality.

As noted above, the Buddhist doctrine of interdependent co-origination states that identity is never independent and separable from the surrounding environment. Propositional assertions are ill-equipped to represent this worldview.

What does it mean to adhere to a middle path between the notion that nothing exists and everything exists eternally? While Aristotelian propositional logic insists on deciding between either truth or falsity, Nāgārjuna seems to endorse hovering somewhere between seemingly dichotomous alternatives. As we saw above, language lines up with reality, for Aristotle, and there are only two possibilities, i.e., "is" or "is not," or "true" or "false." According to Jay Garfield, Nāgārjuna doesn't contest that the "... only truth values are true and false," however "... these truth values are independent of each other."¹⁰ This allows him to state that a claim can be true, false, both or neither. Such a view sees the non-duality of existence as not only a permissible view but in fact the clearest picture of reality as it is in itself. For example, in the *Mūlamadhyamakārikā* Nāgārjuna states:

- 8. Everything is real and is not real
- Both real and not real
- Neither real nor not real.
- This is Lord Buddha's teaching.¹¹

According to Garfield, Nāgārjuna employs the *catuskoti* both positively and negatively throughout the *Mūlamadhyamakārikā*. In the positive form, claims can be true, false, both and neither.¹² However, while one view would be that Nāgārjuna explicitly rejects the law of non-contradiction; in fact, his claims are more subtle. Again, he advances a middle view. In the negative formulation of the logic, "all four possibilities are denied," he

rejects language's ability to make true statements about reality.¹³ The *catuskoti* should not be thought of as a simple assertion about the truth of reality. Instead, it should be regarded as a corrective tool put to use in order to eliminate dualistic thinking and faith in language's ability to capture absolute reality. When we enter into the Buddhist worldview, we come to see how the former and the latter are tied. Nāgārjuna's work demonstrates the limits of language when it is connected to the notion of essence; however, he also pushes it to communicate insight into its own limits.

How is this all connected to his notion of the "middle path"? According to Peter Hershock "Realizing the non-duality of all things is not an erasure of differences, a final collapse of all distinctions into an all-frozen sameness; it is a restoration of the logically excluded middle between 'sameness' and 'difference' – the irreducibly dynamic totality of mutual contribution."¹⁴ Insisting that the only true picture of reality is in line with Aristotelian propositional logic – either A or not A – is to insist on "difference." Conversely, the assertion that everything is one, or the "same," if we shed the concept of intrinsic essence, is also mistaken. Such forms of thinking fail to grasp that the lack of essence doesn't preclude all individuality.

Returning to the doctrine of the two-fold truth of form and emptiness provides a new way to interpret how Nāgārjuna is using the positive *catuskoti* in that we can make statements at the conventional level that are true while they are simultaneously false at the ultimate level. Conventional knowledge is useful in that distinctions are necessary for communication. However, attachment to conventional knowledge can obscure the fact

7. James Blumenthal, "Indian Mahayana Buddhism" in *Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*, edited by Steven M. Emmanuel, (John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2013) 124.

8. See Garfield, 2015, 2002; Westerhoff, 2009; Burton, 1999.

9. Jay Garfield, *Empty Words: Buddhist Philosophy and Cross-Cultural Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 99.

10. Jay Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) 244.

11. Jay Garfield, translator. *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakārikā* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) Chapter XVIII.

12. *Ibid.*, 244.

13. *Ibid.*, 245.

14. Peter Hershock, "Diversity Matters: Buddhist Reflections on the Meaning of Difference" in *Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*, edited by Steven M. Emmanuel (John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2013) 746.

that everything lacks intrinsic essence, including human identity and time.

Lastly, Nāgārjuna subjected his own assertions to the notion of emptiness; he claimed that his words and the words of the Buddha are empty in that they too could not express ultimate truth. In other words, Nāgārjuna's skepticism about the possibility of capturing reality in conceptual statements holds true even for his own Buddhist views. While Buddhist teaching is aimed at dispelling the notion of essence, the absence of essence itself, emptiness, can easily be mistakenly reified. Reifying emptiness means to interpret it as some "thing" that needs to be experienced that is completely separable from ordinary experience. Nāgārjuna closes Chapter XXV on "Nirvana" in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* by stating:

24. The pacification of all
objectification
And the pacification of illusion:
No Dharma was taught by the
Buddha
At any time, in any place, to any
person.¹⁵

The "Dharma," or teaching, does not reflect any thing-like, essential truth; it is only a method used to dispel "ontological fabrication," to employ a term by Garfield.¹⁶ If grasping to permanence is the tendency Buddhists aim to eliminate, then it does not make sense to substitute this tendency with a permanent reified teaching. The same notion is expressed in Nāgārjuna's dramatic claim in verse 19 "There is not the slightest difference between cyclic existence and nirvana."¹⁷ "Cyclic existence" symbolizes samsara, which stands for all deluded existence. Nāgārjuna asserts such a contradictory argument in order to

show that nirvana is not a separate independently existing truth. Nirvana is merely the absence of deluded thinking. Similarly, with respect to the two-fold truth of form and emptiness, emptiness, or ultimate truth, is just one side of the same coin as form, or conventional truth. Garfield states "Emptiness is not the annihilation of convention but the ability to return to convention, seeing it merely as conventional."¹⁸ Nāgārjuna should not be read as a nihilistic skeptic then in that he does not recommend discarding conventional truth, but rather points to its limits by instructing the reader to dispel his or her attachment to the notion of essence.

While Nāgārjuna's way of expressing his findings is quite radical, his theories do not actually depart from the Buddha's teaching. Mahayana scriptures used the term *upaya* to capture the provisional nature of Buddha's teachings. *Upaya* means "skillful" or "expedient means." While the term itself rarely occurs in the Buddha's own body of scriptures, the Pāli Canon, Michael Pye points to thematic continuities between the teaching of the historical Buddha and later Mahayana scriptures with respect to the teaching method of *upaya*.¹⁹ Instead of delivering the same teaching to all his disciples, the Buddha adjusted teachings based on the needs of his disciples.²⁰ In the Mahayana Sutras, the Buddha is even seen referring to nirvana itself as empty, in that Dharma, or teachings, can only point to an ultimate reality beyond words and concepts.²¹ The Mahayana branch of Buddhism, influenced by Nāgārjuna, emphasizes that all Buddhist teachings cannot reflect reality; they are only practical tools that hopefully inspire non-conceptual knowledge.

Recalling that the goal of Buddhist practice is non-attachment – even to

the ultimate truth – it's important to emphasize that conventional truth need not be transcended. Instead, the goal is to loosen one's attachment to conventional truth. The "return to convention," however, is still separate from the philosophical appearance vs. reality distinction in that emptiness is not "reality" in the sense of something substantial. This distinction, so entrenched in much of the history of Western philosophy simply does not hold for either the Mahayana Buddhist notion of nirvana and samsara nor the levels of form and emptiness

In the remainder of this paper, I argue that Buddhist insights into non-duality provide valuable tools when seeking to understand and conceptualize the first-person experience of PTSD. More specifically, interdependent co-origination, *catuskoti* logic, and the twofold truth of form and emptiness will be drawn on to illuminate the perception of time in PTSD. Importantly, if one only views Buddhism as a spiritual practice, this project will be questioned. While Buddhist philosophical insights are tied to bodily practices, Buddhism has rich ontological perspectives that one can benefit from outside of its role as a spiritual practice. As noted above, Nāgārjuna's critique of the appearance vs. reality paradigm is fruitful for scholars of Western philosophy and psychology. Significantly, while Western philosophical systems are replete with the appearance vs. reality distinction, according to Garfield, Nāgārjuna is not making such an assertion.²² While there are two ways of perceiving reality, articulated by the two-fold truth of form and emptiness, there is only one reality. Much of the history of western philosophy has been committed to uncovering the "real" underneath the way that things merely appear. Garfield writes of Nāgārjuna's refusal of the appearance

15. Garfield (1995), Chapter XXV.

16. Ibid, 334.

17. Ibid, Chapter XXV

18. Garfield (2015), 261.

19. Michael Pye, *Skillful Means: A Concept in Mahayana Buddhism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003) 119.

20. Ibid, 123; 129.

21. *The Essential Lotus: Selections from the Lotus Sutra*, translated by Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) 12.

22. Garfield (2002), 102.

vs. reality distinction:

... it is hard to find a parallel in the West prior to the work of Heidegger. But even Heidegger does not follow Nāgārjuna all the way to the dramatic insistence on the identity of the two realities and the recovery of the authority of the conventional. This extirpation of the myth of the deep may be Nāgārjuna's greatest contribution to Western philosophy.²³

For the purposes of this paper, Nāgārjuna's questioning of essentialist thinking will be a main focus. While Aristotelian propositional logic stipulates that there are only two possibilities (A or not A, true or false, past or present), Nāgārjuna's work offers up the radical perspective that there is no A because all beings – and propositions about beings – are ultimately empty of intrinsic essence.

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Nāgārjuna, and a Non-Essentialist Concept of Time

In this section, I will demonstrate how Nāgārjuna's philosophy of non-dualism offers a way of thinking through the first-person experience of PTSD. Remaining committed to Aristotelian presuppositions about essence and non-contradiction curtails the ability to conceptualize the interpenetration of past and present at work in reports of PTSD. Most basically, PTSD entails a blurring of the boundary between the past and the present; the past "intrudes" on the present and is relived in the present. However, this blurring is by no means unique to PTSD; human experience by nature lacks clear boundaries between the past and present. One could reasonably claim that the present is interpenetrated at all times by the past. However, if we hold to the law of the excluded middle, it's difficult to capture the multidimensionality of time as we are then committed to drawing sharp distinctions between concepts (e.g., A or not A, true or false, past or present). In this form of thinking, the past would be clearly separable from the

present. As Nāgārjuna points out in his analysis of causation, in order to give an account of how one thing affects another the notion of essence must be discarded:

8. If existence were through essence,
Then there would be no
nonexistence
A change in essence
Could never be tenable.
9. If there is no essence,
What could become other?
If there is essence,
What could become other?²⁴

As noted above, he defines essence as that which is permanent, eternal, and independent. The first two lines follow from the notion that an essence is by definition eternal; however, if we hold this view then we would be committed to the idea that nothing could pass out of existence. This is an untenable position. He goes on to reason that if something is eternal and independent, then by nature it cannot undergo change, i.e., be affected by something else or come to be otherwise. In the second verse, he speculates that if we discard the idea of essence, which governs much thinking on identity, then it becomes difficult to express what changes. These lines throw into question language's ability to speak about an individual being undergoing change or even the continuity of time from moment to moment. In the last two lines, Nāgārjuna returns to his argument that despite worries about our ability to refer to entities without the concept of essence, returning to the concept of essence still doesn't allow us to account for change.

If we follow Nāgārjuna's reasoning, then we must think of each moment in non-essentialist terms. If the "past" is conceived of as independent and easily separable from the present then it falls within essentialist thinking. As the positive form of *catuskoti* logic allows for a

lack of resolution between opposites, it seems to more adequately capture the human experience of time. With this Buddhist form of logic, the past can be conceptualized as both past and not past at the same time.

The past, present, and future thus share an ambiguous relationship which is only intensified by individuals who suffer from PTSD. With regard to intrusion symptoms, in their most extreme manifestation, the individual may lose all awareness of the present. One of the hallmark traits of PTSD is the individual's "reliving" of the traumatic event:

The individual may experience dissociative states that last from a few seconds to several hours or even days, during which components of the event are relived and the individual behaves as if the event were occurring at that moment... Such events occur on a continuum from brief visual or other sensory intrusions about part of the traumatic event without loss of reality orientation, to complete loss of awareness of present surroundings.²⁵

With respect to the two logics discussed, while a complete dissociative episode may be captured sufficiently by Aristotelian propositional logic (one is either present and "aware of present surroundings" or not), when the episodes appear on "...a continuum...without loss of reality orientation" they cannot. Continuums simply can't be reflected by propositional either/or thinking. Furthermore, the fact that many individuals suffering from PTSD aren't completely debilitated by their symptoms demonstrates that they are able to maintain two kinds of awareness simultaneously: awareness of the present moment and awareness of the traumatic event. Indeed, psychiatrist Judith Herman suggests that present and past perceptions can occur simultaneously in individuals who have been subject to repeated trauma.²⁶ Even this formulation of two separate states is misleading, though, in that there is no

23. Ibid.

24. Garfield (1995), Chapter XV.

25. *DSM-V*, 275.

26. Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (Basic Books, 1992) 90.

clear division between these two forms of awareness. Instead, the present is experienced together with the past or we could say that the present is filtered through the past.

Dissociation, Contradiction, and the “Illusion of Invulnerability”

“Doublethink”

Individuals who meet the diagnostic criteria of PTSD may also express dissociative symptoms, either in the form of depersonalization or derealization.²⁷ Catuskoti logic is useful in conceptualizing such experiences according to their proper polysemous nature rather than attempting to articulate them with either/or propositional statements. Psychologist Judith Herman uses the term “constriction” to describe dissociative tendencies: “Sometimes situations of inescapable danger may evoke...a state of detached calm...Events continue to register in awareness, but it is as though these events have been disconnected from their ordinary meanings...The person may feel as though the event is not happening to her, as though she is observing from outside her body...”²⁸ While such states can exist during the traumatic event itself, they often continue to live on after the event has passed with regard to how the traumatized person remembers the event. In such cases, we see symptoms described as occurring along a continuum, rather than dualistically, i.e., in terms of reliving the trauma completely or being aware only of the present reality. Herman suggests that the individual maintains two kinds of awareness simultaneously: one of the event and one in which she is removed from the event. Interestingly, individuals at times report that they perceive the event outside of their bodies from a vantage point beside

or above their bodies.²⁹ In this case, the event seems to be stripped of a subject experiencing the event.

With regard to chronically traumatized people, Herman suggests that they develop the ability to alter their state of consciousness through dissociation, but also through “voluntary thought suppression, minimization, and... denial.”³⁰ She specifies that:

Ordinary psychological language does not have a name for this complex array of mental maneuvers, at once conscious and unconscious...Perhaps the best name for it is doublethink, in Orwell’s definition: ‘Doublethink means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them.’³¹

For example, survivors may actively deny focusing attention on their past traumas on one hand, while simultaneously experiencing it as their present reality. Herman notes that the past trauma reality is often experienced in sharper detail than the present, which is instead viewed as lackluster and diminished. Such an experience affirms both realities and is thus similar to the earlier example of symptoms experienced along a spectrum, in that the individual doesn’t lose awareness of the present when recalling the past trauma. However, the past reality is often more absorbing and insistent than the present one.³²

“Doublethink” also manifests itself in the way in which the individuals who have suffered from trauma attempt to communicate to others about the trauma. Herman writes that individuals are torn between their desires to both speak of the trauma and to leave it hidden: “The psychological distress symptoms of

traumatized people simultaneously call attention to the existence of an unspeakable secret and deflect attention away from it.”³³ This phenomenon is further evidence that posttraumatic experience is shot through with contradictory desires and emotions. Herman uses the term “dialectic of trauma,” which captures alternating contradictory states of dissociative “constriction” and “intrusion,” in order to capture the way in which symptoms of PTSD manifest themselves in terms of these seemingly un-resolvable contradictions. She highlights the jarring incongruity between defensive numbing and intrusive affect-laden memories:

This dialectic of opposing psychological states is perhaps the most characteristic feature of the post-traumatic syndromes. Since neither the intrusive nor the numbing symptoms allow for integration of the traumatic event, the alternation between these two might be understood as an attempt to find a satisfactory balance between the two...The instability produced by these periodic alternations further exacerbates the traumatized person’s sense of unpredictability and helplessness.³⁴

This dialectic itself, according to Herman, can lead to the traumatized person adopting “doublethink” as a form of coping.³⁵

Essentialist ontology, expressed through propositional logic, simply doesn’t possess the tools to express this experience as PTSD represents a case of simultaneously existent contradictory perceptions of reality undergone by one individual. The simultaneous holding of two perspectives is similar to the two-fold truth of form and emptiness, wherein the conventional (conceptual) and ultimate (non-conceptual) frames are two true

27. *DSM-V*, 272.

28. *Ibid.*, 42–43.

29. *Ibid.*, 43.

30. *Ibid.*, 87.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*, 90.

33. *Ibid.*, 1.

34. *Ibid.*, 47.

35. *Ibid.*, 1; 87.

ways to view the same reality, both of which can be held concurrently. While traumatic remembering could be considered “delusional,” it represents a truth to the patient. However, with regard to the two-fold truth of form and emptiness, a word of caution is merited: ultimate truth and conventional truth are not equivalent with non-traumatized and traumatic experience, respectively. I suggest that Nāgārjuna’s ontology can illuminate the study of PTSD in Western psychology; such an ontology is consistent with the phenomenon of simultaneous contradictory perceptions held by an individual.

Shattered World Assumptions

Herman’s discussion of “Doublethink” falls in line with Professor of Psychology Ronnie Janoff-Bulman’s theory of shattered world assumptions.³⁶ Janoff-Bulman theorizes that we have core beliefs, one of which is that the world and other people are basically benevolent and safe. While we are rationally aware of the harm that befalls many people in the world, we are able to nevertheless maintain an “illusion of invulnerability” with regard to our own person.³⁷ Trauma can shatter this illusion and lead to the belief that the world and other people are fundamentally dangerous. Unsurprisingly, studies have revealed that negative world assumptions are connected to increased PTSD symptoms.³⁸ Janoff-Bulman writes:

In the case of traumatic negative events, individuals confront very salient, critical ‘anomalous data,’ for the victimization cannot be readily accounted for by the person’s preexisting assumptions...Following traumatic life events, victims’ basic

assumptions do not seem viable in light of the data from victimization, yet stability and coherence are threatened by change.³⁹

Returning to the notion of “doublethink,” individuals who have not experienced trauma seem to be able to hold the contradictory views that a) harm befalls people across the world every day and b) It is unlikely that harm will befall me as I am invulnerable. The second view is psychologically more compelling than the first. Such a perspective does not provoke cognitive dissonance for the average person. However, in the aftermath of a traumatic event, the first viewpoint overshadows the second and brings it into question. Janoff-Bulman argues that world assumptions are significantly altered after severe traumatic events. For example, in a study of 338 college students, Janoff-Bulman found that students who had experienced a severe traumatic event held more negative basic world assumptions than the non-victims.⁴⁰

In her analysis of the aftermath of trauma, Janoff-Bulman suggests that the symptoms of self-blame, denial, and intrusive recurrent thoughts, which often occur, are psychologically beneficial in that they allow the survivor to gradually integrate the event into their existing world assumptions schema without the collapse of the total schema.⁴¹ Herman’s theory of “doublethink” could very well imply that trauma survivors may partially retain the idea that the world is safe while simultaneously believing that danger is constant. For example, Herman recounts a concentration camp survivor’s reflections 20 years after being released:

Watching Israeli soldiers passing outside her window, the woman reported that she knew the soldiers were leaving to fight at the frontier. Simultaneously, however, she ‘knew’ that they were being driven to their deaths by a Nazi commander.⁴²

Here, the woman is able to maintain both perspectives. While this example does not explicitly reference the woman’s perception of her own safety, we can see that she is not completely overtaken with the notion that danger is everywhere; rather, she is able to understand the reality of the event while simultaneously interpreting the event through the lens of her traumatic past.

Like many psychological realities, individuals experience a continuum of such feelings. While some survivors of trauma may completely lose the illusion of invulnerability, I think it is likely that in some corner of the mind many survivors retain a belief in it. Core assumptions about the benevolence of the world and the worth of the self are constructed over time, but many of them are sedimented in early life.⁴³ While traumatic events challenge the believability of these basic assumptions, usually for a period of time post-trauma, it is unlikely that they will be challenged for the remainder of one’s life. Indeed, Janoff-Bulman notes that many survivors do go on to gradually integrate their prior and post-victimization world assumptions.⁴⁴

The law of non-contradiction, as applied to past and present seems to preclude the possibility of integration. Integration implies a transcending of absolutist either/or thinking. While the focus of this paper is on describing the lived experience of PTSD and the ontological insights that it reveals, ther-

36. Herman, in fact, refers to Janoff-Bulman’s “basic assumptions” theory in *Trauma and Recovery* when she discusses the rupture of a traumatized person’s basic perception of the world as safe in the aftermath of trauma, 51 n. 2.

37. Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma* (New York: The Free Press, 1992) 18-19.

38. See Lilly, Howell, & Graham-Bermann, 2015, 98. This particular study focuses on survivors of intimate partner violence.

39. Janoff-Bulman (1992), 121.

40. Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, “Assumptive Worlds and the Stress of Traumatic Events: Applications of the Schema Construct” *Social Cognition*. 7.2 (1989): 131.

41. Ibid, 121-122.

42. Herman, 90.

43. Janoff-Bulman (1992), 17.

44. Ibid, 171.

apeutic practices that aim to treat PTSD should be considered in brief. As we will see, psychoanalyst Robert Stolorow also argues for the integration of the traumatic past with the present reality rather than completely removing the traumatic perception.

Stolorow presents an analysis of trauma's effects related to Janoff-Bulman's discussion of shattered world assumptions. For Stolorow, the root of traumatic experience is characterized as a loss of "the absolutisms of everyday life":

When a person says to a friend, 'I'll see you later,' or a parent says to a child at bedtime, 'I'll see you in the morning,' these are statements, like delusions, whose validity is not open for discussion. Such absolutisms are the basis for a kind of naive realism and optimism that allow one to function in the world, experienced as stable and predictable. It is in the essence of emotional trauma that it shatters these absolutisms, a catastrophic loss of innocence that permanently alters one's sense of Being-in-the-world. Massive deconstruction of the absolutism of everyday life exposes the inescapable contingency of existence on a universe that is random and unpredictable and in which no safety or continuity of being can be assured.⁴⁵

The result of trauma is a "catastrophic loss of innocence" which engulfs the subject and evokes feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness.⁴⁶ However, Stolorow suggests that traumatic experience can also provide us with the opportunity for authenticity by revealing our true human finitude in a way that can be productive and life-enriching.

Repetition, Finitude, and Integration of Contradictions

I will turn now to an extended examination of Stolorow's discussion of trauma and temporality. His analysis of lived time is similar to the point that I have emphasized above in that the past continually interpenetrates the present and future. Stolorow first discusses lived time by alluding to Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl's views of time as a continuity rather than a summary of discrete moments. More specifically, the present does not stand alone; it is instead, inextricable from the past and the future.⁴⁷ However, this continuity can be ruptured; indeed, Stolorow argues that "trauma destroys time." Trauma, in fact, leads to a break in both the felt continuity of time and the perceived unity of the self.⁴⁸ It leads to a profound alteration of one's everyday experience. Drawing on Heidegger's notion of healthy *Dasein* as a being-at-home-in-the-world, the traumatic experience is characterized by loss, strangeness, and a sense of the uncanny.⁴⁹ Stolorow likens such an experience to Heidegger's discussion of anxiety, which dislodges the individual from his or her immersion in the everyday.

The rupture in temporality is part and parcel of dissociation, according to Stolorow. He describes dissociation as "...a kind of 'tunnel vision'...keeping apart...incommensurable emotional worlds."⁵⁰ The traumatized person – often unsuccessfully – attempts to keep the traumatized emotional world at bay. This defensive dissociation, however, prohibits the integration of the traumatic events and memories into the self's identity. Once again, Stolorow, via Heidegger, emphasizes that the unity of the self depends upon the felt continuity of time. However, the re-experiencing of trauma through memory jolts one out of the continuous flow of time. Stolorow recounts how one of his patients was

triggered by retelling her experience of traumatic events: "...with the retelling of each traumatic episode, a piece of herself broke off and relocated to the time and place of the original trauma...[afterwards] she was completely dispersed along the time dimension of her crushing life history" (Ibid). As evident in Herman's analysis above, intrusive traumatic memories are often unpredictable and serve to de-stabilize identity. Stolorow provides a thorough account of how identity is inextricable from one's being-in-time; thus, the de-stabilization occurs with regard to both identity and the individual's perception of time.⁵¹

Traumatic temporality is further characterized by Stolorow as a sense of being trapped in a present that endlessly repeats the past. Stolorow reads Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of "the eternal return of the same" as a useful description which can be applied to the experience of traumatic time.

In the region of trauma, all duration or stretching along collapses; past becomes present, and future loses all meaning other than endless repetition...Because trauma so profoundly modifies the universal or shared structure of temporality, the traumatized person quite literally lives in another kind of reality, an experiential world felt to be incommensurable with those of others.⁵²

Here Stolorow pictures trauma in terms of sameness, repetition, and a frozen present. With regard to the anecdote about his patient above, the triggered reactions could be seen as a repetition wherein the present and future is continually overtaken by the past. The loss of the continuity of time leads to a fragmented identity as well as a lost capacity for relation.

45. Robert Stolorow, *Trauma and Human Existence: Autobiographical, Psychoanalytic, and Philosophical Reflections* (New York: The Analytic Press: Taylor & Francis Group, 2007) 16.

46. Robert Stolorow, *World, Affectivity, Trauma: Heidegger and Post-Cartesian Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011) 49.

47. Stolorow (2007), 19.

48. Stolorow (2011), 54.

49. Ibid, 43.

50. Ibid, 54.

51. Ibid, 55.

52. Ibid, 55-56.

While I have discussed above how Buddhist ontology, as reflected in *catuskoti* logic, effectively captures the ambiguity of post-traumatic experience pictured by Herman and Janoff-Bulman, I think it is also useful in Stolorow's analysis of traumatic experience as well as his discussion of recovery. The repetition of the same is surely a denial of contradiction; it is a narrowing of awareness to the present, or the past made continuously present, through evasion. However, as Janoff-Bulman suggests above, such evasion can be psychologically beneficial until integration is possible. In Stolorow's characterization of PTSD, the individual may be more aptly described as being stuck in a rigid either-or way of seeing reminiscent of Aristotelian propositional logic in that only one reality is acknowledged. That is, Stolorow's characterization of dissociation, is a kind of "tunnel vision" brought about by a trigger, or "portkey," in Stolorow's terminology, wherein the individual is suddenly thrust into reliving a past trauma.⁵³ The reliving is all-encompassing and separates the individual completely from present reality. However, when the traumatized person is capable of letting go of this evasion, he or she can return to time as a discontinuous continuity, i.e., to an acknowledgement of the interpenetration of the past, present, and future. Here, a healthy perception of time in fact allows for a fluidity better pictured by *catuskoti* logic in that one can hold together the discontinuous moments of time in a continuity. As stated above, human experience by nature lacks clear barriers between the past and present. This continuity is ruptured when the traumatized person is thrust into reliving a past trauma. The goal, when treating individuals diagnosed with PTSD, according to Stolorow, Herman, and Janoff-Bulman, is to allow for the integration of the past and the present without discounting or evading either.

As mentioned above, despite the profound disorientation that follows a traumatic event, Stolorow believes that one may go on to develop an authentic and deeper understanding of human existence afterwards. As he holds a relational view of the self, supportive others play a key role in the survivor's return to continuity. Drawing again on Heidegger, Stolorow writes that authentic existence involves the "non-evasive recognition of finitude"⁵⁴:

In trauma, a potential dimension of authenticity – authentic Being-toward-death – is unveiled but not freely chosen; on the contrary, it is forced upon the traumatized person, and the accompanying anxiety can be unendurable, making dissociative retreats from the traumatized states – retreats into forms of inauthenticity – necessary.⁵⁵

Similar to Janoff-Bulman's "illusion of invulnerability," using Heidegger's terminology, Stolorow describes how being "thrown" into a traumatic event can force the individual to apprehend his or her own mortality. While Stolorow theorizes that such a revelation is at first evaded through dissociation, once the repetition of the same is transcended, it can provide a possibility to face one's death authentically.

Heidegger's notion of inauthentic falling into the *they* (*Das Man*), wherein *Dasein* does not apprehend its own finitude, is initially similar to a dissociated traumatized state in that both are characterized by evading finitude. However, while inauthentic falling is an absorption in the everyday, for both Heidegger's notion of anxiety and the traumatized person, "...in anxiety the significance of the everyday world collapses."⁵⁶ Furthermore, both are infused with a feeling of almost unbearable aloneness: "Trauma, like authentic Being-toward-death, individualizes us, but in a manner that

manifests in an excruciating sense of singularity and solitude."⁵⁷

What I think can be drawn out of Stolorow's analysis of trauma, is that the traumatized person's inauthentic absorption in the past is tied up with both the present repetition of the past and an insight into his or her finitude. In other words, while PTSD can be accurately described as a frozen present, wherein the past repeats itself *ad nauseam*, it simultaneously contains an awareness of one's finitude, albeit an unproductive one. In fact, I think dissociated memories of traumatic events are not just blocked from awareness and integration; I think on one level they are blocked while on another they take over all of one's awareness and make one continually live one's finitude. However, as Stolorow notes, until the radically incommensurate emotional worlds of the past and the present are integrated, the awareness of one's finitude is paralyzing, and thus quite limiting.⁵⁸

This perspective can be captured well with the Buddhist two-fold truth and the logical structure of *catu ko i*. For example, one can feel cut off from the present when reliving the past while simultaneously feeling fear about harm in the present. In fact, hypervigilance is one PTSD symptom that demonstrates how one is simultaneously unable to transcend one's past trauma while at the same time feel fear for one's present and future security. The "non-evasive recognition of finitude" can play out in a way that is merely undergone, through compulsive hypervigilance, for example, or in a way that is freely chosen. Stolorow describes the latter possibility as authenticity, but I think it is important to emphasize how awareness of one's finitude can be both paralyzing and liberating for the traumatized person.

53. Ibid, 54-55.

54. Ibid, 50.

55. Ibid, 45.

56. Ibid, 48.

57. Ibid, 44.

58. Ibid, 49.

Stolorow's authentically-chosen "non-evasive recognition of finitude" involves an embracing of the repetition of traumatized memories and human vulnerability. Interestingly, emotionally grasping the unpredictability of one's assured death is both a heightened awareness of each moment of human reality as well as a way of seeing the world through the lens of a past trauma. The insight into vulnerability is tied to our own experience of vulnerability and our ability to tolerate this vulnerability together with the other aspects of our human experience.

Moreover, the "non-evasive recognition of finitude" is not a solitary exercise, for Stolorow. He argues that the integration of the two emotional worlds depends upon relationships with supportive others. Indeed, his concept of dissociation is as much separation from others and "the shared structure of temporality"⁵⁹ as it is a separation of one's own emotional worlds. Integrating the two worlds is possible with empathic dialogue in which the past trauma and the present world can be held together.⁶⁰

Integrating the two emotional worlds is different from simply nullifying the past trauma. Trauma, in that it persists in the body and our memory, continually recurs, just like Nietzsche's eternal recurrence. Here healing is more aptly conceptualized as an ambiguous process rather than a complete cure or break with the recurring sense of vulnerability in the aftermath of trauma.⁶¹

Conclusion

In conclusion, catuskoti logic and the two-fold truth of form and emptiness is useful in conceptualizing Herman's discussion of "doublethink," Janoff-Bulman's concept of the "illusion of invulnerability," and Stolorow's description of traumatic temporality. Aristotelian propositional logic denies the possibility

that two contradictory realities can be experienced concurrently. However, if we try to faithfully represent the experience of those who are diagnosed with PTSD, then it seems that this is precisely the case. We saw above how one can re-live a past trauma while simultaneously being aware of present experience. The two-fold truth does not hold that there are two realities, but it does affirm that there are two ways of seeing reality (conventional and ultimate); they are different, but not exclusive of each other. In the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, one is not "more true" than the other; they are both ways of seeing. Such a view is useful in conceptualizing PTSD in a way that respects the force of the past trauma reality. While dualistic forms of thinking are often restricted to either "objective" or "subjective" perceptions of reality – the former representing true perception while the latter is false – the two-fold truth doesn't require that we shed one viewpoint in favor of the other. Instead, finding understanding in an empathic Other and integration of the two ways of seeing is encouraged. Furthermore, with regard to perceptions about one's safety, Janoff-Bulman's theory of the "illusion of invulnerability" suggests that a somewhat misleading "subjective" viewpoint in individuals who do not have PTSD is actually a psychologically healthier alternative.

However, once again, traumatized and non-traumatized experience don't map neatly onto form and emptiness. Furthermore, PTSD causes suffering and often leads to the shrinking of the world of the individual who suffers from it. It would be counter-productive to suggest that therapists who work with survivors of trauma avoid making distinctions between the two viewpoints; encouraging the client to see the present without the lens of the traumatized past is paramount.

Nevertheless, the idea of "both and" put forward by the two-fold truth is useful when conceptualizing the integration of the past trauma and the present reality.

The Buddhist doctrine of interdependent co-origination, together with catuskoti logic, is also useful in conceptualizing recovery and changes to one's identity post-trauma. Interdependent co-origination is a way of adhering to a middle path between the extremes of nihilism (nothing exists) and eternalism (only independent essences exist) when conceptualizing identity. Stolorow, Herman, and Janoff-Bulman all emphasize the importance of integration of the traumatic episode into one's personal narrative. However, this is impossible if a strict separation between one's being-in-the-world before and after the trauma is maintained. Continuity can only be re-established if neither the past world nor the present world are discounted. However, similarly, with regard to the other extreme, eternalism, one way of being cannot be affirmed while the other is denied. Ultimately, there is no separately existing essence with regard to identity in the Buddhist worldview; instead, identity emerges out of relation between the different moments of one's existence and aspects of one's environment.

Catuskoti logic provides a way to think about time and identity free from dualistic and essentialist presuppositions. In such a logical structure, it is permitted to assert that the past can be both past and not past at the same time. Trauma irrevocably transforms one's being-in-the-world through the shattering of the "illusion of invulnerability." While the loss of stability and security often manifests in PTSD symptoms, it also grants one insight into the truth of our human vulnerability

59. Ibid, 55.

60. Ibid, 61-62.

61. Ibid, 61.

and finitude. However, as Stolorow has shown above, one's willingness to acknowledge the unceasing reminders of one's vulnerability while not being overcome by this vulnerability depends upon the empathic attunement of others. Lastly, integration of the traumatic event(s) is not about erasure of the past; rather, it is only possible when understood as the holding together of contradictory realities.

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