

Colloquium Series Presentation: Review of Robert Katz, Ph.D:
“An Imperfect Death: Heidegger, Oedipus and Basescu”

On the evening of Friday October 28, 2011, Robert Katz, PhD gave the Manhattan Institute for Psychoanalysis *John Fiscalini Memorial Lecture in Interpersonal Psychoanalysis*, entitled “An Imperfect Death: Heidegger, Oedipus and Basescu” at the Kimmel Center at NYU. Dr. Katz is on the faculties of Manhattan Institute for Psychoanalysis, New York University Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis and the Westchester Center for the Study of Psychoanalysis.

In his persuasive presentation, Dr. Katz outlined the way in which he believes *death anxiety* informs issues of separation and a concept of a separate self that he feels is missing in contemporary theorizing. According to Dr. Katz, “by demonstrating the defensive potential of the exclusive focus on relationships as being the central organizing factor in psychic organization, the domain of clinical inquiry could be expanded to include the psychological dynamics that flow directly from our basic sense of aloneness.” By attempting to delineate a conception of what he termed a separate ‘separateness’ as being distinct from its relational counterpart, Dr. Katz argued for the expansion of its meaning. He suggested that “this philosophy reflects the idea that there exists an intimate connection between integrity and the degree to which one can enter life more fully by acknowledging their mortality.... highly similar to one of the foundational ideas of Existentialism.”

Dr. Katz further contended that, “the soul of existentialism as well as its clinical relevance is found in the paradoxical notion that the more one can accept death, the more capable they are of living fully.” Dr. Katz, interpreting the existentialist Heidegger contends that “experientially and clinically, the idea of being more one’s self, that is, more authentic in the Heideggerian sense of the term is highly compelling.” In referencing Sabert Basescu’s (1976) teachings, Katz agreed with the idea that “within each session, the patient constantly traverses the polarity between being the non-responsible victim and the self-responsible agent.”

This added to Dr. Katz’s contention that “more than any other variant of psychoanalysis and solely based on the capacity for separateness, existential analysts hold the patient more directly and wholly responsible for the

creation of their own experience. Note that this freedom entirely resides in the self's capacity to be separate."

The presentation concluded with Dr. Katz sharing his view that "all analysts possess an existential sensibility and vary according to how much non-being they have taken in, how separate they themselves can be, and how separate they can allow their patients to be." He went on to say that "given the omnipresence of death anxiety, the analyst is always confronted with the choice of being more present and separate or retreating into the hinterlands of psychic defensiveness and non-being that relationships can provide." He reminded the audience that they "are most fortunate to have the opportunity to constantly be engaged in the process of attempting to use our own separate aloneness in the service of helping individuals to become more free to create themselves according to their own unique, aesthetic sensibility."

-Cynthia Chalker, MSS/MSLP

First Year Candidate, Certificate Program in Psychoanalysis