

Life and Life-Energy  
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Chapter 4

Energy Cycles and Emotional States  
(a) Depression:

*" How weary, stale , flat and unprofitable  
Seem to me all the uses of this world."*

*- Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act I, scene ii, 133-134*

Depression is psychic paralysis. One is put in mind of a vigorous body, unable to realize its goals because of paralysis in its limbs. By analogy with the dynamics of physical bodies, the state of depression is akin to Inertia, a state of rest that can be measured through its resistance to change. Indeed, "inertia" is a force in its own right, as one recognizes when two bodies, each at rest in their own frame and moving with constant velocity, collide. One can also speak of *thermal inertia* , the ability of a substance like water, to incorporate large amounts of heat without any alteration of temperature.

Psychological depression attests to the weight of a spiritual burden. It is a state of undermined morale, an immobilization of

will power. On a positive note, and in analogy with the phenomenon of collision, it can take the form of obstinate, passive resistance.

Listlessness and apathy alternate with giddiness, sometimes wildly with capricious enthusiasms. A depressed state of mind may find temporary relief through an excessive number of ambitious projects. What appears to be admirable enterprise quickly reveals itself to be its opposite: the moment a given project runs into difficulties, a new one is taken up, diluting the energy available for the original project effectively to nothing. Thus, although it appears to a superficial observer that someone is engaged in a wide diversity of activities, each of them annihilates the others. Think of someone setting out to learn a new language, German for example. Everything seems to be going well, until he is required to memorize a large vocabulary. Suddenly he decides that it will be more useful for him in his work to learn Russian. Soon he has prepared programs for learning German, Russian,

Spanish and Italian, but the truth of the matter is that he will end up learning nothing.

This is a common form of depressive over-activity. Another form is its direct opposite; it, too, ends in futility. Someone becomes so obsessed with the notion that a great injustice has been done to him, that he engages in a long series of lawsuits, a protracted legal battle that he cannot hope to win. Soon most of his suits are frivolous. Once in awhile he gains a victory, which leads him to conclude that he is making great progress. Each step forward is followed by three steps backwards. One detects in him an almost perverse delight in repeated failure, as if proving to himself that the gods have chosen him for their special victim.

On a deeper level, and in all these instances, one observes that what the depressed mind is struggling against is its damaged capacity for concentration, expressed as difficulty in moving from contemplation to action. One discovers an extreme reluctance to bring any of the children of the imagination to term. A

fundamental breakdown has occurred in the psychic processes which do away with a previous identity to the bold assertion of a new one. One could describe this as a stubborn resistance to being born anew.

*Medvedenko: Why do you always wear black?*

*Masha: I'm in mourning for my life. I'm unhappy*

*-Chekhov; opening lines, The Sea Gull*

There may be more delight in dreaming of a rosier existence than in making any effort to seek one. The exercise of the imagination becomes the chief form of gratification. One finds enough fulfillment in *imagining* fulfillment elsewhere, that it isn't necessary take all the risks involved in going there. Why go searching in distant places what one imagines to have found at home?

The habit of reliving past glories and achievements as a substitute for striving to achieve new ones, resting on one's laurels, is a variant of this. And there is even delight even in regret, in

wallowing in speculations of what one might have accomplished if one had only followed up on lost opportunities.

*"Why did I not follow up my advantage at that time?"*  
followed by the ironic reflection : *"It would have failed in any case."*

One is speaking of nostalgia, a pleasant enough emotional state if not taken to excess. Nostalgia takes numerous forms, one of which is the longing for visiting, revisiting, or even relocating to, foreign lands where, certainly, things must be better. The fear of potential disappointments, real or exaggerated, steps in to inhibit the initiative required to make the break. As Shakespeare , once again in Hamlet, expresses it so well:

*"But that the dread of something after death,  
The undiscovered Country, from whose bourn  
No Traveller returns, Puzzles the will,  
And makes us rather bear those ills we have,  
Than fly to others that we know not of."*

A nother one of Chekhov's plays comes to mind: *The Three Sisters* . The perpetual yearning for a "Moscow" of the imagination

allows one to endure the daily misery of one's real circumstances. It also guarantees that one will not run the risks of making real changes.

This may not always be unwise. The real "Moscow" in our world (Paris, London, New York) tend to become savage battlefields. In *The Sea-Gull* the young actress Nina actually does move to Moscow. The result is a catastrophe.

When forced to live at close quarters with a victims of acute clinical depression, one may find it difficult to keep from interpreting his inertia as an attitude of willful obstinacy. This fixity is their tragedy and their strength. Somehow they can abide indefinitely in the same state, like the stump of a tree held in place by networks of entangled roots, as if challenging all comers to uproot them.

Friends and relatives may surrender in exasperation because

they cannot be goaded into any form of constructive action. Like war widows rendered all but comatose by grief, they seem to be daring others to console them.

Who has not known persons afflicted with a serious illness, the symptoms of which are encroaching and growing every day, yet who refuse to seek help, citing cost, inconvenience, even a well-founded distrust of the medical profession; excellent arguments in themselves though concealing, (mostly to themselves) the clear intention of doing nothing to interfere with their settled routines.

Not all forms of depression are negative; its positive face is what is known as "melancholy". The melancholic personality has been praised by many cultures. It is reflective, philosophical, weighing all sides of an issue before taking action, capable of pondering difficult problems for long periods. Such traits can, if properly used, lead to impressive insights and discoveries. Many great scientists, philosophers and writers have been formed in the melancholic attics of the soul.

Melancholy has its good aspects.

The Japanese considered what we call the “depressive” personality as a superior kind of person. Until the introduction of tranquillizers to cure a disease no one had never heard of, “depression”, the Japanese had no word in their vocabulary for what we call “depression”. This was before an advertising blitz put an end to the nation’s so-called “ignorance” Quote, the New York Times, October 19,2007:

*“Searching Japan for Soul Survivors*

*If “Does Your Soul Have a Cold?” strikes you as an unusually arresting title for a documentary, you can probably put it down to the fact that it was the slogan for a SmithGlaxoKline advertising campaign that brought antidepressants to the Japanese market in 2000. In other words, it’s the work of a professional copywriter. The idea was not only to introduce the Western concept of depression to a culture still leery of it, but also, by suggesting that, like a cold, anyone could “catch” it, to reduce the shame the Japanese felt about being depressed.*

SmithGlaxoKline mounted a campaign to brain-wash the Japanese public to convince it that it was suffering from a serious (and

contagious!) illness! The details can be read in the enlightening book by Ethan Watters "Crazy Like Us".

It is characteristic of depression that it seeks to establish a low profile. To avoid causing trouble, one tries to act responsibly, non-destructively. At the same time one feels justified in contributing something less than one's fair share to one's obligations and responsibilities, as if claiming one's due reward for being inoffensive. Ashamed of appearing dull or boring, yet one also becomes quickly bored with whatever one is doing. An immersion in fantasy and make-believe becomes habitual; it compensates for a painful present, and any need to be concerned for the future.

## **Depression as physical energy cycle**

Depression is the psychological equivalent to energy conservation in the situation of a strongly stable dynamical system that quickly returns to its initial configuration when disturbed. It is the energy cycle of the passive balance, ever seeking to return to a

homeostasis. Another word for this is “withdrawal”. It allows one to survive indefinitely through the exertion of minimal effort.

Consider the series of bodily responses to extreme cold.

Trapped by a sudden snowstorm the body will automatically seek to conserve every atom of heat. The limbs are drawn up against the trunk, the face is lowered, the body huddles together as its systems shut down in hibernation. Energy exchange with the environment, anything that results in the loss of vital life-resource, is reduced to the bare minimum.

If one is too far from sources of rescue, the only hope is that of being discovered from the environment by which one has been overwhelmed . This metaphor of Arctic survival is an effective description of the state of withdrawal characteristic of depression. Nothing can improve on the description to be found in Jack London’s short story “To Build A Fire”

In miniature form, the essence of Jack London's story has been distilled captured in this short poem of Emily Dickinson (something of a world authority on depression):

*Now is the Hour of Lead.  
Remembered if outlived.  
Like freezing Persons recall the snow.  
First chill.  
Then stupor.  
And then, the letting go.*

## Anxiety

In the same way that fire feeds on the stable potential energy stored in fossil fuels , so the condition of anxiety in ourselves is instilled and aroused by the presence of depression in those to whom we are attached, notably parents. Anxiety may take many forms, both humane and callous: on the negative side one has worry, possessiveness, greed, dissipation, sadism, invasiveness, exploitation, contempt for the privacy of others, conceit, boasting and, deceit; on the positive side there are

Along with good traits such as friendliness, sympathy, interest, concern, emotional responsiveness.

The characteristic form for anxious behavior is that of the wild swing of the pendulum; instability is inherent to its very nature. It can take the form of panic; or extreme fear; wild-eyed terror, fears that appear to have no discernible source. Accompanying these is the willful pursuit of transient whims; the mad pursuit of pleasure, undirected curiosity, the thirst for novelty.

Anxiety is psychic pregnancy; as such it is the root condition for mental disturbance, of which hatred and grief form it, thus everything is found in it, from the most exemplary compassion to the destructiveness of an alcoholic or fanatic.

Jack Kerouac's novel "On The Road " captures this unpredictability in the personality of Neal Cassady, this ambiance of panic and flight. Helpless to control his whims, Cassady steals cars from parking lots, then sets out to unknown destinations at

100 miles per hour. There may be some place he wants to go to; or he may change course; or have no idea at all where he is going.

Tiring of this mode of living, Cassidy may settle in for a brief spell until the restlessness overtakes him again and he is off once more.

Leaping from scheme to fancy, fancy to scheme like an elfin flame sprinting from branch to branch, shedding objectives with the same recklessness that once inspired them, Anxiety's native element is fire. The anxious mind jumps from one combustible source to the next; like a chameleon in the flames it assumes the coloration of its substrate, delighting in its power of mimicry, setting up transitory intimacies and conspiracies of identification in the very deed of flying away from them.

The cycles of storage of potential energy associated with depression are thus inseparably linked with those of transformation or thermal energy associated with anxiety, in nature, in society and in the psyche.

The substrate, whether physical or psychological, is itself inert. As gasoline or oil or coal can serve as the basic for ignition, so the inert substrate of anxiety can become, variously, the attraction of a new sexual conquest, or gambling, some wild exploit, vices and addiction like those of smoking or alcohol. The adaptability of this raw unharvested energy to a bewildering diversity of forms is driven by a permanent reality of incurable dissatisfaction, the very heart of all-consuming anxiety.

### *(c) Anger*

In the same way that Anxiety feeds off the potential energy latent in Depression, so Anger feeds off the thermal energy, or heat, of Anxiety . It is its nutrient, source of kinetic power. Anger is always reactive, and what it seeks to accomplish is to bring order into chaos. The behavior of extreme anxiety is nothing if not chaotic.

Anger is obsessed with victories, with ambitions. Forceful anger is characterized by its immediacy, the goal of hostility is inhibition, suppression, reduction. Think of the rain that dampens the forest fire; medicines that kill the encroachment of disease-bearing organisms; the pruner's hook rooting out the weeds that infest the crops.

Force is the physical equivalent to anger. It signifies focused kinetic energy in opposition to the aimless thermal energy of Anxiety. In response to the presence of an imminent threat, it

Characteristics are action without reflection, rigidity, blind willfulness, fear, stubbornness and the appearance of strength.

Smother the fire that heats the steam and the train will stop immediately.

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Two of the fundamental energy cycles, thermal and kinetic, are active. The inertial cycle, that of potential energy, is passive, *the active cessation of activity. It is intrinsic to life-energy that its natural movement is towards increase and fulfillment.*

The psychological equivalent for physical action is passion. All three cycles are "passionate", cycles of transformation and inhibition, not immobilized or inert states. Even the condition of psychic inertia or depression demands an energy of inhibition, the *active suppression of creative growth* .

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It has been demonstrated that there is a natural correspondence between the dynamical stages of the cycles of *physical energy*, and the psychic states of *life energy* which we label as the emotions:

(a) Depression corresponds to the stability of stored potential energy, held in place by internal oppression.

(b) Anxiety corresponds to fire, the conversion of energy from a potential well into a state of activity driven by heat;

(c) Anger feeds off the energy of conflict, of force, of kinetic energy drawing its power from the energy of the assailant. The distinction between anxiety and anger is the same as that between thunder and lightning: thunder spreads panic far and wide, lightning strikes blindly, with a narrow focus and devastating force.

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*Commentary:* It is instructive to examine current psychiatric practice in the light of the ideas presented in this essay. Our

theoretical framework acknowledges certain Freudian or Freud-inspired insights as valid, and recognizes the worth of some of the discoveries in modern psycho-chemistry. The existence of an Unconscious Mind is admitted here, along with the standard real-life dramas used to depict the “complexes”, yet in a radical re-interpretation: the fundamental cycles of life- energy transformation can be depicted as domestic dramas portrayed by the Father – insemination- Mother –pregnancy- child. Equivalently, they can be interpreted in terms of the philosophical categories of Being – Death- Non-Being- Becoming- Rebirth

These categories have nothing to do with infantile sexual desires and a so-called ‘castration complex’, notions that we consider fairly silly, Rather they should be seen as effective metaphors that allow us to understand the stages of the transmutation of psychic energy in the formation of identity (the Rebirth Mechanism). In particular, the reification of the procreative

roles of the 'persons', Father, Mother and Child capture the spirit of the *temporal phases in the creative process*.

Indeed, what we are presenting is a hierarchic table of analogous structures that has nothing at all to do with latent memories of frustrated sexual longings at the age of 2:

- I. The successive phases of transformation of psychic energy in the mental process leading to the formation of identity.
- II. The temporal succession of the persons of the archetypal family of transformational phases: Father, Mother and Child
- III. The 3 energy cycles of physical energy: the accumulation of Potential Energy; the movement from Potential to Kinetic Energy; the discharge of Kinetic Energy
- IV. The fundamental emotional states of Anxiety, Depression and Anger.

V. The progression of the categories of time, Past, Present and Future, as present in the instant of living experience

These similarities and analogies are too striking to be ignored. They speak to the vast structural unity of the cosmic order; they bridge the gap between the physical and the psychological; they unify internal and external experience and place life itself decisively within the larger context of nature.

Whereas contemporary psychopharmacology seeks to trace the root cause of each emotion to a specific neurotransmitter in the brain (serotonin as the causative agent of depression (relieved by Prozac), *sodium* for manic-depression (relieved by Lithium) *dopamine* for anxiety, (relieved by Thorazine), *testosterone* for anger, (relieved by Xanax), our hypothesis maintains that the emotions find their origins in the transformations of the states of matter and energy, rather than to specific material substances, that energy storage (matter) , energy transformation, (heat) , and energy in action , (force) are the 3 fundamental paths by which psychic-

energy, or what we have called life-energy, seeks to translate intentions in to actions in the real world, all of which are, almost by definition, energy exchanges. In the interplay of these transformative cycles, both internally and between individuals, one may situate all the dramas of human relations, social, domestic and spiritual.

We therefore readily acknowledge that the life energy cycles associated with emotional distress can activate physio-chemical cycles in the brain. Given that the human body and brain have evolved over billions of years to accommodate the survival of the sentient beings they harbor, it is only to be expected that there should be intrinsic chemical responses triggered by the processes of emotion. It also makes sense that research and development of medicines and drugs can rectify their power, providing enough temporary relief to allow the rational person to take stock of his situation and initiate constructive action.

However, we cannot stress too much that unless mind and body be re-directed onto creative paths, narrowly conservative cycles of mental activity will continue to operate, fixed as they are in the Unconscious by traumatic experience, conditioning or long habit. belonging to a unwholesome, neurotic or diseased mind.

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