

Life and Life-Energy
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Chapter 6
Transformations of Being

The concept of "Self" - *the* Self, or even *one's* Self, does not admit the possibility of unambiguous definition; yet, as with "God" ("gods" or "a god"), humankind will never give up trying to do so. "Self", however it is defined, is a compound notion : there is the *impersonal self* , and there is what one might term the *objectification of an inner self* , one's sense of *identity* .

At the same time we all realize, even without the positing of an Unconscious Mind, that "self-awareness" only covers a small part of what we recognize as our total potential. Via the externals of our self-definition we orient ourselves with respect to the community and the universe. It is something that we assemble through bits and pieces taken from largely impersonal categories of attributes: our age, name, nationality, skin and hair color, etc. Sentience itself skits along the thin boundary between the animate and the inanimate, forging an identity which, to others and in part to ourselves, is void of internal content or intentionality.

Our intuition of personal identity is something we maintain under all circumstances. Accommodating the conflicting requirements of internal and external aspects of one's identity is an unceasing process, owing to which the self-image is in a continual state of flux, The decisive opinions one acquires with regard to

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selfhood, personality or ego, are not necessarily positive: pride, guilt, self-love or loathing, smug self-satisfaction or hyper-criticism may enter into them in equal measure. Still, effective action appears to be impossible without some meaningful answer to a question which, in some sense, is unanswerable: *What am I?*

The quest for identity both binds and absorbs one's psychic energies. Acquired with difficulty, it remains vulnerable to the vagaries of a constantly shifting reality. Fatuous complacency is rightly perceived as a personal failing, yet in fact it is impossible for anyone to be truly complacent for very long. In positing the forces of Love and Strife, Heraclitus put the greater emphasis on the latter.

The immediate psychic reaction to challenges to the self-image is *shock*. Shock may be brief or prolonged, exhilarating or demoralizing. A perceptible, if minute shock reaction underlies every perception. All things, from the faint buzzing of a fly's wings to the devastation of an earthquake, produce an initial reaction of shock, as it figures in the adjustment mechanism as the first stage of the process of transformation of being through confrontation with change.

Something always dies in us when our concept of self comes into confrontation with the outer world. In this sense shock is the psychic equivalent of bodily death, through which the self will be recreated via the process of rebirth. The initiating affront of the process creates a temporary region of non-sentience, or unconsciousness, in the living psyche; conversely, fully realized

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readjustment is accompanied by triumphant affirmation of existence: *I am; I exist; I am alive.*

This unending activity is essential to our joy in living; a vibrant pulse of death and resurrection is our most potent stimulant. Both Permanence *and* Change, Being *and* Becoming, are vital to well-being. Happiness requires that the proper equilibrium be maintained between "deadly" boredom and "lethal" disaster. Prolonged, intense *traumatic* shock, however, enlarges the scope of the Unconscious so that it takes up what seems to be a permanent residence within the mind, producing the external states we associate with mental illness.

Thus do we progress from alienation to integration. The causal structure of the fundamental process Death and Resurrection of readjustment is inextricably rooted in our existential situation with regard to a cosmos in ceaseless turmoil:

<p><i>Full Being = Identity + the Operation of the Rebirth Process.</i></p>

A complete description of individuated Being must include, in addition to the customary lists of specific attributes, (old, rich, 6 feet tall, etc.), the structural patterns of the readjustment process inherent in the psyche of that individual. There is nothing mysterious about this: they are known as the *passions* : our loves, hates, ambitions, appetites, beliefs, and, more fundamentally, in general terms our manner of accessing the world.

(ii) Inertial Identity

It takes a considerable effort to let go of one's convictions. Evidence that they are misguided, wrong-headed, mistaken, or contingent on immediate circumstances will meet with inevitable resistance. We are, of course, not speaking about neutral, abstract or intellectual views about one's identity, but of real challenges to major commitments of heart and mind, things like "nationhood" to a conservative, "objectivity" to a scientist, "religious dogma" to a devout believer, "family" to a married couple, "self-reliance" to a businessman, and so on.

Yet even the most self-satisfied person on earth lives in constant danger of being jolted out of his intellectual slumbers. Attitudes deemed unalterable are at the mercy of unexpected events and the unintended consequences of one's own behavior. All the Greek tragedies that have come down to us revolve about this central theme. Nor is the phenomenon necessarily negative. Rude awakenings can lead to major discoveries, often beneficial, often revelatory of one's unsuspected potential.

The categories of self-critical judgments are surprisingly few in number. They are cast in the form of dichotomies: "I am a good/bad person", "I am intelligent/stupid", "I am sane/insane", "I am liked/disliked", and so on. When the circumstances producing them change, we still cling to them. As Jean-Paul Sartre states in several essays, all of our views about ourselves come to us indirectly, through observations on external events.

The attributes of stubborn adherence to one's self-image may be collectively classified as *inertial*, in analogy with the force within matter that naturally opposes change. Personalities in which these tendencies dominate are prone to fixed ideas, mental stagnation, obsessions, fatuous ego-centricity and, conversely, morbid preoccupations, pathological self-doubt, and marked insecurity.

(iii) And Rebellion

Yet despite this deeply rooted need to cling to one's self-conscious perception of identity self-image, one finds within the psyche an equally powerful force which seeks to throw off the burden of limited self-definition.

Facing and assimilating challenge, confronting the alien, that which is contrary to Being, (or Non-Being), is a psychological necessity, re-igniting as it does the living challenge of self-redefinition. This creative upsurge, exemplified in the intellectual domain by problem-solving, and by adventure in the physical, culminates, when successful, in the liberation of life-energy from bondage.

Bestowing a condescending glance upon Freud's monomania, one can indeed invoke sexual metaphors when speaking of the satisfaction deriving from this experience, from letting go of the fictions that bind the daily routine; one may speak equally of epiphanies, peak experiences, catharsis, call it what one will. Relating this to the schema of the Rebirth Process, one has:

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Non-Being</i> <i>Being</i> ----- -----<i>Becoming</i>-- <i>Reborn Self (Being)</i> <i>Shock</i></p>

Life-energy, as opposed to material energy is self-generating .
Just as the body restores itself after illness, even as the final stage of convalescence is privy to the return of a strong appetite for life, so too does the process of healing the devastation of trauma to the psychic identity terminate in affirmation of living.

Deeply rooted notions of one's own identity are imprisoning. When Hamlet states , "Denmark is a prison", the term 'Denmark' functions as a metaphor for what is most fundamental to the play, , the incestuous mentality, the obsessive self-preoccupation, a permanent "state" is in which there is "something rotten" . Escape from the multiple double-binds of selfhood demands an eager participation in the living challenge.

These twin faces of the living nature, stable identity versus creative force, Being and Becoming, are in existential opposition, even as our hearts are forever torn by the alienation of Present from Future. *It is the fundamental contradiction of sentient existence in the worl.:* Being and Becoming, existing simultaneously, are necessarily sequential in action. That which brings gratification to one aspect of our psyche inhibits the other.

The oppression of prison is painful; as is the desperation of homelessness. Impotence against tyranny is a state of misery; yet the responsibility of rule also brings heavy burdens. To be

typecast like a movie star , though it may bring fame, is ultimately stultifying. Yet to be without a socially defined role can render life intolerable. Opposites cannot abide simultaneously in the same person; hence any quest for happiness based either on a stable social situation required narrowly defined roles , or from a rootless craving for adventure erroneously identified with freedom, must be dissatisfying and unacceptable in the long run.

Yet the greatest of all miseries, (as depicted once again in *Hamlet*) , is to be found in a prolonged, incurable "identity crisis" that renders action impossible and negates the possibility of meaningful effort.

(iv) Analysis of the Rebirth Mechanism

Being, Non-Being, Becoming, Rebirth; Identity, Perception and Creation: these attributes covers the field of activity of the psyche . All psychological phenomenon and emotional states can be analyzed in terms of them.

The *first stage* , that of *Being* , has already been discussed. *Shock* is the *second stage* . In its abruptness, finality, terror and sense of sudden loss, it shares kinship with Death, even as Being has a kinship with the inertial rigidity of frailty and age. Whether shock is brief or prolonged depends on a host of factors: the intensity of the initiating crisis, one's level of expectations and state of preparedness, the degree of the implied threat , one's inner strength, resonance with similar experiences in the past, and so on.

All the phenomenon associated with hypnosis, (as described for

example in Bernheim's treatise, "Hypnosis"¹), are rooted in the *third stage* : fixation, trance, latency, hypnosis, imagination, suggestibility, anxiety and counter-anxiety. Hypnosis the psychological equivalent of somatic pregnancy. One's mental universe is consumed by its objects, absorbed into them, with a double fixation upon both (1) the external event (*Non-Being*) initiating the whole process of readjustment (*Becoming*), and (2) an internal object, the self concept (*Being*).

In this third phase the erotectic syllogism: "*To be or not to be*", should be taken quite literally: the advantages of maintaining one's earlier apprehension of personal identity are being weighed against the possibilities and dangers posed by the intrusion of the Other.

Pregnancy; Becoming; Fixation; Trance; Hypnosis; Latency: as in somatic pregnancy this state extends from conception to birth, from the passing away of Self to the reaffirmation of the living nature.

The *fourth*, or final stage of the rebirth cycle is *Rebirth* itself. Like the butterfly, the creature cracks open the chrysalis of *Becoming*, emerging with resurrected affirmation, positing a new demarcation of the cosmos into Self and Other, a fresh recognition, however transitory, of one's place in the natural order.

¹ (1884; trans by Christian A. Herter, 1964; University Books.)

The Rebirth Process divided between external and internal worlds. The emergence of personality

Virtually everything that Sigmund Freud has to say to us can be briefly summarized. The horribly confused state of his thinking leads him to propound far too many principles and complexes, such as the "Pleasure Principle", the "Reality Principle", the "Death Instinct", the "Oedipus Complex" and others. In all of this, what he's really talking about is *fear*. Had he simply invoked a "Fear Principle", then subjected it to a proper analysis, he would have realized that it contains all the others and more besides.

As stated elsewhere in this treatise, emotions are neither "good" nor "bad" in themselves. Mental illness is caused by unhealthy reactions to emotional states that, in themselves, are normal. Thus, although virtually by definition "fear" is linked to pain, some of its secondary characteristics are positive. In addition to aversion, fear may inspire admiration, respect, even awe. Of course it is deliberately exploited in some situations to compel obedience. In its collective qualities and the way they are structured, fear has all the requirements, on the conceptual level, of a *surrogate father*. The psychological equivalence of fear with fatherhood, and its translation to the form of a universal principle, covers most of one finds in the elaborate complexities of the Freudian ideology.

Fear as the External Father derives naturally from the conceptual picture developed in this essay, finding its place in the schema of the Rebirth Process, in the initial stage of Shock.

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Internalized, Fear becomes *Anxiety* or, to employ the telling word devised by Soren Kierkegaard, *Dread* . Thus, there is (1) fear from without, which we may call *terror* ; (2) fear from within, or *dread* ; and (3) fear as a mode of actualization, which is *anger* .

The underlying idea is simple: the passage from Death to Resurrection is in *Nature* . It simply is , and does not distinguish between Self and Non-Self. Error arises when one of the 3 stages of this process is perceived as being "external", that is to say *alienated* , whether by separation, loss, or rejection. This mistaken perception of a distinction between internal and external processes creates a false dichotomy between oneself and others. This dichotomy leads to conflict, energizing a dynamic which, actualized in the external environment, defines what is called "personality".

Aristotle shrewdly observed that happiness is an activity, not a quality. From the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Chapter 6:

"If we define the function of man as a kind of life, and this life as an activity of the soul or a course of action in accordance with reason, and if the function of a good man is such an activity of a good and noble kind, and if everything is well done when it is done in accordance with its proper excellence, it follows that the good of man is activity of soul in accordance with virtue."

The same view is expressed in the *Poetics* in a mercifully brief phrase :

"...life consists of action, and its end is a mode of activity, not a quality..."

What Aristotle calls the "activity of the soul" we identify with the Rebirth Process, the stages of adjustment intrinsic to the

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sentient mind, the *impersonal* driving force of consciousness, even as gravity drives the cosmos and electro-magnetism the atom.

This 3-fold phenomenon: the distinction of (1) external and (2) internal stages of the Rebirth Process, and (3) the actualization of personality through the dynamic of conflict, can be displayed in a simple diagram, cross-correlating with (A) the 3 stages of the Rebirth Process, and (B) their equivalence to socio-biological metaphors of Father, Mother and Child:

	Father	Mother	Child
Anxiety	Internal (Dread)	Realized (Possessing)	External Alienated (Hunger Fear)
Anger	Realized	External (Fear of Injury)	Internal (Vulnerability)
Depression	External (Fear of Death)	Internal (Imagination)	Realized (Withdrawal)

Interpretation

Anxiety is :

(1) *The externalized Child . Being* as object for possession and consumption. The longing to be re-united with the alienated source of Identity. The scourge of hunger and the fear of starvation.

(2) *The internalized Father* . Fear in the form of dread. *Hunger* , or pain perceived as coming from an inner source.

(3) *The realized Mother* : nurturing, possessive, invasive, overwhelming, insatiability, the pangs of pregnancy .

Melancholy or Depression is :

(1) *The external Father* . Depression is caused by traumatic shock, terror or fear, a form of panic reaction characterized by aversion, withdrawal, self-nurturing, and indifference to events or opportunities. Pain is perceived as coming from the outside, from a source outside the self , *the external father, or fear in the presence of death* .

(2) *The internalized Mother* . Becoming is internalized, driven into the Unconscious, emerging in the form of dreams, fantasies and imagination.

In contrast to the anxious state, seeking creative fulfillment in the consumption of external palliatives , or the state of anger, obsessed with potential dangers and threats, the melancholic mind is itself the "mother of invention", filling the entire psychic cosmos with the mythology of its own creation.

(3) *The realized Child* . The "inertial" attributes in the conduct of the depressed individual are effectively portrayed in the stereotype of the ostrich burying its head in the sand. To the extent that such a response is non-threatening or inoffensive, it may have the temporary effect of deflecting hostility. Yet it leaves the ostrich painfully vulnerable to starving predators . The "realized personality" of depression is thus one of *vulnerability, or the Child* .



Anger is :

(1) *The externalized Mother* : The creative process is projected externally, and perceived as a threat. Along with this comes a fear of being possessed, of invasion, of being overwhelmed, of being deprived of identity. Superstition, fear of injury, fear of disease, of all things alien and unfamiliar.

(2) *The internalized Child* . Anger arises from a sense of vulnerability, of exposure to enemies and the elements, to threats and challenges that must be answered.

(3) *The realized Father* . Through the actualizing of fear, the angry person seeks to impose dominance and restore order. Pain being perceived as arising from the interaction between "self" and "not-self": conflict



These observations have been introduced into a modification of the first schema:

	Internal	External	Realization
Greed (Anxiety)	Hunger The Father	Food The Child Fulfillment perceived as external	The Nurturing Mother engendered by separation
Hatred (Counter- Anxiety)	Vulnerability The Child	The devouring invasive Mother, the enemy; Becoming perceived as external	The Hostile Father engendered by fear of injury
Delusion (Depression)	Imagination and Dreams; the Mother internalized	The Hostile Father; Being perceived as external	Withdrawal The Child in fetal slumber Fear of death

Further considerations on the domestic triad

People who have gone through the experience of thinking their death immanent, sometimes relate that their entire life flashes before them. This image bears comparison to the state between the perception of change and the onset of shock: one's psychic identity has been called into question although one does not yet know in what way this is so. In this initiating interlude, one develops a heightened sense of self-awareness. This process of

re-assessment is summed up in the use of the term, "Being", to characterize the first stage of the rebirth cycle.

All the characteristics of the onset of shock, go into the *Category of the Father* .

Between this and the category of *The Mother* , or 'psychic pregnancy' lies shock itself , the perishing of the life-energies bound up with the emotional sensibility of selfhood .

Pitched between Past and Future by this dynamic of conception, the *Category of the Mother* is grounded in the emotional state of Anxiety. The acute sufferings of mental anguish are very similar to those of child bearing. Indeed, one can say that Anxiety is the psychological correlative of childbirth: *Will the child miscarry ? Emerge stillborn? Defective? A freak of nature? What damage might the ordeal of its birth visit upon its procreator?*

In the great cycles of the earth's replenishing , the seed is planted in the Fall, just before the death of Nature. Nothing will appear on the ground throughout the long Winter; yet with the coming of Spring, the kingdom of life asserts its triumphant return. The rebirth of self-awareness, accompanied with an upsurge of creative energy and affirmation of the will to live, is the category of *The Child* . Thereby do all 3 persons, as in the Christian notion of the Trinity, enter equally into the cycle of readjustment: First a child-like innocence and security is perturbed by an external shift in the local context: Being is affronted by non-Being. The coupling of Being with non-Being reflects the drama of the sexual game, with each of its actors taking on characteristics associated with fatherhood and motherhood: identity; ego; aggressivity;

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resistance; submission; anguish; nurturing; concern ;ecstasy;
fulfillment.

The Father expires at the moment of insemination which is the somatic equivalent of shock, so that the Child may emerge from the womb of Becoming, The Mother. The Death of the Father and compensating Rebirth of the Child through re-entry into the womb of the Mother, is the psychological equivalent to the physical phenomena associated with the transformations of energy, as a flame will leap from one substrate to another, consuming and thereby undermining the basis of its own survival, dying here to be reborn elsewhere.

