

Of Entropy, Dialectics and Integration

By
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This open letter to Mr. David Boadella, responding to his monograph 'Formative Process and Organising Field' raises some significant issues on the boundaries of modern physics, psychoanalysis, politics and philosophy.[1984]

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[The text of a letter to Mr. David Boadella responding to his recent monograph: "Formative Process and Organising Field" (Abbotsbury 1983).]

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As I understand it, your thesis in a nutshell is that just as physical matter on a microscopic scale may be considered as a standing wave, or an interference pattern generated by the interplay of two or more distinct fields of energy, so at an intermediate scale the psyche and our whole mode of being and being conscious, can also be seen as the outworking of the interplay of multiple and interacting energy fields. While uncertain of how this can be grounded empirically, it certainly raises a lot of creative issues and does so in a way which helps to synthesise disparate parts of experience. I am reminded particularly of the work of David Bohm (Wholeness and the Implicate Order, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1980) although you do not appear to make reference to his work in the bibliography.

Is there any way that this kind of perception links up with the possibility of the transmission of data within the genetic material as involving not simply coding of atomic arrangements within the DNA helix but a very high density of almost multi-dimensional hologram encoded at the sub-molecular energy field level? On Bohm's thesis, this could actually carry the complete coded history of what it is to be and to have been this particular point of matter/energy in space/time and therefore to be capable of communicating that kind of data initially into the protoplasm and ultimately the consciousness of the emergent next generation? I know of no work or writing in this field but it seems to me to be an exciting frontier to be explored.

I have one or two comments on the substance of your monograph.

Firstly, there seems to me some confusion in the literature as non-physicists have sought to apply the second law of thermodynamics to the fields of psychology and biological evolution. Perhaps I may re-quote your extract of the introduction to the article by Szent-Gyorgi from page 4:

"For quite some time science has recognised the principle of entropy as a fundamental factor in the universe. Entropy causes organised forms to gradually disintegrate into lower and lower levels of organisation. This tendency by itself leads one to consider the world as a whole to be like a great machine running down and wearing out.

"But there is mounting evidence for the existence of the opposite principle: syntropy or 'negative entropy', through the influence of which forms tends to reach higher and higher levels of organisation, order and dynamic harmony ... Syntropy is closely related to the process of synthesis, and today many are calling increasing attention to a psychological drive towards synthesis, towards wholeness and self-perfection. Szent-Gyorgi's conception has therefore far-reaching implication not only for the physical and biological sciences, but perhaps even more for psychology and for our view of the human being, of society and of the world ."

As I understand it, the second law of thermodynamics refers to a closed system, i.e. one that has no inputs or outputs from the system to its environment. Now the universe as a whole

may (or may not) be such a closed system. However within the universe there are pockets which, as sub-systems of a total entropic whole, represent counter-entropic sub-systems. Such subsystems are not closed systems and are characterised by the transaction between sub-system and wider-system in which the sub-system gains a net amount of energy from the rest of the system. In other words, the entropy of the sub-system is externalised into the system as a whole and the counter-entropic sub-system appears to be operating in a non-entropic or counter-entropic manner. Instead of moving towards greater randomisation and chaoticisation, it shows characteristics of increasing order and complexification as the energy pumped into the system is vested in increasingly complex molecular, physical, organic and psychological structures. Now I suggest part of the apparent conflict between entropy and synthesis, arises from the rather narrow view of treating 'the world' as if it were 'the universe'. The world, and in particular the surface layers of this particular globe, do seem to represent a counter-entropic envelope or subsystem within the entropic universe. This sub-system is characterised by a net energy-gain in its interaction with its environment in terms of the reception of both geothermal and solar energy. The sub-system thus represented by the world's surface does indicate a counter-entropic or synthesising evolutionary pattern of being. Matter, inorganic and organic, is undergoing a process of molecular complexification and integration to higher and higher levels of 'being'. I don't think this in any way contradicts the second law of thermodynamics because if we widen the terms of reference to include the solar system as whole, rather than setting our frontiers at the boundaries of 'the world', then clearly entropic patterns are still in place.

A good example of what I am talking about occurs within your text on page 14, where you note:

"We have seen already that under appropriate conditions regeneration and repair can grow out of the energies released by breakdown into illness as a pre-existing state of order is given up. R.D. Laing has argued that even schizophrenic disintegration can potentially be a painful transition to what is potentially a higher level of creativity and openness. The conditions which are needed are security, affection, ample time, lack of panic by people in the environment, and good support. Under such conditions what Postle calls a 'recovery catastrophe' may occur."

If we refer to entropy language, then here is a clear example of a counter-entropic envelope within psychological space. Sufficient resources are received by the client from the environment to enable a creative disintegration and reintegration to higher level of synthesis to occur within the field, although the stresses and strains are taken up in wear and tear in the consultant and therapeutic community. It is, I suggest, only within the conditions of a counter-entropic sub-system that synthesis of this kind is possible. In an entropic system there would be a sharing of pain with an overall degrade in system ability to handle pain. In the counter-entropic sub-system there is a creative sharing of pain which, supported by the drawing in of resources from the environment, allows a reorganisation of the subsystem towards greater synthesis and complexification.

I think, however, that it is very important not to generalise from the experience of the counter-entropic sub-system towards a universal law going in the face of the second law of thermodynamics. That is the error of treating the part as the whole, and represents an inability to move beyond the limitations of a geo-centric cosmology.

My next point concerns your section on polarity and synthesis, page 8 following. I think this is the point at which I have to take my stand over against Hegel with the greatest possible

clarity. I have known for some time that there were issues here to be dealt with which I felt were not simply a matter of linguistics. Wrestling with your text has helped me to clarify my position a little, but I think it may be an area in which we have more work to do together.

You note (page 9) "Reich's concept of functional identity and antithesis was itself a development from Engels' account of contradictions in nature as the driving force behind development. Engels in this area, was, of course, directly indebted to Hegel's philosophy of the dialectic, which saw historical development as the interplay between thesis and antithesis, moving to synthesis. This then becomes the thesis of the next level of development, itself opposed to some other antithesis and moving on step by step through the process of historical dialectic. In this sense, progress is always made by opposing the current thesis to its antithesis and through revolutionary conflict generating a higher level of historical evolution in synthesis.

My difficulty here is that I understand Hegel's basic assumption as concerning the pre-existence of polarity of being. Freud, of course, takes up the same kind of stance in his opposition between the life instinct and the death instinct as axiomatic for the development of all future character structure and defence. Now if you grant the fundamental polarisation of being as unmodifiable data, then you are faced either with the depressive position of conflicted ambivalence, the way of compromise, the holding of the two uncomfortably together, or with some level of the process of synthesis that is a bringing into an integrated field of both sides of the polarity. The third position is a kind of backing off from polarisation to the place where you deny either pole of the dialectic. My application of the Johari diagram with which you are familiar is an attempt to map this kind of process.

Now my main point of argument is this: that the assumption that polarisation is an unalterable datum of human being seems to me to be a presentation of schizoid idealisation and splitting, projected into philosophy and the structure of meaning in a parallel way to the process of projection of polarities into myths and symbols, religious constructs and social systems behaviour as evolved over the ages. If that is true then it raises the possibility of a different kind of dialectic which is itself fundamentally a non-dialectic. I don't have a word for it. It stands over against the dialectic process as a reversal of energy. Instead of taking the existence of the opposites for granted and spending all energy on the attempt to bring some kind of creative interplay between the experienced polarities, we press back behind the presenting polarisation, between the paradoxical juxtaposition of thesis and antithesis, to the point at which that bifurcation or catastrophe emerged. It is therefore possible to see being as essentially a unified drive which under conditions of transmarginal stress, convolutes, develops a catastrophe surface to its energy field and splits into polar modalities which are then held in fundamental opposition, with one or the other held repressed, denied and projected. The energy of initial trauma is vested in the maintenance of polarity. The repression mechanisms manage the boundary of polarisation and cut off all memory of the pre-polarised position. Thus the conscious agenda is one of reconciling given polarities. The deeper agenda of catharting or annealing the underlying energy of polarisation (thus decreasing the sense of splitting in the field, resolving the bifurcation, removing the catastrophe surface further down the line of experience, and therefore allowing free flow of energy across the field without catastrophic jumps) is blocked by all the resistance and defensiveness of unconscious repression.

Now this raises the possibility which I think Rank opened up, only to be stamped upon by the plague reaction of the Vienna Circle, reinforced by the psychodynamics of the oppressed Jewish community of Berlin in the inter-war years, namely that it is possible to begin a therapeutic engagement in the pre-polarised position, in other words before fundamental splitting has been utilised as a defence against life threat or life attenuation. As the primitive traumata are then approached and cathartically resolved within the supportive (counter-entropic) relationship with the therapist or analyst, the fundamental energy of splitting or polarisation is reduced. As a process this undermines the very polarity between thesis and antithesis in the first place. It begs the very questions which Hegel and subsequently Engels, Freud and even Reich set out to answer.

As I understand it, the dialectic of Jungian therapy enables the various polarities to get into some kind of talking relationship with each other, without in any psychodynamic sense reducing the levels of polarisation. In other words, the fundamental primitive defences, the paranoid schizoid dynamics laid down presumably in the pre- and peri-natal stages of formation, remain unresolved, but the patient or client is enabled to come to terms with their effects in a way which enables them to take a slightly more functional relationship to the world in which they live. **It is imperative that we should not confuse this re-ordering of the defences within the dialectic of synthesis with the dynamic resolution of the defences themselves in the process of integration.**

Now I think we need a clear distinction between integration and unification and here I take up your material very positively indeed. There is a seduction of regression to the point of unity as if that itself, in a kind of time reversed stance, were an answer to the problem of polarisation. This is a retreat from a fixated trauma to a pre-traumatised position and must again not be confused with a resolution of the trauma itself. Integration may start with regression to the pre-traumatised unified point, but then proceeds through a reliving of the trauma integrating the unacceptable stress levels and annealing the splits bit by bit during the process so that the history is reclaimed, the process is re-engaged, albeit with the adult resources to handle the hyper-stress. The fundamental energy of splitting is therefore withdrawn from the system, allowing the polarities to reduce and their subsequent synthetic defence-construct to be dismantled. I think we are looking at the distinction between synthesis as a dialectical process being a kind of para religion, and integration in terms of the resolution of the very cause of polarisation as the path of reality-oriented maturation. The first, for all its similarities of linguistic usage, is in fact a reinforcement and rearrangement of the defences, the second allows for the resolution of the defences.

That is a complex statement and I think with time it must be clarified and tightened up, but if it can bear weight then it seems to me that we are looking here at a breakthrough into a non-Hegelian view of psychohistory, which has the potential to resolve the conflicts between, for instance, the antitheses of the Communist and Capitalist worlds and to deal creatively and integratively with the questions of racism, sexism, scapegoating, polarisation and idealisation within the social construct. It also has massive implications for the development of the intrapersonal structure in a non-regressive, non-defensive mode of integration with differentiation, with low energy vested in the boundary defences between the differentiated sub-parts so allowing very high levels of functionally adaptive systemic integration of the personality within its social construct.

David Wasdell, June, 1984