

# Chinese Medicine and Psychoanalysis, Part II: The Metal Element and the Anal Character Type

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#### **Abstract**

This article considers Freud's writings about the anal character type and its relevance to the metal element and its correspondences. The metal element is further examined in relationship to materialism, capitalism, Martin Luther's Enlightenment, and the emergence of linear time. Both Chinese medicine and psychoanalysis are described as qualitative functional models that endeavor to articulate the interior dimension of the human condition. As archetypes of health, the similarity is noted between Laozi's idealized infant whose spontaneity is said to flow from its "fullness of *jing*" and Freud's idealized view of the infant's "unrepressed libido."

Psychoanalytic theory is critiqued regarding its relevance to the outlook and therapeutic goals of Chinese medicine while striving toward a deeper synthesis in our understanding of the human condition. Freud is critiqued for seeing every higher human capacity as a reflection and sublimation of the first two stages of infantile development. It is noted that, while analysis offers many concepts such as repression, sublimation, and shadow that are essential to an integral understanding of the human condition, it limits itself to those stages of development that culminate in the formation of a healthy ego. Wilber's "pre/trans-fallacy" is discussed in relation to the analyst's conflation of the pre-personal stages with the more highly evolved trans-personal stages of development that lie beyond ego.

Psychoanalysis is credited as an evolutionary step in functional medicine conceiving all internal dimensions of the human being as constituting "self" as opposed to a collection of spirits as originally conceived in the Chinese tradition. I suggest that an understanding of the evolution of the self and culture as seen through the lens of psychoanalysis is imperative for the practitioner who aspires to practice an integral medicine that leaves no part of humanity behind.

**Key Words**: Chinese medicine, acupuncture, psychoanalysis, anal character type, mind, ego, metal element, pre/trans-fallacy

## The Anal Character Type

Freud's essay, "Character and Anal Eroticism," describes a constellation of adult character traits, orderliness, parsimony, and obstinacy, which he associates with the sublimation of infantile anal eroticism.¹ Interestingly, these traits also correlate with the "Parkinson's personality type."² I find that a significant number of my patients with Parkinson disease have a constitutional dynamic implicating the metal and wood elements.

From a psychoanalytical perspective, during the anal-erotic stage (18 months to three years), Eros is concentrated in the area of the anus. The major conflict of this stage involves toilet training and the child's discovery of having power over its parents through the manipulation of both urination and bowel movements. The quality of the parents' reactions to the infant during this time, the amount of shame involved, and other factors such as trauma are thought to engender distortions that manifest as the anal character type in later life.

In Freud's view, the infantile fascination with feces, that which is unclean, is repressed and thereby sublimated into an adult obsession with cleanliness. Feces represent that which is seen as "not self," possessing no value, and is one of the first things in life the child is charged with letting go of that has been part of the self. As such, it represents a first intimation of loss and death.

In CM, "letting go," grieving, feces, and death are all associated through the metal element. Numerically, metal is the fourth element to arise cosmologically. The number four si (四) and the word for death si (死) are homophones. While heaven, earth, and qi "remain as one," the fourth stage of cosmogenesis involves the fall (fall being the season of metal and death) to the ten thousand things, the loss of wholeness.3

We may understand the characteristic of "obstinacy" in relationship to the functioning of metal in terms of "rigidity," the stubborn refusal to change due to pride. Cinnabar, the first herb discussed in the *Shennong bencao*, is the archetype of the metal element. This rock, in the form of mercuric sulfide, signifies a fixed sense of self—the concretized ego. With the application of the heart's fire across the *ke* cycle, impurities are burned away. Quicksilver, a metal that flows like water, is produced, symbolizing flexible consciousness and the conception of a new self.<sup>4</sup>

Parsimony, the adult hoarding of money, is held as the result of having sublimated anal eroticism.<sup>5</sup> Hence, the adult's hoarding of gold is a reflection of the child's withholding of feces or, in Freud's own words, "It is possible that the contrast between the most precious substance known to men and the most worthless, which they reject as waste matter ('refuse'), has led to this specific identification of gold with faeces."<sup>6</sup>

In this sense, eroticism does not necessarily mean that the child is having sexual fantasies pertaining to the anus. Rather, it refers to

the concentration of Eros (life force) there during a specific stage of development. The trait of parsimony is taken as an adult reflection of the infant withholding feces in an exertion of power and denial of death. In other words, one's fascination with what is unclean and of no value has been sublimated into what is deemed by culture to have great value: money, power, and the ego's imagined immortality.

In denial of death, the adult thus holds onto money rather than feces. The retention of feces by the infant and the adult hoarding of money are both substitute gratifications for connection to spirit, for lost wholeness, for realization of that self beyond ego that is unborn and will not die. Wealth, as some of us know, is rarely fulfilling in and of itself. For it is spirit that is immortal, transcends form, and has ultimate value.

The metal element is particularly concerned with value, and this is imaged in the names of acupuncture points like Lu-11 (*Shaoshang*, Little Merchant), Ll-1 (*Shangyang*, Merchant *Yang*), and Lu-1 (*Zhongfu*, Central Treasury). Fall, the season associated with metal, is the time that merchants adjusted the scales in the marketplace to ensure fair trade.<sup>7</sup>

# Metal, Money, Materialism: The Enlightenment of Martin Luther

The rise of capitalism in Protestant Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century holds some interesting associations with both the metal element and anality.<sup>8</sup> Capitalism emerged with the waning of feudalism and the rise of cities as centralized locations for commerce and exchange. Lacking spirit and lusting for money, the Catholic Church began selling indulgences and in fall (October 31<sup>st</sup>) 1517, Martin Luther famously affixed his list of grievances to the church's front door. Aided by the newly invented printing press his edicts spread through Europe within two months.

In his work, "Life Against Death, the Psychoanalytic Meaning of History," Norman O. Brown reflects on Martin Luther's enlightenment and the implications for capitalism and modern culture. What is not so widely known is that Martin Luther was enlightened when in the privy in a tower at the Wittenberg monastery. Martin Luther seems to have become enlightened to the absolutist black and white nature of righteous indignation. Such black and white moral distinctions are typical of the pre-modern traditions rooted in mythic world views.

From such a perspective you are either in or you are out, with us or against us, going to heaven or to hell, true self or evil other. The colon and the lungs are membranes that embody in their functioning a drawing of the distinction between self and not-self to engender the virtues of transparency and purity within. Righteousness  $(yi, \frac{3}{8})$ , being aligned in service to what is recognized as being higher, is the virtue assigned the metal element in the Bai Hu Dong.<sup>11</sup>

The analyst Jacques Lacan postulated that the unconscious is structured as a language. 12 From this perspective, virtues represent innate potentials and their manifest distortions can be understood as "mistranslations" that corrupt development. In his text The Atman Project, Ken Wilber discusses at length the relationship between "translation" and "transformation." 13 The relationship between virtue and its distortion comprises a significant dimension of my own work as well.14

The dysfunctional ego mistranslates the virtue of righteousness as "self-righteousness" or seeing one's self (body, ego, tribe, clan, creation myth, nation state) as pure and everyone and everything else as "other," somehow soiled, and less than. Pride, as associated with dysfunction in the metal element, may be likened to the moon imagining that its beauty is a reflection of its own worth, failing to embrace that it is merely a vehicle for the transmission of the sun's light (spirit). Thus is born the illusion of self-image.

Martin Luther's writing is filled with references to the devil as feces, going so far as making the threat to "throw him into my



Figure 1a. Bosch's Garden of Earthly Delights. Note the imagery of the devil seated on a toilet defecating the souls of the damned into a pool of feces while an individual simultaneously defecates gold coins into the same pool. Black crows fly out of the anus of the body being consumed by the devil.

anus, where he belongs."15 The devil represents all that we deem unclean and bury in the depths of our bodies and awareness, denying that it represents any part of our own selves. Luther's protestations against the Roman Catholic Church selling indulgences can be seen as a sublimation, or even perhaps a shadow projection, of his own rejection of whatever he let go of as he renounced materialism in the monastery privy—his feces, his ego, the devil.

The connection between material wealth and the function of the anus is featured in Hieronymus Bosch's (1450-1516) painting, "The Garden of Earthly Delights." The devil is shown evacuating damned souls into a

cesspool; one is depicted as defecating coins into the same pool. Another detail depicts two ears configured with a knife between them—a metaphor for the male genitalia. A demon is piercing the ear with a needle at acupuncture points thought to stimulate and diminish sexual desire. These points have become known as the Jerome and Bosch points.<sup>16</sup> [Fig.1b]



Figure 1b. Two ears and a knife serve here as a metaphor for the male genitalia. A demon is poking the ear with a needle at locations that Nogier termed the "Jerome and Bosch points," which have come to be used to sedate (the inferior "Jerome" point) and stimulate (the superior "Bosch" point) sexual desire respectively.17

From the perspective of Freudian analysis, one might view gold as sublimated feces. The case can be made that the distortions of capitalism and materialism leading to the war on nature represent repressions of anal eroticism. In other words, the unwholesome accumulation of wealth with the attendant destruction of the biosphere (the feminine as in mother earth) are the result of the ego's own immortality project, the acceptance of a substitute gratification for unity, humanity's denial of death, and the stubborn refusal to truly live.

Neumann points out the significance of the transition from circular to linear time as being congruent with the shift from hunting and foraging to farming, which was necessary to sustain the existence of cities. 18 Cities today, largely constructed of stone and steel, are compelling manifestations of the metal element as archetype.

While hunting and gathering was based on daily survival, farming necessitated and allowed the capacity to look to the future and plan. It also accommodated the accumulation of wealth and other excess resources by an upper class. With farming came capitalism and with that came financial interest—the delayed gratification of saving money now for a better future. Humans no longer lived in heaven (Eden); heaven was now something to be attained after death. The world, the body, and the biosphere are treated as dregs, while heaven, imagined as the future destination of the soul, always exists as "eventually" and never as "right here and now." Hence, Brown elaborates capitalism, interest, and the gold standard as the cultural products of sublimation.<sup>19</sup>

#### Conclusions

Laozi's infant with "fullness of jing" and Freud's fully alive and unrepressed infant flooded with "Eros" are similar views of an optimum state of healthy spontaneity that are lost in early childhood and whose return is an essential foundation of healing. In positing the ultimate expression of human health, Brown asks us to "imagine" an unrepressed man—a man strong enough to live and therefore strong enough to die...."20 Brown imagines such a human as one fully expressed and without repression, perhaps not too different from the sage Huzi who, Zhuangzi tells us, "has not yet emerged from his source."21

It is interesting that in outlining the anal character type, Freud essentially corroborates several key associations of the metal constitutional type. Of course, the "syndrome pattern" that Freud points to is more extreme than the average metal constitution; however, the traits of "orderliness, parsimony, and obstinacy" and their opposites are common characteristics associated with the metal element.

In his article, Freud notes the importance of considering if there are additional character complexes associated with other erotogenic zones and notes that the only one he is aware of is the association of "intense 'burning' ambition of people who earlier suffered from enuresis."<sup>22</sup> Again, Freud elaborates a relationship long recognized in Chinese medicine between the bladder and ambition (*zhi*, 志), the spirit associated with the water element.

Freud and the ancient Chinese were both thinking synthetically, mapping the interior dimension of the human being using functional metaphors, whether "Eros" or yang, and it's not surprising that two radically different perspectives, separated by culture and time, elaborate such correlations. Freud's adaption of the concept of sublimation from alchemy aligns well with eastern teachings such as Kundalini and Tantra relative to harnessing lower potentials to cultivate higher capacities. In my text, *Nourishing Destiny*, I discuss at length the cultivation of virtue through the reframing of one's relationship to the contents of the mind, thought, feeling, emotion, and sensation.<sup>23</sup>

One of Freud's and psychoanalysis' most significant contributions was in identifying the inner dimension of the human being as "self" and not as an "other." In pre-modern Chinese culture, hidden motivations—what we might consider to be various types of mental illness or symptomatology—were often attributed to ghosts and "possession by internal and external evils" later objectified as "syndrome patterns." Gu ( $\underline{*}$ ) and gui ( $\underline{*}$ ) were conceived of as an "evil (xie:  $\overline{*}$ ) other" and not as manifestations of self. However, it was recognized that for any invasion there is a corresponding vulnerability that allows it. In modern traditional Chinese medicine, it is not unusual to hear a patient's belligerence objectified as yang fire rising. This language sounds like a strict thermodynamic statement—one that fails to account for a patient's conscious and unconsciously made choices rooted in specific values that must be reframed if medicine is to attain to the heart of the issue.

Concepts such as the unconscious and shadow, suppression, repression, sublimation, negation, transference, displacement, disassociation, defense mechanisms, discussions of Eros and Thanatos as the life and death impulses, Jung's archetypes, etc. have expanded our knowledge of the human condition beyond that found exclusively in any of the pre-modern traditions. Many of the precepts that we postmodern healers take for granted are either elaborations or reactions to Freud's work; therefore, it can be quite helpful to become familiar with the basis of his and the other analysts' works for the sake of explicating our own assumptions so

that we may scrutinize them. Further, the inclination of psychoanalysis to understand culture as the external projection of an internal process can help the evolution of culture become more self-aware.

There are those who would debate whether or not the Chinese medicine physician *should* be concerned with these realms. My answer is that one *cannot* touch a patient *without* influencing these dimensions. The only question is, "To what degree is the practitioner aware of emergence in the more subtle realms of the patient's expression as treatment progresses?" Put simply, to be ignorant of the structure and function of the human mind, as explicated by Freud and those who followed, is to compromise quality of care by denying a significant dimension of the best of our available knowledge.

Such an exclusion is not necessarily different than when a biomedical physician prescribes medicine symptomatically while failing to appreciate the functional precepts of health inherent in Chinese medicine—a failure that often has dire consequences for the functional integrity of the patient. An understanding of these dimensions is essential if one purports to practice an integral/holistic medicine, a medicine in which no aspect of the patient is excluded. Being a healer today requires a greater embrace and understanding of human complexity than ever before.

### Critique

Perhaps three of the most influential thinkers of the last century were Marx, Freud, and Einstein. Wilber has suggested that Marx made it as far as the first chakra, reducing all human complexity to the least common denominator of his "means of production" and that Freud made it as far as the second chakra by reducing everything to sexuality.<sup>24</sup> Einstein's elaboration of relativity helped set the philosophical foundation for the flowering of pluralism and relativism in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (I speculate that Einstein's philosophical view was coming from a high fourth chakra level corresponding to that of an ego well-rooted in pluralism.)

With the advent of modernism and a retreat from the repression endemic in the pre-modern era, I understand the analysts' emphasis on sexuality as representing their own liberation (similar to how teenagers often act when they first leave their parents' home for college). With his emphasis on history as the cause of self, Freud appears to hold that who an individual is in any moment is most significantly determined by his past. The human being is seen as the momentary effect of a previous cause, and therapy seeks to make that cause—hidden in the shadows—conscious.

Its goal, not unlike Laozi's (Laozi literally means "old infant"), is to return to the state of infancy, where Eros unsuppressed—a

"fullness of jing"—floods one's being. Taking this perspective to its theoretical conclusion, Reich considered that the ultimate expression of freedom was to be found in orgasm.<sup>25</sup> For Reich, orgasm represented a transcendence of ego and flooding of Eros that recaptured the state of the infant and liberated the adult. (Let it suffice to say that if orgasms had the potential to liberate, the world would be in a very different condition today!)

A significant weakness in Freud's perspective is that he tends to view the higher as a repression, sublimation, or some type of expression of the lower. Describing the soul or the emergence of virtue as an expression of repressed or sublimated infantile sexuality is like describing Shakespeare as a collection of carbon atoms or the reduction of a symphonic piece to a collection of mathematical equations that represent the interactions of sound waves. Rather, we must understand higher emergence to represent an evolution of the lower that includes but transcends it.

Freud sees the whole of human progress as a reflection of the first two chakras and Eros as a "polymorphous perverse field" that the healthy adult seeks to return to. We may, however, recognize that Eros actually has a *telos*, a direction, and therefore hold the emergence of higher capacities not merely as a reaction formation to denied infantile states of eroticism, which trivializes them, but actually as the primary directive of the entire human project.

Virtue is not a consolation prize; rather, it is the point of the whole endeavor. Wisdom is not merely the result of sublimating fear and channeling it in a more productive way. The emergence of wisdom represents the actual transcendence of fear that involves a significant shift of identification away from the ego's inherently self-centered motives and toward the emergence of a deeper and higher self. Such a self has evolved to experience ease in the face of the unknown, embracing a passion to create a better future, the torpedoes be damned. Such are the virtues of soul depth and spiritual self-confidence.

Freud and psychoanalysis in general seem to have worked entirely within the stages of human development up to and including ego, possessing little if any understanding of the transpersonal realms that lay beyond it (the psychic, subtle, causal, and nondual). In Wilber's text, *The Atman Project*, he elaborates the state and stage schemas devised by the developmental psychologists and correlates them with the stages identified by the pre-modern traditions.<sup>26</sup>

He presents the stages of evolution beyond ego (4<sup>th</sup> chakra) described in the eastern traditions up through the psychic (5<sup>th</sup> chakra), subtle (6<sup>th</sup> chakra), causal (7<sup>th</sup> chakra), and non-dual (8<sup>th</sup> chakra), continuing down through the bardo realms as stages of "involution" described in Tibetan Buddhism to fully elaborate the cycle of state and stage development from birth, to death, and beyond into a new incarnation.

Freud mistakes the expression and experience of the higher realms, for instance those manifested by authentic shaman, as regression to a state of infancy or psychoses. On the other hand, Jung elevates "pre-rational mythology to trans-rational glory."<sup>27</sup> This category error is a perfect example of Wilber's "pre/trans" fallacy where higher expressions are conflated with those that are lower.<sup>28</sup>

An example of this would be to conflate the spontaneity of Laozi's infant with that of the sage. Though both share the virtue of spontaneity (ziran: 自然), the infant is spontaneously selfish while the sage is spontaneously selfless. We must recognize that between these two expressions there is a lifetime of intentional cultivation. There thus exists a simplicity before complexity (the infant) and a simplicity after complexity (the sage), and we are at peril of negating developmental hierarchy by confusing the two.

Evolution of consciousness proceeds as the life force (Eros) ascends through ever-higher centers (the chakras represent one such model). Each center engenders higher capacities that include the lower centers while also transcending their limitations. For example, Eros manifesting through the first and second chakra has no inherent morality and its primary directive is survival. Any ethic one might bring to the expression of sexuality is not inherent within the impulse itself but rather arises from higher centers associated with the mind and heart (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> chakra in some systems) and beyond.

Freud sees the higher as an expression of the lower rather than as an evolution of the lower. From my perspective, as we evolve, a shift in motivation occurs from one that is initially self-centered to that of an increasing embrace of selflessness as "other" is recognized as "self." Using Chinese medicine terminology, we might say that our sense of self shifts from our microcosmic *shen* (small "s") to the macrocosmic *Shen* (large "S").

With this evolution there is an accompanying increase of dignity manifesting as the capacity to bear what one must for the sake of others. Hence, for virtue's sake, a healthy individual might be expected to suppress unwholesome dimensions of the self rather than feel free under the pretense of transparency to enact and speak every deed and word that crosses her mind. In this way, without denying the less-developed dimensions of the self, we may endeavor to bring the best part of ourselves forward into relationship.

During the stages of infancy up through the formation of a healthy and well-balanced ego, the individual is shaped most significantly by genetically programmed and culturally reinforced habits. As the individual transcends ego, a cataclysmic shift (for the ego) occurs where "who one is" in any moment is relatively less impacted by history and is relatively more impacted by the better future she is striving to create. Precisely at this moment where the world seems to shift upon its axis, one begins to self-consciously guide the life

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impulse rather than have their behavior dictated by an unconscious denial of it.

Having a healthy ego is the theoretical endpoint of psychoanalysis as it lacks an appreciation for the higher trans-personal realms (having conflated them with the pre-personal realm of the infant). A healthy ego is one that is mature, responsible, autonomous, and respects the autonomy of other healthy egos. Self-reflection is a very highly evolved capacity, yet it seems that humanity is now stuck in a hall of mirrors, with every surface reflecting "I," "me," and "mine," thus creating the illusion of the personal self as the center of its very own universe. Hence, ego is a healthy stage of development foundational for further growth, yet, like any stage, it is innately limited and causes problems when there is a failure to move beyond it.

The mind is an evolutionarily-evolved mechanism dependent on the structure and functioning of the human nervous system. Its job is "to know," by orienting us in time and space through the storage and retrieval of memories in the forms of thought, feeling, emotion, sensation, and imagery. A mind conditioned by ego orients the self in time and space by habitually keeping awareness focused on the past and on the known, with that step beyond the known inducing terror—hence, the terror that both mediators and seekers in general often experience in the moment prior to letting go of the mind.

It appears that the one thing the ego simply cannot do is transcend itself. In this sense the ego can be thought of as a motive to maintain the *status quo* as resistance to the next stage higher of development. To become our next higher, more integrous self, we must die to who we are now. This always appears as an epic step *forward* (not backward as conceived by the traditions) unimagined by both the ego and Freud.

To truly live is to evolve. As practitioners of perhaps the most highly evolved holistic medicine, it does not seem too far a stretch for us to endeavor to catalyze the emergence of that human who would be, to paraphrase Brown, "strong enough to die and therefore courageous enough to truly live."

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