

Alexander Voznyuk

 alexvoz@ukr.net • <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4458-2386>

ZHYTOMYR IVAN FRANKO STATE UNIVERSITY

 <https://ror.org/044ghaj56>

Psychological and spiritual aspects of threats to person's existence

 <https://doi.org/10.15633/9788383700854.06>

Numerous threats to human existence are associated with situations of uncertainty that act as a stress factor being the physiological shock of human body which is due less to adverse environmental factors, but more to psycho-spiritual state of the human being¹.

The stress (the nonspecific response of the body as a whole to any stimulus influencing it) is accompanied by a set of nonspecific reactions that are common to all diseases without exception. Thus, a narrow set of reasons, or, better to say, some universal factor lies at the root of any disease, which leads to the weakening of the organism's vitality/immunity thus reducing its living space and increasing various threats of the environment.

1 A. V. Voznyuk, *Aggression and health: an attempt at conceptual integrating these phenomena*, „Technologies of intellect development” 2 (2018) no. 8 (19), <http://www.psytir.org.ua/index.php/technology>.

This reasoning leads to the conclusion that stress as the physiological shock of human body is due less to adverse environmental factors, but more to person's psycho-spiritual negativism. So the essence of the stress being an *information phenomenon* is mostly of a psycho-philosophical nature: the disease occurs when a man cannot adequately respond to external stimuli due to his own psychological and worldview inadequacy, which leads to forming a lot of negative psychological settings and social attitudes that in their turn generate different diseases being the basic threats to human being.

In this respect, A. Maslow wrote that many psychologists and representatives of other professions believe that the major reason of man's diseases is connected with his psyche, with his spiritual, value orientations and, ultimately, with his worldview². Therefore the treatment of any disease is extremely simple: it consists in harmonizing man's spiritual world since, as St. Augustine wrote, „human sufferings stem from disorderly human mind”.

So, man's negative attitude to reality leads to weakening his energy tonus. This was proved by John Diamond, the founder of Life-Energy Analysis (formerly Behavioral Kinesiology), a system based on Applied Kinesiology, who developed what he termed „Life-Energy Analysis” in the 1970s.³

Like J. Selye, who discovered that the greatest and single contributor to physiological mechanism of stresses is man's negative thoughts and feelings (that is why the annihilation of these symptoms lies in the positive emotions, such as love, gratitude, goodwill, etc), J. Diamond came to the same conclusions: „the thoughts,

2 A. H. Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, New York 1976.

3 J. M. Diamond, *Behavioral Kinesiology. How to Activate Your Thymus and Increase Your Life Energy*, New York 1979.

feelings, and attitudes which activate the thymus and increase our Life Energy are benevolent love, faith, trust, courage, and gratitude. Those which weaken the thymus and reduce our Life Energy are hate, envy, suspicion, and fear. Moreover, thoughts and feelings related to unpleasant associations, images, and experiences also weaken the thymus. Pleasant thoughts and associations strengthen the thymus and the Life Energy. The latter are termed „Homing thoughts” by Dr. Diamond. If you need a lift, strengthen your thymus with a „homing thought” – think of something uplifting or someone you love”. Even more: „Our physical gestures which reflect our emotional attitudes are also connected with our thymus and Life Energy in Dr. Diamond’s experiments. Affirmative nodding of the head strengthens the thymus; shaking of the head weakens it. The „Madonna” gesture of love – arms outstretched to embrace – is a movement that instantly strengthens a weak thymus and has therapeutic value when you are under stress, even if the gesture is only imagined (but with feeling). Smiling is not only benevolent, it is also beneficial. The muscles of a genuine smile are connected with and stimulate the thymus. The opposite occurs when the mouth is sad or frowning”. In general, as P. Weinzweig puts it, „Love is what people most hunger for. Enlightened love is the spirit of generosity which does not seek to possess but to liberate. Love is the key to our Life Energy. Impersonal love is the sunlike centre of Personal Power”⁴.

So we can conclude that stress is an information phenomenon⁵. Analyzing the psychophysiological aspect of the phenom-

4 P. Weinzweig, *The ten commandments of personal power. Creative strategies for shared happiness and success*, New York 1988, p. 41–42.

5 A. V. Voznyuk, *Fundamental Factors of Human Health as Prerequisites for COVID-19 Prevention*, [in:] *Philosophy, psychology and pedagogics against*

enon of stress we can say that stress manifests itself in the form of emotions, which are an integral characteristic of human body, as evidenced by the information theory of emotions developed by Pavel Simonov. If a person experiences a lack of information about a particular event, then this psychophysiological state forms an emotional (orientation, search, stressful) reaction. Thus, as Simonov experimentally showed, emotion is a function of information, that is, emotion is realized as a reaction of an organism to a lack of information about a particular life situation related to a person's satisfaction of his/her needs⁶.

This lack of information is closely connected with human being's world outlook being a crucial factor in his/her physical and spiritual health, first, because it largely determines his/her way of life which, in its turn, determines man's style of work, behavioral patterns, food preferences, etc. that may cause diseases.

Based on the information theory of emotions, we can believe that emotion as the lack of information about the outside world is an expression of situational uncertainty as well as the fundamental uncertainty in today and tomorrow. And these lead to different threats to human existence.

Deepak Chopra and Rudy Tanzin in the book *Super Genes* (2017) write that chronic stress is usually based on three factors: repeatability, unpredictability, and lack of control. A. M. Svyadoshch in his book *Neuroses and Their Treatment* (1971) writes that a psychic trauma does not always relate only to the past, but to that which threatens our future, revealing our uncertainty concerning

COVID-19: Manual, ed. V. V. Rybalka, A. P. Samodryn, O. V. Voznyuk and others; a team of authors, Zhytomyr 2020, p. 223–250.

6 P. V. Simonov, *The motivated brain a neurophysiological analysis of human behavior*, Philadelphia 1991.

important for us situations and therefore requires a decision as to how act further.

This uncertainty causes emotional reactions in a human being that, in its turn, can cause frustrations and stresses – the main threat to our existence, if these stresses become chronic, when, as studies have shown, chronic stresses lead to premature aging of the body. Anger, aggression being the elements of stress leads to the same result: scientists from the USA and Great Britain have established that anger and hostility significantly accelerate the aging process of the human body. It was also experimentally shown that negative emotional reactions, as well as related psychophysiological conditions confirmed on the level of behavioral attitudes and psychological settings (such as lying, insincerity, anger, hatred, envy, etc.), are the result of a stressful behavior model and worldview that undermine human health because they reduce the energy tone of his body.

At the same time, stress as a fundamental cause of diseases is realized not only in the process of emotional response to stimuli of the external and internal environment (which expresses the adaptive aspect of stress), but also in the process of the impossibility/inability of such a reaction (this inability acts as a factor of maladaptation): as experimental studies show, the cancer patients do not reveal a tendency to the external manifestation of irritation and anger, they are usually complaisant, unsure of themselves and patient. At the same time, they are highly sensitive to stress and less able to discharge negative emotions⁷. These people can be unbalanced

7 S. Greer, M. Watson, *Towards a psychobiological model of cancer. Psychological considerations*, „Social Science and Medicine” 1985, no. 20, p. 773–7.

by such interpersonal problems as envy and competition, which causes their losing hope, becoming helpless and depressed⁸.

And depression as an expression of emotional stress, by the way, may be considered as a carcinogenic factor: according to a longitudinal study in which 2000 workers from Chicago (USA) took part, depression is the most definite determinant of cancer death even in cases of persistence of such factors as smoking and alcohol abuse, age, position and precedents of cancer in the family⁹.

All this suggests that the psycho-spiritual-behavioral factor of human life has a decisive impact on human health. The psycho-energy-behavioral component of health was most fully studied by already mentioned Institute of Kinesiology (USA)¹⁰.

The researchers of the Institute of Kinesiology, having studied the numerous psychophysiological indicators of human body in the conditions of social communications, came to a conclusion: if two human beings communicate, and the vital tone (energy) in one of them is higher than in the other, then the vital energy „flows” to the latter, which is fixed by appropriate devices. Something similar takes place in electrical engineering in the form of a „capture effect” (a phenomenon associated with frequency modulation reception in which only the stronger of two signals at, or near, the same frequency or channel will be demodulated): if you include two sound generators in a single power grid that generate oscillations with close but different frequencies, and if the first generator is characterized by more power than the second one, then the „capture

8 L. R. Ormont, *Aggression and cancer in group treatment*, [in:] *Psychotherapeutic Treatment of Cancer Patients*, ed. J. G. Goldberg, New York 1981.

9 R. B. Shekelle et al., *Psychological depression and 17-year risk of death from cancer*, „*Psychosomatic Medicine*” 1981, no. 43, p. 117–125.

10 J. M. Diamond, *Behavioral Kinesiology. How to Activate Your Thymus and Increase Your Life Energy*, New York 1979.

effect” takes place, when the „strong” generator leads the „weak” one and makes the latter work at the frequency of the „strong” generator.

Having studied the features of such an exchange of energy between people, D. Diamond came to the conclusion that various manifestations of vital energy are interconnected. The energy of a „strong” person is weakened by continual personal contact with a „weak” person, while the energy of the latter is enhanced. During personal contacts, the disturbances in mental balance, destructive emotional reactions, negative value attitudes can be transmitted from one human being to another: moods and thoughts are contagious.

At the level of neuron organization of the human brain, the principle of resonance is realized in the phenomenon of *mirror neurons*, discovered and investigated by Giacomo Rizzolatti with his colleagues¹¹. This Italian scientist has revealed the mirror effect according to which the functioning schemes of neuron cells in human brain of a person are mirrored by the neuron cells of another person when these persons are in the process of communicative interaction. That is, the actions of a person, accompanied by the activation of the corresponding structure of the neurons of his/her brain, cause the activation of the same structure of the neurons in the brain of another person, who observes these actions and participate in these actions.

This mirror effect is also manifested at the level of *ideomotor reactions*, when a thought or mental image brings about a certain muscular reaction being beyond the awareness of the subject, *when the movement being imagined by a person is realized reflexively*. So,

11 G. Rizzolatti, M. A. Arbib, *Language within our grasp*, „Trends in Neurosciences” 1998, no. 21, p. 188–194.

under the influence of some mental processes within human nervous system the nerve impulses providing real physical movement in the body spring up, which activates minimal in intensity (and not realized in actual movements of human body) motor impulses arising in connection with person's thoughts about physical movements.

So, we can talk about the *ideo-dynamic response* (or „reflex”) which relates to a wider domain, and is applied in the description of all bodily reactions (including *ideo-motor* and *ideo-sensory* responses) caused in a similar way by certain thoughts/mental images, when, for example, the salivation being a secretory response is often caused by mere imagining by a person of the process of tasting a lemon.

The mentioned phenomenon is embodied both in the context of *evoked potentials of the brain* (when the frequency characteristics of sounds perceived by human beings generate brain processes characterized by the same frequency characteristics), and in the form of *ideomotor reactions*, when in the brain of a person who imagines certain physical movements, the nerve impulses are detected, which occur during real physical movements¹².

So, a positive mood and positive attitude towards the world is a factor in increasing the vitality of a person and strengthening his/her immunity with all the social and biomedical consequences stemming from this.

On the whole, negative person's psychological states arise from stress being an information phenomenon, accompanied by a decrease in body's energy tone and realized in the situations

12 A. V. Voznyuk, *The farther reaches of studying foreign languages as a psycholinguistic phenomenon*, [in:] *Building Professional Linguistic Competence of Future Specialists. VI Regional Students' Scientific Internet-Conference* (November 27, 2020), Zhytomyr 2020, p. 223–235.

of informational uncertainty, which leads to stressful states and behaviors, and the latter is expressed in negative psychosocial reactions of fear, anger, envy, aggression, lies, insincerity, hatred, etc – which are the names of different threats of human existence.

At the same time, a prolonged state of uncertainty towards environmental events, as well as to the world as a whole, gives rise to noogenic neurosis (noogenic stress) in humans, according to V. Frankl¹³. Noogenic neurosis is a term in V. Frankl's logotherapy denoting a form of neurosis stemming from „existential frustration“. This neurosis causes a wide variety of human suffering due to the lack of a life meaning that connects events and human thoughts into an integral whole thus reducing the information uncertainty of reality due to *synergetic emergent phenomenon* which decreases the entropy in the system of different nature. A series of small uncertainties gives rise to a series of continuous stresses to which our body reacts emotionally with reducing its energy, which “de-energizes” our life and makes it a painful vale of sufferings characterized by different diseases.

Conversely, positive emotional states associated with optimism fill our body with energy. In this case, we can talk about such harmonizing psychological state as *the fundamental optimism*, which appears when a human being is fully informed about the world, whose processes are freed of any uncertainty.

And this allows a person to relate to the world with complete confidence, sincerity and openness, to be an altruist and at the same time to realize himself/herself as something separate and unique, that is, to harmoniously combine a child and an adult in one person.

13 V. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning. An introduction to logotherapy*, New York 1992.

The fundamental optimism has much in common with D. Chopra's "*radical well-being*", which goes beyond just good health: this is a state in which human body is constantly full of joy and energy, the heart loves and full of compassion, the mind is calm, vibrant and reflective, and finally, more importantly, life is full of ease of being, carefree and joy. These qualities, as D. Chopra puts it, automatically lead to a beautiful body and a harmonious state of mind.

Absolute informational certainty, which implies complete control of reality by a person, leads him/her to self-confidence and openness to the world.

And full and absolute control of reality can be realized when a person lays this control on the Supreme Being (God, Absolute), whom a person treats with full trust as a guarantor of justice and harmony of the world and all its events. Then this person is freed from negative emotions, from anxiety and fear.

W. James, in his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, gives examples of how a change in the worldview of a person who has abandoned fear and anxiety – the eternal companions of our lives – transforms his behavior and also fundamentally alters his psycho-physiological essence.

Here is an example taken from W. James's book, where he conveys the impression of a person who has achieved a high degree of control over himself in the context of oriental religious doctrines. This person took to the heart the advice of a spiritual teacher, who urged him to free himself from anger and mental confusion. Here is a story of this man.

"On my way back I could think of nothing else but the words 'get rid, get rid'; and the idea must have continued to possess me during my sleeping hours, for the first consciousness in the morning brought back the same thought, with the revelation of a discovery, which framed itself into the reasoning, 'If it is possible to get rid

of anger and worry, why is it necessary to have them at all?' I felt the strength of the argument, and at once accepted the reasoning. The baby had discovered that it could walk. It would scorn to creep any longer. From the instant I realized that these cancer spots of worry and anger were removable, they left me. With the discovery of their weakness they were exorcised. From that time life has had an entirely different aspect. Although from that moment the possibility and desirability of freedom from the depressing passions has been a reality to me, it took me some months to feel absolute security in my new position; but, as the usual occasions for worry and anger have presented themselves over and over again, and I have been unable to feel them in the slightest degree, I no longer dread or guard against them, and I am amazed at my increased energy and vigor of mind; at my strength to meet situations of all kinds, and at my disposition to love and appreciate everything. I have had occasion to travel more than ten thousand miles by rail since that morning. The same Pullman porter, conductor, hotel-waiter, peddler, book-agent, cabman, and others who were formerly a source of annoyance and irritation have been met, but I am not conscious of a single incivility. All at once the whole world has turned good to me. I have become, as it were, sensitive only to the rays of good. I could recount many experiences which prove a brand-new condition of mind, but one will be sufficient. Without the slightest feeling of annoyance or impatience, I have seen at rain that I had planned to take with a good deal of interested and pleasurable anticipation move out of the station without me, because my baggage did not arrive. The porter from the hotel came running and panting into the station just as the train pulled out of sight. When he saw me, he looked as if he feared a scolding, and began to tell of being blocked in a crowded street and unable to get out. When he had finished, I said to him: 'It doesn't matter at all, you couldn't help it, so we will try again

to-morrow. Here is your fee, I am sorry you had all this trouble in earning it.' The look of surprise that came over his face was so filled with pleasure that I was repaid on the spot for the delay in my departure. Next day he would not accept a cent for the service, and he and I are friends for life. During the first weeks of my experience I was on guard only against worry and anger; but, in the meantime, having noticed the absence of the other depressing and dwarfing passions, I began to trace a relationship, until I was convinced that they are all growths from the two roots I have specified. I have felt the freedom now for so long a time that I am sure of my relation toward it; and I could no more harbor any of the thieving and depressing influences that once I nursed as a heritage of humanity than a fop would voluntarily wallow in a filthy gutter.

There is no doubt in my mind that pure Christianity and pure Buddhism, and the Mental Sciences and all Religions, fundamentally teach what has been a discovery to me; but none of them have presented it in the light of a simple and easy process of elimination. At one time I wondered if the elimination would not yield to indifference and sloth. In my experience, the contrary is the result. I feel such an increased desire to do something useful that it seems as if I were a boy again and the energy for play had returned. I could fight as readily as (and better than) ever, if there were occasion for it. It does not make one a coward. It can't, since fear is one of the things eliminated. I notice the absence of timidity in the presence of any audience. When a boy, I was standing under a tree which was struck by lightning, and received a shock from the effects of which I never knew exemption until I had dissolved partnership with worry. Since then, lightning and thunder have been encountered under conditions which would formerly have caused great depression and discomfort, without [my] experiencing a trace of either. Surprise is also greatly modified, and one is less liable to become

startled by unexpected sights or noises. As far as I am individually concerned, I am not bothering myself at present as to what the results of this emancipated condition may be. I have no doubt that the perfect health aimed at by Christian Science may be one of the possibilities, for I note a marked improvement in the way my stomach does its duty in assimilating the food I give it to handle, and I am sure it works better to the sound of a song than under the friction of a frown. Neither am I wasting any of this precious time formulating an idea of a future existence or a future Heaven. The Heaven that I have within myself is as attractive as any that has been promised or that I can imagine; and I am willing to let the growth lead where it will, as long as the anger and their brood have no part in misguiding it.”¹⁴.

The result of a radical change in the spiritual and mental state of the convert was that this man transformed into a sincere, altruistic and at the same time socially stable and integral, full of energy, healthy physically and mentally entity that perceives the world with full trust, being confident of the future, and at the same time is able to act as a volitional organism.

This psychophysiological and mental state of a man presupposes his *minimum aggression towards the environment*. This, in its turn, leads to sustainable health of man and society. Besides, scientific studies show that believers are less sick and live longer¹⁵.

14 W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, New York–London–Bombay–Calcutta–Madra 1917, p. 176–179.

15 M. Argyle, *The psychology of happiness*, London–New York 1987; G. W. Comstock, K. B. Partridge, *Church attendance and health*, „Journal of Chronic Diseases” 1972, no. 25, p. 665–672.

Conclusions

Based on the information theory of emotions, we believe that emotion as the lack of information about the outside world is an expression of stress as situational uncertainty being the essence of any threat to human existence.

There is an effective mechanism to completely reduce the informational uncertainty of a person's living space, which is not associated with numerous psychological defenses. This mechanism is connected with our faith in the Higher Mind (Absolute, God) understood as *creative harmonious principle of reality*. This belief in the predetermined harmony being a fair and causal arrangement of living and inert matter is based on the belief that the existence of our world is guided by a Supreme Will, that keeps everything under control when not a single hair from a person's head falls without God's will (1 Samuel 14:45; Matthew 10:30; Luke 12:7).

Abstract

Psychological and spiritual aspects of threats to person's existence

The chapter by Alexander Voznyuk analyzes threats to human existence associated with uncertainty, which acts as a stress factor and triggers psychophysiological effects. Stress, understood as a nonspecific response of the organism to stimuli, is mainly a consequence of the psycho-spiritual state of a person, not only negative environmental factors. The author emphasizes that diseases and threats are usually the result of negative psychological attitudes and inadequate reactions to external stimuli, leading to the emergence of diseases and threats to life. The

chapter also discusses the role of worldview and spirituality in health, indicating that harmonizing the inner world of a person can be a basis for treatment and prevention. The author refers to the phenomenon of noogenic neurosis according to V. Frankl and shows how positive attitudes and faith in higher principles can protect against existential threats and stress. The chapter concludes that the key mechanism for reducing threats is faith in a higher order and harmony, which allows for a reduction in uncertainty and an increase in psychological and physical resilience.

Keywords

stress, existential threats, spirituality, worldview, mental health, harmonization