

Energy in Contemporary Reichian Analysis

Genovino Ferri, Giuseppe Cimini

ABSTRACT

Reflections on concepts of energy and their scientific application, followed by examinations of the literature regarding energy, first from a historical perspective and then from a Reichian viewpoint, are discussed by the authors. Next, the *negentropic-systemic* code will be presented, which can be used to appropriately interpret the concept of energy in contemporary Reichian analysis and in the context of its dialogues with both complexity and neuroscience.

Keywords: energy, complex living systems, negentropy, the arrow of time and psychotherapy, orgone, Reichian analysis

Received: 30.07.2020

Revised: 10.11.2020

Accepted: 18.11.2020

International Body Psychotherapy Journal
The Art and Science of Somatic Praxis

Volume 19, Number 2,

Fall/Winter 2020/2021, pp. 17-23

ISSN 2169-4745 Printing, ISSN 2168-1279 Online

© Author and USABP/EABP. Reprints and
permissions: secretariat@eabp.org

Despite the fact that today's school of Reichian analysis¹ is based on a concept of energy found in the interpretation of the *negentropic*²-*systemic* code (see below), we would pose a question: Is there room for a concept of energy in the framework of psychiatry, psychopathology, and psychotherapy, which are wcurrently dominated by a growing operationalization of its fundamental concepts?

What is the definition of “energy”? This term often raises doubts and suspicion, especially when used in the context of “healing traditions” such as psychiatry, psychopathology, and psychotherapy. Therefore, can a satisfactory, scientific definition exist for energy?

In our discussion, “psychiatry” should be understood in its original meaning of “healing the psyche,” apart from its medical and biological associations. Using instead an earlier definition, it refers to the complex world involved in the study of illnesses afflicting the human spirit and their remedies – the world of the *psy*³. Psychiatry “does not belong to the true sciences, but rather represents a set of doctrines and practices which are not without scientific elements” (Gozzetti, 2008, p. 7).

Being a psychiatrist means working with something that really does not sit completely comfortably with any medical model; there is no doubt about this. But that does not mean that it can be labeled as unscientific, which would risk evoking the hieratic, priestly, or even shamanic parts that live within us, and that are seen in certain forms of behavior, ritual, and use of the spoken word to facilitate healing.

It is no wonder, therefore, that forms of energy have always been greeted with an air of suspicion, especially whenever they have

“*Energy is not something tangible and material that can be directly observed, but is, rather, defined by what it does, or could do, in its various forms.*”

1. The contemporary model of Reichian analysis is characterized by the passage from an exclusively energetic drive concept to a relational concept, and by the transformation of the setting to become a complex systemic setting – from a clinical point of view, the decisive repositioning of therapeutic practice with the methodology of analytical-character vegetotherapy, as recovered and systematized by Ola Raknes and Federico Navarro, and later developed by Genovino Ferri.

2. Negentropy refers to the evolutionary organization of living organisms as ordered and dissipative structures.

3. The statement refers to the *psy*-world, which is composed of psychiatry, psychology, and psychotherapy.

been introduced to the world of psychiatry. However, forms of energy really do need to be part of the conversion. There is indeed no all-encompassing definition of energy. Energy is not something tangible and material that can be directly observed, but is, rather, defined by what it does, or could do, in its various forms.

As the dictionary states, energy is the capacity that a body or a system of bodies has to do work. Energy can be possessed by a body or released from it in various ways. Through movement, it is expressed as kinetic energy; from position, as potential energy; through temperature variation, as internal or thermal energy; in chemical reactions, as chemical energy; in an electrical current, as electrical energy; and so forth (*Treccani Online Encyclopedia*, 2020). Thus, we define energy by the form in which it manifests.

Brief History

In the realms of medical science, concepts of energy have appeared ever since Hippocrates' *vital force*, Stahl's "*De motu tonico vitali*" on tonic motion, Caspar Friedrich Wolff's ideas on *epigenetics*, which traced the birth of every body back "to the life forces inherent to a primary substance without definite form" (Zilboorg, 1963, p. 222); Barthez's *principe vital* (life principle), and vitalism, according to which the vital force is responsible for all the functions of the organism; Boissier de Sauvages, who held that "the power of the life force expressed itself, in the Self, as consciousness, and, in connection with the sense organs, as movement" (Zilboorg, 1963, p. 249), and then Reil, who gave his name to an area of the brain (island of Reil), and founded *Archiv für die Physiologie* in 1796, with an article on *Lebenskraft* (life force) in the inaugural issue.

The concept of life force had a significant impact on the whole field of psychiatry. "For the first time in the history of medicine, a doctor who did not wish to leave mental illness in the hands of the theologians was suggesting a new type of information. He was suggesting a new biological factor, because it was, indeed, biological despite the fact that it could not be measured or taken by mouth. The concept of energy had not been developed at the time of Stahl and doctors had to wait until science had advanced sufficiently" (Zilboorg, 1963, p. 452).

More recently, when psychiatry started to take on more precise connotations, Beard interpreted neurasthenia as a state of functional exhaustion of specific nervous energies, and numerous models of the psyche began to take shape. These models were based on the isomorphism of physical and mental energy, which were largely derived from the positivism in fashion at the end of the 19th century, for which behavior was influenced by *endogenous energy*. The models were expressed in language and vocabulary derived from the terminology of physics.

Helmholtz influenced Freud's energetic model: "the only active forces in biological organisms could be reduced to physical-chemical forces inherent to matter and to forces of attraction and repulsion" (Freedman, A. M. *et al.*, 1980, p. 104).

Living organisms were considered as aggregates of atoms "governed by physical forces according to the principle of conservation of energy" (Freedman, A. M. *et al.*, 1980, *ibid.*) Additionally, European research in neurophysiology was dominated, as emphasized by Freedman and Kaplan, by the triumvirate of Brucke, Exner, and Meynert, whose beliefs included the idea that "the nervous system operates through the transmission of a variable quantity of energy from the afferent nervous terminals to the efferent nervous terminals. Brucke considered this nervous impulse to be electrical in nature and it was conceived in hydraulic terms as a sort of fluid transported in nervous fibers as if it were in a hollow tube" (Freedman, A. M. *et al.*, 1980, p. 106).

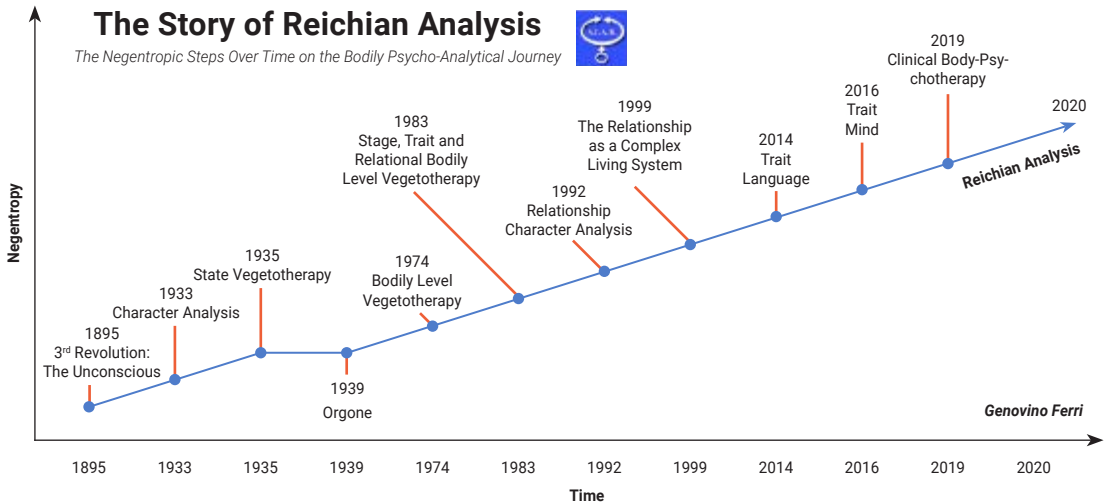
We underline the fact that an impression of Freud's ideas on energy can be gathered from his *Project for a Scientific Psychology*. This work was redrafted after a two-year period of development from 1895 to 1897, and then abandoned in a drawer by the author, destined for destruction. However, it is not hard to see how the structure of *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* are closely derived from the conceptual formulations in the abandoned work. Freudian energetics owed much to the nature of the problems presented by the physics of the time.

The basic assumptions entailed the concepts of entropy and conservation,⁴ and the tendency, therefore, of the energetic content of systems to remain constant and homogenous. The psychological interpretation translated to the principles of pleasure⁵ and of nirvana⁶.

4. The first law of thermodynamics, also known as the Law of Conservation of Energy, states that energy cannot be created or destroyed in an isolated system. It can only change forms. The second law establishes the direction in which processes occur, from order to disorder. Clausius expressed this direction of the evolution of physical systems through a quantity called entropy, which will tend to increase over time in an isolated system. Since this evolution is accompanied by increasing disorder, entropy is a measure of disorder.

5. Pleasure principle: the view that human beings are governed by the desire for gratification, or pleasure, and oriented towards the discharge of tension that builds up as pain or "non-pleasure" when gratification is lacking. In the classical psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud, the pleasure principle is the psychic force that motivates people to seek immediate gratification of instinctual or libidinal impulses, such as sex, hunger, thirst, and elimination. It dominates the id and operates most strongly during childhood. Later, in adulthood, it is opposed by the reality principle of the ego. It is also called the pleasure-pain principle. APA dictionary of psychology online, 2020. Entry: pleasure principle.

6. Nirvana principle: in classical psychoanalytic theory, the tendency of all instincts and life processes to remove tension and seek the stability and equilibrium of the inorganic state – that is, death. This is the trend of the death instinct, which Sigmund Freud believed to be universal. APA dictionary of psychology online, 2020. Entry: nirvana principle.



When used in medical contexts, the word *energy* still suffers from a lack of clarity. It is often used as an all-encompassing, multi-faceted term. This can obfuscate or dilute its meaning, sometimes conveying more extreme aspects such as material and non-material, corporeal and psychic. It is a concept capable of grasping its own disparate meanings until its fate is sealed by becoming an explanatory model. Neurophysiological contributions have led to the inclusion of information systems, and even within the world of psychoanalysis, the unconscious tends to lose its energetic dimension, thanks to Lacan, Bion, and Matte Blanco.

The term *unconscious* also becomes semantically corrupted, losing the more powerful sense that would have it in a “meta-position” that is “beyond”⁷, and which should limit the simple, or simplistic, common usage into which it has slipped.

Energy itself is a slippery, protean concept, which should be handled with great care as it can easily be misunderstood while trying too hard to follow its various manifestations. On the contrary, it inhabits the realm of complexity, and its heuristic potential can be fully revealed only from that perspective.

Whether it is an informational concept, which itself hints at a modernist reflex, or a vector space, both are far from resolving psychiatry’s fundamental problem – the psyche-soma dichotomy.

Reichian Analysis – A Brief History

Reich, indebted to Bergson, recognized the problem: “I was instinctively aware of the validity of his efforts to reject both mechanistic materialism and finalism. It was impossible to deny the principle of a creative force that supported life.” Reichian vital energy was defined by

Kammerer as being “a form of energy which is neither thermal or electric, neither magnetic or kinetic (as it is neither oscillatory or radioactive), nor is it a combination of any or all of these types of energy, but, rather, it is a type of energy which specifically characterizes the processes to which we give the name life” (Dadoun, R., p. 46).

We shall pay our dues to Reich!

Dadoun asserts that “should you analyze the emotional life-experiences and the different means of expression of patients... should politics or anthropology be under consideration... should great natural phenomena, such as thunderstorms, hurricanes, or the aurora borealis, be examined from unheard of perspectives, it is the same primordial reality, the same specific vital energy – in a word, it is ‘bioenergy,’ that we see coming to greet us and functioning in the same shapes that isolate it, that identify it, that historicize it and that naturalize it” (Dadoun, 1976, p. 47). “Bioenergy is therefore not,” in Dadoun’s words, “so much the name of a principle or a theory, and even less is it a philosophical vision, but rather it is the global designation of a unique field of investigation” (Dadoun, 1976, p. 47).

However, within our (the authors’) energetic concept, it has a different connotation – the condition of a human being as a nucleus of focused cosmic energy, which is not dissimilar to an elementary particle that “is only a small area of an electric field in which the intensity can reach particularly high values, indicating that an enormous part of the energy is concentrated in a small space” (Weyl, 1949, as cited in Capra, 1982, p. 246). Human beings, as nodes of energy, do not appear to be clearly distinct from the field in which they are immersed. Elementary particles move through empty, space-like waves on the surface of a lake, and the move-

7. “Meta-position” and “beyond” mean a vision of the relational and analytical scene from a higher and more complex perspective.

ment of the plasmatic energetic current of the organism, which participates in the pulsation of the universe, is similarly undulatory. It is important to bear in mind the concept of equivalence between energy and matter, which in reality is no more than a metaphor for the dynamic situation of living energy.

In the context of energy medicine, this is usually described, in whichever tradition is chosen for reference, in terms of “flux models,” which foresee a continuous energetic exchange between the individual and the environment. Our model, however, foresees the presence of a field together with the concept of energy and flux, as we have already mentioned. The organism is, indeed, a flow of energy immersed in a great flow of energy, the field.

We can speak of the field each time we encounter the space of an “object” that has been conditioned so that another “object” experiences its forces. There is an example of this in ethology – the attachment and, naturally, the bonds that are formed between mother and fetus and newborn baby, and then in the family and society. A further example is “Praecox-Gefühl,” which is our perception of feelings of schizophrenia, which is the desolate sense of emptiness that comes from psychosis. You grasp it, as Minkowski says, in the immediate intelligibility of the feeling as the breath of life that has escaped from it. In other words, our energy field interacts with the schizophrenic emptiness, which it simultaneously perceives.

We are dealing with a concept of energy/field taking a qualitative step forward compared to the models we have examined. We are proposing a different vision, which is global and unlimited. The cultural background in which we are operating has profoundly changed. Contemporary physics, for example, is prepared to investigate the real possibility of creating matter from the energetic fluctuations of a vacuum, which would have been an impossible idea in the cultural scenario in which Reich operated.

It is difficult for us to imagine what is moving around us. Our senses are not capable of conveying the greatness and richness of life that is all around us. “It is possible that we are living our lives in a dimension that is remarkably larger than we suspect” (De Finetti, 1984, p. 45).

An energetic concept of existence must speak a language that agrees with a systemic approach to reality and uses descriptions of dynamic models of life that go beyond Cartesian reductionism to reach out towards wider horizons. Bioenergy is the vital energy that underpins biophysical processes and the expression of the organism’s emotions; it is the unifying element of the psyche-soma dichotomy.

Let us clarify.

The gene of complexity existed in Wilhelm Reich, and it is natural that we, as representatives of this specific genealogical branch, are open to this evolutionary development.

“... We feel today that we are at the end of the period that started with Galileo, Copernicus and Newton and culminated in the discovery of quantum mechanics and relativity...” (Prygogine in Tiezzi, 1996, p. 1).

“... Classical science emphasized stability, order and balance. Today we are discovering instability and fluctuation everywhere and, instead of dealing with certainties, we are dealing with possibilities...” (Prygogine in Tiezzi, 1996, p. 1).

“... On every level we see nature emerging from narrative elements – cosmological history includes the history of matter, the history of life, of human beings and so on, right through to our own personal histories, associated with our own consciousness...” (Prygogine in Tiezzi, 1996, p. 1).

“...On every level novel occurrences associated with the creative potential of nature can be seen to emerge...” (Prygogine in Tiezzi, 1996, p. 1).

It is easy to associate with the Reichian vital energy. In the last few decades, a new type of language has appeared that is suited to understanding highly integrated, complex living organisms. Different scientists give it different names: dynamic systems theory, complexity theory, non-linear dynamics, or network dynamics.

Central nodes of the new paradigm become chaotic attractors, self-organization, fractals, structural coupling, dissipative structures, autopoietic networks, entropy, negentropy, information, bifurcation points, the arrow of time, and evolution.

A paradigm is “a variation in the visual gestalt,” as Kuhn would say – a variation in the mental architecture of observation that has emerged from a different way of feeling, we might add. It appears, on closer inspection, that the new language and new paradigm were already present in Reichian thought.

Ola Raknes, the only European teacher trained by Reich, was the teacher of Federico Navarro, our teacher, who affirms that “vital energy is negatively entropic, that is to say that the strongest concentrations attract more energy than the surrounding weaker concentrations. This negative entropy opposes mechanical entropy and is essential for the creation and maintenance of life... ... natural concentrations of orgone energy tend to form systems that develop, reach their peak and then decline until they have dissolved. Such systems may be galaxies, stars or planets and, in the Earth’s atmosphere, may be hurricanes and other cyclonic systems, as well as individual clouds; even living organisms are systems of orgonic energy.”

“... the free flow of orgone within living organisms is an indispensable condition for the healthy functioning of the organism” (the founding principle of open systems).

“... the orgonic metabolism of the organism also depends on the external orgonic field,” another founding principle of open systems (Raknes, 1967, p. 68-69).

Being interested in complexity certainly does not mean ignoring the necessity for mechanical laws that function in their sphere of well-defined intervals in the reality of life and must, at least, serve as operating concepts.

We will again pay our dues to Wilhelm Reich!

With regard to functional thought, Reich affirmed that "... functional thought does not tolerate any static condition. As far as it is concerned, all-natural processes are in motion, even in the case of rigidified structures and still forms... Even nature flows in each of its various individual functions as it does in its totality... Nature is functional in all of its areas, not only in those regarding organic matter. Obviously, there are mechanical laws, but the mechanics of nature is, in itself, a particular variation of functional processes" (Capra, 1984, p. 286).

Nor, on the other hand, can the functional nature of vital processes be completely separate from a vision we define as systemic: "Reich's approach, which he called organismic functionalism, is in perfect agreement with the idea of processes as defined by modern systems theory" (Capra, 1984, p. 286).

The "all-integrated," which our I-environment-life represents⁸, cannot be restricted to the separate existence of the single parts of which, for the record, the system is formed. These parts are not living their own separate autonomous lives but are totally interdependent.

According to Koestler, in the scope of each system two opposite tendencies exist: one "integrative" in nature, which guarantees its function as a part of the whole, and the other, which is "auto-assertive," which tends to preserve individual autonomy. A balanced system must necessarily oscillate between integration and self-assertion, reaching equilibriums that cannot be static, but can be identified in the connection between the opposite, yet complementary, orientations of which they are composed. In this way, the system becomes ductile, elastic, and open to change and development. All of nature is organized through pluristratified structures that are not simply "overlaid layers" – the parts are connected, and the functionality of the whole depends upon the functionality of the interconnected parts, or, in other words, of the subsystems that it is composed of. In no case can its properties be reduced exclusively to those of only one of its parts (Capra, 1984, p. 39). Such systems are more functional than rigid or rigidly hierarchical systems, and they have a greater probability of survival.

Thus, we have said that "were Reich's theory to be reformulated using modern system language, his relevance for research and for contemporary therapeutic practice would become even clearer" (Capra, 1984, p. 286).

Contemporary Reichian Analysis and Its Position On Energy – the Negentropic-Systemic Code

Before the 1940s, the term "system" – meaning that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts – had been used by many scientists, but it was the concepts of open systems, and the theory of von Bertalanffy that consecrated "systemic thought" as an important scientific movement.

He focused attention on the dilemma that had disconcerted scientists since the 19th century, when Newtonian mechanics, the science of eternal forces and trajectories, had been integrated by two diametrically opposed views of evolution. In other words, a new type of science was required – the science of complexity.

The first formulation of this new science was classical thermodynamics, with its second law: the law of dissipation of energy. This was first stated by Carnot, the French physicist, as physical phenomena tending to move from order towards disorder. Every closed or isolated physical system will proceed spontaneously towards ever greater disorder.

Entropy was introduced (from energy and *τροπή*, transformation). The ideas of irreversible processes and of an arrow of time, which we today define as entropic, were introduced by the thermodynamicists from the second law, and from the concept of entropy. This slightly terrifying picture of cosmic evolution was in sharp contrast with the evolutionary thought (Darwin) of 19th century biologists who had observed that the living universe evolves from disorder towards order, and towards states of increasing complexity.

Who was right, Carnot or Darwin? Bertalanffy was not able to resolve this dilemma, but he took a crucial step: "living organisms are open systems because they need to feed themselves with a continuous flow of matter and energy from their environment to remain alive" (Capra, 2001, p. 61).

It was not until the seventies that Ilya Prigogine re-examined the second law, using more recent developments in mathematics, and resolved the contradiction between the two 19th century visions of evolution. In reality, the contradiction is only apparent: "entropic balance must be global and must include both the organism (be that plant, animal or man himself) and the environment with which the organism is continuously exchanging energy and matter" (Tiezzi, p. 15). In other words, organisms can develop and die through the increase in the amount of entropy that they cause in the surrounding environment. The entropy of the universe has been increased, so the second principle has not been violated.

8. "I-environment-life" refers to the complexity of the biopsychosocial system.

As a city, or an organism, is an open system, it is fundamental to calculate its entropy and negentropy. In this way, it can be seen that any increase in negentropy is at the expense of external disorder, but that average disorder also increases.

We have again used the term negentropy; let us explain.

Many take 1944 to be the starting date for biophysics. It was when Erwin Schrödinger, Nobel prize-winner for physics and founding father of quantum mechanics, published his Dublin lectures on biological problems in *“What is life?”*, where he introduced the concept of negentropy – a negative variation in entropy, starting from an original value (the birth of an individual, the origin of life, the beginning of biological evolution, or the origin of a relationship in the setting), and not of absolute negative entropy, given that, according to the third principle of thermodynamics, a value of entropy of less than zero cannot exist (Tiezzi, 1996, p. 16).

In Schrödinger’s assertion is the secret of the origin of life on earth, of the story of biological evolution, which has a protagonist, photosynthesis.

It is the history of a special, intelligent planet that learned to capture the sun’s energy and feed itself on

the negentropy of the universe so as to create ordered, dissipative structures that are living organisms. The biosphere is this negentropy’s geometric space (Tiezzi, 1996, p. 16).

Negentropy is held to be a negative variation in entropy towards ever greater order.

It seems to us (Reichian analysts) that negentropy is something more than negative entropy, or should at least be interpreted differently, because the direction of the arrow of time reverses on this planet and in every living form. It is a bottom-up representation of the drive and the pulsation of life, and of the *élan vital*, in Bergson’s words, which emerges both phylogenetically and ontogenetically.

This leads to certain different analytical interpretations on evolutionary time, and on psychopathological nosography regarding appropriateness, and regarding the body being indispensable in psychotherapy.

This is because relationships, from intrauterine time onwards, leave incised marks on the body (etymologically, “character” = *incised mark*), and the body then expresses these over the course of time, as relational patterns.



Genovino Ferri is a psychiatrist and Reichian analyst; member of the New York Academy of Science (N.Y.A.S.);

Director of the Italian School of Reichian Analysis (S.I.A.R.); trainer for supervisors in Berlin, San Paolo, Athens, Sofia, and Rome; author of the following books: *Psicopatologia e Carattere* (Ed. Alpes 2012), *Il Corpo sa, Storie di Psicoterapie* (Ed. Alpes 2017), *Il Tempo nel Corpo* (Ed. Alpes 2020), *Body Sense* (e-book, Ed. Alpes 2017), and *Psychopathology and Character* (e-book, Ed. Alpes 2018). President of the Italian Association of Body Psychotherapy (A.I.P.C.); Editor of the CorporalMente (BodyMind) Series of books by Alpes Edizioni; former director of the U.O.C. of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy in Atri, Asl Teramo, Italy and Chairman of the Studio Analysis Centre for Psychotherapy and Social Medicine in Atri, Italy.



Giuseppe Cimini is a psychiatrist and psychotherapist with academic training in medicine and psychiatry at the

University of Pisa, Italy. He directed the Mental Health Centre of the psychiatric unit in Giulianova, Teramo, Italy.

REFERENCES

- Capra F.** *Il Punto di svolta* (1984). [*The turning point: Science, society, and the rising culture*]. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1984.
- Capra F.** *La rete della vita* (2001). [*The web of life: A new scientific understanding of living systems*]. Milan: BUR.
- Dadoun, R.** *Cento fiori per Wilhelm Reich* (1976). [*Cent fleurs pour Wilhelm Reich*]. Venice: Marsilio.
- De Finetti, B.** "Vero, falso, oppure probabile", *Prometeo*, 8, 1984.
- Ferri, G. & Cimini, G. (2012).** *Psicopatologia e carattere*. Rome: Alpes.
- Ferri, G. & Cimini, G. (2018).** *Psychopathology and character*. Rome: Alpes e-book.
- Freedman, A. M., Kaplan, H., & Sadock, B.J. (2000).** *Comprehensive textbook of psychiatry*. New York: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
- Gozzetti, G. (2008).** *La tristezza vitale: Fenomenologia e psicopatologia della melanconia*. Rome: Giovanni Fioriti Editore.
- Koestler, A. (1978).** *Janus*. London: Hutchinson.
- Meissner, W. W., Mack, J. E., & Semrad, E. V. (1980).** *Theories of personality and psychopathology*. Baltimore: William & Wilkins.
- Prygogine, I. in Tiezzi, E. (1996).** *Fermare il tempo*. Milan: Cortina Editore.
- Raknes, O. (1967).** *Wilhelm Reich e l'orgonomia*. Rome: Astrolabio Ubaldini Editore.
- Schrodinger, E. (1995).** *Che cos'è la vita? [What Is life? The physical aspect of the living cell - Mind and matter]*. Milan: Adelphi Edizioni.
- Tiezzi, E. (1996).** "Fermare il tempo." Treccani online encyclopedia. Milan: Cortina Editore.
- Weyl, H. (1949).** *Philosophy of mathematics and natural science*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Zilboorg, G. (1963).** *Storia della Psichiatria [A history of medical psychology]*. Milan: Feltrinelli.