Fritz Riemann

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Using Depth Psychology to Find a Balance in Your Life

Translated by Greta Dunn

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After studying psychology and training as a psychoanalyst, *Fritz Riemann* (1902–1979) became one of the founders of the Institute for Psychological Research and Psychotherapy in Munich (today, Academy for Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy). He was lecturer and teaching analyst and had his own psychotherapeutic practice. He was also an honorary member of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis in New York (today, American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry). "Anxiety" ("Grundformen der Angst") is Riemann's best-known work.

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Contents

Introduction

The character of anxiety and life's antinomies

Anxiety is an inescapable part of our life. In constantly changing guises it accompanies us from the cradle to the grave. The history of mankind illustrates our never-ending efforts to govern anxiety, to allay, to overcome or to confine it. Magic, religion and science have all attempted this. The security of belief in God, devoted love, discovering nature's laws or world-renouncing ascetism and philosophical insight do not lift fear from us, but they can help to make the burden lighter and perhaps help us to use it fruitfully for our own development. The belief that it is possible to live without anxiety will remain one of our illusions; it is integral to our existence and is a reflection of our dependencies and the knowledge of our mortality. We can only try to cultivate counterforces against it: courage, trust, knowledge, power, hope, humility, belief and love. These can be of help to us in accepting anxiety, in our dealing with it, in repeatedly conquering it. We should regard with scepticism methods of any kind that promise us a life free of anxiety; they do not do justice to the reality of being human and give rise to illusory expectations.

Even though anxiety is an unavoidable part of our lives, this does not necessarily mean that we are always conscious of it. However, in a manner of speaking, it is omnipresent and can impinge on our consciousness at any moment when summoned by an inner or outer experience. When this happens, we often have the tendency to evade it, to circumvent it, and we have developed quite a few techniques and methods to repress or deaden

it, to cover it up or to disclaim it. However, just as death does not cease to exist when we are not thinking about it, neither does anxiety.

Anxiety exists independently of the culture or level of development of a people or an individual. What are different are merely the objects of fear, those things which trigger the anxiety and, correspondingly, the means and measures we avail ourselves of in order to combat this anxiety. Today, in general, we no longer fear natural phenomena such as thunder and lightning, and solar and lunar eclipses have become an interesting natural spectacle. They elicit no anxiety as we know they do not denote a permanent disappearance of these heavenly bodies or even the end of the world. In their place we have anxieties that earlier cultures were not affected by – we are afraid, for instance, of bacteria, of new diseases, of automobile accidents, of old age and loneliness.

In contrast to this, the methods of dealing with anxiety have changed very little. Only today, in place of sacrifices and magical counterspells, we have modern, fear-suppressing pharmaceutical treatments – but anxiety is still with us. Probably the most significant new prospect for anxiety management is psychotherapy in its various forms: first it reveals the history of the origins of anxiety in the individual, then it researches the interrelationship between individual-familial and socio-cultural conditions. This makes possible the confrontation with anxiety – the goal being fruitful anxiety management through further maturation.

Obviously, one of life's balancing acts lies herein: If, through the agency of science and technology, we are able to make progress in mastering the world and therefore eliminate or do away with certain fears, we still exchange these fears for others. The fact that anxiety is an inescapable part of life is not altered in the least. Only *one* new fear seems to belong to our modern life: We increasingly recognize anxieties that arise from acts and deeds of our own making which turn against us. We recognize the fear of the destructive forces within ourselves – think only of the dangers inherent in the misuse of nuclear power or of the possibilities for power arising from intervention in natural life cycles. Our hubris appears to be turning against us in the manner of a boomerang; lacking in love and humility, the will to have power

over nature and over life gives rise to the fear in us that we ourselves can become manipulated beings, empty of meaning. If in former times mankind was afraid of the forces of nature, helpless and at the mercy of threatening demons and avenging gods, today we must be afraid of our very selves.

Therefore, it is an illusion to think that "progress" – which is always also a regress – will relieve us of our anxieties; certainly, it will remove some of them, but it will at the same time result in new fears.

The experiencing of anxiety is thus part of our existence. However valid this is, every human being experiences his or her own personal variation of anxiety, "the" fear, which exists as little as does "the" death, or "the" love and other abstractions. Everyone has his or her own personal, individual form of anxiety that belongs to them and their being just as everyone has their own form of love and has to die their own death. Thus, anxiety only exists when experienced and reflected by a particular person. Therefore it always has a personal imprint in spite of the collective fundamental experiencing of fear common to all. This, our personal fear, is linked to our individual life situation, to our disposition and our environment; it has its own phylogenesis which starts virtually when we are born.

If we look at anxiety for a moment "without anxiety", we get the impression that it displays a double aspect: on the one hand it can stimulate us, on the other it can paralyse us. Anxiety is at all times a signal and a warning in the case of danger, while at the same time having the character of a challenge, namely the impulse to overcome it. The acceptance and mastering of anxiety signifies a stride in development, it allows us to mature a step further. Avoiding anxiety and the need to deal with it, on the other hand, causes us to stagnate. It hinders our further development and we remain childish in that area where the obstacle of anxiety has not been overcome.

Anxiety always arises when we find ourselves in a situation with which we cannot cope or cannot cope with yet. Every development, every step on the road to maturity is a cause of anxiety as it leads us into something new, something unknown and for which we do not yet have the coping skills. It leads us into

internal or external situations that we have not experienced before and which we have not yet experienced in ourselves. Alongside the attraction of something new and the love of adventure and joy of taking risks, everything new, unknown, done-or-experienced-for-the-first-time contains anxiety. Because our lives constantly lead us into unknown territory, into what is unfamiliar and not yet experienced, anxiety is our constant companion. We generally become conscious of it at important stages in our development. Those places where old and trusted ruts must be abandoned, where new tasks are to be dealt with or changes are due to be made. Development, becoming an adult and maturation therefore appear to have a lot to do with mastering anxiety, and every age has its own appropriate rites of passage with the corresponding anxieties that must be mastered if the process is to be successful.

Therefore, there are completely normal, age- and development-appropriate anxieties that a healthy person can weather and can grow through. Coping with these is important for his or her further development. Consider for a moment the first independent steps of a small child when for the first time it has to let go of the mother's hand and must overcome the fear of walking alone, the fear of being left alone in an open space. Or think of the great turning-points in our lives. Let us take the first day of school when the child has to leave the bosom of its family and is expected to adapt to a new and strange community and to assert itself there. Let us take the example of puberty and the first encounters with the opposite sex under the compulsion of erotic longing and sexual desire; or let us think of the commencement of a career, the founding of one's own family, of motherhood and, ultimately, of growing old and the encounter with death. In all beginnings or before any first-time experience, there is always anxiety.

All these fears belong, in a manner of speaking, to our lives in an organic way because they are linked with bodily, emotional or social stages of development that manifest themselves with the assumption of new functions in a community or society. Such a step always signifies a crossing of borders and challenges us to let go of what is habitual and trusted and to venture into new and unfamiliar territory.

In addition to these fears, there are a plethora of individual anxieties that are not necessarily typical of the particular borderline situations mentioned above and which we often cannot understand in others as we do not have them ourselves. Thus for one person loneliness can trigger severe anxiety, while another suffers in crowded gatherings; others have panic attacks if they have to cross bridges or an empty square; some cannot stand to be in enclosed rooms; and yet others are afraid of harmless animals such as beetles, spiders or mice.

As varied as the phenomenon anxiety might seem in the case of different people – there is practically nothing that we cannot develop anxiety about – when we look more closely it is always variations of quite particular anxieties which I call for this reason "basic forms of anxiety" and which I would like to describe. All possible variations of anxiety are derivatives of these basic forms. They are either extreme and distorted variations of these forms or they are displaced onto other objects. We have the tendency, namely, to attach anxiety that has not been dealt with, not mastered, onto harmless substitute objects that are easier to avoid than the actual elicitor of anxiety which we are unable to elude.

The basic forms of anxiety are linked to our mental state towards the world, with our 'extendedness' between the two great antinomies in their insoluble dichotomy and polarity in which we are expected to live. I would like to clarify these two antinomies with an allegory that positions us in relation to superpersonal order and the natural laws of which we are generally not conscious but which are real nevertheless.

We are born into a world which obeys four powerful impulses: Our earth rotates around the sun according to a certain rhythm, that is, it moves around the central star in our closer world system in a movement that we call revolution, that is, "upheaval". At the same time, the earth also revolves around its own axis therefore carrying out the rotary motion called self-rotation. This sets two further contradictory or complementary impulses in motion that keep our world system moving while at the same time impelling this movement to keep to prescribed courses: gravitational force and centrifugal force. Gravitational force holds our world together, so to speak, adjusting it centripetally inwards towards

the centre and has the features of a holding and attracting pull. The centrifugal force strives centrifugally outward, fleeing the centre, it thrusts out into the vastness of infinity and has the features of a letting-go, a drawing away. It is only the equilibrium of these four impulses that guarantee the lawful, living order in which we live and which we call the cosmos. Should one of the movements overweigh the others, or fail, this would disturb and even destroy the magnificent order of the universe and lead to chaos.

According to this cosmic analogy, we are subject to four fundamental imperatives that are reflected in us as strivings, each contradicting the other but at the same time complementing one another. In ever-changing manifestations they run through our whole life continually demanding new responses from us.

The *first imperative* which, to follow our allegory, would correspond to the rotation is *that we should become a unique individual* affirming our self-being and delineating ourselves from others, that we should become an inimitable personality, and not an interchangeable member of the mass. From this, however, arises all the anxiety that threatens when we distinguish ourselves from others thereby falling outside the usual parameters of security, belonging and community which would mean loneliness and isolation.

The *second imperative,* which, to follow our allegory, would correspond to the revolution is *that we should trustingly open ourselves to the world, to life and to others,* that we should commit ourselves to the non-ego, to what is foreign, to enter into an exchange with that which is outside ourselves. What this means is the aspect of commitment – in the broadest sense – to life. From this, however, arises all the anxiety of losing our ego, of becoming dependent, of surrendering ourselves, of not being able to live our life in accordance with our self-being, of sacrificing it to others and, in the demands of adaptation, having to give up too much of oneself. Here, therefore, we are talking about an aspect of our dependencies, about our "being thrown" off balance. However, in spite of these dependencies and hazards threatening our ego which allow us to feel our helplessness, we need to turn towards

life, we need to open ourselves. If we do not risk this, we will remain isolated single beings without commitment, without belonging to anything greater than ourselves; and ultimately without security because we have not learned to know ourselves or our world.

In this first antinomy we have encountered the one paradoxical imposition demanded of us by life: We should live by the precepts of self-preservation and self-fulfilment as well as those of self-surrender and self-forgetfulness; at the same time we must overcome the fear of self-loss and the fear of self-becoming.

And now to the other two imperatives that stand in a polar relation of contradiction and complementation as in the ones just described:

The *third imperative,* in our allegory the centripetal corresponding to the force of gravity, is *that we should strive for permanence.* We should, as it were, settle down in this world, establish ourselves and plan for the future, be as ambitious as though we were going to live forever, as if the world were a stable place and the future foreseeable, as if we could count on permanence – knowing all the while that "media vita in morte sumus", that our life can end at any moment. This imperative, demanding permanence and that we plan for an uncertain future, yes, demanding even that we assume we have a future, as if we therefore had something solid and secure before us – this imperative encompasses all anxieties connected with our knowledge of mortality, of our dependencies and of the irrational incalculability of our being: fear of venturing into what is new, of planning in the dark, of letting oneself go with the eternal flow of life that never stands still and seizes us even in the midst of change. This is what is meant by the saying that you can never swim in the same river twice – the river, and therefore oneself, is always another. However, if we were to renounce permanence we would be incapable of creating or realizing anything; everything we produce must have something of this permanence – otherwise we would not even begin to try to achieve our goals. Thus we live as if we had unlimited time at our disposal, as if what we have achieved were stable –

this semblance of stability and permanence, this illusory eternity, is a significant impulse that drives us to act.

And now, the *fourth imperative,* in our allegory corresponding to the centrifugal, the fleeing force. This expects of us *that we should always be ready to change ourselves,* to welcome wholeheartedly alterations and developments, to renounce the well-known, to abandon traditions and customs and to constantly detach ourselves from what we have only just achieved and to take our leave, to regard everything as merely transient. Connected to this demand to vitally continue to develop ourselves at all times, not to halt, not to attach, to remain open to everything new while venturing into the unknown, is the fear of being determined and held fast by order, necessities and habit; constricted, limited in our opportunities and our striving for freedom. Ultimately, what is threatened here, in contrast to the anxiety described above where death is seen as transient, is death as something rigid and final. If we renounce the impulse towards change and the venture into the unknown then we remain clinging to what is accustomed, repeating and holding on to the uniformity of things past – and time and the rest of the world will overtake us and forget us.

With this we have sketched the other antinomy, a further demand made on us by life: that we should strive at one and the same time for permanence and change, that we must overcome the fear of inexorable transience as well as the fear of inescapable necessity.

Thus we have become acquainted with the four basic forms of anxiety that I will sum up once more as follows:

1. The fear of surrendering oneself, experienced as loss of the ego and dependency;
2. The fear of self-becoming, experienced as being unprotected and isolated;
3. The fear of change, experienced as transience and insecurity;
4. The fear of necessity, experienced as finality and bondage.

All possible forms of anxiety are ultimately always variations of these four basic forms and are connected to the four basic impulses that are also part of our being and that also complement and contradict each other in pairs: As a striving towards self-preservation and dissociation with counter-striving towards self-abandonment and belonging; and on the other hand as a striving towards permanence and security, with counter-striving towards change and risk. Every striving is accompanied by the anxiety of the counter-striving. And yet, if we return to our cosmic allegory, a living order only appears possible if we attempt to live an equi-potentiality between these antinomian impulses. However, an equi-potentiality such as this does not mean something static, as one might think; rather, it is full of tremendous inner dynamism because it is something that is never attained but must always be re-created.

Here, we must take into account that the type of anxiety being experienced and its degree of intensity are in a large measure dependent upon our genetic makeup, on our "inheritance" as well as on the environmental conditions into which we are born; that is, on our physical and mental-spiritual constitution as well as on our personal biography, the history of our coming into being. Our anxieties have their own history too, and we will see what great importance our childhood has with regard to this. Anxiety in every person is influenced by disposition and environment, which partially explains why other people's anxieties are difficult to empathize with – they arise from life-conditions that are too disparate from our own.

Disposition and environment – to which society belongs along with the family, the "milieu" – can also encourage certain anxieties while leaving others in the background. A mainly healthy individual – one who is not disturbed in his or her development – will usually be able to cope with anxieties and perhaps be able to overcome them. Those disturbed in their development experience anxiety more intensely as well as more often, and one of the basic forms of anxiety will predominate.

Anxiety can be a heavy burden and cause illness if it increases above a certain level or if it lasts too long. Those that cause the most severe strain are the anxieties that were experienced too

early in childhood, at an age when the child had not yet been able to develop defences against them. Whenever anxiety becomes too great due to intensity or duration, or if we encounter it at an age when we are not yet ready for it, it is difficult to cope with. The activating and positive aspect of anxiety does not apply; arrested development, stagnation or regression into earlier, childish behaviour patterns, as well as symptom formation, are the result. Understandably, it is particularly in childhood that we will encounter anxiety experiences that are not age-appropriate and anxieties in such quantities that they override the degree of what can be tolerated. The weak ego of the child, still in the process of developing, cannot yet cope with certain levels of anxiety; the child is dependent on outside help and will sustain impairment if left alone with such overwhelming anxieties.

In the case of adults, rare exceptional circumstances such as war, imprisonment, life-threatening danger, natural and other catastrophes as well as endopsychic experiences and processes, can also overstep the threshold of tolerance so that they react with panic, impulsive acts or neuroses. In normal cases, however, adults have the advantage over children in that they have a much broader selection of responses and counterforces at their disposal. They can defend themselves, think through the situation and recognize the anxiety trigger; most importantly, they can understand where the anxiety comes from; can communicate it and therefore can depend on understanding and assistance; and they can calculate possible endangerment correctly. All this is not yet available to a child; the smaller it is the more it is an object of its anxieties, it is helplessly at their mercy without the knowledge of how long they will last and what might still happen.

We will see how becoming supervalent of one of the four basic anxieties – or, seen from the other point of view, largely giving up one of the four basic impulses – leads us to four personality structures, to four types of being-in-the-world, the varying nuances of which we all recognize and in which we all take part with a varying degree of emphasis. These personality structures, therefore, can be understood as one-sided accentuations with regard to the four main anxieties. The more marked and one-sided the personality structures being described are, the more probable it is that

they arose from developmental disorders in early childhood. Accordingly, it could be regarded as a sign of good mental health if someone were able to live with the four basic impulses in a dynamic equilibrium – at the same time this would mean that he or she had also dealt with the four basic forms of anxiety.

To begin with, the four personality structures are normal structures with certain accentuations. If the accentuation becomes markedly unilateral, it will attain borderline values that are to be understood as distorted forms or extreme variants of the four normal basic structures. Here we are confronted by the neurotic variants of the structure types as described by psychotherapy and depth psychology in the four great forms of neuroses: schizophrenia, depression, compulsion neurosis and hysteria. These neurotic personalities only reflect in an intensified or extreme form general human existential forms that we all know.

Ultimately, we are dealing here with four different types of being-in-the-world. In giving an account of these, I would like to describe the results of the aforementioned unilateralness from what we could still call quite healthy manifestations through lighter disorders up to severe and then the most severe disorders. Constitutionally accommodating traits should be taken into account; but our interest will be focussed particularly on the biographical background.

One other important point: Insofar as the description of the four personality structures takes on the semblance of a typology, this would be distinct from other typologies. Based mainly on psychoanalytical knowledge and experience, it is less fatalistic and irrevocably determining than types derived from constitution or temperament. The latter are represented as inevitable and unalterable – to be accepted as given. I am interested in something else altogether.

It is not only because I have certain physical characteristics that I am like this or like that. Because I have a certain approach, a certain attitude towards the world and to life, gained from my life-history, my personality is imprinted and has been given certain structural features. What has been decreed by fate – genetic psychophysical predispositions, the environment of our childhood and the personalities of our parents and educators as well

as society with its rules into which we are born – can be reshaped to some extent by ourselves, can be changed. It is not something that has to be accepted. The personality structures dealt with here should be understood as partial aspects of an integral holistic human picture. The later continuing development of what at first were the inevitable, insufficiently developed, neglected, misdirected or alienated and repressed partial aspects of our being can change the acquired structure. It can complete it for the benefit of that envisioned wholeness, maturity or rounding-out to the degree to which each individual is capable of achieving for him or herself.

As our point of departure, we are therefore, taking the four generally valid basic attitudes and behavioural choices, as opposed to the conditions and dependencies of our being whereby we envision the cosmic ideal of a living order and equilibrium between apparently irreconcilable contradictions.

Retaining the conceptual terms taken from the theory of neurosis for the four structural types, as well as for the so-called healthy ones, has practical advantages because in these concepts the biographical genesis and the neurotic variant can be seen together. They have also become so widely accepted that finding new terms seems superfluous. The reader will soon understand this when the concepts of the schizoid, the depressive and so on have become familiar and tangible in the imagination.

In this book I have avoided availing myself of the usual distinction, often encountered in literature, between anxiety and fear. It was of no importance to my basic concept and also appeared to me to be not cogent or convincing enough as is evident in the uncertainty of the use of both terms in colloquial speech. We speak of death anxiety and fear of death and cannot differentiate between them without bending over backwards. The general distinction of applying fear to something specific and concrete and anxiety to something vague, even irrational, might have a certain justification but this does not always stand up under closer scrutiny: Fear of God, for instance, ought to be God anxiety according to the above distinction. I have, therefore, consciously desisted from undertaking a conceptual separation of fear and anxiety in this book.

This book has been written in order to help the individual to live, to convey to him or her more self-awareness and understanding of others and to show how important our early years are for our development. It is also written in order to awaken a sense, to reawaken a sense, of the great interconnectedness of the universe of which we are part and from which, I am persuaded, we have much to learn.

Fear of commitment

The schizoid personalities

"Come, let us be different from all the others
who teem among the general rabble."
Spitteler

Let us look now at the personalities of those whose fundamental problem, from the standpoint of their anxieties, is the fear of commitment. Those who therefore live supervalently to retain their self-preservation and ego-boundaries. We call this type of person schizoid.

We all have the desire to be unique individuals. Just how strong this desire is can be seen by how sensitively we react if someone calls us by the wrong name or pronounces our name incorrectly. We don't want to be just anybody, an interchangeable unit; we want to possess a consciousness of our uniqueness as an individual. The striving for the demarcation from others is as much a part of our make-up as is the opposite side of the coin, the need to belong to a group or collective as a social being. We want to follow our personal interests while feeling ourselves to be allies in a partnership, with close human interrelations and responsibilities in equal measure. What will result from someone denying the giving side of his or her nature and trying to live with self-preservation as their primary goal?

The main endeavour of such a person will be toward being as independent and self-sufficient as possible. To depend on no-one, to need no-one, to have to answer to no-one, this is of paramount importance. This is why such a person draws away from others,

needs to maintain distance, does not allow others to come too close and interacts only marginally with them. If these borders are overstepped, it is felt as a threat to his or her life space, as a danger to the need for independence and integrity and such a person will react brusquely in defence. This is how the typical fear of human closeness develops. However, in normal life, closeness is difficult to avoid, so protective measures are sought behind which he or she can hide.

In particular, such a person will avoid close personal contact and no intimacy will be allowed. Encounters with individuals or partners will be shunned and human contacts reduced to the businesslike. If other people should be sought out, then such a person will feel most comfortable in groups or collectives where it is easier to maintain anonymity but, with common interests as a base, a certain feeling of belonging can be experienced. For such an individual, the cap of invisibility, as in fairy-tales, would be ideal. From under its protection one could take part in the lives of others without having to give anything of oneself.

The impression such a person makes on his or her environment is one of aloofness, distance, coolness, of being unapproachable, impersonal and even cold. They often appear odd or peculiar, their reactions incomprehensible or disconcerting. One can be acquainted with them for a long time without ever really getting to know them. If good relations seem to have been established, they will suddenly turn around and behave as if they had never met one before: as if the closer the contact, the more brusque the cold shoulder must be. The reaction can be unfathomable as it is often accompanied by apparently groundless aggression or hostility which can be very wounding to us.

The avoidance of any trusting closeness due to fear of intimacy, the fear of opening up and giving of oneself, results in the schizoid person sinking ever more deeply into isolation and loneliness. The fear of closeness increases proportionally the nearer it approaches. Because feelings such as affection, sympathy, tenderness and love result in our coming closer to one other, they are experienced as particularly dangerous. This explains why it is usually in such situations that these personalities react in such a detached, even hostile way and reject others brusquely. They

switch off abruptly, break contact, retreat into themselves and can no longer be reached.

This causes a yawning chasm to open up between schizoids and their environment which becomes wider with the passing years and isolates them even further. As a result, more and more problematical situations arise. Due to their remoteness from the rest of humanity, these personalities understand too little about others. Broader and broader gaps in their knowledge of other people develop and cause insecurity in their interactions with others. They never really know what is going on in the mind of another, as this is only possible – if at all – in an atmosphere of trust and affection. This means that they are dependent on assumptions and imaginings when trying to orient themselves toward others. They are, therefore, prey to deep-seated insecurities as to whether the impressions and expectations they have of others are their own imaginings – are all their perceptions merely imaginings and projections or are they indeed reality?

An image, that was probably first used in this context by Schultz-Hencke to illustrate the perception of the world that such people have, helps to clarify this – we have all experienced this situation: We are sitting in a train at the station prior to moving off. There is also a train on the neighbouring track. Suddenly we realize that one of the trains is moving. As most trains today move off very smoothly and almost imperceptibly, we have felt no tremor, no jerk, so that we have only the optical impression of movement. We cannot orient ourselves immediately as to which of the trains is moving, we have to wait until we can pinpoint a fixed object outside the train before we can decide that it is our train that is moving and the other that is still, or vice versa.

This picture exemplifies the inner situation of a schizoid personality for us in a very striking way. They never know for certain – and this to a degree far beyond the maximum possible insecurity that can be experienced by a healthy person – whether what they are feeling, perceiving, thinking or imagining exists merely inside themselves or if it is also "outside". Due to the fragile nature of their contact with human society, a person like this lacks the ability to find orientation in it and so when evaluating experiences and impressions vacillates doubtfully between won-