



Apithology: An Emergent Continuum

By William Varey (Founder)

Abstract

Apithology is the field of study concerned with identifying and enhancing the essential elements for the healthy development of emergent systems and the structural and functional changes that produce emergent health.

In this paper the nature of apithology is explained, together with the reasons why the depth of practice in this field will increase. Looking at a continuum of development, the term is contrasted with its conceptual antonym – being ‘pathology’. Reasons are elucidated why a balanced focus on both the pathological and apithological is desirable.

Etymology of Apithology

Apithology is a word created to describe a timeless concept in a modern context. It is not known whether the word apithology also has an ancient meaning. The term originally emerged from the development of a concept that in essence is the counterpart to its opposite, being *pathology*. The origin of the word comes from the etymology of its basic elements:

Pathos~ (the root in *patho-biology*) - comes from the ancient Greek. In this context *pathos* has the meaning related to ‘suffering’ or ‘disease’. *Bios* – is the ancient Greek word meaning ‘life’. Pathology can be understood literally, based on its etymology, to mean studies of the ‘*suffering of life*’ – being any adverse abnormality in a natural biological state.

Apic~ (the root of *apithology*) – derives from the Latin. In is used here in its modern English meaning; ‘*of, at or forming an apex*’ (as in apical). The suffix end-form is the same as in *bi-ology*. Apithology can be understood literally, based on its etymology, to mean studies of the ‘*apex of life*’ – being any beneficial normalisation in a natural biological state.

An antonym is a word of opposite meaning, a counter-term, used as a correlative of its synonym. The antonym of apithological is pathological. In a similar way, the antonym of apithology is pathology.

Technically, a noun, being a descriptive label for something, does not have an antonym - its counterpart is a just a different thing. The word pathology, in its wider meaning, is also an adjective – describing not the study of something, but the descriptive quality of the thing studied (ie *the pathology of the system*) and therefore ‘apithology’ can have as its antonym pathology in this particular sense.

As ‘apithology’ is the counterpart concept of pathology, we can understand the less familiar term by looking at the meaning of the more familiar, which we will now explore.

The Pathology of Disease

Pathology is defined as:

pa·thol·o·gy (pā·thŏl'ə-jē)

n. pl. **pa·thol·o·gies**

- 1) The scientific study of the nature of disease and its causes, processes, development, and consequences. Also called **patho-biology**.
- 2) The anatomic or functional manifestations of a disease: *the pathology of cancer*.
- 3) A departure or deviation from a normal condition: “Neighborhoods plagued by a self-perpetuating pathology of joblessness, welfare dependency, crime” (Time).^(1.)

The term ‘pathology’ has as its most common usage the clinical medical term and its reference to the professional discipline that has expertise in this area. Pathology has a much wider meaning in relation to its subject focus – being ‘disease’ generally.

Disease is tautologically defined as:

dis·ease (dī-zēz')

n.

1. A pathological condition of a part, organ, or system of an organism resulting from various causes, such as infection, genetic defect, or environmental stress, and characterized by an identifiable group of signs or symptoms.
2. A condition or tendency, as of society, regarded as abnormal and harmful.
3. Obsolete. Lack of ease; trouble.^(2.)

In the first meaning of disease, we understand that the focus of pathology extends to any system or organism. While a common focus may be on human health, any system's health can be the subject of the study of pathology.

In the second meaning, pathology also looks at the conditions of society regarded as abnormal and harmful. In this we see pathology extend beyond what science defines as abnormal, to include that which society sees in itself as abnormal. The distinction also being that to be pathological the condition must be seen as harmful.

The third meaning is perhaps the most interesting, which is the meaning of disease as the concept of 'dis-ease'. Pathology is also the study of the cause, processes, development and consequences of the 'unease' we feel in society. However, the study of something that has no object that can be physically located will usually see a shift in the focus of scientific inquiry to the philosophic or socially speculative, and hence with the modern world focus on the material and empirical, the obsolescence in this meaning of the term.

Within these three usages of the examination of the *pathos* of the *bios* - we can find a converse definition for *apithology* – being the *apic* of the *bios*.

The Apithology of Health

Converse logic creates a proposition which arises from interchanging the terms of another, as by putting the predicate for the subject, and the subject for the predicate (e.g no virtue is vice, no vice is virtue).

For example, in mathematics, if two sides of a sides of a triangle are equal, the angles opposite the sides are also equal; and the converse is true, i.e., if the angles are equal, the two sides are equal.

We find by looking into the mirror-definition of pathology a definition of apithology. The converse logic provides us with an opposite and equally valid truth.

If pathology is an abnormal and harmful condition of a system – the converse proposition is that there is a corresponding 'adnormal' and healthy condition of that same system.

Just as the opposite of sickness - is not the absence of sickness, the opposite of pathology is not the absence of pathology (being the absence of disease) - but is instead the presence of health – otherwise known as 'wellness'.

Just as the antonym of 'disease' is 'wellness', the antonym of 'pathology' is 'apithology'. Our mirror shows the new definitions arising from the converse proposition:

[wellness] (wĕl'nĭs)

n.

1. An [api]thological condition of a part, organ, or system of an organism resulting from various causes and characterized by an identifiable group of signs or symptoms.
2. A condition or tendency, as of society, regarded as [normal] and [healthy].
3. Emergent. Lack of [un]ease; [un]troubled.

api·thol·ogy (ā'pĭ thŏl'ē-jē)

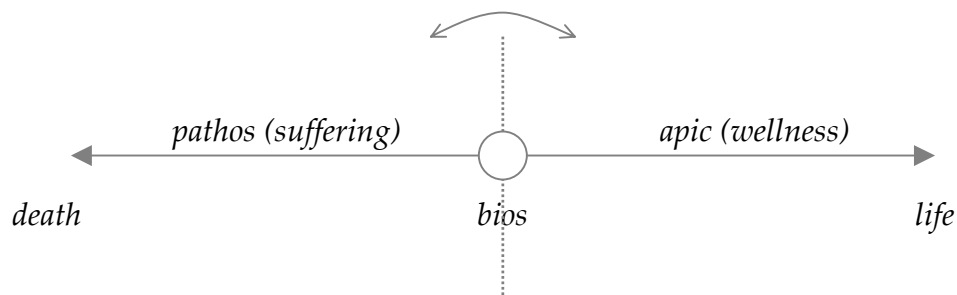
n. pl. api·thol·ogies

1. The [systemic] study of the nature of [wellness] and its causes, processes, development, and consequences. Also called **[apico]-biology**.
2. The anatomic or functional manifestations of [health]: *the apithology of emergence*.
3. A [conformance] or [adherence] to a [healthy] condition: "Neighborhoods were enabled by the self-reinforcing apithology of community engagement, independence, kindness".

The simple presence of the term highlights a definitional prejudice. We often see in our society a desirable state as being, not the presence of wellness and health, but simply (and only) as the absence of sickness and disease.

From Behind the Looking Glass

By defining these two polarities we can now see a continuum of development from death to life (as a lineal fiction). From one side of the mirror, we see the avoidance of suffering as leading forwards to an equilibrium point. When we stand on the reverse side of the mirror, we see an avoidance of growth and development as leading backwards to the stasis of existence.



[Figure 1. – Api-pathological Continuum]

Depending on which side of the mirror we stand, our view is affected accordingly. Normalcy is any point on the continuum. The distinction made is between a normalcy that is seen as the presence of health and a normalcy that is seen as the absence of harm. The degree of presence and absence is what defines a relative position on the continuum. We see an abnormal condition as any movement away from a position of nominal normalcy within the continuum.

The tendency of any system will be the movement towards the polarities of either apex-point on the continuum. When a system is not in static (or dynamic) equilibrium (the nominal position of normalcy), it may either decline into sickness, suffering and death, or move towards growth into health, wellness and life. The dynamics occurring within the system are what will determine the progression. In order to manage the system as a integral whole we would need to understand both sets of dynamics.

If we have a view predominantly from only the left-hand side of the mirror, we will see the absence of sickness and the presence of equilibrium as the desirable state. There is, however, a view from the other side of the looking glass. This emergent worldview sees the presence of wellness and an absence of a permanent equilibrium as the desirable state.

From Beyond the Looking Glass

The fields of pathology and apithology involve the study of the cause and effects of changing conditions in a system. That system may be a single cell, a sole germinating plant, a human body, a functioning society, one aspect of the global condition – or extend to an inquiry of the condition of our biosphere as a whole. The span of inquiry is limited only by our conceptualisation of that span. Our capability is then limited only by our familiarity and understanding within that expanded span.

The disciplines of clinical medical pathology to deal with disease within the human body are well advanced. Sub-disciplines of medical pathology include nosology (the classification of diseases), etiology (the study of their causes), cytopathology (cellular pathologies), serology (the use of serums in the identification and treatment of causes) and immunology (which looks at the structure and function of the immune system itself).

The disciplines of apithology to deal with the causes, processes, development and consequences of healthy development of the human body and other living systems are less well defined. They are, however, well established, as the disciplines of apithology are the disciplines of life.

We may speculate on the reasons for an imbalance in the development of these two approaches. The monological methodology of scientific empiricism, the nature of subtle-reductionism and the effects of Cartesian dualism on the secular as causes of this are well documented elsewhere. An obsession with the continuation of our own existence is also a prevalent cause. It is perhaps then more interesting and useful (and hopeful) to identify indicators of the leading edge of a future increase in interest in apithological practice.

One reason for a shift in thinking towards the right hand side of the mirror is our only recent deeper understanding of the principles of Darwinian evolution and within this the inexplicability of evolutionary leaps and their role in the evolutionary process (Fritjof Capra, Richard Dawkins, Julius Fraser).

Another is the development of insight into the biopsychosocial development of levels of consciousness and the corresponding alteration of views of normalcy as static concepts within our societies, particularly as higher levels of consciousness gain greater capacity for systems perspectives (Clare Graves, Jean Gebser, Ken Wilber).

A third is the development of an understanding of the principles of emergence in the reversal of entropic systems and the potential of systems that align as emergent holarchies (Arthur Koestler, Ervin Laszlo, Harold Morowitz).

The emergent view from beyond the looking glass is one which sees both sides of the continuum as one system in co-dependent dynamic equilibrium without division. The first step towards this is a rebalancing of our worldviews. By identifying the disciplines in pathology and apithology we can see what is being looked at. We must also understand why these things are being looked for.

The Unease in the Pathos

The shifts mentioned provide underlying reasons for the development of new practices, reflecting the emergent worldviews from the other side of the mirror as a progression along the continuum. The development of these new disciplines, particularly in areas of research based in integral theory, are symptomatic of a more subtle effect that will eventually lead to an increase in the depth of practice in apithology.

This increase will be reflective of the extent of a realisation that the creation of a system that is apathological (without disease) will not create a system that, in of itself, defines health, but will instead only create one that exhibits suspended entropy.

Within a worldview that believes that the avoidance of suffering leads to equilibrium and peace we have a confusion that life does not involve death. Within this lies a deception regarding an essential, if not noble, truth.

The unease in the *pathos* (the suffering) drives us to alleviate this condition. Amelioration of the suffering of disease is essential for life. This is, however, only the means to sustain the potential for life, but does not sustain life itself. It is, however, the first of two essential steps.

If we create an equilibrium state without pathology and an absence of disease, we will have created a system with the potential for life. We refer here to *life*, not as the existence of a living thing, but the existence of systems of living things and the potential for their evolution and development.

The Easing of the Bios

The removal of the pathology of disease returns a system to stasis. In stasis is the normalcy of the perennial biological struggle for existence. In this normalcy is the immediate prospect of extinction and death. We are also required to take the second step.

When we see life from an evolutionary systems perspective, we do not see the *bios* as the study of living things, but as the study of the '*thing that is life*'. Transcendence of the traditional anthropocentric view of biology will define the point of shift in perspective that marks the emergence of *apithology*.

In understanding 'life' as a process of which we are part, rather than something we possess, we have a much greater perspective on our co-dependent origination within the biosphere. This is when we distinguish *apithology* from the study of biology and move beyond the static discipline pioneered by Aristotle towards a modern integral ecological systems perspective.

From this perspective, discovering the causes, processes, path of development and consequences that lead to the ease of the emergence of the potentiality within the living system is a challenge of great importance. It is one that is at least equal to an enquiry, the focus of which, is the suspension of the potentiality of death.

Enabling the potentiality of life is where we now must turn. To achieve a balance with our fixation on the prevention of death – known to us as *pathology*, we will also need to focus on enabling the emergence of life – known as *apithology*.

The increasing examination of our world and our own development as a species explains our need for a name to describe what we already know and understand. Through this enquiry we can consciously acknowledge all that is known about creating health and wellbeing, and then understand deeply that we must now seek to discover a great deal more.

16 October 2004

⁽¹⁾ Source: (2000) The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition, Houghton-Mifflin Company.

⁽²⁾ Source: (2000) The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition, Houghton-Mifflin Company.