

Two Forms of Power: Integrity as Coherent Gravity and Extraction as Dark Magnetism

siistrategic.com/two-forms-of-power-integrity-as-coherent-gravity-and-extraction-as-dark-magnetism/

lockekdauch

April 15, 2026

A Case Study of Post-Breakdown Becoming

David Humble

Sovereign Integrity Institute (SII)

Abstract

This paper proposes a dual-model of human influence: **sovereign power**, generated by nervous system coherence, stored vitality, and non-reactive presence; and **extractive power**, associated with traits commonly described in the Dark Triad literature (narcissism, Machiavellianism, psychopathy), and characterised by a transient, high-intensity interpersonal pull that facilitates exploitation.

Drawing on polyvagal theory, personality research, and a longitudinal first-person case study, the paper examines a critical transition phase following psychological breakdown—a “neutral zone” in which prior identity structures collapse, and behavioural direction remains undetermined. In this phase, individuals may exhibit heightened interpersonal influence without stable regulatory grounding.

The paper argues that the deliberate cultivation of integrity—operationalised as nervous system regulation, non-reactivity, and behavioural consistency—transforms unstable influence into coherent, prosocial presence. In contrast, the absence of such integration may consolidate extractive behavioural patterns.

Implications are discussed for post-traumatic adaptation, interpersonal influence, and the development of stable, non-exploitative forms of power.

Keywords: sovereignty, integrity, Dark Triad, interpersonal influence, polyvagal theory, post-traumatic growth, self-regulation, behavioural coherence

1. Introduction

Not all influence operates through the same mechanisms.

Some individuals exert influence through a calm, non-demanding presence that promotes stability and mutual regulation. Others exert influence through intensity—often experienced as compelling or charismatic—but which ultimately leads to asymmetry and depletion.

This paper distinguishes between these two forms:

- **Sovereign power:** grounded in regulation, coherence, and behavioural integrity
- **Extractive power:** driven by dysregulation, opportunistic behaviour, and asymmetrical gain

Between these poles lies a less examined state: the **post-breakdown transition**, in which an individual's prior identity structures have collapsed, but a stable mode of functioning has not yet been established.

This paper explores that transition through a single case study (“the witness”), examining how influence manifests in this state and how subsequent choices shape its trajectory.

2. Extractive Power: Dark Triad Traits and Interpersonal Leverage

2.1 The Dark Triad

The Dark Triad—narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy—describes a cluster of personality traits associated with:

- Strategic manipulation
- Reduced empathic concern
- Goal-oriented interpersonal behaviour

Empirical research indicates that individuals high in these traits are often perceived as socially confident and attractive during initial encounters (Back et al., 2010; Holtzman & Strube, 2010). This effect facilitates access, trust formation, and subsequent exploitation.

2.2 Mechanisms of Influence

Common behavioural strategies include:

- **Accelerated rapport formation** (e.g., excessive attention or “love bombing”)
- **Behavioural mirroring** to simulate similarity
- **Emotional modulation** to influence target perception

These mechanisms function to reduce resistance and increase compliance.

Importantly, this form of influence is **instrumental** rather than relational: its purpose is outcome acquisition, not mutual regulation.

2.3 Instability of Extractive Influence

Although initially effective, extractive influence is typically unstable:

- It depends on sustained input (attention, manipulation)
- It degrades trust over time
- It often results in relational breakdown or disengagement

This distinguishes it from more stable forms of interpersonal influence grounded in regulation.

3. Sovereign Power: Regulation, Coherence, and Non-Reactivity

3.1 Autonomic Regulation and Social Function

Polyvagal theory, developed by Stephen Porges, describes how autonomic state shapes social behaviour.

The **ventral vagal state** is associated with:

- Perceived safety
- Social engagement capacity
- Flexible emotional response

Individuals operating consistently in this state tend to exhibit:

- Reduced reactivity
- Increased behavioural consistency
- Greater capacity for mutual regulation

3.2 Coherence as Functional Stability

In this paper, **coherence** refers to alignment across:

- Physiological state
- Behavioural output
- attentional control

This alignment produces a form of influence that is:

- Non-coercive
- Stable over time
- Low in volatility

Rather than actively drawing others in, it reduces environmental instability, allowing voluntary alignment.

3.3 Stored Vitality

The concept of **stored vitality** is introduced as a functional description of:

- Energy not expended through reactivity
- Reduced leakage through impulsive behaviour
- Increased availability for intentional action

Practices associated with this state include:

- Controlled rest environments
- Somatic regulation (e.g., breath control, pressure-based input)
- Behavioural restraint (non-reaction under stimulus)

4. The Breakdown State: Transitional Instability

4.1 Collapse of Prior Structure

Psychological breakdown—whether through trauma, stress accumulation, or systemic destabilisation—can result in:

- Loss of identity coherence
- Increased emotional volatility
- Disruption of behavioural patterns

This aligns with the concept of **positive disintegration** (Dąbrowski, 1964), though outcomes are not inherently positive.

4.2 Emergence of Unstable Influence

In this transitional phase, individuals may exhibit:

- Heightened emotional intensity
- Reduced social filtering
- Increased interpersonal impact

However, this influence is:

- Unregulated
- Inconsistent
- Not yet integrated into a stable behavioural framework

4.3 Directional Indeterminacy

The key characteristic of this phase is **indeterminacy**.

The individual may:

- Develop structured, regulated behaviour (integration)
- Default to opportunistic or extractive strategies (maladaptive consolidation)

Outcome depends on subsequent behavioural patterns, not the breakdown itself.

5. Case Study: Post-Breakdown Transition

5.1 Context

The subject (“the witness”) experienced prolonged exposure to high-stress, high-uncertainty environments, followed by a period of psychological destabilisation.

5.2 Observed Phenomena

During the transitional phase, the subject reported:

- Increased interpersonal responsiveness from others
- Reduced need for explicit behavioural prompting
- Situations in which others appeared unusually compliant

These observations are interpreted cautiously as **heightened interpersonal influence under reduced internal regulation**, rather than as evidence of directed control.

5.3 Behavioural Constraint

Crucially, the subject did not systematically exploit these dynamics. Instead, subsequent behaviour shifted toward:

- Withdrawal from destabilising environments
- Adoption of regulation practices
- Reduction of reactive behaviour

5.4 Stabilisation

Over time, reported changes included:

- Increased baseline calm
- Reduced behavioural volatility
- More consistent interpersonal outcomes

This trajectory supports the interpretation that **integration, rather than intensity, determines stability of influence**.

6. Comparative Model of Influence

Dimension	Sovereign Power	Extractive Power
Source	Regulation, coherence	Opportunism, dysregulation
Mechanism	Stability and alignment	Intensity and leverage
Effect on others	Mutual regulation	Asymmetrical gain
Sustainability	High	Low
Behavioural pattern	Consistent	Variable
Development pathway	Post-integration	Adaptive or defensive

7. Implications

7.1 Post-Breakdown Development

The transitional phase following breakdown represents:

- A period of increased plasticity
- Elevated risk of maladaptive pattern formation
- Opportunity for structured behavioural recalibration

7.2 Differentiating Influence Types

A practical distinction can be made:

- **Stable influence:** consistent, non-demanding, low volatility
- **Unstable influence:** intense, situational, outcome-driven

This distinction is operationally more useful than moral categorisation.

7.3 Leadership and Systems

In organisational or institutional contexts:

- Extractive influence may produce rapid short-term outcomes
- Coherent influence supports long-term stability and resilience

8. Conclusion

Two distinct patterns of influence can be observed:

- One grounded in regulation, coherence, and stability
- One driven by intensity, leverage, and asymmetry

Between them lies a transitional state in which influence may be present without integration.

The case examined here suggests that **the decisive variable is not the presence of influence, but its regulation.**

Influence without regulation is unstable.

Regulation without exploitation becomes coherence.

The distinction is behavioural, not theoretical.

References

Back, M. D., Schmukle, S. C., & Egloff, B. (2010). Why are narcissists so charming at first sight? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 98(1), 132–145.

Dąbrowski, K. (1964). *Positive Disintegration*. Little, Brown.

Holtzman, N. S., & Strube, M. J. (2010). The dark side of personality. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 4(9), 760–775.

Paulhus, D. L., & Williams, K. M. (2002). The Dark Triad of personality. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 36(6), 556–563.

Porges, S. W. (2011). *The Polyvagal Theory*. W. W. Norton.

Strutzenberg, C. C., et al. (2016). Love-bombing as a relationship strategy. University of Arkansas Discovery.

Humble, D. (2026). *The Gravity Well of Coherence*. Sovereign Integrity Institute (unpublished manuscript).

Footer (for publication formatting)

Sovereign Integrity Institute (SII) — David Humble — April 2026

Comments
