

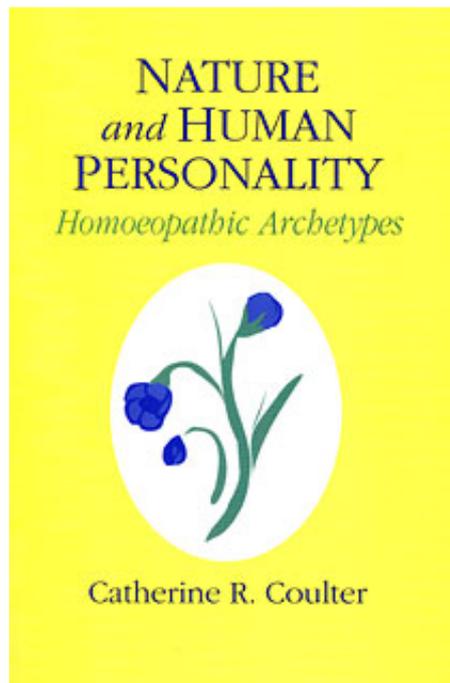
Catherine R. Coulter
Nature and Human Personality - Imperfect copy

Reading excerpt

[Nature and Human Personality - Imperfect copy](#)

of [Catherine R. Coulter](#)

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Arsenicum album



Anything worth doing is worth overdoing.

—Anonymous

The above epigraph points straight to the heart of *Arsenicum album* and is a continuing theme in the picture of this strong, projecting, and, for the most part, driven personality. What is the source of *Arsenicum's* drive? For what is he striving? The answer is: *perfection*. He is the perfectionist par excellence; he himself admits it. But perfection is seldom achieved in this world, even by *Arsenicum* himself, hence his unceasing, unrelenting drive.

The aspiration to perfection begins early in life and can already be perceived in the child, who is unusually persevering and conscientious. This picture is continued in the pale, exhausted model student who, not satisfied with simply receiving good grades through moderate effort, must obtain the best grades through superior effort. One college student explained that he had to overprepare for every examination, because if he did not know the answer to even one question in ten, his mental faculties were so paralyzed that he could not concentrate on the other nine. Besides, however serious the physical consequences of such overexertion, they were still preferable to the anxiety of feeling not fully prepared.

The same striving for perfection is found in the adult, who labors indefatigably to master a new discipline or works compulsively

on a project he has set his mind to—adding to it, tearing it apart, then reconstructing it, never completely satisfied with what he has done. He sleeps poorly as a consequence, and other aspects of his life must give way to the project that currently engrosses him, but still he is unable to slow down or go on to the next thing, because he cannot live with an unfinished product or an unmastered skill.

And there is more to the picture: although in seeking perfection *Arsenicum* may drive himself to exhaustion, hard work gives him immense satisfaction. After all, he is not one to put himself out unless he so chooses, knowing full well how to take care of his own comfort and interests ("I'm one helluva hard worker," he says cheerfully of himself). The more responsibility piled on him, the happier he is—in this way exemplifying the popular wisdom in the business world that a job needing to be done quickly and well should be given to the busiest person in the office (that is, to an *Arsenicum*). Thus, the overzealous, overconscientious, unrelenting businessman, lawyer, doctor, or broker who works long hours without let-up and is then unable to unwind—who accomplishes as much in one day as any two other people, yet still reproaches himself for not accomplishing enough—is often an *Arsenicum*. Other constitutional types may possess a similar capacity for and enjoyment of work, but it is *Arsenicum's* driven, compulsive manner that makes him unique.

Although his colossal inner drive creates the semblance of strength, he is sustained more by nervous energy than by true endurance. "I often feel as if I am running full speed on 'below empty,'" was one individual's way of phrasing it, as he oscillated between excessive application and total exhaustion. Yet, barely recovered from a collapse, he starts up again on all cylinders. For the truth of the matter is that the ultra-ambitious and overachieving *Arsenicum* is not content unless he is pushing himself to the limits of his strength.

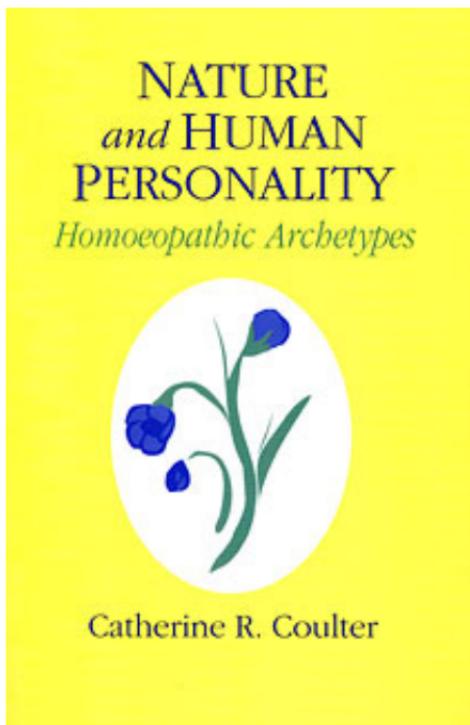
He may actually suffer from headaches on weekends when unable to go to the office to work. Some will fall ill during vacations or become restless and irascible while relaxing at the seashore; they cannot wait to get back to the daily grind. When under stress, at a low point in life, or in a state of despair, *Arsenicum's* most reliable

and effective therapy—his panacea—is to immerse himself in work. For certain individuals work may even take the place of an emotional life. They find in it the pleasure and meaning that other constitutional types find only in human relations.

Arsenicum's driven quality may prevent him from resting on his laurels and enjoying his own achievements. Highly self-critical and with his eye always fixed on some distant peak, a triumph or a success is merely one more step in an endless progression of (largely self-imposed) compulsory achievements. No accomplishment can calm his drive, because it comes from within and is not satisfied by the 'world's acclaim. To be sure, he seeks acknowledgment as much as another and will not turn it down when it is deserved, but this is neither his primary motive nor his principal source of satisfaction. Always looking toward the next goal, he presses ever forward.

This driven perfectionist can also be seen in family situations, especially in the female *Arsenicum*. At best she is the "supermom" who balances the needs of husband, children, career, and household •without impairing the interests of any. In her •well-regulated life she finds time to do everything (including playing an active role on the school board or the Neighborhood Watch committee), and every minute of her day is accounted for. Although this may require tight deadlines and rigid adherence to plans drawn up and enforced by her restless energy, she uses the time efficiently and everything is done well, without missing a beat. She is a fair-minded disciplinarian and intelligently supportive parent, with happy, creative, and well-balanced children.

At times, however, the "*Arsenicum* mother" caricatures the type. Eager to promote her children's •welfare, she assails doctors, teachers, friends, and relatives with importunate demands. Her relentless drive for perfection may lead her to transfer her child from one school to another in midterm, yank him out of an extracurricular activity in which he is perfectly content and enroll him in another, or constantly switch tutors, doctors, and babysitters, while frankly indicating to each his deficiencies and the reasons for the change. Bulldozing all obstacles before her, she clears the ground for her



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