

Human Energy From Individual Potential to Social Power

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INTRODUCTION:

What drives us to think, act, and create? Human energy is the invisible force shaping our communities and the systems they operate within. It fuels creativity, powers civic engagement, and underpins economic activity, yet it is fragile and easily depleted. This poster examines how energy is experienced by individuals, how it is mobilised within governing structures, and how it has been transformed into economic value.

THE NATURE OF HUMAN ENERGY:

Philosophical inquiry offers a lens to understand what human energy truly is. Aristotle’s concept of *energeia*, literally “being at work” or the actualization of potential, frames energy not as mere physical exertion but as the harmony between our actions and what we are capable of. Nietzsche expands this into the *will to power*, the restless drive behind ambition, creativity, and growth, while modern thinkers such as Simone Weil and Josef Pieper stress that attention, rest, and leisure are conditions for sustaining it. These insights feel most real in everyday experience: the rush of clarity that carries you through the first pages of an essay, the sudden mental fog when thoughts tangle after hours of effort, the creeping exhaustion when tasks pile without pause. Energy in this sense is fragile but renewable, a rhythm that alternates between intensity and recovery, meaning and distraction. To understand it is not only to ask how humans fulfill their highest potential, but also how we manage the finite reserves of focus and vitality that shape the quality of our days, reminding us that energy is at once philosophical, ethical, and deeply personal



This illustration depicts human energy as an active, radiating force, linking the individual to their environment (Source: Pinterest).

MOBILISING AND DIRECTING HUMAN ENERGY:

Energy in the political sphere becomes visible in the ways people’s vitality is drawn into public life. When citizens vote or protest, their personal energy is transformed into a collective force capable of shaping society, and within this shared energy, communities find the capacity to progress. Governments, in turn, influence where this energy goes: long working hours, or restrictions on education and healthcare, can drain what individuals might otherwise give to their communities. In more controlled regimes, energy is not only guided but captured, redirected into the machinery of the state, whether through propaganda or the demand for compulsory service. Yet political energy does not always erupt in dramatic acts; it can be diffused quietly, such as in the endless debates and campaigns on social media, where passion is expended but rarely translated into tangible change. Crises make this tension especially clear, as societies survive only through coordinated human effort, yet the weight of that effort often falls unevenly. In this way, political energy is never neutral: it can empower, it can be muted, and it can be exploited, reminding us that how energy is channelled is as much a question of justice as of power.

HUMAN ENERGY AND PRODUCTIVITY:

From an economic perspective, human energy drives productivity and growth, yet treating it as a commodity is both fragile and ethically troubling. Workers’ vitality fuels labour markets, but fatigue or burnout can instantly undermine output, posing the instability of relying on energy itself rather than on the products it generates. John Maynard Keynes, the 20th-century economist who imagined that technological and organisational advances could free people from long hours of toil, effectively recognised that energy has its own potential that should be directed toward learning, creativity, and personal growth rather than sold directly. Today, when people trade their focus and effort directly for income (in freelance work, nail shifts, or attention-driven content creation) they are essentially selling the capacity to act and think rather than tangible goods, leaving the system vulnerable to collapse if that energy falters. This approach treats human energy as a substitute for resources, ignoring its finite, personal, and fluctuating nature, and reminds us that ethical economic design requires respecting the limits of energy while cultivating the deeper potential it enables.

REFERENCES:

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- Nietzsche, F. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Discussion of the will to power and human drive.
- Weil, S. *Waiting for God*; Pieper, J. *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*. Ideas on attention, rest, and the sustenance of human energy.
- Keynes, J.M. *Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren* (1930). Prediction of a reduced workweek and the potential to redirect human energy toward creative and intellectual pursuits.

CROSS-DICIPLINARY REFLECTIONS:

Across philosophy, politics, and economics, human energy appears as a vital yet fragile resource that shapes individual lives and broader social structures. In philosophy, energy is the actualisation of potential, the force that allows a person to think deeply and pursue meaningful goals. In politics, energy becomes visible when a citizen casts a vote or organises a local campaign, showing how personal vitality can influence social outcomes while also being constrained by laws or institutional pressures. Economically, energy drives work and innovation, but when it is treated merely as a commodity it becomes unstable and ethically complex. These patterns reveal how poor health or lack of educational opportunities can limit the development of potential, both individually and collectively. As technologies transform how people work and communicate, the challenge is to cultivate energy in ways that respect its limits and support human growth. Energy, in this sense, is both literal and metaphorical: it powers thought, sustains action, and underpins the systems that organise society, connecting personal wellbeing with social and economic life in a continuous, dynamic flow.