

4.2: ΔA , ΔG , and Maximum Work

The functions A and G are oftentimes referred to as **free energy** functions. The reason for this is that they are a measure of the maximum work (in the case of ΔA) or non p-V work (in the case of ΔG) that is available from a process. To show this, consider the total differentials.

First, consider the differential of A .

$$dA = dU - TdS - SdT$$

Substituting the combined first and second laws for dU , but expressing the work term as dw , yields

$$dA = TdS - dw - TdS - SdT$$

And cancelling the TdS terms gives

$$dA = dw - SdT$$

or at constant temperature ($dT = 0$)

$$dA = dw$$

Since the only assumption made here was that the change is reversible (allowing for the substitution of TdS for dq), and dw for a reversible change is the maximum amount of work, it follows that dA gives the maximum work that can be produced from a process at constant temperature.

Similarly, a simple expression can be derived for dG . Starting from the total differential of G .

$$dG = dU + pdV - VdP + TdS - SdT$$

Using an expression for $dU = dq + dw$, where $dq = TdS$ and dw is split into two terms, one (dw_{pV}) describing the work of expansion and the other (dw_e) describing any other type of work (electrical, stretching, etc.)

$$dU = TdS + dw_{pV} + dw_e$$

dG can be expressed as

$$dG = TdS - pdV + dw_e + pdV + VdP - TdS - SdT$$

Cancelling the TdS and pdV terms leaves

$$dG = +dw_e + VdP - SdT$$

So at constant temperature ($dT = 0$) and pressure ($dP = 0$),

$$dG = dw_e$$

This implies that dG gives the maximum amount of non p-V work that can be extracted from a process.

This concept of dA and dG giving the maximum work (under the specified conditions) is where the term “free energy” comes from, as it is the energy that is *free* to do work in the surroundings. If a system is to be optimized to do work in the surroundings (for example a steam engine that may do work by moving a locomotive) the functions A and G will be important to understand. It will, therefore, be useful to understand how these functions change with changing conditions, such as volume, temperature, and pressure.

Contributors

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