

# Understanding The Etheric Organization In The Human Being: New Insights Through Anthroposophical Research

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From the early 1980s a growing number of articles on psychoneuroimmunology have appeared in specialist and popular publications showing that negative thoughts and feelings such as stress, grief, faintheartedness, lack of perspective and depression can damage self-preservation and natural defense functions (collectively called the immune system). Conversely, positive thoughts and feelings such as calm, pleasure, enthusiasm and hope have a stimulant effect on the immune system. So far, however, it has not been possible to present a satisfactory working hypothesis on the way thoughts and feelings may affect the body's immune functions. In view of this, Rudolf Steiner's research on the dual aspect of the human etheric organization is once again of considerable current interest. Rudolf Steiner spoke of a set of laws that on the one hand provide for growth, regeneration (healing) and reproduction and on the other sustain conscious thought life.

## **Metamorphosis Of Growth Forces Into Thinking Activity**

One of the fundamental research findings made by Rudolf Steiner concerning the way the etheric organism functions was to throw light on the connection that exists between vital functions and thought activity. He put it most clearly in the book he wrote together with Dr. Ita Wegman, *Extending Practical Medicine*:

*“At the beginning of human life on earth - most dearly so during the embryonic period - the forces of the etheric body act as powers of configuration and growth. As life progresses, a part of these forces becomes emancipated from activity in configuration and growth and is transformed into powers of thought, the very powers that create the shadowy thought world we have in ordinary consciousness. It is of the greatest importance to know that ordinary human powers of thought are refined powers of configuration and growth. A spiritual principle reveals itself in the configuration and growth of the human organism. And as life progresses this principle emerges as the spiritual power of thought.*

*And this power of thought is only one part of the power of human configuration and growth that is at work in the etheric. The other part remains faithful to the function it had at the beginning of human life. Human beings continue to develop when configuration and growth have reached an advanced stage, that is, to some degree a conclusion, and it is because of this that the non-physical, spiritual etheric which is alive and actively at work in the organism is able to become power of thought in later life. The power to change and be changed thus presents itself to imaginative perception in one aspect as being etheric and spiritual and in its other aspect as the soul content of thinking.”*  
(Rudolf Steiner Press, London, 1996, page 6)

Steiner thus succinctly uncovers a surprising functional relationship. It is presented as a factual situation, primarily axiomatic in character, that is like the perception-based judgments that form the basis of classic mathematical axioms.

Biology as a science of vital functions and their laws is thus put directly side by side with philosophy, a science of thought activities. Things that seem to lie far apart are said to be very closely connected. It is said that ordinary human thinking activity is not produced by the neurosensory system, which is

frequently the assumption in neurophysiology. Instead it is said to derive from the organism's powers of growth and regeneration, needing the brain only to make their function conscious, that is, to produce a shadowy "reflection" of powers of thought that are full of life. In *The Case for Anthroposophy*, Steiner wrote:

*"In a way similar to that in which one may look in psychophysiology for the connections between a soul life that involves the forming of ideas, feeling and will on one hand and bodily life on the other, it is possible in Anthroposophy to look for the connections between the life of the soul in ordinary conscious awareness on one hand and the life of mind and spirit on the other. And using the Anthroposophical methods described in this book and my other works, one Finds that a basis for the forming of ideas may be found in the mind and spirit, as well as nerve activity in the body. On the other side, the side not concerned with the body, the soul relates to something that is spiritual by nature and is the basis for forming ideas in ordinary conscious awareness. This spiritual principle can, however, only be known in a living way by means of vision-based perception. Its contents then show themselves to be differentiated images perceived through vision. Just as on the bodily side the forming of ideas is based on nerve function, so does it on the other side flow from something that is spiritual by nature and comes to revelation in Imaginations. This spiritual principle is called the ether body or life body in my works."*

Modern attempts to describe the function of the human mind clearly point in the direction of such a view,<sup>1</sup> but it was Rudolf Steiner who first described this surprising connection and showed its practical consequences in education and medicine. He described the etheric organism as a set of laws that are responsible not only for heredity, growth, regeneration (self healing powers) and reproduction, but also for the mysterious system of relationships we call the "life of thoughts."<sup>2</sup>

How can we test the validity of the fact presented by Steiner, that vital and thinking activity are identical, doing so in real life? Which experiences gained in life, which generally known biological facts, relate to this and help to substantiate Steiner's research findings? The first requirement would be that if this research ending is correct, everything we are able to learn from observation and knowledge about the laws that govern vital and thinking activity should not only be similar by nature but show consistent correspondences. Comparing the two spheres must lead to clear evidence that fundamentally speaking this is one and the same activity acting at different levels - the level where biological processes occur and the level of mind and spirit where thought work is done. And finally it would be necessary to indicate in which direction one should look for the insights to be gained and their practical application in education and medicine.

### **Manifestations Of Vital And Thinking Activity And Correspondences Between Them**

Below, some characteristics of vital and thinking activity will be compared to establish how far they correspond. Readers are asked to let these examples come alive in their minds to the best of their ability and complement them with their own observations and thoughts on vital and thinking processes. If this should raise questions, or if a suggested correspondence does not convince or cannot be found, the author would be pleased to enter into dialogue with the reader. It is in the nature of Anthroposophical spiritual research that one must become active oneself in soul, mind and spirit in order to understand things. It is not enough simply to take note of the findings made in this science. They do in fact challenge individuals to gain self knowledge and go through further development.

## **1) The Differentiated Whole**

In all life forms, from single-cell organisms through all species to man, vital processes present as differentiated wholes. An outstanding feature is that the whole is always greater than the sum of its parts. Thus a biochemical reaction which is quite simple in itself has its significance in the life of the whole organism only because of the context in which it occurs. Thinking activity correspondingly has the characteristic that a person's whole capacity for thought is a system of complex interrelations, with a single thought only given its full significance in its full context.

## **2) The Organism**

The living organism has its counterpart in the thought organism or thought life. At the biological level, all functions are interactive and have mutual feedback, and the same holds true for thinking activity. Thinking is very much an activity where one thing relates to another, derives from another, refers back to another. It is not possible to think "large" without thinking "small", nor "hot" without considering "cold." The one only gains its individual significance in the light of the other or by comparison with it.

## **3) Vital And Thinking Activity As Open Systems**

Living organisms are open systems. Food, air and light are taken in from an environment that goes as far as the stars; they are processed and then eliminated in a different form. Digestion and metabolism are the most obvious signs of vital functionality. Sunlight, for instance, is responsible not only for the production of the green chlorophyll pigment in plants and vitamin D in human organisms. The biorhythms also take their orientation from sun and moon as cosmic time setters. Thus the moon with its changing phases is a major time setter for many rhythms connected -with reproductive behavior, above all among lower animals. The "biological clock" of endogenous rhythms (circadian 24-hour rhythm, circaheptan rhythm of regeneration and healing) come under this heading.<sup>3</sup> These and other laws of life have their exact correspondences in our thinking. For every law of nature is in some way connected with man and his environment. The body is built according to these laws, interacts with them - and all this also exists in abstract form in our thinking.

This also marks the crucial difference that exists between vital and thinking activity, in spite of all correspondences: Vital processes are apparent to the senses, they take place on the physical and material level in space and time. They are subject to an unconscious control inherent in them. In thought activity, vital activity is emancipated from body function, has been lifted out of intervention in metabolism and hence also out of space, and it depends on conscious control or guidance provided by the human being. Conscious attention given to the rhythms of day and night, of the week, the month and the year can thus give positive support to the life of thought and memory. This is part of the approach used in Waldorf kindergartens, for example.<sup>4</sup>

The human thought organism shows itself to be an open system corresponding to that of the vital processes. Known and unknown elements may be taken up, replaced and/or processed further.

## **4) Interaction Between The Three States Of Aggregation And Heat**

Solid, liquid and gaseous substances interact in some form or other in every living organism. The degree of their activity is to a major extent determined by their temperature level. Remarkably, the typical manifestations of the states of aggregation and the warmth of solids, liquids and gaseous matter are also apparent at the thought level. Thus one notes that ideas based on sensory perceptions form the main body of thoughts in human minds, These are clearly defined thought forms, and in German they are also called

“solid ideas,” examples being one particular table, the picture hanging slightly askew on the wall, the evening mood in the sky at a particular time, and so on.

Thinking takes quite a different form when it is in concepts. To think the concept of a circle, for instance - without forming a visual image - is only possible if one uses pure, image free relationships independent of all sensory perception. A circle may thus be defined as the geometric location of all points that are at the same distance from a center, or the geometric location for all points for which the ratio of their distances from two different points is constant. To illustrate one of the definitions by drawing an example on a blackboard would give an idea, an image of the concept but not the concept itself. This can only be grasped as an extremely mobile thought element - pure concept, free from mental images. It is similar with concepts such as “flower,” “lamp” or “table.” To think in concepts (with no mental images) is to be extremely mobile inwardly and let all possible kinds of ceiling, wall or table lamps come to mind without settling on a fixed idea of one particular lamp. Seen like this, “lamp” is a creative principle that can be used to produce an inexhaustible number of different kinds of lamps or lighting systems. Here concepts show themselves to be the source springs of potential ideas, with the power to generate innumerable ideas, all of them possible. Their essence lies in relation and reference per se, without any content that can be grasped in a mental image. So here we have the mediating, mobile, fluid element at thought level.

There are also thoughts the dynamics or specific nature of which correspond to those of air - good or bad ideas or notions seem to flash into ones mind, wafting on the wind, like the light in the air. They may vanish as quickly as they came unless one holds on to them, makes a note or remembers them in some other way. It is also worth noting that such inspired ideas cannot be made to come. Nor can they be systematically evolved the way concepts or a nexus of mental images can. You have to “have” or “get” them, and there is something inconstant and playful about them, like the wind. The spirit “bloweth where it listeth,” following its own laws.

The specific nature of warmth shows itself in our thinking in the form of ideals. Ideals have the same ordering and regulating role in the thought organism as warmth has in the living organism. Warmth is present throughout the organism, co-determining its activity and chemical processes. And it also depends on a person’s current ideal in life, what is of value to him, how he interprets anything he learns from life, and if his thought organism has a focus, as it were, enthusing the individual, warming him, and making it possible to organize knowledge and integrate anything new more easily. If the life of thought is cold and impersonal, on the other hand, many things have to remain incomprehensible and lacking context, as one is unable to “warm” to them.

## **5) Digestive Processes<sup>5</sup>**

Processes of nutrition and digestion of the kind found in a living organism also occur at the thought level. New and strange ideas are taken in, processed, perhaps subjected to critical analysis, taken apart, individually considered and then integrated in ones personal thought complex. In the organism, analytical processes occur in digestion in which food substances are taken apart into their individual elements. Having passed through the intestinal wall they then provide material for the organism to create its own substance. Correspondingly we have analytical and critical as well as synthesizing and constructive thinking activity as characteristic modes of thinking. We also like to speak of “processing” or “digesting” things mentally, or that a thought complex lies heavy on one’s stomach, or that we have problems dealing with or digesting a particular thought complex. What is more, all thoughts that have not proved useful are eliminated from the thought world of anyone who has a healthy thinking life as inappropriate or at variance. Only an uncared-for or “sick” thought organism will have deposits of material that has not been comprehended or proved indigestible, or a kind of “stone formation” in the form of dogmatic thought complexes that drop out of the totality of thought life as it has not been possible to understand and integrate them.

## **6) Rhythmic Respiratory And Heart Beat Functions And Corresponding Forms In Dialectic Thinking**

Quite a different approach to thinking lies in its dialectic nature. The opposite of the concept “existence” is “nothing.” The verbs “come into existence” and “pass out of existence” mediate between them. Every thesis has its antithesis. Both are taken beyond themselves through mediating synthesis. Dialectic thinking is the basis of opinion or judgment forming in our thinking. In forming an opinion, we weigh rhythmically between a possible Yes, with everything in favor of this, and a possible No, considering everything that militates against a particular issue one wishes to judge before coming to a decision. This rhythmic activity in our thinking involves weighing things more or less rapidly as we form an opinion. At the biological level the corresponding process is the rhythmic co-ordination of respiration and heart beat, or the “rhythmic system,” as it is called, with patterns of movement that are polar and recur at greater or lesser frequencies.

## **7) Growth, Reproduction, Regeneration And Immunity**

Man has the potential to continue growing forever once the physical body has grown to its fullness. He is also able to reproduce, or produce, whole thought complexes of his own accord. The regenerative and indeed healing power inherent in thinking is particularly remarkable. Goethe spoke of this in one of his late poems:

*Day by day and night by night  
I thus praise the lot of man;  
Eternally thinking to find the right way  
He is great and good for ever.<sup>6</sup>*

To be able to think something through, set it right, resolve misunderstandings, bringing movement into the rigid positions taken by others - that is regenerative, healing activity. And there are also the special thoughts in prayers of intercession, wishing someone, “all the best,” the possibility of having someone in one’s thoughts, taking him with us, giving him strength by “thinking of him” and many other forms of wholesome, beneficial thought work. Using them we are able to bring etheric power into effect in ourselves and for others.

Thinking also has an element that corresponds to the immune system. There are “contagious ideas,” and others we resist to the point of having an “allergic” reaction to them. Every thought organism has its own boundaries within which it takes in new things, processes them and decides which are experienced as “belonging” and which are “alien” and rejected.

## **8) Differences In The Thinking Of Men And Women**

If people are thinking with powers of growth and regeneration no longer needed at the physical level, this must also throw light on the difference between the sexes at the level of thought activity. For it means no more and no less but that a man has the generative potential of the female organism at his disposal, powers that have not been brought to realization in his physical organism, and conversely a woman has the powers of mind that at the physical level represent male potency. Rudolf Steiner spoke in a number of lectures about women having a male ether body and men a female ether body.<sup>7</sup> There has been considerable speculation about this. If one considers embryology, however, it is evident that the etheric powers manifest in thinking which cannot come to physical expression due to differentiation into male and female sexual characteristics. To consider this in more detail: It is known that up to the 6th or 7th week of pregnancy; male and female embryos look exactly the same externally and both have bisexual

primordia (known as the indifferent stage of gonad development). The etheric organism is thus fully human, having the generative principles of both the female and the male organism. From week 7, sexual differentiation laid down in the chromosomes causes the opposite sex to go through involution. It means that the primordium of the female sexual organs goes through involution in a male embryo, and vice versa (see Fig. 1.) It is interesting to note that this happens at exactly the time (7th week) when the primary cerebral vesicles develop, marking the beginning of development for the cerebrum or the cerebral cortex as the organ for reflective thought activity; Vestiges of the primordia of the other sex persist, however, as shown in the Figure 1.

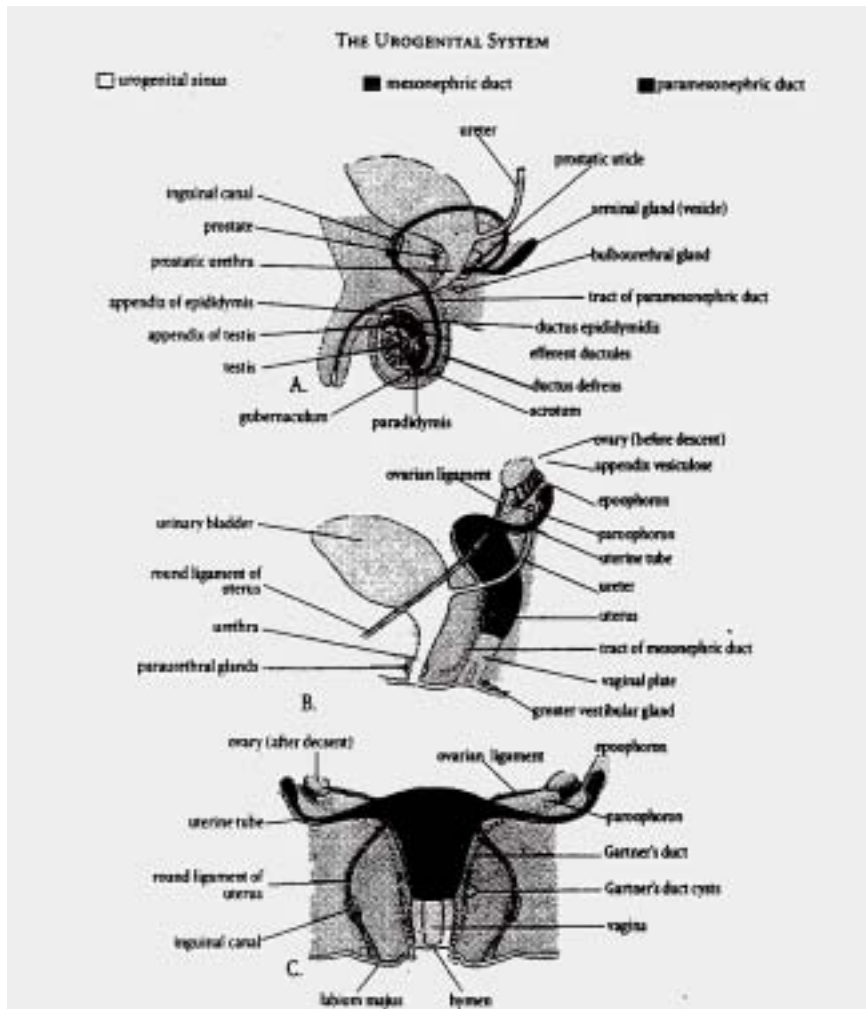


Figure 1: Schematic drawings illustrating development of the male and female reproductive systems from the primitive genital ducts. Vestigial structures are also shown. A) reproductive system in a newborn male. B) female reproductive system in a 12-week fetus. C) reproductive system in a newborn female. From Moore, KL: Embryologic. *Lehrbuch und Atlas der Entwicklungsgeschichte des Menschen* S. 313. Stuttgart 1990.]

These vestiges of reproductive organs belonging to the opposite sex show that the etheric laws (generative powers) of the opposite sex remain a potential for the rest of a persons life, even though the actual organs do not develop. They are thus wholly available for thought activity. The male thought organism visible to Rudolf Steiner, the spiritual scientist, thus showed itself to have female dynamics, while the female one had male characteristics. Hormonal stimulation may to some degree effect somatization (“physical

development”) of these powers which are now freely available for thinking activity, for example if a man’s or woman’s hormone-sensitive tumor is treated with androgens or estrogens, or with antiestrogens and antiandrogens. With some dosages, the secondary sex characteristics of the opposite sex may develop to some degree as an undesirable side effect. A woman may grow facial hair, her voice may break and there may be signs of a male pattern of hair growth. She becomes physically “masculine.” In a man, on the other hand, one may see breast development and the typically female distribution of fat deposits, with the musculature showing a reduction. The man becomes to some extent “female.”

What differences exist between the typical thinking dynamics of men and women, leaving aside individual variations? In line with the above, one would expect male thinking dynamics to bear the stamp of the ether body’s female reproductive activity that has not come to physical realization, and conversely female thinking dynamics the stamp of the ether body’s male reproductive activity. To understand this and think it through oneself, one must first of all bring to mind the functional dynamics of the reproductive organs of both sexes at the physical level.

Male reproductive activity involves the outward-directed, quasi effervescent process of semen production and ejaculation with great variation in intensity, frequency and volume. The functional dynamics of the female reproductive organs are utterly different. Month by month an ovum matures with beautiful regularity, entirely governed by the organism itself and beyond volition or external influences. The uterine mucosa is at the same time prepared to make nidation possible and allow the embryo to grow. Continuity, calm, a certain element of being closed off and of solidity are characteristic of the process. Taking this as our background, let us now compare the “typical” aspects of male and female thinking - again leaving aside individual variation. A man’s thinking seems designed to progress to some extent systematically, in a solid way, and in a degree independent of external influences. Characteristically, the great philosophical works of world literature are almost without exception written by men. Men are inclined to let thoughts mature and create whole edifices or complexes that have the quality of organisms. The basic disposition in a woman’s thinking on the other hand is more effervescent, irregular, but often surprising, stimulating and exciting. Pleasure in variety, openness to new ideas, readiness to go once more into something discussed the day before and see it in a new light, or “to know roughly what one wants” when going shopping, and take pleasure in picking up some things spontaneously, while perhaps not buying some things one had originally thought of buying -- essentially such things are relatively alien to a man’s way of thinking. Men have the gift of considering their purchases in advance, if there has to be a shopping trip, and then going straight for those items so that they will be home again as soon as possible, having acquired the necessary items. It is of course possible for a man to learn the typically female way of thinking to some extent, just as a woman can train herself in the calm, systematic way of thinking.

Nevertheless, a person’s thought life, reflecting the vital activities of the whole organism, continues to be dominated by the powers belonging to the reproductive organs that are not physically active in that person’s organism.<sup>8</sup>

## **9) Time Sequences In Vital And Thinking Activity**

The living organism has its past, present and future, and so does our thinking. Mental images have the tendency to be out of date when the life situation has changed; a bunch of flowers I have been able to visualize in full flower just yesterday is already fading today, and the image formed yesterday needs to be corrected. And, of course, a world to be seen in mental images must actually be there first, before one can have those images of it. It is always the world that already is, having gone through the process of becoming, that we perceive with the senses and can visualize accordingly. It is different with inspired ideas and with ideals. Something new, belonging to the future, enters into the life of thought with them. Forming concepts from mental images and ideas about things on the other hand is something that happens in the presence of mind of thinking now in progress. Just as ideals and inspired ideas give human

evolution direction and goal and therefore a future, so does memory preserve the thoughts and mental images of past days.

## 10) Near-Death And Out-Of-Body Experiences

In recent decades, much has been published on near-death and out-of-body experiences.<sup>9</sup>

*“I think it is in the realm of things that in a similar way almost everyone will finally accept in their mind, even if there is no final proof, that there is another dimension of existence, the dimension to which the soul moves after death. We should not forget that it is our own fear of death’s finality that somehow lives in us when we ask someone who has had the experience of dying to prove to us that there is life after death. Most of those who have gone through a near-death experience seem little concerned to furnish proof for others. A colleague who specializes in psychiatry and had gone through her own near-death experience once said to me: ‘If you’ve known it yourself, you know what it is about. Anyone who has not will just have to wait.’”<sup>10</sup>*

A characteristic feature of out-of-body experience in a near-death situation is the “panorama of life,” as it is called:

*“I flowed in wonderfully breathed-through intermediate realms, having only the faintest notion of them and yet experiencing them with far more wide-awake organs than those given to dreamers and confused minds. Once again I affirm the reality of the experience and state firmly that nothing else in my life has ever been so utterly real, definite, down to the most objective intensification of what I sensed. What happened beyond this - I would call it awakening to clarity .... then again a timeless interval. Then many images began to flame into life before my inner eye, representing the major events in my life. In these images ! seemed to be both actively involved in and witnessing everything that was going on. I realized that in full clarity, completely without prejudice and without any vagueness of feeling, I myself was the judge of everything that had happened in this past life both good and bad.”<sup>11</sup>*

Or:

*“Suddenly light and movement entered into the darkness that surrounded me. Misty forms separated from me, growing clearer and dearer. A film ran on a screen inside me: I saw myself just three years old, toddling along to the corner shop next door, my hand clutching the coin my mother had given me to buy some candy. Then I saw myself as a child, saw myself as my right leg got caught under a collapsing pile of boards ... More and more images from my life flickered to life, were shaken and jumbled up...”<sup>12</sup>*

If we take vital and thought activity to be identical all these reports of living images coming alive after death, with everything experienced or thought in life gathered around the dying individual, seem perfectly natural. If we think with etheric powers that are no longer needed in the organism nor required for vital functions, then at the apparent or real moment of death, when this combination of powers comes loose from the physical organism, this loosening has to be experienced as a mighty world of thoughts or images shining out. For the same thoughts, or laws, that have created the body and maintained it in life are then relieved of their activities in the physical body and appear in their true nature as a world of mobile images and forms existing in mind and spirit. Death thus shows itself to be a moment of greatest clarity of mind, an awakening in the spirit. The world of thoughts appears as the place where the human being - leaving behind the laws of the physical world - ends himself in a reality of life that is purely of the spirit and can

only be experienced in thought. “In these images I seemed to be both actively involved in and witnessing everything that was going on.” Those are the words quoted above. This experience in the spirit can be known in a lesser form even in our ordinary thinking. On the one hand we produce our thoughts ourselves and on the other hand we can look at them once we have thought them. We are also able to identify so strongly with an ideal that we become the ideal ourselves, bringing it to “realization” in the work we do on ourselves or in the world. In the final instance this world of created and also creative thoughts is behind all existence in both matter and spirit; we ourselves belong to it in spirit - a thought entity among other thought entities - never to be lost or destroyed, like a thought. To experience oneself as a spiritual entity creative in thought is one of our most important experiences, helping us to overcome the materialistic view of the world that is riveting in the truest sense of the word. Learning from experience also leads to new awareness of responsibility for oneself and the world. For it depends on every individual human being how he affects the further progress of the “creation of the world” with his thinking and doing, or which spiritual goals and laws he will help to bring to realization with his thinking and doing, that is, help them to be embodied on this earth.

### **Human Biography And The Phases In The Development Of Thought Life**

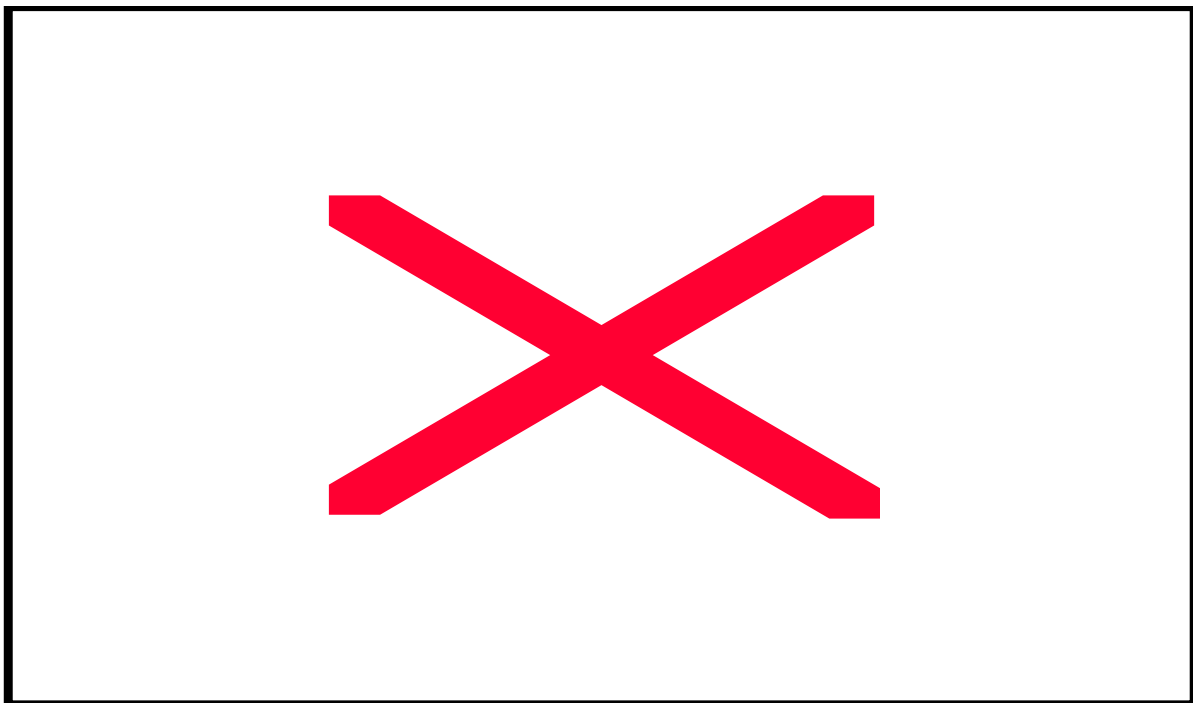


Fig. 2 shows how in the first half of life the vital energies no longer needed for growth manifest in the progressive development of thought life as thinking in images, thinking to make judgments, and idealistic, independent creative thinking. In the second half of life we continue to grow and mature in mind and spirit, now at the cost of the organism's vitality. The body goes through involution in the last third of life, with powers of regeneration clearly lessening, but someone who is aging in a healthy way is able to take up these further vital energies coming free of the body into his thinking, and this may lead to further advances in mind and spirit. The individual is then able to find his way to a new life idealism and develop a power of judgment that no longer takes its orientation from personal preferences but objectively from the given situation, above all in the social sphere. Between 60 and 70, finally, a disposition to take the long view, look ahead prophetically and have an overview develops. The “wisdom of old age” in the second half of life owes its special quality to the individual being prepared to let go of physical

regeneration and freshness: The more self-centered thinking of a younger person comes from an excess of growth forces in childhood and youth.

### **Practical Consequences For Medicine And Education**

Anthroposophical medicine and Waldorf education work specifically with the reality of the dual nature of the ether organism that has been presented above. A major part of their research activity concerns observation and furthering of the etheric powers in professional practice. For if a view like the one presented here convinces, this has far-reaching consequences. Education then serves no longer only to convey knowledge and develop the skills of children and young people but above all to assist healthy incarnation of a human being who before birth existed already as a thought entity in the spirit. Education thus becomes the primary prevention that is so often called for in preventive medicine, though this has not so far been described, let alone proved deducible. It is prevention before any symptoms of disease have even appeared.<sup>13</sup> A teacher will have to ask himself in anything he does with his pupils if he is challenging the boys' and girls' awakening capacity for thought exactly as appropriate to their age and stage of development. This demanding work is given major support by the differentiated Waldorf curriculum which closely relates to physical development and the growth energies becoming free for thinking activity in the course of this development. A school doctor at a Waldorf school will thus find it necessary on many occasions to take pupils out of class instruction for a time so that too much may not be demanded intellectually, and physical maturation can proceed at its proper pace.<sup>14</sup> A book on the work of the school doctor at a Waldorf school will shortly be published in German by the Verlag am Goetheanum.<sup>15</sup> This book discusses many detailed aspects and the consequences for daily work. It is also possible to see from the above discussion how medical practice must evolve if the activities of the etheric organism are taken into account for diagnosis and treatment. It is then always possible to work "holistically," with this bridging function between body and spirit -- the etheric organism -- the heart of one's medical efforts. Caring for the etheric organism at the level of the physical body by means of a healthy life style, nutrition, taking account of biorhythms and using medicines to stimulate its functions is one aspect. The other is to nurture thinking activity that takes its orientation in truth, awakening a healthy life idealism, and encouraging meditative training of thought life. Such comprehensive consideration given to vital and thinking processes also leads to better understanding of "salutogenesis," as it is now called in medicine, the opposite of the pathogenic theories as to the origin of disease. A new paradigm is now under discussion in medicine in this context: Does illness develop on the basis of pathological processes or because the powers of self-healing -- the organism's laws that determine health -- are growing less active?

Horst Noack has written:

*"All in all, the salutogenic theory may be considered a milestone on the road to a comprehensive theory of health. It can, of course, only give partial answers thus far to the question of how health arises. The secret of healthy development continues to be one of the great challenges in health science research and the development of theories. From the perspective of systems theory, health, the maintenance of health and its promotion demand a high degree of salutogenic self organization and self government. A central human faculty in this appears to be the effective processing of internal (e.g. physiologic, psychological) and external (e.g. economic, social, ecological) demands and stresses. To deal effectively with demands and stresses, individuals must preserve or strengthen their bodily, psychic and social integrity, and their functional and performance capacity. With this they can experience and evaluate their self, their life situation and life's opportunities positively and continue to develop successfully. This calls for adequate health resources; at the biologic level, for instance, the ability to regenerate physically*

*and achieve 'self repair;' at the psychological level well being and functional ability; at the social level socio-emotional support and integration."*

The concept of the etheric organism with the dual aspect of its laws relating to life and to thought, introduced in the fields of education and medicine by Rudolf Steiner, offers a possibility of getting closer to the secret of health development. It proves to be the organizational system underlying Noack's above postulates, responsible for health and the maintenance of health in body, mind and spirit.<sup>16</sup>

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