

4-DIMENSIONAL MAN

You are going to die! In any meaningful consideration of oneself or of Mankind In general this central fact must be held constantly in mind. During the course of our development we become habituated to seeing the World as being composed of discrete physical objects and ourselves as a permanent entity in association with such an object. This is a useful abstraction, but on closer inspection the Universe is seen to be an inter-weaving of processes. In a world of constant change all entities must undergo transformation.

To see Man as a whole we must see him as a four-dimensional being – extended in time as well as space. Put so simply this may strike the reader as obvious to the point of banality. However, in studying Man one will find that most of the information available is oriented to describing Man as a static structure - the “Adult”. Such developmental studies as are commonly available are fragmented - studies of child development, embryology or gerontology in isolation. There are few expositions of the complete process. There is thus an obvious need for a description of the FOUR-DIMENSIONAL BODY OF MAN from conception to death. The WEB OF LIFE is presented as a framework for such a study (see Figure 1).

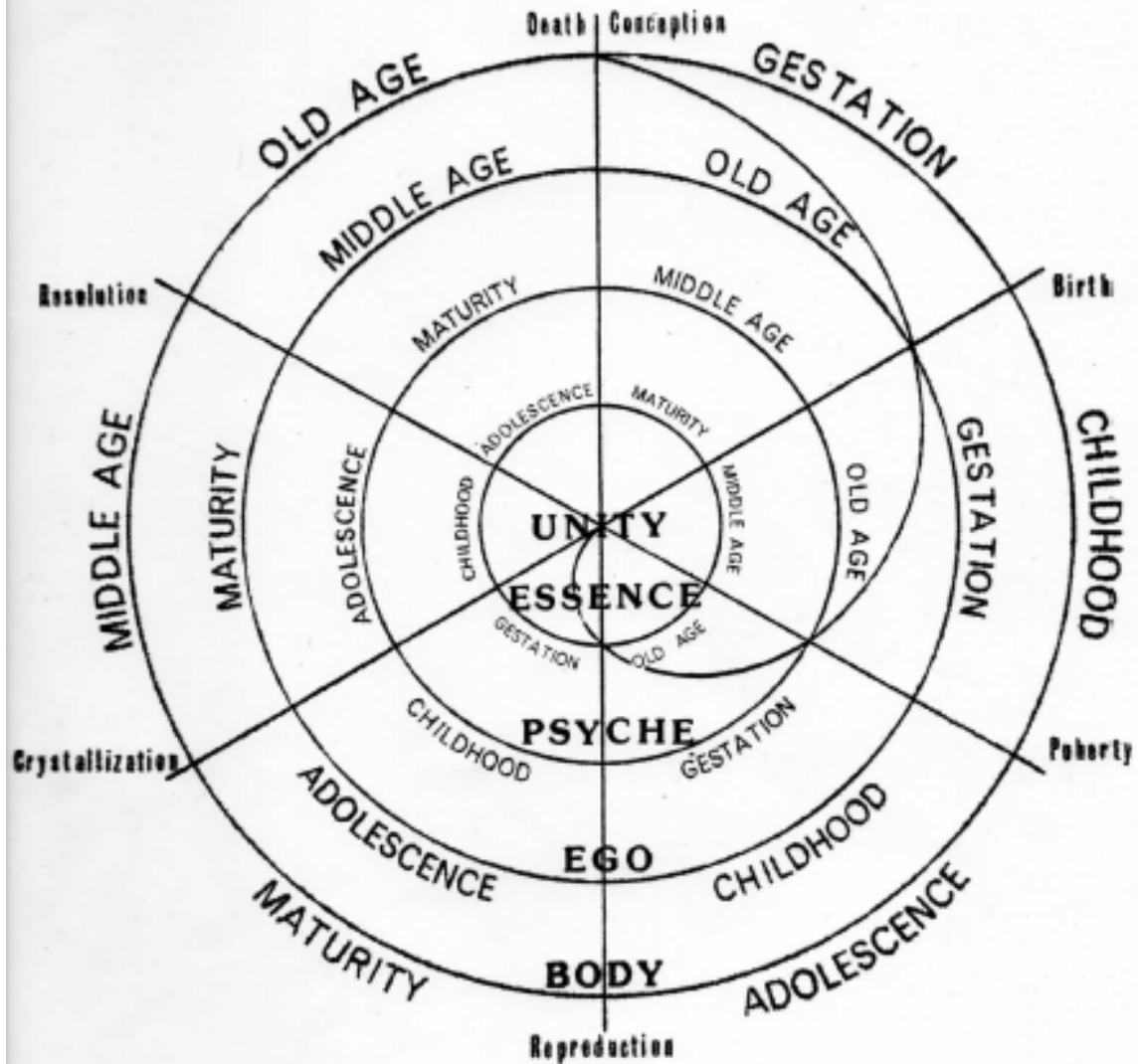
In the “Web of Life” Man is viewed as a developmental process. This time-body can be analysed into six distinct phases: gestation, childhood, adolescence, maturity, middle age and old age. These six phases are delineated by seven “shock points”: conception, birth, puberty (organisation), completion (reproduction), crystallization, resolution and death. At each shock-point the growth process is radically altered. The transformation is triggered by a shock originating either from without or from within.

Human development can be seen as a number of parallel processes - each going through the six phases and seven shock points. It is convenient to consider four such processes Body, Ego, Psyche and Essence. All four are of course interrelated.

In the WEB OF LIFE “Body” is seen as a constantly changing process, not a static structure. This dynamic aspect of the body is more obvious in the early stages where the changes are rapid and far-reaching. In later life the changes become more subtle and occur over a longer time span.

By EGO is meant the developing sense of self and the process of identification that accompanies this. In acquiring an ego one may become identified with particular ideas, clothes, possessions, places and activities. Ego is experienced internally as that which says “I”, “Me” and “Mine”. It is recognised externally in others in those general behaviour patterns peculiar to a particular Body - the way it moves, the way it is decorated, its habitual postures, manner of speech etc. The Ego seems to be concerned with controlling and coordinating the general behaviour of the Body (this excludes reflexes and physiological responses which can be regarded as the consciousness of the Body itself).

WEB OF LIFE



© SARCS
 December 1988

During the course of its development the Ego tends to become fragmented. Thus most people are not one "I" but a whole collection of "I's"! In a "well adjusted individual" there is an appropriate "I" for dealing in a habitual manner with any commonly occurring situation. In a well-ordered life as one situation changes for another there is a corresponding change in "I". Ambiguous situations where two "I's" may try to act at the same time are avoided. Of course, different facets of the Ego are not totally independent but mutually condition one another if only by virtue of the fact that they act through the same body. It is therefore a useful social convention to refer to a person in the singular (except perhaps in extreme cases where psychiatrists recognize "multiple personalities"). However, the true state of affairs is revealed in common expressions of the following sort: "I was in two minds"; "I could

have kicked myself!"; "The left hand doesn't know what the right hand's doing"; "I can't understand X's behaviour - it's not like her/him!"

Despite our multifarious nature most people have the possibility of becoming individuals in the real sense of the word. PSYCHE is a process of integration of the different Egos within us. The level of Psyche can be compared to communities arising through interaction between people. The "people" in a Psyche "community" are of course different "I's". Another analogy is that of a computer. Our physical structure represents what is known in the technical jargon of the trade as the "hardware" - the electrical circuits of the nervous system housed within the Body. Our psychological development can be seen as the programming of this "organic computer". Our programming includes physical postures, mannerisms, ideas, mental attitudes, and all manner of personal idiosyncrasies. Ego consists of special types of programme which arise for the purpose of controlling and coordinating other programmes. An even more sophisticated programme can be envisaged that has the job of supervising groups of Egos. This level of operation represents PSYCHE. (At the time of writing these higher levels of operation have yet to be built into man-made computers. They are functions that have to be carried out by their human operators. Also, in the use of such analogies it is important to remember that Man has made the Computer after an aspect of his own image and not vice versa.

Although Psyche is a higher degree of organisation than Ego it is itself fragmentary. It is possible, however, for these fragments to become constellated around a common core. This is the level of ESSENCE - the kernel of an individual being. This is perhaps what was originally meant by the term "Soul". To use a biological analogy, each separate "I" is a "cell" in the "body" of our being. At first we may just be a loosely coordinated "colony" of such "cells". Later these may be organized into different groups (the level of Psyche). With the development of Essence we become a truly "organic" whole, each "I" part of the greater unity.

It is the experience of many individuals and a traditional teaching in many cultures that Essence is not the goal of Human development. It is merely the beginning.

As we have seen, the WEB OF LIFE describes Man as an evolving multi-level process. Let us now consider how this "life-flow" appears to unfold across the time span of an individual. We can take as our starting point the CONCEPTION of the physical Body (the first of the Body's seven Shock points). In our contemporary world view the "building blocks" of Life are seen as functionally and structurally distinct units called "cells". In its later stages the Body is composed of some tens of billions of these cells. These are all derived from one single cell - known as a "zygote".

It is a principle of modern biology that under the conditions "naturally" occurring on the Earth at the present time life can only come from already existing life - the Law of Biogenesis. Thus the Human zygote is seen as being derived from the fusion of two already existing cells - the "sperm" derived from the father and the "ovum" derived from the mother. This creative act is known as "conception".

The sperm is considerably smaller than the ovum. It has been described as "a bag of DNA with a tail" (DNA is the chemical structure that carries the instructions for building life-forms). The sperm swims to the ovum and penetrates its protective coat.

The paternal DNA enters the ovum and pairs up with the maternal DNA to form a Unity. The shock of this unity causes the ovum to begin the process of development. This process is initially simply one of multiplication of the original cell. This occurs by internal division - the initial cell splits in two. The process is repeated by each of the two new cells giving a total of four cells. Each of these four divides giving a total of eight and so on to 16, 32, 64 etc. As a result of this a hollow ball of cells is formed.

A second aspect of the developmental process now becomes apparent – cells become specialized into different types (a process known as “differentiation”). As these different cells interact they generate a structure of increasing complexity (the “embryo”). Throughout this period of “GESTATION” we are dependent on the body of the mother both for protection and nourishment. Whilst gestating we are in a sense still part of the maternal structure (although we are partly derived from material alien to the mother’s body). It is not until the shock of BIRTH that we become truly separate physical beings.

The BIRTH of the BODY coincides with the CONCEPTION of EGO (at this point the reader is advised to study Figure 1 again). The concept of being a separate entity has its roots in this first act of physical separation. Throughout the CHILDHOOD of the BODY we explore the World and ourselves through the three modes of “Action”, “Feeling” and “Thinking”. These three roughly correspond to what are usually termed “Motor Development”, “Emotional Development” and “Intellectual Development” respectively. All three are intimately connected with the development of EGO. Through the mode of Action we learn to manipulate the world according to our inherent predispositions. Through Feeling we become identified with particular likes and dislikes. Thought enables us to construct models of Reality including self-images of varying degrees of accuracy.

By analogy with the BODY this period can be seen as the GESTATION of the EGO. Just as the physical body begins its development within the womb, the “embryo” EGO “gestates” within the security of the family. In the early stages the primary influence is of course the parents. “You are your father and mother” just as much psychologically as physically.

The home environment provides food for our psychological growth in the form of emotional interactions, learning through trial and error and copying of adult behaviour (Conditioning), theorizing and playing at situations observed in others (Abstraction).

As with the BODY the development of EGO can be seen as a process of Growth (through accumulation of impressions), Differentiation (into different social roles etc.) and Interaction (generating mental structure).

The GESTATION of EGO can be divided into three phases defined according to which of the aforementioned types of nourishment predominates. Initially Emotional Interaction predominates as the baby learns to relate to other beings, especially the mother. During the second phase the child learns about its environment and is Conditioned according to the requirements of civilised life. Thirdly the faculty of Abstraction is paramount as school provides a diet of concepts and symbols.

BIRTH of the EGO often coincides with the physical shock of PUBERTY. At this point one becomes aware of one's potential as a Creative Being in one's own right - in a very direct physical way. It is therefore hardly surprising that the ADOLESCENT period of sexual development is often accompanied by psychological trauma as the young EGO strives to break out of the "family womb". This may also be the CONCEPTION of PSYCHE. Prior to physical PUBERTY the role of PSYCHE in regulating the EGO is performed from outside by the parents. With the increased freedom of ADOLESCENCE the developing being explores its capacity for self-regulation. As many an anxious parent may observe this regulatory function may at first be somewhat erratic! But by the end of physical ADOLESCENCE the GESTATION of the PSYCHE should be complete and the EGO fully ORGANISED.

This may be the beginning of true individuality - the CONCEPTION of ESSENCE. Significantly, it is at this point that the BODY has reached its full reproductive potential and has completed most of its growth. (For these reasons this shock point in the physical process is known by the alternative names of REPRODUCTION and COMPLETION). Here one is a unique individual whose greatest desire (whether it be fulfilled or not) is to perpetuate oneself - yet in so doing one is part of the unbroken chain of all Terrestrial Life.

With the arising of ESSENCE the individual can begin to take responsibility for himself/herself. Paradoxically, the desire for responsibility may manifest itself in behaviour that appears anything but responsible! "Irresponsible" youths may deliberately put themselves in situations of extreme danger. It is often said that such people do not think of the danger and are foolhardy. But this is not necessarily so. What may be sought by such acts is a state of complete responsibility - of having one's life in one's own hands. This may occur in moments of intense awareness where the outcome depends entirely on the person's own skill and judgement. Here we are not talking about ADOLESCENT bravado oriented at impressing a peer group. Here It is self-proving and self-testing that is paramount. It may be this need that lies behind much of the adventure sport indulged in by young men. Of course this does not mean to say that all people who engage in such activities are stuck at this stage of development. But where CONCEPTION of ESSENCE is concerned the way the person rides his motorbike / drives his car / climbs his mountain / fights his battles will have a special intensity about it. Such activities may be continued in later life, but the attitude and the motivation will be different. This basic need for self-Initiation is often forgotten by the older generation as their own approaching physical decay makes the preservation of life at any cost the prime obsession.

This basic need of Youth is found expressed in numerous myths concerning the young hero who must prove himself (usually prior to losing his virginity). For some it may not be necessary to resort to such extremes. The "shock" of the first sexual encounters may be enough, for others the terror of being alone in the big wide world may be sufficiently traumatic.

The question of virginity raises an interesting point regarding sexual development. The word itself is a hybrid of the Latin "viri" meaning "man" (as in "virile") and the Greek "gyn" meaning "woman" (as in "gynaecology"). Thus "Virgin" literally means "man/woman" implying that complete sexual differentiation does not occur until actual intercourse. We can thus see three stages of sexual development. Gender is

determined at CONCEPTION by the “genotype” (i.e. it is coded in the DNA). But in the early stages of development both sexes have a similar indeterminate “sex organ”. It is only later in GESTATION that this will develop into specifically male or female genitalia. Thus by BIRTH one has usually acquired what are termed “primary sexual characteristics” and are clearly recognizable as male or female. “Male” and “female” sex hormones are produced in the bodies of both men and women But there is usually a gender associated difference in the balance of male and female hormone production. It seems that these hormonal differences account for the differences in physical development between boys and girls. Thus by the end of CHILDHOOD one has normally acquired “secondary sexual characteristics.

At the end of CHILDHOOD there is a very rapid change in hormonal levels and subsequently in sexual differentiation. Hence PUBERTY can be seen as a definite “shock point”. The third stage of sexual differentiation - the emergence of “tertiary sexual characteristics” occurs with actual copulatory behaviour.

By now the BODY has completed most of its growth. The phase of physical MATURITY is one where the Body’s powers may be explored to the full. The EGO having become fully ORGANIZED may now enjoy an “ADOLESCENT” period of rapid development as new social roles are explored. This should be accompanied by the “BIRTH” of PSYCHE. By “BIRTH” is meant the transition from a smaller to a larger world: by now one should have left the narrow perspective of the introspective teenager or teenage gang for a wider view of society as a whole. This begins the “CHILDHOOD” of the PSYCHE. “CHILDHOOD” implies a stage of semi-independence. In physical childhood our bodies are able to function independently of the mother’s body. But we are still dependent on the parents for protection and nourishment. Similarly, in the CHILDHOOD of PSYCHE our psychological organization is semi-autonomous. The young adult has more individuality than the teenager but still takes most of his/her cues from peers.