

Further Developments of the Web of Life (Part I: The Phases of Life)

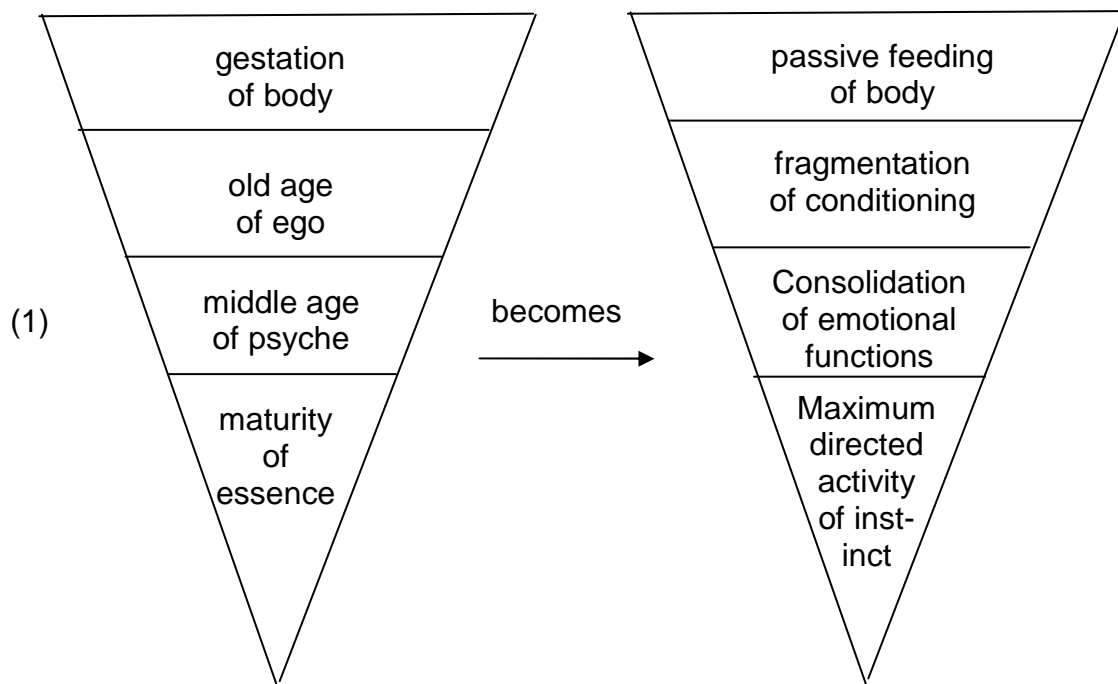
The web of life uses the readily-observed phases of the body's development as a map for the analogous development of "inner" or "higher" bodies: those of the ego, the psyche and the essence. In this way the psyche for example is said to have a gestation, childhood, adolescence, maturity, middle-age and old-age. This is a fruitful and compelling metaphor, but like all metaphors it also limits what it describes. It is therefore useful to look again at these phases, using terms that are not so closely linked to familiar bodily development. Abstracting a key function from each phase, the following sequence emerges:

gestation	=	passive feeding
childhood	=	active feeding
adolescence	=	experimentation
maturity	=	maximum directed activity
middle-age	=	consolidation
old-age	=	fragmentation

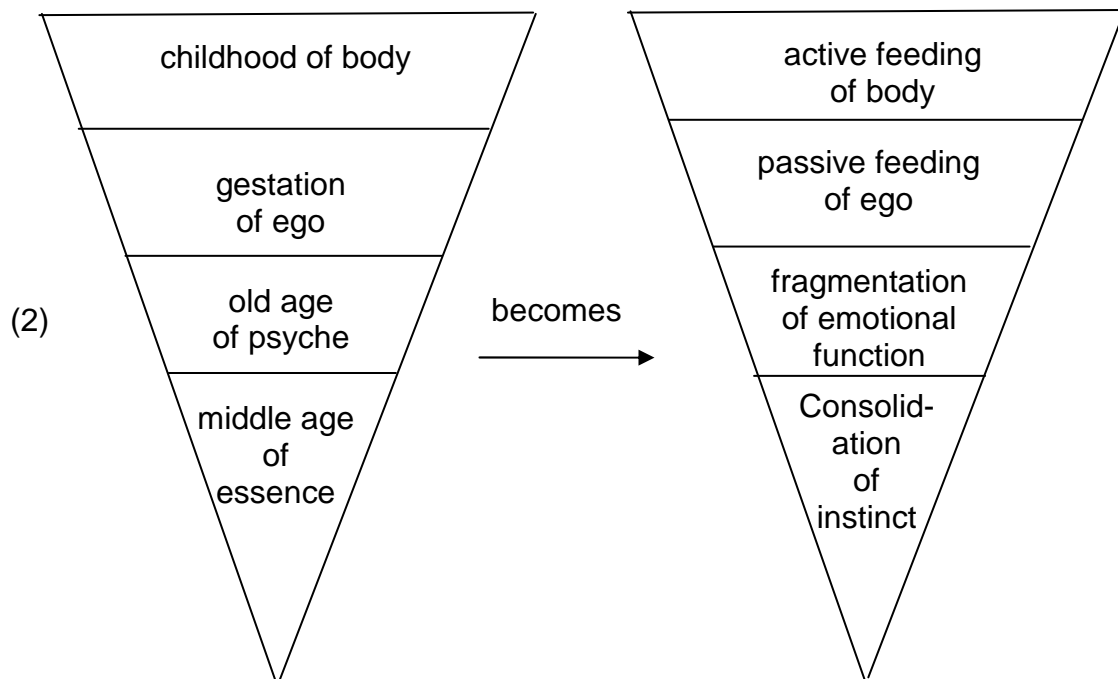
To explain and justify this choice of term, gestation is a period of passive feeding where the organism grows and is fed from outside automatically and without conscious effort. Childhood, however, is a period of active feeding, where the organism must interact with its environment to gain the input required for its growth. In adolescence the organism experiments, tests and plays with its faculties. In contrast to the undirected, playful activity of adolescence, maturity is the period of maximum directed purposeful activity. In middle age the results of this activity spurt are consolidated, and in old age, the organism's faculties begin to fragment.

Before this terminology can be applied, another adjustment to the framework is necessary. At the conception of the body, the Web diagram implies that the ego, psyche and essence are entering their old age, middle-age and maturity respectively. Unless rebirth is postulated (and this is often a controversial point) it is difficult to see how this can be integrated into the system. However, if the correspondences between the psychological and physical worlds are used, this dilemma can be avoided.

The ego can be equated with the organism's conditioned functions, the psyche is linked to and rooted in the organism's emotional functions and the essence is linked to its instinctive functions. If these physical correspondences are used prior to the conception of their psychological counterparts, the following scheme arises:

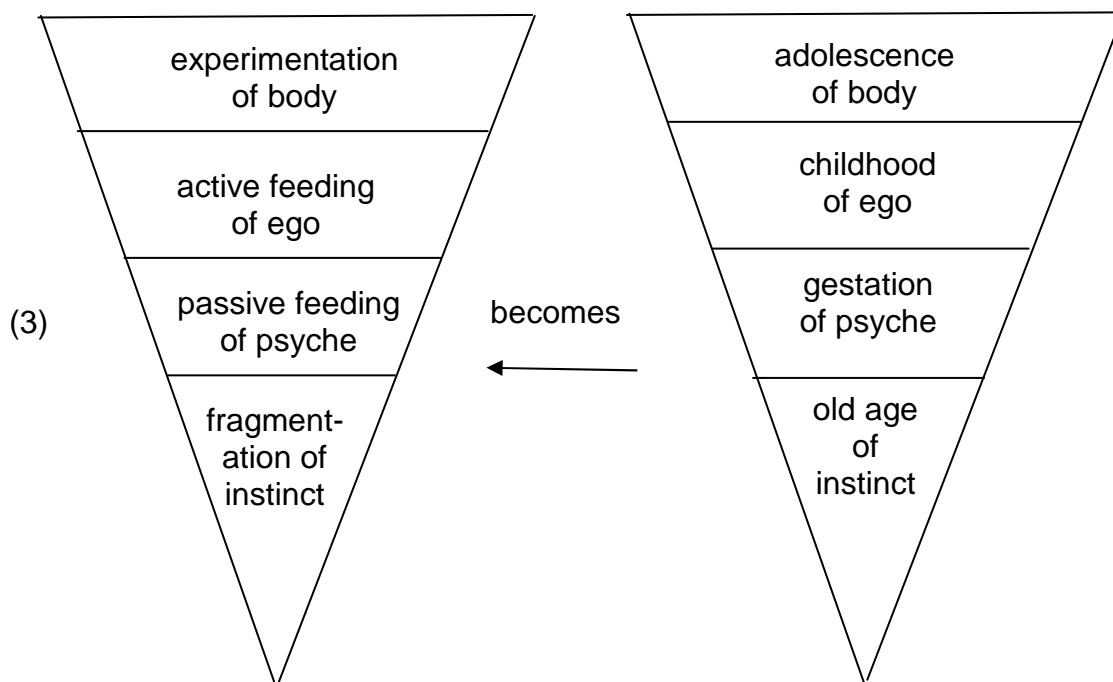


Thus the foetus is being passively fed by the mother's blood passing through the placenta. Its conditioned functions are in a state of fragmentation as its nervous system is too immature to be capable of complex learning. Its emotional functions are being consolidated as the neuronal pathways that subserve emotion are being laid down in the brain. It is known that under the influence of testosterone, these structures are laid down differently in males and females at this time. All this is controlled by the maximum directed activity of instinct, causing growth and differentiation according to genetic plan.

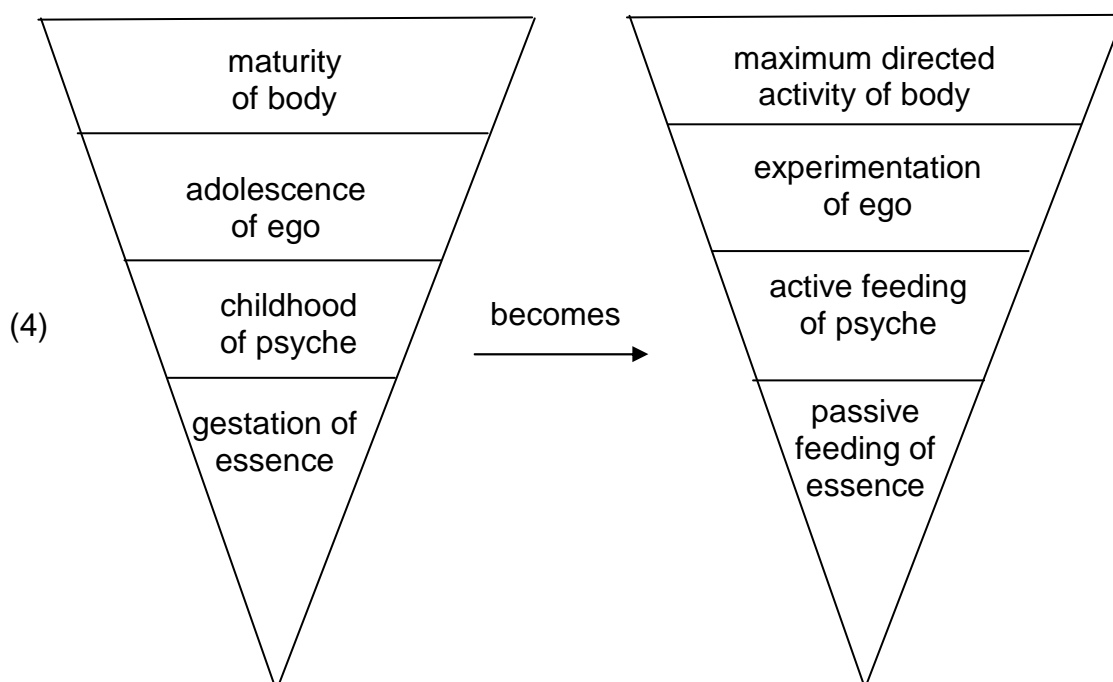


In phase (2) the body is actively feeding not only by loudly demanding food and drink when hungry and thirsty but also by greedily seeking sensations of touch, sound, colour, smell and so on, using interaction for growth. The ego has now been conceived out of the organism's ability to be conditioned, and it is being

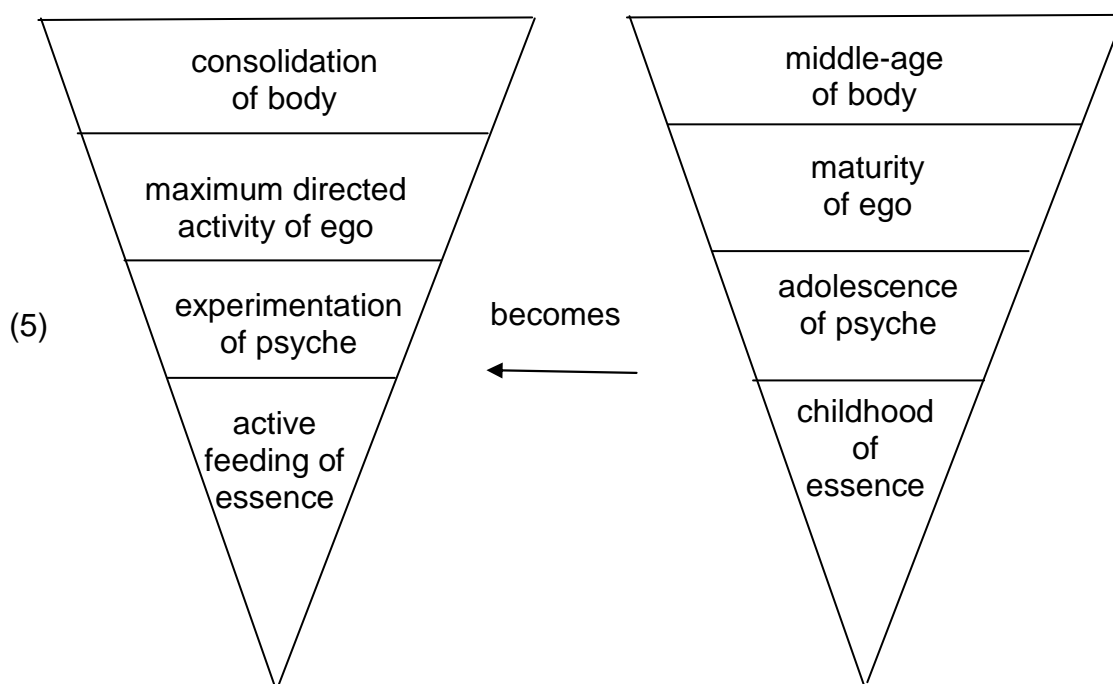
unconsciously fed by parental expectations, punishments and rewards. Emotional function is in a state of fragmentation. Total uncontrolled pleasure, fear, anger and other emotions rage within the small being. Instinct is consolidated as the infant lays hold on life, its sucking and other instinctive reflexes ensuring its grip on existence.



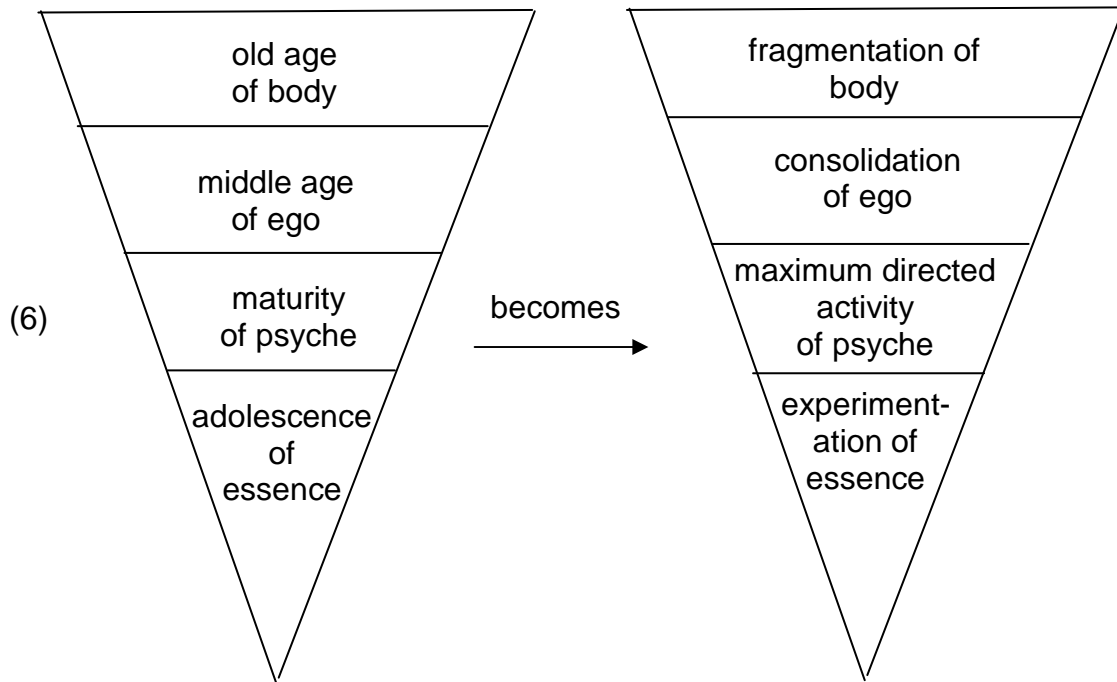
The adolescent experiments with physical skills in sport, apprenticeship and sexuality. The ripples this causes in the social environment gives the young person feedback which actively feeds the ego. At this stage, the psyche, or moral sense, is conceived out of the emotional functioning of the individual, and passively absorbs the mores of the society in which the individual is growing (despite his or her protestations of absolute uniqueness). The instinctive functions are fragmented, as the survival drives abate temporarily to allow the dangers of physical experimenting (e.g. skateboarding).



At this point, the female body undergoes its maximum directed activity of pregnancy, the uterine contractions of giving birth and then lactation. The male ceases playful practice of physical skills and goes out to hunt purposefully to feed his family - in the modern setting this is the striving to progress in a career to earn a good living. The ego tries different modes of operation to fit these changing and simultaneous roles of child, companion and parent. Feedback from this experimentation actively feeds the psyche, along with the continual challenge to personal moral judgement that occurs when children, with their chaotic emotions, interact with parents. The essence is now conceived out of the organism's deepest instinctive functioning and is fed unconsciously.



In phase (5) the previously harmful or good habits of physical care, along with the results of heredity and accidents, are now consolidated in the body's state. The ego is maximally effective - at work and in the family. It can be used to teach skills to the next generation. It is full of authority and power and can achieve its aims. The psyche begins to experiment as individuals test their personal morality. This can easily go overboard in the pursuit of "personal fulfilment" as the middle-aged family man elopes with his secretary, or the mother rebels against a family situation seen as stultifying. The essence actively feeds on the results of this experimentation, provided that they can be transformed to this level and do not descend back to lower emotional functioning.



The bodily structures and functions begin to fragment. The quirks, characteristics and habits of the ego are set in this consolidation phase into the rigid personality of old age. The psyche, however, is now fully equipped with a grasp of justice and mercy. It is able to use these effectively now - most judges are already old when they take office. The essence experiments with feeling and groping towards some relationship with the Divine, in preparation for the body's death. (Interestingly, after death the essence goes on to its maximum directed activity. Could this be the choice of a new conception, or some other form of essence work?).

Part II (The Shocks) to follow ...

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