

Planetary qualities in child development: an independent research study

A detailed exploration of the planetary qualities as they manifest in the six stages identified by the Gesell Institute research

An esoteric perspective on the planetary qualities

The Gesell Institute of Child Development has observed that children go through a repeating sequence of six different stages with predictable changes in mood and behaviour in each.¹ The behaviour observed in these stages reflects the qualities associated in tradition with the planets. It may be that the Six Stages merely show the characteristics associated with the traditional planetary influences but it is also possible that there are active principles involved, such that archetypal forces or energies, traditionally described as “planetary”, could be influencing the way children develop. This essay describes such planetary qualities and influences from an esoteric perspective.

To explain what is meant by ‘Planetary qualities’ from an esoteric viewpoint is somewhat challenging because the idea is complex and this brief explanation will probably raise more questions than it answers. The concept of active archetypal forces associated with the planets is not new. The qualities and influences of the planetary bodies, (initially just those visible to the unaided eye, including the Moon, and Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, which are the ones described in these essays), have been known for millennia. The myths of antiquity contain descriptions of these in the characteristics of their gods, including the Roman gods of the same names. Astrology, over thousands of years, has also described the qualities and influences associated with the planets. Similarly these qualities are also woven through the profound wisdom that lies behind ancient healing modalities like acupuncture.

However in our world today, where we seek so diligently to find answers to questions about human growth and health in genetics, it may seem like madness to seek for some of the origins of human growth and behaviour (and perhaps these genetic sequences themselves) in planetary qualities as *active forces*. This will certainly be a challenge for materialist thinkers to accept. Yet this changing, rhythmical unfolding in the growing child described by Gesell in the Six Stages exists and the qualities of the stages have an uncanny likeness to the planetary qualities. So how can we understand ‘planetary influences’ better to see how they might have an effect on childhood?

There is more and more evidence that the *movement* of the planetary bodies themselves do influence nature and ourselves. Biodynamic agriculture research has shown these

¹The Gesell Institute of Child Development carried out detailed observations of children from Birth to Sixteen years. They observed that children went through predictable changes in ‘mood’ or ‘tendency’ in different stages, where behaviour seem to alternate between being in equilibrium and dis-equilibrium. Some stages were more expansive, some more inward, some more amenable, some outright challenging! They identified six stages in a cycle which was repeated throughout childhood, with the stages increasing in length incrementally through the first seven years when the stages became one year in length. More about the Gesell Institute, their research and how they discovered these stages is described separately in the essay “The Gesell Institute for Child Development and the Six Gesell Stages in Child Development.”

relationships in plant growth, bud formation and in animal behaviour.² Recent studies of the effects of the moon in different phases has shown that the moon can indeed affect humans – in our sleep patterns³, in an increase in the occurrence of epileptic seizures away from full moon times⁴, changing our physical fitness index⁵ and in recovery from major heart surgery (aortic dissection)⁶ to list just a few examples. However these Gesell Stages in childhood do not appear to reflect such *movements* of the planets.

The Gesell Stages seem rather to reflect an *archetypal pattern of creative forces associated with the planets*. These different archetypal forces work *together continuously as a whole*, all at the same time. However they may also work *differentially in a sequence within time*. It is then we can observe more clearly the different qualities of these active forces or principles. For example, we can identify these planetary qualities in examining the growth of the archetypal plant through *time*: the plant forms the root first (which reveals Moon qualities), then the leaves (Mercury), before the flowers (Venus), reproductive organs (Mars), fruit (Jupiter) and seed (Saturn, containing the beginning and the end of the process). In the metals associated in tradition with the planets, we can observe these creative forces working directly within the pure elements of matter, *within space*. So we find certain Moon qualities in silver, Mercury qualities in mercury or quick silver, Venus qualities in copper, Mars qualities in iron, Jupiter qualities in tin and Saturn qualities in lead. Sun forces, as the seventh force integrating all the others, can be found in gold.

In the human body we can see these forces working differentially in the different life processes, like reproduction and digestion, and in the different organs. These associations with the planetary influences as they are revealed in time and space are explored in more depth in the essays.

So in the development of children we also see this order of planetary qualities, repeating and

2 References for such BioDynamic agriculture studies are given within the essays on the planetary influences.

3 Christian Cajochen, Songül Altanay-Ekici, Mirjam Münch, Sylvia Frey, Vera Knoblauch, Anna Wirz-Justice, *Evidence that the Lunar Cycle Influences Human Sleep*, Current Biology, Volume 23, Issue 15, 5 August 2013, Pages 1485-1488, ISSN 0960-9822, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2013.06.029>. (<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0960982213007549>) accessed 29/9/2014

4 Baxendale, S., & Fisher, J. (2008). *Moonstruck? The effect of the lunar cycle on seizures*. Epilepsy and Behavior, 13 (3), 549-550. doi:10.1016/j.yebeh.2008.06.009 <http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/118186/>. Accessed 29/9/2014 Baxendale attributes this correlation to the increased light at night experienced during full moon periods.

5 Ujjwal Chakraborty, Tusharkanti Ghosh, *A study on the physical fitness index, heart rate and blood pressure in different phases of lunar month on male human subjects*, International Journal of Biometeorology (Impact Factor: 2.59). 11/2012; DOI: 10.1007/s00484-012-0605-z http://www.researchgate.net/publication/233538511_A_study_on_the_physical_fitness_index_heart_rate_and_blood_pressure_in_different_phases_of_lunar_month_on_male_human_subjects. Accessed 29/9/2014

6 Jeffrey H. Shuhaiber, Joseph L. Fava, Tai Shin, Nikola Dobrilovic, Afshin Ehsan, Arthur Bert, and Frank Sellke *The influence of seasons and lunar cycle on hospital outcomes following ascending aortic dissection repair*, Interact CardioVasc Thorac Surg, first published online July 9, 2013 doi:10.1093/icvts/ivt299 <http://icvts.oxfordjournals.org/content/17/5/818.full>. Accessed 29/9/2014

differentiated *within a sequence in time*, through the Gesell Six Stages, Stage 1 with Moon qualities, Stage 2 with Mercury qualities, Stage 3 with Venus qualities, Stage 4 with Mars qualities, Stage 5 with Jupiter qualities, and Stage 6 with Saturn qualities.⁷

While the pattern we see in the Six Gesell Stages is more apparent as a six-fold one, the planetary influences reflect what is actually a seven-fold pattern. The Sun is the seventh force in this sequence; it works as the great integrating force within the whole, including in the stem in the plant, in the heart in the human being. The particular place of Mercury being second in this planetary order is discussed further in the essay on Mercury.

In earlier times these creative planetary forces were seen as *spheres of influence* which embrace the sun and earth and extend right out to the limits of the orbits of the planets. Thus these planetary spheres were seen to interpenetrate each other while also remaining distinct entities, simultaneously creating an order or sequence between them. The forces are concentrated in the individual physical planets and the order of the planetary forces is somewhat related to the position of the planets in space. Clearly this is a complex picture which includes not only a concentration of influences in the physical planet itself and its orbit, but also everything within that orbit and the way the different planets interact with each other, but particularly with the Sun and the Moon.

From the perspective of esotericism, the planetary bodies were seen in this way to be part of the spheres in which they moved, with the physical planet being the most material part; the rest of the sphere was considered to be a spiritual being or beings. The great ancient civilisations recognised these beings as their gods. By the time of the Greek philosophers, the gods, which had originally been recognised as the spiritual beings who worked in these great planetary spheres, had come down to earth and become personified taking on human, as well as super human, strengths and weaknesses. This Greek pantheon was passed on to the Romans who made them their own and gave us the names of the planets which we use today.

The essays on the planetary qualities briefly explore where the *energies* of these planetary spheres can be identified as working in phenomena in the material world, in nature and in the workings of the human body and psyche. Although the nature of these energies has not yet been identified even in contemporary science, which works at the boundaries of the material and possibly non-material worlds, it may be that one day it will be understood whether these meet and are one or not. Meanwhile there is still resistance to this idea of 'invisible forces' (as the antipathy of some orthodox medical practitioners to complementary medicine – which uses such 'energies' – demonstrates). For these forces do not come within the conventional scientific paradigm.

⁷ In Gesell, Arnold, Ilg, Frances L., Bates Ames, Louise *The Child from Five to Ten* (Harper & Row, New York 1977) p. 47 the Gesell researchers list the ages in each Stage, in the cycles of the Six Stages up to 16 years. The Stage is in brackets: Birth (Stage 6), 4 weeks (Stage 1), 6-12 weeks (Stage 2), 16 weeks (Stage 3), 20 weeks (Stage 4), 24-28 weeks (Stage 5), 32 weeks (Stage 6), 40 weeks (1), 44-48 weeks (2), 52-56 weeks (3), 15 months (4) 18 months (5), 21 months (6), 24 months (1), 2 ½ years (2), 3 years (3), 3 ½ years (4), 4 years (5), 4 ½ years (6), 5 years (1), 5 ½ -6 years (2), 6 ½ years (3), 7 years (4), 8 years (5), 9 years (6), 10 years (1), 11 years (2), 12 years (3), 13 years (4), 14 years (5), 15 years (6), 16 years (1) They more recently suggested some slight variations on these for the first year.

I am not an expert in astronomy, astrology, medicine, agriculture and so on. In the essays I can only indicate relationships suggested by others, which build a picture of the qualities we can find manifesting within the Six Gesell Stages. In this way, I hope others with more expertise can expand on these points and add to our understanding of these phenomena.

To contemplate that the Gesell Six Stages may reflect planetary influences is not a novel idea but one which is found in esoteric tradition to explain phenomena in the human and natural world. It is a challenge to once again use a phenomenological approach to science, as Goethe would have had us do, to discover the wisdom that might lie behind what we can observe in child development. The detailed descriptions in the Gesell research provides a basis for us to do this, adding our own observations of the children in our care over time. It helps us to separate what is *developmental* in behaviour from what is *individual* and what is *environmental*.

It is possible that some people may be able to accept that the Six Stages have the characteristics *associated* with the traditional planetary influences but be sceptical that there are *active principles* involved, such that planetary influences could be affecting the way children develop in time. That is understandable in our world dominated by the paradigms of science based on materialism. What I suggest is that people just observe the phenomena in the children. If understanding the need in a child in a Mercury stage for *freedom to move and be independent* helps you to better deal with the challenging behaviours of the child in this stage, then that is sufficient. If understanding a Jupiter stage's *big thinking, and bold manoeuvres* helps you to have more tolerance for the dramatics and tendency to boasting in the child, all the better. If understanding the Moon and Venus stages' *priority for relationship* helps you to become aware that you need to teach the child to be true to themselves and firm in their 'yes' and their 'no', then that is helpful for supporting children to be their strongest, healthiest selves. Ultimately, what is most important is whether these insights help in the understanding and supporting of children.

More details on the influences of each planet are to be found in the six essays on the particular planets in the series *Planetary qualities in child development: an independent research project*.