

Planetary qualities in child development: Mercury

This essay is part of an independent research study which makes a detailed exploration of the planetary qualities as they manifest in the six stages identified by the Gesell Institute research.

Summary of the general introduction to these essays¹:

Over the course of one hundred years, initially in association with Yale University, Arnold Gesell and the associates who followed him (in what became the Gesell Institute of Child Development²) carried out detailed observations of children from Birth to the age of Sixteen. From these they developed profiles of typical development of children at each age. Well into this research, they noticed that children went through different stages with predictable changes in mood and behaviour in each. Behaviour in these stages seem to alternate between being in equilibrium and in dis-equilibrium. Some stages were more expansive, some more inward, some more amenable, some outright challenging! They eventually identified six stages within a cycle which was repeated throughout childhood, increasing in length incrementally until age seven, when the stages became one year in length.

In my work with children, parents and teachers over 25 years, I found the Gesell profiles very useful in understanding children and pondered what could underlie this six-fold pattern in children's behaviour. My thesis is that these stages reflect archetypal qualities associated in tradition with the planets: Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, in that order. These essays explore this thesis, comparing planetary qualities and the associated personality with the behaviours described in the six Gesell Stages in childhood. This essay describes Mercury qualities in relation to Gesell Stage 2.

Mercury influences in child development. Gesell Stage 2

Introduction

Our aim in this essay is to build a picture of the archetypal qualities associated with Mercury, and then to closely examine the behaviour of children in Gesell Stage 2, highlighting any similarities to these Mercury qualities. Through this we can identify the gift of these qualities, which each child is offered again and again in the progression of the stages through childhood. Finally, we consider the potential strengths and weaknesses of this stage in light of what can be done to help children maximise the opportunities for growth it offers. Reference is also made to the children who show Mercury qualities as their natural disposition through childhood.

¹ Full introduction to this idea is a separate essay, *Planetary Qualities in Child Development as seen in the Six Gesell Stages*

² The Gesell Institute was also called the Gesell Institute of Human Development at one stage, and I have used these two names interchangeably. The present Institute uses the name the Gesell Institute of Child Development and can be found on the internet under that name at www.gesellinstitute.org

The archetypal influences and characteristics associated with the planets and described in traditional and contemporary astrology can be seen in a number of areas— in the nature of the physical planet and its orbit, in its associated metal and its role in plant growth; in the structure of the human body, organ function and life processes; and in personality and character, in thinking, feeling and willing and the development of the self. These personality or character descriptions are sometimes called the ‘soul types’ or ‘planetary types’. Much of the information in these observations about planets comes from researchers and writers who work with the insights of Rudolf Steiner. Their work enriches more traditional astrological sources of information on the planets.³

Each planet has a special relationship with the planet which has the opposite qualities, Moon with Saturn, Mercury with Jupiter, and Venus with Mars. In this way, each sheds light on the qualities of the other. Knowledge of these relationships is used as a diagnostic tool in anthroposophical medicine and in the therapeutic use of the metals associated with each planet.⁴ Here we will see Mercury’s fluidity, resistance to form and chaotic tendency is opposite to Jupiter’s great forming power leading to more rigidity.

The planetary qualities of Mercury appear in children in the second of the six stages in child development which the Gesell Institute of Child Development observed, what we are calling Gesell Stage 2⁵. The planet Mercury is also the second in ‘temporal’ order from the earth, in the sequence Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn.⁶ The Gesell Stage 2 occurs at 6 to 12 weeks, 44-48 to 52 weeks, 2 ½ to 3 years, 5 ½ to 6+ years, 11 years. Extrapolated from these, and to complete the first 21 years of growth, (which contains six cycles of the Gesell stages,) the sixth Gesell Stage 2 would be 17 years. In life span development, the whole of middle childhood (7 to 14 years) reflects Mercury qualities.

The key words the Gesell researchers used to describe Stage 3 were *in disequilibrium* and *breaking up* but their descriptions of the children’s behaviour give us much more than this. They reveal many of the strengths of the ‘Mercury type’ adult which are based on their giving priority to *freedom to move* in the world, to keep the social world alive and flexible. This need for freedom and movement in Stage 2 can make children fiercely resist attempts to put boundaries and forms around them, which they nevertheless need. This makes this

³ Rudolf Steiner’s insights and observations have been worked with further by many in Biodynamic agriculture, Steiner/Waldorf education, Anthroposophical medicine and social development initiatives. Two sources I especially wish to acknowledge are: first, conversations with Lisa Romero and unpublished lecture notes from her Anthroposophical Health and Healing Course held in 2007 in Byron Bay; second, the website on ‘Planetary Qualities. An Anthroposophical View’ by Bibi van Bussel, 1999, at busbi.home.xs4all.nl

⁴ When it is observed that the qualities associated with one planet have become too weak or too strong, and are thus out of balance with the opposite planetary qualities, then the metals associated with one of the two planets can be used therapeutically to bring back a balance.

⁵ Gesell Stage 3, and the other five stages which Gesell and his co-workers observed in child development, are described in the works of the Gesell Institute of Human Development, especially in: Gesell, Arnold, Ilg, Frances L., Bates Ames, Louise *The Child from Five to Ten* Harper & Row, New York 1977 p. 47

⁶ More on this order of the planets can be found in the section on Mercury. These archetypal forces behind the six planets are each strengthened and integrated by the forces of the Sun, the seventh force in this pattern.

stage one of the most confronting of all the stages—the challenge lies in allowing them to *feel* their freedom of movement, while still experiencing order and security around them

It is in more clearly identifying the characteristics of each Gesell stage and their associated planetary qualities, and the differences between the stages, that we begin to see the true gift that these stages offer the developing child for eventual well-rounded development, through repeated experience of each stage through childhood. For each stage gives the child a different way of experiencing the world, with different underlying motivations for behaviour; each stage offers very particular opportunities to children in their relationships to other people and in the development of their own individuality. For example the Mercury experience gives children the opportunity to embrace the world with great enthusiasm and sociability, and to develop flexibility, social adaptability and quick thinking.

Sometimes the planetary qualities in the stages are quite obvious, at other times they may be seen in mere nuances in behaviour which might hardly be considered anything significant, certainly not a ‘proof’ of planetary influence. Yet it helps to observe these more subtle changes in behaviour from stage to stage to build a picture of the rich sources of experience the stages offer children in their development.

Before we examine the nature of the Mercury type some mention needs to be made about why Mercury comes second in this series in relation to the Gesell stages rather than third as might be expected from the order of the planets if taken from the distance from the earth. Based on ancient mysteries and Ptolemaic astronomy, the planetary sequence was understood to be: Moon, *Mercury*, Venus, (Sun) Mars, Jupiter, Saturn. This sequence was based on the ‘order of the spheres’, a ‘temporal relationship, not a spatial one’. In late astronomy, at the time when Earth lost its central position in astronomical thinking, Mercury and Venus names were ‘exchanged’ in the planetary sequence. Copernicus and astronomers since, with more accurate ways to observe and measure planetary movements, could develop a planetary sequence based on spatial relationships, which changed the order: Moon, Venus, *Mercury*, (Sun) Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. This reversal of the positions of Mercury and Venus (transposition) has puzzled many thinkers ever since. More is said of this in the footnote.⁷ However it is the planetary sequence based on the temporal order (known in the mysteries) which can be observed in the unfolding of plant growth in Biodynamic Agriculture research, in human life in biography and in the life processes and growth in the human body. This is the sequence which can be observed in the Gesell stages in child development where, for example, it is clear that the challenging behaviour of Gesell’s stage 2 (which we are calling Mercury) would in no way fit the comparatively amenable nature of a Venus type, which we have found matches Gesell Stage 3.

So we begin an exploration of the nature of Mercury and then see where it is found in Gesell Stage 2.

⁷ Elisabeth Vreede, quoted in *Anthroposophy and Astrology. The astronomical letters of Elisabeth Vreede* (Anthroposophic Press, Great Barrington MA, 2001 p 64-5) says regarding this: “Without going in detail now into the very complicated question of the “transposition of Venus and Mercury” it can be shown here how it is that both Ptolemy and Copernicus call the same heavenly body “Venus” though giving it a different place.

Understanding Mercury qualities, influences and the 'Mercury type'

Mercury type qualities: a quick reference

The Mercury type has all the gifts of youth: vigour, energy, movement, quick intelligence and enthusiasm for new ideas. Their thinking is quick, perceptive, innovative, and flexible and they use it effectively to work and move in the world. They are adaptable, sanguine in temperament and are motivated most by freedom. Their tendency is to try to keep things moving to prevent stuck-ness and rigidity. They can have a charming sociability which helps keep community life going, for they like people, are communicative and witty. Their strength of will is for the present, not for a prolonged period.

The following descriptions of planetary influences are rather unconventional but provide a basis for a deeper understanding of the influences and associations with Mercury. For a simple psychological understanding of the Mercury type, some may prefer to go straight to 'Mercury in human behaviour' section.

Mercury: the planet and the mineral and plant world

Mercury is the smallest planet of the six planets visible to the eye in our sequence, while Jupiter, its opposite, is the largest. Mercury is closest to the sun, moving around it so that sometimes it is visible at dawn or dusk just before or after a conjunction. Occasionally it is seen as a very small dark ball as it passes over the sun, but often it is not visible at all. Though it only rotates slowly on its axis, it is the fastest mover of all the planets around the sun, with a year of 88 days. This quickness of movement is characteristic of the Mercury type.

Mercury's metal, mercury or quicksilver is different from other metals in its quality of movement and solidness (or lack of it); for mercury is a liquid, which breaks into tiny balls which can smash and reform easily; being the most volatile of metals, it gives out its vapour easily. Its power of cohesion (in itself) and being able to form droplets is great but its adhesion to the surroundings is slight. After scattering into droplets it 'immediately and completely returns into itself'.⁸ With other metals, however, it has strong powers of adhesion and can dissolve them. Wilhelm Pelikan in *The Secrets of Metals*⁹ describes mercury: 'quicksilver is for the world of metals what water is for the earth. It dissolves metals as water dissolves salts.' It is also a good conductor of heat and electricity. It does not freeze and solidify until -39°C but it boils at only 359° C. This volatility, versatility and flexibility in structure (lack of rigidity) are also characteristic of the qualities of the Mercury type of person.

In the archetypal pattern of plant growth, Mercury works in the leaf formation, where Moon works in the roots and Jupiter works on the fruit. Mercury brings variation, as in the leaf

⁸ Pelikan, Wilhelm *The Secrets of Metals* (Anthroposophic Press, New York, 1973) p 121. More on the nature of mercury/quicksilver in relation to the human body and Mercury forces can be found in pp. 119-131.

⁹ Ibid p 122

form within the same species – though each species of tree, for example, may have a similar form of leaf, yet each leaf will be slightly different, more individual. Another characteristic of Mercury influence is asymmetry. In the elm, a tree influenced by Mercury, one can see such asymmetry. (The elm’s Latin name means ‘irregularly dispersed’).¹⁰ This is a real contrast to the regularity of form in the field maple, the tree influenced by Jupiter which acts symmetrically.

Mercury in the human body, organs and life processes

Mercury’s lively influence is behind the life process of ‘growing’ in the human physical body and is also related to the eyes, the lungs, mucous membranes, the glands and lymphatic system. Mercury’s tendency to resist fixed forms can be seen in the lymphatic system, for example, where form is obliterated – there are no longer the fixed channels, which one finds in the blood vessels.¹¹ It is particularly in these areas that mercury or quicksilver remedies are used in therapies.¹² Rudolf Steiner noted that the Mercury process terminates in the lungs where it manifests in its weakest form – the lungs are in fact a relatively hard organ, an ‘earth’ organ, unlike the fluid movement of Mercury; it is an earth organ which holds air within ‘fluid man’.¹³ The lungs are asymmetrical, with three lobes on the right and two on the left.

It is interesting to note that in children at the Mercury stages (for example, 5 ½ to 6+ years and 11 years) there seems to be a propensity for more health problems in these areas influenced by Mercury. The Gesell researchers note¹⁴:

Though Eleven’s health may be quite good, there is a tendency to an increasing number of colds, flu, ear infections, and occasionally even pneumonia. The tendency for an infection to spread, as into ears and lungs or even into the meninges, as in mumps meningitis, is a quality of the age, as it was at the earlier age of five and a half to six years.

Mercury in tradition is the god of healing and it is the staff of Mercury which has become the doctors’ symbol. This association with healing and medicine may be a reflection of

¹⁰ There is some ambiguity about how many species of elm (*Ulmus*) there are because of the difficulty in delineating the species; such ‘individualizing’ is typical of Mercury. The elm is also associated with political revolutions, which given the rebelliousness of the Mercury stage in childhood is perhaps not so surprising!!

¹¹ Lievegoed describes characteristic Mercury movement in the lymphatic system in *Man on the Threshold. The challenge on inner development*. (Hawthorn Press, Stroud, 1985) p.107 ‘What kind of movement this is and how it flows depend on circumstances.’ ‘Mercury adjusts, but flows. That is why in man he is active in an area where there are no fixed channels; in the lymph and the lymphatic vessels. While the blood vessels have their fixed locations, the lymphatic vessels move as they may, as long as they reach their goal, the lymphatic gland.’

¹² For a brief explanation of the use of Mercury in therapies used in anthroposophical medicine can be found in Wilhelm Pelikan’s *The Secrets of Metals* 127-131 op cit

¹³ See Holtzapfel, Walter *The Human Organs Their functional and psychological significance* (The Lanthorn Press, Cornwall 2002)

¹⁴ Bates Ames, Louise, Ilg, Frances L., & Baker, Sidney M. *Your Ten-to-Fourteen-Year Old* (A Dell Trade Paperback New York 1988) p. see chapter on ‘The Eleven-Year-Old’ p 50

Mercury's capacity therapeutically to bring flowing movement to stagnant, 'stuck' processes which can present a danger to health.

In the larger biographical rhythms in life, Mercury is associated with the years 7 to 14.

Mercury in human behaviour

The Mercury type: Introduction

The gifts of Mercury in the Mercury type are their liveliness, wide ranging interest in the world, quick-wittedness and astute sociability. The motivation for much of their behaviour is their need for *freedom*, especially the freedom to move, to follow their interests and be flexible, in contrast to Jupiter's need for form and *power*. Quickness and movement are key qualities here.

We can now look in more detail at different aspects of the way Mercury forces might manifest in the Mercury type.

The Mercury type: Sense of self

The Mercury types, like Moon before them and Venus after them in the planetary sequence, are on the less conscious side of the planetary maturity scale. They have all the gifts of youth, enthusiasm, vigour, sanguinity, energy and quick intelligence and are associated with the sanguine temperament. They are curious, interested in new ideas, and informative. They relate easily to world, are interactive and observe and react instantly. They are the great realists who live in the present.

As we saw, the motivating factor behind the Mercury type is their need for *freedom* characteristically involving *movement*, freedom to enthusiastically embrace the world in their thinking, in their sociability, in their interactions. They move swiftly, independently, in any direction to maintain their freedom and interest, to avoid restriction or limitations, to dodge unwanted blocks or threats.

The Mercury type's sense of self is more related to others and more strongly influenced by the environment. In nature in plant growth we can find a metaphor for this relationship to the outside world – in the leaf (Mercury influenced), spreading itself, open to interaction with the sun's light and warmth, the air, the wind, the rain and so on. Because the Mercury types' interests are more diverse and peripheral, they may be less centred, even scattered in themselves. It takes more conscious effort for them to remain centred.

It is helpful to contrast this with the nature of the Saturn types who are also strongly motivated by freedom. For the Saturn types, this freedom involves a fierce *protection* of their inner freedom, their inner core, their privacy; anything which threatens the inner freedom of their individuality will be resisted by their closing off and creating a shell around themselves to withdraw into, like the bone around the marrow, like the seed with its protective shell, which contains the concentrated essence of the plant where Saturn influences work. The Saturn types *withdraw* into stillness, into a point; their sense of self is more inward, centred and concentrated in their core. By contrast, the Mercury types *move* to retain their individual freedom.

The Mercury type is skilled at recognising the preferences of other people and use this to meet their own or others' needs. This has implications for their sense of self. Like the Moon type, who may, consciously or unconsciously, reflect back to others what others might want them to be, even to the extent of hiding their real selves by so doing, the immature Mercury type may also sometimes be reluctant to completely reveal their real selves. They may feel vulnerable if they can be seen too well by people. To protect themselves they may take the role of 'the entertainer' or 'the joker', as a façade, as 'smoke and mirrors', while they observe the situation better. They may also avoid answering questions which may reveal parts of themselves; they may dodge and weave. If a conversation starts to reveal their own lack of knowledge they quickly move talk to something else.

They do not want to be labelled and boxed by others as one sort of person; they want to be free to be all the different parts of themselves that they like to be; but with their reluctance to show their real selves and to be judged on that self, they may show different parts of themselves to different people. They have the social awareness to judge whether a particular behaviour or opinion is appropriate for a particular group of people or not; they can then reveal just that part of themselves that fits the profile of the group they are in. Part of this effort towards 'social appropriateness' in the adult Mercury type may include feelings of *obligation* to be a 'sociable person'.

This apparent tendency to 'conform to the norm' is really an aspect of their 'smoke and mirrors' behaviour, for they really love to challenge the status quo if they can get away with it. We see this in their willingness to push the social boundaries of the group at times, even to the extent of making people feel uncomfortable. And, as will be seen below, they love a little chaos.

These adaptable but sometimes conflicting behaviours of sociability and non-conformity in the Mercury type sometimes elicit negative judgements from others: that Mercury is self-centred, self-serving, devious, or manipulating, or is superficial in social contacts. There is certainly a self-centredness and playfulness in the Mercury type, and they certainly use their ability to read people to entertain themselves or others, and to get what they want. In the immature Mercury type this interaction with the world is essentially motivated most by self-interest but with maturity it may be more motivated by care for others and true altruism.

The conflicts between self-centredness and the need for freedom versus sociability in the Mercury stages in childhood also cause frustration and confusion in their carers. Children in the Mercury stages may also show a certain vulnerability in their sense of self, despite their capacity for warm sociability. There seems to be a conflict between their need for freedom and independence (and self-centredness) on one side and a sociability which verges on social dependence, on the other. They seem to exhibit more fear of being alone at Two-and-a-half to Three, at Five-and-a-half to young Six and at Eleven, as can be seen in the excerpts from Gesell's observations. They fight fiercely for independence and may resist the guidance of others, but may not be entirely comfortable to withdraw to be alone.

An understanding of the need to *experience freedom through movement* is important in comprehending the behaviours in the Mercury type and the Mercury stages in childhood. The Mercury type needs the freedom to move, intellectually, physically and socially. Just as the metal mercury is volatile and flexible in structure and movement, so the Mercury type

has a strong relationship to movement without specific direction, for it will flow wherever appropriate, left or right, adapting and transforming but always staying in motion, resisting rigidity and forms that become too fixed in traditions or routines. This is Mercury's gift. For Mercury's impulse is to move and to keep the world capable of being flexible, adaptable and open to change. Just as the metal mercury dissolves other metals, so does the Mercury type love to break down form, order and societal norms when these are in danger of becoming *fixed or are too restrictive*.

In this sense Mercury's challenge to fixed-ness brings a certain chaos and unpredictability. Yet Mercury's chaos may be a 'sensitive chaos' out of which completely new things may grow and develop. In this way Mercury is the opposite to Jupiter whose forces give rise to form, harmony and order but, in the extreme, may become too rigid. It is important to realise, however, that for the Mercury type, *chaos can be enjoyable*; they are not necessarily disconcerted by it as other types might be; they delight in being able to function within it. This is a key to a compassionate understanding of the Mercury type and a challenge to understanding where we ourselves stand with chaos! The Jupiter type might also enjoy the challenge of a chaotic situation but only if they can bring order to it eventually.

An example of this love of chaos is to be found when our Mercurial Eleven-year-olds deliberately create havoc around them; they take delight in chaos; they are interested in disharmony and confusion and being able to test holding themselves together within it; they can disrupt relationships within the family, within the schoolroom, between teachers and parents. A perceptive teacher of movement of Eleven-year-olds created a winning scheme when she asked her children to create a movement sequence to 'confuse' an enemy; the children loved it but still had the experience of having to be disciplined themselves in their movement! Interestingly, the children realised that asymmetry (Mercury) in the rhythm of the movement creates such confusion or 'mental chaos'.

It is perhaps the combination of the need for freedom with their expansive social and intellectual interests, which leads to trouble in another way in the Mercury stages in childhood, before children have learned the skills of evaluating, prioritizing and self-limitation. They have great difficulty with *decision making* because they embrace the outer world so enthusiastically that they like the freedom of being able to have *all* options open to them; they do not want to be limited by their own choice or by the directives of others. It may seem to others that, for Mercury and the Mercury stages, the 'grass is always greener in the next paddock' but it is not so much that they are dissatisfied with what they have, as that they do not want to miss out on anything else that excites their interest, because of what they already have. So in the descriptions below we see a Six year old who just cannot make a decision about what cookie to take and the Eleven year old who did not want to be limited by naming just one 'best friend'. 'Don't make me choose', could be their cry. Even adult Mercury types display reluctance to make decisions about 'favourites', about their favourite music for example, they love it all, all styles, all types. Don't try to 'nail Mercury down' to anything.

Bibi van Bussell¹⁵ describes one special exception to the Mercury type's more usual 'accommodating' relationships with others, where they do not necessarily show their true selves; in this exception, the Mercury type can accept another person's authority and feel the security and freedom they need to just be themselves, so show their real selves:

As the planet Mercury revolves so slowly (a day takes two thirds of a Mercury year) that it shows the same face to the Sun for a long time, so a person with Mercury qualities looks for someone to look up to, to show his 'real' self to, someone who will accept him as he is (or as he wants to be). This person is often a Jupiter [type] and Mercury will try to be more or less consistent with him and try not to practice his wheeling and dealing on him.

In this way the Mercury type seeks an authority and perhaps public opinion, despite their need for independence. We would add to this picture that, not only does the Mercury type need to respect this authority figure, but they also need to feel *understood* by him or her, especially in their need for respect for their freedom and independence. In dealing with children in a Mercury stage this may be a helpful clue: that the child may respond to the adult who not only understands them but also has true 'authority' (Jupiter) in their being — we need to gather up our 'bigness' and 'wisdom' and 'our authorship for our living' for them! We also need to see past their provocative behaviours to try to understand who they really are and what they need. With anything less they are less likely to give us their trust!

Increasing maturity, of course, helps the Mercury types to learn to deal with such inner conflicts regarding the expression of the sense of self, but those who are slow to learn may find life difficult when the responsibilities of adulthood demand decision making and commitment. The danger for the Mercury type is that they may be so overwhelmed or distracted by outer enthusiasms and trivialities, by the enjoyment of social interactions that they lose touch with who they are, and what they want; they cannot hold their own direction and order in their lives, to follow through, follow up, slow down and go deep sometimes, to truly be as independent as they want to be. It may take more effort for the Mercury type to become more conscious of their sense of self, their inner world and motivations and work with these, rather than being carried by outer forces, outer rewards and self-interest.

The Mercury type: Relationship to Thinking

Mercury's thinking is quick, sharp, innovative, and flexible. They use their thinking to work in and deal with the world; they put together new arguments quickly; they can dive and weave with flexibility in their thinking; they amuse us with their jests and jokes. They also access information with mobility and quickness; they may have thousands of unrelated facts readily available to them, to use, to persuade with, and sell; they must love 'quick' internet search capacities as they will love and be distracted by the social media.

One can see the great strengths of Mercury's thinking in Jeff Mayo's descriptions¹⁶, (in his *The Planets and Human Behaviour*) where he describes Mercury's primary function as

¹⁵ Bibi van Bussell in the writing on 'Planetary Qualities. An Anthroposophical View', 1999, at [www.http://busbi.home.xs4all.nl/index.html#overview](http://busbi.home.xs4all.nl/index.html#overview)

¹⁶ Mayo, Jeff, *The Planets and Human Behaviour* (L.N. Fowler & Co Ltd, London, 1972) p.78-9

'communication and coordination' and names further constructive qualities as: inquisitiveness, analytical ability, cleverness, skilfulness, studiousness, eloquence, good memory, technical ability, fluency, lucidity, wittiness, debativeness, perceptiveness. His descriptions also hint at the consequences of their thinking for their social relationships: communicativeness, co-ordination, adaptability, versatility, information exchange, volatility.

Rudolf Steiner clarifies further the nature of Mercury's thinking, pointing out that Mercury is associated with 'coordinative knowledge and mental activity' whereas Jupiter is associated with 'wisdom filled thinking'.¹⁷ One can see this difference in the two kinds of thinking: Mercury is curious, interactive and informative, the great realist who lives in the present, relates easily to world, observing and reacting instantly; Jupiter's thinking is bigger, deeper, more profound; it has the overview which Mercury lacks. The Jupiter type also is quite prepared for (and enjoys) more serious debate, where Mercury may avoid it.

While the emphasis in these essays has been to concentrate on the positive archetypal qualities associated with the planets, it is perhaps important to also cover the more negative manifestations of Mercury influences to better understand children in Mercury stages, because they are such potentially challenging times. The immature Mercury type may use some of their abilities to manoeuvre and manipulate; they may argue, contradict, pick other people's opinions apart quickly; they may back off quickly if others appear to know more than they do; they may camouflage their lack of knowledge with humour. Mayo names other more problematic qualities associated with the Mercury types in relation to thinking and the nervous system: restlessness, nervousness, excitableness, criticalness, cunning, forgetfulness, clumsiness. Observation of some of these qualities in children in the Mercury Gesell Stage 2, especially a certain restlessness and debativeness, may explain some of the incomprehension adults sometimes feel over the children's behaviours.

The Mercury type's quick thinking, their grasp of ideas and judgements, shrewdness and their responsiveness to opportunities are also associated with Mercury as the god of business deals and thieves. Untransformed Mercury is not beyond deviousness and slipperiness, a smooth sliding sideways out of trouble, an unwillingness to seriously confront head-on. There is a danger in the Mercury type that if they do not act consciously out of their own principles or independent thought, they can be dominated by their own unconscious fluid reactivity to the outer world, to outer mandates. They may become trapped within their own subtle rebelliousness, deviousness or scattered-ness. It is particularly important to understand the Mercury stages in childhood better, in order to be able to help the children move beyond such behaviours and let them feel our appreciation for the real gifts of Mercury influences.

Mayo's list¹⁸ of traditional activities associated with the adult Mercury type also builds a general picture of their strengths and interests especially in relation to their quick thinking, inquisitiveness and communication skills: literary works, publishing, printing, correspondence, the Press, advertising, messengers, teaching and education, study, the

¹⁷ Steiner, Rudolf in the lecture "The Spiritual Individualities of the Planets" (GA228 Dornach July 27 1923

¹⁸ Mayo op.cit

intelligentsia, communications generally, transport generally, commerce, merchandise, agents, changes, travel, markets, mathematics, libraries.

The Mercury type: Relationship to Feeling

Mercury's relationship to feeling is different from that of other planetary types. Their ability to live more completely in the present, without being burdened by past or future, possibly enables them to be happier than most types and this also makes others happier while in their company. They are not trying to change the world but accept it for what it is and find pleasure in what 'is'. In a way they are living in their feelings, in the present. They are not looking for deeper significance than what there is, nor will they necessarily be critical of it, or judge it.

They show a readiness to accept the flow of life as it is, as long as it is moving on, and not 'static'. Their need for movement will make them unconsciously seek movement out. They are frustrated by stagnant situations or people who are stuck or holding things back and preventing change or exploration. If they can't bring change quickly or easily themselves, and nobody else does either, they may distract themselves by looking for movement in other places or directions. They will not stick with lack of change for long.

They have an unconscious need for variability in the environment and their experience. Saturn, in comparison, would happily (or unhappily) stay with the same feeling, or situation, consciously pondering deeply upon it.

Their frustrations are driven by restrictions on movement, stuckness in situations, confinement and these lead to feelings of rebelliousness. Their sociability can cover many things.

The Mercury type: Relationship to people

Great breadth in their social interest is characteristic of the Mercury type. They love people of all types and enjoy people. They seek people out, and others seek them out for social activities. They may be the hub in the social wheel; they are good 'networkers'. They have considerable social ease, inspiring ideas, a great sense of humour, wit and an entertaining nature. They are skilled in dealing with people; they know how to pitch where people are at, how to get what they want. They can be the life of a party and initiate interesting conversations. There is a real richness in their social life and others appreciate and respond to this. They keep community life going with their lively adaptability and sociability.

There is a tendency in the sources of information on the immature Mercury type to point to Mercury's slipperiness and untrustworthiness because they know so well how to manipulate people and situations. However the mature Mercury type can meet other individuals in such a way that they feel recognised and understood. This is a gift of mature Mercury. Perhaps this is why when the Mercury type makes a cheeky comment (based on recognition of the individual and given with good intent, not out of selfish motives) we allow it. Such a comment made by someone else out of more selfish motives might collect them a slap in the face!

So the Mercury types are socially inclusive, have many friends, know many people and, with their social skills, may well be able to sustain more relationships than other types. They

do not wish to exclude social possibilities because these give them more freedom to move. This social generosity is reflected in such statements as: 'At my birthday I had 200 of my most intimate friends' or 'I had 30 people at my child's birth.' Nevertheless immature Mercury types are sometimes accused of being more superficial in their feelings and relationships.

In addition there is a danger that the immature Mercury type may be like Peter Pan emotionally, not taking adult responsibility for their interactions with others. Because of their social ease and entertaining nature, they are often more easily forgiven for their less mature behaviours than other types – their thoughtlessness, their inconstancy, their forgetfulness, their distractedness, their unreliability, their meddlesomeness, their over-talkativeness.

Mercury's mobility is very evident in the social sphere, solutions are never final, enthusiasms change; if the conversation is stuck and tedious, they try to liven it up; if they cannot get it to liven up or they get bored, they move on; while they do not press to get their own way as Mars would, they may nevertheless end up doing something, anything, for better or worse, for the sake of movement. This propensity can be seen illustrated clearly in Eleven-year-old-ness. In arguments, Mercury tends to quarrels that are sharp and cutting but brief!

The Mercury type: Relationship to Will power

The Mercury type also has a particular kind of will. Not surprisingly, it reflects a will for the present, not a will or perseverance carried through a longer period of time. Living in the present, Mercury may know what they want and take short jabs at achieving it, but they are happy to step aside and let others take over for the long haul. They are not interested in prolonged will-filled activity, in following through on a job – a fact that makes them seem untrustworthy to other more 'will filled' planetary types! They start, they stop, they start, they stop. Their direction and commitment can change. Their will too is arrhythmic!

Thus some of the more problematic qualities possible in Mercury types in relation to will power are their indecisiveness and unreliability. In their need for the freedom to change their minds, to keep their options open, they may not want to make a definite decision or may find it hard to make any decision at all. They may struggle with prioritizing. In their lack of decisiveness or lack of awareness of the time passing, living as they do in the present, or lack of awareness of the future and the consequences of their actions, in their lack of 'follow through', they may be unreliable. But with all their charming sociability, we often forgive them! After all, their gift towards getting the job done is their infectious and enthusiastic interest!

Other associations with Mercury

In an analysis of planetary types and their influences in the racial types, Mercury is said to influence the 'Black' race, as Venus was said to influence the 'Malayan' race. The beautiful fluid physical movement of those of African heritage is certainly a picture of Mercurial movement.

Day of week- Wednesday (dies Mercurii- Latin *day of Mercury*; mercoledì- Italian); musical note- D; colour- yellow; grain- millet; tree- elm; sound for Mercury - i as in 'me'.

Summary of some qualities associated with Mercury to be considered in relation to child development:

- Acceptance of the need for movement and freedom
- Difficulties with decision making because they do not want to give up any possibilities. How to reframe situations so that decisions made are not either/or decisions, but rather a prioritizing of choices.
- A social tendency which makes them more reluctant (or fearful?) of being alone. Need to be helped to find a peaceful, conflict free, individual space while still being with others.
- It is important to observe in the child in Mercury stages to see whether the child is at the mercy of the outer world they may be resisting and need help to respond from inner strength and useful purpose, inwardly directed control. The child's need for feelings of freedom and independence in a Mercury stage needs to be met in age appropriate ways first if their resistance and apparent contrariness of this stage are to be avoided. The motivation for change may come from this very need for independence.
- Recognition of the frustration with static-ness, stuckness, stillness. How does Mercury find quiet space? In rhythm, movement? Swings? Walking?
- Recognition of frustration with sameness. How to meet quick thinking, need for change in constructive ways.
- Need for social interaction. How to help Mercury create constructive interactions with others, especially siblings.
- Appreciation for living in the present, generosity of spirit and difference.
- Mercury seeks authority in a person who is respected and understands him. With this person he can be himself. A clue for adults dealing with Mercury stages in childhood to be authoritative, more 'Jupiter'.
- Appreciation of Mercury's gift to the social sphere
- Acceptance of Mercury's short-lived will. Do we need to make shorter tasks, redefined?

A closer look at child development: Gesell Stage 2 and Mercury

Firstly we must emphasize that there are many things that effect development in childhood and these rhythmical changes in gesture or mood identified in the Gesell stages are only one part of this picture. It must also be emphasized that Gesell researchers always stressed that these stages were not rigid in their timing and could be different for different children.

However, in relation to the planetary influences which affect the 'gesture' of the different stages, this may be an *archetypal* pattern which is not in fact so greatly affected by genetic and environmental factors in development.¹⁹

So now we can look to see whether we can find more Mercury characteristics in children in Gesell Stage 2, which we have identified with Mercury. The Gesell Stage 2 is associated with 6-8 to 12 weeks, 44-48 to 52 weeks, 2 ½ to 3 years, 5 ½ to 6 plus years and 11 years.²⁰ Extrapolated from these, the sixth Gesell Stage 2 would be 17 years.

In the Mercury/Gesell Stage 2 in development, children are enthusiastic in their interests, full of movement and are lively communicators; but they are also quite fiercely independent and in need of the feeling of freedom. This seems to create many of their problems. Gesell defines this stage as *in disequilibrium* and *breaking up*, which it certainly is in comparison to amenable Stage 1.

We will quote as much as possible directly from the Gesell works to illustrate the possible connections between the stages and the characteristics of the Mercury type. Direct quotations in 'single quote marks' or indented are from the Gesell research unless indicated otherwise.

6-8 to 12 weeks: the first Gesell Stage 2 (revised version sequence 2-3 months)²¹

In *The Child from Five to Ten*,²² Gesell, Ilg and Ames list the sequence of what we are calling the 'Gesell Stages' and what they identified to be the associated ages. It seems that the allocation of stages for children under two years by Gesell is still tentative but, working

¹⁹ Some children may have their teeth come loose later than sooner, or reach menarche or spermatarche at differing times, and certainly some children 'wake up' sooner than others. Indeed we know that many boys need more time than girls, even up to a year, to develop before they start school learning. But despite all this, it is possible that there are some more archetypal patterns in childhood that are more predictable. My own conversations with teachers and parents suggest these planetary gestures may be so but more work needs to be done on this. Another archetypal pattern of growth in the development of children was described by Rudolf Steiner as occurring in seven year stages, where the direction of physical growth moved from the head and the sense-nerve system down into the chest and rhythmic system and then down into the metabolic system and limbs in each seven year stage. This pattern has been observed in children to be consistent as a basic blueprint for growth in normal children.

²⁰ Gesell, Arnold, Ilg, Frances L., Bates Ames, Louise *The Child from Five to Ten* (Harper & Row, New York 1977 p.47

²¹ In 2011, after our own research was well underway, the Gesell Institute of Human Development presenter in a web seminar gave a slightly different revised version of the stages in the first year of life. They gave the following (I have added the Stage number and planet for clarification.) Birth - Expansion /5 (*Jupiter*); 2 weeks - Neurotic /6 (*Saturn*); 1 month - Smooth /1 (*Moon*); 2-3 months - Breaking Up /2 (*Mercury*); 4 months - Sorting Out /3 (*Venus*); 5 months - Inwardizing /4 (*Mars*); 6 months - Expansion /5 (*Jupiter*); 7 and 8 months - Neurotic /6 (*Saturn*); 9 and 10 months - Smooth /1 (*Moon*); 11months(?) - 1 year - Breaking Up /2 (*Mercury*); 1 year 1 month Sorting Out /3 (*Venus*); 1 year 3 months - Inwardizing /4 (*Mars*). We have kept to the original versions of the stages in the first year, which are at any rate very approximate.

²² Gesell, Arnold, Ilg, Frances L., Bates Ames, Louise *The Child from Five to Ten* op. cit. p.47

from the stages given, it does put 6-8 to 12 weeks at Stage 2 which we are postulating to be associated with the forces of Mercury. The later Gesell estimates would put this stage beginning at 8 weeks, which makes more sense if there is a gradual increase in times of each stage.

Gesell has given us relatively little information on the specific ages in infancy regarding the emotional behaviour, or 'mood' in these stages. As we have seen in the Moon section, by 4 to 6-8 weeks, physiological functions in the baby, in heart, breathing, temperature control have become more regular. By 6 weeks their eyes are beginning to coordinate efficiently and follow and object for a short distance; the outside fingers on the hand are stronger. By 8 weeks their legs are active and they can roll and swing their hips and muscles are coming into more voluntary control than being reflexive. They are observant and responsive; they smile immediately and spontaneously; expressiveness and vocalizations increase. In the next weeks, the child grows in movement, coordination and communication, fitting areas of development for a Mercury stage.

44- 48 weeks to 52 weeks: the second Gesell Stage 2

The original timing of this stage beginning at about 44 weeks makes sense in relation to seeing planetary influences because we see more potentially Mercurial behaviour in the last two months of the first year of life. Gesell researchers do not describe this age group specifically in the later books on childhood but in The Princeton Center for Infancy and Early Childhood's book *The First Twelve Months of Life*, edited by Frank Caplan²³ we see that the eleventh month (44 to 48 weeks approximately) is an age where the child has many more capacities to move more freely. Many can squat and stoop, and importantly stand alone and even wave and walk holding on. At the same time in the social area the child 'increases dependence on the mother' or major carer, inferring their intentions and even trying to 'alter them through persuasion or protest.' How fitting for a Mercury stage: this new mobility, the discovery of the capacity for persuasion and what we see in the social dependence on the major carer.

Also notable for an influence associated with Mercury is the increasing need for independence as is seen in the following: 'Is not always cooperative. Refuses forceful teaching; opposes removal of toys; extends but does not release toy to person; likes imitating, then doing for himself; protests curtailment of play. Establishes meaning of "No." Shows guilt at wrong doing. May tease and test parental limits.' Caplan's title for this month is "A Proper person". It does have hints of Mercury rather than Moon, which comes before it!

The Mercury qualities appear again in the twelfth month, the remainder of this Stage 2, with tantrums and negativism increasing. Caplan describes the Twelfth month (48 to 52 weeks approximately), calling it 'Stepping Out':

By the twelfth month [48 weeks], many babies are ready to walk. This fascinating activity distracts the baby from what his mother and most adults consider basics—eating and sleeping. But there are even more profound consequences. The baby is

²³ Caplan, Frank (Gen Ed) *The First Twelve Months of Life. Your baby's growth month by month* (Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1973) Chapter on 'The Eleventh Month' and 'The Twelfth Month' pp. 218-249

able to get to people and things and to explore space and objects by himself in a way that will be far more efficient than crawling. He is also more independent of adult control. Yet fearful of this independence, he again grows anxious about strangers and separations from you. Beyond this, the balance between freedom and containment becomes an issue that you and your baby must mutually solve. Walking is the crowning achievement of this long and exciting “motor” year...

The exuberance and accomplishment radiating from your baby’s face show his recognition that he has attained another major goal...

Walking has a curious companion. Just as it appears, swimming behaviour begins to show in the tub...Now if you support your baby under the chest, his body will undulate, his arms will circle naturally at his sides, and his legs will kick alternately.

His determination when he first walks affords a precious glimpse of the inner force that pushes young animals from one level of development to the next and drives them to conquer their environments. His feelings also testify to the joy and pride that come from doing something by oneself...

‘Freedom’, ‘independence’, movement, walking and swimming, also the conflict between the need for independence and fear of separation— could Mercury be part of this inner force that drives these things?

From the two-handed reach of midyear, he now offers a preferred hand along the line of sight.

A move from symmetry to asymmetry in hand preference. Could Mercury also drive this development?

...The independence that walking inspires may further complicate meals and vex mothers. In fact, the baby may use food against you, much like his new “No’s” and even tantrums, as one aspect of his self differentiating and assertion over his environment....Many babies at this age interpret motherly participation as pressure and use it to key off a negative reaction to the whole meal. You might consider serving finger foods and leave choices to the child.

Is this Mercury’s need for freedom working itself out here? Freedom and independence in eating at all cost!

They also describe how children of this age find it hard to quiet down to sleep and may need movement to settle. They naturally ‘rock on hands and knees’ and may bounce the crib across the room. They say ‘the best way to help the baby is an after dark session of crooning and gentle rocking as you feed him his last bottle. Although it may take as much as half an hour from your evening, feeling his tense little body begin to relax will be worth the time.’ Is this too a Mercurial need for movement?

Overall this is not really an easy age because ‘negativism increases’, and the child ‘refuses eating a meal, new foods, mother’s feeding; resists napping; may have tantrums.’ The child also ‘fears strange people and places. Reacts sharply to separation from mother.’ The resistances here are consistent with what we see in later Mercury stages. Although there are

still questions about the length of this stage, these characteristics seem to fit the pattern of both Gesell Stage 2 and Mercury.

So already we see qualities which could be associated with Mercury at this age: a surprisingly determined need for freedom and independence, with the perhaps inevitable conflict between dependence on the major carer while wanting to be independent of her or him, a strong need for movement, a preference for asymmetrical movement, and even the recognition of the powers of persuasion.

2 and a half to 3 years: the third Gesell Stage 2

While we have relatively little on 6 and 44 weeks' emotional behaviours specifically in Gesell, we do have many behaviours of 2 and a half years to examine for planetary influenced behaviours. This age also illustrates how difficult it can be to separate out what may be other developmental, as distinct from planetary influenced, behaviours. Two and a half certainly shows a different gesture from the quiet good nature of Two years, a Moon stage. Two and a half is a particularly challenging time for the child, not only because he is in Mercury stage with the struggle between the need for independence and their social dependence, but also because a new experience of 'self'²⁴, of feeling physically separate from others (on a physical level at least) brings deep insecurities which were not there before. 'Will my parents leave me?' 'Will they come back?' 'Will the things in my life still be here tomorrow?' Fears, even terror, around separation manifests in very challenging behaviours for adults to deal with. Children's feelings of 'coming more deeply into themselves as a separate person', show visibly at this time in their drawings of inward spirals, crosses and concentrations of scribbling and with the established use of and 'ownership' of the word 'I'. The fears around separation associated with Mercury influences then are exacerbated by this new powerful sense of self at this age.

To protect themselves, children of this age set up all sorts of ways to bring stability and predictability into their relationships and environments. They are desperate to be in control. If adults do not understand these needs and the children's calls for support, difficult behaviours become more entrenched as the child becomes more desperate. With this new awareness of self, they inwardly question 'what is me? My hair, my hat, my toy, my bed?' Anything that threatens this notion of an extended 'me' also causes trouble. They do not want to share, or see their coat or special toy given to another. It threatens their newfound sense of self and they can be desperate to defend that. It is wiser to support this need at the time and not worry about "they need to learn to share". A more appropriate time will come for that. Having 'for sharing toys' and even clothes (spare hats for example) from early on in the child's life, as distinct from 'Tommy's toys' can help with this problem.

²⁴ These more intense experiences of a 'differentiated self' seem to occur at particular times in the seven year cycles of growth which Rudolf Steiner observed. After Two and a bit years of growth with its emphasis concentrated in the head and nerves sense system there seems to be an 'awakening to self'. At about two and a half this manifests in the children experiencing themselves as physically separate from others. At nine and a half it manifests again, but more in the sphere experiencing separateness in feelings, inner experiences. At Sixteen and a half there seems to be an experience of separateness and search for understanding around one's spirit or individual identity.

Desperate behaviours aimed at meeting these deep needs seem to disguise some of the nature of Mercurial influences at this age. It is a time when the best idea is try to meet these needs as fully as possible, for routine, security, reassurance, protection of self, and cut down (it is only for a few months) on all those things that challenge their security and feeling of reasonable control of their life. It helps to stay home, hold to routines, avoid new situations unless led by the child. Put the child first for a few months. It is not a good time to start child care for many! Wait until their sense of security reappears. Remove the stresses and we may find the influence of Mercury show up more clearly. If their fears can be allayed, they can be 'delightful, less resistant', in Gesell's words.

We will find quotations to make this clearer in Gesell but need to separate out the 'survival' behaviours from the Mercury 'gesture' of the age.

Descriptions quoted directly from Gesell are in quotation marks or indented:²⁵

This is not any easy age. Gesell describes Two and a half as being: in 'disequilibrium', 'breaking up' and '...even more difficult and demanding' '...many children become rather terrible.' 'He is imperious, bossy and demanding.' '...especially difficult when violent, demanding, explosive emotions take over...' an age of exaggerated tensional outlets...thumb sucking...stuttering.' [they] scream and produce temper tantrums on the tiniest provocation.' [Is] 'a complete despot'. '..."no" is a much used word.'

Contrariness and the resistance to demands from adults, which threaten their independence, appear at this age as it will with other Stage 2 ages later. Here we also find the quality associated with the Mercury type that in their 'vast and enthusiastic interest in all that happens' *they want it all!* They do not want to choose between one thing or another, between extremes. They have not yet learned to prioritize, or to wait, or to modulate, or to accept they have to have some things one at a time. No! They want it all at once *and* they want their independence and not to be limited in their options by other people's choices and directions. With these immature Mercury qualities in mind, one may see the contrariness of Two-and-a-half in Gesell's descriptions in a different light:

'...his direction tends to be the *opposite* of the way *you* have directed. Now he has matured to the point where he sets up his own opposites. This is how he finds out about the world—by exploring *both* of any two extremes in quick succession...a very important part of growing up.' It is an age when other adults may do better to take over.

'He may disrupt parental harmony by pitting Mother against Father. And he can drive everyone to distraction by his insistence that "Mommy do it" when Daddy is taking over, and then that "Daddy do it when Mommy takes hold.'" 'The person he wants is *whatever* person is not available at the moment, and if everyone *is* available, his demand may change to "Me do it myself."

When not met with understanding, these behaviours become entrenched:

'Met head-on with harsh, unrelenting demands [from adults], a Two-and-a-half-year-old tends to become even more rigid, oppositional, negative, and generally

²⁵ Some of this is from *Your Two Year Old* (Dell Trade Paperback, New York 1976). By Gesell researchers Louise Bates Ames and Frances L. Ilg

difficult than he might otherwise have been. Met with skill and kindness, with good preschool techniques, with a little bit of humour, even a very demanding boy or girl may be willing and able to give in now and then.' '...for all his rebelling, his stubborn opposition, even the Two-and-a-half-year-old still believes that you, his parents, are all-powerful and all-wonderful.'

This is an age of 'opposite extremes'. The child can be terrible but also 'often very loveable, engaging, enthusiastic, and appreciative.' He has 'an almost total inability to modulate'. 'He is exuberant one minute, shy the next.' 'The grass is always greener, for him, in someone else's pasture. He acts with sudden speed or dawdles endlessly.'

He or she can have great difficulty with decisions.' 'This is possibly the worst age of any for making choice. Two-and-a-half vacillates back and forth, and if he finally settles for one of two choices, he is almost bound to choose the other immediately'. By his very nature, the child of this age has merely to choose the *red* one and he wants the *blue*; to choose *yes*, and he definitely wishes *no*. Indecisiveness is a weakness of Mercury, who wants it *all*, and it is seen also at Six.

Gesell describes the child of this age: He 'demands sameness. He wants everything to always be the same.' This is not a Mercury quality but is a developmental need for predictability in the same way he 'wants everything to be *appropriate*—belongings to go with the people they *belong* to.' 'He himself fulfils his need for sameness by setting up elaborate, sometimes amusing, sometimes exasperating rituals to keep himself on the right track...to avoid the conflict of having to make a choice.' He wants 'the same route taken, the same order of events in time. By three he will not need the environment to support him in this way. He will be able to permit variety, difference, change.' Yet at the same time, 'he does like to explore and investigate.'

'The two-and-a-half-year-old may be, above all else, imperious, bossy, and demanding...but it helps to remember that the child is bossy not because he is sure, but actually because he is unsure. If he can command even a small part of it (his parents) it helps him to feel secure.' Yet 'he is a good deal more wily than the adult realizes, and with his increasing vocabulary and his vast and enthusiastic interest in everything that happens, he is often putting two and two together to a far greater extent than one's casual observation may make evident.' This last description is very consistent with Mercury influences, the wiliness and vast and enthusiastic interest.

The Mercurial characteristic which comes so much to the fore in later stages— the need for movement—are not commented on particularly by the Gesell researchers, perhaps because children of this age are expected to be on the move constantly, but they do say: 'Almost any restriction of his bodily movements is hard for him to accept, especially when it keeps him from doing something that he wants to do.' Further, the uninterrupted smooth flowing of his own activities are important to him: 'Interruptions to his play—which of course come often in daily life—are very real frustrations for him. It may seem to the child that play is constantly interrupted by parental demands that he eat, sleep, go to the bathroom, come into the house.' Perhaps then it is not so surprising that he can be so contrary in his responses to parental requests, particularly since he is not yet skilled in modulating his social behaviour. His need for freedom perhaps expresses itself in the freedom to play, move, explore

uninterrupted! The skill of the adult lies in being able to subtly redirect all this in the direction of what the adult needs to happen, without the child having to follow a directive which he very likely will want to resist!

So Two and a half wants control, he shows enthusiasm, he shows indecisiveness, to-ing and fro-ing from extremes which we will see in the later Stage 2 ages and which may have its origins in his *wanting it all* in true Mercurial fashion. It seems he also needs the freedom to move and play independently, uninterrupted, unobstructed. All a little bit of Mercury there.

Five and a half years to just over Six (Six and 3-6 months?): the fourth Gesell Stage 2.

Gesell researchers describe Five to Five and a half years as sunny and serene.²⁶ This certainly seems an apt description for a child in a Moon stage at Five to Five and a half. However this amenable stage of Five comes to an end at around Five-and-a-half when the child seems to enter a new more turbulent time — Gesell's stage 2, which we hypothesize is a stage influenced by Mercury.

There is some question about just how long this particular Stage 2 lasts. The original Gesell timing puts the next stage as beginning at 6 ½ years, but it may be that it starts slightly earlier than this, making the stage 9 months long, which would make the following stage also 9 months in duration, and more in keeping with an incremental increase in length of the stages. By Seven, the stages become one year in length. With a challenging age like Stage 2 it may be that disruptive behaviours, and the adult's response to them, flow on into the next stage while family harmony is gradually re-established. More needs to be observed here, with perhaps, the planetary information to assist us.

This stage too is complicated by other growth factors. At this age the emphasis in growth is well established in the limbs and metabolic system which are associated with the 'will'. In fact in terms of the whole of childhood, we are now in the the 'will' stage of the first seven years, and in the 'will' stage of the whole of childhood. The development of all aspects of the will (as well as the frustrations at the lack of it) are evident in these years; learning about initiative, perseverance, completion of tasks, as well as modulation of responses, and experiencing independence and autonomy which give the child a sense of their own power and control. We see the child working at all these, somewhat more gently at Five; but at Five-and-a-half to into Six, these become more challenging issues, perhaps because we now also have Mercury adding to the mix. We now have the need for *power* (will power) and *freedom* to deal with at the same time! We have a fierce independence driven by the developing will and also immature Mercury's enthusiasm for everything, wanting it all, but still without the maturity to prioritize, to modulate their responses, to accept limitations imposed by choices and decisions. This is challenging both for the children and for those who love and care for them.

²⁶ Bates Ames, Louise, and Ilg, Frances L. *Your Five Year Old. Sunny and Serene* (A Dell Paperback, New York, 1979)

Gesell describes how this manifests; here we quote directly from their description of the changes from Five (Moon) to Five-and-a-half years (Mercury)^{27 28}:

So here you are, sailing along, happy as a lark. Your little son and daughter for almost six unbelievable months may have been good as gold. He or she not only plans to be good and wants to be good but actually *is* good. This age can be a parent's dream come true. Thus it can be more than a little disconcerting when all of a sudden things aren't so rosy any more. That little angel who responded, oh, so easily with "Yes, I will," now is quite likely to say "No, I won't." That child for whom mother was indeed the center of the world begins to show every evidence that he is now reserving that spot for himself. What's gotten into him?

Quite possibly, no more than the beginnings of Six-year-oldness, a time that often brings trouble into the calmest households. Not yet a full-fledged Six, nevertheless the child of Five-and-a-half shows an all-too-great readiness to disobey, to go against what is asked or expected of him and he doesn't always do this gently. "Brash" and "combative" are adjectives mothers use in describing this child and all with good reason.

Five-and-a-half is characteristically hesitant, dawdling, indecisive, or at the opposite extreme, over-demanding and explosive. Behaviour is all too often characterized by the opposite extreme, which we saw earlier at Two-and-a-half years of age. That is the child may be extremely shy one minute, then extremely bold the next; very affectionate, and then almost without warning very antagonistic.

And when he doesn't have the courage to defy you outright, he dawdles—which amounts to almost the same thing. That is, whatever you want him to do, very often does not get done.

The Gesell researchers continue:

Emotionally the child of this age may seem to be in an almost constant state of tension, though fortunately most are calmer at school than at home. The child finds it hard to conclude an explosion or sulk or burst of tears once it has begun. This may be the beginning once again, of a tantrum age.

Physically, too, we see signs of a breakup. The almost predictably healthy Five-year-old now suddenly has many colds, headaches, earaches, stomach aches. Or his feet hurt, his face hurts. He may even revert to toileting accidents when he is over excited. The physically rather placid Five has now come to a place where there is an increase in tensional outlets—many hand to mouth gestures, chewing on loose clothing, biting or tapping a pencil.

Motorwise there is more restlessness, less composure...His total body seems less under his control than just formerly. And it becomes increasingly difficult for him to sit still for long periods.

²⁷ Ibid and also Bates Ames, Louise, & Ilg, Frances L. *Your Six Year Old Loving and Defiant* (A Dell Paperback, New York, 1979)

²⁸ Ibid *Your Five Year Old* p. 5-9

...The simple, sure reality of Five is breaking up. Thus the child frequently loses his visual orientation and may often reverse his numbers and letters...

Eyes and hands now function with less speed and sureness than they did at Five, though his behaviour is gathering content and flow. The child at this age may recognise he doesn't *have* the right answer; he just doesn't know how to *get* it, but he does recognize inconsistencies. His organization is breaking up, his reality often shattered. And in a way he enjoys this. Thus the child of this age may voluntarily and experimentally cross his eyes when he doesn't understand something, when he is surprised or when he wants to be silly.

...the golden age of Five gives way in time to the complexity and confusion of Five-and-a-half to Six.

In all this we can see we can see the children's struggle to take hold of the will, in the alternations of boldness with dawdling, with getting started, with stopping, with making and sticking to decisions. If Mercury influences are adding to the mix, with an enthusiastic drive to have it all, it is not an easy situation for a child with, as yet, still maturing capacities to moderate, to prioritize, for self-control, for decision making. It is not surprising that the child of this age is tense and prone to illness and tensional outlets. Something of Mercury can be seen also in the breakup in organization and stability, the restlessness and need for movement and independence. One can get glimpses of the chaos associated with Mercury even in the words 'the complexity and confusion' of this age.

More can be seen in the descriptions of younger Six. As we have said, Gesell puts the end of this stage at Six-and-a-half, but an even unfolding of the stages would put the next stage (Venus) as beginning more at Six and three months.

The tendency towards the shifting fluidity, the mobile approach to life and the need for independence of Mercury, becomes even clearer in Gesell's descriptions of Six. We quote Gesell directly²⁹:

Your typical Six-year-old is a paradoxical little person and *bipolarity* is the name of his game. Whatever he does, he does the opposite just as readily. In fact, sometimes just the choice of some object or course of action immediately triggers an overpowering need of its opposite... The typical Six year old is extremely ambivalent. He wants both of any two opposites and sometimes finds it impossible to choose...."I want and I don't want to" said one little girl when asked at a party why she didn't go to the table and get herself a cookie....One specific example of Six's oppositeness is his frequent reversals of letters and numbers as he reads or prints... Six's reversals are truly something to be reckoned with.

...Six is also stubborn. It is hard for him to make up his mind about big things, but once made up it is hard to change. About small things he does change rapidly.

...One of the Six-year-old's biggest problems is with his mother... At Five, Mother was the center of the child's universe. At Six, things have drastically changed. *He*

²⁹ Op.cit Your Six Year Old pp. 1-15, 31-32, 51-3

child is now the center of his own universe. He wants to be first and best. He wants to win. He wants to have the most of everything.

...it is this quite natural move towards more independence...that makes him so aggressive towards her at times. On the other hand, his effort to be free and independent apparently causes him much anxiety. He worries that his mother might be sick or might die, that she won't be there when he gets home from school. And in his typically opposite extreme way, one minute he says he loves his mother and the next minute he may say he hates her...He depends on her so much, and yet part of him wishes he didn't.

The struggle of this age towards independence, (yet dependent on, and fearing the loss of, his mother, his carer,) this emotional insecurity, their ambivalence, their indecisiveness is all consistent with Mercury. One Mercury type young woman remembered her fierce independence as a child, and said that, in order to be *free* in her choice, she would sometimes choose what she thought the parent did *not* want her to choose but would then be unhappy and conflicted because she did not get what she actually wanted!! Oh poor Six!

...One of the things that bothers parents most is the child's "freshness". "Why do you want to know?" he or she asks pertly. "Why should I?" Try and make me." ...

...He is, part of the time, demanding and difficult because he is still, even at this relatively mature age, extremely insecure, and his emotional needs are great. If with tremendous patience and effort, you can meet these needs, nobody can be a better, warmer, more enthusiastic companion than your Six year old girl, or boy.

...The typical Six-year-old tends to be highly undifferentiated—everything is everywhere. He seems into have little feeling for scale or hierarchy....

This somewhat chaotic aspect and lack of a feeling for order in the child is also very Mercury.

...he may be bold and brash at times, tends to be very babyish about physical hurts...

...The child of this age is a very vulnerable little person, very sensitive emotionally, especially when he is being good. Very small failings, comments or criticism hurt his feelings. But if he is being naughty, once he gets started on a bad tack, he may seem impervious to punishment. That is why he needs so very much protection and understanding from his parents.

However, for all we have said, Six can at times be a delightful addition to the household. One of his most endearing qualities is his extreme enthusiasm. He is enthusiastic for adventure, for new games, for new ideas. He loves to practice and show off his new academic abilities. He loves to ask questions. He loves to be read to. He loves to learn about things.

Another of his attractive characteristics is his emotional warmth. When things are right between him and his parents, as of course they often are, nobody could love a grownup with more warmth and openly expressed affection. And sometimes he can be a wonderfully warm, loyal and admiring friend.

He is most loveable when he dramatizes something he is telling you: "The biggest one I ever saw" ...When happy, he not only smiles and laughs, he fairly dances, with joy....His enthusiasm is contagious. Things mean so much to him that it is a pleasure to provide for him opportunities to feed his very real need for the new and exciting.

This enthusiasm and need for the new and exciting, their sociability when things are going well, are all consistent with Mercury influences, as is their restlessness, their need for movement and clumsiness, and their need to talk, and again a certain chaotic confusion, which Gesell describes next:

...Even by Five-and-a-half and increasingly at Six, the calm composure so characteristic of Five will be disturbed. Now the boy or girl becomes increasingly restless. The child plays indoors or outdoors and sometimes doesn't seem to know which place he wants to be. ...The typical Six year old is almost constantly active, even when sitting....Even while seated the child wriggles and bounces in his chair, sits on the edge, may even fall off....Many children of this age become suddenly clumsy. In fact, as their mothers put it, they would "fall over a piece of string." He seems to be consciously balancing his body in space. He is everywhere—Climbing trees, crawling over, under and about his large block structures. He seems to be all legs and arms as he dances about a room, and his coordination is not always good....he touches, handles and explores everything in sight but there is often more activity than accomplishment.

Five was a talker. Six is even more so. The child of this age *loves* to talk; he loves conversation; he loves to share his thoughts.

In health, at Six—'all mucous membranes seem more sensitive and more easily inflamed than at other ages; eyes may be red and there may be sties. In girls genitalia may become reddened...; nose and throat membranes seem much more sensitive than at other ages. The throat hurts and becomes red and infected and the infection frequently spreads to the ears and lungs. Otitis media (inflammation of the inner ear) again reaches a peak, as it did earlier at Two-and-a-half. The child complains of being too hot and perspires easily... Allergy responses are high.' One would expect more health problems in more stressful ages and this Stage 2 is a stressful age but is it just coincidence that many of these health problems are related so closely to the bodily systems traditionally ruled by Mercury—the lungs, eyes, mucous membranes and lymphatic system? Is temperature regulation also a part of this, for this problem of temperature control occurs again at the next Mercury age of Eleven?

So we find in Gesell's descriptions of children of this age in Gesell Stage 2 that they 'can be expansive and out of bounds, contrary, hard for mother to live with' and 'increasingly restless' and needing to move. In these things they are also rather less modulated in their responses than we would expect from a more mature Mercury type, for this stage can be 'combative', 'violent' and 'bossy', with a strong, but not-yet-in-control will. Yet, they also show many of the characteristics we quoted earlier, which, sadly, Mayo suggested were negative Mercury qualities: 'restlessness, criticalness, meddlesomeness, clumsiness, indecisiveness, excitableness, worrisomeness, over-talkativeness.' At the same time Gesell confirms that children in this age and stage can also be 'lively, enthusiastic, enjoyable' and some of...'the nicest, warmest, friendliest, most delightful little persons in the world' just as

Mercury's finest self would be. As the children move through Six, these latter more positive characteristics show through more and more, and other more Venus qualities start to really shine through.

Eleven years: the fifth Gesell Stage 2

At the next stage, Eleven years, which we hypothesize is also influenced by Mercury forces, we find many similar qualities as seen in Five-and-a-half into Six, though perhaps with a little more control over the will; on some level, at Eleven, the child has a little more choice in playing with what could be seen as Mercurial qualities than at Six. Again Louise Bates Ames and Frances Ilg, along with Sidney Baker, in *Your Ten-to-Fourteen-Year-Old*³⁰ describe a challenging child especially for the mother or main care-giver!

Overall in Eleven, one can again find many of the characteristics of Mercury, need for movement, restlessness, independence, self-centredness, a tendency to chaos and confusion.

Firstly we see again the constant movement: 'Perhaps the two adjectives which describe him best are egocentric and energetic. He is constantly on the go—eating, talking, moving about. It is hard for eleven to sit quietly. He seems almost constantly in motion.' 'Activity, especially when the child is in any way confined, (as when sitting in a chair at an interview) is so constant that one almost becomes seasick when watching.' 'Eleven is always...active, ready for anything. Even when sitting in a chair he twists and turns, waves his arms, wiggles his feet.' 'If there is an object in hand, such as a ball or a glasses case, they repeatedly toss it up and down. As they grow restless they stand, stretch, want to shift to another chair or lie on a couch.' 'The face is as mobile as the rest of the body. There is a remarkable play of expression across it... Eyes sparkle as they shift from side to side, then suddenly dart toward the person they are talking to. The eyebrows may be raised and lowered. Lips are often pursed or the tongue protrudes, usually to one side.' 'The tensional outlets of Eleven involve increased motor activity.'

'In fact the eleven-year-old is bursting with energy and enthusiasm for the things he likes to do, which are many. Outdoors, girl or boy may enjoy almost anything that involves physical activity—and the more active the better.' 'Eleven is not an age when boy or girl characteristically complains that "There's nothing to do." For Eleven, there is almost always something to do.'

The other quality of 'extreme egocentricity' is a 'deep-lying characteristic of the age—rebellion against mother, quarrelling with friends'. Eleven makes 'little or no effort to cooperate in even the most minor ways, let alone smooth things out for other people. He is slow to respond and quick to criticize.' A mature Mercury type would be much more adept at avoiding conflict, even if it were only because it would be in his own interest. But in the child we once again have this inner conflict between the necessity of some dependence on the outside world (family/mother) and desperation for inner freedom and independence from the family but without the maturity to find it without conflict. One can see in Eleven's very uncooperativeness and rebelliousness this crude resistance to imposed tasks and parental expectations and one has to say, perhaps an enjoyment of a little chaos, disharmony

³⁰ Bates Ames, Louise, Ilg, Frances L., & Baker, Sidney M. *Your Ten-to-Fourteen-Year Old* (A Dell Trade Paperback New York 1988) p. see chapter on 'The Eleven-Year-Old' pp. 44-76

and confusion. Perhaps the world assumes too much that the Mercury type should be like other types and seek more harmony and order; it is confronting to think they might enjoy confusing, befuddling, stirring up responses in the world around them. Yet that is what can be seen in many of these descriptions of Eleven. If enjoyment of chaos and confusion is a reality for this age, how do we accommodate that, use it for growth, as the movement teacher mentioned earlier did, by getting her students to design a movement which would confuse an enemy?

Gesell continues:

Eleven is a prize example of a period of very definite disequilibrium. On his behalf, we should note that much of Eleven's inept behaviour can be ascribed to sheer inexperience in making interpersonal adjustments within a culture which is changing as he himself changes. His quarrelling with siblings, rebelliousness against parents, and resistance to imposed tasks and proprieties are largely manifestations of early preadolescent self-assertiveness and self-absorption.

He has 'an almost totally uncooperative and critical manner when it comes to his mother' ... 'Eleven's criticism of mother, his challenges to her rules and restrictions, suggest correctly that the child of this age is more adept at rebellion than response. As he matures he will bring the two into improved balance. But at his present stage of development he tends to set up challenging resistances in order to evoke responses which provide leverage to work against.' 'Eleven not only hates work but resists doing it and acts badly when required to help.' 'The child of this age needs to be motivated from within rather demanded of from without.' 'The approach [for expressions of affection] must be theirs'. 'The child must do his own growing. But the parents can provide the atmosphere which is conducive to good growth.'

In Eleven's behaviour there are also an unevenness and contradictions: 'The eleven-year-old is full of paradoxes, very "good" for a spell and then "very bad". A child can be terrible at home, yet suave, giving and charming away from home.' '[Elevens show] that sudden sweep from high to low, the unaccountable shift in mood, the same rudeness, the same devilish unreasonableness [as seen at five and a half years].' In mood: they can wake up peevish in the morning and yet be bright in the afternoon; 'sudden drops, high peaks, and junglelike confusion.' A common emotion in Eleven is anger — 'sudden, furious outbursts uncontrolled, especially when directed toward younger siblings.' 'Eleven is more deeply involved [emotionally than Ten] and needs to find ways to come back to equilibrium.' There are 'fluctuations' even in appetite, 'a ravenous appetite might be followed by a poor or finicky one.' 'Eleven is one of the most tearful ages.'

Away from home, Eleven can be 'wonderful', 'mannerly, helpful, and outgoing.' This would seem to confirm that his rebelliousness is indeed mostly against parental restrictions. 'An eleven-year-old at his best can be a delightful person — alert, imaginative, outgoing, energetic, ready for anything.' 'They really do enjoy life and take great interest in all that goes on. In fact, many are regular gossips.' Gesell researchers comment: 'In response to the questions which we, the examiners, ask when we interview them they will tell us anything, far more about family and family problems and activities than we bargained for. As one

teacher of eleven-year-olds commented, “When I get through teaching this class, I’m going to retire and live on blackmail.””

In relation to people, Eleven shows very Mercurial tendencies in ‘their responsiveness to people.’ ‘Elevens are especially interested in constant interaction (positive or negative) with other people.’ However ‘Elevens’ relationship with people is often far from positive.’ ‘Elevens seem to gather strength by an “against” response. They strike out, hardly realizing what they are doing. This striking out—in action, words and feelings—is all the more apparent to us because it is against people.’ ‘Elevens rarely choose to be alone and are forever in the midst of the family circle, even though they get on badly with both parents and siblings.’ ‘Perhaps no other age gets on as badly as Eleven does with siblings.’ Yet Elevens ‘are right in the midst of any family activity, working at the dining room table, responding to everything that is going on around them, fearful they will miss something. In fact, some spend very little time in their rooms. But even in the family group Eleven is fidgety and restless...’

Gesell suggests that ‘relatively fearless Ten has become more fearful at eleven. Children of this age seem afraid to be alone. This may account for their constant presence in the family circle and may be the reason they spend so little time in their rooms. They don’t talk about this fear but may ask to have the light on in the hall and the door open. They look in closets or under the bed.’ ‘If forced to be alone, Eleven might imaginatively become two people to play both side of a chess or a baseball game so that he can experience that feeling of interplay which is enjoyed so much.’

At school this need for social interaction is equally evident. ‘Eleven comes to school because of the “kids”. The need for contemporaries, even when the child gets along badly with them, is insatiable. They tease, chase, push, grab or hit classmates, sometimes not realizing how much this may hurt, at times with actual intent to hurt. But Eleven also nudges or pokes with an elbow in a friendly way to get a neighbours attention.’ ‘Eleven clusters into small groups. There is nothing casual here. They may come together with intent as much for evil as for good.’ ‘The group may suddenly dissolve to exclude certain unwanted members. Then the nucleus reforms and may or may not allow the excluded one or ones to re-enter its confines.’ What a Mercurial image!

With friendships, which are important to Eleven, and are often intense and strong, quarrelling and making up are frequent with girls, and even the ‘boys do more quarrelling with friends than they used to.’ Both boys and girls tend to have more than one good friend. ‘Some just loosely have “a whole gang” of friends; others arrange them in a definite hierarchy.’ ‘One Eleven typically asks [the interviewer], “Could I just say who *isn’t* my best friend?”’ ‘Play can be included in their relationships with people, but the people are now actually more important than the play.’

School behaviours also reflect Mercury qualities, unfortunately including many of the negative ones³¹ — ‘Many Elevens are still excited about learning. Compared to Tens, may show even more enthusiasm but less organization. Seem to thrive on competition.’ ‘A turn for the worse often appears in school behaviour.’ Elevens can be very fatigable, show uneven performance, have frequent illnesses. Many become ‘restless, careless, forgetful,

³¹ Ibid pp. 300-305

boisterous, they start day dreaming, dawdling.' Attention span is very short. Still, school behaviour is usually better than at home. Much interaction among children: 'notes, spitballs, teasing, chasing, hitting.' 'Elevens are often resentful and rebellious against teacher', may be quite difficult to manage. 'Very restless and active.' 'Though Elevens don't want to be held with an iron hand, they do prefer a tough teacher, one who can challenge them.'

Eleven is in constant motion and loves gross motor activities but is also a watcher, explorer and above all, a conversationalist.' 'Eleven loves to argue, but as one mother explained, "It is all one way. *You* cannot argue with *him*.'" This is rather reminiscent of the comment about the Mercury type that if he discovers you know more than him about a subject he will change the topic!

On health Gesell comments—

Though Eleven's health may be quite good, there is a tendency to an increasing number of colds, flu, ear infections, and occasionally even pneumonia. The tendency for an infection to spread, as into ears and lungs or even into the meninges, as in mumps meningitis, is a quality of the age, as it was at the earlier age of five and a half to six years. Elevens' whole physical mechanism is very labile. All of a sudden a boy may feel intolerably hot and fling off his coat. With any overexertion or overexcitement allergic children may develop asthma...Fatigue is more pronounced than it has been and may be evident in an increased need for sleep.

Once again we see ailments associated with the lungs, mucous membranes and glandular systems, all associated with Mercury. Is it possible that Elevens' ability to cry more easily is also associated with Mercury's capacity to move bodily fluids more freely?

Overall it would seem that understanding the influence of Mercury on Eleven, helps to understand better their otherwise rather puzzling behaviours especially perhaps their irrepressible movement and tendency to create chaos as well as their enthusiasm, love of conversation and ability to be socially charming.

Seventeen years: the extrapolated sixth Gesell Stage 2

Seventeen years is outside the the scope of the Gesell studies. This is an age in the school life of many students when they are forced to take their studies more seriously, and curb or at least limit their social activities for a time. While the increasing maturity of the young people would help with this, a Mercury stage would not make this easy and one hears many a parent bemoaning this conflict between social life and study of their sons and daughters in this year. One mother commented that she had learned to try to leave her Seventeen year old able to be much more free in his social activities if she wanted him to be open with her. Freedom in return for sociability. That is a very Mercury deal! Freedom is something all parents need to learn to negotiate better while also asking for responsibility in return.

Conclusion:

The aim of this essay was to examine whether the archetypal influences and qualities associated with Mercury could be found to any significant degree in the behaviour of children in Gesell Stage 2. We have found that there is indeed evidence of Mercury in the children's behaviour, in their sense of self, in their thinking, feeling, relationships with

people and in their will and in their giving priority to having freedom in their inner life. As we have seen, the order of the planets— Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn— represents both youth to old age, and innocence to wisdom, with mature qualities involving a wiser, more developed consciousness of the world and its ways. Mercury falls at the more youthful end of the spectrum, with a tendency, while not as innocent as Moon, yet still with the lively sanguinity of youth. Children's development in the Mercury stages reflect the enthusiasm and sociability to be expected from Mercury, but also the challenges driven by the need for independence and freedom in movement, which brings with it a certain chaotic element in these stages.

A metaphor for the lively social nature of Mercury can be found in the spreading, moving leaves with which Mercury is associated in trees—that part of the plant which reaches furthest into the world, to the sun, the wind, the rain, into the exchanges with the environment.

From the beginning in child development in the Mercury stages one sees these interested, enthusiastic social exchanges and movement into the environment. In the first Mercury stage at 6-8 to 12 weeks, one already sees an increase in movement, coordination and communication. Movement is more free and less reflexive, and smiles and verbalization come more readily. By the next Mercury stage consisting of the last two months of the first year, the child is also showing a surprisingly determined will, to be more independent, to be free to choose and move. We also see the perhaps inevitable conflict between dependence and independence, a new preference for asymmetrical movement, and even the recognition of the powers of persuasion, associated with Mercury. The negativism, disequilibrium and 'breaking up' of behaviour of the Stage 2 described by Gesell begins to appear, as the Mercurial needs for independence and freedom of movement, along with a definite sociability and delighted interest in the world, become more evident.

At Two and a half years, behaviour is complex and challenging. Children show a vast and enthusiastic interest in all that happens but they want it all and do not want to choose. They are more wily than one might think, true to Mercury's cleverness. They too need movement and hate restrictions and interruptions by others—they want the control and freedom of Mercury. By the next Mercury stage of Five and a half, we see a fierce independence driven by the developing will and also immature Mercury's enthusiasm for everything, wanting it all, but still without the maturity to prioritize, to modulate their responses, to accept limitations imposed by choices and decisions. We see again the restlessness, the clumsiness and need for movement and get glimpses of the chaos associated with Mercury. The conflict between dependence and independence also appears again as well as the wonderful enthusiasm for the new and exciting, and sociability when things are going well. Illness involving the lungs, eyes, mucous membranes and lymphatic system, all associated with Mercury, are prevalent, as they are at the other Mercury ages.

At Eleven, one can again find many of the characteristics of Mercury, need for movement, restlessness, independence, self-centredness, a tendency to chaos and confusion. At the same time one sees very Mercurial tendencies in their responsiveness to people. They can be, enthusiastic, conversational and socially charming or they can be adversarial, critical and demanding, especially at home.

So overall, Mercury offers a very social, if somewhat self centred experience where they find themselves most comfortably in interaction with others, rather than alone.

In thinking, Mercury offers a wide ranging enthusiasm, quick flexible thinking and more superficial exploration, rather than serious in depth study, of ideas. In feeling too the experience is somewhat sanguine and more light hearted, if only they have a little freedom, movement and independence. They actually enjoy a little chaos. Their will power, while feisty, is not so long lasting.

The development in the Mercury stages does indeed reveal a great deal of Mercury and does not just reflect incremental, chronological development, for much will change in the following stage as the influences of Venus again begin their work, and the determined independence and restlessness of Mercury calms down to reveal the affectionate good nature and friendly helpfulness of a Venus nature. However the opportunity that the Mercury stage offers in experiencing a different way of being in the world — to be sociable, flexible, interested, enthusiastic, charming, amusing, independent, quick thinking, able to live in the present — this is a great gift to childhood and ourselves (though with this stage it might have been a bit challenging along the way!)

An understanding of the planetary influences and qualities offers another way of understanding children, their motivations and needs in each Gesell stage, in this case a Mercury stage. This allows us to support children better, acknowledging this aspect of developmental factors. In education, this makes possible a more refined way of meeting children's needs, both individually and in the classroom. For those who are involved in healing and are familiar with the planetary influences in speech, eurythmy gesture and metal therapies, this knowledge offers an opportunity to observe each age group more carefully and to use the therapies in even more precise ways. Knowing these developmental tendencies helps us to separate these factors from the individual and environmental factors. Further understanding of children and the planetary influences in the broader context of development can be found in the child development profiles at www.creativelivingwithchildren.com.

What helps the Mercury type and children in Gesell Stage 2

From all this we can identify many things which might help support children who are by nature a Mercury type or who are in a Mercury stage. We can help them by being aware of their needs and meeting these better. Of course when children have a strong inherent temperament which is different from the influences of the planetary stage they are in, the manifestation of these needs may not be so strong. Awareness of these needs may also help our relationships with Mercury type adults!!

Some qualities and needs associated with the Mercury type to be considered in relation to child development and how we can support children:

- The major issue for the Mercury type is their need for *freedom*. Of all the qualities of Mercury to be found in Gesell Stage 2 children which so confounds and troubles the child's carers, it is this need for freedom or at least the feeling in the children that

they are free to make their own choices, to follow their own enthusiastic interests. This is further complicated by the child in this stage not wanting to limit themselves by choices at all—they want it all! This need for the freedom to experience all the possibilities underlies the contrariness which causes the most trouble.

First to deal with the need for freedom: at any point when the children feel mandated (pseudonym for: instructed, authorized, directed, delegated, assigned, required, commanded!) they may feel the inner necessity to resist, to protect their power of choice and their freedom. We need to be wise enough to help children wherever possible to come to decisions and actions from within, to feel these are their own, not ours. This is complicated by the fact that in this stage the child also finds it hard to make and stick to decisions (also a weakness of Mercury).

This need for freedom does not mean at all, and indeed must not mean, that adults should leave everything to the children; but the adults need to orchestrate it so that the children have room to move *towards* what is required, and not react with *resistance or backing away* because of their need for independence. The more investment we adults have in something we want them to do, and the more we show this with our expectations, frustration, anger, bossiness or an autocratic approach, the more the children at this Stage may feel trapped and rebel, resist us and fight us back. We have to find another way.

We have to find another way of interacting which is less threatening to their need for freedom and independence. Where possible, with very young children, it is wise to avoid “I” – “You” confrontations by taking care with physical postures, gestures and language. Instead of standing above or opposite them, it is more useful to come from ‘beside’, to sit beside, to get ourselves more at their level. It is more effective if we use inclusive language like “we”, “our family”, rather than “I” (which is more likely to be resisted). It is more effective to use factual statements rather than questions (which offer the possibility of rejection.) So we can say “we”, “we are all getting dressed”, “off we all go!”, “in this house”, “this is the way we do it”, “this is where socks live”, “this is a red dress day”. We exert our adult ‘will’ no less strongly, not through the centred personal “I”, but by sweeping them along within the general periphery of “us” and “our” environment and how things are done within it. Within the group consciousness of the tribe, one could say.

To some extent, these things can be appropriate to avoid confrontation with all ages! As adults too, if you want to avoid conflict in a meeting with someone you have issues with, it is best to sit *beside* them not *opposite* them! With older children (already with Stage 2 Elevens) and adults, if you want obedience you command (and good luck to you!), but if you want cooperation, you share and *negotiate*.

As children get older, more responsibility is asked in return for the freedoms they demand. Then we adults need to become skilled negotiators and be prepared to follow up on negotiated consequences. Healthy democracy is based on responsibility and at Eleven one could say the child is demanding democratic rights, if simplified ones! In the Steiner Waldorf Curriculum at this age, they learn about early Greek democracy, meeting this need right on time. But Greek democracy also included the

service of slaves! (You?) By the final Stage 2 year, Seventeen, adults really need to be very clear in their thinking about boundaries and their own and the children's rights, as well as skills in negotiating agreements with consequences. Hopefully, by then, you will have also taught them, by example, how to negotiate responsibly! The Seventeen year old will also want their freedom, but it is up to us to teach them that respect and consideration of others demands that they still take responsibility even within new freedoms. So, for example, we teach them that even adults, who care for each other and live together, tell each other what they are doing and whether they expect to come home to dinner or sleep that night or when there is a change of plans!! This was never so easy as it is now with mobile phones!!

With the young child who needs order, routines, predictability, love and reassurance in their lives we can try to let the order, routines and predictability be very strongly contained in the environment within which we all live. This way we can take the role of giving love and reassurance without these being sabotaged by fights over other things, like bed times. Indeed outer order, routines, designated places for things can help all those with a Mercurial bent to bring form into their scattered-ness. A regular place for bags, shoes and keys means they get lost less easily! With children it helps to stay with the same way, the same order of doing things where we can, so that the need for directions and decisions are avoided wherever possible. Exceptions to the routine should happen infrequently enough to be just that—exceptional. “Just this once because Aunt Jane is here!” “Just today, because it is a holiday tomorrow.” The power of routines to carry the children and ourselves should not be underestimated, but we adults have to be very disciplined to set them up in the first place and to keep to them. Of course the Mercury type and stages may well resist order and routines, but they need it nevertheless. It helps if we can keep these flexible as well.

All the way through childhood, but especially as they grow older, we need to stop to ask ourselves what the children are really asking for in their behaviours. What needs are not being met in the case of misbehaviours? Are they hungry, tired, scared? Is it because we are asking too much, have done too much with young children that they are having tantrums at the end of a busy day? In the case of the Mercury stage children (also Saturn stage children) we specially need to ask whether they are asking for more feeling of freedom, more independence. We have to learn to identify just what tasks or part of tasks they in fact *can* do with our careful (preferably well-disguised) support? For adults this is sometimes ‘preparing the space’, doing the organization for something to happen, or diplomatically helping with the ‘too hard’ or ‘unsafe’ parts but letting the children feel empowered by doing the parts they can do themselves. For example, a very young child can cut a banana with a blunt knife, but one would not give him a very sharp knife to cut a raw carrot! We need to educate them about safety, as well as empowering them by offering opportunities to do more challenging things.

We also need to watch our own less conscious, egotistical ‘power play’ behaviour which will quickly challenge the child's need for independence. On the other hand, true authoritativeness in ourselves offers support to the child without threatening their autonomy.

- The need to have it all: The need for freedom also manifests in another way in Mercury stage children and the Mercury type—they are so enthusiastic and interested in participating in life that they have great difficulties with decision making because they *do not want to give up any possibilities* of what they can have or what they can do. *They want it all, now.* Gesell described this as ‘oppositional behaviour’ for when they want opposite things, this is where it is most obvious and confusing for us; we are suggesting that when Mercury is involved that it is more than the child just wanting the opposite thing, but that the child does not want to choose at all between any options.

With maturity they will learn how to prioritize, to order, but young children do not yet have these skills or the self-discipline required to accept delayed gratification. They need help from us with this. How can we reframe situations so that decisions made are not either/or decisions, but rather a prioritizing of choices. ‘This one today, that one tomorrow.’ Can we make matter of fact statements that avoid decisions altogether but are indirect suggestions. How can we make the child feel that they are not going to miss out altogether on a choice, though they may have to wait a bit longer to get another option? Not easy, but it is a start in meeting these needs which cause parents and children so much difficulty.

- The Mercury type also needs one ‘authority’ person in their life whom they can trust sufficiently to be themselves with, to reflect on themselves with. The Mercury type can be so good at being flexible, turning this way and that with different people to get what they want, to entertain, amuse, be liked—being the jester, the life of the party, the chameleon— and in this they can lose touch with themselves. With an authority figure, whom they not only trust but feel understood by, the Mercury type can let go and just ‘be’. In dealing with children in a Mercury stage this may be a helpful clue: that the child may respond to the adult who understands them and has true ‘authority’ (Jupiter) in their being— we need to gather up our ‘bigness’ and ‘wisdom’ and ‘our authorship for our living’ for them! We also need to see past their provocative behaviours to try to understand who they really are and what they need, and act on that. We need to draw out of them their best selves by our belief in them. In this way we can be the person with the authority and the understanding to whom they can turn and with whom they can be themselves.

It should not be underestimated how effective it can be for a respected authority to affirm good character qualities in the child to encourage the repetition of admirable moral actions in the future. This acceptance of a real authority figure, by even Mercury children, is confirmed by the fact that Elevens themselves told the Gesell researchers that ‘though they don’t want to be held by an iron hand, they do prefer a tough teacher, one who can challenge them.’

However, we adults also need to learn quickly, before resistances and resentments set in, how to encourage children to be motivated from within, to develop healthy will, self reliance, resilience, responsibility, which can eventually be put to good use in serving the world. Rebelliousness in an otherwise healthy child and environment is a sure sign that we need to look again for the motivating factors behind their rebelliousness, for their unmet needs. Given the difficult behaviour Gesell describes

in the stage of development we are relating to Mercury influences, our task will not be an easy one, but these are places to at least begin.

- We need to be awake to when children at this stage are trapped in resistance behaviours. It is important to observe children in Mercury stages to see whether they are at the mercy of their resistance to the outer world (often represented by adults!) and need help to respond from inner strength and their own chosen purpose/preference instead. The children's need for feelings of freedom and independence in a Mercury stage needs to be met in age appropriate ways first if their resistance and apparent contrariness of this stage are to be avoided or minimized. Acknowledgement to the child, especially the older child, of their needs is a good place to start. As can the question: "What would help?" So often the child can tell us, but we forget to ask, ask at the wrong moment, or worse, don't want to hear at all.
- The Mercury type's need for movement is a challenge. Sometimes the constant movement and fidgeting of children at this stage is very irritating for other people who would appreciate some peace. Restlessness, messiness and clumsiness all impact others in the children's environment and can aggravate social relationships. Relationships with siblings are particularly affected by this. To make things worse, children in this stage seem to enjoy stirring things up and so may have no inner motivation to stop the behaviour. Channelling of the children's need for movement into constructive movement activities will help more than chastisement for behaviour, much of which is very difficult for the child to control. It is more helpful to find ways to go *with* the movement' rather than against it. Give the movement something to *do*! This is the imaginative task of the adult! Similarly the child of Six also needs to be given something for his strong *will* to do.

Dance and music might contain and direct the movement, for example. Finger songs and nursery rhymes, with their rhyme and repetition might help the young child. Soothing quiet times on swings and hammocks allow rest with movement. Traditional games like skipping, hopscotch, 'sticks', marbles encourage controlled movement in primary aged children. Crafts such as finger knitting, and modelling clay, biscuit dough and marzipan can give fiddly fingers something to work creatively with. Artistic work allows more subtle movement in the soul.

Teachers the world over are being challenged by children with underdeveloped sense of movement, balance and our place in space. How does this complicate the need for movement in the Mercury stages and the chaos these already may bring? Parents, teachers and carers of children need to make sure children have many chances for healthy movement in their play, especially up to age seven years and protection from activities which reduce movement like 'screen time'. These latter compromise sensory and physical development and compound such a need for movement in these stages.

- We need to recognise the Mercury type's frustration and impatience with sameness, static-ness, stuck-ness, stillness, slowness in other people and the environment. An image that comes to mind is the young child's propensity to poke and prod the poor

pet guinea pig! They don't want it to be still! They want it to move!! Is this impatience with stillness (doing nothing) just another another manifestation of the need for movement? How do we help the child to deal with this in others? How do we build empathy in the child for people with other ways of being which are less quick thinking, slower, more fixed? How do we help them to find compassion and understanding rather than respond with teasing or criticalness? How do we meet their quick thinking and need for change in constructive ways?

- **Love of chaos and confusion.** It needs to be realised that the Mercury type may not want to avoid chaos and confusion but may revel in it! They may enjoy their capacity to live in chaos, while others are being disturbed by it. They may enjoy setting it up! This is a challenge for all other types to find their own capacity for inner centredness to be able to tolerate chaos and confusion long enough to help children in a Mercury stage. It is also a challenge to find a way to work with this love of chaos by finding ways the children can learn to control it while having fun with it. We need to learn what sort of movement helps in this. It is not direct movement of running around the oval or the block, or single activities that is needed but variation and movement which involves especially dodging and weaving, encountering obstacles to go around, sideways movements, asymmetry, the challenge of an obstacle course, not necessarily fast, not necessarily up and down, touching, not touching. It involves the challenge of being in control within changing varied situations, within chaos.
- **The Mercury type can be dominated by the influences of the outer world** – they may need more inwardly directed control. Children and adults influenced by these Mercury tendencies can be so enthusiastic, curious about and interested in the world around them, they can be drawn out into the world so much that they lose a firm sense of themselves and what *they* want. They may need help to reconnect inwardly with themselves, something they may resist. How can we support children in learning ways to be less distracted by outer experiences and more able to create their own clearer personal boundaries and personal space, when they need to? Do they need times of less stimulation? Do they need a space of their own, however small, that they can be encouraged to withdraw to when they are 'losing themselves' in the world—a 're-gathering' space. Such children, like hyperactive children, may need to be taught this skill of withdrawal for regathering the self. How does the Mercury type find their own quiet inner space which they need as a healthy balance to all the outwardness, the excessive stimulation they seek? Within rhythmic movement? Swings? Hammocks? Walking? Swimming? Water play?
- Another aspect of this dominance of the outer world on the Mercury type is to be seen in **their over-dependence on social interaction**. The temptation for the Mercury type is to just continue to connect, particularly today, even when alone, through social networking, mobile phone and text messaging. Research is showing that teenagers may even make themselves available throughout the night, cutting out precious sleep time! One might suspect the Moon and Venus types (who find it hard to say 'no' to friends) as well as sociable Mercury types, are the most likely to

be doing this! They may need help to draw boundaries for themselves regarding these social activities, such as time restraints, sleep protection strategies etc.

They may need help to feel more comfortable with being alone at times and not dependent on others. One sees this clearly with Elevens, who will even play games with an imaginary opponent when alone! Appreciation of quiet alone time may be a skill that today may have to be taught, preferably when the child is NOT in a Mercury (or Moon or Venus) stage! Times of natural withdrawal, the Mars and Saturn stages (7, 9, 13, and 15 years), are ideal for this. The capacity to meet oneself, alone, is a necessary part of deepening self-knowledge.

It may be that the Mercury type and stages also need help to learn to find a peaceful, conflict free, individual space while still being *with* others. If one does not want to isolate the child, then the compromise position would be to help them to co-exist peacefully within the family group, protecting others from their negative interactions by finding individual challenges to keep them stimulated within their own space.

- **Learning constructive interactions.** The Mercury tendency is to keep up interaction with others, even a deliberate stirring up of others, for even negative interaction is better than none, as we saw in Eleven-year-oldness. They may need help in learning how to create constructive interactions with others, especially siblings, and help with recognising legitimate forms of interaction, argument (debate) and diplomatic feedback, as different from hurtful quarrelling and criticism. Avoidance of arguments about emotional issues, where there can be no right or wrong helps in this. This is an opportunity for education about communication skills and the benefits of being friends with (that is nice to) lots of people, something the Mercury type inherently prefers.
- These children need appreciation for their ability to live so well in the present and for their generosity of spirit. However they may also need more help in learning to consider the future and past. They may need help with planning and thinking more long term.
- They need appreciation for Mercury's gifts to the social sphere, their wonderful sociability, despite their sometimes bringing a certain chaos into the situation!
- With children of the Mercury type and in the Mercury stage we may need to accept Mercury's short-lived will. We may need to make tasks shorter, redefined, with fewer expectations of prolonged effort at these stages of childhood?

Working with these needs will maximise the wonderful gifts of each planetary influence in children's development.