The way to the heart is through the head

Within and behind our everyday world is another world, inaccessible to our present day perception but accessible, if we make the effort, to our thinking. For the Greek initiate Plato in 400 B.C., this other world was more real than our everyday world. It was a world of living, shining forms of which the physical objects of our natural environment, as beautiful and precious as they are, are merely the shadows. Plato saw two different worlds—one light-filled and enduring, the other shadowy and transitory. He felt the contrast starkly. Therefore his philosophy was dualistic, a view of two interpenetrating but distinct worlds.
For most of us, since Plato's time and continuing today, the everyday world of transitory objects and events is experienced as the real world. That other, invisible, world of Forms, or Archetypes, so important to Plato, has been called the ideal world. The ideal world can reach into the human soul through thinking—by means of ideals, images, concepts, and ideas.

The dualistic worldview of the contrast between two worlds, between spirit and matter, between “I” and “world,” between soul and body, persisted for centuries in human consciousness. Putting it very simply, one could say it has been the task of theology and religion to study the ideal world, the task of science to study the real world, the task of philosophy to describe our human experience of reality as a link bridging these two worlds, and the task of the arts to bring the ideal within the real to greater expression and visibility.

For 2,000 years after Plato in the West (and for longer in the East), it was universally acknowledged, and by some experienced, that the invisible ideal world was the home of God—of conscious, living spiritual beings and forces from which our material world on Earth had descended, condensed, and evolved. In these ancient worldviews, which persist today in indigenous cultures, the Sun, moon, planets and stars belong to the world of creative spiritual beings and forces. Even into the modern world, poets and artists have often felt the ideal world living in their souls when they are seized by creative imagination and inspiration.

The poet and playwright Friedrich Schiller wrote the following lines at the end of the 18th century:

*Truth seek we both,*
*Thou outside in life,*
*I in the heart within.*
*Surely each will find it,*
*For the eye, if healthy,*
*Encounters God in outer life.*
*And the heart, if healthy,*
*Surely mirrors all Creation.*
By using the qualifier “if healthy,” Schiller was perhaps diagnosing a soul illness in those contemporaries who were not convinced of God’s presence in the outer world of phenomena, nor in their inner thought-world of mind and heart. If so, the illness can be traced back to the sea change in thinking that had begun gradually two centuries earlier due to the influence of Copernicus, Galileo, and Isaac Newton, known today as the Scientific Revolution. This change in consciousness spelled the end, in all scientific thinking from that time onward, of Plato’s ideal world of divine living spirit-forms from which intelligence and life flowed into each individual in the huge variety of plants, animals, and humans on Earth.

Now there would be just one world, a self-sufficient world of matter energized from its own innate mechanisms and needing no help from the ideal or the divine. God was still in heaven, but heaven, for human thinking, had become an abstract, distant realm. God had wound up the clock of the universe and now, as viewed by the new science, it was running very well by itself according to its inherent mechanical laws.

The momentum and global spread of this new one-world scientific thinking was unstoppable, and has continued to the present day, not only in science but in all realms of thought, including religion. Early on, objections were raised by poets, artists, and others who had a strong feeling of active spiritual impulses in their lives, their work, and in the world. The poet and artist William Blake declared:

“…and twofold always. May God us keep from single vision And Newton’s sleep.”

The scientist and poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, a friend of Schiller, also opposed the dominant thinking of his time. For Goethe, the active participation of the ideal world in all the phenomena of Nature was not a theory; it was a living, direct experience. Out of this direct experience he wrote scientific treatises on the metamorphosis of plants and on color as a spiritual-physical interplay between light and darkness. For Goethe, scientific discovery of the true workings of the natural world was only possible if the scientist was motivated by a love and reverence for Nature.

The 19th century was not yet ready for a science based on a loving partnership with Nature, because too few were able to see in Nature what Goethe’s thinking saw. Not even Schiller’s thinking was alive enough to enable him to follow Goethe in seeing the living ideas/ideals within the natural world. Goethe was not clairvoyant, but his powers of thinking and observation were far ahead of his time. Goethe was able to liberate his thinking capacities and achieve a degree
of freedom from the materialism of his age.

In the 20th century, Rudolf Steiner revived Goethe’s scientific approach and developed it further. This resulted in a remarkable creative output: biodynamic agriculture, anthroposophic medicine, Waldorf education, eurythmy, rhythmical massage, and new approaches to speech, drama, singing, painting, sculpture, design, architecture, botany, and economics. In these disciplines, the practitioner’s work is both scientific and artistic. Scientific because, through practice, one seeks to know, factually and objectively, the spiritual ideal elements (and the physical elements, too) within one’s discipline and their characteristic ways of working. Artistic because, through practice, one seeks to bring one’s own creative forces into play to enhance and develop the expression of the ideal elements living in the discipline.

For Steiner too, the ideal world was a concrete experience. Like Goethe, he experienced it not as a world separate and remote, but abiding with us and in us and in inseparable union with our perceived reality, as expressed in the maxim, “Matter is never without Spirit.” For Goethe and Steiner there was just one world, a shared reality of matter and spirit.

By contrast, one who observes science as it is practiced today can have the impression that the two worlds of Plato have returned, but in an inverted form. For Plato and the other ancient philosophers who acknowledged an ideal world, it was an active world from which proceeded the causes of all happenings in the real world: “As above, so below.” But today, our biomedical science assumes that the ultimate causes for health, illness, and all that goes on in the human body and mind are working at the sub-microscopic level of our molecules and genes. This assumption, called reductionism, leads modern biomedical scientists to dissect down to ever deeper levels of living organisms, always seeking ever smaller parts whose activities are thought to trickle upward to determine the health of the whole organism: “As below, so above.”

The study of this netherworld of molecules (molecular biology, genetic engineering, nanotechnology, etc.) would of course be impossible with our unaided senses, so powerful and sophisticated instruments are necessary, like the electron microscope and many others.

There is no doubt that the reductionist approach to medicine and its accompanying technology have made life-saving discoveries, like insulin, antibiotics, and other hormones and drugs. Steiner clearly applauded such discoveries. Yet he also said that the most perfect knowledge of the molecular and biochemical processes underlying an illness might still not help us in understanding how to heal it because, in order to heal, we must direct our observation and
thinking not from below upward but from above downward. He said in his first lecture course to physicians that the most important forces working in cells are the same forces that work in the universe around us, fully accessible to our experience—i.e., to the observation of our unaided senses and to our healthy thinking.

We usually use the noun experience to describe the result of active participation in life and the world, especially having lived through an event and learned from it. The learning is conditional on being awake and on one's interest, courage, and goodwill in actively grasping the lesson offered by the experience, even though, due to our errors, the lesson may be painful.

Most of us have found that what we learn through experience is far more valuable than the knowledge gained through studying and thinking. With experience, our knowledge is put to the test by life itself. Is our knowledge realistic and practical? Does it work? Thinking alone cannot answer these questions because our thinking today is abstract. Thinking is not immersed in reality. It seems to function in its own virtual sphere within our head, insulated from the workings of the great universe in which we live. Our thinking is usually just a pale reflection of the physical reality around us. But to regard this "virtuality" as expressing the true nature of thinking is like mistaking the shadow of a human being for the real human being. Thinking has not always been so abstract and shadowy as it is today. Nor will it be so in the future. We are living now through a low point in the evolution of the human faculty of thinking.

To help us ascend from that low point was Steiner's mission in writing The Philosophy of Freedom (first published in Berlin, in 1894) and in all his subsequent labors. In a letter to a friend, Steiner said of The Philosophy of Freedom, "I was not setting forth a doctrine, but simply recording inner experiences through which I had actually passed...personal experience in every single sentence." Steiner then said that writing the book was an intense personal struggle that he compared to climbing a mountain for the first time and having to find the right path as you go.

Thus the book itself is a record and an example of the kind of thinking into which our ordinary thinking must evolve if our global culture is to become healthy. Thinking must not remain only in the head, but must become alive and as immersed in real life as the practical experience of our hands. As thinking connects with its living source and becomes heart-centered, ideas can become life-forces.

Scientific thinking today is "head-thinking" only. It lacks the warmth and spiritual power to
motivate researchers to work for the highest good, so they are easily tempted to work instead for personal gain. In this way the mission of science is corrupted, and the health of the Earth and all its inhabitants suffers.

Only a scientific thinking based on love and reverence for the natural world can lead researchers to the hidden truths within Nature. These must not be mere sentiments grafted onto an arid intellectual science that seeks to control Nature. Love and reverence for the world are pulsing in the heart of any scientist who learns to bring life into thinking.

All our attempts to solve the world’s problems start from our thinking about them, so before anything else can be healed, our thinking must be healed.

Many of us today carry love in our hearts but often the love is ineffectual because we lack love in our intellect. A loving intellect is nothing soft or sentimental—it is rigorous, truth-seeking, and practical. But rather than contracting into a narrow focus to study molecules, a loving intellect expands its field of vision to include the ideal world in its scientific worldview. Such an intellect works not from the head alone, but from the integrated and healthy whole human being. The thinking of the loving intellect is not content to reflect the world as “through a glass darkly,” but it courageously seeks to meet the world in living experience, face to face.
A New Kind of Thinking

Written by Philip Incao, M.D.
Friday, 01 September 2017 00:00 - Last Updated Tuesday, 22 January 2019 08:51

This article appeared in *Pathways to Family Wellness* magazine, Issue #55.

View [Article Resources](#).

View [Author Bio](#).

To purchase this issue, [Order Here](#).