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 **The
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Wilhelm Reich's Legacy: Bombshells in Science

Peter A. Crist, M.D.

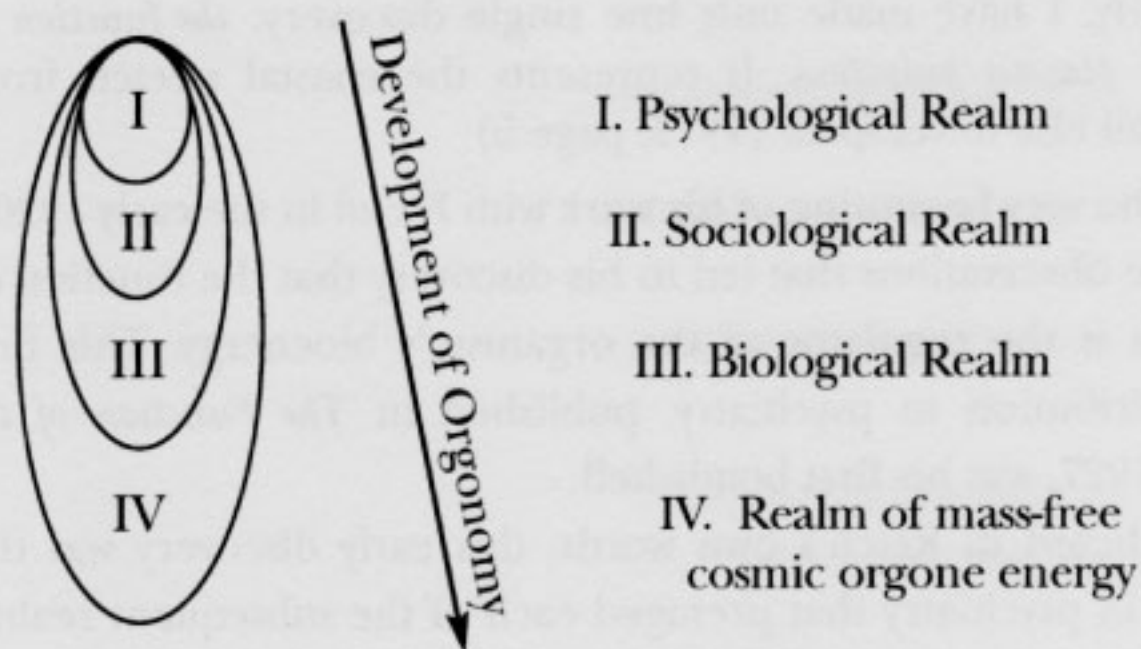
The following remarks were made by Peter A. Crist, M.D., President of the American College of Orgonomy, at the ACO Annual Dinner on November 3, 2007. The dinner was held at the Wyndham Princeton Forrestal Hotel and Conference Center, Plainsboro, NJ.

On our invitation to this dinner we wrote that we were: "Celebrating the Life, Honoring the Work, Continuing the Legacy of Wilhelm Reich on the Fiftieth Anniversary of his Death."

Fifty years ago today Wilhelm Reich, the greatest natural scientist in history, died of a heart attack, alone, in a cell in the Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary. The loss to his loved ones was tremendous, the loss to the world immeasurable. We are here because of the remarkable body of work he accomplished, and the legacy he gave to the world, in the 60 years of his short life. We are here, however, not to mourn his loss but to celebrate his life and continue the work he pioneered.

His professional life began in psychoanalysis, as a star student of Sigmund Freud, in the realm of unconscious emotions; however, his work led him into progressively deeper and broader realms as he investigated social problems, and then biology. In 1940, with his discovery of the atmospheric orgone, he entered the deepest and broadest realm: the physics of mass-free cosmic energy.

The following is a diagram of the realms of Reich's work modified from the one found in his book *Ether, God and Devil* (1949):



Early in 1941 he arranged a meeting with the most well-known physicist of the day, Albert Einstein. After describing to Einstein that the temperature in an orgone energy accumulator was consistently higher than that of the surrounding free air, Einstein said, "That is impossible. Should it be true, it would be a great bombshell."

Reich's legacy was a series of "great bombshells" in each of the great realms that he worked: psychoanalysis, sociology, biology and physics.

We can't possibly cover them all tonight. That is one of the problems with Reich's work as he himself was all too aware. In the opening pages of *Ether, God and Devil*, Reich writes:

The greatest difficulty in grasping the orgone theory lies in the fact that the discovery of the orgone has solved *too many* and *too great* problems all at once: the biological basis of psychic diseases, biogenesis and with that the cancer biopathy, the ether, the cosmic yearnings of the human animal, a new physical energy, etc... No one has felt the TOO-MUCHNESS as painfully as myself. ...many, very many facts of great significance were lost... Still the vital point and basic principle in the discovery of the orgone energy seem firmly established and so arranged that others can continue to work on the structure I could not complete. (1949, page 6)

He goes on to write:

In reality, I have made only one single discovery: *the function of orgasmic plasma pulsation*. It represents the coastal stretch from which all else developed. (1973, page 5)

From the very beginning of his work with Freud in the early 1920s, Reich made observations that led to his discovery that the function of the orgasm is the regulator of the organism's bioenergy. This first major contribution to psychiatry, published in *The Function of the Orgasm* in 1927, was his first bombshell.

As we heard in Reich's own words, this early discovery was the bombshell in psychiatry that presaged each of the subsequent realms he studied. It showed that emotional health is deeper than conscious thought and will; that the biological basis for neurosis is libido stasis. The understanding of the function of the orgasm also begged the question, "Where does energy stasis and neurosis come from?" This led Reich to the realization that society itself is sick, especially regarding sexuality. This is still a bombshell for most people who see themselves as paragons of normalcy.

In his investigation of society Reich discovered another bombshell, the mass psychology of fascism: One individual can control the masses by tapping into their simultaneous longing for freedom and their fear of it. One cannot free a people merely by eliminating their despotic ruler. Just look at the former Soviet Union and Iraq.

Freud became uneasy with Reich's mixing of social issues and politics with psychoanalysis, and their friendship began to cool. Ultimately, Freud sanctioned his expulsion from the International Psychoanalytic Association in 1934.

As Reich the man who cared deeply about human suffering tried to help the masses of people with their sexual disturbance, Reich the scientist continued to investigate the function of the orgasm. If libido stasis causes biological effects then the libido must be a real energy.

He wanted to investigate more deeply what moves out toward the world in sexuality and away from the world in anxiety. At first believing he was dealing with a known energy, electricity, he devised the

bioelectric experiments. He found that the deflection measured by an instrument in a room away from the test subject could accurately describe the subjective experience of the subject, and vice versa: a bombshell that bridges the gap between psychology and biology. For the first time, a subjective impression could be objectified. Clearly there is a real "something" that moves in the body that is perceived as pleasure or anxiety.

Reich wanted to observe more directly what was moving and to observe the "streamings" reported by patients who had overcome their neurotic armoring. Recalling his own observations of ameba as a young student and being aware of Freud's analogy of connections between people being like an ameba sending out pseudopods, Reich decided to observe these protozoa under the microscope.

Wanting to make his own preparations of ameba rather than having to order them from the laboratory, he asked where ameba come from. He was told to put grass in water and wait several weeks, and sure enough they appeared. Not satisfied with the explanation that they came from "air germs," he decided to make direct observations of the grass. He discovered that over time the grass in the water gradually disintegrates and heaps of vesicles spontaneously develop a membrane and organize into protozoa.

This observation was a bombshell in biology. How so? By late in the 19th century, Pasteur and biological doctrine had thrown out the idea of spontaneous generation and the doctrine of *omne vivum ex ovo* ("All life [is] from [an] egg.") had taken hold. A demonstration that protozoa form spontaneously out of decaying living matter goes against this established doctrine.

Reich's laboratory work continued in a logical progression from here. From some of these experiments he developed cultures of the vesicles, which he called "bions," described as the elemental particle of life. In 1939, he discovered the radiation of a previously unknown energy from some of these cultures. He called this energy "orgone."

In 1940, Reich observed and discovered the orgone in the atmosphere. As I've said, he was now working in the physical realm of

a mass-free cosmic energy. That energy spontaneously moves from an area of lower energy charge to an area of higher energy charge, as he demonstrated in his famous temperature ($T_0 - T$) experiments with the orgone accumulator, the very data he described to Einstein.

So we have come full circle in our brief tour of some of Reich's bombshells. Did you notice the theme that runs through so many of Reich's "bombshells"? They are discoveries of something spontaneous: spontaneous development, spontaneous movement.

Reich concluded that spontaneous movement is a basic quality of orgone energy. This fact alone is a bombshell that violates mechanistic physics' second law of thermodynamics, the basic law of the universe, not to mention sending shock waves through the ubiquitous immobility of armored human rigidity.

I have only brought you to the discovery of the orgone. But the number of fields in which Reich set off bombshells is truly amazing. And in this all too brief outline, I have not even mentioned so many of his concepts and discoveries: the importance of mother-infant contact and healthy childrearing, work democracy, the discovery of muscular armor, somatic biopathies and the cancer problem, and all those that came after the discovery of the orgone, the orgone accumulator, Experiment XX, the Reich Blood Test, the emotional plague, the vacor tube, the orgone motor, Oranur, DOR, preatomic chemistry, the medical Dor-buster, orgonometry, theories of weather and galaxy formation, as well as gravity, and the list goes on.

Reich devoted his life to helping Man leap the gap between his healthy core and the superficial and destructive way he lives his everyday life. I want to end with one image:



Kari Berggrav

Wilhelm Reich working on "Man Leaping the Gap"

References

- Reich, W. 1949. *Ether, God and Devil*. Rangeley, ME: Orgone Institute Press.
- . 1973. *Ether, God and Devil: Cosmic Superimposition*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.