Healthy thinking is the greatest accomplishment. Wisdom consists of speaking the truth and acting in accordance with nature - listening to her.

Heraclitus

The word "health" has never been so overused as in our time; I am thinking for example of the innumerable advertisements in the newspapers, on the radio and television for foods, medications and equipment which are supposed to make people "healthy again very easily". At no time have the efforts concerned with human health been so great, i.e. so large-scale and comprehensive as at present. I draw attention to the increasing number of doctors who are concerned about curing a greater number of their patients, and also of the efforts of governments to build ever larger hospitals and preventive facilities. A total registration of the health of everyone is planned and being put more and more into practice.

We might well conclude from all these efforts that human health is in a bad way. Are the intensity of preventive medicine and concern about health perhaps caused by the fact that nobody really knows what health actually is? It almost appears so. It is characteristic and highly illuminating that in the sciences which are concerned with life, i.e. "healthy" life, the concept of "health" does not occur at all. In the relevant textbooks of hygiene, disease, physiology and medicine the word "health" is not
mentioned although hygiene is derived from Hygieia, the Greek goddess of health. I have closely examined about 18 modern textbooks in these disciplines in this regard.

I did not find any keyword "health" in "Knaurs Gesundheitslexikon". "Der Große Brockhaus" and "Der Gesundheits-Brockhaus" at least state that it is difficult if not impossible to define unequivocally the commonly used word "health", designating one of the greatest blessings of men, and to define it as a logically unassailable concept.

The 23-volume "Encyclopaedia Britannica" defines the concept "health" in a single line: "Health is a condition of physical and mental well-being". As we shall see this is a highly unsatisfactory definition of health. "Well-being" indicates situations which give rise to precisely the opposite of health, as we know very well today.

What is the reason why it is not possible to give an exact definition of health? The answer must be: because health is the same meaning as life and life cannot be precisely defined either.

However, if we cannot define health precisely, then it will perhaps be possible to describe it and to interpret it according to its meaning.

Linguistics usually gives valuable information on how to find the meaning or sense of a word or to recover them. The new High-German word "gesund" is related to the word "geschwind" which in Old High German and even today has the meaning "moved", "powerful", "rapid". According to its meaning, health could consequently be viewed and interpreted as "powerful mobility". We found the same statement with Alkmaion: Healthy life is "moved of itself" (cf. Chapter III). If health is "spontaneous movement"