

The Changing Horizons of Health and Healing and The Need for an Expanded Understanding of Mind/Consciousness

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This essay makes an effort to elaborate on the system of Unification Thought. The philosophical perspective of Unification Thought is a holistic, comprehensive worldview. Its stated purpose is "to achieve the goal of one-world family and to realize an everlasting ideal world of God's love, through solving - fundamentally and once and for all - the numerous and difficult problems that afflict humankind." (1) Unification Thought "holds that in God there can be found the standard for solving actual problems of the individual and society." (2) This is an ambitious vision and it must be tested, through an actual and realistic application of its various paradigms to the different problems which afflict us. One important area of human life is that of health and healing, and Unification Thought sets forth a number of paradigms which can give us new perspectives and suggest new solutions. I would like to explore some of these new paradigms in this essay, and offer for discussion some new ideas concerning sickness, health, and the healing process. Let me first touch on some

basic notions about health and healing.

Traditional Ideas Concerning Human Health

Although there are important differences between them, concern for one's health has been of enduring interest in both the East and the West, and it is not difficult to find extended reflections on restoring and maintaining one's health. It is fairly widely recognized that the body by itself (if it is not burdened by environmental toxins, or by drugs, pills, and other artificial supports) possesses significant healing capacity. Nevertheless, at times the body's healing capacity is exceeded, and it is then that one becomes sick.

The Eastern tradition has traditionally taken a holistic approach to health, preferring to take into account the body's overall balance, especially in terms of the balance of yin and yang. For example, one can sometimes see men, women, and children, young and old alike, going through the movements of Tai Chi in the morning. Oriental medicine is popular because it is successful and it is successful because the philosophy of yin and yang draws upon universal principles. As the body moves and functions more and more in accordance with universal principles, all its systems function smoothly, energy flowing freely and smoothly, and overall health is the result.

In the Western medical tradition, on the other hand, one only needs to walk into their neighborhood drugstore or stop at the local pharmacy to encounter the vast array of pills and ointments, and other medicines and prescription drugs artificially produced to treat every conceivable illness, malady, or disease, including anxiety and depression, migraines and nausea, and fever and fatigue. (3) Even in the long-term care and maintenance of health, there is a tendency to rely extensively on artificial drugs and medicines of all types. In emergency situations, of course, such as an automobile accident or severe injury, Western techniques, including surgery, are extremely important and invaluable in the emergency room where many lives have been saved.

Attempts have been made in the past to harmonize these two approaches, the Western and the Eastern, and at the present time there is a movement toward a more integrated approach to health and "complementary therapies will almost certainly play a part in the future moves toward integrated health care." (4) Let us turn to consider some of the more recent ideas concerning health and healing, which are coming largely from "new age" thought.

New Age Ideas Concerning Health

Much has changed in people's thinking concerning health and healing. There has been at minimum a "subtle shift in the practice of medicine, from treating disease to treating the whole person." (5) Even religious faith and prayer are now being recognized as significant factors in healing. The title of a recent Reader's Digest article states the case very succinctly: "Why Doctors Now Believe Faith Heals: Because they're finding medical evidence." (6) There are two relatively new ideas in these quotes, at least from the Western perspective: a) treatment of the whole person, and b) scientific, medical evidence for the healing power of faith. To appreciate the newness of such ideas, it will be helpful to review some of the changes in perspective through which medical theory and practice have gone in the history of medicine.

Historical Shifts in Medical Perspectives

If one takes a broad look at the history of modern medicine (7) a certain trend can be seen that reflects the way people have thought about health and healing. I would like to draw rather extensively in what follows upon the work of a doctor whose views are resonant with what I am saying in this essay. Larry Dossey argues that the history of medicine manifests "three distinct types of healing methodologies...Era I may be called 'materialistic medicine'... Era II ...'mind-body' medicine ... and Era III ... nonlocal medicine." (8) These key phrases are significant, and indicative of the parameters of the medical perspective of that particular time. I will offer a short summary of the contents of his essay, and then I will be arguing that today there is great need for a further move to an "Era IV" methodology. First, let me summarize what Dossey says in his insightful article. In his view:

Era I medicine is guided by the classical laws of matter and energy described by Isaac Newton. The effects of mind and consciousness are considered of secondary importance, if not entirely absent ... In Era II or "mind-body" medicine ... mind-body approaches began to be studied scientifically. It became possible to show that perceptions, emotions, attitudes, thoughts, and perceived meanings affect the body, sometimes in dramatic, life-or-death ways. (9)

In short, the legacy of Era I (materialistic medicine) was that only the body is meaningful and the body is a machine. The "mind" is not considered to be very important. In comparing these two approaches:

[T]he major difference between Eras I and II is that the latter attributes a causal power to the mind, which was lacking in Era I. Still, the two have much in common: With respect to the mind, they are both local in emphasis; that is, they consider the mind to be localized to points in space (the brain and body) and time (the present moment) ... Era II is a local approach, because it emphasizes the mind and consciousness of the individual operating on the individual body. (10)

In short, the legacy of era II (mind-body medicine) was that mind is primary and it is local (that is, it is confined to being in the head and operating on the individual body). We are still dealing with the mind and body of the same person; that is what is meant by "localized."

Notes:

1. Unification Thought Institute, *Essentials of Unification Thought: The Head-Wing Thought*, Japan: UTI, 1992, iv.

2. UTI, *Essentials*, 1.

3. For a thought-provoking analysis of the situation, and the issues, with prescription drugs, see Dick Morris and Eileen McGann, *Outrage*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007, 197-217.

4. Anne Woodham and Dr. David Peters, *Encyclopedia of Healing Therapies*, New York: Dorling Kindersley, 1997, 21.

5. Reader's Digest, May 2001, "Faith Heals," 115.

6. Reader's Digest, "Faith," 109.

7. When I speak of modern medicine, I am speaking of medicine as it has been understood since the time of the Renaissance, when many of the scientific findings about how the human body actually functioned, were discovered. Scientists learned during the Renaissance and its aftermath, for example, about the flow of blood. I am not concerned with the medicine in, for example, the Middle Ages, which was filled with misunderstanding and superstition about how the body actually functioned, and during which time the ways of treatment would seem rather barbaric by today's standards.

8. Larry Dossey, "Era III Medicine: The Next Frontier," in *ReVision*, Winter 1992, vol. 14, 128.

9. Dossey, "Next Frontier," 128.

10. Dossey, "Next Frontier," 128.

(to be continued in February issue)