

The scientific basis of anthroposophy

Anthroposophy and Science

The scientific nature of a true human medicine forms the essence of the book “Anthroposophy and Science” which was written by Peter Heusser, professor for Medical Theory, Integrative and Anthroposophic Medicine at Witten/Herdecke University (DE). The book is available in German, English and Finnish.

The demand to increase humaneness whilst retaining scientific standards constitutes one of the greatest challenges of modern high-tech medicine. Humaneness in medicine means that the whole human being, with its physical, spiritual, mental and social dimensions, is being perceived. Can we investigate and explain the organism’s living processes, the human soul or even mind with the same scientific rigor that we know from pathology, anatomy, molecular biology or medical imaging? Integrative medical systems such as Anthroposophic Medicine scientifically examine the emergence of life, soul, mind and spirit on the basis of physical, atomic-molecular natural science.

Knowledge and reality

Peter Heusser begins his treatise with a concise epistemological inquiry into the principal question of knowledge and describes three stages of scientific cognition: the perceiving of empirical phenomena, the forming of concepts, i.e. the laws that explain what has been perceived within a certain context, and the conjunction of percept and concept in the forming of a judgment that precedes knowledge. The actual joining of the two is seen as being achieved by the human subject. A problem that is being widely discussed, particularly in the world of medicine, is that of subjectivity. How does the knowledge acquired by the subject relate to the objective truth? According to Rudolf Steiner the required objectivity is possible when the cognitive process itself becomes the object of observation. The act of thinking relates to the thinking content as the activity of perceiving does to the perceived content. The recognition of the inner identity of law and concept leads to an objective cognitive judgement and to the experience of the real congruity of law and

experience, that is, to certainty. This results in an “ontological idealism”, in which the laws generated by the thinking are objective, real and inherent to the phenomena in question as their determining essence.

Ontological idealism

Peter Heusser then applies the concepts of science and reality, as developed by ontological idealism, to the central questions of modern science. He demonstrates how the required perceptive possibilities, laws and constellations of forces can be found on each of the four levels of matter – life, soul and mind/spirit – and how they can enhance the understanding of substance in physics and chemistry: in molecular biology and morphogenetics, in modern neurobiology and the body-soul problem, and finally in the philosophy of mind with its central question of free will.

Ontological idealism can also be the foundation for an expanded anthropology, as proposed by Paul Vital Troxler (1780–1866) and Immanuel Hermann Fichte (1796–1879). They both protested that anthropology informed by natural science and psychology only recognized what had been effected in the human being. They demanded that the boundaries of knowledge needed to be overcome so that one could arrive at an empirical knowledge of the effective agent. They both referred to this approach as “anthroposophy”.

An anthropology that is based on empirical phenomenology will also affect medicine in that it does not reduce reality to atoms and elemental particles, but sees the empirically emergent phenomena of body, life, soul and mind/spirit as ontologically autonomous entities, each with its own specific laws. Anthroposophy complements this kind of anthropology by investigating the effectiveness of these laws empirical-



ly. Health and illness are then no longer the result of ongoing processes of molecular interactions alone, but the consequence of a complex interaction of the various levels of emergence in an organ, organ system, or in the whole organism. This is what Anthroposophic Medicine is based on.

Research in Anthroposophic medicine

Peter Heusser describes the present state of research in Anthroposophic Medicine, which sees itself as an evidence-based medical system. The great wealth of studies, which encompass examples of the most diverse specialist fields in medicine as well as basic research and numerous clinical trials on the effectiveness and safety of anthroposophic therapies, reveals that the evidence in Anthroposophic Medicine is constantly growing. Peter Heusser also includes examples of how Rudolf Steiner’s therapeutic indications can be verified with modern research designs, in the laboratory (in vitro) as well as in clinical trials (in vivo). This is a scientific textbook and therefore not an easy read, but the universal validity of its content, the immensely careful research and its clear structure make this volume a true treasure chest for all those who are concerned with questions of knowledge and truth in science, independently of their specialization. | Peter Zimmermann, Hollola (FI)