

BOOK REVIEW BY BRANKO FURST, MD

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AS RECENTLY as the mid 1990s words such as "alternative" or "holistic" were used by conventional medical practitioners mainly to alert their clients to what is "unscientific" or even "quack." Fast forward a couple of decades and we witness a tremendous expansion of all types of holistic and patient-centered forms of care. Responding to popular demands, economic incentives and prospects for new avenues of scientific research, departments of complementary medicine continue to spring up in academic medical centers across the country. To boot, public opinion polls show increasingly that patients turn to complementary medicine to find what is missing in conventional medicine and demand greater access to complementary forms of treatment.

As much as the focus in the complementary medical research so far has been in establishing scientific proof of effect and safety of various methods and substances, little work has been done in conceptual integration of complementary methods into the framework of the conventional model. In fact, a gaping chasm remains between the conventional medicine-based concepts arising from a genetic/molecular approach as the ultimate cause of pathological events, and some traditional medical systems such as in Ayurveda, Chinese medicine, and Homeopathy where imbalance in non-material causes such as "prana," "chi," and "astral forces" are considered to be the causative factors.

This conceptual chasm is the main theme of the book by Peter Heusser, MD, Professor and Head of the Institute of Integrative and Anthroposophic Medicine at Witten/Herdecke Medical School, Germany. The material presented in the book was in fact part of his Ph.D. dissertation originally published in German in 2010. It has since been expanded and is now available to the English readers in a masterful translation by Lynda Hepburn.

The author skillfully argues that attempts to explain complementary medical concepts and therapies in terms of conventional pathophysiological events—or the wish by some, that they will in due course be "assimilated" into mainstream medicine—will invariably fail. Equally utopic are reductionist attempts by conventional science to explain the phenomenon of consciousness, with their specifically human mental, emotional, and moral dimension, on the basis of molecular occurrences in the brain. The very fact that human beings in their inner experience believe themselves to be far more than the sum of physical and chemical processes as touted by reductionist science, draws the public to seeking alternative explanations.

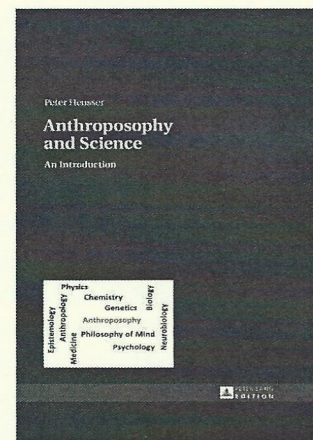
According to philosopher John Locke the phenomenal world can be divided into primary qualities which can be attributed to objects and quantified, and secondary qualities (*qualia*) such as colors, hearing, smell, and taste, effects that the outer world produces in us as a result of sensory experience. On the basis of this division, Immanuel Kant, one of the fathers of the prevailing theory of knowledge, maintained that what is observed by the senses—the percept—and the idea of what is observed—the concept—are equally necessary for cognition. However, the way these two subjective categories are combined to form "objective reality" is traditionally solved by arbitrarily assigning objective reality to

what can be quantified (measured) in nature and/or in the human organism, whereas the psychological experiences such as feelings, intentions, and sensations are considered subjective, and therefore only of secondary importance. The beneficial side of this dualistic development has been an unparalleled expansion in the analysis of material structures and molecular interactions in living organisms. The downside of this paradigmatic choice, on the other hand, has been that the phenomena of life can only be viewed externally, i.e. mechanistically, even if considered at a molecular/atomic level. Thus the above mentioned "non-material" causal factors such as life, prana, chi, soul, spirit, etc., cannot be treated as independently operative forces, as is the case in traditional medical systems, but are considered merely an epiphenomenon of physicochemical and molecular interaction, not amenable to scientific inquiry! This leads to "scientific reductionism" not only in the field of chemistry and physics, but also in biology and medicine.

What then is the prospect for bridging the chasm and bringing together these two rather different realms of human experience, the outer and the inner world, into an organically integrated anthropology and thus into a unified system of medicine? To answer this question, the author takes us to the root of scientific method: epistemology, the science of knowing. Although, historically, great thinkers such as Hegel, Fichte, Schiller, and others recognized this impending "chasm" as a fundamental flaw in scientific method itself, they could not compete with the rapidly gaining reductionist Cartesian method.

These thinkers nevertheless paved the way for a new direction in science ultimately developed by J. W. Goethe and set on a sound epistemological basis by Rudolf Steiner. One of the core tenets of this phenomenological approach to science is that passive thinking, i.e. spontaneously appearing thoughts, are no different from perception, which is "a given," similar to an image given by the eye, or a tone perceived by the ear. However, when active, this thinking can become an organ of perception for laws of nature, as is the case in mathematical or any scientific thinking. It is such active thinking, the "mind's eye" (Goethe) or "intuitive thinking" (Steiner) which leads to objective empirical knowledge. "What is crucial for this kind of empirical knowledge is not the theory, but its agreement with the actual experience, with manifest reality," says Heusser.

Steiner further maintained that apart from physical laws active in inorganic nature, there are additional classes of emergent laws which apply to living, psychological (soul-related), and spiritual elements in nature and humanity. Unlike the more recently developed concept of self-organization, which proposes the emergence of life and consciousness from matter ("from below"), Steiner's concept of emergence encompasses lawfulness "from below" as well as "from above." Applied to substances, for example, these laws are in agreement with views of modern physics and provide the key for understanding homeopathic effects. These are the laws that were



intuited by medical practitioners of ancient mystery traditions but have been redefined in the language of contemporary western science.

Heusser points out that Steiner moreover described in detail the method by which the faculty of “intuitive thinking” can be developed for perception of these non-physical forces effective at four levels of organization: physical, life (etheric), soul (astral), and spiritual. This fourfold conception of the world and of the human being forms the basis for a new anthropology stemming from western scientific tradition by which health and illness result not merely from faulty molecular processes, but arise from a dynamic interaction of an individual’s physical, living, soul, and spiritual organizations at the level of a cell, organ, or entire organism. In this sense, evidence based on calculations of statistical probabilities used in ordinary research is at best an approximation of outer observable events but does not reveal the inner lawfulness of these connections. Thus from the epistemological point of view, the concept of “evidence-based medicine” needs to be revised and expanded to “cognition-based medicine.”

Only when taking into account the sum-total of these activities, says the author, will there be a true “holistic” or “integrative” approach to science and medicine. This new anthropology, which arose from systematic work of the above-named thinkers, is the foundation of anthroposophic medicine, a spiritual-scientific extension of natural scientific medicine.

According to Heusser, “human medicine is not simply a matter of physics, chemistry, biology...and in spite of similarity between humans

and animals, not a matter of zoology either, but a matter of human anthropology.” The specifically human element which is repeatedly challenged, or has largely disappeared from conventional anthropology, finds its full validation in anthroposophic medicine. In addition to being the focal point of individual self-consciousness, the human spirit is the unconscious organizing principle, much like a concert master presiding over the physical, life, and soul. It is also the bearer of specifically human traits such as the uprightness, speech, and memory.

Since its founding in the 1920s Anthroposophic medicine has become a worldwide movement with clinics in a number of countries and hospitals in Germany, Sweden, and Switzerland. Opportunities for post-graduate medical, nursing and artistic therapy education exist. A vast amount of primary and secondary literature on Anthroposophic medicine and related sciences has been systematically reviewed in the book, but unfortunately, much of the material is available only in German.

In summary, this book offers both an excellent review of the historical development of the scientific method in biology and medicine and a constructive critique of the same. By providing a firm bridge between the physical and psychological, *Anthroposophy and Science* offers a unique starting point for a scientific debate at the academic level between complementary-holistic and conventional systems of medicine. It will serve as a valuable resource to all who are interested in epistemological and ethical questions in medicine and its organic development into the future. ●

FEBRUARY MEETINGS AND EVENTS

First Class Study

Wednesday, February 1, 7pm

At Windy Hill. Call Hanna, 325-3648, or John, 325-1113.

First Class

Thursday, February 2, 7:45 pm

At Camphill Village, Copake. Call Anke Smeele, 329-7973

Branch Initiative Meeting

Friday, February 3, 4pm All are invited who wish to take an active part in the life of our Branch of the Anthroposophical Society, or just learn more about it. We begin with a short study from Steiner’s *Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts*. Contact the editor or anyone listed as a participant in the group on the mailer page of this newsletter. At Windy Hill.

Curative Education Study Group

Friday, February 3 at 7:00pm

We will be studying *The Modern Art of Education* by Rudolf Steiner, Lecture 4. This group meets on the first Friday of each month at the home of Christiana and Dr. Basil Williams of 83-7 May Hill Rd near Harlemville. Everyone who is interested in Curative Education or Waldorf Education is invited to participate. For directions or information call 518 672-4332.

Free Columbia Film Screening: Flight of the Butterflies

Friday, February 3, 7:30pm

At Free Columbia’s Space on Main Classroom, 84 Main Street, Philmont. Join hundreds of millions of real butterflies on an amazing journey to a remote and secret hideaway, and one scientist’s 40-year search to unravel the mystery—where do they go each fall? Experience the Flight of the Butterflies. The monarch butterfly is in trouble. Their numbers are down 90% of what they were in 1992. We will have a short discussion about how you can

help these amazing pollinators by planting milkweed in your garden and resources for technical assistance for creating a habitat on your farm. Free Milkweed Seeds will be distributed!

Remembering Mary Delle Le Beau

Saturday, February 4 at 3:00pm

There will be a gathering of friends to remember the life and mark the passing of Mary Delle Le Beau, who was born on October 24, 1951 in El Paso, Texas and who died in Los Angeles, California on December 15, 2016. Following her training as a eurythmist in Spring Valley, NY, she taught French, Russian and eurythmy at the Hawthorne Valley School throughout the nineties. She then moved to Los Angeles in 2002 to pursue her PhD in Russian literature on full scholarship at the University of Southern California, teaching there as well. At the time of her death she was serving as secretary to the Los Angeles Branch of the Anthroposophical Society. She is survived by her husband of the past 10 years, Gary Stalcup of Los Angeles. The gathering will take place at the home of her good friends Robert and Cecelia Elinson of 190 Harlemville Road, Hillsdale. Call Cecelia at (518) 672-7447 with any questions or if directions are needed.

SteinerBooks BookLaunch!

Reading, Talk, & Book Signing by Dr. Anna Lups

Saturday, February 4, 4:00pm

Join us as we celebrate the recent publication of *The One of the Emerald Tablet: Illuminating Ancient Cryptic Truths* by Anna Lups, MBChB, MD. Introduced through the autobiography of a female physician practicing in the Columbia County region of rural upstate New York, this is a book that invites the reader to join in the journey that each human being will undertake into earthly life and the wisdom learned in the process of “becoming.” At the Hawthorne Valley School Hall.