

Profits and Paradigms, Morality and Medicine

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We often hear and read today about moral lapses in medical practice and in medical research. In “Corporate Greed Infects Medicine,” Richard Fried states, “It never fails to amaze me how cheaply doctors can be bought.”¹ In recent years several books have detailed the corruption of medical research by the lure of profits. In his book *Science in the Private Interest*, Sheldon Krimsky shows us that the prime driver of scientific research today is the hope of commercial gain, and not the pursuit of “pure science” as it once was. Academic and research institutions are no longer in a protected ivory tower but are increasingly influenced by the profit motive of our economy.²

In his 1920 lecture, “Hygiene as a Social Issue,” Rudolf Steiner warned: “If the profit motive continues to prevail in our economic sphere, then the economic will become master over the spiritual [sphere]. This must not happen!”³ Sadly, this is precisely what is happening, and not only in medicine and scientific research, but increasingly in education, too, which presents a serious challenge to Waldorf schools. Education and medicine belong to the spiritual sphere of the social organism and, in order to function in a health-giving way, they must remain as free as possible from political and economic influences.

Michael Moore in his film “Sicko” demonstrates how the profit motive of the insurance industry often trumps the health care needs of its

insured clients. Moore recommends a nationalized healthcare system as currently exists in Canada, France, England, and Cuba, as the solution to this problem. American physicians have historically resisted nationalized healthcare because they fear that their freedom and the patient-physician relationship will be violated. Yet today these have already been violated, not by governmental bureaucracy, but by the corporate business model of managed care imposed onto medical practice.

Writing in the newspaper of the AMA in 2002, Edmond Blum, MD, characterized American managed-care medicine eloquently:

Management is committed to “volume-driven” productivity standards. This means maximizing the “throughput” of patients per unit time, resulting in a “one size fits all,” assembly line style of care.... [T]he patient is seen not as a fellow human being in need but as a commodity and a statistic. The physician is seen not as an independent professional but as a cog in the corporate wheel.... Such a model must inevitably turn the practice of medicine into a perfunctory and dehumanized ritual....⁴

A sorry state of affairs, and one foreseen by Steiner. One remedy for the corporatization-for-profit of medical practice lies in the establishment in practical life of Steiner’s model of the threefold social organism. Intrinsic to this model is that the motives of sustaining and enhancing human and earthly life must gain ascendancy over the profit

1. Lilipoh, No. 48, Summer 2007.

2. Krimsky, Sheldon. *Science in the Private Interest: Has the Lure of Profits Corrupted Biomedical Research?* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003.

3. Steiner, Rudolf. *Hygiene as a Social Issue*. Spring Valley, NY: Mercury Press, 1981.

4. Blum, Edmond, MD. “Managed Care Requires Making Bricks without Straw” in *American Medical News*, March 11, 2002.

motive in the economic sphere. Many enlightened voices today already speak to this.

Another remedy for the dehumanization of medical practice and the corruption of medical research must be sought, I believe, in a thorough reform of our materialistic medical paradigm along the lines of Steiner's spiritual science. Anthroposophic medicine as it exists today is bravely attempting this reform, but the obstacles and the pressures it faces to conform to the standards of materialistic medicine are enormous.

Steiner characterized anthroposophic medicine as an "extension" of contemporary matter-based, reductionist medicine. Always the realist, Steiner had profound respect for the achievements of modern medicine, yet warned that the future would be grim unless medicine could extend itself to acknowledge the spirit as a primal causative agent in human physiology.

One of the most stubborn obstacles to a healthy spiritual and moral outlook on the world, according to Steiner, is the modern dogma that the blood is an inert fluid that moves through the body only because it is pumped mechanically by the heart. That blood is a fluid capable of moving within the body through its own inner spiritual vitality and mobility is a thought incomprehensible for materialism. Yet, surprising as it might seem, a thorough and painstaking examination of the physiological facts of blood circulation, admirably detailed in a book edited by Craig Holdrege, *The Dynamic Heart and Circulation*,⁵ shows convincingly that it is scientifically impossible to attribute all the blood's movement through the body to the pumping action of the heart.

The heart-as-a-pump-of-inert-blood dogma is a prime example of what Steiner often lamented: the superficiality of materialistic science. It becomes clear that many of today's scientific constructs owe their durability not to the weight of the physical evidence—which is often lacking—but to the compelling need to maintain an edifice

of mechanistic thought in the face of its relentless erosion by the growing, evolving spiritual consciousness of our time.

We are in the midst of a gradual but enormous change in human consciousness, of a mighty paradigm shift comparable to the scientific revolution brought to birth by Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton in the 16th and 17th centuries. I believe that Steiner considered the change from a matter-based to a spirit-based science of medicine to be crucial to the broader paradigm shift now occurring in human consciousness.

Perhaps the most grievous sin of today's materialistic medicine is its denial of any meaning, purpose, or validity to the human experience of illness. This denial is countered by a growing and spreading awareness among individuals today of the reality of karma and of repeated lives on earth. Such awareness is a healthy sign, a sign of progress in human consciousness, without

which illness, suffering, and death cannot be truly understood.

[J]ust as an age was once ready to receive the Copernican theory of the universe, so is our own age ready for the ideas of reincarnation and karma to be brought into the general consciousness of humanity. And what is destined to happen in the course of evolution will happen, no matter what powers rise up against it. When reincarnation and karma are truly understood, everything else follows of itself in the light of these truths.⁶

When a healthy understanding of reincarnation and karma becomes part of humanity's general consciousness, then materialism will have lost much of its grip on our thinking, and today's little known specialty of anthroposophic medicine will become mainstream medicine.

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5. Holdrege, Craig, ed. *The Dynamic Heart and Circulation*. Fair Oaks, CA: AWSNA Publications, 2002.

6. Steiner, Rudolf. *Reincarnation and Karma: Their Significance in Modern Culture*. Vancouver: Steiner Book Center, 1977.