

Vitalism's Roots in Chiropractic: Should Vitalism Be a Subject of Study by Modern Day Chiropractic? -- Part I

No one will argue that vitalism is an integral part of chiropractic. However, strong and sometimes vitriolic disagreement exists over whether or not vitalism should be let out of its closet. In one camp are those who are frankly ashamed that chiropractic has anything to do with this unscientific nonsense. An equally vocal but opposing camp insists that true chiropractic cannot exist without vitalism. Obviously, the last words on vitalism are far from being written.

Those who place wagers against the viability of vitalism on the basis that it is a non-science obviously haven't been reading the literature as well as they should.

Whatever the outcome concerning vitalism's role in chiropractic one thing is certain: its fate should not be determined by political dictum. Arguably, vitalism's fate should rest in the studious hands of those who have reviewed contemporary studies on this fascinating topic. Unfortunately, vitalism has not been the subject of scientific scrutiny in chiropractic. This serious omission, however, can easily be remedied.

What is Vitalism?

Vitalism's roots lie within the tumultuous times of the 18th century. Art and literature flourished in the 18th century and the love for beauty found expression in various forms. On the other hand, medicine was trapped in a chaotic situation for the better part of the first half of the 18th century. Patient care was largely whimsical, and reflected the persistent belief in religion's views of astrology and alchemy.

Slowly, knowledge increased and the practitioners of Galenic medicine, now popular for some 1500 years, came under harsh criticism. Dissenters sprouted up everywhere and fought hard against the mutilating practices of Galenic medicine which was based upon stodgy religious dogma and ancient doctrines. These new-thinkers, sometimes referred to as vitalists, were not surprisingly forbidden by the "old guard" to enter the academies and medical schools. Not to be out maneuvered, the dissenters opened up a great number of academies and medical schools to advance their beliefs. (Do you see a 20th century parallel here?)

The vitalist's beliefs were refreshing. They believed that living matter was clearly distinguishable from nonliving matter; living material became alive because of the action of the anima. Consequently, life and disease was explained by the action of the "innate" or anima, which inhabited every part of the organism.¹ Disturbances or imbalances in the anima (innate) of the person caused illness and death.

Is Vitalism Dead?

Vitalism is not dead, according to critically acclaimed modern thinkers. There is a resurgence of

vitalistic ideas. These viewpoints are brilliantly expressed by two accomplished authors, Daniel Redwood, DC, and Andrew Weil, MD. If you haven't read either of their works you truly are missing out on some very compelling contributions to the innate side of healing.

A Time to Heal: How to Reap the Benefits of Holistic Health

The following is excerpted from Dr. Redwood's tremendously informative web site. You can visit his web site at

[url=http://www.doubleclickd.com/Articles/RedwoodWorks/dan_index.html]http://www.doubleclickd.com/Articles/RedwoodWorks/dan_index.html[/url].

Daniel Redwood, DC, is a chiropractor, writer, speaker and musician. He is the author of *A Time to Heal: How to Reap the Benefits of Holistic Health*, (A.R.E. Press), and is a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*. His writing appears regularly in publications of the Institute of Noetic Sciences, *Venture Inward* magazine, and numerous community papers, including *Baltimore Resources and Pathways* (Washington, D.C.).

The foreword to his book is written by James Gordon, MD, director, Center for Mind-Body Studies, and professor, Georgetown University School of Medicine. He writes, "We need models of healers -- people who in their practice and their being -- are willing to enlarge the prevailing orthodoxy as they serve others. In his work and the way he writes about it, Dr. Redwood is such a model. This book of his work as a chiropractor comes at the right time for all of us."

It may be of interest to know that Dr. Redwood was the first chiropractor ever invited to speak at the National Museum of Health and Medicine in Washington, D.C. He also wrote the chapter on chiropractic in the textbook, *Fundamentals of Complementary and Alternative Medicine* (Churchill Livingstone, 1996), and is the editor/author of the forthcoming textbook, *Contemporary Chiropractic* (Churchill Livingstone, 1997).

Spontaneous Healing

Spontaneous Healing is a best-selling book by Andrew Weil, MD (Alfred Knopf, NY, 1995.) You can learn more about Dr. Weil by visiting Dr. Redwood's web site or by visiting:

[url=<http://sun.lclark.edu/~miller/spontaneous-healing.html>]http://sun.lclark.edu/~miller/spontaneous-healing.html[/url].

Spontaneous Healing has something for everyone. He tells an interesting story of osteopathy, provocative anecdotes of personal healing, and suggestions for a healthy diet and lifestyle. Dr. Weil speaks of medicine as it should be, and even provides explanations of the immune system at work. He discusses common food products and their positive or negative impact on the immune system.

Dr. Weil sees the body's healing system as having an innate healing potential that can be accessed in many different ways. He believes that is the foremost principle of natural health and natural medicine. From this he concludes that the optimal treatment is that which minimally impacts the physical body and maximally accesses the healing system.

Cynics of Vitalism, Please Read On

The following is a portion of a dialogue between Dr. Redwood and Dr. Weil discussing the likelihood of

significant change occurring in the medical curriculum in terms of natural health and medicine.¹ Dr. Weil: I really am deeply pessimistic about the prospect of curriculum reform. They are constantly talking about reforming the medical curriculum, and all it is reshuffling the deck and dealing it out in a different order. I don't see fundamental change happening.

I am working on a project now which I'll give my best shot. We have a unique chance at the University of Arizona College of Medicine to make some change. We're going to start a fellowship program in "Integrative Medicine." We'll start by offering one year fellowships to people who have completed family practice and internal medicine residencies. This will be a one-year fellowship in training on how to combine the best ideas and practices of conventional and alternative medicine, with a strong emphasis on healing, natural healing, mind-body interactions, and so forth. Our hope is that this will grow into a residency program, and eventually into a track that will begin in the first year of medical school. So we're going to try.

So, What Is the Bottom Line?

Vitalism and the notion of innate healing is a topic brimming with life and the subject of intellectual curiosity. Why not openly and boldly take on the subject of vitalism within the wings of every chiropractic college? Why do some colleges snub the notion of vitalism? Why do some colleges merely pay lip service to its existence? Why is it that only a minority of the colleges are bold in their expression of vitalistic principles and have dared to come out of the closet on this issue? Who is right and who is wrong? Is anyone right or wrong?

From my perspective as a college professor I believe we need a better understanding of vitalism's roots and its controversial role in chiropractic. Those who argue that vitalism is a dead theory with no place in modern-day chiropractic may be correct. Still, others who argue that vitalism is a viable approach to health and the need is greater than ever to expand vitalism within the chiropractic community may also be right.

References

1. Ackerknecht, EH. A Short History of Medicine. The Ronald Press Company, New York. 1955, pp.130.
2. The complete text of the interview can be seen by visiting Dr. Redwood's web site at [url=http://www.doubleclickd.com/Articles/RedwoodWorks/dan_index.html][http://www.doubleclickd.com/Articles/RedwoodWorks/dan_index.html[/url]].

With each article I encourage you to write the questions you may have, commentaries on patient care, or thoughts to share with your colleagues, to me at the following address. Please include your own return address.

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