Keynote Speech:
A Philosophical Reflection on the Conference Theme:
“Body, Mind, Spirit, and Healing—An Encounter of Religious and Clinical Understanding”

International Conference on “Body, Mind, Spirit, and Healing—An Encounter of Religious and Clinical Understanding” to be held at National Chengchi University (Taipei) and Nanhua University (Chiayi), Taiwan from May 25th to 28th, 2011.

Shigenori Nagatomo
Dept. of Religion
Temple University
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
19122 USA
Key Terminologies:
12. Synchronicity

I. Introduction

A fair and clear treatment of this conference theme requires a thorough knowledge of multiple disciplines including those in natural sciences as well as humanities, and for this reason I had been at a loss for a long time as to where I should begin. After a long deliberation I decided to approach the theme of this conference by engaging myself in a philosophical reflection in such a way that I can at least provide a platform for conference participants to engage in fruitful and meaningful discussions. Through this philosophical reflection I will attempt to bring out what we as citizens of a global society must endeavor to collectively advance: a new vision of what it means to be human. I decided to take this route, because healing, its object, method, and goal, are all predicated on understanding what human beings are. In this presentation then, I want to share with all the participants an idea that human beings must be understood holistically as functional organic, unified wholes.

To achieve this end, 1) I would like to first provide five different stances we can take in terms of establishing what is the object, or recipient, of healing. In other words, what exactly is healed? 2) Secondly, I will address two different conflicts, because I believe that they will bring into clear relief the goal and the objective of this conference. 3) Thirdly, I would like to trace the philosophical origins of these conflicts to two views of human beings. 4) Fourthly, I will articulate some of the implications of accepting what I call “body-only stance” as a conceptual
II. Five Stances on the Object of Healing

I take the theme of this conference to address healing the body, mind, and spirit, taken either individually or collectively, and it urges us to problematize “an encounter of religious and clinical understanding.” Accordingly, we may initially entertain two questions in order to think through the issue at hand. The first question can be framed as: “what is the object of healing?” by which I mean “what entity is targeted?”, and the second question may be formulated as: “how are we to understand ‘an encounter of religious and clinical understanding of healing’”? I will try to respond to these queries in the order mentioned.

When we attempt to approach the first query, it appears that there are five different stances we can take as to what counts as an object of healing.

1) The first stance is to maintain that only the body is the main object of healing, and hence both the mind and the spirit are excluded from it. Because it takes only the body as its focus, we may call this “body-only stance.” Methodologically, this is the stance which modern Western medical science takes, including psychiatry [ft], with an assumption that the mind (and by extension spirit, as well) can be reduced to the physiological function of the body. Philosophically then, it assumes a reductionistic attitude toward the mind and/or the spirit. This stance is probably most fittingly designated as “clinical,” where the term “clinical” means empirically observing patients, supported by a scientific method.

2) The second stance is to maintain that only the mind is the main object of healing, but neither the body nor the spirit comes directly into its purview. Because it takes only the mind as
its target and focus, we may call it “mind-only stance.” (This stance may or may not acknowledge that a spirit exists.) For this reason, this stance is taken by some schools of psychology as well as various healing therapies (and folk beliefs). For example, it includes Freudian psychoanalysis and Jungian depth-psychology. [ft]

3) The third stance is to maintain that both the body and the mind are the main objects of healing, regardless of whether it acknowledges that a spirit exits or not. Because it takes both the mind and the body as its object, we may call it “body-mind stance.” It will include, for example, psychosomatic medicine, where the term “psycho” refers primarily to emotions but not to the spirit or the soul. Methodologically, this stance explicitly recognizes that there is a reciprocal influence of activity[ft] between the mind and the body when healing a sickness. [ft] This means that it philosophically maintains a functional mind-body correlativity. It is also considered “clinical” regardless of whether or not it accepts mechanistic causality as its explanatory model.

4) The fourth stance is to maintain that only the spirit is the main object of healing, and a person needs to restore the health of his or her spirit, if he or she becomes sick, even though its effect may show up either in the body or the mind. And because it takes the spirit as the main object of healing, we may call it “spirit-only stance,” where the term “spirit” is understood to be an incorporeal substance capable of existing apart from the body. [ft] Hence, this stance is predicated on the assumption that there exists a spirit-body dualism, and with this assumption it prioritizes the spirit over the body in its methodological procedure. It is a twin to the body-only stance, [ft] but the two positions are diametrically opposed to each other. Some of the Western religious traditions will accept this stance, including Plato, [ft] and accordingly this stance may be considered “religious,” although we need to clarify later what is meant by “spirit” in this case. [ft]
5) And the last stance is to maintain that all three, the body, mind, and spirit, are the object of healing, taken either individually or collectively, while living in “this” world. It recognizes that they are integrally related to each other in their function and activity, while at the same time acknowledging that there is a correlation of activity among them. Unlike the previous stances, this stance does not accept mind-body or spirit-body dualism, at least insofar as “this” life is concerned. Because it approaches healing from the comprehensive stance of taking into its purview the whole of a human being, i.e., the body, mind and spirit, we may call its stance “holistic.” We can include in this category some of the religious traditions which do not accept mind-body dualism, such as Buddhism, Daoism and Shintōism. As such this holistic stance embraces also a “religious” understanding of healing, where the term “religious” in this context means that it recognizes a higher healing power capable of addressing a sick person in these three dimensions.

III. III. An Encounter of Religious and Clinical Understanding: A Conflict Between the Body-Only Stance and the Mind-Only Stance

To indicate the nature of a conflict by way of an example, although admittedly it is not of an encounter between a religious and a clinical understanding, we can mention a case involving an organ transplant in which an issue of cellular memory was reported some time ago. An elderly lady reportedly received a heart transplant, and her donor happened to be a young man who died in a motorcycle accident. After recovering from the surgical operation, the patient started having sensations she had not experienced before: she wanted to drink beer and wanted to ride a motorcycle! She complained to the doctor who had operated on her, and was told that it was not his problem, because his purview and stance, to use the terminology introduced in the
foregoing, was the body-only stance, which does not take into consideration the healing of the mind. Consequently, the advice given to this patient was that because it was a psychological problem, she should consult a psychologist, instead. This story relates to us a conflict arising from the incompatibility of the methodological orientations between the body-only stance and the mind-only stance. The conflict emerges because both stances take a one-sided approach to healing, guided by a methodological decision to prioritize either the body or the mind in spite of the fact that human beings are unitary, organic wholes. A striking feature of either the body-only or the mind-only stance, as I want to highlight, is that it is characterized by one-sidedness in its methodological stance and in its practice, which, according to C. G. Jung, is a sign of barbarianism. Or to quote Dōgen, a Japanese Zen master who maintains a holistic non-dualistic stance, “when one side is illuminated, the other side remains in darkness.”

III-2. A Conflict Between the Body-Only Stance and the Holistic Stance

Among the five stances enumerated above, a most striking conflict is, however, seen between the body-only stance and the holistic stance, because the respective understandings of what it means to be a human are radically different. When we attempt to assess these two stances philosophically, we can point out a few salient differences between them as follows: the body-only stance is that stance which is reductionistically steeped in materialism, i.e., it states that human beings are best understood by reducing them to a material substance. It accepts as an explanatory model a mechanistic or efficient causality. On the other hand, the holistic stance is a stance which recognizes that body, mind, and spirit, taken together, form an organic, unitary whole. A crucial demarcating line between these two methodological stances lies in how to understand the body. If we follow the body-only stance, which is notably the stance of Western
medical science, the body is taken to be a material substance that is in itself devoid of life, whereas if we follow the holistic stance, which is represented by some Eastern religious traditions such as Buddhism, Daoism, and Shintōism, it takes the body to be a life phenomenon that is situated, when schematically represented, in the intermediary region between the body *qua* the material substance and the mind (and the spirit). [ft] The above differences amount to recognizing that as long as we accept Cartesian [ft] [ft]mind-body dualism as a viable conceptual paradigm for understanding what human beings are, it prevents us from seeing the body as a living phenomenon. This is because in Cartesian mind-body dualism the body categorized as a living phenomenon doesn’t exist, or because human beings are understood to be *either* the body *or* the mind. In other words, this paradigm understands the human mind and body *disjunctively*. On the other hand, if we are to approach the conference theme from the holistic point-of-view, we must follow the interpretive stance that takes the body *qua* the object of healing a living, life phenomenon. This is because human beings, while living in this life, are unified, organic wholes.

As can be seen from the preceding analysis, the nature of the conflict arising from an encounter between the religious and clinical understanding is embedded in how we understand what human beings are; the body-only stance regards the reality of what it means to be human as confined to the body as a material substance devoid of life [of its own], wherein the mind, let alone the spirit, is theoretically excluded from its methodological consideration. On the other hand, the holistic stance maintains that what it means to be a human is to understand all three dimensions, the body, mind and spirit integrally as comprising a unified, organic whole. Accordingly, the holistic stance would charge that the body-only stance is predicated on an understanding that is fragmented, one-sided, and imbalanced.
IV. Some Implications of the Body-Only Stance

Now, I would like to articulate a few philosophical implications of the body-only stance while also noting attendant practical consequences. As I indicated in the foregoing, the body-only stance is most notably taken by Western medical science. I would like to delve into the origin of this stance by reflecting on how the body-only stance philosophically emerges in modern Western philosophy.

As noted in the foregoing, the body-only stance is an offshoot of accepting Cartesian mind-body dualism as a way of understanding what human beings are. To repeat, human beings, according to this paradigm, consist of two incompatible substances: the mind as a thinking substance understood as that which is not extended and the body as a material substance conceived of as that which is extended, wherein, it is declared, there is nothing whatsoever in common between them. And when one applies an either-or logic to this understanding, the body-only stance emerges as a paradigm to be accepted by prioritizing the body over the mind as natural science arose to empirically observe natural phenomena, including the human body. Historically, it arose as a reaction to the emphasis which medieval Christian theology placed on the spirit as a principle of salvation. At any rate, the preceding is a philosophical derivation of the body-only stance. What needs to be noted here in this procedure is that reason is used as the standard for making this methodological decision, and this is supported by a belief that the essence of human beings lies in an exercise of rationality, understood as a discursive mode of thinking. We may note, however, that the discursive mode of thinking was considered by Aristotle (as well as Thomas Aquinas) inferior in scope and power to active, intellectual reason, which Aristotle called “nous poētikos” (and Aquinas “intellectus.”)
Let us draw further implications from the methodological decision to prioritize the body as the object of healing. This prioritization means that the body is observed from outside, i.e., the body that is thematized is an object-body, and an observer who thematizes the body in this way stands outside of the body, as a thinking substance. When we generalize this position, it will be seen that a human being comes to be defined as a “being-outside-of-nature.” This will put human beings existentially in a conundrum or logically in a contradictory state, because this view collides with the fact that the body exists in nature as it is incarnate. If we follow the latter view, a human being comes to be defined as a “being-in-nature.” Now, if we are to accept the former definition, it will psychologically create a divided self, and may in fact lead to “schizophrenia,” if driven to a pathological condition. In actual day-to-day life, it will fill the streets with walking dualists!

There is one more important implication that needs to be observed in this connection: when modern Western rationalism declares that the essence of human beings lies in the exercise of a discursive mode of reasoning, death is not included in its definition. This is an assumption that is also accepted by Western medical science, for the latter shares the same methodological assumption as the former. It is embedded in its theoretical stance, but in practice people die, wherein there is another instance of one-sidedness included in the methodological stance of Western medical science, namely that theory and practice are not brought to a synthetic unity, but rather theory is prioritized over practice, or theory is privileged over practice, which is a consequence of accepting that the essence of human beings lies in the exercise of rationality, or a belief that an observer can stand outside of nature to observe the body.

If death is not included in the definition of what it means to be human, one would feel that something is amiss, because as long as people live, they are also destined to die. This feeling is
no doubt related to the fact that the body-only stance understands the body to be a material substance. Research conducted in medical science also accepts this understanding with its mechanistic causal explanation, which was originally proposed in the history of Western science to account for the activity of nature, seen as a collection of dead, material substances. Just consider, however, what happens if a human being is reduced to a material substance which does not die. With this understanding, living human beings will lose the meaning of life and hence will inevitably fall into nihilism or hedonism, and as a reaction to it, will start engaging in many meaningless activities. This is because the body-only stance spurs fragmentation in people’s minds, in their interpersonal relationships, and in their negotiations with nature.

Let us look into the issue of fragmentation a little more closely. If a human being accepts the body-only stance even without a clear self-awareness, he/she would feel that his/her being is fragmented, because he/she knows that he/she also has a mind. Consequently, he/she will revolt against the body-only stance in order to gain his/her raison d’être, to restore the wholeness of his/her own being. This revolt has two aspects to it. First, it is a revolt by a fragmented mind against the body; the mind feels alienated by its own body, because it knows consciously or unconsciously that both the mind and the body are a unitary whole. Secondly, when the mind detects its alienation from its body, the unconscious is left to oblivion, as its activity is suppressed by the conscious, rationalistic stance. Consequently, the unconscious that is fragmented from a conscious mind, will revolt against the body-only stance, demanding a recognition of its presence in the human psychē. As a result of the fragmented mind taking a one-sided attitude toward either the conscious mind or the body, the unconscious will create various pathological conditions in order to signal that the whole activity of psychē has become fragmented and one-sided, and to create an impetus to restore its wholeness. Once these revolts
are in full swing, it is easy to see how an interpersonal relationship can be plagued by them, as well. If a human is defined as the body only, the mind, for example, sees it cannot “touch” another human being, because it believes that a human being is not a body, but a mind. Furthermore, the body-only stance also makes it impossible to carry out a meaningful conversation with nature because nature is reduced to a collection of dead, material substances. However, according to the holistic stance, nature is filled with life activities and recognized as a natural place for healing to occur, to which a human can return to rejuvenate him/herself.

There is one more point that I feel necessary to observe regarding the treatment and research methods employed in Western medical science in its theory and practice. Modern Western medical science is called an organ-oriented medicine; its treatment targets a specific organ when it diagnoses a sick body, without, however, taking into its purview an holistic stance of examining the rest of the organs. One of the two pillars supporting this practice is to provide medication. However, when researchers search for a cure for a certain disease, they produce a “cure,” i.e., a medication without considering the possible effect it has on other organs. Consequently, this methodological procedure has a tendency to create side-effects as its by-product. Moreover, a “cure” is conceived by addressing the symptom rather than its cause. We are led to question then if these methodological procedures are a reasonable and sound practice to follow, in spite of its allegedly rationalistic standpoint, because if a “cure” of one condition is accomplished by harming another part of the body, it is hardly a cure. This is no doubt a consequence of taking a fragmented approach to healing, as it does not study the human body from an holistic perspective of examining its effect on other parts of the body. It is guided by a belief that a whole is understood by the sum of its parts. However, this disregards the wisdom that a whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
V. Holistic Stance

While acknowledging that the greatest issue in healing is to overcome the existential fact of living, or for that matter death, understood as sickness or suffering, we may now look into a concrete example of the holistic stance which maintains a mind-body-spirit correlativity. To do so, I would like to briefly introduce Motoyama Hiroshi’s works, because his works illustrate a mind-body-spirit correlativity, an holistic stance. Motoyama is an accomplished yogin, Shintō priest, scientist, and thinker. He is also known for his invention of a computer-assisted measuring device, called AMI.

He observes that there obtains an interactive function among the body, mind, and spirit, and claims that when he sends energy to a particular energy center (cakra) of another person, whose cakra is awakened and active, it is possible to measure changes that occur in the targeted cakra of this person. When he sends energy, he is in a deep state of meditation, an emancipated, “spiritual” state. What is meant by a deep state of meditation is as follows: Yoga distinguishes between two senses of samādhi, which is a state of absorption; samādhi with object [bīja samādhi] and samādhi without object [nirbhīja samādhi]. In the latter case, it is said that an object alone shines forth. This is a nondualistic state wherein there is no oppositional relationship between subject and object. Experientially, this means that a subject in this state of meditation no longer projects anything from the unconscious or any idea or image onto an object. From this state, Motoyama targets a particular cakra and emits psi-energy, which is the energy with a “divine” quality that is not delimited by spatial and temporal determination. The point he wants to make here is that there occurs a conversion of energy, from psi-energy to physical energy that can be measured by AMI. If, for example, an activity of meridians associated with a given cakra
increases after a person receives energy from Motoyama, as has been measured, one is led to conclude that there is a correlation between a spiritual state and a physiological/physical state.

Another point which confirms the correlativity between the physical dimension and the spiritual dimension is his observation that what he sees in a samadhic state correlates to what is actually the case in the physical dimension. For example, if there is an image-experience in a samadhic state that there is a conflict between two parties, there is indeed a conflict existing between them in actual life. Jung for example proposed the theory of synchronicity to account for this type of phenomena. Both Motoyama and Jung, in other words, maintain that the physical world is mirrored in the spiritual world. In Buddhism, for example, this is called “great mirror wisdom,” which is said to become operative in a meditator after the storehouse consciousness ($ālayavijñāna$) goes through a radical transformation ($paravṛtti$), where the $ālayavijñāna$ is understood as a potential, unmanifest consciousness, containing all the seeds of experience ($sarvabīja$).

VI. Concluding Remarks: the Holistic Stance over the Body-Only Stance

Given these points about the holistic stance, a question we may have to entertain is: what does it mean to hold the holistic stance rather than the body-only stance? This question leads us to summarize what has been argued so far in this presentation.

The holistic stance is a healthy stance, because it is not, unlike the body-only stance, steeped in the one-sidedness of holding that human beings can best be understood as a material substance, of extolling rationality at the expense of the unconscious, of championing the use of either-or logic as the standard for making judgments. Consequently, the holistic stance does not fragment human beings into many disjointed pieces, i.e., fragmentation from oneself, from others,
and from nature. For example, a fragmentation from oneself will create various pathological conditions, a fragmentation from others will create various situations of conflict, and a fragmentation from nature will create various environmental, ecological problems to the point that this earth becomes no longer inhabitable by many living beings, including human beings. Moreover, because the holistic stance does not rely solely on the discursive mode of reasoning in understanding human beings, it regards human beings as “beings-in-nature,” rather than “beings-outside-of-nature.” It believes that to extol rationality in the modern Western Enlightenment spirit conceals an arrogance on the part of those who hold this methodological stance, as it is predicated on a mistaken belief that the human beings who exercise rationality are in control of the world, when in fact it is simply a projection of an anthropomorphic way of understanding reality. This position would be reasonable if what exists on this planet are only human beings, and nothing else to support them. However, it has at the same time many consequences, or to use Jung’s terminology “shadows,” that need to be reintegrated in understanding what human reality is.

In the foregoing, I have touched on the conference theme with a view to responding to its thematic concern, hoping that my presentation can become a platform to further engage in conversations on the topic of healing. This topic has multi-faceted dimensions, but my presentation has explored what I take to be the philosophical issues that need to be clarified and heeded to, if we are to have a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Having said this, however, I do not claim that I have given a comprehensive picture, because I am fully aware that there are many concerns that require a more in-depth investigation. Nonetheless, I hope I have at least taken steps pointing the discussion toward a comprehensive understanding of healing.