

THE SOMATO-PSYCHIC WHOLE

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Recovery, in terms of scientific somatic medicine, implies the disappearance of symptoms, and the establishment of a fresh physiological balance. As illness is regarded as a disorder affecting the biological organism, this equilibrium is determined by means of various anatomic and physiological tests. If we depart from this over-narrow perspective in search of a more fundamental approach to the problem of the "diseased" and the "healed," we find that psychological and sociological factors are involved in illness and in health. To be "sick" is an existentialist situation, and the same is true for being "healed." For instance, we see that the condition of being "well" implies not only the resumption of the organism's normal operation, but also the inner feelings—re-establishment in the community, and so on.

In these conditions, the question of non-orthodox healings falls into a broader problem, namely that of the interpretation of the concept of "well-being" in relation to the total sum of the human existence. Concretely, should our absolute concept of a healing not take into account certain perspectives regarding the somato-psychical whole, and the unity of man with his environment?

From the somato-psychical viewpoint, this is the whole question under consideration by psychosomatic medicine today. An emotional disturbance in the life of relation may be expressed somatically, and may therefore be resolved on the psychical level through the appropriate psychotherapy. In such a case, what is the test of full recovery? Is it the disappearance of somatic symptoms? And

what if these are replaced by psychic symptoms? It is indispensable, therefore, to take into account the shifts from the somatic to the psychic, and vice versa.

From the viewpoint of the relation of man with his environment, and particularly of his human environment, can integration into a certain type of community, or into a group living under certain myths—can such an integration, because of the establishment of a fresh equilibrium—be regarded as a “healing”? I have in mind those primitive societies, and also the real societies that have been formed around certain healers. In conditions such as these, how can we assess the “value” of these healings? Have they not been secured at the price of psychic regression to an archaic stage? Have they not been acquired at the price of a retreat from civilized and reasoning society? In other words, does the attained balance imply a shift of the symptoms rather than their disappearance?

At the core of all these questions, there is the essential problem of determining what is meant by man’s health, as a somato-psychic whole, within our present world, and at the present stage of human civilization.