"In the developed countries, the obsession with perfect health has become the predominant pathogenic factor. The medical system, in a world impregnated with the instrumental ideal of science, continuously creates new needs for health care. But the greater is the offer of health, the more people reply that they have problems, needs and illnesses. Each proclaims that progress will bring an end to the suffering of the body, preserve the vitality of youth, and prolong life indefinitely. No old age, no pain, no death. Forgetting in this way that such a regard for the art of suffering is a negation of the human condition itself.”  Ivan Illich, 1999 article in ‘Le Monde’ newspaper [L’obsession de la sante parfaite]

As I was browsing through the pages of Wikipedia making sure I had my medical facts right, I was amazed at the emphatic denials that exist against any form of 'Alternative' medicine, and had to conclude that if it wasn't just some obsessive fanatic spending hours and hours trawling through the pages of the various strands of unorthodox health ideas, writing the same thing over and over like a stuck record, then it must actually express something of a despair or resentment against alternative ways of doing things. And given that people are free to choose their own systems of health care, why such a rant against something which represents no threat other than the idea that someone else is doing something differently?

The answer, I feel, was expressed by Monica Sjoo in her book 'Return of the dark/light mother or New-Age Armageddon' [1999], in which she gives an account of the death of her son from cancer because, as she believed, he wasted precious time trying to cure it with new-age remedies; in particular one she calls Re-birthing, which not only delayed him seeking proper care in conventional ways, but actually made his condition worse. I suspect this is the dilemma that a lot of people face in the western world, in that they are wholly tied into a philosophy of health management, as Illich calls it, which correctly contrasts the holistic idea of prevention with the Allopathic concept that pathological conditions can be treated as isolated problems with drugs or surgical intervention. For Illich this view suggests that we have gone from a traditional notion of ourselves as people with bodies which need looking after, to the experience in the modern welfare state of being ourselves ‘une vie’ – ‘a life’ to be categorised by statistics or traded in death as a source of transplant organs.

As I was wondering how to approach this subject in a way which would not immediately alienate those with affinities with the western paradigm, it occurred to me that the fundamental block to appreciating the merits of alternative therapy, is the dependence that most 'patients' have on pain-killing or infection-reducing drugs. That is to say that if the alternative focus is essentially one which says that health care is about promoting a positive concept of how the body functions and maintains its vitality, then the western approach, which looks only at how to cure the body of disease, will have an advantage when someone is actually ill. This is again not to suggest that
alternative therapies do not accept disease or that they don't have ways of alleviating the symptoms, but that the 2 approaches define the same condition with reference to different states of being. In holistic speak this means something equivalent to the Chinese saying that 'you only pay the doctor when you are well'. I.e. if you get ill it's because you haven't been following the prescriptions for good health so there's no point seeing the doctor; you just have to go back and see what it is you haven't been doing right. On the other hand, the western approach is to say that whatever symptoms appear, they are categorised according to conventional concepts of specific conditions, which are potentially applicable to everyone, and that the eradication of the symptoms of the condition equals a restoration to 'good' health. The key question then, is what is meant by 'good' health; and whether the condition it supposedly represents actually tallies with the type of care given.

Anyway the problem of what 'good' really means and whether there can, or should, be a shared sense between the medical and the ethical dimensions of the concept, is a complex subject which I will broach a bit later. But getting back to the basic concepts of the processes of the 2 systems, one of the main objections on the Wikipedia pages was that alternative systems are 'unscientific', and this is shown by the fact that there is no proof or evidence for the efficacy of alternative therapies. For me that is not a problem, basically because this is exactly the niche which these systems occupy; they are systems which have arisen in the west to fill the gaps left by a western approach to health. Most people who come to these systems are dissatisfied with conventional approaches or have a belief system which starts from a basically holistic or organic model.

My feeling is that this state of affairs has arisen in the context of a culture which fundamentally relegates the role of the senses and the personality to one of a bystander in the scientific perspective, which treats the body as a machine. That people not only have the ability to participate, and should, in their own health care; but that their exclusion from the process because they lack expertise leads to a skewed picture of what is going on, attests to the fact of a kind of entrenched moral boundary between the 2 approaches. And rather than attempt to define what the unbalanced view of dualist paradigms represents from a holistic perspective, I feel it is worth making a quick sketch of what disease actually is in holistic terms.

The basic idea is that human organisms exist within a very closely interdependent relationship with the ecological environment. As such what is thought of in the west as an 'Immune System' which serves to fight off unwanted pathogens from outside, is regarded holistically as a sensitivity for the naturally fluctuating conditions of the environment in which the body recognises the signs of diversity and adapts as best it can. Obviously in the case of an introduced bacteria or un-natural toxic environment, we have no way of sensing how to balance ourselves within this context because there is no natural balance. Anyway my own path of healing has led me to the understanding that the process of disease is similar in conception to what we call an allergic reaction. This is when a particular element of our environment,
whether it is outside or ingested, triggers a response in our bodies to warn us against that thing. This is also part of the process of addiction to stimulants or suppressants when, instead of being warned against something, we actually crave it because it gives us the characteristic boost of the body reacting to reject that state of affairs. If that substance which is ingested gives us the opportunity to escape from a situation which is felt as worse than the addiction, then we continue to take it.

The same is true for minor sensitivities which we may develop in the course of a lifestyle which we tolerate for the sake of more wide-reaching goals in our lives. This kind of addiction may be not just a taste for coffee or large amounts of salty meat, but could also be an addictive behaviour pattern such as spending hours on the internet gambling or shopping. The effect is the same. Initially we experience a high associated with the release from a perceived 'malaise' and the excitement of the adrenalin boost of doing something a bit risky. However, as all addicts attest, the initial excitement soon wears off and we nose-dive into increasing doses just to stave off the unwanted feelings and also to maintain the sense of normality which the boosting sensation gives.

In this condition, the body is still tolerating the invasion, but is using ever more resources to try to maintain that feeling of normality, until eventually we lapse into the disease state in which the functions of whichever parts of the body are affected, start to break down. This is the point at which a conventional biomedical doctor is called because symptoms of abnormality manifest. This is a crucial stage in the demarcation of what has caused the problem and leads to the subtle distinction that the problem exists either in a particular isolated condition, or it reflects the imbalance of the entire system; the latter being an understanding which involves the role of the personality in diagnosis, and leads to a very different picture of how to treat the person.

Fundamentally, this apparently small variation in approach, which could also lead to a similar conclusion, actually reflects a shift in method which is the same as my previous description of the way that reductionist or dualist concepts misdiagnose the situation because they unnecessarily put things in boxes which sometimes don't fit what they are trying to put in them. Or, in other words, it is the basic complexity of the situation which involves a) the multiple equation of the personality of the sufferer, b) the manifest symptoms of the body and c) the state of the environmental context; which leads to a sense that we have to understand the problem through the healthy perspective of the healer, and their grasp of the problem as an empathic and intuitive sensitivity expressed through the symbolic culture of the health system.

The role of the healer in effecting a cure or a re-balancing of the patient is understood not so much as a physical intervention which corrects the malfunctioning of individual parts through drugs or surgery, but a directing of the body's natural energy towards a greater awareness of the root cause. How the patient must be involved in this process is that they have to connect with the sensations of manipulation, or subtle herbal remedies, in a way which allows them to recognise the existence of a possibly suppressed cause. This
marks a chasm of difference with the western approach which denies the responsibility of the patient for their own disease. The lack of values in scientific observation means that any definition of the state is termed a purely 'incidental' happening and has no moral implications. Conversely, if there is no sense of the value of one feeling over another, then there is no way to recognise or reject causal processes which are the cause of the symptoms.

Another significant concept in a holistic understanding of health is that the body has a 'mechanism' for bringing about greater sensitivity and awareness of the causes of the problem as a means to preventing the causal factors. It took me a long time to be able to recognise this process in myself as I went through years of problems associated with an injury. Although I am by no means an expert in this field, it is only through the conviction that the body does in fact essentially know how to heal itself and that this works on a whole-person basis, that I became more aware of how my reaction to the pain I was feeling seemed to operate on different levels. On the primary level it results from the injury itself. And this also applies in the case of symptoms of internal imbalance and digestive disturbances. What we notice are the signs that something has gone wrong and the immediate nervous pain which results more strongly in a particular place.

What the healing mechanism then does is to focus our attention on the wound as basically a deep sensitivity for the pain in the body as a whole. It is as if everytime the body manages to effect a minor repair to the wound, it increases the overall level of sensitivity in the body so that underlying causes or other old problems which are still unresolved, surface into the awareness and give the body a whole a chance to sense how to rebalance itself as a whole system. In this way any root causes which may have given rise to the wound as a chronic symptom can be identified and this lends to the healing of the wound. As such, it is remarkable that this healing process tends to drag out any core processes or organic imbalances which somehow block a total restoration of vitality. And on the emotional basis I have noticed that what this translates to is a kind of feedback loop in which my emotional reaction to pain somehow acts as a moderator of the physical pain until the emotional reaction settles into a greater awareness of root causes which it may have been trying to deny.

The need for pain

“If one concentrates all the activities of the mind which are normally directed outward, that is ideas, judgements, feelings, volitions and even the function of breathing; in fact if all the life energy is concentrated in the centre of the body, in the Tanden, a new sphere of consciousness arises within us which completely transcends the opposition of objective and subjective, of outward and inward and even our usual sleep-clouded consciousness. This leads to the absolute and final stage of spiritual experience in which one realizes that God lives and works as the highest principle and the Primordial Source of life in every single being, as well as nature as a whole.”
Kaneko Shoseki, Nature and Origin of Man, 1910
Having raised the idea of the need for a moral reference point by which to gauge our sensations of right and wrong in the body, what really brings it all into focus is the addition of the fundamental purpose of our lives. If we are of the persuasion that there is indeed a meaning to our lives as part of a 'cosmic plan' then it becomes relevant to wonder how this sense of meaning can be dovetailed with an awareness of pain in the body. And without referring to the highly relevant question of why pain exists at all, what we need is a link between the function of pain as part of a healing process in the body and our emotional or spiritual aspirations for fulfilment.

The above quote brings in the concept of the 'Tanden', the gravitational centre of the energy system of the body, which is transmitted through a number of pathways known as meridians. By bringing our conscious awareness to focus on this point in the body we not only allow for an awareness of any blocks in the energy of the body, but this also brings an awareness of the fundamental meaning of our existence as a physical sensation. This is because it is only when we are totally focussed and relaxed into a state of wholeness of being that we are able to experience the undifferentiated reality of divine harmony. The Tanden is a point just below the navel and bringing our attention to this point coincides with a focus on the role of the diaphragm in breathing deeply. Thereby the awareness and the rhythm of the body are in harmony in one gesture of receptivity to the meaning of our being in the universe.

Having outlined why it is necessary to experience our pain on a physical level, we have to understand how this translates to a belief in the necessity of pain in general. In other words, if I can appreciate how the body heals itself largely through a subtle balancing of its own energy, and that this derives its sense of balance intuitively from either the natural world or a healer; then how do painful ideas such as mortality and the torture of others, or even myself, reflect an emotional sense of pain as the fundamental struggle for a spiritual path? I feel the answer to this is twofold. Firstly we have a sense of our own destiny and how this plays out in the context of our own development and our relations with others. Secondly we have a physical encounter with life which brings us into contact with the suffering of others and the 'pain' of the world.

On the first count, I feel that my life is valued primarily by my attitude that the goal is to achieve a process of being which is in balance with the rest of life, however that might pan out. On this basis the Buddhist view of the impermanence of all forms in life as the starting point of selfless liberation from individuality, called Compassion, gives us the concept that my individual struggle exists only relatively, and the deeper urge to liberate myself in a mystical embrace of the infinite serves to dislocate my pain. It is interesting on this score to sense that the ultimate pain in life is an encounter with death on both the physical and spiritual levels. Whatever suffering I may have to endure through misadventure or chance has its ultimate release in death; whatever struggles I may engage with on a personal basis, they are trivial when compared to the cosmic balance of life as a whole. This doesn't mean that I don't engage with life or take risks which may result in pain. But that my
awareness of the ultimate contours of existence allow me to modify my path as a reference to the ultimate value of peace beyond the borders of my imagination.

And on the second count, there is another crucial factor in holistic understanding of the body which basically forms the energetic equation of how we relate to others and all life forms. This is called the Aura, a kind of magnetic energy field linked to the body's energy system and which allows us to sense the Aura of other beings. You may have noticed that animals have this way of connecting with each other through subtle movements of the interactions of their energy fields. On the wider scale this sensation of the collective pulse of life as the unified vibration of the life force allows us not only to connect with others on a local empathic level, but gives us a sense of the interconnectedness of all life as a sharing of suffering known as Compassion. This experience represents our highest attainment of physical balance and reflects a desire to unite the strivings of physical discipline with a spiritual outlook.

From this basic outline of a holistic sense of the configuration of the body's energy patterns, it becomes obvious that the approach towards otherwise similar symptoms, is substantially different. The machine metaphor of western physiology is contrasted to the idea of the body as an autonomous unit which regulates its functions through a dynamic energy field which can also be construed as the energy of the consciousness of the person. And although it is again apparent that there is a similarity between the inter-relations of the body's control mechanisms, known in the west as the voluntary or autonomic nervous systems; the focus in a holistic paradigm is one of the primary action of the individual in recognising a secondary process of the automatic self-regulating propensity of the organism as a whole. As with meditation, we become focussed on the distracting elements of our general disposition as a means to greater clarity of awareness of our interdependent relationship with the All.

This perspective naturally leaves plenty of room, not only for the sense that we are taking responsibility for our health, but for the deeper spiritual idea that what goes on in our bodies is a direct correlation of the psychic process of self-realisation. In this way the role of a healer in therapy becomes more discernible as someone who has not just the skills associated with a particular form of treatment, but is fundamentally grounded in the person-centred approach which maintains a dialogical relationship with the person as patient. And on the score that this relationship is essentially a personal one rooted in the experience of both parties, we can go no further in attempting to delineate what path it may take. Therefore it is up to each person to choose, experience and refine their own healing process accordingly.

**Concepts of the body**

Having made a sketch of a holistic view of how the body works, we can now come back to the sense of objection in the west to the supposed lack of
evidence of effective cures and the gulf of incomprehension which divides the 2 approaches. Again, we have to hold in our minds the idea that what is the source of the dispute is the claim to a valid concept of health. That this will entail a varying degree of connectedness to the domain of moral valuation in the 2 systems only serves to obscure how a western idea of health is propped up by its intellectual justification in both theoretical and concrete hierarchies of medical expertise. It is tempting on this score to define a western concept of health as not only the absence of disease, but the absence of dependency on the behavioural conventions associated with conformity to the institution of health management.

If I have emphasised that the central role in the holistic approach is the acceptance of pain as an indicator of the workings of a healing process; this differs markedly with a belief that medical science has the knowledge to be able to discern the cause and mechanisms of malfunctioning organs or systems, and that they can fix it with their sophisticated medical toolkit. So this points to the big difference being one in which the role of the individual in their health care is either a necessary element, or is almost entirely excreted from the equation in favour of the technological management of humans as machines. That painkillers and 'immune-boosting' drugs are used to inflate the body's natural defences to the extent of eliminating awareness of the process of disease, apart from the obvious addiction that this engenders to numbing passivity, also accounts in large measure for the belief in the uneducated majority that what they are getting is better than if they were left to their own devices. And due to the obvious fact that we cannot speculate what would happen in a world where this world did not exist, we are left with the idea that really what sustains peoples allegiance to such an institution is the element of relationship predominantly provided by the minions of the medical hierarchy. And the last nail in the coffin is just to say that if we are still convinced that the kind of life of drug-dependent longevity and spiritual vacuum is worth hanging on for, then perhaps we should pay more attention to the role of personal care in the equation and the vital role it plays in sustaining an otherwise catastrophic decline.

Well I won't labour the point any more in case I risk setting myself up as beyond the need for authentic dialogue. Rather I want to shift my attention to the more broadbrush perspective of how such a culture effectively undermines a natural or traditional approach to health care and in fact does not even attempt to construct any kind of social envelope of care beyond the decreasing token of what is otherwise the privilege of the rich. Its obvious neglect of the health-promoting value of a natural environment in favour of the conditions of life for the majority of the urban poor, reflects an overt distaste for the problems of embodiment, no less than an intellectual denial of its significance. And in the absence of a sustaining myth of the value of physical well-being, it nurtures a belief in the unalloyed value of intellectual processes enshrined in its institutions.

From this platform of a definition of the body encapsulated in a concept of healthcare which merely serves to embellish the absurd ideals of human
perfection, outlined by Huxley in Brave New world, and later examples such as the film The Matrix; we see the key role of civic identity in its designation of appropriate behaviour. This fact which maintains a kind of detached vision of the exclusive destiny of the elite parades its technological icons as representations of a perfectly manicured existence. However it also perpetuates the concept of the need for ever-increasing levels of defence against an unsavoury underworld of imperfect 'unpeople' as defined by Mark Curtis in his excellent survey of the myth of the infallibility of the British Empire in a book called 'Web of Deceit' [2003]. In this way we arrive at a dualistic universe inhabited by people whose heads are in the clouds filled with the celebrity ideals of eternal youth and whose bodies are veiled in a tortuous tangle of emotions and suppressed physical urges.

As it appears to me that the western world is gradually slipping towards a Niagara Falls of its own making, I have noticed that the tendency, or schism, which engenders this basic paradox of disembodiment not only increases with time, but acquires a collective character of desperation in the justification myths which boast the power to stave off the inevitable. If the heroic stereotype of human physicality is expressed in the west as the muscular mystique of military and intellectual domination, then the alternative is the regenerating or re-conditioning potential of the healing power of nature. Therefore we have to envision a possible world free of the disastrous metaphors of the intellectual self-obsession of the technocratic elite, and recognise that these function for them to stave off an unwanted maturity of collective being based in the necessities of a shared environment. The alternative must be one in which the health of the individual is derived from a sense of belonging to a healthy community.

**Useful tools of traditional medicine**

Inevitably I come back to the necessity in a definition of Well-being of the concept of belonging, and a mystical idea of the essential goodness of the universe. What this means in an education for healthcare is that the central and elusive idea of goodness has to come from the experience of the individual. Although we do create symbolic representations of positive ways of being and learn from them, we still have to retain that fundamentally personal perspective of making individual decisions ourselves based on our sensation of being wholly embodied and, ultimately, wholly at one with the universe. Perhaps it is this very need for a vital link between the state of our minds and our bodies which has favoured the emergence in the East of systems of healthcare focussed on the function of the energy pathways of the body. Or more simply, if all of life is conceived as energy, then by understanding the role of energy in regulating the processes of the body, we have a ready-made conduit between consciousness and bodily awareness.

On the basis that we are coming at this from a non-eastern culture, it becomes necessary to sense the subtle effect of the indigenous lens. Whether this entails regarding the East through a lens of western origins or attempting to view the West as deficient from the perspective of the East, we are necessarily
at a disadvantage. Fortunately, this being a discussion of the role of the body in care, we can invoke the primary experience of the body by the individual as an arbiter of value in the discernment of how to approach new feelings; and whether it is useful in this context to hold on temporarily to familiar ideas as explanations of a process in transition to a more integrated culture. Equally, if our initial experience seems to lack any familiar reference of value, can we not use this absence of conditioned imperatives as a basis on which to construct a new knowledge-foundation of being?

So to help fill in the gaps where a newcomer to this field of healthcare has perhaps already experienced a sense of the disillusionment with the grim realities of the bio-medical model, maybe through an experience of nature or enhanced symbolic reflections of truth, I will elaborate a couple of general concepts which have been especially useful to me and reflect an attitude or principle rather than any specific approach. Having already mentioned the role of what Shoseki calls the Tanden, but which is known more widely in western complimentary therapies as the Hara, I will elaborate a bit more on how this part of the body occupies a central place in the Eastern map of the body.

One could describe the character of the Hara in 3 ways:

1). It has the central role of being located in the area of the diaphragm muscle which controls our breathing. That this muscle is actually a voluntarily operated one can in some cases get overlooked because people tend to forget that their breathing has a vital place in the maintenance of a steady rhythm and that deep breathing has to originate from the diaphragm and not from the nose. This is not to say that nose-breathing is not necessary in contrast to mouth-breathing, but that if we forget to pay attention to the breath then we can end up breathing shallow breaths which actually reverse the natural function of the diaphragm from breathing in when the diaphragm pushes out and vice-versa.

2). It occupies a kind of central hub in the Meridian pathways in the body so that one can sense the imbalance of the whole system directly in this area. As such it will ideally be in a state of dynamic tension without lapsing into a state of over-tension or inertia. Therefore the bringing of awareness to this point in a focussed and relaxed way dramatically aids both the flow of energy round the body as well as facilitating the connection between the mind and the body.

3). From this state of facilitating both the correct breathing and a balanced flow of energy, the mind is then in a position to sense how the energy of one's posture, for example, reflects the needs of the body as a whole, and the Hara then becomes a kind of gravitational centre which brings together the focus of the mind with a conscious sense of how the energy is distributed around the body. If one observes the remarkable similarity of posture in all the Martial Arts and also the more sedate versions of Tai-chi and Chi-gung, you can see how this sense of the Hara being the middle of the person acts as a feeling of dynamic balance in motion and also a central focus of the conscious distribution of energy.
Having mentioned these exercise disciplines I will give a quick sketch of how I feel these types of practice aid the holistic understanding of life, not least in the realisation of some form of exercise generally as a way of promoting good health. Again, I feel it will be useful for anyone who is not an adept at this sort of thing to forget about the theoretical background of these routines, which have now become so popular in the west, and allow the body to educate itself as a gradual process of sensing the shift from the conditioning imposed by mental or moral imperatives, to one in which the body becomes the source of truth.

In a way I think what is happening when we do Yoga or Tai-chi /Chi-Gung etc. is that we are learning to balance the energy in our bodies. In the course of aspiring to achieve a more positive feeling of well-being it will become apparent that there are physical tensions and emotional dispositions in our bodies which resist stretching and effort. It is really these sort of obstacles which are the focus of this type of work. If one thinks of Meditation as somehow the physical relaxation of the mind, then what the body is doing in comparison is attempting to let go of the physical baggage of a lifestyle which is perhaps not as fulfilling as we can imagine. The existence of pain in stretching stiff muscles, and the emotional pain of resistance to working muscles in a particular way to induce liberating sensations, reflect the similar mental process which is conditioned by language and the impulse to behave in certain ways.

All in all what this opening up of the mind/body relationship leads to is a need for a greater understanding of how to hold the body in balance in the long term and how our goals for spiritual fulfilment are a parallel of this search for meaning and purpose. In this attempt I have found that a synthesis of the Chinese and Indian systems of body-awareness give me a perspective which suits my character and path in life. I have largely outlined the main themes of Zen or Taoist traditional medicine; the Indian system known as Ayurveda focusses primarily on the diet as the source of our energy; and how the balance of the whole body facilitates the effective functioning of the digestive system as a regulation of the finer processes of the body. In other words you are what you eat!

The main point of similarity between the two, as indeed with traditional western herbal medicine, is its use of a four or five element symbolic pattern by which we learn to integrate the various functions of the body. This is also known as Alchemy and a form of this art was prevalent in Europe prior to the Enlightenment of the Middle Ages. The elements of fire, water, air, earth, metal, wood and ether are used in a combination to give one a symbolic representation of the forces of nature. As such, in Chinese medicine they are further elaborated by the 12 Meridians and the Yin/Yang; and in Ayurveda by the 3 Doshas and their equivalents in the body and its Chakras, which are an ascending system of points going up the spine and which signify the spiritual development of the body's energy.
Out of this elaborate pattern of interlocking elements and forces comes an array of more subtle concepts of particular bodily functions which are learned in much the same way as western physiology, with perhaps the proviso that the personality can affect their behaviour. Personally I am not of the type to be able to focus on specific disciplines which require detailed and applied knowledge in a committed choice of career. I feel this is due to my temperament as a creative/intuitive manual worker who lacks the type of memory which can easily store and retrieve complex abstract information. On this basis, I have taken a general view of the energy body from the Chinese outlook mediated by the five elements, and a more detailed approach to my diet from Ayurveda. That this allows me to configure my being as sensitive both to the energies of the natural world and the basic functions of my body suggests that one can exist largely on an emotional level with regard to the balance between oneself and the natural world.

Another practice common to both, and to many cultures all over the world is that of Massage. I have myself done some basic training in Massage both of the Zen type and the more European variety which is now known either as Swedish or Aromatherapy. This subject leads me to the more psychological component of healthcare in that it acts as a bridge between the regulation of pain sensed as a purely physical element, and the idea of its counterpart of pleasure being more related to the emotions, despite its obvious physical origins. As such it becomes a complex and highly subjective balance between the desire to avoid pain and the need for pleasure, sometimes itself serving merely to avoid pain.

I have expressed my belief that forms such as meditation and a correct understanding of the process of breathing, allow us to focus on the role of pain in enabling deeper healing mechanisms; the same could be said for Massage in the way that it heightens the awareness of both pain and pleasure and serves to make us aware of the difference. And perhaps, if we are able to notice what out true motivation is, we can start to feel how we use the one in relation to the other. Having mentioned that western culture has developed a dualistic definition of mind and body, there is a tendency both to create a mutually reinforcing myth of their functions based on their separation; and also to exploit this division in devising strategies which are evidently unbalanced.

To explore this theory further, we could suggest that the west's conventional association of Massage with Sex and Prostitution revolves around both its emphasis on the inferior functions of the body as well as its creation of a myth of sexuality which justifies its blatant oppression of women and their bodies. My feeling is that this derives from the long-standing classical regard of women's bodies as a source of horror and the concomitant need to secure a dominant myth of both their inferiority and, more significantly, their rightful role as producers of male babies. That this has the knock-on effect of instilling in the culture of femininity in the west, a sense of passive availability and functional fertility, masks a more holistic understanding of sexuality as pertaining to the reunification of persons with their bodies. On this count the role of the subtle regulation of pain and pleasure in sexual activity restores a
necessary balance in the body as part of the evolutionary process of perpetuating the human race. Ideally this also reflects a balance of how erotic energy nurtures our sensibility for the creative forces of the natural world and imparts an emotional and symbolic feeling for the appropriate distribution of that erotic energy within a framework of mystical belonging.

**The proof of the pudding**

We have to understand the state of our health as something which expresses the totality of our path in life; because if there is no distinction between the process of health care and spiritual development, then everything which happens to us forms part of our purpose in life. You may object to this that if I am stung by a mosquito which has been genetically altered as a measure against dengue fever in Brazil, and as a result give birth to a child who has a brain half its normal size, then there is nothing intentional in that child's life which has led to their appalling disability. Of course, this is true and it is just as true for a natural disaster such as an earthquake. How can we find a rationale for explaining suffering in the context of a meaningful universe?

In my own case I had to struggle with a particular injury I sustained due to falling off a bicycle. I use this example because it was a relatively minor injury and the fact of its cause also having a simple origin serves to flesh out the argument. In fact this injury created considerable complications in my health and was the catalyst for my exploration of alternative healing. The question as it arose in my context was how could I believe that somehow I had participated in causing my own downfall which was caused by such a random event as a hole in the road? And the answer I eventually came to was that I had accepted to become part of the technological culture of cycling and so had taken the risk entailed by cycling at 20 m.p.h. on a tarmac road.

So to magnify this argument one could say that ultimately if one is part of a culture that believes in genetic engineering and nuclear power then one has to accept the inevitable consequences. This means that ultimately we are all responsible for everything that happens because we are part of the whole system. And this applies in principle to the fact of earthquakes and floods; the fact of becoming aware of our own existence entails an acceptance of the risks involved. And this really, as I see it, is the challenge and the lesson of life. That we accept its darkness as a necessary contrast to our ability to perceive the light as something eternal and beyond the struggles of individual embodiment.

This is the necessary perspective for anyone who wants to disentangle themselves from addiction to a healthcare system which denies the need for pain and the role of the individual in taking responsibility for their condition. From this vantage point we can have a look at a couple of examples of the catastrophic misinterpretation of the meaning of life by western scientific models. I am describing these here because anyone who is convinced by the arguments of reductionist materialism will be caught in a net of what is called in philosophy a 'tautological' argument. This means that the the argument is basically circular. Or, to give a simple example; 'because the sun is hot I get
sunburn'. This says that I can explain sunburn because I know the sun is hot. But in reality there is no way of forming an idea of the heat of the sun unless one experiences it as hot, perhaps by getting sunburn. It is equally possible therefore that the sun is not hot and that my sunburn is caused by something else. The argument is circular. When we apply this to the state of western biomedicine we have the argument, say, that, high blood pressure is caused by excess cholesterol. In this argument the patient is tied into a system which defines their condition as 'high blood pressure' and its cause as 'excess cholesterol'. So we have to ask is the 'high blood pressure' somehow part of the same system of explanation as 'excess cholesterol'? The answer is obviously yes, because it defines the body, and its relation to the person and the natural world as characterised by a reductionist model. The diagnosis of 'high blood pressure' forms part of a system which regards the regulating of the body's 'blood pressure' [another Newtonian concept] by the mechanical functioning of a 'pump' called the heart and a network of blood vessels which are prone to clogging from excess 'cholesterol' in the diet. Therefore it eliminates any other possible cause of the symptoms associated with its diagnosis and posits a mechanism which is limited to the narrow definition of a pump and liquid flowing through tubes, possibly being constricted by a substance defined as cholesterol. The existence of the so-called cure is defined precisely in relation to its ostensible cause, [according to mathematical correctness], and the argument is based on the reductionist logic of 'if one, then the other'. But if the premise is not correct, i.e. the diagnosis misconstrues the meaning of the symptoms, then the cure is equally wrong. This leads to the interesting equation that if the disease necessarily justifies the cure; and if this is indeed a circular argument, then it is equally true that the cure justifies the disease! This state of affairs amplifies Illich's concept that people demand to be managed and that the expanding technology of diagnosis and pharmacology merely serves to expand the pantheon of non-science masquerading as care.

Out of this self-contradicting riddle of the 'grinding of flesh' by the Moloch of the modern health machine, the debilitated citizen needs an alternative which speaks to their condition as a person craving soul food and not synthetic poisons. I cannot be more emphatic that such a need can only be supplied by a recognition that the facts of western health 'care' are a badly-disguised excuse for the doctor-as-god ego trip of our classically inspired culture. 'We are part of Nature', as John Seymour stressed in his book 'The Ultimate Heresy' [1989]. The MWC [Men in White Coats, as Seymour defines them], who tell you that they can outdo nature with a synthetic model of the body and its relation to nature is basically on a fantasy trip; the only way to reclaim your body and your soul is to take responsibility for your own health and start to listen to what your body is telling you.

What follows are some of the things I and plenty of others have noticed about what is the most urgent threat to life on the planet resulting from the insane theories of Dualism. And the deeper meaning of this for the future is that if we continue to deny our own part in this largest phase of extinctions the planet
has ever known, we will never recognise the cause and be able to put it right. On the personal level this applies to the denial of the cause of the major killers in the west which are virtually unknown in the 'undeveloped' world. If the continued attempt to deny the connection between the lifestyles of the west and its main diseases is not revealed, there will be no relief from the nihilistic culture which it fosters and, more significantly, there will be no chance for ecological adaptation in recognition of the destabilising effects of this culture.

So given that we can infer the falsity of the theory from a recognition of the falsity of its claims to provide an effective integration with the natural world, we can look to a number of issues to demonstrate this; and then suggest some alternative ways of conceiving the same processes.

**Agriculture**

Pesticides are known to cause Autistic-spectrum disorders which have undergone a dramatic increase with the continuing ingestion of sprayed food and accumulation in the bio-sphere. This can also be applied to the build-up of antibiotics in meat which are used in increasing amounts to overcome immunity in the animals. Neonicotinoid pesticides are known to cause severe damage to the Bee population on which life depends. Non-organic fertilizers and the effect of large scale monoculture denudes the soil of its natural goodness, depleting wildlife and causing digestive disorders in humans. Run-off from nitrates kills aquatic life and sterilises the soil when it accumulates.

**Alternatives:** Organic agriculture, Permaculture, mulching, small scale subsistence farming.

**Deforestation**

The planet has undergone rapid deforestation since the expansion of industrial culture and is continuing to be used to create space for the processing of mineral resources, urban expansion and the growing of cash crops, not to mention the illegal destruction of priceless habitats to feed the timber trade and the massively wasteful use of paper in disposable ways. The potential harm of this reduction to almost zero of our essential foundation for life is incalculable and no doubt it will be ignored until it is way too late to remedy, if this hasn’t already happened.

**Alternative:** It is absolutely vital that we recognise the essential role of tree cover in the maintenance of a diverse and sustainable ecology. On this count education is as important as replanting and leads to a revitalisation of culture from the ground up.

**Nuclear**

The effects of the bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki are widely known. The effects of the meltdowns at Chernobyl and Fukushima remain disputed despite mounting evidence in the ecosystem and the medical record. Since at least the 1999 bombardment of Yugoslavia and since then in Iraq and Libya, Uranium in various forms has been used in weapons leading to widespread increases in cancers and birth defects. Nuclear regulators are now suggesting that it is in fact good for you echoing the unfortunate mistake in the 30's when radium was prescribed as a tonic. This also reflects the nuclear mentality of irradiating
food supposedly for our protection.

**Alternatives:** Nuclear bombs and power are part of a nightmare future – no thanks! We could live sustainably without it or fossil fuels by creating massively more efficient ways of doing things, and renewable ways of generating small-scale power. The vast majority of energy burned today is either in perpetuating the war economy or to provide profits for the multinationals.

**Pollution**

Industry has long been pouring out massive amounts of toxic waste. From smog, groundwater pollution, poisoning of wildlife, acid rain, respiratory problems, off-gassing, environmental toxicity to sick-building syndrome, blighting of natural beauty and geopathic stress, to name a few; this does not even start to catalogue the detrimental side-effects on humans who have to work and live in these environments. Mass-production is impersonal, unaesthetic and designed to increase the profit of the few at the expense of the rest.

**Alternatives:** Small scale quality local production for local use. Preference for manual work over mechanisation incorporating traditional crafts and land-based knowledge. Use of organic and non-polluting materials and processes in a sustainable way. Schumacher, echoing Gandhi, recognised the need for intermediate technology in conjunction with low-tech training at a community level. The recent Transition movement has come into its own in bringing out the quality of lifestyle generated by local exchange.

**Healthcare**

Fertiltity drugs, contraception drugs and processes, test tube fertilisation and cloning create the illusion of liberation from the burden of enforced childbirth all the while nurturing the concept of the body as a machine to be managed by impersonal systems of baby production. Drugs are 'tested' on animals in ways that are totally unacceptable to anyone with half a conscience and their results are inconclusive leading to side-effects and worse. Transplantation is seemingly a lifesaver for some, although a nightmare for others; it reinforces the machine metaphor and the belief that longevity is the ultimate proof of medical science whatever the quality of life. Trade in black market organs has sprung up to cater for the growing demand in the affluent west preying on the unfortunate masses in the poor south.

**Alternatives:** Health systems which attempt to mirror nature's way, person-centred programmes of disease prevention, natural remedies, concepts of health tied in to the health of the planet and spirituality.

**Genetically Modified Organisms**

The most recent version of this supposedly miracle solution to the worlds food problems [e.g. Golden Rice] – is the invention of Gene Drives which are an attempt to eradicate species deemed as pests because they have developed resistance to engineered herbicides. Gene Drives have been called “mutagenic chain reactions,” and are to the biological world what chain reactions are to the nuclear world, writes Vandana Shiva.

**Alternatives:** Traditional Biodiversity and subsistence agriculture, organic.
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<th>Holism</th>
<th>Western</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diet</strong></td>
<td>Balanced protein, fat, fibre, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals. Regularity, non-stimulants</td>
<td>Overeating, refined sugars, saturated fats, salt, stimulants e.g. alcohol, coffee. Junk food lacking nutrition, vitamins, minerals</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Exercise/ Yoga</strong></td>
<td>Regularity, rests heart, conditions muscles, relieves tension, aids metabolism, digestion and circulation</td>
<td>Lack of or inappropriate. Overexertion e.g. driving, office work. Hurrying prevents relaxation. Poor sleep quality</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Breathing/relaxation</strong></td>
<td>Rests body. Brings calm. Focusses on Hara. Releases tension, aids healing</td>
<td>Shallow breathing. Identity focussed in head. Mouth-breathing creates dry mouth. Relaxation as collapse</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Massage</strong></td>
<td>Deep relief from pain, emotional tension. Deep relaxation. Euphoric stimulation</td>
<td>Associated with sport and illicit sex. Denial of mind/body connection</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lifestyle</strong></td>
<td>Primacy of balance and regular rhythm. Focus on spiritual as process and belonging</td>
<td>Individualism. Avoidance of pain. Stress as drug. Goal-focussed based on conditioned ideals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mental health</strong></td>
<td>Importance of 'whole' person experience. Nature source of mystical identity. Sense of conditioning effect of life force</td>
<td>Identity as part of 'humanist' ideal. Brain as source of consciousness. Denial of emotional extremes and pain, suppressed with drugs</td>
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