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II. Healers without Books, Readers without Souls

Brian Stock

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

II. Healers without Books, Readers without Souls

Brian Stock (bio)

The religious or spiritual dimension of healing has been called the forgotten factor in modern medicine.¹ The problem is traced to the medical consequences of the Scientific Revolution. The thinker most often singled out for criticism is René Descartes. He is routinely accused of imposing philosophical dualism on unsuspecting Europeans, who allegedly believed in a close association between mind and body.

Despite its persistence in the popular imagination,² this view considerably oversimplifies Descartes's thinking, representing his conception of mind-body relations through the *Meditations* of 1641 rather than through the revised statements in later writings such as *The Passions of the Soul* of 1650. The distrust of spiritual healing has much earlier roots in Western thinking. As noted, resistance can be traced to Greco-Roman and Islamic traditions of rationalistic medicine, which consistently favored the physical explanation of illnesses, as well as to the intellectual changes of the Reformation period, which discredited many healing practices embedded in magic, superstition, and popular religion. Among venerable schemes that were abandoned during this period were the four humors, which explained illnesses through disequilibrium in emotions, and macrocosm and microcosm, which accounted for "sympathetic" connections between the individual and the cosmos. Theses of this kind have no relevance to current thinking about mind-body medicine, as illustrated for instance by meditation and imagery, which is largely based on experimentation.

To the degree that the earlier history of these approved clinical procedures in the field have Western roots, they fall into a branch of learning that historians of religion routinely call "spirituality." This term, as well as the discipline it represents, is modern in inspiration. The noun "spirituality," meaning the quality or condition of being spiritual, is not found in English before 1500, and its Latin predecessor, *spiritualitas*, is a relatively late word, which is first cited by Pelagius in the early fifth century.³

The word spirituality means different things over time. The phrase "spiritual healing," as used by Christian authors down to the nineteenth

century, normally refers to healing by unction or the laying on of hands. "[End Page 503] Spiritual exercises" bring to mind the treatise of the same name by Ignatius of Loyola, in which impressions, imagination, understanding, and will are employed in conquering passions and seeking a pathway to God. In the contemporary field of mind-body medicine, the term "spiritual" is an uncomfortable synonym for "mental" or "internal," and the contrast between "spiritual" and "bodily" has no metaphysical connotations. This is a return to the secular meaning ascribed to the word by many ancient authors, for whom Latin *spiritualis* translated Greek pneumatikōn, referring to breath or to wind (*genus spiritale*) rather than to a spiritual entity of some kind. This usage survives in Tertullian and Augustine, and is based on the translation of phrases concerning *pneuma* in the Pauline epistles.⁴

Despite these changes, anyone who enters the field of Western spiritual or contemplative disciplines is bound to be struck by the historical resilience of the field. From antiquity to the present, people at all levels of society have had a continuing interest in this aspect of life. Greek philosophy had a persistent concern with the contemplative dimension of thought, both in its classical and Hellenistic phases. Ancient Jewish and early Christian traditions were rich in spiritual themes and practices. During the Middle Ages, heresies, schisms, religious movements, and theological schools came and went with regularity, but an interest in the fundamentals of the spiritual life reappeared in every period.

Later centuries saw renaissances of spiritual thinking in nonreligious dimensions of culture. One such revival took place in the poetry of John Donne, George Herbert, and Richard Crashaw, while another, influenced by the transcendental idealism of Kant, Fichte, and Schelling, appeared in William Blake, William Wordsworth, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Keats. We are presently in a new phase of this history of *longue durée* that differs from the immediate past but has much in common with the ancient world, inasmuch as its concern is with the role of contemplative practices in the health of mind and body. Its institutional patrons are not

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Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218
[+1 \(410\) 516-6989](tel:+14105166989)
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