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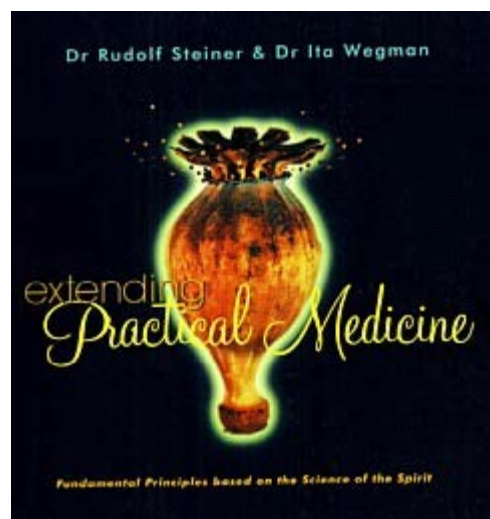


A READER'S JOURNAL

**Extending Practical Medicine,
GA# 27
by
Rudolf Steiner and Ita Wegman**

Fundamental Principles based on the
Science of the Spirit

Published by The Rudolf Steiner
Press in 1996



A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©1999

One impression one gets from this book is that there are many ways of approaching the healing of a human being, all of them good — to the extent that they are effective. What Steiner and Wegman add to the arsenal of observation techniques of medical doctors, who observe only the physical body of a patient, is the ability to observe consciously the patient's etheric, astral, and Ego bodies. By observing imbalances in the three non-physical bodies, the authors are able to suggest remedies that would not be found in the standard Physician's Desk Reference, but remedies that are nevertheless quite effective and practical.

The case histories the authors provide are difficult to assess because they occurred at the beginning of the 20th century and use chemicals, minerals, elements and natural plant concoctions that are unfamiliar to most people now at the end of the 20th century. The authors use names such as *Colchicum autumnale* which stimulates the astral body. Also sorrel salt compresses, *Urtica dioica* solution, and lime blossom solution — all three of which they used successfully to treat migraine headaches in one patient and root of *Potentilla tormentilla* they prescribed to improve the general metabolism (Ego body or I organization) of another patient. These examples of obscure medications and natural preparations show that this book will not likely be useful for "extending practical medicine" to the average person, as the title implies.

What is likely meant by the title is that extending the ability of the medical practitioner to observe the etheric, astral, and Ego bodies' operations *consciously* will lead to suggestions for simpler, more direct treatment of diseases with fewer side effects than currently available, in other words, lead to a more practical medicine. Consciously, because many doctors cannot explain where their diagnoses originate, and it seems likely that from long observation of their many patients, doctors have learned to recognize symptoms of etheric, astral, and Ego body imbalances. Thus the thrust of this book is to extend the material world sensibilities of the doctor into the super-sensible world so that a true healing of the human body may take place for human beings whose bodies bridge the material world and spiritual world. Any healing is shortsighted and therefore short-lived that does not bridge both worlds.

In those early years of this century when medical licensing was not so prevalent and coercive as it is

today, it was easy for the authors to introduce their book thus:

[page 1] Basically those who follow the established practice of medicine cannot object to what we are presenting because we do not go against that practice. The only people who can refuse to accept our attempt without further ado are those who not only demand that we accept their system of knowledge but also insist that no insights may be presented that go beyond their system.

Nowadays there are laws that will put people in jail if they attempt to use practices that "go beyond" the establishment's medical system. In this case the going beyond "adds understanding of the *non-physical* or *spiritual* human being"(page 2). In the past 20 years or so the advent of *holistic* medicine has brought to the average person's attention the non-physical or spiritual aspects of healing. Unfortunately the name *holistic healing* tends to be materialized in its presentation and understanding, giving one the impression that *holistic healing* refers to paying attention to the *whole* physical body versus only *some* of its constituent parts. This common mistake is similar to the one that table-tappers made in Steiner's time. To prove the existence of the *spiritual* world, they sought evidence in the *physical* world, i. e., the sounds of the so-called spirit's tapping on the table.

How does one extend one's understanding and perception to the etheric, astral, and Ego body? Steiner describes how to do it in detailed techniques in *Knowledge of Higher Worlds* and *Occult Science*. Simply stated it involves the three processes of Imagination, Inspiration, and Intuition. Through Imagination one comes to know the etheric aspect of human nature, through Inspiration, one comes to know the beings or spirits of the astral world, and through Intuition one comes to live within those spirits. (paraphrase from page 9)

In the chapter "Why Do People Fall Ill?" the authors describe what happens when a limb becomes paralyzed. One's leg, for example, becomes part of the outside world. In *A Leg to Stand On* Oliver Sacks, himself a trained neuropathologist, while recovering from a serious hiking accident, writes on what it's like to attempt to move a leg that seems to be part of the outside world.

The chapter "The Phenomena of Life" has a vivid description of the transition from lifeless matter to living material. The lifeless is governed by forces radiating from the center to the periphery, while the living is governed by forces that flow from the periphery to the center.

[page 20] In the transition to life, matter must withdraw from the outward radiating forces and make itself part of those that radiate in.

Independent of the forces radiating to and from the earth, and of a higher order, is the astral forces that create an independent, self-contained aspect in animals that we call the astral body.

[page 25] Through the physical forces it separates itself from the cosmos, through the etheric forces it lets the cosmos influence it; through the 'astral' forces it becomes an independent individual entity in the cosmos.

This background prepares us to understand the nature of our bodily organs, which are generated from physical material that has been operated on by the etheric and astral forces, in which our organs are on their way back to the sphere of the physical, only fully arriving there upon our death (pages 26, 27). The etheric substance of plants develops from lifeless matter, and the sentient substance of animals develops from living matter. In humans the sentient substance is drawn into another organization, the I organization or Ego body, and that is the body that leads us to self-awareness. The Table below shows some of the bodily functions and organs and how they are related to the three super-sensible bodies of the human.

Etheric Body	Astral Body	I Organization (Ego Body)
Respiration	Final Digestion (food to	Tongue, Palate, speaking muscles

	blood)	
Sympathetic Nervous System	Spinal Column Neurons	Preliminary Digestion (pepsin, pancreas, bile)
	Reflexes	Cerebral Nervous System
		The I lives in inner warmth of the blood and body
		General metabolism

One of the food stuffs that is intimately associated with the I organization is sugar. It should not be surprising that newly civilized countries greatly increase their intake of sugar — it is a natural process that accompanies the increased I organization of civilized beings. The common disease of *diabetes mellitis* involves sugar becoming an elimination product.

[page 44] This is a case of the I organization coming on the scene in the human organism in such a form that its actions are destructive.

Another common food constituent is fat, and the current fad of fat-free foods flies in the face of the bodily wisdom of ingesting fat.

[page 51] Fat proves least of a foreign substance when taken into the organism. Fat will most easily change from the nature it has when taken in as food to the nature of the human organism. . . . Fat is able to behave like this because it takes as little as possible of a foreign organism's nature (its etheric forces, etc.) into the human organism. The human organism can easily make it part of its own sphere of activity. The reason is that fat plays a special role in producing inner warmth.

A new mother's I organization is drawn off from her in the mother's milk with which she nurses her child, adding to her child's creative ability. Our bones are formed by our I organization releasing its inner hold and maintaining only an external manipulation of the resulting bony parts of our bodily skeleton. When the I organization withdraws from the arteries, the calcified deposits create arteriosclerosis.

At the turn of the 20th century doctors were beginning to focus on the chemical properties of the human body. At the turn of the 21st century the current focus is on the genetic properties of the human body. Both of these approaches are purely materialistic and operate in ignorance of the spiritual realities that infuse the human body, realities such as the etheric, astral, and I organization. When these bodies get out of balance with each other, the chemicals and the genetic mechanisms of the body lead us into the processes we know as illnesses or dis-ease. The physical composition of the human body is as important to the doctor of medicine as the physical composition of the paints are to the artist — a necessary but not sufficient condition for producing worthwhile results.

[page78, 79] Yes, it would be a good idea for a painter to know something about the chemical point of origin. But the way he uses pigments when he is painting is based on another methodology. The same applies to the medical practitioner. He may take chemistry as a basis that has some significance; but the mode of action substances have in the human organism no longer has anything to do with this chemical aspect. Anyone who holds the view that only data established in chemistry — and that includes pharmaceuticals — are exact destroys the possibility of developing views on what happens when healing processes occur in the organism.

When doctors find a deficiency in the chemicals, in the neurotransmitters, or in the genetic structure, etal, and deduce that they can cure the human being by administering the deficient substance, they are putting the cart before the horse. They are expecting the lifeless cart, the lifeless physical body, to pull the living human being along the road to health. Not surprisingly, many of their efforts in such a direction, supported

by so-called excellent science and blind tests with placebos, turn out to lead to a once again unhealthy, even dead, human being, about which the doctors can say with pride, "We did our best to save that patient." Doing one's best as an anthroposophical medical doctor is helping the patient to correct the imbalances in their living bodies: etheric body, astral body, and their I. Once these are balanced properly the physical effects will no longer be present to the materialistic doctor, who won't be called in to notice them anyway because the patient will be healed.

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