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The Holistic Hippocrates: ‘Treating the Patient, Not Just the Disease’

In this final chapter I want to look at the Hippocrates of today not through specific uses in news stories or in quotes, but through the invocation of his name in holistic (or, as we shall see, ‘wholistic’) medicine. Holism today presents itself as a return to a superior past, and brings Hippocrates in as part of this strategy. The model of the history of medicine implicit – or sometimes explicit – in holistic users of Hippocrates is one in which there was a golden age until ‘the turn away from holism in medicine allowed diseases to be located in specific organs, tissues or cells.’¹ While there is something in this where ancient medicine is concerned, with its basis in fluids rather than organs, this is of course also a tried and tested strategy for convincing an audience of the value of a ‘new’ thing: you claim it is ‘old,’ or ancient, or just traditional. Tracing the lineage of a treatment or approach back to Hippocrates is, as ever, a winning move in a power game. New is bad: traditional, having a history, is good and, if that goes back to the Father of Medicine, it is even better.

After discussing what can be meant by ‘holism,’ I shall start by considering various approaches which operate under the umbrella of ‘holistic medicine’ today, and outline their reception of Hippocratic medicine. I shall also locate some of the claims made, in relation to the texts of the ancient Mediterranean world and to the earlier history of holism. I find useful here the model of ‘projection,’ described in Chapter 2.² How does the holistic Hippocrates fit into this practice of projecting our utopias or nightmares? What versions of holism are currently being projected back on to the classical past, what does this tell us about current views of what medicine should be, and how are the classical texts then used to reinforce what their new users mean by holism? Returning to questions raised throughout this book, whose Hippocrates is he anyway – does

he belong to orthodox medicine or to alternatives to this – and is he the founder of a system, or the rebel trying to overthrow it?

The self-healing body

James Whorton has shown in general terms how and why alternative practitioners often consider Hippocrates to be ‘their doctrinal father’. In orthodox medicine, Hippocrates was designated the Father of Medicine because he had rejected supernatural phenomena as the causes of illness: the ‘alternative’ Hippocrates was valued for his ‘natural’ methods of healing and his belief in an ‘inborn ability of the human body to respond to the insult of illness or injury and restore itself to health.’³ In both cases Hippocrates is a champion of the natural, but the end result can be very different, depending on whether his opposition is to the supernatural or to the artificial.

This alleged ability of the body to heal itself is often linked to the phrase *vis medicatrix naturae*, ‘the healing power of nature’, a tag which features heavily in alternative medicine and which is sometimes traced back to Hippocrates, sometimes in the mistaken variant *vis mediatrix naturae*; as we have already seen for *primum non nocere*, Latin looks good, even if it is not correct.⁴ Some scholars have attributed the origin of the phrase in its Latin form to the eighteenth-century William Cullen.⁵ One article I have found by naturopaths, citing as one of their sources the entry for *vis medicatrix naturae* in ‘Wikipedia 2010’, comments on the Hippocratic origins of the phrase, ‘some writers maintain there is little evidence that he used the term *vis medicatrix naturae*’ and states instead that he ‘used the term *physis*, the ability to heal oneself, or *nature* in Greek.’⁶ The Wikipedia page on ‘*Vis medicatrix naturae*’ presents the phrase as being the Latin form of the Greek ‘*Νόσων φύσεις ιητροί* (“Nature is the physician(s) of diseases”).’⁷ While it has recently been seen as something entirely un-Hippocratic,⁸ it does in fact translate the three opening words of the fifth section of the Hippocratic *Epidemics* 6, which begins ‘The body’s nature (*physis*) is the physician in disease. Nature finds the way for herself, not from thought . . . without instruction, Nature does what is needed.’ As Wesley Smith pointed out, however, ‘the text of the manuscripts shows signs of commentators’ interference’ and *physis* here seems to mean both the nature of

the body, and *physis* in a philosophical sense, as opposed to *logos*.⁹ In the nineteenth century, perhaps in a reaction against the excessive interventions of 'heroic medicine', the Latin phrase was reclaimed by some orthodox practitioners but, at least from the 1830s to the 1860s, 'art' was still believed to trump 'nature'.¹⁰

Another naturopath, Pauline Nelega, whose approach to holism will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, wrote: 'Hippocrates, who is considered the father of modern medicine, was a physician in ancient Greece in around 400 BC. He emphasized a holistic approach to medicine, *warning doctors not to interfere with the body's ability to heal itself*'.¹¹ This last phrase seems to bring *vis medicatrix naturae* towards 'First do no harm.' Holism, Hippocrates and the self-healing body reinforce each other: presenting Hippocrates as the person who first understood that the body can heal itself also links him to nature and suggests the safety of his healing methods, while providing an antique seal of approval for later methods concerned with maintaining a balance with an external 'nature'. The ideology of alternative medicine often uses 'nature' as 'a symbol redolent with beliefs and meanings about health, the body, and the ideal state of the human being'.¹² The body has an original healthful state which is one with nature, and it desires to return to that state. Rosalind Coward has pointed out that 'nature' and 'old' or 'traditional' shade into one another; if it has been used for thousands of years, it must be safe, and if it is 'traditional', it must be natural.¹³ Holistic systems suggest that the alternative to orthodox medicine and its drugs lies in a return to 'natural' approaches to health, concentrating on diet, exercise, herbal medicines and positive thought patterns.

Both holism and 'let food be thy medicine' are manifestations of what Norman Gevitz has called the 'drugless systems', important in US medicine from the nineteenth century onwards.¹⁴ The use of Hippocrates as a forefather by the modern alternative health movement can be traced in its popular literature throughout the first half of the twentieth century and, as we saw in the previous chapter, the dietary Hippocrates was often invoked. Today, 'Let food be thy medicine' is commonly appropriated by practitioners and advocates of vegan raw food diets. In this set of beliefs, even life-threatening conditions such as terminal cancers can be cured through the strict application of a diet using only raw 'living' foods. The critique of orthodox medicine implicit, or

often explicit, here asserts that orthodox physicians do not see their patients as individuals and are blind to their emotional needs, while conventional medicine destroys the body whether or not it destroys the disease (that is, it 'does harm').¹⁵ Coward argues that alternative medicine's antipathy towards artificial products is grounded in 'hostility to the destruction of an original wholeness'.¹⁶ This image of a primeval but recoverable wholeness can be particularly attractive to those experiencing the bodily fragmentation of chronic illness; Jessica Hughes has shown that the experience of fragmentation was also present for patients in the ancient world.¹⁷ Alternative methods focus upon non-invasive, 'natural', dietetic treatments which promise endless energy, 'optimal health', and self-healing, so long as the patient maintains the regimen constructed for them. At the end of this chapter, I shall glance briefly at one of the most powerful uses of the name of Hippocrates in this context today, one which continues to have considerable press coverage: Brian Clement's Hippocrates Health Institute (HHI), which has brought Hippocrates' name into the public domain in the USA and beyond.

How far does any of this have its roots in the Hippocratic Corpus? It would be logical for those claiming Hippocratic roots for holism to discuss the Hippocratic whole/parts claim from Plato's *Phaedrus*, where as I noted in Chapter 2 priority is given to 'the whole'.¹⁸ In modern discussions of holistic medicine, while this is rarely cited explicitly, it often lies in the background. For example, consider Robson and Baek's 'Hippocrates held the belief that *the body must be treated as a whole and not just a series of parts*, which is the underlying concept of the recently emerging *systems biology*'; by omitting any mention of Plato, this supports the impression that the whole/parts point can indeed be traced to a specific Hippocratic text.¹⁹ What is meant by 'the whole' in Plato is in any case far from clear. Is it, as Galen and subsequently Littré thought, the universe, or is it the whole body?²⁰ Is it 'all external factors that influence health'?²¹ And does the passage tell us more about Plato than about what the Hippocratic writers, let alone Hippocrates himself, originally meant? For Wesley Smith, it was 'the nature of the whole man', 'the nature of the cosmos' and perhaps also 'the nature of all body'. Smith argued, 'As always, Plato uses his language precisely and self-consciously, and if he is purposely ambiguous he will take account of all the meanings he has suggested.'²² So, rather than either/or, perhaps we should see this as both/and: the 'whole' is all of these things.

The specific promotion of raw foods in order to enhance the body's self-healing powers has to ignore the inconvenient Hippocratic treatise *On Ancient Medicine* which offers a history of human diet in which people gained health only by rejecting the raw diet of animals, because this was too 'strong' for them. In the process, some foods were removed entirely from the diet because human nature could not 'overcome' them.²³ Ralph Rosen has further argued that, for the author of *On Ancient Medicine*,

dietary regimen is not a 'natural' phenomenon. Nature may go to great lengths to heal the diseased body, as Hippocratic treatises are fond of saying, but it does not in fact do such a good job of directing humans towards foods and dietary habits that will keep them healthy or heal them when sick. That requires the intervention of intelligence and agency: the τέχνη of regimen, in other words, addresses a deficiency that needs to be rectified, and this is the polemic on which much Hippocratic medicine seems to have been based; it forms, in fact, the rationale for the very notion of medical intervention. It is not insignificant that Hippocrates was credited in antiquity with saying that medicine was a 'servant of Nature', for servants are brought in to do what masters cannot or will not do themselves.²⁴

When it comes to the implications of allowing Nature to heal the body, there is clearly variety among the treatises of the Hippocratic Corpus. Nature, alone, is unlikely to be enough; she needs a helping hand. However, this is also precisely why modern holistic alternatives make money despite their enthusiasm for Nature; they argue that, without their specific interventions, Nature will not be able to carry out her healing work.

Beyond the Hippocratic texts, a range of meanings of 'holism' existed in the ancient Greco-Roman world: it could concern the relationship between mind (or soul) and body, or advocate considering the body as a whole, or focus on the body's unity with the cosmos, this last meaning being the one chosen by Paul Carton, one of the French naturopaths who promoted what he considered Hippocratic holism in the 1920s as part of a return to simplicity as an 'antique virtue'.²⁵ Modern holistic medical approaches, while rarely constrained by any of these meanings, also tend towards the larger, 'cosmic' interpretations. Often combined with using the name of Hippocrates, they promote better ways not only to treat illness, but also to live. The slogan of hippocrate.net, a French site which sells a range of short courses including the 'Academy of Alchemists', is

'I improve my health and my life'.²⁶ When we read on a website advertising the Apivita cosmetics range that its founders were inspired by 'the holistic approach of Hippocrates to health, beauty and well-being' and that this approach influences their 'make-up, fragrances, soaps, hair products and sunscreen, all of their unique products are designed to act beneficial [sic] to the body, spirit and soul',²⁷ the word 'holistic' is being used in a deliberately imprecise way; what is most important is, firstly, that whatever it means it is supposed to be a Good Thing and, secondly, that its credibility is somehow enhanced here by its attribution to Hippocrates.²⁸

Fears about Big Pharma also play an important part here. Whorton linked the resurgence of drugless alternatives to the loss of confidence in pharmaceutical treatments following the Thalidomide tragedies of the 1960s. At this point, he argued, it became normal to attack medicines as dangerous, and alternative practitioners were able to exploit popular anxiety.²⁹ The enthusiasm for 'natural' approaches to health exploded in the late 1970s with the growth of a medical counter-culture. Beginning as a critique of psychiatry, this widened to include other medical issues, claiming that holism saw the patient as a 'whole' being, rather than as a disparate collection of organs and symptoms.³⁰ Coward adds that the emergence of AIDS in the 1980s disrupted traditional understandings of both treatment and contagion, and further highlighted the limits of conventional medicine. She argues that, for heterodox practitioners, 'Aids [was] the prototypical disease of our age' as it was 'a disease which made visible [a] heralded collapse of immunity', which they insisted had been compromised through the bombardments of a highly artificial mode of life in the West.³¹ Following this, admissions from orthodox practitioners that some 'alternative' methods may be effective for some conditions (although not AIDS) only strengthened the revival of naturopathy in America.³²

Hippocrates in contemporary holistic medicine

In this section I shall examine in more detail how ancient Greek medicine features in holism today, by looking at the claims made and the sources used by some specific examples. The website 'Greek Medicine' is a good place to start, not least because it is so widely used by other online materials, whether

or not they credit it as their source; these include a sample essay from a UK-based 'essay mill', worryingly entitled 'A Brief History into Greek Medicine History Essay'.³³ 'Greek Medicine' is run by David K. Osborn, who describes himself as 'Master Herbalist – Astrologer – Holistic Health Consultant and Educator' and who explained its genesis as 'a website about traditional, holistic, Greek Medicine'; the juxtaposition of 'tradition' and 'holism' is significant.³⁴ He is also a trained acupuncture practitioner and certified yoga instructor; current practitioners of holism often use a range of methods, contrasting with specialism, where one person is an expert on a very narrow field. Healers also project their range of healing methods back in time so that the sanctuary of Asklepios in Cos becomes 'a holistic healing centre' which 'contained infirmaries, temples, hot springs, hostels, a school for physicians and much more';³⁵ taken from a Greek tourism website, this wording picks up and gives a 'holistic' spin to an older scholarly view that healing sanctuaries were much like modern health spas frequented by 'health tourists'.³⁶

Osborn's online bio describes how his life changed when he found a book which 'correlated the astrological signs and planets with the four temperaments and humors of Greek Medicine. This gave David the Golden Key to medical astrology; he was then able to relate everything he had learned and studied in holistic healing to astrology. This key to medical astrology also started David's study of Greek Medicine'.³⁷ His basic approach is that 'Truth is one, but the sages of these different traditional medical systems call it by different names.' Holism, then, is broader than anything we have so far encountered: it concerns a single medical truth which connects all forms of medicine. For Osborn, Greek medicine is 'truly a natural healing system for the whole world' as well as being 'the traditional healing system from which modern medicine grew and evolved'.³⁸ One truth: whole world. Here, holism is about more than treating the body as a whole: it concerns treating medicine itself as a whole, with different local models expressing the same truth, and being the ancestors of 'modern medicine'. In his history of naturopathy, Whorton labelled this trend 'world medicine'; we also have met it in Chapter 5 as 'global medicine'.³⁹

While there is no reason why users of the site would necessarily read Osborn's bio, he also writes a blog, where in March 2017 he celebrated ten years of the greekmedicine.net site.⁴⁰ He explained there that the book which gave him that Golden Key was *L'Astrologie Médicale* by Sylvie Chermet-Carroy, an astrologer

and graphologist.⁴¹ This is an example of how the greekmedicine.net site adds to its image of authority by Osborn's practice of giving 'acknowledgements' of some of the books he has used, a common internet strategy which plays into a model in which books must surely be (even) better than online materials. However, Osborn does not use the standard printed works we would perhaps expect; those deriving from scholarship on ancient medicine. On Hippocrates and his works, Osborn thinks we can be 'fairly certain' that some of the works of the Corpus can be attributed to him; specifically, *Airs Waters Places*, *Aphorisms* and *On Ancient Medicine*. He writes that Hippocrates led a 'band of renegade physicians' who moved with him from Cnidos to Cos. His source here is acknowledged as another printed work, Ghulam Chishti, *The Traditional Healer's Handbook: A Classic Guide to the Medicine of Avicenna*.⁴²

That 'band of renegade physicians' phrase is repeated widely online; greekmedicine.net was cited in 2009 by a chiropractic blog using it.⁴³ The entire section of greekmedicine.net in which it appears was copied with attribution by Jim Putnam in his blog *The Colton Points Times*, 31 January 2017, as part of a piece on the Hippocratic Oath.⁴⁴ The phrase also features extensively without attribution; for example, on a site selling nutritionals, *Tested Nutrients*, which proudly proclaims 'We are people in search of science.'⁴⁵ It also migrated from online materials into supposedly academic publications, including those 'published, print-on-paper sources'.⁴⁶ A 'band of renegade physicians' sounds almost like Robin Hood ('riding through the glen/ ... with his band of men'), and immediately identifies Hippocratic medicine with the forces of the Resistance; Hippocrates himself can become 'The medical renegade who came to be called the Father of Medicine.'⁴⁷ The resistance story has other internet variations, and recalls the myth that he was imprisoned for 'opposing the infrastructure' of ancient Greece, discussed in Chapter 3.

In Chishti's and thus Osborn's narrative, holism is used to explain the alleged move from Cnidos to Cos. Both say that Cnidian medicine 'considered the body to be merely a collection of isolated parts, and saw diseases manifesting in a particular organ or body part as affecting that part only, which alone was treated'; not a holistic approach. This part of the Osborn/Chishti model is repeated widely, including on the website of Red House Australia, an independent centre for the treatment of eating disorders majoring on superfoods eaten in a community environment, where it appears on a page on

‘Hippocrates’ influence on Red House philosophies, principles, and practices.’⁴⁸ Red House quotes the Osborn/Chishti idea that ‘The Cnidian school considered the body to be merely a collection of isolated parts’, alongside what was then the opening of the Biography section of the Hippocrates page on Wikipedia:

Historians agree that Hippocrates was born around the year 460 BC on the Greek island of Kos. He is renowned as the ‘Father of Modern Medicine’ – in recognition of his lasting contributions to the field as the founder of the Hippocratic School of Medicine. It was Hippocrates who finally freed medicine from the shackles of magic, superstition, and the supernatural.⁴⁹

Use of the Wikipedia line ‘Hippocratic medicine was humble and passive’ (discussed in Chapter 3) also betrays the origins of this Red House page. While I have not yet been able to work out the origin of this widely-repeated line – it could simply be the creation of a Wikipedia editor – it proves a particularly useful marker for reliance on what holistic practitioners often wrongly call the ‘wonderful Hippocrates wikipedia page.’⁵⁰ For Chishti and Osborn, holism thus characterizes Cos and marks its superiority over Cnidos. As it is from Cos, it must also be the approach of Hippocrates.

Chishti himself clearly had Plato’s *Phaedrus* in mind, although not naming this as the source, when he wrote that ‘He [Hippocrates] viewed the human body as a complete, integrated whole (as opposed to a collection of parts) and his system of treatments was of a general nature, rather than a specific treatment against one set of symptoms.’⁵¹ From this formulation we also learn that, in addition to being opposed to specialisms, holism supports treating the whole person rather than ‘specific’ treatments. Here is Osborn’s development of this: ‘As a holistic healing system, Hippocratic medicine treated the patient, and not just the disease.’ This is interesting wording. In 2013, in one of his assaults on alternative medicine, Edzard Ernst – formerly Chair in Complementary Medicine at the University of Exeter – noted that when he asks alternative practitioners ‘What do you treat effectively?’ he was given answers like ‘Alternative practitioners, unlike conventional clinicians, do not treat diseases’ or ‘I treat the whole person, not just the disease.’ In response to these answers, Ernst argued that ‘any good medicine always has been and always will be holistic. High-jacking [sic] holism as a specific characteristic for alternative medicine is misleading and an insult to all conventional clinicians who do their best to practice good medicine.’ Ernst’s concern is that, by claiming a monopoly on holism and saying

that they treat the whole person, alternative practitioners then receive what Ernst calls ‘a “carte blanche” for treating any disease or any condition or any symptom.’⁵²

Osborn’s statement about Hippocratic medicine and the answers Ernst was given echo, whether consciously or unconsciously, the quotation I have used in the title of this chapter. Found on many holistic medicine internet sites, sometimes as ‘It is more important to know what sort of person has a disease than to know what sort of disease a person has’, or bumper-stickered into ‘treat the (whole) person, not the disease’, it is a saying associated with one of the greatest physicians of the modern era, Sir William Osler (1849–1919): ‘The good physician treats the disease; the great physician treats the patient who has the disease.’⁵³ It has however so far proved impossible to source this in Osler’s writings; the nearest quotation may be ‘Care more particularly for the individual patient than for the special features of the disease.’⁵⁴ As we saw in Chapters 5 and 6, Hippocrates does not have a monopoly on ‘fake quotes’. As applied to Hippocrates, the axiom also recalls Lasagna’s 1964 version of the *Oath*, which includes ‘I will remember that I do not treat a fever chart, a cancerous growth, but a sick human being.’⁵⁵

Unlike many other modern users of Hippocrates, practitioners of holistic medicine tend not to give ‘quotes’ but instead simply invoke the name of Hippocrates in support of their beliefs. For example, Sandra Sigur, a practitioner from Florida of reflexology, yoga, reiki and aromatherapy, and a former doula, author of *Healing Groovy* (2015),⁵⁶ was interviewed for the blog ‘Windermere Sun’ in 2016:

Natural or holistic medicine has been around for over 5,000 years. Hippocrates, who is considered the Father of Modern Medicine, emphasized a holistic approach to medicine, warning doctors not to interfere with the body’s ability to heal itself, as well as to treat the body as a whole – mind, body and spirit. The early Hippocratic Oath was revised to exclude the word ‘spirit’ because it was thought to mean religion, when in actuality our spirit is what defines us as unique individuals (i.e., how we respond differently to life’s circumstances).⁵⁷

Holistic here becomes another word for natural, and the dating suggests that the system had been around for millennia before Hippocrates; it is unclear, therefore, what makes him the ‘Father’. That exclusion of ‘spirit’ is perhaps a

reference to those versions, such as the Revised Hippocratic Oath proposed by the British Medical Association in 1997, which have dropped the opening invocation of the Greek gods.⁵⁸

The site *Natural Wellbeing* goes into more detail, featuring a page on ‘The History of Holistic Medicine: The Ancient Greeks and Holistic Medicine’, by Paulina Nelega.⁵⁹ Written in 2009, this is part of a short series, all written by Nelega, on the allegedly-long history of holistic medicine; the ancient Greeks provide ‘another forebearer [sic]’. Nelega is a clinical herbalist based in Vancouver who describes how her passion for ‘exploring our relationship with nature and the healing properties of plants’ developed from growing up surrounded by ‘majestic cedars [which] shared their timeless wisdom as I sat beneath them’. She then took a ‘conventional path’, becoming a medical laboratory technologist, which taught her ‘the benefits – and shortcomings – of allopathic medicine’ and encouraged her to understand ‘our body’s innate wisdom and profound intelligence to heal – *vis medicatrix naturae*’.

In holistic circles, as we have already seen, ‘*Vis medicatrix naturae*’ may be taken to mean that there is a natural healing force in everybody, or that nature tends towards health and should either be left alone or should be given encouragement to get on with it. There is however a further use: as here, it may be used to suggest that healing depends on actual contact with ‘Nature’, whether that is growing a plant in a pot or being in a forest. Nelega did not only learn from the cedars, however; she also trained at Coastal Mountain College of Healing Arts in Vancouver. Currently, this no longer seems to be operating, and at one point it was merged with Wild Rose College, a school which offers individual online courses at around \$200–300, and a ‘Wholistic [sic] Therapist Diploma’ at \$1,697, payable in monthly instalments.⁶⁰ For a mere \$97, you can submit a ‘Wholistic Therapist Thesis’ and ‘you have one year from date of approval to complete your thesis.’⁶¹ ‘Our emphasis is on the wholism of the individual – the integration of the body, mind, and spirit. We believe wholistic healing is an art to be cultivated through a sound investigation.’⁶²

Wider discussions of what Hippocratic medicine involves thus lie behind Nelega’s version of Hippocrates. It is significant that she claims Hippocrates as the ancestor of holism, not of biomedicine, when she writes: ‘While Hippocrates is considered the father of modern medicine, many of his practices bore more resemblance to what is today considered holistic or alternative medicine. Many

of today's holistic practices date back to the understandings of Hippocrates and the ancient Greeks.⁶³ Elsewhere on the same page she develops these claims:

Hippocratic medicine bears more resemblance to today's holistic medicine than it does to allopathic (traditional) medicine. Hippocrates based his methods on 'vis medicatrix naturae' – the healing power of nature. According to Hippocrates, the body contained the ability to *heal itself* through balancing the four humors (blood, black bile, yellow bile and phlegm). When one of the humors was out of balance, the body became ill, and Hippocrates taught that administering certain natural substances would bring about a rebalancing of those humors.

Here the suggestion is that, while you can intervene (using 'natural substances,' of course), what you are doing is merely stimulating a natural process of 'rebalancing.'

Wild Rose College's 'wholistic' medicine with a 'W' deserves some attention, as other holistic sites too prefer this spelling. Loma Linda University, a Seventh-Day Adventist school in California, has as its motto 'To make man whole.'⁶⁴ Once again, this concerns the body's natural tendency to heal itself. In 2008, Loma Linda announced its Pediatrics Wholistic Medicine Clinic, merging 'modern Western medicine' with 'ancient treatments from the East.'⁶⁵ Another 'wholistic' site, 'Wholistic kids and families,' offers a different merger under the same label. It presents wholistic medicine as 'neither entirely conventional or ultra-holistic'; they prefer diet and herbs, but they use antibiotics when necessary. Their aim is to 'treat your child as a whole.'⁶⁶

Adventists have a particular affinity with (w)holism. They 'believe the key to wellness lies in a life of balance and temperance' and recommend – although do not insist on – a vegetarian diet.⁶⁷ In 1898, Ellen G. White, revered by Adventists as a prophet whose writings are second only to the Bible in their relevance, published *The Desire of Ages*, where she retold stories from the gospels about Jesus as the Great Physician who taught that 'health is the reward of obedience to the laws of God.'⁶⁸ She stated that 'For the sick we should use the remedies which God has provided in nature, and we should point them to Him who alone can restore.'⁶⁹ In *The Ministry of Healing* she wrote that the holistic principles were 'Pure air, sunlight, abstemiousness [avoiding things that are harmful], rest, exercise, proper diet, the use of water, [and] trust in divine power – these are the true remedies ... Those who persevere in obedience to her laws will reap the reward in health of body and health of

mind.⁷⁰ These ‘Eight Laws of Vibrant Health’ sound much like the six Galenic non-naturals – air, exercise/rest, sleep/waking, diet, evacuation/retention and passions/emotions – and there has been much discussion in other contexts of whether or not White was a plagiarist.⁷¹

By putting the W into holism, Loma Linda University claim to be separating themselves from the ‘quacks and false promises’ present in the field of holistic health.⁷² Across the world, there are now many other medical centres calling themselves ‘wholistic’; for example, in Sydney, Melbourne, Atlanta and London. They often combine a range of methods which sound scientific, rather than ‘natural’. At one such centre in Marylebone, which says it is attended by patients from all over the world, the mission statement does not use ‘the great physician treats the patient who has the disease’ but states this in these words: ‘Patient individuality is our prime concern. What helps one person may not suit another with the same condition.’⁷³ The founder, Dr Shamim Daya, and her team offer ‘food therapy’, which – in another echo of the claims for Hippocrates – they describe as ‘Food as Medicine’. This gives ‘A greater feeling of being anchored and grounded’.⁷⁴ It is practised alongside processes which sound very scientific, such as ‘Therapeutic PEMF’ to counter ‘electrosmog’ which ‘comes from electric wiring and equipment’ including power lines, TVs and mobile phones.⁷⁵

Somewhere in the marketing for its version of wholism, nearly every such centre will invoke Hippocrates’ name, although not necessarily where one would expect to find it. At the Marylebone Wholistic Medical Centre, that unreliable Hippocrates quote about disease beginning in the gut is attributed to Daya herself, in the form ‘The origins of most disease processes lie in the gut and therefore healing starts with normalizing the function of the gut.’⁷⁶ However, Daya does cite Hippocrates in another section of the Centre’s website, on digital infrared thermal imaging offered for breast screening: she includes ‘In whatever part of the body excess of heat or cold is felt, the disease is there to be discovered. Hippocrates, 400 BC.’⁷⁷

Invoking Hippocrates through history

These examples show how references to Hippocrates support a range of alternative healing practices which operate under the ‘holistic’ – or ‘wholistic’

– umbrella. In their repeated reclaiming of the true Hippocrates from the hands of a mistaken or deliberately-distorting orthodoxy, the imagined moral core of the man remains intact, even though many different versions of ‘his’ views have been constructed. One of the patterns of engagement with the image of Hippocrates, found throughout the history of medicine and still strong today, is to contrast him with whatever the speaker or writer perceives as most negative in mainstream medicine: ‘appeals to Hippocrates were explicitly and most fundamentally appeals to the past which expressed considerable discomfort with contemporary science and, more generally, with the world that science had created.’⁷⁸ This clearly happens with contemporary holistic medicine websites.

What is different in the present uses of Hippocrates is partly that none of the standard concern for identifying a ‘genuine work’ seems to interest those promoting holistic medicine today, and – like the spread of quotes online – their claims about Hippocrates are constructed with very little reference to any texts. This may stem from the period between the World Wars, when the neo-Hippocratic movement developed as ‘a revolt against the system, formalism, academics, professionalism, materialism, and analysis of the nineteenth century’, favouring instead ‘vitalism, humanism, individualism, and synthesis, a return to Hippocratic doctrine.’⁷⁹ There were regional variations: in Britain, the neo-Hippocratic movement was about Hippocrates as generalist rather than specialist, while in France it provided support for both homeopathy and naturopathy.⁸⁰ Through selective reading, the different treatises of the Hippocratic Corpus could be called upon to support homeopathy’s practice of curing like with like as well as allopathy’s cure by opposites.⁸¹ Homeopathy has had a particularly strong relationship with Hippocrates as ‘an ancestral figure worth of veneration’ but also as a practitioner of direct observation of the patient, although this is not always a feature of current holism, as the practitioners discussed in the previous section of this chapter demonstrate.⁸² For example, Nelega consults at a distance, inviting readers to ask her any questions and to ‘let me know if I can assist you with a health consultation and custom-compounded herbal formula.’⁸³ Readers fill in a very simple form and send in the money. In the form, you give your details (age, gender, weight, current pattern of smoking, caffeine, alcohol and water consumption, exercise) and your ‘primary health concern’ and tell her what existing conditions you

have, attaching any lab reports and a list of medications and dietary supplements.⁸⁴

Analysing why the name of Hippocrates was so important for the emerging holistic movement in 1920s and 1930s France, George Weisz argued that ‘The notion that was most identified historically with Hippocrates was that of “nature” or “natural” healing’; Emile Littré had defined ‘hippocratism’ as ‘the doctrine which attempts to imitate Hippocrates, giving to this imitation the particular sense of following nature, that is to say of studying the spontaneous effort that it makes and the crises that it produces.’⁸⁵ Ideas of the healing power of nature were able to find plenty of support in the Hippocratic Corpus; for example, in the section from *Epidemics* 6 mentioned at the beginning of this chapter: ‘The body’s nature is the physician in disease. Nature finds the way for herself, not from thought . . . without instruction, Nature does what is needed.’ Such ideas had also been widely discussed in American medicine of the 1860s. John Harley Warner has argued that this interest in Nature was a reaction to changing therapeutic interventions, as doctors moved from trying to reduce fever and inflammation by attacking with bleeding and purging, to seeing their role as being more about building up the strength of the patient.⁸⁶ The conclusion reached was that while ‘bloodletting had indeed been carried to absurd excesses greatly impeding nature’s work . . . this did not mean that bloodletting was necessarily bad in principle.’⁸⁷ Nor did believing that diseases were self-limiting mean that the answer was to do nothing, as the role of the doctor could be to support the body in healing itself. Here, too, the current uses of Hippocrates in holism are not new.

Today, however, alleged Hippocratic holism does not even have to be an ‘alternative’: mainstream medicine wants to claim it too. For example, in 2000, the Royal Society of Medicine held a conference on the topic ‘Healthcare for the Whole Person: Is Holistic Medicine More Healthy?’⁸⁸ An article by a medical student, Sneha Mantri, in the 2008 edition of the American Medical Association’s *Journal of Ethics*’ online section, *Virtual Mentor*, argued for the humanistic integration of Hippocratic holism with modern knowledge. Mantri stated that medicine has moved ‘from prescientific holistic approaches to modern, scientifically supported explanations of pathology’, and contrasted ‘the integrative Hippocratic view . . . [with] the specialization view.’⁸⁹ This, apparently unconsciously, echoes the concerns of inter-war British neo-Hippocratics, who

emphasized Hippocrates as generalist rather than specialist and, looking back at the First World War, criticized what they saw as the specialization of German education and the centralization of its institutions, as opposed to the greater focus on the individual and on personal initiative in British society.⁹⁰ They saw the unity of the organism as a key principle, and – according to the leading neo-Hippocratic Alexander Cawadiaz – a focus on the ‘whole individual patient’ was essential.⁹¹ Mantri ended with a call for fuller integration to take into account ‘both the individuality of illness and the universality of disease etiology’.

Mantri’s contrast between ‘the integrative Hippocratic view’ and ‘the specialization view’ is worth exploring further. The history of medicine has long been interested in the history of specialisms. Vanessa Heggie’s 2010 article in *Medical History*, ‘Specialization without the Hospital: The Case of British Sports Medicine’, summarized the main approach as follows: ‘Specialization in medicine acts to normalize categories of health and sickness that, once constructed, can appear to be obvious and rational divisions of the body, of disease, or of populations.’⁹² This underlines the point that, while decisions on how we divide the body into organs or systems or other sorts of ‘part’ are arbitrary, once these categories exist they can then take on a life of their own. As Roger Cooter argued for the emergence of fracture treatment under the control of orthopaedics, a specialism also needs ‘professional interests and aspirations’ to propel it into existence; its emergence was partly due to the Second World War leading to a greater interest in accidents and trauma, and partly to orthopaedists ‘enlarg[ing] their professional space.’⁹³ Cooter argued that ‘accidents and trauma cut across the “organ geography” of medical and surgical specialties’ and argues against the claim that orthopaedics can trace its lineage to ‘traditional bone-setting [which] appears to legitimate orthopaedic surgeons as the rightful menders of broken bones’; nevertheless, that claim of antiquity was important.⁹⁴ Orthopaedics emerged ‘as a specialized branch of general surgery ... in the early twentieth century in terms of a holistic physiological vision of the structures and functions of the musculoskeletal system—a naturalized division of labor’ but later became fragmented into separate smaller branches: ‘the surgery of the hand, the foot, the ankle, the spine, and so on.’⁹⁵ This increasing fragmentation was at least partly due to the various technical developments in the field, in which ‘knowledge appeared to increase year after year’;⁹⁶ ‘There is no mind so comprehensive that it can keep pace with all the requirements of modern surgery’, as Robert Jones

had said in a lecture delivered in May 1925.⁹⁷ So, here we have spurious claims of historical continuity (those traditional bone-setters), then the emergence of specialisms due to social and economic factors and also to new techniques, further division into sub-specialties, and then – perhaps – a return to holism?

While mainstream medicine can now claim to be holistic, hits on search engines suggest that there is still more *popular* interest in holism than *mainstream* medical interest.⁹⁸ I have already alluded to the veiled criticism of allopathy: holism is seen as a ‘whole life approach’ rather than being about ‘fragmented (i.e. nonholistic), episodic (i.e. lack of continuum of services), and external symptom-based (as opposed to dealing with the root cause of illness) diagnostics and treatment, mostly depending on the one-fits-all approach and yet on the trial-and-error for treatments.’⁹⁹ Here holism comes a little closer to ‘personal medicine’ – individualized and empowering to the patient¹⁰⁰ – but, once again, holism is defined in opposition to how mainstream medicine is perceived: unlike that medicine, it is not about fragmentation, nor about specialists clinging to their little empire of one organ or system.

Hippocrates branded

Commentators have noted that the draw of alternative methods is greatest amongst those who have chronic or potentially fatal conditions, ‘where orthodoxy has least to offer’, or who are undergoing traumatic treatments such as chemotherapy.¹⁰¹ Here, in its darkest formulations, the quote ‘let food be thy medicine’ in particular can be used to encourage desperate people with life-threatening conditions to reject drugs and instead to undertake, against medical advice and at great expense, drastic and demanding dietary regimes. Big Pharma here is more than the enemy: it is presented as the devil. Brian Clement, who runs HHI, asserts that ‘Doctors back 100 years ago and before that were all natural doctors. There was no such thing as the pharmaceutical industry then, no pushing drugs just for the heck of it.’¹⁰² The HHI website also argues that the *Oath*’s ‘I will give no deadly medicine to anyone’ has been ‘disregarded by much of modern medicine as physicians blindly and reflexively embrace the marketing campaign of every new pharmaceutical drug coming off industry assembly lines.’¹⁰³ It thus draws on ‘Let food be thy medicine’ and the *Oath* while

embracing the ‘drugless medicine’ approach; a 2011 TripAdvisor review of HHI from an enthusiastic user, ‘islandler’, states ‘Let food be your medicine and examine what should be your food that is the most nutritious’ [sic].¹⁰⁴ Clement’s claims have been dismissed in much of the press as ‘nothing but pure American pseudoscience’ and his claimed degrees are from diploma mills; he is only state-licensed as a nutritionist.¹⁰⁵ While he apparently no longer calls himself ‘Dr’ he still mentions the PhD, in addition to making much of his own journey to health from being ‘unfit and gasping for air’ as a young man.¹⁰⁶

Why is this the ‘Hippocrates’ Health Institute? Not because it is easy to spell; in a radio interview, Clement spelled it out for his listeners, because it ‘is a big, hard name for most of us’.¹⁰⁷ But it is clearly worth using. In 2010, in his book *Supplements Exposed*, Clement presented Hippocrates in holistic terms as ‘Perhaps the greatest practitioner of this ancient wisdom tradition’ as he ‘and other innovators of the complementary healing system examined no part of the human condition in isolation from its other parts’.¹⁰⁸ Clement has also used the very vague quote ‘Medicine is woven into the stuff of our mind. Hippocrates’, which comes from the Hippocratic *Decorum* 6 and is found widely on the internet.¹⁰⁹ The HHI website underlines that the name was selected because of the holistic aspects of Hippocrates: ‘As a fifth-century BC Greek physician, Hippocrates treated the body as a whole, not just a series of parts, and taught a natural healing process centered on a wholesome, natural diet.’¹¹⁰

HHI traces the history of its raw vegetable diet to its claimed founder, Ann Wigmore; Clement claims that she used this diet to reverse her own stage four colon cancer, while he himself benefitted by ‘eliminating death and dying from my menu’.¹¹¹ In an interview in 2012, he said how much he enjoyed his work, because ‘Can you imagine watching people come back to life?’¹¹² Interviewed as an ‘entrepreneur’ in August 2018, Clement said that ‘Our institute is proudly named after its founder, Ann Wigmore, who said that Hippocrates principles of health are the natural rules for obtaining physical wellness, hence establishing an Institute around those principles and practices.’¹¹³ Yet it is not the ‘Wigmore Institute’; what has happened is that the title Wigmore gave to her own clinic in 1960s Boston has been taken over by Clement. Hippocrates’ name has become a commodity here, and not only for patients; a spokesperson for the Ann Wigmore Foundation commented in 2015 that ‘She lost the name Hippocrates and we’re not connected.’¹¹⁴

The year 2015 was significant for HHI, as Clement was ordered to ‘cease and desist’ from practising medicine after two children were taken out of conventional cancer therapy to attend HHI, and one of them died.¹¹⁵ The State of Florida did not pursue this, apparently because HHI has no need for a licence because it does not accept payments from medical insurance.¹¹⁶ The expense of HHI is mentioned by reviewers: in 2018 one commented, ‘There was a constant pressure to buy more goods and services every single day’ and added ‘I am weak and just as exhausted and fatigued and in pain as before attending Hippocrates.’¹¹⁷

Beneath the application of the apparently relaxed ‘Let food be thy medicine’ quote, there are interesting suggestions of something more sinister at HHI. The language of religion is often applied, including by its users. Frank D described his experience as a ‘rebirth’ – ‘I am opening the door and my heart to a rebirth for me, only me, no one else but me’ – and wrote that HHI was ‘My Mecca’.¹¹⁸ As we saw in Chapter 3, when the story about Hippocrates in prison was taken up by the *weeksmid.com* site it included the idea that Hippocrates competed with the priestly system of medicine in which ‘Whether the cure worked or not, depended upon your degree of sin and the priest kept the payment regardless’, and this idea of one’s personal morality affecting the efficacy of a cure is also used by HHI.¹¹⁹ Current concerns in holistic medicine with overall well-being and perfectible health present health as something to be attained through dedication and effort, so guilt is generated when, despite the effort (and the financial investment), the patient does not improve or recover.¹²⁰ While earlier Western religious discourses of guilt and perfectibility centred around the purification of the soul as separate from the corrupted body, modern alternative health movements in the 1980s locate the body as ‘the place where this perfectibility is to be found’.¹²¹

Clement asserts that ‘both health and healing are dependent upon our beliefs’.¹²² While this can be viewed (and often is viewed) as a method of self-empowerment for a sick individual, it can also be used (and indeed is used) as a stick with which to beat the noncompliant HHI ‘guest’. Reviewer ‘tmaddow’ (who gave only one star) suggested that ‘When MANY of the residents did not achieve the results they were promised the staff turned on them . . . and had the audacity to insinuate that the residents in question were preventing their own healing through lack of faith.’¹²³ Conversely, a positive reviewer on Tripadvisor suggests that the negative reviewers ‘are missing the whole point of the self

healing [sic] process' which includes 'tak[ing] responsibility for your own health care' and 'examin[ing] your thinking as it relates to your health, do you deserve good health?'¹²⁴ Health thus becomes something that is a reward for the morally responsible or pure, and the body withholds it from the person who is not thinking in the correct manner.

The example of HHI also shows that part of the appeal of holism is that it is not an easy route to health; their programme runs for twenty-one days and, as a user puts it, 'This is a HOLISTIC healing center, not a quick fix, so don't go there expecting that.'¹²⁵ Reviewers are clear that they have 'now lost faith in the western medical establishment and realise that the natural way is the best way, as it gets the most results.'¹²⁶ Yet amidst the insistence on the 'natural', the trappings of biomedicine are still used, even at HHI: users note that 'Blood samples are taken on arrival and departure' and there are 'scientific references aplenty'.¹²⁷ In a 2018 interview, Clement mentioned the technology available as a selling point; he said 'At Hippocrates Health Institute, we have numerous cutting edge electromagnetic, high frequency healing modalities such as QRS, Hwave, Cyberscan and Biowell.'¹²⁸

Another holistic healer who uses the H-word in her brand – and whose approach has been extensively challenged – is Rebecca Carley, who developed what she calls 'the Hippocratic protocol' which she says can cure autoimmune diseases, autism and cancer.¹²⁹ After being suspended as an MD in 2003, Carley – who believes she can reverse what she identifies as vaccine-induced diseases – promptly repackaged herself as a 'holistic' healer. As her archived website for 'the Hippocrates Academy Protocol' puts it, 'Note that Dr. Carley does NOT practice medicine, and does NOT give medical advice. Rather, she teaches her students what she would do if she were you after reviewing your individual history of assaults to your immune system.'¹³⁰ Holistic healers seeking to avoid prosecution insist that they are not healing the patient: the patient is healing herself, courtesy of the self-healing body with a little help from the healer who offers a way to stimulate the healing process.

Conclusion

Everyone – in biomedicine and in various branches of alternative medicine – wants Hippocrates on their team. Considering the whole, whether that is the

whole body rather than an organ or system, or the body in relation to its wider setting, clearly has a long history, and several 'medicinal utopias' are currently held under the umbrella of 'holism'. The term 'holism' is always used in a positive way, but in its alternative medicine uses it often contains a barely-veiled criticism of Western biomedicine. The holistic Hippocrates conjures up nightmares of excessive specialization and 'toxic' drugs alongside more positive dreams of the individual being heard and understood and participating in a worldwide natural healing system.

Contemporary holistic medicine goes well beyond arguing that a knowledge of the whole body is essential to understanding what is wrong with a part of it. Holistic medicine presents Hippocrates as its ancestor, using the strategy of the claim to be returning to the 'original', the 'ancient'. The past is a time of integration, holism and Hippocrates, and the answer to our present problems is to reject fragmentation and return to this holistic Hippocrates. Comparing this with other current uses of Hippocrates as a projection screen on to which we place our ideals of medicine, holism too may not go far beyond using a 'quote' – for example, 'Let food be thy medicine' – which may or may not have its origins in any text of the Hippocratic Corpus. Yet, despite having a rather promising potential source text in Plato's *Phaedrus*, very few holistic medicine sites referencing Hippocrates make any use of this. I wonder if the problem is that it is in Plato, not the Hippocratic Corpus, that the key sentence about the whole and the part is found?