

The Life of the Body-Heart-Mind-Spirit:

Cross-Cultural Reflections on *Cura Personalis*

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I feel truly honored to receive the Nachbahr Award from my home institution, Loyola University Maryland, and to be associated with the legacy of Bernhard Nachbahr, a former professor of philosophy about whom so many have spoken so highly. I am grateful not only for the award but also for this opportunity to speak to my esteemed administrators and colleagues, and most of all to many of our brightest students and to their parents—who are probably fairly bright themselves.

It is the custom for Nachbahr Award recipients to speak on a topic related to “the life of the mind.” There are many pleasures and duties in life, but at a university such as Loyola we enjoy the privilege and we assume the responsibility of dedicating ourselves to what is traditionally called “the life of the mind.” I am a philosophy professor, and this phrase well describes much of what I do and what I try to model for and share with my students.

Philosophy doesn't aim to teach one how best to navigate the rat race so that one can quickly collect the most cheese; if such instrumental know-how is all one is interested in, one should probably go to a trade school rather than a liberal arts university like Loyola where students are required to think about more intangible and maybe even impractical things, such as the meaning of life. Philosophy deals with the big questions—but, to be frank, philosophy often doesn't answer our questions so much as it questions our answers. It makes us wonder about things we've taken for granted. Indeed, one of the main jobs of a philosopher is to be what Socrates called a “gadfly,” that is, a pesky insect that stings us so as to wake us up from our dogmatic slumbers and urge us ever onward towards a greater realization of truth, goodness, and beauty.

Today, it is in the spirit of such a philosophical gadfly that I want not only to applaud but also to critically reflect on what we mean by “the life of the mind,” this motto that even we

philosophers usually take for granted. Specifically, as the title of my talk suggests, I want to advance a more holistic view of education.

Modern academic philosophers have tended to forget that philosophy was for the ancient Greeks, not just an intellectual exercise, but a transformative way of life, a life-changing pursuit of wisdom. For ancient philosophers such as the Stoics, it explicitly involved the training of one's embodied emotions as well as one's intellectual mind, and it was meant to lead ultimately to a spiritual liberation or what in the Middle Ages came to be called the salvation of one's soul. We moderns, by contrast, have largely consigned the training of the body to the gym, the shaping of emotions to the home and to mass media, and the salvation of the soul to religious institutions.

This narrowing of philosophy to the life of the mind, segregated from the lives of the body, heart, and spirit, was in fact foreshadowed in ancient Greece, in particular in Plato's view that the human psyche consists of a hierarchy of three parts—a desiring body, a passionate heart, and an intellectual mind—and that philosophy is a “practice of dying,” that is to say, a practice of separating the intellect from the body. Christian Platonists such as St. Augustine added to the top of this psychological hierarchy the immortal soul. I cannot here, without getting in over my head, attempt to wade into and weigh in on the theological debates over whether salvation in Christianity should be understood in Platonic terms of a “separation of the soul from body” or in Biblical terms of a “resurrection of the body,” and if these views are somehow compatible.

In any case, as Pierre Hadot suggests, the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius of Loyola can be seen as taking up, or taking over, the lineage of ancient Greek conceptions of philosophy as a transformative and liberating way of life. When in the Enlightenment philosophers declared their independence from theology, they left, as it were, such spiritual exercises with the churches and increasingly restricted the practice of philosophy to an intellectual pursuit of knowledge rather than a more holistic and therapeutic pursuit of wisdom. The poor body, often disdained for its sinful desires and distrusted for its deceptive senses, has frequently been viewed in the philosophical as well as religious traditions of the West as a nuisance rather than as a vehicle for intellectual and spiritual pursuits.

Matters are very different in other cultures and traditions. My own intellectual and spiritual quest led me to Japan, where I lived for 13 years, commuting between the activities of a student

and lecturer at various universities on the one hand, and the practice of Zen Buddhism at temples and monasteries on the other. Along with their importation of Western culture and its institutions such as the university, the modern Japanese have in part also imported our segregation of body, heart, mind, and spirit. Fortunately, a more integrated approach to education has been preserved in its temples and monasteries, an approach that can fruitfully supplement, as well as be supplemented by, the life of the mind cultivated to a very high degree at modern Western-style universities.

In East Asia, when one refers to the “mind,” the word or sinograph they use—pronounced *xīn* in Chinese and either *shin* or *kokoro* in Japanese—in fact means both “heart” and “mind.” They speak not of the heart *or* the mind, but of the unitary heart-mind. That is to say, they do not tend to make the linguistic, conceptual, and experiential split that we, in the West, have made between the seat of the intellect (the mind) on the one hand and the seat of the emotions (the heart) on the other. Moreover, as with our word “heart,” their word denotes the locus of one’s feelings and spiritual center as well as the physical organ that keeps one’s life-blood circulating. Hence, in a single word, they refer to the core of the self as a holistic body-heart-mind-spirit.

In the modern West, especially in the US, many have tended to separate the life of faith from the life of the mind, a separation that has given rise to a perceived antagonistic relationship between religion and science, and to the kind of fundamentalistic fideism that Pope John Paul II warned against in *Fides et Ratio*. The Dalai Lama and others have claimed that the core teachings of Buddhism are compatible with modern science. Whether or not that is the case, in Buddhism faith and reason are supplemented and mediated by holistic practices, especially practices of meditation. It is said that one enters the stream of Buddhism by means of faith, that is, by means of trust in the teachings, but crosses it only by means of practice. In other words, it is not enough just to believe; one must exercise the whole body-heart-mind-spirit in order to realize the truth for oneself. Enlightenment in the East is an integrated, rather than a merely cerebral, realization; it entails not just an insight into, but also an embodiment of truth.

The practice of Zen is accordingly said to require the “whole body and spirit” (*zenshin-zenrei*). Dōgen, a thirteenth-century Zen master, spoke of the need to engage in both the practice of the body and the practice of the mind (*shinjin gakudō*). Yet for him these two forms of

practice ultimately converge in the realization of what he calls “the oneness of the body-mind” (*shinjin-ichinyo*). It is not that Dōgen did not recognize any distinction between mind and body, but he thought that the ideal is not, as Plato suggested, to separate the one from the other, but rather to harmoniously reintegrate them.

In East Asian traditions such as Zen Buddhism, education is thus thought of in holistic terms of cultivating the body-heart-mind-spirit. In the modern West, however, as a result of our history of splitting up the self into body, heart, mind, and spirit, our lives have become compartmentalized. Usually institutions, and often individuals themselves, attend mainly only to one or the other parts of the self. A sports gym and the athletes who train there attend to the body; a university classroom and the students who study there attend to the mind; and a church and its congregation attend to the heart and spirit. But does not the athlete also have a mind, a heart, and a spirit? Does not the student also have a body, a heart, and a spirit? And does not the church-goer also have a body and a mind? When we are feeling unwell, we may go to a medical doctor who looks at the body, to a psychologist who speaks with us about our minds and hearts, and/or to a priest or spiritual teacher who counsels us about our hearts and souls. But no one seems to be sure just how these different forms of treatment and different aspects of the self relate to one another.

There have been, of course, exceptions and resistances to this fracturing of the self in the West. For instance, upon entering Loyola’s Fitness and Aquatic Center, one is immediately confronted with the following quotation from Saint Ignatius: “A proper concern about the preservation of one’s health and bodily strength for the divine service is praise worthy and all should exercise it.” Now, I am not sure how many of us think of our workouts at the gym as a spiritual as well as a physical exercise. Nonetheless I do think that a holistic approach to education is quite explicitly called for by the pedagogical principle that informs the life of a Jesuit university: *cura personalis*, care for the whole person. Taking care of the body, taking care of the heart, taking care of the mind, and taking care of the spirit; each of these is surely vital to the cultivation of the whole person.

How well do we integrate these modes of taking care of the self? Do we too not tend to compartmentalize our lives? A student may go to class to take care of the intellect, to the gym to

train the body, to the Counseling Center to address issues of the heart, and to Alumni Chapel to attend to matters of the spirit; but at the end of the day she or he may be left wondering how to relate these activities to one another. Even so, I do think that students at Loyola are given many opportunities to reintegrate the life of the body-heart-mind-spirit. Certainly a literature class engages the heart along with the mind, and an art class gets the body involved as well. A holistic pedagogy is explicitly implemented in our service-learning classes. The students on the service-learning path of my Asian Thought class, for example, physically, mentally, and emotionally engage in and reflect on community service in light of the teachings and practices of Hinduism and Buddhism. The other experiential option offered in this class is the meditation path; those students not only read about and intellectually reflect on the role meditation plays in Hindu and Buddhist traditions, they also experiment with the practices themselves by participating in *The Heart of Zen Meditation Group* which I lead here on campus. Our Messina “living learning” program is yet another important vehicle at Loyola for connecting the classroom to the dorm room.

I have so far been criticizing the fracturing and compartmentalization of our lives, and stressing the importance of reintegrating the body-heart-mind-spirit of our selves. Yet, without retracting or retreating from anything I have said, I want to end my talk by acknowledging that, nevertheless, there is an important sense in which it is proper for a university to remain primarily, even though not exclusively, focused on the life of the mind. Just as a gym is properly focused on training the body, and a church is properly focused on cultivating the heart and soul, a university should indeed be focused primarily on the free exercise of the intellect. It is important that even institutions of higher learning that are guided by a clear and confident religious mission remain welcoming spaces for open-minded and unbiased critical inquiry. Whereas secular universities might be criticized for excluding or ignoring matters of the heart and spirit, universities with religious affiliations must be careful not to dogmatically restrict the myriad ways in which such matters can be connected with intellectual pursuits. The ideal university, in my view, not only maintains a primary focus on the life of the mind, but also supports the cultivation of a diversity of individual and communal avenues for reintegrating the whole person.

In my experience, Loyola University Maryland approximates this ideal as well as does any existing university. Let me leave you with a concrete image that symbolizes how a university

can—even while maintaining a primary focus on the life of the mind—at the same time have as its unobtrusive center an open place crisscrossed by various pathways of integration: the Quad. (Admittedly, this is more of a grassy than a concrete image.) On one end of our Quad stand Alumni Chapel and Campus Ministry, with its interfaith as well as Catholic programs. At the other end stands the Humanities Building, which houses a Counseling Center and the Center for Community Service and Justice, as well as, side by side on the ground floor, the pious Theology and pesky Philosophy Departments. On all sides stand classroom buildings in which the various arts and sciences and other academic disciplines, including of course business and management, are studied. Branching out, on the way to the library can be found a beautiful Japanese style meditation chapel, and up Charles Street a state of the art fitness center. Left and right are dormitories in which to sleep and cafeterias in which to eat. Yet in the middle of all this is the Quad, an open space traversed by the pathways on which we commute between these interconnected places in our ongoing individual and collective endeavors to educate and integrate the whole body-heart-mind-spirit.

Thank you very much for giving me your undivided attention!