Philosophy originated from medicine, while medicine nests in philosophy

Wherever there are humans, exploration of the inherent relationship between humans and nature is always examined. Before rational thinking was fully developed, human beings tried to explain natural phenomena and the impact of nature on themselves using myths and primitive religions. The fear of birth and death turned into the fear of ghosts, and the doubt of pain transformed into the pursuit of witchcraft. Medicine was born out of the initial expression of human suffering and the desire to reduce the pain. To explain various phenomena, continuous exploration has become the philosophy. Philosophy is a theoretical and systematic unity of worldview and methodology, and a reflection of the relationship between thinking and being, and mind and matter, which in some way, originated in medicine.

Meanwhile, medicine nests in philosophy as well. Early in human history, the role of “doctors” was played by wizards and clergy. They were believed to have magical powers to cure diseases. Over time, with the development of philosophy, medicine was gradually liberated from the illusion of sorceries and gods. The role of “doctors” was taken over by philosophers, such as Pythagoras and Empedocles, who were both a doctor and a philosopher. Meanwhile, “the language of medicine” was expressed by “the language of philosophy.” For example, Lao Tzu said, “all things leave behind them the obscurity (from which they have come), and go forward to embrace the brightness (into which they have emerged).” He thought that everything is a combination of yin and yang, and the balance between them is the balance of nature. This idea was used in the Inner Canon of Huangdi: the balance of yin and yang is the key to being healthy.

Philosophical idea mentors medical practice, while medical practice reflects

Medicine and philosophy are similar. Aristotle repeatedly referred to the similarities between a philosopher’s and doctor’s work in his writings. Medicine and philosophy are integrated. As Hippocrates mentioned, “medicine cannot be without medical truth, and philosophy cannot be without medical facts too.”

Meanwhile, Chuang Tzu said, “Nature and earth are parents of all the life.” He emphasized the harmony between man and nature, and between body and mind, which is the main component of ancient Chinese medicine. In ancient China, people regarded form and spirit as an organic whole. To understand a disease, the first step is to focus on the overall change caused by local conditions. Second, philosophy also guides the development of medicine. Inspired by Thales’s hypothesis that the originating principle of nature was a single material substance: water, Hippocrates proposed that “body fluid” forms the basis of human body. In addition, philosophy sets the standard of value for medical practice. An ancient Chinese saying mentions, always maintain “a sense of mercy,” know that “human life should be paramount,” and understand that “a doctor shoulders great responsibility of life and death, so never discriminate your patients based on socioeconomic status.” Hippocrates said, “Wherever there is love from mankind, there should be love from medicine” and “doctors thus should possess all...
noble characteristics of outstanding philosophers: altruism, kindness, and modesty.”

Medicine provides a factual basis for philosophy. Empedocles proposed the “four elements” based on medical practice. Influenced by this hypothesis, Hippocrates proposed “four humors,” namely, blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile, providing a basis for pathology for the next 2000 years.

**Blemish of Philosophical Idea and Drawback of Medical Practice**

The East and the West shared similarities in medicine and philosophy in the past: empirical medicine, holistic view, etc. However, rooted in different cultures, differences in Chinese ancient medicine and Western medicine were bred. Chinese esthetic pursues the unity of mind and matter and that of form and spirit. While, since the beginning of European natural science, mind–body dualism gradually replaced the holistic view. At the beginning of the 14th century, Western medicine began to pursue experimental science, which was accompanied by changes of the value orientation. The value of “people oriented” was gradually transformed into the value of “only the technique theory.” People were not regarded as a whole person, but a piece of organ or tissue. In Chinese medicine, the impact of Western medicine, market economy, and the loss of human spirit have also caused numerous unresolved problems.

In the early 20th century, the prominent medical educator William Osler correctly pointed out that medical practice is disadvantaged by “the lack of historical insight, the rift between science and humanity, and the alienation of technology advancement and humanitarianism.”[11] Even today, these three issues continue to hinder the development and innovation of modern medicine.

Some nonmedical factors distorted the intentions of technology: “technology is supreme,” “technical economic benefit,” etc. “Medical technology” has become a symbol of medicine. The “technology oriented” may cause over-reliance of clinicians on test results, ignoring clinical experience and clinical history. Dr. Lin Qiao-Zhi, mother of Chinese modern obstetrics and gynecology, said, “The medical technology is well developed there. However, I am afraid that these instruments may become obstacles for doctors and patients” after visiting hospitals in America.

Modern technology may also lead to the absence of dialectical unity, the lack of the holistic view, and over specialization in skills and knowledge. Over-detailed professional subdivision benefits in-depth development but may cause a disconnection with knowledge. A living human being may be divided into spare parts of the assembly line. The humanistic spirit is gradually lost. Lin Qiao-Zhi said, “a physician always needs to see the patient face-to-face, and diagnosis should be made only after taking both the examination results and his or her own experience into account.”[12] Modern medicine excessively emphasizes technology, which can sometimes even be inhumane. This may turn the clinician into an interpreter of reports. The art of conversations can become the technique of being silent. The story of patients and doctors can become the story of men and robots.

**Probing into Rootstock of Philosophy and Reaching Beyond Wisdom of Humans**

Fortunately, one of the trends in the development of Eastern and Western medicine is an increasing number of voices calling back to its traditional origins: “people-oriented” medical values. In 2002, *Annals of Internal Medicine* and *Lancet* published the “Medical professionalism in the new millennium: a physician’s charter” focusing on “improving quality of care.” In 2011, the Chinese Medical Doctors Association released the Chinese edition of the declaration “primacy of patients’ welfare.” Today’s medical model transforms from traditional biomedical model to bio-psycho-social medical model. This transformation of medical model also means that mind–body dualism should turn back to mind–body monism, which requires doctors to think more about their patients’ needs. Hippocrates said, “to understand a patient is much more important than to understand his disease.” There are certainly different expectations for treatment between doctors and patients: doctors prefer to reduce the recurrence and progression, while patients prefer to reduce the side effects and pain. In addition, the ways of understanding diseases are different. Patients’ view of their illness is based on the context of their life experience, while doctors manage the diseases with medical knowledge.[3] Medical background, treatment gap between expected similarities and differences, and the doctor–patient relationship make it difficult to bridge the gap. Fortunately, “three solutions” [Figure 1]: “understanding” through understanding of the disease, the relationship of doctors and patients, “understanding” through understanding the diagnosis, treatment and outcome, and “understanding” through understanding the dilemma and

![Figure 1: “Three solutions”: understanding of the disease, diagnosis, and patients’ helplessness.](image-url)
helplessness, confusion and weakness, in this way, can bridge the gap.

Doctor–patient communication is an important link in the process of medical treatment. To facilitate this process, “ABCD” principle is proposed, including Attitude, Behavior, Compassion, and Dialogue. First is sincere attitude, the attitude of trust between the patient and the doctor. Second is the behavior between them, which should reflect kindness and love. Compassion is the doctor’s nature, to have a heart filled with love and charity, and the doctor’s feelings are the origin of fundamental medicine. Dialogue is a part of the diagnosis and treatment, need to respect and listen, patience and acceptance, honesty and communication, affirmation and clarification, guidance and summary. Based on the return of “human value,” medical attention is no longer simply the disease of an organ, but it is also concerned about the sick people. Both doctors and patients have different cultural values, social relations, and lifestyles, and they cannot be forced to impose their own ideas on each other. Thus, it is important to go to the patient’s bedside, communicate with the patient based on personality and integrity, and try to understand that “the pain caused by the disease is not only associated with the loss of the body but also the relationship between the self, the world, and the whole network integration related.”[4] The first prescription that a doctor prescribes to his patient should be care and love[5] based on the fact “sometimes to cure, often to help, always to console.”

Another way to bridge this gap is to listen to the patient. Medicine includes three aspects: the patient, the disease, and the physician. It is useful when science facilitates human health, but it can be worrisome when doctors turn into complete scientists. Medical decisions should not only be made based on evidence but also the patients’ willingness. Based on “research evidence, patients’ care-seeking orientation, and patients’ background,” doctors and patients should make joint decisions with full concern of the patients’ feelings, wishes, quality of life, and needs of the patients and their families.[6] Doctors in the next century need to be careful observers, patient listeners, and sensitive conversationalists.

Looking back, we realize that medicine is an expression of human emotion and decency, and being a doctor is an art and humanity based on science. It is a profession instead of a transaction: an expression of human kindness and loving emotions, a sacred mission, as well as social responsibility. Medicine is not a pure science; instead, it is an evolving elusive system of knowledge, technique, and consciousness because it serves living beings with thought, emotion, mentality, will, and related roles in family and society.[7] Hence, Hippocrates said, “Philosophy should be embedded in medicine, and medicine should be embedded in philosophy.”

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