

Prospectives in Health and Healing

Illness & Medicine in Cultures

- Illness, health, medicine and other related terms are culturally defined.
- The terms are consistent within a culture but are often inconsistent *between* cultures.
- *Before* studying and attempting to understand medicinal plants, one must study and attempt to understand the cultural context in which the plants are used.

Western Digression

- Origin of the term “Western”
 - Western Civilization
 - Western Culture
 - Western Thought
- False synonyms
 - European
 - Christian
 - English-Speaking
 - Others
- The term is racially biased, poorly defined, and often prejudicial in usage

Talking about Medicine

- There are **not** just two cultural possibilities (western and non-western)
 - Other terms include: “allopathic” vs. “alternative”
 - Plurality of “western” cultures
 - Each culture may have multiple options.

Medicinal Systems as World-views

- Each medicinal system is part of a complete world view (or paradigm) that explains how the world works and why.
 - Consistency of terms, ideas, logic.
 - Predictability of systems.
- B. Some broad differences between systems:
 - education of healers
 - selection of remedies
 - application of remedies
 - determination of a successful treatment

Sickness and Healing Theories*

- Environmental/evolutionary theory
- Cultural theory
- Political/economic theory

Sickness

- Sources and maintenance of illness.
 - Biological environment
 - pathogens
 - allergens
 - Toxins
 - Non-biological environment
 - atmospheric conditions
 - location (altitudinal, latitude) conditions
 - geological conditions

Sickness

- Sources and maintenance of illness.
 - Cultural environment
 - phenomenon recognition and cosmological placement
 - granted or acquired control
 - nocebo and placebo expectations and the role of faith
 - spiritual activity: ancestors, non-human creatures, demi-gods, gods, God
 - bodily processes categorization

Sickness

- Resolution of illness.
 - Pharmacological
 - Environmental (non-biological)
 - Cultural

Health and Well-ness*

- Diet
- Medicinal Foods
- Medicines
- Cultural Normality

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. Is illness a culturally or scientifically defined category?
2. How is medicine a part of a "world view"?
3. What are some broad differences between cultural medicinal systems?
4. What are three theories of sickness and healing?
5. What are two sources of illness from the biological environment?
6. What are two sources of illness from cultural environments?

Environmental / Evolutionary

- Focus: Interplay between environment and adaptive evolution of each culture.
- Principal determinants of sickness and healing processes: *Human Adaptations*
- Sociobiology
 - Reductionism:
 - Emergentism:
 - Interactionism:

Cultural

- Focus: Cultural systems
 - Coherent sets of values, concepts, beliefs.
 - Rules that guide and rationalize behavior.
- Principal determinants of sickness and healing processes: *Pre-existing cultural beliefs*
 - Reductionism
 - Emergentism
 - Interactionism

Political / Economic

- Focus: Power (ownership) and control of social interactions with the environment
- Principal determinants of sickness and healing processes: *Cultural economic organizations*
 - Reductionism
 - Emergentism
 - Interactionism