

## 'Religion' and 'body'

### Reclaiming the missing links of Western education

In this paper I intend to depict Western education as being led by a scientific ethos of objectivity. Such an ethos lends itself clearly to a disengagement from 'religion' as representing the realm of so-called 'unscientific knowledge' and speculation on the one hand, and to a disengagement from the 'body' as the locus of sentiment and idiosyncrasy on the other. Thus Western education promotes a secular mind-oriented ideology, weeding out the spiritual realm on the one hand, and the emotional-physical realm on the other.

I will claim that an education based on this reductive perception of man cannot possibly be worthy of its name. It may be a form of information propagation, but not Education in its fullest sense. Conversely I will claim that education can only take place once it becomes an exploratory path which poses the question 'who am I?' at its core. The exploration of such a question will forever be a depleted one as long as it is deprived of 'religion' and the 'body' as possible research paths. This paper is thus an orientation call for the field of curriculum development serving as a foundation for the 'holistic education' discourse developed in recent years by figures such as John Miller (2005, 2007), Linda Lantieri (2001), Ramon Gallegos-Nava (1999), Ron Miller (1997), David Marshak (1997), and others.

The paper will include three sections, an introduction and a short epilogue. In the introduction I will claim 'well-being' to be the goal of education. Following this in the first section I will show why this goal cannot be achieved given Western education's rational ('body-less') – secular ('religion-less') epistemology. In the second section I will attempt to reconceptualize education by means of reclaiming the 'body' and 'religion' as Western education's missing links, reintegrating them into its proper epistemological/ontological basis. In the final section I will deal with our inherent dualistic conceptualization of reality (education included) as it constitutes an obstacle to the reconceptualization of education which I offer in section two. As a concluding statement I will offer a way to overcome this obstacle.

## Introduction: the goals of education

I would like to begin with a short story:

A seven-year-old is on his way to school, in the car with his father. The boy begins crying, saying: 'I'm afraid to go to school.' 'Why?' the father asks. 'Because I'm afraid something will happen to me when there's no adult around.' The father asks: 'Did something happen yesterday, or the day before?' 'No, I'm just afraid, my heart is beating fast, I don't feel well, I'm afraid.' The father: 'Listen, we have to go, I have to go to work. We'll tell the teacher to help you out if you have any problem.' The boy: 'I'm afraid, something can happen to me and what if there is no adult around?' The father: 'But nothing really has to happen.' The boy keeps crying: 'You don't understand, I can't, I can't explain this, I just feel afraid, like something bad is going to happen.' The father contemplates this for a few moments. He knows his son's tendency to think too much; to get caught in his own world, losing contact with reality. Then this father suddenly remembers himself as a young boy feeling such feelings. Some sense of a threat hovering above. Some heaviness on the chest, or was it hollowness in the stomach? When he was a boy, he kept it to himself. They spoke less in those times. He turns his car and drives back home. *The boy stays home that day.*

I will conclude this short story by stating that this boy happens to be my son.

In recent years the notion of education's goal as 'well-being' or 'happiness' has been brought to the foreground. Nel Noddings (2003) dedicates a full book to exemplify and support her claim that: 'Happiness should be an aim of education, and a good education should contribute significantly to personal and collective happiness (Noddings 2003: 1).' Anthony Seldon has developed a '10 point program for developing well-being', implementing it at the Wellington College where he serves as headteacher<sup>1</sup> and ardently promoting it over the media.<sup>2</sup> However the notion of 'teaching happiness' or setting 'well-being' as a goal of education has been raising much criticism. Richard Smith (2008) denies the possibility of defining 'happiness', resulting in the impossibility of teaching it. Judith Suissa (2008) criticises the methodology of reducing 'hap-

1 Wellington College, <http://www.wellingtoncollege.org.uk/page.aspx?id=31>.

2 'Can We Teach People to be Happy?' *The Guardian* 19.2.2008.

piness' to a 'market-list' which fails to encompass the full meaning of this concept, while Alistair Miller (2008) adds a thorough unraveling of the circular argumentation lying at the basis of 'teaching happiness' and its 'positive psychology' foundations. I here wish to reclaim 'well-being' as education's goal, and modify Noddings's claim that 'well-being' should be merely *an* aim of education to a more drastic claim: 'well-being' should be *the* aim of education, contrary to the above mentioned critiques. Although I appreciate the academic level of the critique mentioned above, and analytical philosophy's being a powerful tool when applied to ambiguous concepts, I believe in this case it is rather tedious, counter-intuitive and unnecessary. Defining 'happiness/well-being' does indeed raise questions, but it will suffice to state that this term can be taken to mean a sense of livelihood, a wish to thrive, to explore, a sense of loving and being loved, a sense of meaning and more.<sup>3</sup>

It is indeed quite useless to extend the list of constituents of 'happiness' given the above-mentioned critique farther, since this is by no means an exhaustive philosophical analysis of the term. It rather draws the boundaries of 'the ballpark', and for the purposes of this paper there is no need for more. The fact that any man wishes to feel the above-mentioned features of 'well-being' is hard to dispute, and it is quite natural that we hope that our education would promote such 'well-being'.

I proceed by saying that if 'livelihood, a wish to thrive, to explore, a sense of loving and being loved and a sense of meaning' are all constituents of my sense of 'well-being', then I must make an investigation into the ways by which they can be enhanced. I wish to claim now that all these constituents require some form of 'knowledge'. My ability to experience 'well-being' must be enhanced as I know more about my surroundings and about myself, since such knowledge broadens the scope of my possibility of experience.<sup>4</sup> This means that my possibility for creating meaning is extended. It suggests that I am exposed to more potential objects to love and so on. Education thus is a form of 'knowledge' acquisition.

Western education indeed ardently adheres to this last statement. But, it is its definition of the term 'knowledge' which reduces education from its broad understanding as promoted here, to what may hardly be perceived as worthy of the term 'education'. In the following section I will elaborate this claim as I

3 Noddings (2003: 5) lists the following as some sources of happiness: 'making a home, love of place and nature, parenting. . . the development of personal and interpersonal capacities'. This list can easily be extended further.

4 This is of course clearly a Deweyan notion, which sees education's goal as growth through the unfolding of perpetual experience (Dewey 1929).

undermine Western education's mind-oriented epistemology, which deprives us of the 'body' and of 'religion'. Such deprivation means that Western education imposes boundaries which restrict us from exploring 'who we are', which in effect is the most essential question education must attend to. We cannot enjoy 'well-being' if we do not know who we are. The question 'who we are' cannot by any means ignore our 'bodily existence' and a great majority of humanity's spiritual inclination towards transcendence rooted in a 'religious quest'. Exploring ourselves as a mind-body-soul complex should thus be the focus of education, turning it in actuality into a scientific spiritual quest.

## **Western education's reduced epistemology**

### ***Minding the loss of the 'body'***

The Western curriculum is rooted in the two intertwined agendas of rationalism and secularization, characterizing our inheritance from modernity. These inclinations can be traced to ancient Greece, but have gained their 'final twist' with Europe's enlightenment, represented strongly by the rationalists' and empiricists' search for objectivity along with the famous Kantian call: 'dare to think'.

Both rationalism and empiricism were guided by the old quest for certainty. Descartes' path led him to a distrust of the senses, and to the anchoring of his quest for certainty in the bedrock of a disengaged mind.<sup>5</sup> The empiricists, by contrast, saw the senses as the anchor for the same quest, but their demand for 'objectivity' as the cornerstone of scientific validity, had led them to 'weed out the self' (Kincheloe & Steinberg 1993: 312). The greater the 'objectivity', the more grounded the truth revealed. Together the empiricists and the rationalists have established an ethos of separation between 'knowledge' and 'self'. The farther 'knowledge' is driven from 'self' the more valid it becomes. 'Knowledge' is accepted more fully as it is disentangled from the residues of idiosyncrasy.

This ethos is no other than the (notorious) mind-body dualism. Whether it is Descartes' disengaged mind denying the body as a source of knowledge, or the empiricists' selective mind which accepts only that portion of the 'body' which is remote from our subjectivity (assuming that is actually possible), eventually the ethos of modernity has left us with a 'crippled body'; a 'body'

5 The affinity with Augustine and earlier with Plato should be taken into consideration here. See Hatfield (2003: 21) among others.

which is used/abused as a mere means of knowing the external world, while rejecting its own story as our own subjective existence.

Postmodernity's attack on the myths of 'objectivity'<sup>6</sup> and 'scientific success'<sup>7</sup> has taught us much about critical thinking, but according to my view, it has not created a significant shift in our perception of 'knowledge'. In fact, Western science is perceived as a successful model (and rightly so),<sup>8</sup> which should be applied to all fields, education included. It is not science's success which I am criticizing in this paper, but rather science-as-ideology rather than a method of inquiry; in fact a *mere* method of inquiry which bears tremendous advantages, but grave dangers as it becomes an agenda.

The fact remains that contemporary Western education is still run by the mind-body dualism established three hundred years ago. An anti-Cartesian, postmodern critique remains a theoretical discourse as Michelle Lelwica (2009: 123) points out. Descartes is still very much with us as we continue to cherish the severing of 'knowledge' from what we depict as the portrait of man. Thus we allocate nearly all school time to 'facts', leaving the realm of idiosyncrasy and subjective feeling to the 'mercy', or rather 'cruelty', of life outside school.<sup>9</sup> This brings us back directly to my son's story this preference becomes clarified. My son does not wish to go to school, since he has an unexplained fear felt excruciatingly clearly in his body. School wishes to set him behind a table and impart arithmetic, historical dates, chemistry and physics to him, treating learning as what occurs 'from the neck up' (Lelwica 2009: 125). Will all these 'facts' lead my son to 'well-being'? They may apply to what the West has conceived as an ethos of success quite mistakenly equated with 'well-being'.

6 I refer to Polanyi (1958: 3): 'Any attempt rigorously to eliminate our human perspective from our picture of the world must lead to absurdity.'

7 I refer to Laudan (1997) as he critiques postmodern attempts to discredit Western science's success.

8 Laudan (1993: 156-7): 'The methods of science are not necessarily the best possible methods of inquiry. . . nor are the theories they pick out likely to be completely reliable. But we lose nothing by considering that the methods of science are imperfect and that the theories of science are probably false. Even in this less-than-perfect state, we have an instrument of inquiry which is arguably a better device for picking out reliable theories than any other instrument we have yet devised for that purpose.'

9 Noddings constantly challenges the Western approach to the curriculum (2003: 11): 'It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the view placing intellectual activity over all other forms of activity is still alive today. We see it active in the elevation of mathematics and physics over politics and natural history. We see it in the insistence that all students study algebra and geometry, but not parenting, even though most of us become parents and relatively few use algebra.'

The relation between success and ‘well-being’ must of course be explored. We already know that the two are not necessarily inseparable. The West tends to measure success by social status, bank accounts, and glamorous positions. Education thus follows this agenda. Western education falsely equates financial success with well-being, as it becomes almost an economic endeavour, as Mike Rose (2009) demonstrates. I do not wish to object to arithmetic’s and history’s significance, but rather claim that all these become painfully marginal when juxtaposed against my son’s agony. In fact, as long as he feels his agony he will not be able to absorb any of these issues. Being embodied, his agony is more present than any fact we can bear in mind that school may propagate. School knowledge is *disembodied*. It constitutes ‘food’ for the mind, bypassing ‘body’ and ‘soul’. Our Western school is concerned about what the student *thinks* with his brain much more than about how he *feels* in his body. That is quite far from a concern with ‘well-being’. I suggest that learning to cope with his fear may be the most important lesson my son can learn. Following the ‘holistic education’ discourse I ask, must school take *reason* to be its only course of study? Are there not practices which school can adopt in order to address the student’s full being? Must we be resigned to such a narrow epistemological basis?

### ***Recruiting Merleau-Ponty***

The emergence of the ‘body’ into our ‘mind’ oriented ethos is among others, the product of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962). Without privileging either ‘mind’ or ‘body’, Merleau-Ponty depicts man as an ‘embodied subject’ as he describes the process of perception as encompassing both a perception of an object, *and* a perception of the lived body’s situatedness against the object.<sup>10</sup> Perception is never a mere absorption of ‘things out there’, but rather a process of being and acting in the world as the perception of the situated body presents a field of meaningful possibilities which the object bears for the perceiver. The body thus becomes ‘the instrument of my “comprehension”’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 235). As Thomas Csordas (1994: 9) interprets Merleau-Ponty: ‘If we begin with the lived world of perceptual phenomena, our bodies are not objects to us. Quite the contrary, they are an integral part of the perceiving subject.’ Consequently: ‘. . . on the level of perception it is thus not legitimate to distinguish mind and body.’ (Csordas 1994: 9.)

10 ‘Every external perception is immediately synonymous with a certain perception of my body’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 206).

This very short description lends itself to a very different understanding of what education must become, as it steps away from a dualistic view of either 'body' or 'mind'. Disembodied knowledge in the form that the Western curriculum imparts fails to address the student as a holistic being. It is a form of segregation of the 'self' from the 'world', it is in fact a form of 'deadening' as it betrays Merleau-Ponty's perceiving/being 'embodied subject'.

The query I am raising should not be reduced to a mere 'how does the date 1492 apply to the student's life?'<sup>11</sup> My call is not a call for instrumentalism. It is more complex, and requires more elaboration, but for the time being it is a call for us to awaken from a depleted way of viewing education as tending to the 'mind' which neglects our being as a 'body-mind' complex.

As we extend Merleau-Ponty's perception as a pragmatic process of perceiving-being, we may delve into a more psychologically oriented context. My son's perception of school raises a very different field of possibilities from my own perception, or his classmates' perceptions. His perception/being process in this case, brings forth a sensation which I do not perceive. For some reason my son's perception/being is manifested by a fear which I do not experience. If we shift Merleau-Ponty's descriptive philosophy to a more normative field of education we may begin contemplating education as a process of probing into the perception/being process for the enhancement of 'well-being'. What is it in my son's perception/being process that brings forth that fear which I myself do not experience? Why is his perception coloured by fear? I suggest that these are not mere psychological issues, but rather educational issues of *healing*. Once we accept such an approach, we are pressed to locate a pedagogy which will enable us to transform education into a non-dual process, overcoming the ontology-epistemology, perceiving-being, self-world dualisms inherent in our system and critiqued by Merleau-Ponty's philosophy.

Before tending to pedagogy, the careful reader may raise an eyebrow in the face of the combination of education and healing above. Am I not getting this all wrong? Am I allocating education an inappropriate turf? Should education be concerned with *how we feel*? Shouldn't such questions be dealt with by therapists/healers and so on outside the school doors? Let us revisit this issue later on, but for the time being I will state that the standpoint which I am promoting sees education in its broadest, most integrative sense. It fits well within the discourse of 'holistic education'. As a holistic endeavour, education can never be settled the way Western society has been conducting it, since it encompasses every aspect of being human, treating man as an: 'intellec-

11 Although I do not underestimate the need of educators to address such a question.

tual, emotional, physical, social, aesthetic, and spiritual being' (Miller 2005: 2). School thus must meet this challenge. If teaching my son to 'know' and face his fear may be the most important skill school can teach *and* we rethink education as a preparation for adulthood (a commonly accepted claim), then our pedagogy must change. Let us merely contemplate how much our adult lives are riddled with fears we are unable to handle; fears standing in our way to 'well-being'. The famous Deweyan observation of the dualism of school and life is still here to haunt us, pressing us to overcome our reduced dichotomous pedagogy. Western education's epistemological basis is thus painfully narrow. Its understanding of 'knowledge' as disembodied creates a rift between school and the child's life.<sup>12</sup>

The Western curriculum, guided by a 'scientific' agenda 'weeds out the self' (Kincheloe & Steinberg 1993: 312) from the educational endeavour; weeding out the self means depleting education of meaning; education deprived of meaning is education bereft of its final goal of 'well-being'.

We are to develop a new model of education which broadens our view of 'knowledge' to that same realm which science has deprived us of—we are to heal the 'crippled body' through the resurrection of education's epistemological basis and transform education into a practice of healing.

### ***The loss of 'religion'—minding the realm of 'soul'***

The deprivation of idiosyncrasy, of subjectivity, of the 'lived body', as a contrast to the realm of objectivity, reason and science, does not quite sum up the problem of education's reduced epistemological basis. The consequence of rationalization and science is a 'disenchanted world' according to Max Weber's meta-narrative. A growing belief in man's power to decipher nature through the language of mathematics has led quite naturally to a dwindling of the need for any realm which is beyond man. The more grounded education becomes in an ethos of objectivity and facts, the less it will lend itself towards realms of mere belief, metaphysics, spirituality, *religion*. Education bereft of these becomes a *secular* endeavour.

And yet, when attempting to assess whether Weber's prophecy has actually materialized, reality proves otherwise. As Ruth Illman notes:

12 John Dewey (1956) identified this rift as mentioned, nearly a hundred years before and attempted to heal it through his pragmatic approach to education. I do not object to his philosophy, but I do believe his solutions to be partial, as his treatment of the individual did not delve deep enough into the psycho-physical workings of man, as I will elaborate later on.



For many researchers looking into the global religious landscape of today, it seems obvious that the scholarly predictions introduced some decades ago concerning the slow decline, or even death of religion through the processes of secularization, have not been fulfilled. . . the vivid interest in and practice of religion in new, innovative ways seem to give the phenomenon a character of expansion rather than erosion (Illman 2010: 230).

Philip Wexler (2005) on his part, claims that Weber's infamous 'iron cage' is rather porous, and humanity refuses to resign itself to the shackles of reason alone. The movement towards science and desacralization creates friction in the form of what Wexler (2000) defines as the 'mystical society', which according to my own interpretation is no other than New Age, cleansed of charlatanism. It is a more academic treatment of human efforts towards liberation, whether socially organized in the form of new religions, or through individual spiritual tendencies, which may be located within Michel Foucault's (1988) 'technologies of the self' in the way Robert Hattam (2004) has suggested.<sup>13</sup> According to Wexler (2000), Weber underestimated the power of such movements, while Wexler sees them as a source of societal rejuvenation; an antidote to our alienated contemporary society and a movement towards 're-enchantment'. Given this background Western education becomes an anachronism. It is still well set within Weber's narrative while society is beginning to speak a different language. It results in a situation in which our contemporary education promotes a 'disenchantment of the world' while a good portion of the world outside school is pushing us towards 're-enchantment'.

### **Reclaiming the 'body' and 'religion' through the broadening of 'knowledge'**

I suggest, quite unoriginally, that the problem lies in our narrow definition of the 'empirical'; in our misguided identification of 'knowledge' with scientific-empirical 'knowledge'. It was William James who noted this in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1974), claiming that reality encompasses much more than what we can perceive through the realm of our senses. Our confinement to this sort of ethos of knowledge leaves no room for a credible 'unscientific'

13 'I propose that Buddhism, and especially its meditation practices, be read as 'technologies of the self' (Foucault 1988), that deconstruct a reified self, and enable the development of an altruistic mind as a basis for living an ethico-political life in an unjust world' (Hattam 2004: 110).

experience of the world promoted by religion. Here lies the relation between our tendency to the rational and the inevitable secularized view stemming from it; here lies the relation between the 'body' and 'religion'. If our senses are mere sources of data in the process of knowing the world, than the framework we confine reality to is one which will never yield more than sense-data information.<sup>14</sup> Following Thomas Kuhn's (1970) logic, the whole scientific endeavour is a paradigm which is subject to the framework of the senses undergirding it every step of the way. Science guided by the 'body' will leave no room for religion, thus the 'body' and 'religion' become antagonists in the same way that 'science' and 'religion' continue to fight their epic and non-sensical battle. I will not engage in this battle, but rather adhere to Wilber's acute analysis of it<sup>15</sup>—'religion' and 'science' as forms of 'knowledge' must part ways, not in the sense of antagonism, but rather in the form of a respectful reconciliation; as a reciprocal recognition of the power of each to render valid and different aspects of reality.

Following Ken Wilber, I am claiming that *there exists* knowledge which we must reclaim and reinsert into the picture of contemporary man. The realm dismissed by the scientific ethos of 'objectivity' as metaphysics/spirituality/religion must be resurrected. We must abandon Immanuel Kant's banishment of metaphysics from our discourse. In fact this is the knowledge which bears the most potential for 'well-being'. By banishing this knowledge from the curriculum we are depriving the student of the possibility of asking questions which lie at the core of actual meaning; the meaning of being in this world and making sense of existence. As noted before a sense of meaning is one of the main sources of our experience of 'well-being'.

But what *is* this 'knowledge' exactly? It is the 'liberating' knowledge depicted by Eastern traditions, which will possibly enable my son to observe his agony's true nature, as he realizes the Buddhist teaching of the ephemeral character of all phenomena, including the most overwhelming of fears; it is the knowledge of the *Tao* as one tunes into the perpetual flow of *yin/yang*, transcending dualism through finding stability as one flows with the flow. Buddhism and Daoism are brought here simply as an example. It might have

14 I refer to the debate between Paul Geisert (2002) and Warren A. Nord as they interpret Arthur Eddington's fisherman parable, which conveys the message that one can discover only those findings which do not slip between the holes in the net. In the same way, Western science throws a specific kind of net over reality, while some of reality slips between these holes.

15 Ken Wilber analyses the history of this battle in several of his writings. Among these *Eye to Eye* (2001) and *The Marriage of Sense and Soul* (1999).

been Patanjali's rendition of classical yoga or Zen Buddhism as each of these traditions points to its form of liberation and yet they all breathe a mutual ethos pointing towards knowing 'who we are'; knowing the 'self' in whichever interpretation each of these traditions promotes.<sup>16</sup>

The Upanishadic tales,<sup>17</sup> as the tap-root of all the above mentioned traditions, call our mundane factual 'knowledge' which includes our Western science—lower knowledge (Mundaka Up. 1.1.3.), 'mere names' (Chandogya Up. 7.1), or even 'unworthy' (Svetasvatara Up. 1.12). It is only the knowledge of *atman* (the self) which bears the potential of transcending man's inherent and inevitable sorrow. It is clear that these paths are based on very different premises. They promote a completely different viewpoint, driving us from the outwardly oriented gaze characterizing our Western science, to an inward gaze rejecting the phenomenal temporal world of appearances. It is very reasonable to raise the critical issue: Can we as Westerners even begin to relate to such esoteric and alien notions? I will revisit this issue at the end of this paper.

### ***Moving on to practicality—yoga as pedagogy***

The soteriological 'knowledge' pointed towards here, brings us to the realm of 'religion' and integrates the 'body' into the discourse. It is no more a 'crippled-body' but rather a 'full body'; a Merleau-Pontian 'embodied subject'—but even farther than that. It becomes rather an interaction in which thoughts, emotions, sensations, insights, intuitions and moods are formed, resonating as a more Buddhist-like perception of a human being as the five *skandhas*;<sup>18</sup> an *aware* human being. It is closely related to Csordas's (1994: 5) negative definition: 'Self is neither substance nor entity, but an indeterminate capacity to engage or become oriented in the world, characterized by effort and reflexivity.' And yet I do not wish to block the possibility of 'self' as some form of entity, as it remains an enigma to be unraveled through practice. It becomes a consciousness expressing itself in its attempt at self-understanding. It is man asking 'who am I?' and in the normative orientation brought here, it is a *courageous* man welcoming any practice which allows for this question's life-long exploration. His courage lies in his willingness to see any dogma (Western or Eastern) for its 'emptiness' (*Shunyata*) as he practices Buddhism's

16 Of course these interpretations contradict each other to the point where Buddhism will deny the existence of 'self' as such.

17 I refer to Patrick Olivelle's (1998) translation.

18 I refer to David-Neel (1977: 127) and Gethin (1998: 139) for more on the five *skandhas*.

‘non-attachment’ towards his own set of ideals and beliefs. This kind of conceptualization suggests Eastern body–mind practices, namely yoga in its broadest forms and manifestations, as defined by Georg Feuerstein (2001), W. Y. Evans-Wentz (1970) and others.<sup>19</sup> This arena extends Merleau-Ponty’s ‘embodied subject’ even further. As a pragmatic hypothesis it nourishes this discourse with the lore of the East, bringing in notions of an enlightened state although in the same breath I claim to be less concerned with final goals than with enhancing the potential of ‘well-being’ in less lofty terms.<sup>20</sup> The paths I am pointing towards stress the activity of ‘striding’ rather than reaching the goal. The stride itself *is* the goal.<sup>21</sup> Allowing myself to apply Merleau-Ponty’s terminology, enlightenment exists in the background without me focusing my gaze upon it. It is a blurred object in my perceiving/being process, which becomes meaningful only through the practice of yoga. Broadening education’s epistemological basis must include such possibilities, which blur the mere distinction of epistemology and ontology.

After broadening the ‘crippled body’ to a ‘full body’, I am now tending to a broadened view of ‘religion’. It is not the sectarian institutionalized form of ‘religion’ which I am after. Such an understanding of ‘religion’ would be reductive as well. It is the ‘religious’ sentiment which interests me, following James’s path, while it is also a form of ‘knowledge’ which science-turned-into-ideology will deny. It is here where I find the possibility of reuniting the ‘body’ and ‘religion. If the ‘crippled body’ will be broadened towards a ‘full body’, which allows us our five senses and any ‘knowledge’ beyond them gained by

19 Feuerstein (2001: 3) treats yoga as: ‘all the Indian practices oriented towards the transcendence of self or liberation from the ego’, while Evans-Wentz (1970: 35) sees yoga as the: ‘. . . tap-root of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Taoism.’

20 I am well aware that the Western rendition of ‘well-being’ problematized at the beginning is by no means parallel to ‘well-being’ in Eastern terms. This issue will be addressed in future publications.

21 As Zen guru Suzuki Shunryu states in his *Zen Mind, Beginners Mind* (1994), assuming the meditation posture correctly is enlightenment itself. We are not to look for anything outside it. Suzuki’s rendition of the Zen tradition stresses this demystified, quotidian approach. I believe such an approach is necessary, especially for the Westerner’s inquisitive and skeptical mind. Enlightenment may seem to the scientifically oriented Westerner as mythology. We do not need to fight such a battle. We may leave the results of mind–body practices to speak for themselves. We may ask: Does one have to become a virtuoso violinist in order to enjoy playing music? Or from a different angle, we may resign to Baker Roshi’s famous aphorism: ‘Enlightenment is an accident—practice makes you more prone.’ I am here promoting education in its broadest sense, embracing all alleys which may enhance our sense of meaning leading to ‘well-being’ as education should.

the application of body–mind practices *then* 'religion' in the sense I am referring to it, may emerge. Again, not as a form of human organization in the Durkheimian sense, but rather as a 'spiritual' awe, characterizing individuals' paths in a Wexlerian 'mystical society'. Such an endeavour extends our view of 'knowledge' towards a broadened 'science'—a 'science of life'. It opens us towards life as a scientific path, life as an educational path, education as a path for life.

Why do I turn specifically eastwards, rather than remain in our own confinement of Western religion? I will not engage in a long discussion of this worthy issue, but rather claim that these Eastern paths integrate the 'body' within the story of liberation in a sense which Western religions do not convey. Classical yoga, as condensed by Patanjali offers a rare combination of an embodied philosophy as it is constituted of a psycho-physical practice which is necessary for the realization of truth. As such it is a unique example of 'body–mind' and what a Westerner mistakenly would perceive as 'religion' while a more loyal description would define it as a 'path'.<sup>22</sup> Buddhism's *vipassanna* meditation cultivates awareness to our body–mind complex. Yiquan practice directs our awareness to feeling our entire body as it moves through its surroundings. These are but a few examples of these practices. Western religions have not developed in this direction. They *do* offer various practices related to the body, but the overall ethos of these religions calls for a *rejection* of the body in order to achieve the higher qualities of soul (Denton 2005: 755).

Given the potency of soteriological knowledge compared to our 'lower' scientific knowledge we must ask why should we not abandon our Western science all together, if it is so impotent indeed, in our search for 'well-being'? Because that would mean depriving us of 'reason' or 'mind' as we perceive it as the counterpart of 'body'. It would mean that we would fall into yet another trap of reductionism. I am not here to condemn reason, but rather to point to its limitations, to its deadening grip on our curriculum and from there on our being; to its partial role in our story; the story of man. We are *not* to abandon either 'reason' or 'body' or 'soul'.<sup>23</sup>

22 I am even refraining here from the term 'spiritual path' as I prefer not to fall within a dualistic trap which confines me to one specific tradition. The debate regarding the Western attempt to define Eastern paths is a very old one. I refer to Gethin (1998: 63–5).

23 I am aware of the possible confusion which the terms 'soul'/'self'/'man'/'subject' and so on may bring forth. I will not solve this confusion here, as my motivation is merely to shed light on areas we are neglecting in our perception of man. The terminology

I am thus pointing eastwards since this is our way of including the realm of the 'body' *and* the realm of 'religion'; our way of tracing Western education's missing links, without abandoning the 'mind', which is still a great part of our being and of our culture. I am here to broaden education, and broadening means keeping what is there and at the same time allowing for more. This is the way towards a fuller life of 'well-being'.<sup>24</sup>

### **Cartesian thought as an obstacle**

There are quite some hurdles we must leap over before such an approach can be adopted. Here I will deal with an essential theoretical hurdle rather than deal with hurdles concerned with pedagogy which are definitely troubling as well. It is the hurdle of our Cartesian perception of reality, which tends to draw sharp borders constricting our view to education as an enclave unto itself. Education in this sense is separated from religion, from adulthood, from training, from healing and continuing this line it is in actuality severed from life. John Dewey (1929) has long before critiqued this course of thought, attempting to overcome this rift in his philosophy of education and its practice. But eventually contemporary Western education is not as affected by Dewey as may be expected. We tend to cling to lofty aphorisms stating that 'education is a life-process' and so forth, but do we really see this aphorism translating itself into the actual schoolday?

Overcoming this dichotomized view begins with a reconceptualization of education. Education should be perceived as the platform over which mind, body and soul interact through any form of discipline. This means that religion and healing are fused with education, as Philip Wexler has pointed out clearly:

- in this case is less concerning, but rather the assumption that there may definitely be a realm which is beyond the body-mind complex, a realm which may be referred to as 'soul' or 'spirit' (although these last terms are not necessarily interchangeable).
- 24 It is clear that we must elaborate more on the process of gaining such liberating knowledge which I am promoting. How does a yogic posture, or breath exercise contribute to such knowledge? How does it eventually infiltrate our lives; into the life of my son as he is confronted with school. This issue will be addressed in future publications.

American mass-media now routinely report the healthful effects of prayer and the relation between health and religion. By this series of truly post-modern social transformations, the end point of this fusion (a point that is not yet evident) is that education will become 'healing,' the core New Age transformative practice. (Wexler 2008: 190.)

A common observation differentiating education from healing states that the student is not 'sick' and is not in need of 'healing,' therefore education must not be understood as a form of therapy or healing. The consideration of such a claim, of course, depends on what philosophy of man is applied. If we adopt a more Easternized pattern of thought we may very well begin to view the human condition as a state of 'dis-ease'.<sup>25</sup> In fact the Buddha's four noble truths are related to as a therapeutic doctrine in which the first noble truth characterizes man as being in a state of 'dis-ease' (*dukkha*), the second points to the reason for the 'dis-ease' (*trsna*), the third points to the possibility of a healthy state (*nirvana*), and the fourth points to the way to achieve this state (the eightfold path of *pana, sila & Samadhi*). The Buddha thus is no other than a doctor of humanity, a fact which the scriptures constantly repeat (Gethin 1998: 63). Of course, it does not clearly follow that education is thus a form of healing. But if man is viewed through a Buddhist prism (which can easily be paralleled to classical yoga as bearing very similar premises, although deferring in the healing strategy), man *is* a 'sick' being and is indeed in need of healing. It will suffice to prove this view experientially if we ask an average person to sit for five minutes and observe his breath. Very quickly he will find his 'monkey-like' mind (to use a famous Tibetan metaphor) jumping from one thought to the other, rejecting the mere notion of remaining in this moment, in *this very breath*. Of course now we must ask if the task of healing is to be deposited in the hands of education, or rather is this a task for the psychotherapist, or for the Buddhist guru? Recapping the beginning of this article we will quickly conclude that education as characterized here bears the characteristics of a Buddhist path, once it is stripped of all the residues added to Buddhism in its later stages.<sup>26</sup> If we remain at a very basic level of interpreting these four noble truths which constitute the core of Buddhism, we are presented with a standpoint which sees man as bereft of 'well-being' because of an inherent perpetuating uncontrolled thirst for more.

25 Of course Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* (1965) would bring a Western relativist view of the notion of health and disease.

26 I refer to Conze (2000) for more about developments in Buddhism as a tradition throughout history.

‘Well-being’ cannot be achieved if one experiences a constant state of lack. Unaware of this mechanism man acts out of ignorance (*avidya*), perpetuating his state through the false attempts to fill his bottomless pit of cravings. It is an uncontrolled mode of action, resulting from an uncontrolled pattern of thought. The only way to overcome this fruitless form of living lies in experiencing this mechanism, which governs human action, through the cultivation of awareness. Wisdom (*pana*) is developed through *Vipassana*<sup>27</sup>—a penetrating vision into the true nature of existence. This is that ‘knowledge’ which I referred to earlier as the antipode of our Western scientific ethos. In a way these two types of knowledge pull us in opposite directions. The West pulls us outside, to observe the objects around us, and through science to cushion our lives with commodities and the technology borne by science.<sup>28</sup> It brings us to the ‘body’ as a source of sensual momentary enjoyment. The East pulls us inwards, to observe our ‘body’ but to extract a very different understanding from it in the form of realizing these sense pleasures’ futility; to observe our craving’s grip on our being, and the misery they impart on us as we cling to them. This same ‘body’ is both our way to *samsara* and to *nirvana*. As we engage in sense pleasure we are doomed to continue our *karmatic* existence, while as we engage in contemplating the *process* of pleasure, we gradually pull ourselves from the realms of *avidya* to the realm of *pana* and ‘well-being’.

*But we are Westerners.* We cannot simply wrap ourselves in monks’ robes and enter a Buddhist monastery. We *do* enjoy food, comfort, sex etc. Should we turn our backs on all of these? This is life as we know it. It does have some disadvantages, but overall some of us do not feel such an urge to change our lives. Walking in Eastern mythological paths seems quite detached from life. These paths bear quite an unfathomable promise which some of us may see as a dispassionate life, which denies life itself. We do prefer the known over this unknown esoteric goal. Where does our path lie, then?

As we enter into the world of Eastern paths, one of the most prominent ideas which strike us is the notion known as ‘a-dvaita’—‘non-dual’ understanding of existence. The Upanishads’ enigmatic *atman = Brahman* parsimonious formula brings this notion to its most radical expression. Once we explore our modernity-inherited mythical dichotomies through the prism of such a formula our dualisms crumble one after the other. All dualisms are but

27 One of the Buddha’s most well-known forms of meditation.

28 Habermas (1971: Ch. 4) had shown that in everyday life we conceive of science more as a technology of control, rather than as a growing reservoir of knowledge about the world.



various manifestations of each other. *Atman = Brahman* means that the self/world dichotomy is a fictitious one. If the boundaries between self and world dissolve, then the body as some form of link between self and world must also be merged into this bigger merger. The Western dualism of religion and science is no other than a separation between the spiritual and the material, the heavenly and the mundane. We can quickly see how an 'advaitic' realization will require that we heal these splits as well.

But my approach suggests that eventually we are to step away even from this 'monism–dualism dualism', represented by the dualism of East<sup>29</sup> and West. Reality manifests itself to the human mind as dualistic, while the mystical experience, or enlightenment, may be conceived as monistic. Encompassing these two poles, reality is both monistic and dualistic, and should not be confined to an either/or interpretation.<sup>30</sup> Pushing the envelope means that we incorporate a monistic aspiration into our dualistic curriculum. We accept the possibility of a mystical experience as a scientific supposition in need of constant individual confirmation.

We are not to abandon the West in favour of the East, losing our Western postmodern critical mode; losing our identity in the lore of India, as Alan Wilson Watts warns us.<sup>31</sup> Neither are we to shy away from indulging in this ancient wisdom. We are to 'thrive on the differences,' as J. J. Clarke (2000: 11–12) suggests, between these two very different approaches, through incorporating the East into our Western life. But this incorporation should eventually become an unaware integrated act dissolving the borderline between the yoga class which I attend on Wednesdays and the cubicle I inhabit at work; the meditation cushion I sit on in the morning and the people I encounter on the line to the bus. East–West, life–practice, world rejection–world affirmation. . . our lives are riddled with these dualisms and we must find a way to integrate them into a field in which we can walk freely. This walk is education, since it is a walk towards 'well-being' in an open-ended field, which allows me to thrive on all the possible routes towards 'well-being'. As I walk the walk the 'body' is my vehicle teaching me about sense pleasure, and of sense pleasure's ephemeral nature, through scientific 'knowledge' of the temporal, and soteriological ('religious' as I interpreted it earlier) 'knowledge' of the atemporal.

29 That is, if we think of *advaita* as a representative school of thought. Of course there are dualistic traditions such as classical yoga.

30 *Neti neti* tells us the Buddha.

31 'It is of the utmost importance that [we] keep [our] scientific wits about us. . . otherwise there is the morass of esoteric romanticism which awaits the unwary' (Watts 1971: 29).

*In such a field education regains its core as a quest of body–mind and soul.*

As the Buddha's path is called *the middle path*, wishing to avoid extremes, we should make an attempt at holding the rope from both ends, through a pragmatic approach both to our Western science, and to the traditions of the East. The view promoted here is that these are not rival ways of knowing, but rather complementary ones. The framework for such a path is a 'non-dual' curriculum, as the notion of 'non-dualism' is interpreted here. We must not abandon western science in order to accept the mystical, and vice versa. On the contrary, we must raise our eyes from the confinement of the laboratory microscope, into the heavens and into ourselves and then bring them down back to that microscope in a perpetual motion. Only thus can we fully be engaged in a true exploration of *what there is*, and *who we are*.

## Epilogue

*What if that father in the beginning would know that leaving his son at school that day, would mean that the boy would begin his day with a practice of mindfulness, cultivating the ability to observe any agony, any fear, any pain equanimously. What if such a practice could bring him to a realization of some liberating truth. What if after this class they would learn about triangles, studying geometry while assuming a trikonassana posture (triangle pose). What if then they would move on to study gravity through experiencing its power when practicing qigong or zanzuang (standing poses), study physics as they learn to integrate their body force by practicing a taiqi form. . .*

## References

**Clarke, J. J.**

2000 *The Tao of the West*. New York: Routledge.

**Conze, Edward**

2000 *Buddhism: a Short History*. Oxford: Oneworld.

**Csordas, Thomas J.**

1994 *The Sacred Self*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

**David-Neel, Alexandra**

1977 *Buddhism: Its Doctrines and Its Methods*. London: Unwin Paperbacks.

**Denton, Diane**

2005 Toward a Sacred Discourse: Reconceptualizing the Heart Through Metaphor. *Qualitative Inquiries* 11: 752–70.

**Dewey, John**

1929 *Democracy and Education*. New York: Macmillan.

1956 *The Child and the Curriculum*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

**Evans-Wentz, W. Y.**

1970 *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines*. New York: Oxford University Press.

**Feuerstein, Georg**

2001 *The Yoga Tradition*. Prescott: Hohm Press.

**Foucault, Michel**

1965 *Madness and Civilization: a History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. Toronto: Random House.

1988 Technologies of the Self. In: Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman & Patrick H. Hutton (eds), *Technologies of the Self*; pp. 16–49. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press.

**Gallegos-Nava, Ramon**

1999 *Educación Holista*. Cruz Atoyac: Editorial Pax México.

**Geisert, Paul**

2002 Nord's Net: "Ways of Knowing" for the Science Classroom and Nord Warren A's Response. *The Journal of Religion and Education* 29 (1): 77–89.

**Gethin, Rupert**

1998 *The Foundations of Buddhism*. London: Oxford University Press.

**Habermas, Jurgen**

1971 *Towards a Rational Society*. Translated by J. J. Shapiro. London: Heineman.

**Hatfield, Gary**

2003 *Descartes and the Meditations*. London: Routledge Philosophy Guidebooks.

**Hattam, Robert**

2004 *Awakening-Struggle*. Flaxton: Post Pressed.

**Illman, Ruth**

2010 Embracing Complexity. The post-secular pilgrimage of Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt. In: Tore Ahlbäck (ed.), *Pilgrimages Today*; pp. 228–43. Åbo: The Donner Institute for Religious and Cultural History.

**James, William**

1974 *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Collier Books.

**Kincheloe, Joe & Shirley R. Steinberg**

1993 A Tentative Description of Post-Formal Thinking: the Critical Confrontation with Cognitive Theory. *Harvard Educational Review* 63 (3): 296–320.

**Kuhn, Thomas**

1970 *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. New York: New American Library.

**Lantieri, Linda**

2001 *Schools with Spirit*. Boston: Beacon Press.

**Laudan, Larry**

1997 Explaining the Success of Science: Beyond Epistemic Realism and Relativism. In: Alfred I. Tauber (ed.), *Science and the Quest for Reality*; pp. 138–57. London: Macmillan.

**Lelwica, Michelle**

2009 *Embodying Learning: Post-Cartesian Pedagogy and the Academic Study of Religion. Teaching Theology and Religion* 12 (2): 123–36.

**Marshak, David**

1997 *The Common Vision: Parenting and Educating for Wholeness*. Peter Lang: New York.

**Merleau-Ponty, Maurice**

1962 *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated from French by Colin Smith. London: Routledge and Keagan Paul.

**Miller, Alistair**

2008 A Critique of Positive Psychology—or ‘The New Science of Happiness.’ *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 42 (3–4): 591–608.

**Miller, John**

2005 Introduction. In: J. Miller et al. (eds), *Holistic Learning and Spirituality in Education*; pp. 1–16. Albany: State University of New York Press.

2007 *The Holistic Education Curriculum Review*. 2nd edn. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

**Miller, Ron**

1997 *What are Schools for?* Brandon: Holistic Education Press.

**Noddings, Nel**

2003 *Happiness and Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Olivelle, Patrick**

1998 *Upanishads*. New York: Oxford University Press.

**Polanyi, Michael**

1958 *Personal Knowledge*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

**Rose, Mike**

2009 *Why Schools? Reclaiming Education for All of Us*. New York: The New Press.

**Shunryu, Suzuki**

1994 *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*. Boston & London: Shambhala.

**Smith, Richard**

2008 The Long Slide to Happiness. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*. 42 (3–4): 559–73.

**Smith, V. A.**

1919 *The Oxford History of India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Suissa, Judith**

2008 Lessons from a New Science? On Teaching Happiness in Schools. *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 42 (3–4): 575–90.

**Watts, Alan Wilson**

1971 *Psychotherapy East and West*. New York: Ballantine Books.

**Wexler, Philip**

2000 *The Mystical Society*. Boulder: Westview Press.

2005 *Beyond the Iron Cage of Education: Toward a Weberian Sociology of Edu-*

- cation. In: M'hammed Sabour & Leena Koski (eds), *Searching for the Meaning of Education and Culture*; pp. 29–39. Joensuu: University of Joensuu.
- 2008 *Symbolic Movement*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

**Wilber, Ken**

- 1999 *The Marriage of Sense and Soul*. New York: Broadway.
- 2001 *Eye To Eye*. Boston: Shambhala. (First published in 1983.)