

Book Commentary

# HOLISM AND COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE BY V. DI STEFANO

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**Di Stefano V. *Holism and complementary medicine: origins and principles*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2006. ISBN 1 74114 846 4. \$45. Available from Allen and Unwin telephone (02) 8425 0100, fax (02) 9906 2218.**

It is estimated that about 60% of Australians are using complementary medicines, and spending about \$1 billion on complementary medicines and its various therapies.

The rise of complementary medicine in a highly developed country like Australia is nothing less than phenomenal. However almost all of the publications on complementary medicine have been published by American or British writers.

This book by Melbourne osteopath and lecturer Vincent Di Stefano serves to address this deficiency. The book discusses the holistic philosophy underlying the practice of complementary medicine. The author is strategically placed to offer a deep insight into complementary medicine as he has been involved in complementary medicine education and practice since the early 1980s.

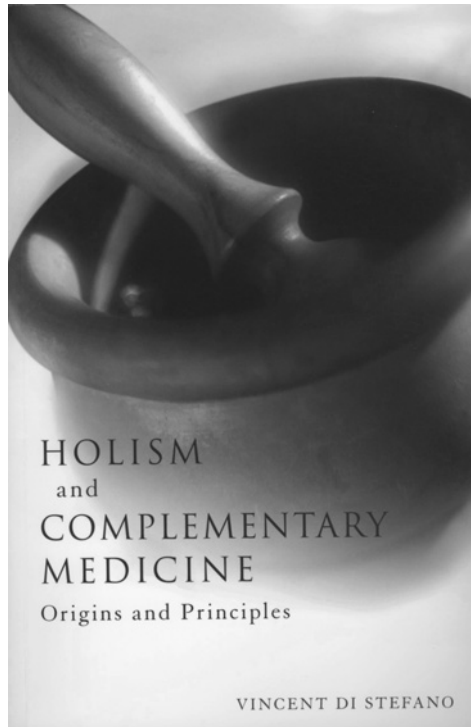
The book has 9 chapters and is divided into two parts. The first part reviews the historical development of Western medicine, including the development of biomedical practices, and the second explores the nature of holism and reductionism, the role of the therapeutic relationship and the differing aims and paradigms that characterise complementary medicine practice.

The term 'holism' was coined in 1925 by Jan Smuts. Holism was adopted in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in 1927. It is sometimes misspelt as 'wholism', even though the Macquarie Dictionary recognises both spellings.

Holism refers to the philosophy that seeks to understand the whole person or the whole situation, rather than explaining events based on individual components. Holism embraces interconnectedness between all factors. In healthcare, the holistic approach seeks to take into account all of the circumstances that may effect a person's health.

It is often wisely uttered that to understand the present, one must understand the past. The book commences a historical inquiry in Egyptian times, and enthral the reader with an in-depth comparison between ancient Egyptian medicine practices and today's complementary medicine practice.

The reader soon learns that the concept of holism that underpins complementary medicine practice is not a recent development. Historical arguments are presented to show that the roots of complementary medicine philosophy are linked to ancient times. The works of Empedocles, Hippocrates, Theophrastus, Galen and Paracelsus are examined.



The book assesses and discusses the link between biomedicine, philosophy and science. Though biomedicine sees itself resting on the foundations of scientific theory, the book discusses how philosophy has greatly influenced and directed the evolution of scientific inquiry over the centuries. It is this same philosophy that has also shaped the development of complementary medicine practice.

The reductionist model of biomedicine is in many ways limited in its outlook, whereas the holistic model is expansive and capable of accommodating human individuality. In some cases holism can offer an explanation of a person's health problem where biomedicine cannot.

We are reminded that biomedicine was largely a disorganised and unstructured occupation about 100 years ago. Yet the biomedical model now dominates our healthcare system, and criticises any practices that it fails to control.

The author compares and contrasts the practice of biomedicine and complementary medicine. From one perspective the differences are stark, and this is how many see biomedicine and complementary medicine. But from another perspective, there are surprising parallels. The author draws upon the narratives with complementary medicine practitioners to highlight these similarities and differences.

This book is highly recommended for all complementary medicine practitioners, whether massage therapists, herbalists or naturopaths. It is essential reading for all who are undertaking complementary medicine research at either the Masters or PhD level. ❖