

Osteopathy began as an original alternative American medical reformation. Empiric science and anatomy were complemented with considerations of psychological and spiritual considerations as an extension of the vitalist/materialist debate. This book presents historical documents and philosophical reflection on these themes.

The Soul of Osteopathy

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# The Soul of Osteopathy: The Place of Mind in Early Osteopathic Life Science

Including reprints of Coues' Biogen  
and Hoffman's Esoteric Osteopathy  
with contemporary explanatory  
prefaces by

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## *Introduction*

### **Introduction**

Though not part of the business of everyday practice, osteopathy from the beginning, as part of its scope and focus, has included the definition and understanding of the human person. This included the question of "What is Life." This philosophical theme is reflected in the words of A. T. Still,

"No one knows who the philosopher was that first asked the question, What is life. But all intelligent people are interested in the solution of this problem."

1

The question arose in the context of Still's appreciation of social and scientific advances of his century and his desire to apply science in the osteopathic clinical context of improving quality of life and health.

Throughout human experience there are two intertwined efforts in the quest to reconcile science and philosophy. The one asks us to accept our material character as the complete description of who we are by nature, and one views man as additionally possessing a soul which draws him to a higher purpose, to strive to be more, to fulfill a destiny. Classically we see this latter theme set down in Greek mythology in *The Odyssey*, and the myth of Prometheus. The Genesis account of the fall from the Garden of Eden reflects the intricacies of this same theme. In early Christian times the competition for a proper place for Man in the

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universe was reflected in the orthodox approach to faith versus the Gnostic belief that salvation came from a certain type of esoteric, or hidden, knowledge.

In the field of science, Einstein's wrestling with the relationship of light, energy and matter attempted to expand our understanding of the physical universe, a modern quest for the Holy Grail. In our own day the Human Genome Project and the quest for a cancer cure may reflect this same dynamic to understand the big picture.

In all this searching there arises a dilemma between the acceptance of tangible reality as the completeness of existence, or on the other hand, the allowance for the reality of unseen, or unrecognized, forces. The struggle has been defined in the past as the dialectic between the vitalist and materialist point of view. Throughout the historical progress of the field of inquiry which acknowledges the legitimacy of the unknown, there have been the Essenes, the Gnostics, the followers of Paracelsus, Rosicrucians, Masons, Theosophists all claiming to possess uncommon knowledge of the unseen behind everyday reality.

Dr. Still, founder of osteopathy, placed himself in the company of these searchers. He associated as a freemason, although his independence of thought made him a renegade there, too, and he was sometimes challenged in his loyalties. In an editorial in the *Journal of Osteopathy* in 1901 he defends the practice of Masonic secrecy, but in the context of religious tolerance. He ends the editorial with:

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"It is much to be hoped that we will some day have something better than masonry, and that the church from Mahomet down will give way to something better, and all rally around the flag on whose face you read 'Love thy neighbor as thyself'."

Still uses the name of God hundreds of times and praises Christianity. Why did he not profess a Christian church affiliation, especially as the son of a Methodist preacher?

Still's unorthodox view of health and healing led him to be rejected by the denominational churches, in fact to be denounced from the pulpit.<sup>3</sup> His early practice struggled under the weight of this stigma.

Since Still's proclaiming osteopathy in 1874, the esoteric theme and the contested boundary between physics and metaphysics has been an element of the quest to define the scope of osteopathic practice. Still several times describes osteopathy as the science of mind, matter and motion. Still would reflect on looking to discover the health in the patient by the correct relationships between tissues. This addresses the matter and motion components of his science, but what of the mind? If one reads carefully, one finds Still interpreting anatomical finding and relationships as reading the mind of God in nature, in the anatomical design of the patient.

This rather lengthy quote, also from the 1901 Journal of Osteopathy, captures these relationships better than I can find in his lengthier texts:

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“What is God? If all of man, with his mind, matter and motion, is one being, what is the universe but a being? It has mind, matter and motion. It does its work well and wisely, still it is only one universe. Then mind to the universe is the same that mind is to man. This God would be the universe. We are in the universe therefore, we are with God and help compose that great all, and journey as it journeys. That great composite is eternal, and so are we. We have lived, do live and will live out the full number of days of the universe. Thus to us a universe means all space and all therein contained. This signifies the universal universe. Man under the same law of reasoning would be a dependent universe, while the universal universe is not dependent, because it is the all of all, specially and universally, mental, motor and material. The individuality of mind with its independence of all else, to me seems to be impossible, because of the superior endowments of the mind over motor, which motor is above material in quality, but not at all its superior mentally. Thus both the physical and mental submit to the higher principle, which makes a unit of the three; matter, motion, and mind. Thus the universe is a being, with the mental, motor and material combined, and leaving the management of all under the mental. Thus we have God as mind in union, working in union with the motor and physical.” 4

However, the conventional way of interpreting the essence of osteopathy is as if Still were solely directing us to study our physical anatomy. And he does drive us to study anatomy. However, there is more to following Still in the development of his practice than anatomy in the conventional sense. Still derived some information



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from study, but he was also described as a telepath. Furthermore, he was reported to maintain contact with a medium, Matah, the Indian.

Most early osteopathic texts claimed to be following and represent the content of Still's teaching by describing osteopathy primarily as an organized system of procedures. Barber, McConnell, Hazzard, all describe osteopathy primarily from the point of view of technique. Indeed, little of that writing reflects the broader quest to explore the nature of life and man's participation in it.

Still himself explores that theme in the chapter in the *Philosophy and Mechanical Principles of Osteopathy* entitled "Biogen". He describes a life force in the context of a dualistic approach to the nature of man.

"All material bodies have life terrestrial and all space has life, ethereal or spiritual life. The two, when united, form man."

And later:

"A man, biogenic force, means both lives in united action...Thus we say biogen or dual life, that life means eternal reciprocity that permeates all nature." 5

But how did Still come to conceptualize the human experience in these terms? Still's style was rarely to reference his sources. For a frontiersman, the scope of his written discourse seemed scattered; however, to the astute investigator it demonstrates that Still was either well read or otherwise well informed as to the

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scientific and philosophical ideas of his days. His apparent ramblings are in actuality his best attempt at synthesizing a broad spectrum of complex ideas presented by a host of thinkers.

The current book is to be read as a companion to Still's *Philosophy and Mechanical Principles of Osteopathy*. It includes a reprinting of the full text of Coues' *Biogen; a Speculation in the Origin and Nature of Life* (1874) which predates *Philosophy and Mechanical Principles* (1992) and in some way was no doubt Still's source of the term.

Who was Elliot Coues? What was his contribution to nineteenth century science? How did Still access his work? The introduction to this text will deal with this and related issues.

This book includes a second frequently overlooked work, Herbert Hoffman's *Esoteric Osteopathy*. Hoffman writes directly on the topic of Mind and its role in osteopathic treatment. I had mentioned Still's having contact with a psychic medium or guide. Still wrote of this in his notebooks which have subsequently been destroyed by his family to avoid an appearance of mental unbalance or eccentricity. Interestingly enough, Hoffman's small book, from the early era of osteopathy, also showing Indian influence.

Who was Hoffman's mentor in regard to this subject? Was it Andrew Still?

Osteopathy has over the years evolved a panoply of techniques and philosophical points of view, from

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stressing biomechanical approaches to more subtle work. Often these are seen as contradictory or at least competing as the true paradigm. The current work seeks to bring forth some little known evidence that the osteopathic approach to health was based on an understanding of the need to bridge these two paradigms, not to establish a competition between them.

How relevant are these topics? Today we wrestle with the frontier between pharmacologic and alternative medicine, between bioscience as self-organization of matter, with consciousness as an emergent property of biomolecular complexity, versus a creationist belief in intelligent design. Twenty-five hundred years ago the philosopher commented that there is nothing new under the sun. How true is this today?

As Part 3 I have included an essay of my own, written about ten years ago but as yet unpublished. It revisits the long view of the vitalist/materialist controversy but brings it into era of proteomics and genetic determinism.

In a more practical vein, we know that mentation, everyday social and mental activity, is not uniform throughout life. Certainly our early developmental phases reflect this thought. But more and more, as we become more sophisticated with life support and resuscitation, the question of "what is life" has a more poignant application for many of us. Cerebrovascular accidents, temporary hypoxia, or progressive dementia leave millions alive yet without "normal" mental life and function. How to make sense out of this phase of

## **Contemporary Preface to Biogen**

There are few guides for the student who looks beyond the anatomic/biomechanical interpretation of osteopathy according to Dr. Still. However, one is immediately excited, if one has been intrigued by Still's description of Biogen in his wrestling with the concepts of body-mind- spirit, when one discovers Coues. Elliot Coues' publication (1884) certainly predates Still's publication of *The Philosophy and Mechanical Principles of Osteopathy* (1901). Coues lays claim to credit in coining the term biogen. Since Still would not cite references, we know little directly about how Still came to use the term, biogen, in approaching the problem of "what is life?"

Did they have direct contact? Kirksville was on the active rail line and a busy center of therapeutic activity. Once he left Virginia as a youth, Still's travels eastward were limited to his participation in the 1903 Columbia Exposition in St. Louis. By the time of his writing of his monograph on Biogen, Coues, as we will see in reviewing his biography, was ensconced solidly in the Washington intellectual community. His days as an explorer of the American West as an army surgeon and scientific field officer were behind him.

An analysis of the text does not help greatly. On an initial reading, there seem to be minimal conceptual links. The setting and occasion for the use of the word is different. Still's eclectic style in writing, or compiling, his books places chapters in random juxtaposition

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creating a literary collage. Still's Biogen chapter rests between Fevers and Smallpox. Still begins his chapter on Biogen by setting the stage to help osteopathy fit in with nineteenth century modernity and rapidly expanding technological and scientific progress. He ends it with reflections on the negative effects on man's evolutionary development of war as the slaughter of the fittest.

Coues, on the other hand, is working in dialogic fashion with several previous presenters to the Washington Philosophical Society in reviewing and refining the perennial vitalist/materialist argument on the divide between physics and metaphysics. The main body of the text is written in Socratic fashion with an appeal to common experience and current scientific ideas, including the now quaint but then advanced concept of luminiferous ether, the medium for transmission of light. He does so with an urgency to call for balance in the face of the rapidly rising shift in science to limit thought related to biology only to physico-chemical considerations. He sees the scope of biological science to be much broader. His analysis is of necessity more rational and organized than Still's. In his appendix, he is more direct and succinct in describing his view of the relationship between body, soul and spirit.

One could assume that with this rather loose congruence between the two writers, beyond the common use of the word, that Still picked up the concepts and topic from discussion with a third party, such as his old friend and intellectual mentor, Colonel James Abbott. Abbott was born and educated in the East and shared Still's interest in science and

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philosophy. They encountered one another as members of the Kansas Legislature, militia, and in founding Baldwin College. There would have been plenty of occasions for intellectual discussion and Abbott is cited by Still in his *Philosophy of Osteopathy* among a short list of major influences. 1

Beyond this scope of inference, there are some details and key phrases in the texts, as we will see below, which may suggest that Still had encountered a copy of the written presentation of Coues' *Biogen: a speculation on the origin and nature of life*.

### Coues career

Although he began and ended his intellectual career in the nation's capital, Coues was not a salon philosopher. His early love of nature led him at seventeen to sign aboard the schooner Charmer to study maritime wildlife in Labrador. Encouraged by his lifelong patron and mentor, Spencer Baird, assistant secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, Coues would become one of the foremost of American ornithologists. Birding, in those days was done by the search, shoot, inspect, skin and classify method. Coues' *Key to North American Birds* includes taxonomy but also instruction on preparing specimens, and principles of biology, included his theory of biogen.

The real drama of Coues' life unfolded as he served as a medical officer and field biologist for the U.S. Army in Colorado and Arizona. Identification of new species was done with an eye out for Apache Indians anxious to retain and regain their home territory. Serving in a role

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similar to Lewis and Clark, Coues medical duties were minimal and he regularly shipped hundreds of new species east, including new species or sub-species of birds and mammals. His related publications fill volumes.

Of more interest to us here is his affiliation with Freemasonry which began in 1867 during a deployment in South Carolina. This would reflect a sensitive but philosophically variant view from orthodox religion, of which he was known to be critical. However, it is not until his address to the Washington Philosophical Society, the transcript of which we have here in this book, that Coues makes a definitive break with conventional science of his day. After this date, he became more expressive of his broader world view. He became acquainted with Madame Helena Blavatsky, the popularizer and charismatic founder of the Theosophical Society, an eastern/western syncretism of occult practice. Coues was, in 1885, to become the president of the society, also serving in the same period as the censor, or literature reviewer, for the American Society of Psychical Research. During this period he was a prolific writer and frequent conference speaker on topics related to spiritual science and related topics. This, and the Freemason connection he shared with Andrew Still, could easily have made his thought visible in print to an exploring and curious Andrew Still.

Few in the spiritualist circles appreciated the effort Coues made to reconcile the apparently esoteric sphere with that of empiric science. So, later in life, he returned to the field of biological science and the

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history of western exploration, writing biological definitions for the Century Dictionary and material for the Encyclopedia Britannica before becoming involved in the controversial reediting of the Journals of Lewis and Clark, of Zebulon Pike as well as early French and Spanish explorers.

### Gist of Coues' Biogen argument

Elliot Coues takes issue with the emergent perspective in bioscience that looked at protoplasm as the basic element and condition of life. It had been proposed by advancing science that life is concomitant with protoplasm, formed spontaneously and advanced by the progressively complex aggregation of chemical elements, for us the "emergent property" hypothesis.

"Biology has proven that Life was a mode of matter and motion, ergo, protoplasm was the life principle; and it has just upon the point of being discovered by the Society, when the protoplasm, which the Society had examined, died. So the vital principle had given them the slip."

Coues makes a different proposal. Existential awareness of oneself as conscious and operative is the motivation for Coues to speak. He develops an argument to align one's consciousness as an operative power and reference point which in itself, because of its cogency, is self-validating in a way that the regional succession of chemical actions can never be. In so doing, he reaffirms that this critical self-consciousness is both evidence of an undefined vital force, which can be potentially evaluated by science, in much the same



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way as science of the times was coming to accept the "luminiferous ether" as a way of understanding the phenomenon of light. At the same time, he cites that this universal cogency of the self-awareness of human kind is linked through the will to motion- all motion - and to Universal Mind. Simultaneously, he uses this self evident conviction to reaffirm the perennial and universal phenomenon of faith, including faith in the ultimate and supreme consciousness, God, as an essential element of scientific cosmology.

Although this is Coues' main argument, Still would be compatible with it but does not cite it in the development of his own thought. However as mentioned before, there are key phases on a more physical, less psychological basis, which bind the two presentations together and hint at some contact by Still, at least with Coues' written text.

From Still

"We see the form of each world, and call the united action biogenic life. All material bodies have life terrestrial and all space life ethereal or spiritual life. The two, when united, form man." 2

From Coues

"....spirit...I have postulated that it actually does exist, and defined it as self conscious force (biogen). I have speculated that a living body results from the action of spirit on matter and that life subsists on the union of the two." 3

From Still

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“Thus we say biogen or dual life, that life means eternal reciprocity that permeates all nature.” 4

### Motion

Both authors refer to the aspect of life represented by motion. Each reflects a familiarity with the philosophy, physics and cosmology of Herbert Spencer, an important philosopher of that era. Coues make the argument however, that there needs to be a *cause* for motion, or a moving system, calling on the Aristotelian concept of a First Cause. And so:

“Force cannot act where it is not; neither can it act with nothing to act upon; its presence and operation upon matter are, therefore, necessary conditions of its manifestation; all the manifestations of life are ultimately resolvable into modes of motion, and in the particular modes of motion exhibited by living things, *and by no others*, are evidenced the presence and operation of the vital principle, the energy of which differs from other energies precisely as the modes of motion of living things differ from those of all things that do not live.”

A familiarity with Spencer is also disclosed by the reverence which the two men have for the *unknowable*.

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### Spirit

Still's sense of spiritualism and telepathy, though attested by family members and friends, are hidden in his language. Echoing his previous work Still cites:

"First there is the material body; second, the spiritual being; third, a being of mind which is far superior to all vital motions and material forms, whose duty it is to wisely manage this great engine of life." 6

He gives little detail regarding the sense of the spirit per se, recapitulating the argument for a "celestial force" underlying life processes. 7

But Coues is concentrating on a different argument, the relevance of which should be apparent in our day. He was concentrating on a rebuttal to the position that protoplasm, the simplest evidence of life, was proposed to be what we call today an emergent property of self-organized matter. The chemico-physical explanation for this proposed that physiologic motion, concomitant with life, was a result of the instability occurring with larger and more complex aggregations of matter. The Darwinist point of view of survival of the most adaptive carried the rest of the argument. Coues most fundamental reply to this is to cite the impossibility of the random occurrence of a system which could then self-replicate. To say that a biological system could spontaneously organize in a way that continued by laying its own egg was a scientifically untenable, and non demonstrable, position.

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Especially in the appendix, as you will see, Coues develops a psychology/cosmology which related his concept of biogen, spirit, matter, soul in such a way as to suggest that biogen is an extended capacity of matter, and not really a dualistic way of viewing the world, the usual vulnerable attribute of a vitalistic theory.

Both Still and Coues invoke the importance of Mind in living organism, Coues by recognizing that awareness itself is evidence of a primary vital principle reflecting the Universal Mind. Still in turn refers to the study of anatomy:

“Let us accept and act on it as true, that life is that force sent forth by the Mind of the universe to move all nature, and apply all our energies to keep that living force at peace, by retaining the house of life in good form from foundation to dome. Let us read a few lines in the book of Nature. If we stop blood in transit...”

Coues states, in his appendix, that “The mind is the result of interaction between spirit and matter.” And again:

“Whence emanated matter in the beginning is inscrutable; from nowhere, certainly, -if not from the self-conscious, self-determining universal Mind which willed to become so manifested.” 9

In the case of both authors, linkage is made through this reference to mind to the third work discussed,

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*Esoteric Osteopathy*, by Herbert Hoffman discussed as part two of this current book.

### Current thought

So what is the relevance of this discussion for us today? In the not too distant past, Robert Fulford, DO, taught and operated under the presupposition that "thoughts are things" and had an impact for good or ill on the etheric or energetic body. His treatment relied upon the use of intention or mental activity as an operational principle capable of potent interaction with the patient. He had read Reichenbach as had Coues some generations before. 10

In the time since physics has advanced in its understanding of light and biochemical bonds, these issues seem archaic. However, the field of condensed matter physics is today a viable discipline as is the field of prebiology involved with the evolution of macromolecules and genetically orchestrated self-organization of molecular systems, let alone galaxies. The term intelligent matter seems to counter Coues argument for a distinction between mind and protoplasm. Coues would side with what we now call a creationist world view. Contemporary attempts to reconcile the vitalist/ materialist conflict include the concept of theistic evolution and intelligent design.

The contemporary study of the physiology of consciousness has moved beyond the discovery of nuclei, brain waves and neurotransmitters to the study of oscillatory synchrony and phase changes both among and between populations of neurons. Not only

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in the brain is this recognized, but oscillatory function is held by a large number of physiologists to be the means of information transmission and coordination in living systems in general.

Yet the questions are still debated. Is consciousness an emergent property of complex adaptive systems of genetically elaborated proteins alone? Or is there an extrinsic or participatory aspect of psychic life which is generated by something beyond the material as we know it?

Search the web and you will find that the questions and hypotheses of Still, of Coues, and of Hoffman are still hot topics today.

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