As an evolving field of professional inquiry, integral approaches to medicine and healthcare have few established reference points. With less than 20 citations in academic reference libraries, there are even fewer books. Elliott Dacher’s two publications offer the only truly integrally informed texts rooted in the full flavor of the application of Integral Theory to the field of medicine. I will provide a brief review of both texts because my sense is that these books are companions in their broad vision of human health fully embodied through the use of Integral Theory. In Integral Health (2006), Dacher offers a theoretical treatise on how the Integral approach can be used to frame and support healing and growth. He builds on this line of thought in Aware, Awake, Alive (2011), which guides the reader through practices that lead to increased health and vitality, reduction of illness, and greater happiness and peace.

Early in each book, Dacher outlines a perspective of health and healing that he calls flourishing: “I have never encountered an individual who did not desire happiness, peace and well-being. That human desire is universal. It is our deepest impulse. It will never leave us. We all want to flourish and prosper” (2011, p. 3). These opening lines connect to the innate desire in all of us for peak experiences, for fullness in our everyday lives, for joy and equanimity. Yet how many of us experience life in this way? How many of us find our health suffering from the daily reactions to modern life? From growing older, becoming more dependent on medical and social constructs to relieve our suffering? For Dacher, flourishing is how one’s inner healing capacity grows; it is our innate birthright that is always already there. From the opening words of each book, Dacher grounds his vision with passion and potential; the potential that each of us has to live an extraordinary life filled with sustained health, happiness, and wholeness. Sound good? It does to me.

What does it require to access this flourishing? What must I do to flourish, to know the finer tastes of life? Dacher’s Integral Health teaches how to develop finer and finer consciousness—yes, mental fitness—that forms the basis, the engine of human flourishing. He states, “We know that the mind is trainable and that robust health can result from the systematic training of our mind through planned, systematic inner development” (2006, p. 23). He doesn’t overwhelm the reader with evidence, however, as there are plenty of research citations that “prove” to the empirically minded reader that approaching health in a mindful way has a positive outcome. Dacher’s perspective of flourishing sets the tone of both books in contrast to our common medical perspective which is rooted in the rational expert logic of modernity. Dacher’s perspective begins without the usual “pathological” model in which medicine is so often framed. Rather than talk of removing
disease, or curing illness, Dacher’s focus stays on increasing the potential for improved health, moving beyond the ordinary with our physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual vitality. “For true flourishing of body, mind and spirit, we must go to the root of our mind/body ailments and permanently heal them at the source. This requires inner development” (2006, p. 19). Reminiscent of the seminal work of Michael Murphy in *The Future of the Body* (1992), the possibility of extraordinary experiences alights from the pages of these two books.

Key to the integral health model is a state-based approach that integrates state development in an eloquent manner. However, Dacher integrates state development in a way that may leave the well-schooled integralist wanting more. Notice the subtitle of *Aware, Awake, Alive* includes the phrase “the Ancient Science of Integral Health.” Perhaps you are wondering how “ancient” and “integral” fit together. Dacher takes us back to the ancient Greeks, teaching about how healing occurred in the culture that birthed the Western polis. During the time of the Greek Gods of healing, Apollo, Asclepius, Panacea, and Hygeia, many techniques of healing were utilized. Dacher shares one such process, of participating in an Asclepian Healing Center, which in modern terms would look like a week at Esalen Institute or Canyon Ranch Spa. Part of this retreat included purification of the body, mind, and spirit with ritual baths, massage, fitness activities, and athletic competitions. Other aspects included time to enjoy the gardens, attend theater, and enjoy conversations about a healthy body and mind. Central to the healing was the evening sleep ritual, which began with offering of a gift. Participants then took their place in the temple to recline and sleep, quietly reflecting upon their circumstances and asking for a healing dream. This process of sleeping and dreaming was called *incubation*. Through incubation, a subtle or causal experience, you might have the experience of a healing dream. These dreams would be shared with the priests or sacred healers, the *iatromantis*, who would offer an interpretation (e.g., healing instructions, or perhaps simply an acknowledgement of the healing process that the dream conveyed).

Why is the concept of incubation important to integral health? The process of incubation, as described by Dacher and Peter Kingsley in his seminal work *In the Dark Places of Wisdom* (1999), offers a sound historical and practical state-based healing process, something quite overlooked in contemporary biomedicine. Incubation as a gross, subtle, and causal process is the essential focus of Dacher’s work. Healing occurs through the development of deeper consciousness, and thus takes time, effort, and space—mental space to allow the changes to occur. Virtually the entire text of *Aware, Awake, Alive* is devoted to this concept through study, reflection, and practice while *Integral Health* lays out a system based on the five principles of Asclepian Healing: 1) holistic, 2) evolutionary, 3) intentional, 4) person-centered, and 5) dynamic. These principles offer guidelines to a highly evolved system of healing. From a developmental perspective, Dacher takes us though amber, orange, and green altitudes, delivering a second-tier perspective that is rooted in ancient teachings that give his work breadth and eloquence. He is not advocating a regressive return to the Greeks, however, as he describes his integral perspective as an evolutionary one.

In *Integral Health*, Dacher next offers a four-quadrant journey with flourishing as the goal of each quadrant—psychospiritual flourishing (Upper Left), biological flourishing (Upper Right), interpersonal flourishing (Lower Left), and flourishing in the world (Lower Right). He offers an assessment tool that asks readers to evaluate three developmental lines in each of the four quadrants. The evaluation scale is low, medium, or high, with low being body-centered, medium being mind-centered, and high being spirit-centered. Details of the assessment are beyond the scope of this review, but I continue to use Dacher’s assessment tool in classes I teach at John F. Kennedy University (Kreisberg, 2010). Students find it easy to use and powerful. One feature that I find most useful is that upon completion of the assessment, one or two areas are identified as weakest and appropriate goals and actions are suggested to strengthen that particular line(s). In contrast to Integral Life Practice (Wilber et al., 2008), which focuses on a diversity of practices across different facets of the AQAL model, Dacher’s approach assesses all quadrants but focuses on only one or two.
It is worth noting that Dacher is no stranger to Ken Wilber’s work. Indeed, he graciously acknowledges Wilber’s contributions throughout his books. At first I wondered why Integral Health was not an essential read for the integral community. My belief is that the same 12 lines that Dacher spreads across the four quadrants in fact collapse the holarchical design of the AQAL model. Dacher uses some of the formal developmental lines commonly used in Integral Theory, but mostly he is using more common domains. For example, in the Lower-Right quadrant he uses the three lines of work, social activism, and generativity. In the Upper-Right quadrant he describes the three lines of fitness, nutrition, and self-regulation. As you can see, these are not the developmental lines of Robert Kegan or Lawrence Kohlberg. However, take a moment and consider self-regulation as a developmental behavior. How well do you self-regulate? Do you do it from a physical, mental, or spiritual center of gravity? Spend a day or two with this inquiry. See how it might affect your health! The lines of development used in Dacher’s approach are adaptations made in an effort to design a system that is usable in support of personal flourishing. While based on Wilber’s AQAL approach, Dacher makes no claims for it fitting strictly into the Integral Operating System.

Aware, Awake, Alive offers concise instructions for people on a path of personal development. Chapters 4 through 13 are practice chapters with titles like Clearing the Mind, Cultivating and Abandoning, The End of Suffering, Transforming Afflictive and Disturbing Emotions, Overcoming the Overactive Mind, The Noble Heart, Work as Practice, The Alchemy of Adversity, and The Lightness of Being. Each chapter takes the reader through one aspect of consciousness development. For example, in the Cultivating and Abandoning chapter, Dacher discusses topics including abandoning what does not work, reliance on outer sources of pleasure, an exclusively physical approach to health, and harmful attitudes, language, and actions. He then discusses cultivating what works, including a motivation to practice, wholesome motivations in daily life, inner calm, loving-kindness, simplicity, and a healthy body. Dacher’s insights resemble the wisdom of the sages. Each chapter culminates with specific exercises, many of which are rooted in mindfulness practice.

The two most basic and essential practices, Clearing the Mind and Loving-Kindness, are described in detail in a 45-minute CD that accompanies the book. The instructions, which are read by Dacher himself, bring the text home in a clear, simple manner that is both soothing and inspiring. Clearly, Dacher has been teaching these mindfulness practices for many years.

For me, the practical instructions that make up the lion’s share of the text are not the remarkable aspect of Dr. Dacher’s teachings. While his instructions are clear, at times they feel much like other meditation and mindfulness guides I am familiar with such as Jon Kabat-Zinn’s Full Catastrophe Living (1990) or Jack Kornfield’s Path with a Heart (1993). What is important is that Dacher (2011) is not only putting these teachings in a medical context, but he is also offering an integration of integral perspectives:

The embrace of the far-reaching vision of integral health is a significant departure from an exclusive focus on biological health. It is a major change in the focus and allocation of resources…. the central characteristics of the shift towards an integral approach is the turn inward and the reliance on our inner capacities rather than on remedies and therapies. The reliance is on ourselves rather than on practitioners. So we must know the difference between a variation on biological medicine, which merely increases our medical tool kit, and an authentic vision of integral health that results from inner development. They are not the same. (p. 222)

Dacher’s articulation of the priorities here is insightful from an integral perspective. To date, I have not seen this in the literature. Most often, integral applications for various health and medicine topics look at the topic, rather than as the patient. While this approach serves to keep broad, inclusive perspectives, oftentimes it acts as an unintegrated pluralism, perhaps appearing as second tier, with little or no distinctions. Applying the In-
Integral map to pluralistic ontologies such as medicine and healthcare does not necessarily crystalize a second-tier perspective. This cognitive shadow is one of the enduring aspects of the integrative medicine movement of the past 20 years. Emerging Integral Medicine perspectives have been unable to shake this characteristic. The only other book about Integral Medicine, the seminal work by Marilyn Schlitz, Tina Amorok, and Marc Micozzi, *Integral Approaches to Mind-Body Medicine* (2005), offers multiple perspectives but little if any coordination and meta-mapmaking.

Essential to Dacher’s body of work is the notion that focusing on interior work is how deeper healing occurs. In this regard, he articulates an aspect of holarchy that fits nicely in Wilber’s integral system. Indeed, the leading edge of the integral wave is rooted in consciousness development. This requires the commitment of each one of us to enact the full responsibility of our journey and our health, a post-postmodern perspective on healing that is essential for the journey toward second-tier development. To Dacher, integral health and medicine requires this commitment. To fail to do so is to remain attached to orange and green altitude–based biomedical perspectives that continue to collect innovative healing techniques without any means for incubation and transformation. Kudos to Dr. Elliott Dacher for taking a firm stand and putting integral health on the map. Any of us can flourish with the help of these useful books.

**REFERENCES**


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