HELEN FLANDERS DUNBAR (1902–1959) AND A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO PSYCHOSOMATIC PROBLEMS. II. THE ROLE OF DUNBAR’S NONMEDICAL BACKGROUND

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Despite Dunbar’s central role in the American psychosomatic movement, few successors seem to have grasped the nature and context of her work. This is partially because, as conveyed in Part I of this article, most histories of psychosomatic theory and research overlook the holistic, organismic point of view shared by Dunbar and other psychoanalysts of the psychobiologic persuasion. However, to grasp the full meaning of Dunbar’s work one must look to her nonmedical background in Dantean philosophy and in religious healing.

When Mrs. Kate Macy Ladd, patroness of the Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation, expressed her belief “that health is more than freedom from sickness, that it resides in the wholesome unity of mind and body,” her words reflected the near culmination of an era’s concern with “healing and wholeness,” an approach to the patient that was both religious and scientific. In accordance with her wishes, the Foundation committed itself in 1930 to “a special . . . interest in a field of investigation now . . . referred to as the psychosomatic problems.”

Among the first projects funded by the new foundation was a seemingly modest bibliographic survey on the “relation of emotions and

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bodily changes," sponsored by the New York Academy of Medicine's "Joint Committee on Religion and Medicine." The bibliography was to have two volumes, one reviewing the medical literature, and another having "special emphasis on the relation of religion to health and... on religion as a factor in directing and controlling emotion." As undramatic as this study now sounds, when the first volume appeared in 1935, as *Emotions and Bodily Changes: A Survey of the Literature on Psychosomatic Interrelationships*, it quite literally launched the "American psychosomatic movement." It also established the medical reputation of its author, Helen Flanders Dunbar, B.D., Ph.D., M.D., Med.Sci.D.

The circumstances that allowed Dunbar to lead and help mold the American psychosomatic movement, certainly until 1939, and in some respects until 1947, provide the intrigue for this study, for in terms of post-war medical science, Dunbar must now seem a most unlikely candidate for the role she played. In addition to the four editions of *Emotions and Bodily Changes* (1935, 1938, 1946, 1954), she wrote the first handbook in the field, *Psychosomatic Diagnosis* (1943), and the first best-seller, *Mind and Body: Psychosomatic Medicine* (1947). She also founded the American Society for Research in Psychosomatic Problems (later the American Psychosomatic Society), and its journal: *Psychosomatic Medicine* (1939). Although not a scientist in the positivistic sense of the term, Dunbar did have a brilliant mind, and she more than met the criteria of the group that guided her medical career. When members of the Joint Committee on Religion and Medicine sought a director, "a clergyman with special interest in this field whose interest in religious therapy was distinctly religious and not a form of amateur psychiatry," they apparently felt that Dunbar, with her degrees in theology, philosophy, and medicine, fit the requirements.

So who was this curious pioneer in psychosomatic medicine? Before demonstrating the role of Dunbar's nonmedical background in the formulation of her holistic approach, let us first look specifically at her religious and philosophical education.

As an undergraduate at Bryn Mawr, Dunbar, majored broadly in mathematics, premedicine, and especially psychology, as a student of James Henry Leuba, a pioneer psychologist of religion. During the second decade of the century when theologians, under attack by historians and biologists, transferred their faith from metaphysics to "religious experience," Leuba had audaciously stormed the new stronghold and claimed that "religious experience... belongs entirely to psychology." Leuba's studies of conversion—the first to submit religious experience to scientific treatment—effectively demonstrated that "there need be no difference between religious and nonreligious ecstasies other than those due to a different interpretation—the interpretation being itself the cause of important affective and volitional phenomena." Taking both the normal and the abnormal into account, Leuba focused on religious emotions and their attendant bodily changes. Although he did not seek "a replacement of the religious spirit by science," but rather "the inclusion into religion of the