

Thomas Hanna coined the phrase "[Somatics](#)" in 1976. His book, from which this excerpt comes from, is the first thing we ask True Body Master Class students to read.

What "Somatic" Means

There are two ways in which a human being can be viewed: from the outside in, or from the inside out. Looked at from the outside, by a physiologist or a physician, human beings are very different from the beings they appear to be when they view themselves from the inside out. When one looks at another human being, one sees a "body" with a certain external shape and size. It's just the same as an observed statue or wax dummy that also has a "bodily" shape and size. But when the human being looks at himself or herself from the inside, he or she is aware of feelings and movements and intentions—a quite different, fuller being. To view a body from the outside is a third-person view: One sees a "he" or a "she" or an "it." **But when the human views himself or herself from the inside, it is a first-person view—a privileged view of "me," which means being aware of "I, myself."**

What physiologists see from their externalized, third-person view is always a "body." What the individual sees from his or her internalized, first-person view is always a "soma." Soma is a Greek word that, from Hesiod onward, has meant "living body." **This living, self-sensing, internalized perception of oneself is radically different from the externalized perception of what we call a "body,"** which could just as well be a human, a statue, a dummy, or a cadaver—from an objective viewpoint, all of these are "bodies."

Any viewpoint of the human being that fails to include both the first-person, somatic view and the third-person, physiological view is deceptive. To view a human only as a third-person, externalized body is to see only a physical puppet or dummy that can be changed by the external methods of chemical and surgical engineering. This is, *prima facie*, a false view of the human being: It is one-sided and incomplete. Inasmuch as "scientific medicine" has built itself on the foundation of an objective third person view of the human as a body, it is a deceptive and incomplete approach to human health. Scientific medicine not only ignores a fundamental truth about human beings but dooms itself to be consistently inefficient as a method of aiding human improvement.

Because its view of the human being is insufficient, medicine's ability to help human beings is insufficient. The uniqueness of human beings is in being, simultaneously, subjects and objects. Humans are self-sensing and self-moving subjects while, at the same time, they are observable and manipulable objects. To yourself, you are a soma. To others, you are a body. Only you can perceive yourself as a soma—no one else can do so. But everyone else can see you as a body. Even you can see yourself as a body by looking into a mirror. In the mirror you will see an external, third-person "him" or "her" just like everyone else; but only you have the privileged perception of also seeing "me." The great calamity of the human sciences is that we have, as it were, ganged up on ourselves. Only one person can see himself or herself as a first-person somatic being, but millions of people can see that person as a third-person bodily being.

Consequently, these millions can join together and observe, measure, and diagram the objective body of the human person.

That is the easy and obvious way taken by the sciences. But what is easy and obvious is not necessarily true or effective. It is all very well for millions to study our objective bodies: There are some fundamental and essential facts to be ascertained about how humans are subject to the same physical and chemical forces as are all other bodies, from atoms to asteroids.

But if these millions pursue their studies of human bodies as if humans were only third-person, objective bodies and not simultaneously first-person, subjective somas, then they are blind and dangerous. They are blind because they have trained themselves to see only one side of whole people: They ignore our somatic side. And they are dangerous, because their observations, predictions, and practical methods are based on a false, incomplete view of the human being. The reason that physiology and medicine have failed to perceive the myths behind aging is that they have failed to recognize the fundamental fact that all human beings are self-aware, self-sensing, and self-moving: They are self-responsible somas.

The somatic viewpoint recognizes not only that human beings are bodily beings who can become victims of physical and organic forces, but also that they are equally somatic beings who can change themselves. Humans can learn to perceive their internal functions and improve their control of their somatic functions. This is the underlying theme of this book: that the somatic viewpoint must be added to the objective bodily viewpoint if we are to understand exactly what happens to human beings as they age. By adding the somatic viewpoint to our human sciences, we not only become capable of overcoming major health problems mistakenly attributed to aging, but we are capable of overcoming many of the major health problems that plague all of humankind. In saying this, there is absolutely no implication that physiological science is invalid.

On the contrary, its contributions to understanding the objective functions of the human being are monumental. What I am saying is that this contribution is, even so, incomplete and insufficient, and that this is clearly seen in the perennial incompleteness of medical diagnosis and the insufficiency of medical treatments in the areas I am discussing. The somatic viewpoint complements and completes the scientific view of the human being, making it possible to have an authentic science that recognizes the whole human: the self-aware, self-responsible side as well as the externally observable "bodily" side. Together, these two viewpoints make possible an authentic human science. By completing a viewpoint of human beings that has, for so long, suffered from incompleteness, we will set foot on a new continent of human advancement.

Thomas Hanna. Somatics: Reawakening The Mind's Control Of Movement, Flexibility, And Health (Kindle Locations 317-320). Kindle Edition.