

The Great Forgetting 重大的遗忘
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My talk today is simple, but ambitious.
我今天的话题很简单，但是也有很高的期望。

It is simple, because I want to communicate just one basic idea. It is ambitious, because I hope to persuade you of the critical importance of this idea, and to inspire you to keep thinking about it for many years to come.

很简单是因为我只想讨论一个基本的概念。有很高的期望是我希望能够说服各位去相信这个概念的重要性，并且启发各位对这个概念不断的思考。

I call the idea “the Great Forgetting” (重大的遗忘) , and I wish to speak of it today for three reasons.

我称这个概念为“重大的遗忘”。今天之所以讲这个概念有三个原因。

The first is that it names one of the most remarkable and influential changes in the history of Western medicine. Indeed, I think this development so interesting and significant that it is the one thing about the history of Western medicine that I think *everyone*—even those who are not students of medical history—should know about.

第一是因为这个概念是西方医学史中最显著，最具影响力的转变之一。由于这个转变的重要性和曲折性，我认为每一个人，包括不是研究医学史的人，都应该对它有所认识。

The second is that, despite its critical importance, this change has gone largely unnoticed and unstudied. There are, as yet, no studies on “The Great Forgetting”, though I am currently working on a book about it. The Great Forgetting, that is, has itself been forgotten. That is part of why I call it “Great”.

第二是因为尽管这个转变是极其关键的，但是几乎完全被忽略了。虽然我正在着手撰写关于这个巨大转变的书，到目前为止，这个课题还没有任何学术著作。重大的遗忘是让这个转变本身完完全全被忘怀了，所以我说这个遗忘是“重大”的。

My third and final reason for introducing the Great Forgetting is that it presents a profound historical puzzle. I have been studying this puzzle for some years, and I believe that I’ve been able to illuminate parts of it; but I also know that a complete solution will require the contributions of many scholars, and I would like to invite you all to join me.

第三也是最后要讨论“重大的遗忘”的原因是因为它展示了一个深远的历史谜团。这个不解之谜我已经探讨了很多年了，也相信可以解释其中的一部分。但是要全面剖白谜团，必须仰仗众多学者的力量，合力完成。我邀请各位加入这个行列。

So what exactly is the Great Forgetting? It refers to an astounding change that occurred in the Western understanding of medicine and the body in the middle of the nineteenth century.

“重大的遗忘”到底指的是什么？它指的是十九世纪西方对医学和人体的理解上发生的巨大变化。

To appreciate this change, we first need to review the history of Western medicine before that change.

为了深切了解这个变化，我们必须先重温一下在此变化之前的西方医学的历史。

The term Western medicine is commonly used today as a synonym for modern medicine. This identification of the modern with the Western is rooted, as you know, in the fact that the form of medicine that dominates our world today had its origins in the late nineteenth West. But the rise and development of modern medicine constitutes, of course, only a slim sliver of the long history of Western medicine. Medicine was theorized and practiced in the West for thousands of years before the late nineteenth century, and this medicine was radically different from the modern medicine that we know today.

今天西方医学跟现代医学这两个词已经普遍地成为同义词了。众所周知，将“西方”等同于“现代”是由于当今医学主流的根源是西方的十九世纪后期。但是现代医学的兴起和发展只是西方医学悠久历史中的一小环节。在此之前，医学已经在西方被理论化，并且实践了几千年，而那时的医学跟如今的医学是截然不同的。

To get an idea of just how different traditional Western medicine was, consider the regimen that the doctors in 17th century France prescribed for King Louis XIII. In order to keep the king in good health, the doctors let blood from him no less than 42 times—in just a single year! In the same year, they also had him throw up 215 times, and they cleansed his intestines 212 times. Just about every day of the year, in other words, the king had to be bled, or throw up, or have his intestines cleaned, and on many days he had to undergo two or even three of these treatments.

两者之间的分歧有多大，让我们来看看法国十七世纪的医生给国王路易十三制定的养生法。为了保持国王的健康，医生在一年之中为国王放血不下于四十二次。在同一年中，医生让他呕吐 215 次，还为他灌肠 212 次。这也就是说国王每天都会接受放血，或呕吐，或灌肠的治疗，有时甚至一天要接受两、三种。

Of course, Louis was a powerful king, and so he was treated more frequently than ordinary folk. But there was nothing special about the approach: everyone, laymen as well as doctors, believed in the need for bloodletting and purging both to prevent sickness and to combat disease. Constant cleansing was the foundation of the traditional Western medical practice, the core idea guiding both prophylaxis and therapy (西方的养生法) for most of the history of Western medicine.

当然，路易是国王，所以他的治疗是比一般人频繁。但是他的治疗也没什么特别之处：每个人，医生也好，普通老百姓也好，都坚信放血和催吐灌肠对预防和抵抗疾病的必须性。不断地清除体内污垢是传统西方医学的根本，也是引导西方预防及养生的核心思想。

The idea originated in ancient Greek medicine and the teachings of Hippocrates (希波克拉底) and Galen (盖伦), and it continued to shape medical practice in Europe and America well into the 19th century. For over two thousand years, people in the West were absolutely convinced that periodic cleansing was essential to keeping healthy. And they felt sure, too, that the cleansing efforts had to be intensified when people became sick, that the best way to combat sickness was to bleed and purge more often and in greater quantities.

这个概念历史悠久。它起源于希腊医学以及希波克拉底和盖伦的学说，并且一直到十九世纪都不断地影响着欧美医学中的预防和治疗。两千多年来，西方人都坚信定期涤除体内污垢是保持健康的精髓。他们也坚信患病的时候，必须加强涤除污垢手段，治病时必须增加放血和催吐灌肠的频率和数量。

And then, in the middle of the nineteenth century, attitudes underwent a dramatic change. In a very short span of time, the beliefs and practices that had been taken for granted since antiquity came to seem not just wrong, but barbaric and delusional. Suddenly, people could no longer remember why their ancestors had trusted these practices for over two thousand years. It was as if minds abruptly awoke from an unimaginably long sleep, and suddenly realized that they had been dreaming.

然而，到了十九世纪中叶，人们的态度突然彻底改变了。在一个很短的时期之内，自古沿用的信念和实践变得不但是错误而且是粗野荒谬。人们突然忘记了他们的祖先为什么会在这种治疗法相信了两千多年之久。人们的脑子好像从漫长的睡眠中惊醒，忽然觉悟自己是在做梦。

Let me give you two examples that mirror this change.
现在让我举两个例子来反映这个变化。

The first concerns the two great collections of Greek medical texts whose compilation began in the middle of 19th century. One is the complete works of Hippocrates, edited by Emile Littré, whose first volume appeared in 1839. The other is *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum*, edited by Charles Daremberg, whose first volume appeared in 1851.

第一个例子是关于两大十九世纪中叶开始编修的希腊医学著作。一套是 Emile Littré 编修的希波克拉底全集。其中第一册是 1839 年面世的。另一套是 Charles Daremberg 编修的希腊医学体系大全 *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum*。其中第一册是 1851 面世的。

Littré explains that he wanted to make the works of Hippocrates more readily available to doctors, because they could still contribute to the contemporary practice of medicine.

Littré 表示他希望医生们可以更容易地接触到希波克拉底的著作，因为这些著作对当时的医学实践还是有贡献的。

By contrast, just twelve years later, Daremberg explained that he compiled Greek medical texts for philologists and historians, as valuable sources for understanding ancient culture. For Littre in 1839, in other words, the works of Hippocrates were still thought useful for the practice of medicine; by 1851, they were useful only for the study of history.

相反的，仅仅十二年以后，Daremberg 说明由于希腊医学文献是理解古代文化的重要资源，他是为了文献学家和历史学家编修的。对 1839 年的 Littre 而言，希波克拉底的著作对行医治病还是很有用的；但是到了 1851 年，这些著作只是对历史学有用了。

My second example suggests a slightly longer period of transition, but speaks of a more dramatic change. In an 1890 review of a medical text, the American writer Mark Twain points out a great reversal that had occurred in his lifetime. When he was a young boy in 1840s, Twain recalls, doctors still practiced medicine as they had for thousands of years. If the Greek doctor Galen had magically appeared in their midst, he would have been hailed as a god. But by 1890 beliefs had completely changed. If this ancient authority were to appear today, Twain writes, doctors would attack him rather than celebrate him. They would lynch him as someone whose wrongheaded ideas killed patients rather than saving them. In just a few decades, in other words, the certainties that had guided medicine for most of history came to seem like dangerous folly.

第二个例子涉及一个较长的过渡期，但是却包含一个起伏更大的变化。美国作家马克吐温在他 1890 年的一篇医学文献评述中指出他一生中一个重大的转变。吐温记得在十九世纪四十年代，他还是个孩子的时候，医生仍然像过去几千年那样行医治病。如果盖伦突然现身其间，人们必定会把他供奉为神灵。但是到了 1890 年，医学信念完全改变了模样。如果盖伦这时候出现，吐温继续写道，医生们只会攻击他而不是供奉他。他们会对他处以极刑，因为他的错误观念不但没有救活病人，反而杀死了病人。换句话说，在短短的几十年中，引导了大部分历史中的医学理念竟然宛如危险的无稽之谈了。

This is what I call the Great Forgetting. Somehow, by the late nineteenth century, people in Europe and America could no longer remember the logic that made bleeding and purging seem like the natural and inevitable way to combat sickness. Suddenly, nearly all of the past ceased to make sense.

这就是我说的重大的遗忘。然而，到了十九世纪后期，欧美人士已不复记得放血和催吐灌肠这些自然而无法避免的抗病治疗背后的逻辑了。一夜之间，西方医学过去的一切也变得无法理解了。

How is such forgetfulness possible? How could convictions that had endured for over two thousand years come, in just a few decades, to seem alien and absurd? How did Western doctors come to be estranged so quickly and radically from their own past? This is the puzzle of the Great Forgetting. It is a fascinating question, and I suggest, one of the most important puzzles in the history of the Western body. But until now the question hasn't even been asked. 这种遗忘是怎么产生的？两千多年来坚信的理念怎么在几十年间就一下子变得陌生荒诞了？西方医生又是怎么如此迅速、彻底地跟过去疏远，脱离关系的？这就是重大的遗忘的

谜团。这是一个引人入胜的疑问。我更认为，这是理解西方人体学历史中最关键的疑问之一。但是连这个疑问本身，一直到现在，都没有被提出过。

Daremborg's introduction to the *Corpus medicorum graecorum* tells us that this estrangement had already started by 1851. This date is noteworthy, because we are then still several decades away from most of the key developments habitually associated with the rise of modern medicine, such as the triumph of bacteriology at the end of the nineteenth century, and the invention of new technologies like X-rays. And indeed, Mark Twain's account of the dramatic reversal of attitudes toward Galen describes a change that occurs before any of these innovations. The rise of modern medicine, in other words, cannot explain the Great Forgetting, for the Great Forgetting came first. If anything, it was the Great Forgetting that helped prepare the way for the rise of modern medicine.

Daremborg 在希腊医学体系大全的序言中告诉我们现代西方医学和传统西方医学的疏远早在 1851 年就开始了。这个年份很值得注意，因为它跟 十九世纪八十年代 Pasteur and Koch 的细菌学，1895 年 Röntgen 发明 X 光透视机，还有很多与现代医学兴起连在一起的发现相隔还有几十年。当然，马克吐温记载对待盖伦截然相反的两种态度更是描叙出比这些发现还要早的转变。换句话说，现代医学的兴起并不能解释这重大的遗忘，因为重大的遗忘在先。我们只能说重大的遗忘为现代医学的兴起铺路而已。

So how, then, are to explain the Great Forgetting? As I said at the outset, much about the causes of this momentous change remains obscure. Today, I want to speak less about the possible *causes* of change and to focus more on the *nature* of the change. I want to clarify, that is, exactly what was forgotten in the Great Forgetting.

那么，应该怎么解释这个重大的遗忘呢？正如我开始的时候说的，很多导致这巨大转变的因素仍然模糊不清。我也要再一次邀请各位参与阐明这个谜团的行列。今天我不是要讲可能导致这种转变的因素而是着重于讲这些转变本身。我希望说明这个重大的遗忘是忘了什么。

Put briefly, what was forgotten was a profound fear of excrement. One could also call it the fear of food. Let me explain.

简单地说，被遗忘的是对排泄物的深切恐惧。也可以称之为对食物的恐惧。现在我来说明一下。

We all need food to live, of course. Without food, we die. But over the course of antiquity Greek doctors came increasingly to emphasize the great danger that food posed to life. Yes, food is necessary to sustain life, but the great bulk of it becomes waste, polluting excrement. And because we are constantly eating, this excrement tends soon to accumulate inside the body. And as it accumulates, it becomes corrupt and poisonous and cause all manners of pains and disorders. This accumulation of waste is, Galen urged, is the ultimate cause of most diseases.

我们依靠食物生存。没有食物，我们会死去。但是自古以来，希腊医生都一而再，再而三地强调食物对生命的祸害。不错，食物维持生命，但是大量的食物都变成废物，污秽的

排泄物。由于我们不断地进食，排泄物就会在体内积累。在积累的同时，这些排泄物会变得腐坏、有毒，造成体内各种疼痛、障碍。盖伦强调，废物的积累是万病的根源。

This is why bleeding and purging were for so long the necessary foundation of all disease prevention and cure. Bloodletting, emetics, and purgatives all aimed to cleanse the body of accumulating wastes. People were constantly eating, so they had to be regularly purged.

因此，放血和催吐灌肠长久以来都是预防和治疗疾病的必须基础。放血、催吐、灌肠的目的都是涤除体内积累的废物。人们不断地进食，所以也必须不断地涤除。

Most surveys of the history of Western medicine pay little attention to this fear of excrement. This neglect is one consequence of the Great Forgetting. Historians have ignored what they no longer understood. Their accounts have presented traditional Western medicine as focused above all on **balance**. Health is when the four humors are in balance. Sickness is when the humors lose their balance. The aim of therapy, therefore, is to restore balance. I'm sure you've encountered this account of traditional Western. Quite possibly, you have even taught it in your classes. But it is wrong.

一般的西方医学史概论都很少关注对排泄物的恐惧这一点。这种疏忽的一个后果就是重大的遗忘。历史学家忽略了他们不再理解的部分。他们把传统西方医学诠释为对均衡的专注。健康就是四种体液的均衡。疾病就是体液不均衡造成的。因此治疗的目的是恢复均衡。我相信各位在传统西方医学史书里都碰到过这种说法。很有可能，各位还这样教过学生。但是这是错的。

I don't have time today to explain why it is wrong or how this wrong account came to be so popular. But let me just point this out: this notion of traditional medicine as focused on balance gives us no insight into why traditional practice focused so intensively and for so long on bleeding and purging, and this not just to cure disease, but to prevent it.

今天我没有时间说明这为什么错，或者这种错误是怎么变得这么普遍的。但是我想指出：认为传统医学是以体液均衡为中心的概念并不能帮助我们深入了解传统医术为什么那么强烈地，又那么长期地偏重于放血和催吐灌肠。而且这不只是为了治病，更是为了预防疾病。

In order more accurately to understand traditional medicine we must, I suggest, replace the static image of a body naturally in balance, with the dynamic model of life lived on a slope. In this dynamic model, human beings are required constantly to make efforts to stay in the same place, that is, to maintain health. If they fail to do so, their bodies will naturally slide toward sickness and decline. Concretely, in traditional Western medicine, the most important aspect of the effort needed to stay healthy was the steady elimination of wastes, the regular cleansing of the body. This is why King Louis XIII was bled and purged nearly every day.

为了更准确地理解传统医学，我认为我们必须淘汰人体应该是自然均衡的静止状态这种概念，而以生命是活在斜坡上的动态模型来取代。人类必须不断地用力气才能停留在同样的位置，也就是保持健康。如果他们失败了，他们的身体就会倾向疾病，走下坡。具体地说，在传统西方医学里，保持健康最重大的努力就是不断地排除废物，定时涤除体内污垢。这也就是为什么法国国王路易十三每天都放血、催吐、灌肠。

But then, in the middle of the nineteenth century, a remarkable reversal occurred. The longstanding anxieties about the accumulation of poisonous wastes were replaced by a new and opposite fear—the depletion of vital energy. Significantly, it was precisely at this time that the very notion of energy was first created. For the first time in Western history fatigue and exhaustion came to the foreground of medical concerns, and worries flipped from the buildup of negative polluting wastes to the loss of positive vitality and force. Instead of eyeing food with suspicion as the source of eventual excrement, food comes to be welcome as the source of necessary energy. It comes to be counted as **calories**.

但是，到了十九世纪中叶，医学的领域中发生一个巨大的扭转。长期以来对积累有毒秽物的焦虑被一个新的，相反的恐惧取代了。这是对精气损虚的恐惧。值得注意的是“能量”(energy)这个概念正是这个时候诞生的。在西方历史里，疲倦和精神损耗首次成为医学关注的焦点，人们的焦虑也从积累秽物转移到丧失生命力和力气了。食物也不再被视为制造排泄物的源泉，而是备受欢迎不可或缺的精气源泉。食物也可以以‘卡路里’来计算了。

Many of you here know about Chinese medicine, so the concern with depletion will be very familiar to you. From ancient times to the present day, the long tradition of *yangsheng* in China has been focused above all on delaying and minimizing the loss of vital essences, on preventing and remedying depletion. This brings me to one of the great unrecognized ironies of the history of Western medicine: as Western medicine became modern, it became, oddly, more like Chinese medicine.

在座很多位都懂中医，所以对“虚”这个词很熟悉。从古至今，中国的养生一直都以延迟和减少，预防和治疗精气的损失为中心。这让我很意外地发现：西方医学越现代化却越像中国医学。

Let me repeat: as Western medicine became modern, it became more like Chinese medicine. The idea may sound surprising at first, but if you think about it, it makes sense. The move in 19th century Western science to convert everything into something called energy—the move away from the opposition of eternal spirit and corruptible matter—brought Western reflections on the body closer to Chinese notions of *qi*.

让我再重复一遍：西方医学越现代化就越像中国医学。这个想法乍看上去有些离奇，但是再想一想，觉得是有道理的。远离永生灵魂和腐败物体的对立这种思想之后，十九世纪的西方科学把一切都转化为统称“能量”的东西，也把西方的身体观与中国“气”的观念拉近了。

Understanding this convergence of modern Western and traditional intuitions helps us interpret a notable paradox in the contemporary West.

了解这个现代西方与传统观念的会合可以帮助我们了解当代西方一个显著的矛盾。

As you know, many in Europe and America today consult acupuncturists. They may not necessarily be convinced of the truth of Chinese medical theory, but they are at least willing to entertain the possibility that ancient Chinese classics like the *Huangdi neijing* contain real insights into medicine and the body, and that these insights can possibly cure their problems

today. Very few of these people, however, would trust Galenic bloodletting to give them relief, even though the teachings of this Greek doctor guided therapy in the West into the 19th century. It is remarkable: Westerners are now more willing to believe Chinese teachings from two thousand years ago, than to trust practices that governed Western medicine until the recent past. This is the consequence of the Great Forgetting. To Europeans and Americans today, the great part of their own medical tradition now seems more alien and incomprehensible than the traditions of ancient China.

众所周知，很多欧美人士都用针灸。他们未必相信中国医学的理论，但是他们起码愿意考虑像黄帝内经等的古代中国经典对医学和身体的确有见地，并且可能治愈他们的毛病。但是没有几个人愿意相信盖伦式的放血会对他们的病有帮助，尽管直到十九世纪西方的治疗法都是在继承这位希腊医生的教诲。值得关注的是西方人竟然愿意相信两千多年前的中国教诲多于愿意相信一直到不久之前还引导着西方医学的治疗法。这就重大的遗忘的后果。对欧美人士来说，他们自己的医学传统竟比中国的传统更为陌生，更难理解。

What happened in the nineteenth century to bring this situation about? I have some hypotheses that I am currently writing up, and which I can perhaps share with you on another occasion. I am certain, however, that my hypotheses will offer only the beginnings of a full solution. And so, let me conclude by first expressing my hope that I've persuaded you today of the interest and importance of the question, and second, by extending my invitation to all of you to join me in seeking an answer. Thank you very much for your attention!

十九世纪发生了什么事会造成这样的结果？我有一些设想，现在正在整理，希望以后有机会跟各位分享。我可以肯定的是我的设想只是一个完全的答案的开端。我以两点结束今天的讲话：第一，希望今天各位认可这个曲折而重要的问题；第二，我邀请各位参与为这个问题寻求答案的行列。谢谢。