



The Battle for Innate: A Perspective on Fundamentalism in Chiropractic

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ABSTRACT

Various chiropractic organizations and individuals contribute to make chiropractic a “construct of confusion” in the minds of those who have the power to grant access to resources and legally sanctioned privileges. However, what is the source of this seemingly dichotomous dilemma? The perception of a spectrum that spans the profession and its beliefs from far left to far right, dispels a distinct separation between belief model A and belief model B and allows for the spreading of thought across a broad range. “Straights” and “mixers” are tags of the past and may not be appropriate to apply in the dispersion of beliefs and practice patterns today. As this internal conflict continues to thrive in the profession, its source must be sought as a step toward resolution. (J Chiropr Humanit 2004;11:2-10)

INTRODUCTION

In his description of the social transformation of medicine in the United States during the end of the nineteenth and the forepart of the twentieth centuries, Starr¹ makes the following statement:

The historical success of a profession rests fundamentally on the growth of its particular source of wealth and status – its authority. Acknowledged skills and cultural authority are to the professional classes what land and capital are to the propertied. They are the means of securing income and power. For any group, the accumulation of authority requires

the resolution of at least two distinct problems. One is the **internal problem of consensus**; the other is the external problem of legitimacy. These are necessary but not sufficient conditions for success. **Consensus facilitates the articulation of common interests and the mobilization of group effort**, while respect and deference, especially from the more powerful classes, open the way to resources and legally sanctioned privileges. (author emphasis in bold)

The articulation of common interests and mobilization of group effort has challenged chiropractic for more than a century. It could be argued that access to, “...resources and legally sanctioned privileges...” coupled with, “...respect and deference...from the more powerful classes...” has been affected by the lack of “internal consensus” within chiropractic.

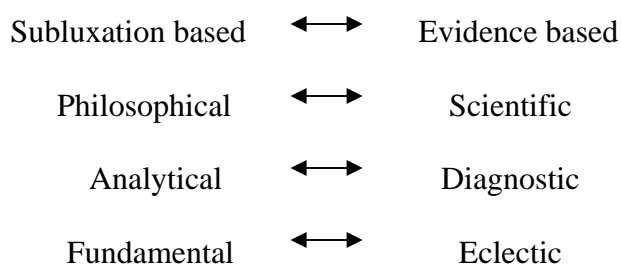
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Considering the many chiropractic organizations (WFC, WCA, ACA, ICA, FSCO, FCER, FACE, CCE, DECE, etc.) with accompanying rhetoric that is often combative, the near universal acceptance of the Association of Chiropractic Colleges Paradigm Statement² encroaches upon the margins of miraculous. Representatives from many of these organizations lobby legislative representatives (...the more powerful classes...) with agendas that are conflicting, making chiropractic a “construct of confusion” in the minds of those who have the power to grant access to “...resources and legally sanctioned privileges....”

What is the source of this seemingly dichotomous dilemma? The perception of a spectrum that spans the profession and its beliefs from far left to far right dispels a distinct separation between belief model A and belief model B and allows for the spreading of thought across a broad range. “Straights” and “mixers” are tags of the past and may not be appropriate to apply in the dispersion of beliefs and practice patterns today.

However, a perceptual spectrum can be anchored many ways depending upon the image to be conveyed. Some examples might include those in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Perceptual spectra of chiropractic.



As this internal conflict continues to thrive in the profession, its source must be sought as a step toward resolution. Where to look and what to look for remains obscure. At times, effective parallelism can reflect enough illumination to offer a better understanding. One such parallel reflection can be found in three significant religions of the world: Judaism, Islam and Christianity.

Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism is not easily defined. Its historical roots are best described when viewed over an extended period. In her book, *The Battle for God*, Karen Armstrong³ offers the following perspective:

Today...we are undergoing a...transition. Its roots lie in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of the modern era, when the people of Western Europe began to evolve a different type of society, one based not on an agricultural surplus but on a technology that enabled them to reproduce their resources indefinitely. The economic changes over the last four hundred years have been accompanied by immense social, political, and intellectual revolutions, with the development of an entirely different, scientific and rational, concept of the nature of truth; and, once again, a radical religious change has become necessary. All over the world, people are finding that in their dramatically transformed circumstances, the old forms of faith no longer work for them: they cannot provide the enlightenment and consolation that human beings seem to need. As a result, men and women are trying to find new ways of being religious; like the reformers and prophets of the Axial Age, they are attempting to

build upon the insights of the past in a way that will take human beings forward into the new world they have created for themselves. One of these modern experiments – however paradoxical it may superficially seem to say so – is fundamentalism.

Armstrong points out that from a spiritual perspective, the people in the past thought, spoke and acquired knowledge somewhat differently than today. They derived “truth” from two methods of thinking, “*mythos*” and “*logos*.” While the two approaches were complementary, each had its own unique contribution.^{3(p.xv-xviii)}

Myth was regarded as primary; it was concerned with what was thought to be timeless and constant in our existence...Myth was not concerned with practical matters, but with meaning...The *mythos* of a society provided people with a context that made sense of their day-to-day lives; it directed their attention to the eternal and the universal...Myth could not be demonstrated by rational proof; its insights were more intuitive,...Myth only became a reality when it was embodied in cult, rituals and ceremonies which worked aesthetically upon worshippers,...

Logos was equally important. *Logos* was the rational, pragmatic, and scientific thought that enabled men and women to function well in the world. We may have lost the sense of *mythos* in the West today, but we are very familiar with *logos*, which is the basis of our society. Unlike myth, *logos* must relate exactly to facts and correspond to external realities if it is to be effective...*Logos* is practical. Unlike myth, which looks back to

the beginnings and to the foundations, *logos* forges ahead and tries to find something new: to elaborate on old insights, achieve a greater control over our environment, discover something fresh, and invent something novel.

Logos had its limitations too. It could not assuage human pain or sorrow. Rational arguments could make no sense of tragedy. *Logos* could not answer questions about the ultimate value of human life...By the eighteenth century...astonishing success in science and technology...[people] began to think that *logos* was the only means to truth and began to discount *mythos* as false and superstitious...Our religious experience in the modern world has changed, and because an increasing number of people regard scientific rationalism alone as true, they have often tried to turn the *mythos* of their faith in to *logos*.

Chiropractic history spans slightly more than a century unlike the 4-500 years Armstrong reviews showing how modernization tends to polarize the societies of religious groups, threaten sacred values, and is viewed as an aggressive assault on lifestyle rather than liberation from mores of the past. The scientific advancements in health care over the past one-hundred years have nevertheless challenged sacred values of the caregiver also. Particularly in chiropractic, as science has shifted from a “vitalistic” to a “non-vitalistic” basis, fundamental beliefs (*mythos*) have been aggressively assaulted and sacred values (33 principles) have been threatened.

Elements of the chiropractic community have wrestled with these threats to the profession’s

mythos. Armstrong^{3(p. 35)} reminds us that: Mythological thinking looks backward, not forward. It directs attention to the sacred beginnings, to a primordial event [Harvey Lillard's adjustment], or to the foundations of human life [Universal Intelligence]. Instead of looking for something fresh [scientific evidence], myth focuses on what is constant [The Major Premise]. It does not bring us 'news,' but tells us what has always been; everything important has already been achieved and thought [33 principles]. We live on what was said by our ancestors [BJ], especially in the sacred texts [the Green Books] which tell us everything we need to know. [author's additions]

It was in the Christian dominated European cultures during the seventeenth century that *logos* gained a dominant presence over *mythos*. The forward momentum of their scientific discoveries drove them to search for the new. From Ptolemy to Copernicus to Newton, Europeans were evolving a fresh notion of truth.

Truth was never absolute, since new discoveries could always replace the old; it had to be demonstrated objectively, and measured by its effectiveness in the practical world. The success of early modern science gave it an authority which was starting to be stronger than that of mythical truth, which met none of these criteria.^{3(p.70)}

In his contrast to the growth of "cultural authority" between allopathic medicine and homeopathic medicine, Starr^{1(p.107-8)} alludes to the importance of scientific discovery.

The turn of the century (19th to the 20th) was both the point of acceptance and the moment of

incipient disintegration ... Homeopathy had one foot in modern science, the other in pre-scientific mysticism; this became an increasingly untenable position. While regular medicine was producing important and demonstrable scientific advances, homeopathy generated no new discoveries.

Thus, the stage is set. As a profession, chiropractic desires a greater share of the "cultural authority" afforded to medicine by the "more powerful classes" of society. To achieve this desire, advancement of scientific discovery is essential. However, scientific advancement places a greater emphasis and value upon the *logos* of the culture of chiropractic than upon the *mythos*. This transition to modernity becomes a threat to the *mythos* and those who advocate its supremacy over *logos* or scientific development. It is this dilemma that spawns the growth of fundamentalism within a culture, a profession, or a religion.

When "fundamentalism" arises, it rarely does battle with the external enemy, be it science, medicine or secularism in general.

...it usually begins, instead, as an internal struggle in which traditionalists fight their own coreligionists who, they believe, are making too many concessions to the secular world. The fundamentalist will often instinctively respond to encroaching modernity by creating an enclave of pure faith... This marks a withdrawal from the Godless world into a self-contained community where the faithful attempt to reshape existence in defiance of the changes without. It is thus essentially a defensive move.^{3(p.110-1)}

Fundamentalists in all three of the monotheistic faiths are in revolt against the pragmatic *logos* that dominates modern society to the exclusion of the spiritual, and which refuses the restraints imposed by the sacred. But because the secular establishment is so powerful, most have to confine their revolt to small symbolic acts. The vast majority...confine their protest to a determined retreat from the secular state and to the establishment of a counterculture which challenges its values at every turn.^{3(p.208)}

It is not to be overlooked that chiropractic has focused and continues to focus on external challenges, such as the Wilk Antitrust Suit against the American Medical Association (AMA) or the current legal battles with major insurance carriers. There has also been a movement of solidarity within the profession as battles have been won regarding the implementation of chiropractic care in the Department of Defense and the Veteran's Affairs Health Systems. Unity of effort can accomplish miracles, albeit, from my inside perspective of this achievement, complete unity of effort was not always present.

In the midst of these spectacular advances on "cultural authority" by a predominately united chiropractic profession, we have seen the destructive force of a "fundamentalist" attack. As the Council on Chiropractic Education has attempted to apply standards of educational attainment to chiropractic educational programs, there has been a backlash of legal interventions, threats of creating alternative accrediting agencies and the typical cry of "conspiracy" toward those representatives who were applying the process of accreditation, following existing procedures, and relying on established educational

standards to fulfill duties they were charged to perform.

If these attacks simply opposed improved educational standards, their actions could be likened to the work of Bryn Mawr psychologist James H. Leuba. In the early twentieth-century when creationists were combating evolutionists, Leuba wrote a book *Belief in God and Immortality*, wherein he, "...'proved' that a college education endangered religious belief."^{3(p.175)} Could it be that some in chiropractic believe that an improved scientific education (*logos*) would not be in the best interest of the profession or the future of the individual graduate? This attack upon an accrediting body recognized by the US Office of Education is a classical representation of the actions of "fundamentalists."

An additional factor is worthy of note. While Armstrong speaks of fundamentalism as a movement within a culture, superimposed on this movement are those elements (individuals) of a culture that thrive and benefit amid the turmoil of change. Benefit may be measured in terms of the accumulation of perceived or real power, peer adulation (ego fulfillment), and material goods (money and what money can purchase). While leaders may be "true believers" in the fundamental movement, the gains just described certainly do not detract from the energy put forth to maintain their privileged role at the head of the movement they lead.

While "rank may have its privileges" within appropriate bounds, self-gratifying, hedonistic leadership is a form of "priestcraft", such that,⁴ "...priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion."

The power to prevail over a fundamentalist movement, aside from the obvious personal gain, comes from the promise of “certainty” amid change, the assurance that security is found in the *mythos* while loss of purpose and identity will likely occur through the *logos* of modernity. It is unfortunate that the need for “certainty” fosters a high tolerance or ambivalence for the absence of *ethos*.

Counterculture

In her work, Armstrong describes the formation of a “counterculture” (1925-60) in response to the ever-advancing secularism. The symbol of God and all that was considered sacred had been made meaningless in a world that had become a much better place to live. However, the dominance of secularism created a void of *mythos* and into this void came the destruction of seventy million people in Europe, Asia and the Soviet Union through violent means.^{3(p.279)}

The Holocaust was also a reminder of the dangers that can accrue from the death of God in human consciousness...Auschwitz was a dark epiphany, giving human beings a glimpse of what life could be like once all sense of sacredness has been lost.

Some fundamentalists see modernity as equally hubristic, evil, and demonic; their vision of the modern city or the secular ideology [*evidence-based chiropractic*] fills them with something of the same dread and helpless rage as overtakes the liberal secularist who gazes into the darkness of Auschwitz.

It is important that we understand the dread and anxiety that lie at the heart of the fundamentalist vision, because only then will we begin to

comprehend its passionate rage, its frantic desire to fill the void with certainty, and its conviction of ever-encroaching evil.

If the formation of chiropractic groups opposed to improving educational standards, advancing our scientific research accomplishments, discoursing intellectually with our colleagues in the various health professions, or accepting responsibility for patient care beyond what some may consider to be, are not myths, then at least the unscientifically validated constructs (ie, the subluxation) would represent, by Armstrong’s description, a chiropractic counterculture to the profession’s scientific and academic advancements.

As science and education in chiropractic started to advance, fundamentalists were hungry for *mythos* and tended to reject the scientific rationalism of science being applied to chiropractic. They sought to reaffirm or even reshape the myths and symbols of their tradition in ways that became persuasive in encouraging people to rise up and save the profession from extinction.

During the 70’s, 80’s and 90’s chiropractic and the art of manipulation experienced significant scientific scrutiny that tended to shed a more positive light on its effectiveness. Previous rhetoric, external to chiropractic, had shunned chiropractic and spinal manipulation as quackery but during the last decades of the twentieth century, evidence accumulated that placed spinal manipulation (and by association chiropractic) on a pedestal equal to or even higher than more traditional forms of back pain care.

Chiropractic fundamentalists were not averse to the positive support generated by research but considered these scientific advances as potential assaults on the purity and sanctity of

“... fundamentalists have sought to make their philosophy more acceptable ...by guising scientific rationality under the cloak of emotionality.”

traditional chiropractic. Public acceptance based on scientific evidence led to greater “cultural authority” but also opened the door for other disciplines to incorporate similar therapeutic procedures. The isolationism of the past was melting away. Fundamentalists believed the purity of “chiropractic philosophy” would be washed aside as the ripple of scientific evidence increased the popularity of a procedure (manipulation) absent due regard for the belief system (philosophy) that set chiropractic apart from the rest of the health care delivery system. Furthermore, as manipulation moved more toward mainstream healthcare (and therefore chiropractic by association), the responsibilities associated with a mainstream first contact provider, ie performing a diagnosis, working within the current medical system, etc., came also. Fundamentalists rejected the assimilation of additional responsibilities by labeling such duties as “medical.”

In Armstrong’s work she describes the offensive posturing of the fundamentalists during the 1970s. Much of what she describes is not unlike the posturing of fundamentalists in chiropractic at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Many had withdrawn from modern society to create a sacred reservation of pure faith. Convinced that they were in danger of being wiped out by regimes committed to their destruction [CCE, NBCE, FCLB, WFC], they felt embattled and defensive. They had evolved ideologies to mobilize the faithful in a struggle for survival. Surrounded by social forces that were either

indifferent to religion or hostile to it, they had developed a siege mentality that could easily tip over into aggression.^{3(p.356)} (author additions)

Chiropractic fundamentalists have sought to make their philosophy more acceptable in today’s world by guising scientific rationality under the cloak of emotionality. They selectively incorporate scientific findings that support their “major premise” while shunning or ignoring scientific findings incongruent with their way of thinking. They have remained separate and distinct, striving to create a counterculture within the profession that thrives on emotion and a religious zeal. Their faith has brought them,^{3(p.368)} “cast-iron certainty and hierarchy to challenge the doubts, open questions, and shifting roles of the modern [chiropractic] world.”

CONCLUSION

It is difficult to determine how many practicing doctors of chiropractic consider themselves “fundamentalists.” The belief that the “fundamentalist” side of the profession would wither under the bright light of scientific advancement is likely false. On the contrary, scientific advancement has charged the growth of fundamentalism within the profession just as modernity has spawned fundamentalism within the world religions.

Annihilation is not an option. That would be contrary to the *logos* of the prevailing majority. Armstrong^{3(p.370)} offers an alternative:

First, it is important to recognize that these theologies and ideologies are rooted in fear. The desire to define

doctrines, erect barriers, establish borders, and segregate the faithful in a sacred enclave where the law is stringently observed springs from that terror of extinction which has made all fundamentalists, at one time or another, believe that the secularists were about to wipe them out. The modern world, which seems so exciting to a liberal, seems Godless, drained of meaning, and even satanic to a fundamentalist....The pre-millennial vision, which views some of the most positive institutions of modernity as diabolic, harbors genocidal dreams, and sees humanity as rushing toward a horrific End, is a clear indication of the dread and disappointment that modernity has inspired in many Protestant fundamentalist. We have seen the nihilism that can inform the fundamentalist program. It is impossible to reason such fear away or attempt to eradicate it by coercive measures. A more imaginative response would be to try to appreciate the depth of this neurosis, even if a liberal or a secularist cannot share this dread-ridden perspective.

If Armstrong is correct, fundamentalism in chiropractic is here to stay and the hope of obtaining an “internal consensus” is unrealistic unless a pathway is found to assure the fundamentalist mindset that scientific advancement, integration of the professions, acceptance by the medical community, increased educational standards, and expanded practice rights are not synonymous with a threat of extinction.

On the contrary, there is a developing role of “vitalistic” beliefs in health care. Although hard data is lacking, it is probable that a large

“...scientific rationalism in chiropractic has created a new soul.”

portion of practicing doctors of chiropractic retain a warm relationship with the *mythos* of chiropractic. Whether this relationship is rooted in the fear of extinction from the onslaught of modernity (being absorbed into or overshadowed by medicine), the long-term absence of social acceptance (the AMA’s attempts to “contain and eliminate”) or the ostracizing of the profession (by legislators, third party payers, and “...the more powerful classes...”) or a lack of adequate education that would lead to an appreciation and understanding of science, the relationship persists.

There is a basic human need for security, socialization, recognition and validation. In the words of Dr. Louis Sportelli (personal communication 2004 Aug 14):

The need to be validated is what continues to be the key to why these ‘cult’ groups continue to exist and flourish. They have a cause and the cause is so powerful that to deny the basis of the cause is more than many could handle. Many in the profession, who do not openly adhere to the open ‘*mythos*’, still feel some kindred spirit to this thinking. Many...had the strength of the philosophy to fall back on ALWAYS...if the patient did not get better it was ‘limitation of matter’, if they did, it was ‘the wonders of chiropractic.’ If we did not know what was wrong with the patient, what relevance was it, ‘find the subluxation and the body will heal itself’...”

Fundamentalism in the world's religions came about as,^{3(p.370)} "...an attempt to fill the void at the heart of a society created by the widespread acceptance of scientific rationalism." Has scientific rationalism in chiropractic created a profession void of heart and emotion into which fundamentalism has been inserted? Has the scientific secular side of the profession "lost its soul?"

I would posit that scientific rationalism in chiropractic has created a new soul. A soul willing to search for truth, to challenge the "status quo" in hopes of making it better, and to be self-reflective of its internal values. It is modernity within chiropractic that has brought the profession to the forefront of society wherein access to "...resources and legally sanctioned privileges..." have become more widespread throughout the profession. A retreat into fundamentalism with a reliance

upon the *mythos* while avoiding the *logos* and ignoring the *ethos* of our time is a step toward distinction and eventual extinction. Fundamentalism is not the answer; it is a nihilistic reaction to the present and the future. Until a way is found to manage this internal conflict, the battle for Innate will continue.

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