

Review of: "Changing chiropractic's subluxation rhetoric: Moving on from 'deniers', 'vitalists', and 'unorthodox', to realists, post-realists, and absurdists"

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I commend the author for courageously offering this work for open, un-blinded review. I also applaud the spirit of this work insofar as it seeks to bring a "...clear and strong debate in which the issues and their evidence are examined in the manner of traditional philosophical debate." It isn't clear what the author means by traditional philosophic debate, however, and this is where I'll begin offering good faith recommendations for possible improvement of the manuscript. I will restrict my comments to the content of the work, but it must be added that the author would greatly benefit from having an editor proofread the manuscript for grammar. With this caveat, I'll add a word about form. Not knowing the guidelines of the intended journal, the abstract would benefit from greater structure, as would the work as a whole. There are many subsections that could be grouped into larger headings for the sake of readability.

With respect to content:

In the abstract the author states, "...The purpose of this paper is to present two behaviours that will each change the profession." If this is the solution offered to the dilemma presented in the opening paragraph, it needs to be more explicit. The language used here is somewhat confusing. Later in the abstract the author states, "For the reason the post-realist and absurdist's positions are opinion, have not been thought-through, and show no appreciation of the paradox that they have no evidence at all supportive of that opinion, they should cease gaslighting the realists and anyone who opposes their position." The wording utilized here is mere conjecture unless supported by solid evidence. The abstract closes: "Chiropractic realism is the conventional position of the majority of the profession and of the discipline. The realists quite rightly demand to see and discuss the evidence, if any, held by the post-realists for their position." The groups in question are not adequately defined in the abstract, however, which introduces a high degree of confusion at the outset.

The author precedes the introduction with an italicized quote without citing the source or offering a reference. The author ends the brief introduction by relating the chiropractic concept of subluxation to ancient practices specifically those of the Egyptian chancellor Imhotep. Subluxation as a philosophical concept discussed in the chiropractic literature is an invention of Daniel David Palmer. It cannot be tied to Imhotep (or any other historical figure) without equivocation. Where it is the case that subluxation as a physiological phenomenon may have been present in vertebrates from the biological beginning of the subphylum, it does not follow that what Imhotep (or any other individual prior to Palmer) attempted to do could be considered alongside chiropractic subluxation qua concept.

At the start of the section titled "My position as the writer of this paper", the author states, "I offer a peer-reviewed opposition to those intent on removing the idea of subluxation from the evidence-based chiropractic education curriculum."

I do so in this paper which represents a new application of the peer-review process.” The argument of maintaining subluxation as a viable construct within the profession is not new. It is perhaps underrepresented in the literature pertaining to chiropractic education. In either case, I cannot see how this paper, in arguing to retain subluxation, “... represents a new application of the peer-review process.”

Later in this same section, the author states, “...I am writing as a philosopher and following the rules and commonly understood principles of philosophy that ground this writing in reality.” It is unclear which rules the author is referring to. I know of no such rule or “...commonly understood principles” that would “...ground this writing in reality”. To assume as much is to commit a fallacious appeal to authority or, at least, to ambiguity. Where it is true that a philosopher (or anyone for that matter) may be free to write whatever they see fit, it does not follow that the writing is inherently truthful, accurate, or grounded in reality. It seems the author tries to clarify this point by ending the paragraph with the definition, “...‘*argument*’ which I offer relies on facts or statements to support a proposition while an *opinion*’ is a belief that a person has formed about an issue.” The contrast offered here between argument and opinion is inadequate. Arguments may follow a well-defined structure (as in formal logic) but be based upon the very same beliefs the author uses to define “opinion”. This interpretation takes opinions to be foundational to argumentation thereby conjoining rather than contrasting the two. Perhaps citing an academic definition of these terms would improve the strength of the author's position. Additionally, the few non-chiropractic specific references in the manuscript are taken from online discussion boards, specifically, Stackexchange and Quora. These are woefully inadequate sources for published literature and undermine a criticism that directly follows the aforementioned definitions. The criticism is against Homola who is, according to the author, “...a retired chiropractor who publishes frequently in on-line fora.” Clearly, it is hypocritical to criticize an author for publishing in similar online forums to those one is citing.

What follows in the manuscript is a table defining the lexicon offered by the author. The terms *Realism*, *Post-Realism*, and *Absurdism*, as derived from Western philosophy, differ from the meanings given by the author. *Realism* represents a rather broad method of approaching topics within philosophy and is regularly applied to a variety of disparate topics in a dissimilar fashion. The author must be clearer about the nature of realism and the epistemological basis of the claims he attaches to it. A few lines later the author claims that he has drawn the term *absurdism* from the chiropractic literature. A reference is sorely needed here. It is also important that the author distinguish absurdism, as he is applying it to members of the chiropractic profession, from other uses of the term within academic philosophy particularly as applied to the early-mid twentieth century existentialists.

In the section titled “Correcting the notion of orthodoxy” the author makes the claim that “It is surprising that any well-trained chiropractor would accept this imposition. The downside is the perpetuation of this flawed judgement to trust medicine’s view of chiropractors as representing the orthodox benchmark *within* the discipline.” The author offers no substantive basis as to why this judgement is flawed. Where it is certainly implied, it would strengthen the author’s case to make it more explicit. This same error is observed later when the author, discussing Innes’ work claims that Innes makes “...an elitist attempt to exclude students who hold beliefs different to his...” The author needs to show a logical error in Innes’ argument rather than merely labeling his view “elitist”. Failing to do so constitutes an ad hominem fallacy. Similarly, the author begins a subsequent paragraph with the line, “Another piece of nonsense from the realists and absurdists was a peculiar report about a global summit that may not have been all that was reported.” By beginning the sentence with the

claim of "nonsense" the author is introducing potential bias and undermining his own objectivity. This is particularly problematic as later the author concludes a paragraph stating, "I contend it is preferable to be dispassionate in our comments, yet as truthful as truth needs to be." This is a tautology at very least and question-begging at worst. Additionally, it represents a glaring contradiction to the charged language utilized earlier in the manuscript.

In the section titled "The realists" the author writes, "I cannot see an argument against my identification of Palmer as the original chiropractic realist given it was he who not only founded chiropractic but named it, however Mirtz disagrees and presents theological arguments." The confusion here with Mirtz's position is the result of the equivocation mentioned earlier regarding the use of the term "realist". The very next line in the manuscript reads, "We owe much to McDowall for his rich evidential reporting of Palmer's thinking, writings, and expressions of understanding and it logically follows that those over time who accepted and enriched Palmer's ideas would also be considered realists." The argument offered by the author begs the question by using the conclusion, i.e. those who follow Palmer are realists, as evidence to support the assumption that Palmer was a realist.

In the section titled "The post-realists" the author states, "On the basis of my logic in naming Palmer as the original realist, I would consider Oakley Smith to be an early if not the first post-realist as he tried to claim Palmer copied chiropractic from others and went on to establish a discipline based on his own ideas." Smith's claim that Palmer copied chiropractic from earlier sources does not satisfy either the necessary or sufficient conditions needed to label Smith a "post-realist" even by the author's earlier definition of the term. Later the author states, "The harshest expression of post-realism, published or not, is denial that chiropractic's realism of subluxation exists and instead is a relic of history." Use of the terms "realism of subluxation" is a syntactical (formal) error. *Realism*, as a school of thought within chiropractic, may exist apart from the presence of a physiological phenomenon otherwise called subluxation.

Concluding the section on post-realist claims, the author states, "My underlying contention is straightforward: the post realists either have evidence for their claim that subluxation is an irrelevant historical artefact, in which case they must produce their evidence that subluxation can not exist, or they do not and can not which I suspect was the case in 2010." It is important to note that one cannot prove a negative. The most that a subluxation skeptic (post-realist) may claim is that those who bear the responsibility of producing evidence (realists) have failed sufficiently to do so.

There are several other smaller errors and assumptions in the work that follow from here but can be rectified given what I have pointed out so far as these remaining errors are of the same nature as those cited above. Two additional comments are necessary, however. First, the author refers to subluxation as a "clinical lesion" toward the end of the manuscript which, though in-line with the prior characterization of "realists", may not accurately reflect the nature of the phenomenon. Lastly, the author states, "In the absence of any such guide it is valid to ask what is it that post-realist chiropractors address in practice? Indeed, are they *chiropractors* or *manual therapists*?" It is important to note that, by its etymological roots, all chiropractors are manual therapists but not all manual therapists are chiropractors. Perhaps the author is taking "post-realist" to mean technician?

Looking beyond the shortcomings mentioned above, the manuscript aims at a noble goal which is a more rigorous, dispassionate discourse within the philosophy of chiropractic. I am certainly aligned with this endeavor and hope to see it come to pass. I offer these edits as a means toward that shared goal and wish the author all the very best in this pursuit.

