

Retro-evolution in food and health care and its impact on modern culture

This article may be cited as:

Robertson, L. H. (2024). How pseudoscientific ideas about food and medicine have helped to devalue science, reason, and all things Western. *Humanistically Speaking*.

<https://www.humanisticallyspeaking.org/post/how-pseudoscientific-ideas-about-food-and-medicine-have-helped-to-devalue-science-reason-and-all-t>

I engaged in food struggle sessions with my mother when I was eight. An earlier introduction to spinach would have likely produced a different result. Infants will eat most anything including worms and dirt, but young children quickly become conditioned to the taste and consistency of food given to them by their caregivers. It is possible to change one's diet later in life. Having read about its health benefits, I reconditioned myself to like spinach at age 30. Millions of North Americans have been using a similar process to reject "Western" foods and modern medicine while promoting preferred non-European alternatives. While much has been written about how 1960s radicalism eventually resulted in replacing workers with students as the revolutionary class in the Marxist paradigm (Coughlin & Higgins, 2019; Lindsay, 2020), there has been little examination of the vital contribution of the less overtly political "counterculture" side of the old Hippie movement. My thesis is that today's identity politics would have died stillborn had it not drawn from many sources in an evolutionary process. Notions that things European are bad while non-European ways are superior grew out of the New Age Movement which, in turn, is grounded in pre-Marxian Romanticism – the Noble Savage Myth of Chateaubriand and Rousseau. This has been used to promote questionable notions about food and medicine.

In 1969 Mohawk activist Kahn-Tineta Horn drew on this romanticization of the indigenous to tell an overflowing crowd of mostly white students, at the University of Saskatchewan's largest lecture theater, that they were guilty of genocide and the instrument of their genocide was milk. Milk was described as poisonous to people who are aboriginal to the Americas, and it has allegedly been fed to aboriginal children since first contact in an effort to reduce the population. Of course, if milk has such deleterious effects on the aboriginal population, it likely is not so healthy for the non-aboriginal population either. Other European-typical foods have increasingly become proscribed.

It was the second decade of the 21st century at an expensive restaurant overlooking Yokohama harbor. My partner ordered spaghetti, and almost as an afterthought added, "Of course, gluten free." She thought that a rice based culture would naturally have superior "rice spaghetti" but the waitress appeared to have difficulty understanding. Her supervisor, who had a better command of English and understood food intolerances, offered several traditional rice dishes. A cook was added to the discussion, and he explained that he could not make spaghetti out of rice. On leaving the restaurant my partner slapped her hands together triumphantly having educated the Japanese on the need for gluten-free spaghetti. She viewed herself to be part of a movement.

Whether or not one can make spaghetti out of rice, corn or quinoa flour depends on how one defines the term. While the traditional Italian dish is made from wheat, it has been re-defined in North America to reference long noodles that resemble the original. Similarly, "oatmeal" is being redefined. One can now buy "superfood oatmeal" containing chia, buckwheat and hemp but no oats. Why not call it "chia and buckwheat cereal with hemp?" Such honesty in advertising would be counterproductive if the objective is to replace whole food categories with

alternates while making people forget about the original. Marketers of oatmeal have fought back by selling “gluten free” oatmeal, but the product is glutenless in its natural state. In addition to increasing the price for the product, the “gluten free” label perpetuates the notion that there is something unhealthy about gluten for most people.

People from modern Euro-American cultures have shown a unique historic willingness to question their own cultural assumptions including those related to diet but this openness is not shared by everyone. I have debated Muslims have insisted that their proscription against eating pork is not primarily religious but is based on the “fact” that the food contains unhealthy bacteria and worms. They would be doing everyone a favor by banning pork for everyone. The willingness to question our diets have led to some strange fads. For example, butter was abandoned in favour of margarine by people concerned about high cholesterol levels. When the original research supporting this change was debunked, people flocked back to butter with the assumption that there is something artificial and unhealthy about eating margarine. Now “plant butter” is on the market but it is not clear how this new product differs from margarine.

If we do not eat a food for an extended period of time our bodies will often react with the feeling of disagreeableness should it be re-introduced thus creating a self-fulfilling prophesy. With some foods such as milk, we may even lose the enzymes needed for digestion. It begins with an accepted authority suggesting the elimination of wheat, milk, seafood or some other suspect food group to combat symptoms such as headaches, sleeplessness, drowsiness, or lack of energy. The patient will subsequently either feel better or not. If the patient feels better he or she will likely attribute this positive result to the change in diet. If the patient does not feel better then the practitioner suggests removing different foods from a proscribed list. When new symptoms occur, or old ones reoccur, the impulse is to stop eating yet another food. My partner

is now intolerant to wheat, oats, milk, shell fish, peanuts, tomatoes (except in pizza sauce), oranges, pork, mushrooms, watermelon and wines from California. She has never been diagnosed with a food allergy. Advertisers appeal to the food-phobic by stating what their product is not rather than what it is. For example, people will often purchase gluten and lactose free products without knowing what is being used as a substitute. Sometimes nothing is used as a substitute. For example, what is marketed as “lactose free yogurt” has all the original lactose but the enzymes needed to digest it have been added. Whether marketing foods as lactose free that have always been without lactose, like goat cheese, or subtly adding the digestive enzymes, the marketing reinforces the narrative that there is something wrong with basically nutritious foods and that the alternative is more expensive “health food.” This bias is replicated with respect to medicine.

The term “alternate medicine” generates the notion that there are ways outside of scientific medicine to treat illness with equal efficacy. The name “naturopathy,” implies that modern medicine is unnatural. But modern medicine is constituted by proven treatments that are often based on older folk medicines. For example, chewing the bark of the white willow is an effective pain reliever used as a folk remedy by several cultures aboriginal to the Americas. Aspirin is a copy of white willow. Both are proven therapies for pain relief and blood clotting, but neither have been shown to cure cancer. Failure to understand the distinction between proven and unproven therapies can lead to death. For example in 2012 Ezekiel Stephan, a 19 month old infant, died of meningitis. His parents had been advised to take the boy to a hospital but they chose to instead treat him with “natural remedies” such as garlic, horseradish and apple cider. In 2015 eleven year old Makayla Sault stopped taking chemotherapy for leukemia and she was taken to the [Hippocrates Institute](#) in Florida, an institute that uses supplements, massages and

raw food consisting largely of sprouts and wheatgrass. While chemotherapy has a 75% success rate in treating the type of cancer she had, no studies have shown any degree of success for the treatments given at this institute. The notion that modern medicine is harmful, ineffective or unnatural is grounded in homeopathy.

In 1774 England, Benjamin Jesty successfully tested his hypothesis that infection with cowpox could offer protection against smallpox. In 1796 German physician [Samuel Hahnemann](#) concluded that a substance that causes symptoms of a disease in healthy people can cure similar symptoms in sick people. His homeopathic remedies were made by diluting a symptom producing substance repeatedly until the final product was chemically indistinguishable from the diluent. Between each dilution practitioners called homeopaths may hit and/or shake the product to help the diluent, such as water, “remember” the original substance. Homeopaths attempt to match such dilutions to the patient to promote the body’s ‘vital force’ and stimulate healing. Although homeopathic remedies have been found to be [biochemically](#) inert (Ernst, 2002; Linde et al., 1997; Shang et al., 2005) they have become central to the anti-western medicine movement.

According to their national website, naturopaths use homeopathy and traditional Chinese medicine in the service of regulating the individual’s “vital force.” To the extent that naturopaths advocate the proven use of herbal medicines, or lifestyle choices like regular exercise, sunlight, fresh air and bathing to build general health, they reinforce modern medicine. Unfortunately, naturopathy has also embraced the pseudoscientific. Dr. Harriett Hall pithily stated, “Naturopathy doesn't make sense. The things naturopaths do that are good are not special, and the things they do that are special are not good” (Hall, 2010, p. 5). After graduating from the Bastyr University with a doctorate in naturopathic medicine Britt Hermes explained:

Naturopaths are not trained similar to physicians, nurse practitioners, or physician assistants.... Naturopaths are trained in a hodgepodge of antiquated methods, mystical theories, and bare-bone fundamentals of medicine. (Senapathy, 2016, para. 6)

Naturopathic students are required to master homeopathy, energy modalities, herbalism and chiropractic-like manipulations. There is a strong emphasis on anti-vaccine promotion and alternative cancer treatments. Naturopaths also claim affinity to traditional Chinese medicine defining the concept of “chi” to be the “vital energy” hypothesized by Hahnemann. In 2012, I answered an advertisement for a one hour acupuncture treatment by a doctor of Chinese and Korean medicine. The \$30.00 charge seemed a reasonable price to satisfy my curiosity. I was admitted into a consulting room where Dr. Li had me clasp a galvanic response machine that was connected to a computer. With a show of deep concern Dr. Li diagnosed me as having liver, kidney and bowel disease. This surprised me because I had a full physical examination three months previously and had not been diagnosed with any of these conditions. We proceeded to another room where I disrobed and had acupuncture needles inserted in various points on my chest, arms and legs. He gave each needle a twist before leaving the room. On his return, about twenty minutes later, I asked what specifically this treatment was for thinking it would have had something to do with his diagnoses. He appeared surprised by my question and said, “Oh, it’s just your general health.” After dressing, I returned to his outer office where the receptionist was packaging a series of medicinal herbal teas. These expensive teas had not been mentioned previously. When I objected, the doctor’s assistant turned to my partner and said “he’s afraid.” My partner, with a look of loving concern, encouraged me to purchase the teas for my health. I agreed providing I was given the names of each potion. Following the homeopathic tradition Dr. Li wrote out their Latin names, and subsequent analysis revealed that 11 of the potions were

relaxants and one was an aphrodisiac. None had any obvious relationship with liver, kidney or bowel disease, and I have not suffered any of these conditions since.

Before we label Dr. Li as a scammer, we need to consider a cross-cultural explanation. Modern medicine diagnoses and treats conditions. Pre-modern treatments often identified evil spirits or a lack of life balance as the cause of ill health. According to his traditional culture, North Americans do not live in balance and this results in health problems. Dr. Li assumed that people not practising his culture would have these conditions, but it is necessary to convince us to change our ways before the conditions become untreatable.

About 10 years after my experience with the Chinese/Korean doctor, my partner and her sister suggested that I see a “great new” acupuncturist in Regina. I demurred on the grounds that I do not wish to seek medical treatment unless I have a condition I want treated. My sister-in-law turned to my partner and said “he’s afraid.” The belief system had created a stock answer to explain acupuncture “hesitancy.”

A more recent stock answer is to accuse doubters of racism. Since the Enlightenment that brought science and reason to the fore began in Europe, inviting others to share the methods of the Enlightenment is portrayed as assimilationist. Publisher Scott Douglas Jacobsen was accordingly accused of racism and arrogance by the President of the British Columbia Naturopathic Association after he wrote an article (Jacobsen, 2020) challenging the assumptions of naturopathy. Jacobsen turned the tables stating:

I find the charge backwards, blind, and, indeed, “racist and... arrogant” of you. Where you’re coming out as among the worst type of arrogant racists, someone who presents themselves as anti-racist by claiming others are racist with an assumption of moral superiority by asserting another as “culturally arrogant,” but, in fact, someone assuming

that only individuals capable of or acting in... certain cultural practices have been one 'race' or ethnicity are indeed being racist. (Jacobsen, personal communication, February 2021)

Ericka Li (2023) proposed a tripartite distinction of “Premodern,” “Modern,” and “Postmodern” in describing medical practices. She described modern medicine as, “a product of the Enlightenment, prioritizing reason, science, and individual sovereignty [transcending] geographical boundaries and ethnic divides,” (Li, 2023 Stop calling my profession 'Western Medicine,' para. 4). She illustrated how postmodern medicine seeks to dismantle modern medicine’s underlying philosophy using the example of postmodern gender dysphoria:

There is no objective data obtainable through testing that can disconfirm the transgender diagnosis. Regardless of a teenager’s biological sex, history of family dysfunction or sexual trauma, age of onset of transgender identity, potential social contagion, or autism, the prescribed treatment remains the same—puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones. (Li, 2023 Queering medical science, para. 5)

Dr. E. Li noted that postmodern medicine has no means of identifying those who would benefit from medical transition to the exclusion of those who wouldn’t. While a practitioner of modern medicine would consider the severe risks of treatment aware that even the existence of a single detransitioner would sound alarm bells, postmodern practitioners are concerned only about current identification. While modern medicine seeks to collaborate with parents and guardians in maintaining family cohesion, the postmodern practitioner regards parents as a threat. She noted that for modern medicine it is unthinkable to pit a divorced mother and father against each other, using the parent more willing to transition their child as leverage against the hesitant one. She said postmodern doctors play “word games” to protect themselves from charges of misdiagnosis:

During the 2023 gender symposium co-sponsored by Seattle Children's Hospital, I was informed that I must not use the word "detransitioner" because it is "harmful to the community." Instead, I was instructed to say "people who changed their gender goals." (Li, 2023 Queering medical ethics, para. 3)

According to E. Li, concerns about morbidity, mortality, providing false hope, and patient abandonment vanish in postmodernism and are replaced with a concern that Trans People as a class gain collective power. The result is that there can be "no meaningful distinction between trans identities that began in toddlerhood or adolescence, those resulting from social contagion or autism, or between real and factitious cases" (Li, 2023 Blurring boundaries para. 1)

As can be seen, Transgenderism and Queer Theory did not evolve from modern medicine but from New Age philosophies that, in turn, attempted to preserve the pre-eminence of folk remedies. What is taken as "postmodern medicine" is the latest attempt to preserve and reify unproven treatments in part, by changing the meaning of words. "Treatment" no longer means something done to combat a specific illnesses but something done to "treat" the general condition of being "Western." Alternative foods are given the name of foods they are meant to replace. More recently, a woman is no longer defined by her sex but by her decision to identify as one with the result that there can be no woman-specific health conditions. "Breast feeding" is changed to "chest feeding" and "mother" becomes "birthing person." The transgenderism of which E. Li speaks, and the "health food" and "alternative medicine" turns are part of a larger movement that seeks to "deconstruct" modern civilization. "Racism" no longer means an ideology to justify the discrimination of groups of people but the advocacy of merit and ability in academic or career choice. "Systemic racism" no longer means identifiable mechanisms that discriminate against groups or classes of people but the assumption of such discrimination as

applied to non-white peoples. If this new movement were truly postmodern, then this belief could be deconstructed but any such attempt is met with the charge of racism. Thus, we can see that this movement uses the methods of postmodernism but holds itself to be immune from deconstruction. In this it mimics the fascism of Martin Heidegger (1962) who held that science and reason are subject to the superior and true knowledge of a Dasein or Fuhrer. The cancellation and ultimate suicide of Richard Bilkzsto (Robertson, 2023) offers an object lesson.

Drawing on his experience as a school principal in both countries, Bilkzsto disputed a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) trainer's unsupported assertion that Canada was more racist than the United States. DEI provides mandatory training to employees in the new ideology which has variously been called "political correctness" (Mueller, 2004), "cancel culture" (Wright, 2023; Young, 2021), "gender ideology" (Frederick & Balswick, 2011; Miller, 2018), "critical social justice" (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020), "Cultural Marxism" (Coughlin & Higgins, 2019; Lindsay, 2020) and "Woke Identitarianism" (Robertson, 2023). The DEI trainer did not offer any argument in support of her assertion, but said the job of white people is to believe and failure to do so is to support "white supremacy." She continued to use Bilkzsto as an example of white supremacy in a subsequent session he was forced to attend. He was then told he would not be receiving any further contracts of employment. Other professionals have also been harshly cancelled with a predictable silencing effect (Applebaum, 2021; Bloch, 2023; Kriegman, 2022; Wright, 2022).

This new movement substitutes Marx's "working class" with oppressed "races" such as blacks and Muslims. Like pre-WWII fascists, it has formed alliances with multinational corporations (Samuels, 2022) and it engages in identity politics racializing certain groups. It has borrowed the New Age Movement's antipathy for all things western coupled with a

romanticization of non-European cultures. For example, New Agers embraced a form of Aboriginal Spirituality with some becoming pipe carriers. One New Ager, Charles Storm, inventing the modern medicine wheel with quadrants representing the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual (Robertson, 2014). This movement operates as a quasi-religion built on the myths of the blank slate, ghost in the machine and the noble savage (Pinker, 2003).

This article has traced the contribution of New Age foodism and “alternate” medicine to a political movement that devalues science, reason and all things “Western.” It is unlikely that anyone consciously combined the disparate pieces of antagonistic philosophies into a new proto-religion that was then marketed. I have argued that this Wokism is likely a product of cultural evolution whereby random units of culture that Richard Dawkins (1976, 1982) called memes combined with other units that could then be copied from brain to brain forming a kind of mind virus (Robertson, 2021). In this article I have argued that New Ageism has played an understudied role in its incubation.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Sharon Romanow and Scott Douglas Jacobsen for their suggestions with respect to content and editing.

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