

## Introduction

When you start nattering about being a philosopher, you better have a good grip on the literature that forms the *Philosophical Canon*.<sup>1</sup> There is a good number of 'lists' on-line to get you started on reading, but if you want to get to first base as a philosopher, be prepared to spend about 10 years in reading, being sure to understand what you are reading.

The second major position is for a philosopher to know their own philosophical position, the lens through which they see their world. My lens is pragmatism, what is yours?

### [INTRO CLIP]

During my decades of reading and learning, and through a 5-year, tortuous process at the post-doctoral level with a university, I have come to think I am a pragmatist.

My position is that if I see it, which is the point of view of a realist or empiricist, then the best answer as for '*why*' I see it is most likely the right answer.

This interpretation of chiropractic lessens reliance on Dewey<sup>2</sup> and others who represent the American origins<sup>3</sup> of pragmatism, and increases reliance on the Japanese philosophy of science. Here conciliation and agreement through acceptable compromises are preferable to the Western view of confrontational resolution by argument driven from quantitative data sets.

One of the punctilious things about writing philosophy is precision with words. If, for example, I apply the term 'vague' in any sense, I need to understand what the term 'vague' means in a philosophical sense. Here I rely on Swinburne's arguments.<sup>4</sup>

A quick example is the statement 'I will arrive at ten o'clock'. This can only ever be a vague statement. We have issues of '10'o'clock where? AM or PM? My watch or yours? And if I do arrive when my watch says 10:00 it is only true for less than one second. It would be 9:59 and 59 seconds, 1 second past 10. There are amazing extensions of this argument which go to the ideas our brain filters and smooths the real-time input and there is an argument that our experience of the world is always a few seconds behind real occurrences.

---

1. Philosophical canon. URL <https://philosophyoutreachproject.azurewebsites.net/philosophical-canon/>

2. Haack S. The Pragmatist Theory of Truth. Br J Phil Sci. 1976;27(3):231-9. URL <http://www.jstor.com/stable/686121>.

3. Howard VA. The Pragmatic Maximum. (Review) Four Pragmatists by I. Scheffler. Br J Phil Sci. 1975;26(4):343-51. URL <http://www.jstor.com/stable/686680>.

4. Swinburne RG. Vagueness, Inexactness, and Imprecision. Br J Philos Sci. 1969;19(4):281-99. URL <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjps/19.4.281>.

Due to this vagueness, a philosopher of chiropractic can not stand up and say, for example, that '*universal intelligence is a thing*'. Now, a *Chiropractic Philosopher* can do this, but I can't. I am bound to provide an argument, one way or the other. In particular, what does 'universal' mean, what is 'intelligence', and what is 'a thing'.

These arguments usually rely on the concept of *a priori*, a theoretical claim from which argument flows, as with the 32 principles of Stephenson that follow his broad opening gambit.<sup>Stephenson's 33 Principles 5</sup>

As a pragmatist I am not suggesting whether this is right or wrong, just that it is how I see it. To find any meaning you must form your own conclusion.

The third and final characteristic of a philosopher of chiropractic is to have a body of work that you have written, argued through critical peer-review, and published. Without this, you have no face validity in the profession, and with this, you position yourself for critical argument against you.

Some of you will say that publication is an elitist activity, which is really quite silly. There is nothing elite about the pain of writing and the lessons in humility gained through critical peer review. Peer review is like having an observer in your clinic telling you that every adjustment you made is performed wrongly, and that your clinical decision making is flawed.

A major problem for chiropractic as a science-based clinical discipline is that there are far too few chiropractors who write, let alone think about what they teach, let alone publish under peer-review.

Even more damning on the profession is the paucity of academics who write and publish. Usually a profession's intellectual core is rooted in its academics and they take the lead in writing to advance thought within the profession. Chiropractic should be embarrassed with its shortfall in this matter.

Now, if I had to make a call about whom I regard as philosophers of chiropractic I would offer first and foremost the founder, Daniel David Palmer. The evidence is that DD thought deeply about what he did, said, and wrote.

His son Bartlett styled himself more as the developer of chiropractic and commercialised the enterprises of practice and education. Was he a philosopher? Perhaps, at least many think he was, but is a pithy advertising slogan 'philosophy'?

---

5. Stephenson RW. Chiropractic Textbook. Davenport. Palmer School of Chiropractic. 1927. xiii (Introduction).

Stephenson? No, and certainly none of his contemporaries such as Watkins and Nugent as promoted by Joe Keating. Fred Barge?<sup>6</sup> Yes, in his dogmatic North American manner and as a pendulum between argument and belief. Sinnott?<sup>7</sup> No, as he writes of *Chiropractic Philosophy* as his belief.

Joe Janse? Yes, to a degree. And before him, and from the same institution, Forster. And more recently, Meridel Gatterman,<sup>8</sup> Christopher Kent,<sup>9</sup> Dennis Richards,<sup>10</sup> and Eric Seiler.<sup>11</sup>

Gatterman clarified the paradigm of chiropractic as being patient centred, and Richards built strongly on that<sup>12</sup> and from a difficult political position. I am looking forward to seeing much more of his current work based on his post-doctoral studies.

Christopher Kent is a clear thinker and a strong writer and his work deserves to be read and savoured, especially his *Models of Subluxation*<sup>13</sup> and his critical analysis<sup>14</sup> of the folly of the *General Chiropractic Council* of the UK. Also from the United States was Virgil Strang who through one textbook and his classroom teachings at Palmer has influenced the thinking of thousands.

In Australia we have Kleynhans who was prolific at the end of the 1990s but is now regrettably silent. His 1999 paper '*Models of chiropractic care*'<sup>15</sup> shows a deep understanding of the issues philosophers must think about. We also have Peter Rome who

- 
6. FH Barge. Life without fear. Vol V. Chiropractic's major philosophical tenets. Bawden Bros. Eldridge Iowa. 1987.
  7. Rob Sinnott. Sinnott's textbook of chiropractic philosophy. 1e. Frankfort Illinois. Self published. 2009. URL <https://www.lulu.com/content/hardcover-book/sinnotts-textbook-of-chiropractic-philosophy/7598355?page=1&pageSize=4>
  8. Gatterman MI. Teaching chiropractic principles through patient centered problems. J Can Chiropr Assoc. 1997 Mar;41(1):27-3. URL <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2485294/>
  9. Kent C. Proposed neurobiological processes associated with models of vertebral subluxation: Dysafferentation, dyskinesia, dysponesis, dysautonomia, neuroplasticity and ephaptic transmission. *Ann Vert Sublux Res*. 2019 Aug;2019(0):113-16. URL <https://www.vertebralesubluxationresearch.com/2019/08/02/proposed-neurobiological-processes-associated-with-models-of-vertebral-subluxation-dysafferentation-dyskinesia-dysponesis-dysautonomia-neuroplasticity-and-ephaptic-transmission/>
  10. Richards D. Mechanic or gardener? Contrasting philosophical models underlying health care. Chiropr J Aust. 2013 Mar;43(1):19-24. URL [http://www.chiroindex.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/CJA\\_43\\_1.pdf](http://www.chiroindex.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/CJA_43_1.pdf)
  11. Seiler E. Primal principle, pandemics, and the price of progress: How chiropractic's major premise, cultural anthropology, and ancient scripture shout in unison where we've gone wildly wrong. *Asia-Pac Chiropr J*. 2022;2.6. URL [apcj.net/papers-issue-2-6/#SeilerPrimalPrinciple](http://apcj.net/papers-issue-2-6/#SeilerPrimalPrinciple)
  12. Richards D. Paradigm shift: Why the need? Chiropr J Aust. 2008 Sep;38(3):87-8.
  13. Kent C. Models of subluxation. *J Vert Sublux Res*. 1996 ;1(1):11-17. URL <https://www.vertebralesubluxationresearch.com/2017/09/10/models-of-vertebral-subluxation-a-review/>
  14. Kent C. An analysis of the General Chiropractic Council's policy on claims made for the vertebral subluxation complex. *J Philos Princ Pract Chiropr*. 2011 Spring;2011(2):Online access only p 1-9. URL <https://www.vertebralesubluxationresearch.com/2011/09/11/an-analysis-of-the-general-chiropractic-councils-policy-on-claims-made-for-the-vertebral-subluxation-complex/>
  15. Kleynhans AM. A chiropractic conceptual framework. Part 4: Models of chiropractic health care. *Chiropr J Aust*. 1999 Mar;29(1):11-21.

writes with John Waterhouse and together they are eminently capable at clarifying chiropractic's contemporary debate.

Other noted writers whom I shall address in Video 5 of this series, called the Two-Sided Coin, are Mark Force and Charles Blum. I also enjoy the thinking of Monika Buerger. Her presentation for the *Australian Spinal Research Foundation* goes close to examining the questions a true philosopher addresses. I recommend you watch her interview with Marcus Chacos, the link is in the transcript.<sup>16</sup>

Buerger is asking some big questions about the way science contributes to a deeper understanding of the clinical outcomes she sees in her practice. The way she addresses them is essentially by asking the classic philosopher's question of '*what happened and why?*'

And I really must mention my mentor from Japan, the late Kazuyoshi Takeyachi, whose conversations and teaching materials of philosophy were of a very high order.

So where does this leave us? Well, if you are happy to hang out with your tribe from time to time and talk about the magnificent things you see in practice, and to re-charge your batteries by talking about the very wide range of things we consider represent chiropractic philosophy, then well and good and all power to you.

*Chiropractic Philosophy* will certainly strengthen your sense of purpose and commitment to the big ideas of chiropractic and what it can do for so many people.

I come back to my proposition that '*Chiropractic Philosophy*' and the '*Philosophy of Chiropractic*' are two sides of the one chiropractic coin. A strong grasp of what chiropractic is, as explained through chiropractic philosophy, provides the foundation to follow the academic pathway towards being a *Philosopher of Chiropractic*, able to ask 'why' chiropractic is what it seems to be.

---

16. Buerger M. Presentation: Clinical Applications of Chiropractic Philosophy. URL <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mxwABwydJ9lMaSZ6zJYHm3RZL89gaWDB/view?usp=sharing>

This video is indexed at [ebrall.com](http://ebrall.com) as '01-4 Philosophy'

**Indexing terms:** Philosophical Canon; pragmatism, pragmatist; Dewey; Japanese philosophy; vague; Swinburne; a priori; Stephenson's 33 Principles; publication; Palmer, DD; Palmer, BJ; Watkins, CO; Nugent, J; Barge, Fred; Sinnott, Rob; Janse Joseph; Forster, Arthur; Strang, Virgil; Kleynhans, Andries; Gatterman, Meridel; Kent, Christopher; Richards, Dennis; General Chiropractic Council (GCC); Rome, Peter; Waterhouse, John; Seiler, Eric; Force, Mark; Blum, Charles; Buerger, Monika; Takeyachi, Kazuyoshi.