

Modernized Chiropractic's Core Concepts

ROGER R. COLEMAN, D.C.*

***Modernized Chiropractic* is widely recognized as chiropractic's first textbook. The text places great importance on the terms Special Philosophy, Subluxation, Spontaneity and Thrust. These terms are indispensable to an understanding of how early chiropractors viewed their profession. A better understanding of these terms may give the modern reader a window into the thought process of a group that had a great effect on the beginnings of the chiropractic profession and whose influence is seen today.**

Introduction

Modernized Chiropractic^{1,2} put into print a detailed view of the infant profession of chiropractic. It gave the reader an understanding of the philosophy, art, and science of an American-born healing arts profession. The text could not only be instructive for the graduate and undergraduate doctor of chiropractic but could also give information to the interested lay person or provide a roadmap to appropriate boards and legislators. It may be said that this book today, largely unread, vastly unappreciated, and even unknown to many in the profession it sought to describe and improve, was and possibly could be, if not all things to all people, an indispensable part of the legacy and the present for those seeking a better understanding of chiropractic. Understandably, the wording and tone of the text, a product of its time, lend themselves to misinterpretation and mockery when attempting to bring it into relevance today. In attempting to convey that tone, the bolding, italicizing, and capitalizations used for emphasis in the original have been preserved in the quoted materials below.

While the capacity of a journal article to discuss all the facets of this two-volume

text is woefully inadequate, a fair look at four concepts: Special Philosophy, Subluxation, Spontaneity, and Thrust, which are of indispensable importance and arguably essential to an understanding of chiropractic's first textbook can be accomplished.

Special Philosophy

Published in 1906, the wording of *Modernized Chiropractic*¹ is a product of its time. Its authors, Oakley G. Smith, Solon M. Langworthy, and Minora C. Paxson, Dean, President, and Professor of Gynecology and Obstetrics respectively at the American School of Chiropractic, often use somewhat foreign and confusing terms and words. But a careful read allows for an appreciation of the methods and concepts put forth. *Modernized Chiropractic*¹ proclaims that "Chiropractic is a separate and distinct system of therapeutics and prophylaxis differing in various vital and valuable points from all other systems."^{1(p.17)} Chiropractic recognizes that displaced structures can interfere with normal blood and nerve supply.^{1(pp.17,18)} At this point the knowledgeable reader will realize that chiropractic was not alone in looking at altered blood and nerve supply as a cause of disease. The authors also recognize this and proceed to argue, "That which is the real **foundation** of a school is the **philosophy**, the **theory**, the **practice**, the **science** and the art peculiar to itself."^{1(pp.17,18)} They acknowledge that

*rrroger2706@gmail.com

they are not the only profession to recognize the problems produced by altered blood and nerve supply, the problems they call “the pathological foundation of all localized tissue change”^{1(p.17)} but unlike this other school they do not make this premise the foundation of the profession.^{1(p.18)}

Chiropractic regards the interference with blood and nerve supply “...as a single stone in the **great archway** that supports health, the **keystone of which is the Chiropractic (Napravit) Thrust.**”^{1(p.18)} And as if to remove any doubt as to the importance of this concept they further state that the “...**THRUST, is unquestionably the foundation of Chiropractic.**”^{1(p.18)} For the horrified student who has spent so much of their time being taught that the subluxation was at the heart of chiropractic or if one is of another bent, that subluxations, like unicorns, were very rare indeed, it must come as a shock that these scribes of old might appear to think that the treatment was more important than the cause. In addition, their contention that interfering with the blood vessels or the nerves that go to a particular tissue is bad for the subject is hardly such a revolutionary thought that one would think it would bring forth so much praise or ire depending upon which side of the philosophical fence one might be standing. They contend that the Chiropractic Thrust can make corrections with “minute accuracy”^{1(p.18)} resulting in a change in the tension of ligaments and muscles, which helps hold the vertebrae in its new position and allow the improvement in nerve and blood supply for a sufficient time in order to affect a partial or complete restoration of “weakened structures”^{1(p.21)}. The importance of the Thrust to chiropractic is compared to the importance of the brain to a human.^{1(p.21)} “The **ultimate purpose** of the Thrust is the **removal** of the cause of disease by the **replacement of displaced structures**, especially the **reduction of subluxations.**”^{1(p.22)} But the Thrust is not designed to take a subluxated vertebra from one fixed position of malalignment to a fixed position of alignment.

Subluxation

“A simple subluxation is a condition in which the exact relation between the articulating surfaces of bones has been altered from normal, the articulating surfaces still remaining in partial contact.”^{1(p.24)} We are admonished that there is not merely a need to line up the spine. That a subluxated vertebra is not a fixed brick in a wall but that it moves and in different positions produces more or less interference with blood vessels and nerves.^{1(pp.22,24,27)} The purpose of the Thrust is to correct the subluxation by changing the center of its field of motion such that the “hub” is returned to its normal position.^{1(pp.23,24,26)} A more modern wording of this thought might be that the vertebra was returned to its proper position allowing for the normal equal bilateral motion of the articulation. So, for those who place the early chiropractors upon some high pedestal of philosophical reasoning, this seems rather mundane and for those who feel that the chiropractic philosophy is near to pagan rituals this is also non-inspiring. They do state that, “the ultimate purpose of the Thrust is the **removal** of the cause of disease...”^{1(p.22)} but they talked about the idea of having altered blood or nerve supply as “the pathological foundation of all localized tissue change.”^{1(p.17)} Calling altered blood or nerve supply “the pathological foundation of all localized tissue change”^{1(p.17)} would certainly not be considered an accurate statement today. But considering that *Modernized Chiropractic* was published in 1906, four years before the release of the Flexner report³ which sought to abolish sub-standard medical schools, many of which might be viewed today as more associated with witchcraft as opposed to modern medicine, this statement seems reasonably mild. In addition, *Modernized Chiropractic* asserts that the Chiropractic Thrust also produces Spontaneity which they consider to be an essential part of chiropractic.^{1(p.30)}

Spontaneity

“**Spontaneity** is the name we have decided to use to indicate certain **forms of activity** produced in ligaments, cartilage, muscles, and other tissues of the body as a result of the **Chiropractic Thrust**.”^{1(p.30)} They note that Webster defines spontaneity as “the tendency to undergo change characteristic of both animal and vegetable organisms not restrained or checked by environment.”^{1(p.30)} *Modernized Chiropractic* proposes that Thrust is needed to produce Spontaneity because both rapid delivery and an accurate adjustment are necessary.^{1(p.21)} As this concept seems difficult to explain, *Modernized Chiropractic* makes a number of attempts to clarify Spontaneity. “The facts are a single adjustment moves the vertebra but a trifle, but this movement be it ever so small, when accomplished by the Chiropractic Thrust produces an **influence** upon the surrounding tissue, as well as the centers involved, which tends to make **permanent** the **slight gain** made in normalizing the center of motion. **This influence we have named Spontaneity.**”^{1(p.29)} “The value of Spontaneity produced by thrust, coupled with accurate adjustment **“cannot be overestimated”**^{1(p.21)} But perhaps its most clear attempt to explain Spontaneity in a manner that can be understood at a practical level is to compare it to an unconscious man being gently shaken awake; Spontaneity being analogous to the shaking that brings the man out of his unconscious state.^{1(p.31)} “In other words, the bodily forces which were dormant have been literally **shaken into activity.**”^{1(p.31)} In this philosophy a rapid delivery and accurate adjustment produced by a Chiropractic Thrust is needed to produce Spontaneity but it does not take a complete “mechanical correction” to produce Spontaneity.^{1(p.21)} Yet they note that neither a slow nor violent force produces Spontaneity and they are careful to warn that it is not a stimulation but the effect of an adjustment that moves the structures toward a more normal

position which produces Spontaneity.^{1(p.29,30,31)} We can conclude that Spontaneity derives from a properly delivered Thrust which is quick and accurate and moves the articulation toward a more normal position and brings the structures out of their dormant state in the same manner as gently shaking awake an unconscious person.

PHOTOGRAPH EXACT SIZE of the Two Volumes of **MODERNIZED CHIROPRACTIC**

By DRS. SMITH, LANGWORTHY and PAXSON, Founders and Incorporators
 of the American School of Chiropractic, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

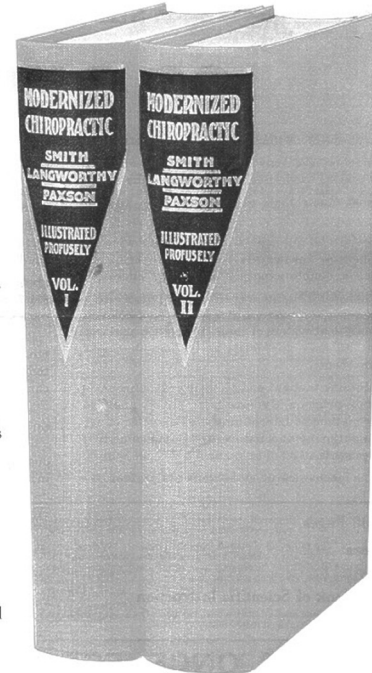
The Title letters are in Gold Leaf

The label is surrounded by a Gold Leaf border

The binding is of red Buckram

The paper is the finest quality, dull finish and easy on one's eyes

The type is the production of the Monotype large, clear cut and easy to read



Over 700 pages, each page a volume of new and valuable ideas

Over 200 original illustrations, including drawings and half-tones all of which were made especially for this work

All half tones inserted on heavy glazed stock

Exact size of each volume 2x6¼x9¼ in.

A WORK which has been pronounced A CLASSIC

Figure 1. Ad for Modernized Chiropractic, c. 1906

Thrust

The authors have called the Thrust the cornerstone of Chiropractic. They define it as follows, “**The Chiropractic Thrust** is a movement of the hand of the operator when in contact with some point on the patient, the delivery of which movement is **non-violent** and **gaugeable** as to **rapidity, pressure, and direction.**”^{1(p.36)} The value of the Thrust is such that “A Chiropractor without the Thrust would be as helpless as a doctor of medicine without his dope, a surgeon without the knife, a hydrotherapist

without water.”^{1(p.36)} The authors were concerned that the real value of the mechanical properties had not been understood. They explained seven mechanical factors that they felt were important to understand regarding the Thrust.

1. It was applied in a quick manner to the smallest possible area in a similar manner that allowed “a **quick stroke with a light hammer**”^{1(p.37)} to start a nail as opposed to applying a large amount of dead weight.^{1(p.37)}

2. It disrupts only the tissues involved in the subluxation.^{1(p.37)} Their illustration was a stack of boxes in which one toward the middle of the stack is slightly misaligned. If you attempt to align that box by a slow forceful pressure you will affect all the boxes. But if a quick force is applied to only the misaligned box it can be tapped into alignment.^{1(p.37)}

3. Because it is precise you can adjust one subluxation and not affect another subluxation near it, allowing the second subluxation to be adjusted in the manner needed for that particular misalignment.^{1(p.38)}

4. By using an application appropriate to each area it can be used on articulations other than those in the spine.^{1(p.38)}

5. The speed, direction and force of the Thrust can be modified for the particular case at hand and the direction of the Thrust can be changed during the delivery.^{1(p.38)}

6. Combination adjustments can be given where multiple contacts are made to allow for the movement of more than one articulation in the desired manner with a single Thrust.^{1(p.38)}

7. Small areas of the malalignment can be contacted to adjust the displaced structures.^{1(p.39)}

They also defined multiple physiological properties.

1. The Thrust produces a negative pressure in the joint and enhances “**imbibition of nutrition**”^{1(p.39)}

2. There is an increase in “**appositional growth**” in the cartilage.^{1(p.39)}

3. The Thrust releases pressure on vessels and nerves in the foramina.^{1(p.40)}

Discussion

The subluxation is often held out as the concept that lives in the *sanctum sanctorum* of the chiropractic profession. It is the entity that, if it did not exist, there would be no reason for historical chiropractic to exist. The subluxation is the problem that needs correction. Without a problem there is no need for chiropractic. Yet for such a necessary and central concept it is remarkable that *Modernized Chiropractic* refers to the Thrust rather than the Subluxation as the keystone of the chiropractic profession. For the most part *Modernized Chiropractic* is a book on biomechanics. Many tend to think of the early chiropractic professionals as bearded gurus dedicated to the worship of Innate Intelligence. But the founding principles in *Modernized Chiropractic* appear to be much more practical. They are more akin to a farmer saying he was going to remove a dam in an irrigation ditch and allow the water to flow to his crops. This is hardly a revolutionary thought.

This comparison to a farmer can be disputed by noting the following reference, “The **ultimate purpose** of the Thrust is the **removal of the cause of disease by the replacement of displaced structures**, especially the **reduction of subluxations**”,^{1(p.22)} and correctly observing that not all disease is caused by altered nerve or blood supply. This inaccurate and extreme statement could have been made much more palatable by substituting “a” for “the” in front of the words “cause of disease.” But it does not change the fact that many of the explanations for these concepts read more like an instruction manual for an electrician or plumber than a philosophical guide. Given the hyperbolic statements not infrequently used in advertisements and speeches of the time, and even today, this was unfortunate but should not be held to today’s standards. Some of us will remember when tobacco use was thought to be a healthy practice but

none of us read *Modernized Chiropractic* in 1906.

A further partial case can be made that the word Spontaneity takes a mystical turn. In one of the attempted explanations of Spontaneity the authors state, "It is an **admitted fact** that there is a **hereditary force** within the various structures of our bodies which produces **variations** in **structure** and **function regardless of environment**. This force becomes **dormant** but is **liberated** by the application of the Chiropractic Thrust, the result of which is **structural replacement** coupled with **spontaneous regeneration**."¹(pp.31,32) But if we once again use the farmer and crop analogy, we could say water and nutrients allow the forces dormant in seeds to be liberated and spontaneously grow. It is true that certain parts of the text can be viewed to represent something more than simple physiology but for the most part the core of the principles of this text are a mechanic's guide along with some archaic and flowery language coupled with substantial salesmanship. And it could be argued that this was the intent of this two-volume set. Tell the why, show the how, and sell the two. The core principles of *Modernized Chiropractic* might offer a practical understanding of why chiropractic as expressed in this text survived its early years. It was based on the understandable logic of practical life with a little, or a lot, depending on your definition, of added pizzazz.

Historians have shown interest in *Modernized Chiropractic*^{1,2} and its authors. Faulkner, in his book *The Chiropractor's Protégé*, states, "[Oakley] Smith wrote the manuscript on every piece of paper he could find sometimes even scraps of paper. . . . Much of the handwritten manuscript survives in the Oakley Smith papers."⁴(p.378) He notes that through dates on many of the pieces of paper it can be determined that the writing of the book was underway by 1 April 1904 and continued until at least 16 June 1906.⁴(p.392)

Troyanovich calls *Modernized Chiropractic* "a well written dissertation that

would easily work as classroom texts for the teaching of chiropractic methods."⁵(p.103)

"[Langworthy] had distinguished himself as an excellent practitioner; had established a top-notch chiropractic educational institution with a superior faculty; had invented, patented and produced chiropractic equipment for use in his own practice and for sale to the consuming chiropractic profession; and had produced the first professional journal and text books."⁵(p.104)

With their red buckram binding and gold lettering the books were impressive but the authors must not have thought that they would be a best seller as only 500 copies were ordered.⁴(pp.392,393)

In a bit of irony, Smith was soon to leave the chiropractic profession. By 1908 he had incorporated the Oakley Smith School of Naprapathy in Chicago, Ill.⁴(pp.421,425) Minora Paxson also left chiropractic and by 1909 had joined the American Naprapathic Association.⁴(p.425) Smith considered her a founder of naprapathy and she practiced that profession for 34 years. She retired at the age of 90 and passed away four years later at the age of 94.⁶ Langworthy continued in chiropractic, and following an illness, passed away on 28 September 1922 at the age of 54.⁷ He was buried in an unmarked grave in Dubuque, Ia.⁵(pp.154,156,162)⁷ Fortunately this was corrected when a former editor of this journal, Dr. Stephan Troyanovich, ordered a gray granite headstone which was transported to the Linwood Cemetery by previous and current Executive Directors of the Association for the History of Chiropractic, Alana Callender, Ed.D. and Roger Hynes, D.C., to be placed on Dr. Langworthy's grave.⁵(pp.156,162,163)

Conclusion

Many of the concepts of *Modernized Chiropractic* are still alive and well today. While the word Spontaneity may no longer be used, there are few experienced doctors of chiropractic who have not had cases that responded almost instantly to the Chiro-

practic Thrust, analogous to a part of the patient's body roused into consciousness as if gently shaken awake. Certainly the thought of the importance of the direction of the Thrust is kept alive in the use of listings, and precise return to both normal alignment and movement of a subluxated vertebra is still the goal of many chiropractors today, just as it was in 1906. The core concepts of *Modernized Chiropractic* coupled with the additional scientific knowledge added along the way have improved the lives of countless patients and continues today and hopefully far into the future. An understanding of these historical concepts and the times in which they were written should be a part of chiropractic education.

The history of *Modernized Chiropractic*, like most history, can be more than dusty volumes and lifeless dissertations. It can be enriching and enlightening. But there is a final irony. When we seek to find chiropractic's first textbook in the Library of Congress, "the book *Modernized Chiropractic* would be available for requesting in the Jefferson Building's Main Reading Room or the Adams Building's Science and Business Reading Room - the building where the book is actually housed. And yes, it is listed under the subject heading 'naprapathy'" (Correspondence, Library of Congress Science Reference Section. February 2021). Chiropractic's first textbook is not even listed under the subject heading of chiropractic.

Funding

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Notes

1. Smith, O., Langworthy S., Paxson, M. (1906). *Modernized Chiropractic, Vol I.* Cedar Rapids IA: Solon Langworthy.

2. Smith, O., Langworthy, S., Paxson, M. (1906). *Modernized Chiropractic, Vol II.* Cedar Rapids IA: Solon Langworthy.

3. Flexner, A. (1910). *Medical Education in the United States and Canada.* New York, NY: The Carnegie Foundation.

4. Faulkner, T.J. (2017). *The Chiropractor's Protégé The Untold Story of Oakley G. Smith's Journey with D.D. Palmer in Chiropractic's Founding Years.* Rock Island, IL: Association for the History of Chiropractic

5. Troyanovich, S. (2020). *Finding Langworthy: The Quest to Discover the Life and Times of a Chiropractic Pioneer.* Lulu Press, Inc.

6. Faulkner, T.J., Foley, J.M. (2018). Minora C. Paxson, C.P.: The profession's venerated persona meets the historical facts. *Chiropractic History* 38 (1), 66-78.

7. Troyanovich, S.J., Gibbons, R.W. (2003). Finding Langworthy: the last years of a chiropractic pioneer. *Chiropractic History*, 23(2), 7-17.