

conditions, some 'alternative' practitioners who claim to be 'holistic' are in fact far more biologically reductionist. Are you tired? Do you have headaches? Are you depressed? Gaining weight? Unhappy? Have decreased sex drive? Maybe it isn't because you have too little money, or work too hard, or feel unsafe in your neighbourhood, or have a mean boss, or a spouse who drinks to excess, or children who are in jail, or a close relation who has died. Maybe you just need less wheat in your diet, a high colonic enema, a few drops of a herbal remedy under your tongue. Undoubtedly, this is a large part of the attraction of so many of these therapies — that the miseries of life are biologically treatable. But no matter how attractive, it is not true. No simple therapy aimed at the body (or even the mind) will treat these problems, and it is neither fair nor right for any practitioner, whether allopathic or 'alternative', to hold out such false hope. It is also, in the most profound sense, not holistic. Holism does not mean 'anything outside traditional allopathy'. In themselves, herbal healing or faith healing or exercise therapy or cultural therapies or shamanism are no more holistic than the use of pharmaceuticals or surgery. Indeed, the very concept of a single 'holistic therapy' is oxymoronic; at best there can be a holistic approach, combining, when needed, a variety of therapies.

The hope of a holistic approach is that we can employ many allies in the effort to bring better health to people. The tradition of social medicine, of physicians that help to demonstrate how social conditions can impact health and work to ameliorate them, is an excellent example. The EURACT definition of holism is quite a good one. And, by the way, the study presented in Orlando found that Swedish GPs, at least, subscribe to the importance of a holistic approach, as did the study of British patients and practitioners by Tarrant *et al.*⁶ We need to adhere to this sort of definition, and oppose efforts to highjack the term, and prevent modern day Humpty Dumpty from making the word mean whatever they wish it to.

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Manchester United – 0 Exeter City – 0 8 January 2005

WHAT CAN IT ALL MEAN?

Over 10 000 Exeter City supporters (the Grecians) made the long trek north for the third round of the FA Cup — on paper a mere formality. Not since Miltiades led the Athenians at the Battle of Marathon has such an army of underdogs been assembled to meet their predestined fate. Why the Grecians? No one knows. But the adoption of an Athenian milieu allows us the indulgence of our club mascot — the politically incorrect but lovely Athena, 'Goddess of the West' who challenges both the cold and the sensibilities of the match-day terraces in an outfit that can only be described as both ethereal and physiologically challenging. No furry mannequin mascots for the lads of Devon.

The gap between the competing sides was best illuminated by the competing medical facilities. In Manchester, a team of eight doctors man medical facilities up to the standard of a small intensive care unit. In Exeter, I have been thrilled this season by the arrival of a wall-mounted paper-towel holder and the upgrade to a 100 Watt bulb.

WHAT WENT WRONG FOR MANCHESTER AGAINST ALL THE ODDS?

Chaos theory identifies a complex, non-linear world where small inputs into the system can have large and unintended consequences elsewhere. A butterfly flaps its wings in New York and there is a tornado in Tokyo. Often, large inputs have no effect at all. The recursive interplay of local positive and negative feedback loops gives rise to behaviour that appears random but has an underlying pattern directed by chaotic attractors. These place constraints upon the trajectories of a system, the evolution of which is exquisitely sensitive to its initial conditions.

At 3pm in Manchester the attractors were in place, determined by the history of what had gone before, and set towards their inevitable conclusion. But at 3.17pm a small boy cheered, almost imperceptibly. His input was taken up by those next to him, and those next to them again; modulated, amplified, convoluted, folding back upon itself as the dynamic echoed around the stadium. On the pitch, the attractors of both teams were at a critical juncture, a brief moment of bifurcation. At that instant, the impact of the crowd struck. Trapped in the arms of non-linear determinism, the system spiralled into a new attractor and its inevitable consequences. It was to be a draw.

As Sir Alex determines not to be humiliated again, will the gods favour us for the replay? Perhaps their messenger Athena will provide the critical perturbation for the return match?

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