Chiropractic conversations concerning philosophy, technique choices and scope of practice are akin to religious and political debates. Everyone has opinions and birthdays, and because of social media I get notified of both. I find most want to express their opinion; few seem interested in the opinion of others.

I do not teach philosophy at Palmer; I teach technique and history. But within those courses I frequently apply Socratic methods; asking questions and not just giving answers, which I feel stimulates critical thinking. In my history class I lecture on the ancient Greeks, who are rightfully credited with the philosophical tradition as they broke away from the previous mythological approach to explaining the world and man’s place in it. To the ancient Greeks health care and philosophy were inseparable. For the majority of philosophy's history what we refer to today as science was considered a part of philosophy called natural philosophy. The separation of philosophy from science is relatively recent in our history. It has become common to find those who utilize scientism as the only acceptable form of epistemology. So does philosophy have any utility?

A simple question I often ask students is, "What is philosophy?" Typically, answers include the standard definition: a love of wisdom. Does that mean anything you can learn is philosophy? It sure sounds like it. But how about chiropractic philosophy in particular? If chiropractic philosophy has no impact on how I deliver chiropractic care then it is nothing but a bunch of gobbledygook. Chiropractic philosophy can play a major role in your decisions about patient care, and how you view sickness and disease.

When I ask students to define sickness, the responses I get are a myriad of expected
symptoms: fever, diarrhea, vomiting. If I experience these symptoms I am sick, correct? Heads bob in flexion and extension. So I give them a scenario. If I eat the potato salad that has been sitting in the sun all afternoon and twenty minutes later I experience the forceful expulsion of the contents of my stomach through my mouth, am I sick? The heads bob in agreement again. But then I explain the scenario like a chiropractor; this situation is not an example of sickness, but an example of a healthy response. My body is doing exactly what it should do. It has decided retention of that "gone to the other side" potato salad was not in my body's best interest and therefore it took steps to remove it. Not expelling it would be an example of sickness.

I ask students for a definition of disease. Disease is a term that is ubiquitous in today's society, but I usually get enough 'ahhs' and 'umms' to drive a toastmaster's judge insane. It is not as easy to define as it seems. Robert Hudson, M.D., a medical historian at the University of Kansas Medical Center and author of "Disease and Its Control," states the definition of a disease has varied historically and across cultures. "Disease has always been what society chooses it to mean—neither more nor less." Common to most definitions, he says, are two elements: it usually implies some kind of impairment, and it's what doctors treat.

So from a chiropractic philosophy perspective, what is the cause of disease? According to well-known chiropractic philosopher Fred Barge, D.C., there is only one cause of disease: the body's inability to comprehend itself or its environment. And there is only one real cure and that is the body's ability to heal itself. And there is only one thing any doctor, regardless of his or her degree, can do for a patient and that is to remove an obstruction to healing, thus facilitating it.

Chiropractic philosophy clearly states there are limitations to matter, but it also recognizes the human body's amazing capacity to heal and adapt.

Any doubt of this ability can be eliminated by looking at the Palmer osteological
collection that has been meticulously cared for by the Palmer museum department. It clearly demonstrates the body's ability to heal, compensate and adapt.

Understanding the body's innate abilities is central to Palmer College's philosophy statement. What we are is defined by what we do. I am therefore immensely proud of the chiropractic institution from which I graduated that it continues to promote the stance that chiropractic improves quality of life without drugs or surgery.

I am not naïve. Chiropractors have always been willing to argue minutiae with each other. However I still believe that for the vast majority there is more that unites us than divides us. Chiropractic philosophy isn't antiquated or lacking clinical usefulness, nor is it the antithesis of science. It may just be what saves us.

Socrates is reported to have said on his death bed, "I am not an Athenian or a Greek but a citizen of the world." Perhaps we could spend less time engaged in an artificial chiropractic taxonomy and realize that what we are is chiropractors. I will end with the words of a great but sadly often underrated philosopher, Dave Palmer, D.C., who said:

"I hope that someday soon clear vision will be given to all of us who work for our profession. So that we will come to see more clearly not that which divides us but that which unites us—our chiropractic Philosophy—so its virtue and its glorious works will prosper and live among us."