

Harris L. Coulter (1932-2009)

From *The Washington Post* (October 31, 2009):

“Coulter, PhD, Harris Livermore.: Died on October 28, 2009, at the age of 77, after a long struggle with stroke damage. Born in Baltimore, MD on October 8, 1932, Coulter attended Milton Academy and Yale University (1954). He earned a master’s degree (1961) and doctorate (1969) from Columbia University, New York, in Russian studies and political science. Coulter worked for the State Department and the United Nations as an English/Russian interpreter. He authored nine books on medical history. He is survived by his sons, Andrew and Alex; and daughters, Elizabeth and Marian. No services will be held.”

Remembrances

An Appreciation: Devoted Scholar, Keen Intellect, Soldier for the Cause

Harry was my first personal contact with homeopathy, one which began in 1970, four years before we actually met. A doctor who knew of my interest in home birth and my jaded perspective on the medical system mentioned his name as a medical historian who had written sympathetically about homeopathy. But at the time this was a subject I was wholly unfamiliar with, and would undoubtedly have looked askance at if someone had tried to explain it to me. It took me four more years of doing home births and dabbling in whatever herbs were growing near where I lived in the Colorado mountains to realize that in fact there were other methods and philosophies of healing out there that deserved a closer look. In 1974 I finally enrolled in the NCH Summer School at Millersville, Pennsylvania, in Amish country.

Harry’s words were among the first I heard in that course, and were a big part of what hooked me once and for all. More than anyone else, he showed me that homeopathy was no mere New Age cult, but a philosophy and method that were deeply rooted in the history of medicine, and had already endured for two hundred years, a fact which seemed almost miraculous when compared with the dizzying pace of change that

modern medicine rightly prides itself upon. In short, he was no hippie, but a serious scholar and intellectual who had devoted years of his life to studying the subject, and who taught it in a way that made rational sense, not as dogma to be learned by rote, but as an important subject that merited careful and dispassionate investigation.

In those days, American homeopathy had become a very small fraternity, a shadow of its former self, but Harry was always right in the thick of it, and was never one to hold back from an argument or keep his opinions to himself, even when controversial, as they often were. At meetings and conferences he was personally acquainted with and esteemed by prominent homeopaths all over the world, and much sought after as a speaker and lecturer, with a lucid style of presentation that made arcane, learned, and difficult concepts readily understandable to others without such

background. In short, he was a brilliant teacher, and an authority on all things homeopathic, whose views I always sought and took seriously, even when I disagreed with them, of which more later.

Also gifted with a clear, direct, and persuasive literary style, he was known perhaps best of all as a writer. His



magnum opus was the four-volume *Divided Legacy: A History of the Schism in Medical Thought*, which arose out of his doctoral thesis at Columbia, on the conflict between homeopathy and orthodox or allopathic medicine in 19th-Century America. In a prodigious *tour de force* requiring decades of concentrated scholarship, he located and identified similar tensions between what he called “empirical” and “rationalist” strains that helped shape and define the entire history of Western medical thought and practice, from its Hippocratic origins to the rise of scientific medicine and extending into our own time. Published in 1973 as *Science and Ethics in American Medicine, 1800-1914*, his dissertation became Volume III of the final work; Volume I, on Ancient and Medieval Medicine, and Volume II, on the early modern period, followed in 1975 and 1977; and Volume IV, *Twentieth-Century Medicine: the Bacteriological Era*, appeared in 1994.

Characteristically, he insisted on publishing it himself, rather than submitting it to editorial scrutiny by a large commercial publisher, who would probably have rejected it in any case because of its limited marketability and polemical style, which never hesitated to take sides or stake out a clear rhetorical position of its own. Always true to himself, Harry believed passionately in the superior cogency and power of the homeopathic philosophy, and unapologetically upheld it as a mirror to what he perceived as the scientific excesses and moral deficiencies of organized medicine.

Among his other written works, two others were especially influential on me, and also deserved a much wider audience. Published in 1991, *The Controlled Clinical Trial* looked long and hard at the theory and practice of the double-blind or Random Controlled Trial (RCT), the “gold standard” of modern clinical research, exposing numerous flaws and limitations in both design and execution that are seldom examined or taken seriously. Here again, like a *samurai* of the spirit, he ventured even into the lions’ den to get at the truth of what he believed and felt.

Perhaps his most famous piece was *DPT: A Shot in the Dark*, published in 1985, and written with Barbara Loe Fisher, whose child was severely brain-damaged following a DPT shot. Compiling the stories of dozens of similar cases, it was so explosive and aroused such a furor among the medical community that the publisher took it off the market, and it had to be re-issued under another imprint at a later date. It was one of the first books in the Postwar period to challenge the theory and practice of routine mandatory vaccination of young infants, and helped Ms. Fisher found Dissatisfied Parents Together (DPT), an advocacy group which grew into the National Vaccine Information Center (NVIC), sponsors yearly conferences, and maintains local and regional chapters of concerned parents and their friends and supporters throughout the country. This

was Harry putting his intellect to work in the service of patients and indeed *victims* of that same establishment, an activist role that he certainly relished. As I look back on the trajectory of his work, I am struck by the extent to which I myself have been following many of the same paths that he pioneered, and I regret that I never adequately recognized or thanked him for this kind of modeling while he was alive.

That may in part have been due to the circumstances of our falling out, which took place rather abruptly in 1980-81, shortly after I joined the NCH Board, and began a long estrangement that lingered on for many years after the issues that led to it were no longer relevant. I was one of a new crop of younger physicians that included George Guess, Sandra Chase, and Dave Wember, who were brought onto the Board at the instigation of Dr. Panos. At that time, Harry was an officer and long-time member of the American Foundation for Homeopathy, which exercised total control over our extremely meager budget and tiny, aging membership. When we began to look more carefully into the fine print of this overly intimate and seemingly redundant relationship, the AFH leadership threatened to cut off our funding unless we desisted, and Harry as their spokesperson lost no opportunity in denouncing our impertinence in their newsletter. Matters came to a head when he tried to crash one of our Board meetings, and it fell to me to show him out, the upshot of which was that the NCH became independent, and Harry and I weren’t on speaking terms for months, although I never stopped reading, valuing, and indeed praising his writings.

In 1985, I became NCH President, and helped to organize its annual meeting, which was held at Emmanuel College in Boston. A highlight of that occasion was the visit and lecture of Dr. Tatanya Popova, a Ukrainian homeopath who operated the clinic that her father had founded in Kiev. Inviting her with the help of a Russian physician at Harvard Medical School who had studied with her, I asked Harry if he would give a simultaneous translation of her lecture, knowing that among his other talents he had once moonlighted as a Russian translator and interpreter at the United Nations. Needless to say, he did so willingly and with his usual facility.

But after that I saw very little of him until his massive stroke in the late 1990’s and his surprise appearance in a wheelchair at the rededication of the Hahnemann Monument in Washington in 2000. By then severely crippled but still sharp mentally and, as always, very much himself, he greeted me warmly, and all of our past unpleasantness was suddenly washed away as if it had never been. To this day I’m still ashamed that we both let it go so long for no good reason. In the years since then, he often phoned me to while away the hours of helpless tedium and loneliness in the nursing home

where he lived. Ever capable of lively conversation, he was also solicitous about his estranged wife Catherine, the superb homeopath and author who had moved to the Boston area after their divorce, was renting my office to train licensed physicians, and had become a close friend. Although I often had my hands full trying to avoid being drawn into these remains of their drama, I finally grew to love and grieve for him as a friend and colleague, someone whose wit and acumen I still admired, and whose ever-growing incapacity I could do nothing to allay. Much as I mourn his passing, and will miss his companionship, I take comfort in the assurance that his passionate commitment and important contributions to homeopathy will long endure.

Richard Moskowitz, MD,DHt

In 1997, the Homeopathic Pharmacopeia Convention of the United States (HPCUS) celebrated the 100th anniversary of the publication of the HPCUS during the annual spring meeting. I coordinated the festive Saturday night dinner. When I invited Harris to give the opening remarks his response was immediate; '...when, where and for how long can I speak?' His words and stories provided a memorable touch to that special evening. Later, while in the nursing home, I'd occasionally phone him, if nothing more than to let him know 'we' hadn't forgotten him.

We won't will we? We can't!

Jay Yasgur, RPh, MSc.

I had the privilege of visiting Harry Coulter several times during these last years of his life. I had been asked by a friend of his to treat him. Harry made no bones about it!! He wanted to regain his strength to walk and become continent, so as he could go back to work!! A daunting task for a homeopath, for anyone! From what I observed Harry never did stop working!!! He created a library/work space in his little cubicle in a three person room. He maintained close friendships and never, never gave up hope!! For a period of several months he did manage to gain strength in his limbs, stand for short periods of time, and wheel himself in a wheelchair. I started to believe that maybe he would walk again. These accomplishments didn't last but his continence did, for which he was very grateful.

I enjoyed my visits in person and on the phone with him. His sense of humor and fiesty political commentaries were both educational and entertaining!!

Harry made an invaluable contribution to our beloved Homeopathy, he gave us our history.

Lauren Fox, FNP,BC
Northampton, MA

I was both saddened and relieved to learn of the death of Harris Coulter. I had seen him in the nursing home in Washington, D.C., in May, where he had been in recent years following his stroke in 1997. His room in the facility was a poignant microcosm of aspects of Harris's uniqueness: one whole side of the room was covered by bookshelves, with many books in different piles in the room and three on the bed (on which he was dozing when I arrived). Despite his handicaps, including a degree of impaired cognition, he remained ever the determined scholar, with endless curiosity about the world. With massive edema of his affected lower limb he was largely confined to the bed.

Dr. Coulter's literary accomplishments are well-known, and he provided many of us with inspiration and information during our homeopathic careers. As reminiscences of others make clear, he was very generous with his time, encouragement and support for the members of the community. Well-known also are Harris's skills and accomplishments in other areas of his professional life. He was a Russian-English translator for the astronauts and cosmonauts and for the United Nations. He learned fluent Spanish later in his life. His writings crusaded for more intelligent viewpoints regarding many of the sacred cows of mainstream medicine, including immunization, controlled clinical trials and the lack of regard for the concept of *Vis Medicatrix Naturae*. His four volumes of *Divided Legacy* provided the world with a detailed history of medical thought and philosophy and afforded the homeopathic community a beautiful historical perspective of our place in the annals of medical care.

Along with Karl Robinson and Ahmed Currim, I taught with Harris at his Arizona course for homeopathic professionals and lay prescribers. He organized a well-attended program, complementing the development of the Arizona Homeopathic Medical Board which was taking place at the same time.

At the start of the day, Harry's hair was tidily combed, and as the day went on, it became more wild and disheveled, a perfect accompaniment to his passionate nature. He was enthusiastic about whatever he involved himself in, with his gravelly baritone voice and his wide eyes paralleling the level of excitement in his voice.

Harris had a sharp wit. His observations about people were quite humorous and incisive, and he loved to laugh at his own funny observations as well as execute his own brand of deadpan humor. In his earlier years, among his various occupations, he was a taxi driver. When I was in Washington D.C., for a meeting, he was kind enough to drive me to the airport on the same Sunday morning that the Marines' marathon was taking place. With a constant patter of guttural mumbling and exclamations he negotiated the streets with wild determination, doing U-turns when encountering blocked

off streets, cutting across parking lots and lawns and squeezing between narrow obstacles. It seemed like great sport for him. It seemed emblematic of his pleasure in tackling large challenges and going against the grain when he was moved to.

Another motoring adventure with Harris happened at the time of a different meeting in D.C., when we arrived at the hotel late for the first speaker and he was busily searching the parking lot for an available parking spot. He finally squeezed his car into an impossibly small space, allowing 2 inches of clearance at the most on both sides of the car. He had me get out before he entered the space, then—undaunted by the dilemma—he struggled over the back seat and out of the hatch back of his car, in his suit and tie, carrying his briefcase. The whole time he was growling, with a straight face, about the inferior parking skills of our neighbors on each side. It was one of the great in-person, physically comedic moments of my life, ranking with some of Buster Keaton's best.

With his passionate nature and his tenacity for whatever viewpoint he espoused, he didn't live in gray areas. He was absolutely convinced of the truth of the opinions he wrote about, and was scholarly and thorough in documenting his assertions. He found himself on the side opposing many of his friends in the dispute between the American Foundation for Homeopathy and the (seceding reorganized version of the) National Center for Homeopathy, in the early 1980's. I remember him saying years later, "I had to go to Tipp City and make that long walk up the driveway of Maisie's (Dr. Mesimund Panos's) house with my hat in my hand, to try to win back her friendship."

Harris had many friends in the international homeopathic community, with hundreds of world-wide leaders in the profession bearing great respect for his accomplishments, treasuring his friendship and enjoying his love of a good time. We can all look back with pleasure and gratitude at those instances, whether through his written word or his actual presence at a lecture or a dinner table or a conference hallway, in which Harris Coulter imprinted his unique image on our lives.

Nick Nossaman, MD, DHt

I remember Harris Coulter as one of the most staunch defenders of homeopathy. His spirited advocacy and intellectual writing made him a leading force in the re-emergence of homeopathy, in the latter part of the 20th century. Harris Coulter belongs to that honored list of unique individualists who have left their mark on the development of our science.

David Wember, MD, DHt

I have had the pleasure to speak on the phone with Harris a few times over the last two to three years in regard to Liga Congresses. He said he greatly missed going to them after his health started to fail. He especially wanted me to meet Maria Gloria Alcover Lillo, who lives now in Italy. He visited her school in Italy and was greatly impressed by her adeptness in homeopathy. Her ex-husband, Rinaldo Vargas, who is a sociologist and presented in a number of Liga Congresses, last year sent him a manuscript, soliciting his opinion of it. Harris liked it and offered help Rinaldo. I was very much impressed by Harris's desire to aid others, especially in regard to homeopathy. As has been stated by others, his *Divided Legacy* is truly a classic which outlines with great accuracy the tumultuous history of homeopathy and conventional medicine. I wish that I had had a greater knowledge of and friendship with him.

Richard Hiltner, MD, DH

I talked to Harris several times many years ago. I wrote my summa thesis in college on the history of homeopathy as a model of psychosomatic medicine. His *Divided Legacy* was one of my principal sources. I found him to be an exceptionally gracious man with an especially keen intellect. His writing captured my interest and ultimately helped me make the decision to enter medical school and attempt to integrate homeopathy back into regular family practice. I have succeeded in doing that to some degree, despite the surreptitious approach required in the late 70's, and I credit him with planting those seeds in my mind as I read his wonderful history of homeopathy. When I told him that story years later, he was truly astounded and touched. He felt he could claim a personal role in influencing a small part of homeopathic history. I was surprised that he didn't seem to openly acknowledge his own very powerful influence on the world of homeopathy through all of his writings. Here was a truly great scholar and a man of vision. I am indebted, as are all of us, to the legacy and legend of Harris Coulter.

Paul Bergquist, MD

Shortly after I moved to the United States from Colombia, while researching what was available about homeopathy in the U.S., I came across the third volume of *Divided Legacy*, the masterpiece written by Harris Coulter, PhD. I wrote to him about my experience reading his book and inquired about the state of homeopathy in America. While I can imagine him being a very busy person at that time, in the early 80's, he responded, to a complete stranger, with a lengthy, very warm, sensitive, and informative letter. Later on, I had the opportunity to thank him personally.

For me, Harris was an example of an extraordinary being, intelligent, giving, gentle, unassuming, and dedicated to homeopathy like no other. The legacy he left with his trilogy on the history of medicine and the place of homeopathy in that history is inestimable; we will be eternally grateful to him - what a way to reach immortality!

Bernardo Merizalde, MD

I was on a panel with Harris in Annapolis in the 1980's. He was tough, opinionated, and always stood up for homeopathy in the face of any and all opposition.

George Keeler MD

One of my very first exposures to homeopathy was Harris's book *Homeopathic Science and Modern Medicine: The Physics of Healing with Microdoses*. The book made perfect sense to me, having been written in an objective, scientific style that appealed to my freshly indoctrinated medical brain, and spurred my interest in furthering my education in homeopathy. Sometime later, while attending the National Center for Homeopathy (NCH) Summer School, then held in Millersville, Pennsylvania, I had the distinct pleasure of attending a lecture given by Harris on the differences between Rational and Empirical trends of thought in Western medicine. That same two weeks I also was introduced to such fine practitioners and educators as Bill Gray, MD, Henry Williams, MD, and Ruth Rogers, MD. What a fine introduction to homeopathy it was! Harris's presentation bolstered my certainty that I was, finally, after years of training, embarking on the proper path of medical education. I recall how impressed I was with both his erudition and fascinating speaking style - emphatic, precise, confident, not to mention very entertaining.

Subsequently, over the years, in addition to the pleasure of reading his *Divided Legacy* tome, I enjoyed his company, socially, on a few occasions. He was an engaging raconteur, charming and gregarious, with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes - a pleasure to be around. I always considered him an honored colleague and friend despite the unpleasantness of the NCH-American Foundation for Homeopathy schism already commented upon.

His was an undying and passionate commitment to homeopathy, homeopaths, and the improvement of healthcare. His influence was profound, his legacy will be lasting.

George Guess, MD, DHT

Books by Harris L. Coulter, PhD

Vaccination, Social Violence, and Criminality: The Medical Assault on the American Brain

Divided Legacy, Volumes 1-4: A History of the Schism in Medical Thought

AIDS and Syphilis: The Hidden Link

Homeopathic Science and Modern Medicine: The Physics of Healing With Microdoses

A Shot in the Dark: Why the P in DPT May be Hazardous to Your Child's Health
The Controlled Clinical Trial: an Analysis

Homeopathic Influences in 19th Century Allopathic Therapeutics AŦH