

Abstract

Critical Thoughts About Herbal Medicine

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When thinking about herbal medicine, it is useful to consider two fundamentally different types:

- Traditional herbalism,
- Traditional phytotherapy.

Rational phytotherapy employs conventional diagnostic methods, uses well-tested phytomedicines against specific conditions. It thus has several similarities with conventional pharmacotherapy. Traditional herbalism is the type that globally is much more common, e.g. traditional Chinese, Tibetan, European herbalism. It employs obsolete diagnostic methods, uses individualised herbal mixtures often for treating fictitious conditions. It is thus very different from conventional pharmacotherapy. Both types of herbal medicine have in common that their proponents are prone to fallacious thinking. Common fallacies include:

- Appeal to nature
- Appeal to tradition
- Appeal to authority
- Special pleading
- Strawman fallacy

In my lecture, I will discuss these fallacies in some detail. My overall conclusion is that herbal medicine is a complex subject which too often is dominated by a lack of rational thought.