

Cameras and Bagels : Metaphors as Tools to Better Understand and Navigate Society and Medicine in these Rapidly Changing Times



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Submission: June 08, 2026; **Published:** June 15, 2026

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Abstract

Two metaphors

SLR cameras and bagels are presented as important tools to better understand 21st century society and medicine. My proposal is that fully understanding these metaphors in multiple sensory dimensions (i.e. seeing, hearing, touching, etc.) one is better equipped with critical thinking skills necessary to successfully navigate these complex times.

Keywords: Cameras and Bagels; Metaphors; Skepticism

Commentary

Many thinkers from multiple disciplines have observed and commented on this rarely epochal time in human history with massive changes in all aspects of society. It affects how we live, work, interact, and communicate with others. Advances in science and technology [i.e., Information technology, biology, neurosciences, etc.] along with increasing complexity in all major pillars of our society [i.e. government, education, entertainment, etc.] are major causes of this situation. I recently have discussed this issue from multiple perspectives [1-3]. In addition, posit that the world is imperfect and flawed, and that any proposal should be viewed with skepticism, but not cynicism [4]. Thus, I invite readers to critically read this brief paper and come to your own conclusions. Photography developed in the 1830s, where an image was recorded through the action of light on reactive film creating an image [5]. The development of this technology goes back centuries, to Kepler and others [6]. A single reflex camera [SLR] is comprised of a lens, prism, and a screen. This allows the photographer an accurate image of the picture, which is taken at a point [f stop], where the light converges. Thus, when taking a photo one needs to set the distance of interest - a continuum of close to far. An important lesson is that we need in life to have purpose, a plan, and a means of execution.

A corollary is that in life most choices require closing other options. Only the focal length set will clearly depict that image, blurring others. Digital photography is very different. This technology allows a wider range of images obtained; in fact, 3-dimensional depth can be seen by the photographer. However, this approach has several serious drawbacks. One, this method fosters passivity. Two, it encourages one to be intellectually lazy. Three, these images although striking in many respects, are unconsciously perceived as not 'real', [a trait that many current superhero movies share]. Thus, many professional photographers even today use SLR cameras and related analog equipment for specific tasks. We all, in our personal and professional lives, can use this approach i.e. planning, executing, and evaluating as we live each day. There are other senses, which are important in our experience [auditory, tactile, taste, etc.]. A bagel is another metaphor to illustrate this argument.

Bagels are donut-shaped, leavened bread. The ingredients are flour, yeast, water, and salt. Eggs, milk, and butter can be used to change the consistency of the dough. Their history dates to Poland in 1394, while other nations [China, Italy, etc.] had similar bread [7]. They arrived in the USA in the late 19th century during the immigration from Eastern Europe. Originally, they were boiled in

water to seal the dough , which imparted a crisp external surface overlying a compact interior. They were then baked with various coatings [salt, onions , garlic, etc.] to modify their taste. Soon after arriving in America, they became a product that could be mass-produced . Machines took center stage - mixing, steaming [as opposed to boiling], packaging, and shipping [8]. Two processes now produce bagels, but are they the same ? Bagel epicureans are adamant that boiled are better, while many are less convinced. Also, consider other foods - fish, vegetables steaming is better. Eating a bagel is a multi-sensory experience. When a person bites a bagel, she feels and hears a pop. The next sensations are the uniform consistency of the interior along with its taste. I also a bagel 'lover', have discovered that both kinds trigger similar sensations. However, a process must be present that allows these important goals of consistency, flavor, etc., to be realized. The quality of the ingredients and how they are combined is crucial for success. Thus, the seemingly simple is surprisingly subtle and has multiple factors which contribute to its success. A perfect metaphor of how we should approach life and medicine.

Another important point is that eating is more than consuming calories , which pigs are known to do. In fact, many today in the USA frequent eateries where food is placed in a bowl for people to consume. However, food and eating have been for millennia ,a social experience. Preparing and eating food promotes traditions both religious and familial. It allows the entire family - all generations - to contribute - in food, history, knowledge, and wisdom, thus continuing to the circle of life. A final point that is important in these times. There are a multiplicity of sources of data, but this begs the question: what is true, reliable, and useful? Recently, a Journal of Science asked me to write something concerning science. I refer everyone interested in reading : What is science ? At this time, unfortunately, many don't actually know [9].

Summarizing this discussion, it is apparent that these metaphors communicate important ideas for life and medicine. We do not need to reinvent the wheel those generations before ours, much like us , except they were enmeshed in a particular social/political milieu which influenced their decisions either for the good or bad, but these decisions can only be judged by the standards of that time. This is a crucial point we must all recognize. Yes, because of science and technology, our era may cause us to assume that humans are capable of anything. However, the SLR camera and bagel show that everything is not possible, despite the illusions generated by digital technology. Success in life and medicine requires practice of several virtues [faith, hope, charity, diligence, patience, humility etc.] along with following the 'Golden Rule'. These are all tools allowing us to navigate these tumultuous times.

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DOI: [10.19080/GJO.2026.29.556251](https://doi.org/10.19080/GJO.2026.29.556251)

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