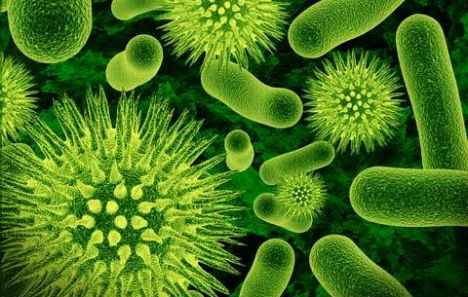
# Grok My Enthusiasm (27)

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*One in a* [*weekly series of enthusiastic posts*](http://hilobrow.com/tag/grok-enthusiasm/) *contributed by HILOBROW friends and regulars.*

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We co-evolved with microbes. There are 100 trillion of them in your intestines right now. That’s *your* intestines. Just at the moment, mine have roughly 500 billion more that I swallowed this morning.

For every cell in your body, there are about nine cells of microbes (bacteria, fungi, and archaea) who are not you. In the course of your actuarily average lifetime, you will be the Airbnb for around twenty tons of microbes. That’s three T-Rexes more or less. Twenty fucktons of not-human crittermeat inside you.

Hadn’t you better get to know them?

The microbiota in your gut ferments the plant fibers you consume and produces metabolites: short chain fatty acids called butyrate, acetate, and propionate.

But I’m losing you.

Let’s get Biblical and think of those metabolites as Pious Young People such as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

The thing to know is mostly this: These Pious Young People have been kicking around our bodies for so long that they are a critical part of the function of that body. They regulate your immune system.

How does that work? In very brief:

The metabolites produced by your microbiota can modulate your immune signaling proteins, the interleukins and the tumor necrosis factors. Of course, short chain fatty acids are fuel, and thus get burned up in the process. (Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.)

The body wants to protect itself and becomes inflamed wherever the immune system perceives a threat. This is all very well when the threat is real, but it becomes problematic when the mechanism to turn off the inflammation is damaged, or when the threat is imagined.

Think of this as McCarthyism. Or else think of it as autoimmune disease.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are the turn-off switch. Without the metabolites produced by your microbes, this inflammation becomes systemic — and symptoms (depression, anxiety, obesity, psoriasis, chronic fatigue, diabetes, MS to name a few) abound.

(Without the Pious Young People, the institution becomes authoritarian — and symptoms abound.)

You can, and you should, nurture the Pious Young People by eating fermentable plant fibers. You can, and you should, keep your inner state dynamic by consuming the microbes themselves.

(It should be noted here that I am not a doctor or even a science writer. I’m a novelist. I make shit up for a living. And you can no more — or less — trust a novelist than a cop. I speak as a *fanboy*.)

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