

**62º CONGRESO DE LA LIGA MEDICORUM HOMOEOPATHICA INTERNATIONALIS  
26ª ASAMBLEA GENERAL DE HOMEOPATÍA DE MÉXICO A. C.**

**Puebla de los Ángeles, México**

**Agosto 2007**

## **HAHNEMANN'S FORGOTTEN DIMENSION – THE RELATION BETWEEN MEDICINE, PHILOSOPHY, AND ETHICS**

**Josef M. Schmidt**

**ALEMANIA**

### **RESUMEN**

#### **LA DIMENSIÓN OLVIDADA DE HAHNEMANN – LA RELACIÓN ENTRE MEDICINA, FILOSOFÍA Y ÉTICA**

En los últimos 200 años las condiciones sociales, científicas y religiosas en que la homeopatía ha sido enseñada y practicada han cambiado enormemente. Por lo tanto muchas tentativas han sido hechas para introducir y sostener formas modernas y actuales de homeopatía. Para no llegar a ser engañado por el pluralismo predominante de las diferentes escuelas y tendencias contemporáneas, como estandar de referencia para estimar conceptos nuevos, la actitud e idea original de Hahnemann frente a la medicina, filosofía y ética van a ser presentadas.

### **ABSTRACT**

During the last 200 years, the social, scientific, and religious framework in which homeopathy has been taught and practiced has tremendously changed. Accordingly, numerous efforts have been made to establish and advocate modern opportune forms of homeopathy. In order not to be misled by the prevailing pluralism of contemporary schools and trends, as a standard of reference for assessing new concepts,

Hahnemann's original idea and attitude towards medicine, philosophy, and ethics will be presented.

## INTRODUCTION

Two hundred years ago (1807) Samuel Hahneamnn coined the term "homeopathic" for his new method of rational therapeutics which he had recently suggested to his medical colleagues. By that, homeopathy became an entity on its own, distinguished from any other concept of medicine and defined by characteristic basic principles. In the sequel, the "new school" of medicine set out to make its impressive way through history up to the present day, benefitting and converting an ever increasing portion of doctors and patients of all continents and lots of countries all over the world.

This spread around the globe, however, took place under most different regional and cultural conditions. Prompted by varied modes of reception, from the beginning an intricacy in principal was set up which never in the history of homeopathy could be resolved completely. Since the first big quarrel between Hahnemann and some of his adherents (Moritz Mueller, Traugott Kretzschmar and others) about the limits of the principle of similars in the 1830s, no clear and lasting consensus could be brought about by the homeopathic community as to what is really good or true (or the best kind of) homeopathy. Despite a general agreement on Hahnemann's "Organon of medicine" as the supreme reference book of homeopathy, diversity of its interpretation by modern homeopaths is tremendously high. Although some basic quotations can be found with almost any author and teacher, since the days of Hahnemann the face of homeopathy had changed from generation to generation. Given the faster and faster succession of new approaches in the last decades, the latest state of the discussion about what should be considered homeopathy today cannot be checked any more in traditional textbooks but just in recently published articles or in the Internet, e.g. on the website "[www.grundlagen-praxis.de](http://www.grundlagen-praxis.de)", under "debate on homeopathy".

From a historical perspective, any change of paradigm within homeopathy occurred and occurs in close interaction with concurrent changes of social, scientific, and religious conditions. In a postmodern pluralistic civilization of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, e.g. it seems

perfectly plausible to utilize concepts of quantum-physics or chaos-theory as models for an explanation of homeopathy, to apply computer-repertorization and video-supervision as tools for practice and education, and to resort to notions of psychoanalysis or secondary esoterics as means for understanding mysterious courses of disease. Thus, what any generation discovers and identifies as the essence of homeopathy tells more about the mentality and values of the respective era than about what Hahnemann had in mind when he projected homeopathy as a rational and charitable therapeutics. When in a time of propagated individualism anybody considers homeopathy to be just what he or she makes out of it and likes most of all, it may be worthwhile to draw again attention to what Hahnemann really wanted – in order not to lose contact with historical reality completely.

### **HAHNEMANN'S WORLD**

The places where Hahnemann worked can all be determined geographically. From the time, however, in which he lived, we are separated not only by two centuries on a linear time-axis which commonly is imagined as a line of economic, social, scientific, and technological progress, but rather by "worlds". In order to put oneself into Hahnemann's position one is forced both to subtract from our present knowledge all the milestones and achievements of modern medicine and – what is more difficult – to go back before the establishment of our present-day system of so-called Western values.

Contrary to the materialism, atheism, and hedonism of modern Western fun and consumer societies, the leading ideas constituting Hahnemann's world were oriented by a high spiritual and moral vocation of man. For Hahnemann the human was the noblest being and created to perfect his or her emotional, practical, and mental capabilities, and by doing so find bliss and give God the honor. By the end of the eighteenth century, phrases like this did not strikingly differ from the bulk of other cultivated contemporaries. Nevertheless, from Hahnemann's biography it can be deduced that his emphasis on aspiration for higher things was not just an opportunistic lip service but rather a constant factor, determining his life and work, which he adhered with great earnest and consequence.

This strong interest in a spiritual and moral life obviously took the first place in Hahnemann's mind and soul. Hence, it must have been one of the most vital impulses for the founding and development of homeopathy. This innocent-seeming statement at once loses its anecdotal look and gains explosive relevance if one considers under what circumstances today people try to establish and justify homeopathy. In those days for an educated man it was still possible to outline a therapeutics (or even the new kind of science which was at the point of constituting itself) in a way that it was compatible with a good, moral, and fulfilled life. With such a claim, at the time of enlightenment, German idealism, and romanticism, one was in best philosophical company. The typical question of philosophers of nature, such as Schelling, was: How must nature, spirit, matter, the organic and inorganic, etc. be thought (constructed) in order to – on the one hand unravel the relation of these notions and on the other hand enable man to conceive oneself as a moral and spiritual being. The starting point was clearly and definitely the interest of mind and soul in an intelligible and moral world. The goal or the searched for was a theory of science or – in Hahnemann's case – the founding of a rational therapeutics whose framework was defined by the mentioned irrevocable interests.

Today the proportion seems to be just the other way round. Irrevocably steadfast seem to be

- the definition of science which is dominating the medical faculties,
- the entanglement of medicine with the pharmaceutical industry,
- the sturdy structures of the medical profession and health insurances,
- the directions by the state towards lowering costs of health care etc.

This is the framework today. The searched for is a possibility to live – within that framework – a fairly moral and fulfilled life and to find a niche in the system where homeopathy is granted a right to exist to some extent. The question today seems to be: What do I have to do, how do I have to practice, what do I have to demonstrate – in order to be recognized or at least tolerated by the existing institutions? According to these socio-political circumstances, homeopaths e.g. strive to prove the efficacy of homeopathic remedies against placebo in compliance with pharmacological standards,

to outline scientifically plausible hypotheses for the efficacy of ultramolecular dilutions, to document cost reduction under homeopathic treatment, to define the bounds of homeopathy to guard against forensic charges etc.

It seems that the struggle for adaptation to the establishment and the meeting with socio-political demands today has taken the same (high) status in the inner hierarchisation of values which formally was held by the urge of many educated men to create a well-ordered spiritual world. Today, any yearning for a cosy and easy to survey cosmos— if still existing with a few people – is of course expected to give way in case of conflict.

Some examples from the development of Hahnemann's homeopathy may illustrate this topic.

#### **HAHNEMANN'S DOCTRINE**

Today it seems to be clear that incurable diseases exist. Who ever is told to have got one has had bad luck and no chance any more. Hope for healing is useless, stupid and naive. Within present day's horizon this view seems to be obvious, evidence-based, and verified in practice. Hahnemann, however, at his time was still capable to argue theologically – that incurable diseases cannot exist! To maintain such an infidel statement, he said, would be blasphemy! With the same certainty that there is a wise and kind God there must also be a remedy for each disease! It lies only with the doctors to find it in each single case. So strong was Hahnemann's interest in a world in which he could realize himself as a moral and intelligent physician that he – as he put it – "rather would forswear all medical systems than allow this blasphemy to happen". The radicalism with which Hahnemann clarified the feasibility in principle of a therapeutics before he engaged in further details points out the steep inner hierarchisation of his aspiring towards self-perfection within a sensible and moral task.

Even Hahnemann's semiotic approach to drug provings and case taking is based on the same argumentation. A modern scientifically educated physician may entirely admit that after application of a substance in a drug proving on a healthy person certain symptoms

occur and that a given patient has similar symptoms. However, he will be overcharged when asked to understand that this is the reason why the substance is the healing remedy for the patient. Even homeopaths use to get in distress of argumentation at this point. They try to find scientific causal mechanisms as explanations or hypotheses or refer to empiricism or clinical studies which, however, usually do not satisfy the critics. Ultimately, also homeopaths are discontented with such an inconvenience of proof. On the one hand they are applying something practically what on the other hand they are unable to explain theoretically, neither to themselves nor to others.

Hahnemann, however, had other inner preferences. Higher than his drive to look for explanations of his daily experiences was his impetus to found a therapeutics in which it was possible to heal with (mathematical) certainty. After all, for him, this was the precondition of medical practice as a moral and spiritual being. Had he not clarified this issue before, he would rather had kept to forensic medicine, chemistry, or writing. At this critical point, again, Hahnemann argued theologically: Since from God's love and reason and consequence follows that a reliable therapeutics must exist, and since often neither causes of diseases nor active agents of drugs are discernible, this knowledge obviously is not necessary to cure diseases. From the mentioned premises rather ensues that is must be possible to cure patients exclusively by means of the perceptible, i.e. by the symptoms of patients and healthy provers. Hence, diseases have to reveal themselves to "those who can see" in the symptoms of the disease, while drug forces of proven substances have to do so in the symptoms of the proving. Accepting this logic, the principle of similars indeed appears to be the only possible rational and reliable principle of healing. For Hahnemann, his main problem was resolved by that, any further details were minor problems. Contrary to present-day's situation, he e.g. had no problem with the fact that the term "revelation" is incompatible with the terminology of modern scientifically oriented medicine.

Bringing to mind these examples, however, neither means that Hahnemann's homeopathy was nothing but a despairing construction by a quaint aesthete nor that today's scientific medicine is grasping anything like true reality. Both approaches, the

Hence, regarding the founder of a therapeutics, it appears to be as important to bear in mind his internal dimension as the external conditions under which he lived and struggled. Since a philosopher can be understood only when one understands his basic question, the key to a deep understanding of Hahnemann's homeopathy could be his top problem which can be reconstructed approximately like this: How is a therapeutics possible which on the one hand permits real cures and on the other hand enables the doctor to conceive himself as a moral and spiritual being?

Modern science-oriented medicine, however, comes from an almost opposite tradition. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the predominating question of science and industry was: How can nature be commanded most certainly? Contrary to former eras, since the time of Francis Bacon, scientists and engineers tried to wrest nature its secrets with screws and clamps. The results gained by that, however, told more about the questioner than the questioned.

Hahnemann stood at a point of intersection of conflicting trends. On the one hand, he advocated – especially in his early days – a positivism of science which made him hope to elevate therapeutics from its status as a “conjectural art” into the rank of a reliable science. On the other hand, in his clear creed in religion – even if an enlightened natural religion – still lingers the traditional humbleness with regard to the (confined) possibility of human knowledge. In scholasticism it read: “Credo, ut intelligam” (I believe in order to detect, Anselm of Canterbury, 1033–1109). As it was pointed out, without his faith in a wise and charitable creator, neither Hahnemann's foundation of homeopathy nor its further development would have been accomplished. Frankly he admitted e.g. that he did not understand the surprisingly long effects of high potencies (30c). Although, wherever possible, he “dared to know” (aude sapere), the avowal of his ignorance was not the worst case for him. Much worse would have been the impossibility in principle of a therapeutics in which he could practice successfully and at the same time experience and conceive himself as a moral and spiritual being.

## **HAHNEMANN'S VIEW OF MAN**

As we see, homeopathy involves philosophical dimensions such as perennial questions about the meaning and end of our life or possible life projects. Hence, detached from the spiritual and mental background of its founder, only parts of his homeopathy can be grasped. Just the most important connecting links or the reconciling spiritual ties would be missing. A therapeutics e.g. which by artificial electromagnetic field modifies alleged electromagnetic fields of the patient, would not be homeopathy in the sense of Hahnemann, even if both fields would be similar!

Hahnemann's homeopathy was founded before the definite reification of man as a material, biochemical, molecular-biological, cybernetical, quantum-mechanical, or other reductionistic thing. This is the big difficulty when today homeopathy's integration in the scientific apparatus is intended. On the other hand, this is a big chance also to call to mind what was lost in medicine during the last two centuries. In Hahnemann's cosmos of ideas, the human still had an internal dimension which was not considered a mere epiphenomenon of neuronal currents in brain cells but an undeceived last instance to which people granted important privileges – e.g. when designing one's concept of life or a rational therapeutics. To Hahnemann rationality never meant anything like logical sterility but always the inclusion of the perspective of this inner source of human life. It would have struck him as being most irrational to consider man as entirely explicable by science.

The recognition of the inner dimension and vocation of man, which for Hahnemann was a matter of course, today indeed seems to be more difficult but not any less important. It is an act of freedom but not of arbitrariness. It should acknowledge just what is the case even without it or prior to it, i.e. it should remember a certain constitution of man, not establish it from the outset (like in constructivism). In this way, it could restore to man the wealth of his dimensions and capacities which were contested more and more by the triumphant advance of science. This needs not even to be understood as an act of pure kindness. Considering the potential dangerousness of a medicine exclusively based on modern science, manifesting itself in iatrogenic allergies, addictions, illnesses



**Hahnemann's forgotten dimension-the relation between medicine, philosophy, and ethics**  
**Josef M. Schmidt**

**and deaths, a revision or widening of the strict scientific view of man today has also become an ecological task of the first order.**

**Datos del autor**

**Priv. Doz. Dr. med. Dr. phil. Josef M. Schmidt**

**Institute of the History of Medicine**

**University of Munich**

**Lessingstr. 2**

**80336 Munich/Germany**

**E-mail: [j.m.schmidt@lrz.uni-muenchen.de](mailto:j.m.schmidt@lrz.uni-muenchen.de)**