

Evidence and excellence of homeopathy – revised and revisited

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Introduction

Many practitioners of homeopathy may have noticed during their professional career, that without a good theory one is lost in a complex world of puzzling phenomena. While founding homeopathy 200 years ago, Hahnemann was in a similar situation: on a medical plane he had to replace the prevailing doctrinal disorder by a new rational and beneficent medical theory. Equally, we are challenged today to overcome the drawbacks of our healthcare system by means of a comprehensive critical theory – however, not on a medicinal level only, but also from an epistemologic, sociologic and economic perspective.

While Hahnemann could limit himself to argue just in terms of medicine within a comparatively consistent professional community, meanwhile traditional premises have since fallen apart, rolled over by major socio-economic changes. For example, although today everybody is striving for and talking about „evidence“ and „excellence“, these notions are used (and misused) by partisans of antagonistic interests in an equivocal way. The real challenge is now, first of all, to uncover and dissolve this entanglement of concepts.

Analogously to the approach taken by Hahnemann, we may now (1) first describe and analyze the present state or situation, (2) then try to find – by its symptoms – its core, essence, or the gist of the matter (in Hahnemann's terms „the underlying miasm“), and (3) finally reflect about strategies of treatment and the chance of recovery.

Due to the shortage of time it will only be possible to outline in brief statements some major problems and paradoxes and suggest preliminary hints towards an argumentation that may help to defy and possibly solve them. Further explications and elaborations may be found in my published works and in forthcoming research still to be done on this topic.

(1) Anamnesis

Looking at homeopathy from the perspective of a homeopath, its history and achievements may appear to be a big success story: A 200 year old existence, spread over the whole world, curing of millions of patients from all kinds of diseases, institutionalisation, professionalisation, scientific research, etc. From an opponent's point of view, however, homeopathy has for 200 years failed to prove its scientificity and thus demonstrated that its claims are wrong and its results not distinguishable from placebo effects.

It is one of the most striking paradoxes in the *history of medicine* that what a homeopath considers to be „evidence“ of efficiency and „excellence“ of practice, would be evaluated by a so-called modern sceptic as random hits and as magical or spiritual, at any rate unscientific treatment. To be sure, in order to avoid errors as well as fraud in medicine there must be some kind of critical appraisal and control of therapeutic claims and successes. However, the currently

predominating standards for assessing the scientificity of a medical therapy, established under the name of Evidence-based Medicine, obviously are lacking criteria to perceive, understand, and appreciate the accomplishments of homeopathy. This blind spot in the categorical concept of Evidence-based Medicine may be illustrated with some examples.

As André Saine has outlined in his forthcoming work „The Weight of Evidence. The Extraordinary Success of Homeopathy in Epidemics“, there are statistics from more than 7,000 references (out of more than 25,000 volumes of homeopathic literature) demonstrating that homeopathic treatment during epidemics was in the last 200 years constantly correlated with a very low mortality rate (almost always under 3 %), regardless of the physician, time, place, or type of epidemic disease, including diseases with a very high mortality rate (up to 50 % and more), such as cholera, smallpox, diphtheria, typhoid fever, yellow fever, and pneumonia, thus constantly outnumbering the (much higher) mortality rate under allopathic treatment. Despite this ample documentation of homeopathy's effectiveness, low cost, and safety, however, proponents of evidence-based medicine consider this kind of observational studies simply as anecdotal and thus not convincing.

The same defensive strategy is used by sceptics against the overwhelming mass of individual case reports describing quick and totally unexpected recoveries from sometimes very serious diseases. Till the year 1840 already 3,800 cases were published in a nine-volume series by David Roth in Paris. Since then, the number of cases may likely have increased by 50 to 100 fold. Perhaps 10 % of these cases may document extraordinary outcomes worthwhile further investigation (A. Saine). Despite the mass and accuracy of the existing documentation of both historic case reports and contemporary outcome studies (C. Witt etc.) and the robustness and magnitude of the effect of homeopathic treatment, hardliners of Evidence-based Medicine argue that as long as studies are not blinded, randomized, and placebo-controlled, their results are not reliable, not compelling, and thus irrelevant.

If, however, clinical studies are well designed and well-done according to these requirements, then – if they have a significant positive result (Frei, Bell etc.) – it is argued that without independent replication by others the finding may simply be due to random chance and thus meaningless and unconvincing. In any case the burden of proof would lie on the side of the homeopaths.

Meanwhile, in order to raise the threshold into infinity, out of any reach of homeopaths, so-called scientific sceptics advocate a substitution of Evidence-based Medicine (EBM) by the stricter concept of Science-based Medicine (SBM). According to that, also positive results of randomized clinical trials (RCTs) would no longer prove anything if their underlying rationale is not plausible to modern scientists. Since, according to their view, homeopathy is based on implausible principles such as the laws of similarity, infinitesimals, miasms, etc., any positive result of any future study whatsoever based on premises like that would henceforth – a priori – be judged as futile and irrelevant.

On the other hand, if randomised clinical trials related to homeopathy fail to have a significant result, the same advocates of so-called Science-based Medicine agree with the (definitively false) conclusion of a meta-analysis published in the most prestigious, supposedly scientific medical journal, the Lancet, in 2005, under the title „The end of homeopathy“ (Shang). In that case, only

eight studies attributed to homeopathy were analysed at all, however, none of them represented the principles and practice of genuine homeopathy, i.e. individualized remedies and potencies, long term treatment, etc.

These few examples may suffice to illustrate the intricate and desolate position in which homeopathy, for its adepts a clearly rational and beneficial system of medicine, has gotten within modern medicine's questionable scientific framework utmost antagonistic to and ignorant of homeopathy's evidence and excellence.

(2) Diagnosis

True science, however, never stops asking. So at this point the question may arise: What is the cause, the reason of that? Is there a system, a logic behind it?

Drawing on the knowledge and methods of most advanced modern sciences, such as *epistemology*, *quantum physics*, *chaos theory*, *systems theory*, and *history of science*, today it seems clear that the mechanistic and materialistic Cartesian and Newtonian approach is not able to cope with the systemic, non-linear, and complementary conditions of living beings. Nevertheless, since the nineteenth century conventional medicine has been essentially based on this kind of reductionism and is chasing after quantification, standardisation, and reproducibility of medical actions, although this purely technical approach comes from and indeed makes sense only in the factories of industrial mass production.

To understand the connection between medicine and industry, not only natural sciences, but also social sciences have to be consulted. *History of medicine* for example can show in detail how modern conventional medicine emerged in strict parallelism with the rise of industrialisation, mechanisation, and technologisation of all aspects of modern societies. At the same time, traditional holistic approaches were relegated to the fringe.

Sociology can go one step further and explain that what any society generates during a certain epoch depends on the way its members socialize with each other. This socialization process is on the one hand being performed by individuals, on the other hand it actually creates, brings forth, and constitutes the individuals participating in it. Thus, according to its basic paradigm or way of thinking, a society may breed human subjects whose values, ideals, and convictions are totally different from those of another one in another century or country.

The science of *economics* may now teach that money is not a thing, a substance, or something owning an intrinsic value, but just a form of thinking. More concretely, it is the form of thinking in which modern capitalistic societies socialize their members. Since virtually everybody is subjected to this socialization process from infancy, there is actually no escape, it is, (looked at it this way), totalitarian – comparable only with our first exposition to our native language which was certainly already present, spoken by others, and prior to our conscious realization that we have just learnt and thus reproduced it.

Together with the insights of other sciences, such as *sociology* and *theory of science*, this means, that our view of the world, especially the modern (allegedly enlightened and objective) scientific world view, is mainly constituted by our thinking in terms of money, since all our thought processes have ever since been infiltrated by it.

History of science can actually prove that the emergence of modern natural science in the seventeenth century coincided with fundamental socio-economic changes triggered by a raised status of money (as the predominant form of thinking). Accordingly, the basic attitude of modern scientists towards nature is no longer respect and the wish to live in harmony with her, but the temptation to prise out her secrets (with screws and clamps) and control her – because money may be made with inventions based on knowledge gained in that fashion. Quantification, mathematization, standardization, reproducibility, materialism, positivism, reductionism, etc., i.e. concepts on which conventional modern science and, from the nineteenth century, conventional modern medicine are essentially founded, would make no sense without the context of the socialization process in terms of money in modern capitalistic societies. To indigenous cultures, these concepts must seem absurd, even today.

As it turns out that, instead of human individuals, money – as a form of thinking – is the real protagonist of history, controlling and exploiting everything, including sciences and medicine, it may be clear now as to why homeopathy must have many enemies. On the one hand, pharmaceutical companies, aiming for mass production of standardized medicines, and scientists sponsored by them are defending their financial claims. On the other hand, newcomers are surging onto the market in order to make profit with any kind of innovation, no matter whether allopathic or naturopathic, disdaining the traditional as rivalry. Both, conservative and progressive players, are money-driven and insofar oblivious to anything else, at any rate to truth in the traditional sense, as well as to homeopathy.

To understand the difference in principle between the traditional and the money-driven world, *history of philosophy* provides two helpful notions coined by Aristotle. Far from denying any use of money whatsoever, he had a positive view of *oikonomia*, the moderate exchange of money and commodities, based on barter and temperance, while he rejected *chremastiké*, the self-referential art of money-making, just for the purpose of money-making, detached from any other meaning, because this, he maintained, is against the nature of man.

Hahnemann had a quiet similar view, as can be deduced from the sources *history of homeopathy* preserves. Earning and spending money was always just a means for him to make a living for his family, but never an aim in itself. And, most important and contrary to modern conventional medicine, money as a form of thinking never infiltrated his medical theory. He was lucky insofar to live at a time when monetarisation and industrialisation did not yet play a predominant role in his country (Saxony). And homeopaths may consider themselves lucky to have Hahnemann as a beacon reminding all subsequent generations that it was (and still should be) possible to found a method of healing free of monetary thinking.

By contrast, in modern capitalist civilizations the basic intention pervading all realms of life and culture, the utmost incentive, end, and merit is the turnover and multiplication of money, called economic growth, to be measured, of course, by the gross domestic product. Apart from relatively few people who selflessly lived for higher ideals, including some good-hearted pioneers of science and medicine, the majority of people unconsciously pursues this trivial way of living.

(3) Treatment

Looking for options to untangle or even dissolve the spoiled situation, it is important to be fully aware of the perverted condition in which people of modern industrialized civilizations are living. Due to the all-embracing dominance of money, it is no longer human individuals that are deciding freely and autonomously what to do and what not to do. But just like a virus causes the infected cell to enable the intruder's unlimited proliferation (for the benefit of the virus only and on the cost of the cell and the entire living organism), it is money – as a form of thinking – that prompts human individuals, (be it economists, politicians, or scientists), to think and act and argue in a way that safeguards the unchecked multiplication of money rather than the health and welfare of its servants. Under these circumstances, trapped and remote-controlled subjects, when engaging in science, fixate on single sciences and shield themselves from others.

On the contrary, applying all sciences, (as has been outlined), in a balanced and constructive way, may be a way to make the limitations of certain points of view and especially their monetary reasons clear and evident. As the *history of homeopathy* records that Hahnemann, in the course of founding homeopathy, had to refute one-dimensional dogmatism as well as the arbitrariness of medical pluralism by actually transcending their horizon, homeopaths today are still challenged to develop the spirit and courage to criticize and supersede crude and money-driven paradigms by more appropriate concepts and good practice.

Theory of medicine, another science neglected by conventional medical fundamentalists, has shown that medicine, rather than being an applied cognitive science, has always been a practical science on its own part. This means that its principles and maxims may never be tested in a laboratory, but always only in concrete therapeutic contexts. Hahnemann knew that. And with this in mind, he openly admitted that potentized remedies do not act chemically, physically, atomically, mechanically, etc., thereby accepting that there may never be anything found that is measurable, such as molecules or the like. Instead of despairing over the incompatibility with rude mechanistic concepts, he self-confidently continued and perfected the excellence of his practice and theory.

To be able not only to master but also to criticize different sciences and apply them in a balanced and beneficial way and at the same time avoiding the pitfalls of misleading concepts of medicine and science, obviously requires an artist of science and medicine. In his self-conception as an artist of healing Hahnemann connected with the perennial tradition of good clinical practice reaching back to Hippocrates. That way he left his successors an ever lasting example of how to counter the impositions laid on homeopathy by modern concepts of evidence and excellence.

Instead of wasting resources on trying to achieve the impossible, i.e. convincing narrow-minded one-dimensional fundamentalists of science, homeopaths may continue and perfect their way of practice and documentation as their master did, unimpressed by objections on the part of those who are unable or unwilling anyway to see and appreciate what homeopaths are doing.

From a historical perspective of centuries, by all means, it seems more than likely that the current Gold standard for evidence and excellence in conventional medicine will elapse, while the evidence and excellence of good homeopathic practice will persist – thus once again proving true the immortal dictum of Hippocrates: „Ars longa, vita brevis“ (the art is long, while life is short).