

SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL

200 years *Organon of Medicine* – A comparative Review of its six editions (1810–1842)[☆]

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In 2010 the 200th anniversary of the *Organon* is celebrated by the homeopathic community. Samuel Hahnemann's *Organon of Rational Therapeutics*, published in 1810, however, marks neither the beginning of homeopathy nor the endpoint of its development. On the one hand, its contents are based on terms and concepts developed and published by Hahnemann during the preceding two decades. On the other hand, the five revised editions of the *Organon* that followed in the next three decades contain major changes of theory and conceptions. Hahnemann's basic idea, running through all the stages of the foundation, elaboration, and defence of his doctrine, may be detected by a comparative review of his works from a historical and philosophical perspective. *Homeopathy* (2010) 99, 271–277.

Keywords: Samuel Hahnemann; *Organon of Medicine*; Homeopathy; History of medicine; Theory of medicine

Introduction

This year, 2010, homeopathy is once again said to have reached its 200th anniversary. The truth is that homeopaths have already celebrated '200 years of homeopathy' at least three times within the last 20 years. These correspond to important stages in the foundation and development of homeopathy by Samuel Hahnemann (1755–1843). In 1990 the 200th anniversary was commemorated of Hahnemann's famous experiment on himself with Peruvian bark in 1790, later considered to be the "dawn" of the homeopathic idea.^{1,2} 1996 marked 200 years since the basic principles of homeopathy were published by Hahnemann for the first time, in his essay "On a new principle". This included drug provings on healthy humans and treatment according to "similia similibus".^{3,4}

In 2007 the term "homeopathic" finally had its 200th birthday, having been introduced by Hahnemann in 1807.⁵ It was mainly German-speaking people who cele-

brated this anniversary, as the corresponding article has never been translated into English.

The noun "homeopathy" was first used by Hahnemann in 1810.⁶ Also, the basic maxim of homeopathy "similia similibus curentur" was first published in its complete version in the *Organon of Rational Therapeutics*.⁷ Thus, in 1810, homeopathy acquired a basic textbook and a distinctive label, constituting itself as a discrete entity. This first edition of the *Organon* is widely known under the title *Organon of the Rational Art of Healing*, as it was under this title that it was introduced to the English speaking world by CE Wheeler in 1913.⁸

But this translation obscures the difference between the German words "Heilkunde" (knowledge of healing) and "Heilkunst" (art of healing). In Hahnemann's day, the professional dispute was exactly centred on this issue, i.e. whether medicine can or should be considered an art or a science/knowledge.⁹ Consistent with modern positions in the theory of medicine,^{10,11} in 1819 Hahnemann revised his initial emphasis on rationality in medicine in favour of a broader concept of medicine as an art rather than an applied science.

The fact that the title of the first edition of the *Organon*, published in 1810, is *Organon of Rational Therapeutics*, while all the subsequent editions bear the title *Organon of the Art of Healing*, gives a first hint that the development of homeopathy cannot be considered to have been complete in 1810. A comparative examination of the different

[☆]Revised version of a paper presented at the 65th Congress of the Liga Medicorum Homoeopathica Internationalis in Los Angeles, California, on 19 May 2010.

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Received 29 May 2010; revised 11 August 2010; accepted 18 August 2010

editions discloses changes of concepts and theories in the development of the *Organon*, rather than a continuity of attitude and approach. The latter does, of course, exist, but is more difficult to unravel.

Homeopaths who read the sixth and final edition, may also get a sense of this problem, if they study it in depth. Apparent contradictions arising from a critical reading can often be resolved by demonstrating that Hahnemann, when revising the *Organon*, was not always totally consistent in eliminating old concepts and substituting new ones.¹²

Comparison of all six German editions is facilitated by a literary tool called *Organon Synopse*. This is a book in which the complete contents of all six editions are printed, with corresponding phrases side by side, enabling the reader to trace continuities and discontinuities in the development of Hahnemann's thought.¹³ So, although the *Organon* is often called 'the Bible of homeopathy', for many the basic reference of homeopathy has always been very difficult to understand.

In order to shed new light on the content of the *Organon*, let us take a step back to obtain a broader perspective, from where we may be able to place it in a historic and philosophical context.

Historical perspectives

From time immemorial – due to the precarious condition of human existence – the motive to heal people has been a perennial challenge, an anthropological basic constant. It can be found in all epochs of history and on all continents of the world. This goal – whether inspired by compassion, worship, curiosity, or convention – can be and has been pursued and achieved in very different ways. As the history of medicine shows, concepts, terms, and theories of how to cure people varied widely – depending on time, place, intellectual climate, socio-economic, cultural, and political circumstances.¹⁴ Seen from a historian's view, for instance it was not by chance that homeopathy emerged in 18th and 19th century Germany. It would not have fitted with Greek antiquity, Western middle ages, traditional Chinese culture, or the like.¹⁵

In the wake of major political, social, and economic changes, such as the French Revolution, emancipation of citizens, and early industrialisation, and of intellectual movements, such as enlightenment, German Idealism and Romanticism, toward the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries a remarkable culture of critical thinking evolved.

As if triggered by an ever-rising consciousness and relevance of economic relations, not only scientists and physicians, but even theologians and philosophers tried to expand the realm of rationality within their fields. The term 'ratio' derives from the commercial rendering of accounts, so 'rationalism' may be seen as the triumph of money – as a form of thinking – over all realms of life.¹⁶ Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) claimed to have elevated metaphysics to the rank of a true (rational) science, and many physicians (as well as philosophers and artists) were anxious to achieve the same for medicine.¹⁷

Against this background and within this context, Hahnemann's life's work, the finding, foundation, and development of homeopathy, may be contemplated and assessed: from his first vision of the principle of similars in 1790, to his completion of the sixth edition of the *Organon* in 1842. Seen in this context, the first edition loses some of its alleged status as an outstanding landmark in the history of homeopathy, let alone a kind of holy scripture. It rather turns out to have been one of several transitional stages in a busy literary and medical career, extending over six decades, from Hahnemann's dissertation (1779)¹⁸ to his manuscript of the last edition of the *Organon* (1842).¹⁹

Philosophical perspectives

Apart from taking into account the regional and cultural circumstances, influences, and biases of his time and contemporaries (a vast field for medical historical research), it is important for a clear understanding of Hahnemann's work to consider philosophical and epistemological problems, with which any explorer of anything new and previously undiscovered is confronted. It is a paradox of the human condition, that language, logic, and concepts allow humans to communicate their thoughts and opinions to other fellow human beings, but at the same time limit the content of what is communicable to others.

As a rule, ordinary people are only able to perceive, experience, and grasp those things for which they have a sense, and also a basic concept in their minds. For instance, without having a concept of a chair we would not be able to recognise any chair in a room, since we would not even know what to look for. Everything alien to our senses and concepts, though it may be sensed by bats, bees, or eels, or spiritual or mystic insights of saints, drops through the meshes of our perception and understanding and will thus remain unknown to us.

Given the case that somebody has discovered something that is truly new and unheard of, be it by chance, intuition, revelation, providence or the like – in order to communicate this to his people, has no option but to try to express it by means of existing language, logic, and concepts. But were it possible to easily grasp and communicate it by these means, it would have probably been discovered long before. History contains many examples of how philosophers, writers, and also physicians had to challenge the boundaries of language, or even create a fresh terminology for their new approaches.²⁰

Unlike for example Paracelsus (1493–1541), who could develop his own world of concepts along with his alchemical, astrological, and therapeutic findings relatively undisturbed (most of his work was published posthumously),²¹ Hahnemann, living 300 years later, was more obliged to comply with the conceptual standards and fashions of his time.

Although modern peer-review procedures did not yet exist, to publish an article for instance in Hufeland's *Journal* or to find a publisher for a book on medicine, certainly was not possible without talking the same language as one's colleagues and sharing their scientific interests. Empirical

details could be reported at will, as long as the intellectual framework was understandable to readers. This is why Hahnemann used terms like organism, life-force, life-principle, dynamic, potencies, agencies, remedies, miasms, causes of disease, signs, symptoms, etc., and why he never stopped working on clarifying their relationship and meaning during his long life of practising and writing.

Had Hahnemann lived today, in order to obtain access to a peer reviewed medical journal he would, like everybody else, have to comply with writing in terms of modern science, such as immunology, epigenetics, cybernetics, etc. He would have probably used progressive concepts, such as complexity, semiotics, systems theory, or salutogenesis.

In order to put the *Organon of Rational Therapeutics* into the context of Hahnemann's striving for recognition by his contemporaries, let us now take a closer look at the way he modified his presentation of, and arguments for his cause over the course of more than 50 years.

Behind ostensible shifts of perspective, emphasis, and concepts, one can detect the continuous development of a basic idea, although, there are certainly some theoretical and terminological discontinuities. The task is to abstract the original vision or experience from contradictory concepts, to identify the non-verbal essence of homeopathy which should be expressible in more than one theoretical framework and be transferable to different times and languages.

Early writings of Hahnemann (1790–1809)

In 1790, in his translation of William Cullen's *Materia Medica*, and following his self-experiment on Peruvian bark, Hahnemann drew the attention of the reader to his observation that "*substances which arouse a kind of fever extinguish the types of intermittent fever*".²²

Referring to this early statement, in an article published in Hufeland's *Journal* in 1796, Hahnemann presented himself as a "*true physician having the perfection of his art at heart*". He focussed exclusively on two questions: 1. What pure effects do medicines bring forth in healthy human bodies? and 2. What do their effects in distinct diseases teach us?²³ Rejecting all other (indirect) sources of medicinal knowledge, such as chemistry, botany, animal experiments, etc., Hahnemann advocated drug provings on healthy humans and treatment according to the principle "*similia similibus*". However, if a basic cause of a disease, such as a tapeworm (taenia), was known, its elimination would be the "*via regia*" of the art of healing. If no basic cause was known, i.e. in the majority of cases, antipathic treatment (treatment by the contrary) would be suitable only in acute diseases. Chronic diseases, on the other hand, were to be treated with so-called 'specifics', i.e. remedies which have proven their practical uses in similar cases. For any state of disease there should be a specific remedy.²⁴

Hahnemann's uncompromising pragmatic attitude toward his goal of healing human beings in this early publication is very striking. It results in a differentiated and

balanced handling of the causal and phenomenological approach.

In another publication in Hufeland's *Journal*, in 1797, Hahnemann for the first time distinguished between "*dynamically*" and "*chemically*" acting medicines.²⁵ In 1800, in his translation of Richard Pearson's *Thesaurus Medicaminum*, he contrasted "*dynamic*" with "*mechanic*",²⁶ and in 1801, in Hufeland's *Journal*, with "*atomic*".²⁷

In 1801, again in Hufeland's *Journal*, Hahnemann introduced his conception of "*fixed (stable) diseases*" which have a stable cause, for instance a "*quite invariable miasm*", like syphilis or psora, and run a similar course. All other diseases, infinitely different in their symptoms, had to be individually considered.²⁸ "*In practically useful regard*" Hahnemann also distinguished "*material*" and "*dynamic*" causes of diseases. If a material cause, such as a splinter, a foreign body, or a gall-stone, could be detected and eliminated, this should be done. Since dynamic causes were not known in their essence, however – even if one knew their names, like psora, syphilis, or smallpox – they could not be treated directly.²⁹

In these publications Hahnemann presented himself as a practical physician who emphasised the distinctions mentioned, because these seemed to him to have direct therapeutic consequences.

In 1805, in Hufeland's *Journal*, Hahnemann presented his doctrine under the heading *Therapeutics of Experience* (known also as *The Medicine of Experience*).³⁰ Once more he pointed out that some diseases may have one and the same cause (e.g. a miasm): these may be called "*peculiar diseases*", bear single names, and be treated with the same remedy. All the rest of the diseases, however, were not homogenous and could not be enumerated. They had to be considered and treated individually, comprising a unique combination of manifold influences in this person under these particular circumstances. In case-taking the physician should ask for basic causes as well as for exciting causes.³¹

Aside from these practical considerations this paper was dominated by Hahnemann's attempt to theoretically explain his doctrine in terms of contemporary concepts. For this (academic) purpose he had to resort to a stimulus theory in order to explain the principle of similars: pathogenic and medicinal stimuli (potencies) provoke diseases. If they are dissimilar, they suspend each other; if they are similar, they extinguish each other.³² By means of a semiotic theory he tried to substantiate his phenomenological approach toward the many individual diseases: since the inner essence of any disease reveals itself through signs and symptoms, they are "*the disease itself*".³³

To justify why a knowledge of all signs and symptoms suffices for healing every individual disease, Hahnemann took refuge in teleological and metaphysical concepts: God, the wise and beneficent creator of humankind, guarantees that, also under the condition of a limited perception, humans must be able to cure. "*Therapeutics*" was now defined as a "*science of experience*".³⁴ However, ostensible cures by non-curative remedies were denied.³⁵

This publication was the forerunner of the *Organon*. Hahnemann embarked upon the scientific discourse of his time,

and was obviously under pressure to explain and sustain in current academic terms what he had been doing in practice for more than 10 years. With the claim of conforming to science, the necessity arose to give reasons for everything. Since any proof or argument is based on certain premises, Hahnemann was ultimately forced to introduce theological topics into his medical writings, as the ultimate premise.

In 1807, again in Hufeland's *Journal*, Hahnemann coined and defined the term "homeopathic", complained that the "truth" of curative healing was not yet "scientifically recognised", and called his doctrine "the most rational and perfect way of healing".³⁶ Up to this publication the term "rational" was used by Hahnemann only casually, for example when he spoke of the "more rational modern times" in 1797,³⁷ a "rational physician" in 1800,³⁸ or the "rational use" of coffee in 1803.³⁹ From this time, however, when Hahnemann entered a phase of defending his doctrine as an entity, the term "rational" – as well as "truth" – became increasingly important to him.

At the same time, in a series of articles in a popular journal for a broader public known as *Allgemeiner Anzeiger der Deutschen*, Hahnemann kept his distance from traditional sciences. In 1808 he stressed that since the way "vitality" works is not reducible to any mechanical, physical, or chemical measure, the wise physician confines himself to a "knowledge of vitality by experience".⁴⁰ In 1809 he recommended to a student the "study of medicine", but only because "one has to know, what concepts people who consider themselves clever physicians have, of all the things which they do not understand".⁴¹

On the other hand, in an open letter to Hufeland, in 1808, Hahnemann tried to reconstruct his discovery in a picture as consistent and incontestable as possible, drawing heavily on teleological arguments. In this context, for the first time he called his new therapeutic maxim a "law of nature" and compared his difficulties in being recognised to those of Luther.⁴²

In 1809 Hahnemann made a significant change of meaning in his terminology: the term "art of remedying" was used pejoratively, while the term "therapeutics" became the new ideal.⁴³

The six editions of the *Organon* (1810–1842)

Hahnemann's high valuation of the terms "rational" and "therapeutics" during that period may certainly have influenced the title of the book, whose 200th anniversary is celebrated this year: the *Organon of Rational Therapeutics*. In this work Hahnemann introduced the noun "homeopathy" and for the first time presented the full formulation of the basic maxim of homeopathy: "similia similibus curentur".⁷ Leaning on a quotation from Francis Bacon (1561–1626) first mentioned in 1805,⁴⁴ the "art of healing" was now denounced as having been a "conjectural art" – until Hahnemann's revision had brought forth the "beneficial truth".⁴⁵

Hahnemann's own ambition was "rationally curing", i.e. "according to fixed reasons".⁷ His doctrine was

claimed to rest upon the "homeopathic law of cure",⁴⁶ the "homeopathic law of nature",⁴⁷ the "law of homeopathy without exceptions",⁴⁸ and some more "special laws of rational therapeutics".⁴⁹ Regarding the examples of involuntary homeopathic cures by former physicians he even spoke of "homeopathic causal connections".⁵⁰

The stimulus theory advocated in 1805 was now replaced by the idea that "the organism obtains a special tuning from the disease" and cannot receive a second one without having to abandon the first.⁵¹ Drug proving was explained entirely in Cartesian terms: "medicinal substances produce disease symptoms, according to special laws".⁵²

In 1810, more than in 1805, Hahnemann was concerned about fitting his knowledge and insights into standard scientific terms and concepts. In consequence, some of his more practical findings almost sank into insignificance, like his further differentiation between fixed, individual, and collective diseases⁵³ and his elaboration of the conception of "vicarious maladies",^{54,55} which substitute, mask or replace the danger of an internal serious disease, for instance by an external eruption on a less important part of the body (a concept introduced in 1809),^{56,57} as a warning against treating local symptoms without curing the "inner disease", such as syphilis or psora.⁵⁸

The problem of the attempt to grasp phenomena of the living in terms of rationality is a tendency to generalisation and dogmatism. Indeed, in 1813, in an article in the popular journal mentioned above, Hahnemann even claimed that nature acts according to the (homeopathic) "laws" – "with mathematical certainty" "in all cases". Homeopathy was asserted to be the most "certain, reliable, gentle, quick, and lasting way" of healing.⁵⁹

In 1819, a second edition of the *Organon* appeared, now entitled *Organon of the Art of Healing*. In the preface Hahnemann stated several times that his subject is the "true art of healing", conceptualised as a "pure science of experience".⁶⁰ The term "rational", so prominent in the first edition, was now erased from the entire book, except for one footnote where it was used to denounce the errors of the old 'rational' school.⁶¹ This ostracism of the term "rational" was maintained through all subsequent editions of the *Organon*.

The same change of attitude may also be seen in a subtle shift of wording in paragraph 1: In 1810 the starting point and subject was "the physician" who had a "goal". From 1819 to 1842, the emphasis was laid upon the "calling of the physician", putting the physician into the genitive. In addition, a new footnote to this section from now on served as an explicit demarcation from academic theorising, in which professors of "theoretic medicinal art" used to indulge.⁶²

While in the first edition a teleological poem from Christian Fürchtegott Gellert (1715–1769) was on the title page, this was now substituted by the motto "aude sapere" ("dare to know" or "dare to be wise") – whereby 'sapere' not only means 'knowing', but also 'smelling', a sensual activity that may not entirely be translatable into rational concepts.

The terms and concepts used in the second edition, to give Hahnemann's medical colleagues a clear idea about homeopathy, were less Cartesian-academic and closer to the

phenomena. Diseases were now described as “*spiritual derangements of our life in feelings and activities*” or “*immaterial derangements of our well-being*”.⁶³ At the same time, he continued to claim (up to the sixth edition), that his doctrine was based on the homeopathic “*law of nature*” or “*healing law of nature*”.⁶⁴ Of practical relevance was Hahnemann’s suggestion to ask patients for a former infection with specific miasms, such as syphilis, psora, or sycosis, since the local symptom, such as the chancre or the skin rash, may have disappeared and with it the completeness of the picture.⁶⁵

The third edition of the *Organon*, published in 1824, was a largely unaltered version of the second. Nevertheless, Hahnemann inserted an approving comment on mesmerism and some extensions of practical rules for the treatment of chronic diseases.⁶⁶ Sycosis was depicted clearly, as an internal disease with specific local and secondary symptoms, taking its place besides psora and syphilis. For the treatment of psora Hahnemann suggested the internal use of the best “*antipsoric remedy*”, using the term “*antipsoric*” for the first time.⁶⁷

In 1828, Hahnemann published his monograph on the nature and treatment of *Chronic Diseases*. As he wrote, he had been working on this issue since 1816,^{68,69} i.e. since the time between the first and second edition of the *Organon*. Based on his concepts of fixed diseases, vicarious maladies, and original and exciting causes, Hahnemann now attributed all chronic disease to a previous infection with a chronic miasm (psora, syphilis, or sycosis) and claimed that these could only be healed homeopathically. The fact that psora was conceptualised to be the most infectious and versatile disease, persisting, without cure, lifelong, like a “*parasite*”,⁷⁰ had the far-reaching consequence that virtually nobody would be free of it. Hahnemann considered himself to be one of very few exceptions.⁷¹

Upto the psora theory, normality had consisted of healthy people occasionally becoming ill. Now (almost) everybody had to be considered to be chronically ill, at least in a latent state, and unable to recover without homeopathic aid.

In the fourth edition of the *Organon*, published in 1829, the paradigmatic changes resulting from psora theory had been incorporated and digested. One of the main concepts helping Hahnemann to explain why the average human would be ill, and not healthy, was the “*life-force*”. In the first edition of the *Organon* this term appeared only once,⁷² in the second edition twice,⁷³ in the third edition 10 times (mainly in connection with mesmerism),⁷⁴ and even in the *Chronic Diseases*, in 1828, only three times,⁷⁵ always in a general and non-specific sense. In the fourth edition, however, Hahnemann used it 70 times,⁷⁶ in the fifth 139 times, and in the sixth, posthumous, edition, 106 times.

In contrast to his earlier use of the term “*life-force*” as a metaphor or synonym for “*nature*” or “*organism*”, Hahnemann now distinguished between “*wise*” “*big nature itself*” and the “*mere individual nature of the organic human*”, namely the “*instinctive, unreasonable life-force*” which once out of tune acts “*blindly*”, “*automatically*”, and “*inappropriately*” and whose “*efforts are itself illness*”.⁷⁷

This, of course, should not be imitated. On the contrary, the “*art of healing*” required the “*higher human spirit*”,

“*free deliberation*”, and “*reasoning*”,⁷⁸ to “*retune*” the “*detuned life-force*”. Only from this point on was disease defined as “*a derangement of the life-force*” and chronic miasms considered to be the “*biggest tormentors of humans*”.⁷⁹

The fifth edition of the *Organon*, published in 1833, was influenced by issues of confrontation and demarcation, including significantly harsher attacks on allopathy,⁸⁰ but also a new delimitation of homeopathy as distinct from “*isopathy*”,⁸¹ against a putative “*sect of bastard-homeopaths*”,⁸² and a new group of “*conceited beginners*” and converts.⁸³ In the course of a tightening of homeopathic identity, from now on he claimed homeopathy to be the “*only true art of healing*”, just as “*between two points there is only one straight line*”.⁸⁴ and suggested using the 30c potency as a standard dose, especially in the form of “*smelling*” (also known as olfaction).⁸⁵

Outstripping his former assessments, Hahnemann now estimated the number of people affected by chronic diseases at 99%.⁸⁶ In the sixth edition, however, he reduced this to “*the majority of diseases*”.⁸⁷

The sixth edition of the *Organon*, completed by Hahnemann in manuscript in 1842, contained few changes of concept and ideas in principle. From a practical point of view, there were a number of relevant modifications of doctrine presented for the first time. The most surprising was his new and more sophisticated method of potentisation, later called Q or LM, fifty-millesimal potencies,^{88,89} together with new directions for dosage and intervals of prescription and rules for following-up cases, including the description of a new kind of late aggravation.⁹⁰

Contrary to the editions three to five, Hahnemann no longer considered mesmerism as a mere “*auxiliary aid*” which could “*act homeopathically*” but not perform a “*lasting cure*”.^{91–93} Rather mesmerism was now granted the peer status of an “*invaluable gift of God*”, equally able to “*extinguish the derangement of the life-force*”.⁹⁴ Hahnemann also admitted – under certain circumstances – the usefulness of the application of magnets, electricity, and galvanism, as well as of massages and baths.⁹⁵ For the first time he also included a vision of homeopathic hospitals and education.⁹⁶

Conclusion and outlook

It should now be clear that the *Organon of Rational Therapeutics*, published in 1810, cannot be adequately understood and judged without considering its context. With the first edition of the *Organon*, homeopathy neither began nor ended. On the contrary, its position seems to be rather in the midst of Hahnemann’s literary and practical life’s work. Basic principles of homeopathy, like drug proving and treatment by similars, had already been prefigured in 1796.

Other fundamental concepts, such as “*dynamic*”, “*fixed disease*”, “*miasm*”, and “*original and exciting causes*” were developed in 1796, 1797, 1801, and 1805, respectively. In 1805 various scientific theories were drawn upon to make the new method plausible, understandable, and acceptable to academic physicians. Even the name

“homeopathic” had already been coined in 1807. Compared to these preliminaries, the particular achievement of the first edition of the *Organon* was little more than a deliberate alignment with the prevailing trend of rationality.

On the other hand, formal similarities of the six editions of the *Organon*, viewed superficially, may give the impression that all editions were basically the same, just republished at different times, with some corrections. A deeper, comparative analysis shows them in a different light. Each seems to possess an individual personality: from the first, most ambitious and rationalistic edition, to the second, more artistic and phenomenological, to the third, almost unaltered, to the fourth, which was dominated by the psora theory, to the fifth, the most pugnacious and delimiting, to the sixth, probably the most pragmatic and balanced. Each corresponded to a phase in Hahnemann’s life and development, his social conditions, and intellectual environment.

After starting out to impress readers of his first *Organon* by means of the rationalistic claim to make medicine a natural science in 1810, Hahnemann embraced anew the ideal of medicine as an “art of healing” in 1819, had almost nothing to add to this in 1824, assimilated a large paradigmatic change in 1829, defended his doctrine against various threats and false friends in 1833, and, after moving to Paris, perfected his life’s work in 1842.

The six editions of the *Organon* are different, but connected by a strong invisible thread. It is Hahnemann’s basic idea of an art of healing that, on the one hand, attempts to conform as closely as possible to the sick human and primary phenomena (disturbed well-being/feeling, detuned vitality, remedies as potencies to influence these states) and, on the other hand, strives to find tools, rules and laws that make the highly demanding practice of medicine certain and reliable.

If one admits this basic idea to be the core of the spirit of Hahnemann, pervading all his writings, practice, and research, there still remains the need to translate this hazy vision into concrete terms and concepts: a challenge which Hahnemann met and pioneered throughout his life. That he had to comply with theories, ideas, and conceptions of his time and contemporaries, does not at all impair his achievements. On the contrary: instead of criticising or deconstructing Hahnemann’s dependence on contemporary conditions, homeopaths should engage in the task of carrying his noble and beneficial intention into the 21st century, trying to translate the perennial mission of medicine into the language of modern science, humanities, and philosophy.

Only if one tried to write a seventh edition of the *Organon*, would one probably realise how much Hahnemann had already accomplished in the previous six.

Conflict of interest

None.

Acknowledgement

I thank Francis Treuherz MA RSHom FSHom for reviewing and editing the paper.

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