

# Making Hahnemann's 'Organon': a Modern Textbook

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**Abstract:** Students new to homeopathy do successfully learn from Hahnemann's complete *Organon*. A new format and an updated translation greatly help. Homeopathic principles and methodology are still true. It only requires a modern presentation to nicely motivate students. Only a thorough foundation in the original homeopathy leads to true advances and enrichment of the science.

**Keywords:** Hahnemann, Organon, Heilkunst, heal, cure

## Introduction

The closing sentence for an article published in *Homeopathic Links* says, "It is discouraging to me that students are no longer taught the original homeopathy with accuracy and depth in many existing schools, and that they are no longer making the effort to master the original teachings before trying to enrich it."<sup>(1)</sup> Now instead of wishing that the *Organon* be taught in detail, it is happening.

The National University of Health Sciences in Lombard, Illinois, includes a full naturopathic medical school curriculum successfully on the official accreditation track. The required courses include homeopathy. The first of four lecture classes introduces homeopathy in 15 hours. I teach Homeopathy 2, which is Hahnemann's *Organon*, in 60 hours. Homeopathy 3 includes the repertory, case taking and polychrests in 60 hours of classroom work. Homeopathy 4 teaches more materia medica for 60 hours.

The naturopathic medical school is under the direction of Fraser Smith, ND. I thank him for his vision to teach the original homeopathy.

## Hahnemann's 'Organon' as Textbook

After reviewing most of the books that teach homeopathy, I find that the *Organon of Medicine* by Hahnemann remains the most concise and carefully written text on the principles and practice of homeopathy; however, many students new to homeopathy find the *Organon* difficult to read.

The modern reader encounters several obstacles when first trying to read the *Organon*. There is no obvious beginning and ending to each subject. No chapters divide the material. It is difficult to differentiate major points from minor points in the original aphorism style. Translation from a different language and a different two hundred-year old culture makes

some of the teachings obscure. For instance, how does the new student know that §70 is a summary of all the preceding paragraphs and §71 delineates the content of the rest of the book?

## A New Format for the 'Organon'

A new format addresses some of the difficulties in studying the *Organon*. The experienced reader of the *Organon* divides the text into sections or units and assigns titles to each part. It may be of academic interest to memorize what each aphorism says by the number, but it is of no practical value to a new student. The goal is to understand the principles of homeopathy, not to memorize quotes. For this reason the aphorism numbers are de-emphasized. Instead, a bullet point arrangement is used. Major points in each unit are listed first. Further descriptive points are listed under the major point. For example, Unit 12 is named, "Intermittent Diseases/Alternating Diseases - §231-244." One of the major points of this section of the *Organon* is written as follows:

Each epidemic of intermittent fever has a specific remedy common to every sick individual - §239-241

That remedy is found according to the totality of symptoms common to all the patients.

Every medicine's pure action produces a particular fever different from all other fevers, even intermittent fever with its alternating states

There is homeopathic help for the numerous natural intermittent fevers in the large realm of medicines.

The remedy helps those who were in fairly good health before the epidemic (i.e., those who were not chronically sick with developed psora)

New translations are made when it seems neces-

sary. When possible, shorter sentences are used for the modern attention span. Every generation must re-translate the *Organon* because words change meaning over time; the cultural norms change and real scientific knowledge changes.

A modern format and a modern translation is not enough, however. The teacher still has certain unavoidable responsibilities. In the above example, the teacher must remind the class of Hahnemann's specific definition of "epidemic" in §73; he must compare the term "intermittent fever" to "marsh fever" and the modern category called "malaria." He must point out that Hahnemann never uses the term "genus epidemicus," but says "specific remedy" in this aphorism as well as in §100-103 where he introduces the collective disease. The teacher must clarify that "moderate number" refers to around 100, and he must especially point out the last sentence as a modern warning to those homeopaths who believe that homeopathy will provide a panacea for the next pandemic: the specific remedy for a serious epidemic will help many, but not cure because of the prevalence of chronic disease and general low level of health in the population.

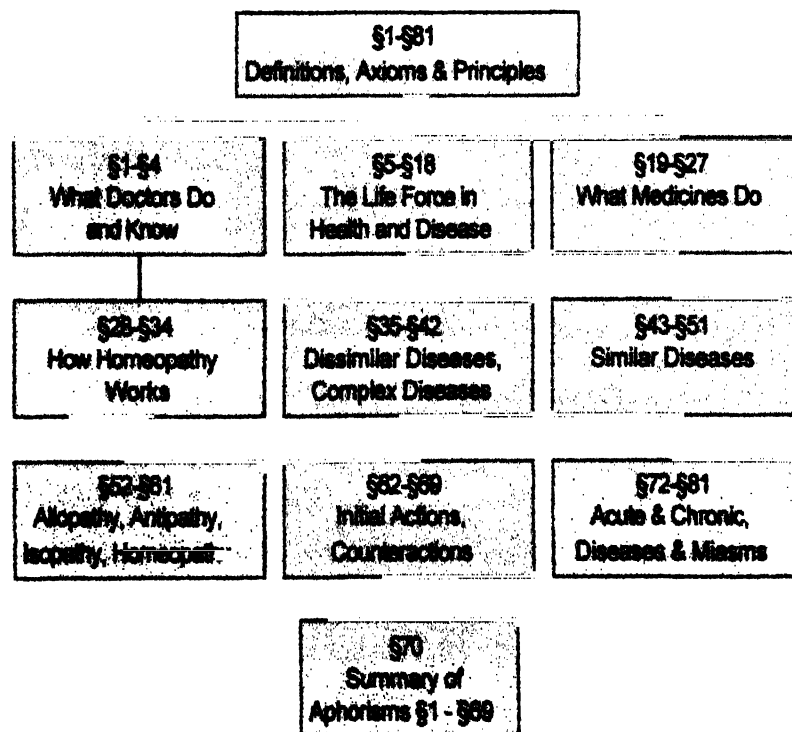
The *Organon* in modern textbook form is not a condensed or shortened version. No teaching by Hahnemann is left out. It provides maps of the *Organon* aphorisms to show overall structure (see Map A). It includes an outline for each section of the *Organon* (see Table 1), provides a list of key words to define in context; discourages rote memorization and, instead, forms an answer based on the context of the aphorism

where the word is used. For example, in allopathic medicine, "symptom" has devolved into a specialized meaning: descriptions of disease that are subjective. Hahnemann uses the word "symptoms" interchangeably with the word "signs" to include all subjective and objective phenomena.(2)

A textbook of the *Organon* also includes additional quotes from Hahnemann taken from his other written works. Each unit lists self-examination questions to encourage class participation. A summary in slide format ends each unit. When a student receives only a short list of principles summarizing homeopathy, it is not enough. The students relish the chance to understand Hahnemann's observations and reasoning step by step, and are motivated to incorporate this methodology into their developing worldview of the many systems of medical treatment.

### Translation Problems

There is an Italian saying, "*traduttore, traditore*"—the translator is a traitor. Consulting eight English translations of Hahnemann's *Organon* and comparing them to two German editions reveals several problems of interpretation. The title of the book is a good example. *Organon der Heilkunst* (3) is variously called *Organon of the Art of Healing*(4), *Organon of Medicine*(5), *Organon of the Medical Art*(6), *Organon of the Healing Art*(7). What title conveys Hahnemann's intent for today's American culture? "Heil" means both "cure" and "heal" in German. The word "Cur" that Hahnemann occasionally uses, as in §206, is not



Map A

**Dissimilar Disease Interaction**

KINDS	POSSIBILITIES	RESULTS	REFERENCE
Two Natural Dissimilar Diseases	If the older is stronger	It repels the newer	§36
	If the older and newer are equal	The newer is kept away	§36
	If the newer is stronger	The older is suspended, then reappears	§38
	If the older and newer join	Complex	§40
One Natural, One Medicinal Dissimilar Diseases	If the medicine disease is mild	The older natural disease is uncured	§37
	If the medicinal disease is stronger	A new disease begins	§37
		It suspends the older natural disease for a time, but no cure	§39
	Or a complicated disease made of old and medicinal diseases	§41	

Table 1

a German word. Currently, in American usage, curing and healing no longer mean the same thing. “Experts cure, but people heal each other...I can heal with my humanity things that I can never cure with my science.”(8) The word “Kunst” refers to “art.” In an English dictionary, there are two pertinent meanings for “art.” One meaning is, “a work of imagination or imitation.” The major meaning is “a skill mastered as result of practice.”(9) If homeopathy is called an art these days, it gives permission for anyone to fabricate anything they wish from their imagination. If we use the word “medicine,” then we are confused with allopathy. Should we call Hahnemann’s book “Organon of Skillful Curing?”

If we don’t even agree on the title of the book, then the more complex content of the text is bound to generate irresolvable diversity. Why does the Kunzli edition translate “Krutz-Siechtum” in §206 as “scabies disease” instead of “itch disease?”(10) Hahnemann certainly included much more than one mite in the psoric process. Why does the O’Reilly edition translate “Schlusse” as “deductions” instead of “conclusions?”(1) Hahnemann does not allow theories and deductions in the *Organon*. See §1a. His conclusions are based on observations,

experiments and experience. How is “Gleichgewicht” in §289 translated? Kunzli says “equally,”(12) thereby passing up one of Hahnemann’s major definitions of health. The German dictionary offers “balance, equilibrium, equipoise.”(13) O’Reilly leaps to a newer word “homeostasis.”(14) This so-called newer word borrowed from mechanistic physiology is out-dated. A more modern term is “homeodynamics.”(15) In such detail does the interpreter of Hahnemann get involved. The new student has no way of judging which teacher is more useful, more practical until she actually treats the sick and sees the outcomes.

**The Worst Error in the English ‘Organon’**

As in most books, there are misspellings and typing errors. The error in Dudgeon, however, is an error of content. The last phrase of §70 says, “when to an old disease there is added a new one similar to the first, whereby the new one is rapidly and forever annihilated and cured.”(16) The emphasis is added. Boericke’s translation of the sixth edition carries over this error. (17) Kunzli’s 1982 translation does not have this error. This implies that American homeopaths who did not speak German lived with this incorrect teaching for

80 years. I have, so far, not seen it mentioned in the literature. Did they not really study the *Organon*? The Wesselhoeft translation of 1875 is rather ambiguous: "When a new and similar disease is added to the older one, this is permanently extinguished and cured."(18) The English translation of 1833 that Hering's group used says, "by adding to an existing disease a new one that resembles it, he cures it promptly and effectually."(19) Emphasis added to §LXVI. On the final exam given to the students in the class on the *Organon*, almost all of them recognize the error and correctly restate it.

## Why Teach the 'Organon'

The reasoning may go like this: It is an old, outdated book. For instance, they do not teach the law of gravity using Newton's original manuscripts. Much has been discovered since then. However, like Newton's laws, the law of homeopathy is not out of date; it is still the truth. It is the presentation to the student that changes according to the needs of the time.

Before any practitioner can truly advance and enrich homeopathy, she must completely master the pure principles and methodology. Without real experience based on the consistent application of the authentic laws of homeopathy, no true advancement takes place. Witness the short cuts and easier methods of homeopathy promoted by teachers in much of the world today that leads to the deterioration of applied homeopathy.

If there were another reliable textbook of all of Hahnemann's teachings, I would use it. No other textbook goes through the careful reasoning of Hahnemann. Instead, other authors summarize or explain the main points. A short list mentioning the conclusions of homeopathy is not enough to convince a student of the importance of the law of similars.

Instead, we must present all of the *Organon*, but anew to meet the challenge of the times. Is the following translation of §1-2 too new, too radical?

Make sick people well - §1, 2  
 The doctor's highest and only calling  
 Termed curing  
 Act  
 Help  
 Heal  
 The highest ideal of curing  
 Cure rapidly, gently, permanently  
 Remove and annihilate the whole disease  
 In a short time  
 In the way  
 Most reliable  
 Least harmful  
 By clear intelligible principles

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