

Hahnemann As Scientist

This article concerns itself with the extent to which Hahnemann was scientific. If we define science in its broadest sense as the desire to break things down, scrutinise and analyse, then we can easily see that the 18th century was a very scientific century and in no subject more so than in chemistry. But was Hahnemann scientific?

Some History

Hahnemann (1755-1843) lived during some of the greatest advances in chemistry, during which literally hundreds of natural minerals were successfully analysed and purified into their constituent elements and compounds. For example, during Hahnemann's lifetime: Black (1755), Cavendish (1766) and Priestley (1770) did fundamental work on gases; Priestley (1774), Lavoisier (1772) and Scheele (1768-73) worked on combustion; Priestley, Cavendish and Lavoisier established the composition of water (1781-5); Priestley did further fundamental work on combustion in 1775; Volta was splitting gases using electric sparks in 1776; de Morveau & Lavoisier began to analyse substances into elements in 1782; Henry (1803) and Davey (1806) did work on the solubility of gases in liquids; Proust (1789), Dalton (1803) and Richter (1792) investigated the quantitative laws of physical chemistry; Avogadro (1811), Dalton (1803) and Berzelius (1811) did fundamental work on atomic theory and atomic weights; and Faraday (1833) published his laws of electrolysis.

1649 Carbon, Sulphur, Antimony and Arsenic were well known

1669 Phosphorus discovered by the German alchemist Brand

1750 Cobalt and Nickel discovered

1755 Magnesium shown to be an element by Joseph Black (1728-99)

1756 CO₂ discovered by Joseph Black

1766 Hydrogen discovered by Henry Cavendish (1731-1810)

1771 Fluorine discovered by Carl Scheele (1742-86)

1772 Nitrogen isolated by the Scot Daniel Rutherford (1749-1819)

1772 Oxygen discovered by Scheele

1774 Manganese discovered by the Swede Gahn (1745-1818)

1774 Chlorine discovered by Scheele

1774 Oxygen discovered by Joseph Priestley (1733-1804)

1777 Sulphur shown to be an element

1781 Cavendish showed water to be a compound

1783 Baryta, Oxygen, Prussic acid and Glycerine isolated by Scheele

1785 Water proved to be made of gases

1800 Electrolysis of water by Michael Faraday (1791-1867)

1803 Dalton discovers atoms have different weights

1807 Sodium and Potassium isolated by Humphrey Davy (1778-1829)

1808 Davy isolates Calcium, Magnesium, Boron, Barium and Strontium

1808 The Atomic Table devised by John Dalton (1766-1844)

1810 Davy coins the term 'element'

1811 Iodine discovered by the Frenchman Courtois (1777-1838)

1813 Iodine discovered

1813-14 Berzelius published atomic symbols

1818 Table of Atomic weights published by the Swede Berzelius (1779-1848)

1825 Aluminium discovered by Hans Oersted (1777-1851)

1827 Aluminium isolated by Friedrich Wohler (1800-82)

1828 Wohler isolates Beryllium, Calcium carbide and Acetylene

1828 Wohler synthesises Urea from ammonium cyanate

1869 Periodic Table published by Dmitri Mendeleev (1834-1907)

These were obviously developments that Hahnemann could not have failed to know about and indeed, was thoroughly excited about. It is clear from many of his asides, that he regarded chemistry as the most important science. Like Paracelsus before him, he was mad about metals, minerals and acids.

Purity

Did all this scientific progress have any effect on Hahnemann's approach to homœopathic pharmacy and materia medica? I hope to show that it did have profound effects and that Hahnemann, like his contemporaries, became swept along with a tide of chemical purification and analysis. However, I also hope to show that Hahnemann had several other reasons for adopting this approach, which were more social and presentational than therapeutic.

Reading some of Hahnemann's greatest works, like *Chronic Diseases*, the *Materia Medica Pura*, the *Pharmaceutical Lexicon* or the *Lesser Writings*, one is presented repeatedly with very detailed chemical instructions on how to purify the ingredients and remedies and how to rid them of any contaminants.

Examples include, in *Chronic Diseases*, pp186-7 re *Alumina*, p231 re *Ammonium carbonicum*, p392 re *Baryta carbonica*, p558-9 re *Causticum*, p783 re *Iodum*. In Preface to 'Venereal Diseases' pp1-7 of *Lesser Writings*, *ibid.* re various mercurial preparations for syphilis, in pp106-116 of *Lesser Writings*; general instructions in *Chronic Diseases* pp145-152.

Why did Hahnemann go to such lengths to keep his remedies pure?

When you look at the history of remedies that Hahnemann studied, proved and brought into use, it is clear that he was doing two things:

- he was aware of the natural unrefined minerals and plant mixtures, but by and large, he avoided their use and kept their inclusion in his materia medica to a strict minimum.
- he strived – like his contemporaries – to use isolated and

purified compounds and elements wherever possible.

I am not necessarily suggesting that Hahnemann consciously decided to act in this way, though he may have done. Certainly this is of interest to us today. Judging from the rest of that century, it would be remarkable had he not been excited by chemicals. In any case, he left scant indications as to why he chose the remedies he did or his mode of preparing them. Many require little explanation in any case, as they had been in use for centuries. Examples here include *Digitalis*, *Mercury*, *Sulphur*, *Phosphorus*, *Arsenicum*, *Belladonna* and *Aconite*. What is curious, however, is that he so often opted not to use the natural unrefined minerals, but preferred instead to use mostly purified substances. The care and detail with which he then describes the preparation of his remedies is quite exhaustive. He gives the strong impression that the reader MUST follow these instructions in order to produce an exact copy of the remedy he describes, and that no other impure alternative will do.

For example, in the case of *Calcarea carbonica* he uses oyster shell. This is very curious. Why did he choose oyster shell when you consider that Meissen is over 235 miles (380km) from the sea? Why did he not use limestone, eggshells, chalk, snail shells or calcite, which would be much more common in his own area and basically identical chemically? And why did he call it *Calcarea carbonica* and not *Calcarea ostrea*? Further examples include the use of *Hepar sulph* and *Causticum*, which must rank as two of the weirdest remedies ever devised. He would have got basically the same product using sulphurous limestone or metamorphosed marble for *Hepar sulph* and slaked wood ash for *Causticum*. Likewise he could have used pure sand instead of flint for *Silicea*, sea salt instead of purified sodium chloride for *Natrum muriaticum*, burned kelp for *Iodum*, etc.

For example, is there any major difference in medicinal properties between *Ferrum metallicum* and Iron oxide as rust? Or between Sea salt and *Natrum muriaticum*? The list goes on. Were all these possible remedies separately and meticulously proved and Hahnemann chose the best? Extremely unlikely. It would have taken years just to choose one final remedy. He did not have the time or manpower required for this. And probably not the inclination.

We can also go on to ask why he used so many minerals at all, while ignoring so many medicinal plants? Was he biased in his choice? Did he dislike the 'impurity' of plants compared with pure minerals like *Kali bichromicum*? Or was he by inclination just more of a chemist than a botanist? Where on earth did he get the ideas for using so many of these remedies from? In many cases, these substances had never been used in medicine before, so it was not just a case of refining our knowledge of already existent drugs. In the *Chronic Diseases*, for example, of the 48 drugs listed, 35 are minerals, 12 from plants and one from an animal source (*Sepia*). Thus over 70% are of mineral origin.

The same goes for the plants. Why did he use the berries of Hawthorn and not the bark or flowers, the root of *Arnica* and *Aconite* instead of the whole plant, the spores of *Lycopodium* instead of the whole herb? The list is endless. Certainly, some hints and hunches came from herbalism as it was known experientially that certain portions of the plant were more poisonous or medicinally potent. Yet this is not holistic is it? It is scientific to suppose that the best medicinal power exists only in one part such as the root or the berry and only thinly dispersed (if at all) throughout the rest of the plant. We know today about active ingredients and alkaloids which are more

concentrated in one portion of the plant, but they didn't know this in the 1790's. Hahnemann, as a good chemist, probably had a hunch that this was the case. Yet no explanation has ever been offered as to why he chose the remedies he chose and their very precise methods of preparation.

Why did he not use the perfectly natural ('impure') remedies and choose instead weird concoctions, the preparation of which demanded great knowledge of and skill in chemistry?

It is my contention that in part he did this to appeal to the spirit of his times. He wanted, perhaps, to flex his chemistry muscles and reveal to others that in an age of great chemists he was also an expert chemist and that by using these newly purified and isolated drugs he was, like them, eschewing what he and his contemporaries saw as the irrational and unscientific mumbo-jumbo of medieval science - viz., unpurified and unpredictable drugs. It may be the same reason why he so forcefully derided and rejected polypharmacy. Why should herbs be used separately? There is no overriding theoretical reason why they shouldn't be used in combinations. Perhaps it was just part of the Puritanism and analysis of the times. Maybe also some of this was macho pride on Hahnemann's part.

We know that later, through the use of provings, he was to gain a sounder and more rational justification for his preference for individually used drugs, never to be used in combinations. To us today this all seems so logical, but at that time it was a revolutionary concept. One could, of course, find another reason why Hahnemann wanted to deride the errors of his medical forebears. It was very much in his interest to keep his new therapy 'squeaky clean' and to present it to his contemporaries as totally new, modern, scientific and rational, with totally new chemically pure remedies, selected objectively through the use of provings. Were the provings that objective anyway?

He had a strong and justifiable desire to break away from the 'old wives tales' and disorder of herbal lore. He had a yen for scientific accuracy, which comes over very clearly in his writings on pharmacy. He also wanted to present homœopathy as forward-thrusting and the new medicine of the future. He seems to have devised the accurate system of a potentisation scale - in part - as a way of breaking away from the vagueness and sloppiness of medieval 'bucket chemistry' and recipe pharmacy, which he so detested. His claims for homœopathy emphasise very clearly that it is new, modern, scientific, rational, futuristic and accurate, based upon the 'new gods' of skill, accuracy, measurement, reason and scholarship. It is difficult not to conclude that all of this was at least in part designed to appeal to his contemporaries, who he fervently wished would take up homœopathy.

Paracelsus

Perhaps he also wanted to dissociate himself from his greatest enemy: Paracelsus. The truth is, of course, that Hahnemann was a 'second Paracelsus', but he felt he had to hide this fact. Both mercilessly derided their contemporaries, rejected the medicine in which they were trained, used small doses and emphasised the law of similars. Both also made extensive use of minerals, acids and metals. Both also obtained brief university teaching posts, but got sacked after abusing their position, 'indoctrinating' their students, castigating the medical system of the day and teaching heretical forms of medicine. How similar to each other can you get? And both were thoroughly castigated by their orthodox colleagues. Their

biggest difference is that Hahnemann liked to use purified drugs, while Paracelsus tended to use unrefined natural products. Likewise, Paracelsus loved alchemy, astrology and mysticism, while Hahnemann appears to have loathed all three. Paracelsus was a real problem for Hahnemann; Hahnemann must have thought about him a great deal: how to shake himself free? Yet he never mentions Paracelsus in all his writings. One reason is obvious: guilt by association, which had to be avoided at all costs.

Perhaps he decided pretty early on that the only mud that would stick to him was that of plagiarism and that homœopathy might be seen as just a rehashed form of Paracelsian medicine. And to an informed historian, this is a very valid claim, and almost impossible to refute. One way, however, to rebut the claim was not to use natural minerals, but rather to use refined ones; not to use mixtures of herbs, but to use them separately; and to minimise any fanciful or spiritual overtones, mystical formulae or astrological symbolism, thus keeping to the spirit of his contemporary scientists. The other way would be to never even mention Paracelsus. Hahnemann chose to follow both these methods, and thereby must have felt sure that he was giving homœopathy a clean start, successfully dissociating it from the stigmas of medieval medicine in general and Paracelsian medicine in particular.

The point here, of course, is that Hahnemann was far more widely read than any other doctor of his day. He knew medical history intimately. Indeed, some of his works contain references in Greek, Latin and Arabic from authors before the Christian era (e.g. 'On the Helleborism of the Ancients', *Lesser Writings*, Jain Edition, pp 569-617). He translated works from English, French, Spanish, and Italian, as well as Latin, Greek and Arabic. His linguistic skills were truly astonishing. Of course he knew about Paracelsus, but he kept quiet. It cannot be a coincidence that he put people off the trail leading to Paracelsus by never even mentioning him. The two systems of therapy are unmistakably similar. It is amazing that he is never mentioned. Indeed, many of the metals, acids and minerals in use in 18th century medicine, and later proved by Hahnemann, were actually introduced into medicine originally by Paracelsus, including Mercury, Arsenic, Sulphur, Tin, Lead, Gold, Iron, Copper and Salt.

Hahnemann also needed to break away from the past because he genuinely believed much of it was nonsense – dead-wood that had dogged medicine for too long. He derided the apothecaries for routinely and unquestioningly making up their mixtures from their old formularies without ever really knowing whether they killed or cured. He saw them as colluding with doctors in a form of medicine that was totally irrational, ineffective and corrupt. And he says so repeatedly.

Thus we can conclude that Hahnemann was much like his contemporaries in being very concerned with purifying natural products, plants and minerals, rather than using them in their natural state. Hahnemann clearly believed that great skill in chemistry was essential for the production of a rational materia medica. It is my contention that he went too far in the direction of his contemporaries, being also driven on by his own abiding obsession with chemistry and thus effectively ignored many excellent herbal remedies and natural minerals that he might easily have proved and brought into a rational homœopathic materia medica.

Some of our Anthroposophical brethren might even feel that he 'threw out the baby with the bath water', though that may be slightly overstating the position. I also feel he relied

too heavily on chemicals and too little on plants. The numerical facts of his materia medica confirm this view. As I have said, the reasons for this were largely the 'tide of the times'. As I said at the beginning, Hahnemann was scientific, in an analytical sense. Some might feel he was too scientific for his own good. On the other hand he was a curious mixture of less rational elements, derived mainly from his avid interest in medical history, his translation work and his encyclopaedic knowledge of drugs and chemistry.

The Proving

Though Hahnemann seems to have 'swam with the tide' of his contemporaries, through his strong interest in chemistry, he then went off at a surprisingly new angle and adopted two completely original ideas, which to an extent, went against that tide. These were the proving and, derived from it, the concept of holism, both of the drug picture or remedy and of the disease – and therefore by implication of the person. Proving was first described in his 'Essay On a New Principle' (1796) (pp249-303 of *Lesser Writings*). By proving medicines on the healthy – a concept so profound and revolutionary even today that it is still decades ahead of current medical thinking – Hahnemann established that a very complex image of symptoms is produced. He then confirmed – through clinical practice – that a truly curative system of medicine based upon parts, illness names, large doses and polypharmacy was completely unworkable (i.e. uncurative). And this for two reasons:

- that natural and drug-induced illnesses (and therefore people) are multisymptomatic and
- that drugs must be tested and clinically used individually rather than in mixtures.

He then built up a materia medica based entirely on these principles. The method of operation was to be similars and small doses. Once he had proved for himself the total ineffectiveness of large doses, many remedies, opposites and using disease-labels, he was left only with the opposites of them all: viz. – small doses, single remedy, similars and holism rather than parts (person not disease).

Allopathy

Hahnemann got his critique of allopathy from two primary sources:

- his own dismal attempts at allopathic practice and
- his translation work, which revealed to him hundreds of cures from the past that had been attained using specific drugs, often through using the law of similars.

The result of this on his part was doubt, confusion and hesitation. Rather than practise, he chose to live on his translation work. This was a sensible choice as it allowed more time for his research and held him back from the chaos and confusion, let alone the emotional drain that bad practice engendered in him. Two out of many possible quotes well illustrate this point:

"After I had discovered the weakness and errors of my teachers and books, I sank into a state of sorrowful indignation, which had nearly altogether disgusted me with the study of medicine." (opening lines of 'Aesculapius in the Balance' (1805) in *Lesser Writings* p410, Jain Edition.)

"For 18 years I have departed from the beaten track of medicine. It was painful to me to grope in the dark, guided only by our books in the treatment of the sick...In an 8 years' practice, pursued with conscientious attention, I had learned the delusive nature of the ordinary methods of treatment..."

(from 'Letter upon the Necessity of a Regeneration of Medicine', (1808) in Lesser Writings pp511-3, Jain Edition.)

Yet the demands of his growing family forced him to continue searching for a rational and effective system of therapy.

"...serious diseases occurred...endangered the lives of my children...caused my conscience to reproach me still more loudly, that I had no means on which I could rely for affording them relief." *ibid.* p512.

It is little wonder therefore, that, inspired by his loathing for dismal and ineffective allopathy, Hahnemann took consolation in chemistry, which drew him closer and closer to the use of mainly mineral remedies in his materia medica, and, somewhat ironically, down the very road that a century later – via the mainly German chemical industry and the isolation and purification of active ingredients – would lead straight to antibiotics, tranquillisers, analgesics and the other 'magic bullets' of modern allopathy! As we have seen, his development of the proving and the practical and therapeutic necessity of holism – derived from it – proved to be his and homœopathy's saviour.

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50 Years Since Liberation: A Case

January 1995: I decided that I cannot let the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camps go without being mentioned. There have been some moving scenes on television and in our communities as the remembrance takes place.

Two weeks ago I drew number one out of a hat for the first case presentation of this year, at the weekly clinical meeting at the National Health Service general practice where I work. I decided to present the case of a Jewish woman of 84 who survived some horrors in Europe, came to England as a refugee and was then deported to Australia as an enemy alien. This was revealed when I asked her when did her problem begin? She said 50 years ago. Where were you 50 years ago? In Australia. How did you get there I asked noting her Central European accent? I was deported she said and gave me an account of her life. She returned to the UK soon after and remained here ever since. She is married happily. She looks frail. She has a foot deformity but manages well with special shoes. I saw her in June 1994. She presented as a closed rather taciturn individual who did not smile.

She was referred for true vertigo. Her GP confirmed in his letter that she had had it for 50 years.

I ascertained the following:

VERTIGO; CLOSING eyes; amel.

VERTIGO; FALL, tendency to; sideways

VERTIGO; LYING; while

VERTIGO; OBJECTS seem; turn in a circle, to

VERTIGO; RISING; on

VERTIGO; TURNING; circle; in, as if

MIND; SLOWNESS; old people, of

GENERALITIES; AIR; open; amel

EXTREMITIES; COLDNESS; Foot

She told me after some conversation that she had become hard. She used to be able to show affection but now she could not. See what Roger Morrison says about this in his *Desktop Guide*.

"The mental pathology occurs from a type of slowly advancing 'induration' of the mind. The patient develops an emotional flatness or hardness which eventually leads to indifference and depression. On the mental level we see fixed

ideas and superstitions. Eventually we can see progressive mental deterioration and senility."

I prescribed *Conium* 6c bd, to stop if better or if unwanted reaction, to repeat if relapse, to call if in doubt, and to return after four weeks.

Four week follow up: the vertigo ceased quite soon, and after one week she stopped the *Conium*. No prescription. Repeat if relapse, return in four weeks.

In another four weeks she returned again. No more vertigo. She reported disturbed sleep, exhaustion, the day's events on her mind, feeling generally exhausted. When did this begin I asked? In Vienna in 1938 she replied. I listened and pondered. I did not want to undo the work of the *Conium*, but this was not the required remedy. I prescribed *Kali phosphoricum* 6x available at every corner pharmacy as a so-called tissue salt.

After a week she sent a brief note that not only had her sleep been restored for six out of seven nights in the first week, but her energy and her spirits had lifted. She felt well being again! The note is in the file. She returned for evaluation after four weeks; she actually looked happy, and smiled a little, and was discharged with encouragement to return if there was any relapse. Her GP says she continues well when she came for a new pair of special shoes recently.

I have often discussed these tortured histories with colleagues, and prescribed all sorts of remedies like *China*, *Belladonna*, *Aurum*, *Natrum muriaticum*. I never managed it so well and with such low potencies before. I offered the group some explanation in the form of a handout about *Conium*, a summary of *Kali phosphoricum*, and read a brief account of the suffering of Socrates. One of the doctors at the clinical meeting suggested that it was because of my origins and empathy that she recovered, and that I was the placebo! Her colleagues rounded on her and disagreed.

We Jews have no monopoly on suffering, but homœopathy, "given to the world by the Almighty" as Hahnemann said, may have a monopoly on healing.

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Remedy Masquerade

A patient presents with oedema of the ankles and feet and difficult respiration. She is a reserved person with a strong history of griefs, broken relationships and bereavement. She is averse to company, is very sensitive to music and has a fear of thunderstorms. She has previously been given *Natrum muriaticum*, *Staphysagria* and *Aurum* with no effect. On the basis of the following repertorisation she is given *Digitalis* 12c three times daily with a complete disappearance of the oedema and breathing problems and a deep resolution of her grief.

MIND; COMPANY; aversion to; solitude, fond of

MIND; GRIEF

MIND; AILMENTS from; love; disappointed

MIND; FEAR; thunderstorm, of

MIND; REPROACHES; himself

MIND; RESERVED

EXTREMITIES; SWELLING; Lower Limbs; dropsical

MIND; SENSITIVE, oversensitive; music, to

GENERALITIES; ASCENDING; agg.

It is important to remember that there are many grief remedies. *The Complete Repertory* lists 84.

Compiled by the editor.