

What Substances Should We be Proving: Some Thoughts on Gaps in the Literature and in the Substances hitherto Chosen for Provings

Foad Katirai D.Phil. (Oxon.)

Abstract: This paper looks at gaps in the homeopathic proving literature and the criteria by which homeopaths have, hitherto, chosen what substances to prove. A series of criteria are suggested which are rooted in the place substances occupy in relation to humans and human homeostasis — i.e., what we are made of, what we eat, what we wear, what we have added artificially to our environs and what exists naturally in our environs. These considerations can form a basis for determining what provings should be conducted next.
Keywords: homeopathic provings, guidelines for substances to prove

Provings of substances are the cornerstone of homeopathic therapeutics and, although there are legitimate concerns and in turn differences about what can or should be defined as a substance — viz, imponderables, for example, widespread agreement can be found for the idea that any substance is potentially a candidate for provings. The choices which determine what substances we should be proving, however, are much less well defined and agreed upon in the literature.

Homeopathic literature is markedly lacking in any rules or a priori criteria for choosing, from amongst the literally innumerable substances there are that can be proved, those substances that reason would suggest are most likely to exert symptomatic effects upon human beings. Aside from passing references to “simple” (Aphorism 141, 143) and “well-known” substances (Aphorism 122), the *Organon* contains almost no reference to any reason for choosing one substance rather than another for a proving. This lack of guidelines in the early literature for choosing a substance to prove can perhaps be partially explained if we remember the framework within which Hahnemann and his generation sought cures — the herbal and/or toxic pharmacopœias and materia medicæ, such as Dioscorides’s *Codex Vindobonensis*, Cullen’s *Materia Medica*, or Magister Santes de Ardoynis’s *The Book of Venoms*. It was alchemical elements, plants and poisons that were “well-known” cures and hence worthy of homeopathic provings. Additionally, it would seem that a substance’s close

association with humans was also a justification for proving it. *Septia*, for example, was neither an alchemical element nor a well-tried-and-tested cure in the then existing herbal or plant pharmacopeias, yet, according to Bradford’s Index of Homeopathic Provings, Herring said its choice by Hahnemann was suggested by the intimate association of the ink with artists and artisans in their drafting and drawings.

Homeopaths, of course, know from practice that this lack of specific, precise rules and criteria has not invalidated the efficacy of the numerous provings done to date. Alas, since no one has yet made any systematic attempts to formulate a set guiding principles for the selection of substances to prove, derived from a study of what might or might not have made past provings worthwhile, a gap has persisted in the literature of homeopathy — a gap in the database of both the kind of substances proven in the past and what substances need to be proven in the future. This lack of systematic criteria could create the erroneous impression, to those who are not familiar with homeopathy, that provings are grounded in divinations, ephemeral whims and mere personal likes and dislikes, more characteristic of choices in the occult or fashion and culinary worlds than in a science of Medicine.⁽¹⁾ This issue goes beyond simply a gap in the literature and threatens any goodwill with which the public, either as a doubting scientific community or inquisitive potential clients of homeopathic practices, may view it. It is time homeopaths and the homeopathic literature address

these foundational gaps.

Today, homeopaths need to be much more rigorous and sound, in the eyes of a skeptical and cynical scientific community, than Hahnemann ever was, and need to add to the principles of homeopathy sound and rigorous criteria for why their choices of provings were or are made. (2) That these principles need not be based upon any a priori knowledge of the efficacy or curative prowess of the substance may be obvious to those who know homeopathy to be an Empiric rather than a Rationalistic system of medicine. In establishing such guidelines to find predictive criteria for selecting a substance, no more may be needed than to consider how the substance stands in relation to humans, as opposed to presumptions of homeopathic efficacy based upon known or assumed pharmacologic effects of a substances' ingredients.

Table 1 and Diagrams 1 and 2 have been constructed using only five broad affinities to show in which classes of substances, that relate to humans, provings in the past have been conducted and where gaps can be seen. In order to keep the analy-

humans, that a large number of provings have been done of first order substances in the first category - macro, micro and trace elements - in Table 1, "What we are made of." However, many second-order, synthesized compounds, also essential components of 'what we are made of,' such as proteins, enzymes, hormones, neurotransmitters and by-products of biochemical processes (including leptins, calmodulins, prostaglandins, peroxinitrates, etc.), still remain unproven. To attempt even a partial list of all the potentially provable elements would, of course, be beyond the scope of a short paper such as this. Surprisingly, almost as many provings have been done in the last category, that furthest from humans, as the first; this last category encompasses "What we have naturally in our environs." The comparatively more recent interest of many homeopaths in the various kingdoms of Nature and their correlation with varied human pathological states (mental, emotional and physical) no doubt has fueled a flurry of provings of these substances.

A great deal of scientific research, outside the realm of homeopathy, has been devoted to the

Table 1: Substances, Examples, and their Relationship to Homeopathic Provings

Relationship to Humans	Examples	Provings: Track Record
1. What we are made of	Macro, micro & trace elements, hormones, etc.	Most of these substances have been proved, even if incompletely.
2. What we eat	Onions, salt, pepper, coca cola, cocoa, cofee, gingko, etc.	All of these have been proved.
3. What we wear	Cotton, silk polyester, nylon, leather, animal hairs, etc.	Few of these have been proved.
4. What we have artificial-ly added to our environs	Cements, wood, plastic, etc.	Most of these have been proved.
5. What we have naturally in our environs.	Other minerals, gasses, plants, animals, etc.	Many of these substances have been proved.

sis here from becoming inordinately detailed, the table only shows, rather than demonstrates in extensive detail, how the results shown were obtained. More information, albeit also in summary form, has been relegated to an endnote (3).

It is not surprising, given their close affinity to

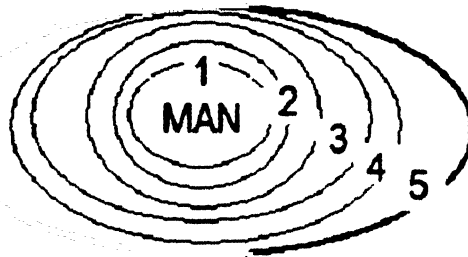
identification of those substances belonging to the first category, our chemical composition. Today we know that the human body is composed of macro-elements, micro-elements, and trace elements in the following proportions:

96.0%: four **macroelements**

3.9%: nine **mi-croelements**
 0.1%: eleven **trace elements** (see Table 2 below)

Interrelationships between Substances & Humans

Figure 1: TOP VIEW



Though it might seem, since only 13 elements make up 99.9% of the human body, that our interest in provings need only be concerned

with this very small number of important substances, it is important to remind ourselves that these elemental substances comprise not only the physical components of human beings, but also many other substances found in our environs, whether they be plants, animals or the myriad substances that constitute what we eat, what we wear, and what we come into daily contact with, whether natural or man-made. As a result, the varied combinations of these thirteen elements, coupled with, of course, elements foreign to human biochemistry, found in the latter categories of Table 1, will continue to generate a wide choice of substances to prove and employ as medicinal remedies in the practice of homeopathy.

While the other categories have been extensively proven, category three – What we wear – has not. Although by their very nature these substances have a close, intimate proximity to our bodies, the substances we wear have not been made the subject of extensive provings, despite the fact that many of these substances are neither difficult to obtain nor potentize. The only substance in the third category for which I could find a proving, *Byssus*, has, as far as I can find (in Radar's *Encyclopedia Homeopathica*),

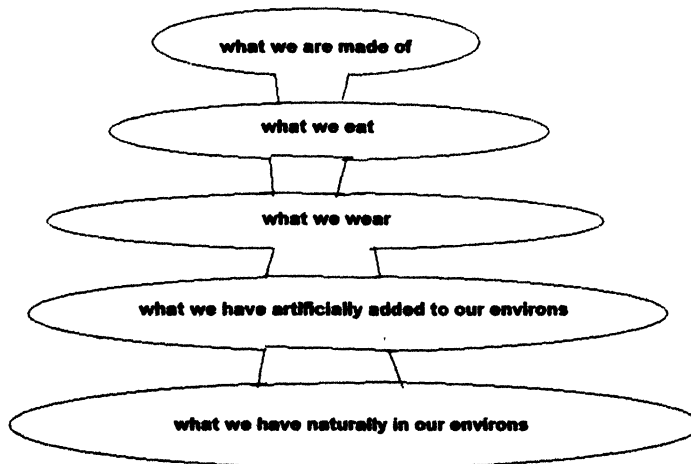
no remedy picture. But even if there were such a picture, *Byssus* is not an accurate representation of cotton. Because the preparation of *Byssus* involved the addition of nitric and sulphuric acids to the cotton base, *Byssus* flies against the admonitions

of Hahnemann that provings are to be from the 'simple' substance itself. Substances used to clothe ourselves - cotton, silk, polyester, nylon, leather, and other animal substances – require, in my opinion, extensive provings.

The foregoing discussion identifies gaps in our provings and recommends that a clear, rational set of guidelines be established to inform our choice of substances to be proved. A series of such criteria are suggested, based upon how substances stand in relation to humans and human homeostasis, namely 1) what we are made of, 2) what we eat, 3) what we wear, 4) what we have added artificially to our environs and 5) what we have naturally in our environs.

As a basis for finding gaps in provings and for prioritizing substances, from amongst a myriad of possibilities, for future provings.

Figure 2: Side View



ENDNOTES

(1) Even Jeremy Sherr, the doyen of homeopathic provers, reasons for choosing the sub-

stances of his widely used provings are not above raising methodological eyebrows. In Volume II of his *Dynamic Provings*, Sherr notes, "I usually choose my proving substances by omens. As the current Dynamis class were ready to begin a new

Table 2: What we are made of

96% Macroelements		3.9% Microelements	0.1% Trace elements
Oxygen	65.0%	Calcium	Aluminum
Carbon	18.5%	Phosphorus	Boron
Hydrogen	9.5%	Sulfur	Copper
Nitrogen	3.0%	Magnesium	Chromium
		Iodine	Fluorine
		Iron	Manganese
		Sodium	Molybdenum
		Chlorine	Selenium
			Tin
			Vanadium
			Zinc

proving, I emptied my mind and asked the universe for a sign, then waited." For his entry for the proving of *Cygnus cygnus* or the Whooper Swann he notes, "... it entered our hearts, asking to be proved". Alas, neither omens, divinations from the universe, nor calls from substances to be proven are part or parcel of any replicable and therefore credible scientific methods and cannot avert serious questions being asked by the general public, regulators of Public Health, and the scientific medical world about the adherence to rigor and methodological soundness in homeopathic methods.

Sherr, Jeremy Yaakov. *Dynamic Proving. Volume II*. Malvern, England: Dynamis Books. 2002. pg. 134.

(2) Although the website of the European Council of Classical Homeopathy or the ECCH also uses the word 'reflection,' it clearly envisions a different *modus operandi* than that of Jeremy Sherr as it involves a selection that needs to be more than the wish of that substance to be proven and must be, it is suggested, selected on the basis of its known efficacy for human health, to wit: "Therefore as homeopaths engaged in curing the sick, we should devote our efforts to finding via the process of proving new remedy sources, answers to the challenges of our time. By a process of careful reflection and selection we can decide to prove those substances which will be most useful to us."
<http://www.homeopathy-ecch.org/content/view/24/41/>

(3) Although the lack of any extensive literature or publications that delve into the methodologies and analysis that have gone into past provings preclude any comprehensive and thorough research into the underlying reasons and explanations for specific provings and why they were chosen, even a cursory search through the internet (Jeremy Sherr's www.dynamis.edu, an excellent database

for provings), Radar's *Encyclopedia Homeopathica* and Frederik Schroyen's *Synthesis* proffer interesting, if broad, insights into which of our categories, above, have been proven to date. Increasingly, published volumes of provings such as those by Jeremy Sherr and his Dynamis school also provide explanations, if not actual guidelines, for particular substances chosen for their published provings.

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About the author: A self-taught homeopath in Japan since 1988, Dr. Katirai earned his BA (cum laude) from Columbia College, Columbia University in New York and his B. Litt and subsequently D. Phil at Trinity College, Oxford University in England. Dr. Katirai is currently at the Ontario College of Homeopathic Medicine (www.ochm.ca) in Toronto, Canada, to upgrade his knowledge of the most recent devel-

opments in homeopathy and the sciences of health management, including anatomy and physiology. He has published two books on governance and numerous papers in economics and management. His most recent paper on homeopathy was published in the March edition of Homeopathic Links.

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