

HAHNEMANN'S PURE METHOD OF SCIENCE

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Introduction

Hahnemann's authority is earned. No one imposes his authority on us. It grows out of the effectiveness of what he says. He created a new method of healing that is a radical discovery, even now. His works are the result of careful observation of phenomena, rigorous experimentation, and repeatable verifications. In other words, he created a science.

Attributing dogma to Hahnemann distracts from the real issue of what he actually did. He developed criteria for accumulating knowledge. A system that is developed to define how we know what we know is called an epistemology. Such a system describes definitions, states principles, and applies methods in a consistent way. If this system of knowledge is about a specific subject, it is called a science.

Hahnemann developed a pure method of science that allows for growth and changes in knowledge. None of his books were written in unchangeable stone; witness the six editions of the *Organon*, the two editions of *Chronic Diseases*, and the constant additions to the *materia medica*.

What is science?

Any field of knowledge starts with assumptions or beliefs. Each culture shares a basic set of beliefs about reality. Since most people in a society accept a common reality, these assumptions are mostly unstated and unchallenged.

There are two common assumptions in popular science today. First, reality exists objectively independent of the observer. This is the "principle of objectivity." It means that a real world exists independent of human perceptions. A second common axiom is that nature can be understood and explained because it is predictable and ordered.¹ Hahnemann did not accept either of these assumptions in his scientific method.

Objective reality creates a world "out there." Objectivity isolates the "inner world" as subjective and uncertain. Subjective perceptions, such as tastes and odors, cannot be verified in a standardized way. Subjective knowledge becomes less real than a reality that can be measured. Quantities and measurements become the accepted method to verify knowledge. Since only material objects can be studied this way, materialism becomes the standard of reality.

Hahnemann believed in the totality, the whole, the *gestalt*. He observed all changes in a sick person: the objective, the subjective, and the circumstantial symptoms. He paid attention to all the changes that a medicine produced in every part of the body and mind, the quantitative and the qualitative. He studied both the material aspect of the body and the dynamic aspect of the body/mind. Hahnemann did not assume a duality between the inner and the outer reality.

The second assumption of mainstream science is that the hidden order of nature can be understood and explained. Most people who study human nature conclude that we have a strong need to explain the workings of reality in some satisfying way. The most common method that science uses to examine a complicated thing is to study each of its parts. For instance, a living cell is explained by listing all the cell structures, such as the nucleus and the mitochondria, and determining what chemicals they are made from. This applied method is called reductionism. Laws of nature are occasionally discovered, and this unseen order is reduced to a mathematical expression. If a hypothesis about the organization of nature cannot be written in math, then a theory is constructed.

One theory might be that bacteria are a cause of disease. Here, the complexity of the disease process has been reduced to a material cause, to allow the nature of disease to become easier to explain.

Hahnemann did not study the nature of disease for the purpose of explaining it away with theories. He said that it was impossible to know the true inner workings of the endlessly complex living being.³ He developed a purely descriptive method of science rather than a theoretical science. Hahnemann did not develop a theory of chronic disease. He described his experiences, listed his observations, and defined miasmatic disease as a dynamic, infectious process. None of his conclusions are based on theories.

Methods of scientific reasoning

Deductive reasoning starts with general statements that aim to explain or predict future observations. For example, one hypothesis states that life is a result of chemical reactions. No one has seen life emerge spontaneously from chemistry, so it is not actually verified. However, if one assumes that everything is a result of physics and chemistry, and every form of life involves chemicals, then this theory may seem reasonable. If someone else starts with a different worldview, they may propose that life is spontaneously created. This has not been observed in nature or in the laboratory so far, but it would be a logical theory if one assumed that there was a creator. The first theorist has a mechanistic belief system in which the

world is like a complex machine. The second theorist has a teleological or religious philosophy. These theories are not based on all the observations that are possible. They are the creations of people who see reality in a certain preconceived way. Hahnemann is emphatic that the doctor should make no prejudgments.²

The essential scientific method of reasoning today is called the inductive method. It starts with collecting the individual observations. Then, patterns are noticed. Next, general principles emerge. In Homeopathy, Hahnemann took a medicine (Peruvian bark) while healthy, and observed the changes he experienced. A pattern of illness emerged. When he administered the medicine to a sick person who already had symptoms similar to the pattern caused by the medicine, healing events began. Careful, repeated testing verified the general principle that similars cure.

There are problems connected with observing phenomena or symptoms. Some people see what they want to see; they have made assumptions that they may not realize. Some people cannot see phenomena, due to a lack of training or experience. For instance, if someone is told to look for a chair, they will recognize it, because it is a common object in our culture. If they were asked to seek a "temion," it is unlikely that it would be perceived.

These examples point out a shortcoming of the inductive method. If the "facts" are limited or selected improperly, then erroneous principles are inferred. For instance, an allopathic doctor may conclude, from his experience of many cases, that antibiotics cure bacterial infectious disease. A homeopathic doctor may conclude that antibiotics kill some bacteria. Both conclusions are arrived at by inductive logic, but start with different unstated beliefs. The allopath assumes that bacteria cause disease, and that a cure is defined by eliminating a material cause, all before choosing which observations are important. The homeopath may assume that antibiotics are dangerous drugs, and look for poisonous results.

Abstractions

Another limitation of standard scientific reasoning bedevils homeopathy at the present time. After a practitioner makes many observations, he or she draws conclusions that go beyond the perceptible phenomena. The practitioners construct theories, or categories, or themes, that are no more than abstractions. They do not appear in nature; they exist behind nature, only in the human mind. They are disembodied forms or patterns that displace our attention from the actual sensory phenomena. Since these abstractions are not concrete, they cannot be easily proven or disproved. They are only speculation.

This theoretical method of approaching nature has existed for a

long time in science. It starts with a predetermined worldview and belief system. It assumes that there is a hidden order in nature that is above or beyond what is directly perceived. This "behind the scenes" nature is more simple and harmonious, easier to understand, more ideal. It is like a second reality, so this may be called a "two-world" belief system.⁴ One world is the concrete world of sensory perceptions, and the second world exists as a result of the human intellect. It assumes that the senses cannot be trusted, and that human intelligence is superior to nature, rather than part of nature.

At the present time, the "other world" is exemplified by the machine of our times, the computer. This electronic machine has an inner space world, with the Internet and the World Wide Web. This second world is a "virtual" one, with websites rather than real people, and ever-changing data rather than concrete phenomena. This virtual reality makes it harder to resist imagining abstract categories that can shift and move rapidly to reflect the newest thinking.

If a belief system is strong in a person, like a religion, no amount of reasoning will displace it. But at least the distinctions can be explicitly stated. Then it can be shown how these methods are separate from Hahnemann's method of science.

Perceptible phenomena

Hahnemann's science started with observations and experiments that allowed him to draw conclusions that have been validated through continued experience, so they have become true principles or laws of healing with medicines. Hahnemann also described a pure method in the practical application of the law of similars. The signs, symptoms, and circumstances of the sick person are matched with the known symptoms of the remedies. The most similar remedy is chosen. No theory, no abstraction, no generalization stands in the way. The unique characteristics of each sick person are not to be reduced to some imagined theme. The whole or totality of the symptoms is not to be found by retreating to an abstraction in the mind.

The totality is found by directing attention more and more into the symptoms, instead of away from them. The Hahnemannian homeopath does not look for some common denominator in the symptoms through some outside theme that excludes the diversity of symptoms. The many symptoms enrich the reality, and each phenomenon is an essential part of a concrete wholeness. This method of science is called the phenomenological science of nature, or Goethean science. It is an approach used in current philosophy, in cognitive sciences, in botany, zoology, ecology, and in criticisms of genetic engineering.⁵

What are assumptions behind this method of science used by Hah-

nemann? What is the unstated belief system? Hahnemann lived in a German culture that produced a "Nature philosophy" of disease while mechanistic science was just starting to yield results. Hahnemann's scientific outlook rejected both approaches. The footnote to paragraph 1 of the *Organon* rejects theoretical medicine, and paragraph 10 rejects materialism. Paragraph 6 states Hahnemann's belief in the "perceptible phenomena."⁶ Hahnemann's view of reality is that only the total sensory phenomena can be relied upon to discover principles of nature. The nature of disease can be described, but claims to understand something behind nature are an illusion of the human mind.

Errors in method

Two examples from the homeopathic literature will illustrate deviations from the phenomenological science of nature that Hahnemann uses. One line of thinking categorizes the remedies as to their source, the plant, animal or mineral "kingdoms." This theory says that people's symptoms should be analyzed to place them in a kingdom category, and thus make the task of finding the correct remedy much simpler.

But nature has no kingdoms. Nature is, nature appears, nature becomes, but categories are conceived in the human mind. Kingdoms are conjectures by humans attempting to understand nature. Categories shift according to cultural expectations. Two kingdoms of living beings were recognized until the 1960s. A paradigm shift resulted in the "five kingdoms" hypothesis. Now the "three domain" paradigm (Eukarya, Eubacteria, Archaea) has superseded kingdoms.⁷ (This ignores the complexities of the mineral kingdom.) Plants and animals are renamed and re-categorized, based on new observations.

For instance, cladistics is a method of phylogenetic classification that establishes groups based on common ancestry or evolutionary history. Clade analysis reveals that the pachyderms such as the elephant, rhinoceros, and hippopotamus are not closely related at all. Each of these large mammals has a separate and distinct small mammal ancestor.

Categories separate us from nature, rather than making us closer or more in tune with nature. These generalizations allow the human mind to reduce nature to artificial components, to objectify nature (object-making), which allows humanity to dominate and manipulate nature. Hahnemann's homeopathic science observes nature for what it is, without hypotheses or categories or themes. It accepts nature for what it is, and does not put it in a place separate from humanity.

This first example illustrates the methodological error of theorizing within homeopathic science. The second example will point out an

error of materialism, chemical materialism to be specific. One line of current homeopathic conjecture predicts the symptoms of a remedy based on the chemical or atomic structure of the substance. This type of theory assumes that a remedy's action in the body is nothing more than the sum of its chemical parts.

If the symptoms of *Kali carbonicum* are known, and the symptoms of *Sulphur* are known, can we predict the symptoms of *Kali sulphuricum*? What percent are from *Sulphur*? Since *Pulsatilla* is supposed to be similar to *Kali sulphuricum*, does it mean that the plant must have a high amount of that mineral? If the provings of *Hydrogen* are well-known, and the provings of *Oxygen* are accurate, can the symptoms of their combination, water, be predicted? If the symptoms of a simple alcohol, ethanol, are known, is it safe to say what the symptoms of methanol, with only one less carbon group, would be? These are a lot of questions, because there is a lot of guesswork going on.

There may be considerable gaps in the knowledge of possible materia medica, but this does not give us the liberty to raise the making of educated guesses, based on conjecture, to the level of a virtue and a principle worthy of teaching to others. Hahnemann was gifted in chemistry. He was an expert on chemistry, but he did not speculate on the possible effects on people of the most closely related of minerals. There is no substitute for the long, detailed work of accurate, validated provings.

The art of science

The Organon of the Medical Art (Heilkunst) is the more complete name of Hahnemann's major work. In his time, art and science were not yet polar opposites in the culture; they could still be one and the same endeavor. Hahnemann's art can be defined as a form of creativity.

Hahnemann's method of science is not static. It is not a routine process to be repeated over and over again, but a creative process for each person. Each individual case is brand new, never before seen under the sun, and the healing artist must give birth and create anew the living totality of the disease process.

Sorting people into predetermined categories and themes, according to a common theory, is mere systematics. It is not the true healing art. Each practitioner must be aware of the method of Hahnemann's pure science, and each practitioner must be aware of deviations from that science. No one should be called a homeopath who does not follow Hahnemann's method.

References

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- ⁴ Bortoft, H. p. 180. *The Wholeness of Nature*. New York: Lindisfarne Press, 1996
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- ⁶ Dudgeon, pp. 48, 49, 52
- ⁷ www.khepar.auz.com/gaia/biosphere/kingdom.htm
- ⁸ www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/clad/clad3.html

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