

Reinterpreting Homoeopathy

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IF homoeopathy is to take its rightful place in the health care systems of the 21st century, it must be re-interpreted from the standpoint of dialectical materialism. Samuel Hahnemann, the celebrated founder of homoeopathy, was never so dogmatic as to rule out new interpretations. He says that natural laws cannot be capitalised or kept under the seal of human authority. People may utilise natural laws and yet may not be able to understand the crux thereof. Thus Hahnemann indirectly admits that natural laws may be more fully understood by future generations. He terms as *probably correct* his explanation of the mode of action of homoeopathic medicines. He expressly states that others can form their opinions in the matter. He prepared six editions of his magnumopus *The Organon* in his lifetime and he was constantly innovating. Nearly 150 years have elapsed since the death of Hahnemann. It is high time somebody reinterpreted homoeopathy and surveyed medical science in general in the light of subsequent developments in philosophy and science.

In his book *Principles and Art of Cure by Homoeopathy*, Herbert Roberts tried to demonstrate that homoeopathy was based on the bedrock of natural laws. More effort on those lines is required now. In the Soviet Union, philosophers and medical scientists are trying to develop modern marxist concepts of life, health and disease. Hahnemann's role in medicine may be compared to that of Hegel in philosophy. Both were philosophical idealists. The rational kernel of their teaching was enveloped by a mystical shell. Marx accepted Hegelian dialectics but rejected idealism. Similarly, it should be possible to separate homoeopathic therapeutics from its idealist shell.

During Hahnemann's lifetime (1755-1843) there were hardly any scientists who were consciously and consistently materialistic in their world-outlook. It is, therefore, not surprising that Hahnemann was deeply influenced by and deeply dissatisfied with idealist philosophers. He was a deist and a religious free-thinker. He wrote: "The ever-beneficent Godhead animating the infinite universe dwells in us also".¹ He felt attracted by philosophy, but the philosophers and their works offered him little satisfaction. He said: "Philosophy is not only the highest of all sciences, it is also the basis and the fundamentals of all others. No science can exist without philosophy, for without its help it falls to the level of a handicraft or at any rate of a subsidiary subject. This is true above all of medicine" (Haehl).

Hahnemann's biographer Richard Haehl says: "What particular philosophic system he supported is not discernible from his writings or his letters. It seems very questionable whether he definitely accepted any special system. He should rather be regarded as an eclectic who selected from each system the best for his own view of life and the world. From his schooldays onwards he had followed Descartes, Spinoza and Leibnitz (whose systems dominated the schools of the time) and then proceeded to vitalism and to the naturalism of Schelling and Hegel. He advanced beyond this to

spiritualism and for a time lost his way in occultism. In temperament and development, both as man and as physician, he was a strong opponent of materialism. With all his emphasis on scientific exactitude and empiric certainty as the starting point of his therapeutic reform he rejected materialism equally as an outlook on life and as a fundament of his new theory: . . . But, on the other hand, he took for his own purposes the basic thoughts of doubt from materialism. He took up a definitely conscious standpoint from facts of experience and rejected every philosophic speculation which did not agree with the latter. For this reason Kant was too impracticably abstract for him and not clear enough in his manner of presentation. Of Plato he complains that he is only valuable when he speaks intelligibly and expressively. His criticism of the philosophers after Kant is that they wrote 'even more mystically' than Kant, that they composed too freely in fancy and that that they had therefore not kept to the bounds of experience" (Haehl).

For Hahnemann, theory was of minor importance (Haehl). Engels, on the other hand, attaches great importance to theory. "However great one's contempt for all theoretical thought, nevertheless one cannot bring two natural facts into relation with each other, or understand the connection existing between them, without theoretical thought. The only question is whether one's thinking is correct or not, and contempt of theory is evidently the most certain way to think naturalistically, and therefore incorrectly. But, according to an old and well-known dialectical law, incorrect thinking, carried to its logical conclusion, inevitably arrives at the opposite of its point of departure. Hence, the empirical contempt for dialectics is punished by some of the most sober empiricists being led into the most barren of all superstitions, into modern spiritualism" (Engels, 1982).

Let us now turn to Hahnemann's concept of vital force. "In the healthy condition of man, the spiritual vital force (autocracy) the Dynamis that animates the material body (organism), rules with unbounded sway, and retains all parts of the organism in admirable, harmonious, vital operation as regards both sensations and functions. . . The material organism without the vital force is capable of no sensation, no function, no self-preservation; it derives all sensations and performs all the functions of life solely by means of the immaterial being (the vital principle) which animates the material organism in health and in disease" (Haehl).

On the concept of vital force Engels says: "If by this (vital force) is meant that the form of motion in the organic body is different from the mechanical, physical, or chemical form and contains them all sublated in itself, then it is a very lax manner of expression, and especially so because the force-presupposing transference of motion appears here as something pumped into the organism from outside, not as inherent in it and inseparable from it, and therefore this vital force has been the last refuge of all supernaturalists" (Engels, 1982). And again: "*The Organism is certainly the higher unity which within itself unites mechanics, physics, and*

chemistry into a whole (emphasis original) where the trinity can no longer be separated. In the organism, mechanical motion is effected directly by physical and chemical change, in the form of nutrition, respiration, secretion, etc., just as much as pure muscular movement." Thus it may be necessary to modify or even altogether abandon some of the concepts of Hahnemann.

All this, however, should not detract from the merits of homoeopathy which are many and solid. The patient is treated on the basis of 'totality of symptoms'. The uniqueness of each patient is recognised. Permanent cures are accomplished in the gentlest manner possible. The pills are sweet and incredibly cheap. The efficacy of homoeopathic remedies is beyond question. Indeed, allopathic treatment is said to be absolutely necessary only in a few cases. Homoeopathy provides prophylactics as it did when encephalitis was taking a heavy toll of lives of children in our country.

We are chasing the mirage of Health for All by 2000 AD. In a rational world there will of course be great emphasis on prevention of disease. It will be a non-violent, nuclear-weapon-free world. It will be free from pollution. People will consume unadulterated and uncontaminated foods free from toxic food additives. There will be excellent sanitary arrangements. Everyone will get food, clothing and housing. Occupational hazards will be minimised. Consumption of narcotics, alcoholic liquors, cigarettes etc, will be drastically reduced. There will be less stress and fewer deaths due to accidents. Nowadays goods are being produced, advertised and sold without the slightest regard for their harmful effects on the consumers. The elimination of profit motive in production is a pre-condition to achieve the goal of Health for All.

If the masses are the real makers of history, it follows that the above goal cannot be reached without a people's move-

ment. In India, progressive forces have been demanding the nationalisation of drug industry and rationalisation of drug policy. They have not met with much success. Drugs constitute one important area of multinational swindling. Our dependence on transnational drug manufactures and on drugs themselves must be reduced. Right now state aid to systems like homoeopathy, ayurveda, and unani is just nominal. It is nobody's case that the baby should be thrown away along with bathwater. The dialectical method should be applied to the facts of medical science and health care. Such a comprehensive critique will enable us to see things in proper perspective and to assign to each system the role it deserves. The quest for truth and for cures must be the motive of such an inquiry and neither passion nor prejudice nor private profit should be allowed to hinder it. The reinterpretation of homoeopathy will form part of such a critique.

Much basic research has to be done if homoeopathy is to gain wider acceptability. For instance the mode of action of homoeopathic remedies has not been satisfactorily explained so far. The materia medica can and must be enriched. Potentiation of drugs can perhaps be explained in terms of the law of transformation of quantity into quality. The law of cure 'Similia Similibus Curantur' may have something to do with the law of negation of negation. If sufficient funds and talents are pumped into homoeopathy, it may develop into the healing system *par excellence* of the future.

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ADVERSE EFFECTS: ISBN 967-9973-17-4 1986 © IOCU 217 pages 5½" x 8½" US\$7.95 pb.