

The evolution of the *Organon*

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Exactly two hundred years ago, in 1810, there appeared a medical treatise that initiated a revolutionary and controversial system of healing. Within a year it was in the early stages of being spread around the world. Today it is being intensively practised throughout the globe and continues to be as revolutionary and controversial as at its inception.

What had Samuel Hahnemann, doctor, researcher chemist, linguist, medical translator, and a leading intellectual of his era, achieved in the 1st edition of the *Organon*? By combining centuries-old medicinal practices along with his creative ingenuity and direct experience, a unique therapeutic system had been launched. Five further evolved editions of the *Organon* were to follow.

In order to begin to appreciate even the 1st edition of Hahnemann's *Organon of the Rational Art of Healing*, it is essential to briefly explore the context and milieu within which it emerged.

Background to the *Organon*

Heroic medicine

It is common knowledge that the excessive blood-letting, corrosive ointments, and hot cautery medical practices of the late 18th century had become so overtly excessive that the medical profession had become an agent of serial medical killing. This is why, in 1789, Hahnemann gave up active medical practice for the impoverished life of a medical translator. One may grasp the tenor of his attitude by his response to the death of Leopold II of Austria:

During 1792 Emperor Leopold died after treatment of a severe fever during which blood-letting was performed not once but three more times. So incensed was Hahnemann that he took out an ad on the front page of the newspaper *Anzeiger* which appeared in Gotha:

We ask from what scientific point of view, according to what principles

has anyone the right to order a second venesection when the first has failed to bring relief? As for a third, Heaven help us! But to draw blood a fourth time when the three previous attempts failed to alleviate! To abstract the fluid of life four times in twenty-four hours from a man who has lost flesh from mental over-work combined with a long continued dysentery, without procuring any relief for him! Science pales before this!
(Haehl, 1922)

Already, contemporary physicians such as Anton Mesmer (see *Madness, mesmerism and moral treatments* on page 29), had given up practice of 'heroic medicine', as it was termed by those who managed to survive. He and others engaged in the search for and innovation of more benign therapeutic systems, elements of which continue to be actively practised in the 21st century.

The influence of the rational philosophy of Deism

It is not surprising that the title of Hahnemann's 1st edition proclaimed itself as the *Organon of the Rational Art of Healing*. The intellectual milieu of Germanic speaking peoples in which Hahnemann grew and matured was

permeated with enthusiasm for the rationalist philosophy of Deism that had powerfully influenced the English, those in the process of founding the USA, and the intellectual instigators of the French Revolution.

Deism. The Enlightenment endeavor to purify Christianity, to rid religion of all that was not rational, natural, and moral, and develop a natural religion. An international movement, Deism reflected local religious, philosophical, and social expressions of the Enlightenment. In England, it was critically concerned with the origins of religion, but positive in moral and religious affirmation; in France it was anti-Catholic, shading into skepticism, atheism, and materialism; in Germany it was championed alongside nationalist metaphysics and historical criticism; in America it embraced a revolutionary creed ... (Crim, 1981)

Centuries-tested medical and medicinal preparation practices

During his younger years Hahnemann became literate in more than eight languages and had the opportunity to acquaint himself with procedures for preparation of medicines some of which had been utilised for several thousand years. Among these is the technique of trituration whereby insoluble substances such as metals are rendered ready for ingestion as medicines. Existing Vedic literature of the 7th century BC outlines this technique as already having been practised from an even more distant past. Later in his life Hahnemann was to employ trituration as a means for dissolving and potentising metals and insoluble substances such as gold, lead, tin, and copper. It was



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learned during the 20th century that the processing of solids into ultramicroscopic nanometer diameters liberates a range of properties and behaviours that are not evident during traditional metallurgical and chemical processes.

Not only did Hahnemann begin tutoring fellow school students in Greek and Latin at the age of twelve, he also seized the opportunity to become literate in a broad spectrum of languages and to continuously immerse himself in medical literature for nearly two years from 1777 to 1779. During that time he accepted an appointment as resident physician to the family of the Governor of Transylvania as well as being responsible for cataloguing his library. The Governor's collection consisted of an extensive range of medical and alchemical works, ancient and contemporary written in many languages including compilations of Greco-Arabic medicine and alchemical methods of substance purification and preparation.

In subsequent years Hahnemann was able to draw upon these

techniques for his own independent chemical research and then later on for the preparation of homeopathic tinctures.

His skill as a translator was to provide Hahnemann not only with a meagre income when he could no longer, in good conscience, practice 'heroic medicine', but also to maintain him at the cutting edge of contemporary medical publications throughout Europe.

From Similar to Similimum

The genius of Hahnemann was to make its most lasting mark in his creating the concept of the 'Similimum', the very foundation of homeopathy. The use of similarity and 'like curing like' was not new. However, the purposeful conscious continuous striving to identify the similimum is the legacy of Hahnemann.

Over the centuries prior to Hahnemann, there had been a gradual evolution of the concept of the similar. This he acknowledges in his extended introduction to the 1st edition that had not been translated for

the English edition. For example, the Egyptian medical papyri contain prescriptions that produce the same colour or odour as a symptom produced by the patient. The relationship of the similar and its corresponding principle, the Doctrine of Signatures, reached an advanced level of systematic application during the 16th and 17th centuries. However, the unique distinction made by Hahnemann following his classic proving of quinine in 1790 is to take the traditional concept of the Doctrine of Signatures or Similar to a new level of understanding and application.

This he begins to elaborate in publications leading up to the 1st edition of the *Organon* in *An Essay on Ascertaining the Curative Power of Medicines*, 1796, and *Medicine of Experience*, 1805.

An overview of the six editions as a series

In the ongoing publication of subsequent editions of the *Organon*, Hahnemann introduces each with a didactic, yet almost poetic, articulation of homeopathic principles followed by his latest experience-based adjustments to the methodology of practice. As a group, the six editions may be viewed as a series of photographs recording the evolution of his reflective response to his on-going clinical experience. At the same time there is also continuity in the format and mode of presentation throughout the series. From the 2nd edition through to the 6th the title becomes and remains: *Organon of the Art of Healing*.

1) The editions of the *Organon* may be divided into two major sections:

Section 1: includes principles, knowledge, and understanding
Section 2: includes practical application and methods.

There are six editions of the *Organon*

The medical profession had become an agent of serial medical killing



➤ 2) Despite popular belief regarding the term ‘Similia Similibus Curentur’, it is seldom used by Hahnemann and appears only once in the introduction, but not in the text, of each of the six editions. At all other times, he repeatedly employs the term ‘Similibus Curentur’ which may be translated: similar things for similar things. (Fincke pp 90-95, O’Reilly p 54)

3) The opening paragraphs of the subsequent editions express the same fundamental principles with modest changes in individual words and phrases. As an example: *Organon*, 1st edition, paragraph 1: The physician has no higher aim than to make sick folk well, to pursue what is called the Art of Healing. *Organon* 6th edition, paragraph 1: The physician’s highest and only calling is to make the sick healthy, to cure, as it is called.

4) There is no mention of ‘the spirit-like life-force ...’ in the 1st edition. Rather in paragraph 13

‘The physician’s highest and only calling is to make the sick healthy, to cure, as it is called’

Hahnemann writes:

Now since when cure is effected through the removal of the whole range of the perceptible signs and symptoms, the inward change which caused the symptoms is also removed (that is, the totality of the disease), it follows that the physician has only to clear away the entire symptom-complex in order also to get rid of the inward alteration – in other words, to remove the whole disease, the disease itself, a feat which must always be the only aim of the rational healer; for the essence of the art of medicine consists in compassing the restoration of

health, not in searching for the change in the inward and hidden things, a quest which can tend to nothing but fruitless speculation.

5) The 1st edition of the *Organon* contains 271 paragraphs; by the 3rd edition it has been extended to 320 and is then reduced to 291 for the final edition.

6) The 4th edition (1829) may be viewed as the point when Hahnemann introduces his most cautious benchmarks concerning the practice of homeopathy:

- a) The standard high potency is the 30th centesimal.
- b) The dosage is to be with the single administration of a few poppy-seed sized pills.
- c) Repetition is to be performed only when there is a relapse of symptoms ie ‘the wait and watch’ method of prescribing. Paragraph 242 of the 4th edition reads:

As long, therefore, as the progressive improvement continues from the

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The six editions of the <i>Organon</i>						
	1st edition	2nd edition	3rd edition	4th edition	5th edition	6th edition
Title	<i>Organon der Rationellen Heilkunde (Organon of the Rational Art of Healing)</i>	<i>Organon der Heilkunst (Organon of the Art of Healing)</i>	<i>Organon der Heilkunst (Organon of the Art of Healing)</i>	<i>Organon der Heilkunst (Organon of the Art of Healing)</i>	<i>Organon der Heilkunst (Organon of the Art of Healing)</i>	<i>Organon der Heilkunst (Organon of the Art of Healing)</i>
Year of publication	1810, Torgau	1819, Leipzig	1824, Koethen	1829, Koethen	1833, Koethen	1921 (manuscript completed 1842)
Main English translation(s)	Dr C.E. Wheeler 1917; Dr Mahendra Singh 2003	No English translation; French translation: E.G. Brunnow 1824	No English translation; French translations: E.G. Brunnow 1832 and A.J.L. Jourdan 1832	Charles H. Devrient 1833; Dr Mahendra Singh 2003	R.E. Dudgeon 1849; Wesselhoeft 1876; B. Fincke 1889	English translations Dr W. Boericke 1922; Künzli, Naude and Pendleton 1982; Steven Decker 1996
No. of paragraphs	271	315	320	292	294	291
Significant concepts and terms introduced	• Similimum	No significant new concepts	No significant new concepts	• Theory of Chronic Disease • Psora • 30c as standard high potency, as a single dry dose • Repeat prescribing only if symptoms relapse ('watch and wait')	• Doctrine of Vital Force • Liquid potencies • Remedy administration by olfaction • Use of higher potencies • Repeated dosing • Administration in a watery solution • Isopathy	• LM potencies • Repetition with ascending potencies; • 'Vital Force' gives way to 'Vital Principle'

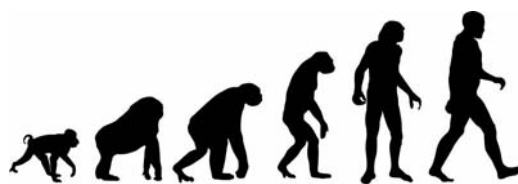
medicine administered, so long we can take for granted that the duration of the action of the helpful medicine, in this case at least, continues, and hence all repetition of any dose of medicine is forbidden.

7) Meanwhile the 4th edition introduces the 'Theory of Chronic Disease' as well as the concept of Psora.

It should be noted that the technique of succussion has already been published in 1826 in *Materia Medica II*, 2nd edition.

8) The 5th edition (1833) represents the introduction of a degree of controlled flexibility that is continued with the revisions and additions that become the 6th edition. Hahnemann advises the practitioner to formulate the remedy in liquid form, an approach that allows the practitioner to:

- a) repeat the remedy during improvement in order to accelerate the time for cure
- b) tailor the repetition to the



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- nature of the illness: frequent repetition for acutes; daily or weekly repetition for chronics
 - c) provide for intercurrent remedies
 - d) alter the dynamisation of the remedy with succussion prior to each administration
 - e) alter the size of the dosage: ie the quantity of liquid of each administration
 - f) only utilise repetition with liquid remedies; if dry remedies are to be prescribed then the rules listed in the 4th edition apply.
- Note also that the above guidelines appeared prior to the introduction of the millesimal or LM

The *Organon* evolved over time

series of potencies that he later introduced in the 6th edition and became known only on its publication in 1921.

This new more flexible system of prescribing and medication is outlined in paragraph 246 of the 5th edition that reads:

A very fine dose of a well-selected homœopathic remedy, if uninterrupted in its action, will gradually accomplish all of the curative effect it is capable of producing, in a period varying from forty to one hundred days. But it rarely is uninterrupted, and besides, the physician as well as the patient usually desire to accelerate the cure by reducing this period of time, if possible, by one-half, one-quarter, or even less. Experience has proved in numerous instances that such a result may actually be obtained under the following three conditions: Firstly, by careful selection of the most appropriate homœopathic medicine; secondly, by administering the medicine in the finest dose capable of restoring the vital

- force to harmonious activity, without causing violent reaction; and, thirdly, by repeating the finest dose of an accurately selected medicine at proper intervals [(See Notes and Explanatory Remark) 126] such as are proved by experience to the most conducive to a speedy cure, and timed as to prevent an injurious and revulsive counteraction of the vital force, whose action is to be tempered and modified in accordance with the morbid (aggravating) power of the medicine which is similar in effect to the natural disease. Note 126 to paragraph 246 begins:
In the former editions of the *Organon* I have recommended that a single dose of a well-selected homœopathic remedy should be allowed to terminate its operation before the same or new remedy is repeated ...
- g) Paragraph 288 of the 5th edition introduces remedy administration by olfaction:
Homœopathic remedies will act with the greatest certainty and efficacy, particularly by smelling or inhaling

them in the form of a vapour emanating continually from a dry pellet impregnated with a highly rarefied medicinal solution and contained in a small vial.

- 9) The 6th addition, which did not see the light of day until it was published in 1921, is far more than a tweaked 5th edition. For example, it includes:
- a) The application of the flexible liquid potency methodology previously outlined in the 5th edition significantly extended by the introduction of the wholly new 50 millesimal potency prescribing system. The motivation for developing this method represents a continuation of Hahnemann's desire to reduce aggravation when prescribing the similimum.
 - b) Repetition with ascending potency until change is observed is introduced.
 - c) The term 'Vital Force' gives way to the more frequent use of the term 'Vital Principle'.

d) Hahnemann concludes the 6th edition, in paragraphs 286-291, with the positive acknowledgment that the Vital Force may be stimulated to achieve cure with methodologies other than homeopathic remedies such as Mesmeric techniques, and massage and water based therapies. This summary overview of the six editions of the *Organon* has only touched the surface of the wealth of experiential wisdom accumulated by Hahnemann during the 70 adult years of his life. Just as the *Organon* is his response to experience, so too does the richness of it become more meaningful with our experience as prescribers. It is the challenge of practice that makes the *Organon* meaningful and brings it to life.

Evolution in the application of the *Organon*

Hahnemann had been penning significant additions to the 5th edition right up to his demise in 1843. However it did not see the light of

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day as the 6th edition until 1921. This meant that, from its publication in 1833 until 1921, a period of 88 years, the 5th edition remained the entrenched bible of homeopathy on a worldwide scale.

However, as with the biblical texts of the Abrahamic tradition, the practices and methodologies that could be interpreted and derived from it would ultimately lead in many directions. The 5th edition had introduced a degree of pragmatic adaptability for following the Vital Force and progress of the patient while at the same time it made reference and gave continued credibility to the 4th. As a consequence the potential for many of the subsequent homeopathic controversies that evolved during the 20th century had been introduced.

According to some, such as Luc de Schepper and David Little, the plot is thickened by the way the introduction of the practices of James Tyler Kent standardised the use of the dry sugar pill to the range of potencies, 6c, 12c, 30c, 200c, 1M, 10M, etc. This, they claim, lead to the over reliance or fundamentalist adherence on the inflexibility of the 4th edition to the exclusion of the 5th and 6th. Meanwhile, they argue that Hahnemann had been evolving in a more liberal direction and would have continued to do so had he remained alive. It needs to be remembered that Kent's revolutionary innovations were already being rapidly absorbed at the very time that the 6th edition was published in 1921. Little writes:

Kent faithfully applied the methodology of the 4th edition of the *Organon* and never put the posology of the 5th edition into practice. He did not see the 6th edition nor know about the LM potency.

In that era, homeopathy and alternative medicine were in rapid decline. In fact it is not until the late 1980s that any real interest is taken in the utilisation of the LM 50 millesimal prescribing of liquid potencies. Even this significant addition to the homeopathic tool kit was abstracted from the 6th edition. It was performed without taking on board the whole of the edition, an act similar to keeping the bath water while throwing out the baby.

The result has been that, during the resurgence of homeopathy since 1960, the profession has been confronted with an ongoing tension

The reality of the emergence of many pathways for the expression of homeopathy is an inevitable result of its very founder's evolution

among its members as to who is the more Hahnemannian or classical. Is it the adherents of the 4th edition approach or of those of the 5th and 6th edition or even the pragmatic synthesisers of the 4th, 5th, and 6th? That is the ever-irresolvable question. As such it is essentially an irresolvable debate given the 88-year gap between the publication of the 5th and 6th edition and the profession-wide response to the powerful influence of the modifications introduced by Kent.

The reality of the emergence of many pathways for the expression of homeopathy is an inevitable result of its very founder's evolution. The editions of the *Organon* were never final documents. Rather, they represented stages in the application of the simillimum principle within the context of the experience, life, and times of Hahnemann's era.

Principles are abstract goals to which we aspire. There are an innumerable number of ways or methods to achieve them. Some are more effective than others, as Hahnemann discovered. The challenge today is the same as for Hahnemann. However, given the nature and context of our milieu and its exposure to an increasing range of illness and dis-ease, the 4th, 5th, and 6th editions of the *Organon* serve as an invaluable reference point from which to aid our journey of reaching toward and expressing the simillimum ideal.

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