

Catherine R. Coulter

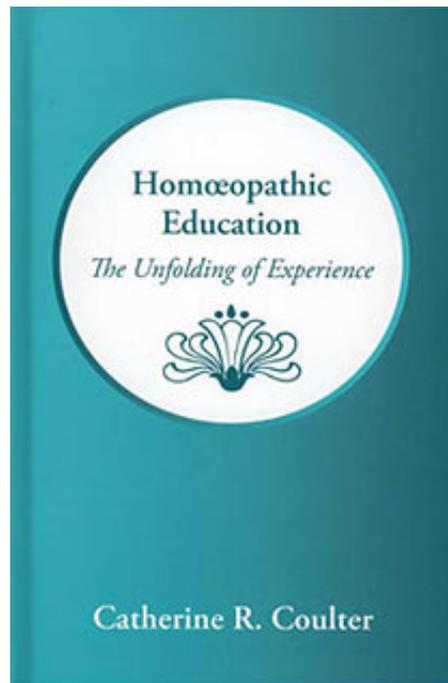
Homeopathic Education - The Unfolding of Experience

Reading excerpt

[Homeopathic Education - The Unfolding of Experience](#)

of [Catherine R. Coulter](#)

Publisher: Ninth Publishing House



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It is a logical corollary of the law of similars that medicines which act curatively for specific conditions can, along the same principle as inoculations, also act preventively.* Indeed, the curative powers of homoeopathic remedies are triple pronged: acting on the past (for inherited and never-well-since conditions), in the present (for an acute, specific, or chronic ailment), and (preventively) for the future.

Constitutional Prescribing

However, since the cardinal tenet in homoeopathic prescribing—its pride and particular signature—is *individualization*, few practitioners remain content for long with prescribing only for acute or specific conditions, no matter how effectively. Especially when (as was noted earlier) any skill in these spheres spills over into constitutional prescribing as naturally as a stream flows into a river and the river into the sea. To address the patient as a whole, to embrace with a single remedy the totality of his physical and mental symptoms and personality traits is the classical homoeopath's ultimate goal.

There is no denying that a shift in emphasis does occur here and that the principle that governs the selection of a remedy is

* Hahnemann, in his article on hydrophobia (*Lesser Writings*, pp. 390-391), strongly expresses his view on the vital and necessary link between a remedy's prophylactic and curative powers. He states:

There cannot be any *prophylactic* of hydrophobia that does not prove itself to be at the same time a really efficacious *remedy for the fully developed hydrophobia*.

Let us begin at this as our starting point. Let a remedy be discovered that has already cured at least ten persons. . . ; this will . . . be likewise the best prophylactic; but any substance that cannot stand this test, can never, in the eyes of reason and experience, be considered as a trustworthy prophylactic.

For modern examples of this same principle, see p. 299.

not the disease entity or ailment per se but the *energetic force* emitted by a patient, reflecting the dynamic interaction of the physical, mental-emotional, and spiritual planes. Therefore, idiosyncrasies that are relegated to secondary importance in acute or specific prescribing (such as *Lachesis's* tendency to weep upon reading beautiful poetry, *Arsenicum album's* insistent pushing for guarantees of cure, the long-winded eloquence of *Sulphur*, or *Natrum muriaticum's* unforgiven mother—not to speak of the patient's manner of comporting himself, his tastes, vulnerabilities, ambitions, fears, and talents) assume paramount importance in constitutional prescribing. It is these characteristics that assist the practitioner to recognize archetypal energy patterns—which, in turn, guide him to the simillimum. Thus, a patient is labeled a *Lycopodium*, *Phosphorus*, or *Thuja* constitutional type according to the remedy that most fully encompasses the aggregate of his interrelated symptoms *and* his personality plane.

The validity of the concept of a constitutional remedy has been questioned, and disagreements over it have arisen, even among homoeopaths who prescribe at this level. The dispute, however, usually boils down to the definition of the word "constitutional" rather than to the concept itself. The argument against it being that the word implies inherent physical attributes (such as dark or blond hair) and mental characteristics (such as an irritable, stubborn, or clinging disposition) that are permanent, fixed, and cannot be changed by homoeopathic medicines. The principal answer to this argument is that there *is* no better word: that other phrases which have been suggested, such as prescribing for a patient's "gestalt," "image," or "essential nature," are less *all-inclusive* in that they lack the necessary connotation of *physical* characteristics and symptoms; while substituting the word "chronic" for constitutional is even more inadequate. An obvious *Pulsatilla*, *Nux vomica*, or whatever individual (in the sense of personality picture) might require *Rhus toxicodendron* for an extended period of time for chronic arthritic pains or a chronical-

ly weak back. This does not mean, however, that the patient's constitutional type is *Rhus toxicodendron*. Therefore, as long as the word "constitutional" is understood to entail a form of homoeopathic *typology* and is employed as an auxiliary tool in matching a remedy to a patient's current symptom *complex*, so long is the concept entirely in harmony with Hahnemann's teachings.* Most important is not to get caught up in nitpicking semantics. The homoeopathic rites of passage are rigorous enough without the practitioner allowing himself to get mired in ultra refined definitions that complicate the realities of actual practice. One has to use *some* word to convey the idea of prescribing not only for the totality of symptoms but also for *a unifying energy that both emanates from and governs the syndrome a patient presents*—and the phrase "constitutional prescribing" is as good a one as any.**

In constitutional prescribing, when one is often dealing with *dozens* of disparate symptoms, that which might well intimidate the novice is the prospect of having to pinpoint *the* most fitting constitutional remedy among the literally hundreds of medicines found in the *Materia Medica*. How is he to find the needle in the haystack? But there is no call for alarm. Basically, in the same way that a few exceptional individuals stand out in a crowd, so some twenty-five remedies are indisputable homoeopathic constitutional "leaders" (E. B. Nash's term) in that they are most frequently used whatever the physical or mental-emotional ailments. These so-called *polychrests* (meaning remedies of "many uses") have been provided by Providence to facilitate the beginner's task. Following is an alphabetical list of the *constitutional* (differentiated from the acute or specific) stars of greater magnitude:

* Typology as a "tool" for prescribing will be examined more closely as we proceed. See, also, footnote on p. 161. ** Specific examples of the unifying energetic force of selected remedies are encountered in Chapter Two, pp. 40-51.

<i>Argentum nitricum</i>	<i>Natrum muriaticum</i>
<i>Arsenicum album</i>	<i>Nux vomica</i>
<i>Aurum metallicum</i>	<i>Phosphorus</i>
<i>Baryta carbonica</i>	<i>Psorinum</i>
<i>Calcarea carbonica</i>	<i>Pulsatilla</i>
<i>Carcinosin</i>	<i>Sepia</i>
<i>Causticum</i>	<i>Silicea</i>
<i>Graphites</i>	<i>Staphysagria</i>
<i>Ignatia</i>	<i>Stramonium</i>
<i>Lachesis</i>	<i>Sulphur</i>
<i>Lycopodium</i>	<i>Thuja</i>
<i>Medorrhinum</i>	<i>Tuberculinum</i>
<i>Mercurius vivus</i>	

Consequently, at this point in his education, the young homoeopath need only concentrate on learning how to identify the unifying energy in the major polychrests: how to differentiate them in the face of their overlapping characteristics and recognize their diversions from type.* Once these are mastered, he will, with time and experience, automatically -widen his *Materia Medica* horizons to include the less often used, less -well known, or more recently proven remedies.

Emphasizing the major constitutional remedies is not to deny

* For constitutional prescribing, however, the homoeopathic texts previously mentioned may prove insufficient, and a *materia medica* that concentrates on the polychrests' personality pictures might be helpful. This author's three-volume work, *Portraits of Homoeopathic Medicines: Psychophysical Analyses of Selected Constitutional Types* was written precisely to assist the practitioner to sense and identify the unifying energetic force of these major constitutional remedies.

The information also exists in an abridged essay form in *Nature and Human Personality: Homoeopathic Archetypes* and *Homoeopathic Sketches of Children's Types*.

the importance of the homoeopathic stars of lesser magnitude. It is simply that, repaired to less often, the latter need not be studied in as great a detail or depth as the remedies listed directly above. Indeed, they *cannot* be. Although powerful in their own particular sphere of action and capable of assisting where *no* other remedy can, they are either not as richly textured as are the superstars or they do not present as clearly defined personalities. Thus, remedies such as *Anacardium*, *Baryta muriatica*, *Lilium tigrinum*, *Nitric acid*, *Platina*, *Veratrum album*, etc., even if possessing distinct personalities, do not display the versatility and breadth of action—the polyvalence—of a *Natrum muriaticum*, *Sulphur*, or *Tuberculinum*; whereas *Alumina*, *Bacillinum*, *Carbo vegetabilis*, *Conium*, *Kali carbonicum*, *Natrum sulphuricum*, *Phosphoricum acidum*, *Secale cornutum*, etc., although undeniably "remedies of many uses" and often employed constitutionally, are not as endowed with a prominent mental-emotional individuality.

The initial stage in homoeopathic education is an exhilarating, exciting, invigorating one. As if some higher powers wish to support the efforts and secure the loyalty of one who is doing important work, the aspiring homoeopath is often visited by a run of beginner's luck. It seems as if he can commit no error in his choice of remedies; and the elation, the sense of empowerment he experiences thereby is akin to that of artistic creativity. Creating health from infirmity, harmony from disharmony, balance from imbalance, is a heady feeling—and the momentum carries the student, full of faith and optimism, to the next stage in the education of a homoeopath.

The Moon

Because of its property of turning from silver to black once in contact with light or organic matter, silver nitrate is known in chemistry as "*lunar caustic*."* This phrase evokes yet another image of the remedy, rich in associations and therefore useful for mnemonic purposes—that of the moon.

Just as the sun, because of its color, has traditionally been associated with gold, so, of the many associations that have adhered to the moon, that of silver is perhaps the best known. In poetry and everyday speech, such phrases as "the silver crescent of the moon," "by the light of the silver moon," "the moon sheds its silver beams," etc., are clichés. For the purposes of our argument, the moon image combines both the poor relative and poor man's gold aspects of the *Argentum nitricum* personality; in shedding light without generating its own, the moon is but borrowing from and is a pale reflection of the sun's life-giving brightness and glory.

In other respects, too, the *Argentum nitricum* picture partakes of the nature of the moon. Being constantly in flux, darkening or brightening, the moon suggests *instability*; and we find in Boericke the phrase "instability; want of balance everywhere." This symptom refers not only to the physical "faltering speech and faltering gait" (Boger), and to the tremblings and faintness discussed earlier; it denotes also the mental-emotional state. *Argentum nitricum's* high reactivity, haste, and impulsiveness, all contribute to the picture of mental lability. Additionally, the manner in which he fluctuates between nervousness or a quick responsiveness and periods of "apathy" (Hering) or indifference—

* In former times, when the compound *Argentum nitricum* was prescribed internally for epilepsy (*wrongfully*, according to Hahnemann; see his *Materia Medica Pura*, vol. 1, p. 77), the skin would acquire a dusky or dark blue tint.

in other words, the "variable, changeable mood" (Kent)—is reminiscent of the waxing and waning phases of the moon.

Apathy appeared to be, at present, the prevailing mood of a longtime patient who alternated between this and an easily excited and mentally alert state. She was also experiencing short, sharp, shooting pains in the heart region, which (understandably) were causing concern—even though there was ample reason for the pains: a severe rupture in a once close-knit family. The symptom "mental stress brings on physical symptoms" (Boericke, re *Argentum nitricum*) holds true for a number of polychrests (for an example, see p. 163), but in the *Argentum nitricum* picture one encounters the less common "apathy accompanied by sharp pains" (Hering) in the head, heart, abdomen, or other regions of the body. And when the woman incidentally mentioned an increasing aversion to riding to work on the crowded subways, there was no need for the prescriber to look further for the similimum.

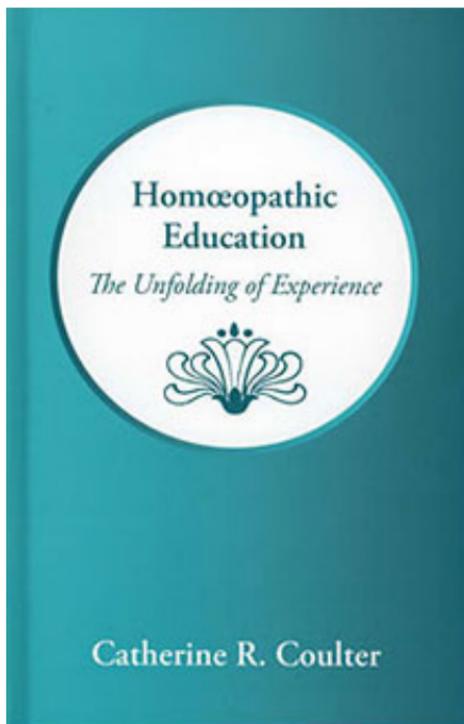
As it phases from waxing to waning, then waxing again, the moon is at least partially hidden from sight most of the time. For this reason, in the symbolism of the occult sciences (such as astrology), the moon is associated with matters secretive, mediumistic, unfathomable; it is also associated with empathy and the hidden recesses of the psyche, including psychic sensitivity. Every one of these characteristics finds expression in the *Argentum nitricum* personality picture.

First of all, there is a *recondite* quality to the nature. "Hidden motives" (Boericke) govern the individual's actions and reactions and have a profound influence on his mentality. Speaking in general terms, the type's very fears and anxieties are moon-like: more hidden than those of *Aconite*, *Arsenicum album*, *Phosphorus*, *Pulsatilla*, etc., whose apprehensions are freely articulated and out there in the open for all to see. *Argentum nitricum* is more reticent ("reserved": Kent): his motives, like his anxieties, not always easy to fathom. This trait gives rise to behavior that

appears peculiar to others, bordering on the eccentric ("does strange things and comes to strange conclusions": Kent's *Lectures on Homoeopathic Materia Medica*)—which, in turn, lends itself to misinterpretation. For, even when his actions are dictated by perfectly logical reasons, a sense of the futility of trying to explain them prompts the subject to retire from the scene of misunderstanding. He will not linger on, trying to make himself clear.

This difficulty often crops up in situations with neighbors, where the misunderstood *Argentum nitricum* feels, "Why bother?" A case in point was the woman who consulted a homoeopath for her digestive disorders: sharp stomach pains radiating into the abdomen and much offensive flatulence. In debating between several remedies, the doctor encouraged her to produce a strange, rare, and peculiar symptom to help him out.

"I don't know whether a *homoeopath* would consider this 'strange, rare, and peculiar,'" she replied, "but my neighbors certainly did. Walking home one day, I happened to see an elderly neighbor, who lives alone, fall down while gardening and apparently injure her hip. But before I rushed to call an ambulance (it wasn't a heart attack or stroke, or anything extremely urgent), I thought—Wait! There are things I have to do first. So I hurried over and established a few vital procedural matters: what did she want done with her cats? who was going to care for her house and where did she keep the keys? what was she going to need to take with her to the hospital? how could I contact her only son who lived in another state? All I could think of was settling these matters before she was whisked away by our town's zealous ambulance drivers. In the meantime, while I was asking questions, some other neighbor called the ambulance. And, of course, eventually, I heard all about my allegedly bizarre behavior, because the old woman herself complained about it. Anyway, the point is that somehow this minor incident is a metaphor for much of my life! What seems to me the most normal behavior under the sun is always strange or suspect in the eyes of others. Yet I can



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334 pages, hb
publication 2008



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