

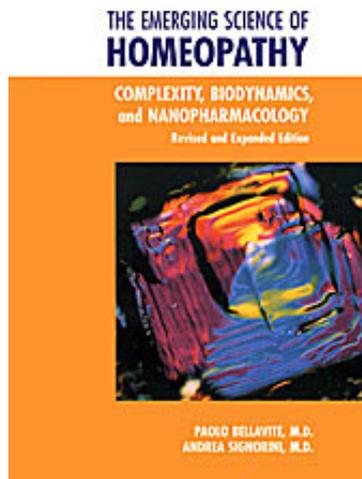
# Bellavite P. / Signorini A. The Emerging Science of Homeopathy

Reading excerpt

[The Emerging Science of Homeopathy](#)

of [Bellavite P. / Signorini A.](#)

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Narayana Verlag GmbH, Blumenplatz 2, D-79400 Kandern, Germany

Tel. +49 7626 9749 700

Email [info@narayana-verlag.com](mailto:info@narayana-verlag.com)

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## 2 *Basic Principles and Brief History of Homeopathy*

Homeopathic medicine is a clinico-pharmaceutical system which uses microdoses of substances derived from plants, minerals or animals for the purposes of stimulating the natural healing response [Coulter, 1976; Dujany, 1978; Vithoulkas, 1980; Reckeweg, 1981; Charette, 1982; Julian and Haffen, 1982; Meuris, 1982; Del Giudice and Del Giudice, 1984; Lodispoto, 1984; Bianchi, 1987; Gibson and Gibson, 1987; Brigo and Masciello, 1988; Tetau, 1989; Ullman, 1991a; Bianchi, 1990; Granata, 1990; Mossinger, 1992; Jonas and Jacobs, 1996; Ullman, 1996; Candegabe and Carrara, 1997; Swayne, 1998; Vickers, 1999]. This system claims to cure diseases using drugs (usually called "remedies") which are prepared according to particular procedures of dilution and dynamization and chosen according to a complex methodology based essentially on the so-called "law of similars."

**2.1** The "law" or "principle" of similars (or similarity) constitutes the main *The Law of Similars* acquisition of homeopathy and the basis for its understanding, though today, as we shall see, it is no longer regarded as a universal "law" valid in all cases. According to this principle, which already figured in certain medical and philosophical systems of antiquity (Hippocrates, St. Augustine, Paracelsus), but which was rediscovered mainly by the German physician Samuel Hahnemann (1755-1853), a disease can be cured by administering the patient a substance which, in healthy human subjects, causes symptoms similar to those of the disease (hence the dictum "*similia similibus curentur*" [Hahnemann, 1796]). In practice, this means that:

- a) Every biologically active substance (drug or remedy) produces *characteristic symptoms* in healthy bodies which are *susceptible* to being in some way perturbed by that substance.
- b) Every sick body expresses a series of *characteristic symptoms* which are typical of the pathological alteration of that *particular* subject.
- c) The healing of a sick body, characterized by the progressive disappearance of all symptoms, may be obtained by targeted administration of the drug which produces a similar symptom picture in healthy bodies.

For example, the homeopath, starting from the observation that bee venom causes a characteristic wheal with pain and erythema mitigated by the application of cold compresses, administers bee extract in a homeopathic presentation (diluted and dynamized) to cure patients presenting

urticaria with wheals and pain similar to those of bee stings, albeit of different etiology.

In its early formulations, which are still present in a number of schools, the remedy is prescribed not only on the basis of the diagnosis, this being of secondary importance, but also by seeking with the utmost care the correspondence between the symptomatological picture of the disease and the symptom picture caused by a given substance in healthy subjects. If the match is substantial or perfect (the remedy is a "*simillimum*" or "most similar medicine"), the administration even of only a minimum dose of the remedy triggers a reaction in the patient which leads, often after an initial aggravation of the disease, to healing. The healing, then, would appear not to be a direct suppressive effect of the substance administered ("law of opposites"), but the result of the subject's reaction, due, according to classic homeopathy, to the action of the so-called "*vital force*," or life force [Hahnemann, 1994].

For the purposes of identifying the remedies most suited to the individual circumstances, the homeopathic pharmacopoeia has been gradually built up right from the early days of homeopathy on the strength of tests of a "toxicological" type, performed by administering small doses of a whole variety of substances to healthy volunteers and painstakingly recording the symptomatological results as soon as a reaction is observed. These experiments, called *drug provings*, have been collected in the so-called *materia medicas* (encyclopedias of drug effects), which have been and are being continually updated and contain data on hundreds of different mineral, vegetable, and animal substances. The *materia medicas* have been and continue to be checked, modified, and updated also on the basis of the experience gained with patients. In fact, for a particular remedy to be introduced and used in the homeopathic pharmacopoeia, it is not enough for it to be capable of causing symptoms in a healthy subject; it must show proven ability to cure patients presenting the symptoms detected during the provings.

Another aspect which should be stressed, inasmuch as it is a recurrent feature of the literature, is the fact that, in this patient, thorough analysis of the symptoms (called *repertorization*), a great deal of importance is attributed to the more unusual symptoms, which may reveal a particular type of individual reactivity, as well as to those in the psychological sphere, which are regarded as no less important than the somatic symptoms. Correct repertorization, in fact, requires an analytical and at the same time a holistic all-embracing approach to the sick person. According to homeopathic methodology, it is only in this way that the correct choice of drug indicated for each patient can be made.

The concept of the choice of drug on the basis of the law of similars can be illustrated here with an example [Gibson and Gibson, 1987]. Three patients with influenza are treated with three different remedies: the first patient presents chills, is anxious and restless, and wants to be covered up and drink fresh water; his eyes and nose are producing an irritating mucous runny discharge causing reddening of the nose and upper lip; he also presents gastrointestinal symptoms (vomiting and diarrhea). The remedy indicated for this patient is *Arsenicum album* (arsenic). The second patient with influenza in the same epidemic feels tired and lethargic, experiences chills, and complains of occipital headache; he wants something to warm his back, wants to stay stock-still in bed, and not make any kind of physical effort. In this case the remedy indicated is *Gelsemium* (yellow jasmine). The third person has influenza with a feverish temperature and the most striking symptom is achiness throughout the entire body, as if all his bones were broken. The remedy indicated in his case is *Eupatorium perfoliatum* (boneset). All three patients have contracted the same influenza virus, but their individual reactions to the disease are different and thus their treatment has to be differentiated.

To the homeopathic practitioner, a symptom like fever says very little, in that it is a very nonspecific reaction of the inflammatory process, but he will take great care to analyze the types of fever and the concomitant symptoms as a guide to establishing the right remedy: fever with heat sensations, reddening of the skin, perspiration, a very high pulse rate, a throbbing headache, mydriasis, and photophobia indicates that the patient needs *Belladonna* (deadly nightshade). Fever of sudden onset after a cold, with anxiety even to the point of fearing death, reddening of the skin (without perspiration), and a strong, hard pulse, but also with miosis, intense thirst, and an aversion to blankets, indicates *Aconitum* (monkshood) as the remedy of choice. It is thus particular details and subtle differences which guide the doctor in his choice.

2.  
2  
**Homeopathic  
drugs**  
(or "remedies")

Not only the clinical methodology, but also the preparation of the substances used in homeopathy is quite unique. As is known, they are produced by means of a process of serial dilution and succussion aimed at endowing the solutions with a greater therapeutic effect (*dynamizantiori*).

There are precise historical reasons for the use of highly diluted substances: many substances which right from the outset were tested and introduced into the homeopathic pharmacopoeia were of empirical origin, derived from biologically highly potent or toxic compounds, *such as certain mineral elements, organic and inorganic chemical poisons, and animal or plant poisons*. The symptoms they caused were deduced from accidental intoxi-

### 6.2.3 Individualization

The conceptual frame of reference outlined here enables us to grasp one of the cornerstones of the homeopathic approach, namely the fact that one and the same disease can present different, peculiar symptoms in different subjects and may require different treatments. To this aspect, i.e. the individualization of the prescription, homeopaths have always accorded paramount importance.

The same disease may result from alterations of a great variety of homeostatic systems, with subtle differences for the individual patient, depending upon his or her genetic make-up, age, previous medical history, type of diet, and other intercurrent endogenous factors. The "typical" symptoms of a disease, that is to say the "diagnostic" or "pathognomonic" pointers, according to the conventional view, are the same in all subjects suffering from the disease (e.g., the high temperature of influenza, the headache of migraine, the jaundice of cholelithiasis). These symptoms are of little significance in homeopathic individualization, where they are called "*locaf*" or "*common*" symptoms, whereas much greater importance is ascribed to those symptoms which differ from one individual to another with the same disease. These latter symptoms are called "*peculiar\**" symptoms.

For instance, two subjects with influenza may both have a high temperature, but one may sweat and not the other; one may be in a state of prostration and the other agitated (*Belladonna* and *Aconitum*, respectively). Perspiration and prostration are peculiar symptoms and guide the homeopathic physician in his choice of remedy.

The importance accorded to the peculiar symptoms, within the framework of the theory expounded above, is justified on the basis of the fact that they reflect both the *patient's physiological homeostasis*, regardless of the disease, and the mode of reacting, *the way the body chooses to face up* to the disruption of homeostasis currently under way. It should be recalled that all homeostatic systems are interconnected, with the result that the modulation of one cannot fail to have an impact on the others. In the example we have given, it would seem clear that the imbalance of other homeostatic systems (thermoregulation, general cenesthesia) "conditions" the influenza. It is only by "conditioning" these systems pharmacologically that the particular subject can be helped by a homeopathic treatment.

The *disease*, from the homeopathic standpoint, is not identified either with what the patient complains of or with what he or she is conventionally accustomed to considering as such, but rather it embraces a broad spectrum of interrelated pathophysiological changes. It is common experience for homeopathic practitioners to observe that, in patients who present with organ diseases or diseases located at skin level, the therapy induces

improvements in the psychological sphere, or in other diseases which have been present for some time and which the patient had not regarded as treatable. This happens because, by targeting the treatment at the patient's peculiar symptoms, one is operating at a much deeper level than that apparently involved on the basis of the symptoms currently experienced.

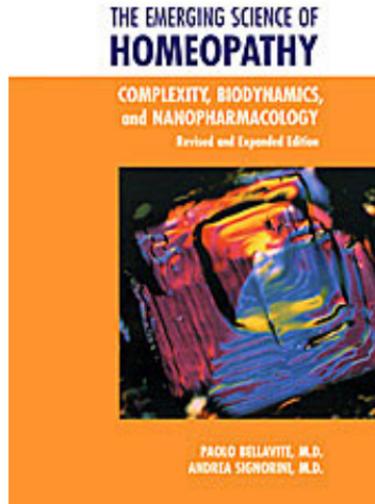
#### **6.2.4 Importance of small doses**

To reactivate the regulatory system impaired by the disease process, *small doses* of a substance acting at receptor level may suffice. The impaired system, indeed, may be hypersensitive, having a greater number of receptors and a heightened sensitivity at postreceptor (transduction) level. This fact accounts for something which was illustrated by Hahnemann and confirmed by the various schools of homeopathy: to cause the symptoms of the disease in healthy subjects you need higher doses of the remedy than those required for patient remission. On the other hand, considerations of this type also hold good for various nonhomeopathic drugs; aspirin, for instance, lowers the patient's temperature only when it is pathologically high; it does not lower it if it is normal; the thermoregulatory system becomes sensitive to aspirin only if it is operating abnormally.

The fact that the homeopathic remedy may act at low doses is also important because in this way we avoid:

- a) The remedy used having toxic effects, seeing that many substances used in homeopathy are fully fledged poisons in their own right when used at high doses.
- b) The actual receptors for the drug on the regulation system becoming saturated and thus losing their efficacy for the reasons explained above apropos of receptor dynamics (Chapter 5, Section 6.3).

Within the context of complexity, the issue of doses makes even more sense and appears even more interesting than would appear to be the case merely in the light of receptor dynamics in the classic sense. The sensitivity to small doses of drug is not explained solely in terms of the increase in numbers of receptors, as might appear from a simplified view of the phenomenon, as proposed in the diagrams in Figures 21-23. If it is true that homeostatic systems are governed by the "laws" of complexity, where chaotic dynamics may easily arise and where order (information) and tendency to disorder (entropy) coexist in a state of controlled dysequilibrium, then also their pharmacological manipulation is subject to laws of nonlinearity. When a homeostatic system oscillates between order and disorder, between positive purposefulness and self-damage, or between the



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