

Dr. Friedrich Dellmour gave this talk at the 56th Congress of the Liga Medicorum Homoeopathica Internationalis 29 August - 2 September 2001, Sibiu, Romania. The author kindly granted permission for publication of this article.

The author states that the principle of similarity is not restricted to homeopathy. It represents a general and physiological regulatory mechanism of living organisms on all kinds of influences, stimuli and information and can be found in two classifications of phenomena: first in magic, philosophical and religious phenomena as magic, mythology, religion, philosophy, epistemology, the doctrine of signatures and anthroposophical medicine, and secondly in scientific, medical and psychological phenomena as physics, psychology, psychotherapy, physiology, folk medicine, phytotherapy, osteopathy, bioenergetics, oncology, pharmacology and homeopathy. To explain homeopathy scientifically it is important to distinguish it from all ideas and speculations belonging to the first group.

Friedrich Dellmour

The similia principle – its historical and scientific roots

When Samuel Hahnemann introduced the homeopathic similia principle to the medical world in 1796 (1), he reported several pages of examples of the similia principle, which have been observed with common drugs (mainly herbal remedies) after application of common doses.

He continued his investigations and presented in 1810 with the first edition of the Organon (2) a comprehensive report of 42 pages of many cases of the similia principle from the ancient medicine till his time observed with 20 herbal plants, 17 poisonous plants, 12 inorganic substances, 3 animal substances, 1 vaccine, 5 stimulants, 3 drainage therapies, 5 electrotherapies and 4 household remedies.

Connected to that, we should never forget, that Hahnemann has discovered the similia principle in 1790 with doses of 15 grammes of cinchona bark and he has treated his patients 10 years homeopathically before he started with the preparation of potencies by the way of dilution in 1800 (3, 4). According to that, Hahnemann has used the term “homeopathic remedy” also in a general meaning for drugs and all other reasons, influences and forces of physical, toxic, alimentary, infectious, immunologic, allergic, drainage, mental and spiritual nature which are able to cause similarity effects in human beings (5). In the same way Hahnemann referred “homeopathy” and “homeopathic cure” on the scientific level generally as “each cure caused by the similarity of symptoms”, if the healing “disease-potency” is able to cause an artificial disease in the healthy organism, which is as similar as possible to the natural disease.

Therefore, according to the scientific concept of Hahnemann homeopathy and similia principle are not limited to the intake of homeopathic (= potentized) remedies. On the contrary, he listed various drugs, therapies and applications, which cause “homeopathic effects” in human beings:

Homeopathy (Homeopathic remedies): crude matter, mother tinctures, potencies, high potencies

Pharmacology (Phytotherapy): flowers, herbs, roots, barks, seeds, tinctures, teas, oils, aqueous extracts, organic compounds etc.

Toxicology: herbal, animal, organic and inorganic poisons

Immunology: smallpox lymph, allergens

Infectious diseases: scabies, measles, smallpox

Stimulants: brandy, tea, wine, spirit, tobacco smoke

Drainage therapy: purgatives, mucous-producing and sweat-producing remedies

Electrotherapy: lightning, galvanism, medical electricity, positive electricity

Kryotherapy: snow, frozen sauerkraut

Thermotherapy: hot bath, heat from fire

Psychotherapy: counselling etc.

If we study these very different “homeopathic” applications, to investigate, if there is a general mechanism of effect to explain “homeopathy” on the basis of similarity and not only limited to potentized remedies, we recognize, that these applications which cause similarity effects belong to 3 different conditions:

Matter: drugs, poisons, stimulants, allergens, infectious germs

Energy: heat and other electromagnetic energy

Information: psychotherapy.

And if we ask, if there is a common basis of matter, energy and information as a general basis for an explanation of their similarity effects in the human organism, we get five answers:

1. Matter, energy and information have in common, that they altogether represent and may act as a “potency” in the meaning of Hahnemann, because of their capacity (= lat. potentia), to cause changes of the body and the mind (5).
2. Matter, energy and information have in common, that they may act as a stimulus to the living organism.
3. Matter, energy and information have in common, that they represent a kind of information.
4. Although matter, energy and information are very different, their application to living beings is their common basis to cause homeopathic effects, because the similarity effects occur in the living organism.
5. The similia principle appears as a general reaction mechanism of living organisms on all kinds of potencies, stimuli and information.

If these assumptions are true, “homeopathic” effects should to be found not only in homeopathy but also in all fields, where human beings react on “potencies” in the general meaning of Hahnemann, that means all influences, reasons and forces, which have the capacity (potency) to cause changes in the human organism.

And indeed, if we look at all fields, where human beings react on matter, energy or information, we can find similia phenomenon, which may lead us to believe, that all these similarity reactions can be explained by a general similia principle.

But we have to be careful, because if we compare these similia phenomenon, we recognize, that they are different and not the same, because they belong to at least two different classes of similia phenomenon, which appear in the human history and science.

Magic – philosophical – religious similia phenomenon: the concept of similarity primarily exists as an idea (invention) and a matter of belief.

Scientific – medical - psychological similia phenomenon: the concept of similarity primarily is based on observations (discoveries) and a matter of science.

These two main classes of similia phenomenons are different but all of these phenomons are effective, since both the belief in magic, philosophical and religious ideas as well as scientific, medical or psychological applications may cause deep influences on the health, sickness and healing of human. But we have to distinguish them thoroughly, if we speak about homeopathy and if we want to investigate the homeopathic similia principle, because homeopathy is not a matter of belief but a matter of science !

And if we want to research on the basics of homeopathy to understand homeopathy, to explain its mechanism of effect, to make homeopathy acceptable also for the modern medicine and critical patients and doctors, to introduce homeopathy as a regular part of the health system and also to improve homeopathic practice and education, we shall research on the similia principle, because it is the main principle of homeopathy !

As an introductory contribution to inspire that research, I want to bring a short survey of similia phenomenons to be found in human history and science, to focus our further research on this challenging subject, to investigate and compare their different approaches and to be able to separate the similia principle of homeopathy from ideas and speculations, which do not belong to medicine or science as a preliminary work to explain homeopathy.

1. Magic – philosophical – religious similia phenomenons

Starting from the roots of human history, we find a lot of similia concepts in magic and mythological traditions, religious scriptures, philosophy and epistemology and some of these ideas are still contained in medical traditions like the doctrine of signatures and Anthroposophical medicine.

1.1 Magic

“Similar by similar” is a very common element of the analogous way of thinking and magic philosophy of primitive people, e.g. if Red Indians wear headdresses and ornaments made from feathers to participate with the nature of the eagle or if cannibals expect to get the bravery of killed enemies by eating them. It is due to Rudolf Tischner to separate these kinds of “magic simile” and “similarity magic” from the homeopathic similia principle (6).

1.2 Mythology

The answer of the oracle of Patara is the best known example of Greek mythology which appears both as a similia legend and a curative principle, when King Telephos, who was hurt by the spear of Achill and the wound did not heal, called the oracle for help. The answer was “Who made the wound, also will cure it” and Telephos was cured, when he managed to bring some filings of the tip of the spear Achills into his wound (7).

1.3 Religion

The Christian scriptures report a lot of similia phenomons, starting from the Genesis words “So God created human beings, making them to be like himself” (8) to the order to Moses, “to make a metal snake and put it on a pole, so that anyone who was bitten could look at it and be healed” (9) to the wonderful parables of the New testimony and the words of Jesus, that “My sheep know my voice” (10) and “I was born and came into the world for this one purpose, to speak about the truth. Whoever belongs to the truth listens to me.”(11).

1.4 Philosophy

Since religious and mythological writings and also magic ideas are basic elements of the most philosophical concepts, parables and similia phenomenons are also to be found in philosophy, e.g. the cave parable of Plato or the famous words of Goethe “If the eye would not be sunlike, it never could see the sun”. And since human recognition normally is based on already known similar things, this reflection leads to the great importance of epistemology for the human

perception and recognition in religion, philosophy, science and medicine.

1.5 Epistemology

Parmenides (515-445 BC) said, that “Similar everywhere is recognized by the similar” and especially Empedokles (490-430 BC) defined similarity as an essential precondition for recognition: “Because of the earth within us we recognize the earth, with the water the water, with the air the divine air, with the fire the fatal fire, the love with the love but the hate with the sad hate” (12).

This leads to the reflection, that human beings mostly can “recognize” only similar things, because new things are “discovered” at first and then investigated by comparison with already known similar things as a basis for re-cognition. This is valid for all perceptions by the sense organs because light, colours, forms, temperature, smell, taste, touch or pain are primarily perceived as “qualities” (13) and secondarily recognized by comparison with already experienced similar impressions.

These epistemological basics are essential for medicine and homeopathy, because symptoms also are perceived primarily as sensual or mental perceptions and then compared with already known similar perceptions to be expressed in words, like shown by the “as-if-symptoms” in homeopathy.

1.6 Doctrine of signatures

Starting from the historical roots of medicine, which come from religion, magic, astrology, alchemy, philosophy and art of healing, a lot of magic ideas have entered medicine e.g. by Paracelsus (1493-1541), who was teaching that from the outer appearance or colour of a plant we get an information about the medical effect of that remedy. These ideas of similarity have survived also in homeopathy till today, although Hahnemann, who was strictly against speculations (14) has rejected these speculations with drastic words (15):

“I shall spare the ordinary medical school the humiliation of reminding it of the folly of those ancient physicians who, determining the medicinal powers of crude drugs from their signature, that is, from their colour and form, gave the testicle-shaped orchis-root in order to restore manly vigour; the phallus impudicus, to strengthen weak erections, and considered hypericum perforatum, whose yellow flowers on being crushed yield a red juice (St. John’s blood), useful in haemorrhages and wounds, &c.; but I shall refrain from taunting the physicians of the present day with this absurdity, although traces of it are to be met with the most modern treatises on *Materia Medica*.”

1.7 Anthroposophical medicine

Many examples of the doctrine of signatures are still used in Anthroposophical medicine, e.g. that content of the early flowering *Prunus spinosa* will bring the “power of the spring” into the remedy (16) as well as astrological interpretations. This is a good example to reflect on the question, if the given effectiveness of anthroposophical preparations or other homeopathic remedies are an effect of speculative ideas or rather of their medicinal composition.

Also for scientific reasons and to develop a solid ground for homeopathy we strictly should distinguish between ideas, which can never be proven and observations, which can be proven scientifically. For that reason the above mentioned similia phenomenons should be separated from homeopathy and can not be used to explain the homeopathic similia principle.

2. Scientific – medical – psychological similia phenomenons

Starting from the general concept of the similia principle according to Hahnemanns view of “potencies” and “homeopathic effects” (5), we find a lot of similia concepts in psychology and psychotherapy as well as in the medical fields of physiology, folk medicine,

phytotherapy, osteopathy, bioenergetics, oncology, pharmacology and homeopathy.

And we know an abstract example of a similia phenomenon in physics, which may be a hint to the nature of the homeopathic similia principle and to focus our research in that direction.

2.1 *Physics*

A very abstract similia phenomenon can be found concerning the interference phenomenon of phase displaced waves. If a given wave interferes with a wave, which is displaced for their half wavelength, this wave is not the same but “similar” to the first wave and may destruct it completely. Both waves are not stable situations, but conditions changing within the time and are acting in the same “direction”, meaning that both waves cause similar effects and the second wave does not cause another effect, which is different from the first one and acting against it like in allopathy, although this example is discussed also controversially.

It is interesting, that Hahnemann has used exactly this particular German term “Auslöschung” which means “destructive interference” to describe the rapid and gentle disappearance of symptoms by the effect of a homeopathic remedy.

Besides the destructive interference also the phenomenon of “resonance” shows a possible similarity with the initial aggravations of symptoms, which already was used to explain the homeopathic effects on a physical level (21, 22).

Also the characteristic of the homeopathic effect, that it may occur in the same moment of the contact of the remedy with the organism like the second-phenomenon in neural therapy and the fact, that homeopathic effects can be antidoted by physical influences like a hot bath or massage (20) are further hints for the biophysical nature of the homeopathic effect.

But there are also reflections about a physical explanation of the active principle of homeopathic remedies (17), because they show a lot of physical characteristics: conductivity through metall as well as glass (electroacupuncture), amplification by electronic means (Mora-therapy), it may be inactivated by physical influences like heat and micro-waves (19) and its “information” can be safed onto floppy discs and CD’s (18).

And last but not least I want to draw the attention on another physical phenomenon, which is a very weak argument but may be a bridge between physics, psychology and homeopathy – the concept of mirror. The mirror image is not the same like the actual image because it is only a virtual picture. But this similar information is able to cause recognition and by that way healing or curative reactions may take place in humans, like known from psychology.

2.2 *Psychology*

Already Aristoteles (384-322 b. Chr.) mentioned on the example of the Greek tragedies, that “Catharsis” may cause mental healing, because they cause fear and compassion which may purify the mind from the same mental conditions. Similar concepts based on the realisation of the own situation exist in psychotherapy also and many phenomena dealing with sympathy, antipathy or love as well as music and all other forms of arts, entertainment industry, sports and sociology show similia phenomena (23).

2.3 *Psychotherapy*

Corresponding to that, different techniques of psychotherapy use similia phenomena to initiate awareness, e.g. by confrontation of the patient with his unconscious, relationship to a individual “simile-person” or application of an artificial trauma, which is similar to the reason of the actual condition. Also idiolectic counselling, working with dreams (23) and many forms of creative “acts of similarity” (24) demonstrate various possibilities, how the reaction of the human mind on similarities may relief blockades and liberate vital force to become more stronger and healthy.

2.4 *Physiology*

The concept of “vital force”, which can be found not only in homeopathy but also in all other human cultures, appears as a matter of physiology, because physiology is the science of the living organism. Hahnemann has called the vital force also “vital principle”, “vital energy”, dynamis” and “autocracy” and has used this concept to explain the functions of the living organism and its reaction on all types of external and internal influences.

Many aspects of this concept (5) appear nearly identical with the today physiological concept of homeostasis and especially with the modern concept of the “autoregulatory system” (25), which actually have the capacity to react on all external and internal stimuli to keep the balance of the vital functions of the organism.

And since the functions of the autoregulatory system mainly are provided by the autonomous nervous system, it is interesting to see, that many characteristics of homeopathy, such as the immediate reaction on homeopathic remedies after application, the homeopathic range of effectiveness from the body to the mind, the effect on all regions of the body independent from the common anatomical or histological structures or physiological functions are in accordance with the characteristics of the autonomous nervous system.

Especially the reappearance of former symptoms and the effectiveness of homeopathic remedies on the mind, feelings and the dreams indicate, that the homeopathic mechanism of effect may be explained based on neural functions of the complete nervous system, mainly provided by the autonomous nervous system in connection with the peripheral and the central nervous system and psychoneuroimmunology. Recent research results found in animals (28) and humans (27) support that hypothesis.

2.5 *Folk medicine*

Already Hahnemann has reported some household remedies like snow or frozen sauerkraut to treat freezings or to apply heat to treat burnings. But also in folk medicine similarity is used e.g. to treat fever at the beginning of a grippal infection with hot grogg, cognac or rum, if the fever is accompanied by distinct tiredness, a condition which is similar to that which is caused by hot spirits in healthy persons (29). Similarity is also to be found, if cold sensations appear with the beginning of the fever and Camphora is administered, which itself causes characteristic sensations of coldness in healthy people.

Since both applications affect the circulatory system and many homeopathic effects are accompanied by circulatory symptoms, provided by the autonomous nervous system, these hints suggest too, that the homeopathic similia principle in its general meaning, which is not limited to potentized remedies only, is based on the autoregulatory system.

2.6 *Phytotherapy*

Chamomille tea can cure mild cases of gastric infection as well as it may cause similar gastric symptoms in healthy patients. From Hahnemanns cinchona bark experiment with common phytotherapeutical doses, his literature references in the Organon up to the today use of herbal medicine and stimulants like coffee we also can find many examples of similia phenomena in phytotherapy.

2.7 *Osteopathy / Bioenergetics*

Both the “Automatic osteopathic reposition technique” and bioenergetic observations show, that the short therapeutical increase of the malposition of the body or the tension of a muscle can cause autoregulatory healing reactions, which may influence the entire body and the mind and are provided by the nervous system (30).

2.8 Oncology

The physical influence of X-ray and radioactive irradiation cause the development of tumor cells as well as the same applications are used to treat tumor diseases. Further on, similia phenomena are also known from Cis-platin and other cytostatic agents.

2.9 Pharmacology

Hippocrates (460-377 BC), whose sentence “*Similia similibus curantur*” was taken over from Hahnemann to express the homeopathic similia principle, stated that “Diseases are caused by the similar and cured by application of the similar” (31), which allows the reflection, that there must be a particular precondition or pathology in the patient to become sick by “the similar”, according to the later concepts of terrain, miasms and constitution.

But also modern clinical pharmacology shows according to Hahnemann, who already has observed the similia principle after the intake of drugs in common doses (2), a lot of similia phenomena by the examples of paradoxical drug actions (32) and the work of Marcus Zulian Teixeira, who has investigated the rebound phenomenon (33, 34).

These data demonstrate, that similia phenomena in medicine do not occur only with potentized remedies but also in clinical pharmacology.

2.10 Homeopathy

As reported above, homeopathy is based on the qualitative perception of symptoms and the comparison with similar, already known perceptions to recognize and express them and the comparison with similar, already known symptoms of the materia medica, to prescribe the individual remedy. The homeopathic similia principle therefore is based on the individual comparisons of sensual and mental perceptions.

But there is not one similia principle for each individual patient, because we know different “layers of similarity” like personotropism, diathesis, constitution, etiotropism, functiotropism, organotropism and histiotropism (35) and further approaches to prescribe the remedy because of the different traditions, philosophies and schools of homeopathy.

Therefore, we do not know only one particular similia principle in homeopathy but different effective approaches, to use “similarity” for homeopathic therapy. And since we do not use potentized remedies only, but also mother tinctures (36), and the proving symptoms as well as the cured symptoms of the patients show clear similarity to phytotherapy and even toxicology as well as psychology and clinical pharmacology show similia phenomena, homeopathy does no longer appear as an isolated, unique phenomenon in medicine but as an important element of the entire medicine and the art of healing.

The common basis of the different homeopathic approaches and also of other natural, psychological and even medical therapies obviously is the similia principle. But since there are so many different similia concepts in human history, science and medicine, it is necessary to distinguish them, if we want to investigate and to explain homeopathy.

3. Conclusions

1. Starting from the fact, that Hahnemann has discovered homeopathy with doses of 15 grammes of China and the effects of phytotherapeutic and even toxic doses are integrated elements of the homeopathic materia medica, it is interesting to see, that the similia principle, which is the mechanism of effect of homeopathy, is not limited to potentized remedies.
2. More than that, similia phenomena can be found also in folk medicine, phytotherapy, clinical pharmacology, psychology and psychotherapy leading to the hypothesis, that the

similia principle represents a general and physiological regulatory mechanism of living organisms on all kinds of influences, stimuli and informations.

3. The historical concept of the vital force introduced by Hahnemann and the modern concept of autoregulation seem to describe the same physiological function in essential parts and the latter appears appropriate, to provide and to explain characteristic aspects of the homeopathic effect.
4. The autoregulation as a possible mechanism of effect of homeopathy is provided by the autoregulatory system, which is based to the large extent on the function of the autonomous nervous system. These complex functions appear appropriate to explain many characteristic features of homeopathy.
5. Considering the reappearance of symptoms, mental effects and influences on dreams, the homeopathic effect may be explained as a nervous phenomenon provided by the autonomous nervous system and the central nervous system.
6. Since we know similia phenomena also in magic, mythology, religion and philosophy, we have to distinguish them from the similia phenomena in science, medicine and psychology, if we want to explain homeopathy on a scientific level.
7. Since magic, religious or philosophical concepts as well as medical or psychological therapies have influence on health, sickness and healing of human, the investigation of the autoregulatory system appears important for the research on the placebo effect.

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56th Congress of the Liga Medicorum Homoeopathica Internationalis.

29 August – 2 September 2001, Sibiu, Romania.

Casa de Presa si Editura "Tribuna", Sibiu 2001: 86-94.

ISBN 973-8009-43-X