

The German original of „On the value of the speculative systems of medicine“, was first published 1808 in the *Allgemeinen Anzeiger der Deutschen*, No. 263. The English version presented here was translated and edited by R. E. Dudgeon, New York; it was published 1852 in *The Lesser Writings of S. Hahnemann* by William Radde: pp. 488 - 505. The following extracts are of special relevancy for the debate concerning the fundamentals of homeopathy and give an impression of Hahnemann's thoughts on this subject.

The theoretical healing art and various so-called „systems“ have not in the least contributed to the healing of diseases in the course of medical history; they have only led to a *materia medica* deformed by hypotheses.

Life - and with it the derangement of the vital force, i.e. disease - really cannot be explained; none of the explanations stands the test of pure experience and the unbiased proving. Therefore, everything the physician can and needs to know is limited to something which could be called the „empirical knowledge of vitality“, i.e. is based on pure experience; the explanation as to how phenomena arise, lies beyond human perception.

Samuel Hahnemann

ON THE VALUE OF THE SPECULATIVE SYSTEMS OF MEDICINE, ESPECIALLY AS VIEWED IN CONNEXION WITH THE USUAL METHODS OF PRACTICE WITH THEY HAVE BEEN ASSOCIATED

Although it has ever been man's endeavour to discover and explain the connection of the various constituents of the living body, and the manner of their reaction upon each other, and upon external forces; to tell how they give rise to those living instruments (organs) which are requisite to the maintenance of life; and how, out of the necessary organs, a self-contained whole - a living healthful individual - is formed and upheld; it has been found impossible, though it has been often tried, to explain these, ...

....

But though all the component parts of the human frame are to be found in other parts of nature, they act together in their organic union, to the full development of life, and the discharge of the other functions of man, in so *peculiar* and anomalous a manner (which can only be defined by the term *vitality*), that this peculiar (*vital*) relation of the parts to one another and the external world, cannot be judged of or explained by any other rule than that which itself supplies; therefore, by none of the known laws of mechanics, statics, or chemistry. All those theories, to which age after age has given birth, when brought in contact with simple experience, and tried by an impartial test, have ever been found to be far-fetched and unfounded.

Yet, in spite of the uniform disappointment of these innumerable attempts, the physiologists and pathologists would still return to the old leaven; not because they saw any likelihood of these hypotheses leading to useful discoveries in the art of .. healing, but *because they placed the essence of the medical art, and their own chief pride, in explaining much even of the inexplicable*. They imagined it impossible to treat scientifically the abnormal states of the human body (diseases) without possessing a *tangible* idea of the fundamental laws of the normal and abnormal conditions of the human frame.

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From time to time, it is true, an accumulation of facts, often of a nature to arrest the least

attentive observer, forced on men the conviction that the doctrine of the structure and functions of . the. human body in the healthy state (physiology); and of the -inward changes consequent on the generation of disease (pathology) which deduces them from atomical and chemical principles, is an erroneous one; but in avoiding this error, - still misled by the *vain fancy that the business of the medicinal profession was to explain every thing*, - they fell into the opposite, but not less dangerous evil of superstition.

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That which had baffled clear chemistry and physics, dim, self-unintelligible mysticism and frenzied fancy were to bring to light: old astrology was to explain what puzzled modern natural philosophy.

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But if these physiological refinements and pathological would-be explanations, as regards their proper object, the cure of disease, are rather prejudicial than helpful, as no unprejudiced person will deny, of what possible use are they ?

"Surely the physician," I fancy I hear one exclaim, "requires a theory at once for a clue, a thread on which to string his ideas and systematic practice, and a line to direct him at the sick-bed ..."

....

True, I reply; but this clue must neither be a flimsy cobweb nor a false guide : for then it were worse than none.

....

It has not been given to mortal man to reason *a priori* on the nature of his own soul.

....

No man is acquainted with the substratum of vitality, or the *a priori* hidden arrangement of the living organization - no mortal can ever dive into it, nor can human speech, either in prose or verse, even faintly shadow it forth : the attempt ends in fiction and sheer nonsense.

Throughout the course of the two thousand years and upwards in which men prided themselves on the cultivation of philosophy and medical science, no single step, not the smallest, has been made towards an *a priori* knowledge of the vitality of the bodily frame or the intellectual energy (the soul) which actuates it. All that inflated bombast, passing for demonstration, abounding in words, but void of sense - all the antics and curvets of the sophists, about indiscoverable things, are ever vain, and to the modest spirit of the true philosopher perfectly insufferable.

We cannot even conceive a path that should lead us to such knowledge.

No not a glimpse shall frail mortality ever obtain of that which lies deep hidden in the sacred recesses of the Divine Creating Mind, far, immeasurably far, beyond the grasp of human comprehension!

All, therefore, that the physician can know regarding his subject-matter, vital organization, and all that concerns him to know, is summed up in that. ... which we might designate the *empirical knowledge of vitality*, viz.: *what the appreciable phenomena are which occur in the healthy human body, and what their connexion is*; the inscrutable *how they occur*, remaining entirely excluded.

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And, in like manner, besides a historical acquaintance with the constitution of the human

frame in a healthy state, the physician needs but in the same way to know the symptoms of the particular malady (further, indeed, he cannot explore, as it would serve him nothing), in order to remove it, supposing he then knows the right remedy.

Or, after all, is this all a mistake, and does the design and dignity of the medical art lie rather in vapoury theorizing, than in skill in curing diseases ? `Then, indeed, those word-mongers, who neither do nor cure, must bear away the palm !

Yet, if these metaphysical speculations and systems concerning the essential nature of disease (supposing they possessed some, though it were the veriest shadow of probability) were of some, the least possible value to the physician, (and some value, methinks, that, after all, must surely possess, which has been the cause of so much ado), then we cannot but conclude that this race of system-framers and system-followers must, at any rate, form the better and more successful practitioners, since they are possessed of that which - to believe them - is the true and only solid basis of the art of medicine !

But alas ! it is these very men who refute, at the sick-bed, their own bragging boast of being the confidants of Nature; it is these very men who are the most helpless, when they are not the most disastrous, practitioners.

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* Although it is certain that the *Materia Medica*, can and must be the daughter of experience, yet even it has given way to arbitrary opinions, ideal and dreamy hypotheses, and has allowed itself to be moulded to-day into one form, and on the morrow into a new form.....*What is to become of an art* (to which the charge of human life has been committed) *if fancy and caprice are to have the upper hand in it?*

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Thus we find; spite of the well nigh uninterrupted revolutions of the physiological, pathological, and therapeutic theories, during two thousand years and more, according to mechanical, atomical, chemical, ideal, pneumatical, and mystical theories and owing to this infantile state of knowledge as to the real properties of simple medicines,- we still find - even in this century which in every other respect is hastening towards perfection - we *still find*, I repeat, that only a *very small* proportion of human ailments can in such a manner be removed as shall leave the physician the merit of having been the undoubted author of the cure.

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Such is the fearful but too true condition of the medical art hitherto, which under the treacherous promise of recovery and health, has been gnawing at the life of so many of the inhabitants of earth.

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