

Dr. Saine's Question:

False Premises About Homeopathy

It is quite common for homeopathy to be grossly misrepresented in the professional and popular literature. You wrote, "In order for an argument to be sound all of its premises must be true. Often, different people come to different conclusions because they are starting with different premises. So examining all the premises of each argument is a good place to start."¹

Let's start with two of the basic premises you stated that they belong to homeopathy, namely the law of infinitesimals and the law of chronic diseases. First, you wrote, "The second law, the law of infinitesimals, says that as you dilute the substance it becomes more potent—in direct violation of the very real laws of physics and chemistry,"² as well as, "I want the public to be aware of the fact that most homeopathic solutions are diluted far past the point where there is likely to be a single molecule of active ingredient left—and therefore claims for the homeopathic 'law of infinitesimals' violates the law of mass action and the laws of thermodynamics."³

Now let's turn to the official definition of genuine homeopathy and its fundamental principles. Forgive me for this very long definition that Hahnemann wrote in the preface of the last edition of his Organon but it is the most complete and most unequivocal one: "Hence homeopathy avoids everything in the slightest degree enfeebling,* and as much as possible every excitation of pain, for pain also diminishes the strength, and hence it employs for the cure ONLY those medicines whose power for altering and deranging (dynamically) the health it knows accurately, and from these it selects one whose pathogenetic power (its medicinal disease) is capable of removing the natural disease in question by similarity (similia similibus), and this it administers to the patient in simple form, but in rare and minute doses so small that, without occasioning pain or weakening, they just suffice to remove the natural malady whence this result: that without weakening, injuring or torturing him in the very least, the natural disease is extinguished, and the patient, even whilst he is getting better, gains in strength and thus is cured—an apparently easy but actually troublesome and difficult business, and one requiring much thought, but which restores the patient without suffering in a short time to perfect health,—and thus it is a salutary and blessed business.

¹ Steven Novella. How to argue. Neurologicablog. March 19, 2009

² Steven Novella. Homeopathy at the Huffpo. Skepticblog. Oct. 19, 2009

³ Steven Novella. Quietus and homeopathy awareness week. Neurologicablog. April 13, 2010

"Thus homeopathy is a perfectly simple system of medicine, remaining always fixed in its principles as in its practice, which, like the doctrine whereon it is based, if rightly apprehended will be found to be complete (and therefore serviceable). What is clearly pure in doctrine and practice should be self-evident, and all backward sliding to the pernicious routinism of the old school that is as much its antithesis as night is to day, should cease to vaunt itself with the honorable name of homeopathy."⁴

You will notice that in this detailed definition, Hahnemann answers the question that you asked me during the debate regarding the use of compounded⁵ versus "accurately" known, simple medicines, and that such a practice, as well any other form of practice that don't abide to the just-cited fundamental principles "should cease to vaunt itself with the honorable name of homeopathy." However, you will not find in this definition of homeopathy and its fundamental principles, or in any other of Hahnemann's works or writings, any reference to a law of infinitesimals or a law of chronic diseases that you mentioned during the debate.

Returning to what you have written, "in order for an argument to be sound all of its premises be true," and given that these two basic premises you claimed for homeopathy unequivocally don't exist or apply to genuine homeopathy, and are therefore false, aren't all their subsequent arguments unsound or completely false, such as " 'the law of infinitesimals' violates the law of mass action and the laws of thermodynamics" and "the very real laws of physics and chemistry"?

As a responsible man of science, what steps are you going to take to correct these gross and completely unscientific misrepresentations of the fundamental aspects of homeopathy and any of their subsequent logical fallacies, which you have repeated for many years in numerous articles and presentations, and that can currently be found on numerous websites?⁶ Also can you precisely describe what laws of chemistry or physics, homeopathy violates, if any at all, once these two completely fabricated laws of homeopathy are eliminated from the equation?

⁴ Samuel Hahnemann. *Organon of Medicine*. Sixth edition. Translated by William Boericke. Philadelphia: Boericke and Tafel, 1922: 18–19

⁵ Unproved compounded medicines or combination remedies sold under the name of homeopathy are clearly not part of homeopathy. However, they could be sold under the name of homeotherapeutics.

⁶ Such as theness.com/neurologicablog, skeptico.blogs.com, sciencebasedmedicine.org, skepticalteacher.wordpress.com, randi.org, csicop.org, friendofreason.wordpress.com, illuminutti.com, lippard.blogspot.ca, trusted.md, lizditz.typepad.com, startleddisbelief.com, skepdic.com, skepticalteacher.wordpress.com, etc.

Dr. Novella's Response:

I find the claim that Samuel Hahnemann did not endorse a "law of infinitesimals" to be misleading in many respects.

First, it is a "No True Scotsman" logical fallacy – arguing that examples of infinitesimals within homeopathy do not demonstrate that homeopathy follows such rules, because such examples are a-priori "not true homeopathy."

The undeniable fact is, that homeopathy, as it is widely practiced today, including the many homeopathic products sold on the market, do follow the basic concept that ingredients are diluted to extreme degree. While the exact extent of dilution varies considerably, very common dilutions include those that exceed the point at which any original ingredient is likely to remain.

I further find it either an example of intellectual dishonesty or extremely poor and selective scholarship to claim that Hahnemann did not endorse extreme dilutions. He may not have written the words "law of infinitesimals" himself, but he certainly endorsed the principles that are captured in that phrase.