

## Did Hahnemann plagiarize Aquinas?

The status of Homeopathy as scientific medicine has been problematic since its inception. Along the 19th century, medical approaches which dated from the Antiquity were finally overcome, while new models were formulated in order to build medicine on sound “scientific” grounds.<sup>1</sup> Homeopathy emerged as one of such new proposals. It was only natural that a thick shield would be erected around it.<sup>2</sup>

Such defensive strategy, allied to other political, sociological and economic factors, may help to explain how it was that homeopathy severed itself from the outer scientific medical world, transforming its literature into an almost sacred corpus, which was to be transmitted with no changes whatever to future generations.<sup>3</sup>

The instance we discuss here may be considered a paradigmatic example of the hypothesis above. It alludes to one of the most polemic stances in contemporary homeopathy.

Alfonso Masi Elizalde (Argentina, 1932-2003) suggested a new model for homeopathy grounded on Thomas Aquinas Scholastic philosophy. This view resulted in an original approach to homeopathic theory and practice, that gathered over many followers around the world in a short time.

Masi Elizalde views may be summarized as follows<sup>4</sup>. Argentinian homeopathy witnessed an amazing evolution in the second half of the 20th century, especially under the influence of Tomás Pablo Paschero (1904-1986), a student of Grimmer who, in his turn, was a direct student of James T. Kent. Paschero’s elaboration of homeopathy as a “medicine of the person” or an “anthropological medicine” eventually turned to Psychoanalytic anthropology as such form of psychotherapy found a fertile soil in Argentinian society.

Masi Elizalde questioned such a bias, claiming that homeopathic frameworks must be sought in homeopathy itself instead of importing alien modes of knowledge into it. This was the reason why he devoted himself to the study of psychology, in order to be able to detect indexes of homeopathy’s founder Christian F. S. Hahnemann’s anthropological views.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, when faced to the amazingly wide scope of psychological theories, he didn’t know where to begin. Thus he decided to choose what he thought it was the most classical, less questioned, psychological approach, i. e., Scholastic psychology. It was while reading Aquinas’ 13th century Summa Theologica that he was stricken by a dazzling realization: he found Hahnemann’s exact words in the pages of the Summa.

He felt it was sound enough to justify an epistemological leap that allowed him to infer an absolute identity between Aquinas and Hahnemann’s thought. Hence he devoted the second phase of his research to read homeopathy through Scholastic lenses, which fully convinced him of the actuality of his initial insight.

This approach finally resulted in a most novel approach to homeopathic theory and practice, extremely fruitful in therapeutic terms.

On the other hand, a religious - actually, a Roman Catholic - homeopathic approach was naturally destined to give rise to the most heated polemics. Many distinguished practitioners felt morally offended by the inclusion of religion into medicine. Fiery arguments were followed by many attempts to refute Elizalde’s views, especially his basic tenet: Hahnemann had grounded homeopathy on Scholastic philosophy.

1. S. Priven, “Hahnemann, um médico de seu tempo. Articulação da doutrina homeopática como possibilidade da medicina do século XVIII”. Dissertation, Master’s Degree in the History of Sciences. Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, 2002.

2. R. Jütte, “Historiography of Non Conventional Medicine in Germany: A Concise Overview”. *Medicine History*, 43 (1999): 342-358.

3. This has been noticed by other authors. Cf, as an example, A. Saine, “Hering’s Law: Law, Rule or Dogma”, Website of the Canadian Academy of Homeopathy. [http://www.homeopathy.ca/articles/hering\\_law.html](http://www.homeopathy.ca/articles/hering_law.html) February 2004.

4. Masi Elizalde didn’t write any books. The only written sources he left were the Proceedings of his Instituto de Altos Estudos Homeopáticos “James Tyler Kent”. He would explain once and again that as his thought was continuously changing, he was afraid that any work would be outdated even at the moment of its publication. On the other hand, he spent the last 20 years of his life giving lectures in Europe and South America. A number of his Brazilian lectures were taped and stored at the library of the Escola de Homeopatia, São Paulo. Such tapes and personal notes taken at lectures by this author are the sources used in the present article.

5. It’s noteworthy that any discussion of homeopathy inevitably begins with its founder. Science historian Ana Maria Alfonso-Goldfarb explains that this is due to the fact that homeopathy’s nature is essentially historical. Personal communication.

Elizalde claimed to possess “many proofs” of Hahnemann’s Scholasticism. Yet, as years went by, he reduced such “proofs” to a central thesis: Hahnemann had plagiarized Aquinas.<sup>6</sup> And he didn’t plagiarize him merely because he liked some of Aquinas’ ideas or his literary style, but such plagiarism was a sign of the absolute identity of thought shared by both. That is to say, Hahnemann didn’t quote the references he took from Aquinas’ work owing to negligence nor, worse, dishonesty, but as both had exactly the same ideas, such quotations were totally superfluous, or even unjustified.

What did Elizalde find in Aquinas’ Summa that convinced him so positively?

“... horns and nails, which are the weapons of some animals, the thickness of the skin, hair and feathers that cover them, constitute one more evidence of the earthly element, which the homogeneity and delicacy of the human complexion abhor; it was because of all of these that they weren’t convenient for man. In their stead, he has reason and the hands, through which he can seek by himself all kinds of weapons, clothes and necessary things to life, in a thousand different ways...”<sup>7</sup>

Upon reading the paragraph above Elizalde was immediately reminded of similar ideas in Hahnemann:

“Man, regarded as an animal, has been created more helpless than all other animals. He has no congenital weapons for his defence like the bull, no speed to enable him to flee from his enemies like the deer, no wings, no webbed feet, no fins - no armour impenetrable to violence like the tortoise, no place of refuge provided by nature as is possessed by thousands of insects and worms for their safety, no physical provision to keep the enemy at bay, such as render the hedgehog and torpedo formidable, no sting like the gadfly, nor poison-fang like the viper; - to all the attacks of the hostile animals he is exposed defenceless. He has, moreover, nothing to oppose to the violence of the elements and meteors. He is not protected from the action of the water by the shining hair of the seal, nor by the close oily feathers of the duck, nor by the smooth shield of the water beetle; his body, but a slight degree lighter than the water, floats more helplessly in that medium than that of any quadruped, and is in danger of instant death. He is not protected like the polar-bear or the eider-duck by a covering impenetrable to the northern blast. At its birth the lamb knows where to seek

its mother’s udder, but the helpless babe would perish if its mother’s breast were not presented to it. Where he is born mature nowhere furnishes his food ready made, as she provides ants for the armadillo, caterpillars for the ichneumon fly, or the open petals of flowers for the bee. Man is subject to a far larger number of diseases than animals, who are born with a secret knowledge of the remedial means for these invisible enemies of life, instinct, which man possesses not. Man alone painfully escapes from his mother’s womb, soft, naked, defenceless, helpless, and destitute of all that can render his existence supportable, destitute of all wherewith nature richly endows the worm of the dust, to render its life happy... Behold, the Eternal Source of all love only disinherited man of the animal nature in order to endow him all the more richly with that spark of divinity - a mind - which enables man to elicit from himself the satisfaction of all his requirements... - a mind, that indestructible itself, is capable of creating for its tenement, its frail animal nature, more powerful means for its sustenance, protection, defence and comfort than any of the most favoured creatures...”<sup>8</sup>

Elizalde’s conclusion was absolutely unquestionable: Hahnemann had plagiarized Aquinas, since it’s only too “evident” the exact correspondence between both texts and, as mentioned above, Hahnemann didn’t quote the source where he had obtained his. From this he inferred the “identity of thought” between Hahnemann and Aquinas, which he summarized by stating that “homeopathy is nothing but Scholasticism applied into medicine, or Scholastic medicine”.

Elizalde didn’t put forward his view as just one amidst many others, but as the only possible path leading to the understanding of “homeopathic orthodoxy”, the true Hahnemannian homeopathy. On these grounds, he submitted homeopathy to a “critical review”, developing the plan he had designed: to elucidate homeopathy from a Scholastic hermeneutical perspective.

As mentioned above, such an approach immediately became polemical, giving rise to two irreconcilable “sides”: equally rabid partisans and critics. Nevertheless, none was able to bring up nothing but emotional claims, without being able to put forward sound evidence to ground acceptance or rejection.

This impasse may be explained by the fact that homeopathy’s episteme doesn’t include tools to perform

6. During the last years of his life, Elizalde would not merely insist on the truth of such “plagiarism” in his lectures, but he made it a personal mission to teach that idea to his patients. Personal communication of Elizalde’s former patients.

7. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Q. 91st, art. 3rd. Buenos Aires, Club de Lectores, 1988, vol. IV, pp. 193-4.

8. Hahnemann, CFS “The medicine of experience”, in R E Dudgeon (ed.) *The Lesser Writings*. Nova Delhi, B. Jain, [s.d.], pp. 435-6.

the kind of analysis this requires. As well as traditional history of medicine, the historiography of homeopathy seems to ignore that no single science can be analyzed without referring it to its historical context.

The notion of “plagiarism” doesn’t belong to the historian of science’s vocabulary. Such a researcher knows that when a scientist passes off another’s ideas as his/her own, or his/her own ideas as if belonging to someone else, this doesn’t automatically involve “plagiarism”. The requirement of citing sources is very recent, it wasn’t as normative in the 18th century as in the present time. On the other hand, during Antiquity and the Middle Ages, it was common practice for an unknown author, who wished to make his ideas known, to pass them off as if belonging to some established authority. This was how “pseudo-Aristotle”, “pseudo-Geber” and many other “pseudo-” appeared. Such practice was no longer favored in the 18th century, which thus represents the transition between this ancient practice and our modern “copyright”.

This historiographic fact would suffice to refute Elizalde’s idea of plagiarism, but further considerations are in order. Our research let us find out that the text quoted above isn’t originally authored by Aquinas. A lot older is Pliny’s (1st century) *Natural History*. This encyclopedic work was the main reference concerning natural history up to the time of Conrad Gesner (1516-1565) - who, by the way, followed Pliny’s approach. There it may be read:

“...of all other living creatures, man she hath brought forth all naked, and clothed him with the good and riches of others. To all the rest, given she hath sufficient to clad them everie one according to their kind: as namely, shells, cods, hard hides, prickes, shagge, bristles, haire, downe feathers, quilts, skailes, and fleeces of wool. The verie trunkes and stemmes of trees and plants, she hath defended with barke and rind, yea and the same sometime double, against the injuries both of heat and cold: man alone, poore wretch, she hath laid all naked upon the bare earth, even on his birthday, to cry and wraule presently from the very first houre that he is borne into this world: in such sort, as among so many living creatures, there is none subject to shed teares and weepe like him..

... How long is it ere we can goe alone? How long before we can prattle and speake, feed our selves, and chew our meat strongly? What a while continueth the mould and crowne of our heads to beat and pant, before our braine is well settled; the undoubted marke and token that bewrayeth our exceeding great weakeneße above all other creatures? What should I say of the infirmities and sick-

nesses that soone seaze upon our feeble bodies? What need I speake of so many medicines and remedies devised against these maladies: besides the new diseases that come everie day, able to check and frustrate all our provision of Physicke whatsoever? As for all other living creatures, there is not one, but by a secret instinct of nature knoweth his owne good, and whereto he is made able: some make use of their swift feet, others of their flight wings: some are strong of limme; others are apt to swimme, and practise the same: man onely knoweth nothing unlesse hee be taught; he can neither speake, nor goe, nor eat, otherwise than he is trained to it: and to be short, apt and good at nothing he is naturally, but to pule and crie...

... Mans life is most fraile of all others, and in least securitie he liveth: no creature lusteth more after every thing than he: none feareth like unto him, and is more troubled and amazed in his fright: and if he be set once upon anger, none more raging and wood than he. To conclude, all other living creatures live orderly and well, after their owne kind: we see them flocke and gather together, and readie to make head and stand against all others of a contrarie kind: the Lyons as fell and savage as they be, fight not one with another: serpents sting not serpents, nor bite one another with their venomous teeth: nay the verie monsters and huge fishes of the sea, warre not amongst themselves in their owne kind: but beleeve me, Man at mans hand receiveth most harme and mischief...

Yet, there’s a still older version of the same text, belonging to an author that may be considered one of the mainstays of Western culture. We’re alluding to Plato (5th century). In his dialogue “Protagoras”, he elaborates on an ancient Hellenic myth concerning the beginning of the world as an illustration of his ideas about the World of Ideas and the Perceptible World:

“Once upon a time there were gods only, and no mortal creatures. But when the time came that these also should be created, the gods fashioned them out of earth and fire and various mixtures of both elements in the interior of the earth; and when they were about to bring them into the light of day, they ordered Prometheus and Epimetheus to equip them, and to distribute to them severally their proper qualities. Epimetheus said to Prometheus: “Let me distribute, and do you inspect.” This was agreed, and Epimetheus made the distribution. There were some to whom he gave strength without swiftness, while he equipped the weaker with swiftness; some he armed, and others he left unarmed; and devised for the

9. Pliny, “Preface to book VII”, *Historia Naturalis*. Website James Eason, University of Chicago. Version of Philemon Holland (1601) <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/holland/pliny7.html> July, 2003.

latter some other means of preservation, making some large, and having their size as a protection, and others small, whose nature was to fly in the air or burrow in the ground; this was to be their way of escape. Thus did he compensate them with the view of preventing any race from becoming extinct. And when he had provided against their destruction by one another, he contrived also a means of protecting them against the seasons of heaven; clothing them with close hair and thick skins sufficient to defend them against the winter cold and able to resist the summer heat, so that they might have a natural bed of their own when they wanted to rest; also he furnished them with hoofs and hair and hard and callous skins under their feet. Then he gave them varieties of food-herb of the soil to some, to others fruits of trees, and to others roots, and to some again he gave other animals as food. And some he made to have few young ones, while those who were their prey were very prolific; and in this manner the race was preserved. Thus did Epimetheus, who, not being very wise, forgot that he had distributed among the brute animals all the qualities which he had to give, and when he came to man, who was still unprovided, he was terribly perplexed. Now while he was in this perplexity, Prometheus came to inspect the distribution, and he found that the other animals were suitably furnished, but that man alone was naked and shoeless, and had neither bed nor arms of defence. The appointed hour was approaching when man in his turn was to go forth into the light of day; and Prometheus, not knowing how he could devise his salvation, stole the mechanical arts of Hephaestus and Athene, and fire with them (they could neither have been acquired nor used without fire), and gave them to man. Thus man had the wisdom necessary to the support of life... And in this way man was supplied with the means of life...<sup>10</sup>

And we were still able to find another version of the same text. It belongs to British astronomer John F. W. Herschel (1792-1871), thus a contemporary of Hahnemann's:

"The situation of man on the globe he inhabits, and over which he has obtained the control, is in many respects exceedingly remarkable. Compared with its other denizens, he seems, if we regard only his physical

constitution, in almost every respect their inferior, and equally unprovided for the supply of his natural wants and his defence against the innumerable enemies which surround him. No other animal passes so large a portion of its existence in a state of absolute helplessness, or falls in old age into such protracted and lamentable imbecility. To no other warm-blooded animal has nature denied that indispensable covering without which the vicissitudes of a temperate and the rigours of a cold climate are equally insupportable; and to scarcely any has she been so sparing in external weapons, whether for attack or defence. Destitute alike of speed to avoid and of arms to repel the aggressions of his voracious foes; tenderly susceptible of atmospheric influences; and unfitted for the coarse aliments which the earth affords spontaneously during at least two thirds of the year, even in temperate climates, - man, if abandoned to mere instinct, would be of all creatures the most destitute and miserable... Remarkable only for the absence of those powers and qualities which obtain for other animals a degree of security and respect, he would be disregarded by some, and hunted down by others, till after a few generations his species would become altogether extinct... Yet man is the undisputed lord of the creation... The spoils of all nature are in daily requisition for his most common uses, yielded with more or less readiness, or wrested with reluctance, from the mine, the forest, the ocean, the air. Such are the first fruits of reason..."<sup>11</sup>

We've still have to take into account Hahnemann's particular cultural context. During the 18th century up to the Treaty of Vienna (1815), present-day Germany was still the Holy Roman Empire, which wasn't a political unity but a loose conglomerate of small feudal states.<sup>12</sup> Heterogeneity wasn't merely political but also religious. It's noteworthy to remember that even today a German's religious identity is a fundamental value, very different from the situation in South America.<sup>13</sup>

Saxony, Hahnemann's fatherland, was a Protestant duchy. It's very difficult to believe that Hahnemann learned Scholastic theology at Lutheran schools. Also hard it's to imagine that Hahnemann learned such a vast and complex system during his stay in - equally Protestant - Leipzig, where he not only had to attend lectures,

10. Plato, Protagoras, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/protagoras.html> The Internet Classics Archive - MIT. July, 2003.

11. John F. Herschel, A preliminary discourse on the study of natural philosophy (1830). Chicago/Londres, The University of Chicago Press, 1987, pp. 1-3.

12. M. Fulbrook, A Concise History of Germany. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 70.

13. Up to recent times, there was a compulsory tax, 8-9% of wages destined to some religious community, called the Kirchensteuer. Each tax-payer had only the right to choose to which denomination it should go.

but he needed to do translations and give private lessons to make a living.

We may think that he got acquainted with Aquinas' works during his stay in Catholic Vienna. Yet, a new obstacle arises: such visit lasted merely nine months, which were devoted to the learning of practical medicine.

For the sake of brevity, it's very difficult - if not impossible - to try and find out when it was that Hahnemann became a Scholastic scholar in any period of his life. Actually, whenever he explicitly refers to Scholasticism, he does it in a most critical way.<sup>14</sup>

Evidence suggests that it would be more reasonable to infer that Hahnemann was better acquainted with classical Greek authors, as we are told by himself in his "Autobiography"<sup>15</sup>, than with Roman Catholic dogmatics, alien to his background and cultural environment.<sup>16</sup> And from the strict perspective of text analysis, it's too obvious the asymmetry between Aquinas' version and the remaining four.

Let's examine the case of Herschel's. Once again a Protestant, and one whose family had originally been Jewish. How are we to explain that also he learned Catholic theology?

All evidences point to the fact that Elizalde's hypothesis to explain the inclusion in "The Medicine of Experience" of the text we're discussing is not accurate. Most probably, it was a common motive frequently used along history and precisely for being so well known, nobody would mention its original source. It's highly probable that we'll keep finding it in the works of other authors.

Homeopathy is established enough as not to be afraid of reviewing its notions and methods. It's mature enough as to face the ghosts and spirits it has inherited together with the proper clinical and therapeutic corpus. "Exorcisms" as the one we performed here can only contribute to the development of a truly "scientific" homeopathy. In this context, the tools provided by other fields of knowledge ought to be welcomed.

14. Cf, a few examples: *The Lesser Writings*, op. cit., "Dietetic conversation...", p. 184; "A nursery...", p. 251; "View of professional liberality...", pp. 364-5. Actually, Enlightenment as a whole was strongly critical of Scholasticism.

15. C. F. S. Hahnemann, ["Autobiographie"] in J. M. Schmidt & D. Kaiser (orgs.), *Samuel Hahnemann: Gesammelte kleinen Schriften*. Heidelberg, Karl F. Haug, 2001. Originally published in J. K. P. Elwert, *Nachrichten von dem Leben und den Schriften jetzlebender deutscher Aertze, Wundärzte, Thierärzte, Apotheker und Naturforscher*. Hildesheim, 1799, vol.1, 195-201.

16. Besides the fact that Hahnemann toyed with Plato's style, as in the dialogue, "Socrate et Physon. Les apparences et la réalité; où se trouve le bonheur" (1795), *Études de médecine homéopathique*. Paris: Maloine, 1989. Vol. 2, pp. 260-265.

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