

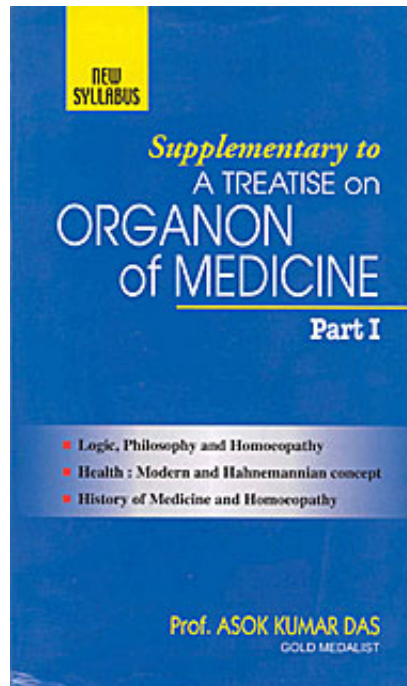
Asok Kumar Das

Supplementary to A Treatise on Organon of Medicine Part I

Reading excerpt

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CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF WHO DEFINITION OF HEALTH

The WHO definition of health is considered by many to be an *idealistic goal* rather than a realistic definition. The criticism levelled against the WHO definition is that health is considered a "state". Some argue that health cannot be defined as a state at all, but must be seen as a *process*—a process of continuous adjustment to the changing demands of living and of the changing meanings we give to life itself. The ancient saying that 'nothing stands still' is just as valid in the case of health. There is also no satisfactory definition of the term "well-being". Nevertheless, the concept of health as defined by the WHO is broad and positive in its implications; it sets the standard—the standard of *positive health* as a goal to be attained by all people.

Health = Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely an absence of disease or infirmity.

Positive Health

The WHO'S definition of health envisages three dimensions—physical, mental and social well-being. A person who enjoys health at these three planes is said to be in a state of "positive health". To this we may also add spiritual well being.

The "positive health" advocated by WHO implies that a person should be able to express as completely as possible the potentialities of his genetic heritage. This is possible only when the person is allowed to live in healthy relationship with his environment—an environment that transforms genetic potentialities into phenotypic realities.

The attainment of "positive health" is one of the important ingredients of good life that a nation should assure for every citizen. Previously health promotion of the individual and the family was considered man's own personal business. The view has now changed and every child born is considered a potential asset to the community. This has led to the development of social services,

ranging from "womb to tomb", to protect and promote health. These services are maternity and child health services, child guidance clinics, school health services, vocational guidance, occupational health services, comprehensive medical care through health centres, rehabilitation services, physical, occupational and diversional therapies, health education, adequate food supply, control of vectors and rodents, safe food and water, proper disposal of human and animal wastes, slum clearance, housing programs, town and village planning, facilities for recreation and physical training, unemployment compensation, old age pension, stabilization of employment, maternity leave and benefits, sickness and disability benefits, marriage counselling, population control and family planning etc. This shows the wide sphere in which medicine has to function—not merely to cure or prevent disease, but to promote and preserve health at the optimum—the *positive health*.

Ideal health will, however, always remain a mirage, because everything in our life is subject to change. Health in this context may be described as a potentiality—the ability of an individual or a social group to modify himself or itself continually, in the face of changing conditions of life, not only in order to function better in the present but also to prepare for the future. In working for positive health the doctor and the community health expert are in the same position as the gardener or farmer faced with insects, moulds and weeds. Their work is never done.

Health a Relative Concept

There are no fixed standards governing health. What is considered normal in one person may be abnormal in another. For example, a newborn baby weighs 2.8 kg on an average in this country as compared to 3.5 kg in the developed countries and yet compares favourably in health. Many normal people who have heart murmurs, enlarged tonsils and x-ray shadows in the chest and yet do not show signs of ill health. Thus, health is a relative concept and standards of health vary from person to person, and from country to country.

Spectrum of Health

The health of an individual is a dynamic phenomenon. It fluctuates within a range, varying from optimum well-being to extreme illness.

The lowest point on the health spectrum is the state of death, and the highest point corresponds to the World Health Organization's definition of health. An individual's health at a given instant may be represented by a point on the spectrum, and this point moves in one direction or another as the individual's health improves or declines. In other words, health is never state; it varies continuously. What is maximum today may be minimum tomorrow. In this context, health is defined as "a flexible state of body and mind which may be described in terms of a range within which a person may sway from the condition wherein he is at the peak of enjoyment of physical, mental and emotional experiences, having regard to environment, age, sex and other biological characteristics due to the operation of internal or external stimuli and can regain that position without outside aid."

Perkins defines health as "a state of relative equilibrium of body form and function which results from its successful dynamic adjustment to forces tending to disturb it. It is not passive interplay between body substance and forces impinging upon it but an active response of body forces working towards adjustment." These definitions envisage health as a pendulum oscillating between a range or spectrum, one end of which represents the minimum and the other end the maximum. It implies that health is a 'state' not to be attained once and for all but ever to be renewed. There are degrees of well-being as there are degrees of severity of illness.

MODERN CONCEPT OF HEALTH VIS-A-VIS HAHNEMANNIAN CONCEPT OF HEALTH

A critical analysis of Hahnemannian concept of health clearly depicts that it is very similar to the modern concept of health including WHO. What Hahnemann conceptualized more than 200 years back is now being accepted by the modern science. The similarities of both the concept of health are as follows:

1. Both the concepts accept that health is dynamic, not a static state.

2. Both the concept conceptualized that health is a normal condition of life characterized by the perfect functioning of the body and mind when every parts of the body (from cell to organ) functions harmoniously at optimum capacity.

3. Both agrees the physical, mental and social dimension of health.

In section 9 of Organon of Medicine Hahnemann states, "so that our reason gifted mind can freely employ this healthy living instruments for the higher purpose of our existence". A healthy mind with healthy body thinks healthily, which in turn employs the healthy body for healthy functioning leading ultimately to the development of whole mankind - the higher purpose of human existence. This very comment of Hahnemann reflects the social dimension of health like that of WHO. Thus homoeopathic concept of health is also multidimensional and envisages all the three specific dimensions of WHO concept - the physical, the mental and the social.

4. Both the concepts agrees regarding the role of environment and life style in the maintenance of health.

5. Both the concepts supports the holistic consideration of health

6. Both the concepts of health are idealistic, not realistic.

The only difference between these two concepts is the existence and role of vital force in maintaining life and health. The presence and role of vital force in maintaining human life and health as described by Hahnemann are not being accepted by the modern scientists, although the existence, need and role of energy in maintaining life and health are not denied. The role and mechanism of functioning of energy in the living organism are being explained by the modern scientists in terms of ATP (Adenosine ti phosphate) produced and utilized through different biochemical reactions. Such materialistic view of life and health of modern science makes it different from that of Hahnemann, who solely emphasized on the role of vital force in maintaining health, disease and cure - the different conditions of life.

SIMILARITIES AND DISIMILARITIES BETWEEN MODERN CONCEPT HAHNEMANNIAN CONCEPT OF HEALTH

Similarities

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Both agrees the physical, mental and social dimension of health.

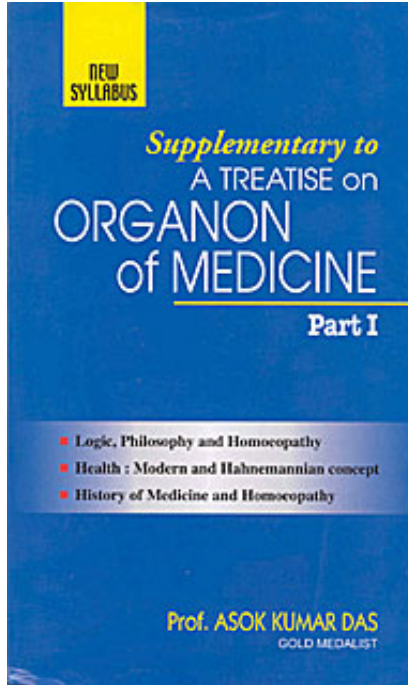
Both the concepts agrees regarding the role of environment and life style in the the maintenance of health.

Both the concepts supports the holistic consideration of health

Both the concepts of health are idealistic, not realistic.

Disimilarities

Existence and role of vital force in maintaining life and health.



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