PARACELSUS

WALTER PAGEL

PARACELSUS

An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine
in the Era of the Renaissance

2nd, revised edition

Basel • München • Paris • London • New York • Tokyo • Sydney • 1982

National Library of Medicine, Cataloging in Publication
Pagel, Walter, 1898-Paracelsus,
an introduction to philosophical medicine in the era of
the Renaissance/Walter Pagel. - 2nd, rev. ed.
Basel; New York: Karger, 1982
1. Philosophy, Medical - biography 2. Paracelsus, 1493-1541
WZ 100 P221PR
ISBN 3-8055-3518-X

All rights reserved.
No part of this publication may be translated into other languages, reproduced or
utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying,
recording, microcopying, or by any information storage and retrieval system,
without permission in writing from the publisher.

© Copyright 1982 by S. Karger AG, P.O. Box, CH-4009 Basel (Switzerland)
Printed in Switzerland by Buchdruckerei Gasser & Cie Aktiengesellschaft, Basel
ISBN 3-8055-3518-X

Table of Contents

Preface XI

General Introduction 1
The individual "Savant" and his "World" as the focal point of the investigation. 2
Paracelsus: Interdependence and fusion of the scientific and non-scientific elements 3

The Life of Paracelsus 5
Name, birth and family 5
Formative years 8
Early journeys (1517-1524) 13
Attempts at settling down. Reasons for frustration 14
Relationship between medicine and surgery 15
(a) Salzburg 17
(b) Strassburg 18
The reformers at Strassburg 18
(c) Basle 19
The second set of journeys 22
(a) Colmar, Esslingen, Nuremberg. The work on Syphilis 23
(b) Beratzhausen and the "Parigranum" 24
(c) St. Gall and the "Opus Paramirum" 25
(d) Appenzell, Innsbruck, Sterzing. "On the miners' disease" 25
(e) Meran, St. Moritz, Pfäfers and the foundation of Balneology 26
(f) Augsburg and the "Great Surgery" 26
(g) Bavaria and Bohemia. "Philosophia Sagax" 27
(h) Pressburg and Vienna 27
(i) Carinthia. The "Kärntner Trilogie". The End at Salzburg 27
Johannes Oporinus and his pen portrait of Paracelsus 29
The Literary Remains. Short notes on the Bibliography of Paracelsus 31
Paracelsus as a figure of the Renaissance and Humanism 35
Paracelsus as a religious and social thinker and preacher. Paracelsus in the Era of
the Reformation. Sebastian Franck and Paracelsus 40
Paracelsus and popular criticism of Doctor and Patient in the Pre-Reformation Era.
The "Narragonian" sermons 44
The Philosophy of Paracelsus 50
Paracelsus' general system of correspondences and the position of scientific elements
therein. Introduction 50
Paracelsus' approach to Nature. Empirical search for the divine seals in nature. 53
God and Nature 54
The uncreated virtues and the created objects 54

VI Table of Contents

The futility of superstitious practices and the Devil 55
The "True Signs" as revealed to research into Nature 56
Experience ("Erfahrung") versus pseudo-knowledge based on reasoning
("Logica") 56
Censure of Aristotle and Avicenna 58
Theory of Knowledge. "Experientia" and "Scientia" through identification
of the mind with the internal "knowledge" possessed by natural objects in
attaining their specific aims. "Ablauschen" (overhearing) of this "knowledge" which is immanent in the objects of research 59
Union with the object as the ultimate aim of the naturalist ("philosopher") and physician 60
"Derived" as against "inborn" knowledge of the elements. Man and the "Sagani" 61
Magia Naturalis: Its religious background; its protoscientific significance; its purport in medicine 62
The analogies between Macrocosm and Microcosm and the role of the Stars: Astrology and "Astrosophy" 65
Man as microcosm 65
Limitations of astral "powers" 66
Cosmis correspondences as against astral influx (inclination) as the power conferring specificity and destination 67
Correspondences between the astral firmament and parts of the human organism
Correspondences between the Astrum and the Seat of Disease 68
Astral concordance is the power of remedies which it directs to the diseased organ 69
Celestial bodies and wounds 71
Inconsistencies in the doctrine of correspondences 71
Paracelsus' conception of Time 72
The ancient conceptions of Time. "Empty" numerical (astronomical) time as against "qualified" time 72
Paracelsus and the astronomical notion of Time. Its "qualification" 73
Qualitative determination of Time. Time as determined by changing events and "Astra" as the vector of specificity 74
Time, qualitatively determined, and Medicine 75
Biological ideas in Paracelsus' conception of Time 77
Biological time and the "Astra" 80
Theological aspects of Time 80
The "Elements" and the "Three Principles" (Sulphur, Salt and Mercury): General considerations 82
The "Elements" 89
Earth and Water as "Mothers". Their offspring 95
Earth, the "Mother" of man 96
Water the matrix most productive of natural objects 96
The role of water and earth in the composition of natural objects 97
Water as the main substance ("flesh") of plants 97
Water as the common virtue in the ground ("earth"), forming the raw material of objects - without accounting for specificity 97
The "Predestined Element" and "Quinta Essentia" 98
Sulphur, Salt and Mercury 100
The Macro-Microcosm theory in conflict with the concept of specificity. The astral origin of specificity. Archeus and Iliaster 104
The Archeus. Vulcan. The Iliaster 105

Table of Contents VII

The Archeus as the principle resident in the stomach 106
The role of the Archeus in disease 107
The Archeus as the individualising principle in the elemental "Matrix" 107
Archeus and Monads. The Archei in organs 108
Archei in external objects and inside man. Their correspondence and . Interaction' 109
The Physician himself an Archeus 109
The Archeus acting by "Imagination", "Magia" and astral forces III
Iliaster 112

Prime, intermediate and ultimate matter 112
The Cagastrum 113
Generation and putrefaction 115
Life, soul, spirit, astral body and air 117
The astral body 120
The Power of Imagination 121
Imagination, semen and contagium 123

Medicine 126
Introduction. Paracelsus' Fame as based on his development of chemical therapy.
Ancient Medicine and Paracelsus opposition to it in general terms 126
The "Elements", "Matrices" and the "Tria Prima" ("Salt", "Sulphur" and "Mercury") 129
The Iliadus. Diseases as "Fruits" of the human "Iliadus" 130
Motivation of Paracelsus'opposition to Humoralism 131
The action of Mercury, Sulphur and Salt in causing disease 133
Man as a Mine 134
Localisation of Disease. Its local "Seats and Causes" 134
Chemical Considerations: The "Salia" and their "Anatomy" ("Anatomia Elementata") 134

Microcosmic Theory and Organic Pathology 137
The "ontological" view of Disease ("Anatomia Essata") 137
The "Oportet" and Disease 139

Aetiology 140
The "seeds" of Disease. Air as the Vector of the Disease Agent. The M.M.
(Mysterium Magnum). The role of Air 140
"Ens Substantiae" - "Poison" - versus complexion (i.e. humours and qualities)
as inducing Disease 141
Aetiological and Specific Therapy 141
The invention of remedies through a study of the cosmos 143
Specificity in the relationship between the organ (seat of disease), the disease and its remedy 143
The Principle of Pharmacy 144
"Poison" as a remedy - Mercury its prototype 145
The homoeopathic principle 146
Minerals as "homoeopathic" agents causing and curing the same disease 147
The homoeopathic principle as a consequence of the "Anatomy" of the Arcanum 147
The Treatment of Wounds. Its golden precepts in close proximity to superstitious injunctions 148
The "Signatures" 148
Disease and the Stars. The "Animal in man" and Lunacy. The Psychiatry of Paracelsus 150

VIII Table of Contents

Special Pathological Theories 153
Diseases due to "Tartar" 153
Localism and Specificity as based on Paracelsus' concept of digestion and "Tartarus" formation 154
Tartar of the various organs. Its volatility (like "alcohol"). The nutritive centre of an organ; its "stomach" 155
Summary of the Pathology of Paracelsus as emanating from the concept of Tartar 157
Appendix. New ideas in the physiology of gastric digestion and the excretion of albumen in the urine as associated with "Tartarus" 158
Van Helmont's criticism of the Doctrine of Tartar 161
Paracelsus' version of the ancient Doctrine of "Catarrh" and the Causes of Epilepsy 165
Traces of catarrh theory in Paracelsus' chemical and symbolistic speculations on Epilepsy 167
The Spirit of Life as the "ascendant" causing Epilepsy 168
Survey of Paracelsus' Ideas on Epilepsy in the light of Ancient and XVIIth Century Pathology (Localism versus Catarrh) 168
"Obstruction" as a primary and local change causing Disease. Its divorce from "catarrh" and its role as a further germ cell of "Localism" 170
Paracelsus on Plague. The Influence of Ficino. Traditional Plague Theories and Paracelsus' "Anthropocentric" Doctrine. Its further Development in Van Helmont's "Tomb of the Plague" 172
Traces of a suggested quantitative and chemical analysis of urine to replace
mediaeval uroscopy 189
Paracelsus' demand for a chemical examination of urine. Chemical
"uroscopy" and "dissection" ("Anatomy") of urine by Paracelsists.
Assessment of the specific gravity of urine by Van Helmont 190
Thurneisser zum Thurn's "Probierung der Harnen" 195
James Hart's criticism of chemical uroscopy 196
Van Helmont's criticism of chemical uroscopy 198
Progressive aspects of Paracelsus in Medicine and their limitations 200
The Sources of Paracelsus (Ancient, Mediaeval, Contemporary) 203
Paracelsus and the ancient, mediaeval and Renaissance sources 203
Paracelsus and Gnosticism 204
The Gnostic concept of microcosm 204
Mediaeval sources of Gnostic speculation and Paracelsus 210
The Cabalah 213
Paracelsus and Neoplatonism. The influence of Marsilio Ficino. Ficino's ideal of the
"Magus" as Priest-Physician. Paracelsus and the Philosophy of Plotinus 218
Was Paracelsus really a Neoplatonist? 226
The "Prime Matter" of Paracelsus as foreshadowed by the philosophy of Salomo
ibn Gebirol (Avicebron) and the "Popular Pantheism" of the Middle Ages. Giordano
Bruno. The anonymous "Introduction to the Philosophy of Life" (1623) 227
Ancient ideas as transmitted by Salomo ibn Gebirol 229
Gebirol's Prime Matter as fundamental to popular pantheism in the Middle
Ages and Reformation 230
Giordano Bruno 232
The "Introductio in Vitalem Philosophiam" (1623) 232

Table of Contents IX

The Microcosmic Pattern as reflected by the Womb and the Earth. Leonicenus,
Cesalpino and Aristotle 238
Paracelsus and Ramon Lull 241
Paracelsus and Arnald of Villanova 248
Independence of thought. Use of empirical remedies 249
Naturalism and Empiricism 250
The quest for medical reform in a new age............... 252
Religious ideas and motives in medical theory and practice 253
Influence of the Stars 254
Specificity of objects (including diseases) and the Stars 256
Arnald and Humoralism 257
Paracelsus and Alchemy 258
The New Precious Pearl on the Philosophers' Stone 259
Preface

Who does not know Doctor Paracelsus, renowned reformer of medicine, chemist and naturalist, philosopher and theologian, lay preacher and protagonist of social justice, believer in natural magic and effusive diviner? Indeed, something is known everywhere of each of these aspects offered by what appears to us as an erratic block in a period of renascent progress. Little, however, if anything is known of the link which must have forged such disparate trends into the mould of a savant at once unified and unique in himself. To-day their unification in a single personality does not easily make sense - at a time of transition they were not incompatible. Their very synthesis had a share in the development of modern naturalism, science and medicine in the 16th and 17th centuries. In Paracelsus it was a consistent philosophia naturalis based on a medical view of man and world, in many ways archaic and in others surprisingly modern. Understanding
it requires an effort to make oneself contemporary with him, an
arduous task which of necessity will remain short of completion and full
satisfaction. An attempt at achieving it as far as possible is the burden of
the present book.
It was first published a quarter of a century ago. It met with unexpectedly
wide approval and, unobtainable as it has been for some time,
with persistent demand. No further monograph comparable in style and
scope has come to light in the meantime, but a large number of new facts
and views have. The author's own continued research concerned Paracelsus' debt to occult tradition from neo-Platonic and Gnostic sources as perpetuated
in mediaeval literature. Preliminary results are found in 'Das medizinische
Weltbild des Paracelsus, seine Zusammenhänge mit Neuplatonis-mus
und Gnosis' (Wiesbaden 1962); it opened as volume 1 the new series
'Kosmosophie', edited by Kurt Goldammer. This was followed by a
number of papers in 'Ambix', various historical-medical journals and
more recently in the 'Salzburger Beiträge zur Paracelsusforschung', edited
by Sepp Domandl. Little if any doubt remains about the great significance
of the neo-Platonic and Gnostic pieces studied - they are organic components
of genuine Paracelsian texts and doctrines; they are not merely
quotations adduced from outside to embellish them or to show off his

XII Preface

erudition. Other students of Paracelsus have contributed importantly in
correcting traditionally repeated unrealistic data and views concerning
uncharted areas in Paracelsus' life, the dating of his treatises, his journeys
and religious ideologies, as revealed in first editions of his religious and
social-political writings from manuscripts under the aegis of K. Goldammer.
All this justifies re-publication of the book with correction of errors and
amplification of contents bringing it up to the present standard of our
knowledge and understanding of Paracelsus. This has now been provided
in the form of a comprehensive appendix of 'Addenda and Errata' referring
to their appropriate places in the original text which thereby could be
preserved in its entirety. It also offers a collation of all loci quoted from
Huser with the standard edition of Sudhoff.
The author remains indebted to the Wellcome Trust - ever since,
under the auspices of the late Sir Henry Dale, O.M. F.R.S., it has supported
his publications in various ways up to the present day. He gratefully
remembers the help in all problems scientific and personal extended to him
by the late Dr. F.N.L. Poynter, F.L.A., librarian, founder and director
of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine. He also provided
most of the illustrations of the present book. Of his staff and his successor's,
E. Freeman, the author enjoyed cooperation with Marianne Winder and Renate Burgess, as also bibliographical information given to him by John Symons. Unfailing personal support and encouragement he received from Dr. William F. Bynum. Dr. Bernard E.J. Pagel corrected and revised the text. As in the production of two books on Harvey (1967 and 1976) the author wishes to record special thanks to the publishers, Dr. Fritz Karger and Dr. h.c. Thomas Karger, for their courteous and highly efficient work in publishing the present edition of 'Paracelsus'. He cannot conclude without remembrance of Magda Pagel-Koll (M.D. Cologne, 26.6.1894 to 22.8.1980). She dedicated 57 years of her own life to indefatigable protection and maintenance of his life and literary activities taking more than a full share in these in addition to her own studies in mediaeval art and surgery. The present book with all its sequels is essentially indebted to her co-operation.