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# Diseases as general scenarios to map individual existential routes

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# Initial intuitions

- Medicine contains much more philosophical issues than doctors are usually ready to accept;
- There is a new wave of thoughts and reflections in philosophy of medicine on the concept of disease, e.g special issues in the Journal of Medicine and Philosophy at 2018 and 2014 among others;
- Some scepticism on the possibility to create a simple, universal and productive concept of disease.

# Background

- The concept of disease seems to have quite different content in medical science and philosophy of medicine;
- In medicine disease is filled with rather pragmatic content from empirical roots and experience;
- In philosophy there is a temptation to find as universal and as simple set essential conditions to the phenomena belong under the term *disease(s)*;
- A common crucial source for disease in both medicine and philosophy seems to be the *incorrect functioning*.

# Disease in philosophy of medicine

- Concept of disease is rather theoretical and bound to other more or less general issues of philosophy, e.g existence, causality, norm, life, death, meaning et cetera;
- Philosophical approach to the disease tends to be universal for whole terrain of serious unwanted disturbing conditions, sometimes philosophers differentiate bodily and mental diseases.
- Naturalism vs constructivism distinction in its different forms seems to be a principal distinction in modern philosophizing on disease

# Concept of disease in philosophy of medicine I

- C. Boorse' biostatistical theory (1977, 2014) – a pathological condition is a state of statistically species subnormal biological part-functional ability, relative to sex and age.
- J.C. Wakefield's hybrid harmful disorder account (2007) – a disorder is a *harmful dysfunction*, where „harmful“ is a value term, referring to conditions judged negative by sociocultural standards, and „dysfunction“ is a scientific factual term, referring to failure of biologically designed functioning.

# Concept of disease in philosophy of medicine II

- MJ Walker and WA Rogers (2018) still believe in possibility of a general definition of disease and offer a **cluster concept of disease** – undesireability or disvalue, harm, dysfunction, statistical abnormality, treatability, being within the remit of the medical profession.
- P. Hucklenbroich (2014) writes about disease entities as patterns – The full theoretical description of a disease describes the *pattern* or *type* for each natural course of the respective diseases (i.e. instances of the theoretical entity).

# Disease in medical science

- Etiology, pathogenesis, clinical picture (symptoms) and course, therapy and care, prognosis, spread in natural and social environments, prevention are common dimensions for every disease.
- Naturalist and constructivist approaches have different importance to create content to above mentioned dimensions – e.g. etiology and pathogenesis are rather naturalistic, prevention and social epidemiology constructivistic.
- Normativity and norms have dual meaning biology and sociology based understanding of diseases.

## Dorland's Medical Dictionary (2000)

disease – any deviation from or interruption of the normal structure or function of a part, organ, or system of the body as manifested by characteristic symptoms and signs; the etiology, pathology, and prognosis may be known or unknown



# Taxonomy of diseases

- Example from Carl Linnaeus' classification of plants;
- First classifications of causes of death were developed in 19th century in purposes of social statistics;
- Medical aspects of the disease give numerous dimensions to be taken into account classify diseases (for example 55 000 different codes (states and scenarios of life) in ICD-11 for Mortality and Morbidity Statistics).

# Interdisciplinarity of modern medicine

- Multidimensional concepts of disease produce richer platform for interdisciplinary approaches.
- We nowadays see more research on different aspects of disease(s)/disorder(s) done outside of institutions of „pure“ medical science, for example in departments of computer sciences, sociology etc.

# Summary

- Ability of philosophical concepts of disease to create new ontological networks seems to be rather low;
- Medical concept of disease is rather mongrel and less elegant, but gives more options for empirical development, networking and filling with empirical content.
- Disease is an approach to describe and manage variety of options in the course of life of somebody.