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*Methods of Definition and Explanation with regard to
Disease Entities in Theoretical Medicine*

Abstract

This paper elucidates several special features of the usage of the notions *definition* and *explanation* in medicine and medical theory, particularly with regard to the key concept of *disease entity*. The first section gives a short reconstruction of this concept. The second section presents three methods of defining disease entities, supplemented by a fourth, logically unsound method found in many medical textbooks. The third section shows that there are two senses of explaining symptoms and pathological conditions by referring to disease entities, i.e. a part-whole kind of explanation and a causal one. The relationship between *explanation* and *diagnosis* of diseases is analyzed by comparing their logical structure. In the last section, the very special kind of explanation found exclusively in medicine, viz. explaining *why* some condition is a disease or is pathological, is clarified by elucidating the concept of *pathologicity* and its criteria.

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