

Psychiatry is a branch of Medicine, not a specialty.

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Summary

The imprecise status of Psychiatry may be due to Cartesian dualism and the mind / body assumption. We can clarify this status resorting to an alternative ontology. Popper's Worlds 1, 2 and 3, and the corresponding concepts of *matter*, *energy* and *information*, from Von Bertalanffy and his General Systems Theory, are candidates for a new ontology. Applying them to the history and present structure of Western Medicine, we can assume that Surgery is the branch of medicine which deals with bodily matter, Internal Medicine is the branch which deals with energy and Psychiatry is the branch which deals with information. The respective basic disciplines are Anatomy, Physiology and Psychology. None of them is a medical specialty, because specialties, such as Neurology, Urology and Cardiology, deal with a sub-system of the organism and may have a surgical, medical or even psychiatric emphasis. In the same way that the body / mind problem seemed important for Cartesian dualism, this triadic structure of Medicine may also inform a new ontology. The recent history of Philosophy may be interpreted as an attempt at looking for it.

Nowadays, psychiatry has an imprecise status. Its borders with neurology, clinical psychology, sociology and neurosciences are fuzzy. Moreover, many psychiatrists claim that they deal with a specific form of psychiatry: community psychiatry, liaison psychiatry, psychosomatic psychiatry, biological psychiatry and so on. Thus, we can ask if psychiatry is a medical specialty, or is it something else?

The problem is that psychiatry has to face the body-mind duality, which is based on Cartesian ontology. Contemporary scientists reject Cartesian dualism, but they are not free of the body-mind problem, which is a corollary of it. Nor do they present credible alternatives to that ontology. However, some philosophers think that Popper's trilogy of Worlds 1, 2 and 3 may be a path to an alternative ontology.

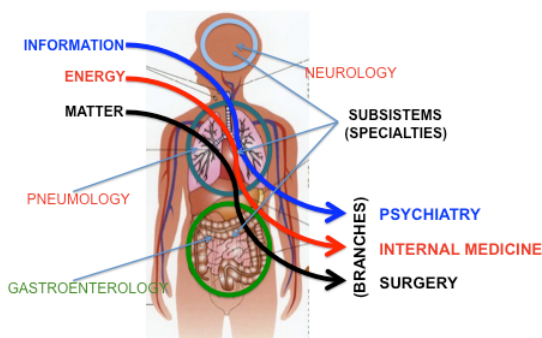
They also think that Popper should be best known for the trilogy of Worlds. Popper needed it in order to base his ideas about the survival of theories on world 3, but ontology was not the main focus of his interests. However, Popper's trilogy converges with the work of several philosophers, including Henry Bergson, Ferdinand de Saussure and Ludwig Von Bertalanffy, who he does not quote and it is not even certain that he was aware of them. I will return to this. For now, to face the problem of psychiatry, it is enough to consider another similar trilogy, that of Von Bertalanffy and his General Systems Theory. He presented the world as an open hierarchy of systems. Each one of the systems in this hierarchy evolves while processing *matter*, *energy* and *information*.

In fact, one of the main intentions of Descartes, was to free matter – the matter of the body – from the clutches of the Church. At that time, Medicine was taught at Universities, but it was based on rhetoric about bodily energy and some medicines close to alchemy. Autopsies were forbidden and, when it was necessary to “profane” the human body, physicians had to call inferior classes of professionals: the surgeon-barbers or the blacksmiths.

In Europe, there was a struggle between surgeon barbers (the *short gown surgeons*) and blacksmiths (the *long gown surgeons*), lasting for two centuries, until surgery would be accepted in the Medical schools. However, from the XVII century onwards, the new schools of Surgery and Medicine began to appear all over Europe. Thus, there were two branches of the medical schools: Surgery and Medicine. The first dealt with the matter of the body and had Anatomy as a basic discipline; the second dealt with energy, and Physiology was its basic discipline. The respective pathological disciplines were Anatomical Pathology and Physiopathology.

Returning to the hierarchy of Systems, the human organism is an example of an autonomous system which belongs to social communities and is composed of tissues and

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system. Thus, Psychiatry is not a medical specialty.

Psychiatry began to be accepted in the medical schools only in the XIX century. Just as there were with surgeons, who were divided into the “long gown” and “short gown” groups, there is a heavy psychiatry represented by Pinel and Kraepelin, and a light psychiatry represented by Freud and the psychotherapists. There is still some conflict between them. Surgeons have settled their differences, but psychiatrists haven’t yet done so.

However, while surgeons deal with matter, all psychiatrists deal with information: information about the world, interpersonal and intrapersonal information. They also deal with information conducted between parts of the body. The nervous system is one of their concerns, but it is not the only one. Unlike neurologists, psychiatrists are concerned with the all body, its behavior and, more than this, the person, his memory and his identity. They deal with patients as subjects, and information is in their scope.

Thus, we can say that Psychiatry is, after General Surgery and Internal Medicine, the third branch of Medicine, which deals with information. Physicians now have to deal with matter, energy and information. The basic discipline which is linked to Psychiatry and Information, is Psychology, which has some dispute with Psychiatry because it was traditionally taught in the Philosophy schools. In its turn, unlike Anatomical pathology and Physiopathology, Psychopathology is looking for its place.

MEDICAL SCHOOLS XX CENT.

MATTER	SURGERY ANATOMICAL PATHOLOGY ANATOMY
ENERGY	MEDICINE PHYSIOPATHOLOGY PHYSIOLOGY
INFORMATION	PSYCHIATRY PSYCHOPATHOLOGY PSYCHOLOGY

I hope that Psychiatry and its basic and pathological disciplines may take its place in medical schools as the third branch of Medicine. Without it, physicians may do no more than veterinarians.

This tri-partition can also inform a new ontology. Descartes was also interested in the human anatomy, and this was a great motivation to present his dualism. In the second meditation, he defined matter, as opposed to spirit, by its *extension*, with the example of a piece of wax. Popper’s World 1, is the Cartesian world of matter; it is the world of space and things, including human and animal’s bodies.

The French philosopher Henry Bergson defended the concept of *duration* against the Cartesian concept of *extension* to define life, including the life of the world (Creative evolution). His ideas can be related to thermodynamic entropy and negentropy, i.e., the

Popper's	WORLD 1	WORLD 2	WORLD 3
Studied by	Descartes	Bergson	Saussure
Substance	Matter	Energy	Information
Ground	Space (extension)	Time (duration)	Sharing
Elements	Things	States	Signs
Categories of knowing	Unity Variety Quantity	Identity Diversity Quality	Equivalence Contrast Meaning

dynamics of energy. It is the world of states and their evolution over time. Avoiding detail, Popper spoke about World 2, the world of animal behavior and spiritual life. He did not quote Bergson, but it seems very plausible that Popper's World 2 should be similar to Bergson's world of duration, the dynamic world of energy and its states, including the behavior and life of organisms.

Finally, Ferdinand de Saussure studied the world of information, after the definition of its molecular element, the *sign*. The sign joins a *signifier* part with a *signified* one. The signifier part is the perception of a thing, belonging to the spatial Cartesian world. The signified part, or meaning, belongs to the Bergsonian dynamic world of energy, behavior and life. Popper presented his World 3 in a similar way. A story or theory, which belongs to World 3, may be written or expressed in several ways and inscribed in diverse things (for instance, books) of World 1. However the content of the theory or story is the same, irrespective of the way of expression. This content is information.

The new ontology of Popper's Worlds 1, 2 and 3, or *matter*, *energy* and *information* may permit us not only to understand the organization of modern Medicine, but also to understand, to deal with and help the human being and his mind in health and suffering.

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