

The Myth of Mental Illness
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Abstract

Questions of ethics lead to questions of philosophical anthropology: How is a human being to be conceived in medicine? Since Cartesian splits man into mind and body, conceived dichotomously, we have been led to consider the place of psychiatry in medicine and in relations to the rest of medicine. The physician is often presented with the question as to whether a certain problem is physical or emotional, mental or some variant of a non physical problem. We may say that medicine should be limited to strictly physical or we may say that medicine should be broadly defined to include mental or emotional problems. Thomas Szasz argues that medicine's only proper concern is physical illness and the mental illness is a "Myth."

Szasz is aware of the the impact of Cartesianism on medicine and accepts it as proper and inevitable. Say Szasz, "Strictly speaking, disease or illness can affect only the body; hence, there can be no mental illness. "Myth" itself has many possible interpretations. "Myth" refers to a non reality, something that is not to be believed."Myth" is a system of belief, which organizes the way reality is to be understood in a particular culture or religion. Thus we may understand the myth of mental illness to mean a non reality in which we should not believe or a reflection of the organising beliefs of our culture, a way of understanding reality.