

# Medical sociology: normal and pathological

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# What is normal?

## Medical and sociological concepts of normality

- Concept of 'normal':
  - Littré and Robin, 1873: normal is what is in line with a rule/norm
  - Laland, 1938: normal is what we see in most specimens of the same species or what represents an average or a unit of measure

- Oxford Illustrated Dictionary, 1962: normal is what corresponds to the standard, regular, usual, typical
- Faber, 1953: 'norm', 'norma', 'normal'
- lat. *norma* = square – etymological basis of concepts 'norm' and 'normal'
- original root derived from Greek word *ortos*

Concept of normality branches into several source concepts:

- Biological normality
- Physiological normality
- Anthropological normality
- Socio-psychological normality
- Legal normativity
- Idea about biological and social homeostasis – Bernard (‘father of physiology’) and Comte (‘father of sociology’)

- Normal/pathological – health/illness (Offer and Sabshin, 1991):

- ‘absence of pathology’ model
- utopian model
- statistical model
- systematic model
- pragmatic model

# Physiological concept of normality

- To cure means to restore a function or an organism to a healthy state
- concept of complete health = ideal type
- Where the physician takes the norm from?
  - from his/her own knowledge of physiology
  - from his/her own perception of organ functions
  - from a norm currently of general value

- We perceive the life and health of an individual (and of society) in a way that we see first the mistakes, irregularities and violations, and only afterwards do we see regularities
- 2 basic approaches to physiological concept of normality:
  - Bernard's idea on internal environment
  - Muller's and Ludwig's theory
- understanding of functioning of internal and external environment (biological and socio-ecological) and man's constitution

How to determine the borderline between normal and pathological?

- pathological– positive or negative quantitative deviation from physiological
- pathological is opposite to normal – marked by *hyper* and *hypo*
- concept of biological reserve

## Quantification in biology and population genetics: Quelet's statistical average type

- Biometrical measurements of population
  - data on temperature, basal blood and tissue metabolism – development of comparative physiology, anatomy, pathology – *tabulae biologicae*
- comparison of individual variables and their associations with climate and race

- concept of abnormal
- concept of anomaly

- Normalization – process of restoring organs, organisms, individuals or community to a normal state – establishment of biological and physiological processes for normal functioning of an organism
- Theory of normalization – theoretical and therapeutic contrast to theory of labeling
- Normalization – different meaning within ethnic groups

## Abnormal division of labor

- Division of labor (Durkheim) – process of specialization of functions within society, analogous to organism
- Specialization – developing in line with technological progress and therapies
- general practitioner (GP) – specialist