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For the Good of Mankind? The Shameful History of Human Medical Experimentation

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Book Review

Title: For the Good of Mankind? The Shameful History of Human Medical Experimentation

Author: Vicki Oransky Wittenstein

Reviewer: Grayson Hughes

Publisher: Twenty-First Century Books

Publication Year: 2014

ISBN: 9781467706599

Number of Pages: 96

Interest Level: Young Adult

Rating: Dependable



Review

A historical account of a controversial topic, *For the Good of Mankind?* traces accounts of human experimentation and the people responsible. The book outlines that, starting as early as the 18th Century, U.S. doctors experimented on children, slaves, and the mentally ill in order to advance and protect the human race from diseases like Smallpox, Yellow fever, and Malaria. Their experiments often raised questions about the ethics involved, especially after Nazi doctors were convicted after the end of World War II of experimenting on thousands of individuals without consent, often under the same pretenses of discovering new cures and treatments. Even after the war ended, the advent of nuclear weapons prompted doctors to search for cures to radiation sickness and fallout at the expense of unwilling human research participants, even to the point of giving the test subjects radioactive shots and releasing radioactive particles into the air they breathed. Recent events, however, have changed the way that humans participate in medical trials and have shifted the public's attitude towards how cures and vaccines are obtained. The book concludes with a warning: Today we are still susceptible to practicing unethical human experimentation and it is up to us as individuals to determine whether or no the price of progress is right, or if we need to help change the way we seek for the good of mankind.

For the Good of Mankind? is an acceptable beginners foray into the ethics of the medical advancement and experimentation. Written in an academic style, it attempts to portray questions of morality and ethics alongside specific examples of humans breaking those same norms for the "greater good," and seeks to help people make their own decisions as to how medical research should be conducted. As such, the author attempts to make the material more accessible and understandable for a younger audience with in-text definitions of more complicated words and ideas; no glossary is provided. It may not be suitable for younger readers since the topics are somewhat advanced, and include graphic descriptions. As it is more sophisticated in terms of content, it is designed for an in-classroom experience, with group and individual questions and study topics provided at the end and a useful index for further readings. Thus, while not particularly alluring in exterior design, readers will find a helpful guide to the dangers of medical experimentation over the years, the goods and evils that have come of it, and where we stand on the issue today. A must read for those looking to bridge the gap between young-adult academic literature and adult academic literature, as well as those interested in the ethics of medicine.

*Contains some graphic descriptions of medical experimentation.

