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Sabine Hildebrandt

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MEDICINE AFTER THE HOLOCAUST: FROM THE MASTER RACE TO THE HUMAN GENOME AND BEYOND

Edited by Sheldon Rubenfeld
233 pp, \$35
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MEDICINE AFTER THE HOLOCAUST IS A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS stemming from the 2007/2008 Michael E. DeBaKey Medical Lecture Series given at the Holocaust Museum in Houston, Texas. Internist Sheldon Rubenfeld's personal experiences with questions in medical ethics motivated him to propose this lecture series, which explores the question, "If the best physicians of the early twentieth century could abandon their patients, can we, the best physicians of the twenty-first century, be certain that we will not do the same?" (p 5). Speakers from different professional fields were invited to discuss the topic, including geneticists, physicians, bioethicists, lawyers, historians, rabbis, and politicians. Among them were the Noble laureates James D. Watson, Ferid Murad, and Eric R. Kandel. Of the original 30 presenters, 22 contributed articles to this collection. All of the lectures are available online at a site established by the Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies in the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Texas at Austin (<http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/scjs/med-ethics/lectures.php>).

The essays are grouped into 2 parts, one covering the topics of eugenics, euthanasia, and extermination and the other focusing on medicine after the Holocaust. However much these articles vary in terms of topic and opinion, most quickly focus on 3 central questions: (1) Why did physicians in National Socialist Germany commit evil? (2) Where is the potential for evil in modern medicine? (3) What can be learned from the history of medicine in the Holocaust to prevent evil from being committed in modern medicine?

There is a clear unity among the contributors in terms of the answer to the first question. They see physicians in National Socialist Germany not as sadistic madmen or misled citizens but as willingly acquiescing to the ruling government and its so-called scientific policies, which included involuntary sterilization, euthanasia, and mass murder. These physicians betrayed their traditional contract of care for the individual in favor of care for the body politic.

All of the authors agree that there is potential for evil in modern medicine, but the critical issues identified differ according to personal politics, profession, and value systems.

These issues range from preimplantation genetic diagnosis and abortion with the potential for "homemade eugenics" (Francis S. Collins quoting Daniel Kevles, p xx) to physician-assisted suicide or aid in dying, commercialism in medicine, and the future duties of bioethics in global health and human rights.

In terms of the third question, all of the contributors draw lessons from the Holocaust but in varying manners. Some (eg, Annas) see the Nuremberg Code, which resulted from the physicians' trial following the war, as basis for the supreme importance of patient autonomy, while others (eg, Smith) doubt the value of "radical individualism." Some (eg, Tucker) see an important role for government in the regulation of questions of medical ethics, while others (eg, Watson, with respect to genetics) would like to see the role of government in these matters minimized. There is general agreement that the teaching of this history should be part of medical education and might help develop the personal character and values of future physicians (as is argued, for example, by Jordan J. Cohen). Greenberg sees this rich variance of opinions as the basis for productive work on medical ethical questions and their solutions: "Pluralism [of religions and secular systems], especially one built on balance of power, is dynamic. It can, in an ongoing way, protect freedom, human dignity, and the power of free inquiry" (p 178).

The quality of the contributions in *Medicine After The Holocaust* varies greatly with the scholarship and expertise of the authors in this particular area; for example, the otherwise brilliant geneticist Watson demonstrates some moral obtuseness on the subject of certain questions of history and ethics. Also, it would have been wonderful had Kandel's musings on the nature and nurture of evil been included. This collection of essays is highly enlightening for readers of any professional background who are interested in medical ethics and the history of medicine in the Third Reich. The array of political opinions is so widespread that any reader will surely take issue with some of the contributions but will be motivated to further explore the topic.

Sabine Hildebrandt, MD
Division of Anatomical Sciences
University of Michigan School of Medicine
Ann Arbor
shilde@umich.edu

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