Anti-Nazism & the Making of Modern Medical Ethics

20th Anniversary Bioethics Program Discussion
Offered on the 75th Anniversary of the Nuremberg Doctors Trial

Robert Baker, PhD
Arthur Caplan, PhD

“Nazi medical ethics”

The thesis of this discussion is that the post-WWII rejection of Nazi medical ethics & medical practices led to the creation of modern biomedical ethics.

Some may find the expression “Nazi medical ethics,” offensive. But if “ethics” designates the justification of practices deemed “moral,” then the Nazis had a medical ethics.
Dr. Mengele’s Twin Experiments
Auschwitz-Birkenau 1944
Nazi medical experiment subject immersed in icy water at Dachau. Dr. Sigmund Rascher oversees
NUREMBERG WAR CRIMES TRIALS 1945-1946
Dr Karl Brandt  
(1904-1948)

Dr. Josef Mengele  
(1911-1979)

http://www.auschwitz.dk/doctors.htm
Arthur Caplan on Bioethics & the Holocaust

An extraordinary panel of experts and concentration camp survivors-examine problems first raised by Nazi medical experimentation that remain difficult and relevant even today.

A. Caplan 1992
Ramm’s Textbook

Official textbook in a required ethics and law course for undergraduate & graduate medical and biomedical science students at German medical schools 1942-1945
Andrew C. Ivy (1893-1978)
AMA Advisor Nuremberg Trial
Ivy’s 1st Draft of Nuremberg Code  Paris, July 1946

Rules for Ethically Permissible Experiments on Human Subjects

• Consent of the human subjects is required, i.e., only volunteers should be used.
  • The volunteers before giving their consent should be told of hazards, if any.
  • Insurance against an accident should be provided, if it is possible to secure it.

• The experiment to be performed should be so designed and based on the results of animal experimentation that the anticipated results will justify the performance of the experiment; that is, the experiment must be such as to yield results for the good of society.

• The experiment must be conducted
  • so as to avoid all unnecessary physical and mental suffering and injury, and
  • by scientifically qualified persons

• The experiment should not be conducted if there is any a priori reason to believe that death or disabling injury will occur.
Ivy’s 2nd Draft of Code adds Context

The Ethical Rules for Human Experimentation

Human experimentation has been conducted according to certain ethical rules in all the countries of the world which have contributed to the progress of medical science, i.e., to the prevention, cure and control of disease and suffering.

• Consent of the human subjects must be obtained. All subjects [be] volunteers in the absence of coercion in any form, informed of the hazards, if any. ....

• The involved Nazi physicians and scientists ignored these ethical principles and rules, which have been well established by custom, social usage and the ethics of moral conduct, and which are necessary to insure [sic] the human rights of the individual and to avoid the debasement of a method of doing good and the loss of faith of the public in the medical profession.
The Nuremberg Code
(August 20, 1947)

Permissible Medical Experiments: The great weight of the evidence before us is to the effect that certain types of medical experiments on human beings, when kept within reasonably well-defined bounds, conform to the ethics of the medical profession generally. The protagonists of the practice of human experimentation justify their views on the basis that such experiments yield results for the good of society that are un procurable by other methods or means of study. All agree, however, that certain basic principles must be observed in order to satisfy moral, ethical and legal concepts:

• 1. The voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential.
NUREMBERG CODE 1947
TEN PRINCIPLES HUMAN EXPERIMENTS

1) VOLUNTARY CONSENT of INDIVIDUAL ESSENTIAL
2) RESULTS UNPROCURABLE BY OTHER MEANS
3) PREQUIRED PRIOR ANIMAL EXPERIMENTATION
4, 5, & 7) AVOID NEEDLESS PAIN OR INJURY
6) BALANCE RISK VS IMPORTANCE TO HUMANITY
8) RESEARCHER SCIENTIFICALLY QUALIFIED
9) SUBJECT MAY TERMINATE EXPERIMENT
10) RESEARCHER MUST TERMINATE EXPERIMENT

LIKELY TO INJURE, DISABLE OR KILL ITS SUBJECT
Rudolf Ramm
1887-1945

• Physician
• Anti-Semite
• Author: official textbook of Nazi medical ethics and medical jurisprudence
• 1942-1945
Nazi Medical Ethics: Ramm (I)

During the powerful upheaval of the intellectual and moral structure of the German Volk... the National Socialist [Nazi] revolution...there was also a fundamental rearrangement of the ideal conception of medicine. The individualism of the liberal age had...produced a purely individualistic professional conception of the physician. ....with the inexorable ...racial decline and with continuously growing clarity towards the day of the death of the Volk.
As guardians of the health of the Volk, physicians are “responsible for the healing of patients... for discouraging use of tobacco, and for obeying laws for the reestablishment of German blood... for Prevention of Genetically Ill Offspring... which prohibit... further mixing of German people with Jewish and lower races. [and] preclude[s] ... genetically ill and morally inferior people from transmitting their genes.” Consequently, you must report them to hereditary courts. (Which sent them to, e.g., Hadamar Psychiatric Hospital, to be killed.)
A Lexicon of Nazi Medical Ethics

**Rassenhygiene**, (racial hygiene) Alfred Ploetz (1860-1940) added German lexicon in 1895

**Euthanasie**, Adolf Jost (1874-1908) imported From English 1900; “euthanasie” mercy killing those burdensome to themselves or to society.

**Mendelianism**, (1856) 1900, confirmed “hard” heritable characteristics (e.g., race, skin color).

**Social Medicine**: medicine for the people (*Volk*)

*Volk* in Nazi usage, people connected culturally, genetically, & geographically

(Heidegger: *Volk* vs “Nomads” / Jews & Roma).
Leo Alexander (1905-1985)
Holocaust refugee & Prosecution Expert
“Well into the 1960s, the American research establishment considered the Nuremberg findings and the Nuremberg Code irrelevant to its own work.”

• David Rothman

“But the bioethics revolution was made by dissidents, not by the establishment!”

• Robert (Bob) Baker
Henry Beecher in Service WWII
Used Nazi Researchers’ Data
Maurice Pappworth (1910-1994)
Jewish WWII Veteran & Outsider
On Human Subjects Abuse
Popular Article 1962; Book 1967

M. H. Pappworth, M. D.

HUMAN GUINEA PIGS

Experimentation on Man
Whistleblower Henry Beecher, 1966

*New England Journal Article*
Beecher “Ethics & Clinical Research”
2,775 citations by 50th anniversary
Peter Buxtun (1937- )

- Born in Prague of Jewish father & Christian mother
- Holocaust Refugees in US
- Conservative NRA Republican.
- Medic during Vietnam War
- Contract tracer for CDC
- Learns CDC told Drs. not to treat syphilis—allowing spread
- Shocked! Gathers evidence!
- Report to CDC Tuskegee = Nazis
- CDC rejects Report → Resigns
- @ law school contacts AP (Heller) NYT → Kennedy Hearings →
- Belmont Principles: Autonomy, Beneficence & Justice
Bioethics as Rejection of *Rassenhygiene*

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<td><em>Volk</em> &gt; individual pt</td>
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