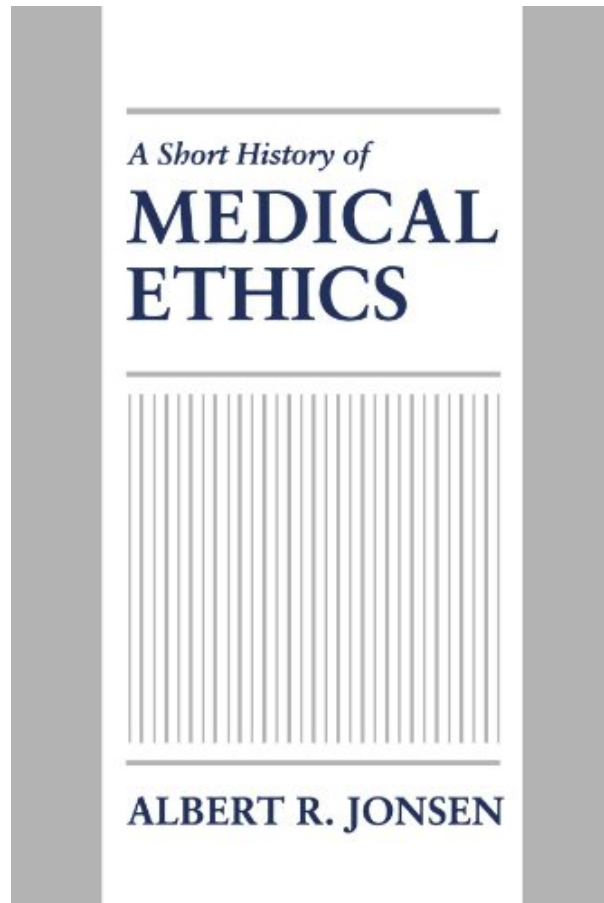


A SHORT HISTORY OF MEDICAL ETHICS

BY ALBERT R JONSEN



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In the course of exploring the concepts of deontology, decorum, and politic ethics, Jonsen makes interesting observations that challenge prevailing assumptions about ethics. In his discussion of the Hippocratic corpus, he comments on the widely quoted injunction to "do no harm," which may have been a reaction to the tendency to subject patients to the rigors of medicine even though they had no chance of recovering. Jonsen argues that the exhortation against taking on desperate cases, far from endorsing the abandonment of dying patients, was in fact a judicious caution against futile therapy. Jonsen also observes that Eastern and Western cultures shared similar ethical precepts, in contrast to the modern view that medical ethics is culture-specific. At least in the long prehistory of bioethics, he suggests, there may have been a "universal moral atmosphere that surrounds the work of caring for the sick and pervades that work."

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A physician says, "I have an ethical obligation never to cause the death of a patient," another responds, "My ethical obligation is to relieve pain even if the patient dies." The current argument over the role of physicians in assisting patients to die constantly refers to the ethical duties of the profession. References to the Hippocratic Oath are often heard. Many modern problems, from assisted suicide to accessible health care, raise questions about the traditional ethics of medicine and the medical profession. However, few know what the traditional ethics are and how they came into being. This book provides a brief tour of the complex story of medical ethics evolved over centuries in both Western and Eastern cultures. It sets this story in the social and cultural contexts in which the work of healing was practiced and suggests that, behind the many different perceptions about the ethical duties of physicians, certain themes appear constantly, and may be relevant to modern debates. The book begins with the Hippocratic Medicine of ancient Greece, moves through the Middle Ages, Renaissance and Enlightenment in Europe, and the long history of Indian and Chinese medicine, ending as the problems raised modern medical science and technology challenge the settled ethics of the long tradition.

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The copyright for this book is 2000 not 2008. Good book I utilize it for teaching Clinical Ethics (the history portion of the class) to pre-health profession students 4th year undergraduate education. The need a newer edition though as the year 2000 is leaving out a lot of important ethical concerns and issues that have occurred in the past 12 years. Would also recommend Clinical Ethics in which Albert R. Jonsen is one of three authors of that book. That is the text I teach from for the majority of the class.

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