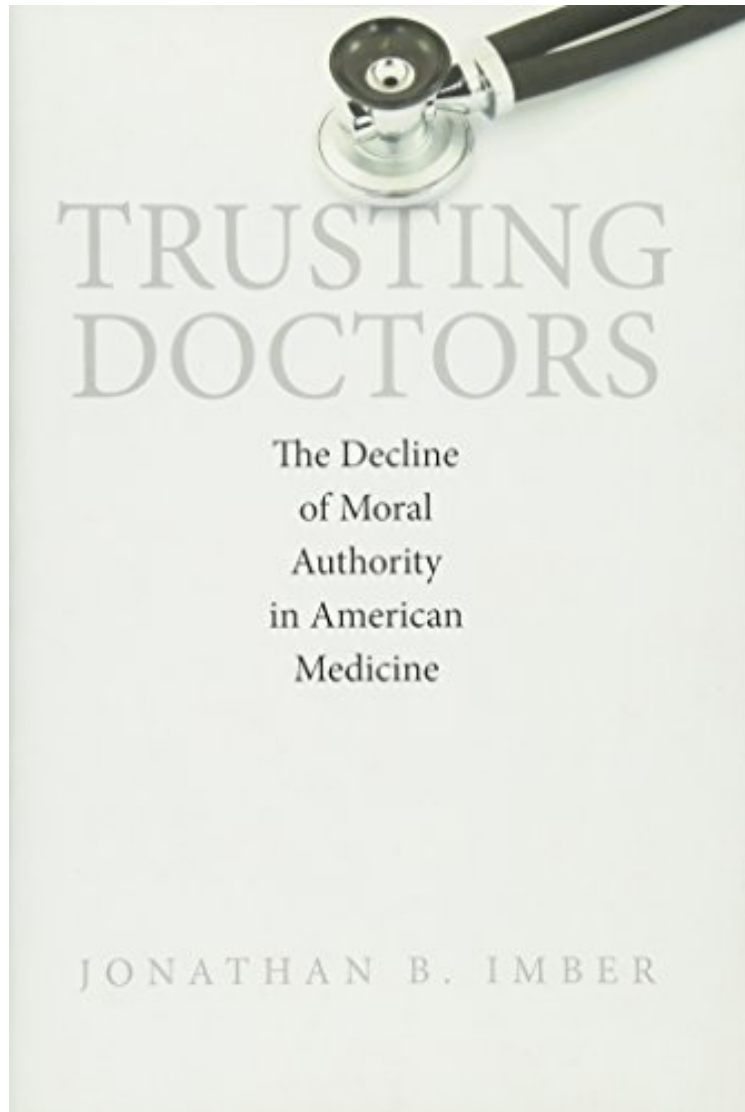


[Download pdf ebook] Trusting Doctors: The Decline of Moral Authority in American Medicine

Trusting Doctors: The Decline of Moral Authority in American Medicine

Jonathan B. Imber

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Jonathan B. Imber : Trusting Doctors: The Decline of Moral Authority in American Medicine before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Trusting Doctors: The Decline of Moral Authority in American Medicine:

4 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Needs another round of revisionBy Dr. Cathy GoodwinI found this book on a library shelf. I tried to read it because I like sociology and I'm fascinated by the cultural and psychological

aspects of medicine. But somehow I just couldn't get into this book. As a former academic myself, I understand the challenge of writing for a general audience after writing for academic journals. Still, this book seemed unnecessarily dense. I was also uncomfortable with the author's style of focusing on very specific examples to make a point. For example, when the author quotes from an address to a medical school, it is hard for the reader to tell whether it's typical or influential. The book does have value because it raises questions that stimulate thought and could lead to useful discussions in public forums. For instance, I hadn't thought about the influence of religion on medicine. Some of the anecdotes would be interesting to discuss in the context of ethics and professionalism. But I wonder if today's lack of trust can be attributed to more mundane reasons. Just about everyone I know will consult the Internet as well as a doctor when they have a medical question. Doctors themselves (such as Atul Gawande and Jerome Groopman) write books that acknowledge the gaps in scientific medicine. These books, along with prominent newspaper accounts, reveal that medical decisions can be influenced by drug company incentives as much as by pure science. Ultimately, Americans (and perhaps people all over the world) are replacing the question "Why we don't trust doctors" with, "Why shouldn't we bring a healthy skepticism to our encounters with the medical profession?" Imber recounts a horrific story of a doctor who actually slapped a grandmother who dared to question his authority, back in the 1930s. Although this conduct would be unlikely today, I would refer to a scene in the very recent book *The Light Within*, where doctors held down a dying woman to administer a useless but painful treatment. On page 128, Imber quotes at length from Lisa Alther's review of a book about personal experience with a medical error. Alther "had to wonder where modern America got the idea that physicians should somehow be more competent than the rest of us." This quote seems to raise additional questions about the book's premise. If physicians don't have to be "more competent than the rest of us," why would we award them moral authority? As an ordinary person, not an expert on medical sociology, I think many of us can answer Alther's question with some cynicism. If doctors keep people waiting for hours, expect patients to tolerate a degree of rudeness not accepted elsewhere, and continue to use the word "patients," they are creating expectations. Simple failure to meet these unrealistic expectations may account for erosion of trust more than the more complex rationale the author proposes.

For more than a century, the American medical profession insisted that doctors be rigorously trained in medical science and dedicated to professional ethics. Patients revered their doctors as representatives of a sacred vocation. Do we still trust doctors with the same conviction? In *Trusting Doctors*, Jonathan Imber attributes the development of patients' faith in doctors to the inspiration and influence of Protestant and Catholic clergymen during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He explains that as the influence of clergymen waned, and as reliance on medical technology increased, patients' trust in doctors steadily declined. *Trusting Doctors* discusses the emphasis that Protestant clergymen placed on the physician's vocation; the focus that Catholic moralists put on specific dilemmas faced in daily medical practice; and the loss of unchallenged authority experienced by doctors after World War II, when practitioners became valued for their technical competence rather than their personal integrity. Imber shows how the clergy gradually lost their impact in defining the physician's moral character, and how vocal critics of medicine contributed to a decline in patient confidence. The author argues that as modern medicine becomes defined by specialization, rapid medical advance, profit-driven industry, and ever more anxious patients, the future for a renewed trust in doctors will be confronted by even greater challenges. *Trusting Doctors* provides valuable insights into the religious underpinnings of the doctor-patient relationship and raises critical questions about the ultimate place of the medical profession in American life and culture.

"Imber offers a well-researched, insightful work on the role of trust in American medicine, and how social changes altered both doctors' and patients' understanding of the role of the physician from the late 19th century to the present. Imber's relentless focus on the issue of trust differentiates his work from other histories of medicine and doctoring in America. . . . Overall, this is an important book on medicine, doctor-patient relationships, and the historical progress of medical ethics."--A.W. Klink, *Choice*"*Trusting Doctors* can strongly be recommended as a reference text for all teachers in the sociology and bio ethical fields and should be referred to by those who determine and regularly change the content of Medical School teaching."--Sam Mellick, CBE, Supreme Court Library of Books"Imber offers a thought-provoking entry into the history of bioethics, a history which continues to unfold."--Susan E. Lederer, *Social History of Medicine*"Imber is at his best . . . when he presents his views on religion and the origins of American medical professionalism. With erudition, he draws on archival material drawn from the writings and preaching of American clergy in the 19th and early 20th centuries."--Joseph J. Fins, *Journal of the American Medical Association*"*Trusting Doctors* is an original and important analysis of the decline of doctors' moral authority and a subtle, sociologically informed critique of contemporary medical bioethics."--Robert Zussman, *American Journal of Sociology*"I learned a great deal from reading this book. . . . The book is exceedingly well documented, the notes are very illuminating, and I've already bought or downloaded a number of Imber's sources for further reading. Anyone interested in medical ethics, medical sociology, or the history of medicine will find this book a very worthwhile read."--Daniel P. Sulmasy, *New Atlantis*From the Back Cover"Jonathan Imber's *Trusting Doctors* is an important,

interesting, and readable book. We all know that our modern doctors do not have the social aura they once did. Imber effectively tells us the eye-opening story of why that change has happened."--Daniel Callahan, cofounder of the Hastings Center"Doctors and people who have no choice but to trust doctors--which means all of us--need to read this book. With both sympathy and uncompromising honesty, Jonathan Imber traces the frequently troubled history of a medical profession that needs to attend to its increasingly fragile moral authority."--Richard John Neuhaus, editor in chief of the journal First Things"Trusting Doctors is a major book, a benchmark on medical morality and trust, and an exemplar of religion's impact on medicine."--Peter Conrad, Brandeis University"This important book challenges many ideas that have long been taken for granted in medical sociology and the history of medicine: ideas about the work of bioethics and epidemiology, as well as the relation between religion and medicine."--Raymond G. De Vries, University of Michigan

About the Author Jonathan B. Imber is the Class of 1949 Professor in Ethics and professor of sociology at Wellesley College. He is the author of *Abortion and the Private Practice of Medicine*.