

Three Close-Readings and Psychoanalysis on the Doctor in “The Use of Force” by William Carlos Williams

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I intend to present three primary interpretations of The Use of Force, a short story written by William Carlos Williams. Two of the three readings are explored in pre-existing analytical works of literature, and the third is my own reading to determine the resolve of the moral dilemma in the story. Throughout the paper, I will argue that autonomy is justified to be overridden at times, however it is still unjust. Structurally, the paper is organized in a way starting with definitions to establish a foundation that will aid in understanding the interpretations. Such definitions include concepts within the Hippocratic Oath and other terms related to society that still reign true with the concepts explored in The Use of Force. The understanding of such issues is vital to establishing a perspective towards the story, and brings out more space for discussions. Then, I will discuss and analyze the short story including analysis of the doctor’s behaviour, in-depth quote analysis, thought experiments, and finally interpretations relating to the real world.

Keywords: Hippocratic Oath, consent, autonomy, bioethics, psychoanalysis

INTRODUCTION

The research question to be answered in this paper is, should the doctor in The Use of Force have pried the girl’s mouth open against her will to diagnose her? If he should have, how would this justification affect societal practices and norms, and would future problems be resolved morally in the same way? The overall argument that I will make throughout the paper is that the doctor in The Use of Force should have overridden the girl’s autonomy as it was able to save her life, however it does not mean that it was right or respectful by any means.

The first bout of definitions are the prerequisites to understanding the idea of literature in bioethics. Later, this paper delves deeper into each subcategory that all relate to certain ethical standpoints of The Use of Force. Each aspect relates to the story in some way, argued for or against the girl.

Definitions

Bioethics is a word that can be split up and defined as one. ‘Ethics’ means “the identification, study, and resolution or mitigation of conflict among competing values or goals.”¹ It provides possible answers and paths to embark on for questions that life poses, and is able to guide decisions a person makes. ‘Bio’ puts the ethical question in the context of certain areas relating to biology. Bioethics, as a whole, means the ethical implications on healthrelated life sciences.

¹ *What Are Bioethics?* <https://bioethics.msu.edu/what-is-bioethics>. Accessed 22 June 2023.

Some topics commonly discussed are: the evolution of the Hippocratic Oath, abortion, active and passive euthanasia, experimentation and research, and allocation of resources. It can range from what to do at the bedside of a person in hospital care, to how to ethically do experimentation on global vaccines, both important questions to address and to wonder about. The field of bioethics consists of constant deliberation on the solutions to ethical issues in practical situations.

Literature is a form of human expression.² It takes shape in the form of written works, words on a page that are expressed by an individual. Although the exact borders of what consists as literature changes and is argued, some examples include poetry and prose. Traditionally, it has been applied to imaginative works by authors that express aesthetic excellence through words.³ It can be classified through many different mechanisms, such as language, national origin, historical period, genre and subject matter. The art of literature brings clarity to the complications of moral life, as seen in the novels *Frankenstein*, *Brave New World*, and *1984*.

Literature in Bioethics

Literature frequently manifests in the field of bioethics, often curated in order to caution the world about future occurrences, or to discuss a dilemma in simpler terms. Some argue that literature obscures the ethical discussions within bioethics, leading it to be artsy in a misdirecting manner.⁴ That means, authors exaggerating certain ideas for maximum entertainment with a profit incentive. On the other hand, incorporating ethical issues in literature may twist the values that are inherent in the study of literature.⁵ Fiction may fuel misdirection in order to cause suspense, which may lead to readers being paranoid or even influenced by some bias about bioethical issues.⁶

To be able to truly solve or delve deeper in various ethical questions, one must possess imagination. Such imagination is best exhibited through the use of literature.⁷ Fiction creates imaginary worlds that are all possibilities of the future, and as individuals and society nears one future or another, people are prepared to evaluate the values and new advancements in the world. For instance, the novel *1984* predicts future events such as brainwashing and personal identification of the future, which gives people an early heads up on the way technology and regimes can affect the world.

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The history of bioethics is essential to consider as well, because it shapes the overall perception of *The Use of Force*. Without knowing the development of bioethics, it is hard to form a holistic view on the story because it was written almost one hundred years ago. Bioethics was not

² Literature | Definition, Characteristics, Genres, Types, & Facts | Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/art/literature>. Accessed 22 June 2023.

³ IBID

⁴ "Literary Bioethics." NYU Press, <https://nyupress.org/9781479801251/literary-bioethics>. Accessed 22 June 2023.

⁵ Terry, James S., and Peter C. Williams. "Literature and Bioethics: The Tension in Goals and Styles." *Literature and Medicine*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1988, pp. 1–21. muse.jhu.edu, <https://doi.org/10.1353/lm.2011.0155>.

⁶ Chan, Sarah. "More than Cautionary Tales: The Role of Fiction in Bioethics." *Journal of Medical Ethics*, vol. 35, no. 7, July 2009, pp. 398–99. PubMed Central, <https://doi.org/10.1136/jme.2009.031252>.

⁷ "Viewing Literature as a Lab for Community Ethics." *Literary Hub*, 17 July 2020, <https://lithub.com/viewing-literature-as-a-lab-for-community-ethics/>.

prevalent at the time when the short story was written, so the value of it then is different to the value now. Although compared to the scope of history one hundred years is not long, values can shift dramatically over a short period of time depending on situations that the world encounters. As a present example, COVID-19 has changed people's values greatly in just a span of around three years in terms of sanitation and even with social practices. It is important to note that some ideas that have developed may have been better before, and some have developed for the better. They have adapted to suit society's development which is always a controversial issue for people of age groups and demographics. Would Williams have written this story if he knew its controversy on the language and patient-doctor relationship?

The Hippocratic Oath

The Hippocratic Oath consists of many overarching ideas for each physician to agree upon. Beneficence and non-maleficence are major ones along with the doctor-patient relationship.⁸ Justice is discussed, and in the modern era, autonomy more prevalently enters the discussion.

Beneficence is having an absolute regard for life. It prioritizes the nature of humanity, putting the preservation of a life before anything else.⁹ This follows the deontological moral theory where this certain action is right because it is a duty to ourselves and to others. A physician must take this action because it is their duty to provide the utmost aid to a patient.

Non-maleficence is the idea of "do no harm"¹⁰ in the Hippocratic Oath where the physician is instructed to take action on what is physically best for the patient only when no harm is done. This follows normative ethics and also deontological moral theories where doing no harm is an end all be all, though in most cases it is not and a much more complex issue.

Justice involves the respect to privacy, the avoidance of abusing privilege and the restriction to one's field of expertise.¹¹ The Oath respects confidentiality and addresses the patient physician relationship. When dealing with letting human nature run its course, it follows naturalistic moral theories where ethical judgements relate to the ideas of human nature, which is quite controversial in the modern day as it limits the autonomy of many individuals.

Limitations of the Hippocratic Oath

Autonomy is a more modern idea in medical ethics. While benefiting the individual, it goes against some of the ideals of the Oath.¹² The Oath states that the physician should "do no harm" and do all to benefit the patient's life. However, if a patient chooses euthanasia instead of getting treatment for the remainder of their life, it does not seem to align with the Oath. Consent links closely to autonomy as it is what path a person chooses to take on their medical journey is their decision that should be respected. It is difficult to guarantee consent in every medical circumstance, and at times consent may be overridden to save an individual's life. But, is this

⁸ Bulger, Roger J., and Anthony L. Barbato. "On the Hippocratic Sources of Western Medical Practice." *The Hastings Center Report*, vol. 30, no. 4, 2000, pp. S4–7. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3527655>.

⁹ IBID

¹⁰ IBID

¹¹ IBID

¹² Loeffler, Imre. "Why the Hippocratic Ideals Are Dead." *BMJ*, vol. 324, no. 7351, June 2002, p. 1463. 12 www.bmj.com, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.324.7351.1463>.

the action that the physician should take? Or should the person be left to fend for themselves as nature set animals up to?

Dionysius describes history as "philosophy teaching by example"¹³. The Hippocratic Oath has existed since 400 BC¹⁴. The Oath has shifted meaning for many physicians, and has become less relevant to the progression of medicine in the present day. Current proposals have altered the framework, such as euthanasia which has many decisional capacities and autonomy-based implications. Modern medicine focuses on society at large along with the individual, whereas the Hippocratic Oath more so focuses on the physician and patient relation¹⁵.

The Oath discusses letting the path of a human follow its intended course in nature, however surgery exists which heavily changes the course of nature's way of healing, whether for better or for worse. Moreover, abortion and gender-transitioning exists so this ideal is, to put it simply, dying.

Consent is the "instrument of mutual communication between doctor and patient with an expression of authorization/permission/choice by the latter for the doctor to act in a particular way"¹⁶. Consent is vital for physicians to take any action on a patient, because without it, any action on a person's body can be considered physical harassment. There are three main sectors, implied, expressed, and informed consent. Mentioned later, assent also plays a role in such decisions when it relates to children. The latter being the form of consent most valued and with the most information being disclosed. In other words, it is the safest option that has the least backlash.

DISCUSSION

The Use of Force by William Carlos Williams was published in 1938 as part of the short story collection entitled "Life Along the Passaic River" and "The Doctor Stories", a collection that is still in print.¹⁷

William Carlos Williams was born in 1883 in New Jersey and was influenced by poets such as Sappho and Walt Whitman¹⁸. When Williams wrote the story, he was quite socially conscious. In the USA, the Great Depression was happening and poverty surrounded him. He wrote The Use of Force and many other short stories to depict the "beauty as well as the pain of the

¹³ philosophy Teaching by Examples." Grand Strategy: The View from Oregon, 23 Dec. 2010, [https:// 13 geopoliticus.wordpress.com/2010/12/22/philosophy-teaching-by-examples/](https://geopoliticus.wordpress.com/2010/12/22/philosophy-teaching-by-examples/).

¹⁴ Indla, Vishal, and M. S. Radhika. "Hippocratic Oath: Losing Relevance in Today's World?" *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 61, no. Suppl 4, Apr. 2019, pp. S773–75. PubMed Central, https://doi.org/10.4103/psychiatry.IndianJPsychiatry_140_19.

¹⁵ IBID

¹⁶ Satyanarayana Rao, K. H. "Informed Consent: An Ethical Obligation or Legal Compulsion?" *Journal of Cutaneous and Aesthetic Surgery*, vol. 1, no. 1, Jan. 2008, pp. 33–35. PubMed Central, <https://doi.org/10.4103/0974-2077.41159>.

¹⁷ The Use of Force by William Carlos Williams, 1938 | Encyclopedia.Com. [https:// 17 www.encyclopedia.com/arts/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/use-force-william-carlos-williams-1938](https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/use-force-william-carlos-williams-1938). Accessed 22 June 2023.

¹⁸ oundation, Poetry. "William Carlos Williams." Poetry Foundation, 21 June 2023, [https:// 18 www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-carlos-williams](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-carlos-williams).

common American”¹⁹. Williams frequently displays brutally honest writing, as shown in a manuscript written by Marilyn Kallet uniquely on the honesty of Williams²⁰.

Analysis of The Use of Force

The Use of Force is a short story about a physician patient relationship and its development involving force.

Initially, the reader is introduced to the doctor named Olson and his thought process as he is let into the house of the girl that he is doing a checkup on. The price of such a check-up is 3 dollars. The girl is surrounded by her family, set in the kitchen where it is warmest as the family, along with herself is aware that she is ill. The reader learns that she has had a fever for three days, and likely it was given to her by people that she has been around during fever season. The girl has stated that her throat has not hurt her, but the doctor is skeptical. Immediately the doctor inferred that she may have diphtheria. We learn that the girl is named Mathilda as the doctor asks to see her throat, utilizing her name for the first time. The parents usher in the fact that this doctor is so kind and just wants to help her. Mathilda starts to become violent, hitting the doctor's face. Her parents are upset, and the doctor gives the parents options. He will have to use force, or the girl will probably die. The parent's must give consent first before he starts his violence. The violence begins, with her father holding her down and the doctor trying to pry her mouth open. Her child admits that they are hurting her, that they are killing her. Her mother finally has some doubts that her daughter might be suffering from this force. The doctor successfully gets his wooden tongue depressor between her teeth, and finds that she has had a sore throat. The story at a glance at the summary may seem quite normal, a typical encounter with children and parents, especially getting vaccines or something uncomfortable. However, it is the doctor's internal dialogue that is most intriguing about the story.

The Use of Force displays fictional characters that initially have no backstory or depth into real people, in a very real situation²¹. When readers start to see ethical problems in the story, it turns the entire situation into one that can be integrated into society. Along with the situation, the characters can be integrated too as a part of a bioethical dilemma. That is what is so special about this specific story, that it is all too real and relatable to society at any point in time. It is truly timeless.

Williams actually did not truly regard philosophy, “science is a deceit; Philosophy a sham: these are not life, but a scum over it through which we see torturedly. But poetry is the breath of life itself.”²² He never let any theories “replace” or “dominate” any of his work as a skilled and educated physician and writer.

¹⁹ IBID

²⁰ Collection: “Honest Simplicity in William Carlos Williams’ ‘Asphodel, That Greeny Flower’” | 20 ArchivesSpace Public Interface. <https://scout.lib.utk.edu/repositories/2/resources/4438>. Accessed 22 June 2023.

²¹ Bell, Barbara Carrier. “Williams’ ‘The Use of Force’ and First Principles in Medical Ethics.” *Literature 21 and Medicine*, vol. 3.

²² Dickie, Margaret. “Williams Reading Paterson.” *ELH*, vol. 53, no. 3, 1986, pp. 653–71. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2873044>.

Before discussing the ethics of whether or not the girl should be saved, her diagnoses should be considered. When making ethical decisions, a life is always weighed over many other factors, oftentimes even autonomy. By analyzing the severity of diphtheria on her specific body at that specific time in history, it can justify, or not, the doctor's actions to determine whether or not he saved her life, or of prolonged suffering. Diphtheria is a serious disease that is quite transmissible. It causes many flu and cold-like symptoms to occur, along with a swollen throat²³. It can lead to airway blockage, damage to heart muscle, nerve damage and kidney failure if not treated at all. In the 1900s, diphtheria had some vaccines to help deter and some treatment to heal it, meaning that the girl would have likely faced treatment following her diagnosis²⁴. However, during the time at which *The Use of Force* was written, the vaccine had just been quite fresh in development and may or may not have been used by all doctors. It is safe to assume that at the very least the girl's suffering was spared due to her diagnosis, but it is difficult to say whether or not her life would have been saved. That makes it harder to determine if it was worth overriding her autonomy, and further discussion must be held to determine if she could have healed on her own. Diphtheria can cause breathing problems in the long term, and likely will need treatment at some point to reduce suffering. The doctor was aware that the girl had a high chance of diphtheria, so was engaging in such extreme force to open her mouth necessary or worth the struggle? Is it worth the risk to give a wrong diagnosis if no force needed to be used?

Interpretations of The Use of Force

The Doctor Should Not Have Overridden the Girl's Autonomy *Because It Is Wrong:*

The first interpretation here is depicting the doctor as being in the wrong. He violates his deontological moral theory of fulfilling his duty to benefit her health. The doctor knows that he is wrong, and feels internal guilt. People have argued that *The Use of Force* is a metaphor for rape or assault²⁵, where the man, with asserted dominance and control can take over a woman, easily or not, and the efficacy of concealment. This is because it is a male to young, vulnerable, and helpless female who has no control of the situation. The range of perspective can determine the way to interpret such readings. For example, if a teenage girl who is quite involved in societal issues and polarized reads the story, she may be disgusted by the doctor's actions, and take the side of the girl, regardless of any ethical implications, just as a way to be against the doctor who is pushing his limits. The doctor makes utter statements such as the fact that he has "fallen in love with the savage brat" which could concern the reader, as well as the description of his harsh actions on her. Especially the imagery of him inserting the tool into her mouth as an extremely similar metaphor for any form of assault. While it is a valid interpretation that many others have, there are multiple other perspectives on the reading, stating that it may not have gone that far.

The Doctor Should Have Overridden the Girl's Autonomy *Because It Is Right:*

First, the doctor also has an ego himself that he must uphold, thus a reason for his intense and desperate actions towards the little girl. He is trying to prove himself and his diagnosis right, and do his job successfully. He does not want to be known as the man whose patient died

²³ Diphtheria | CDC. 9 Sept. 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/diphtheria/index.html>.

²⁴ Pinkbook: Diphtheria | CDC. 19 Oct. 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/pinkbook/dip.html>.

²⁵ Barbara Currier Bell. "Williams' 'The Use of Force' and First Principles in Medical Ethics." *Literature and Medicine*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1984, pp. 143–51. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.1353/lm.2011.0092>.

because he was not able to open her mouth to diagnose her. It is embarrassing for the doctor to lose the battle that he initiated. So of course, he has no choice but to enact force to confirm his assumption that she had diphtheria. Second, in an unruly child's childhood, hands will be used on them to restrict movement at some point, and it will be deemed as normal. However, that is a norm that this paper aims to break apart, and hopefully to decrease. Society still believes that dealing with children through subtle or even unspoken violence is extremely normal and necessary, but if children are raised in ways without any violence or force, outcomes can still be the same. In this case, the process is more important than the result. If the intended result is not satisfactory but the child feels better, then that should be the step to be taken to the point where the child will know inherently what is good for themselves, and go in the right direction. Thus, the girl, if she had been in a more comforting situation, could have assented and even consented to such care.

The Doctor Should Have Overridden the Girl's Autonomy, *Not Because It Is Right, But Because It Preserves Her Life:*

Pulling from the previous two interpretations, the doctor did commit disrespect to the child, regardless of societal norms at the time, but was able to preserve her health. There can be an ambiguous consensus made to the case that is able to bring justice to both parties involved. The girl is able to gain justice from the validation of her emotion and morality, and the doctor is able to successfully diagnose and treat her. The girl will always be dissatisfied and unhappy, regardless if she heals or even gains some sort of moral justice or highness from the encounter. She has been humiliated, and will always be in that present moment, and afterwards. Her autonomy was overridden regardless, and that itself is enough to trigger her to be unhappy. Physicality when dealing with children is quite common in many households as adults hold some sort of moral (and physical) high ground against the child. The parent technically "owns" the child, legally, so that term, however it may be interpreted, gives the adult some sort of excuse to act in a way that may not respect the child's autonomy and get away with it. It is always justified by how the decisions made by the adult are "for their [the child's] own good". It is the fact that the person making the decisions is an adult that somehow validates the practice, but not always are these decisions the right ones to make or better for the child. Although the dilemma is not directly tied to medicine, it definitely is tied to the debates around the Hippocratic Oath and its conflict with autonomy. Children gain a sense of trauma from many experiences in childhood, whether great or even just small actions that lead to a build-up of child behaviour that can be shown during teenage hood all the way into adulthood. It is important to consider the fairness of the psychological implications that this can have on the child, not just the moral or physical. Williams aims to analyze a child's experience during the diphtheria epidemic in the early 1900s, which, at the time, may be a source of discussion on steps to take in similar situations. In the end, the doctor won physically, but the girl won morally.

Psychoanalysis of the Doctor

In the early twentieth century, psychoanalysis started to emerge in literature. The works of literature are known to "enrich our notions about inner life". The doctor's social self is most explored in the story, displaying his values, presentation, and behaviour that all stem from his occupation as a physician.

The doctor's role in the story is quite important and the main case to analyze. More specifically, his inner dialogue describing his emotions and opinions of his patient sparks intense discussion. Some examples of the doctor's dialogue are listed below, and context will be provided along with analysis.

"When I Arrived, I Was Met by The Mother, A Big Startled Looking Woman, Very Clean and Apologetic"²⁶

The doctor's initial reaction at the very beginning of the story foreshadows quite a lot of events that occur. First, the mother was apologetic as the story goes on, apologizing on behalf of the girl's violence but also doubting that her daughter could take this violence any longer. Second, his description of the mother being "big" and "clean" shows his overt regard for women's appearance, and his need to comment on it in general. He did not have such a description for the father at any point. Williams, writing it in the 1900s, would receive different and adverse reactions in the time it was published versus now.

"The Child Was Fully Dressed"²⁷

This statement infers a sense of awareness of the doctor on the child's appearance and clothing. Why wouldn't this child be fully dressed if she had a fever for many days and was extremely cold? It seems as though it is an anomaly to point out, but it is not. This statement can also be interpreted in the sense that the way she was fully dressed shows the intensity of her sickness, causing her to have to bundle up or else she will be too cold, even in the warmest area in the house.

"An Unusually Attractive Little Thing, And as Strong as A Heifer in Appearance"²⁸

This statement is one of the most glaring ones that people view as more concerning. He claims her attractiveness as unusual, probably because she is a child, and refers to this kid as an object or unhuman-like animal. He calls her a "thing", but also a "heifer", which is a young female cow. This comparison is quite random and displays, again, his careful observation of people's appearances and need to describe it intrusively. The term "attractive" may be used to increase deliberation about the story, because without his inner dialogue there is much less to discuss. The doctor may be quite observant because of the fact that he is a doctor and must monitor many aspects of a person's life. However, by calling her "attractive" by nature, it breaches one area of the Hippocratic Oath where the doctor is just there to benefit the patient, not view the patient in any other way or make comments on their appearance.

"She Had Magnificent Blonde Hair, In Profusion. One Of Those Picture Children Often Reproduced in Advertising Leaflets and The Photogravure Sections of The Sunday Papers"²⁹

The doctor hones in on her facial appearance, typical thus far, as that is the primary area where people focus when observing an individual. He gawks at her hair, which is a feature that people as early as young adults do admire in younger children, especially when they have full and healthy hair. Although quite common to think in such a way, he describes the hair as

²⁶ Williams, William Carlos. *The Use of Force*.

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magnificent and in profusion, which is almost an enthusiastic way to describe it, as if it really catches his eye. Later in the second half of this quote, he depicts her as a child who could model for the paper. That means he really admires her beauty, but also points towards one of the interpretations of the story where it hints to his view on her being more than just admiration. However, people do admire others' beauty without heeding such thoughts or ideas. The only aspect is that the doctor keeps going on to describe her beauty, not just stopping after complimenting her hair. It represents the extent of his observant nature, and his intrusive thoughts following just looking at something or someone. It could show his skill as a doctor to transfer to life skills and experiences.

“Asking For the Child’s First Name I Said, Come On, Mathilda, Open Your Mouth and Let’s Take a Look at Your Throat”³⁰

This statement is definitely interpreted in more of a parental way, as he uses her name specifically to coax the child as if it would help her feel more connected to the doctor. However, the second part of the dialogue, “open your mouth and let’s take a look at your throat” can also be interpreted in a very demanding manner, where he is being straightforward with her, rather than focusing on the process of gaining trust.

“Will You Open It Now by Yourself or Shall We Have to Open It for You?”³¹

The doctor states this to the girl, which likely is not a good way to soothe the girl in her already quite anxious state. He asks her for her assent almost to do such a violent action, but the only reason he is asking her instead of demanding is to make it seem softer, as if he is not going to completely dominate her, and hurt her by doing so. Although there is not a formal term for informed assent, it should be necessary at the very least for this girl to know what is going to happen to her. In fact, she did not even give assent, hence the desperate efforts to fight back of expressing dissent.

“After All, I Had Already Fallen in Love with The Savage Brat”³²

This statement, above all, was the one that resonated the most as it points out, directly, his love for the girl. This statement can be interpreted in two main ways. First, in the more outright way in the sense that he is hyper- observant. It draws into the metaphorical assault interpretation of this story, and makes the other statements that he makes obscener and more represented in a negative manner. He objectifies her by utilizing the term “savage”, identifying her as more unhuman-like, similar to calling her a young cow previously. In contrast, using the word “brat” adds immaturity and childlike-ness to her nature, which shifts the interpretation into an adult describing a child. The second interpretation is that he is simply fond of her strength and will to fight back, loving a child as a parental figure, admiring her, even more than to her parents.

“Till I Wanted to Kill Him”³³

This short phrase is less relevant to the patient-doctor relationship; however, it reflects the doctor’s character. The context here is important to acknowledge. The father was holding on very tightly to the girl, hurting her. The doctor stated that when he was close to getting a look

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³¹ IBID

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at her mouth, he'd let go of her or loosen his grip, because he did not want to hurt her further. It seems as though consent was barely given as the mother also confessed her doubts about such violence. The doctor, with his determination to do his job, pushes forward. His intrusive thoughts are heavily emphasized here, showing how intense they become. He has thoughts to even kill the father, and it seems even more gruesome as a doctor to think that! However, it is likely quite common for people under high stress and intensity situations to have such intrusive thoughts.

"The Child Let Out a Scream. Don't, You're Hurting Me. Let Go of My Hands. Let Them Go I Tell You. Then She Shrieked Terrifyingly, Hysterically. Stop It! Stop It! You're Killing Me!"³⁴

The child's screams give the opposite of assent, in fact, she states that she is being physically hurt, along with mentally tortured. It is not the intrusive thoughts of the doctor; however, it represents the repercussions of his harsh actions. It brings out more sympathy for the child who will not comply with the doctor. Audiences may be frustrated with all characters in the story: the child, for her stubborn behaviour, the doctor, for his violence, and the parents, for their inability to do anything in the situation. The only one changing and adapting is the doctor, and he made a difference at the end to save the child's life. But at what cost?

Williams is known to be an honest writer, hence the many confessions and thoughts expressed in such a short story.

CONSOLIDATION

As stated earlier, consent is the primary aspect of bioethics that is explored in *The Use of Force*, as shown in the girl and her adverse reaction to being pushed, against her will, to get checked for her illness. Consent is at deliberation in such an instance because, for the girl's benefit, her consent was overridden. In modern healthcare, consent seems to be at the forefront of any medical actions, even just getting a checkup. At this point, the rights of individuals override the efficiency of a society, which is the development of healthcare in the West and in some areas around the world.

Decisional capacity links quite well to consent as part of it determines if an individual is capable of consent. In the context of *The Use of Force*, the child seems to have limited decisional capacity, meaning that she may not have full decision capacity to make decisions for herself that will benefit her the most. However, even people with completely fine decisional capacity will not make decisions that benefit them, physically, the most. Then a conclusion can be drawn that everyone has decisional capacity to an extent, but sometimes it is not enough to guarantee a valid decision.

Hippocratic Oath's Relation to The Use of Force

Beneficence is the overall argument for the doctor, in stating that his actions were justified because it provided the most benefit to the patient, who is the little girl. The doctor's duty is to preserve the life of the girl, thus fulfilling his duty if inferred that he provided her with the proper treatment thereafter. However, by utilizing vaccines to cure the diphtheria, that does not fall under the natural healing that the Oath may point towards. Although it doesn't precisely

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fall under the idea of beneficence, it can be argued, quite strongly and effectively, that the doctor made the right decision simply because he saved the girl's life.

Non-maleficence can be argued against the doctor, in regards that he was violent towards the girl causing her to experience bodily pain and probably mental distress, both not regarding the "do no harm" principle that this idea beholds. It can be argued that if no violence was used, the girl would not be diagnosed, leading to suffering and possibly death, so it would not be the best solution for her health.

Autonomy is an essential part to making consensual decisions. With autonomy, one is able to formulate opinions based on what to do with one's own body, and then be able to apply that to making decisions regarding medical issues. However, autonomy is not always achievable and is always determined on a case-by-case basis. This relates to The Use of Force as the main argument for the girl is that she deserves to exercise her own autonomy, and feel invalidated if it is not respected, even as a child. By acting on the beneficence of her health, the doctor does not promote beneficence for her morally or even physically in the moment. That represents the ambiguous nature of medical decisions, especially regarding children that do not have full decisional capacity. The story is one case in which autonomy is overridden in order to sustain health.

Justice relates to the girl sustaining her autonomy. If the doctor had not acted upon his impulses by violently holding down the girl against her will, she would have gotten her moral justice and held her ground. But since he did not regard her autonomy, she now has the ability to strive for justice after that invalidation of her own bodily choice. Although there is no specific legal action that she can take since she is a child and that is the norm, she can still get justice as she won, morally. The doctor's actions are not viewed positively and clearly provide harm, making him likely regretful for some actions or even guilty. Those feelings are enough to provoke justice to the girl, along with her desperate actions to fight him off.

The patient-doctor relationship under the Hippocratic Oath states that the doctor must act in the best interest and not exploit the patient by any means. Although he physically did his duty, assuming he followed through with the treatment, he exploited the girl morally.

Thought Experiments³⁵

Thought Experiment Part 1: Gender Changing Perceptions:

Let's look at a thought experiment that may shift perspectives on The Use of Force. What if a different character was introduced, for instance a young, female physician named Mary who is extremely kind and loves kids. The girl is still unruly and refuses to be checked. The female doctor never had any intrusive thoughts about the girl and the situation and is just there to do her job as far as the reader knows, however internally she may still have the same thoughts. She still pries the girl's mouth open against her will, and diagnoses her with diphtheria. Simple descriptions, nothing about her savagery or brattiness. Without the usage of words and descriptive literature, these issues become situations to read about for entertainment, rather than something to provoke actual ethical discussion. The girl pushes against her, but the doctor

³⁵ ZaggoCare. "Should You Use a Female Doctor?" ZaggoCare, 5 Dec. 2021, <https://zaggocare.org/use-35-female-doctor/>.

coaxes her and soothes her before, during and after the check-up. All of this is still against the girl's will, consent and autonomy. However, since the descriptions changed and the thoughts fluttered away, the meaning is lost, and people do not look twice at the situation. That shows that without honesty, no lessons are able to be learned. Moreover, it shows that gender does play a role in terms of interpretation, even with the same intrusive thoughts. The perception of individuals is quite varied, some may not even have any bias towards gender, others may have it greatly. As considered from readings and statistics, female doctors are more patient-oriented, but also women in general are more process-oriented rather than result-oriented. That means a result-oriented approach is one in which the actor values the process as much, if not more than the result. Although it is uncertain to know if Mary, this female doctor, exhibits such traits, a reader with the biases in their brain from societal norms is likely to think in the direction that this is just helping the little girl, saving her life. The male doctor, on the other hand, is more result oriented. The patient-doctor relationship will not be interpreted in a sexual way at all, again through the traditional and normative interpretations and bias that people have learned as time goes on.

This gives a sign that there is no distinction between what is considered an ethics problem, and what is just societal bias or judgement. Just by a gender change of the doctor, it shifts the story into something less of a medical school discussion into a basic story about a girl getting a check-up. So not only are women less valued to make an impact, good or bad, but also the issue turns from ethical to more political.

Thought Experiment Part 2: Assent vs Consent:³⁶

The second part of the thought experiment has a slightly different situation. The doctor's gender will not be of focus here, but the previous description can probably still make an impact on how the situation will turn out and be interpreted.

The definition of assent specifically with children in a practical sense is regarding their choice to agree in circumstances where they are not able to give legal (informed) consent³⁷. The children are too young to give informed consent but are able to understand the situation at hand. The question to be made regarding assent is: what if the child was bribed with, say, a lollipop in order to be calm for the doctor check-up? Even if the child is strongly against it mentally, they would still "sell their soul for a piece of candy". First, due to the short-term gratification, but also because it is a distraction from the situation at hand that may be very scary for them. Although this is a form of pretty harmless bribery, it is still bribery. The idea of bribery is considered unethical in general, so why does it seem ok to bribe gullible and vulnerable children? Clearly, there is no harm to be received back as the child cannot really do anything but comply. However, does that not seem even more unfair and oppressive?

³⁶ Consent and Assent | Institutional Review Board. <https://www.uaf.edu/irb/faqs/consent-and-assent/#:text=What%20is%20the%20difference%20between,to%20participate%20in%20the%20activity>. Accessed 22 June 2023.

³⁷ Cotrim, Hortense, et al. "Children's Understanding of Informed Assents in Research Studies." *37 Healthcare*, vol. 9, no. 7, July 2021, p. 871. PubMed Central, <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare9070871>.

Current Day Applications of The Use of Force

The issue of consent and decisional-capacity are interlinked and ever so prevalent in society with topics that are still in discussion on its legality.

The first instance is abortion. Consent loosely and closely relates to abortion in a couple of ways. Consent of the individual for abortion, and parents if the person is under 16. That shows that for a child to get an abortion, assent must be made, along with informed consent by their family. There is a heavy reliance on interpersonal relationships in such situations that may not be applicable for everyone, and it puts the child at a disadvantage because there are many complications that come with that, such as the fear of just telling the parents in the first place. Decisional capacity also is prevalent because the individual themselves may not have the capacity to make informed decisions based on their body, but other people may also not know the best course of action. That is why there is an ethics consultant and doctor in many situations where difficult decisions must be made. However, it is still an unsolved decision. In terms of The Use of Force, there is not even assent from the child, just likely verbal and informed consent from the parents as they did not stop the doctor when he became violent, and were able to let the doctor come in the first place. The child may or may not have complete decisional capacity, but still should have a say in her decisions about her body. A lack of decisional capacity and life experience as a child can manifest in the future in terms of independence and overall decision-making skills. When this child is alone, the child may be nervous to make decisions³⁸, and have problems with self-esteem, always doubting their own decisions. What's important now is how the patient reacts in that scenario, and repercussions that follow.

The second instance is euthanasia. Evidently, consent is essential for an individual to require passive or active euthanasia, typically for situations where they have to be on life support or are in hospice. The discussion is whether or not it should be legal, and if so, for which group of people and in what circumstance. In some countries, it has to be for people who have chronic illnesses and have a certain amount of time to live. In other instances, it is just determined by suffering which may be quite broad. Decisional capacity also links as it determines if the person themselves can choose euthanasia, and on the time frame at which they decided to do so. For instance, if a person, 20 years ago decided to not get life support but then lives happily now without decisional capacity on life support, it may cause deliberation to stop the life support to respect their wishes, or to continue it to save their life for longer.

In terms of The Use of Force, it can be argued that by refusing the treatment by the doctor, the girl would be subject to passive euthanasia as the diphtheria could probably make her suffer endlessly and potentially die. The tradeoff from all her autonomy being stripped from her is her life. That is quite a large trade off, and when worded in such a way, makes people likely to sway with the doctor. But it also seems like a betrayal if the person supports the doctor, instead saving her life should be the priority, not picking a side in an argument that is much more complicated than two sides bickering.

³⁸ Eng, Joanna. "Study Uncovers What Happens When Children of Helicopter Parents Grow Up." ParentsTogether, 24 Oct. 2022, <https://parents-together.org/study-uncovers-what-happens-when-children-of-helicopter-parents-grow-up/>.

CONCLUSION

Literature in Bioethics is a prevailing field of research, but also of art that can teach hard earned lessons to society, and the individuals digesting such art within the scope of society. All of the literature relating to medical bioethics links to some part of the Hippocratic Oath, whether being an outright argument against it, or unconsciously writing a piece that relates to a certain value within the Oath. Regardless, the Oath, whether or not "outdated" still makes its impact on society, manifested in stories and other forms of literature, as well as in film and media. The Use of Force is still discussed and taught in educational platforms to this day, and deliberated on the resolve of the dilemma within that story. An example of that is this paper. That itself shows the timeless nature of literature, especially ones that deal with worldly and futuristic issues. In the story, it is justified that the doctor should have won over her physically and tried to diagnose her in order to save her life, however, the girl is even more justified to feel invalidated and hurt. In fact, if she wants to strive for justice, she should be able to even though the doctor likely saved her life.

The story deals with themes of autonomy and justice regarding the patient-doctor relationship in situations where it is not a black and white situation. There is no such thing as a win-win or lose-lose situation, in fact this certain story presents wins and losses for each individual, on different scales but both co-existents. The girl won because she made the doctor feel guilty for his actions, but she also lost physically because he was able to open her mouth. The doctor won physically by achieving his goal of diagnosing her, but he lost morally because he clearly went against her consent and autonomy.

So, after establishing an ambiguous consensus, what should we make do of this? What does this leave us to think, or to do?

Well, it shows that if children are taught responsible autonomy at a young age, then incidents such as in The Use of Force may not happen as often, or to such a large degree. It also shows that in such a developing and advanced society where individuals gain more and more autonomy by the day, that maybe efficiency through brute force will not be at the forefront of any morals or values as time progresses, and that communication and peopleskills are becoming more and more prominent to possess. Of course, it is quite Western centered as the entire world is diverse and may possess different values due to past historical experiences, but it can be applied universally to any person themselves to adapt so that they can still have their own autonomy, and let themselves heal, rather than fight against the inevitable.

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