



MAKING THE MONSTER FROM BOTH HUMAN AND ANIMAL PARTS

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MAKING THE MONSTER FROM BOTH HUMAN AND ANIMAL PARTS

“My cheek had grown pale with study, and my person had become emaciated with confinement. Sometimes, on the very brink of certainty, I failed; yet still I clung to the hope which the next day or the next hour might realize. One secret which I alone possessed was the hope to which I had dedicated myself; and the moon gazed on my midnight labours, while, with unrelaxed and breathless eagerness, I pursued nature to her hiding places. Who shall conceive the horrors of my secret toil, as I dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave, or tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay? My limbs now tremble, and my eyes swim with the remembrance; but then a resistless, and almost frantic impulse, urged me forward; I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit. It was indeed but a passing trance, that only made me feel with renewed acuteness so soon as, the unnatural stimulus ceasing to operate, I had returned to my old habits. I collected bones from charnel houses; and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame. In a solitary chamber, or rather cell, at the top of the house, and separated from all the other apartments by a gallery and staircase, I kept my workshop of filthy creation; my eyeballs were starting from their sockets in attending to the details of my employment. The dissecting room and the slaughter-house furnished many of my materials; and often did my human nature turn with loathing from my occupation, whilst, still urged on by an eagerness which perpetually increased, I brought my work near to a conclusion.”

QUESTION RAISED

Victor’s grave robbing and torture of animals raise the following questions:

- Do the ends ever justify the means in research or in other areas?
 - If useful data can be gathered through unethical means, should they be?
 - And if such data are so gathered, ought they to form part of the evidence base of science?
 - Analysis of the history of human experimentation in the twentieth century comes solidly down on the negative answer, based on experiences like those of concentration camp inmates experimented on by Nazi doctors during World War II and of African Americans and Guatemalans experimented on by US Public Health Service researchers in the decades following the war.
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PRINCIPLES OF BIOETHICS

- The principles of bioethics hold that human beings may never be used solely as experimental means to a scientific end, but human autonomy can also create an affirmative role for self-sacrifice, allowing people ethically to volunteer for dangerous experiments.
 - Some bioethicists also argue that if a practice is physically or viscerally repugnant—“the horrors of my secret toil,” in Victor’s words (p. 38)—then the practice is at least suspect of being morally repugnant.
 - For a time, the ethical debate about human embryonic stem cell research focused on whether medical science should be permitted to progress based on research that was putatively unethical in its destruction of human embryos to derive human pluripotent stem cells.
 - Is such research always spoiled as the fruit of evil exploits?
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