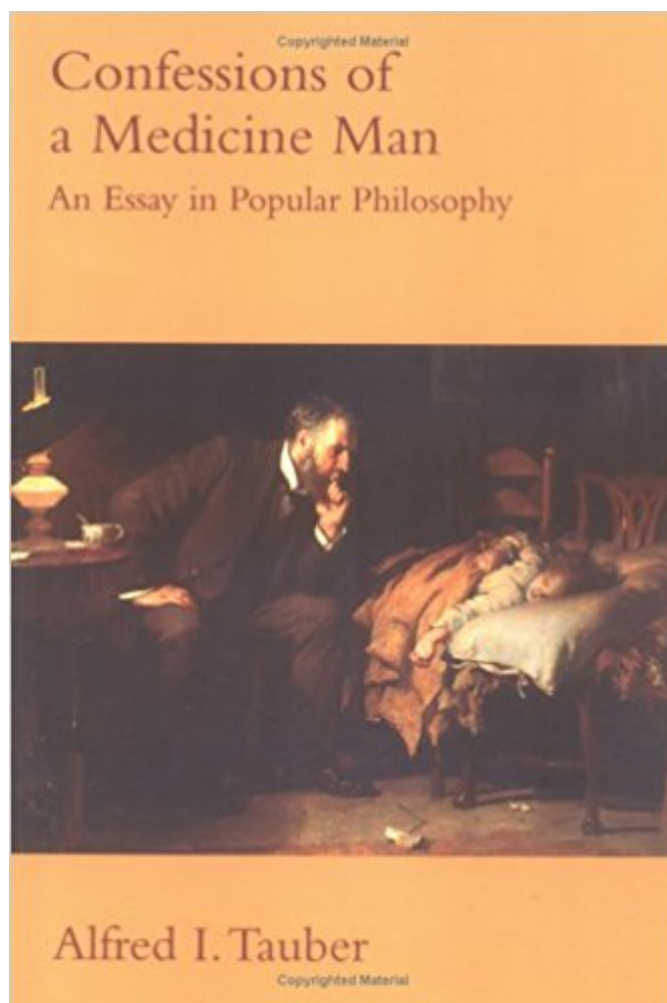


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# Confessions Of A Medicine Man: An Essay In Popular Philosophy



## Synopsis

"My mission is to analyze medicine's ethical structure. I do so as both a physician and a philosopher. Of my two voices, it is the latter that is informed by the former.... As a physician I have sought professional solutions to the frustrations of fighting a medical system that has become increasingly hostile to my standards of care for my patients; as a philosopher I will explore here the ethical issues I believe are the root of our predicament." -- from the introduction.

In *Confessions of a Medicine Man*, Alfred Tauber probes the ethical structure of contemporary medicine in an argument accessible to lay readers, healthcare professionals, and ethicists alike. Through personal anecdote, historical narrative, and philosophical discussion, Tauber composes a moral portrait of the doctor-patient relationship. In a time when discussion has focused on market forces, he seeks to show how our basic conceptions of health, the body, and most fundamentally our very notion of selfhood frame our experience of illness. Arguing against an ethics based on a presumed autonomy, Tauber presents a relational ethic that must orient medical science and a voracious industry back to their primary moral responsibility: the empathetic response to the call of the ill.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In this collection of essays on the state of the modern health care system, Tauber, a physician and a professor of philosophy and medicine at Boston University, presents an engaging study of ethics and the medical system. Modeling his book on the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, Tauber presents

his own confessions in a similar way: narrative personal history plus ethical and philosophical discourse. Tauber clarifies both metaphysics and the intricacies of medicine for the lay reader, and he does so with vivid, terse imagery. His narratives are poignant and amazingly real. His philosophy is well grounded in excellent scholarship, his discussions of the philosophy and history of science prove fascinating, and his conclusions are indisputable. The state of our health care system, a need for universal health care, the fractured and imperfect mechanics of health maintenance organizations, patient rights laws, economics, spirituality, interpersonal relations, and many other medical ethics issues are discussed here with alacrity. A fascinating and approachable study on a subject that touches everyone's lives. Michael Spinella --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

An intelligent and thorough philosophical analysis of the medical care morass, this does no less than clear away superficial and superfluous arguments, leaving a few essential issues and a direction for reform. Tauber, a philosopher as well as professor of medicine (Boston Univ.) briefly catalogues the well-known ills of our health care system, and provides a cohesive overview of how we arrived at this point, interwoven with experiences from his own medical practice and family life. Three basic questions emerge: how do we regard ourselves when ill, what do we expect from the physician, and as a result, how and what professional ideal do we wish to instill in health care providers to make medical practice more humane and compassionate? In a society that so prizes individual autonomy, Tauber makes it clear that we have to accept that being ill means immediately losing such self-sufficiency and self-direction, given today's setting of highly technical and obscure clinical science." If we acknowledge that the doctor-patient relationship is a fundamentally unequal one (and one with no parallel in the business world), then we can turn our attention to how best to prepare practitioners who adhere to a moral obligation to restore health (and thus autonomy). Not only should we not look to the business world for help in structuring medical care, but Tauber also takes issue with using science as the single basis for clinical care. Distinguish between scientific and caring missions, he suggests, since laboratory-based medicine addresses only what Tauber calls the "materialistic" aspects of disease (those which can be physically or chemically measured). Tauber succeeds in his effort to step back, begin again at the philosophical beginning, and cast a new light on the tangle of medical care. Involved professionals and the general readership alike will benefit. -- Copyright ©1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Many decry the dehumanization of medicine, which doubtlessly has many causes but prominently includes the escalating encroachment of science and technology at the expense of the doctor-patient relationship. No one doubts the profound benefit of science and technology to medical practice, but Tauber aims to turn the tide in advocating that the ethic of the doctor-patient relationship should remain the core of medicine. He puts science in its proper place: science plus an instrumental role in the ethic of a healing relationship. The brilliance of this book goes beyond its sound philosophy; through a series of poignant clinical vignettes, the reader comes to know the author as a physician and a person. Here we have a model of humanism in medicine that all of us patients might wish could be brought back into the fore. Here is a writer who practices what he preaches.

Here is a short, resonant book on a topic that concerns us all: medical ethics. Alfred I. Tauber is a biochemist and an M.D. (medical doctor). He is also a professor of medicine and a professor of philosophy at Boston University. Tauber provides us with hard-to-get knowledge: (1) a thoughtful historical overview of the development of twentieth century medicine (1880 to the end of the 1990s), with particular focus on the doctor-patient relationship; and (2) a philosophically sophisticated analytical scheme that enables the reader to assess current developments (crudely: How is my HMO or managed care plan doing?). Although Tauber subtitles his book "An Essay in Popular Philosophy," the word "popular" is somewhat misleading. The reader entirely innocent of twentieth-century Anglo-American analytic philosophy as well as of its differences from Continental (European) philosophy, may initially have a bit of hard time following the argument. Nevertheless, *CONFESSIONS OF A MEDICINE MAN* is the right book at the right time. Deeply philosophical and factually up-to-the-minute, it provides the compass we need to understand the real causes of the "crisis in medical care" that most average Americans face. For example, Tauber gives an extended--and brilliant--critique of one of those causes: the total acceptance of the idea of the "autonomous self" within the context of the doctor-patient relationship. For the interested reader, Tauber provides a valuable (& wonderfully readable) section called "Bibliographic Notes." Here the reader can trace out the origins of Tauber's thinking on the key topics covered in the book: changes in American medicine over the past 120 years; the various concepts of "self" that doctors and HMOs adopt and how these various concepts directly affect the patient's relationship with her doctor; the whole notion of "medical ethics" itself and what its various interpretations may mean to the patient and her family (one of Tauber's fresh observations: "medical ethics" is fast becoming a specialty, just like surgery or gastroenterology--and that is just the direction we do NOT want to go). A serious,

needed book, one that challenges American medicine's dangerous and unacknowledged assumptions about exactly who the doctor is and who the patient is. Bravo!

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