Making Medical Progress

Answers to the question "what is medical progress?" have always been contested, and any one response is always bound up with contextual ideas of personhood, society, and health. However, the widely held enthusiasm for medical progress escapes more general critiques of progress as a conceptual category. From the intersection of intellectual history, philosophy, and the medical humanities, Vanessa Rampton sheds light on the politics of medical progress and how they have downplayed the tensions between individual and social goods. She examines how a shared consensus about its value gives medical progress vast political and economic capital, revealing who benefits, who is left out, and who is harmed by narratives of progress. From ancient Greece to artificial intelligence, exploring the origins and ethics of different visions of progress offers valuable insights into how we can make them more meaningful in future. This title is also available as open access on Cambridge Core.

VANESSA RAMPTON is an intellectual historian and senior researcher at Assisted Lab in the University of St. Gallen's Medical Humanities Chair.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 14:28:13, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009602662

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 14:28:13, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009602662

Making Medical Progress

History of a Contested Idea

VANESSA RAMPTON
University of St. Gallen

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 14:28:13, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009602662

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,
a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009602655

DOI: 10.1017/9781009602662

© Vanessa Rampton 2026

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, with the exception of the Creative Commons version the link for which is provided below, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

An online version of this work is published at doi.org/10.1017/9781009602662 under a Creative Commons Open Access license CC-BYNC 4.0 which permits re-use, distribution and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial purposes providing appropriate credit to the original work is given and any changes made are indicated. To view a copy of this license visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0

When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI 10.1017/9781009602662

First published 2026

Cover credit: Philadelphia Museum of Art: The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, 1950 (1950-134-104)

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Rampton, Vanessa, 1980– author
Title: Making medical progress : history of a contested idea / Vanessa Rampton.
Description: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2026. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2025007707 | ISBN 9781009602631 paperback | ISBN 9781009602655 hardback | ISBN 9781009602662 ebook
Subjects: MESH: Biomedical Research – history | Philosophy, Medical – history | Bioethics – history | Personal Autonomy | Health Equity – history | History 20th Century | History, 21st Century
Classification: LCC R852 .R27 2026 | NLM W 20.5 | DDC 610.72/4–dc23/eng/20250703
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2025007707

ISBN 978-1-009-60265-5 Hardback
ISBN 978-1-009-60263-1 Paperback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

For EU product safety concerns, contact us at Calle de José Abascal, 56, 1°, 28003 Madrid, Spain, or email eugpsr@cambridge.org

The open access publication of this book has been published with the support of the Swiss National Science Foundation.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 11 Nov 2026 at 14:28:13, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009602662