**CC0003 / Ethics and Civics in a Multicultural World**

**Sem 1 AY21-22**

**Case Study for Week 02: The Development of the Birth Control Pill**

**Summary of Case Details:**

In 1960, the birth control pill was legalised in the US and this had an enormous socioeconomic impact: it brought about the sexual revolution and gave many women in the US significantly greater autonomy in their education and careers. Sexual activity could now be divorced from reproduction and parenthood was now a matter of choice rather than fate. However, prior to its approval, the drug trials were conducted in Puerto Rican clinics owned by a eugenicist.\* The researchers carried out tests on poor, vulnerable Puerto Rican women who were not made aware of the health risks involved. These women experienced side effects such as nausea, dizziness, headaches, and blood clots and a number of them even died (1.5%, around the mortality rate of COVID-19).

\*Clarence Gamble, heir of the Procter and Gamble empire, “believed that Puerto Ricans and others living in poverty should be wiped out to make room for more ‘fit’ members of the population, and birth control was part of that vision” (Blakemore 2018).

**References**

* Blakemore, Erin. 2018. “The First Birth Control Pill Used Puerto Rican Women as Guinea Pigs” *History*, last modified March 11, 2019, <https://www.history.com/news/birth-control-pill-history-puerto-rico-enovid>.
* Lopez, Iris. 2008. *Matters of Choice: Puerto Rican Women’s Struggle for Reproductive Freedom*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. Is it morally good or not morally good that the women in the US gained greater autonomy over their own lives at the expense of the Puerto Rican women? Or is there no morality to this?
2. If one judges that it was morally good, can this judgment be objectively true? Or is it merely the opinion of those who benefited from it?
3. If one judges that it was not morally good, can this judgment be objectively true? Or is it merely the opinion of those who did not benefit from the birth control pill?