

"Smart Mice, Not-So-Smart People: An Interesting and Amusing Guide to Bioethics"

Arthur L. Caplan, 2007, 209 pages, Rowman & Littlefield, \$19.95

Review by Norman M. Goldfarb

"Smart Mice, Not-So-Smart People: An Interesting and Amusing Guide to Bioethics" demonstrates why we need bioethicists: There are a lot of very difficult bioethics questions to resolve. Dr. Kaplan, as one of the most prestigious bioethicists in the world, devotes most of his time to academic research and analysis, but this book is a light-hearted romp through the field, sure to stir everyone's pot. The book is not recommended for people with strong beliefs, powerful emotions, and weak hearts.

The book tackles 76 controversial issues in 11 areas:

- General Interest
- End of Life
- Engineering Ourselves
- Engineering Plants, Microbes and Animals
- Experimentation Ethics
- Health Reform
- Human Cloning and Stem Cell Research
- Mapping Ourselves
- Reproduction
- The State of Science in the United States
- Donation and Transplantation of Organs

The section that relates to clinical research is relatively brief but reaches plenty of provocative conclusions, including the following:

- All data from human research should be filed in a national database with open public access.
- Human subjects protection failures at leading research institutions, such as Johns Hopkins, the Hutchinson Cancer Center, and the University of Pennsylvania, make it obvious that our current systems are not working and a thorough reexamination is required.
- A no-fault compensation fund for injured clinical research subjects is a better solution than the lawsuit lottery.
- Research on chemical and biological weapons will eventually involve human subjects (again), so we better start sorting out the ethical guidelines now.
- Research on the recently "dead" makes sense, but they have rights, too.
- Informed consent, even when it exists, is not a panacea.

Anybody can reach these conclusions, but not everyone can provide a sound bioethical rationale in a couple of pages. If the clinical research enterprise does not put its ethical house in order, others will do it for us, probably with displeasing consequences.

The book is available in bookstores.

Reviewer

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