

"The Ethics of Pediatric Research"

David S. Wendler

2010, 337 pages, Oxford University Press, \$56.00

Review by Norman M. Goldfarb

"The Ethics of Pediatric Research" thoroughly explores the issues related to the participation of children in clinical research. Pediatric participation is problematic because of the priority society places on their protection, their vulnerability, and the ambiguous role of parental agency. For example, what role can altruism play when a child has a childlike understanding of the concept? To what extent can parents enroll their children in a clinical study against the children's wishes but "for their own good"? At what point do children have the maturity to make such decisions for themselves? Does it matter whether the child agrees with the decision when he or she becomes an adult, years later? These are complex questions that require thoughtful and subtle consideration. However, as the book demonstrates, there are few easy answers.

The book is closely reasoned, as can be seen from the following excerpt:

The present argument that participation in nonbeneficial pediatric research can be in children's interests to the extent that it involves their contributing to a valuable project or end and they later may come to embrace these contributions seems to capture all three conditions. First, the fact that making passive contributions can be in an individual's interests implies that parents can decide to enroll their child in a valuable nonbeneficial research study that poses some risks. The justification for exposing children to some risks for the benefit of others is that it can be in children's broader interests to contribute to valuable projects. This is the risk allowance condition. The claim here is not simply that enrolling children in such research is within the scope of parental authority. That claim might explain why parents can make this decision, but it would not account for why such decisions are consistent with parental responsibility to nurture their children. It also would not provide a justification for the involvement of third parties or for the support and endorsement of society in general. In contrast, the claim that such contributions can be in the children's overall interests implies that making these decisions can be consistent with parents' goal of helping their children to have a good and a valuable life.

The book includes 10 chapters:

- Introduction
- Background
- Evaluating the Worry
- Proposed Justifications
- Human Interests and Human Causes
- Our Connections to Our Contributions
- The Value of Passive Contributions
- Implications
- Objections and the Potential for Abuse
- Conclusion

The book is available in bookstores.

Reviewer

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