“The Ethical Challenges of Human Research: Selected Essays”
Franklin G. Miller, editor and author, 2012, 322 pages, Oxford University Press, $55.00
Review by Norman M. Goldfarb

“The Ethical Challenges of Human Research: Selected Essays” is a collection of closely reasoned essays on critical issues in human research, principally clinical trials. The following passage illustrates the information-dense but clearly presented and persuasive contents, in this case about a topic that is seldom addressed:

There are no agreed-upon criteria to determine what degree of research-related discomfort is acceptable in [infection-inducing challenging] research without the prospect of benefit for individual subjects. Some would argue that there should be no limit on how much discomfort is allowed in such research, because competent adults who are presented with adequate information about an infection-inducing challenge study have the right to decide how much discomfort or inconvenience they are willing to accept. Others, including the authors, contend that some studies might be likely to produce such a magnitude of discomfort that it would be unethical to recruit volunteers. In any case, the discomforts anticipated in a challenge study should be addressed by investigators and IRBs and minimized, by means of careful monitoring and control of symptoms, in a manner consistent with the scientific purpose of the research. Reports of infection-inducing challenge studies typically describe the physical symptoms that are experienced by the volunteers but not the accompanying subjective distress. Empirical research on the assessment of discomfort experienced by volunteers in infection-inducing challenge experiments would illuminate the level of tolerable discomfort from the perspective of the volunteers and thus contribute to ethical appraisal of this experimental paradigm.

The book includes 22 essays:
- Situating research ethics: Revisiting Beecher and Jonas
- Facing up to paternalism in research ethics
- Limits to research risks
- Psychiatric symptom-provoking studies: An ethical appraisal
- The ethical challenge of infection-inducing challenge experiments
- Placebo-controlled trials in psychiatric research: An ethical perspective
- What makes placebo-controlled trials unethical?
- Ethical issues concerning research in complementary and alternative medicine
- Sham surgery: An ethical analysis
- Benefit in phase I oncology trials: Therapeutic misconception or reasonable treatment option?
- Deception in research on the placebo effect
- Debriefing and accountability in deceptive research

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The book is available in bookstores.

Reviewer
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