The book is intended as a text for instruction in biomedical research ethics. Cases are its heart and can be used as resource in a variety of settings. Taken as a collection, the cases introduce some key episodes and debates in biomedical research ethics. They are as short as they can reasonably be to convey their core elements. Some cases simplify events and debates, but in each I have tried to convey an accurate sense of historical events, even if they offer only a window on the past rather than a complete vista. Each case has a brief introduction that offers context for the case and the issues it raises. For the most part, the cases are drawn from historical records and from articles in the scientific and bioethics literature. A note identifies source materials for cases quoted or adapted from published works. Identified sources can be used for further research in the area. Other cases are purely hypothetical, drawn up to illustrate particular kinds of problems; they are always identified as fictional.

Most cases are drawn from the biomedical sciences, although I could not help including a few salient ones from the social sciences. By the overwhelming focus on biomedical research, I do not mean to slight the social sciences that make essential contributions to knowledge. It strikes me, however, that full consideration of cases from the social sciences probably requires a book in its own right, and I have not attempted to fold two projects into one.

As an instructor with many years in front of a classroom, I have rarely found questions from teacher’s manuals very useful. They can be stilted and limiting, the pedagogical equivalent of a lesson plan left for use by a substitute teacher hastily called in at the last minute. I have found that armed with sufficient information and left to their own devices, discussants are quick to raise many questions that open a topic for meaningful analysis. I have supplied study questions at the end of each case but hope that these are used as triggers for discussion, not as ends in themselves. At the end of the Introduction I have identified some core questions that may be profitably applied to research in general.

This book will not be all things to all people, but it can educate and spur discussion about key events and debates in research ethics, a history with its own full share of dubious and ill-conceived ventures. It is not enough to look at this history as a voyeur; it is important to engage this history with an eye to identifying principles
and practices that can help guide biomedical research toward respectful and humane
treatment of subjects and toward consistency in matters of social justice.

As an editorial note, let me say that in presenting the case materials in this format,
some minor changes have been made while adapting original materials. For example,
when quoting materials directly, I have broken some long paragraphs into smaller
ones. Other editorial modifications are similarly minor.