

INTRODUCTION TO BIOETHICS

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GAME PLAN

2:30–3:15

Introduction to ethics and bioethics

3:15–3:50

Small groups: case discussions

3:50–4:00

Break

4:00–4:30

Case analysis and problem-solving

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this session participants will be able to:

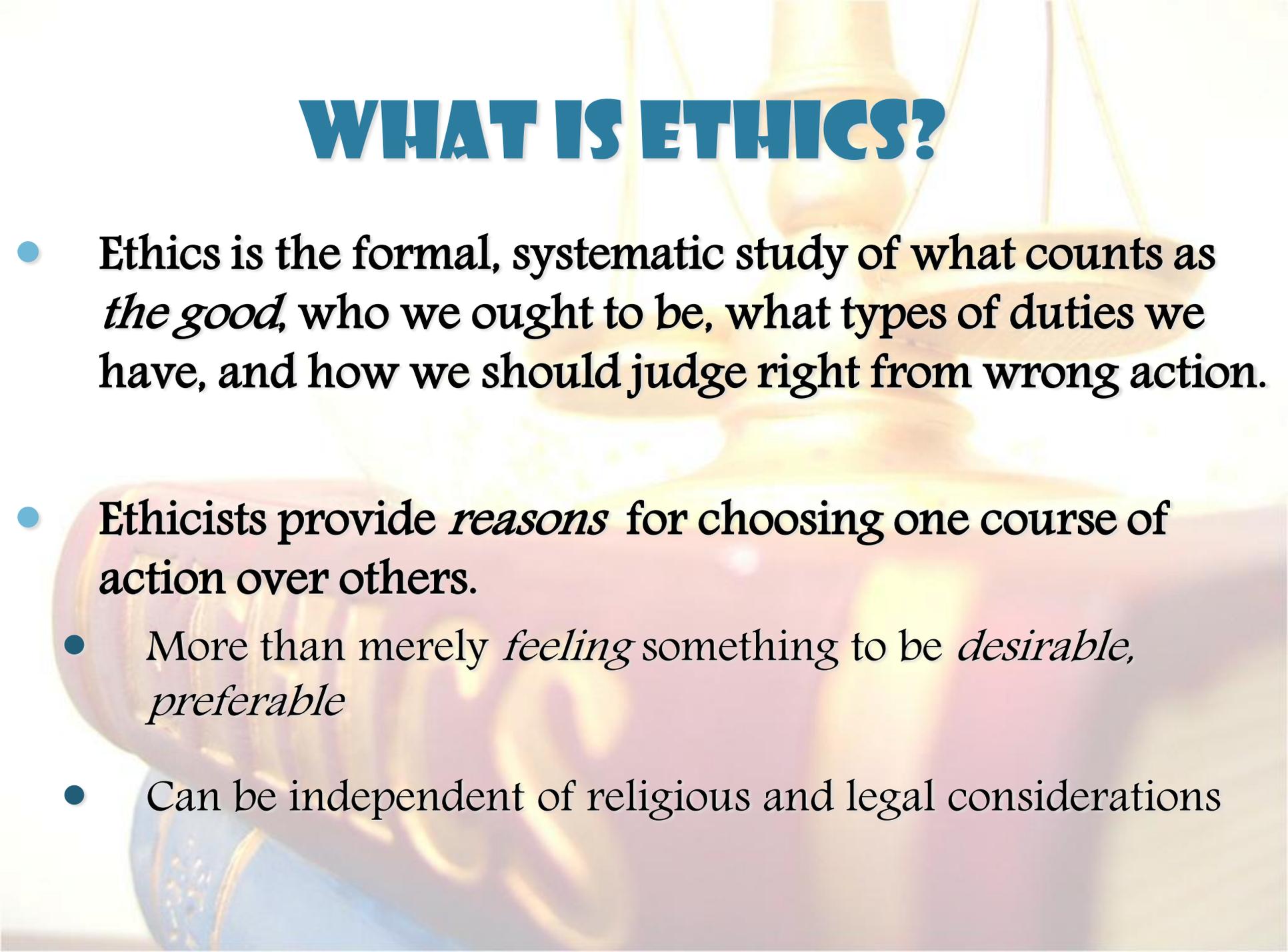
- Understand the aims of ethical inquiry
- Describe the birth of U.S. bioethics and U.S. principles of bioethics
- Grasp at least one moral problem that pervades medical practice
- Describe and critique what informs your moral judgments

WHAT IS ETHICS?

Moral

Responsiveness Motivation Valuing
Character
Accountability Reasoning Discernment
Sensibility

WHAT IS ETHICS?



- Ethics is the formal, systematic study of what counts as *the good*, who we ought to be, what types of duties we have, and how we should judge right from wrong action.
- Ethicists provide *reasons* for choosing one course of action over others.
 - More than merely *feeling* something to be *desirable*, *preferable*
 - Can be independent of religious and legal considerations

DESCRIPTIVE VS. NORMATIVE

- **Descriptive** claims concern *what is, was, or could be*
 - Scientific inquiry, for example, seeks to accurately describe and predict phenomena that exist in the world or universe.
 - Example: *How do we genetically modify animals?*
- **Normative** claims concern *what should be*
 - Facts matter to ethics, but the aim of ethical analysis is to figure out what should be the case (even if it does not actually turn out that way).
 - Example: *Should we genetically modify animals? What are the moral costs and moral benefits of the available options?*



MORAL RESPONSIBILITY



- Comes in degrees
- Can range over individual and collective actions, motivations, intentions, attitudes, emotions, dispositions
- Can be responsible for action, omission, complicity, ignorance, unintentionally doing something, being part of an unjust system
- Can be responsible even when you “luck out”
- Can be mitigated by a number of factors
- Can be backward-looking (assign praise/blame) or forward-looking (make improvements for future)

HOW DO I PROMOTE ETHICAL RESPONSES TO MORAL PROBLEMS?

- Pay attention to *how you reason* as you think about how you *should* and *would* respond.
- What counts as the *right* response?
 - Promotes human dignity and the common good
 - Maximize good and minimize harm
 - Just distribution of goods and harms
 - Respects rights
 - Responsive to vulnerabilities
 - Promotes virtue
 - Other possibilities...



MORAL DILEMMA

Moral Prohibition
A

Moral Prohibition
B

OR

Moral Requirement A

Moral Requirement B



MORAL DILEMMA

- Conflict between moral requirements or prohibitions
 - **Tragic** when there is no way to resolve the dilemma
- **Moral residue** is a byproduct of an unresolved moral dilemma
 - *Did* something you *must not* do or *did not* do what you *must*
 - → Problem of dirty hands

If you had the opportunity to be in a position of power where you would routinely face moral dilemmas (many of them tragic), would you accept the job, knowing that your hands would be dirtied as a result?



Before we move on...

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?

WHAT IS BIOETHICS?

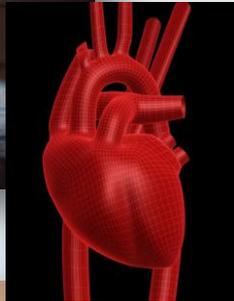
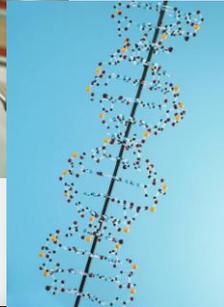


BIOETHICS: ACADEMIC FIELD & PRACTICE

- What moral obligations do we have, individually and collectively, in our pursuit of advancement in medicine and biological science?
 - How should biomedical science and patient care proceed?
 - How should we address and prevent potential wrongdoing?
- Includes **research ethics, clinical ethics, and public health ethics**
 - Broadly, also includes **environmental ethics and animal ethics**

TOPICS IN BIOETHICS

- Some areas of ethical analysis:
 - Reproduction and beginning of life
 - Informed consent in research
 - Public health surveillance
 - Pharmaceutical advertising
 - Enhancement, cosmetic & genetic
 - Organ donation & transplantation
 - End of life decisions
 - Pediatric vaccinations
 - Placebo use
 - Conscientious objection



BIRTH OF U.S. BIOETHICS

DAN CALLAHAN

Cultural Developments

- Civil rights movement
- Rebirth of feminism
- Fresh surge of individualism
- New possibilities to combat disease, illness and death
- New possibilities for changing the way human beings could live their lives

Scientific Developments

- Kidney dialysis
- Organ transplantation
- Medically safe abortions & contraception
- Prenatal diagnosis
- Intensive care units
- Shift from death at home to death in hospitals
- First glimmerings of genetic engineering

CONTROVERSY & SCANDAL

- **Nazi Experiments**

- Painful, often deadly experiments on prisoners without consent -- often no scientific merit to studies



- **Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment (1932-1972)**

- Poor, black sharecroppers with syphilis were not properly informed; research had racist assumptions
- Denied proper treatment, even after penicillin became readily available in 1947



- **Willowbrook Hepatitis Studies (1956-1971)**

- Mentally disabled children in putrid conditions infected with live Hepatitis A – some treated with experimental drug, others were not
- Parents given misleading and coercive consent form



PRINCIPLES OF BIOETHICS

- **Autonomy**

- 1) Respecting, promoting, and supporting a person's capacities for self-determination and 2) providing extra protections to those with diminished autonomy

- **Beneficence**

- Strict obligation to maximize potential benefits, to do good by the patient/research subject

- **Nonmaleficence**

- 1) Strict obligation to minimize potential harms (medical and other) and 2) duty not to exploit vulnerable populations

- **Justice**

- 1) Equals ought to be treated equally, and 2) benefits and opportunities should be distributed fairly

FOUR KEY QUESTIONS

NIH: *EXPLORING BIOETHICS*

1. What is the ethical question?

- Requires *moral imagination* and *moral sensitivity*
- Distinguish *ethical, legal, scientific, and personal* questions

2. What are the relevant facts?

- Scientific, social, and legal facts are needed to determine costs, benefits, risks

FOUR KEY QUESTIONS

NIH: *EXPLORING BIOETHICS*

3. Who or what could be affected by the way the question gets resolved?

- *Who has a stake* in the outcome? – Consider his/her *own perspective*
- Could be an individual, a group, an institution, community at large

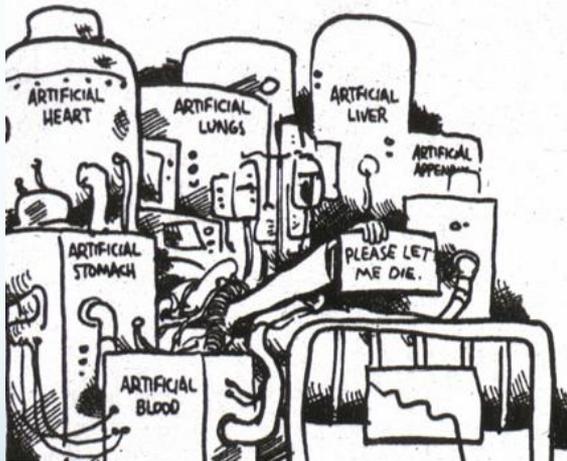
4. What are the relevant ethical considerations?

- What are the core issues? What are some other issues that should affect our evaluation?

Before we move on...

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?

DISCUSSION GROUPS



End of Life



Governmental
Paternalism



Reproduction

CASE ANALYSIS & PROBLEM-SOLVING

THE CASE OF DAX COWART



UVA
NewsMakers

Dax Cowart, J.D.
Patients' Rights Advocate

CONFLICTING POINTS OF VIEW

- **Dax's stated reasons for wanting to die.**
 - Primary reason: Extreme, constant pain with minimal pain management
 - Secondary reason: Could not imagine sufficiently worthwhile quality of life
- **Dr. Burt's stated reasons for continuing treatment.**
 - Concern about autonomy running amuck
 - Doctor's business not to give up on a patient

DISCUSSION

- Do you think that Burt should have agreed to Dax's request the first time? The second? After a month?
- When is the decision to refuse treatment because of a disability sufficiently autonomous, informed, and voluntary?
 - Are Dax's concerns about pain more morally pressing than his concerns about lifelong disability?
- How should a medical team advocate for Dax in this scenario? What would *you* have done as his doctor?

RESEARCH ON CHIMPS



SPECTRUM OF POSITIONS: SHOULD WE RESEARCH ON CHIMPS?

Lenient:

Human interests
nearly always
outweigh animal
interests

Demanding:

Human interests *almost*
never carry significant
weight



Middle Ground:

- a) There are moral limits on animal use;
AND
- b) Humans can use them when doing so
advances *significant* human interests.

DISCUSSION

- How should we determine the moral limits of using non-humans in research? What are some key relevant factors?
- Do you think that we owe anything (morally speaking) to animals used in research?
- What do you think about the NIH's decision to restrict chimp research? Would you go further and restrict other types of animal research?



THANK YOU!

Materials from this guest lecture can be found here:

<http://gumedinstitute-bioethics.weebly.com>