

INTRODUCTION TO BIOETHICS

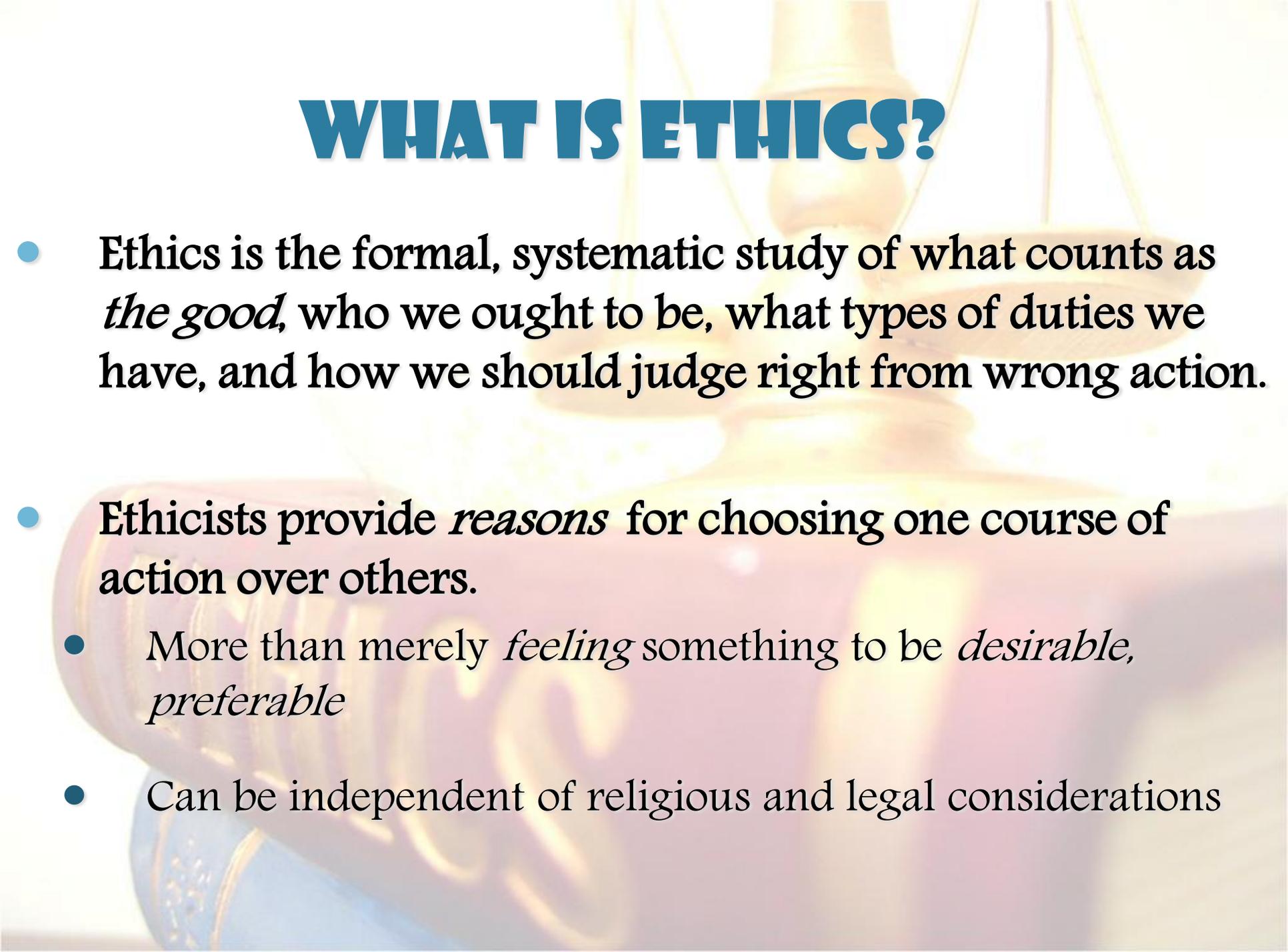
Ethics: Bioethics (Spring 2015)
Laura Guidry Grimes

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
 - For 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?



WHAT IS BIOETHICS?

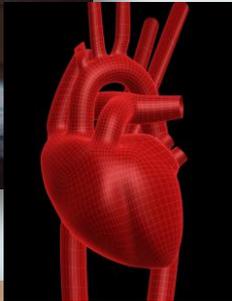
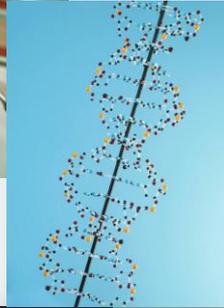


BIOETHICS: ACADEMIC FIELD & PRACTICE

- 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

BROAD AIMS OF BIOETHICS

DAN CALLAHAN

- Challenge fact/value distinction in medicine
 - Best decision medically/scientifically might not be best decision morally
- Develop methodologies for analyzing and resolving new moral problems
- Numerous ways to proceed
 - **Top-down:** From theory, principles → cases
 - **Bottom-up:** From cases → flexible, changeable set of principles
 - Or go back and forth between considered judgments and rules we think bear on cases, revising both ways (**reflective equilibrium**)

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?

CASE ANALYSIS & BRAINSTORMING

CONSIDER

- **Morally relevant issues**
 - Separate from purely religious/legal/personal issues
- **Ethical stakeholders**
 - Whose interests, short-term and long-term, are at stake in this issue?
 - Consider individuals and larger groups, society
- **Questions to ask**
 - What philosophical/ethical concepts need clarification?
 - Are there factors that you would want to research?
 - Whose perspective(s) would you want to know further?

JEHOVAH'S WITNESS MINOR REFUSING BLOOD TRANSFUSION





QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?