

# INTRODUCTION TO BIOETHICS

Ethics: Bioethics (Fall 2014)  
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 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

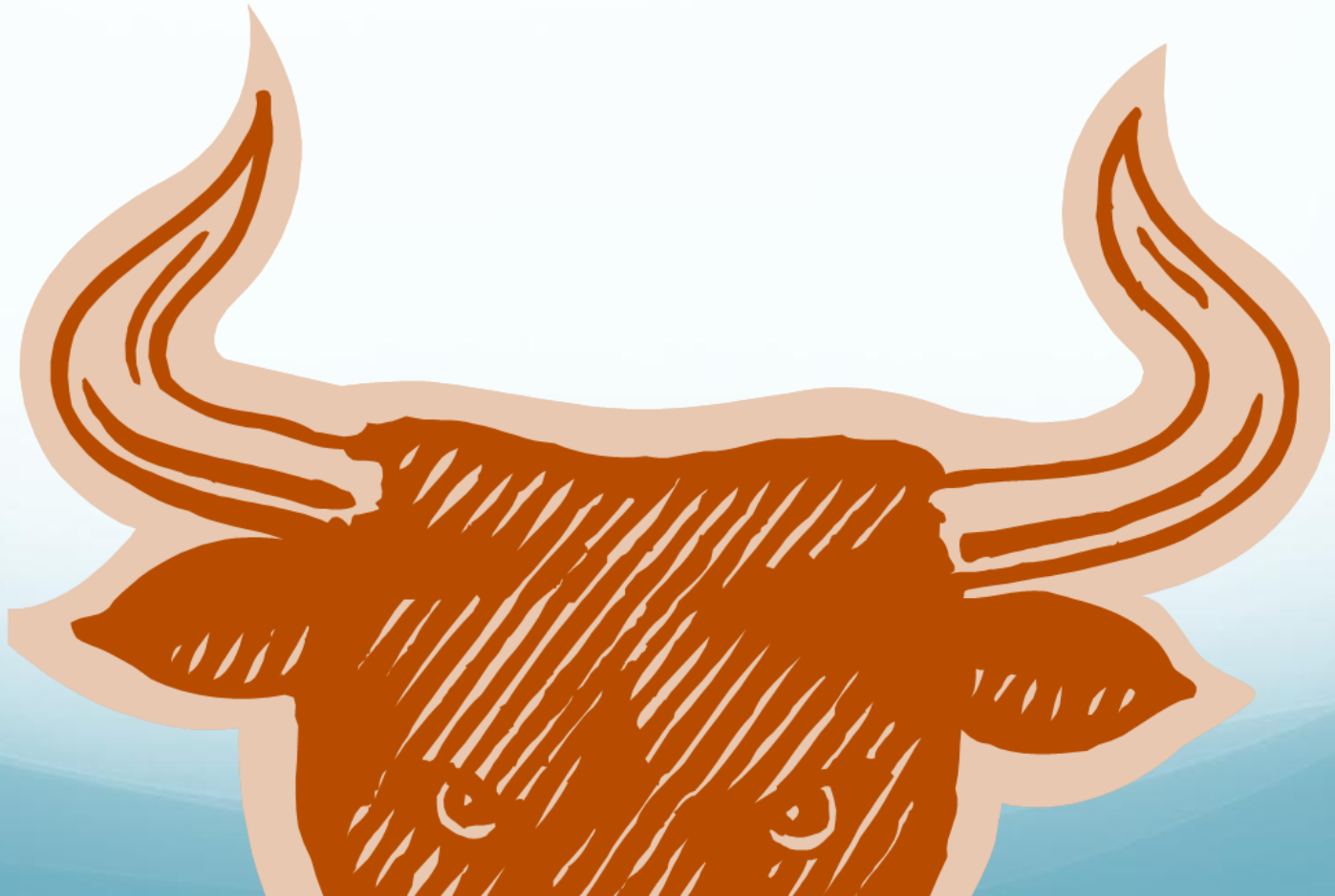
Moral Prohibition  
A

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?





# WHAT IS BIOETHICS?

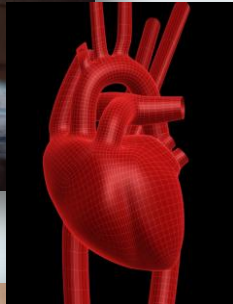
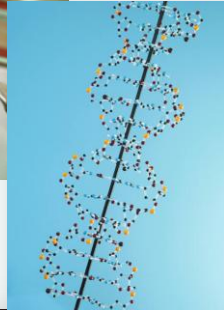


# BIOETHICS: ACADEMIC FIELD & PRACTICE

- 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?



**QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?**