

Introduction to Bioethics



The Basics

Ethics = Morality and Medical Ethics=Bioethics

- Some draw a distinction between ethics and morality, but no distinction is generally recognized.
- Philosophers use the terms interchangeably
- “Medical ethics” has come to be called *bioethics*:
Presidential commissions, professional associations

A Moral Dilemma: 3 Patients

- All 3 patients are terminally ill and suffering pain that cannot be relieved without excessive sedation
- All 3 patients are competent and able to understand their condition
- All 3 patients prefer death to life

Patient 1: Muhammad

Refuses ventilator needed to sustain life

Patient 2: Latisha

Requests withdrawal of ventilator needed to sustain life

Patient 3: Jennifer

Asks to be killed
(intervention to bring about death)

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Rachels: No Morally Relevant Difference

- Three actions: withhold treatment, withdraw treatment, kill
- There may be a psychological (and currently a *legal*) difference, but no moral difference.
- How to determine the act's morality: look at the *results* in each case.
- Key question: is continued life a benefit?

Opposing View

- What is immoral is any act done with an *intent* to bring about death
- Withholding and withdrawing treatment are not actions performed with an *intent* to bring about death (even though death expected).

Highlights 2 Opposing Approaches

- Consequentialism: an act is moral or immoral purely depending on its consequences (results)
- Nonconsequentialism: there are other morally relevant considerations besides an action's likely consequences.

Ethical Decision NOT Based on

- Custom
- Authority
 - Law
 - Religion
- Feelings

About This Course

- Internet access is essential
- I'll use group email list for important announcements.
- I'll send links for you to bookmark.
- Consult *schedule* often
- CourseTools allows discussion

CourseTools and Email

- Add your profile this week.
- You need your *kerberos* password. If you don't have it, get it from Linda McLauchlan in the Computing Wing (593-3274).
- You need to go in person.
- When you email me, use one of the links or remember to include "442" in subject.