

The image shows the cover of a spiral-bound notebook. The cover is a dark blue color with a fine, pebbled texture. At the top, there is a black spiral binding with silver-colored metal rings. The text is centered on the cover in a clean, white, sans-serif font.

# Foundation of Ethics

Basic Ethics for Public Health

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# Outline

- What is Ethics?
- Ethics and Decision Making
- Ethics and Religion
- Ethical Theory and Practice
- Ethical Theories

# What is Ethics?

- Branch of philosophy dealing with values of action.
- What is action?; what is value?
- Normative ethics and metaethics.
- Is/Ought distinction

□ Basic questions:

□ Is killing wrong? Why is it wrong?

□ What is the meaning of 'wrong'?

□ How do we know whether an action is right or wrong?

□ Are ethical values universal or relative?

# Various Dimensions

- Normative ethics
  - "Abortion is wrong"; "the 30-baht scheme is fair."
- Metaethics
  - 'Good' is indefinable (Moore).
  - To say 'this is good' is just to give approval.

## Ethical Theory

- What principle governs ethical values of actions?
- Are ethical values objective or subjective?
- Are they relative to a group of people? Or are they absolute?

# Ethics and Decision Making

- In social science or policy oriented disciplines, there is an interest in ethics in aiding decision making.
- Since it deals with values, ethics has a role to play in decision making.

□ Examples:

- A patient lies in comatose stage with no apparent improvement soon. His relatives want the doctor to switch off the respirator.
- Should the doctor follow the relatives' advice or should he follow the Hippocrates injunction of 'Do No Harm'?



□ Public health:

□ During the SARS epidemic, many patients are kept in one place, sometimes against their will - are their rights being violated?

- What if genetic information is encoded in smart ID cards so that those whose genetic makeup make them predisposed to certain diseases find themselves marginalized or at a disadvantage?

# Ethics and Religion

- Main difference is that religion is that some religions refer to 'commandments' as the basis of morality; ethics refers to the reasoning capacity or something that is based on empirical evidence.
- How about Buddhism?

# Ethical Theory and Practice

- Ethical theory is a result of philosophical endeavor aiming at understanding ethical problems. A theory answers the question "why is an action a good or a bad one?" - "what accounts for an action's having ethical value?"

- There are many dimensions in which theory is related to practice - but here is the problem. It is not necessary that one who understands an ethical theory is thereby a good person. The theory informs us why an action should or should not be done, but does not give us injunctions.
  
- The assumption is that understanding leads to behavior.

□ Nevertheless, we can use ethical judgments in assessing the ethical value of an action or a policy.

□ Example:

# Ethical Theories

- Kantian ethics
  - 'Deontology'
- Utilitarianism
  - 'Greatest good for the greatest number'
- Virtue ethics

□ *Communitarian ethics*