

## Foundation of Ethics

**Basic Ethics for Public Health** 

Soraj Hongladarom

Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts
Chulalongkorn University



#### **Outline**

- □ What is Ethics?
- O Ethics and Decision Making
- O 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



- D 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?

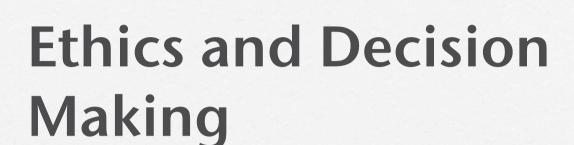


#### **Various Dimensions**

- □ 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?



- 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'?



- D 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
  - 1 'Deontology'
- U utilitarianism
  - Greatest good for the greatest number
- □ Virtue ethics

