

Medical Ethics: Introduction

Dr Melad Gad Paulis

Professor of Forensic Science and Toxicology

teams code

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Objects

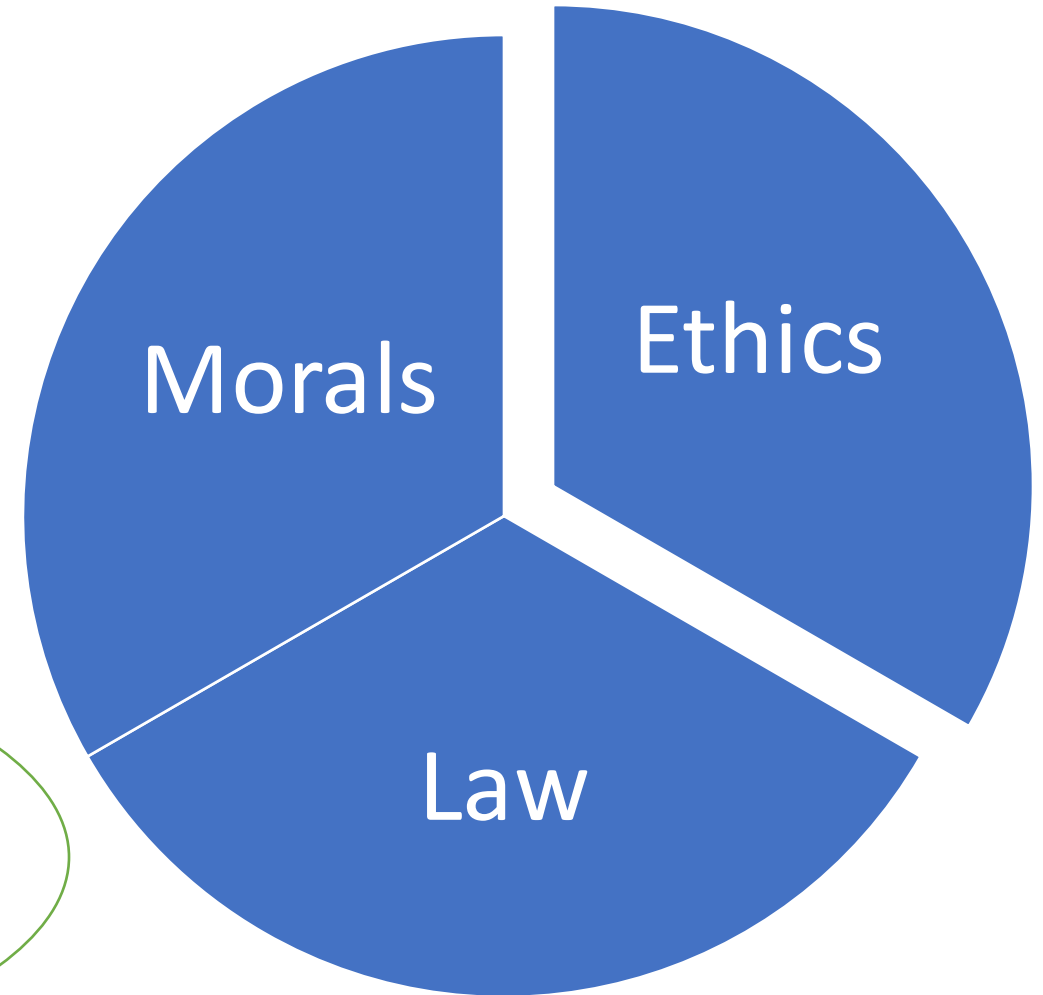
- To define the **Medical Ethics**.
- Is it **important**?
- To understand the **theories** of Ethics.
- To apply the **ethical principle**.



Primum non nocere

3 words

- Mean?
- Is there difference?



Ethics and Morals

- The word “Morals” and “Ethics” originally meant much same thing (habits, customs):
- **Ethics** came from “Greek” while **Morals** came from “Latin”.
- Both words refer to the **general area of right and wrongs** in the theory and practice of human behavior.
- **Morals** refer to **standards of behavior** held or followed by individuals and groups.
- **Ethics** refer to the **science** or study of morals and its activity in the academic context.

Ethical versus legal obligations

Parameters of Comparison	Legal	Ethical
Basis	Based on law	Based on principles
Effect of nonadherence	Not adhering is punishable.	Not adhering is not punishable.
Scope of choice	Lawfully mandatory	Voluntary
Form	Have written records	Totally abstract form.
Governed By	Government	Individual, Legal and Professional norms

Traditional arrangements of the field of ethics:

- **Meta-ethics** (nature of right or good, nature and justification of ethical issues)
- **Normative ethics** (standards, principles): is the study of what makes actions right or wrong.
- **Applied ethics** (actual application of ethical principles to a situation).

Difference Between Meta-Ethics, Normative Ethics & Applied Ethics

1. Meta-Ethics

What Does Morality Mean?



Focus:

- Meaning of 'Right' & 'Wrong'
- Moral Truths – Objective or Subjective?
- Nature of Moral Values.

Example Question:

- What does 'wrong' mean?
- Are moral truths real?

Analyzes Morality

2. Normative Ethics

What Should We Do?



Focus:

- Moral Principles & Rules
- What is Right or Wrong?
- Duties & Good Life

Example Question:

- Is lying always wrong?
- What should we do?

Prescribes Morality (Rules)

3. Applied Ethics

How to Apply in Real Life?



Focus:

- Real-Life Ethical Issues
- Case-by-Case Decisions
- Ethics in Professions.

Example Question:

- Is abortion ethical?
- Euthanasia – Yes or No?

Applies Morality to Cases

Applied ethics

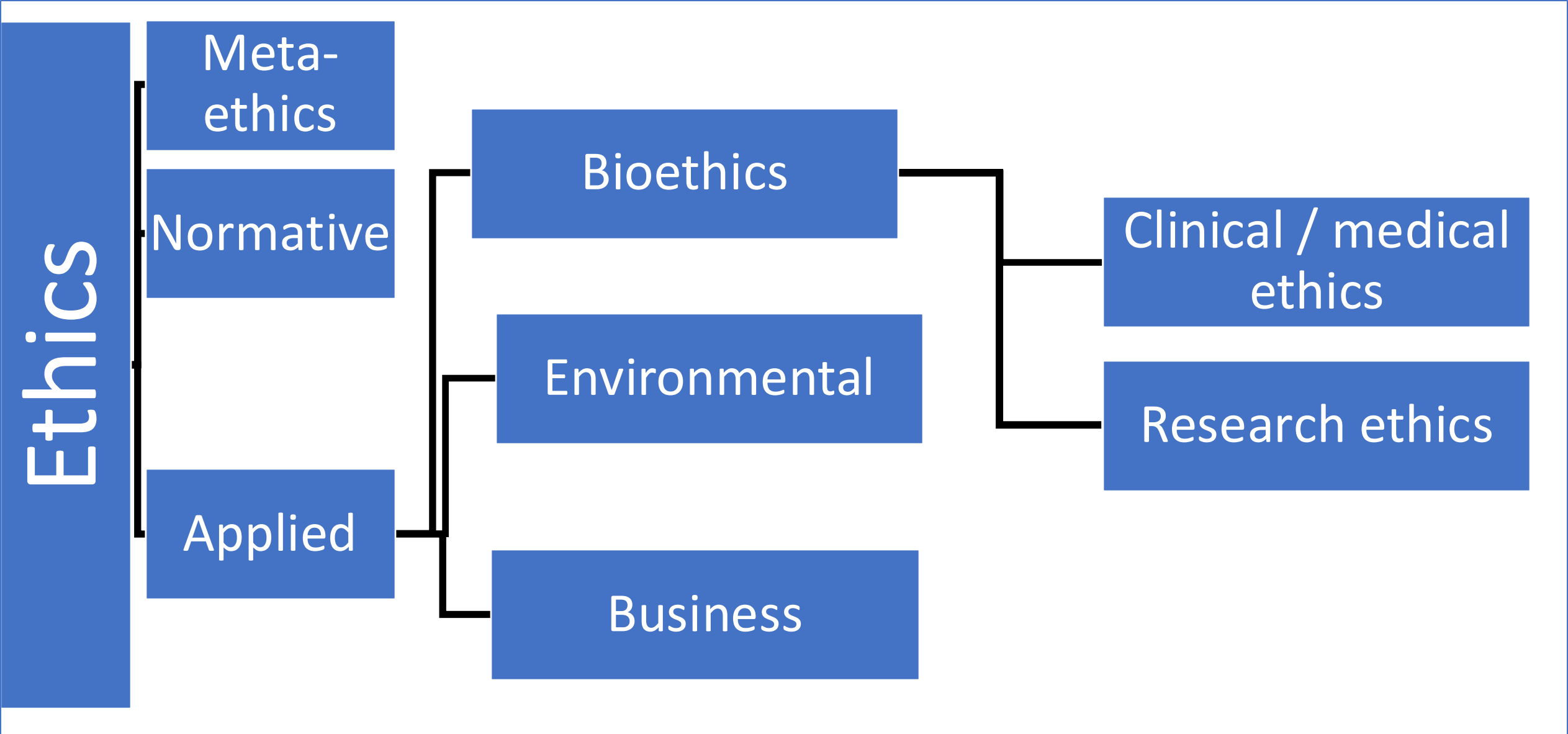


Normative ethics



Meta-ethics





Definitions:

- What is Bioethics?
- It is derived from Greek bio- life and ethics.
- The science/art that aims at studying of the ethical issues in almost any field that is related to **human life and health**.
- Medical ethics – is a system of moral principles that apply values and judgments to the **practice of medicine** . – It is the branch of bioethics that is related to study of moral problems that arise in **the healthcare of individual patients**.

IS STUDYING MEDICAL ETHICS REALLY IMPORTANT?

- “As long as the physician is an educated and skillful clinician, ethics doesn’t matter.”
- “Ethics is learned in the family, not in medical school.”
- “Medical ethics is learned by observing how senior physicians act, not from books or lectures.”
- “Ethics is important, but our curriculum is already too crowded and there is no room for ethics teaching.”

WHY ARE MEDICAL ETHICS SO IMPORTANT

- Medical ethics guide physician through decision-making and through interaction and conduct with patients.
- Ethics provide us with moral compass the guide us through medical situations that are not straightforward.
- Violations of medical ethics can threaten your job, medical license, or even constitute a crime.

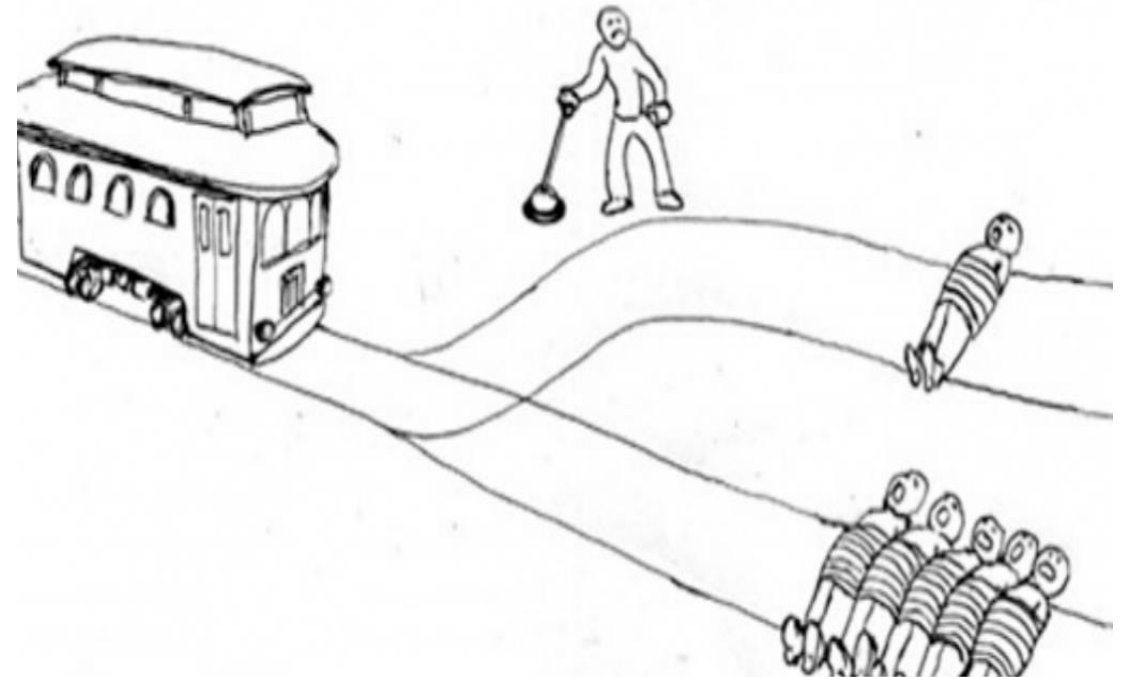
WHY ARE MEDICAL ETHICS SO IMPORTANT

- <https://neal.fun/absurd-trolley-problems/>

Trolley problem

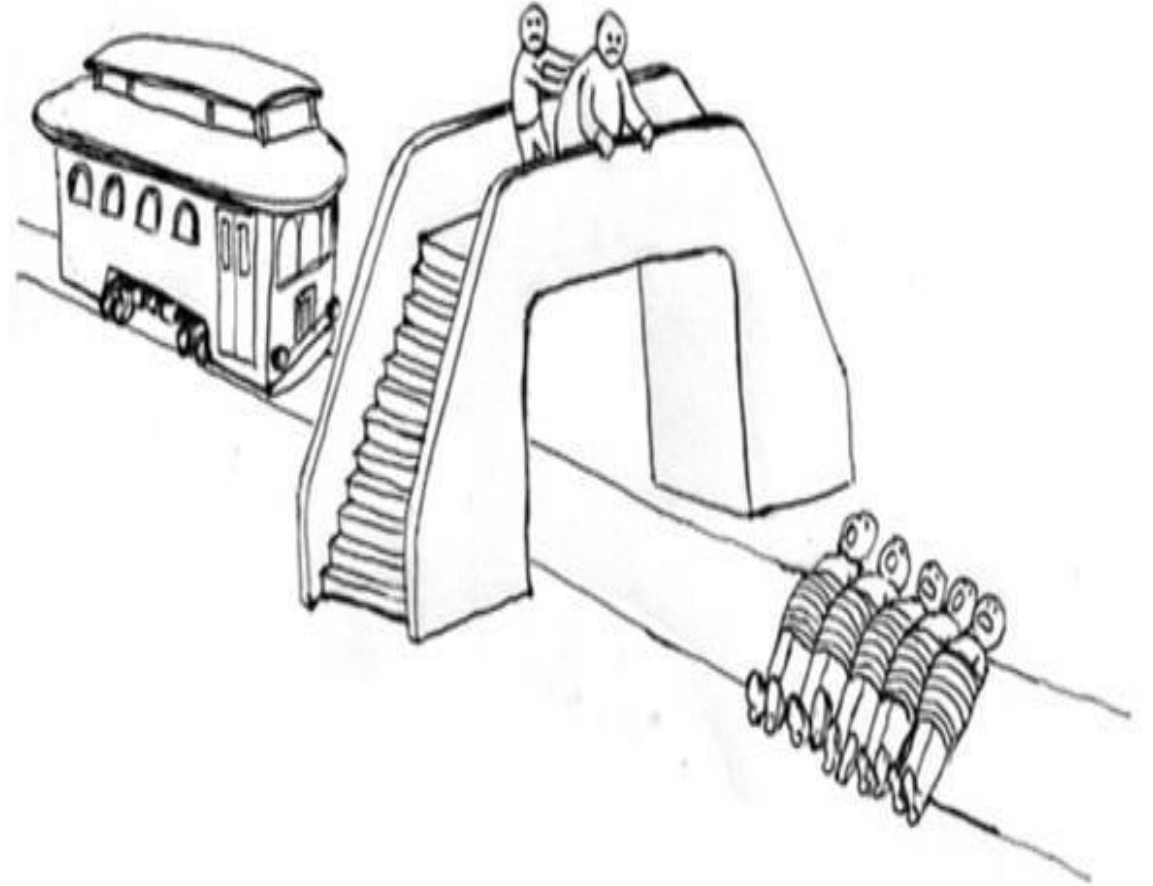
What would you do?

- Suppose that a trolley is running down a hill at a fast speed, heading towards five people at the bottom of the street.
- When it reaches them it will surely kill all of them.
- You notice that there is a switch next to you that could direct the trolley to a side path where there is one man standing and once you do, it will be the one man that dies.
- Would you do it?



Trolley problem

- A trolley is again running down a hill at fast speed, aimed at five people at the bottom which it will surely kill.
- However this time you are standing on a bridge with a fat man next to you. If you push the fat man off the bridge the trolley will stop but kill that fat man.
- Would you do it?



- ethical values lie at the heart of medicine.
- Imagine this situation:
 - In a cold rainy calm night, during your work shift, an ambulance came with 3 victims of road traffic accident. 2 cases have severe internal hemorrhage and must be operated immediately. However, there is only one available surgeon and limited blood for transfusion. You have to choose one patient to operate first. On what bases should you decide?

Ethical case scenario 2

- A resident in her obstetrics and gynecology rotation was faced with a case of a 28-year-old pregnant woman of 13 weeks gestational age, who is already a mother of three healthy children. The woman was diagnosed with ovarian cancer stage 2. The oncologists made a recommendation to the obstetric team to terminate the pregnancy to initiate chemotherapy. The woman refused chemotherapy and insisted on continuation of pregnancy.
- What is the best decision?

- **Case scenario 3**

A 23-year-old medical student was in his last year of medical school. He was asked to perform a procedure he hadn't done before. His mentor was called away from the operating room about an urgent matter and the young student made a mistake, which led to a complication that caused the woman patient to lose her life.

- **Case scenario 4**

A 30-year-old female patient went through an aggressive chemotherapy session and hysterectomy after she was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer. Later, her oncologist told her she had been mistakenly diagnosed.

What will we study?

- Your ethical and legal considerations toward your patients, colleagues, and profession.
- Patients' rights.
- Ethical consideration in research.
- Euthanasia.
- Abortion.
- Organ transplantations.
- Professional secrecy.

Ethical theories



- 3 QUESTIONS MAY HELP TO ANSWER “IS THIS ETHICAL”
- **Consequences** of the action (utilitarian theory).
- Is the **ACT** itself ethical “deontology theory”.
- Is the acting **agent** (physician) a virtuous one.

Utilitarian theory

- Also called Teleological, Greek word, Telos, meaning end or consequence.
- Consequences alone that determine what is right or wrong.
- Seek for the greatest aggregate welfare of the community as whole.
- 👉 *The greatest good for the greatest number*
- **Medical example:**
 - Allocating limited ventilators during a pandemic to patients with the highest survival chance.
-  **Strength:** Useful for public health and resource allocation
-  **Weakness:** May sacrifice individual rights

Deontological theory

- Deontological theory: Non-consequentialism: Derived from the Greek word, Deon, meaning duty.
- Considers that some acts are right or wrong independent of their consequences.
- Actions are right or wrong regardless of consequences.
- Physicians must follow ethical duties (truth-telling, confidentiality).
- **Medical example:**
- You must **tell the truth** to a patient even if it causes distress.
-  **Strength:** Protects patient rights
Weakness: Can be rigid and ignore outcomes

The virtue theory (Character-based ethics)

- A right act is the action a virtuous person would do in the same circumstances, in contrast to the approach that emphasizes duties or rules (deontology) or that emphasizes the consequences of actions (consequentialism).
- Honesty is good and should be done in all situation even it hurts sometimes (doctor and cancer patient).
- Abortion : Killing the human being is a crime , the embryo is a human being , so , according to virtue theory , abortion is considered a crime and shouldn't be done even if it is life threatening in some medical conditions.

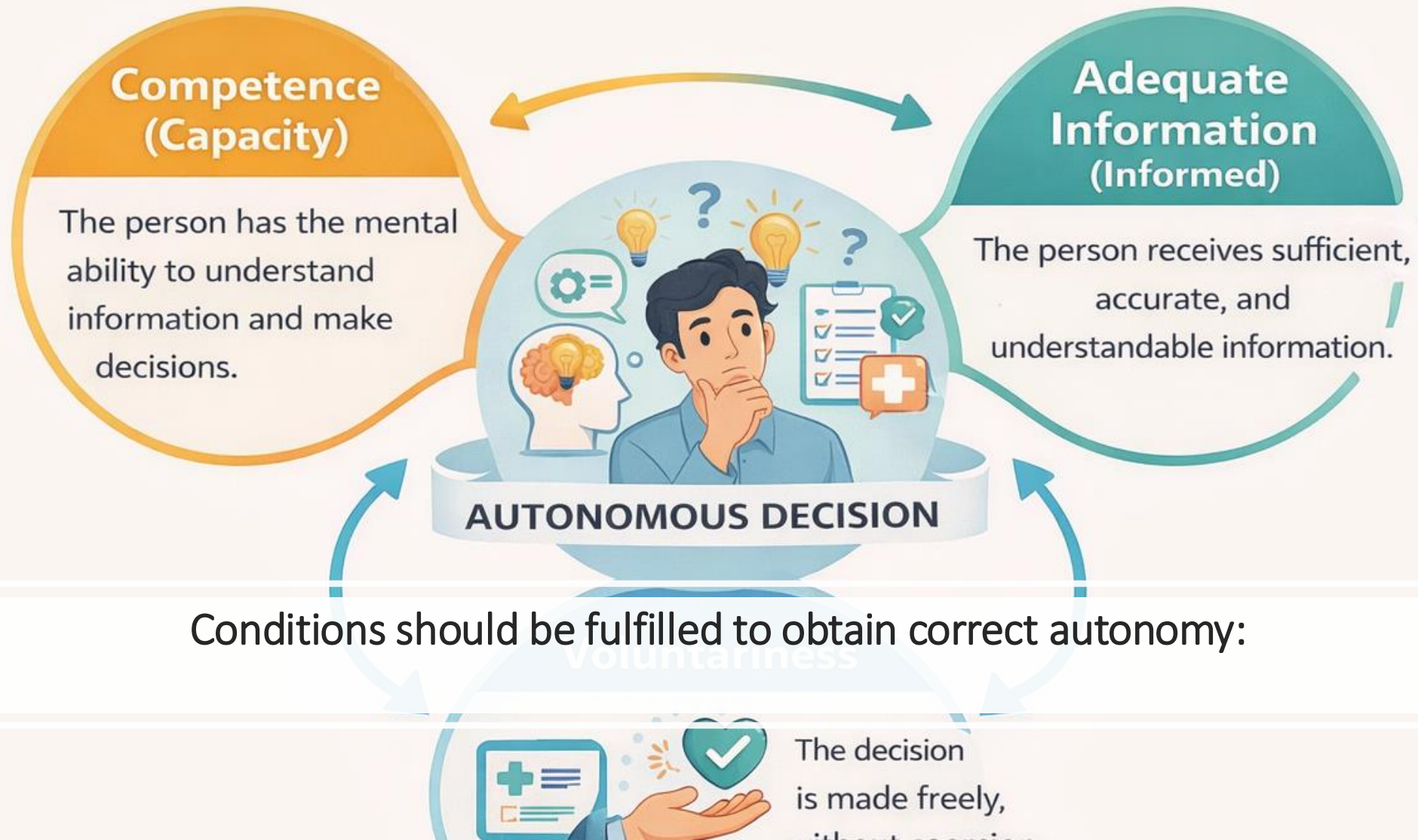


Principlism: principle-based ethics and is used as a framework to analyze and resolve ethical dilemmas.

Autonomy

- From the Greek **autos** (self) and **nomos** (rule or law), self-determination, self-rule.
- This principle states that any **competent** person should be given the **freedom** to decide on any decision that is related to his/her body and/or health.
- Is the human right of a patient to control access to his/her body and what is done to him or her.

For a decision to be considered autonomous, the following conditions must be met:



CONDITIONS WHICH **CHALLENGE** AUTONOMY:

- **Incompetent**

patient is legally unable to make rational decision. For example, under 18, patient with dementia, or mentally retarded.



- **Incapacity**

patient that is clinically unable to make rational decision as disturbed conscious level (coma).



- **Threat**

to others or him/herself:
psychotic patient.



1- Autonomy

Case:

- *A 26-year-old male has been involved in a RTA, in which he sustained blunt force trauma to his head as his head hit the front windscreen of his car. He did not lose consciousness – he is fully responsive and has no indications of neurological damage.*
- *He has a significant head wound that is bleeding continuously. This patient has refused treatment on the grounds that he feels “fine” and is refusing to have sutures to close his head wound. He would like to leave the Department.*
- *What is your opinion?*
- *Even though the best interests of this patient would be served by undergoing a CT scan and having sutures, he is an adult with full mental capacity, and so we must respect his patient autonomy in choosing to leave the Department. We cannot prevent him from leaving, and if we did it would be unlawful detainment.*

Beneficence

- Beneficence means Physicians have a duty to act in the **best interest** of their patients by promoting good, preventing harm, and maximizing possible benefits while minimizing risks.
- Beneficence is an active ethical duty.

Case:

- A diabetic patient with uncontrolled blood sugar refuses insulin because of fear of injections.
 - Physician educates, reassures, and offers alternatives.
 - Acting in beneficence means ensuring best medical outcome while respecting patient choice.

Another example:

Case: Life-Saving Blood Transfusion

- A 35-year-old patient presents with severe hemorrhage after trauma. He refuses blood transfusion due to religious beliefs.
 - **Beneficence perspective:** The physician wants to save his life by giving blood.
 - **Conflict:** Respect for autonomy vs. beneficence.
 - **Ethical dilemma:** Should the doctor override the patient's refusal to save his life?

Non-Maleficence

- The principle of nonmaleficence is captured by the Latin maxim, primum non nocere: “above all, do no harm.”
- Non-maleficence states that a medical practitioner has a duty to do no harm or allow harm to be caused to a **patient through neglect**.
- Is the sister to beneficence and is often considered as an inseparable pillar of ethics.
- Non-maleficence differs from beneficence in that beneficence is considered as the positive attitude while non maleficence is the negative one.

Principle of double effect

Single action – two effects : good effect and bad effect



When a treatment has both **positive outcome** and potential **bad effects**. It is known as (double effect).

1 The act itself must be morally good or neutral.

(e.g., giving medication for pain relief)

2 The bad effect must not be the intended goal.

The intention is to achieve the good effect only.

3 The good effect must not be achieved through the bad effect.

The harm cannot be the means of producing the benefit.

4 There must be proportionality.

The good effect must outweigh the bad effect.

Example : High-Dose Morphine in End-of-Life Care

✅ **Intended effect:** Relieve severe pain (good effect).

⚠️ **Unintended effect:** Respiratory depression that may shorten life (bad effect).

Ethical Analysis:

- **The act** (pain relief) is good.
- **The intention** is pain control, not death.
- **Death** is not the means of relieving pain.
- Relief of severe suffering **justifies** the risk.
- 👉 Therefore, under the Principle of Double Effect, the action is ethically permissible.

Justice

Justice in medical ethics refers to the principle of **fairness in the distribution of healthcare resources, benefits, risks, and costs**. It requires that patients be treated equitably and without discrimination.

Organ Transplant Distribution

Organs are scarce. Patients are placed on waiting lists based on:

- Medical urgency
- Likelihood of success
- Time on waiting list



Equality

Equity

