

An Introduction to the Ethos of Nursing

Fourth Edition

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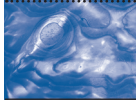
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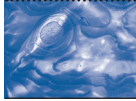
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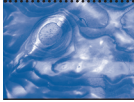
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About the authors

Frieda Paton had a long and varied management and academic career in nursing and is currently a full-time author with emphasis on global issues in nursing and health.

She was a professional officer at the South African Nursing Association from 1976 to 1985 – a period that saw immense historical changes in nursing organisation and education in SA. She was employed consecutively as education officer, editor of *Nursing News* and *Curationis*, and Manager: Research. From 1986 to 1999 she was lecturer and senior lecturer at the University of South Africa in nursing education and nursing research.

During her career she participated in various large research projects into the nursing profession. This included working with the Human Science Research Council and conducting the research and compiling the report of the Democratic Nurses Organisation of South Africa's final submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She is co-author of a number of books and has published numerous articles in accredited professional journals and on international nursing education websites.

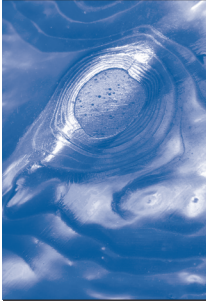
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Anne-Mart Oosthuizen (deceased) was a senior lecturer at the Department of Health Studies, Unisa. She was involved in the academic education of nurses at university level for 20 years. She taught nursing ethos and professional practice at basic and post-basic levels. Her teaching focused on nursing dynamics, nursing ethics and advanced general practice. She had a keen interest in the ethical foundation of nursing and was a scholar in the Erasmus Mundus Master of Bioethics programme in Nijmegen, in the Netherlands. She contributed a number of chapters to nursing textbooks, delivered papers (nationally and internationally) and published articles in accredited journals on issues related to nursing ethics, transcultural nursing and the emigration of South African nurses. Anne-Mart held a Bachelor's degree in Nursing, an Honours degree in Nursing Ethos and Professional Practice, a Master's degree in Nursing Science with a focus on ethical issues related to transcultural nursing and a doctorate in Health Studies with a focus on the emigration of South African nurses.



Chapter 1

Outline of the book and a reflection on the ethos of nursing

Anita van der Merwe

Learning Outcomes

After studying this chapter you should be able to:

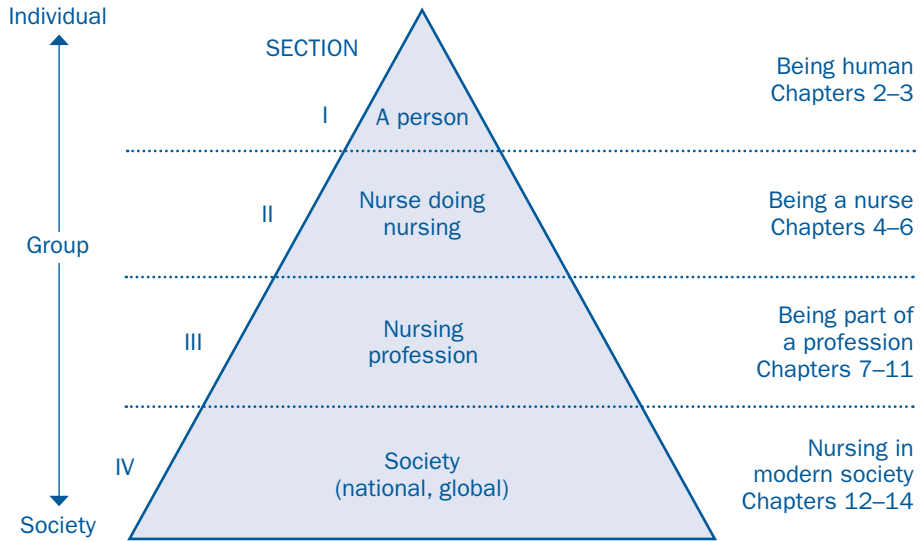
- define the concept 'ethos'
- discuss the common characteristics of the concept 'ethos'
- explain what is understood by the 'ethos of nursing'
- explore the link between ethos, ethics and law
- describe a contemporary approach to nursing ethos, as followed by this book, and demonstrate the value of it.

Outline of the book and explanation of its significance

Understanding and applying the ethos of nursing is not an easy task. It is often seen as a complex subject so we often shy away from addressing ethos or matters related to ethos in our day-to-day conversations and actions. Nurses also tend to make ethos abstract and far removed from them as human beings, becoming practising nurses and midwives and having no place in clinical practice. Numerous questions may be still unanswered, for example, What is the ethos of nursing? What does it consist of? and How do we become nurses? that society looks up to respects and trusts?

This book will serve as an aid and guide in this process of practising a so-called worthy ethos. It will move from the self or person to a moral human being who needs to make ethical decisions (Section I), followed by what it

takes to be a nurse and to do nursing (Section II). It then outlines what being a professional and part of an organised profession is. It also shares some of the rich historical highlights of the nursing profession globally and in South Africa (Section III). The last part (Section IV) reflects on nursing within society. It shows the effect on nursing of developments and changes in modern society, including incorporating important aspects of modern society, legal frameworks and international or global realities and structures.



Sections of the book

The South African Nursing Council consistently refers to practising or rendering care within a relevant ethical and legal framework. The authors provide guidance in studying the ethos of nursing within such legal and ethical frameworks. We acknowledge, however, that this is a vast area of study and that we cannot do justice to all the intricacies and viewpoints that the subject matter gives rise to. This book is thus an introductory text that aims to provide a broad introduction, arouse interest and stimulate enquiry. The outcomes and activities that we provide are meant to inspire further study, reflective thinking and in-depth peer-group discussions.

We acknowledge that nursing students are socialised into the profession in many ways, but we hope that this publication will contribute to the development of reflectivity, discussions and morally sound action in nursing practice. The need for a sound knowledge and skills base, values and attitudes in managing ethical and professional matters in practice deserves more attention than it gets.

ACTIVITY

- Make a list of all the topics you need in order to know how to be able to provide sound ethical care.
- Make a drawing of yourself in relation to others – emphasising core values and moral actions. Discuss these drawings with one another.
- Debate the importance of studying ethos. Have ‘for’ and against groups.

Section and chapter overview

This book consists of four sections and a total of fourteen chapters that logically progress from you as a moral human being able to make moral decisions to being a nurse and what it means to be a nurse. This progression includes important aspects of being part of the nursing profession and nursing in the broader society. A brief overview follows of the history of nursing and then a reflection on nursing within the broader society. Relevant, important regulatory frameworks and acts will be referred to and/or incorporated.

Chapter 1: Outline of the book and a reflection on the ethos of nursing

This chapter provides an outline and rationale for the sections and chapters and introduces the concept of ethos of nursing to its readers.

Section I: Being human

Section I focuses on the individual person – you and me as human beings. It brings to the spotlight our individual moral nature and existence, as well as moral values and the development of such values during our life time. These values help each of us to make difficult moral decisions, using, as appropriate, a range of possible ethical decision-making approaches.

Chapter 2: Being moral

The authors agreed to a contemporary approach that is person-centred in the first instance. This means that we will start with the person as a human being and try to understand our own moral fabric and the moral development of a human being. We reflect on moral values within the context of humanness and humanity.

In our reflection we unpack ‘care’ as a core concept across societies, professions and individuals. As often agreed, we consider ‘caring’ to be central to what nursing is all about.

Chapter 3: The ethical foundation of nursing practice and moral decision-making

In this chapter, we reflect on a number of well-known ethical theories that are employed and respected by societies. We include both global and African examples. We venture into ethical decision-making by looking at possible modes and models of ethical decision-making.

Section II: Being a nurse

Section 2 focuses on being a human and a human being who practises as a nurse. We try to understand what nursing and being a nurse is all about, accepting that there is a range of values, theoretical and philosophical underpinnings that shape who we are and what we do. We also know that nursing and being a nurse do not take place in a vacuum and that, for example, political, cultural and environmental factors significantly influence who we are and what we do.

Chapter 4: You and nursing

Here we reflect on a nurse as a human being and try to answer the questions ‘Who is a nurse?’ ‘What is nursing?’ and ‘What are the core nursing care values and commitments we espouse?’ We describe where, when and how nursing care happens or comes to life.

Chapter 5: Worldview, philosophy and theories in nursing

The meaning and value you attach to being a nurse and doing nursing influence each relationship and interaction in your everyday caring practice. This meaning and value begins with how you see the world and how you make sense of the world you live in. In this chapter, we will explore how worldviews, philosophy and nursing theories underpin and influence your nursing.

Chapter 6: The factors that shape being a nurse and doing nursing

The development of nursing across the ages occurred in specific cultural, social, political and economic environments as well as in scientific realities. The development of nursing over time is intricately linked and influenced by the broader global and national contexts, with numerous societal factors directly or indirectly shaping us being a nurse and doing or practising nursing.

Section III: Being part of a profession

Nursing has a proud history that is situated in specific global and national realities and historical events. Such a past provides a rich and diverse environment from which nursing of the future may learn and benefit. We journey from our early beginnings, to the rise of specific areas of practice

in nursing and reflect on the role that nursing education has played in the development of our profession. We observe how we as nurses have a unique identity that forms an organised group of likeminded members that meets the criteria of being a true profession.

Chapter 7: Establishment of the nursing profession

While we see people committed to caring for the sick throughout the ages, the beginning of general nursing can be dated to the early 1630s when the first formal education of nurses began. From this time, the development of nursing continued with the work of Florence Nightingale, Henrietta Stockdale, Cecilia Makiwane and others. Great strides in the regulation of nursing and the education of nurses have been made over time and have established where we are today.

Chapter 8: The development of midwifery, psychiatric and community health nursing

The development of general nursing, midwifery and psychiatric and community health nursing followed different paths until the need for a comprehensively trained nurse arose towards end of the 1900s. Today's nurse is able to provide services to communities at all levels of healthcare.

Chapter 9: Nursing education's contribution to the nursing profession

Knowledge and technology have been expanding at a great pace, especially from the beginning of the 20th century. In nursing, as in most professions, undergraduate education and specialisation through further education became necessary to produce practitioners with advanced knowledge and skills in various areas.

Chapter 10: Organising and regulating the nursing profession

As the number of qualified nurses increased, the need for public recognition and standards of admission to the profession arose and nurses came together in organisations to further their interests. Eventually regulatory bodies were established through legislation whose task is to determine educational requirements as well as to establish a system of registering qualified practitioners.

Chapter 11: Nursing as a profession

There is still some argument about whether nursing qualifies as a profession. The attributes generally ascribed to a profession are outlined and nursing in South Africa is compared to these elements to assess how far nursing in South Africa has achieved the status of a profession.

Section IV: Nursing in modern society

The last section of this book moves to national and global realities that influence our profession and our being a nurse. We take a look at the national legal framework (such as laws, regulations, policies and so forth) that guides nursing and organises our profession, whilst taking into account other directives that directly or indirectly influence us at a national and global level. We accept that the world has become a small place and that isolation is no longer an option – we truly live in a global village.

Chapter 12: The legal framework for nursing practice

This chapter focuses on the law which governs the practice of nursing in South Africa. It concentrates on professional regulation in the context of the South African Constitution. It unpacks The South African Nursing Act (No. 33 of 2005)* and the work of the SANC to regulate the profession of nursing in South Africa. It also reflects on other legislation which pertains to nurses in various areas of practice. *All following mention of the South African Nursing Act No. 33 of 2005 will refer to it simply as the Nursing Act.

Chapter 13: National and international directives which affect nursing

Nurses and the nursing profession do not exist in isolation of each other. We practise in the context of the South African Constitution, the Health Act, the Batho Pele principles, the Human Rights Charter, the Patients' Rights Charter and nurses' rights to mention a few. We also accept that the context and the environment change all the time requiring new initiatives to make the healthcare we provide better and better. Strategic initiatives such as the National Office of Health Standards and the proposed NHI plan focus on the rendering of quality healthcare to all.

Chapter 14: Nursing in the global village

The global context influences who we are and what we do. Global health has become a major buzz word supported by United Nations initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals. The burden of disease is shifting and the global influences of it, for example technology, migration of healthcare workers and nursing shortage are real.

In conclusion, in this book, we will move from each of us as a moral human being (Section I) to being a nurse and doing nursing (Section II) and practising nursing in the context of a profession; (Section III) a profession that we proudly belong to and that functions in society by contributing to the health and wellbeing of all its members (Section IV).

Ethos

What does the word 'ethos' mean?

We often use the word 'ethos' without exactly knowing what it means or what we are referring to. Like so many words coming from the science of philosophy, there are many understandings of 'ethos' and we tend to use it quite broadly. However, the following common traits or characteristics in the use of the word 'ethos' are noted:

- The word 'ethos' is very old and comes from the Greek word *ēthos* that refers to the fundamental character or disposition that underlies and informs our thought and behaviour. 'Disposition' means a tendency to think and act in a certain way.
- Ethos finds expression or is visible in the common fundamental customs, values, traits and aspirations of a person, a particular group such as a profession, an organisation or a community. A nurse and nurses as members of the nursing profession thus share certain traits, customs and values that distinguish the person or group from other persons or groups.
- It is important that our ethos emerges from and is absolutely part of whom we are and how we interact with others; it has a clear social and cultural presence and creates a certain moral atmosphere or way of being.
- Our ethos outlines and defines our individual and collective moral purpose. More simply put: the values, attitudes, thoughts and behaviour that are part of our ethos influence who we are and how we care for ourselves and others.
- Our ethos outlines the expected behaviour, the right or desirable thing to do. We often hear this behaviour expressed by the so-called Golden Rule: Treat others the way you would want to be treated.
- What is interesting about ethos is that it defines the reputation or credibility of a person, group and/or profession. Members of the public are keen observers of our ethos as nurses and it is our ethos that persuades them to have trust in us as nurses and as a profession. Our stated and lived ethos convinces them they are in safe hands and that we will not harm them.
- This very reality of having a truly working ethos provides a certain authority to the nurse as an individual and as part of a profession. Such an authority is, however, precious and needs to be carefully managed.
- Lastly, an ethos is not static; it develops and may change over time. Within the global and local healthcare context, there are numerous realities that may influence our moral character and stamina, for example changing our work place, political currents and legal realities.

To summarise, in the context of this book, ethos refers to the fundamental character of nursing and the nursing profession that finds expression in our thoughts, behaviour, values and attitudes. It may change over time and is sensitive to cultural and social environments. However, it defines our credibility and engenders the trust patients may have and continue to have in us. Ethos is therefore a moral force, summed up by ‘doing what is right, helping and causing the least possible harm’.

ACTIVITY

- Find similar words or translations for the word ‘ethos’ in a range of languages and discuss possible differences in meaning.
- Give examples of personal values that you think find a home in a nursing ethos.
- Debate why an ethos of nursing is important or not.

What does the ethos of nursing refer to?

Nurses throughout the ages have cared for other human beings to the best of their ability and given the limitations of the context, knowledge and skills set of the time. Within contemporary society, a range of factors influence nursing care, and more fundamentally, the ethos of nursing. Examples are generation changes, the proliferation of complex legislation, informed communities, a shortage of nurses, unionisation and the advent of patients’ and nurses’ rights to name a few.

For the purpose of this book, ethos refers to the distinct character of a particular group – in this case nurses and the nursing profession. This book places the spotlight on the character or nature of being a nurse and of nursing. This is a complex reality, especially if we reflect on the meaning of nursing and the factors that have shaped nursing and the nursing profession. As we can imagine, nurses and nursing was and is shaped by a range of social, political, cultural, religious and scientific factors. The ethos of nursing is concerned with the origin, evolution, development and growth of nursing in the past, present and future. It also reflects on moral development and moral decision-making and holds caring and compassion as key values and actions.

The ethos of nursing is not simply a summary of the history, an outline of ethical considerations and a reflection on theories of nursing. Although it includes these, it holds a contemporary understanding of and focus on the nurse as a human moral being in interaction with and providing care in complex and ethically-laden contexts.

How are ethos, ethics and law linked?

The words 'ethos' and 'ethics' are clearly linked. Although they originate from the same Greek word, ethics most often refers to a specific branch of philosophy that studies morality (what is considered right and what is considered wrong and why). Ethics also studies how we act and should act (our obligations) in general (for example caring for the vulnerable populations and in specific complex situations such as abortion and euthanasia).

To sum up: ethics is a science that studies norms of behaviour and desirable values we should hold and apply in caring for our patients. A community's or group's values inform laws, for example if we accept that we should not harm another human being, then there are laws to prosecute the person doing harm to others. Examples are the laws against murder, theft and violence against women.

As professionals in the making, it is important to systematically build a worthy and working ethos. Key ingredients of developing such an ethos are firstly, to build a sound knowledge base that combines the study of relevant theoretical and professional literature and life and work experiences, secondly, to reflect critically, both privately and collaboratively, on moral matters of concern and lastly, to analyse life-like scenarios and case studies. Such exercises link and integrate ethos, ethics and law.

ACTIVITY

- Discuss the pros and cons of the approach to nursing ethos as followed by this publication in groups.
- After reading this chapter, what do you think are the most important aspects of nursing ethos and why?

