

The 2025 Code of Ethics: The Beating Heart of Nursing Ethics

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NURSING ETHICS

LOST & FOUND

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Objectives:

Discuss the foundations and origins of Nursing Ethics

Name 6 moral relationships in nursing

Identify links between the Code of Ethics for Nurses and Nursing Ethics

Yes, there is a
nursing ethics...

And it is a century older
than bioethics

The unexpected

50 years of identifying, scrounging, teaching & gathering the nursing ethics literature.



Nursing Ethics...

is grounded in the values, virtues, duties,
raison d'être and perspectives of nursing

Nursing Ethics...

is a distinct field of inquiry, an *applied professional ethics* that reflects the moral norms of nursing, generated by the values, virtues, goals, aims, purposes, perspectives, and practices of the profession. In that way, it differs from bioethics.

Nursing Ethics is informed by the 150-year ongoing tradition and community of nursing, and guided by nursing's own *raison d'être* and perspectives

Surprised to discover that...a recent awareness sprouting

- Nursing ethics is a century older than bioethics, starting from “day one” of modern nursing
- it was lost in the transition from hospital-based diploma to university-based nursing programs.

Of necessity and by character,

nursing ethics begins as a social ethics.

[Nurse-to-society relationship]

Five Influences of the Social Context from which Nursing Ethics Arises

1. Women's Suffrage
2. Progressive Era of attempted social reform
3. Philosophy of Pragmatism
4. Nurses as social/eye witnesses
5. Social Ethics Movement of social criticism & social change

1. Suffrage Movement: Impediments to creating an educated, scientific, paid, profession, for women, outside of domestic service or the home

Strictures: Doctrine of Coverture: 2=1 (“Mrs. William Jones”); disenfranchisement

Women’s Suffrage Movement, Silent Sentinels—jailed, beaten, force fed, more

2. Progressive Era

The social ills of industrialization, wealth disparities, political corruption, labor exploitation, industrial injuries, child labor, urban squalor, poverty; contaminated water, milk, and food; rampant venereal diseases & TB, infant abandonment...

[social determinants of health]

3. Philosophy of Pragmatism

- ...defines truth, meaning, and value by their practical, real-world consequences and usefulness.
- It focuses on "what works," treating ideas as tools for solving problems rather than abstract descriptions of reality

4. Nurses as eye witnesses

- Nursing took place in the homes and neighborhoods — nurses observed the social determinants of health and illness firsthand
- Nurses created district nursing, visiting nursing service, settlement houses, Frontier Nursing Service, and more



SUFFRAGETTE PARADE, MARCH 3RD 1913

Suffragette Parade Mch 3d 1913 652

5. The Social Gospel Movement: The Religious Arm

- Largely religiously driven
- Protestant – many denominations
- Catholic Social Teaching

[Also Jewish Social Ethics]

And the Academic Arm: The Social Ethics Movement

Catholic social teaching



Emblem of the Holy See

Overview

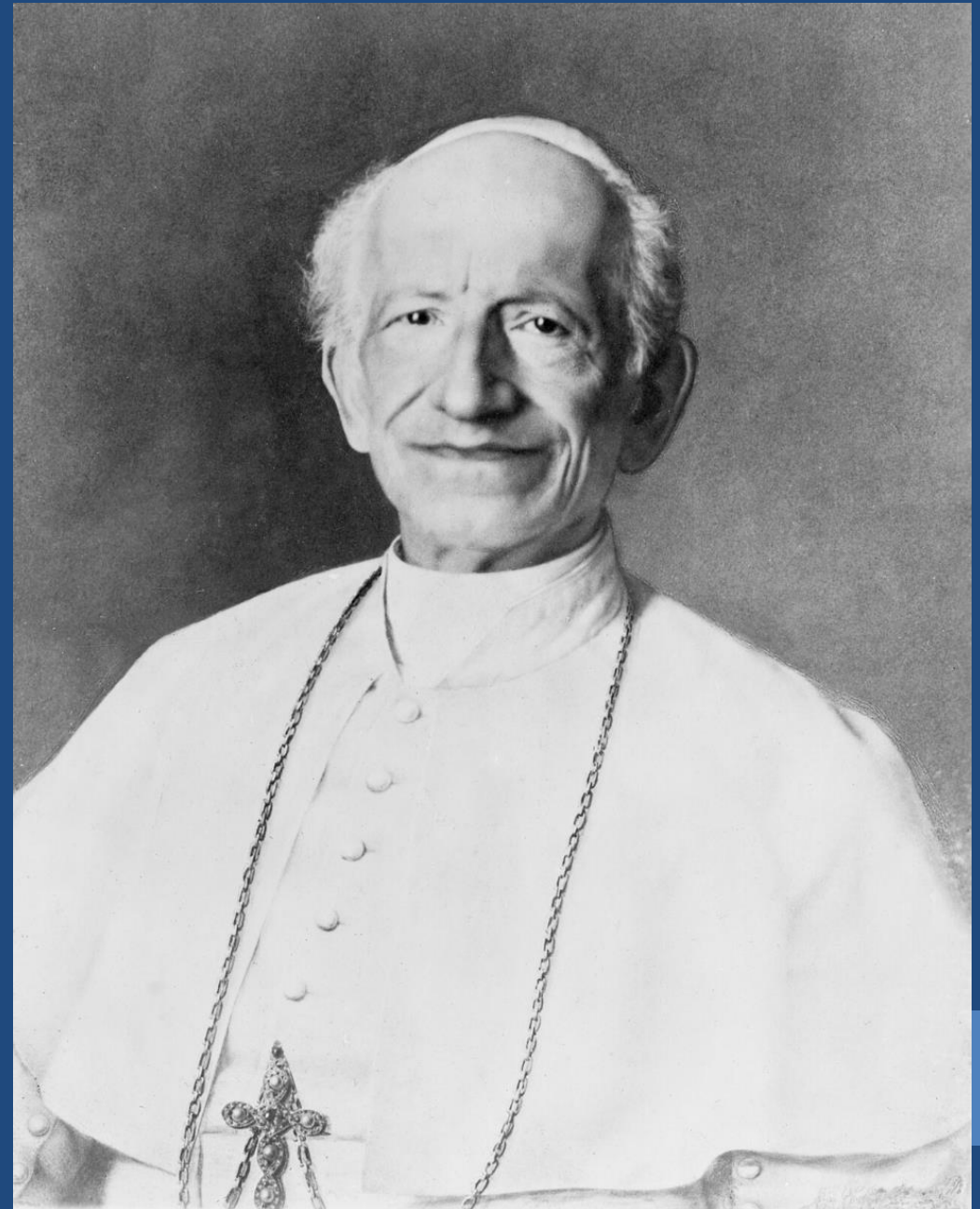
Social teachings of the papacy ·
Common good · Distributism · Human dignity ·
Option for the poor · Social justice ·
Social mortgage · Solidarity · Subsidiarity ·
Tranquillitas ordinis ·
Universal destination of goods

Pope Leo XIII

1891

[hide]

Rerum novarum



Education and Job training: settlement houses, job training, sheltered workshops, thrift stores...

Relief, Disaster Assistance, Development: Disaster relief, global poverty amelioration, Salvation Army, Presbyterian/ Anglican/ Lutheran/Catholic Disaster Assistance, global farm support, Fair Trade, water purification...

Direct social services: soup kitchens, food pantries, shelters, clothing closets, financial aid, bus vouchers...

Social & public services: hospitals, clinics, universities, adoption services, orphanages, Habitat

Advocacy and social activism: social justice activism, civil rights activism, community organizing, environmental justice...

Social Ethics and the Emergent “Bioethics” (mid- 1960s)

Ethics and health care the province of religious traditions

Education in ethics & health found only in religious affiliated colleges and seminaries

So then...

Nursing ethics descends from a web of suffrage, progressivism, pragmatism, theological philosophy, social ethics movements, and nursing experience

Bioethics descends from European philosophical theories, acontextual, rationalist, abstract

Nursing Ethics Lost...

As nursing transitioned into universities, it also lost its social justice edge, its emphasis on ethics and moral formation, and its attention to nursing identity ~ in part because it lost its ethical literature and its knowledge of nursing ethics.

Nursing Ethics Found...

Professional Ethics:

A professional ethics arises from within the community, tradition, and practice of a community of practice (nursing), generating normative expectations of the members of the community

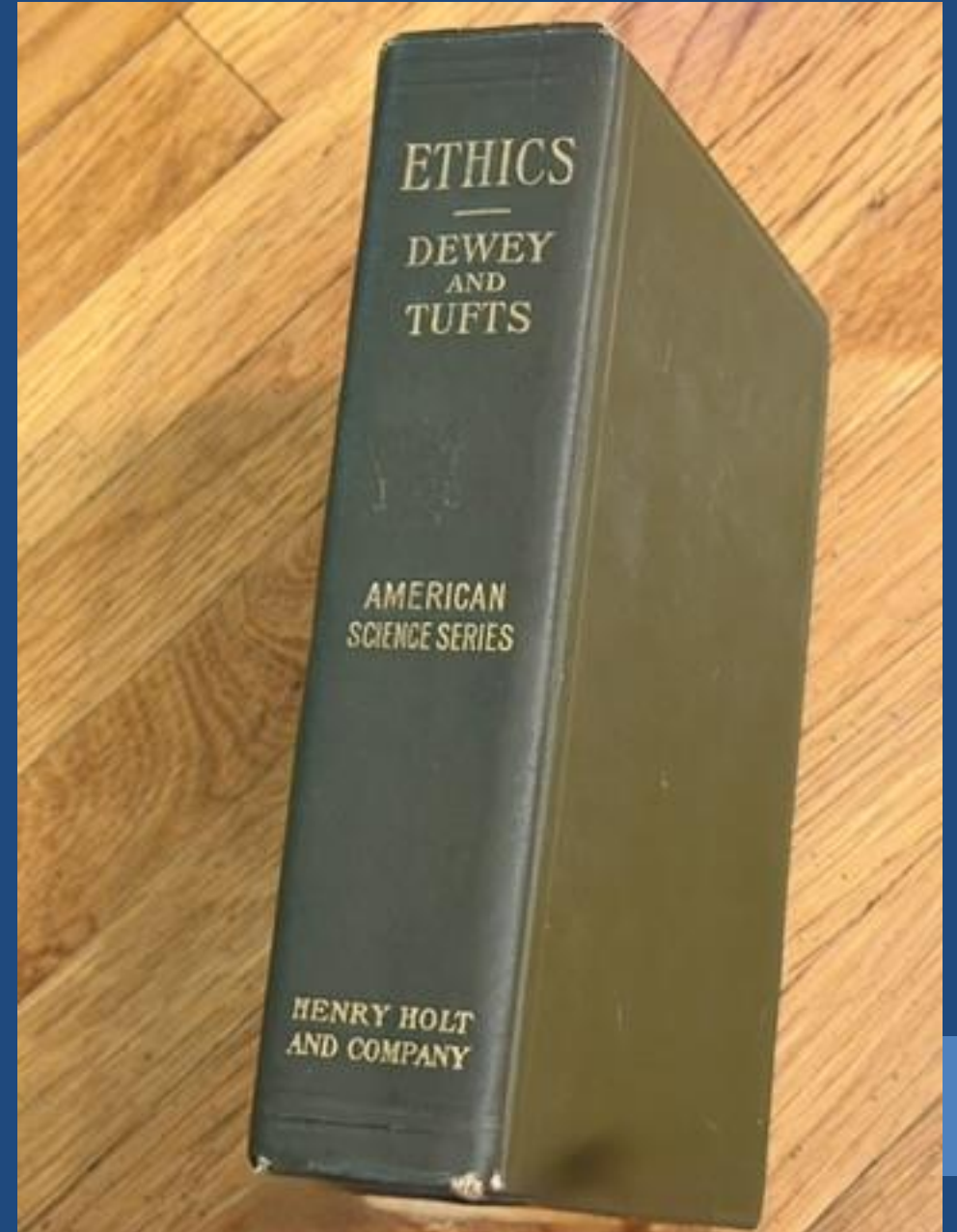
International Council of Nurses, 1926-1927 Report

These nations listed as having mandatory ethics curricular requirements:

Belgium, France, Greece, UK, Jugo-Slavia, Switzerland, Bulgaria, China, Germany, Sweden, Finland, United States...

NLNE Ethics Curricular Requirements, 1915 to WWII

Ethics Course, plus ethics curricular threads through every course



The “First Chapters” ~ Med-Surg Textbooks from the late 1800s, into the early 1900s

Med-surg textbooks with first chapter on ethics,
usually on moral character (virtue ethics), or moral
relationships.



library discards...

Key: Nursing Identity

Formation into the nursing identity, wherein the learner interiorizes/internalizes the norms of the nursing community and tradition.

Being a nurse vs. *Doing* nursing tasks

Nursing has a native nursing ethics that arose from its own soil, that has grown for 150 years. It was lost in the transition to colleges and universities, 1965 and after. In that transition, ethics education was taken from nursing faculty and given to departments of philosophy and moral theology.

The void that was created was then filled by philosopher-taught, physician-identified, medical ethics (then biomedical ethics, then bioethics). Nurses wedged and layered it into nursing. What came to be taught as ethics had little to do with nursing.

Bioethics...

Can usefully be applied to nursing, but does not address nursing values, concerns, aims, or *raison d'être*

From a Nursing perspective...



In abstract principles -- where is caring, compassion, skill, clinical wisdom, dignity, respect, attunement, responsiveness, attentiveness, family, community, culture, common good... the values embedded in morally good nursing ???

The Six Moral Relationships of Nursing: A Structure for Ethics

HCC [Harriet C. Camp]. “The Ethics of Nursing: Talks of a Superintendent with Her Graduating Class,” part 1 [of 6], *The Trained Nurse*. Vol. II, no. 5, May 1889, 179-183.

The Six-Relationship Structure means that nursing ethics is...

- Not solely patient oriented
- Intrinsically encompasses every facet of health including
Professional—political—economic—social—cultural—
religious—environmental—national—global—
preventive—interventional...

Nursing Ethics...

Is — both — relationally structured & relationship focused. [two different aspects]

It is an “everyday ethics,” a preventive ethics. It is NOT problem or crisis or dilemma focused.

Clarifying:
Nursing Ethics is BOTH
Structural (Relationships)
Interpersonal (Relationship)

The Six Moral Relationships of Nursing: A Structure for Ethics

1. Nurse to family (patient)
2. Nurse to other health professionals
3. Nurse to self
4. Nurse to nursing
5. Nurse to society
6. Nurse to the global human and natural environment (the new Code Provision 10)

The ANA Code of Ethics for Nurses...

The normative moral document containing the moral norms of the profession. It arises from within the community and tradition of nursing.

Ten provisions

Intrinsic relational motif of six relationships

Relationships are understood to be inherently reciprocal

The six-relationship structure provides both warrant and normative mandates not found in bioethics, such as

- Nurse-to-self relationship and self care
- Nurse-to-society relationship and social criticism & social change (beyond distributive justice)

Relational Structure of the Code: Provisions

1. nurse to patient/family — Provisions 1-3, 4
2. nurse to self — Provision 5
3. nurse to profession — Provisions 7, 6
4. nurse to peers & other health professionals — Provisions 8, 6
5. nurse to society — Provision 9
6. nurse to global integral world (human & natural environment) — Provision 10

Next Steps...

Thank You
Questions?



Sources

~ 100 nursing textbooks and editions

- e.g., Charlotte Aikens: 1st ed 1916 & 5th ed 1943
- As many as 11 nursing ethics textbooks in print in any given year

OJIN

<https://ojin.nursingworld.org/table-of-contents/volume-25-2020/number-2-may-2020/toward-reclaiming-our-ethical-heritage-nursing-ethics-before-bioethics/>