Nursing ethics

Nursing ethics

A principle-based approach

Steven D. Edwards

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Preface

I have tried to produce a degree-level text in nursing ethics, but one which will be of use to nursing diploma students, to those studying nursing ethics at postgraduate level, and to registered nurses who are undertaking short courses in nursing ethics. I became aware of the need for such a text between 1991 and 1993. During this period I was required to write and to teach a number of courses in nursing ethics at varying levels. There are, of course, several books on nursing ethics, but none seemed to be at just the right level for the needs of the students I taught. Although many students found Melia (1989) and Chadwick and Tadd (1992) extremely useful introductions to the subject, these texts seemed not to provide material beyond diploma level.

The most thorough treatment of health care ethics that I am aware of is Beauchamp and Childress's *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* (1989, 1994). It is no understatement to reveal that this book changed my whole outlook on nursing ethics and this is evident throughout the following text. The students I taught, however, did not seem to find Beauchamp and Childress user-friendly; they found it too dense and too medically orientated. Hence, it has been my intention to provide a text which approximates the systematicity of Beauchamp and Childress's work, but which is more accessible to students of nursing ethics.

When I trained as a nurse, the curriculum included no ethics whatsoever. Yet, the moral problems encountered during my time in nursing drove me to study philosophy at undergraduate level. It soon became apparent that, at that time (the mid-eighties), the subject matter of ethics courses made no mention of the kinds of moral problems which arise in nursing practice. Further, I came to realise that the problem of moral knowledge was merely a part of a larger problem of knowledge in general.

This led me into the problem of philosophical relativism and far away from applied ethics.

A peculiar chain of events resulted in my obtaining a post which involved nothing other than teaching nursing ethics. This gave me the opportunity to re-examine the moral problems which I had faced as a nurse many years earlier, and this book forms part of that ongoing examination.

I have benefited greatly over the years from discussion of moral matters with very many people. But I would like to acknowledge particular debts of gratitude to the 1991 intake of nursing students at Buckinghamshire College of Higher Education, to Ed Lepper and to Simon Woods.

Swansea

STEVEN D. EDWARDS