

# Book Project: Nursing Ethics – Feminist Perspectives

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PHILOSOPHISCH-THEOLOGISCHE  
HOCHSCHULE VALLENDAR

Kirchlich und staatlich anerkannte  
Wissenschaftliche Hochschule in freier Trägerschaft



# Nursing ethics ...

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... as a discipline and practice: its own questions, concerns and responses to ethical challenges

... as part of the interdisciplinary bioethics discourse, it is unheard and invisible

The organization of bioethics reflects the power structures that are inherent of the larger society

# Feminist perspectives ...

... direct us to explore the assumptions that are central to a discipline

... ask us to examine which questions get asked and which are ignored

... investigate the practices of health care with respect to the overall power structures of dominance and subordination

# Chapters and Contributors

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- (1) Bioethics, Nursing Ethics, Feminist Perspectives  
(J McCarthy, H Kohlen)
- (2) The influence of the social location of nurses as women  
on the development of nursing ethics (M Fowler, U Surrey)
- (3) A Evolution of Feminist Thought in Nursing Ethics  
(E Peter, U o Toronto; J Liaschenko, U of Minnesota)
- (4) Organizational Ethics and Nursing Leadership Roles  
(L Campbell, NUIG Galway)

# Chapters and Contributors

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- (5) Bioethics and Issues of Care in Hospital Ethics Committees  
(H Kohlen)
- (6) Palliative Care: from Feminine to Feminist Ethics of Care  
(H Kohlen)
- (7) Feminist Reflections on Home, Digital Health Technologies and Ethics (E Peter, U o Toronto; J Liaschenko, U of Minnesota)
- (8) Bearing witness and testimony in nursing: An ethical-political practice (C. Ceci, M. Djkowich, O. Petroskaya, U Alberta)

# Chapters and Contributors

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- (9) Intercultural Perspectives (D. Wepa, U South Australia)
- (10) Women's Autonomy, Abortion, and Conscientious  
Objection (J McCarthy)
- (11) Feminist Research and Nursing Ethics  
(H Felzman, NUIG Galway)
- (12) Care, Ethics and Politics: An Interview with Joan Tronto  
(J Tronto, U of Minnesota; H Kohlen)

# Women's Autonomy, Abortion, and Conscientious Objection

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## The notion of Conscientious Objection (CO)

may be appealed to by health professionals (HPs) when they refuse to provide legal and professionally accepted services

allows them to refrain from acting in ways that are against their conscience

# Women's Autonomy, Abortion, and Conscientious Objection

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**Q. Why is it important to protect freedom of conscience?**

**A. Because HPs are *moral agents***

Acting according to conscience maintains moral integrity and professionals' autonomy

**Q. Why is it important to limit the exercise of conscience?**

**A. Because HPs are *professionals***

Freedom is not absolute - protection of other people's autonomy and rights to health care

# Women's Autonomy, Abortion, and Conscientious Objection

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Standard positions on the scope of CO

**1: Conscience Absolutism**

Largest extent of freedom possible

**2: Incompatibility Thesis**

Professional obligations trump conscience claims

**3: Compromise (political/practical/ethical)**

Respects individual conscience but limits the scope of CO

# Women's Autonomy, Abortion, and Conscientious Objection

## Feminist considerations on the scope of CO

1. Discrimination and social justice
2. Unique burden of “choice” (not mere choice)
3. Justified ethical norms limit CO
4. Conscience, like autonomy and agency, is relational – power asymmetries must be identified, mapped, and addressed

## Research findings

- If nurses' ethical issues are raised, they are at best called “a petit ethical problem”
- The dominant ethical model used in HECs is the principle-based model
- A principle-based model turned out not to be able to capture ethical questions that arise when care is not practiced well or even left undone

# Bioethics and Issues of Care in Hospital Ethics Committees

## Research Findings: Feminist care ethical approaches ...

... give attention to responsibilities, competencies, resonance and power asymmetries

... can offer a language that is able to capture ethical issues of care practices

... claim that gender, social status, ethnicity and other inequalities have to be included in any analysis if we are not going to ignore social realities

# Palliative Care

- Feminist perspective on end-of-life ethics in particular
- Similarities between palliative care and care ethics
- History of care ethics: relevance of the turn from feminine care ethics to feminist care ethics

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR ATTENTION!**