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## From the editor

In keeping with the theme, "Ethical Issues," I have invited Beverly McElmurry and Roland Yarling to share their current thinking since reading and hearing of the many responses to their article in *ANS* 8:2 entitled "The Moral Foundation of Nursing." As they note here, the discourse that has arisen in nursing around

these issues is significant and necessary for our collective development. I am pleased to provide this avenue for all of us to participate in this continuing discourse.

—Peggy L. Chinn, PhD, FAAN  
Editor

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## Guest editorial

Our article, "The Moral Foundation of Nursing" (*ANS* 8:2, January 1986), has sparked a discourse in nursing ethics that is both gratifying and unusual. In that article we argued that the foundation of nursing ethics was the moral agency of the nurse. And, to have moral agency, the nurse must have freedom of choice.

In response, *ANS* readers have written two letters to the Editor (A. T. Ferran, *ANS* 8:4, July 1986, and J. Brody and S. Greenfield, *ANS* 9:1, October 1986). Ferran's comments stressed the importance of nursing administrators in fostering the development of work environments in which nurses are free to be moral. The second letter, by Brody and Greenfield, reiterated a definition of an ethical dilemma that most nurses understand, such as choosing between limited and difficult options. However, they advanced the idea that nurses know where their moral responsibilities lie and thus do not experience an ethical dilemma in the situation of being forced to choose between the well-being of the patient and the well-being of the nurse. Obviously, we disagree with these authors; our thesis was that the crux of moral agency or the foundation of a nursing ethic was freedom of choice.

Following the letters, there have been three articles in *ANS* in reference to our article:

"Nursing Ethics in an Age of Controversy," by A. Bishop and J. Scudder (*ANS* 9:3, April 1987); "In Search of the Moral Foundation of Nursing," by J. S. Packard and M. Ferrara (*ANS* 10:4, July 1988); and "Covenantal Relationships: Grounding for the Nursing Ethic," by M. Cooper (*ANS* 10:4, July 1988). We have had mixed reactions to these articles. On some points, we wonder if the authors of the above articles really read our article. On other points, we have found the authors developing related and important ideas that expand the general discussion about nursing ethics, but that are not a critique (or even a take-off) of our positions.

Following publication of the Bishop and Scudder article, we had the privilege of debating these authors, and the other authors at a symposium at McGill University (Dawson Schultz, Coordinator, May 1988). We remain unconvinced of their argument for an "in-between situation" for nurses. It does not make sense to us that we should encourage a team approach to moral decision making if it does not allow individual choice. Taken to a logical end, this team approach becomes a modern version of Dante Alighieri's point—The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who in time of great moral crises maintained their neutrality.