

THE ANATOMY STUDY IN NURSING EDUCATION: REFLECTIONS ON ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

Kátia Pereira de Borba*

ABSTRACT

Anatomy is a fundamental science in the training of nurses, the corpse being the didactic material that facilitates the obtaining of this knowledge. The corpse dynamically provides visualization of the body structures, and the student can make comparisons with the living person through direct contact with the anatomical parts. In the contact with the corpse the student must have humanity, respecting the memory of the one who has departed. Otherwise, the honour of learning becomes an object of discriminatory action, with a cold and technical approach. This article aimed to reflect on the ethical principles that encompass the anatomy studies in nursing teaching, based on the narrative of a real fact. This reflection is based on the theory of Kantian principlism, as ethical principles must be relevant to the study of anatomy in nursing teaching, since this content introduces the student into the profession. It is believed that the preparation of the nursing student regarding the knowledge that involves the ethical principles and the study of human anatomy with the use of corpses is still a process under construction, needing the attention of the teachers involved.

Keywords: Nursing education. Anatomy. Ethics.

INTRODUCTION

Human anatomy is one of the oldest medical sciences, and comprises the study of structures and functions of the human body⁽¹⁾, being essential knowledge in the training of health professionals. This knowledge can happen through pedagogical strategies involving computational programs, synthetic teaching materials and manipulation of anatomical pieces and cadavers⁽²⁻⁴⁾.

For many centuries human corpses, generally rejected by society, have served as an instrument of anatomy study for both students and teachers in the medical field⁽⁵⁾. These bodies facilitate the acquisition of anatomical knowledge because they dynamically provide the visualization of the human body's structure, and students can compare their anatomical parts with the living person. In addition, contact with the cadaver allows health students, particularly nursing students, to experience the practice of caring⁽⁶⁾, which is considered a way to strengthen the humanization of these future professionals⁽⁷⁾.

The use of principles and values, which includes sensitivity, respect and compassion for the memory of the deceased, are recommended for students who practice anatomy with the use of corpses⁽⁵⁾. Making use of principles and values is

to adopt an ethical behaviour, which can be interpreted through ethics, understood as a science that studies human conduct⁽⁸⁾.

The statement on the use of the corpse by a professor of anatomy at the University of São Paulo's Faculty of Medicine: "It is a threefold educational lesson, that is, instructive, as a means of knowing the structure of the human body; normative, by the study of methodological character; and of aesthetic-moral language, by its restful nature and by the lesson of ethics and humility that it can provide"⁽⁹⁾ can grab the attention of many people. However, these honourable assertions about the corpse, which contributes to academic studies, aiming to arouse praise to a transcendent being, should be more common among university students in the health field.

As a teacher of a nursing course at a state public university in Paraná, it was possible to come across a real event that involved ethical principles, the actors being a nursing student and a corpse belonging to the anatomy laboratory. The occurrence of this event raised many reflections on the ethical principles that involve the anatomy study in nursing teaching. From this perspective, this reflective article, whose discursive formulation was based on the philosopher Immanuel Kant's principlism theory, aimed to reflect on the ethical principles that

*Nurse. PhD student in Sciences, Ribeirão Preto College of Nursing, University of São Paulo. Professor of the Nursing course at the Centro Oeste State University, Guarapuava, Paraná. E mail: kpborba@gmail.com

involve the anatomy study in nursing teaching, based on the narrative of a real occurrence.

THE NARRATIVE OF A REAL EVENT INVOLVING ETHICS IN THE ANATOMY SUBJECT OF A NURSING COURSE

In the first academic semester of 2014, a public university nursing course first-year female student, attending the subject of human anatomy, eventually posted in the timeline of her Facebook a selfie next to a corpse belonging to the anatomical laboratory used for academic studies. Faced with this fact, the student was notified by the course pedagogical coordination and by the anatomy teacher to immediately remove the image posted on the social network, and they both shared ethical reflections about her conduct with her.

THE USE OF CADAVERS IN ANATOMY TEACHING: REFLECTIONS ON ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

It is understood that teachers have a great responsibility in the discussions and reflections on the ethical issues that involve the use of corpses in anatomy teaching. Teachers should promote the idea that the body is the expression of life and respect⁽⁵⁾, and students should be sensitized to reflect on the ethical principles that involve their own actions.

To paraphrase Immanuel Kant, it is possible to affirm that ethics is a matter of principles and values, since the ethical principles are based on philosophical questions, according to a classification: Empirical philosophy, which is based on principles of the experience; Pure philosophy, which relies on a priori principles; and Metaphysics, pure philosophy that is limited to certain objects of the understanding⁽¹⁰⁾.

Metaphysics comprehends the physical nature and customs, that is, practical anthropology, so-called the metaphysics of customs. The metaphysics of customs is indispensably necessary, not only for reasons of speculative order, to investigate the source of practical principles residing, a priori, in our reason, but also because customs themselves are subject to all sorts of perversion if lacking that line of thought

and supreme standard of its exact judgment. The metaphysics of customs must investigate the idea, as well as the principles, of a possible pure will, and not of the actions and conditions of the human will in general⁽¹⁰⁾. Therefore, humbly respecting a human corpse that serves as an instrument for studying anatomy means making use of ethical principles.

The importance of the human corpse in the practice of anatomy teaching is undeniable, for it is a precious source which represents the most effective way to study this content⁽⁵⁾. However, the anatomy laboratory, which houses the corpse, can cause discomfort in the people who attend it. This laboratory uses unclaimed bodies, that is, bodies of indigents, delivered as a benefit to society without asking anything in return, being worthy of respect or sorrow. Students entering the laboratory for the first time usually experience anguish, anxiety and fear, the latter being seen as a contributor to the dehumanization of the corpse⁽⁵⁾.

It is worth highlighting that the impact caused on the nursing student by the contact with the cadaver has not been object of consideration in nursing training. Experiments have shown that anatomy teaching for nursing students with the use of cadavers has been beneficial, as it contributes to the preparation of those students for the clinical setting, but it may also expose the students to distress and anxiety, resulting in the development of physical and social symptoms such as sleeping difficulties and thoughts about the death of someone close to them, for example⁽¹¹⁾. Moreover, the corpse presentation, associated with the strong formalin odour, can provoke an important barrier in the students' learning⁽⁷⁾.

Regarding these symptomatic confrontations by the students, the distant and free of ethical considerations for the dead body behaviour can be related, which is the basis for this study. This is said because situations similar to this are common in universities^(12,13).

Faced with this, will, autonomy and freedom are actions that express the use of ethical principles in the use of corpses for the study of anatomy. According to Kantian principlism, the human being can find the true path starting from the point of view that all the principles are empirical, derived from the principle of

happiness, being that they are based on the physical or moral feeling; and rational ones, derived from the principle of perfection, are based on the rational concept of this perfection as a possible effect, or on the concept of an independent perfection, as the determining cause of a will. Every rational being who has a will necessarily also attributes to this will the idea of freedom under which they can act. The idea of freedom is inseparably linked to the concept of autonomy, and autonomy is a universal principle of morality. Morality is the relation of actions between autonomy and will⁽¹⁰⁾.

It is believed that practitioners involved in the process of teaching anatomy, in this case monitors and teachers, should personally express the fundamental lesson to all students, sharing teachings on ethical attitudes related to respecting the deceased as a factor of human dignity, in order to sensitize students about the morality of their actions, so that they understand that not always autonomy and will should prevail in their attitudes.

Never should an individual behave in a way that they can desire the truth by believing it to become a universal law. If the truth that the individual believes becomes a universal law, this truth will destroy itself⁽¹⁰⁾.

The teaching experience in Nursing undergraduate teaching allowed us to consider two relevant situations: 1. The anatomy subject always happens in the first year of the Nursing course; 2. The nursing students desire to learn how to save lives from the first year of the course is remarkable.

In this sense, some questions arise: 1. Is it possible that students, when faced with anatomically disposed corpses, without even having been prepared to deal with the presence of death while studying the meaning of life, become vulnerable to building misconceptions about respecting the dead? 2. Does the nursing student have to have the perception of being ethical, practicing the complex science in a dignified way, in order to respect the body that once participated in this spectacle that is life, and is properly prepared to face the image of death? 3. Can the student express dignity over an unclaimed corpse that once was also a person, had emotions, suffered and shared experiences similar to theirs, without having understood that in order to obtain

the necessary knowledge it is necessary to use real bodies?

Certainly the student's conduct narrated here is linked to an ethical question, but being a human practice, it could be said that it is related to bioethics. Ethics is the science that studies human conduct, being the ethical behaviour a consequence of the internalization of principles and values⁽⁸⁾. In this way, ethics from the point of view of practice is called bioethics, and emerges as a domain of reflection, taking its specific object to human questions. Bioethics propitiates the student to develop a critical view on the plurality of values that permeate the relations in the health area⁽¹⁴⁾.

From the bioethical point of view, the human corpse should not be seen as a simple object of study, since it is surrounded by an emotional and affective bond with the individuals with whom they have established a relation⁽⁷⁾.

Knowledge and skills are easily taught and learnt in the formation of health professionals, but it is difficult to develop attitudes based on ethics. Moral behaviour depends on the maturity of the individual and is influenced by reasons underlying attitudes⁽⁸⁾.

In the area of health, the teaching of bioethics is predominantly done in the discipline of deontology. The teaching of ethics must enable reflection on values, culture and decision-making in a real context, favouring the moral development of students. Therefore, the pluralistic and reflexive ethics, which is tied to the choice of internal values of respect, solidarity and justice, is not reduced to external determinations imposed by laws, culture or even fads⁽⁸⁾.

In nursing courses, the teaching of bioethics is still transmitted in a theoretical and abstract way, and discussions are guided by a conservative approach that privileges the deontological view, restricted to norms and codes, lacking reflections, revision of values and principles adequate to the professional reality⁽¹⁴⁾. The deontological view on respect for the dead is addressed on the basis of the Code of Ethics of Nursing Professionals, in which, in its article 19, section I, chapter I describes: "It is the responsibility and duty of nurses to respect modesty, privacy and the intimacy of the human being throughout his life cycle, including death and post-mortem situations⁽¹⁵⁾". In this sense, another question is

highlighted: Is it possible for a nursing student, who only has knowledge about issues involving the code of ethics, to be sensitized on the ethical principles that involve the use of cadavers for anatomical studies?

It is worth noting that the university itself favours the breakdown of knowledge that involves ethics and bioethics, when it provides the construction of knowledge in subjects organized from a biomedical model⁽¹⁶⁾. The fundamental in bioethics is the respect for others, since the bioethics significance is in the respect for human beings and in the meaning of established relationships, which are not extinguished with the death of an individual.

Thus, it is considered that the teaching of ethics and bioethics in a nursing course should permeate the various disciplines that make up a curricular matrix, and depart from real contexts of health work processes. However, the scientific literature⁽⁷⁾ and experience in teaching allow us to consider that the preparation of the nursing student for the use of ethical principles in the contact with human cadavers is still very timid. It is emphasized that the realization of the teachings that involve ethical principles is based on philosophical concepts.

In Kantian principlism, as a rational beings, humans can act before morality in an autonomous way, which relates to principles of their goodwill, inclination, and their principles of duty and obligation to the law. The human being, being rational, is the only one who acts with reason, which implies in their attitudes as a human being. Their attitudes depend on their will, which are tied to their inclinations, desires and happiness, and duty, that is wholly bound up with laws, which are laws of nature, that is, obligations. Humans' attitude, which is nothing more than morality, is their own, and depends on their will. The will relates to their autonomy, which is

freedom of expression. Thus, when one speaks of moral value, it is not about visible actions, but of their intimate principles that are not seen⁽¹⁰⁾.

It is understood that goodwill and duty are articulated, insofar as one opposes the other. Goodwill corresponds to a set of values embedded by the person during his life and that spontaneously leads them in their actions when they are exposed to face a dilemma. Duty comes from goodwill. However, often the attitude of the individual is due to duty and not through goodwill⁽¹⁰⁾.

Unfortunately, Kantian categorical imperatives remain abstract in the face of the medical practice⁽¹⁷⁾. Above all, principlist ethics can aid in human behaviour, in terms of the construction and understanding of one's own previous convictions, whether cultural or of any other nature.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Nursing encompasses social work, which involves the modes of production and reproduction of society. Anatomy is an introductory discipline in nursing education, and fundamental for the subsequent years. In this conjuncture, the ethical dimension should be emphasized in classes, besides the technical dimension. However, teachers who teach anatomy in nursing courses must assert the true meaning of ethics education. Nevertheless, learning is something done by the student, being a result of their interests and expectations.

It is believed that the preparation of the nursing student regarding knowledge that involves ethical principles and the study of human anatomy with the use of corpses is still a process under construction, which needs the attention of their masters.

O ESTUDO DE ANATOMIA NO ENSINO DE ENFERMAGEM: REFLEXÕES SOBRE PRINCÍPIOS ÉTICOS

RESUMO

A anatomia é uma ciência fundamental na formação do enfermeiro, sendo o cadáver o material didático que facilita a obtenção desse conhecimento. O cadáver proporciona de forma dinâmica a visualização das estruturas do corpo, e o estudante tendo contato direto com as peças anatômicas pode fazer a comparação com o indivíduo vivo. No contato com o cadáver o estudante deve se vestir de humanidade, respeitando a memória daquele que já partiu, caso contrário, a honra de aprendizagem se torna um objeto de ação discriminatória, de cunho frio e técnico. Este artigo teve como objetivo refletir sobre os princípios éticos que envolvem o estudo de anatomia no ensino de enfermagem, tomando como base a narrativa de um fato real. Esta reflexão está apoiada na teoria do principlismo kantiano, pois princípios éticos devem ser

relevantes junto ao estudo de anatomia no ensino de enfermagem, uma vez que este conteúdo introduz o aluno na profissão. Acredita-se que o preparo do estudante de enfermagem quanto aos conhecimentos que envolvem os princípios éticos e o estudo de anatomia humana com o uso de cadáveres ainda é um processo em construção, o que necessita da atenção dos professores envolvidos.

Palavras-chave: Educação em enfermagem. Anatomia. Ética.

EL ESTUDIO DE ANATOMÍA EN LA ENSEÑANZA DE ENFERMERÍA: REFLEXIONES SOBRE PRINCIPIOS ÉTICOS

RESUMEN

La anatomía es una ciencia fundamental en la formación del enfermero, siendo el cadáver el material didáctico que facilita la obtención de este conocimiento. El cadáver proporciona de forma dinámica la visualización de las estructuras del cuerpo, y el estudiante, teniendo contacto directo con las piezas anatómicas, puede hacer la comparación con el individuo vivo. En el contacto con el cadáver el estudiante debe vestirse de humanidad, respetando la memoria de aquel que ya se ha ido, caso contrario, el honor del aprendizaje se vuelve un objeto de acción discriminatoria, de carácter frío y técnico. Este artículo tuvo el objetivo de reflexionar sobre los principios éticos que involucran el estudio de anatomía en la enseñanza de enfermería, tomando como base la narrativa de un hecho real. Esta reflexión está apoyada en la teoría del principialismo kantiano, pues principios éticos deben ser relevantes junto al estudio de anatomía en la enseñanza de enfermería, una vez que este contenido inserta al alumno en la profesión. Se cree que la preparación del estudiante de enfermería, en cuanto a los conocimientos que implican los principios éticos y el estudio de anatomía humana con el uso de cadáveres, es aún un proceso en construcción, necesitando de la atención de los profesores involucrados.

Palabras clave: Educación en enfermería. Anatomía. Ética.

REFERENCES

1. Aragão JA, Fonseca-BarretoAT, Brito CJ, Guerra DR, Nunes-Mota JC, Reis FP. The availability of teaching-pedagogical resources used for promotion of learning in teaching human anatomy. *AdvMedEducPract* [on-line]. 2013 [citado em 01 fev 2017]; 4:157-163. Disponível em: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3780282/pdf/amep-4-157.pdf>
2. Guy R, Pisani HR, Rich P, Leahy C, Mandarano G, Molyneux T. Less is More: Development and Evaluation of an Interactive e-Atlas to Support Anatomy Learning. *AnatSciEduc* [on-line]. 2015.mar/abr [citado em 01 fev 2017]; 8:126-132. Disponível em: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ase.1461/epdf>
3. Góes FSN, Fonseca LMM, Camargo RAA, Oliveira GF, Felipe HR. Educational technology "Anatomy and Vital Signs": Evaluation study of content, appearance and usability. *International Journal of Medical Informatics* [on-line]. 2015. [citado em 01 fev 2017]; 84: 982-987. Disponível em: http://ac.els-cdn.com/S1386505615300149/1-s2.0-S1386505615300149-main.pdf?_tid=d6dca26a-ec10-11e6-b3c0-00000aacb360&acdnat=1486346955_52578915d2d924a8ce3df06111ab1b90
4. Herrmann G, Woermann U, Schlegel C. Interprofessional Education in Anatomy: Learning Together in Medical and Nursing Training. *Anat Sci Educ* [on-line]. 2015. jul/ago. [citado em 01 fev 2017]; 8:324-330. Disponível em: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ase.1506/epdf>
5. Castilho MAS, OdaJY, Sant'ana DMG. Miedo y Deshumanización: una Visión Crítica sobre la Realidad Cotidiana en el Laboratorio de Anatomía Humana. *Int. J. Morphol.* [on-line]. 2009 sept [citado em 30 jun 2016]; 27(3):909-912. Disponível em: http://www.scielo.cl/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0717-95022009000300043&lng=en&nrm=iso&tlng=endoi:
6. Salbego C, Oliveira EMD, Silva MAR, Bugança PR. Percepções Acadêmicas sobre o Ensino e a Aprendizagem em Anatomia Humana. *Rev. bras. educ. med* [on-line]. 2015. [citado em 30 jan 2017]; 39 (1) : 23-31. Disponível em: <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/rbem/v39n1/1981-5271-rbem-39-1-0023.pdf>
7. Costa GBF, Lins CCSA. O Cadáver no Ensino da Anatomia Humana: uma Visão Metodológica e Bioética. *Rev. bras. educ. med* [on-line]. 2012. [citado em 01 fev 2017]; 36 (3):369-373. Disponível em: <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/rbem/v36n3/11.pdf>
8. Burgatti JC, Bracalli LAD, Oliveira MAC. Problemas éticos vivenciados no estágio curricular supervisionado em Enfermagem de um currículo integrado. *RevEscEnferm USP* [on-line]. 2013 agos [citado em 30 jun 2016]; 47(4):937-942. Disponível em: http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0080-62342013000400937doi:
9. Locci L. Respeito ao Cadáver no estudo de anatomia humana. [on-line]. [acesso em: 10 julh 2016]. Disponível em: <http://pt.slideshare.net/nathafisioterapia/13respeito-ao-cadaver>
10. Kant E. Fundamentação da Metafísica dos Costumes. 70ª ed. Lisboa: Portugal. 2007.
11. Mc Garvey A, Hickey A, Conroy R. The anatomy room: A positive learning experience for nursing students. *NurseEducToday* [on-line]. 2015. [citado em 01 fev 2017]; 35: 245-250. Disponível em: http://ac.els-cdn.com/S0260691714002391/1-s2.0-S0260691714002391-main.pdf?_tid=7fc0e5be-ec14-11e6-b86b-00000aacb362&acdnat=1486348526_4b2f7ade252c664136745921f84cd7ab
12. High school girl takes selfie with cadaver, wins our vote for most repulsive selfie. *Petapixel*, [on-line]. 2014 fev. [citado em 25 mai 2016]. Disponível em: <http://petapixel.com/2014/02/06/high-school-girl-takes-selfie-cadaver-wins-vote-repulsive-selfie/>

13.Hamik S. Federal de Juiz de Fora investiga fotos de brincadeira com cadáver em aula de anatomia. Uol educação. [on-line]. 2009 mar. [citado em 25 mai 2016]. Disponível em: <http://educacao.uol.com.br/ultnot/2009/03/13/ult105u7719.jhtm>

14.Mascarenhas, NB, Santa Rosa, DO. Ensino da bioética na formação do enfermeiro: interface com a bibliografia adotada. Acta Paul Enferm [on-line]. 2010 mai/jun. [citado em 30jun 2017]; 23(3):392-398. Disponível em: <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/ape/v23n3/v23n3a13.pdf>

15. Oliveira ML. Código de Ética dos Profissionais de Enfermagem. 2ª ed. 2007.

16.Trevisan DD, Minzon DT, Testi CV, Ramos NA, Carmona EV, SilvaEM. Formação de enfermeiros: distanciamento entre a graduação e a prática profissional. Cienc. cuid. saúde. 2013 abr/jun; 12(2):331-337.

17.Boff L. Ética e moral: a busca dos fundamentos.2ª ed.Petrópolis: Vozes. 2003.

Corresponding author: Kátia Pereira de Borba. Rua 05 de outubro, 1931. Santa Cruz. CEP 85015-020. Guarapuava, Paraná. Brasil. E-mail: kpborba@gmail.com

Submitted: 16/09/2016

Accepted: 09/02/2017