

Understanding Philosophy in a Nurse's World: What, Where and Why?

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Abstract Concerns raised about the relevance of philosophy to the work of nurses have prompted us to examine the importance of philosophy in professional nursing. We introduce diverse understandings of what philosophy is, provide an overview of analytical and continental philosophies, and describe how philosophy is central to the work of nurses, educators and researchers. The discussion is situated in what some scholars view as a growing milieu of anti-intellectualism, instrumentalism, and neoliberalism. A three-pronged framework of philosophy is presented to help demonstrate the pervasiveness and magnitude of philosophy in nursing practice today. Philosophy helps nurses to think more critically and reflect on how their own values influence their practice and way of being. A better understanding of the importance of philosophy in the nurses' world is not only relevant but vital to our discipline and professional practice. A broader understanding of the interdependence of practical and philosophical matters in professional nursing is needed.

Keywords Philosophy, Nursing, Analytical, Continental, Anti-Intellectualism

"Philosophical inquiry does not lead to one correct answer but enables the articulation of various views of knowledge and therefore of nursing practice" [1]

Philosophy is often seen as a mystifying topic that is far removed from nursing practice. With abstract arguments and highly technical language, philosophy is frequently seen as too distant from the everyday practice and realities of nurses to be practical or meaningful [2]. Even doctoral students in nursing are loery of philosophy and its relevance as they question, "How can I use and relate to this [emphases added]?" [2]. In this paper we address two broad questions: what is philosophy and how is it important in nursing practice? To address these questions, we start by exploring the trends of anti-intellectualism, instrumentalism, and neoliberalism that inform the socio-political context of resistance to philosophy in nursing. Next, we introduce philosophy and the common categorizations of analytical and continental philosophy. Lastly, we propose an

introductory framework for understanding philosophy as a) content, b) method, and c) a way of life to highlight the interdependence of philosophy and practice in our discipline. We anticipate that a broader understanding of philosophy and philosophical thinking in a nurse's world will be of interest to clinically-based nurses as well as nurse educators.

1. Who has Time to Philosophize? The Socio-Political Context

Philosophical thinking in nursing is provoked by problems that nurses confront every day in clinical practice [3]. Such problems are complex, multidimensional, and often not fully resolvable. Even so, Fors, Ceci and Drummond [3] caution that despite the nature of philosophical questions that do not lead to singular answers, "still we must try" (p. iii). Nurses do try, and continue to engage in philosophical thinking about ethical, existential, and complex practice questions amidst barriers within socio-political and educational contexts.

As a group with one faculty member and four doctoral students, we agree with Fors, Ceci and Drummond who state that "doing nursing, being a nurse, contains as much a philosophical dimension as it does a practical one" [3]. We believe resistance to philosophy amongst nurses and nursing students is not only reflective of the practice nature of our discipline, or the way philosophical thinking is taught (if at all) in nursing programs. Instead, we locate our discussion within current socio-political considerations. We argue that discourses of anti-intellectualism, instrumentalism, and neoliberalism reflect broader philosophical shifts in education and practice domains. Nursing education, as the foundation to a practice profession, is especially vulnerable to these philosophical discourses [4]. The major barriers of anti-intellectualism, instrumentalism and a neoliberal agenda inform the context we explore in order to better understand resistance to philosophy in nursing.

1.1. Anti-Intellectualism

Anti-intellectualism is described by Hofstadter in his

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