PROBLEM-SOLVING, CRITICAL THINKING,

PHILOSOPHY AND NURSING

A colloquium on 26 and 27 May, 1982

Philosophy and critical thinking in nurse education

Ruth A Schröck
Senior Lecturer
Dundee College of Technology

HOGI:FN
Sch

KING EDWARD'S HOSPITAL FUND FOR LONDON
KING'S FUND CENTRE

PROBLEM-SOLVING, CRITICAL THINKING, PHILOSOPHY AND NURSING

Thursday 27 May 1982
9.30am

Philosophy and critical thinking in nurse education

Ruth A. Schröck
Senior Lecturer
Dundee College of Technology

One particular aspect of any educational experience
including nurse education, is the transmission of know-
ledge. But even if it were only the passing on of select-
ed, identified items of knowledge which it is not and
should not be, nurse educators share with their nursing
colleagues the prevailing uncertainty of what it is that
we can define as nursing knowledge.
In this country, over the last twenty-five years, we have
been in search of knowledge which we can, by whatever
criteria, define as our own.
As part of this endeavour, nursing research has grown
and extended into many fields of enquiry using predomin-
antly empirical methods of investigation.
Although I am not suggesting that empirical studies are
unnecessary or useless, I am concerned that the urgency
with which at least some nurses are searching for valid
and reliable knowledge appears to be largely directed
toward establishing a very narrow and it seems to me,
potentially dubious 'science' of nursing.
I am grateful to the organisers of this event to have
given us the opportunity to consider carefully the
potential contributions which another form of enquiry
might make to the development of nursing knowledge and
to its critical understanding and application.

Philosophical approaches in nursing are at present
somewhat arbitrary, certainly ill-defined, often
misleadingly superficial and generally, perhaps wisely,
ignored by both nurse educators and practitioners.
It seems therefore important that we first attempt to
understand what sort of approach or enquiry philosophy
might offer us, before we can discuss what place philos-
ophy may have in nurse education.
I cannot promise you an exhaustive and comprehensive
exposition in the available time, nor would I claim
that at the end of it, we shall have arrived at some
indisputable truths or conclusions. Philosophy in any
case is not that sort of enterprise as I hope we shall
see. Whatever we may achieve now and in the course of the
day will require very hard work, but I hope that at least
some of you will have found it worthwhile and might
continue a little further along the road.

A misleading view of the nature of philosophy
It may not be sound educational practice to begin with
a negative example, but my reason for doing so is, I trust,
more respectable. I would like to start with what may be
familiar to you before we explore more unfamiliar territory.
A familiar use of the word 'philosophy' is

as denoting "an integrated viewpoint toward certain beliefs and

practices." (Gardener 1973)   The custom to talk about 'a philosophy'

or about 'the philosophy' of an individual, of a group of people,

of the profession, or of an institution in the context of established beliefs and values which may be prevalent in nursing, appears to have originated in the North American nursing literature.

Chapman (1978) comments that

"The use of the word philosophy is perhaps a dangerous one as British nurses frequently laugh at their American colleagues because of their preoccupation with the 'philosophy of nursing'."

I am not sure that this use is dangerous because it can be ridiculed, but I think that it may be dangerously misleading for other reasons.

In some of the papers by American nurse theorists, the origin of the use of philosophy as synonymous with values and beliefs is attributed to educational theory. (Walker 1971, Ogundeyin 1976)

Walker bases her conclusion that the "discourse of nursology" (that is, talking about the study of nursing) is accomplished by three modes of inquiry, on an analysis of educational theory by Maccia (1968). According to this analysis, the scientific mode of inquiry provides a description and explanation of nursing phenomena as they occur, the praxiological mode describes and explains what constitutes effective nursing practice while

"In the philosophic mode a description and explanation is provided of what constitutes worthy means and ends for a given practical endeavour."

In other words, the philosophical method of enquiry is here clearly defined and delineated by the question 'What is worthwhile nursing?'.

It goes far beyond this argument to examine the nature of educational theory, or to deal fully with Ogundeyin's claim that "A philosophy of education is a statement of values regarding what should be taught in the educational institution." (1976)

Contemporary British texts in the philosophy of education would suggest that this view is not accepted (Archambault 1972, Lloyd 1976, Schofield 1972) and that the approaches taken by British philosophers of education are not only concerned with very different issues, but also very specifically declare the prescription of practical actions based on certain value systems to be an illegitimate aim for the philosopher. One quote shall stand for many which express the position of British philosophers of education in this respect:

> "Philosophers are no longer to be regarded as the guide
> of humanity, in education or anything else. Moreover,
> if someone were to argue that the philosopher as a human
> being may have some desire to do at least what he can to
> leave the world a little better than he finds it, a common
> contemporary philosopher's reply would be that there is
> not the slightest reason to suppose that his philosophical
> reflections - say upon some aspects of the problem of
> values - would render him in any way more competent to
> pronounce or advise on practical affairs." (Reid 1972)

But "to pronounce and advise on practical affairs" is precisely what these "statements of philosophy", whether they are made in the context of nursing education or practice, are meant to do.

"The course philosophy" as a statement of what should be done, or of what should be achieved in a given educational endeavour has become a standard pronouncement of nurse teachers. (Newell 1978)

"The statement of philosophy contains the broad goals of the
educational program and how these goals are to be attained", declare
Gordon and Anello (1974) in an explanation of a systematic curriculum
revision.   The use of the word philosophy to indicate what ideally
should be *done* is even more clearly narrowed down to a list of
prescribed actions when it is used in the context of nursing practice
and of instructions for the preparation of nursing students for
this practice.

"The Philosophy of 'Briggs'" (Collins 1977) may be an extreme
example of a selection of verbatim recommendations for action taken
from the Report of the Committee on Nursing 1972, and published
under the above title with the, in this context irrelevant,
explanation of philosophy as "The pursuit of wisdom, or of the
knowledge of things and their causes - *the study of ultimate
realities and general principles.*"   (the italics are mine)

Some writers indicate that the system of beliefs and values
denoted by the word philosophy is, or may be, an outcome of
philosophical reflection which is indeed concerned with a
systematic and searching analysis of ways in which we view the
world.

I would therefore agree that "Philosophy helps a person
to develop a coherent world view, one which makes sense of
every-day experience."   (Lanara 1976)

I do not agree that the system of beliefs and values which
a person may hold and on which he or she may act, is either
necessarily or even potentially a function of philosophical
thought.   A *'Weltanschauung'* may well be influenced by the

ideas which have been formed in the process of philosophizing
(Treece 1974), but their adoption as articles of belief which
may eventually form a personal or professional 'ideology' are
a function of social life.

An ideology (or a *Weltanschauung*) expresses the interests
of particular groups of people in particular circumstances, and
will be used to justify such actions as are compatible with the
interests of the group in question.   (Larrain 1979, Williams 1976)

That this is precisely the function of the so-called 'philosophy'
of nursing is clearly expressed by Gordon and Anello (1974):

> "... after the faculty have discussed and clarified their
> beliefs, a committee can then draw up a rough set of
> philosophical statements emanating from the discussion."

But this statement of the group's 'philosophy' must be

> "coherent and consistent with the overall purpose of the
> institution.   ... Faculty must therefore examine and
> clarify the institutional goals *before* formalizing a
> philosophy of nursing education."   (the italics are mine)

It is certain that ideological structures serve to increase
loyalty to the group, and that they are fundamentally necessary in
"the selection of modes, means and ends of action." (Godfrey 1971)
But in serving these purposes, ideologies are expressions of a
commitment which accepts at least for the time being certain
'truths' while

> "... the essence of philosophy is not the possession of the
> truth but the search for truth ... It is a disinterested
> pursuit, to which questions of utility ... have no
> relevance." (Jaspers 1951)

Whatever the Concise Oxford Dictionary may say, "the rules
for the conduct of life" are not drawn up by philosophers nor do
they constitute 'a philosophy'.

My particular concern that the use of philosophy as synonymous
with ideology should be exposed as being dangerously misleading
is that *it confuses questions with answers, uncertainty with
certainty, scepticism with conviction, examination with result,
and personal doubt with group concensus.*

It is important that we are quite clear about this distinction.
If we equate 'philosophy' with 'ideology', then no more is
to be said as an examination of the following comparison will
show.

PHILOSOPHY is concerned with	IDEOLOGY provides us with
QUESTIONS	ANSWERS
UNCERTAINTY	CERTAINTY
SCEPTICISM	CONVICTION
EXAMINATIONS	RESULTS
PERSONAL DOUBT	GROUP CONCENSUS

Furthermore, not only are the so-called 'philosophies' of
nursing part of the wider ideologies of the institutions in which
they find their realization (for example, the hospital, the college)
but as Wagner (1969) says distinctly, they include "the concepts
that a civilized society looks upon as being right, reasonable and
reachable."

The obvious problem here is of course that contemporary
industrial society does not present a homogenous structure of
beliefs and values but "consists of differentiated groups or
subcultures each having the propensity to develop patterns of
values in its members." (Godfrey 1971)

Ideological structures in nursing are under frequent and conflicting pressures. To what an extent and in what way nursing ideology responds to these pressures must depend on the ability of nurses to handle confidently the tools of conceptual analysis and ideological revision.

Where this ability and confidence are lacking, it is likely that nurses will be reluctant to occupy themselves with the confusion and entanglements that seem to threaten their professional lifes. They may console themselves with the thought that these discords are merely transient and that fundamentally everything is alright. It may well be that here Dickhoff and James's 'dogmatically held sets of beliefs and values' do become apparent. Nursing ideology may turn at this point into myths which rest on "numerous cliches, platitudes and strange contradictions which point ... directly to a set of unsubstantiated beliefs ...". (Reinkemeyer 1969)

However, whether we are dealing with reasonably coherent ideologies as perhaps expressed by the articulate spokesmen and -women of the profession, or with the cliches and platitudes which may serve others as a less coherent and less articulate rationale for their actions, the real

> "function of philosphy lies in its *criticism of what is prevalent* ... The chief aim of such criticism is to prevent mankind from losing itself in those ideas and activities which the existing organisation of society instills into its members. ...
>
> (Philosophy) means the lack of faith in the prevailing popular thought. ...
>
> By (its) criticism, we mean that intellectual, and eventually practical effort which is not satisfied to accept the prevailing ideas, actions, and social conditions unthinkingly and from mere habit; effort which aims to coordinate the individual sides of social life with each other and with the general ideas and aims of the epoch, to deduce them

genetically, to distinguish the appearance from the essence,
to examine the foundations of things, in short, really
to *know* them."   (Horkheimer 1972 - the italics are mine)

Confused ethics

When surveying books and articles concerned with 'ethics'
in nursing, applied to nursing or for nurses, one may hope to
find at least here some indications of the appropriateness and
usefulness of philosophical enquiries.   Unfortunately, it seems
to me that again nurses have adopted a terminology (possibly
following a medical tradition in referring to certain professional
issues as 'ethical' or 'ethics') which promises much, but generally
does less than justice to that branch of philosophy known as
ethics or moral philosophy.

It is true that moral philosophers differ in the interpretation
of their task.   Nowell-Smith (1954) rightly points out that
traditionally moral philosophy has been regarded as a practical
endeavour in providing knowledge for moral action, that is for
doing what is right.

But even classical philosophers do not undertake to give
detailed practical advice on how people should behave in certain
situations.   However,

"they all agreed that the goal of moral philosophy is practical knowledge, not that we should know what goodness is but that we should become good."

But if philosophical treatises from Plato and Aristotle to Hobbes and Spinoza contain injunctions to do something rather than another, to adopt this or that course of action, or to subscribe to this or that moral code, these injunctions are usually *implicit* in the nature of their discourse.

Firstly, classical moral philosophers examined a rather general and fundamental question: what is the good life for man and what is happiness? They saw their task in describing the good life in principle or in general outlines, and in showing how it could be achieved. Secondly, they held the view that people would naturally act in such a way as to try and achieve the good life, if they knew what it was. In other words, by offering *knowledge* about good and bad, right and wrong, by means of *a rational discourse*, this knowledge *had to be practical*, since all rational men, who could follow the argument, would inevitably act in such a way as to lead a good life.

In order to find answers to these very general questions about the kind of life that people might lead in striving for individual happiness and collective security, the classical moral philosopher had to range over a wide field of human concerns. Since men must live with one another, life in society and politics had to be discussed. Indeed, ethics and politics were, for these philosophers, one subject. They saw their function in elucidating

principles which might eventually affect individual conduct.

Some later philosophers called this endeavour which aimed at

> "systematising the different ends of human action and
> the different sets of rules for practice, or ideals of
> what ought to be",

practical philosophy and distinguished it from other philosophical

concerns referred to as theoretical philosophy. (Sidgwick 1902)

The latter, by contrast, would be concerned with all those

endeavours which might lead to an understanding of the world in

its widest sense but for its own sake, without either implicitly

or explicitly relating this understanding to any consequent

actions.

This distinction between practical and theoretical philosophy

in relation to ethics was, and occasionally still is, made in

comparing the contributions of, say, Plato with those of Broad

and Ross. (Nowell-Smith 1954)   Where Plato tried to provide an

understanding of the good life with the implicit assumption that

people would act on this understanding (that is, practical

philosophy), Broad and Ross are predominantly concerned with the

study and analysis of moral terms, moral judgement and the nature

of moral discourse generally (that is, theoretical philosophy).

At first sight, this appears to be a useful distinction to

make.   Sidgwick (1902) suggests, for example, that "such professions

as Medicine" are in need of practical philosophy.   Nurses too

have acknowledged that they need to

"justify one form of behaviour over another, to determine the right-making characteristics of action, for purposes of carrying out duties and obligations." (Davis & Aroskar 1978)

What is now on occasion called normative or applied ethics can be seen, for the purpose of my argument, as being synonymous with practical philosophy.

What has been called theoretical philosophy is termed by some nurse writers on the subject 'meta-ethics', which, however, is then quite narrowly defined as that aspect of ethics which "delineates the extent to which moral judgements are reasonable or otherwise justifiable." But even this aspect of moral discourse does not appear to be of importance to nurses. "Health professionals are primarily concerned with ... normative ethics", claim Davis and Aroskar (1978).

The almost inevitable conclusion to which this distinction between the rather narrowly conceived tasks of theoretical and practical philosophy leads, is to assume that practical philosophy in the form of normative or applied ethics only is of importance to nurses. The outcome of this now already limited conception of ethics is often what is called 'ethics' in nursing. It consists of generalized prescriptions for professional conduct which tend to resemble ideological statements rather than that they constitute *an examination of values which may justify these statements*, and *an analysis of how moral judgements based on these values* are made.

Heading these pronouncements on 'ethics' in nursing is the
"Code for Nurses" (1973) of the International Council of Nurses.
It is meant to be "a guide for action based on values and needs
of society." (ICN 1977)   An accompanying text presents "ethical
considerations in nursing practice" by providing fifty examples
of the kind of nursing situations which contain the seeds of a
moral dilemma. (Tate 1977)   There is, however, no exposition
of tenable moral theories or principles which could form a basis
for a critical analysis of the presented situations.   The questions
put to the reader which centre around the issue of what to do,
are not informed by any kind of practical or theoretical philosophy
in the original sense of these terms.   What has got lost, quite
possibly due to the distinction made by philosophers between
practical and theoretical philosophy which I do not think to be
as valid as it might at first appear, is the endeavour

> "to give a true account of what it is to make a moral
> judgement, to decide, deliberate and choose, as well
> as to answer moral questions in a more direct way."
> (Nowell-Smith 1954)

All moral philosophers, including the classical writers,
have always been theoreticians.   That is, they have argued the
reasons, their underlying assumptions and theories, for their
description of the good life and how it may be achieved.

It seems to me that *arguing the underlying assumptions is
the proper function of professional ethics.*

There is, as far as I could ascertain, only one British author
(not a nurse) who makes this point clearly and consistently when

dealing with moral dilemmas in medicine and nursing. Campbell
(1975) explains the concern of ethics as being directed towards
the "understanding of the nature of moral judgments". In this
endeavour, ethics attempt to "provide a rational framework for
understanding the complexities of moral judgments" and to clarify
the meaning of moral terms like good and bad, right and wrong.
As an "abstract, analytical, uncommitted approach" ethics,
Campbell claims, are 'characterized by the spirit of radical
enquiry". The moral philosopher does not attempt to 'solve'
moral dilemmas or

> "to provide any form of specific *moral* guidance such as
> rules for right behaviour ... His function is not one of
> moral guidance but one of objective analysis."

It seems to me that nurses tend to narrow down philosophical
enterprises to the point of distortion and falsification in a
surprisingly consistent way. When one compares Campbell's
explanations of the nature of ethical enquiries in relation to
moral dilemmas in health care with the explanations offered earlier
of how philosophical enquiries might assist a person in the
acquisition of a consistent and coherent view of the world, and
if one then examines what nurses actually do and offer as
'philosophy' or 'ethics', one reaches very similar conclusions.
In each case, what nurses offer should more accurately be described
as ideological statements or statements of belief.

The purposes of philosophy

If the making of ideological statements or the assertion
of beliefs are not the purpose of philosophy, what is it?
As a basis for further discussion, I would suggest that
philosophy fulfils a number of purposes, not all at the
same time, and not necessarily in that order.

```
THE PURPOSES OF PHILOSOPHY

    CRITICISM
    ANALYSIS
    EXPERIMENTATION
    CLARIFICATION
    SYNTHESIS
```

Criticism is based on the unwillingness to take for granted
what normally is taken for granted. The acceptance of
prevailing ideas from mere habit does not satisfy the
philosopher. "All novelty has to break through a cluster
of habits." (Nidditch 1970)

Analysis aims at the clarification of our ideas which the
critical mind has begun to question. Conceptual analysis
in particular is concerned with the clarification of mean-
ing especially when we become uncertain and confused about
ideas which may have served us well enough in the past but
which appear to have lost their usefulness. Logical analysis
provides the tools for a rational discourse, and often for
the elimination of nonsense in our thinking.

Not all analysis is concerned with meaning or logic, even
of the informal kind. By 'taking apart' our thought con-
structs and our conceptual edifices, the elements of which
these are composed may become apparent and, for the first
time, we may become conscious of some very fundamental
discrepancies and contradictions.

Experimentation with these now identifiable elements allows
us to rearrange and restructure them in a more consistent,
effective way. We often refer to this kind of experimentation
as model building. Models are experimental thought structures

which we can change, rearrange, discard or accept as
useful in helping us to understand the world around us,
or some part of it.
<u>Clarification</u> of what we are about, what kind of thing
we are dealing with, what methods we might use in solving
our problems is essentially a philosophical enterprise.
<u>Synthesis</u> of clear concepts in an acceptable model may
lead us to the consistency and effectiveness of thought
which will allow us to restructure reality in such a way
that it makes sense to us once again.

The problems of philosophy

The kind of problems which philosophers are concerned with
are of a particular kind, but like the problems a scientist
might claim as her own, they arise from our experience of
the world.

A *philosophical problem* starts with a person wondering about

what might seem to others a fairly obvious and settled state of

affairs.

Let us assume that I am watching a train leaving the station.

As it gets further away, it gets smaller and finally disappears.

It is plainly false to say, 'the train is getting smaller',

although this, and 'the train is gone', is just what we do say

in everyday conversations about seeing someone off at a railway

station.

But we know that the train, whereever it may now be, has
certainly not changed in size nor has it ceased to exist.
Nevertheless, I have seen something change in size and then
disappear, and if it was not the train, then what was it?   The
answer seems obvious.   What has changed is my visual image, or
my perception.   In saying this, I am making a distinction
between two entities: the train and its visual image.   These
two entities, however, cannot be the same or cannot be identical,
since one varied in size and even disappeared while the other
one did neither.   Does this mean that there are no ways in which
we can say what this object, the train, is *really* like?

The size of an object is clearly independent of the
observer.   If this were not so, then the object would have a
different size at one and the same time, if seen by two people
simultaneously from different distances.   This surely would be
a contradiction and would negate our very concept of a thing
or an object.

Since the train is *seen* at one time or at different times
by someone whose perception is bound to differ from mine, how
many different perceptions do I need to know about, or to
experience myself, in order to be able to say what this object is
really like?   Why should I even imagine that I can infer the
nature of an object by putting together various perceptions,
be they my own or other people's? Can I rely on the corroborative
evidence of others at all?

In other words, what is the relation between sensory perception and physical objects?

In pursuing this puzzle, one would undoubtedly get involved in the philosophical problems of appearance and reality, matter and mind, knowledge and belief, and countless others. (For example, see Russell 1967)

This illustration might demonstrate some general features common to all philosophical problems.

Firstly, that they arise from our experience of the world which makes us wonder at what we see and hear, say and do.

> "It is through wonder that men now begin and originally
> began to philosophize; wondering in the first place
> at obvious perplexities ..." (Aristotle 1956)

That philosophical problems are generated by perplexities about what we experience, is suggested by Goddard (1962) when he says,

> "... philosophical perplexity arises out of a declared
> ignorance; out of a willingness to admit that we do not
> understand what is going on here; or why we should accept
> this or that particular belief ...".

Even more explicit is Parker (1972) who sees the starting point of all philosophical enquiries in the knowledge which people pursue, claim and use in their everyday lives. The whole point of thinking about and investigating a philosophical problem is that the ideas it contains are related to what we are and what we want to do.

Secondly, that they cannot be solved by further observation or by further progress within the empirical sciences.

Whether I ally myself with philosophers who deny the independent existence of objects in the external world, or with those who argue the opposite does not change or affect the empirical data.   In either care, I can only point to, touch, weigh, measure or in other empirical ways describe the same thing.   Idealists and realists do not disagree about empirical data, and it would be useless to try and settle their disagreements by a closer inspection of the train, or by filming it in motion to show what it really looked like after it had left the station.

Their arguments are not empirical arguments but attempts to solve a conceptual problem.

It may, however, have become apparent that it is not merely a question of what one might call conceptual analysis.   Although it might be useful on occasion, to identify and agree on the criteria by which we call an object a 'train', or by which we define an experience as 'perception', the object and the experience as such were not really the difficulties arising from my example.   The possible answer does not lie in an agreement simply on what we mean but in "exploring all that makes such questions puzzling." (Russell 1967)

The problem at first may not appear to be a problem at all, it may seem to admit to a rather simple explanation.   However, as Nelson (1949) points out,

"The philosophical problem is wrapped in obscurity. To
be able to come to grips with it by finding clear-cut,
searching questions demands many trials and much effort."

It seems that each question leads to another more general
one until the specific problem has been submerged in a discussion
of very general and universal features of our experience in this
world. Any examination of philosophical writings will show the
generality of the concepts with which philosophers concern themselves.
Ewing (1951) among many others is representative in discussing
such notions as induction and intuition, knowledge and belief,
truth, matter and mind, space and time, cause, freedom, universals
and God, as fundamental questions of philosophy.

This trend to generality is an important characteristic of
a philosophical problem; therefore I will continue to characterize
such problems by saying,

*Thirdly, that they lead to or are conceptual problems of
a particular generalized kind.*

It may be important to note here that even those writers
who do not see philosophy as having a subject matter of its own,
point to its concern with general concepts common to the empirical
sciences, among which number, cause, induction and deduction,
probability, theory and proof are but a few. One might well
argue that the attempt to explain and interpret the empirical
sciences as one particular kind of enterprise in making the world
intelligible to us, is either one of the major philosophical
problems, or at least is a part of many philosophical problems.

Fourthly, that they are logical problems.

If philosophical problems arise from what appear to be
absurdities and paradoxes, as the chosen illustration might
indicate (for example, it is paradoxical to say that the train
as an object can be of different sizes at the same time, or it
is absurd to think that the train has literally disappeared from the
face of the earth), then the problem is of a logical kind.   That
is not to say that it is necessarily a logical problem in the formal
and classical sense of logic.   It does not necessarily break the
rules of formal logic, thereby yielding a contradiction.   It is
no contradiction to assert that the train does not exist independently
of being seen by me or some other cogniscant being, but it may
appear an absurd statement to make since we know that even when
being locked up in a railway shed at times, the train is still
there as an object which we know continues to exist.

It may well be that, what some people see as the progression
to greater perplexity in following philosophical arguments which
frequently increases one's sense of mystification, is in fact
a clear demonstration of a question or assertion which appeared
to be both meaningful and interesting at first, but on a close
examination turns out to have been quite absurd.   Perhaps this
is what Wittgenstein (1958b) means when he says,

   "My aim is to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised
   nonsense to something that is patent nonsense."

However, Körner's warning (1969) should be kept in mind that

"To philosophize is not to be perplexed by the unperplexing,
to cultivate perplexity for perplexity's sake or, even worse,
to adopt the pose of being eternally perplexed.   Perplexity
is often not only the beginning but also the end of serious
thought.   (But) It is not its aim."

*Fifthly, that there is not one specific way of settling
the problem.*

Goddard (1962) suggests that

"what makes a problem a philosophical question, is that
there is no *settled* way of answering it."

This seems to be supported by Wittgenstein (1958b) who holds

that "A philosophical problem has the form 'I don't know my

way about'."

When compared with the empirical sciences or with mathematics,

philosophy seems to lack a generally agreed method for deciding

the acceptability of its results.

The acceptability of any proposed solution to a problem

depends on its initial definition which indicates what sort of

answers could be expected as possible solutions, and on the

degree of precision of the requirements which the solution of a

problem must fulfil.

As Körner (1966) explains more fully,

"In both these respects philosophical problems vary
greatly.   At one extreme we find problems of logic
which are defined in terms of requirements which are
at least as widely accepted and at least as precisely
formulated as is the case with problems of mathematics.
At the other extreme we find philosophico-religious problems
defined by requirements which are accepted only by
comparatively small groups of thinkers and which admit of
very much less clear-cut formulation.   This accusation
that philosophy is 'subjective' in the sense of lacking
a general agreed method for deciding the acceptability of
its results tends to lose force as we move from the problems
of *Weltanschauung* towards problems of logic."

However, it seems to me that a possible disagreement over

the way in which a problem ought to be settled is not entirely

unique to philosophical problems, especially if one compares

them, as is often done, with the problems of the empirical

sciences generally.

The precision of the requirements which an acceptable solution

must fulfil varies considerably between, for example, physics or

chemistry and anthropology or economics.   Strictly speaking,

it is only one feature of acceptable solutions which applies

across the various empirical sciences, and that is that answers

must be based on or derived from empirical data.   (This, of course,

does not apply to mathematics which is often quite unjustifiably

included under the heading of 'science'.)

If one would wish to argue that at least within one discipline

of the empirical sciences, for example, chemistry, there is quite

general concensus of the criteria by which an acceptable solution

may be recognized, then again, this does not distinguish

philosophical problems from other kinds.   Taking logic as a

comparative example within the wider field of philosophy, some would argue that agreement as to what counts as an acceptable answer is high and based on very precise criteria.

Similarly, if one looks at some other discipline among the empirical sciences, for example, sociology, then it seems not so different really from the situation, let's say in epistemology, where there is greater diversity about what should count as a 'solution'.

Furthermore, just as all empirical sciences share one condition which prevails in relation to all potential solutions, namely their empirical basis, so one could argue that all sorts of philosophical problems share one condition, and that is that their possible solutions are solely based on or derived from *thought*. That which differentiates a philosophical problem from all other kinds of problem is "that it becomes clear to us *solely* through thinking." (Nelson 1949 - the italics are mine) It therefore seems pertinent to emphasize this feature as common to all philosophical problems, as

Sixthly, that they are only answerable through thinking.

If, as I have argued, philosophical problems arise from our experience of the world which makes us wonder at what we see and hear, say and do, then it seems that philosophical thought needs to be purposeful.

What is fundamental to all philosophical problems is that they raise questions regarding the nature and intelligibility of reality. (Winch 1958)

The investigation of the nature, causes and effects of particular real things and processes which can be observed in our world, is the primary aim of the empirical scientist. But what is 'real' involves more than what empirical research may show to be the case. The question expresses the problem of man's relation to the reality as represented by the results of empirical research.

Philosophical analysis of the problem reveals what it makes sense to say about the world.

It is not at all clear at the outset whether the scientific description of the vanishing train as a vast collection of electric charges in violent motion is any more 'real' or meaningful than Berkeley's assertion that matter is really nothing but a collection of ideas. (Russell 1967)

> "Many of the concepts underlying philosophical problems are concepts by which we conceive of, describe and talk about reality. The way we conceive of and understand reality depends upon the way we conceive of an understand relevant concepts. ...
>
> To the extent that the concepts underlying our understanding, our description and our talk about reality are misconceived or deficiently understood, to that extent is our understanding, our description and our talk about reality misconceived and deficiently understood." (Hartnack 1962)

The widely held misconceptions that, for example, 'science' starts with observation and that observation yields a *secure* basis

from which knowledge can be derived, have been rejected by many scientists (but perhaps mainly by philosophers of science like Chalmers 1976 and Nagel 1979).   However, there continues an adherence to these doctrines which is evident in the still widespread endeavour to establish statistical laws based on observations of what happens, and to insist when a proffered interpretation is shown to be suspect in some way, that more or different quantitative measures and manipulations would increase the compatibility of an interpretation with the statistics.   But

> "The compatibility of an interpretation with the statistics does not prove its validity."   (Winch 1958)

The validity of an interpretation rests on

> "what place in the whole scheme of things is held by the realm of facts with which (science) deals or even how they are related to the human minds which observe them. ... The sciences presuppose certain concepts which are not themselves susceptible of investigation by scientific methods and therefore fall in the province of philosophy." (Ewing 1951)

It seems that I have returned in a way to the beginning of my attempt to elucidate some common features of philosophical problems.   It may serve as a final distinguishing characteristic of philosophical problems to say,

Seventhly, that they are concerned with the nature of reality and its intelligibility.

```
PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY
are
  - derived from and informed by experience
  - insoluble by emprical investigations
  - leading to particular generalized conceptions
  - revealing logical paradoxes and absurdities
  - not being settled in one specific way
  - only answerable through thinking
  - concerned with the nature and intelligibility of
    reality
```

<u>Critical thinking in nurse education</u>
Having perhaps succeeded in indicating the far wider
concerns of philosophy than might emerge from the
often misleading writings on <u>a</u> or <u>the</u> philosophy of
nursing,

does this mean that all nurses, practitioners and researchers

alike, need to become proficient nurse philosophers?   I would

hardly think so, quite apart from the fact that it does not appear

to be a very practicable proposal to make.   I do think, however,

that all nurses need to participate at some level and to some

extent in accomplishing the essential philosophical tasks which

I have outlined earlier on.

Perhaps the most general requirement that needs to be met

by all nurses is to think methodically and systematically about

nursing, and to develop the ability to make explicit fundamental

conceptualizations in nursing practice.

To achieve this, I would not suggest that nursing students should study 'philosophy' or any of its branches in a formal manner.   What I would expect to be necessary is that they are given the opportunity to learn about *nursing* in a methodical and systematic manner, to acquire habits of thought that develop their logical and critical powers, to learn to structure their arguments, to develop a critical approach to apparently 'certain' knowledge, to look for and find relevant knowledge rather than to accept passively preselected information, and not least of all, to become consciously involved in using appropriate and relevant results of nursing research.   To put it all much more simply, the task to be accomplished by all nursing students is to think clearly, logically, consistently and coherently about nursing.

Only if and when we achieve this goal, will nurse practitioners emerge in sufficient numbers who can conceptualize their practice and who can make the perspective of their work explicit.

> "Philosophy, though unable to tell us with certainty
> what is the true answer to the doubts which it raises,
> is able to suggest many possibilities which enlarge
> our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of custom.
> Thus, while diminishing our feeling of certainty as to
> what things are, it greatly increases our knowledge as to
> what they might be; it removes the somewhat arrogant
> dogmatism of those who have never travelled into the region
> of liberating doubt, and it keeps alive our sense of wonder
> by showing familiar things in an unfamiliar aspect."
> (Russell 1967)

References

Gardener, M.G. (1973)   Teach-in: Joint Board of Clinical Nursing
        Studies: 1 The Philosophy   *Nursing Times*   Occasional
        Papers   69:15:61

Chapman, C. (1978)   A philosophy of nursing practice and education
        Nursing Times   74:8:303

Walker, L.O. (1971)   Toward a clearer understanding of the concept
        of nursing theory   *Nursing Research*   20:5:428

Ogundeyin, W.M. (1976)   Principles of curriculum development
        International Nursing Review   23:6:185

Maccia, E.S. (1968)   Development of theory in the curriculum
        field   *Samplings*   1:4:5-6

Archambault, R.D. edit (1972)   *Philosophical analysis and education*
        Routledge & Kegan Paul   London

Lloyd, D.I. edit (1976)   *Philosophy and the teacher*   Routledge
        & Kegan Paul   London

Schofield, H. (1972)   *The philosophy of education: an introduction*
        George Allen and Unwin   London

Reid, A.L. (1972)   Philosophy and the theory and practice of
        education in: Archambault, R.D. op cit. pp 17-18

Newell, J. (1978)   The course philosophy   *Nursing Times*
        74:15:639

Gordon, M. & Anello, M. (1974)   A systematic approach to curriculum
        revision   *Nursing Outlook*   22:5:307

Collins, S.M. (1977)   The philosophy of 'Briggs'   *Nursing Times*
        Occasional Papers   73:24:85-87

REFERENCES (2)

Lanara, V.A. (1976)   Philosophy of nursing and current nursing
      problems   *International Nursing Review*   23:2:48

Treece, E.W. (1974)   The philosophical basis for nursing education
      International Nursing Review 21:1:13-15

Larrain, J. (1979)   *The concept of ideology*   Hutchinson of
      London

Williams, R. (1976)   *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society*
      Fontana/Croom Helm   pp 126-130

Gordon, M. & Anello, M. (1974)   op cit   pp 307, 306

Godfrey, J. (1971)   Value orientation: a problem for nursing
      education   *International Nursing Review*   18:2:168

Jaspers, K. (1951)   *Way to wisdom: an introduction to philosophy*
      Victor Gollancz   London   pp 12, 15

Wagner, B.M. (1969) Careplans: right, reasonable and reachable
American Journal of Nursing   69:5:987

Godfrey, J. (1971)   op cit   p 167

Reinkemeyer, A.M. (1969)   The myths by which we live   *International*
      Nursing Review   16:1:39

Horkheimer, M. (1972)   The social function of philosophy
      Radical Philosophy   Winter   3:12-13

Nowell-Smith, P.H. (1954)   *Ethics*   Penguin Books   pp 12, 13

Sidgwick, H. (1902)   *Philosophy: its scope and relations*   An
      introductory course of lectures   Macmillan   London
      pp 30, 26

Nowell-Smith, P.H.   op cit   pp 23-35

Sidgwick, H.   op cit   p 28

Davis, A.J. & Aroskar, M.A. (1978)   *Ethical dilemmas and nursing*
      practice   Appleton-Century-Crofts   New York   pp 20, 1

REFERENCES (3)

International Council of Nurses (1973)   *Code for nurses: ethical concepts applied to nursing*   ICN Geneva

International Council of Nurses (1977)   *Code for nurses: ethical concepts applied to nursing*   Suggestions for application of the concepts   ICN Geneva

Tate, B.L. (1977)   *The nurse's dilemma*   Ethical considerations in nursing practice   International Council of Nurses Geneva

Nowell-Smith, P.H. (1954)   op cit   p 23

Campbell, A.V. (1975)   *Moral dilemmas in medicine*   Churchill Livingstone Edinburgh   pp 7, 9, 6, 8

Nidditch, P.H. (1970) The intellectual virtues An inauguaral lecture Department of Philosophy University of Sheffield p 8

Russell, B. (1967) The problems of philosophy Oxford University Press

Aristotle's Metaphysics (1956) Edited and translated by John Warrigton J.M. Dent & Sons London p 56

Goddard, L. (1962) Philosophical thinking An inaugural public lecture delivered in Armidale, New South Wales on October 17, 1962. The University of New England, Armidale, New South Wales p 26

Parker, N. (1972) The experience of teaching philosophy to adults Radical Philosophy Winter p 23

Russell, B. (1967) op cit p 1

Nelson, L. (1949) Socratic method and critical philosophy : selected essays Yale University Press New Haven p 88

Ewing, A.C. (1951) The fundamental questions of philosophy Routledge & Kegan Paul London p 13

Wittgenstain, L. (1958b) Philosophical investigations Basil Blackwell Oxford p 133

Körner, S. (1969) What is philosophy? One philosopher's answer Allen Lane The Penguin Press London p 5

Goddard, L. (1962) op cit p 2

REFERENCES (4)

Wittgenstain, L. (1958b) op cit p 123
Körner, S. (1966) Some types of philosophical thinking. In:
        British philosophy in the mid-century - a Cambridge
        symposium (edited by C.A. Mace) George Allen and
        Unwin London p 129
Nelson. L. (1949) op cit p 84
Winch, P. (1958) The idea of a social science and its relation
        to philosophy Routledge & Kegan Paul London p 18
Russell, B. (1967) op cit p 4
Hartnack, J. (1962) Philosophical problems: a modern intro-
        duction Munksgaard Copenhagen p 130
Chalmers, A.F. (1976) What is this thing called science? An
        assessment of the nature and status of science and its
        methods The Open University Milton Keynes
Nagel, E. (1879) The structure of science: problems in the
        logic of scientific explanation Routledge & Kegan Paul
        London
Winch, P. (1958) op cit p 118
Ewing, A.C. (1951) op cit pp 13, 15
Russell, B. (1967) op cit p 91