

Part II

Values and the Nursing Standpoint

Introduction

Professional nursing is a moral calling. Discussions of the nursing profession emphasize the importance of empirical knowledge, but surely the moral basis of the profession is equally significant. And the moral dimension of the profession is not limited to the problems of bioethics. Caring for others—whether by a professional nurse or by a parent, friend, or lover—is a way of morally responding to them. There is, then, a moral dimension to the core mission of nursing. Nursing has a social mandate, and this means that the profession has political dimensions too. In the professional practice of nursing there is a deep, organic relationship between nursing knowledge and nursing values. Any nursing intervention has to be based both on what is known about the situation and what is good, right, or valuable. In the discipline, however, the relationship between nursing knowledge and nursing ethics or politics has not been so clear. Indeed, the history of nursing shows that the relationship between the professional values and disciplinary knowledge has often been problematic.

The relationship between nursing values and nursing theories has been an important part in nursing debates about theory. Chapter 3 suggested that adopting a different view of how nursing values are related to nursing science might change the relationship between theory and practice, and thereby help close the relevance gap. This Part will consider the issues about values in more detail. In the seventies, nurse scholars found ways to let values influence the scope of nursing science, and yet keep the content of the science value-free.

Chapter 4 will present the debate within nursing as it has unfolded since the late nineteen sixties. During that period, philosophers began to question whether good science must be value-free. Chapter 5 will work through the philosophical issues. Philosophers of science today commonly hold that that science requires value judgments. The important questions are: What values? And what role do they play in inquiry? Chapter 5 is somewhat technical, but its aim is to develop a philosophical framework for thinking about how values are related to scientific inquiry. Chapter 6 will take a close look at the values of professional nursing and how they influence the discipline. It will argue that nursing knowledge is best understood as a kind of standpoint epistemology. Because of the professional role of nurses, nursing has the potential to develop a more complete, less distorted understanding of human health. Chapter 7 will develop this idea and begin explore its ramifications for nursing knowledge.

In many ways, the work of chapters 6 and 7 is foundational for the rest of this book. They develop the idea that nursing has the capacity to develop unique knowledge about human health *in virtue of nursing's socially determined role*. The importance of nursing practice in nursing knowledge has been obscured by philosophical ideas about science. Part III will begin to strip away some of the inadequate preconceptions, and Parts IV and V will start to articulate a conception of nursing science that is responsive to the nursing standpoint.