

Preface

My intellectual engagement with nursing began with a question about teaching. The Nell Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing at Emory University had just created a PhD program, and Professors Sandra Dunbar and Margret Moloney were teaching “the theory course.” They called to ask for advice about readings in the philosophy of science. I was at a bit of a loss. Like many philosophers of science, I thought that philosophy of science should connect directly with the sciences. Only when the problems are understood from the perspective of the scientists can the important questions be asked. Since I had no understanding of nursing research, I had no clue about how to answer their simple question about a reading list.

The solution, which the Nursing School was happy to support, was to have me co-teach the course. Working with PhD level students would provide a sense of the philosophical questions that arose from nursing research. My intention was to find some philosophically and pedagogically useful readings for the course, and then return to the quiet life of a philosopher. I found, to my delight, a new world for philosophical reflection. Nurse scholars had been writing about philosophical issues for almost forty years. While philosophers had not paid attention to them, they had been paying attention to us. The philosophical issues were clearly recognizable, and the context of nursing research and practice gave them a fresh aspect. I have taught, co-taught, or lectured in this course every year since its inception, and it remains some of the most rewarding teaching I do.

After several years of teaching the course, I began to kick around ideas for a book that would systematically treat the philosophical issues in nursing science. It was the fall

semester of 2006 when a student question catalyzed the ideas. We were wrapping up our discussion of values in science. The students had worked through Longino, Harding, and other feminist philosophers of science. This is all very interesting, they said, but what does it have to do with *nursing* science? In the ensuing conversation, I was struck by the analogy between nursing roles and the oppressed social roles that give rise to epistemic standpoints. With the idea of a nursing standpoint, serious work on this book began.

The phrase “nursing knowledge” is ambiguous. It might plausibly refer to knowledge that individual nurses gain through their training and experience. While the topic is vitally important, this book will not be directly concerned with the knowledge that goes into the decisions or care plans of the practicing nurse. Rather, we will be concerned with the kind of knowledge on which the nursing profession is based. This knowledge is developed within the research enterprise of nursing, maintained in the academy, and transmitted through professional publications. Ultimately, of course, the two senses should join: the knowledge of individual nurses should be informed by disciplinary knowledge. When disciplinary knowledge does not support professional nursing, a theory-practice gap emerges

This work will bring ideas and arguments from the philosophy of science to the discussion of nursing theory. The object is *not* to create a new nursing theory. Nor will there be sustained evaluation of, or commentary on, nursing theories. Rather, we will engage what could be called nursing “meta-theory,” that is, theory about theory. Since the late nineteen fifties, nursing has had lively debates about what forms theory should take, about the unity of the discipline, about the status of borrowed theory, and so on. These debates have been philosophical, and have drawn on philosophical writings, but they have been debates among nurse scholars. In keeping with the idea that the philosophy of science ought to be rooted in

philosophical questions arising from scientific practice, this work will primarily engage the nursing meta-theoretical literature. It will elucidate the historical and contemporary nursing debates and critically evaluate the arguments. While we will develop a ideas within the philosophy of science, the primary audience of this work is not philosophers, but nurse scholars.

A book with two audiences risks leaving both unsatisfied. If the technical details are passed over, philosophers may find the arguments superficial. If presented in all of their abstract glory, nurse scholars may find the arguments pedantic. This problem is partly addressed below by the chapter divisions. Some chapters (5, 8, 10, 14, and 17) are devoted mostly to philosophical positions, arguments, and counter-arguments. Readers who want to understand the full philosophical background to the ideas developed in the other parts of the book will need to work through these chapters. Those who are familiar with the philosophy of science, and who are primarily interested in the ramifications of post-positivist philosophy of science for nursing, might skip them. Those readers interested in an overview of the position developed in this book might read the introduction to each Part and Chapters 3, 7, 12, and 19.

This book is the culmination of ten years of thought about nursing science. The nurse scholars who patiently taught me about their discipline have my deep admiration and sincere appreciation: Sandra Dunbar, Margret Moloney, Kenneth Hepburn, Sue Donaldson, and every one of the nursing doctoral students who have come through Emory's program. During this period, my thinking about theory and methodology was sharpened by some very special colleagues in the humanities and the social sciences. I hope that Ivan Karp, Cory Kratz, Martine Brownley, Kareem Khalifa, and Robert McCauley see something of

themselves reflected in this work. A number of colleagues read and commented on this book at various phases of completion. Feedback of this sort is invaluable and I am deeply grateful to Ulf Nilsson, John Paley, Emily Parker, Norman Risjord, Stephanie Solomon, Alison Wylie, and especially Beverly Whelton for their thoughtful responses. Finally, this book was entirely written during my tenure as Associate Dean of the Graduate School. It would have been impossible but for the support Dean Lisa Tedesco. She not only helped me find the balance between research and administration, she made substantive contributions to my thinking about these issues.

Special appreciation must be reserved for Barbara, Andrea, and Hannah Risjord. Throughout the process of writing this book, they supported me in uncountable ways and suffered both my absences and absent mindedness.