Ethical inquiry and the concept of research

The place of scholarly research in nursing has not been well studied. Ethical inquiry, as scholarly research, has been included in this neglect. The concept of ethics research is defended and new research approaches to ethics are outlined. Forms of ethics research identified are scholarly, empirical, and dual mode. Questions considered are: Is ethics research research? What are the forms of ethics research? What is the role of empiricism in ethics research? And what is the relationship of ethics research to the moral concerns of nursing? Ethics research explores the basic moral norms undergirding nursing research, practice, and education.

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The overwhelming popularity of this image of science arises in part at least from the great successes of recent science.... How else are the successes of "hard" science to be explained except on the assumption that there is some privileged method and a community that disinterestedly applies that method? That is, it is assumed that there must be something special about the method and the community in order to account for the superior achievements of science. Indeed philosophers and others who stumble on without reaching community-wide consensus on obviously successful theories are seen as perversely and willfully spurning this epistemologist's stone. If only the philosopher and his compatriots in the Kingdom of Darkness would emulate the scientist he would acquire the capacity "to solve those problems that in earlier times have been the subject of guesswork only."

—W.M. Newton-Smith[1(p3)]

ETHICAL INQUIRY AND THE CONCEPT OF RESEARCH

The received and accepted categories of research in nursing, until recent years, have

been quantitative and qualitative.[2] The place of scholarly research in nursing, including philosophical research, has been much neglected if not altogether overlooked. Ethical inquiry, as one form of scholarly research, is included in that neglect. This elision is regrettable, since ethics research is the foundation of other forms of nursing research; ethics research explores the basic moral norms that undergird nursing research, practice, and education. The main objective of this article is to defend the concept of ethics research and to outline new research approaches to ethics.

RESEARCH IN NURSING

Kerlinger's *Foundations of Behavioral Research,* an influential and widely used text in nursing in the 1970s, defined research as the "systematic, controlled, empirical, and critical investigation of hypothetical propositions about presumed relations among natural phenomena."[3(p11)] In restricting research to studies of relationships, Fawcett and Downs rightly note that Kerlinger "implies that non-empirical works, such as philosophical inquiries and historical studies, are not considered research."[4(p3)] This definition of research is much too restrictive; it is given here to remind readers of longstanding positivist assumptions in common conceptions of research that to some extent continue to exist in nursing. This bias favors empirical forms of research and regards them as superior achievements.

Since Kerlinger's 1973 work, some progress has been made in the recognition of other forms of inquiry in nursing. Polit and Hungler[5] identify four types of nursing

research approaches and design considerations—experiments, quasiexperiments, nonexperimental research, and some additional types of research, which include historical research. No mention is made of philosophical research. Brink and Wood have stated that "all research designs fall into one of two categories—descriptive or experimental—and include historical research as a descriptive subtype."[6(p90)]

In a beginning move toward recognition of nonscientific research as a separate category, Seaman limited the focus of her book to scientific research. She writes:

Scientific research is a process in which observable, verifiable data are systematically collected from the empirical world—the world we know through our senses—in order to describe, explain, or predict events. Scientific research differs from nonscientific research undertaken by scholars such as theologians, whose work may be careful and systematic but concerned with unseen phenomena such as supernatural spirits.[7(p3)]

In spite of her unusual conception of theology, Seaman acknowledges a nonscientific, nonempirical category of research conducted by scholars.

This acknowledgment becomes better defined in Woods and Catanzaro's newer work *Nursing Research.*

Knowledge that makes up the science of nursing is only one component of the discipline of nursing. A broad scope of knowledge that emanates from humanitarian and scientific perspectives is required to understand the profession of nursing, the value orientation of the profession, and the nature and philosophical foundations of practice. Professional foundations in nursing are derived from modes of inquiry that include empirics, aesthetics, personal knowledge, and ethics.[8(p3)]

In a forthcoming National League for Nursing publication,[9] a number of nontraditional research methods will be addressed, ethics among them. While ethics research may be nontraditional within nursing, it is an ancient endeavor well known from the time of Socrates (469–399 BC). Ethics research can be found in nursing as early as 1935.[10] Today, there is a growing awareness of the importance of ethics research and its potential contribution to the body of nursing knowledge.

The present authors admit that they think of research as an honorific; to identify work as research is to give it a prized status with real-world consequences of grants, recognition, and status. Research is that key realm of intellectual activity that, in addition to teaching and service, denotes the work of academic philosophers and theologians just as much as it denotes the work of scientists. Since the term is so used, it appears to be an odd prejudice or an historical accident to exclude scholarly research, and ethical research with it, from the common definitions of nursing research.

It is the present authors' belief that there are many kinds of ethics research. Some kinds of ethics research are far removed from empirical research; other kinds are heavily empirical. One of the most significant forms of ethics research, here termed dual mode ethics research, combines strong empirical and value inquiry elements.

ETHICS RESEARCH AS SCHOLARLY RESEARCH

A substantial portion of ethics research is properly described as scholarly research.

Scholarship involves observation of data such as historical records, old textbooks, collections of letters, and other documents, both primary and secondary. Except for lacking the use of controls (a lack surprisingly widespread in scientific studies), such research, like traditional scientific research, is verifiable, critical, and rigorous. Each of the characteristic elements of scientific research, including explaining and predicting events, applies to some phase of scholarly research. Establishing an accurate provenance for documents and detailed observation of their condition and contents is required, and interpretation requires knowledge of their historical context. A good scholar is eminently scientific; he or she uses the best means available to find out what was actually said, written, understood, or intended by the authors studied. There is no difficulty establishing this phase of ethics research as research.

However, a deeper division exists here. It is illustrated in practices common among philosophers, where the discoveries of historical scholarship play strikingly different roles. For example, some philosophers will pursue the exegesis of Kant intensely and strive to understand what Kant wrote, what he meant by what he wrote, and how what he wrote can be understood in the light of Kant's historical setting. One sort of philosopher will complete his or her

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work with the historical analysis and not attempt to go on and criticize Kant's ideas, even though argument and discussion may be used to make his ideas clear or to develop plausible interpretations where Kant's intentions are unclear.

Other philosophers, however, will stop at some point and consider that they have stated Kant's argument as best they can with a reasonable amount of study. They are no longer concerned with what Kant may have actually thought or intended. They are now concerned with the argument as they have stated it and as it stands. At this point, the initial scholarly process provides a foundation for a second process that appears to be relatively nonempirical and proceeds more in the realm of the a priori. The philosopher attempts to ascertain through argument the truth of what he or she has set before us as though proceeding from Kant's pen. Even if this second stage is entirely deductive, nonempirical, or a priori, ethics research would still stand as research since at least part of ethics research, the first phase, is research.

But to mark this second stage simply as an a priori realm is to move too quickly. This second group of philosophers breaks down into two importantly different kinds of philosophers of ethics. Some, termed deductivists by Murray,[11] wish to ascertain the truth of moral principles as generalizations removed from and independent of any particular culture, historical period, or individual situation. They tend to see ethical concerns as divided sharply into value and factual realms. The realm of values is one of abstract principles and resolvable only by philosophical argumentation from fundamental and universal ideas. The factual realm of moral judgment and applica-

tion is then seen as essentially trivial. To make a moral judgment, one need only take the right general principles, obtain the applicable facts, and reach the correct conclusion. In their view, ethical principles are not informed or shaped by empirical study; instead, moral judgments are determined by abstract principles without empirical foundations.

Recently, philosophers active in normative and applied ethics have been coming to view ethical reasoning differently. In their view, the fact and value phases of ethics are not readily separable; the two kinds of concerns inform each other in a continuing dialogue. In their reading of Kant, the context of his views would not be set aside. Instead, a constant dialogue would be maintained between the facts about his judgments and theories, insofar as we can ascertain them, and the reflection on values in the current situation.

These recent philosophers, termed here ethical empiricists, criticize deductivist philosophers because their theories of ethics tend to ignore the historical roots of moral arguments.[12] Without appreciation of the historical situations and traditions that gave meaning to moral claims, ethics claims tend to seem unrooted, arbitrary, and ultimately unjustifiable. In contrast to the deductivists, if an exegesis is pursued deeply while the philosopher strives, at the same time, to examine the truth of what is being said, a dialogue takes place between description and evaluation.

This third concept of research, dual mode ethics research, represents a new and growing realm of ethics research. Here, serious and scientific analysis of actual social history and situational contexts is combined with equally critical and careful

examination of moral arguments. In such research, descriptive and evaluative components are so inextricably combined that a special realm of research must be identified. Indeed, there is no reason why dual mode research need be confined to examining the historical documents of traditional scholarly research. Dual mode research can include collection of new data in the formation of ethical arguments.

ETHICALLY SIGNIFICANT RESEARCH

Sometimes, the rejection of ethics as a subject for research has arisen from a preconceived notion of what kinds of data can be used in ethics research. A rejection of that form of research is then taken mistakenly to rule out ethics research altogether. For instance, one might propose the following

To test a moral principle (for instance, that fairness in distributing health care resources is morally required), we must create two societies on two different islands. In one society, principle A is to be followed (eg, fair allocation of health care resources), and in the second society, principle A is not to be followed. After a given number of years, we will then observe which group has the best overall quality of health.

Such grand, costly, and unethical studies are unfeasible. However, a philosopher would rightly point out that such a study would not only be unfeasible, it would be irrelevant as well. The study proposal presupposes that the best moral rule is one that fosters the best overall quality of health in a society. It is this latter ethical claim, a value or theoretical claim, rather

than the fact of whether or not overall better health care was achieved, that needs to be examined and tested philosophically.

A mistake is now made by both the philosopher and the proponents of such a study. Since the proposed experiment does not address the actual ethical question, the parties wrongly conclude that no experiment is relevant to a moral issue. But there are other moral questions to which systematic collections of data may be relevant. Some types of empirical data may illuminate the role of health in society and morality, even though the data do not conclusively resolve the philosophical question.

If one looks at the philosophical literature on facts and values, the emphasis is on the claim that moral truths might be solely established by empirical means. Brandt,[13] for instance, titles a chapter of his book, "Can Science Solve All Ethical Problems"? The answer by most philosophers has been "no"; the claims of ethics go beyond what can be shown empirically. It is not the authors' place here to argue against this claim. They wish only to oppose the next step, which is to divide areas of concern, rather too sharply, into philosophical and empirical concerns, and then to reject the empirical concerns as uninteresting to philosophers. As Frankena notes:

... I think that moral philosophers cannot insist too much on the importance of factual knowledge and conceptual clarity for the solution of moral and social problems. The two besetting sins in our prevailing habits of ethical thinking are our ready acquiescence in unclarity and our complacence in ignorance—the very sins that Socrates died combatting over two thousand years ago.[14(p13)]

The division of labor in intellectual life need not and must not define the nature of the basic questions.

Empirical questions may be beyond the research competence of philosophers because they have been trained in philosophical analysis and not in qualitative research. This, however, does not show empirical questions to be uninteresting or irrelevant to philosophy, nor does it show a lack of interesting philosophical questions about the relationship of empirical data to moral principles. The division of labor in intellectual life need not and must not define the nature of the basic questions.

INTERTWINING EXPERIENCE AND VALUES

The practice of ethics consultation, teaching, and research in health care requires clinical experience. Clinical contact is a highly prized requirement of bioethics teaching and consultation.[15] Experience and study of an issue are necessary for sound philosophical commentary; it would be fatal to relevance to address a clinical question from a purely philosophical viewpoint and to be ignorant of or to ignore the experiential context of the question. The bioethicist needs to know the range of cases that give rise to the issue, the key factors in conflict that give rise to the moral conflict itself, the positions of parties interested in the issue, and an accurate account of the events leading up to the moral question being asked.

Moreover, even straightforward em-pirical work aids in the discovery of important moral considerations, even if such study does not establish the truth of fundamental moral principles. The empirical work need not focus directly on ethics. Examples abound and several can be mentioned here.

A study by Goodwin et al[16] shows that placebos are poorly understood by many residents and nurses. It also shows that residents and nurses use placebos for purposes other than the treatment of pain; for instance, to prove a patient wrong or to degrade a patient. This study does not combine with a general moral principle to produce a moral judgment; instead, it suggests that most of the philosophical writing on placebos focuses too narrowly on truth-telling when additional issues, such as discrimination and anger toward patients, are involved. A bioethics consultant would need also to know of these other considerations.

A study by Brown and Thomson[17] showed that nurses in nursing homes commit a form of euthanasia by choosing not to call the physician for some cases of pneumonia. Again, without specifying any moral judgments, this article raises important issues about the role of nurses in making decisions regarding life support, and about the role of institutions in defining the roles of professionals in making ethically significant decisions.

A study by Bedell and Delbanco[18] of physician–patient communication regarding resuscitation showed that physicians who think they should talk with patients about resuscitation tend not to do so. This study raises important questions about the common moral claim by bioethicists that resuscitation should be discussed with

patients. Either institutional and educational changes need to be made to encourage such discussions, or the common ethical recommendation that resuscitation should be discussed with patients needs discussion and analysis.

Although these examples are concrete and specific, facts relevant to ethical study could also be of a broad and theoretical nature, such as theoretical claims about basic human tendencies to think in certain ways, the capacity of human beings to be altruistic, the ability of humans to understand one another, and the needs of humans to live in community.

Since the empirical study is well established as a scholarly form, it should be possible to develop methodologies that more strongly and explicitly interlink empirical and value considerations. For instance, qualitative research—a social science research method—is well suited for argumentation concerning values because of its potential for exploring individual viewpoints in depth. Although some techniques of qualitative research require that the researcher be as neutral as possible so that categories can emerge from the interview content, the technique also permits the interviewer to explore his or her prior theoretical commitments in interaction with respondents. Philosophers, therefore, have sometimes conducted qualitative research in order to explore their respondents' views as part of the philosophical process.

During the 1950s, Ladd[19] and Brandt[20] conducted interviews regarding ethics with people of a variety of cultures. More recently, bioethicists have conducted qualitative studies. Jameton[21] has published results from interviews with nurses, nurses'

aides, and residents in nursing homes in order to ascertain their views regarding the relationship of responsibility to autonomy. As he explains in the article, the study is motivated by an interest in obtaining concrete examples and attitudes for reflection, since the philosophical literature on autonomy in relationship to responsibility is scant and vague. Although the study of philosophy provided the possibility of a number of approaches to patient responsibility, knowledge of the actual situation helped to determine which approaches were the most reasonable and useful in understanding the ethics of practitioner-patient relationships.[21]

In another case, the bioethicist Self[22] is currently circulating a questionnaire regarding the teaching practices of bioethicists. Although the usual practice in qualitative research is to give the respondent little information about the researcher's views, he is engaging in a philosophical dialogue with the respondents by circulating with the questionnaire an article discussing the issues behind the questions. The study thus has the potential for opening in-depth discussion and philosophical argumentation between respondents and the researcher.

When more traditional scholarly forms are applied to the topic of ethics, a potential is created for strong interactions between empirical and value concerns. Using the techniques of social history, for example, Fowler[10] examines nursing's ethics from the 1870s to the present in considerable detail. Prior historical evidence and common assumptions appeared to show that much of early nursing ethics was actually "etiquette" and that nursing's social ethics was fluctuating, inconsistent,

and discontinuous with contemporary nursing ethics. However, the descriptive first-phase work on nursing's ethics previously had not been rigorously conducted, rendering the subsequent philosophical phase and its conclusions premature. The results of Fowler's study challenge the traditional interpretation. They reveal instead a much more historically constant and systematic normative interpretation of the nursing profession's ethical obligations in and toward society. The results also disclose extensive historical deliberation concerning and justification of nursing's moral claims.

Fowler followed the historical study with a qualitative study of the perceptions of moral conflict among practicing nurses (unpublished data). The results of the two studies provide appropriate empirical evidence for subsequent philosophical analysis of the moral claims of the profession and its individual members.

If qualitative social science research is research, then ethics research is research. There is only a fine line, perhaps one merely of social status, between studying the spoken words of residents and staff in a nursing home, bioethicists, or practicing nurses, and studying the written words of philosophers. There is no basic reason why one type of material should be considered data and the other not. If these types of material seem different to some readers, even less distinguishable cases can be constructed, for instance, by having a sociologist interview philosophers who write on ethics, or by saving the transcripts from interviews in a nursing home for 100 years and then treating them as a historian would primary sources. Indeed, Socrates' inter-

views with Athenians could be regarded both as philosophy and as in-depth interviewing.

A key reason for combining empirical with normative discussion is that general moral principles cannot be understood without understanding the facts and situations to which they are supposed to apply. The range of application of moral principles is limited, and the rules for their application are complex. A principle cannot be adequately stated without understanding the problems the principle is intended to referee. For instance, the apodictic command "thou shalt not kill" has been subject to a wide variety of interpretations and applications. An understanding of the principle critical enough to be considered research must involve both the tools of philosophy, such as argumentation and conceptual analysis, and the tools of social science research in such diverse areas as religion, health care, law, veterinary medicine, and military studies.

Two problems raise interesting questions regarding the relationship of factual, evidentiary material, and philosophical, a priori argument. One such problem is the definition of morality itself. Ethics is the philosophical study of morality. Assuming that the meaning of philosophical is clear, is the meaning of morality equally clear? Is morality an identifiable realm of phenomena and concerns that can be readily identified? Given the variety of what people have called moral problems, moral judgments, and moral principles in various cultures and historical periods it hardly seems to be an easy realm to define. Yet, most basic texts on philosophy simply assume that their readers know to what

forms of judgment the term moral applies and that the only remaining problem is to state that knowledge clearly.

A philosopher writing on ethics could define the realm of moral concerns a priori by a philosophical definition that serves an already established moral theory. However, the philosopher could also define the area empirically by gathering together the various concerns that people in different cultures and times regard as moral problems, judgments, and principles. The philosopher could also interview people about their experience of morality and their judgments as to which of their concerns are moral concerns. The present authors see no prior considerations that determine which should be done. Instead, there are interesting interactions between empirical and philosophical concerns in defining the subject matter of ethical theory, and so the dual mode approach appears most desirable.

Moral judgment is a second realm that involves both philosophical and empirical concerns. The problem is parallel to that of the decision sciences. Decision analysis, game theory, social judgment theory, and so forth attempt to establish and explore standards of rational decision making.[23] In so doing, the analyst must pay attention

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both to fundamental norms of reasoning and to the habits of mind and mental capacities of people. The study of moral judgment requires close attention to both normative and empirical concerns. For the most part, the processes of moral judgment have been little explored by philosophers. Indeed, the common ethics decision procedures recommended to nurses and physicians tend to be ad hoc, vague, and confused in their philosophical foundations. There is every reason for those interested in ethics to explore ethical judgment with the same sophisticated techniques and dual mode combination of argument and experiment that have been developed in the decision sciences.

VALUES AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The exclusion of ethics from the honorific research also results from an excessively narrow definition of scientific research. It is notorious that, since the breakdown of positivism, scientific research also involves values. Values are involved in scientific research at a number of levels, even in the most seemingly abstract and minute study of physics or chemistry. For instance, values are involved in the choice of subject matter; they represent a commitment to what is important to study. Values maintain the human and social activities of scientific study; such values include honesty, accuracy, patience, and attentive observation. The commitment of some scientists to follow empirical questions wherever they lead without concern for human benefits shows a high value of knowledge for its own sake. Explana-

tion in the biological sciences involves conceptions of normal functioning that are not easily separable from value claims. Finally, the social sciences, which are acknowledged to be research under most definitions of nursing research, are fraught with value issues in the treatment of human subjects, in the nature of sociological and anthropological explanation, in the perception of data and the use of observational language, and in the goals of research.

Indeed, some social science research possesses strong dual mode qualities. For instance, Bellah et al[24] conducted a major study of the values of Americans. They chose certain value constellations as typical of American moral points of view on such topics as the meaning of family life, personal satisfaction, the aims of work, and the relationship of individuals to community. Although the work is essentially descriptive, it contains the language of moral judgments by the authors:

... Brian's justification of his life thus rests on a fragile foundation. ... [Joe has a] dangerously narrow conception of social justice.... [Margaret is] caught in some of the contradictions her beliefs imply. ... [Wayne's] political vocabulary at best does a partial job of explaining and developing his own sense of justice and responsibility.[24(pp8,12,16,20)]

Insofar as these judgments by the authors represent careful philosophical argumentation, they move the empirical research toward the dual mode conception of linking empiricism with careful prescriptive thinking.

A second example of sociology at the margins of empiricism can be found in the work of Durkheim.[25] For instance, he pro-

poses in a talk that morality should be studied empirically and that a definition of morality should be empirically generated. As soon as he makes this claim, he proceeds to define morality a priori without actually undertaking the research. His definition is developed with some argumentation, but it does not refer explicitly to the philosophical arguments regarding the nature of morality. If the latter discussion were included, and Durkheim conducted the intended field study, his study would begin to fulfill the criteria for dual mode research.

TOWARD DUAL MODE RESEARCH METHODS IN ETHICS

It is the conviction of the authors that dual mode research characterizes the most interesting and central areas of ethics research today. To address theoretical as well as real-world concerns, ethics research must be conducted in both nonempirical and empirical modes. That is, it must concern itself with both values and facts, the prescriptive and the descriptive, the a priori and the a posteriori. It is not a concern here to debate the nature of the division or relationship between fact and value, a topic that has received considerable attention in philosophical discourse.[26,27] Rather, the present authors assert that both are necessary and interrelated objects of study in ethics.

The research relationship between the descriptive and prescriptive components can be described as a logical circle, with the a priori (the ideal) on one side of the
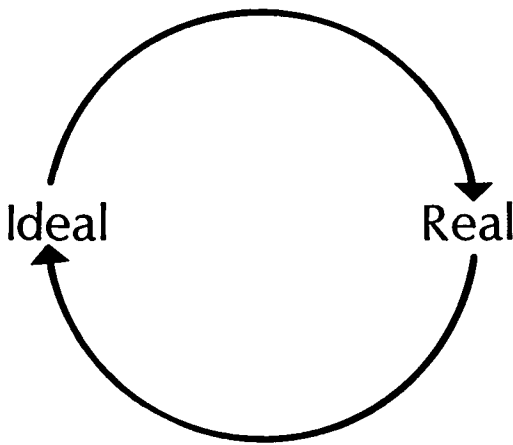
Fig 1. The research relationship between the descriptive and prescriptive components of ethical study.

circle, and the a posteriori (the real) on the other (see Fig 1).[28]

The ideal is universal, formal, prescriptive, and strives to transcend history and culture. The real is particular to time, culture, and society; provides concrete specifications of nonmoral values (goods and ends) that society actually seeks; and is descriptive. While the ideal judges the real in a normative sense, the ideal is also affected by the real. The real also serves to inform the ideal. Their relationship is separate yet interpenetrating. Thus, the arrows show a reciprocal relationship between the ideal and reality. It is in this circle that some of the most intriguing and consequential ethics research is to be found, for it brings together both the empirical and the nonempirical as necessary pieces of the same work of research.

At the same time, the authors are only beginning to be conscious of this type of research; its possibilities and methodological varieties have not yet been catalogued.

The case study

Case studies are a perennial form of data collection for the ethicist and may serve either educational or research purposes. Analysis of cases began in ancient times, and cases with commentaries were collected during many centuries of history. A number of nursing ethicists in the 20th century have collected cases for both teaching and research purposes.[29] The medieval study and teaching of ethics was largely conducted through analysis of cases. Although this method of ethics study fell into disrepute after a famous attack on it by Blaise Pascal, the method is experiencing a rebirth through the work of bioethicists and others working in applied ethics.[30]

Sets of similar cases are useful in identifying and weighing the important factors in making a judgment.[31,32] Cases are also necessary for understanding moral principles and their applications. They also help to identify problems in need of study.

Although cases can be contrived, such cases need to be set in the context of real cases that actually occur. There are three reasons for this. First, it is essential to relevance that a case set addresses actual decision problems. Second, moral reasoning is essentially plausible and practical reasoning; it need not be so powerful as to provide answers to hypothetical cases that can be addressed only in logically possible worlds. Third, a range of cases indicates a range of possible options, and thus a range of choices in each case. Insofar as case collections represent the experience of health professionals, they constitute data. Insofar as they are subjects of philosophi-

cal reflection, they are part of the prescriptive analysis.

Authoritative committee reports and recommendations

Many of the current ethics-related practices in health care have been the subject of blue-ribbon committee recommendations, such as the work of the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research[33] and the President's Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine and Biomedical and Behavioral Research.[34] These committees combine broad data collection with philosophical discussion and the processes of a selected group of persons striving to make considered judgments and policy recommendations regarding difficult ethical issues. For instance, the American Nurses' Association Committee on Ethics,[35] the American College of Physicians,[36] and the American Medical Association[37] have all rendered thoughtful opinions on ethical issues in the care of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome patients.

These opinions have weight partly because these organizations have both engaged in empirical research and gone through a process of deliberating the issues. If it were found that these recommendations were poorly researched or lightly made, health professionals would rightly give the opinions less weight, even if in the end the recommendations were considered to be correct in substance. The probity of these opinions regarding the issues rests in part on their historical actual-ity. Even if one disagrees with the opinions, one can use the historical event of the report as a concrete starting point for more abstract ethical analysis. Without an existing tradition of interpretation of moral claims as developed by such committees, the philosophical discussion would be less substantial.

The clinical ethical study

The *Code for Nurses*[38] emphasizes the commitment of the nurse to the individual patient and gives only modest attention to what may be called the collective good. Yet it is clear that in the current economic climate, the collective good of society and the individual good of the patient can pose a conflict of serious clinical and social proportions. The profession's normative ethical literature essentially overlooks this issue and thus fails to clarify and illuminate the tension between the individual and the collective good. However, a purely a priori discussion of this tension would be substantially less useful than a discussion that combines empirical observation with philosophical analysis. Interviews with nurses both in clinical practice and in policy-making positions could provide material examples of how nurses regard, ignore, weigh, or arbitrate this tension in the clinical judgments that they make or the position statements that they propound. Such empirical evidence would then inform, in content and approach, the normative discussions of distributive and social justice, beneficence, the nurse-patient relationship, and moral policy in nursing.

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The authors believe that research is key to the study of morality and that ethics research is a fundamental area of nursing research. This conclusion is based partly on experience and data collection and partly on philosophical considerations. Morality is not a resolved area of concern that can be entirely detached from culture, experience, and history into an a priori province of philosophical study alone. Instead, the study of morality requires a combination of empirical study of phenomena and philosophical discussion of issues.

Moreover, the authors believe that at least three important and distinct types of ethics research can be distinguished depending on how they interrelate empirical and nonempirical concerns. The authors propose, then, three categories of research necessary to the development of nursing knowledge in ethics: empirical, scholarly, and dual mode. Empirical research encompasses those categories of and approaches to research traditionally discussed in nursing research texts, such as qualitative and quantitative social science studies. Scholarly research encompasses both purely nonempirical research, such as simple philosophical analysis or argumentation, and inquiry that overlays a philosophical analysis on an empirical ground, such as the historical and philosophical analysis of classical philosophers' ethical works. Dual mode research is an emerging category that links ethical arguments closely to clinical investigation through new methodologies, such as case collections, consensus committees, ethical judgment analysis, and clinical ethics studies.

The methods for studying morality are undergoing change. Nursing researchers should consider careful, systematic studies of ethics as research even if such work includes less traditional methods. The superior achievements of science must be conjoined with the superior achievements of ethical and other scholarly research if nursing is to extend the boundaries of its knowledge while further developing its ethical foundation.

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