

Can philosophy benefit nurses and/or nursing? Heidegger and Strauss, problems of knowledge and context

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Abstract

When researchers and scholars claim their work is based on a philosophical idea or a philosopher's corpus of ideas (and theory/theorist can be substituted for philosophy/philosopher), and when 'basing' signifies something significant rather than subsidiary or inconsequential, what level of understanding and expertise can readers reasonably expect authors to possess? In this paper, some of the uses to which philosophical ideas and named philosophers (Martin Heidegger and Leo Strauss) are put in exegesis is critiqued. Considering problematic instances of idea-name use may enable the question: 'Can philosophy benefit nurses and/or nursing?' to be better understood if not answered.

KEYWORDS

Leo Strauss, literature, Martin Heidegger, nurses/nursing, nursing, philosophy

1 | SCENE SETTING

Can philosophy benefit nurses and/or nursing? To the extent that almost anything might, 'maybe'. Nonetheless, this and kindred iterations of the question (iterations that supplement a declamatory *Does* or assumptive *How* in place of the demurely modest *Can*), continue to attract consideration, and sustained attention suggests consensus on an answer remains elusive. Thus, at present, despite sophisticated arguments being advanced the question remains open and this is troubling for, bluntly, if an answer cannot ultimately be agreed, if the conclusion is anything other than resoundingly affirmative, numerous books and articles (this journal?) forfeit crucial facets of relevance and credibility.

This paper does not attempt to resolve the question. It is simply too big. Instead, to illustrate potential problems in the way philosophical ideas and authorities are used in written outputs, a conversation concerning Heideggerian phenomenological research is sketched. Thereafter it is suggested that the concepts

'philosophy', 'benefit' and 'nurses/nursing' should be more clearly operationalized in reports and essays employing philosophical ideas/authorities. Clarification will not in itself dissolve epistemological and other worries generated by the problematizing example. However, absent clarity readers may not adequately comprehend what is being claimed, and they might fail to appreciate whether presented ideas benefit nurses/nursing. A fresh example of potential idea-authority use is then outlined. Specifically, an idea from Leo Strauss is introduced to support the otherwise commonplace observation that anyone attempting to link philosophical investigation/ideas in or to nursing can encounter resistance. This use of Straussian thought is then critiqued. Introducing a philosopher's ideas and then immediately challenging how those ideas were employed could be thought fickle. Nonetheless, this device underscores an important if overlooked difficulty in assessing how philosophical ideas appear in the nursing literature. It might even help identify facets of what is involved in answering the question 'Can philosophy benefit nurses and/or nursing?'

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2 | TRUE (CRIME?) STORY

I am talking to a senior nurse researcher. This person's publications consist principally of phenomenological studies the majority of which claim a Heideggerian pedigree (reports are identified as Heideggerian phenomenologies). Given this one might imagine the researcher's work is based on ideas taken from Heidegger/Heideggerian inspired philosophy. Yet in conversation my discussant reveals she has not read Heidegger. She did once start *Being and Time* [Heidegger, 2010 (1953)].¹ However, she did not understand it ('too complicated'), and quickly gave up.

This vignette generates a veritable blizzard of questions and conundrums. Yet for me, in this exchange a description of one person's behaviour (ability) stands for, it suggests, a collection of puzzles. That is, when nurse researcher/scholars invoke philosophical ideas (or theories) and authorities (named philosophers or theorists) in writing, what function do these invocations serve? How much should researcher/scholars know about the ideas-names being used? And what can readers reasonably expect to be told about what is known and unknown? My presupposition is that in addressing these issues we may gain purchase on the larger or more difficult question 'Can philosophy benefit nurses and/or nursing?'

A nurse scholar who, in her writing, wants to make a simple point about moral reasoning and the role of consequences in reasoning is not obliged to cite or be acquainted with Bentham, Mill or Sidgwick. On the other hand, stating that published research or scholarship rests on philosophical ideas associated with a named philosopher is a major claim, and when that philosopher's work has not been read, it is a curious one.

Not unreasonably it might be believed something significant is being referenced when a paper asserts it utilizes a philosopher's ideas. Language here defies precision and the exact meaning of, for example, 'significant' is indeterminate. Moreover, as Geuss (2013) notes, Nietzsche happily talked about Hegel's work without (probably) having read Hegel in the original, and the issue under discussion is not therefore unique to nursing. Nevertheless, claiming research is a Heideggerian phenomenology presumably means something, and confronted by this declaration I would suppose my discussant was familiar with, at a minimum, Heidegger's main early and later works (including posthumous publications), as well as the more important secondary sources. This, for me, is what familiarity requires. Yet, arguably, absent this reading my interlocuter instead pretended to something (nontrivial knowledge of Heidegger) she did not possess.

The person in question however remained unabashed. She showed no flicker of embarrassment. Indeed, my concerns amused her for, as she said, 'Nurses don't read Heidegger?', and this is broadly correct. Limited numbers of nurses read Heidegger, and many, perhaps a majority of the readers of phenomenological studies will not be *au-fait* with phenomenological philosophy or non-introductory research methods texts. These readers cannot then judge whether asserted associations carry genuine content, and in addition, at least some phenomenological researchers who allege their work is

Heideggerian in inspiration could be accused of being similarly under- or uninformed.

Early drafts of this paper, in describing the vignette, were soaked in evaluatively provocative terminology (e.g., 'sham scholarship', 'farse', 'malady', 'risible'). This revealed my own position, and prejudicial phrasing remains (e.g., 'allege', 'uninformed'). However, while normative judgement cannot be entirely avoided (and nor, possibly, should it be), prim moralizing hampers understanding by distracting attention from what is interesting and difficult. For example, the work of the person described had been peer reviewed. But I assume neither reviewers nor readers challenged her claim that Heidegger's ideas informed how research had been conducted or interpretations made. I assume this because, if these claims had been challenged, since the association made would be undefendable, one might expect the papers either not to have been published, or if published, subsequently retracted. Therefore, either nursing journals do not require substantive links to be evidenced between Heideggerian philosophy/theory and research practice/methods in outputs asserting these linkages, or the researcher's work miraculously and spontaneously aligned itself with Heideggerian phenomenology (which is unlikely).

These comments presume something epistemologically problematic occurred, and if it did, questions about the value and rigour of journal review procedures should be asked. However, is anything remiss? Is there a problem?

A lot hinges on whether 'substantive' links need to be evidenced, and if they do, what is substantive and what does evidencing involve? Heideggerian insights could be expressed in the way research study objectives are framed, how data is garnered, how analysis takes place, how findings are interpreted, *etcetera*. Yet regardless of the elements chosen to highlight philosophy-method/practice linkages, the meaning of 'substantive' remains unstipulated, and (a sperate point) questions about how much researchers need to know about Heidegger and his ideas linger. Indeed, significant philosophy-method/practice linkages could ostensibly be evidenced by researchers in argument when those researchers have limited understandings of a philosopher's wider writings. That is, researchers could appear to speak knowledgeably about an idea without comprehending how that idea developed or fitted into the originating philosopher's writing. I later propose this is problematic. Here it is merely noted that what seems to be evidenced and what is understood need not cohere where understood means 'within the corpus of a philosopher's outputs'.

Further, the definition presented earlier of what being familiar with a philosopher's work involves may be overly ambitious even when that work plays a crucial role in research/scholarship. Nonetheless, if not this what? Fundamentally, when a publication asserts it is based on or informed by a philosophical idea or philosophy, and when 'basing' and 'informing' signify something significant rather than subsidiary or trivial, what level of understanding or expertise can readers reasonably expect authors to possess? I find it difficult to accept that published research reports can be labelled Heideggerian

phenomenologies when the researcher has not read Heidegger. But maybe I am wrong. Perhaps secondary sources can suffice?

Disjunctions between phenomenology as philosophy and phenomenology as method exist, and phenomenology could within nursing now mean something other than it means outside the discipline (Paley, 2017). Secondary sources can therefore refer to material about Heidegger/Heideggerian philosophy and/or methodology/methods texts which translate philosophical ideas into research processes. Where Heideggerian phenomenology is applied in research as method (assuming this makes sense), researchers might perhaps legitimately claim a Heideggerian pedigree for their work without reading Heidegger's philosophy. Cleaving phenomenology as research from phenomenology as philosophy is not without problem. Nonetheless, more easily than when philosophy/philosophers are referenced, it could be argued that researchers can engage philosophical ideas or philosophers at a remove (i.e., as secondary sources) when engagement is reduced to method.

This vignette raises complex questions about what is known, what is claimed, and what is acceptable/desirable in writing. Aspects of these relationships are developed later. However, anyone asserting work is built upon a philosophy or philosophical idea presumably intends something by the claim, and while what is meant remains underdetermined, acknowledging this is important.

3 | PHILOSOPHY AND NURSES/NURSING

The warring partisans on the great issues that engage our culture and politics presuppose, even when they do not recognize it, the truth of some philosophical theses and the falsity of others. If we are to evaluate their claims, we had better know something about philosophy...

MacIntyre (2009) p.1

Intuition as well as hope play into the idea that nurses and nursing can benefit from voluntarily engaging with philosophy. Or as per MacIntyre (2009), engagement might be unavoidable. On the other hand, a great deal here remains assumptive rather than proven, and awkwardly, because the nature and remit of philosophy is notoriously ambiguous, absent clarity regarding what philosophy includes or excludes, we lack surety about what benefit is or confers.

This lack of surety doubtless plays into the sometimes-odd ways philosophy is used in the literature and, for example, while Alasdair MacIntyre is a respected 'big name', does the above quotation add anything to what is said? This may be thought irrelevant. However, when argumentative points can be carried directly and straightforwardly without quotational support, are quotations decorations?

Misusing and mishandling what is cited is not uncommon (Anderson & Lemken, 2019, 2023), and papers sometimes clothe themselves in superfluous names for no obvious reason. Thus, the excerpt above appears at the beginning of MacIntyre's (2009) book *God, Philosophy, Universities*, a work outlining Catholic philosophical

tradition and that tradition's influence on university life/history. However, irrespective of anyone's theistic commitments (or lack thereof), readers of this journal are likely to agree with the quotation's positive orientation towards philosophical understanding, and the excerpt may flatter readers into agreeing with the preferences presented. Ideas and names used in this fashion might be considered sophist or decorative devices. And regardless of whether philosophical ideas and authorities stand as minor or major bulwarks in argument, where quotations and claims appear as adornments, though this possibly suggests bad writing, it might not matter if those using material in this way understand it deeply. Analogously, perfectly serviceable if generic qualitative studies may for affect swaddle themselves in unwarranted philosophical flummery. The presumption here is that philosophy as research method can become 'philosophy lite', and regardless of the role claimed in argument, philosophy as decoration could explain if not justify Heidegger's invocation in the example vignette.

It therefore looks as if to understand what philosophical ideas-names do in written texts we need to think about what writers are trying to achieve, and to do this it may be helpful to consider key terms in the question 'Can philosophy benefit nurses and/or nursing?'

What then is philosophy? Does philosophy signal philosophizing (i.e., doing philosophy/being a philosopher), or reading philosophy (imbibing the ideas of others)? Maybe it suggests some combination of these things? Or something else? For example, does philosophy involve or describe abstract forms of reasoning differing from the uses (philosophizing) to which reasoning is put? Is philosophical speech/writing necessarily distinct from or in tension with ordinary language use (see e.g., Sutherland, 2023)? Or are particular methods presumed? That is methods apart from types of reasoning/logic and discipline appropriate communicative acts? Does the descriptor assume a specific problem set (field or fields of enquiry)? Or is a stance upon and towards life suggested by the term? I am impressed by Hegelian Philosopher Robert Brandom's (2023) reiteration of the distinction between, when thinking of philosophy, nature and history. I suspect this has something to say to the issue in hand. Yet whatever the answers are to the questions posed above, in addition, should we suppose every form of philosophical endeavour, imagination, insight, school, orientation or tradition possesses beneficial potential? Or is this potential differentially skewed or even reserved for privileged forms of philosophical enterprise? How might we tell? And how is dispute to be resolved?

Whatever the topic or subject of interest, if you think a philosophical idea is important but I consider it irrelevant, trivial or compromised by a competing notion, what then? Bar Gödel and Gettier, philosophical ideas tend not to be retired [MacIntyre, 2022 (1981)], and the apparent immortality of philosophical thought contrasts dramatically with naturalistic/scientific knowledge where oblivion accompanies redundancy. Therefore, while philosophical fashions come and go and understandings alter, we still read the ancients, and we do so because their ideas resonate with and inform today's concerns. These are truisms. However, these truisms highlight the fact that philosophical disagreement is rarely concluded in

any final sense, and while naturalistic science generates knowledge claims which, complication aside, over time build testable, valid and reliable knowledge structures; the same cannot be said of philosophy. What, for example, does it mean to say that philosophical ideas 'resonate with' or 'inform' today's concerns? These weasel words allude to knowledge claims. But what sorts of knowledge claim? (see e.g., Grace & Perry, 2013).

Because philosophical ideas cannot be disproved or invalidated in the same way that, sometimes, scientific hypotheses are this problematises the concept of nonempirical philosophical knowledge (Achinstein, 2001; Rescher, 2003), narratives of meaning (Löwith, 1949) and notions of philosophical progress/development (Lynch, 2012). Further, absent progress/development, can discussions about benefit avoid relativist worries? Maybe these worries are an inevitable part of philosophy's problem field? Or might some variety of transcendentalism offer an escape route here?

And what is benefit? Is benefit synonymous with use value? That might be considered crass or naïve. It is certainly question begging. Thus, what exactly is use value? What is the utility of utility? Contrasting terms such as 'emancipation' or 'enlightenment' may be linked with benefit, and insofar as these alternatives designate positives, they are (tautologically) of value. Nonetheless, where philosophical emancipation/enlightenment is achieved through individual or social reflection (e.g., from a critical theoretical perspective, reflection that facilitates the casting aside of false/pathological ideologies), philosophical benefit accrues apart from utilitarian or objective conceptions of use value [Geuss, 1999 (1981)], and the point being laboured, it looks as if we either lack a stable meaning for benefit, or a plurality of possibly contradictory benefits must be recognized.

Additionally, and significantly, is it imagined that identified philosophical ideas or theories based on these ideas have external traction so that benefit is gained by nursing as a profession or practice (and presumably thereby patients)? Externality here signifies that others as well as the person or group engaged with philosophy benefits. Or does benefit reside primarily or even exclusively with individuals? That is, internally with whoever reads/does philosophy. Maybe benefit can be internal and external? However, for the members of a practice-based discipline, determining a position on whether philosophical benefit is in any particular case external and/or internal is presumably both vital and ultimately (perhaps?) disquietingly irresolvable.

To complicate matters, nursing, a potential object of benefit, lacks definitional clarity. Nursing refers to a group or collectivity as well as the actions of individuals. Over the last half-century attempts have been made to designate or associate nursing as a group/collectivity with the title 'profession' (itself a notoriously slippery concept). However, setting to one side the question of whether nursing is or is not a profession, it is undeniably a very heterogeneous entity. It is not one thing.

Activities performed by nurses, as well as the values, attitudes and dispositions that are claimed as scaffolding or justification for activity differ across time and geography. Moreover, even within

temporally bounded single regulatory jurisdictions (e.g., nursing in one nation or region/state on a specified date), it is not immediately obvious what the signifiers nurse and/or nursing designate in the question 'Can philosophy benefit nurses and/or nursing?' Presumably, ultimately, we are interested in benefiting patient care. However, regards nursing, there are many nursing types or functions, and differences between these things and the interests and concerns generated by difference necessitate acknowledgement. Thus, any attempt to address let alone answer questions of benefit require that addressees articulate who benefit benefits. Excluding patients (for simplicity, let us assume they are often if not always potential 'end beneficiaries') are we, for example, in a list that could plainly be extended, considering benefit accruing to nurses with roles in clinical practice, clinical management/administration, clinical education, nonclinical management/administration, nonclinical academic education, nonclinical but nonacademic education, clinically focused research, nonclinically orientated research or some variety of non-research scholarship?

Highlighting distinctions is important. Nurses of course inhabit multiple roles. Clinicians can be scholars. Managers can be educators. Nurses can be patients. However, it ought not to be presumed that philosophy (whatever it is) benefits (in whatever way) all and every nurse who encounters or engages with it in a similar fashion, or in every instance. Further, when we look at beneficiaries, even within outlined categories of nursing, terms such as, for example, 'clinical' do not define uniform undertakings. There is probably as much variation among nurses in clinical practice as there is across the clinical/nonclinical divide; and claims to the effect that this or that philosophical idea benefits nursing as an undifferentiated entity lack the specificity that is required if difference is to be granted due significance (meaning) in explanation. Philosophical ideas that are of immeasurable interest and relevance to a (singular) nursing doctoral student exploring a highly specialized topic in academia may, to most clinically located nurses who do not share the doctoral student's curiosity or concerns, appear petty or inconsequential. Or, by contrast, even when the salience of a philosophically loaded idea is broadly accepted in abstract (e.g., justice), vehement disagreement regarding the bearing or implications of that idea will be present in concrete situations, and concreteness includes the positionality and identity of nurses located within or across the spectrum of nursing roles/activities. Therefore, not only might differently placed nurses have antagonistic views on, for example, the nature of justice. Even within a local or otherwise small homogenous group, agreed actions do not necessarily follow on from accepting claims about justice.

Expanding on this, philosophical discourse may help clarify options and opinions on or about justice. However, even at a micro level, disconnections between clarification/understanding and practice/action cannot but dent unnuanced assumptions regarding philosophy's benefit for nursing as a collectivity. This might be articulated as a 'so what?' problem. And, for example, Marxist inspired ideas about ideology and the way ideology masks self-serving sectional interests (injustices) could be seen very differently by junior and senior nurses within a single ward/institution. One

group might find within the idea a helpful means of articulating what they take to be disliked aspects of their condition. Another group may balk at or reject what is suggested (this is potentially foregrounded or implicit within the concept). Nonetheless, regardless of whether the idea of ideology and its correlates (including justice) are perceived to be defensible or not, no single action or set of actions follow on from acceptance/rejection, and hence, acceptance/rejection has no universally or even generally agreed practice or practical implication.

Alternatively, focusing on nursing discounts wider factors of potential significance, and roles (e.g., the role of a clinical nurse working in this place, at this time), like sociocultural-historical situatedness more generally, contribute to but do not in any totalizing sense delimit what it is to be a self. Thus, since selves might be considered *a* or even *the* key site of benefit, separating or compartmentalizing private from public or corporate (professional) life may be foolish.

Sidestepping entrapment in the minutiae of debates concerning the privileging of social explanation grounded on collective and/or individualistic criteria, it is perfectly reasonable to pose questions of benefit at a group or professional level so long as we remember that groups are comprised of individuals. Therefore, while for the sake of argument we can allow that benefit may accrue to collectivities as well as individuals; nursing is undertaken by nurses, and nurses, as people, as selves, do not metamorphosise into alien creatures outside of work. Philosophy, if it confers benefit, might evince this thing in the private and/or corporate worlds. It could be that benefit obtained privately through, for example, contemplative reading on a subject unrelated to nursing, or realizations gained into what might grandly be termed the wider issues of existence and life later influence ideas about work (nursing) albeit in unexpected ways. That is, nurses as historically situated sociopsychological selves entangled in families, friendship networks, communities, religious groupings, political institutions etcetera, may take up philosophical ideas and grasp insights outside professional contexts that, probably in difficult to define or articulate ways, later contribute to and thereby steer understandings relevant to nursing.

If 'to understand what philosophical ideas-names do in written texts we need to think about what writers are trying to achieve', then unpacking key terms in the question 'Can philosophy benefit nurses and/or nursing?' indicates that a great many questions about what is meant by these words remain unresolved (they may be unresolvable). We must then presumably accept that different writers make different assumptions and have different objectives when using philosophical ideas and names in argument. Given this plurality, and absent an objective or agreed metric capable of determining what or how much should be known before knowledge is claimed, declamatory assertions concerning what is necessary are problematised. Further, relativist angst notwithstanding, researchers who say their studies are based on Heideggerian phenomenology while having only the sketchiest of understandings of his work cannot be shown to be wrong/in error.

Noting something is not wrong does not however mean it is right, correct or desirable. We probably have to assume external philosophical benefits are conceivable in or for nursing, and for these benefits to be realized, despite obvious complexity writers should (a normative claim) make themselves clear. Clarity might involve disclosing how much about the philosopher/philosophic idea being used is comprehended (this is developed further later), and moreover, journal contributors ought to explicitly explain and defend how the ideas they present concretely benefit nursing. In addition, to be satisfying, this explanation/defence needs to be precise in its formulation. Readers deserve to know how this or that philosophy or philosophical idea profits identified beneficiaries, and absent a view from nowhere, it may be necessary for answers to include or at least consider sociocultural and psychological factors pertaining to and situating historically placed individuals and/or groups (meaningful answers are unlikely to be ahistorical or unbodied). These suggestions are of course unnecessary and redundant when the detail sought is provided, and this is often the case. Nonetheless, important claims pass unchallenged (i.e., in the example vignette, what the researcher knows about Heideggerian philosophy), and hereafter, to take forward thinking about what should be considered and disclosed, additional problematic uses of philosophical ideas and authorities in nurse scholarship are explored.

4 | MAKING AN EXAMPLE OF STRAUSS

While I 'like' (psychologically) to imagine that philosophy can benefit nurses in some way, experience indicates that not all of my colleagues find such thought helpful, useful or wanted. Indeed, when philosophical ideas are deployed to challenge existing ways of doing or thinking, hostility can be generated.

Sharp definitions and unsparing analysis would displace the veil beneath which society dissembles its divisions, would make political disputes too violent for compromise and political alliances too precarious for use, and would embitter politics with all the passions of social and religious strife.

Strauss (2023, p.7) – quotation attributed to Lord Acton

In *Natural Right and History* [2023 (1953)],² Strauss claimed that philosophy as unrestrained/unending questioning conflicts with and thereby finds itself countered by powerful interests which demand a modicum of conformity (limits to enquiry) in order that society as a political entity can successfully cohere, operate and reproduce. This argument defines philosophy in a particular way (i.e., as ceaseless questioning), and it might be objected that since philosophical endeavour rejects agreed or definitive classification, Strauss is here somewhat imperious. Yet philosophy often does involve the implicit and explicit questioning of what can be termed foundational

assumptions, and questioning these assumptions is unsettling. It may, using Acton's word, 'embitter'.

Drawing on Strauss to inform thinking about philosophy's relationship with nursing stresses philosophy's negative-critical and destabilizing potential. This potential is arguably antipathic to structures of activity that in modern health and educational systems can reasonably be held to require nontrivial degrees of ideational consensus/stability for their operation, and from this vantage philosophy must be supposed problematic. That is, while nurses are told that criticality is applauded and even required, significant blocks upon philosophic (and other) critique are likely to be encountered by anyone who sincerely and persistently questions established ways of working or the assumptions supporting established practice.

If the link drawn between Strauss and nursing is not a false resemblance, using Strauss to restate an otherwise familiar or commonplace problem serves two functions. First, it bolsters or gives form to what would otherwise merely be an idiosyncratic observation on my part. Second, it suggests the benefit nurses/nursing can derive from philosophical engagement is perforce radically constrained. When benefit assumes practice or behavioural change as an endpoint, it should be noted that Strauss' wider argument in *Natural Right and History* (ibid) discounts important elements of this possibility by challenging claims to the effect that philosophy should involve or promote real-world change. However, ignoring this not insubstantial hurdle, if something like his 'philosophical questioning generates hostility' argument was to be presented in a paper (as it has just been), what is going on? Is the author (me) claiming familiarity with the work of Strauss? Is it being suggested that, as described, Strauss says anything new or important? (And having repeatedly described it as restating a 'commonplace' I have already tipped my hand here).

Philosophical ideas and authorities are, as previously stated, sometimes introduced to nurse writing when, frankly, they are unnecessary. Thus, if all I am saying is that philosophy is disruptive and no one likes disruption, why complicate matters by throwing around the names of dead philosophers and Lords? As per earlier comments about MacIntyre, what does this add? Problematically, authors can cover over a lack of meaning in what is presented by plastering writing with unnecessary adornments. Ponderous quotes from illustrious names represent one form of questionable embellishment, and perhaps the above quotation from Strauss is an instance of this? (see Alvesson et al., 2017, regarding similar practices in research). Further, my use of Strauss ignores the nuance that was earlier demanded. That is, we need to be clear about where, who, and what, before investigating how and why. And thus, who, for example, do I think I am informing or influencing?

Journals such as this carry papers that talk to a comparatively narrow stratum of nurses. I suspect small percentages of clinicians access this material (most doubtless consider it irrelevant), and therefore, if benefit is conferred it cannot be supposed that nursing as a collectivity benefits in any straightforward sense from the publication of philosophical or theoretical papers (the same is almost certainly true for most research reports). Again, these comments

assume benefit has an external dimension. Yet granting this assumption, is it imagined that philosophical ideas appearing in this publication filter out in some fashion from readers (limited in number) to the wider nursing body? This is conceivable. It may be hoped for. However, the hypothesized cascade is quite flimsy insofar as, absent empirical and theoretical supports, we do not know the extent to which it occurs. And therefore, the answer to the question 'Who do I think my words inform or influence?', may beyond a clutch of educator/academics be almost no one.

This statement is not intended negatively. I am not presenting a counsel of despair. Rather, recognizing reality encourages us to ask difficult questions, and thus, speaking directly to the handful of people who read this, when I introduced a Straussian idea, if I intended that idea to play a significant role in argument, what knowledge of Strauss do you think I ought to possess? What should I know about Strauss?

I have read *Natural Right and History* (2023) twice and when reading I earnestly attempted to understand what was being said. Strauss, however, is famously difficult to pin-down. Like Heidegger, different interpretations of Strauss' writing are held by dissenting groups each of which claims the superiority of their insight, and to supplement understanding I therefore engaged with a limited number of secondary texts and online resources (Burns, 2021; Intellectual Deep Web, 2023; Leo Strauss Center, 2011; Robertson, 2021). Yet this means I have barely grazed the surface of Strauss' thought and we must then ask, is my situation any different from that presented in the opening vignette? Do criticisms and questions posed there also apply here?

MacIntyre (2022) warns of the danger inherent in misreading great names, and unless the reference was passing or inconsequential, it would be a mistake if Strauss' comments about the disruptive and therefore resisted nature of philosophical questioning were presented outside of or isolated from his wider thought (as occurred here). For example, Strauss' enquiry into philosophy's difficult relationship with society ('the City') is not easily extricated from ideas juxtaposing Athens with/against Jerusalem (differing idealized poles of reasoning/authority), his thinking about natural rights, manifest and latent (hidden) meaning, and why he engaged with these subjects (his rationale for philosophizing). Thus Strauss (1899–1973) was a German Jewish emigre to America. He fled Europe to escape persecution, and although his intellectual interests were sizable, Strauss repeatedly investigated modernity and modernity's slide into moral relativism; a slide he thought instantiated in the sociopolitical space by Nazism. Like MacIntyre, a thinker with whom he shares notable similarities (as well as differences), Strauss sought a rescue to contemporary ills via a return to and reimagining of ancient Greek thought. His ideas sit within and uphold a complex and frequently convoluted theory (set of theories), and in my view, tearing (as I did) an idea out of context to make an otherwise mundane point (i.e., philosophy is disliked because it is disruptive) does significant violence to that idea (it distorts/corrupts).

On the other hand, what do I know? I have only read one of Strauss' major works. So why trust my interpretation?

Context plays too important a role in meaning making to be ignored. Unless ideas can be extracted from a philosopher's corpus of work and, decontextualized, still make sense when reassembled elsewhere in a pottage of juggleries, ignoring context threatens our understanding of how ideas obtain meaning within systems of meaning making. My presumption is that, more often than we might prefer, ripping ideas out of context (as corpus) muddles meaning. Further, to understand a philosopher's work we should arguably also consider how that work contributes to the wider spectrum of philosophy being done in a field/discipline. And thus, any in-depth or serious engagement with Straussian thought ought on occasion to consider his reaction to/against, for example, Heideggerian literature. This leaves open the degree or extent of required understanding, and what is needed must presumably be determined on a case-by-case basis. However, understanding is something that should be argued for (rather than presumed), and while what is necessary cannot be stipulated in advance (*fiat* is inappropriate), viewing ideas in isolation ignores context and risks misunderstanding.

Or are these declamations too bold? We can sometimes sensibly use or present decontextualized ideas, and as noted, when a philosophical idea plays a minor rather than major role in argument less background knowledge/understanding is probably acceptable. Or perhaps decontextualization may prove innovative? Indeed, since separate and discontinuous conversations make up or are assumed under the heading of philosophy, because philosophy is not progressive or developmental (Geuss, 2013), ideational coherence and consistency within the thought of a single philosopher and/or across broader conversations will often be absent. Further, many famous philosophers (e.g., Nietzsche) had no formal training, and this potentially contributed to the novelty and importance of their contributions (*ibid*).

What matters, I contend, is that researcher/scholars attain and display self-awareness in writing. That is, self-awareness about what it is they are doing and not doing in argument. It is not then the case that nurses making philosophically grounded arguments are necessarily or automatically handicapped by a lack of expertise (knowledge of context), and nurses who turn to philosophy to enhance their understanding need not worry that they are not themselves philosophers. What matters, to repeat, is that those using philosophical ideas are aware of how ideas are being used, and awareness includes thinking through whether 'being used' means in or out of context. This is not always a major problem. Yet if we look critically at how philosophical ideas and authoritative names are presented in nursing texts a modicum of queasiness can on occasion be experienced.

5 | CONCLUDING DISCLOSURES

Researchers who claim for their work a Heideggerian pedigree ought to explain whether they mean Heidegger as method and/or philosophy. This is not always clear. Moreover, insofar as they mean philosophy, and if they have not read Heidegger, should this not be

disclosed? How 'reading' is to be defined remains tantalizingly abstruse, and secondary sources could prove sufficient (though I personally doubt it). Nonetheless, absent information about researcher/scholarly knowledge, readers might feel and be misled.

Likewise, anyone who, as I did, introduces a philosopher's ideas without being familiar with the corpus of work from which they are taken should consider coming clean about their lack of contextual knowledge. What 'being familiar with' involves will vary. Yet authorial self-awareness is a good, and where appropriate, acknowledging the danger of misunderstanding ideas considered out of context (as corpus) seems sensible. Absent this awareness, confused arguments (*baloney*) may be presented, and readers need some steer if they are to assess the veracity or trustworthiness of what is argued.

An under investigated set of interleaved issues are illustrated by the Heideggerian vignette and Straussian example (I am not specifically interested in Heidegger or Strauss). In developing my case I relied upon an anonymized conversation, and also, I mocked my understanding and use of Strauss. However, while discretion and persiflage avoid assaulting identified people/publications (thereby evading embroilment in rancorous and disruptive confrontation), let there be no mistake, difficult questions can be asked about the knowledge and understanding displayed in some nursing papers, and to improve the quality and potential influence of philosophically informed writing we might think carefully about, for example, how ideas and authoritative names are deployed in argument.

In this paper only a part of what could be addressed is covered. This is not the last word. A lot is left unsaid. I have not, for example, tackled questions of philosophical benefit from a practice/clinical (bottom up) perspective, and this starting point may well be more important than that pursued. Nursing theory which designates itself philosophy is left untouched (see e.g., Thorne, 2023). My own writing undoubtedly fails to meet the ideals outlined here. And I might be totally unrealistic. Yet despite brobdingnagian gaps and oversights, and exculpation notwithstanding, focusing on features of exposition offers one means of engaging the question 'Can philosophy benefit nurses and/or nursing?' If nothing else it highlights how key terms in the question require clarification, and also, it ties clarification with or to argumentation/writing. This could prove useful.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ *Sein Und Zeit* appeared in 1927. The date 1953 refers to the Max Niemeyer Verlag (Tübingen) publication of the referenced edition.

² The first edition of *Natural Right And History* appeared in 1953. However, the book reproduces and expands upon lectures originally delivered in 1949, and for this and other reasons the original publication date of this and other of Strauss' works is occasionally disputed.

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