

Philosophical Perspective on Health: A Review Paper

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Abstract

Theory and philosophy guide an individual along a distinct path. Furthermore, because human health includes a number of different characteristics, a single theory is not adequate to properly grasp human health on its own. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore philosophical views on health. This overview discusses only the biomedical, functionalist, post-structuralist (as defined by Foucault), and Marxist viewpoints on health. Every single philosopher has their own unique lines of reasoning and reasons that support their beliefs. For a more comprehensive investigation, which should also include investigation of other possibilities, we suggest doing an additional systematic review.

Keywords: *Philosophy, Health, Bio-medical, Functionalist, Foucault, and Marxist*

Introduction

The WHO Constitution of 1948 defines *health* as a state of complete physical, social, and mental well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (WHO, 1997). In contrast, the Ottawa Declaration says an individual or community must recognize and realize desires, fulfil demands, and alter or cope with the climate. Consequently, people view well-being as an opportunity for daily life, not as the ultimate goal of life. Health is a positive philosophy that emphasizes social and personal capital and physical capabilities (WHO, 1986).

Furthermore, the purpose of health education is to enhance health literacy through intentionally designed learning activities that involve communication, thereby enhancing knowledge and developing life skills that are beneficial to both individual and community health (WHO, 1997). Thus, as part of the larger field of health promotion, health education contributes to improving personal and neighborhood health. This study includes concepts such as participation, voluntary reform, patient empowerment, and human health. Capacity-building

inside health care programs and systems is a valuable and necessary component of the overall strategy group in charge of health promotion (Hou, 2014).

The authors who contributed to this paper not only present my personal philosophy of fundamental health concepts, but also showcase a diverse array of perspectives on health philosophy. Philosophy is the fundamental subject that investigates philosophical issues such as existence, meaning, intelligence, mind-body, language, and ultimate truth. In the context of philosophy, it is imperative to address inquiries that are exclusively metaphysical in nature. Nevertheless, philosophy is distinct from conventional philosophy in that it concentrates on the subjective methods of a particular subject. Philosophy employs an approach that is congruent with its circumstances and obstacles.

Philosophy is the origin of the issues. It focuses on the fundamental principles that underpin the cosmos' atomic assertions. The act of thinking about concepts in order to determine their true nature and purpose is known as philosophy. It is paving the way for technical improvements in mathematics, physics, and the humanities. The progression of thought is synonymous with the progression of research (Tantray & Dar, 2016). Philosophy encompasses a subjective understanding of health-related aspects that are crucial for addressing the entirety of an individual's nature (Black et al., 2009). While there have been many reviews on social philosophy, there is a lack of attention on health philosophy.

Therefore, this study will make a significant contribution to the area of health philosophy. Hence, this study aims to explore the relevance of philosophical and theoretical frameworks related to health education, analyzing health and society interactions, critique traditional and modern approaches, apply these perspectives to health education, foster critical thinking, and explore ethical and political dimensions of the significance of bio-medical, functionalist, post-structuralism (Foucault), and Marxist viewpoints on health.

Methods and Materials

To identify and simplify pertinent publications that investigate the philosophical and theoretical perspectives in health education, we conducted a comprehensive literature review. The review conducted a thorough and comprehensive examination of the current literature, utilizing academic databases such as ProQuest, Hinari, and Google Scholar, among others. Particular keywords and phrases were utilized in the search technique in order to capture the variety of viewpoints that were being investigated. Certain search phrases, such as "biomedical," "functionalist," "Foucault," and "Marxist perspectives," were utilized in the context of health and its relevance in the field of health education. We purposefully chose these topics to investigate the many theoretical underpinnings that underpin health education techniques.

Philosophy and theories related to health education

Any research work is grounded on a single or multiple theories. Some of them are as follows.

Functionalism and its relevance to health

Functionalism is the oldest scientific viewpoint in sociology. Auguste Comte (1798–1857) penned *Sociology* in 1838. Other prominent authors include Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, and Robert Merton (Comte 1896). The central concern of functionalism is maintaining social harmony, equilibrium, or cohesion in human culture. "Internal order" refers to a condition of rationality (Amzat & Omololu 2012). Empiricism, rationalism, and the general modern revolution drove the rise of functionalism. Functionalism is, first and foremost, a realist school of thought. Realists, also referred to as essentialists or objectivists, hold the conviction that existence and social structures are real. They hold the belief that all events are accurate and subject to empirical and critical analysis. In today's society, health problems are an unavoidable fact of existence (Amzat & Razum, 2014).

Talcott Parsons first proposed the idea of the "sick role" in 1951. The ill individual had two privileges and two liabilities, according to Parsons' description. Acknowledging that illness causes instability in the lives of those afflicted was the first step. The second task involved seeking technically qualified assistance to manage their condition, with the hope that they would follow the advice. Meeting these two obligations ensures the disabled person's freedom from regular duties and accountability (Reynolds, 2014).

However, this phrase primarily refers to individuals with severe conditions rather than those with chronic diseases (ibid.). Similarly, Parsons' concept (the sick role) has come under scrutiny due to the rise in chronic illness prevalence and the growing emphasis on lifestyle-centred health promotion (Varul, 2010). In *The Rules of the Sociological Method*, French sociologist Emile Durkheim argued that sociology's foundation must be an awareness of social truths. Social facts are external and coercive forces and structures that affect the individual, as stated by Amzat and Razum (2014). According to Durkheim, a person's level of inclusion in the social classes they belong to has an inverse relationship with their risk of suicide. According to him, egoistic suicide is a symptom of social alienation and a consequence of pathological individualism. One term for self-hatred is suicide. In addition, he stated that religion plays a part in society's gradual, sluggish, but steady functioning (Dew, 2007). His study examines suicide rates across different groups, despite criticism that it does not determine if a particular person could try suicide. Parson's sick leave policy only covers acute illnesses; it does not cover chronic illnesses. Both his definition and his generally positivist value system have generated controversy in recent years.

Marxist perspective in health education

The name "Neo-Marxism" was coined by a number of social science currents that developed Karl Marx's ideas throughout the course of the preceding century with inspiration from other intellectual movements. In the 1980s, a distinctive school of Neo-Marxists called analytical Marxism came into being (Roemer, 1986). Important players in the political systems of recent history were Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Authorities and academics dismissed

their works as mere communist propaganda. Alongside significant world events, such as the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union between 1989 and 1991, their popularity as political literature diminished (Collyer, 2015). Marxists argue that capitalist culture generates dialectical tensions the contradictory existence of the means to address a dilemma that impacts the lives of so many representatives of society but is incapable of doing so and bringing the two together. Much of the explanation behind this paradox is that capitalism, by design, is a monopoly. The very term alienates labor, thereby negating the welfare of the economy. Employees play a crucial role in perpetuating capitalism across successive generations. That is the only route. The only way to overcome this paradox is to eliminate or negate capitalism (Yuill, 2005).

Medical establishments, including scholarly ones, are deeply traditional, owing to Flexnerian medicine's historical origins and the articulation of science, practice, and medical institutions with hierarchical power relations in culture. George Bernard Shaw once described medicine, the military, and the priesthood as the most appropriate occupations. This conservatism permeates the numerous social sciences disciplines associated with welfare and medicine. The following sections clarify these dominant positions and alternate Marxist perspectives in the fields of medicine and fitness. (Navarro, 1985). So, far into the 19th century, Marx and Engels criticized existing medical philosophies and political agendas. Many researchers have used their experiences to step through the rhetoric and agendas of liberalism and recognize that healthcare has been different in the past and that it is likely that it will be better in the future. However, capitalism has created prosperity for the major economies and allowed affluent nation-states to create universal healthcare programs throughout the twentieth century. For the rich, 'health' has come to mean a longer life expectancy and the ability to buy a different kind of human body (Collyer, 2015). Marxists assert that class disparities divide society into two classes, leading to conflict and unequal access to healthcare. In addition, the Marxist method is characterized by positivism and the tendency to assign blame to the victims, while it does contribute to the well-being of marginalized individuals. Nevertheless, other academics have criticized his hypothesis for its reliance on subjective lived experiences.

Post-structuralist perspective (Foucault) in health education

Michel Foucault (1926–1984) was a French philosopher. From 1971 to his death from AIDS in 1984, he held the Chair in History of Systems of Thought at the College of France. He focused much of his theoretical work on the backgrounds of poor and marginalized groups. He became a political activist on behalf of homosexuals due to his sexuality and political activism, as cited by Henderson (Henderson, 2015). Foucault's work is comprehensive and rich in philosophical wisdom that academics can work on. As a "discourse," Foucault explored the relationship between power and knowledge regarding how they react to social, political, medical, and legal facts (Abera, 2019). A study argued that researchers exercise influence

because of their deep knowledge and competence, which enable them to effectively administer and oversee therapy, thereby compelling patients to comply. Legal and bioethical criteria ultimately guide the use of authority to provide care. (Reynolds, 2014). Foucault's ideas have provided explanatory frameworks for comprehending health and medical science. Foucault's later work on 'technologies of the self' has received insufficient attention. Moreover, the researcher also addressed three fields: preserving good health, counseling narratives, and bodily enhancement. These three technologies have been used to illuminate the various. (Powell & Chen, 2017).

Similarly, the concept of panoptic and synoptic social control, and its application in investigating various public health issues, including surveillance, (Couch et al., 2015). A study suggested that most government practices in the area of health promotion perpetuate the neoliberal health viewpoint. Some practices demonstrate resistance and counter-conduct in the face of governmentality practices, explaining the HP sector's power dynamics (Mattioni et al., 2021). In his book "Power and Knowledge," Foucault argues that individuals with knowledge believe they will gain power, while those in positions of power believe they can shape discourses and exert control over others. For instance, psychiatry created the mentally ill, but before psychiatry, people with mental illnesses were perceived as a burden. He also proposes that the term "panopticon" refers to surveillance, a concept that epidemiology also uses to manage disease.

Post-Modernist perspective in health

While the word postmodernism was first used in the 1870s, it was not commonly used until the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century. Postmodernism believes that people have both the intellect and the ability to determine for themselves what reality is. Truth used to be a well-defined assertion that was widely recognized by successive generations. The concept of truth is less evident for postmodern people (Farhan, 2019). Fox (1998) argued that ethics and politics are about 'becoming' rather than 'doing,' about plurality, multiplicity, relationship, and giving. Therefore, postmodernism's hope rests in its insistence on openness, plurality, and democracy (Fox, 1998). A postmodernist perspective on well being and well being emphasizes that the disease experience is not a straightforward, cause-and-effect equation.

On the other hand, life interactions are developed across various social, cultural, physical, and economic environments, highly individual to each individual (Brown et al., 2009). The definition of disease is profoundly and distinctively different from the meaning of the other. Former philosophical, psychological narratives may act as essential connections between the patient's and physician's worlds. These narratives provide doctors with knowledge that is valuable in their work (Tsouyopoulos, 1994). Post-modernist argue that a single reality does not exist in society and reject the dominant school of thought. Additionally, the disease has multiple causalities, and it depends upon context. For example, the mortality of COVID 19 has different. Despite that, multiple views cannot exist to develop society.

Bio-medical perspective in health

From the 18th to the 19th centuries, many significant developments have been made in natural science (Gong et al., 2015). Biomedicine is a scientific approach to health and illness that describes sickness as the lack of illness and depicts the human body as either acting properly or defective and diseased. The mechanical metaphor introduced a characteristic of the scientific model of sickness, which depicts the human body as acting like a machine. Germ theory explains which established micro-organisms as the critical agent for specific infectious diseases (Russel, 2013). On the other hand, this perspective also criticized that health and disease are a mixture of psychological, social, and biological factors. Social influences are those that affect and involve people in a person's life (ibid).

Similarly, other authors also argued that the scientific model of disease, which has dominated health care for the past century, cannot adequately describe many aspects of illness. This deficiency is attributed in part to three assumptions: all diseases have a single root cause, disease (pathology) is often the single cause, and the disease should be eliminated or attenuated to regain health. There is evidence that all three conclusions are incorrect (Wade & Halligan, 2005). So far, medical science is rapidly changing, and the biomedical paradigm is also continually improving. Understanding the evolution of the human medical paradigm and the medical humanistic spirit is essential for the growth of the contemporary medical humanistic spirit (Gong et al., 2015). The biomedical view advocates that disease is caused only by micro-organisms, but other social determinants of health such as behavioral environment, larger political context, and working living conditions also determine the disease.

Results and Discussion

The study showed that the analysis of functionalism, Marxism, post-structuralism, postmodernism, and biological perspectives demonstrates the significant benefits that these philosophical and theoretical perspectives provide in understanding health education. Every viewpoint provides a unique understanding of the complexities of health, sickness, and the fundamental frameworks that influence health outcomes.

Functionalism interprets society as an integrated unit where each part plays a vital function in maintaining stability and social balance. According to this view, institutions like the healthcare system are critical to preserving the balance between health and societal order. Talcott Parsons' concept of the "sick role" epitomizes this view, positing that illness disrupts societal functioning and that those who are ill are expected to seek medical intervention and adhere to prescribed treatments to restore order. However, the theory has limitations, particularly when applied to chronic illnesses, which do not align neatly with the traditional model of acute illness and its associated expectations. From a Marxist perspective, health disparities are significantly associated with capitalist structures, which exacerbate socio-

economic inequalities and limited access to healthcare. Marxism criticizes the capitalist system for prioritizing profit over the welfare of the working class, arguing that health problems are a direct consequence of this exploitative economic model. Marxists also criticize the biomedical paradigm for perpetuating these inequalities, often attributing health issues to individual factors instead of addressing the systemic causes deeply rooted in capitalism.

Furthermore, Michel Foucault's post-structuralist theory shows an exhaustive examination of the fluid connection between power, knowledge, and health. Discourses that regulate and control individuals have a profound impact on health practices, according to Foucault. His concepts, such as the "panopticon," illustrate the impact of surveillance and power dynamics on healthcare provision and health habits. Foucault's work also emphasizes the exploitation of medical knowledge and practices to control populations, thereby marginalizing those who deviate from societal norms.

Similar to the study, Postmodernism, in contrast, challenges the notion of a single, objective reality, emphasizing the plurality of experiences and the contextual nature of health and illness. This perspective suggests that health cannot be understood solely through a cause-and-effect lens but must be seen as a product of various social, cultural, and economic factors unique to each individual. Postmodernism also critiques the dominant narratives in healthcare, advocating for a more inclusive and democratic approach that acknowledges multiple truths and experiences.

The study revealed that the biomedical approach, which views health as the absence of illness and emphasizes biological elements, has significantly contributed to the advancement of medical knowledge. The use of germ theory has resulted in substantial advancements in the management of contagious illnesses. Nevertheless, this paradigm has been subject to criticism because of its reductionist methodology, which frequently neglects the psychological, social, and environmental variables that are equally essential in comprehending health and sickness. Each of these perspectives, therefore, offers valuable insights that contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of health education, highlighting the importance of considering diverse viewpoints in addressing health-related challenges.

The integration of various philosophical and theoretical perspectives into health education provides a holistic structure for comprehending health and sickness. Functionalism underscores the significance of healthcare institutions in preserving social stability; however, this may result in the neglect of the requirements of marginalized communities or individuals with chronic conditions. Marxist theory emphasizes the necessity of adopting a comprehensive approach to health, taking into account systemic disparities and poverty. Post-structuralist and postmodernist viewpoints question power relations and advocate for a more intricate approach, acknowledging varied realities and experiences. Researchers increasingly acknowledge the limitations of the biomedical approach, which typically emphasizes biological aspects, in comprehensively addressing the complex nature of health and sickness. By integrating these viewpoints, health educators may develop programs that are sensitive to both individual and systemic factors that influence health, eventually enhancing health results among various groups.

Conclusion

Philosophy is a holistic view that plays a crucial role in understanding health. Philosophies help researchers clarify their concepts, particularly those in biomedicine. Additionally, Marxists and functionalists subscribe to a positivist perspective, which posits a single reality. Conversely, Foucault's postmodernist beliefs align with interpretivism and embrace subjectivism by acknowledging the existence of many realities. These ideas have played a significant role in the advancement of modern medicine in the field of human health. While Foucault and Marx have divergent perspectives, they both acknowledge the existence of power dynamics. We recommend carrying out an additional systematic review to conduct a more comprehensive analysis, which should address alternative theories.

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