The purpose of this thesis is to develop knowledge about what responsible leadership is, as well as develop a theoretical model for responsible leadership in the perspective of caring science. The study takes as its point of departure the research tradition in caring science developed by Eriksson and her colleagues at Åbo Akademi University in Vasa. The overarching methodological approach is Gadamer's (2004) hermeneutic philosophy. The scientific interest is mainly theoretical. The theory model is ‘tested’ in a clinical context in two hospitals. This implied that leaders were taught about the developed model. Thereafter the leaders ‘translated’ it into their own language and gave it meaning in their clinical context. The clinical part of the study can be regarded as a moment of application research in the sense of hermeneutic.

Responsible leadership is treated in this thesis as a part of human existence and the model is not explicitly associated with leadership in organizations. Nevertheless it is presumed that the model has importance for leadership in organizations, including leadership in clinical context. The theoretical model can be considered as universal, but this universality is limited by the frameworks set by the study's caring science perspective.

The study's salient terms: leadership, responsibility and formation are given initial content in dictionaries. Proceeding from the caring science perspective and from Gadamer's hermeneutics, a preliminary and hypothetical theoretical model of responsible leadership is developed. The theoretical model is given further substantial content in the encounter with Levinas' texts on responsibility and with Gadamer's texts on formation (bildung). The core substance of responsibility is separation, while the properties of responsibility are desire and meaning, freedom and justice, as well as vulnerability and suffering. The core substance of formation (bildung) elucidated in Gadamer's texts is understanding's movement between the particular and the general. The properties of formation are openness and distancing of the self, common understanding of a common objective, application and culture. Hermeneutic reading is employed in the understanding of texts.

The study shows that leadership is part of human existence and entails giving the human substance movement and direction. Human substance is primarily associated in this thesis with responsibility and formation. Leadership becomes responsible leadership by assuming responsibility for the other and by understanding responsibility for the other as a common objective. Determination of the direction and movement of responsibility and understanding entails formation and enables leadership to be understood as responsible leadership. Responsible leadership is formation for responsibility on the so-called preontological and ontological levels. On the preontological level, responsible leadership entails giving one's own, and others', responsibility movement and direction towards the other. This entails formation in vulnerability and sensitivity and is formation for ethical responsibility and charity. On the ontological level, responsible leadership entails giving one's own, and others'
understanding, movement and direction towards responsibility for caring as the subject matter. This entails formation in understanding and acquisition of the universal and is formation for inner responsibility and ethos. Charity and ethos combine to unite formation on these two levels. Formation on the preontological level provides ethical guidance for the other to be respected and maintained as unique in the understanding of this relationship.

Responsible leadership is to serve on behalf of another and in humbleness. It is the other who is the true leader. The other is the one who decides whether leadership is responsible leadership. Responsible leadership is to provide fertile growth conditions for love. This entails bringing out the goodness that is already present, or uncovering that which veils love for fellow human beings. Responsible leadership entails accepting responsibility as a gift and thereby accepting life's opportunities for formation for responsibility and love.

Key words: leadership, responsibility, charity, formation, bildung, ethics, ethos, caring science, hermeneutics