The purpose of the study is to elicit and to describe what moderation is in relation to health. The all-embracing question "what is moderation? is specified by way of the component questions “what kind of implicative dimensions does the concept comprise?” and “what is characteristic of the essence of the concept relative to health?”. The concept of health is not studied separately; the study proceeds from Eriksson’s views on health (1989, 1994, 2001a).

The theoretical perspective of the study is based on the humanistic tradition of caring science developed within the Department of Caring Science at Åbo Akademi University. The framework of interpretation consists of the virtue/health model (Wärnå, 2002) anchored in an ontological health model (Eriksson, 1994).

The ontological premises (Eriksson, 2001a, 14) taken up in the study consist of "Health means a movement in becoming, being and doing, striving for wholeness and holiness, which is compatible with endurable suffering", "The human being is fundamentally an entity of body, soul and spirit", and "The human being is fundamentally holy. Human dignity means accepting the human obligation of serving with love, of existing for the sake of others".

The research approach is hermeneutic. The method applied is a model of ontological concept definition (Eriksson, 1997) involving a conceptual analysis in the form of an etymological investigation plus a semantic analysis and a determination of essence in which the deepening of the understanding of the essence of moderation takes place through the interpretation of a text fragment of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus from around 500 B.C.

The result of the conceptual analysis gives moderation such implications as balance, limitation, consideration and as something ethical, warranted and probable. Contents of something simple, small, beautiful, good and concealed also emerge along with contents of derogatory character. Moderation has implications such as mediocrity, sufficiency and as a sobriety expressing relevance and reason, which also may take on features of extreme abstemiousness.

From the determination of essence there arises moderation as the true, the good and the beautiful that limits itself according to circumstance. Here is discerned a search for a hopeful and appreciative but hard to perceive goodness through motion between opposite poles, where stagnation too becomes visible. The evolution towards moderation as the natural and the good takes place by way of play and of learning.

The hermeneutics assumes a visibility as a dialogue between text and understanding, implying an interpretation on different levels proceeding from the perspective of caring science. The result of the determination of essence deepens the dimensions of meaning that emerged from the conceptual analysis. The ontological interpretation opens up the abstract concept of “moderation” to a world rich in contents that may be meaningful to caring science.

The results of the study have been summarised in the following ontological conclusions as to what moderation is in relation to health: moderation and health are the true, the good and the beautiful restricted according to circumstance. Moderation and health comprise evolution through play and learning. Moderation and health involve motion between opposite extremes and a hopeful search for the pleasurable and hard to discern good. Moderation and health also include stagnation in the form of displeasure, struggle and a sort of suffering. In its deepest essence moderation is the all-encompassing true, good and beautiful comprising unconditional love.

The result has also been represented in the form of a conceptual model of abductive character. The model has given rise to the last ontological conclusion. The conclusions may be suggestive for further studies in the subject.