Abstract


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The overall aim of this present dissertation is to seek new knowledge about what caring means to human beings in a context of forensic psychiatric care. The specific aim is to gain a deeper understanding of WHAT is caring in hermeneutical caring conversations for individuals who experience great suffering.

The epistemological focus of this study is rooted in the hermeneutic tradition. Philosophical hermeneutics is compatible with the interest in knowledge in the field of caring science. The caring science tradition at Åbo Akademi University has established a few significant fundamental assumptions or axioms. The axioms that influence the choice of theoretical perspective in this study concern the holiness of human beings and the fact that their dignity entails the human calling, to serve in love and to be there for the other. Moreover, suffering is an inseparable part of life, and suffering and health pre-suppose each other. Finally, this dissertation establishes that health is more than the absence of disease and that human beings live in a reality that bears the distinctive marks of mystery, infinity and eternity.

In addition to caritative caring science, the ontological basis of the philosophical foundations includes the Infinite, boundary-situations and Being and transcendence. “The faithful companions”, suffering, a darkness in life understanding, reconciliation, holiness and dignity, conditions, the unconditional – unconditionality, longing, freedom, myths and sensuousness and sensitivity constitute the second part of this basis. The exploration of the hermeneutical caring conversation takes place in the collection of data. Caring science texts, as well as philosophical and literary texts and a few pieces of music constitute the material for the reflections in the hermeneutical caring conversations. The development of patterns occurs through the conditions that are created in the course of the conversation, where the researcher is seen as a “co-acting” person in the process. The rhythm and movement of the conversations during a common educational journey may lead to a common understanding of the essence. The ontological basis in relation to the “common meaning” and its resonance in empiricism is shown. The hermeneutical approach which consists of different parts and a whole thus constitutes the basis for the quest for knowledge. Understanding, merging of horizons and pre-understanding are other significant parts in the development of this new knowledge. A continuous calling in question of pre-understanding against new insights occurs throughout the interpretive movement.

The results are shown as an abstraction in three different phases of the substance in the conversations. The pattern-creating phase is the first and describes the interpretation as far as to the emergence of five patterns. These emerging patterns are as follows: carrying and managing guilt, alleviated suffering through development in understanding of life, meetings in caring communion, path of reconciliation, and hope. This constitutes the particular interpretation. The interpretive movement continues as the abstraction of the five patterns in a common interpretation becomes an all-embracing, universal interpretation in the final stage of the movement. Glimpses of a new horizon of understanding gradually emerge: the caring communion implies that the caregiver is together with the patient in boundary-situations where the transcendent may become visible, the common understanding of the essence means that the patients gradually can give themselves the permission to regain their calling as human beings, suffering opens up for the universal and can sometimes take the form of a belief in God, the only path of reconciliation is to forever carry the guilt, and hope. The new horizon of understanding has context-specific characteristics, but opens up to a broader envisioning about what is caring for those who experience great suffering. The new knowledge is consequently viewed from the perspective of its universal character as translatable to other individuals and other contexts than those in this present study.

Key words: hermeneutical caring conversations, forensic psychiatry, caring science, health, suffering, dignity, communion