

Original Article

The Beauty and Mystery of the Bright Light – A Gate to the Source of Strength for Health

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Abstract

Background: Within health science research there is an ongoing discussion from a holistic viewpoint about health and how human beings may find strength. By uncovering health on a philosophical and ontological level the source of strength may be found within the human being.

Aims: The aim of this study is to uncover and deepen the ontological understanding of health and the source of strength by expanding our understanding of what gives the suffering human being the strength of becoming in health. The research questions are: what is the source of strength as the abstract other for the suffering human being, and what manifests the source of strength to enable its recall and dedication in order for the suffering human being to become in health?

Methodology: The study uses a hermeneutical approach. The material consisted of a philosophical and religious psychological text by Wilkstrom (2007). This text was interpreted through hermeneutical reading and through an abductive approach.

Results: The source of strength is hidden in the darkness of suffering. The mystery of the beauty and bright light is a gate to the source of strength. The beauty from the source of strength, like joy and sadness, attracts and calls upon the human being. The dedication of strength means affirming the light in the source despite the presence of shame and guilt. In the creative act the source of strength is present and active despite its veiledness. The dedication of the source of strength requires the movement of the still forces of eternity.

Conclusion: The darkness of suffering offers a gate or entry into the source of strength through rays of light. The human being has to affirm the light of the source, despite awareness of shame and guilt. Further research is needed to explore the source of strength for health, for example, on how beauty and the brightest moments in life may enhance health.

Keywords: health, source of strength, light, strength, becoming in health, well-being, hermeneutical reading, Wilkstrom

Introduction

A holistic approach towards health is more and more emphasized within health science research (Eriksson 2002; 2007; Hemberg, 2015; Santamaki Fischer, Lundman & Norberg, 2010). Berg and Sarvimaki (2003), as well as Rehnsfeldt and Arman (2012), underline the existential dimensions with regards to health and becoming in health. This study wishes to highlight the evident need for expanding our understanding of health on a holistic and ontological level. New dimensions of understanding health and life may be opened through the encounter with spirituality, death or suffering (Cf. Hemberg, Eriksson & Nystrom, 2016; Strang & Strang, 2001; Tibus & de Souza, 2011). According to this study, spirituality is understood as a form of mutual communion in a concrete or an abstract meaning. This study also suggests that experiencing communion with the spiritual dimension, the abstract other or love, may constitute the inner source of strength for the human being, and that an encounter with this abstract other or love may promote health. According to earlier research, love, as an energy, may enhance health and has the potential to have an impact on both health and well-being (Green & Shellenberger, 1996; Esch & Stefano, 2005). Other studies point out that faith in an abstract other is a source of strength for the suffering human being (Henderson, Gore, Davis & Condon, 2003; Strang & Strang, 2001). Tillich (1954) describes love as a drive toward a unity of what is separated and suggests that this drive can be seen in something larger than oneself, in *connectedness with others, and in connectedness with oneself*. Other researchers highlight the importance of preserving the human being's dignity and inner desire for love in order to make way for the human being's becoming in health (Parry & Glover, 2010).

It is also stressed that maintaining an active role in life where one feels useful and has a purpose is important for becoming in health (Murray, Kendall, Boyd & Benton, 2004). Also Lundman, Alex, Jonsen, Lovheim, Santamaki Fischer, Strandberg & Norberg (2012) mean that inner strength in communion is vital for health. According to Nygren, Norberg & Lundman (2007), viewing life in a positive manner without fear may enhance growth in the suffering human being. The authors also suggest that inner strength entails viewing life in a positive way without fear and being active and growing.

Earlier research also indicates that faith and hope are important for becoming in health (Cf. Hughes, Closs & Clark, 2009; Fletcher, Schneider & Harry 2010; Lohne, 2008; Saarelainen, 2012). Soderlund (2004) points out that a force for becoming in health is possible when life itself is made visible for the human being despite suffering. Eriksson's ontological perspective emphasizes that the mystery of life does not have to be fully comprehended or understood by the human being in order for the human being to become in health (Eriksson, 2007). However, Eriksson stresses that the human being may find strength to become in health through wonder and in reverence for life's glory and holiness despite a simultaneously present suffering. She also highlights the human being's experience of meaning in life as essential for health. In order to uncover more of the mystery of health, this study wishes to put forth a holistic understanding of health by expanding the understanding of health and the source of strength on a philosophical and ontological level.

Aims

The aim of this study is to uncover and deepen the ontological understanding of health and the source of strength by expanding our knowledge of what gives the suffering human being the strength of becoming in health. The research questions are: what is the source of strength as the abstract other for the suffering human being, and what manifests the source of strength to enable its recall and dedication in order for the suffering human being to become in health?

Theoretical framework

Eriksson's caritative theory constitutes the theoretical framework of this study (Lindstrom, Nystrom & Zetterlund, 2014). In this theory, the human being is placed at the centre of everything. The human being is seen as a unity of body, soul and spirit and as unique and holy. The core of the theory consists of love and compassion as well as the alleviation of human suffering. Health refers to a "becoming", which concerns a movement towards a deeper wholeness and holiness (Eriksson, Bondas-Salonen, Herberts, Lindholm & Matilainen, 1995; Eriksson, 2007; Lindstrom et al., 2014). Becoming pertains to the deepest level of integration and feeling of wholeness (Eriksson et al. 1995; Eriksson, 2007; Lindstrom et al., 2014). Health also implies a movement between the actual and potential in the human being's

innovative becoming (Lindstrom, et al. 2014; Eriksson, 2006). The direction of this becoming is determined by the person's inner needs and desires. Becoming moves in the direction towards the realization of the human being's potential as well as towards a deeper wholeness and holiness. The substance of becoming in health has to do with the discovery of the inner room (Cf. Hemberg, 2015; Wana, 2002).

Eriksson (1987) views love as the force that represents the most important source of strength within the single human being. She sees love as life's and the human being's greatest force and mystery. Suffering is seen as an inseparable part of the human being's life, natural growth and development and, therefore, both health and suffering are seen as life's fundamental life conditions (Lindstrom et al. 2014; Eriksson, 2000; Eriksson, 2006). One may, according to Eriksson (2006), view suffering as a struggle between life and death, as well as between good and evil. This is a struggle with the aim to achieve inner freedom through an inner source of strength. Eriksson and Lindstrom (2003) indicate that a fundamental part of the human being's life-experience, ability to appreciate him or herself, love and become in health is to preserve his or her dignity and prevent its violation. One may develop knowledge about love as strength through understanding and embracing "natural" love as a force within the human being, and our inner core of love may help us to become in health. With regards to this theoretical framework, this study considers it important to uncover a deeper understanding of health on an ontological level, that is, taking the human being and the human being's life into account in a holistic and profound way that also considers the abstract other as a potential inner source of strength.

Methodological aspects

The study uses a hermeneutical approach. The material consisted of the work of Wilkstrom (2007), *Det blandande morkret (The Blinding Darkness)*. This text was interpreted through hermeneutical reading though an abductive approach.

Text for interpretation

The interpreted text in this study was *Det blandande morkret (The blinding darkness)* written by Wilkstrom (2007). This literary source is a religious psychological text and it can be

briefly mentioned that it touches upon Christian mysticism in the Christian spiritual tradition and the human being's potential to find him or herself. This source was chosen because it treats the human being, the human being's purpose and search for and relation to the abstract other. The aim was to form a nuanced or alternative understanding of health and the source of strength by highlighting how health, love and suffering may be understood against the backdrop of his texts. The book was first published in 1994 and then in 2007 in a revised edition, and it comprises 231 pages in total.

Hermeneutical reading of texts and an abductive approach

This study consists of a hermeneutical reading of the text (by Wilkstrom) with an abductive approach. Because Wilkstrom does not treat love, health or suffering in his work, the interpretation of the work is therefore considered to be an abductive approach. A hermeneutical understanding, according to Gadamer (2004) and Koskinen and Lindstrom (2013), as well as abductive reasoning, according to Rahlm (2010; 2010), constituted the method used for the text. The abductive approach was considered suitable for the ontological phenomena of this study and abductive reasoning may create a synthesizing abstraction of the interpreted text. The abductive leap enabled the researcher to reach one step further in the scientific and philosophical search for truth.

Ethical considerations

The study follows The Finnish National Advisory Board on Research Ethics (2012) and the text used for interpretation was treated with the greatest respect in order to avoid the over-interpretation or omission of parts that emerged.

Strengths and limitations

Limitations to this study may be that only one author (Wilkstrom) was used for interpretation. However, the strengths of this study lie in that Wilkstrom's work treats the human being's path in life in a profound way and in terms of finding oneself.

Results

The beauty and the mystery of the bright light constitute a gate to the hidden source of strength. The dedication of strength means affirming beauty in life despite feelings of shame and guilt and that the still powers of eternity are in motion.

The mystery of beauty and bright light - a gate to the source of strength

The source of strength brings a mysticism that hides in the darkness of suffering. The mystical aspect of the source of strength may be understood as having a connection with the darkness of suffering that represents an entrance or gate to the mystical and veiled source of strength. It is the very light of life and joy themselves that shines through the darkness from the gate of the source of strength and emerges in what appears the darkest darkness.

If the human being has the courage to experience suffering and allows the secretive darkness to enclose him or her, the human being is enabled to recall his or her alliance with the source so that the gates of the source of strength may be opened and the human being is able to receive the good light that shines from the source and dedicate it to him or herself. Wilkstrom (2007, 80) writes:

“The light that one discerns and that shines through the darkness at that time is the fully accepting light, the source of great joy.”

What is remarkable about the human being's path to strength and health is that the human being may see the light only when being in the darkness, that is, the manifestation of the holy light presupposes a being in darkness.

“In this darkness, the human being is sooner or later blinded by a light of holiness of absolute goodness, radical truth and powerful beauty. But this light is not lit as a result of the human being's own efforts... It overwhelms the human being as a gift and great joy – not the joy of exhilaration but rather the calmness of solid peace. This remains a mysterious paradox, the power of the mystery. The path to this light leads through a mysterious garden.” Wilkstrom (2007, 103)

When the human being in suffering sincerely invites the darkest darkness and allows him or herself to be enclosed by it, suffering may be alleviated.

When the anxiety becomes almost unbearable the suffering becomes a struggle of life and death, which enables the possibility of hope. Thanks to this insight and first movement the human being is able to perceive the glimpses of light from the source of strength.

“The human being sometimes enters a darkness that at first appears unbearable. But for those who have eyes to behold an overwhelming light oozes forth in these tunnels, a glimmer from another reality.” (Wilkstrom, 2007, 22)

The veiled source of strength attracts the human being through beauty

The source of strength is paradoxically veiled and simultaneously manifested to the human being as a mystery. It calls out through a holy address that the human being may perceive through experiences of beauty. Wilkstrom writes (2007, 113):

“But also Loss may result from the encounter with Beauty.”

Thus, the source of strength is an active part in the human being's life and invites communion through beauty in life itself. Suffering represents part of the mystery of life and through entering suffering the human being simultaneously enters this mystery. Health and suffering are natural parts of the human being's life, and coming into contact with the inner core of life which comprises, for instance, happiness, sorrow and suffering enables the perception of the sphere of the source of strength.

Also the brightest moments of life, not just the darkest moments, may therefore shed light on the source so that the human being experiences something universally recognizable. It has to do with a form of experience of holiness where the human being experiences awe before beauty in nature or in fellow beings in the form of traces of the activity of the source of strength (love). The beauty that the human being perceives represents a holy address that attracts the human being.

“There is a hidden 'code' in an oak tree, in a mountain slope, and in a child's eyes. Nature is not just a mute chemical factory...but its beauty and order can be experienced as the work of a Creator.” (Wilkstrom, 2007, 169)

The dedication of strength presupposes the affirmation of the light despite feelings of shame and guilt

The disclosure of the source of strength occurs through the human being's acknowledgment of guilt and shame. Will and courage in suffering represent the courage to look into the gate of the source of strength and affirm the light despite

feelings of shame and guilt. This means that the human being through his or her free will chooses to actively focus the source of strength despite suffering and guilt and shame due to the suffering.

Wilkstrom (2007, 129) writes:

“Now the human being’s searchlight turns inward toward the self and its failure. The encounter with this self gives birth to feelings of shame and guilt.”

The human being has guilt to life after once having left his or her true abode in the eternal home that was bestowed upon the human being as holiness in the heart.

Wilkstrom (2007, 106) writes:

“...it also finds expression in a vague sadness over the spirituality and fragility of life.”

This may be experienced as something that needs to be restored to the source of strength, that is, the human being should return to the source of origin and through it restore the self. The human being’s will and courage are needed to reach beyond the light to the source of strength which changes the human being’s perspective so that joy is experienced as a result of the existence of the source.

As long as the human being reflects only him or herself in the brightness of the bright light the focus lies on the human being’s own problems and need for comfort and support. But when the human being wishes to reach beyond the light to its source the perspective changes and the human being does not seek anything for him or herself but becomes aware of that the abstract other is sought for the human being’s own sake.

This means that the source of strength has entered the human being. The human being then experiences an all-embracing joy for the mere existence of the abstract other which in turn unobservedly enhances well-being.

“The human being who sees this remarkable light and walks in it attains a strong identity and integrity... Holy people are often surrounded by an aura of holy strength, they are illuminated by a light from within.” (Wilkstrom, 2007, 103)

Through a creative act the source of strength is present and active

The dedication of the source of strength requires a creative act that leads through a holy presence in the present. The beauty experienced by the human being, represents a form for the holy that bears witness to the essence of the source and is experienced as a power that brings joy and peace. In the creative act, the human being’s focus is no longer on the human being’s own needs. This entails a change of perspectives for the human being who feels liberated because it means that moving beyond self enables creativity in the sense of becoming a co-creator with the abstract other.

In this way, the human being experiences meaning and is an active participant in shaping his or her life. Being moved by the beauty of a creative act reminds the human being of his or her true origin and connection with the holy, which, in turn, brings joy and hope. The essential pleasure to be becomes evident and the human being may appear as his or her self in truth. The dedication of the source of strength, the inner room, means coming home to oneself in oneself and this sense of safety generates strength.

“The holy presence therefore does not merely entail... the acceptance of life as it is. Regardless of hands or where one finds oneself, it has to do with reconnecting to the inner space of peace where a source flows, a light shines forth ... Silence is thus not primarily the absence of sound, but the presence of the Holy.” (Wilkstrom, 2007, 67)

Its dedication presupposes that the still powers of eternity are in motion

Because the source of strength represents the human being’s real home, its dedication presupposes active service based on the human calling (service grounded in love for one’s fellow beings). When the human being actively serves through his or her human calling, the source may fill her with strength which in turn enables dedication. This means that the dedication of strength occurs when the human being is active serving (when the powers of love are in motion) and the human being loves (is concretely there for others through love for one’s neighbour).

Wilkstrom (2007, 131) writes:

“...the human being is no longer just the recipient of comfort or joy, but wants to do something for his or her Lord and fellow beings.”

The source of strength that manifests to the human being who loves fills this human being from within as a living power.

Wilkstrom (2007, 122) writes:

“God has entered the human being’s life, but not in the way the human being had expected. He is an independent power”.

When the dedication of the source strength has been achieved the human being has an all-embracing experience of communion that fills the human being with strength. A candle has been lit within the human being who has become a unity. The value of life is foregrounded and the search for the meaning of life is relegated to the background of the human being’s will to daily create meaning in life.

Discussion

This study revealed that beauty and strength are hidden in the darkness of suffering and that these may come through as rays of light in the darkness. The mystery of the source of strength is understood as a connection to the darkness in suffering that represents a gate to the hidden source of strength. Also Rehnsfeldt and Arman (2012) mention the importance of viewing the human being’s existential dimensions in the process of becoming in health.

This study also shows that in order for the human being to access the source of strength the human being must follow him or herself to be enclosed by the darkness. This could be compared with Nygren et al. (2007) who stress that the human being may attain growth as a human being through viewing life as it is without fear of darkness.

The source of strength may, even though it is veiled for the human being, paradoxically be experienced as manifest through the beautiful in life so that the human being may recall the light and potential power of life for health even in the darkness (Cf. Henderson et al. 2003; Strang & Strang, 2001). The source of strength, love, can manifest through the glimmer of beauty, in the light of joy and in the darkness of suffering. The source of strength is hidden but an active part of it attracts and calls on the human being through

glimpses of light. This finding may be discussed against Green and Shellenberger (1996) and Esch and Stefano (2005) as well as Tillich (1954), who also highlight love as a great potential for health and becoming in health, and especially Tillich refers to love as a force that makes the human being feel connected to something larger than him or herself.

In the creative act, the source of strength is present and active despite its veiledness. Thus, the source of power is constantly close to the human being, longs for, and invites the human being to communion.

The human being may, in despair, in the darkest darkness of suffering where the source of strength is close yet not visible, sense its presence. Consequently, the mystery of life represents a hidden source of strength. The dedication of strength means affirming the light in the source despite feelings of shame and guilt. When the human being acknowledges feelings of guilt and shame as well as sadness, and despite these dares to see the light in the source of strength, he or she may find the source. Dedication requires will and courage.

One may discuss freedom of will against Eriksson’s (2007) statement about the human being’s becoming in health even though there is no attempt to fully comprehend or uncover the mystery of life. Somewhat in line with this notion, this study shows that the creative act instead has to do with the human being, who, in the holy presence, is still in a doing and allows him or herself to be enraptured by the beautiful which in turn enables a reconnection with his or her origin, an inner room of rest.

This does not mean that the human being does not claim to try to reveal the secret of the source to be able to accomplish a becoming in health but rather that the human being’s hope and belief in the existence of the source may enhance health (Cf. Henderson et al., 2003; Hughes, et al. 2009; Fletcher et al., 2010; Lohne, 2008; Saarelainen, 2012).

The dedication of the source of strength presupposes the motion of the still forces of eternity. In the dedication of the source of strength, the human being realizes his or her alliance with eternity, and in eternity becomes the one he or she is meant to be. The dedication of strength and becoming in health thus takes place when the human being is active and loves his or

her fellow beings and recreates meaning in life. (Cf. Murray et al, 2004; Hemberg, 2015)

Conclusions

The darkness of suffering offers a gate to the source of strength and may be discovered through rays of light. This bright light may reveal itself through experiences of beauty in life. The dedication of strength requires the affirmation of the light in the source and a choice to live through it by acting out of love. Further research is needed to explore the source of strength for health, for example, on how beauty and the brightest moments in life may enhance health.

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Ethical approval

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