

## Original Article

# The Ethical Demand as Responsibility according to Logstrup – seen through the Lens of a Caring Science Tradition and in the Context of meaning of Caring

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### Abstract

**Background:** Responsibility is part of the human being's life and plays a decisive role for the nurse in the context of meaning of caring. Exploring the concept of responsibility from a caring science perspective is crucial for understanding what responsibility means on a deeper level within the context of meaning of caring.

**Aims:** The aim of this study is to uncover a deeper understanding of responsibility from a caring science perspective. The research question is: What is the human being's responsibility in the context of meaning of caring?

**Methodology:** The study uses a hermeneutical approach. The material consists of a work of philosophy of religion entitled *The ethical demand* by Logstrup (1997). The text was interpreted through hermeneutical reading.

**Results:** When the human being receives life as a gift the human being's responsibility is love for the neighbour. This responsibility, which gives life meaning, entails caretaking of the other's life, the surrender of one's own life and the reception of life as a gift. Love is born from the reception of life. This means that when human beings encounter each other in responsibility, true love and selflessness, and through communication understand each other, and help each other without desire for mastery, both the subject and the other benefit, and joy, love and vitality spread spontaneously. This is the human being's responsibility and love of the human being.

**Conclusion:** Love arises from the reception of life whereupon responsibility awakens. This is the human being's responsibility and love of the human being in the context of meaning of caring. Further research in this field is needed and should focus on uncovering responsibility from the nurses', patients' and caring leaders' own perspective.

**Keywords:** responsibility, caring, ethics, the context of meaning of caring, inner attitude, Logstrup, hermeneutical reading

## Introduction

Healthcare in the Nordic countries are faced with great challenges and one may ask oneself whether the safeguarding of its basic values is remembered in these times of rapid development and technological, economic and social unrest. Ethically central issues such as human rights and the human being's responsibility for his or her life choices are emphasized. Relying solely on laws, regulations and surveillance to create a socially and morally good society is not possible. Good results may be achieved if nurses patiently approach the human being, the patient, and in their attitudes and actions, treat this person with respect. Laws provide limits that should not be violated but one's own conscience bespeaks a responsibility for the other human being here and now. (Lindqvist, 2004)

According to Lindwall, Boussaid, Kulzer & Wigerblad (2012), nurses are responsible for protecting and safeguarding the patient's dignity. Dignity, in turn, is related to health and human rights. The nurses' responsibility entails for example meeting the patient's needs. The patient's dignity may be preserved if the nurse acts according to his or her ethical responsibility. Also Karlsson, Nystrom & Bergbom (2012) underscore the significance of responsibility, such as caring about, seeing the patient, and considering the patient and listening to what the patient tells and desires.

Wallinvirta (2011) emphasizes that the complex concept of responsibility entails a direction and an action. Responsibility involves a relation to someone who has asked for a reply. Responsibility has legal, moral, ethical and spiritual or religious aspects. The inner core of responsibility consists of freedom, guilt and love. The significance of responsibility offers a deep understanding for human vulnerability and imperfection. Freedom is an inner freedom that the human being possesses in relation to the choices he or she makes to him or herself and to his or her value base, and is a condition for moral action and responsibility for one's actions. The ethical demand in the responsibility makes it infinite and the human being can never renounce this responsibility. The more the human being opens up to love, the more the human being understands and sees the significance of responsibility that, through free will, compels responsible actions. Also Foss (2012) describes the significance of love and will in responsibility-

taking. Love is expressed and recognized as a virtue in the actions of responsibility. The virtue of love as spiritual reality is created in will and represents an authentic engagement for the human being's freedom. Will is a creative force and the love of will is expressed when the human being wishes the other well. Edlund, Lindwall, von Post & Lindstrom (2013) underline that responsibility is important for the human being's dignity and thereby also for his or her health and well-being. Absolute dignity, the spiritual dimension of human dignity, involves responsibility, freedom, guilt and service. Relative dignity is characterized by the corporeal, external aesthetic dimension and the inner, ethical dimension. The depth of responsibility emerges when the human being is seen as an entity of body, soul and spirit, and when the human being's dignity is being respected.

The external ethics of responsibility comprises what is shared externally and is shaped by, for instance, laws, rules and regulations in the caring culture. External ethics sets boundaries and protects as well as governs and controls the activity based on the laws of society. According to external ethics, responsibility is the same for all in the same legitimate position. Internal ethics is unique for every human being and is uniquely expressed through personal actions of responsibility when external and internal ethics merge. (Foss, 2012; Wallinvirta, 2011)

The responsibility in the cause of caring links and enables the patient, the nurse and the nurse leader to develop and grow in the context of meaning of caring (Honkavuo, 2014; Wallinvirta, 2011.) Since earlier research also highlights the concept of responsibility as vital for caring, this paper wishes to explore this concept further as a basis for the context of meaning of caring.

## Aims

The aim of this study is to uncover a deeper understanding of responsibility from a caring science perspective. The research question is: What is the human being's responsibility in the context of meaning of caring?

## Theoretical framework

This study's theoretical framework is based on Eriksson's caritative theory as part of the caring science tradition (Eriksson et al., 1995; Lindstrom, Nystrom & Zetterlund, 2014). The human being is placed at the centre of everything and is given dignity, but is also responsible for

him or herself and for the other and simultaneously wishes to be unique and long to belong to a community. According to Eriksson (2001), the basic condition for the context of meaning of caring is found in the *caritas* motive which is the fundamental value that entails a spontaneous willingness to take responsibility and sacrifice something for the other in love. In this study, the context of meaning of caring refers to the caring communion between patient and nursing staff. Thus, the caring communion and the working community that comprises caring and nurse-leadership constitute the context of meaning of caring. Caring, the alleviation of the patient's suffering, is the linking cause for the patient, nurse and nurse leader. According to Soderlund (2012), the world of caring is characterized by interest and true engagement, where the patient is understood and taken seriously. The nurse conveys faith and hope to the patient in different ways, for instance, by recognizing suffering and making the patient take part in the care. In this way, the care becomes a shared responsibility and a shared struggle to create safety, belonging and communion. Since responsibility is a basis for caring in the context of meaning of caring, this paper considers it important to explore this concept on a deeper level.

### **Methodological aspects**

The study uses a hermeneutical approach according to Gadamer (2004). The material used for creating the proposed deeper understanding of responsibility consists of the work by Logstrup *The ethical demand* (1997).

### **Data material and method**

The data material consists of Logstrup's work *The ethical demand* (1997). The author expresses deep thoughts about responsibility as an ethical demand. Logstrup expresses profound philosophical thoughts on the human being's responsibility and his work is therefore suitable material for interpretation to apply to the context of meaning of caring for the purpose of understanding the responsibility of the nursing staff and the patient. The study's method is hermeneutical reading (Koskinen & Lindstrom, 2013). The study follows The Finnish National Advisory Board on Research Ethics (2012).

### **Results**

The results uncovered that the human being, through his or her existence together with other

people, is responsible and shares a boundedness with others. When the human being receives life as a gift the human being's responsibility becomes the love for the neighbour through a spontaneous inner attitude.

### **Responsibility as love through appreciating life as a gift**

Life is a gift to the human being which cannot and should not be explained. Logstrup (1997, 19–20) writes: "Life has been given to us. We have not ourselves created it. This is why we cannot give it a direct expression." When the human being forgets to live and receive what life has to offer life may instead become a tool to attain material values. As human beings we are not the origin for our life; we have merely been trusted with taking care of it by taking responsibility for what we are and what we have. When life is seen as a gift one takes care of the other's life. This is interpreted as that the human being's responsibility is to appreciate life as a gift because love may then awaken as a responsibility also for the other (e.g. for the patient) in the context of meaning of caring. Responsibility is therefore love. Trust, confidence and love are, according to Logstrup, spontaneous expressions of life in the human being, and this may be interpreted as that these expressions are strongly connected with responsibility because they give responsibility meaning in life. Logstrup (1997, 106) writes: "Through each one of them [various relationships] – each one in its own way – the individual holds something of the other person's life in his hands." The interpretation of this is that the content of the ethical demand implies that a human being's life is involved in another human being's life and that the demand entails unselfish carrying of the other's life with love, responsibility and respect. Spontaneous joy arises here to help another human being and to do good for this other human being, for instance, in the context of meaning of caring.

### **Responsibility as boundedness to one another through an inner attitude**

The human being cannot choose whether to be responsible or not, the human being's mere existence makes him or her responsible. Human beings are bounded to each other and are compelled by each other to responsible relationships. Logstrup writes (1997, 16) that "we do indeed constitute one another's world and destiny". The interpretation here is that human beings' boundedness to and dependency on each

other, expectations from and responsibility for each other are part of human life. This unspoken demand in each human-to-human encounter is something life gives and that is found within human beings and that gives shape to human beings and the world. Being responsible as a human being does not mean blindly obeying the demand but means doing what love would do because *vi* constitute each other's world. Logstrup argues that it is irresponsible to speak, be silent, act or avoid action without having to make a decision. The human being must exercise his or her reason and humanity and simultaneously appeal to the other's reason and humanity.

*A person's passions, feelings, and affections are always shaped by his attitude – or lack of attitude – toward them, however much he may give way to them. (Logstrup, 1997, 67–68)*

The interpretation of the above quoted citation is that the human being's inner attitude in love allows and gives shape to an unselfish communion between human beings in assessments, decisions and personal efforts, which creates responsibility to serve the other without ulterior motives of mastery or triumph. Since responsibility arises spontaneously and naturally, laws are not sufficient to govern responsibility, but when responsibility brings meaning and joy a spontaneous will to responsibility arises. In the demand to take care of the other's life, this power means selfless service to the other. The interpretation, here is that the human being's attitude in love is needed for guiding laws to do good and for to prevent that the power in the situation of responsibility, for instance, within the context of meaning of caring, should not be used selfishly without understanding for the other.

### **Responsibility as trust and understanding**

Logstrup indicates that as part of human life, human beings normally encounter each other with natural trust. To show trust means to simultaneously surrender oneself to another. By expressing their expectations, human beings surrender to the other's fulfillment of them, before it is clear that a fulfillment will take place. At worst exposing oneself through the expression of one's expectations without protection by the other's fulfillment of them may lead to a collision. Logstrup (1997, 10) writes that "one has dared to come forward in the hope of being

accepted but was not accepted". The interpretation here is that trust means surrendering oneself and simultaneously placing an expectation on the other. This entails emotional reactions that can lead to misunderstandings and disappointments which in turn may lead to accusations, while one's conscience openly indicates guilt, for instance, in a context of meaning of caring. "The moment something is claimed of me, it is I who must answer for what I do or do not do" (Logstrup, 1997, 66). Logstrup claims that to understand and to be understood is vital for the human being since communication without true love is evasive, or like a mania for perfection, the desire to turn the other into someone else. The interpretation here is that communication in the context of meaning of caring means surrender and trust, that loving communication means that one has the responsibility that is, for allowing the other to be unique, which is vital for being able to understand and for being understood. Understanding and trust belong together to create a good caring context between patient and nurse.

### **Responsibility as sincerity**

According to Logstrup, the demand is radical because it is unspoken and because it always means taking care of the other's life, even in situations that may seem unpleasant and disturbing. The interpretation of this is that the human being cannot choose or demand responsibility but it arises from the situation. The radical demand prevents human beings from being engrossed by the communion of human encounters, as would happen if the demand were spoken and expressed. The radicalness of the demand is also expressed in that it is not right to demand if it does not mean making the most of life.

*The fact out of which the demand arises, namely, that his or her life is more or less in my hands, is a fact which has come into being independently of either him or her or me. Therefore, he or she cannot identify him or herself with this fact and assume that its demand is his or her own." (Logstrup, 1997, 46)*

Logstrup calls attention to that if the demand would only concern the human being's meeting the other's expectations and wishes, the human being's life would only amount to irresponsibly being the other's tool. Then there would be no challenge for human beings, no responsibility,



they would only ingratiate themselves with each other. The ethical demand concerns the demand on love, not on indulgence. This is why conflict is always a possibility but also a risk. The interpretation here is that it is important that human beings are sincere for responsibility to emerge and generate good actions, i.e., that which the other (for instance, the patient) needs the most in the context of meaning of caring. Patients should be allowed to be themselves and maintain their responsibility, integrity and uniqueness through being treated with sincerity.

### Responsibility as determination

Logstrup emphasizes that the context to which one is bound may entail trust as well as conflict. He writes:

*He or she is the object of an appeal or a challenge, an appeal from another or a challenge implicit in the situation itself.” (Logstrup, 1997, 148)*

The interpretation of this passage is that the human being's surrender to the other and the reception of the other may signify possibility and risk. True surrender that is responded to with authenticity is a possibility, a responsibility in love. According to Logstrup, the risk lies in when an authentic surrender is not responded to with authenticity, which, according to the interpretation, constitutes a loveless responsibility. This loveless responsibility may be according to rule but becomes mechanical because it does not include and is expressed without love. According to the radical demand, the life of the other should be taken care of in a way that is best for the other. To Logstrup, what this may imply in terms of words and actions in any given situation the individual must be informed about through his or her own unselfishness and understanding of life. According to the interpretation, this means that human beings in the context of meaning of caring are dependent on the community with each other and that the human being's attitude, life experience, reflection, courage and humbleness affect whether love and unselfishness can emerge in the actions of responsibility.

### Responsibility as imperfection

Logstrup stresses that the subject is not responsible for the reactions of the other when he or she takes care of the other's life, because that would rob the other of his or her own responsibility for his or her life. Logstrup

indicates that the subject is not responsible for whether this care-taking is beneficial for the other. It is part of life and something that the human being cannot control. The subject has a goal for his or her actions but cannot control the outcome and cannot therefore be responsible for the results of the actions. Logstrup believes that mastery and a sense of perfection are not right, because the human being's possibilities reside in the life that the human being has received as a gift and the human being should therefore be responsible for the life that has been given him or her. The interpretation of this is that the human being's good deeds are not always sufficient, and as the human being's possibilities reside in life the human being should humbly respect his or her imperfection and not strive for mastery. The demand calls the subject's understanding of life in question. Life and responsibility thereby places the human being before important choices that he or she, for instance in the capacity of nurse in the context of meaning of caring, should meet with love, good judgement and insight and consideration of what is best for the patient.

*“Through the demand we are, so to speak, asked whether we intend to make ourselves masters of our own life...[...]...to use it for taking care of the other person's life” (Logstrup, 1997, 127–128)*

### Discussion

The results showed that the human being's responsibility is love, primarily love for the neighbour and in the context of meaning of caring to meaningfully serve the patient in love (cf. Foss 2012; Karlsson et al. 2012; Lindwall et al. 2012). Also Foss (2012) unites responsibility with love and notes that responsibility is realized through actions of love. When the human being lives in the reception of his or her own life, the actions of love arise spontaneously and become an inner attitude. This may be compared with Foss (2012) and Wallinvirta (2011) who indicate that internal ethics is unique for every human being and it enables the natural expression of responsibility through actions. External ethics of responsibility has more to do with following rules and regulations, and when the two merge the result is actions of responsibility that are good.

The results also showed that the human being's responsibility represents what is fundamental in life and that the deep essence of responsibility

emerges when life is viewed as a gift. The human being is assigned to live in trust and understanding. The human being's responsibility is to unselfishly provide for the life of the other and wish him or her well (cf. Eriksson 2001; Karlsson et al. 2012; Lindwall et al. 2012). It entails a spontaneous and natural commitment to do what best serves the other, that is, to discover what the patient in the context of meaning of caring needs (cf. Karlsson et al. 2012). Responsibility means boundedness to each other without desiring mastery over someone else in the context of meaning of caring. Thus, a condition for the human being's responsibility is that he or she can exist in freedom (cf. Wallinvirta, 2011).

The human being's responsibility may, within the context of meaning of caring be interpreted as maintaining trust, confidence and love in life for the benefit of the patient. The human being's responsibility is sincerity and to create meaning in life. It can be compared with Wallinvirta's (2011) notion that the human being's ethical demand means assuming his or her responsibility. The more the human being allows love as a source of strength in his or her life, the more he or she understands and sees the essence and demand of responsibility which enables the human being to naturally want to do what is good (cf. Hemberg, 2015). Responsibility may therefore in the context of meaning of caring be said to demand the nurse to selflessly enter into true encounters with patients and to serve their lives and health. Consequently, responsibility does not mean mastery or domination over others. The human being's responsibility is invisible, but is the common cause of all (i.e. both the cause of the nurse, the nurse leader and the patient) because it connects and allows for the patient and nurse to develop and grow together in the context of meaning of caring (cf. Honkavuo, 2014; Wallinvirta, 2011). Responsibility entails imperfection because the human being is imperfect; yet, responsibility cannot be denied in the context of meaning of caring as this would mean that the human being would not bear the cause of caring.

## Conclusions

Life is a gift with love, trust, and confidence that may provide the human being with responsibility and meaning in life. Love is born in the reception of life. When human beings encounter each other in responsibility, true love and selflessness, and

through communication understand each other, and help each other without desire for mastery, both the subject and the other benefit, and joy, love and vitality spread spontaneously. This is the human being's responsibility and love of the human being in the context of meaning of caring. Further research is needed and should focus on uncovering responsibility from the nurses' and caring leaders' own perspective.

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