

Caring and being cared for in the practice of health operators

Care pertains to the essence of the human being and all that lives and exists.

This truth was admirably expressed in the famous myth on care that comes down to us from the Roman tradition (from the slave Hyginus, fable No. 220). This myth is the central core of Martin Heidegger's greatest work, *Being and Time*¹. It shows clearly that it is not spirit, freedom or creativity that constitute the essence of the human being. This essence is encapsulated in caring, namely that precondition that must occur for any being – but especially the human being – to burst into existence. It was thanks to the infinite care of our mothers that we, without any specialized organ, managed to live and survive. Left in the cradle, we would not know how to search for the necessary food and would die².

Everything we do, therefore, comes accompanied by care. Everything we love we also take care of. Everything we take care of we also love. Care is so essential that it is understood by all. Because we all experience it at every moment, whether walking on the street, or driving the car, or in relation to the patients entrusted to the medical staff.

Three basic dimensions are expressed by care. It means first of all a loving, gentle, friendly and protective relationship with the infirm. In a broader sense, care is seen as a new paradigm. It defies the paradigm of modernity that lies in the quest for power as domination, as a grasping and appropriating hand. On the contrary, care is the hand that caresses and welcomes.

Secondly, care is every manner of involvement we have with the infirm with whom, in a subtle way, we devote empathy and the desire to heal.

Vera Regina Waldow, a nurse who knew how to conjoin vast experience with a sound theoretical reflection, wrote: “The goals of caring involve, among others, relieving, comforting, helping, favoring, promoting, reestablishing, restoring, giving and doing. Care, even in the absence of any illness and in the daily lives of human beings, is also fundamental, both as a way of living and relating to others”³(p.89).

A third dimension of care is that which links humans to planet Earth. From the viewpoint of astronauts who were able to see Earth from Space, it became clear that Earth and Humanity form a single entity, as a living and organic whole. The Earth is alive. We are that moment of its high complexity that has begun to feel, think, love and care. We are Earth because humankind (human beings) comes from humus, namely fertile and fecund earth. There is such a close relationship between us and Mother Earth that if we debilitate her, by overexploiting her, we ourselves fall ill. And when we become debilitated, we also affect the health of the Earth. There is therefore a communality of common destiny between us and planet Earth.

Bringing together the three dimensions mentioned here, we can say that the medical profession and that of all health professionals also emerges as a political and ecological activity, caring for and safeguarding the Earth and, with it, human lives and the entire community of life.

This is where we pose the question: who cares for the caregiver? Like all human beings, health operators are subject to the limitations of the human condition, which is vigorous and fragile, healthy and unhealthy, psychologically strong and weak. They also feel the need for care. Who cares for the caregiver? It is a team of physicians and nurses who band together to give human support to the colleague suffering from stress. Caring is not an act but a permanent and invariably exhausting task. This empathic care reanimates the individuals who return to their work/mission with a revived sense of the ethics of care.

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References

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