

On variability of semantic range of the idea of care in the philosophy of Cracovian nursing

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ABSTRACT

Cracovian nursing has been a dynamic reality since its very beginning. The *continuum* of its changes has existed in a specific axiosphere created by the combination of various values connected with the idea of care. However, an assumption about the unchangeability of its semantic scope on Cracovian background seems false. What is constant within the philosophy of Cracow's nursing is only the idea of care, and its content remains fluid. During the first phase of its existence, Cracovian nursing drew inspiration from christian humanism in its wider sense, where prominent role was played by the notion

of *caritas*. In the times of the domination of Marxist philosophy, the idea of care was explicated in concordance with rules of Marxist philosophy. In the times after the collapse of communism the semantic scope of *caritas* is a cluster of various ideas. It is a contentious question, whether it remains far from or close to understanding of the notion of care. The above stated complex situation is one of the most significant challenges for the philosophy of Cracovian nursing of the present day.

Key words: care, philosophy nursing, Cracow

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Looking at the history of Cracovian nursing one can notice that from the very beginning it has been a dynamic reality. It can even be stated that the transgression of its own existence is enclosed in the nature of nursing, and that it has constantly inclined nursing to transgression of its limitations and to verify the gained results. Therefore, the *species* of the structure of Cracovian nursing seems to be defined more adequately not by the word *sum* but by *sursum* [1].

This *continuum* of change has always been performed in a defined exiosphere and it was created by the conjunction of various values, concentrated around the idea of care. However, Cracovian nursing could be wrongly assumed to have grasped its semantic range in a singular act of perception and to have defined itself once in an unchangeable form. The idea of care is constant within the philosophy of Cracovian nursing, however its substance remains variable.

In the first period of its existence, Cracovian nursing drew its interpretation of care from the widely understood Christian humanism. As it is known, the category of *caritas* played the main role in it. The subject of *caritas* was considered by numerous philosophers but none of them had approved itself with a notable, original contribution to this idea. Only St. Augustine considered this issue deeply, developed it in a comprehensive way and elaborated it in a form of a theory. In the scope of Western European philosophy, his concept was dealt with as a basic pattern of thinking of the idea of care [2]. A detailed analysis of his works lets us assume that *caritas* is the quintessence of moral life [3]. On the one hand, the privileged status of *caritas* was created by accordingly motivated acts of will. On the other hand, the importance of *caritas* was created by the manner of acting and its purpose. Neither the sort of values on account of which the actions are taken, nor the values which are finally referred to do not matter to the quality of the moral status of *caritas*. According to the works of St. Augustine, *caritas* is not merely an emotion, but it is a principle of human existence, defining the appropriate manner of the existence of a human in the world. Care – the wise, the good-willed and the beautiful is the inner logos of *caritas*.

In certain compass, care resembles to attention, protection, watching, vigilance. Therefore it is granted with all the privileges to determine not only the type of human self-attitude but also the way of treating others. In the formulation of St. Augustine, the characteristic feature of care is its dialogicality and dynamism [4]. The dialogical feature of care is manifested in the fact that it never refers to the void, but it is always oriented towards coexistence with another human being and the existence dedicated to another human being. When care starts to exist on this level then it may unite

human beings in one harmonious community. Consequently, the dynamism of care is compared by a philosopher to an insatiable desire or an immense energy, knowing no measure in its self-fulfillment [5]. Boundless care is the only criterion of accomplishment. St. Augustine justified this axiom by the ontological origin of human being, who is an image of the divine being, carrying the divine element in himself.

As we know, St. Augustine states that *Deus caritas est*, therefore care is the divine imprint in human soul. Each human being, from the beginning of his onthogenesis is eternally designed and called to care. Consequently, the human existence can never be indifferent towards its supernatural fate. On the contrary –human being is to accept the significance of care, to practice care in action and to act with care. In this manner, a human being imitates the Creator as the ideal pattern for all the varieties and degrees of care. Within the consequent desire for *Imitatio Dei*, the human existence must constitute its highest value and bestow the deepest axiological importance upon it. Then human being may be considered to have become similar to God. From the perspective of care expressed in this manner, nursing appears to be a profession possessing divine features. The work of nurses gains sacral character, by which a patient is able to experience the contact with the Infinite, while nurses are similar to the priestesses in the shrine of a protective deity. In the time of predominating Marxist philosophy, the idea of care was considered differently. This narration of reality, different from the theistic directions, claimed a materialistic vision of human being. Man was to be free from all metaphysics. The new concept assumed another meaning of human life. The dwelling of the highest Good was claimed to be elsewhere. According to Marxist ethics, it was not God, but human being who gained the status of the highest moral norm and of the *summum bonum*. Numerous intellectuals were highly inspired by this reversal in the hierarchy of values [6], therefore there is no reason to recall the widely known issues. It is enough to say that, according to the Marxist ethics, every human being, seen as the highest value, is a specific, unique individual with a specific personal structure [7].

A human being is the sum of good, regardless of his origin, capabilities, thoughts, health condition or type of activity. He is the authority of the communist morality [8], and is treated as a goal himself and the most important point of reference of all actions [9]. All other values are subdued to a human being. It is only his good and happiness that counts.

To implement these values, two principles need to be introduced. The first principle is called self-accomplishment, and it demands to follow the rights of man to his self-accomplishment on many levels. The second principle, named socialization,

strictly demands from every man not to do any harm to others and to address them with care during his self-accomplishment.

Many ethicists consider the socialization principle to be equivalent to the universal rule of human brotherhood [9]. On its base men can create the commune of persons united by warm emotions [10]. Human fate depends only on human capabilities, and does not originate from the divine being. According to Marx, if only a man could deprive himself of love to God and replace it solely with love to man, the majority of sufferings of humanity would be reduced and the conditions of existence would be humanized.

Thus it is not surprising that the concept of Marx considered the mythical Prometheus to be the moral ideal. This figure is not solely the symbol of disapproval of all discrepancies dehumanizing man's existence or a sign representing the kindness to others, but it is the sign of realization of the philosophy of care, endowed with rational shape [11]. The general meaning of care in the point of view of the Marxist ethics has been materialized in the Code of Professional Ethics of Nurse, approved in February 1973 by the national congress of the Polish Nurses Association. Its form was determined by the tasks of the socialist health care service and by the role of a nurse in this service [12]. Among other issues, the role of a nurse was based on mobilizing powers and means that were necessary to implement the tasks imposed by the 6th congress of the Polish United Workers' Party. The party imposed nursing with the status of ideological herald, obliged to spread the socialist principles. Nursing was compared to Prometheus, and nurses were given prerogatives of the apostles of Marxism. The Party has made a fetish of the common *unanimitas* in all the aspects of nursing, and it claimed that only one, strictly defined idea of care was the best solution for this domain. However, the legitimacy of many postulates of Marxist ethics were negatively verified by the history, we must admit that they were quite coherent theoretically and firmly grounded in the human philosophy postulated by Marxism. Some of the theses are definitely arguable, but they were defined in a precise and clear manner [13].

Nowadays, in the philosophy of Cracovian nursing, after the bankruptcy of Marxism, one can perceive a real sell out of concepts of the idea of care. We are offered multitude of meanings, originating from various concepts of man, various ethic schools and value systems. It is a mere *coincidentia oppositorum*, frequently appearing within one and the same theory. To exemplify these statements, several examples are to be given here. However they are they are chosen subjectively, they can be convincing even in their concise form. In this polyphony, the female trio C. Gilligan, M. Leininger, J. Watson is audible as the main voice. In the point of view of Carol Gilligan,

the phenomenon of care originates from the "call to care", protectiveness, which she claims to be more characteristic of female than of male sex [14]. This instinct enables women to feel the needs of others faster than men can, and it allows fulfill these needs on time. In the practical meaning, the call for care is best visible when women look after someone and prevent the potential harm. According to C. Gilligan, the significance of the idea of care is contained by the involvement of interpersonal relationships full of kindness [15].

Gilligan's voice is amplified by the eclectic sound of M. Leininger. But it is her who, referring to *argumentum et consensu gentium* stated that care has always been crucial, that it is presently invaluable and its importance will be undeniable in the future. Today, the statement of M. Leininger sounds undoubtedly like a pure truism, but it will shock no longer with its banality while considered from the perspective of the Leininger's entire output. Unable to find a precise definition of care, we encounter an important system of ideas. It is not designed to provide any given answers to the question on the essence of care, but it must change the way it is thought of. This system is to help comprehend the fact that care, apart from its universal aspects, is culturally varied, and that it is expressed in various forms. Consequently, if the luminaries of nursing intend to reach the truth about the essence of care, they are to accept key terms of this system. These terms focus the human cognitive activity in a right direction and they provide the conceptual scheme, necessary for exploring the issue considered here. The range of the polyphony was widened by J. Watson by introducing into the discourse a new semantic cluster, created from the mosaic of various philosophical views, where one can notice traces of thinkers of the Far East, of process philosophers – e.g. Hegel, Whitehead, P. Teilhard de Chardin and the New Age feminist spirituality [16]. These associations, as one may assume, were to express the metaphysical outline of care considered in the categories of spiritual power, binding all beings of the cosmos and, as spoken in the language of Teilhard de Chardin, leading the human being to the optimal personalization and the ultimate harmony and beauty.

Apart from these above mentioned, traces of I. Kant and existentialists and also the thought of S. Kierkegaard and G. Marcel are noticeable in Watson's semantic conglomerate. The Sartre's consideration and the analysis of a human being made by Heidegger also appear to be significant here. The presence of this group of philosophers in Watson's considering allows one to assume that she suggests that care is also a kind of existential value, allowing people keep their human nature and to maintain the development of humanitarian nursing. However, the issue of the semantic range of care can

not be concluded. Reading Watson's works convinces us that referring to the sense of care, several equally reasonable hypotheses can be stated definitely. However, the meaning of care can for example be interpreted as a perspective of discussing a fixed area of concepts, which can finally be unambiguously explained and it will be possible to define them as universal principles. In the variety of apparent syntheses and semantic simplifications it is difficult to state what is hidden behind the notion of care. However Watson's concept is original and sometimes even seducing with its intellectual grace, the power of its charm cannot replace the lack of clarity and inner coherence.

The polyphonic sound is completed by the message of John Paul II, concised in the archetype of a merciful Samaritan and the created by T. Kotarbiński, figure of yielding caretaker. The echoes of V. Frankl and the axiology of M. Scheler [17]. Among the luminaries of the philosophy of nursing, there is no concord about the substance of nursing. For instance, Leininger expressed the wish that nursing were more of a area of fulfilling of human care than a separate branch of science. It is also worth to mention that certain ranges of considering the issue of care were solely a prefiguration of John Paul II vision of medicine. Watson wished nursing to be treated both as a science and as an art. And, in reference to these intuitions, the work of a nurse for several decades is perceived as a learnt and preserved art of looking after others. In the image of a contemporary nurse the scientific and aesthetical aspect prevails, however the image must equally consist of professionalism of scientific character and of spiritual sensitivity of an artist.

The above mentioned examples let one conclude that the Augustinian and Marxist unison may be replaced by another extremity. Anyway, the extremity is not the most striking here. The pluralism itself is a positive phenomenon, and it should not be feared of, for it protects the thought from dogmatism and prevents the unilateralist of solutions. What is the most thought-provoking here is the symptom of unconcern by the systematization of concepts according to the degree of their importance and to the power of naming. It is hard to agree that the same, worn out conceptual schemes or empty slogans are equal to these valuable concepts. One can be tempted by the statement, that the most popular propositions is those speaking the language of fashionable phraseology, and not the ones based on strong arguments. However, the most severe is the lack of debate on the more precise defining the semantic range of the idea of care. One should hope that the philosophy of Cracovian nursing, after the time of intellectual drifting, will be capable of taking the helm and, in the close future, will have the courage to formulate its own, unique interpretation of the idea of care.

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