

Where Can I Find Consolation? A Theoretical Analysis of the Meaning of Consolation as Experienced by Job in the *Book of Job* in the *Hebrew Bible*

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Abstract The aim of the study was to explore the meaning of consolation as experienced by Job in the Book of Job and as presented in literature and how consolation relates to suffering and care. The study's theoretical design applied Ricoeur's view on phenomenology and hermeneutics. The resulting themes were as follows: consolation that is present, that originates in confrontation, that keeps suffering at a distance, that does not alleviate suffering, that originates in experience from giving comfort, and that facilitates a change of perspective. The authentic and caring consolation accepts the sufferer's incomprehensible "otherness" but however provides no answers about how to console.

Keywords Consolation · Suffering · Hermeneutic phenomenology · Job

Introduction

Consolation is a term that can frequently be found in Greek and Roman philosophy and in the Bible, and consolation was a sort of prescription for "moral ills". The phenomenon of consolation has been a part of modern care from the days of Florence Nightingale up to the present, although its significance has varied (McIlveen and Morse 1995; Morse 1999; Nightingale 1952). The question: "Where to find consolation" is not only relevant for just that individual, it also has a more universal relevance (Mettinger 1992). It appears, if the concept is extended, to be able in some way to reveal what suffering is and how it is experienced (cf. Roxberg 2005). In a similar manner to the question whether consolation is

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of universal relevance, the issue has also been one that has troubled the thoughts of human beings for centuries.

A theology of caring is the study of the human being's religious and spiritual dimension in relation to health—ill health (Barbosa da Silva 1991; Barbosa da Silva and Persson 1991). The understanding of the spiritual dimension is here based on Sivonen's (2000) definition of the core content of the concept 'spiritual' in etymological, semantic, and contextual terms as well as in relation to the history of ideas. Sivonen (ibid.) shows that the concept of spiritual concerns the spiritual dimension in human beings, health, suffering, relationships, and caring. The understanding of the religious dimension of consolation is based on one of the aforementioned basic assumptions (Eriksson 2001, 2002) and on a definition by William James (1952), one of the forerunners within the field of psychology of religion. The basic assumption (Eriksson 2002) entails an ontological approach that is based on the view that the human being is religious by nature (Lat. *Homo religious*), which according to James (1952) means "the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine" (p. 31). In the perspective of Roxberg's doctoral thesis (2005), the present study and James' (1952) view of the human being as a religious being it thus means seeking to understand if an individual's experience is related to "whatever they may consider the divine" (ibid.) consoles or does not console their suffering.

Consolation is defined among other things as a state of well-being (Morse 1992; Kolcaba and Steiner 2000), and consolation is experienced as supportive (cf Johansson et al. 2008) in a close fellowship, a presence that is characterized by "communion" (Norberg 2001; Norberg et al. 2001; Sundin et al. 2000, 2001, 2002; Talseth et al. 2003; Gilje and Talseth 2007). Keenan (2004) maintains that the sufferer often is struck silent before being able to articulate the suffering referring to Job 3, Psalm 130, which is counsel for giving the sufferer space to speak. Consolation can also be understood as an experience of such a space and of time in order to be able to suffer and to get a consoling interval in or from the suffering (Roxberg 2005; Roxberg et al. 2008; Öhlén and Holm 2006). Norberg et al. (2001) also show that consolation can be likened to coming home and the feeling of being at home, whereas suffering can be likened to the opposite, that of not feeling as though one is at home. Earlier research has also focused on consolation opening the way for hope (Roxberg et al. 2008; Talseth et al. 2003), and a few studies have shown that consolation also concerns health (Pejlert et al. 1999; Malinowski and Leeseberg Stamler 2002; Alfrédsson et al. 1995). For very old people, consolation means to live amidst consolation in the presence of God. Living in consolation means to transcend and come in communion with the sacred (Santamäki 2007).

There are, however, different opinions about the role of consolation in relation to caring. Morse (1999) states that comfort—as a means of consolation—has always been "in the heart of nursing" (p. 394) but that little research has been undertaken to investigate it. Tutton and Seers (2003) maintain the opposite view, i.e., that the position of consolation in caring is indistinct (Malinowski and Leeseberg Stamler 2002; Siefert 2002). Job's suffering might seem to be removed relative to his own time. However, Keenan (2004), Kushner (1981), and Younger (1995) problematize the meaning of Job's suffering as relevant for theology and for care of today. There thus appears to be grounds for further research of the phenomenon of consolation. Furthermore, the attempt to provide consolation to Job can be seen as paradigmatic attempts to console patients in the Western health care today. It seems therefore relevant to explore the meaning of consolation as experienced by Job in the Book of Job in the Old Testament and in relevant literature and how consolation relates to suffering and care.

Sources and Method

This study focuses on consolation as it is described in the Book of Job in the Old Testament. The Book of Job, probably written 400–200 BC, is adjudged to be a literary classic that has generated a vast amount of other literature (Clines 1989; Illman 1996). According to Thomason (1997), the Book of Job is unlike anything else that has been written, for example, due to the mixture of genres. The author of the book was, according to Mettinger (1992), a literary genius.

The materials to be analyzed in this study are thus texts. The motive for this choice of context was that Job experiences a “consolation”, which does not console him. By researching Job’s experience of consolation, the variation of the phenomenon, i.e., what consolation is, through what it is not, could stand out. The present study is a re-analysis of part of Roxberg’s (2005) thesis, Job’s experience of consolation. It thus uses partly the same qualitative material in addition to other relevant material, as well as the Book of Job.

The present study has a philosophical and interpretative design. Paul Ricoeur’s (1976) view on phenomenological hermeneutics forms the basis for the methodological approach. The main motive for this choice is that in Ricoeur’s hermeneutics listening is seen as the core of a human being’s relationship with his/her existence. Hermeneutics has thus the task of recreating a situation where listening, especially critical listening, is possible again (Vikström 2000). To hermeneutically listen to Job’s experiences of consolation is to be in the middle of a critical voice that tells humanity what consolation is in light of what it is not. Ricoeur (1981) distinguishes between two types of hermeneutics: the hermeneutics of belief, recollection, or retrieval and the hermeneutics of suspicion.

Ricoeur (1970) describes the hermeneutics of suspicion as follows. If the reader has an open attitude to the text and listens to what the text wants to say, then the reader’s understanding of both the text and of him/herself, i.e., self-understanding, will be changed. The necessary condition for such an understanding to be possible is that the reader encounters the text with an open and critical mind. Assimilation of all the possible “worlds” that the text offers to the reader thus occurs through the reader (interpreter) relinquishing his position as a judge of the text. An interpretation seen from this perspective is not to deal with one correct “truth” but instead one more probable in relation to other possible interpretations.

To carry out a text analysis according to Ricoeur’s (1976, 1993) philosophy and hermeneutics implies a movement from a naïve understanding to a critical understanding that takes place by means of what Ricoeur (cf. 1976) calls an explanation. The text analysis is thus carried out in three phases: naïve reading, structural analysis, and interpreted whole. The first phase (I) is a naïve reading, which means to read the text several times in order to grasp its meaning as a whole. It also means a switch of attitude from a natural to a phenomenological attitude. The latter includes a shift from the taken for granted attitude to a critical attitude of what, for example, consolation might mean. It also consists in taking the point of view from within, i.e., from the person whose experience it is. Applied to the present study, naïve reading entailed reading the Book of Job several times, “listening” to what the text says about consolation as experienced by Job. It also required reading secondary literature about the Book of Job. The selection procedure of this literature necessitated selection from a large number of literature sources. Searches in databases and reference lists as well as mail or some personal contacts with the authors of the relevant literature about the Book of Job made this selection possible. The second phase (II) is a structural analysis of the text, which is performed as a thematic analysis. It implies decontextualizing the meaning units from the text as a whole, i.e., the text parts are

considered as independently as possible from their linguistic context. The third phase (III) is a combined understanding of the parts as they together form an integrated whole text in its context, i.e., an interpretation of the result as a whole (Lindseth and Norberg 2004). Each phase is a dialectical interpretative process constituting the so-called hermeneutic circle.

During the different interpretative phases, the authors made conscious efforts to be aware of their pre-understanding. Concerning pre-understanding, the first author is a nurse scholar whose research concerns the phenomenon consolation (doctoral thesis) including the Book of Job and the literature about it. The last author is a theologian and moral philosopher with research experience from the mental health, theological, and ethical fields; the second and third authors are specialized in psychiatric care and have carried out research in this field with a caring science perspective. To be aware of our pre-understanding was thus more of an issue of not allowing previous and natural understanding about consolation to influence the analysis. This interpretative procedure consisted of counteracting previous knowledge with an open and critical attitude as to what might appear in the text and text analysis.

Interpretation and Results

The three phases of the theoretical text analysis and the results are introduced by a short description of the setting of the book, followed by the naive reading, which according to Ricoeur is a naive, first impression of the text as a whole (Ricoeur 1976), i.e., what consolation is and is not in the Book of Job. The structural analysis is introduced by a short description of the themes and subthemes that express the phenomenon of consolation as it is described in the Book of Job and then followed by a comprehensive and reflected understanding of all the themes and subthemes as a whole.

For the sake of the interpretation and analysis, it is relevant to emphasize the following. The Book of Job is a drama, written in two parts. The frame is written in prose and the dialogue in poetic language. The frame contains an opening prologue (Job 1–2) and a closing epilogue (Job 42:7–17). In the prologue, the reader is introduced to the intrigue of the drama, and in the epilogue, the drama is concluded. The poetic part of the book (Job 3–42:6) contains a dialogue that includes a number of speeches with a similar design; with the *narrator* speaking in the beginning (prologue) and at the end (epilogue) and the *characters* in the dialogue (Clines 1989). These characters are Job and his four friends whose speeches follow each other in three sequences (Lindström 1998). Job is first and then Eliphaz, Bildad, and Sofar (Job 3–37). This pattern is repeated until the third “round”, which differs from the previous, when the fourth friend Elihu introduces himself in a long speech (Job 32:6–37:24). Then, God takes up Job’s challenge in two speeches (Job 38–41).

The Naive Reading

Job is a wealthy and healthy oriental, highly respected in the society to which he belongs, situated in the land of Uz (Near East). Job is suddenly haunted by a series of tragedies, e.g., he is stricken by disease (sores all over his body) and he also loses a number of his family. The total change of “setting” means that when the reader meets Job, he is sitting on an ash heap (rubbish heap) with a piece of a broken pottery to scrape his sores with. The ash heap was the place at the outskirts of the town, the place for the “outcast” and those with

contagious diseases. Job is visited here, first, by three friends who had heard about the evil that had come upon him. They sit quietly with Job for 7 days and seven nights because they want to mourn with him and comfort him (New King James Version (NKJV Bible) 1982, Job:2). However, the friends' attempts to comfort Job are without success, and therefore, instead of experiencing consolation, he becomes irritated and impatient with the ways they try to console him (cf. New King James Bible 1982). The question for this study is why is he not consoled by their attempts to console him? It is assumed that the answer to that question can tell us something about what authentic consolation is by determining what it is not, i.e., how the various aspects of the studied phenomenon appear in the analysis (Dahlberg 2006). This is the structure or essence of the phenomenon, its pre-suppositions of those who use it, and its effects on the one who experiences it (Barbosa da Silva and Jackson 2007).

In short, the result shows that the presence of Job's friends is in accordance with the Old Testament tradition. The friends are coming to, being with, and communicating their compassion and consolation to Job "for they saw that his grief was very great" (Job 2:13). Job's experience of God is of an evil presence as well as of a presence that makes Job silent. Consolation of a distracting nature is prominent in his experience of suffering. However, it is an act of consolation that remains superficial and conceals the suffering by ignoring its real cause. The attempted consolation, provided by Job's friends, is a consolation that is distanced from the sufferer, namely Job. It is a false consolation that originates in itself and a consolation that reduces the suffering by neglecting or ignoring its cause and thereby the sufferer himself. Although, it seems as though the suffering Job is consoled by returning to the earlier accident and reliving that accident. Job (29:25) for example returns to the good days when he "dwelt as a king in the army, as one that comforteth the mourners" (New King James Version (NKJV Bible) 1982). A converting consolation is an authentic consolation because it turns the experience of suffering to its opposite, i.e., relief of suffering that changes the perspective on the suffering.

The Structural Analysis

The structural analysis resulted in six main themes; consolation that is present, consolation that originates in confrontation, consolation that keeps the suffering at a distance, consolation that does not alleviate the suffering, consolation that originates in experience from giving comfort, and consolation that facilitates a change of perspective.

Consolation that is Present

The consolation that is present appears in the Book of Job (New King James Version (NKJV Bible) 1982) as a consolation that seeks the sufferer. Job's friends sit for 7 days and nights mourning with him. According to the tradition, they are quiet because consolers are not allowed to speak until the sufferer first has spoken (Pope 1983). In terms of health care, Frank (2001) as well as Younger (1995) compared the long silence of Job's friends with the ultimate way to encounter the suffering patient.

"So they sat down with him on the ground 7 days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that *his* grief was very great" (Job 2:13) This attitude of respect and reverence toward suffering is relevant for health care today. The suffering person needs to be genuinely met in his/her suffering situation. This seems to be an enduring presence that speaks of fidelity toward the suffering other (cf. Barbosa da Silva et al. 2006).

Job also experiences God's presence as oppressive and malicious (Lindström 1998). The presence of God is described as a burdensome hand and as a dissection of every step he takes.

You put my feet in the stocks, watch closely all my paths. You set a limit for the soles of my feet (13:27)

Most of the Book of Job concerns the dialogue between him and the friends. When God finally talks in the concluding chapters (38–41), Job is quiet. This quietness is interpreted as a silence of presence. According to Dunn (1981), it seems as if this silence represents approval rather than defeat.

Consolation that Originates in Confrontation

Job is bravely continuing his protests against a God that he experiences as a demonic terrorist, someone who puts on a show of justice (Lindström 1998). However, Job is not trying to escape from his suffering; instead, he is confronting the one who he considers to be responsible for his suffering. Such an example is when, as opposed to his friends, he talks to God and does it often. In the dialogue between Job and his friends, in 58 verses, he turns to God (Mettinger 1997; Lindström 1998). According to Ricoeur (1967), Job turns directly to God to make his appeal against the Almighty.

Job's protest is also directed toward his friends and their attempts to console him, which the following citations are just a few examples of.

What you know, I also know; I *am* not inferior to you (13:2)

Hold your peace with me, and let me speak, Then let come on me what *may* (13:13)!

Consolation that Keeps the Suffering at a Distance

The text analysis showed that the friends' consolation appears in two ways: Consolation that originates in itself and a consolation that reduces the suffering.

Consolation that Originates in Itself According to Lanara (1981), Job's friends are poorly equipped for their consoling position. The friends are "too white" when the "flower of life is red" (p. 142). The friends keep telling Job that what they have found is also right for Job. The right thing to do is what they themselves would have done in Job's situation. The consolation of the friends assumes that their insight is also the right insight for Job.

Behold, this we have searched out; It *is* true. Hear it, and know for yourself (Job 5:27) (Eliphaz speaks out)

The friends are also stating what God's consolation is like and how this consolation should be perceived by Job.

Are the consolations of God too small for you, the word spoken gently with you? (15:11)

As far as health care is concerned today, caregivers should encounter the patient where he or she is and attempt to sympathetically understand their suffering and not explain it away or give a false explanation of it. This is a wrong way of fulfilling one's duty because it does not meet patients' need for relief and consolation. Care must, first and foremost, be sufferer-led, not problem-led.

Consolation that Reduces the Suffering The consolation of the friends includes a perspective that implies seeking explanations for Job's suffering. When Eliphaz starts the dialogue, he reminds Job of his earlier good lifestyle (4:3–4) and the grounds for Job's current reaction (fear and lack of strength) (4:5). Eliphaz explains Job's suffering in light of the Job he knew previously. Thus, the problem of evil is reduced to a kind of deficiency disease, lack of insight, and faith. This kind of consolation seems to explain the suffering by simplifying it. Similarly, Simone Weil (Stenqvist 1984) holds that consolation explains the suffering, because when something can be explained its mysteriousness and difficulties can be reduced. Even in health care today, the existential question of why someone suffers is raised by the suffering person and then answered with an explanation. This explanation can, like Job, be taken as an offence being as it reduces the experience of suffering.

Consolation that does not Alleviate the Suffering

This form of consolation appears in Job's experience of his friends' consolation, in Job's self-caring consolation, and in Job's experience of God and God's consolation. The averted consolation includes dimensions of a consolation that is superficial and a consolation that conceals the suffering.

Consolation that is Superficial Job's experience of his friends' attempts to console him is that it is falsehearted and deceitful. Their act of consolation is empty, just as they were talking "words of wind" (16:3). Frankly, Job tells his friends that they are gloomy comforters.

How then can you comfort me with empty words, since falsehood remains in your answers? (Job 21:34)

I have heard many such things; Miserable comforters are you all! Shall words of wind have an end? Or what provokes you that you answer? (Job 16:2–3)

Job's experience of his friends is that they are not listening to him and he calls for their attention, "Listen carefully to my speech, and let this be your consolation" (Job 21:2). Similarly, Job experiences that God would answer him when calling out for him, but he would not listen to him. Thus, God would answer to something he had not heard or had been present to. God appears to Job as one who pays no attention to the sufferer but to something else. This is an indifferent consolation that seemingly resides at the surface of the sufferer's suffering.

If I called and He answered me, I would not believe that He was listening to my voice (Job 9:16)

Lindström (1998) emphasizes Job's experience of God as a faultfinder, a God that via satellite controls each human step, not the least the wrong steps. In Job's world, it is a faultfinder God who focuses on the surface and thus distances himself from the whole of what it means to be human and to suffer. This also appears to influence the experience of consolation. A consolation that focuses on faults is not alleviating but, on the contrary, turns away from the suffering.

That You should seek for my iniquity, And search out my sin, Although You know that I am not wicked, And there is no one who can deliver from Your hand (Job 10: 6–7)

Jung (1984) turns traditional ideas about Job's God upside down. According to Jung (ibid), God (Heb. *Jahve*) is accusing Job for what he himself has done. This God appears as autocratic and a coward, a God that does not dare to stand by his deeds. This God seems to be more occupied with himself than with the suffering of Job. In health care today, patients become reluctant to express irritation and opposition where, for example, existential issues are concerned, as Job had done toward God, and feel that this is not a care issue, because reactions like these belong to another sphere of life (cf. Koslander et al. 2009).

Consolation that Conceals the Suffering Job expresses that sleeping alleviates the suffering and is consoling. It seems as sleeping consoles by concealing the suffering, even if only for a short while (7:13). Yet, in the following passage, Job conveys that God terrifies him with dreams and visions: "Then You scare me with dreams, and terrify me with visions" (7:14). The meaning and function of sleeping is understood as a prospect of relief in the distance from the suffering.

... When I say, 'My bed will comfort me, My couch will ease my complaint' (Job 7:13)

According to Lindström (1998), the God that Job previous knew is hidden behind a mask: "Why do You hide Your face, and regard me as Your enemy?" (Job 13:24). God is quiet until he answers Job "out of the whirlwind" (Job 38:1). It seems as if the consolation that God, at an earlier time, represented to Job now is concealed. It contributes to Job's deep experience of estrangement (cf. e.g., 19:14–15).

Consolation that Originates in Experience from Giving Comfort

In his innocence, Job experiences consolation, because he considers himself as being honest and authentic toward God. Weil (Stenqvist 1984) emphasizes that Job's suffering cannot be explained and the innocent has potential. The potential is that if man endures suffering, it might be a way to an authentic and real life.

Then I would still have comfort; Though in anguish I would exult, He will not spare;
For I have not concealed the words of the Holy One (Job 6:10)

According to Ricoeur (1967), the total inner re-enactment is no longer a re-storement of a former happiness, but a re-living of the present accident. By re-living the friends' consolation, Job seems to know how he himself would console others if he was in the friends' situation as consolers. Then, he would relieve them with comforting words:

But I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the comfort of my lips would relieve your grief (Job 16:5)

Job returns to his existence as it was before the accidents came upon him. Then, he was like a man who comforted the mourners.

I chose the way for them, and sat as chief; So I dwelt as a king in the army, as one who comforts mourners (Job 29:25)

Consolation that Facilitates a Change of Perspective

Ricoeur (1970) emphasizes that Job does not receive any explanation for his suffering. He is instead, in God's concluding speeches, shown something about the magnitude and order

of the universe, without getting any final answer to his actual question or desire. According to Fox (1981), there is in the god speeches a metaphorical language, a rhetorical power, and a scope in time and space that makes Job broaden his perspective and for a moment forget about his own suffering. This seems to alleviate Job's suffering and can be seen as a consolation. It is in the reflection upon the suffering that a movement is initiated. This movement is concluded by handing over a claim, i.e., to give up the claim of forming an island of meaning in the universe (Ricoeur 1967). Ricoeur writes:

“Job's consolation” stands out as he now saw something that he previously only had heard about. Job's vision does not explain but changes his perspective on his suffering (Ricoeur 1967). Nilsson (2004) questions whether Job's vision shows the mystery (essence) of the turning point (of suffering). Job confesses:

I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You (Job 42:5)
 This vision also makes Job repent
 Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes (Job 42:6)

It appears that Job's struggle against God has now come to an end and reconciliation follows. Hidal (2000), however, maintains the opposite that the Book of Job does not contain any reconciliation or any concepts of it. The book ends up in harmony but the change of perspective is not a sign of reconciliation but that Job has realized the fundamental conditions of human life and what it means to be human. This thus entails a different view on Job's struggle that is to be reflected on and taken into consideration. The critical question is; are health care personnel opposing the view on the patient that consolation is to find meaning with the suffering and to reconcile with it.

According to Ricoeur (1967), Job can only regret his claim for compensation, i.e., the claim for getting an explanation to his suffering. Job does not get any answer to “why the suffering” but he gets something else, which can reasonably be considered as consolation. The consolation of Job's friends does not help, whereas Job's vision seems to provide the opposite, i.e., a consolation that alleviates his suffering. By loosing the immediate narcissistic consolation, it is possible to reach “beyond any ethical view of the world” (Ricoeur 1970). This is regarded as a consolation that originates in the sufferer and in the experience of his/her suffering.

A comprehensive Understanding of Consolation and its Relevance for Care

The analysis of this study shows that consolation is a very complex phenomenon, a neither this nor that but both. One example is consolation that conceals the suffering by keeping it at a distance (cf. Morse 2001). Job expresses, “My bed will comfort me...” but at the same time he seems afraid of going to sleep since God terrifies him with dreams and visions (7:14). The comfort in sleeping is on the one hand a short cut to a momentary consolation that distances from the suffering while on the other aggravates the suffering. This finding corresponds to that in recent tsunami research that shows that one way of coping with painful memories is to keep them at a distance. However, a permanent distancing might also aggravate the suffering (Roxberg et al. 2009, Roxberg et al. 2010a, b) as well as concurring with other caring science research (Morse 2001, Younger 1995). The Book of Job points toward a paradigm of suffering, i.e., a deeply rooted human experience through one person's suffering (cf. Mettinger 1992). The question is whether the Book of Job also points toward a paradigm of consolation?

Consolation that explains the suffering, e.g., Eliphaz's as well as the other friends' explanations to why Job suffers, seems to simplify and reduce the suffering in a way that favors the consoler himself. As previously indicated according to Stenqvist (1984), Simone Weil maintains that consolation that explains the suffering reduces its mysteriousness and difficulties. Both suffering and consolation are ambiguous by nature. To the nature of the mysterious is that it is unpredictable and with no definite answers. The difference between the simplified and the mysterious consolation seems to be a matter of how man is perceived, as a problem or as a mystery (Marcel 1950). A consolation that originates in itself is "too white" when the "flower of life is red" (Lanara 1981, p. 142). Lanara (1981) refers to the Book of Job and means that the book has an important message that concerns people, health care, and caring science today. According to Levinas (1969), the issue of the ethical invitation is to perceive the other as another, not as the same as oneself. It is for another and not oneself one feels, one is aware of both the suffering of the other and of the fact that it is not one's own. This might be 'pity' because awareness of separateness implies that the pitier acknowledges his/her own vulnerabilities, similar to those of the sufferer. That is why pity is closely linked to fear. Pity can be seen at the utmost as a cause of fear that in turn may explain Job's friends' lack of openness to their own conviction of what is right and wrong. Pity also has a false cognitive-evaluative structure, which means that it acknowledges as important what has no true importance (Nussbaum 1996).

Cöster (2003) maintains that the conversation we have with ourselves makes it possible to see myself as others see me. This conversation can, however, create excuses. The more ethically trained we are the better the excuses to act unethically. Neither does pity take the actual point of view of the sufferer, but rather the point of view of the reflective spectator (Nussbaum 1996). Cöster's (2003) and Nussbaum's (1996) line of reasoning can make the friends failure to console Job more understandable. Their "consolation" is not where the sufferer is, i.e., in Job's suffering. According to Nussbaum (1996), it may be understood as an insulting kind of benevolence, which also can explain Job's negative reactions to their attempts to console him. The provider of an "absent" consolation seems to be preoccupied with him or herself and his or her own prejudices', which removes the "real neighbour" (cf. Cöster 2003).

Consolation could also possibly be seen as a coping strategy, a way of handling the suffering. It can help the caregivers to relieve the stress from matters of conscience, such as shame and guilt, without being engrossed in self-reproach. (Dahlqvist 2008). When considering Job's friends as carers then their coping strategy and consolation can be seen as an escape from self-reproach. The friends appear to transfer their own stress from matters of conscience to Job because he, according to the friends, does not cope with his suffering as he should. Coping with suffering is thus transformed into a doctrine, and the consolation is subsequently something that can be learned. The question thus arises as to whether carers should not/cannot learn how to console. A caring consolation, based on the analysis of this study, is perhaps rather an insight that occurs in the immediate encounter with the patient. From this perspective, the most important piece of knowledge for the caring field is that a caring consolation cannot be learned because the experiences of suffering and consolation are unique experiences. This might, of course, raise questions about the relevance of this study and the answer to that question is that there are no answers. Suffering and consolation belong to the mysterious aspects of life which provide no answer to how or why. Consolation must thus be "suffering-led".

The patient bears witness to the otherness (Levinas 1969), to other perspectives, and to another world different to that of the carer. Each patient is thus an incomprehensible mystery. The patient is a world that the carer can possibly gain insight into by receiving the

patient's invitation to a caring relationship. It is perhaps the way one receives this invitation that facilitates good care and a caring consolation (cf. Eriksson 2006). Caring thus becomes an exciting mystery with this perspective, a care that takes place in the unique encounter with another person with his/her unique way of suffering and with his/her unique experience of consolation. A carer should thus approach a suffering person by humbly acknowledging that this person's suffering and consolation are incomprehensible. It thus appears, in light of the perspective of the present study, that by doing just this the best possible conditions can be created for communicating a caring consolation.

How would then a nurse of today console Job as a patient? He or she would first encounter a patient who probably is emaciated, covered with boils all over his body, and complaining about some miserable comforters and a God who has forsaken him. The findings of this study show that consolation can originate in confrontation. With this understanding, the nurse should let Job be Job, with his cursing and complaining behavior. According to Ricoeur (1967), it is to God Job makes his appeal against God. The experienced injustice is encountered and the way of dealing with suffering can be seen as a movement toward health. This is the relevance of the Book of Job, where his experience of suffering and of consolation is important for health care today.

According to the findings of this study, one way of "being in consolation" also implies a culture of caring in which the patient is welcomed, i.e., is accepted as the one he or she is (Eriksson 2006). This may strengthen both the patient's self-confidence and sense of dignity (cf. Barbosa da Silva et al. 2009). To be in consolation and to be in health seems to be part of the same motion. The result shows that the authentic and caring consolation allows the suffering to be suffered as well as it receives and bears the other's suffering. To receive and bear are key words in a caring consolation. This requires a person who is present to the sufferer and his or her way of suffering, with a tolerant and non-judgemental attitude. It is not "consoling" advice, even though wise, that a suffering person needs. Job as well as people of today who suffer has to find his own answers to why they suffer, as there is no one who can provide that answer. Neither does God answer Jobs' questions, even in his speeches out of the whirlwind (Job 38–41). This does not necessarily mean that the suffering will decrease. It can thus be necessary to allow the evil to be evil! The paradox is that to suffer one's suffering is one path to consolation, i.e., to be in consolation. The opposite, the "tweezer consolation" that plucks away the suffering and thus quickly consoles produces no lasting consolation, or any lasting health.

It is, however, important to make some methodological considerations. First, the choice of the Book of Job appears to be a relevant source to reveal aspects of consolation, what it is and what it is not. Selecting relevant literature to correspond to the aim of the study, i.e., focusing on the Book of Job was on the other hand carried out in a field where a vast amount of literature is available. The first selection was made based on a broad understanding of the aim of this study, i.e., the assumption that a deeper understanding of Job's suffering was required, because suffering and consolation are closely linked to each other. This appeared to have been a good strategy because it facilitated for the next step, i.e., to focus on the most relevant literature. The selection of literature was, however, the most difficult consideration in relation to the present research. The final selection was regarded as the most relevant and fruitful for the purpose of this study.

Finally, in the biblical narratives of Job's suffering, humanity is implicit as the paradigm of suffering as well as of consolation. There is, however, little literature research on suffering and consolation with a caring science perspective. Thus, in order to better understand how suffering is consoled and relieved in health care, we suggest further

research focusing on Job's suffering, how he encounters it, and why he encounters it the way he does.

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