

CAREFUL NURSING NEWS

CAREFUL NURSING — INFINITE TRANSCENDENT REALITY

Saint Clare's Health System Nursing has adopted Careful Nursing as the Professional Practice Model for nursing practice. Careful Nursing has three philosophical assumptions: human person, **infinite transcendent reality**, and health.

Infinite transcendent reality is a way of saying God or the spiritual dimension of human life. "The abundantly loving source of all creation, unitary wholeness and healing in the universe," states Meehan (2012, p. 2908)

Meehan, T. (2012). The Careful Nursing philosophy and professional practice model. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 21, 2905–2916, doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2702.2012.04214.x

ASK DR. MEEHAN ABOUT CAREFUL NURSING

The Careful Nursing Philosophy and Professional Practice Model®:

Infinite Transcendent Reality

Part II

Infinite Transcendent Reality in Careful Nursing

Background: Understanding Infinite Transcendent Reality in Careful Nursing is guided by the thinking of Thomas Aquinas (1265-1274/1946), which he developed as he examined and built on the thinking of Aristotle. A simple outline of Aristotle's thinking may help to illustrate some of the philosophical ideas that Aquinas built on.



In his *Metaphysics* (circa 350 BCE), Aristotle seeks to explain the nature of existence, movement, and change in the universe. He reasons that a being must exist which is not dependent on (he says, is not moved by) any other thing. He postulates that this being is infinite and eternal, exists simply in and of itself, and is composed of intelligence, beauty and goodness. He calls this being the *unmoved mover* because although it is not moved by anything itself, it is the cause of all movement, and change in the universe. It does not cause movement and change by reaching out directly to things, but rather by the powerful attraction of its intelligence, beauty, and goodness. Its attraction creates in all things desire and love for it which, in turn, impel their movement, and change. Aristotle comes to think of this unmoved mover as God.

Aristotle is not clear in his *Metaphysics* what he means by desire and love, but gives the impression that desire means seeking for and that love means attraction to the beauty of something intelligent and good. But he is clear in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (350 BCE) that his idea of God is of

a distant God concerned with existence, movement, and change in the universe, and too distant from human beings to relate to them personally.

Much of Aristotle's thinking was lost to the Western world for hundreds of years until Muslim translations were brought to Europe in the 12th century. The same questions addressed by Aristotle were of central concern at the early European universities, not least of which were questions about God. At the University of Paris, Aquinas took up Aristotle's work with great interest.

As a Christian theologian and philosopher, Aquinas builds on Aristotle's thinking from a Christian worldview, a worldview founded on faith in revealed knowledge of God, which is beyond human reason. But, he is also deeply committed to the use of reason to develop knowledge and to the idea that faith and reason complement one another in the search for truth.

His research method is philosophical argument, the science of his time. In some ways this is not so different from our scientific approach today. The equivalent of a null hypothesis is stated and every effort is made to support it. When there is not significant support for it, the equivalent of a research hypothesis is explained and accepted. Arguments proceeded from principles, what we call theories, and from evidence, meaning conclusions arrived at through reasoned arguments which are published in the literature.

Infinite Transcendent Reality: Aquinas addresses the existence and nature of Infinite Transcendent Reality (God) and of God's relationship with us in the *Summa Theologica* (1265-1274/1948).[†] Throughout, he builds in different ways on Aristotle's principle that, taken existence, movement and change in the universe, there must be an unmoved mover. As he proceeds he transforms Aristotle's distant God and unmoved mover into a *first mover* or *first efficient cause*; a creator and sustainer of all things in the universe. He observes that "everyone" names and understands this first efficient cause as God (I, Q 2, Art 3). As their creator, this God is also intimately present to human persons and their relationships with one another. Aquinas's arguments are quite detailed and rely on a good knowledge of metaphysics. Here only his main points can be summarized briefly.

He begins by considering the existence of God and whether this can be demonstrated (I, Q 2). He argues that God's existence is not directly self-evident to us because our finite human intellect does not have the capacity to know the infinite essence of God. However, God's existence can be demonstrated indirectly from natural effects caused by God, which can be evident to us through our senses.

To help us think about how this can happen, let us recall Aquinas's general view of the human person (Meehan 2012). He proposes that we are unitary, rational beings who encompass, simultaneously, two explicit realities, an outward bio-physical reality of body and senses and an inward

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psycho-spiritual reality of mind, spirit and communion with God (I, Q 76; II-II, Q 23). He emphasizes the importance of the bio-physical reality of body and senses because they have a vital role in communicating experience to our intellect and the spiritual substance of our being (see CNN 4/4, p. 4), which is the center of our inward reality and communion with God.

Aquinas reasons that our only natural access to God is through our five outward senses. Therefore, he reasons from effects to cause, rather than from cause to effects. He is widely known for his five arguments (the five ways) which he formulated to demonstrate that God exists (I, Q 2, Art 3). All build on the transformation of Aristotle's argument for an unmoved mover to an argument for a first efficient cause and creator of all existence, movement and change. Everything that comes into being and passes out of being originates in this first efficient cause, God.

In continuing, Aquinas considers the nature of God (I, Q 3-11). He does this by reasoning that although we cannot know what God is in essence, we can know something about what God is *not* and can make inferences from this. For example, he presents much evidence that God is not a material body, and therefore is non-material, self-subsisting, unitary being. He reasons that God does not change (is immutable) and does not exist in time and, therefore, is eternal being. Similarly, God is not a quantity and, therefore, is infinite and limitless.

Aquinas argues further that as infinite and eternal being, God is everywhere and present in all things as their first efficient cause and sustainer of their being. Therefore, God is intimately present to us human beings. This conclusion is in striking contrast to Aristotle's distant God and has significant implications for how we know God in relation to ourselves, our patients, and one another.

In addition, Aquinas reasons that God is perfect and all-knowing, the highest and most perfect intelligence. He relates this to the goodness of God in that good signifies being desirable. Here again he is elaborating on Aristotle's idea that goodness is what all things desire. Therefore, all things are innately oriented and drawn to seeking their own goodness and perfection in God. In doing so, all things seek what is perfect and good, that is, what is worthy, useful and delightful in relation to coming to know God.

Aquinas accepts on faith the Christian principle that "God is love" and he uses reason to examine what this means (I, Q 20). He argues that God's love for everything and especially for all human persons is the primary expression of God's will for the good in every person. Just as God is the first cause of our being, so God's love pours out to us abundantly and in responding to it, we grow in goodness.

Following consideration of God's goodness and love we might ask ourselves, what about all the suffering in the world? Or, in Careful Nursing terms, what about the times when we are inconsiderate and cause

suffering in others? We are all aware of the extensive literature on bullying in nursing. If God is the first cause of all things, is God not also the cause of this inconsiderateness and suffering? Aquinas addresses this problem in terms of evil. He argues that evil is not an entity in itself and that good and evil do not exist in opposition to one another (I, Q 48-49). In his argument, he indicates that inconsiderateness is the absence of goodness in human persons who, in their essential nature, are designed to be oriented towards God's goodness and love.

In summary, Aquinas lays out a philosophical structure for thinking about the existence and nature of Infinite Transcendent Reality and for considering what this means for nursing practice. He argues that Infinite Transcendent Reality is, without exception, present to all human persons in their innermost being, but is also unknowable to us because of our finite nature. However, in the face of this seeming barrier, he identifies a hopeful possibility. He proposes that through a gift of grace, a special expression of God's love, it is possible for our intellect to be *touched* by an impression, intimation, or sense of God's presence, although this is unlikely to be comprehensible to us (I, Q 12). Perhaps this is why we have a propensity to wonder, to be astonished at something awesomely mysterious, and desire to seek for meaning in our life.

Implications for practice

Consideration of Infinite Transcendent Reality brings us face to face with how we understand spirituality in our practice. For any given nurse, this may be in accordance with the Careful Nursing viewpoint or with any of a range of spiritual viewpoints that converge on Careful Nursing. In a sense, Careful Nursing seeks to allow for all things spiritual for all nurses while at the same time maintaining its own spiritual viewpoint.

Our awareness of Infinite Transcendent Reality or spirituality will influence the sensitivity with which we implement Careful Nursing concepts and dimensions, particularly the spiritual-related dimensions mentioned above. Those of us who reject any spiritual system of thought or the idea of spirituality itself, will be able approach implementation from the viewpoint of professional values or practice expectations.

Deepening awareness of the inward life: Developing awareness and understanding of Infinite Transcendent Reality or spirituality in practice settings is a process that takes place mainly in our inward life, and our experience of it deepens with attention and over time. Thus, it is essential that we attend to our inward life on a regular basis. This brings us again to the importance of the 5-minute period of quiet time each day, a time to be still and *listen* to our inner self.

Recall from CNN 4/4, page 6 that this can be thought of as meditation, centering, prayer, mindfulness, stillness, or silence. As this period of quiet time becomes a daily habit, it will gradually, almost imperceptibly, deepen awareness of the inward life of mind, spirit and communion with Infinite Transcendent Reality or one's spiritual center. In turn, this will

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deepen awareness of one's self as a unitary being, and in turn again, will bring with it a deeper, more focused attentiveness to oneself, patients, and colleagues. The dimensions of Careful Nursing mentioned above will also become habits, that is, ways in which we are predisposed to act without thinking about it. For example, recall the practice of the Emergency Room staff nurse CNN 4/4, page 5.

Also recall from CNN 4/4, page 6 that this 5-minute period can be taken when and where it fits best with our daily schedule. The guidelines given can be followed and the suggested images used. Another possible image could be a tree, one that you know or imagine, that has a strong trunk with roots that reach down into the richness of the earth and branches and leaves that draw themselves up with joy to absorb the light streaming from the sun. For a few minutes you can be aware within yourself of the rich vibrancy, beauty, silence and inner strength of the tree and then keep this image with you as you continue with your daily schedule.

Implementation in practice: Perhaps a good way to begin implementation is by talking about Infinite Transcendent Reality or spirituality amongst ourselves, maybe at unit staff meetings or at in-service education classes. A part of this article could be chosen for group exploration and discussion. Keep in mind that the spiritual views of fellow nurses and others may vary widely and that it is important to appreciate and respect each as a fellow human person at a particular place on their spiritual journey in life. Discussion will help to identify where different views converge and how all can work in harmony in integrating awareness of Infinite Transcendent Reality or spirituality into practice. It will also lead naturally to better caring for ourselves and one another, a dimension of Careful Nursing that we will focus on in a future issue of CNN.

Each of us individually could allow our minds to explore who we are as spiritually oriented human persons and how this influences the wonderful gift each of us has of being a professional nurse. Ideas will then come to us about ways that we can grow and strengthen ourselves in our practice. For example, each time we approach our practice area or each time we do something routine like cleansing our hands, we can pause in our minds for a few seconds and be aware of ourselves as human persons who are spiritually oriented beings.

The influence of our awareness of Infinite Transcendent Reality or spirituality in our practice is similar to the influence of our awareness of ourselves as human persons, which we reviewed in the previous issue, CNN 4/4. Recall the examples of nurses in practice on page 5. In comparing the examples of practice the difference was in how the nurses were in themselves; in how they practiced. Spirituality is primarily about how we are in ourselves and this influences how we do what we do. The spiritual-related dimensions mentioned above only make a difference when we truly do them.

With regard to patients, their spiritual views are likely to vary widely

and some may have no spiritual view at all. While patients' spirituality is usually part of their formal nursing assessment, it is not within the scope of professional nursing practice for nurses to give patients the details of their own spirituality, unless they are specifically asked by a patient to do so. It is especially not within the remit of nurses to suggest to patients that any given approach to spirituality is preferable. What is important is that all patients' spiritual views are respected and any particular needs, such as keeping a religious object close by or receiving a visit from a chaplain, are facilitated.

Hopefully, this article will remind us to pause from time to time to wonder in its primary meaning of astonishment at something awesomely mysterious and possibly very close to us. Infinite Transcendent Reality and spirituality are not always easy to talk and write about because they are inner experiences that can touch deeply on the beauty and mystery of our lives. All the same, do take some time to record your impressions, ideas, questions and responses following meetings and your personal musings on the subject – there will surely be something there that you can send to *Careful Nursing News*. Also, you could let me know what you think about this article. Whatever you think, I would always love to hear from you.

† The standard method of referencing sections of Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* is according to Parts (I, I-II, II-II, III), Questions (Q), and Articles (Art).

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- The Careful Nursing Philosophy and Professional Practice Model®
Therese C. Meehan, RGN, PhD
Adjunct Senior Lecturer in Nursing
School of Nursing, Midwifery & Health Systems
University College Dublin, Ireland
Adjunct Professor, Graduate School of Nursing, Midwifery & Health
Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand
Therese.Meehan@ucd.ie