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RESOURCING TRUST IN A FRAGMENTING WORLD

The Social-Economic Dimension and Relational Ethics in the Track of Boszormenyi-Nagy[1]

> 'One who understands the essence of man in terms of the
> dialogical relation between men must walk a narrow ridge
> between the individualistic psychology which places all
> reality within the isolated individual and the social psychology
> which places all reality in the organic group
> and in the interaction of social forces.'
> Friedman (1960, 184)

> 'Fair giving benefits not only the one who receives but also the one who gives.'
> Boszormenyi-Nagy, personal remark

In this essay, we combine literature on economics and social sciences, inducing practical experiences and philosophically and theologically inspired praxis. We give our perceptions of the recent financial-economic crisis and the 'free market'-economy and of some consequences in the private domain. As therapists we have to reflect on contemporary issues of interrelatedness of social-economic facts and narratives with (inter)personal dimensions. How about the conditions for relational responsibility in the midst of social injustice and instability, hidden behind ideologies of autonomy and equality? Against this background as 'heuristics of fear', we search for a realistic perspective of hope. The strength of relational ethics can be seen as an illusion, when we would assume that being responsible is dependent on the extent of freedom which nature and culture give us. Although this assumption is familiar, relational ethics still are the motivational layer in which

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1 The original spelling of his name in his native Hungarian would be Böszörményi-Nagy, but since he is widely known as 'Boszormenyi-Nagy', we follow that spelling here.

hope resides for repairing the hurt human justice. Reading Levinas helps us to understand how this is possible. The appeal of another person motivates me. His/her 'command without force' makes me free. In the contextual approach of Boszormenyi-Nagy, there still are valuable stepping stones to be found for resourcing the sense of responsible relational caring.

Keywords: economic crisis, relational ethics, resources for trust and trustworthiness, contextual therapy, reciprocity

Vertrauensressourcen in einer auseinanderbrechenden Welt: Die gesellschaftlich-wirtschaftliche Dimension und die Beziehungsethik nach Boszormenyi-Nagy: In diesem Artikel werden auf der Grundlage einer Verknüpfung von wirtschaftswissenschaftlicher und sozialwissenschaftlicher Fachliteratur auf einer philosophischen und theologischen Basis beruhende praktische Erfahrungen und Anwendungen hergeleitet. Die jüngste Finanz- und Wirtschaftskrise, die freie Marktwirtschaft und mögliche Konsequenzen für die Privatsphäre werden erörtert. Als Therapeuten haben wir die Aufgabe, aktuelle Zusammenhänge zwischen den gesellschaftlich-wirtschaftlichen Fakten und Berichten mit (inter)personalen Dimensionen zu untersuchen. Wie sieht es in einer Situation gesellschaftlicher Ungerechtigkeit und Unsicherheit – getarnt durch eine Ideologie von Autonomie und Gleichheit – mit den Voraussetzungen für eine Verantwortung in Beziehungen aus? In dieser Situation, verstanden als „Heuristik der Angst", wird die reale Perspektive der Hoffnung erforscht. Die Kraft der Beziehungsethik scheint vielleicht eine Illusion zu sein, wenn man davon ausgeht, dass das Übernehmen von Verantwortung abhängt von dem Maß an von Natur und Kultur zugestandener Freiheit. Diese Annahme mag uns bekannt vorkommen, doch die Beziehungsethik stellt die Art Motivation dar, die in uns eine gewisse Hoffnung auf Wiederherstellung der verletzten menschlichen Gerechtigkeit weckt. Beim Lesen von Levinas beginnt man zu verstehen, wie dies möglich ist. Die Anziehungskraft der anderen Person schenkt mir Motivation. Ihr „pressionsfreier Befehl" macht mich frei. Der kontextuelle Ansatz von Boszormenyi-Nagy bietet wertvolle Möglichkeiten zur Gestaltung einer verantwortungsvollen Beziehung.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Wirtschaftskrise, Beziehungsethik, Ressourcen von Vertrauen und Zuverlässigkeit, kontextuelle Therapie, Gegenseitigkeit

For some time we (the authors of this article) wanted to believe that the problems related to the financial-economic crisis since 2008 are not so very urgent in our part of the world. We wanted more or less to ignore the problems; their complexity was too much of a burden. But we heard the voices of others (often less privileged), we read papers with general and with more specialised knowledge, and could not maintain that these worrisome developments and stagnations were not serious. They *are* happening around us too, and are relevant for social work and therapeutic help, for community and family mental health care, for solidarity with several generations. We know that the issues which are central to this article are related to the energy crisis and the climate change as well (cf. RIFKIN 2009). We nevertheless have to limit ourselves and so we focus on aspects of the socio-economic crisis and some of the effects as we perceive them in our practice.[2]

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[2]   We thank our colleague Marianne Thans, contextual therapist and pastor, for her comments on parts of this article.

1. Worldwide crises: the systemic 'language' and the mandate of therapy[3]

Recently one of us participated in a seminar called, in Dutch, 'Het nieuwe onbehagen in de cultuur', i.e. 'the new uneasiness in culture'. This allusion to Freud refers to feelings of discomfort and scepticism about the contemporary social reality and those supposedly in charge. In accordance with the statements of this seminar, we perceive that nowadays many people, also when they are not threatened in their economic and social safety, seem to be affected in their sense of well-being.

How we reflect upon the world we experience is to a huge degree a matter of perception and definition. An immediate cause for the subject of this article is our perception of the consequences of the worldwide financial-economic crisis that started in 2008. This crisis, and the dominant economy behind it, leaves big debts for the generations to come. It is no wonder that there seems to be much, but vague, concern about 'the future'. Many people are worried about the claims of their work; will they be able to function well when they get older? For youth, existence may become a matter of competition where they are constantly afraid of failure. 'Scapegoating' seems to be a release, to rid ourselves of our problems. In the short run, this seems effective (for the scapegoaters, not for the scapegoats). In the long run, this creates injustice and often violent revenge.

We approach this 'uneasiness' as a trust-related problem of accountability and responsibility, under big pressure in a fragmenting world, a world in which the personal subject seems to be rather isolated. In a more or less generally shared perception, this crisis is viewed as a *systemic* dysfunctional occurrence, which could happen because of certain insufficient mechanisms of control and supervision of either banks or governmental organisations. In systemic language these elements are interwoven in a web of circular interconnected relationships. No element in particular can be seen as the origin of the well- or malfunctioning of the system. We agree with this view as concerning the serious consequences of the absence of adequate supervision. But the reductive effect of a systemic view can easily be overlooked. This systemic frame of reference is *per se* without emphasis on individuals but for their being elements of the system, part of a homeostasis. From a macro-economic point of view, in the description of the crisis an absence of persons, or in other words, the anonymity of power may be legitimate. And legitimately from an ethical point of view, the system's thinking dispels the 'us versus them' mentality, an innocent party versus a guilty one, and as such this is an 'adult' call for taking responsibilities to all sides. Nevertheless, not only the crisis itself, but also this systemic definition of the crisis has great consequences for the perception of this problem by individuals

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[3] The terms 'therapy' and 'therapist' are used here in their broad generic connotation, including all interventions that aim to help people in their needless ('useless') mental or psychic or relational sufferings, and to support them and society in constructive relating. It does not include psychological manipulation of relational sufferings such as guilt and compassion, nor any manipulation of a human being in the selfish interests of another person, a political party, an army, or a business enterprise, etc. See also BOSZORMENYI-NAGY 1987, 294. We write about 'therapy' as including prevention; so this means mental health care too.

who are not in charge. Many people who trusted their banks and their savings, their superannuation and their leaders, feel deceived and helpless. Traditional buffers and moderator mechanisms for living standards often turned out to be weak and there is no real address for protest. This moves us not only as persons and citizens but also as therapists, social workers, and pastoral counsellors.

As many others, we perceive a destruction of trust and trust ability, not only in financial markets and political institutions, but also in more or less personal relationships. We see in our practice many signals of anxiety about the future, exhaustion, distrust, lack of trust, and in what we see as a result of this: an attitude of indifference or 'seeming' commitment. How to protect the frameworks for living, such as personal and relational integrity, parenthood and child rearing, the pair-bond and long-standing friendship? How to help parents in their needs without overburdening or even exploiting their offspring? Where security in adults' lives diminishes, 'parents will increasingly turn to their children for the fulfilment of their adult emotional dependency needs . . . Therapy's mandate includes the task to inform society at large about the implications of preventable transgenerational consequences' (BOSZORME-NYI-NAGY 1987, 286). How to resource trust in a fragmenting world? We mean: in a world in which there is a globalisation of the interdependence of people. And in which this globalisation is accompanied by a crumbling of 'totalities' (strong groups, defined by cultural, ethnic, political, religious bonds and traditions). One of the problems of globalisation is the disconnectedness among people who should be allies by fate but aren't connected in actual solidarity. As stated by JÄGGLE (2006, 75), the process of globalisation is an ambivalent phenomenon, which needs a critical reflection on the positive as well as the negative sides. By using the concept 'fragmenting world', we focus somewhat more on the *negativum*, but we keep in mind as the positive side a growing awareness of global destiny, and no less importantly, the possibility of increasing moral consciousness: that the meaning of no person is reducible to any totality (BAUMAN 1995) including context (RHIJN & MEULINK-KORF 1997, 460).

Even in families and marriages there seems to be an increasing dominance of a narrow pragmatic attitude, an increasing moral indifference towards the other ones, resignation and decline of respect. We often hear this remark: 'There is no more gain for me in this relationship/marriage/family', in other words, we perceive many times a seemingly *non*-dialogical and *non*-dialectical attitude. We hear this remark as hiding a cry for help of one person for himself *and* the other ones, at least the significant others of the primary client.

When we fail to appreciate this rather hidden concern, we do a disservice to our clients. Focusing only on individual psychological freedom or removal of distressing symptoms is not fair. The ethics of therapy are at stake. The social context and its consequences in the life of our clients obviously concern us as social workers, psychotherapists and pastors, and also any professional involved in the essence of therapy, prevention and social work: 'ethics of caring' (BOSZORMENYI-NAGY 1987, 319). So we have to approach the current social-economic dynamics.

2. A revolving slate: blaming without appropriate address

The problems of the social-economic spheres of influence are pervasive and so there is much insecurity and dissatisfaction in the private domain. What about people's reactions? There is a strong tendency *to blame economic and political leaders*. Economic leaders for their greed, political leaders for their weakness. From a viewpoint of the individual citizen, this blame is an appropriate, justifiable reproach because of the nearly unlimited economic power in 'the free market', based on an irresponsible greed for power, money and standing of many of the leaders, and, in connection, the increased dissolution of governmental power. An economic change on this side of the world, 'here', sometimes fractures the living standards of people 'there', vice versa. Nation-states proved to be fragile towards the captains of multi-national corporations, even though – or just because – their seemingly soft, yet imperative paternalistic attitude towards their citizens and their personal freedom is obvious. But as stated above, although this blaming is understandable and even legitimate, the reality viewed as a systemic occurrence does not give a real possibility to (successfully) address the leaders as accountable persons. Then something even more dangerous happens: a growth of cynicism regarding the importance of commercial top-managers and captains of industry and political leaders. So there is not only blaming of the leaders, but also an *absence* of apparent blaming of the leaders. There might be another reason for this absence than only a systemic perception or cynical indifference: the idea that our leaders really are irresponsible persons is threatening. Just as if our parents would be without apparent responsibility. Therefore the blaming often remains subconscious.

As a consequence of this, we look for others to blame. The *blaming of victims*, unjustifiable, seems to be widespread. Such as the blaming of economic-driven immigrants, displaced persons, refugees, coloured people and others. They are blamed for a lot of problems, which they cannot influence at all. We see here a process of displacement of aggression once termed 'a revolving slate' (BOSZORMENYI-NAGY & SPARK 1973, 65–67). Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy constructed this term especially but not exclusively for a process in which a person unjustly lays blame on another in order to protect his parents and tends to be immune to guilt towards the innocent victim of these dynamics. This revolving slate only tends to stop (temporarily) with the most vulnerable persons, often children. After all, *their* capacity for actively taking it out on others, or taking revenge, is very limited. This limitation is temporary only, because later on the transmission of unfairness can go on. In many ways victims become victimisers.[4] Applied to the 'relationship' of persons with their leaders, we can see how retribution is aimed not at the leaders but at others, often vulnerable outsiders.

This displacement seems to be subconscious. However, many other people are conscious and aware that there is no such thing as an appropriate address. But they

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[4] The former victim sometimes 'only' victimises herself/himself. But in this, there is harm to the nearest and dearest, and also to 'the human order'.

are also worried and concerned for themselves, their children, and others. 'It seems I am rather helpless . . . Is there anyone, a person or an institution as a moderator, a helping resource?'

Laura: I was very attached to my work and still like to be committed. But the people who should be trustworthy and reliable proved to be weak and sometimes very irresponsible . . . Perhaps it is not their fault, perhaps it is a matter of rivalries between institutions . . . Or perhaps I am too old now to understand networking dynamics. In my view, society has changed, is very hard. How could this happen? I always hoped my children would be strong and independent, but now I am not sure they are . . . At the same time I want them to remain sensitive to others. And what about the children in our care, most of them very vulnerable, and some of them prone to violence, what will be their future?

Laura, 48 years old, is a medical doctor who is in charge of a department of a child-welfare service, which recently was made part of a much bigger institution. According to Laura this umbrella values 'sound financial tactics' above all other targets including the mandate of providing safety and therapeutic help.[5]

3. Economic policies: a not-tempered power

Many welfare institutions such as the one where Laura is enlisted are nowadays dominated by narrow economic values, much more than in the past. How could this happen? For a possible answer let us have a look at a specific socio-economic analysis. As more and more leading sociologists and economists explain, for some decades a totally free market proved to be an illusion or even a lie. The Korean-British economist H.-J. CHANG (2008) substantiated the limits of Neo-Capitalism. He attacked a main belief of his own profession: the belief that global free trade raises living standards everywhere. He sees this belief as created and confirmed by complicated economic and mathematic models. Chang argues in favour of good economic policy based more on 'simple' common sense than on the models of high-valued economists. The guiding principle of the free market, a not inherently bad model, needs transparency and assistance and tempering by a solid and strong governmental power and by very influential institutions in the social midfield or civil society. Otherwise this model leads to an increasingly unfair distribution of wealth and power. Alas, this tempering function did not really work. On the contrary, vital connected social groups (including the anchorage of employees in companies, religious institutions, extended families with strong ties) have weakened. Governments forfeited much of their power in the struggles with multinational corporations and did not succeed in taking a firm line with the banks. There is more poverty, unemployment and exploitation than ever. Especially, but not only, in the non-Western part of the world, there

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[5]   Each of our case-examples or vignettes is somewhat disguised to protect the privacy of people involved.

are large, ever increasing gaps between the poor people and the wealthy. Fundamentally and all over the world these gaps are neither caused by lack of intelligence or willpower or discipline of the poor nor by immigrations. So says Ha-Joon Chang, whose analysis is rightfully receiving growing attention.

Right-wing populism, the big winner of the June 2010 elections in the Netherlands, takes another point of view. This movement is characterised by a mix of conservative values, xenophobia (esp. concerning Islamic people), disgust with the left, and liberal values such as a strong emphasis on freedom of speech and the protection of gay marriage and women's rights. In other countries in Western Europe (such as Denmark, Belgium, Germany) one sees comparable populism. Many traditional working class or lower middle class voters have been turning away from social democracy, and many lower middle class workers have left Christian democracy. Many voters perceive democracy parties, Christian or socialist, as improper establishments. We do not think that these voters for populist parties are egoistic per se. They are longing for a 'we' but apparently, their 'desire for community is defensive' (SENNET 1998, 138). The attitude is not exactly and certainly not everywhere 'every man for himself', but many are drawn on their reserves. So this attitude often does not meet many reservations. The more one is unjustly overburdened, the more one runs the risk of becoming immune to guilt, like the guilt of excluding other people.

4. The myth of meritocracy

One of our clients in psychotherapy said:

Peter: I have thought for a long time that I could make it, that I would succeed in being a success-man, in business, in relationships, in my fatherhood. I was raised by parents who taught me to be responsible and to work hard, and we all believed that this would be very rewarding. But now it works out totally differently. I do not know what to do. Maybe I am simply not good at competitions. I am constantly afraid of failure. I don't think that my parents were wrong at the time, but the world has changed and is very unfair. I am never in the driver's seat.

This man, Peter (35) works as a consultant on a project-base, every year for another firm. He experiences burnout, exploited and deceived, by society, by girlfriends. His parents were rather devoted Christian democrats, both of them busy as volunteers for what they saw as the public interest. He himself tends to have an explicitly cynical attitude towards society.

'The political domain leaves me cold . . . I cannot contribute anymore, nobody really needs me there. On the contrary, for there is only jealousy among those who are active in politics, professionals or volunteers', Peter says. His private life is rather uncertain, and shows a lack of awareness of relational responsibility. 'Maybe my next [sic!] partner-relationship, when I am feeling better, will

give my life more stability … ?' Sometimes it looks as if he is determined to behave indifferently.

Many do feel that they are deceived, sometimes by specific persons, mostly as an overall feeling. Many others are struggling with themselves in order to escape the feelings of disappointment and frustration. The so-called myth of freedom and meritocracy has proven to be a strong one, and not only for our client Peter in Holland. 'We all believed this would be rewarding … ' We think these words of Peter somehow reveal a strong meta-narrative. But how can this exist, in the 21st century? It is untrue that the grand narratives are over (as J.-F. Lyotard postulated). We think there is a romantic myth about rewards, a 'great narrative', from which many people are suffering. They believe that they are doing something very wrong, because 'why am I not as successful as expected … ?' In Dutch we have the concept 'maakbaar' (makeable); it was coined by liberal and socialist politicians for society as a whole, but over the years it has been also applied to individuals: if only you perform well, your personal life to a large degree would be 'makeable'.

The deceiving neo-liberal meta-narrative of the free market is still strong and reinforced by the power structure of a meritocracy (VERHAEGHE 2010). This is not only about the financial side: such as in the *American Dream*, the *Self-Made Man*, but also about the strong belief that, at least in Europe, we have or nearly have equal chances in education for everyone who gives his/her best, and so equality in the 'makeability' of our life. But more or less we all know that in reality there is no such person as a free individual with unlimited options, equal to others. Indeed 'some . . . are more equal than others' (ORWELL 1966, 114), and for them, the ones who are already very privileged, this narrative has great compensations. But for most people, all over the world, the ideas of meritocracy are misleading.

5. An old meta-narrative and contemporary populism combined

As P. VERHAEGHE (2010, 4–6) rightly said, this narrative has a strong affinity with the *hybris* called Social Darwinism that flourished at the beginning of the twentieth century. Both aim at a 'survival of the fittest'. The ideas about a presupposed superiority of the whites tried to justify colonialism and in some degree succeeded. In order to behold this supremacy, the weaker elements within the race or group itself had to be eliminated, in accordance with this ideology. Around 1900 there were eugenic measures, which were brought to perfection by the Nazis. Verhaeghe points out that this Social Darwinism moved on from groups towards individuals and even selfish genes, as in Dawkins' 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*. So both narratives (Meritocracy and this seemingly purely descriptive Social Darwinism) are claiming to benefit the fittest ones in nature and to favour these above the others. Such is the way the foundations were constructed, seemingly scientific foundations, for the supremacy of men above women, of whites above blacks, of WASPs above others. Of winners above losers. These pretensions are unfair and a strong injustice.

We generally think this supremacy-thinking is behind us now. But this is not true. The social reality in which we live, with major discrepancies in social chances for persons and groups, is hidden by a strong ideology of meritocracy. It is this hidden character of social reality, by collusion, that causes much confusion and self-protection at the expense of others. Or in other words: the meritocracy itself consists of false but nearly self-evident notions: that all human beings are competitive individual beings out to make a profit, and the richest people are simply the best, and poor people do not deserve better. These notions or beliefs are mostly subconscious and therefore are exactly driving the frames of mind on a large scale (SWAAN 2010, 2). Populism uses and avails itself of lies that can grow on these notions. Awareness of the ideologies of the past can help to reveal the true character of these contemporary notions. In the first part of the twentieth century many scholars of various disciplines adopted and formalised racial theories. Not until Hitler turned up as a strong champion of these ideas did most of the theories vanish (alas, not everywhere). But the attractiveness of formalised models and the presupposed scientific importance of a mathematical orientation survived. (We can see this fascination, maybe a 'physics envy', flourish in the free market theories even though this is not always self-evidently appropriate for economy as a *social* science.)

Two empires crumbled in the twentieth century (that of Nazism, and that of Stalinism). Now the free market economy or 'flexible capitalism' (SENNET 1998, 46 and further on) is the dominating regime, and more than ever this functions as an autonomous self-justifying process.

We wrote about a perception of social reality as a neutral system, or an autonomous process that is driven by a survival of the fittest or the best adapters. We see this perception regarding *relational* reality too. Even where nobody thinks about him- or herself and the significant others in terms of 'anything goes' or as only elements in a biological system. Some knowledge and awareness of history and the (past?) ideologies are necessary when one wants to go beyond being people as playthings of fortune or only entities without connectedness and fragments without continuity. This goes for individual self-reflection, too. This self-reflecting and maybe soul-searching process needs contemporary embedding, because without any social support, an historical self-reflection that means a sense of connectedness and continuity is nearly out of the question.

6. 'No man is an island'

At this point we reach, explicitly, the private domain. Preliminary remark: the domain we actually *have* as individuals is not so very private at all. For, as we mentioned above, there is much encroachment on the personal freedom by authoritarian structures sanctioned by local or national governments. This encroachment meshes with needs for safeguarding and defence. In order to gain a feeling of security, people sometimes nearly surrender their freedom (TROJANOW & ZEH 2009). This concerns

not only the fear of terrorism, but also the fear of being untreatably ill. For example: the Electronic Patient Records in the Netherlands include a lot of very private information that will be available not only to medical doctors but for many goals (and officials). The ethically imperative guarantee that this private information will be used only under very specific conditions falls short.

Ethically, no individual *is* a private domain, like an island. With Boszormenyi-Nagy, Martin Buber and many others, we think about people as connected in 'a human order' (= community as qualified by humanity). As John DONNE (1572–1631) wrote:

> No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee. (2008, 97)[6]

These words do not prove anything but have a wisdom in a class of their own.

This remark made, we will briefly focus on some phenomena which we met in stories of our clients concerning the private domain: the often neglected historical dimension, the (danger of) self-protection and selfishness at the expense of others (defensiveness, rivalry, exclusion of strangers), and the threatened responsibility for the youngest ones and the generations to come.

7. Time's arrow

We already underlined the importance of 'history' for mental health. But a socially supported narrative of a continuity of the self is often a serious case of neglect. The 'flexibility' that is required of many persons in their labour and employment and elsewhere does not match their abilities and their needs. Especially not when someone is older than circa 35 years. Living without a continuity that is acknowledged by others means living with only superficial certainty. This causes vague anxiety and relational detachment. 'Time's arrow is broken; it has no trajectory in a continually reengineered, routine-hating, short-term political economy. People feel the lack of sustained human relations and durable purposes' (SENNETT 1998, 98).

Karel: When I came to work at the local Mental Health Service they had 65 people employed. After a few years I became department head of the section for psychotherapy for adults. The director knew me, because all the department heads were part of the management team. After about ten years, a merger enlarged the or-

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6 These well-known lines are prefaced by some which are known to a lesser degree. They reveal human beings as creation: 'all mankind is of one author, and is one volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated . . . As therefore the bell that rings to a sermon calls not upon the preacher only, but upon the congregation to come, so this bell calls us all; but how much more me, who am brought so near the door by this sickness.'

ganisation to 350 employees. After an even larger merger, to 1500 employees, I lost my job because all middle-management was eliminated. The people above me didn't know what my efforts had been in the previous years. I was without history in the organisation with which I had identified myself for many years. I received €150 – for a farewell celebration.

Karel is 57 years old. This experience had negative consequences for his self-esteem and self-respect. Fortunately there were relational resources around him: the support of his family and some friends. He now works as a psychotherapist in a private practice.

Of course for relational continuity and for the 'continuity of the self' there are also other conditions than the support of a socially acknowledged job, such as the one in which Karel initially developed his skills and capacities, and in which he gave more than he was obliged by contract. There are conditions of fate, of family life, of values, of dealing with guilt and guilt feelings, etcetera. A nearly paradoxically constant factor is that the problem is *not* that times are changing. After all, the search for permanence in a world of change has a long history; see Heraclitus, ca. 500 B.C., who teaches about time as a constant flux. 'You cannot step twice into the same river; for fresh waters are ever flowing in upon you' (ALMOND 2006, 24). There are not many biographies without a certain discontinuity. Times are changing, are running fast, or sometimes slow, and people are changing too. As such, this is not the problem. The problem *is* when in the present of the institution there is no attention or even awareness of the past. We meet several people who experience this as a traumatic or nearly traumatic event. Surely, in many companies some attention is given to the past of the firm, but only as a matter of self-celebration for the current board. The past of older employees is 'valued' as an expensive and tricky case, instead of a source of experiences, personal achievements and sometimes even wisdom. Times are changing, but there is a continuing need for reciprocity, for coherence, for a sense of sameness. (Maybe this is one of the reasons that literal and academic biographies have become very popular. At the State University Groningen, the Netherlands, an academic chair for 'History and Theory of the Biography' has been established.)

Please note: the striking lack of attention to the past in companies and also in many social corporations is not the indication of a bad character of individual managers, although there can be some 'corrosion of character' (SENNETT 1998). An absence of remembrance often became inherent in the culture of many companies in their mutual struggles. The whole atmosphere consists of short-term memory. Nowadays routine is seen as an evil of old capitalism (SENNETT 1998, 32–45). You can wonder how this influences the perception and validation of the long-term purposes and routine 'jobs' of child rearing and housekeeping.

8. Flexibility: a risk

It is clear that in (contemporary) 'free-market' capitalism there is a constant com-
petition between corporations. This struggle or inter-group rivalry is the main-
stay of the business. More hidden, behind a screen of 'meritocratic' thinking,
sometimes of a seemingly romantic character, is the intra-group competition of
colleagues. One is encouraged to achieve more or higher targets than the others.
This is the situation of many aging middle management employees: my colleague
has become my rival. It is no longer a relationship in which I assume a certain
responsibility for the other and in which I trust his or her responsibility for me.
For the younger ones, this situation is often the norm. They seldom or never met
another atmosphere on the shop floor. This rivalry and more or less vague distrust
means a short-term attitude of being alert. To be in rivalry means that you have to
watch your neighbour continually as your rival. It also means having to behave
very business-oriented and accommodating in connection with working hours
and being very flexible in connection with place of residence. This flexibility[7]
based on (expectations of) rivalry may be a productive condition for the economic
growth of a company. But it obviously is not a good one for the interpersonal
building of trust and making friends (more than superficially), nor a helping re-
source for maintaining fairness in family life. 'Transposed to the family realm,
"no long term" means keep moving, don't commit yourself and don't sacrifice'
(SENNETT 1998, 25). This lack of valuing continuity is a serious risk especially
for teenagers whose friends-peers may move (or rather, be moved) in other direc-
tions, with their respective parents. Attachment and connectedness not only with
family members but also with friends-peers are a main factor in the *Bildung* of an
adolescent growing to mature adulthood. Appropriate attention for both past and
future is among the obligations of a current generation of parents. But, as already
alleged, this generation is often occupied with burdening struggles.

9. Mimesis, violence, and the loss of energy

Competitiveness, as presumed and requested nowadays among many social institu-
tions and especially in companies and among their employees, can be understood in
a Darwinist framework. But there are more ways of thinking about the problems of
interpersonal conflicting interests and even violence. The work of René Girard gives
fruitful insights, mainly based on anthropological-philosophical studies and literary
historical criticism. As such, competitiveness is not unnatural, because as human
beings we are always living in *mimesis* (*imitatio*). This is not simply imitation of
behaviour. Mimesis means not merely representation. It refers to a mechanism which
generates patterns of action and interaction, 'getting our desires from one another'

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[7]   Sennett took this concept from John Stuart Mill.

(KAPTEIN 1993, 17). Girard's emphasising of mimesis may seem outdated in our authenticity-oriented ideology and culture, but it is remarkable how Girard's hypothesis matches with neuroscience's empirical research of so-called Mirror Neurons.[8]

When two persons desire the same thing or the same person, there will be rivalry between them. Ultimately this can only lead to a clash: *violence*. But how is violent behaviour, physically or verbally, understandable concerning people who used to be well-loved colleagues, friends or at least companions of one another? The answer lies in the triangular structure of desiring. Our desires do not arise spontaneously within us. They arise in me because I am involved with another who already desires this 'object' (a specific job, or a specific person, or a specific capacity, style, etc.). This other functioned for me as a model, for whatever reason. It could be one of my parents, or a teacher, my psychiatrist, the woman next door, or another peer who is admired by me. Maybe the colleague who functioned more or less as a mentor for me, when I entered my job in the company. When the social distance between the other and myself is a big one, we are not at risk of becoming rivals. Between me and the Dutch queen, for instance, there is not much danger of rivalry, although indeed she may be my model. My teacher can also be a safe model, when he knows to limit his model function to his specific assignment. Social differentiation is a buffer. The same is true for the dimension of time. The more the other one is near to me, in space (social group) and time, the greater the risk that I will try to be better and wiser than the other, more attractive, and try to get more targets. *My efforts invite the other to perform harder; my fascination stimulates and infects the other.* Usually the result is an exciting but bitter fight. Consciousness about these dynamics is important. It will be obvious that in our egalitarian cultures, there are a lot of chances for bitter rivalries. Only when people resign from being rivals of each other, and from assigning themselves as rivalling models, can there be freedom from this kind of desire. Only a model who does not assign him- or herself as such is really 'safe'. According to Girard, Jesus Christ is the complete model who is not a potential rival or obstacle. 'Jesus is the man outside desire' (KAPTEIN 1993, 90), and as such model on the way to peace and justice.

According to the theory of Girard, besides the constructive way of consciousness and growing freedom of the mimesis of desire, there is another way of trying to rid ourselves of these problems of rivalry. This is not a real solution, for it is a destructive one. One can make 'sacrificial peace' with another at the expense of a third party. This is victimization: placing the blame for our troubles on a scapegoat. When I feel threatened by my colleague, I can try to suggest to him that our boss is a friendly person but rather incompetent for his job: 'such a pity that Mr. Supervisor is a weak fellow'. There is a big chance that, by this, I can re-establish peace between me and my colleague, temporarily. The threatening tension between the two of us is diverted. This movement resembles the 'revolving slate' concept

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[8] Findings in developmental psychology (GARRELS 2006, 1, 4 and passim) and the principles of person-centred therapy, esp. empathy, also seem to be positively related to neuroscientific research results (LUX 2010, 279).

(see above) but it is not the same, because here there is a tension of rivalry between the two involved, and not an original injustice without appropriate address. In both dynamics there is a lack of awareness. We usually do not perceive that we are 'scapegoating' others. When we see people blaming and turning others into their scapegoats, we despise them. But to see that and how *we ourselves are victimising* is a difficult matter. Nevertheless, deep inside all of us there is a longing for peace (KAPTEIN 1993, 87) not by sacrificing others, but for real peace. This longing is a constructive and contagious 'power'.

Alas, this rivalry is contagious, too. It certainly has gains, for a short period. It also has big costs: lost energy, lost self-reflection, lost friendship, lost solidarity. When someone is used to rivalry in his job, he will not leave this attitude on his desk, but takes it with him. Not surprisingly, this is often at the expense of family life. As written above, this mentality is not unnatural and even infectious. So family life is burdened not only by the pervasive required flexibility, but also in this direct way of living-as-rivals. And by the guilt and feelings of guilt, which often are the results. For, while most dynamics in rivalry may be subconscious, the loss of energy is perceived. How to have energy, time and attention at one's disposal, outside the office? According to literature (SENNETT 1998, 21–31; ALMOND 2006) there is among many people the awareness of failing to offer attention to friends, spouse, and attention and guidance to offspring. In some case studies we observed similar feelings of guilt in adults, in connection with elderly parents (MOS & MEULINK-KORF 2009). The fact remains unimpeded that contacts between adults and their elderly parents still seem to be frequent, with mutual commitment. We assume that this is a helping resource for both parties. Nevertheless, the burdening feeling that one's attention is demanded by many different others with different interests is a serious one. Sometimes even the feeling of being torn.

10. Being a parent: a responsibility under pressure

Being torn by many not always compatible obligations and conflicting interests – this sounds (too) tragic. For many persons – and certainly many a young parent – it really is. We turn, shortly, to parenthood and the vulnerability of the youngest and the generations to come. Especially the situation of poor families, and in particular, single parents (most often mothers), seemingly without any extended family or reliable adult friend, is alarming even in the rather prosperous Netherlands. Among single parents, we heard this anxious concern several times: 'When I drop out [due to illness or exhaustion], who will take care of me and my child?' Here we perceive a strong need for practical, material support but also mental health care and counselling about issues of reengagement with family, neighbours, friends-to-be. This third topic is partly interrelated with the previous ones. Because of the fragmentation and distrust in society there is a strong burden on the trust in extended and nuclear families. People bring their frustra-

tions with society and labour or unemployment into their homes. As a matter of fact, this is not because parents would value their children less than they value their jobs. There is no indication of such a devaluation of parenthood. Parents usually have an awareness of responsibility (PAS 2003, 40–47) and feel the vulnerability of the youngest as their parental responsibility. This is also their own vulnerability: a vulnerability stemming in the vulnerability of their own children. How to raise children and guide them in their coming of age, in various aspects, ultimately toward being responsible mature people themselves? For their part, in their time, people with ethical and moral awareness. And not only with a sense of having, for their own sake, to be obedient in contractual obligations. Another important question is how the overburdened situation of many parents influences the trust, trustworthiness, and carreer of their children. The stress from outside results in pain and psychological stagnation for the individual. And regarding partner relationships? While close relationships are resilient, they certainly are not indestructible. The outcome of a divorce has many aspects: among them the relational costs of the fragmenting of the family and an increased potential of loyalty conflicts and even 'splitting of loyalty'. By this 'loyalty' we mean a special character of the parent-child relationship, certainly not the same as attachment. We mean the existentially basic triadic configuration, with inevitably the preferring one, the preferred one and the one not preferred. When parents trust and respect each other (if not as partners, as parents as a minimum), the child is allowed and able to prefer sometimes one parent and sometimes the other, without being captured by guilt. The splitting of loyalty occurs when a child is forced to choose one parent's love at the cost of betraying the other parent, or to choose between his single mother and his grandmother (or another significant adult person). Then 'trusting one *ipso facto* cancels out the option of trusting the other' (BOSZORMENYI-NAGY & KRASNER 1986, 421). In this situation it is very difficult to attain an attitude of basic trust toward the adult world, which the child (every child) needs for balancing experiences of mistrust. And the lack of this is a difficult predicament in becoming a trustworthy and reliable participant in society. This is only one example how there is not only an impact of current exploiting situations in society on the personal relational level, but that it works equally the other way around: the personal relational level affecting society.

We addressed some impact of contemporary social contexts on personal life and relationships. After pointing out the absence of a policing agency, the needs for an acknowledgement of continuity especially in the labour domain, and for lessening the burden of flexibility and threatening rivalry, we focused shortly on parenting and the vulnerability of the youngest ones and the generations to come. Where does all this impact leave the conditions for relational ethics, and especially the ethics of responsibility for consequences? With BOSZORMENYI-NAGY (1987, 287) we propose that interpersonal and transpersonal consequence is the most important aspect of close relating, including parenting. The question if individuals are *able* to disengage themselves from the social-economic crisis and the impact of distrust and uncer-

tainty is an important issue. We already mentioned the analysis by Richard SENNETT of a corrosion of mentality as a possible result of the ever-changing working conditions, which he signalled in the so-called *New Economy*:

> What's peculiar about uncertainty today is that it exists without any looming historical disaster; instead it is woven into the everyday practices of a vigorous capitalism. Instability is meant to be normal . . . Perhaps the corroding of character is an inevitable consequence. 'No long term' disorients action over the long term, loosens bonds and commitment, and divorces will from behaviour.   (1998, 31)

Let us hope that in the long run Sennett's work itself will help to make this picture too bleak.

11. Ethics without illusions

In the second part of this essay we search to (re-)formulate a helpful approach of fair relating in close relationships ('micro-level'), against the background of much uneasiness and unfairness on macro- and meso-level in contemporary society. We propose that relational resources 'provide the fuel by which fairness may be actualised' (BOSZORMENYI-NAGY & KRASNER 1986, 420–21). First on the micro-level. 'They are major avenues through which people can move towards healing the "discontinuity of the self" . . . or strengthening the ego's mastery in the classical Freudian sense' (1986, 420–21). As therapists and social workers it is our obligation to support people in constructive (honest, reliable) relating now and in consideration of the future. But it should not be done either by moralising via our own values nor by idealising 'therapeutic' ideas or utopian dreams.

The philosopher Hans JONAS introduced the notion 'heuristics of fear', connected with a 'Futurologie der Warnung'. According to him fears can be necessary as correctives. Fear on behalf of future generations is a warning (*Warnung*) against unwarranted optimism, against illusions and utopianism (1992, 128). For Jonas the most important issue was human survival as threatened by modern technology and its 'progress'. His call for an ethics of responsibility as solidarity with generations to come is still very important (for 'transgenerational solidarity' see also BOSZORMENYI-NAGY 1987, 286–318).

There may not seem to be many reasons for optimism, but is there hope, and where? Panicking about the situation of the human world is not sensible, and most of our colleagues do not do that. And although many of our clients are exhausted by experiences of powerlessness and uncertainty and lack of recognition, most of them are not without longing for signals of hope and encouragement. People are not fools, and, in the long run, are not encouraged by illusions. We have to search for resources that really are trust-building.

12. Weakness of moral attitudes

But (how) is resourcing of trust a realistic possibility for adults who are deeply 'uneasy' and sometimes depleted by experiences in society? Instead of only wishful thinking about what we would like to happen?[9]

Is it possible for a human being to be or to become free from the entropic forces that do not differentiate and make us indifferent? Free from contagion? These are not only environmental conditions but also parts of ourselves. How can a human being, amidst an ideology of equality, be free from mimetic desires, free to be responsible and to behave non-indifferent and trustworthy? We have no reason to overrate our ethical strength or resistance to evil. The horrors of the wars in the twentieth century were partly executed by 'ordinary people' who accepted (their subordination to) the rules of their state as normal. We have long known that nearly everyone, under big pressure, can be driven to betray other, or to confess to whatever accusations are thrown at them. Stanley MILGRAM's famous experiment from the sixties showed moral attitudes as very weak in relation with authority (1974). We had the same disillusioning experience reading about the experiment of Philip ZIMBARDO in 1971, with roles of prisoners and guards, and seeing the film on this Stanford Prison Experiment. ZIMBARDO now pleads for personal decisions for heroic conduct, 'everyday heroism' (2007). According to him we have to begin with this, by becoming aware that our idea of the strength of our own moral resistance may be an illusion. Let us be conscious about the potential for evil in ourselves, the dark corners of our own souls, our own dependency. As a rule I am just as dependent on the approval of my peers and leaders as all others, says Zimbardo. Reading about heroism may have a certain potential to strengthen our souls. But overall we think heroism is an idealistic concept, perhaps even harmful because of its exclusiveness. Apparently there is not much evidence of freedom in most individuals and groups regarding ethical behaviour.

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[9] Concerning this question, we, the authors of this article, in our dialogue regarding the near future, do not totally agree with each other. One of us (WN) is more sceptical than the other, especially about the willingness of 'the meritocrat' (see above) regarding social ethics. As long as the well-earning (Western) European citizen keeps his capital and income, (s)he is often not motivated to act for better social politics. And even when the situation turns, and now that the financial Euro-valuation expresses a decline (summer 2011), most of them seem to show more cynicism than social responsibility. Cynicism means stagnation of possible involvement and solidarity. Recently, two quotes were featured rather prominently in some Dutch newspapers. Alan Greenspan, who was chairman of the Federal Reserve of the USA, said, 'I guess I should warn you, if I turn out to be particularly clear, you've probably misunderstood what I've said.' The other often-cited quote came from Simon Cameron, American banker and politician in the nineteenth century: 'An honest politician is one who, when he is bought, will stay bought.' This quoting by journalists is not merely joking, it underlines the paradoxical character of the cynicism among citizens and their leaders. So much for the stagnation of social engagement. Another aspect of the so-called meritocracy is the neglected underdog position of many young people who are not able to move up or feel respected in society. This can result in 'destructive entitled' behaviour which makes their chances even worse: resulting in a blindness for injustice to others but also for their own resources. For 'destructive entitlement' see BOSZORMENYI-NAGY & KRASNER 1986, 66, and further on in this article.

13. Being responsible as a prerequisite to freedom

But an important issue not yet mentioned is this: is 'freedom' to be considered a primary condition for responsibility? As we saw, the idea of a person who in his attitudes and willpower is independent of his environment or totally free from mimetic desire is an illusion. On top of that, the whole idea of personal freedom is under pressure, from materialistic and deterministic views in the natural sciences (does something like 'freedom' exist at all?). Also increasing criticism on liberal socio-political views casts strong doubts (does a view on the human person as an autonomous being striving for maximal personal freedom offer a sufficient basis for moral conduct and social involvement in society?) (see EBBERS-van AALST 2010). We consider a view on the human person as an autonomous being not the foundation for relational-ethical commitment. The same goes for the idea of a mercantile social order as a basis. 'Do ut des' (I give to you in order that you give to me) is not primary.

Ethics are primary, pre-contractual. In the tracks of Emmanuel Levinas, Zygmunt Bauman, Boszormenyi-Nagy and other thinkers from different disciplines, we believe that responsibility neither comes from nature nor, originally, from values in society or the contractual rule of 'do ut des'. A certain moral behaviour can be the result of a consensus about give and take between members of a group. And this consensus (is not the origin but) can be inspired by primary ethics: original experiences of trust and trustability or even, in an irretrievable past, an 'a priori experience' of *receiving the entitlement*[10] *to live as a human being and as such with responsibility*. Somewhat summarised, with words from Paul Ricoeur: 'Do quia mihi datum est' (I give to others because once there has been given to me) (MEULINK-KORF & RHIJN 2009, 31). We like to call this a very special reciprocity.

So where do ethics come from, if not from nature, contracts, values agreed on, or a freedom of choice, autonomy? We consider the truest answer to be: from ethical entanglements themselves. In other words: from being with and for others, 'the other' or 'the Other'. The philosopher Emmanuel LEVINAS (1906–1995) argued that man is invested with responsibility even when he does not want to be, and even when there is no contract: 'une responsabilité irrécusable, précédant tout consentement libre, tout pacte, tout contrat' (1978, 141). There seems to be a sensibility in the Self for the Other, a space or maybe an awareness that is, prior to freedom, rather a fate. Levinas published not only philosophical texts but also religious[11] studies. In one of these he underlines that the Hebrew concept *rachamim*, 'mercy', is linked with *rèchèm*, 'womb', 'uterus' (1977, 158). Of course this does not prove anything, nor do we intend to find the secrets of life in etymologies. But Hebrew words from the same root also share a certain kind of meaning. We think it is also worth mentioning that 'responsibility' in Hebrew, *ahariout*, is linked with *aher*, 'other'. And 'responsibility' is linked to 'time' and 'faithfulness' too, since the Hebrew word for

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[10] Below we will come back to the concept of 'entitlement' in the approach of Boszormenyi-Nagy.

[11] These studies of the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud are as such oriented on the Jewish religion, but according to Levinas this is not a case of particularism, because the Torah was given to Israel for the whole of humanity.

'after', *aharei,* shares the same root as well. In this tradition 'freedom' is seen as an answer to a calling. Man has the 'passive ability' to be moved by what happens to his neighbour (CHALIER 1995, 7–8) and to actively answer. Responsibility presupposes response. A human being becomes really human, with freedom in this ethical sense, when he is ready to answer 'Here I am' to the call of the other, and as such to the Other who asks: 'Where is your brother?' (Gen 4:9). This call is a command, but not the command of someone who terrorises me; it is only valid, ethically spoken, as a command without force. 'The face of the other', not the terrorising other, gives the basic command, the prohibition: 'Thou shalt not murder.' And the link with time and faithfulness? To be prepared means to have time to hear the voice of the other and to postpone betraying (or otherwise killing) the other (RHIJN & MEULINK-KORF 1997, 191–230). So this is about a very specific, difficult freedom, a 'difficile liberté'.

We made this short philosophical-anthropological excursion on our way to elicit resources of trust. 'Contextual therapy aims at the goal of eliciting the trust resources of close relationships' (BOSZORMENYI-NAGY 1987, 191). We carry on with our concern, following in the tracks of others, with our comments and re-interpretation.

14. A search for good therapy: a multi-dimensional perspective

In the 1950s and 1960s many social workers, psychotherapists and psychiatrists perceived their familiar professional approach as inadequate, individualising and objectifying. What was considered intra-psychic, pathological or abnormal in the traditional paradigms of linear causality, they, in their new circular thinking, considered interpersonal and relational.

Boszormenyi-Nagy (1920–2007), working since 1950 in the USA, was one of the pioneers of this new approach. Earlier in his career as a psychiatrist in Budapest, searching for the nature and treatability of behavioural-emotional disorders, and after medical clinical and partly psychoanalytical education, he had turned to biochemical studies. In Chicago he continued this work (about the effect of insulin upon schizophrenia), but these investigations led him nowhere. Inspired by Kalman Gyarfas, also from Budapest, he already had a long-standing curiosity about the significance of relationships with regards to psychotherapy. This interest formed his career ever since 1957 (BOSZORMENYI-NAGY 1987, xiii-xiv). Boszormenyi-Nagy was looking for 'good therapy'[12] and 'what makes therapy work'. During a period of concentration on intensive individual therapy with residential patients, he focused on the connection between depth psychology and close relationships. He was supported by the writings of Ronald FAIRBAIRN, one of the Neo-Freudian founders of the British 'object relations' school of psychoanalysis. Fairbairn theorised about the psychological conceptualisation of the mind as relational. He described mature dependency as 'a capacity on the part of the differentiated individual for cooperative relationships with differentiated

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[12] See note 3.

objects' (1952, 145). His view remained within the limitations of an ego-centred model ('subject-object'). For Boszormenyi-Nagy, though, this contribution of Fairbairn was a step further into a relational redefinition of Freud and a psychological conceptualisation of relationship. As one of the first systemic family therapists, Boszormenyi-Nagy went to meet his clients with a dialectical view. 'The martyr who doesn't let other family members "work off" their guilt is a far more powerfully controlling force than the loud, demanding "bully" ' (BOSZORMENYI-NAGY & SPARK 1973, xiii). Dialectics pushed him forward to look for reciprocity as a motivational power in relationships and to explore the meaning of contradictions, absurdities, and splitting within interpersonal communications over a longer period. A dialectical approach withholds people from dividing each other into good and bad guys. It prevents 'scapegoating' in relationships.[13] Boszormenyi-Nagy was even more encouraged to continue his thinking and practising of therapy in this direction after reading Martin Buber's *Ich und Du* (I and Thou). Interdependence is a *conditio sine qua non* of humanity, and of each individual. In many circumstances seemingly invisible, this 'relational reality' is always present.

He no longer chased a single concept of truth but started to reflect in a multidimensional way, in order to approach this human reality in an integrative framework. Boszormenyi-Nagy formulated 'four dimensions of relational reality' (1987, 191–212). The first three dimensions are described as the dimension of facts (history, physical, social and economic quasi-objective facts: sex, where one is born, what handicaps one has, parental social status, siblings, work, housing, prosperity, etc.); the dimension of needs and affects, and the dimension of interactions and transactions (power alignments). This formula enabled Boszormenyi-Nagy to integrate insights from psychology, sociology and systems theory. The fourth dimension is about the ethics of relating and especially of close relationships (fairness, entitlement and indebtedness, merits, earned trust). This 'dimension four' can be seen as 'an umbrella under which the contextual therapist subsumes the various, mutually untranslatable dimensions of relational ontology and epistemology' (1987, xviii). Each dimension has its own importance, but 'when an intervention is made with one particular dimension in mind . . . it works across the dimensions in effect' (HARGRAVE & PFITZER 2003, 95).

Boszormenyi-Nagy *cum suis* developed a therapeutic approach 'based on the empirical knowledge that a person's fair consideration of his or her relational obligations can result in personal freedom to participate in life's activities, satisfactions and enjoyment' (BOSZORMENYI-NAGY & KRASNER 1986, 414). They started to question their clients from the viewpoint of an ethical dimension in relationships, which cannot be ignored in therapy without injuring clients and their relationships and freezing the process of healing. The definition of relational ethics is definitely an unromantic and nonmoralising one. 'People use each other, are used by each other, and accept or fight against particular usages of each other. This is the essence of close relationships. Relationships can be trustworthy as long as the partner's use of each other is multilateral and equitable'

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[13]   See for a Girardian approach: KAPTEIN 1993. Also above in this article. Nagy used the term mostly in an aside manner, not as a central concept, because it is impossible for us to condemn the scapegoaters without becoming scapegoaters ourselves (Boszormenyi-Nagy, personal remark).

(1986, 420). Cornerstones of contextual therapy are commitment and trustworthiness rather than focusing on affects and/or values. Its major goal is helping people to rely on earned entitlement, 'i.e. on the ethical process of self-validation that is linked to due consideration of significant others' (1986, 415). Preceding in the lifecycle the earning of entitlement by consideration of others, contextual theory postulates an inherent entitlement or 'right' of the newborn to be cared for by others. This entitlement to be cared for includes for the child to receive consideration for the need and even the right of this child to give to others. 'The right to give to others' – this concept takes seriously the indebtedness to parents, other caregivers and to the human world. Maybe this assumption of an intrinsic entitlement to earn entitlement sounds a little odd. It is a complex concept, but at the same time, familiar and recognizable in life experiences. 'Constructive entitlement', earned entitlement, means a certain ability or responsible freedom to enjoy life and to engage with others, without being captured by guilt about unpaid indebtedness.

When this basic entitlement is denied *de facto* to a child, when there is insufficient or no caring, or the child had to deal with another serious handicap of some sort, then – paradoxically – his entitlement grows but develops, as 'overentitlement', a destructive character. Some people have accrued so much of 'destructive entitlement' that they become blind to the impact of their actions on others. Overentitled children or adults can become the actors of new injustice. Their own pain makes them unable to see the pain of the other, even the pain and injustice inflicted on others by themselves. Their own experiences of injustice and injury make them almost unable to feel the primary calling into responsibility and to recognise the admittance to their own possible resources.

In working with their clients, Boszormenyi-Nagy and his co-workers concentrate on the family context, the importance and influence of the special qualities of family ties as 'loyalties'. His main thesis is the conceptualization of an intergenerational connectedness, in which every person is a contributing subject, with indebtedness and merits linked both to the past and the future generations. A dialogue with significant others, not only persons to whom we are emotionally strongly attached, but primarily with persons with whom we are *existentially connected*, is considered a main resource for restoring hurt human justice and eventually for constructive entitlement. This reward can be seen in the freedom for the individual to go beyond the family into a greater society in which the person can contribute to what Boszormenyi-Nagy calls (with Martin Buber) 'the justice of the human order'.

Many actions are ultimately motivated by loyalty to significant others. Often these are hidden dynamics. Here is an example:

Simon, the chairman of a church-council in a big city in Holland, was deeply entangled in a conflict about which of the two churches under jurisdiction of this council had, for financial reasons, to be abandoned. He strongly pleaded for keeping the church which was, in the opinion of most members of the council, far less convenient for the meetings of the congregation than the other building. Normally known as a peacemaking person, a good democratic leader, and a mediator himself, he was now almost primitively excited, without attention to the meanings and needs of other

participants. There was a quarrel at every board meeting. The original atmosphere of trust disappeared; the council became divided and a real splitting of the community was near. One of us met Simon in supervision and asked him: 'To whom would you be disloyal when you should help to end this conflict and really would go for a solution?' This question became the beginning of a dialogue between Simon and some other involved church leaders. Simon told them about the efforts of his parents for this old, 'ugly but lovable' church. Others talked about their motivations. Simon also addressed his two living siblings. He spoke with his brothers about their upbringing by their long-deceased parents, about the commitment of their parents, especially their father to the church (that same old 'unsuitable' building), about his (Simon's) longing for his father' attention and for real contact. He and his brothers dared to address each other and, even more importantly, to *acknowledge* each other's pains. Later, when the issue of the church was already settled in peace, Simon said: 'This conflict turned out to be a blessing for me, and for others, I hope. I now enjoy having more time and attention to my family at home. Linda [his wife] said that I have altered my priorities *at the very last* [Simon emphasised these words]. And I see Harry [one of his brothers, the other is living abroad] more often. Until now we had a joking relationship, now there is contact between us. I feel trusted by him.' The old inconvenient church has been torn down, but before this there was a ritual in which Simon participated without resentment. However, this story does not have a happy end forever, for inevitably relational reality means intermittent relational difficulties: ongoing challenges for dialogue.

This approach focuses not on pathology, although accurate diagnosis can be necessary and even a resource for adequate coping. The focus is on intrinsic accountability and responsibility, on loyalty that might be hidden, denied and working destructively now, but that nevertheless is still there. Family members are encouraged and supported to enter into a dialogue about how they shaped or neglected responsibility towards each other, and how they tried to redress or deny the merit that each family member has accrued from his/her offers of care and consideration. There are always others involved: a third, fourth, fifth, etc. party. Even when there has been no (or nearly no) care at all, the contextual therapist keeps on looking for earned entitlement, a dynamic balance of fairness and a ledger of merits. The same applies in case of factual abuse by family members. This fairness and justice can only be measured in dialogue. There is no other gauge than dialogue and this relational reliability practiced and lived 'as the dynamic foundation of viable, continuing, close relationships . . . ongoing striving for a never fully attainable goal . . . not a possession, not a thing to be owned . . . an ongoing challenge' (BOSZORMENYI-NAGY & KRASNER 1986, 417). Human injustice can be rebalanced in the process of genuine address, 'direct address'. In contextual therapy this is the most important relational resource by which people can improve and help themselves and others.

From the side of the therapist (supervisor, etc.) 'multidirected partiality' is the contextual therapy's chief method and attitude.

> It consists of a set of principles and technical guidelines that require the therapist to be accountable to everybody who is potentially affected by his or her interventions. In the prac-

tice of contextual therapy, this principle of inclusiveness has to be linked to the therapist's determination to discover the humanity of each participant – even of the family's monster-member.   (BOSZORMENYI-NAGY & KRASNER 1986, 418)

15. More than retributive justice: reciprocity

We focused on contemporary socio-economic issues and their distrust-seeding aspects. Concerning the micro-level, we know that many problems of individuals, couples and families are not directly related to these issues. Nevertheless, especially the 'free autonomy', egalitarian and mercantile ideologies mentioned above are a strong power in contemporary society, and this seems to be pervasive in close relationships. Originally there may have been some good in these ideas, but nowadays they legitimate much injustice and unfairness. Concerning relating in close relationships, these principles result in trust-demolishing confusion and uncertainty instead of orientation. We perceive in our own surroundings, including our clients, much uncertainty about the *reciprocity of commitments*.

Boszormenyi-Nagy, by thinking about dialectics, was pushed forward to look for reciprocity as a motivational power in relationships. What is the meaning of this reciprocity? Does it simply refer to the retribution of 'do ut des', 'tit for tat', the complementary character of duties and rights? At least between closely related persons there must be, beyond this, a longer-term ledger of merits and obligations, with more complexity. How do people themselves in their relational entanglements perceive this? We mention an example from our practice, in fact a composite of a few nearly similar cases. It illustrates a relational situation which we met more than once.

A couple comes to us for counselling: *Dirk* (58), a divorced man with 3 adult children, for some years remarried with *Mandy* (39, for her a first marriage). Mandy longs to be mothering a child of her own. Dirk says: 'I am sorry but enough is enough. I am very happy with the two of us . . . Children, trust me, are precious but a heavy burden . . . I am too old for children now, but young enough to enjoy being with you . . . and our lifestyle now . . . You do not know the impact of a child . . . ' Mandy feels misunderstood: Dirk does not take a responsible stance concerning her longing and needs. 'I was always committed to your interests', she says. This discussion is going on for some time and grows in bitterness. They stalemate each other. After some sessions with attention of the therapist to the pain of each of them, and to the histories of pain in their life, they somehow feel their own (emotional, verbal) violence against the other as their own pain. Despite their frustrations this couple is able to acknowledge the other for commitment in their shared past. They are also considering the interests of others involved, first of all the possible child-to-be. Mandy is hearing Dirk's doubts including the consequences for Dirk's older children, and she herself talks about the needs of her parents who are without grandchildren until now. They stop using these other interests as weapons against the other. They dare 'to place their future in the hands of the other', as Dirk said (with reference to

a popular poem that was part of their wedding ceremony). 'He places his life in my hands, and now I know and feel what I can give him' (Mandy).

And the outcome of their process; will there be a child? We think the answer is irrelevant for our topic now, about reciprocity. The point is not who the winner will be, he or she. The point is, there is only 'winning' by not letting the other down. Of course the consequences for a third party (a child) are always very important. A decision which would be founded on acknowledgement of each other's efforts and needs, on 'not letting the other down and trusting the trust of the other', is not a guarantee for good parenting by this couple in the future; nevertheless, it is a condition of responsible consideration. Another couple, alas, took a decision which seemed to be determined by their respective needs for power.

It was the sociologist Gouldner who, in a famous article about reciprocity, wrote 'The *norm* of reciprocity is a concrete and special mechanism involved in the maintenance of any social system' (BOSZORMENYI-NAGY 1973, 56). This can be seen as only a structural principle, but we agree with Boszormenyi-Nagy and others that it has above all to do with justice, fairness, solidarity. Indeed, a generalised norm of reciprocity becomes internalised in the members of a social system, including family and marriage, but 'we want to focus on a multiperson . . . ledger of justice which resides in the interpersonal fabric of human order or "realm of the between" ', writes Boszormenyi-Nagy with reference to Martin BUBER (1973). This interpretation of reciprocity is not to be disposed as a prescriptive. It is founded on empirical facts. Giving and receiving are not settled without delay by a contractual rule. Otherwise the gift does not 'work'. There is giving through receiving (without immediate return of the gift), and receiving through giving. And there is 'something for nothing', but not as altruism, which would deny the other of his/her entitlement to give, and of acknowledgment for what (s)he did. So this is not simply a mutually contingent exchange of gratifications. The growth of confidence of a rough balancing out, in the long run, can be a solid base.

But as said, we hear people saying this: 'Now there is no longer any gain for me in my marriage . . . What is there for me to win in this family?' We hear this as a demand for listening to history, to pain, disappointment, exhaustion, and to more or less invisible loyalties. Sometimes 'each person's reliance on their destructive entitlement is so intense that they are locked into a familiar pattern of mutual recriminations' (GOLDENTHAL 1996, 105). The concept 'destructive entitlement' is often helpful for providing some specific therapeutic guidelines as the importance of multidirected partiality, acknowledgement for credits, efforts and wounds, holding the client accountable for his actions, coaching the client into dialogue with significant others. These are concerning the ongoing dynamic balance of giving and receiving sources of therapeutic leverage specific for contextual therapy. They are as such not sufficient but, as parts of a multidimensional framework (see above), have to be interwoven with concepts and techniques about communication and intra-personal concerns.

A last remark: reciprocity can be seen as mutuality of exchanging services, but this is not the full connotation of the concept 'commitment' (in English): it means 'engagement' including 'taken under custody', even 'arrest'. Commitment is never

free of obligations. Again we quote the words of Ricoeur: 'Do quia mihi datum est'. The affective reciprocity experienced in kinship is an important condition for social responsibility (PESSERS 1999, 247).

16. Similarities with Biblical notions, again

Boszormenyi-Nagy almost never refers to Biblical principles, but one cannot suppress the feeling that contextual therapy breathes the same air as some central ethical notions of the Jewish Torah and also the law of forgiveness[14] in the New Testament. Explicitly in the Torah there is a place for retribution and repairing, through three or four generations, but not infinitely: this retribution is *limited* (Ex 34:7). Here only one other Biblical reference: in the fifth command of the Sinai revelation (Ex 20:12) we can hear a summary of a way of thinking – as a creed – which looks upon God as an eternal trace, and upon mankind as invited to follow in the tracks of God (*vestigia Dei),* which we discern in the mere existence of our parents (see for this paragraph, more elaborated, MOS & MEULINK-KORF 2009). Contextual therapy explicitly focuses on the ongoing pattern of transgenerational justice in families. For instance: the notion of legacy as the inherited endowments of the current generation to its obligation to posterity. The special attention to parentification, 'an adult manoeuvre to turn a child (or adult) into a functional elder . . . a transactional shift of role boundaries' (BOSZORMENYI-NAGY & KRASNER 1986, 419). The metaphor of a revolving slate, a relational consequence in which a person's substitutive revenge against one person eventually creates a new victim. Last but not least we mention the special attention given to the vulnerability of the youngest living generation, because their lives and the lives of the generations to come are shaped by the consequences of the present. Offering due consideration to children is seen as 'the present generation's primary way to repay the inherent generosity of its generative past' (1986, 420). Many other quotations could be given. Boszormenyi-Nagy's approach converges remarkably with Biblical concepts and Biblical narratives about kinship and the strife for justice as the constitution of relational ethics. These statements assume the irrefutable bonds of loyalty between parents, grandparents and their offspring as *ethical* entanglements, making a plea for understanding justice within the family context as the womb of humanity.

As we mentioned already about Hebrew words, of course this correspondence is not seen as evidence, nor do we preach here for the Christian or the Jewish religion. We try to think about relational ethics as what is valid independently of religion. But we have to be open to religious sources and religious experience. We think the Bible and other books of traditional thinking from different cultures are full of practical-based wisdom about relating with kinship, neighbours and strangers.

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[14] Boszormenyi-Nagy sometimes criticised the concept of forgiveness, but partly he misunderstood the Biblical notion, we think (See RHIJN & MEULINK-KORF 1997, 307–08).

17. Conclusion

There is a deep need for ethics that revitalise the hope and motivation to repair the hurt human justice, for trust and trustworthiness. Above all, we assume, for primary ethics, which means not the same as context-bound morals and values. Value systems are important indeed, and in therapy we try to clarify them as possible resources. But preceding this is the 'irretrievable' calling of every man by his/her neighbour. In the words of the philosopher F.H. Heinemann, 'Respondeo ergo sum' (I respond, therefore I am) (BOSZORMENYI-NAGY 1987, 95). Sometimes this calling is not heard because the ears are closed by pains and experienced injustice. Many times the calling is heard but the person is too burdened by conflicting inner and/or external voices including loyalties.

At the beginning of this text we wrote about great pressures on individuals. It is unrealistic to expect trust-resourcing exclusively of individuals. As a society we cannot draw heavily, boundlessly, almost infinitely, on the reserves of the individual. This is not fair to persons and their relationships. Nevertheless, the process of deconstructing false ideologies and constructing trustable and trustworthy sociality and new meaningful social space happens on different levels, one of them the personal. So whoever can has to be alert and active against unfair ideologies and practices in society. As therapists, knowing about these pressures, we have a mandate to support our clients to save and resource their sense of the long-term consequences of responsible caring in close relationships.

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