



Opening ICCT 2018

By Kees Bregman, chair of the conference

Welcome

Ladies and gentlemen, fellow contextual practitioners, researchers, students, colleague professionals in family therapy, in social work, counseling, psychology and psychiatry – on behalf of the Institute of Contextual Approach of the Christian University of Applied Sciences Ede The Netherlands, I welcome you to the

International Conference on Contextual Therapy 2018.

My name is Kees Bregman, I am honored to be your chairman these days. Besides my work as a minister in the Protestant Church of the Netherlands, I am a teacher and trainer in Contextual Pastoral Care and Counselling, a typical Dutch application of the contextual approach.

May I say a few words, as an introduction to this conference.

You have come from all over the world to participate in this ICCT. Today and tomorrow we will work with over fifty conference members. On Friday, the third day, this number will at least double. No matter how different we are in terms of origin, nationality or mother tongue, and also different in our helping professions, we share a common interest: the contextual approach of Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy (1920-2007).

Approach

I would like to underline that today we have been brought together by an institute of contextual *approach*. Approach is a more comprehensive concept than therapy. It includes more than a practical theory or a formal method. I believe this term 'approach' is proper to contextual thinking.

More than half a century ago Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy started developing his first draft of what he called 'dialectic intergenerational therapy', which grew into what we know nowadays as 'contextual therapy'. We know about his efforts to integrate the perspectives of the bio-psycho-social model of assistance: objectifiable facts, individual psychology and systems of transactional patterns. Professor Nagy's great addition to or renewal of family therapy is found in the concept of the fourth dimension: *The Ethic of Due Consideration or Merited Trust*, as he names this viewing direction in 'Between Give and Take' (44). In other words: the fourth dimension is an optic, it's about 'a fair mutual way of looking after each other's interests'. The dimension of relational ethics transcends the other three dimensions, not as an umbrella, overarching, but as the hidden core, the very 'soul', in each of them. This is about the most fundamental aspect of human relationships: that *no man is an island* (John

Donne) – that we exist as human beings in ontic dependence of other human beings; that we all feel the need for justification, a sense of fairness; that we all desire to trust and to be trusted, to be entitled to give and take. This way of speaking goes beyond a therapeutic jargon. Therefore I cherish this term ‘approach’. We might say: the contextual approach aims at an attitude, a way of life. It motivates us to search for chances to dialogue, in all circumstances of the people we are committed to, to help them to live well in their relationships.

A personal experience

Since an introduction in 1991 by the late Aat van Rhijn, I am enchanted by the contextual approach. As from the very first time I heard and read the particular ‘accounting’ language of Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy, I felt: here is someone trying to find words for something of vital importance, about the essence of human life. I mean the insight contained in the concept of *loyalty*, the underlying force of the unbreakable bond of family members from generation to generation. For myself it was very meaningful to see that loyalty can be *hidden*; that someone’s involvement with his or her family may look completely different than what is usually assumed. In our contextual teaching and training of pastors we use to say: *it is not what you see, and what it is, you cannot see*. Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy has taught me to look *dialectically* at people, at their talks and interactions, as a glance in the mirror. The deepest motivational layer may be hidden, even for the person himself. And on the balance of give and take, the return may be *indirect*.

Dialectic

We already find this dialectic way of thinking in the early writings of Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy, for example in his contribution to ‘Intensive Family Therapy’ (1965). He describes the Hegelian term ‘dialectical’ as ‘meaning the dynamic principle of the creative encounter (synthesis) of something and its opposite (thesis and antithesis, particularly of Self and Not-Self’. [Intensive Family Therapy, p. 34, n. 1] There is eminently a *philosophical* element in the contextual approach, which makes this school of thought of great importance, not only for therapists and social workers, but also for counsellors and pastors, and others who support people during major events in their lives.

From this specific perspective I am working with the contextual approach myself. As a theologian, I am training fellow pastors in applying the contextual approach to pastoral care. And I am especially interested in the philosophical foundations of the contextual approach.

Dialogue

From this point of view, I would like to pay attention to the main philosophical source of contextual thinking: the dialogical school of thought of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber (1878-1965). In 1996 Ivan Nagy published an essay titled ‘Relational Ethics In Contextual Therapy Commitment to Our Common Future’.¹ The first line is (quote): *Martin Buber's writings have been a welcome ally in my lifelong struggle to find a way to help psychotics*. (end quote) Buber gave Nagy wordings to express a multipersonal dynamic beyond or rather integrating analytical and systemic approaches.

¹ Boszormenyi-Nagy, I. (1996). Relational Ethics in Contextual Therapy: Commitment to our Common Future. Friedman, M. (Ed.), *Martin Buber and the Human Sciences*, 371-382. Vertaling: Boszormenyi-Nagy, I. (2000). Relationale ethiek in de contextuele therapie. Betrokkenheid met onze gemeenschappelijke toekomst. Boszormenyi-Nagy, I., *Grondbeginselen van de Contextuele Benadering*, 80-91

Genuine dialogue, that means, *meeting as responsibility*, is the key action, the leverage, to restore trustworthiness between family members. So Nagy based the contextual approach on an ethical perspective: it sees people as persons who are responsible for each other. We mature in our being human when we are able to translate our responsibility into due care for others and for ourselves.

In this essay Nagy says (quote): ***I propose that therapy should concern itself with not only the quality of human survival but with the survival of humanity itself.*** He continues: *Probably no other thinker of our century has expanded our understanding of the basic nature of spiritual health and sickness more deeply than Buber. Beyond ordinary notions of mental health and pathology, he describes the positive prospects of the human condition and leads the isolated individual and the therapist to the foundation of all close relationships so that ultimately one can be a vital participant in a genuine community.*

And further, Nagy says: *For Buber, "All real living is meeting", and meeting encompasses more than a psychological need of partners or even an experience of an existential nature. Meeting becomes what I describe as **transgenerational solidarity**. Through caring about their benefits and needs I "meet" even my remote descendants, whom I will physically never have a chance to see. Meeting includes then not only posterity's vulnerability to the consequences of our actions but also its rights to consideration by the predecessors, whose acts will be burdened with accountability for the captive future generation's needs and rights.* (end quote)

Compass

We hear how prolific Ivan Nagy has taken up the thinkings of Martin Buber. This provides us a track of elaborating the contextual approach. De ethical dimension is our compass. In this conference we shall explore multiple vantage points and ways of contextual working, merging models, studying culturally different situations, redefining and calibrating important contextual concepts as 'destructive entitlement' and 'the right to give'. But in all discussing, we shall keep in mind the core business of contextual approach: 'genuine dialogue' means at the same time paying attention to your and to mine interests - 'a fair mutual way of looking after each other's interests'. I wish you all a very inspiring and encouraging conference – ICCT 2018 has begun. Thank you.