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International Conference Contextual Therapy

The need for connection. Relationship challenges in today's world.

Albert van Dieren – keynote speaker

From Personal Conversation to Professional Practice: The Many Facets of Dialogue and Relational Ethics.



Summary:

This keynote explores my personal journey as a family therapist navigating the world of dialogue and relational ethics. Deeply influenced by the work of Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 2018), I have experienced the transformative potential of dialogical moments in my own relationship with my parents, particularly during my training as a contextual therapist. My interest soon expanded to the work of Peter Rober (Rober, 2008, 2017) and the field of dialogical family therapy. Through Rober's work, I encountered the Open Dialogue Approach developed by Seikkula and colleagues (Seikkula et al., 2003).

From the outset, I was fascinated by how these different approaches each illuminate unique aspects of dialogue and relational ethics. This curiosity led me to initiate research projects investigating how these differences in family therapy practice can enrich our daily work with families. Over time, I came to understand that each approach highlights distinct facets of relational ethics. For me, relational ethics is like a diamond: every facet reflects a different color when illuminated, yet together they create a beautiful palette of unity and diversity.

The foundational philosophers and poets who have deeply influenced the concepts of dialogue include Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas, and Mikhail Bakhtin, among others. Maurice Friedman (Friedman, 2002) concluded that Buber's dialogical philosophy offers a foundational relational perspective (I-Thou), which is deepened by Levinas's focus on ethical asymmetry and responsibility, and Bakhtin's emphasis on polyphony and the ongoing, open-ended process of meaning-making. Boszormenyi-Nagy, in turn, emphasized relational ethics and dialogue anchored in righteousness and accountability to others and future generations (Knudson-Martin, 2024) at the core of family therapy. Other approaches, such as Open Dialogue and Dialogical/Collaborative Family Therapy, further expand our understanding by emphasizing attunement, responsivity, transparency, shared responsibility, and reflexivity (Olson et al., 2014; van Dieren & Clavero, 2022).

As the starting point for this keynote, I will reflect on a personal conversation with my parents, examining this experience from multiple theoretical perspectives. I will discuss how this encounter has profoundly influenced my professional development as a therapist, lecturer, supervisor, and researcher.

Finally, I will explore the implications of these insights for our day-to-day practice as family therapists. What does this mean for our therapeutic stance? How can we integrate these diverse perspectives on dialogue and relational ethics into our work with families?

Presenter:

Albert van Dieren (b. 1963) is a Master Contextual Approach therapist, lecturer, and supervisor in the Master's program in Contextual Approach and Contextual Therapy at the Institute of Contextual Approach, Ede Christian University of Applied Sciences. As a researcher, his main interest is in how contextual and dialogical approaches can help social workers attune to clients and their social networks. He also works as a family therapist in private practice.

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