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Reflection as the Core of Supervision

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The overall purpose of this essay is to present a language- and meaning-generating system perspective on reflection as the core activity in supervision. Based on our practice as supervisors over more than three decades, we have come to see and believe in the incalculable value of what we understand to be a dynamic system of meaning and understanding that develops in supervisory groups.

In this essay, we will explore the complementary relationships between thought and language and between understanding and social interchange in our professional practice as supervisors. And finally, we will discuss how "real understanding and communication will be achieved only through generalization and conceptual designation of my experience," as emphasized by Vygotsky.[1] Since *praxis* typically appears before *nomos* throughout history as well as in human development,[2] before presenting our philosophy of supervision, we will show how a supervision session based on our philosophy of language is done in practice.

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A SUPERVISORY SESSION

Torstein is a chaplain in a very large public hospital. His supervisory group consists of seven of his colleagues plus the supervisor. It is an open, ongoing group that meets 90 minutes every other week, and the group has met for the past three decades. He presents the following narrative to the supervisory group.

For some months, Torstein had followed a male cancer patient who has been both an in-patient and an out-patient in the hospital's palliative care program. The patient had lately deteriorated, been in a lot of pain, and was partially paralyzed. Torstein tells the group that the man had had many regrets. He had been looking back on his life and the pain he had caused others.

"I shared Communion with him," Torstein says, and continues: "I wish I could have eased his pain! . . . He died yesterday night. I found out when I called an hour before I was supposed to visit him at home, as I was accustomed to doing. He had been riddled by pain, but when I came to his home and saw him lying dead in his bed, he looked so relaxed and as if he was smiling. . . . He had wanted to die at home, and be carried out 'with his feet first,´ as he had put it. So, he died the way he wanted to."

Then Torstein starts to reflect on his own life: "How am I put together . . . I mean . . . am I a participant or an observer? . . . What about this theme of 'closeness and distance´ that we so often speak about? . . . I am holding back when it comes to bonding. . . . I keep myself back because [he starts crying quietly] . . . I am crying, obviously, because I am engaged."

He stops his narrative at that point and says: "Yeah, I think that's my story." He then turns his chair and places himself outside the circle we are sitting in, with his back towards the group.

The supervisor then addresses the group, saying: "Torstein says . . ." and points to one of the group members, who says: "I can start!" And then the group members retell the story Torstein has told using his own words, as in a recorded dictation or as if reading from a verbatim transcription. The first person repeats most of the story, and the other members add only what the others have missed. The whole narrative is complete when everybody has added their lines of what they heard that has yet not been repeated. Some group members have noted on paper significant expression or formulations, helping them to remember the exact words Torstein used.

This recounting done, the supervisor asks Torstein, who is still sitting with his back to the group: "Have we heard you?" Torstein confirms that the group has heard him, and he adds something about the importance of what he has discovered while listening to the group, something that he had not said earlier, and then he corrects something that was repeated incorrectly.

"Okay, we'll include that," says the supervisor, and then continues while Torstein is still sitting with his back to the group: "So, what does Torstein's narrative bring forth in us? Questions? Comments? Our own experiences? Or does any material from professional journals or books come to mind?"

The members of the group share, one after another, whatever comes to mind in response to Torstein's story. One says, "I listened to his story and felt like I was there in the room with him and this man. It was just beautiful work!"

Then the next: "I became curious about what he meant when he said: 'How am I put together, holding back when it comes to bonding.´ And then when he started crying, I heard him saying that he was crying because he was engaged, while I was thinking he was crying out of loneliness, as in feeling that he was an observer and not able to feel like a participant in the fellowship or Communion this situation invited him to."

And then another: " He said he wished he could have taken the patient's pain away, and I am curious about how Torstein sees the sharing he had with this man of the Holy Communion within the framework of what he just told us?"

Yet another: "Of course Torstein cried! For heaven's sake, we as chaplains grieve, too!"

"Well," says another, "I was just wondering about the funeral. Is Torstein going to be the minister conducting the funeral? That often brings good closure both for him and for the family if, as I understood from Torstein, they have participated in and have had a difficult time together throughout this man's terminal illness."

This response round goes fairly quickly. Torstein and his story are talked about behind his back, literally, and in the third person. He is not allowed to address the group, and the group does not talk directly to him. Torstein has a little notebook in which he writes down whatever comes to mind while he is listening to the group repeating his story verbatim-like and sharing whatever his story brought forth.

Then Torstein returns to the circle and the supervisor asks: "Have we been close to anything having to do with you in our responding, or have we just taken off into our own worlds or fantasies?"

Torstein then tells the group that he did not hear what everybody was saying in their responses. All of a sudden, while one group member was focusing on his sudden tears, he was thinking he might have cried out of the feeling of loneliness about being an observer who was not able to participate in the communion this situation invited him into: "When you said this, Lars, I all of a sudden saw what I hadn't told you. When I came home from work that day, my wife had unexpectedly made a special dinner out of pure happiness over our family situation. And I felt awful! I just smiled, ate, and was polite and correct. But I was not there! And I was not able to share that with her! And it is so terribly lonely not being able to share with her the strong emotional situations I've been in at work. And she just keeps talking and does not even realize that I'm not mentally there." Then silent tears run down his cheek again while he continues: "It felt so good to tell my story here today, particularly sitting outside the circle and listening to you retelling my story in minute detail. I became really emotional hearing myself having been heard!"

Then Torstein's silent tears return before he continues: "I understood while sitting listening to you that this didn't in fact have much to do with this man and my being with him. While I listened to you, not seeing you, not having to explain or defend what I had told you but just sitting there listening to my own narrative and what you were reading into it, what I heard you had seen in my story, then I realized, as I sat there talking to myself,[3] what I in fact was communicating to you. I saw myself as being very good at helping suffering people, and I know that others need me. But what made me cry is that I feel that nobody really knows me. And, that I often feel very lonely and not seen by those close to me, my family and friends. But then again, how could they ever? I withdraw. I don't share.[4] How could they possibly know—when I'm not revealing myself to them?"

The supervisor decides, at this moment, to place Torstein outside the circle again, and the group members once more retell what they have heard and then share with Torstein whatever reflections, experiences of their own, professional knowledge, or emotional support this second story of his has brought forth in them.

Torstein then returns to the circle and shares the thoughts and feelings that occurred to him while he was sitting outside the circle. His feedback results in shorter or longer dialogues between him and various members of the group and among the group members themselves for the rest of the session. When about five minutes are left, the supervisor says: "Okay, Torstein, the last couple of minutes are yours." And then the session is over.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE SUPERVISORY SESSION

Supervision always takes place within a social and institutional context. Of the many different ways supervision is done, our way presupposes that the participants are professionals who are actively working with people. They may work within a church context or within health care, social services, correctional, or school systems.

However, no matter what profession the participants belong to, they seek supervision to sustain and improve the quality of their professional work and of their own personal lives and health as professionals. There is no explicit feedback between the supervisor and the institutions the supervisees belong to except in relation to matters that concern the practicalities of the supervisory process.

Before we go further in identifying and articulating the philosophical foundations of our supervisory practice and exploring our main subject, reflection as the core of supervision, we will briefly describe the underlying structure of our practice.

Each supervisory group is a contract-based social context. The term *contract* is here understood to be the moral obligation agreed upon by the participants, which secures and optimizes the context within which supervision takes place. The supervisory sessions do not follow a particular method but instead are to be understood as a structured experience, much like a liturgy.[5]

Each session starts with the supervisees reporting back from the last gathering or sharing what they have thought or done since then. The person granted the time for that day's session then tells her story from an event in her practice, just as Torstein did above. The story is about an experience that is important for the supervisee. She might not be content with the outcome of her actions, or she may not understand what took place, and therefore she wants to share it with the group to get their reflections on what happened

or what could have been said or done differently. Her issue might concern something in the past or something she is presently dealing with or will have to handle in the future.

While the narrative is being shared, the group listens. The group members may be writing down what they are hearing or thinking while listening. After the story is told, the storyteller is placed outside the circle the rest of the group is sitting in. The storyteller sits with her back to the group, with a notebook for writing down her thoughts and comments while sitting with her back to the group.

The group members then recount, using the storyteller's own words, what she has said (the "parrot round").[6] In this way, she becomes a listener to, and an observer of, her own story. There is no communication through verbal or facial expressions between her and the rest of the group during this retelling of her narrative.

The supervisor asks if the group has accurately retold what she said. She confirms this or adds corrections. This being said, it is also true that we often experience that the person sitting outside the circle all of a sudden breaks out, saying: "Oh, now I know!" She says this as if the insight is something happening to her**,** an event she is participating in. This can be the starting point for new, fresh action

Then, with the storyteller still sitting with her back to the group, the supervisor asks the group members to share their questions, experiences, thoughts, and related readings that popped up in response to the story they have listened to (the "reflection round"). There might also be a few thoughts spontaneously expressed between the group members that were triggered as they listened to each other's responses to the story. The group talks about the person sitting outside the circle in the third person, literarily speaking behind her back. This is in accordance with Levinas's observation that the person acting is exposing and revealing herself in what she says and does.[7] But in the story that is told, the storyteller herself is only seen indirectly as the responsible acting subject. The group's reflection on what she has thought or done is formulated about her as the acting subject in the story, in the third person.

Once the reflection round is completed, the storyteller rejoins the circle. The supervisor asks her if the group has focused on themes that relate to her understanding or were caught up in their own agendas. She, in turn,

tells the group what she has been thinking while sitting outside the circle listening.

She might share her reflections on the story told and the group's responses in a way that opens up dialogue in the group. Or, she may tell a completely new story about what it really was all about that she was not aware of before listening to her own story being retold or reflected on by the group. This is what happened with Torstein, described above.

If a new story occurs, she is placed outside the circle again and the group goes through the same procedure once more. If not, she is engaged in dialogue and conversation within the group during the rest of the supervisory session. And, the storyteller always gets the last word.

SUPERVISION

We are using the English word "supervision" for what we are discussing here. Our use of this term has nothing to do with the etymological meaning of that expression, with its hierarchical connotation. Its Swedish and Norwegian counterparts *handledning* ("leading by the hand") and *veiledning*("leading the way") are a little better but are nevertheless far from satisfactory because they are not sufficiently egalitarian. This qualification is necessary because we want to distance ourselves from the traditional position of the supervisor as an expert on human beings, human lives, and communication.

We think, instead, that the supervisor should take part in supervision from what has been called a not-knowing position throughout the dialogue[8] and meet the supervisee as a person neither fully known to the supervisor nor to herself. Supervision is based on curiosity on the part of both the supervisor and the supervisee. Apparently, curiosity is linked to reflection. A person who is curious about herself and others is probably more open to reflection about her own as well as other persons´ thoughts and actions, and those who are not self-reflective are certainly not curious about themselves. The supervisor and the supervisee are in a certain respect on the same level, and the former is only an expert in creating a favorable space for mutual reflection, i.e., an expert on process but not on content.

We understand supervision to be a creative social field constituted by the participants bringing with them their personal and professional knowledge and experience. The underlying attitude is related to the fact that every

authentic meeting brings forth something new that was not there before the meeting took place.[9]

Creation only takes place when at least two people come together. The point is that our own experience is unfulfilled if it stands alone. Since language by definition is intersubjective, it follows from this that the individual perspective is left behind and is replaced by the social perspective. The world is constituted not by the private, autonomous individual but intersubjectively through dialogue. What is not communicated is not yet reality; it does not have solid ground. Therefore, the understanding developed through supervision is something that we participate in. It happens to us in the dialogue. It is not a result of our own doing.[10] As theologians, we are certainly aware of the fact that the individual (Adam) is not created alone and that only in communion with the other (Eve) does he become aware of himself (Gen. 3). Human beings are seen all the time in the Bible as members of a community, both in the Old Testament as the people of God and in the New Testament as members of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12).

From our point of view, supervision depends on the creation of a room for professionally engaged people to reflect on their own responsibility for their work, just as humans are dependent on the world God has created and Adam is held responsible for his actions in the garden of Eden. Supervision provides professionals with a position to reevaluate their actions, learn from them, and if necessary change them. This is why supervision should be an integral part of every professional's work. Supervision and being a professional are, as we see it, intrinsically connected.

Central to our approach is the idea that reflection is done through narration in a dialogue. Here, narration simply means storytelling. This is why group supervision offers more resources than individual supervision. In a group, more narratives, or stories, about the issue in the supervisee's story may come forth than in individual supervision, and this enlarges the creative field.

Over the years we have developed our thinking in many papers, articles, and books written in Swedish and Norwegian.[11] In addition to theological reflections, our work is based on themes emerging from the Houston-Galveston circle around Harold Goolishian and Harlene D. Anderson[12] and has affinities to many similar psychotherapeutic frameworks, such as those initiated by Tom Andersen[13] at the University of Tromsø, Norway, and Jaako Seikulla[14] at the University of Kuopio, Finland. These thinkers challenge the

expert – nonexpert dichotomy and the hierarchical structures that it generates. Instead, they seek to develop a collaborative approach to therapy, and it is this thinking that we are adapting to the supervisory field.

This has for us actualized the philosophical foundation of our understanding, which has been laid by philosophers as such as Karl Jaspers, Hannah Arendt, Paul Ricoeur, Martin Buber, Mikhail Bakhtin, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Emmanuel Levinas, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. We will try to show what we have learned from some of them as we reflect on supervision.

Mikhail Bakhtin provides a framework for thinking about how we have been changed while studying these thinkers; we become the voices that inhabit us. Through conversation with those voices, we are constantly formed and reformed. Therefore, in the rest of this article some of these voices will be heard as quotations that have contributed to our own understanding of what supervision is about. These voices have changed our way of comprehending and practicing supervision over the years. They have taught us the important characteristics of real dialogue, which are that the dialogue should be as egalitarian as possible and that it is always multidimensional or "polyphonic," as Bakhtin puts it, and made up of stories.

We have applied the thinking of the philosophers named above to the field of supervision, so we might be regarded as belonging to the hermeneutical tradition. We are nevertheless keen to underline our unwillingness to be classified as representatives of a particular school.

In our theoretical as well as practical work, we concentrate on ordinary language and conversation, not allowing technical terminology or constructed theories to alienate those participating in the supervisory sessions nor the theoreticians who want to reflect upon them. The richness of common language is sufficient for both supervisory practice and its foundational considerations.

REFLECTION: INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR

For our purposes, we understand reflection as an interior scrutinizing of one's thoughts and actions, a critical introspection, as well as an exterior, social act of reflecting together. When I reflect, I have a tacit conversation with myself, which is considered self-reflection. I withdraw from the outer world and concentrate on what I have thought, felt, said, and done. The con-

tent of my consciousness is one of the subjects in my reflection in supervision. Other subjects can be the stories produced by others.

The result of my reflection is something that is present only to myself. But, as Bakhtin maintains,

> Like the word, the idea wants to be heard, understood, and "answered" by other voices from other positions. Like the word, the idea is by nature dialogic. . . . The idea is inter-individual and inter-subjective—the realm of its existence is not individual consciousness but dialogic communion between consciousnesses.[15]

I can only reflect if I stop acting in relation to what is in the world around me. Daily life, therefore, is an obstacle to reflection.

Even though every human is created with the capacity to think, it has been argued that certain persons lack the ability to reflect. Hannah Arendt deepened our understanding of thinking and reflection as a basic human activity. Arendt was a political theorist who initiated her studies on reflection when writing about Adolf Eichmann and his inability to realize the moral implications of what he had done during the Nazi era. He was, according to her, not capable of self-reflection. Later, she continued to reason about human thinking and perhaps modified her views. She seems more optimistic when she writes:

> Thinking in its non-cognitive, non-specialized sense as a natural need of human life, the actualization of the difference given in consciousness, is not a prerogative of the few but an ever-present faculty in everybody; by the same token, inability to think is not a failing of the many who lack brain power but an ever-present possibility for everybody—scientists, scholars, and other specialists in mental enterprises not excluded. Everybody may come to shun that intercourse with oneself whose feasibility and importance Socrates first discovered. Thinking accompanies life and is itself the de-materialized quintessence of being alive; and since life is a process, its quintessence can only lie in the actual thinking process and not in any solid results or specific thoughts. A life without thinking is quite possible; it then fails to develop its own essence—it is not merely meaningless; it is not fully alive. Unthinking men are like sleepwalkers.[16]

But, notwithstanding this, it seems important to distinguish between thinking and reflection because reflection can be seen as a way to examine our thinking, a meta-activity or second-order form of thinking. Supervision is intended to help professionals to activate their capacity to reflect, if they are actually able to do it. In our experience, we have found that a certain per-

centage of professionals do not break this code of reflection. They remain alien to genuine dialogue and often find their ways into hierarchical positions where they use power and social control as tools for self-realization.

Self-reflection on its own, however, is not enough, because my perspective is limited, for example, by the cultural and social contexts from which I view myself and the world around me. To transcend this limitedness, I need to communicate with persons holding different perspectives than my own. This is the essence of supervision. Communicating with others gives me as a professional person what I need. Although there is no guarantee that every member of a supervisory group is capable of self-reflection, the group gives those who are capable of it the opportunity for such reflection and for sharing it with others.

> What I gain for myself alone in reflection would—if it were all—be as nothing gained. What is not realized in communication is not yet, what is not ultimately grounded in it is without adequate foundation. The truth begins with two.[17]

When the supervisee's story, the story about herself as a professional, is told, her intentions and goals are revealed. They might well be hidden to the storyteller herself but be obvious to the listeners. What the supervisee has done or is planning to do and tells the group about springs forth from her reasoning. In supervision, we do not talk about the results of the intended action of the supervisee. What we focus on is how the results are understood by the supervisee in relation to her intentions and goals.

How the person(s) affected by the actions of the supervisee reacted or will react, we do not know. But what we do know is how the story told affects the members of the supervisory group and makes them think and feel about what they have heard. This is offered by the group to the supervisee as a possible representation of how it could have been experienced by the person(s) told about in the supervisee's story. This may be helpful for the person seeking supervision because, as we know, the most original product of the supervisee's actions is not the realization of her intentions or goals but the unintended story that can be told after the experience.[18] The stories told by the members of the group as a response to the supervisee's story may become integrated as part of the supervisee's own professional history and in turn be an object of her future reflections and reasoning, thus prompting new actions.

This is an example of why my own reflection is not complete if it stands alone but needs to be communicated and responded to and thereby complemented. It is also an example of how everyday life experiences and expectations need to be talked about and responded to. This is true not only for professional life but for life in general.

REFLECTION AND CONSCIENCE

Self-reflection is related to what is called conscience (Latin: *conscientia*, to know together with). I know together with myself. But I also know together with others, whose voices can be heard in my inner polyphonic conversation with myself.

Conscience reveals itself as an afterthought, a reflection on what I have thought, said, and done. It functions as a corrective in relation to my future actions. This can also be said about supervision, which nurtures my inner conversation. When I am about to act, I can hear the voices from a supervisory session that guide me directly or indirectly by making me anticipate reflections in a future session. It could be said that my conscience is a tool of reflection, my most important one. This anticipation is elegantly formulated by Zygmunt Bauman:

> Lives lived and lives told are for that reason closely interconnected and interdependent. One can say, paradoxically, that the stories told of lives interfere with the lives lived before the lives lived have been lived to be told.[19]

This interaction between lives and stories, in our view, seems to be intrinsic. In a broader context it also means that a human being is fundamentally social and socially interdependent. Stories and lives interact with each other in a complex way to form a social context.

THE MORAL IMPACT OF REFLECTION

Language and supervision are intimately intertwined. In conversation and dialogue, we necessarily make use of language. It has been argued that speech and morality are intrinsically related. One of the strongest adherents to such a view is the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. When we communicate with the Other, we are entering into a field of moral obligation that makes us morally responsible for that person, even if the field also

contains a kind of sensibility, the Other´s face. We have a responsibility towards the person we are speaking with. In an interview, Levinas explains this as follows:

> When I talk about responsibility and obligation, and consequently about the person with whom one is in a relationship through the face, this person does not appear as belonging to an order which can be 'embraced', or 'grasped'. The other, in this relationship of responsibility, is, as it were, unique: 'unique' meaning without genre. In this sense he is absolutely other, not only in relation to me; he is alone as if he were the only one of significance at that moment. The essence of responsibility lies in the uniqueness of the person for whom you are responsible.[20]

It can be difficult to understand how this component of responsibility relates to dialogue,[21] but for our purpose it is sufficient to agree with Levinas that dialogue somehow involves the moral point of view. Therefore, morality can be seen as an important part of the supervisory project. The supervisor is in this respect asymmetrically responsible for the supervisee.

It might seem that we contradict our nonhierarchical way of supervising by introducing a moral hierarchy. But we do this while maintaining a clear distinction between the professional attitude of the supervisor and the moral obligation when facing human beings, which according to Levinas is asymmetric and therefore in some sense hierarchical.

If we then turn to reflection, the moral point of view is also actualized. Because of its relation to conscience, reflection has an intimate relation to morality. My conscience tells me what is right and wrong and helps me to act in accordance with that. It functions as a prosecutor who accuses me concerning what I have done or said and will not be silent until I have pleaded guilty of my act and am prepared to correct it. On the other hand, my conscience is like an advocate who defends me until I myself realize that what I have done is right. It seems that reflection, the conversation between me and myself, is a necessary condition for my conscience to function in this way. According to Levinas, when facing the other I become critical in relation to myself. "It is to be like a stranger, hunted down even in one's home, contested in one's own identity."[22]

This may sound self-destructive, but for professionals in responsible positions it can actually become devastating. They can stop trusting themselves and think that they are not able to handle their work at all, falling into total despair.

In supervisory reflection, this self-critical voice can obtain a possibly reassuring answer. Supervision helps the supervisee by acknowledging the limitations of her possibilities so that she can accept herself and her acts as optimally executed under nonoptimal conditions. We sometimes need to be reminded that because we are finite, limited creatures, our failings or mistakes are also finite (most of the time).

REFLECTION ON PROFESSIONAL ACTIONS

Because supervision is a form of reflection, it has moral implications. This has to do with professional actions that are under judgment, what we in supervision call "reflecting over practice." It concerns both the supervised professionals and other persons´ well-being, those who experience the supervisee in everyday life. In supervision I am summoned as a professional to responsibility by the other members of the supervisory group. I am held accountable for what I have done and said.

> Action does not express. It has meaning, but leads us to the agent in his absence. To approach someone from works is to enter into his interiority as though by burglary; the other is surprised in his intimacy, where, like personages of history, he is, to be sure, exposed, but does not express himself. Works signify their author, indirectly, in the third person.[23]

When I realize through the dialogical reflection in the supervisory group that there are alternatives to what I have said or done, I am often liberated from what might have constrained me, and thereby I am set free to act in a new way as a morally responsible person. This is in accordance with Paul Ricoeur, who argues that "the passage from inadequate ideas, which we form about ourselves and about things, to adequate ideas signifies for us the possibility of being truly *active*."[24]

Our joint reflections can liberate us from the inadequate ideas that have generated actions that became problematic for us, first in our inner conversation and then in sharing our thoughts with the participants in the supervisory group. This is why we emphasize that we do not talk about supervision as a method that can be used to reach a certain goal. It is more like a revelation than a result of methodical action. In the dialogic approach to supervision, this has been described as a dissolution of the problem, not a solution.[25]

THE STORY TOLD IN SUPERVISION

In supervision I, as a professional, tell my story about what I want to reflect on. We agree with Ricoeur, who states: "We tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated."[26] I do this in a group led by a professional supervisor. The group is constituted of participants who have agreed upon a contract defining the framework within which the supervision takes place. My reflection is no longer an inner conversation but is communicated through language with others in a dialogue. It is in this way similar to everyday conversation. It is a conversation in which the participants are obliged to be especially alert, curious, and responsible for my well-being in the group. Together with me, the supervisee, they will openly reflect on what I am telling them. My inner voices are being joined by all the voices that can be heard in the supervisory room. This means that the space of reflection offered me will increase with every new perspective that is shared.

Storytelling is an essential part of our lives. We can almost say that a human being is a *homo narrans*. It is also true that I am what I say, not what I say I am.[27] Hannah Arendt has paid great attention to this narrative aspect of human life: No philosophy, no analysis, no aphorism, be it ever so profound, can compare in intensity and richness of meaning with a properly narrated story.[28] The focus in supervision, however, is on the content of my consciousness, not on the issues shared; i.e., it is on the relation between me and whatever I tell about. This relation is expressed in the language used to formulate the story, which is loaded with meanings and judgments made by me when I am telling the story. To choose words and expressions is an act of both moral and epistemic concern. This is valid for both the supervisees and the supervisor. The story I tell helps to connect and constitute the meaning of the elements that make up the situation that I am reflecting upon, especially those elements that I am concerned about. These are often called problems, themes, or concerns.

As conscious human beings, we are entangled in stories. The story that I share in supervision emerges from this entanglement and has a long historical background.[29] It could be compared to what in hermeneutics is called *Vorverständnis* ("preunderstanding"). This history can be experienced as one of those bonds that I can be liberated from in supervision, which means that my Vorverständnis is corrected during the supervisory session.[30]

Ludwig Wittgenstein notes that we are caught in our frames or in a particular picture that is an integral part of our language:

> "But this is how it is . . ." I say to myself over and over again. I feel as though, if only I could fix my gaze absolutely sharply on this fact, get it in focus, I must grasp the essence of the matter.
>
> (Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, 4.5): "The general form of propositions is: This is how things are."—That is the kind of proposition that one repeats to oneself countless times. One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing's nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it. A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.[31]

Liberation can take place if the members of the supervisory group are able to understand the preunderstanding from which my actual story grows. By telling their own stories in different ways about what they have heard and thought, they can help me see. This means that we develop an understanding that is mutual and a new creation. Only when we get this common understanding of the theme of the story can we work out new understandings and solutions. This view that is held in common enables me to reflect on my own understanding and determine whether it is still a legitimate point of view for me.

In the course of supervision, as we have shown, I will produce new stories thanks to all those new voices that I hear from the others and my making them part of my own reflection. Thereby, I produce a new story where I am still the subject, even though it is a new story that might demand that I show myself as a more or less different person in the future, one who has more personal agency. This means that I will act according to the meaning developed through the new story supervision has helped create.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

We have in this essay presented how we work as supervisors and how we think about supervision, with a special focus on reflection. We hope that this will be helpful for other professional supervisors so that their reflection on our ideas about supervision can reveal new perspectives on supervision and what the supervisor is doing. This, in turn, could perhaps stimulate new ways of doing old things.

NOTES

1 Lev Vygotsky, *Thought and Language* (Cambridge: MIT Press 2000), 8.

2 Jerome Bruner, *The Culture of Education* (Harvard University Press, 1996).

3 Hannah Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," *Responsibility and Judgement* (New York: Schocken Books), 159–89.

4 For example, "Both Bakhtin and Vygotsky . . . assume that thought is inner speech." Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 80. For an in-depth presentation of the views of Bakhtin and Vygotsky on the subject of inner speech, see Caryl Emerson, "The Outer Word and Inner Speech: Bakhtin, Vygotsky and the Internalization of Language," *Critical Inquiry* 10(2) (December 1983): 245–64. "It is worth noting that externalization is rarely used. Most use of language use by far is never externalized. It is a kind of internal dialogue, and the limited research on the topic, going back to some observations of Lev Vygotsky's, conforms to what introspection suggests—at least mine: what reaches consciousness is scattered fragments. Sometimes, full-formed expressions instantly appear internally, too quickly for articulators to be involved, or probably even instructions to them. This is an interesting topic that has been barely explored, but could be subject to inquiry, and has many ramifications." Noam Chomsky, *What Kind of Creatures Are We?* (New York: Columbia University Press 2016), 14.

5 We are here following Gadamer's critique of the Cartesian assumption that it is by the consequent use of a method that we are led to the truth. Quite the contrary, argues Gadamer; the method involves forcing some predetermined frames on reality, thus it lacks the openness necessary for real understanding. Real understanding presupposes a "hermeneutic experience," an experience that changes the one experiencing it, that shatters old thought forms and opens new perspectives. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum 2004).

6 During this round of reiterating, members of the group discover, over and over again, how difficult it is to listen, to really stay with the storyteller and to stay within that which has been said and explore that. Instead, they start to consider what they are hearing, interpreting it and starting to formulate their own opinions about it. Beginning such an inner speech or inner dialogue about what they themselves think she said is comparable to going "backstage" while the storyteller is still "onstage" and thereby losing the totality of "the performance" of the other's telling of her story.

7 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

8 Harlene Anderson, *Conversation, Language and Possibilities* (New York: BasicBooks 1997), 134.

9 Mikhail Bakhtin, like Martin Buber, has a theory of the intersubjective formation of the self. He underlines how the human thought becomes real thought, i.e., becomes idea, solely through living contact with a foreign thought embodied in an unfamiliar voice, i.e., in a strange voice and in a consciousness expressed in words. "The idea is a *live event* played out at the point of dialogic meeting between two or several consciousnesses." Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 88–100. See also Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970) and Levinas, *Totality and Infinity.*

10 Helge Jorheim, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: Forståelsens filosofi* (Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag 2003), 117.

11 TK Lang, Karl-Erik Tysk, *Der fremtiden blir til: Et dialogiskt paradigme for veiledning* (Skara: Ovansjö Järbo Pastorat, 2013); TK Lang and Karl-Erik Tysk, "Gudsrelasjon och troserfarenhet som tema I handledningen," *Halvårsskrift for Praktisk Teologi* (2003): 2, 14–19; see also essays by TK Lang and Karl-Erik Tysk in *Hoppa, landa mjukt: Arbetshandledning—en kultur för kyrkans framtid* (Uppsala: Svenska Kyrkans Information Service, 2001).

12 Harlene Anderson and Harry Goolishian, "Human systems as linguistic systems, "*Family Process* 27 (1988): 371–394; Harlene Anderson and Harry Goolishisian, " Supervision as Collaborative Conversation: Questions and Reflections," in H. Brandau, ed., *Von der Supervision Zur Systemischen Vision* (Salzburg: Otto Müller Verlag, 1990).

13 Tom Andersen, "The Reflecting Team: Dialogue and Meta-Dialogue in Clinical Work," *Family Process* 26, no. 4 (1987): 415–28; Tom Andersen, ed., *The Reflecting Team: Dialogue and Dialogues about the Dialogue* (New York: Norton, 1991); Tom Andersen, "Reflections on Reflecting with Families," in Sheila McNamee and Kenneth J. Gergen, eds., *Therapy as Social Construction* (London: Sage 1992), 54–68. See also Steven Friedman, ed.,*The Reflecting Team in Action: Collaborative Practice in Family Therapy* (New York: The Guilford Press 1995).

14 Jaakko Seikkula, "The Aim of Therapy Is Generating Dialogue: Bakhtin and Vygotskij in Family Session," *Human Systems Journal* 4 (1993): 33–48; Jaakko Seikkula, "From Monologue to Dialogue in Consultation with Larger Systems,"*Human Systems Journal* 6 (1995): 21–42; Jaakko Seikkula, *Åpne Samtaler* (Oslo: Tano Aschehoug 2008*);* Helge Eliassen and Jaakko Seikkula, eds., *Reflekterende Prosesser I Praksis. Klientsamtaler, Veiledning og Forskning* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2006).

15 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 88.

16 Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt 1978), 191.

17 Karl Jaspers, *Way to Wisdom: An Introduction to Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1964), 124.

18 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1958), 186.

19 Zygmunt Bauman, *The Individualized Society* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers 2001), 7.

20 Raoul Mortley, *French Philosophers in Conversation* (New York: Routledge 1991), 16.

21 Steven Hendley, "Speech and Sensibility: Levinas and Habermas on the Constitution of the Moral Point of View," *Continental Philosophical Review* 37 (2000): 153–73.

22 Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being* (Dordrecht: Springer-Science + Business Media, 1991), 92.

23 Emmanuel Levinas,, *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 66–67.

24 Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1994), 316.

25 Harlene Anderson, *Conversation, Language and Possibilities*, 91.

26 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative,* vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1984), 75. The quotation continues: "This remark takes on its full force when we refer to the necessity to save the history of the defeated and the lost. The whole history of suffering cries out for vengeance and calls for narrative." In supervision we often hear stories from professionals who feel both "defeated" and "lost" after meeting with difficult client situations, colleagues and associates, leaders, and family members. The "cry for vengeance" and the "call for narrative" are in supervision given a space where both that cry and that narrative can be expressed, listened to, understood, and reflected over.

27 Harlene **Anderson,** *Conversation, Language and Possibilities,* **216.**

28 Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, 1968), 2.

29 Kenneth Gergen, *Realities and Relationships: Soundings in Social Construction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 209.

30 Martin Heidegger saw language both as a prison and as a tool of liberation. He maintained that human beings are imprisoned in a reality given to us in our language. We cannot get beyond this reality because the words we use to understand it make up its borders. At the same time, Heidegger sees language as a tool of freedom, as a force within the human being, what the Greeks called *poesis*, which makes it possible to express new consciousness. We can never answer the question of where the voice comes from when we speak. It is language's gift to us. Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen, Germany: Neske, 1959).

31 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigation* (Cambridge: Blackwell 1953), 113–15.