The Value Problem in Supervision and Coaching[1]

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Introduction

Our colleague, Professor Bauman, presented a theory of the contemporary age yesterday which culminated in the fact that he considered it virtually incredible to undertake something like supervision in modern times. He was speaking of a "nightmare". For such emergencies, the Austrian dramatist Johann Nestroy had the right answer. He said: *"When all ropes break (meaning: if all else fails), I am going to hang myself."*

What I am trying to say is that on the one hand, the situation is certainly not enjoyable in view of a certain international, global narrowing of general thinking.

But on the other hand, we can confirm to one another as supervisors that we nevertheless see very rich lives and an incredible abundance of livelihood. I think we are still benefiting from these experiences, even though times do change. Our colleague, Professor Bauman, also spoke of this flexible, accelerated society and of project hopping. I could tie in with this, because it is one of my pet subjects and it led to the fact that I founded the "Association for the Deceleration of Time". But I would also like to emphasise a counter-aspect which we may be able to observe: There is also such a thing as persistence. You have mentioned it as a value[3]. And I may quote Odo Marquart, a philosopher colleague, who said: "Who is constantly confronted with new things and is yet immensely curious? It's the children. But at least something must remain stable, even if it is the teddy bear which they take along."

In these processes of change, and also when supervising, I got accustomed to look for where we all have "our teddy bears" which we constantly take along as a foundation to give us that feeling of security. And I found hotel chains, the same kind of offices and buildings everywhere. There are no more surprises for the top manager – he goes from the same airport to the same car, into the same office. There are many persistent things here. And as a

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member of a certain hotel chain he will be angry when he is not getting his cereal in the morning. So there are strong backlashes. In Austria we have thousands of cars lined up in traffic jams between Munich and Klagenfurt during the holiday seasons. German and Dutch travellers are on their way to the Adriatic See. And we all know the phenomenon of the holiday depression, mostly caused by the fact that you have arrived too fast at your destination. Quickly changing the scene by using an aeroplane – that will not happen in a traffic jam. We found in a survey that traffic jams are not at all perceived as extremely unpleasant. You have a picknick, you set up tables, make friends, and above all: You're not getting there that fast. So you might perhaps avoid a holiday depression. Things might get critical though when you have been moving around so much that you wake up in the morning without knowing where you are. The late German comedian Karl Valentin already felicitously described this state at the time between the two world wars: "I don't know. Was it yesterday, was it today, or was it on the fourth floor?"

It should also be part of an introduction to explain to you what motivated me to deal with the topic of ethics in practical situations. That's not only my profession as a philosopher who is of course constantly concerned with ethics and is again and again consulted as an expert. (It is interesting by the way that people need experts to find out about the good things in life, someone who tells them what's good for them. A peculiar division of labour, if you think about it...) But the actual reason is two-fold.
First: There is a tremendous confusion in general issues of ethics which begins with language: Are we talking about values, standards, morale, or morality? These are many terms under which there is a lot of confusion. So there is a need for some clarification.
The other topic was that I could see people who were trying again and again to find values which should give them a feeling of self-assurance, so that they could deduce their actions from these values. And really, you can't do that. Referring to what we have heard yesterday, you could say that there is a "liquidity" of values throughout the whole philosophical tradition, and this leads to diverse problems.

The first people in our occidental tradition who did whatever they wanted with values, were the sophists. They took a value and promised they customers to make the opposite out of it. They were real "value relativists" and made their money as lawyers.
The most unemotional and still most useful philosopher was Aristotle. He said: Values over which you need to agree and which are to be determined are always a scale, a medium in between two antipodes. Courageousness is the medium between "daredevilry" and "cowardliness". That sounds plausible. In fact, Aristotle wanted

to say two things: Values are nothing static from which you can deduce your actions. For this purpose, the casuistry, the interpretation, is too refined. He knew that from the sophists. And he wanted to say: The scale between the extremes, the mediation, is always something which needs to be achieved, which is not given to us.

Let me give you three examples for this from the field of your values: You have a value which is called "persistence". That sounds very open and honest. Aristotle would have said: Positively seen it is the mediation between "tenacious" and "characterless". Depending on the situation, you need to decide to which side you will be inclined more. That means that, as regards content, "persistence" has no fixed value. Aristotle also says: It makes a difference how you relate values to what. You can relate "persistence" individually. In that case, "persistence" is in between "tenacious" and "characterless". But you can also relate it to institutions. Generally speaking, institutions are considered to be very persistent, although in the majority of cases, that's no virtue. You're getting the point – you can do a whole lot of things with those words.

Another example: "Professional Integrity." Aristotle would have said: That's in between "corruptibility" and the lonely heroism of "Michael Kohlhaas", a work by the German author Heinrich von Kleist. Can this integrity really be determined in such a way that standards alone suffice to discard mediation? And then there are values which do not serve as a means to determine what is good, but as means to determine how to proceed. How something is accomplished which is good. That is, for example, the readiness for discourse and reflection, which is no statement as such, but nevertheless a possibility to create values.

A third example is "loyalty". This is actually the value which is currently being most discussed. Aristotle says that's in between "disloyalty" and "submissiveness". But "loyalty" may also mean "I've done my duty."

"Tidying up in the field of ethics"
I would like to raise a few points where ethics basically stands in its own way.

„Pathos of the good"
When talking about ethics, you tend to think about something noble, something completely unachievable, something that no-one can really live up to. There is a saying which pretty much corresponds to what I just mentioned: *"The way to hell is paved with good intentions."* Values and ethics are traditionally associated with blaming: Who is good and who is not? What's the norm and what is not? That is no enjoyable measure of classification.

The dichotomy good and evil
The question is whether the ethical necessarily needs to deal with this dichotomy of binary logic. Good or bad, right or wrong – that is the model of logical subordination. This culminates in the dichotomy of war rhetoric. War rhetoric consists of an extreme "good/bad strategy" to justify wars. That is why we should reflect about what's behind this "good/bad" dichotomy, and whether it is not a bit obstructive with regard to ethics.

The undetermined is absoluteness
A very problematic thing is the awareness that values, norms and customs are set by human beings. Everything which is being set by people is subject to the verdict of possible error. But as these values, norms and customs which are of utmost importance to man, should not be wrong, it is necessary to justify them. A way of justifying and legitimating the ethic and the normative, has been to give it a foundation. First by referring to the Gods, then to God, after that to nature, then to the nature of man ("the humane"), and finally to conventions. But I must disappoint you. All these paths lead to the undetermined. There is no particular base for all the things we are talking about here. The undetermined is absoluteness. "Absolute" means "detached from all of us".

Interests of power
Most efforts to lay this foundation were associated with the pursuit of interests and of power. For God needs His "ground staff" and nature of man needs His exegesis. What's good or bad is linked to hierarchical organisation, to power, institutions and ultimately to social control. Therefore, "not doing good" was always accompanied with the expulsion from the community. That's what we fear. The most trivial form of this is to project a moralistic attitude: We don't like it when we are told what to do.

Universalism
For a long time, we used to have a sort of universalism in ethics: A universal system of values which in a sense should be valid for the whole of mankind. But this universalism is not capable to solve our problems either, simply because it needs to resort to an abstract level which cannot be binding for actions. Only think about the difficulties you encounter when you try to "translate" human rights into the different parts of the world. There is a wide array of interpretations and significant differences in how various cultures define terms like "person" or "individual".

Subjective pluralism
This term denotes changing values and relativism – everything which may be subsumed under pseudo-tolerance: Everybody may

be happy according to his or her own principles. That too makes it difficult to see a binding character in values and norms. The tricky thing about this is that real autonomy is an impertinence. We are bound to our traditions by our conscience. "Conscience" means that there can be no ethical or moral fixation or determination which goes beyond the "inner court of justice" of my own conscience. That is to say that the ethical, the morale, must not come from outside. As those who are responsible we are made to examine and to co-decide. That is difficult and unreasonable. That's why the German philosopher Immanuel Kant said: *"So act that your principle of action might safely be made a law for the whole world."* Now imagine you had to examine each of your actions according to whether the general public would want the same. You would be extremely busy doing that. And you might end up as a moral hypochondriac who does not dare to act because it will not be easy to close the examination procedure.

Collective Autonomy
One of my punch lines which I am going to bring up when speaking about procedural ethics, is the target direction of "collective autonomy". In other words: How do societies and communities become responsible for themselves and not for the individual? How can collective autonomy be established so that institutions, communities, and groups will have something like a conscience which – as I argue – they currently do not have by definition?

 "Legalification"
This was a strong intervention in the development of ethics and morality in our society. Many areas which used be subject to conventions and customs are now subject to the law. If you think about it – what's left to the fields of ethics, conventions, and morality which has not yet been codified by law? Fortunately we are able to see how weak the law is. When you follow a lawsuit you will notice that almost everywhere the arguments are about moral issues, although a legal reasoning would be sufficient. So in order to feel strong enough, you need something like a "moral backup".

Dominance of the economy
Let me also say a few words about globalisation. The world's society is subject to two dominant value systems. The one is coined by the economy and by technology related to it. My claim is that the economy dominates all other societal systems. Its concept of value is about immediate benefit and allocation.

Dominance of scientific feasibility
The objectivity of science is another decision on values which has once been taken, but it is not self-evident to separate humans and

nature as subjects from objects. That was a decision made by the natural sciences. And it's a decision on values. As always and as everywhere, systems should not merely be understood as neutral. In their axiomatics, they are rather subject to predominantly collective subconscious decisions on values about how the world and its nature should be organised.

Reflection on wanting
Strangely enough, the quest for the good is intellectually difficult to locate. I imagine that there is not that much of a need to search outside for accepted values, but rather to create the right preconditions so that the question about what is "good" is asked at all. It is a simple question of reflection to stop doing our business and to ask ourselves: "Do we want this the way we set it up?" And only then the real question evolves. Really wanting to do what we are actually doing is not self-evident. In view of "time compression", actionism, and hecticness – conditions which we all experience – this question is brought up less and less. The answer we hear is, reasonless as it may be, the stereotypical expression of factual constraints.

A Model of Procedural Ethics

You may be disappointed to hear that – in my opinion – models, similarly to values, are something which you cannot apply. However, they are an attempt to create perspectives on realities in a sophisticated way which will enable us to cast anchor in the chaos of dealing with this world.

If the assumption is correct that there is no-one really who could account for customs, values and norms and that these values do not fall from the sky, then the question must be about ourselves and our accountability. The following model is an explanation of this:

Try to imagine a winged altar. There are two side wings which you can open, and we are in the middle piece.

On the left wing there are unresolvable, inevitable contradictions (extremes, polarities), in which we constantly find ourselves. These contradictions lead to problems and conflicts. On the right altarpiece we can find the answers to conflicts and problems. These answers include values, norms, the law, morality, rituals and traditions. These are all attempts to resolve conflicts which arise from unresolvable contradictions. I will start by explaining the left side, the contradictions. Let me specify a few dimensions, so that we get a clearer picture.

When problems arise in supervision settings, I try to look at the right side and ask: What kind of answers do we have in law, in customs, in norms? If these answers are suitable, the better. Then I can exploit the treasure box of our traditions. However, this needs decisions. If that's impossible, I need to look at the left side to see

where this problem or that conflict came from. That proceeding is a sort of "de-personalisation" by not speaking in terms of "good and bad" or "guilty and innocent".

The left side: Contradictions
Existential contradictions
There is a contradiction between man and nature which can be resolved as the primitive people did it or as we do it. The contradiction is: Man is an animal, but since he knows it, he is not. He can declare digestion a science. No ape can do that. Another existential contradiction is the contradiction between the sexes. Here the conflicts stretch from the arduous legalification of domestic violence to women's quota. As you see, even this needs constant solutions. In times of societal change, contradictions have nothing better to do than all becoming relevant at the same time. That's why I'll mention the next one: The conflict of generations including the pensions problem. They want to solve it with actuarial mathematics, but that won't be successful, because it's a purely logical approach, whereas several solutions are needed.
The contradiction between life and death is particularly unpleasant because there is no counterpart to talk to. Therefore, all of mythology tried to visualise this interlocutor so that you could negotiate a little with him. However, this was not successful.
These existential contradictions created conflicts and received answers in all cultures and throughout all traditions. You will notice that the institutions which have survived for a long time, attended to these existential contradictions. Therefore I say: Institutions are unburdening organisations of people who give eternal answers to unresolvable contradictions. And we need them. This paradox is also an existential one.

Social set-ups
They are the second dimension of contradictions, and there are always conflicts at their boundaries. Something which is good for an individual is not necessarily good for a couple. What's good for a couple is not necessarily good for a family. Everybody who has children knows that. We are dealing with different set-ups here, and this contradiction needs to be resolved somehow. Children have a natural tendency to resolve a conflict in their own way. They like to sleep in their parents' bed. So the farther apart mom is from dad, the more comfortable it is for the children.
Relational triangles are also a set-up of this kind: Husband, wife, and friend of the family. Each single relation in that triangle works well, so you could arithmetically conclude that it is an ideal set-up: Three good relations. But unfortunately, it doesn't work that way.
When we enlarge the individual field of supervision to take the general context into account, then we need to deal with social set-

ups. Groups are subject to completely other principles than organisations. And those who do supervision in organisations know that there are major conflicts between departments and the entirety, between the organisation and projects, and so on.

Systemic contradictions
They exist for example between the humanities and the natural sciences. Systems develop their own culture and logic. Within economic enterprises, there is a classical contradiction between manufacturing and sales. The engineers would like to develop a perfect product. They regard the salespeople as "characterless Levantines" who only want to sell fast and do not appreciate perfect products. However, the most perfect is also the most expensive and therefore hard to sell on the market. No matter where you look in organisations and subsystems. You will always find a very own logic which corresponds to the products. So I developed the habit of always closely looking at what is being produced by organisations. Surprisingly, the products are a reflection of these contradictions. All modern business products from cars to television sets include balances between contradictory needs.

Historical "unsimultaneities"
The fourth dimension deals with historical "unsimultaneities" An example: One department of a company is technically fully equipped, another one is just starting to buy their first computers. When these departments are expected to work together, conflicts will arise. The "two-speed Europe" also brings about conflicts. That is to say that there are developmental differences, which is no value judgement. Things simply evolve differently. The issue of historical "unsimultaneities" is also dealt with in what we call "intercultural supervision". How do we behave towards different religions? What does the term "Europe-centred world" mean, positively and negatively?

Structural contradictions
This is the classical contradiction between "Freedom, Equality, Brotherhood" and hierarchy. This contradiction too is unrepealable when we live in organisations, and it creates permanent conflicts.

The right side: Answers
I look towards the left side when I run out of solutions on the right side. It seems as though the right side – the stability of the entire value structure – disintegrated for two reasons.
The first reason is the liberation of man from institutional normativity. You could also call it a loss of authority of classical institutions with regard to values and norms. In the past they said: *Roma locuta, causa finita"*, thus: *"When Rome spoke, the case was closed."*

8

Nowadays you have the impression that when the pope announces something, the debate is only about to start. That is a tremendous difference.

Or take the difference between Shiites and Sunnites. There is a difference you need to know about when you are involved in a war in the Islamic world. The Sunnites take a more enlightened approach to institutional authorities. They are able to decide against a mullah or a priest. Even after he answered their questions. Shiites, however, must abide by the what the priest said. That's a big difference.

The loss of institutions becomes especially evident because one part of the right wing has been exposed, and that is morality. Morality has been abandoned and was taken over by individual freedom. And along with this, everything else is frayed and perforated.

The second area is the law. In democracies, the law is subject to one's own reflection, to procedural control and to the mandatory proof of identity. The law has also been taken away from the authority of *Letztbegründungen* – of "final foundations". It is subject to the democratic process.

Setting new, old values

These two areas led to the fact that all others were made insecure, too. That is why it is now so difficult, compared with former times, to speak of the "setting of values". And that is also why we all put so much emphasis on events in which we try to see these aspects in the problems and conflicts which now arise and which are the issues of our daily work: The most important aspect is that the authority of heteronomy (being under the rule of another person) has come to an end. We have thus gained a freedom which is almost characterised by an "empty" commitment. Therefore, we must – especially due to the relevance of the left side, namely, the contradictions – establish room for negotiations, conflict analyses and solutions, so we can take the time to set new, old values.