

The Scientific Foundations of Psychotherapy*

Pier Francesco Galli**

Abstract. This paper was presented in 1962 at a course organized in Milan by the “Milan Group for the Advancement of Psychotherapy” (later called *Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane*), and reprinted in 2006. The author discusses the problem of the scientific foundations of psychotherapy and the issues related to the use of the method of natural sciences for the study of human nature, with reference to phenomenology, existentialism, and the tradition of interpersonal psychoanalysis in North America. To this end, the author introduces for the first time his concept of “continuous interpretative activity” composed of different semantic codes, not only verbal codes, in order to give back to the patient his/her signifiers. At the end of the paper the discussion that followed this presentation is reported, with the commentaries by Leonardo Ancona, Silvano Arieti, Danilo Cargnello, Elvio Fachinelli, and Pier Francesco Galli.

Key Words: Psychoanalysis, Science, Existentialism, History of psychoanalytic concepts, Critique.

Introductory note to the edition in issue no. 2/2006 of *Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane*. *This essay is the transcription of one of the two addresses I made at the first continuing education course organized by the Milan Group for the Advancement of Psychotherapy (later called *Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane* [“Psychotherapy and the Human Sciences”]) in Milan in 1962; the second was on the theme of psychotherapy training. In the next issue (no. 3/2006) of the journal *Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane*, the one earmarked as a special edition for the Fortieth Anniversary, I will broadly tell the initial history of the group, of its cultural-political choices, and the role, which, I, myself, in concert with many colleagues and friends, believe it played. In this introductory note I will limit myself to pointing out certain ideas. I decided to publish the paper in this issue no. 2/2006 of *Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane* because the subject matter that I was outlining at the time is essentially connected to the position I am presenting in the article published on pp. 153-164 of this same issue no. 2/2006. Then it was about ideas and hypotheses in the making, incorporated into a socio-cultural context, well-represented by the commentaries following the talk, and also interesting from a historical viewpoint. In fact one could also highlight: the comparison with Silvano Arieti on the problem of existential analytic philosophy, which took its first steps in the U.S. with the publication of the 1958 book *Existence* by Rollo May, the commentary of Danilo Cargnello, key Italian representative of anthropoanalysis, the hints of comparison with Harry Stack Sullivan’s interpersonal theory perspective, with his impact on therapeutic practice, presented in Italy as a major development (the first six volumes of the book series “*Biblioteca di Psichiatria e di Psicologia Clinica*” had just been published by the publisher Feltrinelli of Milan, edited by myself and Gaetano Benedetti); Sullivan’s *Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry* (1940) and *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry* (1953) as well as Frieda Fromm-Reichmann’s *Principles of**

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Intensive Psychotherapy (1950) were already available and establishing themselves on the market; Silvano Arieti's Interpretation of Schizophrenia (1955) would be published as no. 7 of the book series a little while later. One could also mention the controversy with Elvio Fachinelli, at the time very close to Lacan's position on verbal language, and therefore critical in relation to my proposal to study the therapeutic factors, keeping in mind the "non verbal" language, which he considered "ineffable". Years later, Elvio himself would write some important papers on ecstasy and on unconscious to unconscious communication (e.g., La mente estatica. Milan: Adelphi, 1989). In conclusion, these were memorable moments of culture in development, about which I will speak further. We were in the process of writing the pages of the history of psychotherapy in Italy together with the many people with whom we came into contact. At the time we just did it, without knowing we were doing it. Now it is exciting to look back on all this in the light of the present.

It is possible that the title of my presentation could make one think of something finalized. Since it has to do with the scientific foundations of psychotherapy, one would assume that it would be a discourse expounding upon these scientific foundations. But I am merely attempting to pose the question, since I feel that, in terms of a scientific discourse in psychotherapy, it is not yet possible to assert such a thing. I say this because, in the two most recent International Congresses of Psychotherapy, many voices were heard posing the question of synthesis in psychotherapy, as if it were possible, since a high level of knowledge in our field has been reached. These voices were also heard drawing conclusions on what the situation of psychotherapy is and therefore of this particular aspect of the human relationship. This is in no way possible and it is anti-scientific today, because we have not had a real and proper scientific discussion in psychotherapy until now.

In other sciences, the scientific dialogue has experienced a series of vicissitudes from which the psychiatric issue was entirely divorced; particularly the psychotherapeutic issue because—and we have to especially try to interpret the problem in historical terms—what have we encountered in the last decades of the history of psychotherapy in terms of the philosophy of science? Freud mostly used biological models to interpret what was being discovered. In other words, he was trying to bring the essential dynamic of the individual back to biological models.

This conception and configuration was correct then, because at the moment when Freud was trying to understand instinctual life in terms of the energy and dynamics, using concepts borrowed from Helmholtzian physics, these conceptions represented the end-point of a situation determined by positivism, which justified having faith in certain explanatory models; therefore the validation of relationship experiences, otherwise inexpressible in terms of these models, was justified as a principal objective. Since these results were not valid in the long-term, the attempt to use analogical discourse in order to explain the psychological dynamic, which psychoanalysis and psychiatry tried to do, is no longer valid.

In that era there were some disciples that detached themselves from Freud: Alfred Adler and Adler's theory, Carl Gustav Jung and Jung's theory. And today we have many other schools of psychotherapy that boast successes and have probably really had them.

It is well-known that successes ascribable to psychological factors can be had by anyone facing a patient, even without adopting techniques related to one school over another, in other words even without adopting a specific theoretical reference strategy.

With these first dissidents of Freud, we have the first two attempts at theory building, ones that have had success because, at the time, it was still justifiable to attempt to construct a theory of the human being, and to try to explain the meaning of the psychotherapeutic relationship in terms of a general theory of human nature; it is easy to understand how certain models of the then culture wind up in Adler's theory. One of the major initial successes of Jung's attempt at separation from Freud was basically the fact that he attacked the issue of sexuality in Freud and in psychoanalysis; if we made a concrete investigation into what is generally known about Jung by the public, even a

specialized public, we would find that basically what is known is that this dissident disciple of Freud was against the idea of explaining everything in terms of sexuality.

All the sciences have had a critical period, coinciding with that revolution in scientific thought that gave rise to the formation in Vienna in 1929 of the *Wiener Kreis* (the Vienna Circle): a group of scholars, scientists, and philosophers, who were opposed to traditional philosophy, and denounced classical metaphysics, within the context of the philosophy of science, and formed the so-called logical empiricist school of thought. This group moved almost *en masse* to the United States, and here we have another example of how ideas of European origin get transferred to the U.S., of how the many successes of these ideas stem from the fact that a culturally open environment granted their expression, without the resistance that, here in Europe, is rooted in our cultural heritage, something that, from a pragmatic point of view, has constituted a considerable hindrance. This orientation has tried to establish new bases for the philosophy of science.

The repercussions, concerning psychology, have been substantial: above all, only behaviouristic concepts were accepted at the inception of logical empiricism; it was the only accepted viewpoint because it was the single thing that related concretely to the established characteristics so that a scientific model could be specifically verifiable, and the only one in which it was possible to verify the characteristics that justified its adoption as a scientific hypothesis. Psychoanalysis, as a general theory of personality, was rejected *en bloc* because it didn't correspond to that specific type of scientific method, which had become customary in all the sciences.

Beneath the issue of logical empiricism lies a fundamental concept: going back to Ernst Mach's principle, we have seen how, in scientific research, there exists a series of factors of a cultural nature, resulting from the cultural values in which the scientist operates, factors that intervene on the very occasion of choosing the issues, and formulating the working hypothesis. The scientist believes him/herself to be objective, and instead introduces a series of elements of a socio-cultural and psychological nature into the development of working hypotheses, at the exact moment in which he/she believes that he/she has formulated a scientific hypothesis, and is presenting systems through which verification can be reached.

This is a fundamentally important fact—and it is so particularly in psychology and psychotherapy—because it allows us to assess the reasons why there has not been progress on an interdisciplinary level in psychology and psychotherapy.

Too often psychotherapists and psychologists speak about an interdisciplinary relationship, when that phase of the interdisciplinary relationship has not been traversed in psychotherapy and psychology.

Too often, to this day, terms referring to schools of thought are adopted, when there exists a huge communications deficit between the various schools of thought and approaches. We must always be functionally accurate with the terms we adopt and with the type of operation we may accomplish with that term, trying to apply the most precise meaning possible. Often we do not know how another acts in concrete terms: we only know the framework of reference that he/she employs, namely the theoretical constructs which he/she tries to draw from the empirical data. Theoretical constructs drawn from empirical data are found in every scientific sector; but where does this happen in psychotherapy?

A scientist who operates in the physics field can use provisional working hypotheses; in psychotherapy this has proved much more difficult because it wasn't possible to adopt provisional hypotheses; but I believe that today it should be possible and that it is moreover necessary, in order to be able to scientifically broach the issue of psychotherapy. The empirical data assembled needed a cultural framework within the cultural values of a specific society; presenting an empirical fact as a simple hypothesis could put in jeopardy a person's very essence as experienced in a particular society.

It is at this point that every psychotherapist has felt the need for a theory of human nature. We thus find Freud who creates his theory of human nature: and herein arise the difficulties of approach to psychoanalysis, the hatred of psychoanalysis, and the rejection of it; an enormous confusion has been created between psychoanalysis, in terms of its philosophical meaning and its existential meaning, and the therapeutic aspect of the psychoanalytic models. If fifty years ago it was justified to attempt a metaphysical theory of humanity, today it no longer is.

Philosophically speaking, we have journeyed through existentialism, which gained many disciples in psychiatry; current theorizing in psychiatry is based upon concepts derived from existentialism, and this is something everyone knows.

Does this then mean that psychoanalysis is no longer valid? Absolutely not! It only means that the human being of today, and therefore the psychiatrist as well, has been able to dispose of a rigid personality theory model, and can express the same acquisitions in new terms. This means that the empirical data of yesterday is framed by the philosophy of today. It is important to point out that this philosophy has explicitly abandoned all attempts at metaphysics.

The situation in which we find ourselves has prompted me to say all this in order to show how many and which philosophical impediments exist at the root of theorizing in psychotherapy—in other words, how we have always felt deep down the need to immediately frame the empirical fact within the theoretical castle we have constructed. Today we still hear too often talk about choice in psychotherapy as if it were an issue of faith. It is not possible to have scientific discourse in these terms. There are historical reasons for this fact: for example, the differences between schools also resulted from the differences between the personalities that created these schools, personalities that gave rise to conflicts of a personal nature. These conflicts took place more or less forty years ago; most of the disciples of these personalities are still alive, and this has created a huge amount of insularity: people who do not communicate, who criticize each other, and who often have no idea what the other is doing. Everyone uses his/her own language to express concepts that should instead serve to create the basis for a common language, useable by everyone. It should be as simple as possible in order to employ models within which to merge the empirical data from any orientation or school. If a certain orientation has a theory on human behaviour and another a different theory, and if we check which patients were treated by therapists of a specific orientation rather than another, we find substantial differences in the type of patients treated. We have here Professor Silvano Arieti, a representative of the interpersonal psychoanalytic school. What has been the fundamental significance of this school? It was one of the first to tackle the problem of schizophrenic psychoses from the psychoanalytical standpoint. Why, in fact, didn't orthodox psychoanalysis deal with this problem? And where did the basic mistake of thinking that orthodox analysis was not valid for the understanding of psychosis come from? Because this is not true, inasmuch as the orthodox psychoanalytic models *can* help a great deal in the understanding and interpretation of psychotic situations.

This core scepticism arose because Freud, probably for personal reasons and also due to difficulties encountered with patients, had concluded that psychoses were not able to be treated with psychoanalysis. This also represents the expression of an array of fears that had a deeper root within society itself—the unease and fear that society feels in relation to a seriously mentally ill person.

On the other hand, most representatives of the interpersonal psychoanalytic school have had most of their success with psychotics. They advise one to enter into the therapeutic situation with greater personality aspects than the older orthodox psychoanalyst would have. They speak about interpersonal relationships. They find justification in their psychological theories and not by chance do the major representatives of this school attempt measures perfectly consistent with the American socio-cultural reality. This explains how, in terms of the scientific evaluation of the data drawn from the therapeutic relationship, we have always been spoiled by the need to construct a theory. It is not by chance that here in Italy the Catholic world has felt threatened by the advent of

psychoanalysis. There was a united rejection, without any discussion, because there was a fear that the Catholic vision of the essence of humanity would be threatened by a specific method of theorizing.

We find ourselves in the same situation with regards to the Soviet world, in which there was the same type of rejection, and a lack of scientific discussion; if we examine this rejection on its premise, we see that a real attempt at communication, a real attempt to acknowledge just the empirical aspect of what takes place in the psychotherapeutic relationship has not been made.

Dealing with a sector, that of psychology and psychotherapy, which invests the whole of the personality, we can find a justification for this situation. However, we have to recognize that it has left us with a cultural void in our wake. For this reason we cannot talk about synthesis in psychotherapy today. If we are able to speak of synthesis, we can speak about it only in the moment when we are trying to open a dialogue on the issue, and trying not to make references to schools of origin and therefore—let us be clear—to the reference frameworks we adopt, and—let us be even clearer—to those reference frameworks which largely help to give us a sense of security in the therapeutic relationship.

What is this “something” of which Professor Arieti has spoken¹ and about which he has also written in his book²? What is this “something”, beyond what we can interpret or understand by means of our reference frameworks, and which nevertheless acts within the therapeutic relationship? This exchange, or primary relationship, is something we must take into account, without rejecting the possibility of knowing it, in order to understand the limitedness of all the reference frameworks that we have up until now employed. The problem, in functional terms, could be formulated in terms of communication theory. We could speak about, for example, non-verbal communication, and attempts at knowledge of this communication. This could be one of the ways in which we may perhaps be able over time to construct a general theory of psychotherapy.

Another emblematic example that caused controversy between Professor Arieti and myself last year in the United States is the issue of existentialism. He accused those of us in the European school of talking about the existential approach, one which however does not ever apply to therapeutic technique, but which does follow psychoanalytic models. This is true even if we could say: the basic therapeutic situation has changed because of our approach.

What I would like to say is that, whereas we lived the experience of existentialism as a cultural phenomenon and our psychiatry was an expression of this situation, it was only a few years ago that a series of articles by our most important existentialist writers was translated in the United States. Some American psychiatrists, referring to Rollo May³—and doubtlessly possessing intellectual knowledge of the subject matter but not the experience of it, this issue being the experience of another culture—discovered existentialism at a moment when the American psychiatric situation was in crisis. Consequently, existentialism’s language of “crisis” found a favourable environment. On the other hand, these psychiatrists did not do anything else but repeat, therapeutically speaking, certain technical models, introducing some value choices in terms of existentialism, to which the American public today could be particularly receptive, but which do not benefit psychotherapy as a science.

¹ The reference is to the paper Arieti presented just before this presentation by Galli at this meeting. The title of Arieti’s paper was “Psicodinamica e psicoterapia delle psicosi schizofreniche” (Psychodynamics and psychotherapy of schizophrenic psychoses), published, in two parts, on pp. 18-68 of the *Proceedings*, and was reprinted in: Marco Conci, Sergio Dazzi & Maria Luisa Mantovani, editors, *La tradizione interpersonale in psichiatria, psicoterapia e psicoanalisi*. Bolsena (Viterbo, Italy): Massari, 1997, pp. 363-395. Later it was reprinted also on pp. 76-110 of issue no. 1/2014 of *Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane*, with the interventions held at the time by Leonardo Ancona, Silvano Arieti, Alda Bencini, Gaetano Benedetti, Massimo Fagioli, Eugenio Iannàccaro, Prof. Manghi, Corrado Montanari, Silvia Montefoschi, Cherubino Trabucchi, and Umberto Vanzelli.

² Silvano Arieti, *Interpretation of Schizophrenia*. New York: Robert Brunner, 1955 (Italian translation: *Interpretazione della schizofrenia*. Milan: Feltrinelli, 1963).

³ Rollo May, Ernest Angel & Henri F. Ellenberger, editors. *Existence*. New York: Basic Books, 1958.

Thus Professor Arieti's criticism is very fair when he asks us what kind of technical contribution can existentialism offer. However, on our part, we are justified in answering that the contribution is not to be considered in terms of technique, but should be considered as a possible aid in understanding certain ontological structures for expressing and understanding the essence of phenomena, which occur in the sphere of the interpersonal relationship. This is the fundamental significance of the existential approach to psychotherapy, rather than what it contributed to technique.

The problem of scientific research in psychotherapy has especially been felt in the recent past. In the U.S. a group of psychoanalysts has assembled a small study group to examine in depth the specific problem of the scientificity of psychoanalytic theory—the *Rapaport Study Group*⁴. Unfortunately Rapaport died, after having published a commendable essay on the structure of psychoanalytic theory in 1959 (*The Structure of Psychoanalytic Theory: A Systematizing Attempt*)⁵, and was not able to continue the work he had started. However, his was one of the first formulations that we have of what is structurally valid, in terms of the modern scientific approach to psychoanalysis, and of how this problem is felt today as a need to connect with certain scientific explanatory models, and as a need to insert ourselves into a scientific discussion of general significance—one which might go beyond the metaphysics of human nature via our knowledge of it within the psychotherapeutic relationship. Unfortunately, no one will relinquish this need, because, while an engineer or a doctor may be able to abandon his/her philosophy of life in relation to others, no psychiatrist exists who does not feel that he/she is a depository of a specific conception of humanity. No psychotherapist exists who does not have his/her own conception of life and who does not introduce it into his/her relationship with others as a value reference, or who does not seek to bring what he/she has worked out from the relationship with others into a general conception of life.

I would like to highlight here how and why today one may be able to perfectly insert the problems of dynamic psychology and psychotherapy into this type of scientific attitude that has rejected psychoanalysis. It has been seen, twenty years on, that there has practically been no scientific principle, whatever the science, which has defied the critical efforts of logical empiricism: nevertheless science has progressed. The logical empiricists of recent times—and I am referring to Albert Ellis and Herbert Feigl, who work in the *Minnesota Center for Philosophy of Science*—had to recognize that it was possible to make a great deal of progress on the basis of a peculiar feature of the individual/human being, namely on the basis of a process that only he/she is capable of making. These authors, who consider scientific reasoning as always inductive, have called primary induction the ability to theorize and formulate hypotheses on the basis of empirically demonstrated and demonstrable, statistically validatable etc. data. However, they have noted that a human being has the intrinsic capacity to formulate hypotheses with a high degree of prediction on the basis of a minimum of information. This is the clinical method which we continue to employ, and I think it is interesting to see how, today, people for whom the validity of psychology lies in being able to trace it back to physiological structures, are able to welcome the possibility of developing hypotheses purely on a clinical basis.

⁴ After George S. Klein's death, in 1971, the group was renamed *Rapaport-Klein Study Group*. This group begun its yearly meetings at the *Austen Riggs Center* (Stockbridge, Massachusetts) in 1963, and still meets today; the web site is www.psychomedia.it/rapaport-klein.

⁵ David Rapaport, *The Structure of Psychoanalytic Theory: A Systematizing Attempt*. In: Koch S., editor, *Psychology: A Study of a Science. Study 1: Conceptual and Systematic. Vol. 3: Formulations of the Person and the Social Context*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959, pp. 55-183. Also in: *Psychological Issues*, 2, Monograph 6. New York: International Universities Press, 1960 (Italian translation: *Struttura della teoria psicoanalitica. Un tentativo di sistematizzazione*. Preface by P.F. Galli [pp. 9-12; also in: *Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane*, 2007, XLI, 2: 231-233]. Turin: Boringhieri, 1969).

We have come to the realization that, in order to conduct this type of scientific research, it is necessary to train researchers on the personality level, to train observers and take advantage of their intrinsic abilities.

I think it is important that in the past five years there has been this recognition of the scientific value of the clinical method, and therefore of the method used in psychotherapy. The issue of psychotherapists is not however one of saying: they have returned to the method we have always used! Sometimes, when colleagues, interested in experimental psychology, try to formulate hypotheses about our work and take scientific stabs at it, a conflict arises, because it seems to us as if they wish to study things which any one of us, with the minimum of experience, would already know the outcome of, would be able to predict, and therefore would find useless to experimentally validate.

However, it seems to me that the fundamental approach would be to start with small situations, to study them in depth in the most objective way possible, using, as well, experimental psychology methods, and above all working so that the study of psychotherapy might be centred on the issues, such as: why does this phenomenon exist? How was this phenomenon viewed by the various schools of thought? How was it described and theorized? What values are operating within it? Why does this term in one school have a different meaning in another?

Here I would like again to make a connection to the problem of “what is eluding technique in psychotherapy”. Too often it is said that psychotherapy is an art.

This is not at all true! I expressed this issue elsewhere a few years ago in this way: the basis of technical knowledge is worked out and assimilated psychologically, and allows us to act without rational control over our actions within the therapeutic context in an appropriate way, and with what I have called the “technical spontaneity” of the therapist. This, in my opinion, takes care of the issue of art in psychotherapy.

Now I will speak about the different perspectives that could be useful to research in psychotherapy.

In order to do scientific research in psychotherapy the first thing to do is to formulate a common language—a language upon which everyone can agree, a common language for which it is not necessary to adopt a magic terminology. It is easily possible to use everyday language to express certain situations, to use a language which is universally comprehensible, and with which to express all possible experiences. That this language should become our scientific code or that it employs everyday terminology is not important, as long as a preliminary effort is made in this area.

A series of empirical studies has been attempted—mostly by Carl Rogers. I must emphasize that the figure of Rogers has a special significance in the history of psychotherapy for one reason: Rogers did his research by applying the techniques of experimental psychology, such as the recording of sessions, the evaluation of diverse treatments, endeavouring to analyze the personality changes that can occur during a single therapeutic session, or during the course of the psychotherapy, or before and after the psychotherapy.

Therapeutically speaking, Rogers was a champion of the so-called “non-directive therapy”, in which there is a minimum of active intervention on the part of the therapist, and in which the variable “person”, therefore, seems excluded as much as possible from the therapeutic field. Rogers rejects interpretation (we are not analyzing here whether it is right or wrong to reject interpretation), however I think it is interesting to see how Rogers has been one of the few therapists who has moved towards theorizing only in recent years. He is one of the few that has had the courage to work for thirty years without ever presenting something in theoretical terms, but continuously referring to practice and answering, “I don’t know!” when asked what meaning should be attributed to a specific manifestation or to a specific phenomenon observed during the course of therapy. When he was asked what framework of reference he was using, he answered “the relationship!” It was not by chance that Rogers has recently had a personal encounter with Martin Buber (we will

discuss this on Thursday evening⁶ and try to elucidate further). However I believe it is important to point out that here we have someone who was able to ignore the compulsive need to immediately convert facts into a theoretical construct; Rogers had the courage to administer care without needing a framework of reference to lean on.

In conclusion, I would like to say that there are three necessary attitudes for doing research in psychotherapy: one scientific, one therapeutic, and one philosophical. Can we find all three in the same person? I do not think so; many of us, with a talent for the therapeutic relationship, refuse to express ourselves in experimental terms, to articulate what we observe in an experimental language, and have difficulty doing so. It is rare to find people with both an experimental as well as a therapeutic mindset. And if they existed, doubts would arise as to their ability to be free of scientific qualms that can impede the interpersonal relationship: there are fundamental personality differences that prompt one to opt for one or another type of work. I think that the most appropriate course to take is that of teamwork, which seems to me truly essential for what could become research in psychotherapy today. There are specialized teamwork techniques, like brain storming, much-used in scientific research today, and which evolved out of a specific need. At first the research team worked towards posing and proposing rational hypotheses, based on the clash between the rationalities of the individuals participating on the team.

It has been seen that the inventive aspect within this type of group was rather scarce. Thus a different kind of technique emerged: a group of people, having studied a specific problem, expresses within the team environment everything that comes to mind in the freest possible manner; ultimately rational control over the material produced by the team takes effect. This permits the introduction of those physiological coefficients of the unconscious, constituting inventiveness, into the formulation of the scientific hypothesis. Only a minimal part of what we do is subject to rational control, so wanting to use only this part when conducting scientific research has resulted in an error, the significance of which can only be grasped through a change in the techniques used to conduct the research. On a strictly technical level, I would say that this is the type of approach that must be adopted for psychotherapeutic research.

It is important to point out one thing: Italy is virgin territory when it comes to this research sector, and so I consider it absolutely essential not to get caught up in those situations that have stifled the scientific approach to psychotherapy. Just because it is virgin territory, we are more unprepared, but it is possible to arrive at a certain preparedness for research over a period of years, in a more open fashion, since we do not have a tradition behind us acting as a hindrance in this specific area.

This is the underlying substance of what we wish to impart here; personally, I cannot view the issue in any other way. I believe that if certain perils exist in our situation, that of being in virgin territory, we must also consider the enormous advantage of finding ourselves in this position and being able to tackle these problems for the first time today.

In conclusion, and in an attempt to summarize what I have said, I would like to make a literary comparison: Robert Musil's *The Man without Qualities* (1930) is a work that has had much success in Italy in recent years; a book written over a period of thirty years and contemplated over fifty, it presents and expresses all possible avenues of human experience in our era; Musil is a witness to our time. The work is unfinished: it is not possible to come to a conclusion about existence, about human nature, and therefore it is not possible to come to a conclusion about the meaning of psychotherapy. I would say, in terms of psychotherapy, that it is above all an attitude towards life, conscious of the limits within which it must move, as witness and presence to suffering: this, in my opinion, is the existential role of the psychotherapist in society.

I will stop here (it is six o'clock) in expectation of the discussion to follow.

⁶ The Round table on Martin Buber, held on Thursday, December 13, 1962, was published on pp. 284-309 of the *Proceedings*, and reprinted on pp. 275-298 of issue no. 2/2015 of *Psicoterapia e Scienze Umane*; it was chaired by Franco Fornari, and the participants were Pier Francesco Galli, Virgilio Melchiorre, Mara Selvini Palazzoli, and Enzo Spaltro, with interventions by Leonardo Ancona, Enzo Codignola, Gianfranco Garavaglia, and Silvia Montefoschi.

Discussion

Danilo Cargnello

In the first place, I would like to congratulate you, my dear Galli, for such a clear and rich presentation. I am not a psychotherapist even if I do try my best to help the mentally ill I work with, but I would like to offer some clarifications to what I have heard.

You began with Freud and have recognized how in Freud there initially was a comprehensive alignment with the culture and the sense of culture of his time, and how he conceived of the human psychic organism in a totally identical manner to how biologists conceived of the biological organism itself. And there was ambition on his part as well: in fact he hoped that one day it would be possible to study the two organisms in the same way: let us say he believed in the philosophical premises of the era in which he lived and in which he articulated his immortal decision. The philosophy which Freud drew on was above all the philosophy of Johann Friedrich Herbart; not just Herbart's philosophy but, especially, Herbart's philosophy. But in Freud, despite this alignment with the ideas of his age, there is truly a novelty; there is the Freud who speaks about regression mechanisms, of the mechanisms—and I highlight this word—of projection, and so on, and there is the other Freud, infinitely greater, the truly immortal Freud: the Freud of transference. What does Freud's advent into psychotherapy mean? It means this: everything that happens originates from this relationship.

Now I would like to comment on what you said about philosophical doctrines that actually touch upon psychiatry and psychology, and in a certain sense, even psychotherapy: that these new vistas place their value in a value much closer to humanity than the one adopted by Freud in his time. I would therefore be cautious. This "I" which exists in the world, does not have intentionalities or functions or something added to it; when "I" is pronounced, it is already in the world, and is already intentionally with someone.

And if there is no one in front of him/her, he/she is with him/herself, or he/she ends up with him/herself, and this naturally is of great importance. So, I would like to urge you to consider these comments, even in terms of philosophy, if you will.

Pier Francesco Galli

I am fully in agreement with what Professor Cargnello has said, and if I had had more time at my disposal I would have expounded more fully on the topic than I have done today. However, my purpose was to illustrate clearly two facts: first, the impossibility and the absurdity of trying to speak today of a synthesis in psychotherapy. In psychotherapy we have progressed by leaps and bounds over decades. We must critically re-evaluate our ideas, establish an essentially critical outlook on what we have done, and on our future perspective, and then begin to reap the benefits of this; we have no idea when or how or if this synthesis might come.

As for Freud, my criticism was of the scientific variety, made in an attempt to demonstrate how attempts of varying significance were continually being made, and this we see even in the history itself of psychoanalysis; if we analyze moment by moment where the most emphasis was put in terms of therapeutic factors, we see how we have lived through, for instance, that period in which we thought everything was about interpretation, and in which interpretation was the therapeutic component *par excellence*.

This morning we talked about Rosen's technique: John Rosen⁷ administers care to patients. He cures them, has undeniable therapeutic successes, and naturally tries to explain all this with the technique of immediately interpreting the patients' behaviours. And it is not here, as we have seen, wherein the value of his therapy lies. At a certain point we come across Jacob L. Moreno, who uses psychodrama, and tries to explain the therapeutic factor in terms of catharsis. And then we have

⁷ John N. Rosen, *Direct Analysis: Selected Papers*. New York: Grune & Stratton, 1953.

Serge Lebovici who uses the same psychodrama, and says that it is not just a cathartic fact, but that even within the context of psychodrama, interpretation is the therapeutic key. Then we see that attention has been moved onto transference, and it becomes apparent that here, too, there is something that escapes us, but that helps us to care for others anyway. Thus I would say that the fundamental issue is only this: to try to point out, to isolate, and to scientifically study the various therapeutic factors.

Leonardo Ancona

I do not know if I will be able to express what I wish, because our good friend, Galli, has truly imbued the various topics with great depth and delicacy. I will try, however, because I would like to clarify the specific merit his talk has had. Such have been the challenges and the mental processes of the last few years that it has not been possible to write about it yet, and this is the reason why Galli has had to avail himself of his own thoughts.

Each of us, when we deal with a topic in psychology, psychiatry, or psychotherapy—and this has been one of the points that Galli has touched upon—brings a mental universe with him/her, a cultural universe with social reflections, of which it is truly hard to divest ourselves. Each of us sets up his/her own philosophy, in every action we undertake, and yet it is necessary to divest ourselves of this because, if it is true what Galli has reported—that progress in psychotherapy and psychiatry has been made precisely in the moment when we have made the effort to distance every structure and every premise of both a metaphysical and methodological nature from ourselves, in a structural sense, and this *has* brought progress—it therefore seems to me that the discussion to be had is this one: it is true that we are human; it is true that we have our principles, and we have to have them, however, we must set them aside in the field of research, of the application of psychology and psychiatry.

The progress made has taken place when we have understood this relationship (as Professor Cargnello has so appropriately reminded us) when one says that within the “I” there is always an inherent otherness, that an “I” cannot exist without the existence, as well, of an *alter*. This relationship is elusive. It eludes sight, measurement, and dreams. It is elusive because beneath every manifestation, there is always a subjective element and it is not possible to discern objectivity. And yet it’s there, it stabilizes everything, and the only way to identify it is precisely to find an instrument to help us grasp it, since we do feel and experience it.

It is only in this way that there exists the freedom to apprehend new realities, to feel that there exist human situations that are full of existential significance for us and for others, and to make progress by means of this new knowledge that cannot be formalized but still represents a true knowledge of human nature.

And why do I want to highlight this fact? Because I sincerely think that this is the only way to be able to draw us all together, and to make progress in the field of psychotherapy and psychiatry. However, we are systematically seeing that there are some who do not do this and this constitutes an injustice to those who are.

I do not wish to insert myself into personal issues. However, when we observe that there are colleagues, psychologists who have their own preconceived and yet, in their viewpoint, legitimate vision into those things expressed in a common language, and who at a certain point become irritated because they hear colleagues speaking another language, ones who say that realities exist which are not seen from their perspective, this truly hurts us and them, because we, in this moment, are stalling the progress of every science, and especially of our own discipline, a discipline that will surely be destroyed.

I do not wish to name names, but this has even taken place in this hall. We hope that it will stop happening, not because this is our Symposium—it is not mine or Galli’s—it is everyone’s Symposium—but because this should establish a code of mutual respect, of intellectual expansion, and also of education at this high level in which we move.

Pier Francesco Galli

I naturally have nothing to comment about what Ancona has said. However, he has reminded me of an episode that may be interesting in relation to a person with whom we are all acquainted. We all know *The Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl* by Madame Sechehaye⁸ and we all know about the life story presented in this work. At a certain moment, Madame Sechehaye, in order to be able to justify the therapeutic result she achieved before the colleagues within the environment from which she came—a rather orthodox psychoanalytic environment—felt the need to assert that the patient's situation was certainly not an Oedipal situation, because, during the course of the therapy, the use of Oedipal-type interpretations had not been necessary to resolve the situation. This therapist, who achieved a brilliant success, who had had a life experience and an immeasurable therapeutic one with her patient, felt the need to connect the validity of what she had done to that microscopic aspect.

Silvano Arieti

First of all I would also like to congratulate our friend Galli who, in a very succinct manner, has been able to give us the benefit of his profound thoughtfulness and his extensive studies. He has said a great deal and I cannot review everything in a few minutes. Much of what he said, in some way, matches my own thoughts and I am honoured to have such a distinguished ally.

For example, he has said that we have to accept even what we don't understand, and this, as Dr. Galli himself has said, in a certain way, applies to some of the things, which I have tried to say this morning⁹, to this concept of the primary relationship. We may not understand the phenomenon well, but just because we can't understand it, it does not mean we should exclude it.

And I would like to say that this can be said for almost every psychological concept. When we speak, for instance, about character, or personality, or even, the ego, the super-ego, the unconscious and so on, we are using terms that we cannot actually define in a scientific manner, terms that the Vienna Circle, to which Dr. Galli has alluded, would definitely reject, and not use, but how can one do modern psychiatry without these concepts? How can one not talk about emotions, feelings, personality, character, even if these terms are obscure? We need to use them even if they are imperfect. And on this point we are agreed.

We also agree on the point that an automatic choice of values always takes place upon adopting one type of therapy rather than another. And he has referred to the fact that existentialism was adopted first in Europe and then in the United States. This can be interpreted culturally—as a manifestation of the culture in the United States today. It is not only existentialism that has been embraced. For example, in the United States we also see a rebirth of religious sentiment: the churches, the synagogues, the temples of any religion that up until fifteen or twenty years ago were empty, are now filling up more and more. Why? It is possible that this acceptance of existentialism and of religion may have common ground, that there may be, for historical reasons, a need for mysticism and a need for things that do not seem rational at first glance. It is possible that there may be deeper reasons, which we cannot yet explain.

I also appreciated another concept that Dr. Galli has expressed, and he expressed it much better than I could in a conversation that I had yesterday with other colleagues. He does not like this term “art”, and he has said that what we opt for represents a certain technical spontaneity on the part of the therapist and I believe that this concept is valid and it immediately brought to mind what happens in some human activities. For example—this is only an example and I do not say that it is the most appropriate—when playing tennis we do not use science, we do not measure the angle or the ballistics where the ball will fall. We don't have the time to do this. And yet, we have the

⁸ Marguerite H. Sechehaye, *Journal d'une schizophrène*. Paris: PUF, 1950 (English translation: *Reality Lost and Regained. Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl. With Analytic Interpretation*. New York: Grune & Stratton, 1951; Italian translation: *Diario di una schizofrenica*. Preface by Cesare L. Musatti. Florence: Giunti Barbera, 1955). See also the 1968 movie by Nelo Risi *Diary of a Schizophrenic Girl*.

⁹ See Footnote 1.

technique and we're capable of playing tennis: this is a human activity which I cannot say is called art. It is a game in which some rational elements can be applied, because even when playing tennis, we use our cerebral cortex, but of course we use it in a different way from when, for instance, we read Kant or Aristotle. For this reason, I would like to say that this immediacy, this non-conscious awareness of which Dr. Galli has spoken may truly be an important concept.

I will now mention a point upon which I slightly disagree with Dr. Galli and perhaps this is because I didn't understand that well. It seems to me that Dr. Galli has a somewhat prejudicial attitude towards theory or theoretical formulations. For example: I think, as I have understood it, that he does not want theories about human nature. Now, it seems to me that despite the fact that these theories about human nature have been made in some way, or revoked or modified or transformed by subsequent theories, they have been very useful. This brings to mind Benedetto Croce's saying that, despite the fact that we build and tear down houses, we always need houses, from the time that humans left the jungle until today, and we will continuously build houses, even if at a certain point the houses must be destroyed if no longer good.

Dr. Galli cited Freud and others and, notwithstanding the fact that these theoretical castles may have now been changed, they have been absolutely necessary, in my opinion, in the search for methods that have had practical effectiveness. And even if all of these theories are eventually abolished, some progress has still been made, just as, for instance it has happened with philosophy: one philosophy follows after another, but it is possible to see signs of progress in all these different philosophical ideas.

It seems to me that Dr. Galli may have slightly contradicted himself. For example, when he has supported those methodologies with which I am very much in agreement: such as, with a minimum of information, we can develop hypotheses; this is also the method that we psychiatrists, beginning with Freud, have adopted, and when Dr. Galli accepts this method, he is acknowledging in some way the formation of theories. Because, what else is a hypothesis? There is a quantitative difference, but basically it is a type of theory.

Finally, I wish now to comment on what Professor Cargnello has said and to merge it with what Dr. Galli has said in reference to those cultural forces that act even unconsciously upon us. Professor Cargnello has spoken to us about alterity, certainly a very legitimate term and one which we should accept, but I want to add that this concept is also part of the culture of this century. In fact, it hasn't only emerged as an existentialist concept but in many other forms. I will cite a few: for example, in the psychology of George Herbert Mead¹⁰, who has nothing to do with existentialism, he, too, speaks to us about the "I" and the "me", and also in the psychiatry of Harry Stack Sullivan, who speaks about the relationships between the individual and others, about this form of alterity, and now, in England, the psychoanalysis of Ronald Fairbairn is acquiring more and more importance. Fairbairn seems to be a rising star in England. And what is he talking about? He is no longer talking about instincts but about this relationship with objects. For this reason, it seems to me that this, too, may be an expression of a natural force that becomes more and more conscious.

Pier Francesco Galli

I will answer as systematically as possible the questions put to me and comment on the observations of Professor Arieti. Firstly, on this remark of his: how can we not use certain concepts in modern psychiatry? This is most correct and it is indeed accepted on an operational basis. The problem is to be able to formulate these concepts in an operational way. I am not going to try here to do that, because, even though I have knowledge of the problem, these are definitions, in which, if one gets a word wrong, it is enough to totally change the meaning of the sentence: every word must have a very precise meaning.

¹⁰ George H. Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1934.

I have transcribed some examples, but I see that they were not among the most valid. However, in a volume of the *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, there is an article by Ellis¹¹, which precisely represents an attempt at operational formulations of psychoanalytical concepts: he starts with classical psychoanalytical definitions and tries to reformulate these same definitions in an operational manner.

In the United States, the philosophy of psychoanalysis had become the philosophy of living better, and at a certain moment I believe they realized that this was not the right route. Among other things, there was an article, called *L'ontologia sul divano* (Ontology on the couch) that came out in Italy in the journal *Il Mondo*, dealing specifically with this problem, and written by Alberto Arbasino, who was in the U.S. at that time. It spoke directly to the enormous influx that existential psychiatry was attracting there, and to how there was no demand within it for a new therapeutic element, but a demand for something more essential, which I can affirm that psychotherapy will never be able to provide: it is not the task of the psychotherapist to impart the meaning of life to another. The psychotherapist can impart the meaning of the relationship experience, which can enable the other to feel equal to all others, and seize from society his/her own opportunity to be.

I do not have any prejudices towards theories at all! I have prejudices towards the desire to theorize about the human being, and I feel that this is a situation which one cannot stay out of today. And this seems a valid position to me, because it is not a passive acknowledgement, but the active acknowledgement of a limit that stimulates and can inspire us towards research. As you, Professor Arieti, have expressed the concept—accepting a theory of the human being in terms of practical usefulness—is most correct; however accepting a theory in terms of the usefulness which we can get out of it, is like accepting, for example, a religion in terms of the usefulness that we can get out of it, and I do not know how possible this is and how it can allow us a European cultural approach.

I am not at all against theorizing. Rejection of theoretical constructs originated from the fact that these theoretical constructs then became binding and prevented scientific progress. Well and good if these constructs are formulated not as a theory of the human being, but as hypotheses, which we can use to move forward, provided that proving them is possible and that therefore they can be reintroduced into those canons that are the basis of scientific discourse. Therefore it is logical to make use of certain theories. It is logical to adopt these concepts, but always fully conscious of their limits. As great as the figure and genius of Freud may be, I do not personally feel that I can accept him as the metaphysician on whom to centre my life and my scientific research; his is a genius of which we can make use, but one which we can also put aside. At some point it is incumbent upon us to shatter some of the great man's myths, and then move forward along a path of research in an operationally valid way, as all of our colleagues in other research sectors do.

I believe that I have clarified my thought and it pleases me to have been given the opportunity to do so.

Elvio Fachinelli

I only want to express some perplexities that have been aroused in me, first during Dr. Galli's presentation and then during these last assertions of his. It seems to me that, in fact, we have now arrived at a sort of tediousness: Jung, Adler, Freud, and on and on, up until the very last, whom I must admit I do not know very well. I feel that instead we should actually look at something else. It seems to me that, deep down, in going back over the history of psychotherapy, Freud appears as one of the most careful in terms of theorizing. The referring of theory to concrete experience is constant in him. There does not exist—up until World War I—a genuine and true metaphysical Freud. There is almost always the scrupulousness of referring to the patient's concrete experience. And so I believe that this, for someone doing psychotherapy, could be a basic guideline.

¹¹ Albert Ellis, An operational reformulation of some of the basic principles of psychoanalysis. In: Herbert Feigl & Michael Scriven, editors, *The Foundations of Science and the Concepts of Psychology and Psychoanalysis*. In: *Minnesota Studies in Philosophy of Science*, 1956, Volume I, pp. 131-153. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1956. Internet edition in PDF: http://mcps.umn.edu/assets/pdf/1_5_Ellis.pdf.

I would say that this could also make it possible for us to explain a certain aspect of Freudian orthodoxy in terms of historicity, because it's easy to say "yes, in essence they are experts". We refer to the experts like one refers to Aristotle, and this I believe is true. However, in a certain way, isn't it possible that this type of prudence, this particular aspect of Freudian orthodoxy, represents cautiousness in the face of the rush to theorization? Because it seems to me that beyond the Freudian environment, there has essentially been a discussion about theories, while, on the other hand, on the strictly clinical level, Freud, at least to a certain extent, tried to control himself. I say this not in defence of Freudianism, but in an effort to provide an explanation of the phenomenon, in terms of historicity.

Another observation that I would like to make is on the use of the term "the existential approach to psychotherapy". Maybe it would be better to say phenomenological approach in that it restores the profound sense of this new achievement. In other words, it is not about a new metaphysics almost externally superimposed onto psychotherapy, but rather the ability of a particular method, of a different approach that is not part of a specific metaphysics, of a specific mode of operation that could be discussed and perhaps abandoned. In the context of a much-needed deepening of the psychotherapeutic experience—rather than pursuing, in fact, the vicissitudes of the preverbal relationship, which are actually inexpressible by their very nature—wouldn't it be more useful to analyze in greater depth the essentials of the relationship between therapist and patient, that is to say the language? In this sense, as in the experiment of the French analysts like Lacan, it could be interesting to focus precisely on the one-to-one relationship, on the analysis of language, and on what is actually unfolding in the psychotherapeutic relationship.

Pier Francesco Galli

It pleases me that Dr. Fachinelli, through his intervention, has given me the possibility to clarify an ambiguity that may have been created. Understanding historically this problem corroborates what I have said. First of all, there has been no attack on Freud the person, because if ever there existed a person who has proceeded with enormous scientific rigour, with extreme coherence, with the greatest capacity to reformulate hypotheses at which he had arrived, to abandon them and to formulate other ones throughout his life, that person was Freud. Therefore I have nothing to say about the person Freud—who surfaces in all his writings—nor on the scientific logic he uses. The attack I made was on the method, which made sense then. Today, however, it no longer makes sense for us to remain attached to it.

Let us look at another example: the attempt to scientifically envisage the therapeutic relationship had been made in terms of the use of free association, a technique borrowed from psychology or experimental psychology. This provided at the time a certain guarantee of an experimental nature, of legitimacy to psychoanalysis—an acceptable concept then, but not now.

Naturally, a rejection of theory does not mean a rejection of psychoanalysis; however it means an attempt—as I have said and repeat once more—to formulate in an operational way the concepts of psychoanalysis, to insert oneself into the modern scientific dialogue, and therefore to respect the requirements of a scientific concept as Herbert Feigl, for instance, presented them. I have copied them here: "Requisites for a scientific theory: consistent operations, logically defined with empirical intersubjective and repeatable premises, with the possibility of formulating laws or concepts of an elevated predictive capacity." It is necessary to be able to find these three elements in each of the concepts we use, and my criticism from an historical point of view was made precisely to show how all too often a certain type of scientific instrumentality has been used as an instrument of power in hindering the progress of science.

Here I have to make some practical references. If you take any psychoanalytic journal, including an Italian journal, and you go look at a bibliographical references, you will always find the names of the same authors over and over. This is not a criticism of psychoanalysis, which has always moved forward with extreme caution during periods of great creativity; however after the first twenty or twenty-five years of psychoanalysis this creativity almost disappeared. Just think, for

example, of what theoretical constraint had created the simple assertion that it wasn't possible to establish transference with a psychotic. We can see how much all this has made it possible to completely reformulate the same theory of approach to some basic facts of psychological theory, made by the same psychoanalysts. Therefore there are no criticisms of one group rather than another, or any attempts to criticize them, or lack of desire to understand them in historical terms. We *do* understand them historically! But may this understanding help us not to feel constrained with respect to the scientific approach.

This then was what I wished to express—no criticism on a personal level, and no criticism either of what was historically achieved. And I wish to say more: I think that a Freud, who could work with actual concepts of scientific research, would have definitely produced more than what psychotherapists living today could produce in this area.

With regard to non-verbal communication, we must clarify: if we adopt the term “sense of the relationship”, it is easy to say it but difficult to then define it, to know what we mean; therefore, one of the modes of operation we can use is that of studying it in terms of communications theory, which is not only limited to the verbal expression of communication. This is one of those expressions and a problem that has obsessed Jacques Lacan for decades... We can also date the educational development of Lacan back to the many contacts he had with a group of English philosophers (the theory of language, the phenomenological study of language etc.).

Lacan, in his seminars, analyzes Plato's *Dialogues* in great depth, bringing them into his seminar as a subject of study. However, in functional terms, in order to understand the essence of this relationship, referring solely to language is somewhat limited; it is necessary to say here whether it is scientifically valid, speaking of language, to wish to consider it purely on the formal level, or to wish to accept as valid the significance of the language interpretation, in other words, whether it is scientifically useful and operationally valid to use the interpretation or not.

Interpretation is a method we can adopt—associating certain contents with other contents. Is it right to use it or not? Phenomenologists naturally say no (not because of bias or rejection), and use another method. It is a matter of seeing whether, in order to grasp the essence of the psychotherapeutic relationship, it is necessary to accept just this method, or whether it is necessary to study precisely those non-verbal expressions, which we cannot say are impossible to study, because there is a great deal of knowledge on this subject. They may be difficult to study, but nevertheless they definitely represent a path to follow in order to understand the essence of what I continue to call “therapeutic factors”. We should face the problem of therapeutic factors, and be able to analyze all of them without being prejudiced in favour of one or the other.

Far be it from me to say that a single person must or can do this, because everyone, practically speaking, continuously needs frames of reference, and needs a threshold to serve as a safety threshold: no one has the ability to study all of these aspects, however all of these ways are valid for trying to grasp the essence of a phenomenon that no one is capable of defining. We shall see how difficult this effort will be, when we'll try all together to analyze what Martin Buber has said, Thursday evening¹². We talk about the relationship, the relationship in psychotherapy. Let us try to see what this relationship is. If we do not, then we are really using terms with a mystical significance. In my talk, I was trying to delineate a variety of fears that should be there, and to offer a series of critical analyses of all that has been done, so that they will allow us to face the issue with a sort of intellectual virginity.

In essence that was the nucleus of my address. Therefore far be it from me to fling criticisms, which would be stupid. So many obvious criticisms have been flung at psychoanalysis that it would be shameful to add any more.

¹² See Footnote 6.