

Enzo Bonaventura, 70 years later, and me, his granddaughter: an Israeli psychologist

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Abstract. Enzo Bonaventura is rarely mentioned in the Israeli Psychology circles and Israeli Psychologists are unfamiliar with his teachings although they were, and still are very relevant. His granddaughter Rachel Bonaventura, discovered the works of her grandfather after she discussed about him with professor David Meghnagi and Dr. Miriam Meghnagi. As his granddaughter and an Israeli clinical psychologist, Rachel Bonaventura, attempts to illuminate the man and the work of her grand father.

Key words: Enzo Bonaventura; Israeli psychology; Integrative psychology; David Meghnagi.

I was a Psychology student at Tel-Aviv university in the 1980s. Bonaventura was never mentioned. Colleagues of mine from other universities, including Jerusalem where he taught - never heard of his professional teaching either.

I figured it was because he had nothing to say that was still relevant. So I never bothered to read his book even though it was all the time in my library – until 2015 when Prof. David Meghnagi and his sister Dr. Miriam Meghnagi showed up: then the shame pushed me to read it...

So I did, and the experience was shaking. I searched for every piece of information I could find about him in Israel and the more I learned about him the more puzzling it became. I would like to share my experience with you.

My first amazement was to realize how and why he was “forgotten”. Looking for written material and personal memories I was surprised to discover how little there was.

During the 8 years he lived and worked in Jerusalem, alongside with his academic work he taught in a teachers’ seminar, wrote textbooks for teachers and educators, participated in committees for early-age school curricula and lectured across the country, in accordance with his belief that Psychology should be accessible to all.

After his death the department collapsed: The number of students declined drastically and eventually the classes were empty. For 6 years there were no academic Psychology studies in Israel until in 1956 two of his former students established a department at Bar-Ilan university, which was followed, a year later - by a new department in Jerusalem. Yet his ideas weren’t taught: not in either of these and not in any of the “younger” departments founded later in other universities and colleges.

Did he really have nothing to say? The answer might be found in the words of a professor of Experimental Psychology from *Tel-Aviv University* who investigated the development of Psychology in Israel. He referred to *La psicoanalisi* as a “deviation”, and in a private discussion said to me: “Bonaventura could have been a great man had he not “crossed the lines”, from “pure research” to psychoanalysis... So for the psychoanalysts he was “Not really one of ours”, not a practicing psychoanalyst, not a participant of the clinical discussions of the Psychoanalytic Society and therefore unworthy to listen to. For the experimentalists, once he looked into the psychoanalytic “immeasurable” issues he was no longer a “serious scientist”.

Looking at it today I believe the real reason to forget him was that he called both experimentalists and Psychoanalysts to deal with issues they preferred to deny.

As he wrote in *La psicoanalisi*:

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«Whatever might be the attitude of psychoanalysts, who disrespect Experimental Psychology, (...) Psychoanalysis will not lose from dealing with the results obtained through other methods and directions.
(...)

This will highlight the good and new in Psychoanalysis alongside with the principles that still need reassurance and those needing correction».

And:

«Psychological research must not settle for describing conscious phenomena as they appear in plain, shallow observations.

(...)

Science will not fulfill its destination; will not explain these phenomena without exploring the unconscious motives of these actions.

(...)

One must not ignore truths [such as our being unconsciously motivated by instincts] only *because they are unpleasant and unflattering* to our prestige. Emotional protest cannot be an argument in science».

These ideas were inconvenient to both parties. He went on with his truth, researched *Time and space perception-distortions*, a sphere in which the unconscious plays a major, tangible role - but can be inferred through objective observations. He taught what he believed, as unpopular as it was. But once he wasn't there it was much more convenient to forget him.

The second reason for my shock was realizing how relevant Enzo Bonaventura is today. My generation of Israeli psychologists “grew up” professionally in an environment of splits: beside the split between clinicians and experimentalists mentioned above, there was the split within the psychotherapies, between the evidence-based movement and the dynamic therapists: those who call for standardization and empirical evidence of the effectiveness of psychotherapy but failed facing compound psychopathologies and personality disorders – and those who claim, again – that therapeutic protocols based on empirical research are too “technical” and shallow, “incapable” of grasping the full meaning of the human experience and therefore are not “real” therapies, but offered long, expensive expeditions that are unfitting to many of our patients. So now we have three “parties”, all of them have good cases but can any one of them deny the contribution of the others?

Recently I heard a director of a public clinic facing endless waiting lists - saying to her staff: “We mustn't “waste time” on creating therapeutic alliances: we are technicians and our task is to solve problems as fast as possible”. One can imagine the expression on the faces of the Psychodynamic therapists in the room... Here again the answer is in the writings of Bonaventura:

«It is the difference between methods that contributes to progress in science.

(...)

Reality is more complex than any theory, and the scientist is not allowed to see it as if it were simpler. He must gather strength and give up the satisfaction coming from one theoretical building that is nicely defined, systematic and fitting to all its parts, but gives a false picture of the turbulent storm of life».

The controversy between these approaches can and should be held through open dialogue. Keeping in mind our goal, to understand the causes of human pain in order to seek relief and wellbeing – we cannot deny our patient a remedy that comes from “the other party”. We cannot afford to stick to one therapeutic method and ignore other methods when they are available and proven effective.

In recent years, the growing popularity of psychotherapy, the demand for it coming from less-privileged populations, and in Israel, as of 2015 the inclusion by regulation of mental health in the compulsory health insurances – created a need for a greater diversity of methods. We see nowadays increasing interest among therapists for combined techniques such as short-term psychodynamic therapies, Schema Therapy, hypnosis, etc., all designed to improve efficacy and efficiency by adding ideas from “other parties”.

80 years after *La psicoanalisi* and 70 years after my grandfather's death, It seems to me that this is the materialization of his vision: The world of Psychology is beginning to see what he saw and taught.

My third surprise was a personal one: I realized that without knowing it I was doing exactly what my grandfather thought. My basic education was Psychodynamic, but I found myself attracted to diversity, and along the years I studied Family therapy, various CBT methods, Buddhist Psychology, Mindfulness and Hypnosis, and all of them are part of my everyday clinical practice. How can they all “live together” in one head, in one session? There are many possible ways to combine them, naturally those are beyond the scope of this paper. But once we accept the basic principal that integration is possible and worthwhile – the road is paved. And again, reading my grandfather in 2018 I strongly believe this is what he tried to say.

Enzo Bonaventura lived in a painful world, torn by conflicts: a Jew in Catholic Italy, WWI, Fascist Italy from where he came, to the conflicted Palestine, WWII and finally the Israeli war of independence which he paid with his life. And also in the professional sphere – the conflict between philosophers and physiologists and between psychoanalysts and experimentalists. He dealt with it quietly, sticking to what he believed to be the answer, as he wrote in the ending of the 4th edition of *La psicoanalisi* – in March 1948, after the horror of the 1940s and a month before he was killed: “We undoubtedly have cruel and greedy instincts... But we can tame them... This power of self control and submission is also rooted in our nature. If we nurture, educate and strengthen this power of ours it can be a grand torch that will illuminate our ways”.

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**Dr. Rachel (“Helly”) Asheri Bonaventura, clinical psychologist,
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