



The Relevance of Neofreudian Thinking in the Light of Social Change

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Instinctual metapsychology dominated unrivalled during the first years of psychoanalysis. Freud himself, in one of his last works, insisted that the theory of instincts in one of the bases of psychoanalysis (1). More than once Freud repeated that the theoretical conclusions of psychoanalysis were continually tested by clinical empirical evidence. In particular, he maintained that the analysis of transference and resistances was the characteristic of the analytical process. On the other hand, theoretical constructs were subject to public discussion by scholars of psychoanalysis, which according to Freud was based on the canons of the scientific method. From this point of view, the Viennese scholar can be considered a genuine positivist and his enterprise is strong evidence of the attempt to bring the light of reason into the deep and obscure parts of the mind. He removed the mysterious aura surrounding the unconscious that he had inherited from the previous romantic movement (2). The history, however, of the analytical movement has now widely demonstrated that psychoanalytical knowledge, and its discursive process, did not obey the canons of scientific methods. This is true both in relation to the nomothetic process (that is, the research for the general laws of the working of the mind), and in relation to the idiographic process (that is, the reconstruction and research into the causes and reasons of a psychical illness in the individual case history). Reading the Freudian case histories themselves, one cannot avoid the impression that Freud searches for data, associa-

tions, childhood memories, details of dreams and so on, that favour an interpretation or an unconscious scenario which he already has in mind. In this respect, many authors have stressed how a particular metapsychology, reflects - crystallized in theoretical constructs - the personal psychopathology of its founder (3). AU this brings us to the conclusion, today more clearly than a few years ago, that psychoanalytical knowledge is not characterized by a free course of minds, but has obeyed and mainly still does, the so-called authority principles (4). Such a method of knowledge was typical of the beginnings of the history of science. A certain claim concerning reality was held true, only if, *sic et simpliciter*, it was approved by a recognized authority in a particular field of studies. This is leaving aside any public demonstration of such truth. The authority principle has dominated the course of the analytical movement for the main part of its history. From this it follows that any psychoanalytical knowledge that sets itself up as an alternative or as being simply different from the authority principle, that is, not approved of by the founder of a metapsychology (the instinctual one, in our case), can only express itself fully by creating an alternative movement. This, too, obedient to the authority principle.

Examples of this are known. Let us think of Jung, who never accepted the sexual determinism of neurosis, and Adler, who was interested in the problems of the working class, in the relationship of the individual within the social context, and in the problem of social inequalities



between men and women. Consider also the last two years of Ferenczi's life, Freud's favourite disciple. His reevaluation of real childhood trauma' in the determination of psychical disorders which appeared in his contribution to the XII International Congress of the I.P.A in Wiesbaden (5) cost him the accusation of madness by Freud's official eulogistic biographer, E. Jones. As we well know, we owe to Balint the true story of Ferenczi's last years.

These brief and essential references to the history of analytical knowledge, were indispensable to get to the heart of our contribution. This is represented by the current slow approach to the relational model by many outstanding orthodox analysts and to the reasons for this. We will refer mainly to the Italian situation. Only a few months ago, Marco Conci opportunely, noted with surprise that in A. A. Semi's recent treatise on psychoanalysis there is no trace of interpersonal psychoanalysis and its theoretical constructs (6).

In another recent article on the work of Fromm and the meaning of his theses, an outstanding orthodox analyst, Graziella Magherini, does not attribute this author any role in the analytical knowledge and ascribes tout court his work exclusively to sociological thought (7). Nevertheless we believe we see signs of outstanding orthodox analysts approaching the neo-Freudian and interpersonal thought. As you know neo-Freudian and interpersonal psychoanalytical thought is represented by the works of H.S. Sullivan, E. Fromm, K. Homey, Clara Thompson and Frieda Fromm-Reichmann. These scholars shared the conviction that the classic theory of instincts was mistaken in its premises concerning human motivations. They also thought that Freud's metapsychology underestimated the vaster social and cultural contexts in the genesis of personality disorders. The importance of the environment and of real primary relations both as mediators of social values and as basic organizers of the child's development became a basic conviction of these authors.

Levenson writes: „All object-relation theories claim somehow that the people who actually take care of the child are important and that the early mother-child relationship - preceding

speech - and the triangular family, all carry enormous weight in the child's future development (8). If these are common assumptions, the single contributions brought by these authors to the heterodox psychoanalytical theory were very different. The term 'neo-Freudian' actually seems appropriate especially for Fromm and Homey. This is because their original work stems from the commitment to revise some basic psychoanalytical concepts of the classical theory. As is known, Fromm built a complete critical theory of psychoanalysis: analytical social psychology. Horney limited herself to an albeit radical revision of many Freudian concepts. However Horney's movement itself had soon to succumb to the authority principle (9). Let us think, for example, of the dissension that came about during the last years between K. Horney and one of her principal students, A. Kelman.

For Fromm, on the contrary, the criticism of the authority principle as a form of knowledge was one of the pivots of his cultural elaboration. He constantly opposed any form of human dependency, and this includes psychoanalytical treatment. In *Von der Kunst des Zuhörens* he writes: „The one-sided emphasis on environmental elements provokes the liberating feeling in the patient of not being responsible for anything, since they are only what their parents have unfortunately made them. And all they can do is go into analysis where they can talk endlessly about what their parents did to them, and this does not necessarily entail a change.“ And further on: „Getting married, many men just go from mother to wife, and the wife or any maternal or authoritarian figure is chosen only as a substitute. In politics things are not greatly different: structures of dependency are built so that people develop a need for great personalities. At the most they change dependency. But what would be essential, that is, to become independent, never occurs. The problem of dependency is quite complex, not only in Freudian therapy, it emerges in all analytical therapies (10).

We have quoted only two passages from the countless references to the problem of dependency and the criticism of authority. Harry Stack Sullivan's contribution was quite different and original. Interpersonal psychoanalysis, which he founded, begins ab-origin as a global hypothesis.



It did not originate as an attempt to revise the Freudian theory, but rather as a structure with its own original foundations. While he accepted many Freudian hypotheses, Sullivan shifted attention from the individual seen as the main responsible of his / her psychical dynamics, to the particular relationships that are created between people and, most of all, with people he feels are meaningful. As we know, Sullivan defines personality as the relatively stable configuration of the typical interpersonal relationships of a given individual. It is apparent here that the pivot of analytical knowledge moves from the Oedipal authority principle to the principle of interactive dialogue -in Sullivan's terminology- to the principle of consensual validation. The field of psychoanalysis moves to the nature and meaning of the relation between the two participants. This has brought about the re-assumption of responsibility on the analyst's part in building a certain kind of relationship with the patient. The immediate consequence of this is a complete capsizing of the relationship between theory and analytical practice in favour of the latter. From clinical observations, elements of knowledge on a given patient can be built. And the conclusions that can be drawn are related to a given observer. We emphasize here that the authority principle appears to be completely overturned.

Neo-Freudian and interpersonal thought has had a historic course parallel and independent from the one of orthodox psychoanalysis. In the last few years it has still been extremely difficult to find authors of neo-Freudian and interpersonal thought quoted in the references of the works of orthodox analysts. Nevertheless, orthodox psychoanalysis, thanks to the long bridge represented by the object relation theory and partly by Self psychology, is slowly beginning to communicate with neo-Freudian and interpersonal thought.

We will briefly mention here what M. Gill stated at the William Alanson White Institute in a Congress on the theme of the levels of participation of the analyst in the intrapsychic and interpersonal approach.

„Having been trained as a strict Freudian, with a more or less impulsive refusal of Sullivan and the interpersonal writings, I was unable to discuss the relationship between

my stances and those of Sullivan and other interpersonalists. I told myself that I had to study these writings, even though I might risk losing the illusion of originality“ (11).

And after studying these authors we find M. Gill among the representatives of interpersonal theory of relationship.

Apart from this anecdote, we would like to recount some considerations made by the psychoanalyst Luciana Nissim Momigliano, training analyst and supervisor at the SPI, taken from the essay *Irriverent Thoughts for a Congress*, held at the last SPI Congress, in Rimini, at the beginning of October 1994 and summed up by her in an interview in the *Unità* of 5 October 1994. Here Momigliano states the need of dealing with various criticisms that appeared in the press, believing that it is better to listen rather than scornfully close one's ears.“ She criticizes the official psychoanalytical institution defining it „closed and arrogant, embedded in the snobism of the elect people, that by the word of the prophet derives its legitimacy to speak“ And she goes on: „In comparison to Freud's times, a great importance is now set on the psychological capacities of the child, who is observed as acting person from the first days of his/ her life, and to countertransference, as participation of the analyst in the setting.“ And further „We do not consider most of Freud's theories valid and we recognize that some of his conclusions owe more to Freud's character than to what he was really able to verify with his patients. Nevertheless, and unlike others, we feel we still have a bond of loyalty with that old gentleman who turned the world upside down.“

And, almost to justify her tenacious adherence to Freud's theory, she adds that „the cult of personality, the blind faithfulness to a cause which is valued more than individuals and crushes them, the expelling of the heretics, are part of the tragedy of this century and were not characteristics of the psychoanalytic movement alone“. She recognizes that: „In America, Sullivan and the culturalists, and also Fromm and Ferenczi are revalued. They were concerned with analyzing man in his social context and they anticipated the relational trend as far back as the Forties. But at the time they were shown the door.“ Nissim Momigliano, in the above



mentioned interview, reformulates various technical concepts (for example, minor importance of interpretations, importance of the here and now of the relation) in such a way that they can be superimposed on neo-Freudian interpersonal thought.

Another orthodox analyst, in the recent article „Must we still use the couch?“ which appeared in the September 1994 issue of the S.P.I. official Journal, writes: „...The rift between theory, technique and theory of technique appears more clear cut, and the couch seems to acquire the quality of an old piece of family furniture, a very valuable antique which witnesses our roots and our feeling of belonging, but which nonetheless raises many doubts on its practical usefulness“. And further: „The hypothesis [is] that adding a pair of eyes to the „third ear“ is more appropriate to a relational model of the analytical process and allows us to see better (concretely and metaphorically) the occurrences of such a relationship...“ (12). We could continue to quote but we now want to go on to the basis of our contribution, that is, the reason for this change of attitude. We can trace three main motives:

- 1) A greater attention to the clinical happenings as a consequence of the depletion of the explanatory, or rather interpretative power, of the instinctual model.
- 2) Scientific research made in the field of developmental psychology, with particular reference to the early mother-child interactions during the first year of life, have confirmed in a public and independent way the greater soundness of the relational model, as more suitable to describe the phases of development of personality.
- 3) Current changes in society have brought about the emergence of a personality pathology of a relational kind that can be better understood through the neo-Freudian and interpersonal model.

Given the general theme of this Congress we shall dwell only on this third point. E Fromm himself stresses the changed focus of analytical theory when he writes: „I am not concerned, as most therapies are, with the question „Why have I become the way I am now?“ but rather that the patient, in a sort of psychological x-ray,

asks himself „Who am I?“ Until we only ask ourselves why we have become so, we still do not know who we are“ (10). It seems to us that here Fromm stresses in an essential and efficient manner the psychopathological characteristics of the disorders that are currently emerging, that is, disorders of identity. To this end we would like to underline some tendencies of the social change and its effect on individual character formation, recently stressed in a study on the subject by A. O. Ferrario, professor of psychobiology at the University of Rome (13:), referring mainly to the situation in Italy. The possible increase of the „hetero-directed“ personality as a consequence of the assertion on the social level of values linked to the image and consumption is one of the current tendencies. C. Lasch in a recent study (14) referring to American society, also insists on the same conclusions. He writes: „... the fantastic production of images that model our perception of the world, not only (encourage) a defensive contraction of the I, but also confuse the boundaries between the I and the surrounding environment. As the Greek myth reminds us, it is exactly the confusion between I and Not-I, and not „egoism“ that describes Narcissus' condition. The minimal self or Narcissistic self is first of all an I which is uncertain of its contours, which aims to reproduce the world in its own image or to merge with it in a happy communion. Today's very common preoccupation with the „identity“ partly reveals this difficulty in defining the boundaries of individuality.“ And further. „The substitution of a trustworthy world of lasting objects and feelings with another world filled with flickering images (makes) it ever more difficult to distinguish between reality and fantasy“. There is no doubt that this kind of social environment stimulates, often in a pathological sense, the individual personality aspects that have their roots in those developmental phases in which the I of the child exist in that It reflects itself in that of the mother. It is here that the child falls into that tragic misunderstanding of the typically Narcissistic condition so that he/she mistakes dependence on the mother, who satisfies his/her needs the moment they appear, for his/her own omnipotence. In a society which is based on image, in which nobody needs to be real, these Narcis-



sistic aspects can be more easily amplified. In this respect the studies on the influence of television programs on the development of children's personalities and its consequences relative to a possible pathology in the adult play a particular role. Although in Italy researchers have begun to take an interest in the problem only during the last few years, a recent account by John Condry concerning studies made in the last 40 years (15) on this subject mainly in America, the need to deal with the problem is made evident. This for the child's natural difficulty to „tell fact from fiction“ with the possibility that the influence of television strengthens the Narcissistic aspects of the personality. Another tendency of today's consumer society is given by the so-called „phenomenon of diffusion of authority“. Young people do not acquire existential values by intragenerational transmission, but often directly from the media. Thus, we find a sort of invisible „anonymous educator“, with whom a direct personal dialogue is impossible. Thus the authority, the source of values to be accepted, disputed or worked through, is present everywhere and nowhere, in an invisible and anonymous way. Obviously we are describing the characteristics of mass society which seem to us more connected to the development of identity disorders. It is apparent that in the treatment of this kind of disorder, which is basically characterized by the lack of genuine feelings, the need to project a self image externally, the tendency to be seductive and manipulating in interpersonal relations and, last but not least, by depression and feeling of emptiness, the explanatory power of Freudian metapsychology is clearly insufficient. On the contrary the neo-Freudian and interpersonal theory, by focusing on the vicissitudes of the relation between Self and the representations of the Self and between the Self and others, lends itself more as a model for understanding these forms of psychopathology.

In short, the relationship between psychoanalysis and social changes, mediated by the „imperfect copy“ of the mother-child relationship the analytical relationship-, has further stimulated, in different analytical groups, the focusing

on relationships as the source of the possible mystification of individual reality. This bears witness once again to the validity and the intellectual relevance of the ideas and insights of authors who refer to neo-Freudian and interpersonal thought.

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