

Psychology and the social system: a story of irrelevance

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FIRST PART: AN HISTORICAL APPROACH

Italian psychology today: a critical analysis of the state of the art

The contribution of Italian psychologists to the development of the social system has been and still is of negligible importance. Psychology has not been able or willing to help solve the problems of living together that affect social relations: in the family, in manufacturing and service companies, traffic, hospitals, the services of the public administration, school and university, in transport as well as in relations between the citizens and the political world. The psychologists in our country – characterized by their number which most people consider exaggerated – mainly work in the psychotherapy field, dealing with mental disorders or the behavioral problems of single individuals and providing their services in communities for the seriously mentally ill or for drug-addicts, taking care of children or less often disabled adults, as staff of the many cooperatives that work in assisting and “keeping an eye on” the socially excluded. Such exclusion is systematically marked by the irreversible nature of the disorder or disability. Once this is accepted, it would be important to help these unlucky people to adapt to the context and recuperate their relational resources. However, the “therapeutic” goal, pursued by the majority of psychologists, makes it frustrating and humiliating to work with irreversible problems, thus creating a situation of underemployment where the psychologist’s presence is reduced to mere practical “care”, carried out randomly, with no prospects of professional development. The number of psychologists that work in the health context, especially in mental health, is shrinking and too often they confuse their role with that of the psychiatrist, subscribing to the psychotherapeutic intervention. Instead of providing a specific psychological function, they have fallen into line with intervention models borrowed from different styles of psychotherapy, where they are also under the constraint of not being able to use psychiatric medications, the fundamental and irreplaceable means of enabling seriously mentally ill patients to survive in their context of life.

Psychotherapy and care, activities mainly performed in the area of social exclusion and marked by an intervention aimed at the single individual, seem to account for almost all the presence of psychologists in our social system.

For psychologists, the problems of finding work are often dramatic, and even more so those caused by their frequent underemployment, in the sense of being engaged in low quality work of scarce psychological relevance. In my opinion, this does not derive only from the current economic climate; it has been a constant characteristic of the psychologist’s lot in our country since even before the “crisis” which officially began in 2008 and which is still underway. The reasons for this lack of importance must be sought in the theoretical and methodological weakness of what is offered by Italian psychology, incapable of giving the profession a solid foundation and of establishing the psychologist’s specific contribution to solving the problems of the social system.

We will come back to this later, keeping in mind that every science that has given rise to a profession with a solid scientific basis, from medicine to economics, engineering, chemistry or pharmacology, has been able to deal with problems concerning not so much, or not solely, the single individual, isolated and cut off from relations with his context, but rather the problems that social groups encounter in the social system. From epidemics to inflation, from urban planning to the use of anti-malaria drugs, the history of the sciences and professions has been strongly marked by a significant contribution to solving the problems of living together. It is in this range of problems, which we reductively call “social”, that in my opinion we will find the cause of the irrelevance of the psychology profession.

I think it is useful to look back at the recent history of Italian psychology, to identify the theoretical and methodological roots that preceded the psychology profession and are associated with it in our country.

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For this purpose, we will re-examine an interesting article written by Luciano Mecacci on the recent history of psychology in Italy. This re-reading will reflect the original but will give some critical comments about its reconstruction of the fortunes of psychology in our country.

December 2012 saw the publication in the *Giornale Italiano di Psychology* (GIP) of an article by the historian of psychology, Mecacci, entitled: “Fifty years of psychology in Italy”. It was an important contribution, and not only for the polemical approach of the argument put forward by the author. Some points in his argument will at times be supported in this article while others will be analyzed critically, and an alternative interpretation offered.

According to Mecacci, the last fifty years of Italian psychology can be divided into four broad periods which we will examine in order, giving each period an ironic title.

I – “They were three hundred, they were young and strong...”

It was the first half of the 1900s, the age of the great masters of Italian psychology: Gemelli, Musatti, Metelli, Massucco Costa, Canestrelli, Canziani, Marzi, Meschieri and a few others. Their work was marked, according to Mecacci, by submission to the harsh criticism of psychology made by neo-Idealist philosophy inspired by Croce and Gentile, a philosophy that had no hesitation in relegating psychology to the level of a pseudo-science. The debate with idealist and historicist philosophy influenced psychological studies, which explains why the masters mentioned above had little or no interest in behaviorism and neo-positivism, which in Mecacci’s view were the basis of psychological epistemology in places outside Italy.

The outcome of this entrenchment of Italian psychology within the “philosophical” debate with the neo-idealists was extremely important. It should be remembered that this entrenchment, which began in the thirties and forties, persisted into the sixties in some of its significant aspects.

Mecacci states:

“First of all, in order to assert its scientific autonomy – in a context that demoted it to an ancillary or pseudo-science – scientific psychology had debated with the philosophical positions of Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile, cutting itself off from the discussions underway about the epistemological foundations of psychology. The most obvious example was the total absence of behaviorism on the Italian scene, where behaviorism was not to be seen in the simplistic, popularized form of the behavior of a rat or a pigeon in conditioning programs, but the underlying epistemological debate, the theoretical terms of which came from Rudolf Carnap’s neo-positivism and from the operationalism of modern physics.

At the same time, however, Francesco De Sarlo, Sante De Sanctis and Musatti had chosen Croce and Gentile’s neo-idealism as their theoretical interlocutor, while Gemelli’s theoretical reference point was none other than Thomas Aquinas.

The result was that Italian psychology became entrenched in the defense of an empirical and philosophical approach that prevented it from gaining a full and timely understanding of the epistemological meaning of various theoretical transformations in contemporary psychology, starting from the evolution of behaviorism into cognitivism.

The second point was the particular way Italian psychology approached the relation between theory and praxis in psychology. It is well known that the majority of the most innovative European and American psychologists of the early 20th century were fully aware of the need to establish a psychological theory that contained both a description and explanation of psychic processes and the models of response to the psychological demands made by individuals and by society.

For most of the Italian psychologists of the early 20th century this direct link between theory and practice was not tackled as a fundamental conceptual point for psychology that was determined to free itself from the influence of philosophy” (pp. 730 – 731)

According to Mecacci, therefore, it was the slavish interlocation with neo-idealism philosophy that created a barrier to the relation between theory and practice in psychological research.

From the early 1900s Italian psychology essentially ignored any possible relation between theory and practice, becoming entrenched in a debate designed to salvage the scientific foundations of psychology which moreover seemed indifferent and –as we shall see – hostile to any possible interest in problems that the context might present to it.

This statement cannot be generalized, if we consider some important exceptions. One exception, for instance, is the school of Gemelli. Perhaps due to his faith in Thomas Aquinas, Gemelli argued fervently for psychology's independence from physiology, medicine and philosophy. Just as an example, he saw a close relation between psychology and labor issues such as studies on reaction times and their predictive power in certain pragmatic tasks like piloting planes. Gemelli's studies gave rise to a psychology of labor: it was his school that hypothesized, and demonstrated experimentally, the importance of the psychological human factor in working behavior especially in the area of workplace safety. Gemelli's experiments in the psychophysiological laboratory during the first world war led to his being commissioned by the Italian air-force to study the influence of certain psychological variables on the performance of pilots. This led to the method of selecting trainee fighter pilots. These studies were contemporary, though different in approach, to the north American studies on "army alpha" and "army beta" tests for the selection of US military personnel participating in the same first world war.

However, it is still true (regardless of the reasons that can justify it) that Italian psychology in the first decades of the 20th century was marked by a complete split between theory and practice. This split persisted until the 1960s. On this point it must be remembered that the first psychology graduates emerging from Padua and Rome numbered no more than three hundred. Two thirds of these psychologists were engaged in research or teaching at universities, in the few psychology chairs in degree courses in Letters and Philosophy, while less than a hundred worked for ENPI (National Organization for the Injury Prevention) set up in 1932 and closed down in 1975, when the Health System was put in charge of workplace safety. In the early sixties, in the only non-university organization in Italy, ENPI had forty branches employing psychologists working on the prevention of workplace injuries; these psychologists based their work on knowledge that came largely from the studies carried out by Gemelli's school. It therefore seems that it was only the Institute of psychology at the 'Cattolica' University of Milan, run by Gemelli until 1959, that concentrated on issues and research in a psychology that focused on its operative function within the broader social system. We will shortly see the reasons for the isolation of the Cattolica and the hostility of Italian academics towards all "applied" forms of psychology studies. But let us now look at the second period presented by Mecacci in his reconstruction of the last fifty years of psychology in our country.

2 – Stylish research and the aristocracy that advocates "single variety" psychology

To confirm the argument of the split between theory and practice in psychological research, Mecacci posits a second stage of psychology in our country: a stage dominated by the school of Padua-Trieste, linked to the gestalt theory and the specific features that marked it until the threshold of the 21st century.

"We must now make an observation, which deserves quite a different analysis and discussion, on the impact of certain theoretical and methodological choices by the school of Padua-Trieste not only on the development of psychological research but also on the general structure of psychology as a university subject. I am referring to the gradual expansion of the university teaching connected to a few centers, basically Padua-Trieste, Bologna, Milan's 'Cattolica' and to a lesser degree Rome and the 'Statale' in Milan. These centers expressed different theoretical orientations, different conceptions of the relation between psychology as research and psychology as application, but essentially revolved around an image of Italian psychology that had its fulcrum in pure research – with an often self-referential and aristocratic representation – in everything that was studied by the Padua-Trieste school." (p. 733)

Mecacci seems immune to the influence that the school of Padua-Trieste undoubtedly exerted over university research and mentions the disdain that its representatives felt for anyone not dedicated to "pure" research, namely research uncontaminated by the desire for application in response to the problems of the social system. But once again it must be pointed out that not all of Italian psychology took this approach.

In fact, once again, in this scenario outlined by the historian of psychology, a distinction must be made for the position of the 'Cattolica' of Milan, one of the very few universities of the time committed to training specialists in psychology: specialists in social psychology, in childhood psychology or in clinical psychology, serving as psychologists throughout the local area. Some of Gemelli's students, who had positions at the 'Statale', at Naples and at the 'Cattolica', had worked hard to open Centers of Scholastic and Professional Orientation: the Milan provincial authorities managed about fifteen of them, the Milan municipality had invested heavily in the activity, but also in Padua, Verona, Bergamo and other northern cities there were facilities where psychologists offered their competence in order to facilitate scholastic adjustment and job training for the young. The debate over the meaning of psychological research was very

heated, as was the debate on the role of psychology – rather than the role of the psychologist – and on the contribution that psychology could make to a cultural system undergoing profound changes. This was the 1950s and 60s: motivational research and the influence of the dynamics of motivation on the behavior and attitudes of consumption (both of goods and culture), studies on social class conflict, research into group dynamics in scholastic and business training, the influence of unconscious emotional dynamics in organizations, were among the contributions that psychologists made in various areas of the social system. It should also be remembered, on the other hand, that the number of psychologists present in our country was limited. As we said, the number of Italian psychologists – in the nineteen-sixties and the early seventies – was stalled at a few hundred. There were great cultural differences between these psychologists: the debate on the contrast between “pure” research, seen as the psychologist’s sole activity that was prestigious and acceptable, and applications of psychology in activities described by the purists as degrading and humiliating, became extremely heated and involved harsh clashes which had repercussions for instance on the legitimacy of the university career of psychologists doing research in the applied field of activities. Today one can laugh at such diatribes, in view of the professional situation of psychology. But it was those conflicts that would give rise to the muddled development of psychology training and of the psychology profession involving degree courses in psychology promoted and run by the very universities that had adamantly maintained that the profession of psychologist was an impossibility.

3 – Todos caballeros!

We have now reached the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies, with the youth protest movement that at the time spread through Europe – starting from France – and the United States, to then become a revolutionary movement in many developing countries in vast backward areas of the world.

In Italy it arrived a year later and had a special impact on psychology.

In 1971, degree courses in Psychology were started.

Let’s see how Mecacci describes this:

“In the 1960s there were some important changes in Italian society and culture that were also reflected in a new image of psychology. It must be said at the outset that Italian psychology found increasing space in the Italian society and culture of the 1960s, thanks not so much to the results obtained in the few university research centers in existence, but more to the debate that exploded on issues of more general interest, relating both to the care for the individual soul and to social and political problems (culminating in the protest movements between 1968 and the early 1970s). It was in this broader and more complex scenario that a process of legitimization of psychology was triggered, which also affected the fortunes of psychology on the institutional level (with an almost momentous change, as we shall see, in 1971 with the establishment of degree courses in psychology).

First of all, the philosophical and ideological barriers to psychology as the study of man began to fall. The «venomous» doubts of the past, expressed by Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile and their followers towards psychology lost their polemical sting before a panorama featuring both new philosophical directions and penetrating analyses of psychic life provided by literature and the cinema. In philosophy there were essentially two innovations introduced in the debate on psychology (I am referring not to the strictly academic debate carried on in university lecture-halls but to the debate that raged in a broader cultural context). On the one hand, the spread of phenomenology, thanks to Enzo Paci and his school and to the magazine «Aut Aut», the circulation of authors like Ludwig Binswanger, Karl Jaspers and Eugène Minkowski, and the development of an independent group of phenomenological psychologists and psychiatrists (from Danilo Cargnello to Bruno Callieri to Franco Basaglia). Besides the rejection of mechanistic theories of the psychological processes, which was part and parcel of the phenomenological line of thinking, there was interest in the individual dimension of pathological behavior that had been ignored by classical psychiatry and by psychoanalysis, both of which aimed at formulating general trans-individual models.

On the other hand, there was a real explosion of interest in the historical-political aspects of psychoanalysis in an intense dialogue with Marxism. Musatti (1976) stated that it was impossible to reconcile psychoanalysis and Marxism, since they were two conceptions of man that differed from the background philosophical tradition. However, since Marxism and psychoanalysis styled themselves two «Copernican revolutions» in their fight against the conditioning of individual psychic life (whether that conditioning was

of social or psychological origin), they found an understanding in their common purpose. A key book in this debate was Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* after its translation into Italian in 1964.

From another viewpoint, Italian culture became aware of the deeper themes of contemporary psychology under the influence of the works of writers and film directors. It should be noticed that it was a particular orientation of psychology, namely psychoanalysis, that was so successfully depicted in books and films that it was identified with the whole of psychology (and the psychologist with the analyst, associated with his ever-present couch)". (pp. 733 – 734)

This analysis tries to credit psychology with something that Italian psychology was not able to understand, and even less, to control. During the protest movement there was a merely marginal interest in psychology and psychologists were certainly not the protagonists of an event that in fact had, in its front line, the psychiatric movement and all those supporting that movement in the name of the revolt against authoritarianism, social exclusion, discrimination, established power, conformity and the values dominating the social order.

"In the 1960s there were important changes in Italian society and culture ...". How can one not agree with this statement? Indeed, but what changes were pursued in the 1960s, and what role did psychologists have, what was the role of psychology in these changes?

It was undoubtedly a cultural movement that aimed to denounce any kind of subjection to "established" authority, designed to highlight the mystifications that the establishment used towards diversity. Think of the mad, the handicapped, women, children, all kinds of immigrants, blacks (in the USA or in France), the elderly, the young and their subjection to scholastic, military, political, cultural power and to the power of bosses and trade-unions. The left was caught unawares by this revolutionary surge and had great problems regaining the upper hand in a movement that was hard to control. The right seemed to disappear when faced with the convincing radical protest that demystified its principles of order and conformist authority.

Italian academic psychology kept its distance from the movement, although a few scattered academics did play some role in the events of the period, due less to the fact that they were psychologists than to the fact that they belonged to the left. Those who really participated in the movement were, as we have said, a great many Italian psychiatrists, who steered the movement in its denunciation of psychiatry as "custody", as expressed in the psychiatric hospitals, or in more realistic terms, "asylums". The fight against asylums and the pressure to bring about the closure of psychiatric hospitals, were aspects that were not confined to the psychiatric movement: they became an emphatic, beguiling symbol of the emancipation sought for all kinds of diversity. It is important to stress that it was a psychiatric movement, solely psychiatric, which attracted young people involved in psychology: they were attracted more by the movement and its pragmatic goals than by the psychiatric culture, caught up in political demands and diluted in the drift towards Marxist sociology or philosophy.

The movement's pragmatic goals took the place of any professional concern or proposal; psychiatry was transformed into "anti-psychiatry", based on the repudiation of a science that had long been at the service of established authority to carry out the discrimination and control of diversity. There was no need for "anti-psychology" because in fact there was neither a science of psychology nor a psychology profession compromised by power, to oppose.

It is significant that in the text quoted, Mecacci says "phenomenological psychologists and psychiatrists", naming Cargnello, Callieri and Basaglia, as precursors of the movement of '68. In actual fact, they were three psychiatrists, one the head of the Sondrio psychiatric hospital, another was a neurologist prior to becoming a psychiatrist, and the third was well known for running the psychiatric hospitals of Gorizia and Trieste and for signing Law n° 180 of 1978, sanctioning the closure of the Italian psychiatric hospitals. Therefore, none of the phenomenologists was a psychologist. I underline this because the absence of psychologists, especially of academic psychologists, from the psychiatric movement of the sixties was astonishing. They were absent not only from the psychiatric movement, but from the whole protest movement. It was a significant cultural absence, insofar as it was impossible not to take a stance if one belonged in some way to the culture of the time.

The protest movement of those years also served to show the cultural irrelevance of a science that had become entrenched in studies on perceptive invariance that rejected any approach to individual differences in perception, just as they excluded any link with personality factors that could also anchor the processes of perception to the social, cultural and political reality.

In other countries, above all in those of Anglo-Saxon and American culture, the connections between perception and personality had been under study for some time. Ever since the second world war these connections had been decisive in the development of clinical psychology. Italy was anchored to research and culture of an academic kind, a real millstone for the development of psychology. On the other hand, let us not forget that fascism had excluded psychology – as often happens in dictatorships – and had taken the country to war “on the wrong side”.

But let us return to the years of protest. Mecacci recalls the protest movement’s interest in psychoanalysis. But psychoanalysis in those years had nothing to do with psychology and psychologists. Admittedly, some psychologists since the end of the fifties had shown interest in psychoanalysis, but academic psychology was totally resistant to Freudian theories and to the contribution of psychoanalytic studies to the understanding not only of the individual’s inner world, but also of social relations. In short, the protagonists of the protest period were many intellectuals, sociologists, physicians and in particular psychiatrists, architects, philosophers, writers, film-makers, and above all young people keen to usher in a “new world”. Yet again, psychologists were on the fringes.

There were a few exceptions, namely the psychologists that had trained in France and brought back to our country the research and knowledge connected to psycho-sociology. At that time, and in my view this is an important point, some areas of Italian society were trying to understand the dynamics characterizing the global protest movement opposing the social system. This was a demand that had largely originated from entrepreneurs, business managers and some trade union figures. It was addressed to specific well-known professional psychologists, some of whom were academics at the university of Rome and the ‘Cattolica’ of Milan, while others were professionals who had trained with these academics. The demand envisaged a psychosocial intervention, conducted by the psychologists, in organizations in crisis due to the rapid, unstoppable process of obsolescence of the old modalities of organizational management.

The psychosocial intervention and the work inside organizations gave rise to a deep divide between those psychologists who saw leftwing militancy as the only possible professional dimension, while remaining anchored to elite “pure” research, and other psychologists, a small but active minority, who worked very hard to develop a professional theory of technique that could analyze the functioning of organizations and modify its dynamics. The work of the latter group laid the theoretical and methodological foundations for a change in the management of organizations in Italy: a profound transformation was triggered in the relation between the staff structure and the trade unions, and both technical and management competences were finally valorized in a systematic way. Perhaps for the first time in our country, it became clear that the workers were the most important resource for an organization, and this transformed staff management into the “development of resources”. At the same time, though more slowly, there emerged the focus on the client and new ways of relating between the organization, be it in manufacturing or services, and the customer/market with which the firm worked. This transformation of the world of work lasted a short time. The change in direction of the economy, which in the mid-nineties was suddenly transformed into cynical, brutal financial management, roughly swept away this new way of managing the organizational process. But the basis of that transformation is still operating in the country’s organizational system.

Meanwhile, in Padua and Rome, degree courses in psychology were set up. This initiative was designed to create ambiguous professional figures, who were initially supposed to be almost auxiliaries to the anti-psychiatry movement in support of the fight to close the psychiatric hospitals. This role of assisting psychiatrists was the only professional outlet that could be thought of by those academic psychologists who had always loathed and detested a “psychology profession” unless it was that of the elegant researcher immersed in laboratory problems; only by renouncing his “scientific vocation” could such a researcher accept the attempts to professionalize psychology as practiced by the few psychologists in contact with the demand of the social system. The Psychology degree courses were introduced in the universities of Padua and Rome, where there was no tradition of professionalizing psychology. One must wonder – and there is still no clear answer to this question today – the reason for this venture designed to transform psychology into a university “faculty” with a professional scope, without in even the slightest way specifying, defining or outlining the possible professional role that was supposedly being introduced with this operation. It was an operation that from the beginning recruited crowds of students carried along by the wave of hope that the protest movement had placed in the human sciences. It was an operation that on top of the vagueness of the training goals due to the fact that the desired competences were not specified, added the recruitment - as teachers - of numerous psychotherapists, psychoanalysts and systemic-relational therapists with medical training and absolutely no psychological competence, to complete the classical academic psychological

training (general, childhood and social psychology) with subjects designed to give a general outline of the practice of psychotherapy. The psychology degree courses in Padua and Rome produced a great number of psychology graduates who did not possess the basic theoretical and methodological knowledge to be able to appreciate the contribution that psychology research had until then made to the understanding of some aspects of psychic life, in particular concerning processes of perception. These psychologists at the same time had no training in psychotherapy, not having been taught a specific psychotherapeutic practice. Before the start of the psychology degree courses, there had been, as we have said, only a few hundred Italian psychologists. Just a few years later there were already many thousands and in the forty years of the psychology Faculties' existence, there are now over a hundred thousand. We know that if we want to discuss the psychology profession in our country, the problem cannot be reduced to a mere number. However, the fact remains that there has been a huge increase in the number of psychologists, which must necessarily be related to the transformation of the role of psychology in Italy.

Mecacci says that psychology was legitimized, in being recognized as a science, thanks to psychoanalysis, that is, thanks to the interest of a large part of Italian culture in Freud's ideas.

I do not agree with this reading of the events. As I said before, from the sixties onwards, psychoanalysis had a great influence on Italian cultural circles, but above all it affected the development of French, English and American culture. This literary, artistic and general cultural movement had very little impact on psychology, and more specifically on the psychology training system in our country.

The psychoanalysis that was talked about in the sixties was tied to the cultural movement that favored the emotions over power-seeking rationality, which had placed itself at the service of the established order. In the eyes of the movement that with Berlin (1999/2001) we can call romantic and which started to grow at the end of the sixties, psychoanalysis seemed to be the new creed of those who hoped to see the emotions and the imagination prevail over a cold rationality that was totally at the service of the power of the dominant ideologies. In Italy these were the catholic and communist bourgeoisie¹.

¹ Let me quote a passage by Isaiah Berlin, in the work cited, where he analyzes the essential characteristics of romanticism, comparing them to a conception that, in one specific historical period, we could consider typical of the enlightenment:

"I now propose to say, however rash it may seem, what in my opinion is the crux of Romanticism. I would like to return to a theme that I introduced earlier, namely the old tradition that was at the center of western thought for the two thousand years and more that preceded the mid-1700s – that particular attitude and those particular beliefs that I think Romanticism attacked and seriously damaged. I mean the ancient proposition that virtue is knowledge, which I suppose was first uttered by Socrates in the pages of Plato, and that he shares with the Christian tradition. What one can disagree on is the kind of knowledge he means: there are battles between philosophers, between religions, between scientists, between religion and science, between religion and art, between every kind of attitude and school of thought and all the others, but the battle invariably concerns the nature of real knowledge of reality, the possession of which enables men to know what to do and how to be integrated. It is agreed that there exists a nature of things such that, if we know it, and if we know ourselves in relation to this nature, if a divinity exists, if we know this divinity and understand the relations between all the things that make up the universe, then our purposes, and all the facts concerning us, become clear in our mind, and we understand what we have to do if we want to realize ourselves the way our nature demands. To this end it is necessary to know whether the knowledge in question is the knowledge of physics or of psychology or of theology, or some kind of intuitive knowledge, individual or public, reserved for experts or able to be acquired by all men.

On all these things there may be divergences, but not on the fact that there is knowledge of this kind, the basis of the whole western tradition, which, as I have just said, was the target of the Romantic attack. The idea is of a jigsaw puzzle in which we have to fit the pieces, of a secret treasure that we have to try and find.

The crux of this conception is that there is a corpus of facts that we must accept. Science is acceptance, science means being guided by the nature of things, it means thorough attention to what is, and keeping strictly to facts. It means understanding, knowledge and adjustment. The opposite attitude, which was proclaimed by the Romantic movement, can be summed up in two points. One of the two will have become familiar. It is the idea of the indomitable will: what men do is not to know values but to create them.

We create values, we create goals, we create purposes, and essentially we create our vision of the universe, just as artists create works of art – and remember, before an artist creates a work of art, it does not exist, it is not anywhere. It is not a question of copying or adapting or of learning rules, there is no external control or structure that has to be understood and to which we have to adapt before proceeding. The crux of the whole process is invention, creation, making out of literally nothing, or of whatever materials we happen to find at hand. The most crucial aspect of this conception is that our universe is, at least to a certain extent, how we choose to make it; that is Fichte's philosophy and also in part, Schelling's, and actually in our century it is still the idea even of psychologists like Freud who maintain

In Italy the opening of degree courses in psychology saw the recruitment, among the teachers, of a long series of physician–psychiatrists, many of whom belonged to the psychoanalytic movement in its various nuances. But in the curricula of the degree courses and faculties there was never a subject that referred directly to psychoanalysis. The teachers talked about psychoanalysis with the psychology students, got them to read a few works on psychoanalysis, at times some Freudian clinical cases, texts that discussed the various conceptual problems raised by the psychoanalytic schools, without however any anchorage to psychology as a science or to the psychology profession. Many of the “psychoanalyst” teachers did not believe there could be a specific profession carried out by psychologists. What prevailed in the training culture of the psychologists, was the conviction that the only professional opportunity for psychology graduates was “psychotherapy”. Psychotherapy could not be learned in the degree courses, but only at one of the “schools” that the teachers belonged to: schools teaching and practicing psychotherapy with a psychoanalytical, systemic, cognitivist or behavioral orientation, separate from each other and seeming to have nothing to do with psychology and its scientific basis. The outcome of all this was the neutralization of psychological training in degree courses and faculties, the proposal of professional training only in schools of specialization in psychotherapy and the affirmation of these private schools with recognition by the Ministry for Universities.

In short, with psychology degree courses, the psychology profession suffered a deadly blow while thousands of new “psychologists” were churned out without the slightest professional preparation. The new graduates, thanks to the kind of training received, automatically became clients of that school of psychotherapy training. The number of schools also multiplied rapidly, in response to the growing demand on the part of the new psychologists. Universities gave up on specialist training for psychologists. At the time, the present writer set up, amidst the hostility of many university colleagues, the first four-year school of specialization in Clinical Psychology, at Rome’s ‘Sapienza’ university. A few other university schools followed, later hampered by legislation that made them equivalent to medical schools, with a very small number of students and great bureaucratic constraints.

“Official” psychoanalysis, in the seventies and eighties, fought hard to block psychologists from practicing psychoanalysis. The clash between psychoanalysts and psychologists was made manifest in the hostility of the Italian Psychoanalysis Society towards the recognition of the psychology profession in our country. The bill proposed by Adriano Ossicini lay for a long time in the desk-drawers of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate and amidst a loud outcry was finally passed in 1989, almost twenty years after the establishment of the psychology degree course.

It is therefore impossible to understand how Mecacci can talk about the legitimization of psychology in the period coinciding with the nineteen-seventies.

Those years were involved in the great upheaval in our social system thanks to an uninterrupted series of governments led by the Christian-democrats, committed to limiting the impact of the cultural wave coming from the left. Let’s look at some of the reforms of the period:

- 1970 *divorce* was introduced in the Italian legal system (Baslini-Fortuna law)
- 1970 introduction of the *statute of workers* (non-discrimination, representation, freedom of opinion)
- 1970 introduction of the institution of the *referendum*
- 1970 passing of the law on funding for the *regions* and holding of the first regional elections
- 1971 passing of the laws for the establishment of public *nursery schools* and for the protection of *working mothers*; introduction of *full-time school*.

that the universe of people possessed by a certain constellation of illusions or fantasies is different from the universe of those possessed by a different constellation.

The second proposition – connected to the first – is that there is no structure in things. There is no scheme to which one must necessarily adapt. All there is, if not flux, is the infinite self-creation of the universe. The universe must not be seen as a set of facts, as a plot of events, as a gathering of pieces of matter in space, a three-dimensional body held together by certain immutable relations, as we are taught by physics, chemistry and the other natural sciences; the universe is a process of perpetual self-propulsion forward, of perpetual self-creation, that can be conceived either as hostile to man (like Schopenhauer, and to a certain extent, Nietzsche), and as such reversing all men’s efforts to hold it back and organize it, in order to feel at home in it and build an environment in which to rest – therefore, in this world; or otherwise we can see it as friendly, since we identify with it, create with it, immersing ourselves in this great process, and discovering within ourselves the same creative force that we find outside, identifying spirit with matter, seeing everything as an immense process of self-organization and self-creation – with organization and self-creation we will finally be free.” (op. cit. pag. 183-186)

- 1971 first degree courses in psychology set up in Padua and Rome
- 1972 recognition of the right to be a *conscientious objector*
- 1974 referendum for the repeal of *divorce*, with the victory of those who wanted to maintain it
- 1975 introduction of *family planning centers*
- 1975 profound reform of *family law*, giving equality of rights and duties to men and women.
- 1975 *age of majority* lowered to 18
- 1975 *prison reform* (introduction of work, training, leave permits)
- 1977 *integration of the disabled* in compulsory schooling
- 1977 *parity of men and women in employment*
- 1978 establishment of the *National Health System*
- 1978 passing of the law on *voluntary abortion*
- 1978 passing of law n°180, known as the “Basaglia law”, for the closing of psychiatric hospitals

As can be seen, the setting up of degree courses in psychology cannot be interpreted as a legitimization of psychology. It was instead a chance especially for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, to access university - which was supposedly for the masses – in non-traditional courses that were considered easier than those giving access to consolidated professions, where the training provisions were far better-structured. On the other hand, the psychology degree courses, where there were thousands of students enrolled and where the attendance at lectures was below the number of enrolments, with no laboratories and above all without a professional training project, quickly gained a reputation as easy courses closely linked to the preferences of the various teachers. In those years – just as an example – subjects like “Theories and techniques of the personality” lost all meaning, with students in the A-L group (students whose surname started with the letters from A to L) studying Bion’s psychoanalytical theory, while those in the M-Z group studied the works of authors belonging to the systemic family school, with no anchorage between the two approaches and with no connection with the other subjects in the degree course. Psychology studies were presented as a more or less random summing up of theoretical e methodological proposals with no connection between them, and with no common training project. The psychology faculties therefore became the area where the various power groups fought for control over university careers and the assignment of university posts, abandoning their role as places of scientific debate, cultural exchange and educational planning.

In sum, as far as our analysis of psychology’s role in Italy is concerned, the sixties and seventies were marked by the loss of prestige for psychology training and by the newborn profession’s scientific and cultural irrelevance. At the same time, the lack of a professional psychological project paved the way for hope in psychotherapy alone as the professional destiny of the new graduates in psychology. The psychology profession was almost non-existent, both in the experience of the psychology graduates and in what was envisaged by those training the psychologists. This facilitated the proliferation of private four-year schools of the most varied kinds of psychotherapy, to the hostility of “official” psychoanalysts, who saw the psychologists’ aspiration to work in psychoanalysis or even “just” in psychotherapy as a threat looming over the elitist orthodoxy of being psychoanalysts. Psychoanalysts, too, made up an aristocratic group that wanted to defend “single variety” psychoanalytical treatment.

All this is summed up in a 1982 document, edited by Cesare Musatti, which we published in the first issue of the *Rivista di Psicologia Clinica* – in its “hard copy” form – and which we include in attachment.

The psychology degree courses had already been in existence for ten years but the “father of Italian psychoanalysis”, long the psychology professor at the University of Padua and later Milan, states that “not only does the profession of the psychologist not exist, but psychology does not exist either”. Such were the contradictions still existing in 1982 in Italian culture and of those who in the culture, were authorities on psychology. Musatti was still stuck at the deep historical, rather than conceptual, division between Paduan “perceptology” and “psychoanalysis”. Instead of being healed, this division was accentuated by the degree courses in psychology.

In parallel, psychiatry played a front line role in the protest movement that saw the involvement of many Italian intellectuals in positions of deep confusion between professional interpretations of the psychic and social reality, on the one hand, and strongly ideologically oriented political analysis of the Italian situation, on the other².

² Mecacci recalls the words of Paolo Legrenzi (2003), which were as follows: “«With moving naivety they tried to not only solve all the problems of psychology, even mentioning “the imperialist role played more and more openly by the

The entry of many psychiatrists, psychoanalysts and psychotherapists as teachers in the psychology degree courses helped to irreversibly confound the role of psychology both in the scientific and the professional field, thus relegating psychology to a fringe position compared to the role played by psychiatry, philosophy, anthropology or economics, in those years so crucial for the development and the decline of the social system and culture of our country.

3 – *Lucunde repetita iuvant*

We have now reached the eighties and the following decades.

Here Mecacci's interpretation of what happened to psychology differs radically from the analysis that I will make in this article.

Let me quote some passages.

"I have described this broader political-social-institutional scenario of the early '70s because it was a necessary premise to illustrate the position of Italian psychology, or shall we say the psychology of academia, in the sphere of theoretical and methodological orientations adopted. The key reference point was the *Giornale Italiano di Psicologia*, which appeared in 1974 and which attracted a group of psychologists determined to bring about a profound, systematic renewal of Italian psychology.

In 2003 Paolo Legrenzi published in the *GIP* an article on the thirty years of the journal which is an important retrospective reflection on the role that it had in the development of psychology in our country. However, Legrenzi is directly involved in the story of the *GIP*, and although he makes some self-critical observations, he cannot fully underline how this journal was the mirror of the contradictions of Italian psychology in the '70s and early '80s.

The journal opened with an editorial by Minguzzi entitled «Irrelevant research» which lucidly showed the scientific uselessness of many micro-sectorial, repetitive and self-referential psychological studies. And yet, it was precisely those who shared this critical position who promoted a new series of studies that were micro-sectorial, repetitive and self-referential. The theoretical orientation had now changed: there was a sudden shift from the Gestalt to cognitivism, without the mediation of behaviorism. This change was not painless in its reluctant acceptance by academics, and had to be supported by a sort of Lateran Pact in an important conference held at the National Research Council in Rome in 1975 on « Gestalt psychology and cognitivist psychology ». The complex of scientific and academic dependency arose again in 1987 with a conference held in this room on «The heritage of Gestalt psychology ». In the two volumes about it there are some of the most significant theoretical reflections of the period by our psychologists.

If one looks through the issues of the *GIP* in at least the first decade, that is until 1984, it is easy to see that the standard research model is that of cognitivism: studies on microprocessors, experimental designs with ANOVA statistics, quantitative methodology with an abundance of reaction times.

....

In short, the group of psychologists active in the *GIP* promoted a rigorous experimental psychology of the cognitivist kind, more laboratory-based than ecological, and on the other hand criticized the training and professional profile of the psychologist.

United States in the world". Rather shortsightedly we blamed behaviorism, which was already in decline, simplistically seen as the effect of the colonization of the old world by American psychology ».

In the book "The culture of the mental health services in Italy", by myself and Rosa Maria Paniccia, we recall an autobiographical passage by the psychiatrist Giovanni Jervis: "For instance, right through the sixties I was pro-Maoist, even though it was something rather platonic and intellectualistic, because I was not active in politics and I have never taken part in a demonstration in my life, or a march. But I remember finding myself at that time discussing with other psychiatrists whether by any chance the nurses in psychiatric hospitals were the proletariat (to be reassessed) and the patients were the lumpenproletariat (who could not be trusted), or whether the nurses were the petit bourgeoisie (for whom there was no hope), and the patients the proletariat (to be reassessed). Today these things are laughable or on second thoughts, perhaps they are a bit pathetic. So schematic! But that was precisely the climate and many of us took things like that seriously." (Corbellini & Jervis, 2008, p. 16). In recalling the stances taken up, they talk about naivety and declarations that today make us laugh or feel pity. On re-reading these things today, one cannot but agree with the authors. The fact remains that those cultural stances, reflecting a marked ideological bent, made up the cultural climate in which many psychologists were trained and in which a great many of our psychologists took their first steps as professionals.

It is my opinion, a kind of historiographic hypothesis which can be tested when a more detached interpretation of the last twenty years of the 20th century is possible, that a new theoretical atmosphere was formed in Italian psychology – starting from about 1980 – thanks to the research in developmental psychology, social psychology and psychology of the personality. To a smaller degree, perhaps far smaller, there was the active influence of labor psychology, clinical psychology and psychotherapy. On this point I wish to be precise. So-called general psychology was channeled into laboratory research most of which gradually merged into a framework typical of neuroscience. There is no doubt that the production in this area, where there is the interweaving of research in experimental psychology, psychophysiology and neuropsychology, reached international levels with some cases of really outstanding work. However, I am referring to theoretical depth-studies, epistemological discussion, the relation between theory and professional practice in psychology, when I say that the most incisive came from the fields of developmental psychology and social psychology.

As regards developmental psychology, think of the gradual decline of the hegemony of Piaget thanks to the assimilation firstly of cognitivist models and later Vygotskian or neo-vygotskian models (led by Bruner). The constant feature in this research environment was however the close interdependence between basic research and applied research. In the same way that Guido Petter, in the '60s, proposed the application of Piaget's theory to outline the cognitive approach to be implemented in school curricula, similarly, reference to Vygotsky's theory, to ideas like the zone of proximal development or mediated and cooperative learning, became the backbone of the new psycho-pedagogical approaches. The other area of developmental psychology with marked theoretical implications is metacognition and the theory of mind. Here again it must be emphasized that there is a close connection between different aspects of investigation and application: think of the role played by research on metacognition and theory of mind in the study of autistic children by interweaving comparative research on the normal and pathological mind with the therapeutic intervention.

In social psychology, too, Italian psychologists have kept up to date with the most recent theoretical developments, moving from social cognition, still tied to a laboratory conception of social interaction, to a more ecological approach in which the innovative reference points are Serge Moscovici's theory of social representations, constructionist models in Kenneth J. Gergen style or those of discursive psychology as in Rom Harré's later work. There is also the sector of cultural psychology, which revisits a whole series of classical problems related both to the role of biological and socio-cultural factors in the development of the human mind, and to the influence of cultural differences in the functioning of mental processes.

These new directions have also entailed thinking about methodology, getting the supremacy of quantitative methods into perspective and reassessing research based on qualitative methods.

...

If I had to draw up a conclusive balance I would say that while the debate on the autonomy, purposes and methods of psychology has been heated in the last fifty years, it has not produced enough certainty about the discipline for its epistemological foundations to be defended with a direct validation on the institutional and professional level. Psychology continues to be a questionable science, in a sense that is perhaps even more complex than it may have appeared in the early 1960s."

Mecacci declares at the outset that his considerations are limited to "Italian psychology, or shall we say the psychology of academia, in the sphere of the theoretical and methodological orientations adopted". Indeed, but which "academia" is he talking about? Since 1974, Italian academic psychology seems to have been identified exclusively with the small group of psychologists that collected around the *Giornale Italiano di Psicologia*, known as the GIP, which began publication - by Il Mulino - in 1974. This group "promoted a rigorous experimental psychology of the cognitivist kind, more laboratory-based than ecological, and on the other hand criticized the training and professional profile of the psychologist". Here we go again: yet again a small group of academics, this time of a cognitivist orientation, who took the place of the Paduan Gestaltists, showing the same detachment from any interest in training and the profession, relegating psychology to "rigorous" laboratory research. This time, however, the withdrawal of psychology from the context is particularly serious, because it occurred when thousands of young psychologists were entering the employment market, dragging psychology into an abyss of incompetence and disorientation.

The author's words give the impression that this little group of colleagues took on a serious responsibility before an academia that ran rampant in the psychology degree courses, and then in the faculties, reaching uncontrollable proportions and churning out uncontrollable numbers of graduates, who were then destined to the professional area. This responsibility lay in ignoring what was happening in the world of psychology

which produced graduates who were culturally and professionally ignorant; people who then, on the basis of the prevailing incompetence, became conceited and arrogant, discrediting and robbing psychology and psychotherapy of prestige, if there had ever been such a thing, and creating distrust for all the professional activities that had anything to do with the “psych” world in our country. This discredit of psychology was promoted by muddled degree courses, lacking not only a training method designed to provide professional preparation, but also frequently lacking the slightest cultural value. Such degree courses were often tied to the narcissism of individual professors, each closed in his special sector in many cases of doubtful scientific credibility, which coexisted with the growing need of psychologists as a category, accentuated by the passing of Law 56/89, which established the profession of the psychologist. With its article 3, this law gave an incentive to specialist training in psychology, making the psychology degree professionally meaningless. Mecacci’s words suggest that a minor group of university teachers “promoted a rigorous experimental psychology of the cognitivist kind, more laboratory-based than ecological, and on the other hand criticized the training and professional profile of the psychologist”, while in the country there was a proliferation of degree courses, with the participation of teachers from the critical group, which spawned an exaggerated number of difficult, ill-prepared psychologists, with the degradation of the meaning of psychology and of its possible contribution to solving the problems of the context in which all this was going on.

In some training and professional contexts attempts were made to give the psychology degree a meaning, to find a role for psychologists that was useful to the context, to find areas of psychological intervention consistent with the difficult demand of those whose hopes lay in psychology’s contribution to solving individual or social problems.

These attempts, on the other hand, encountered many problems, due to the difficulty of coordinating psychologists’ resources which are at times rich and creative: it was and still is devastating to see that it is impossible to reconcile the different approaches that psychology has imposed and supported in training that serves to vicariously rob the psychology degree of meaning. Obstacles were posed by schools of psychotherapy of different origin, cultural background, credibility, professional reputation; all, or almost all, convinced that they are offering the only useful training for the mass of psychologists following them; also the hostility of many university teachers to the development of specialist university training that is coherent and in continuity with the degree course, which could have been reformed and made more efficacious.

This polarization of Italian psychologists towards a specialization in psychotherapy, considered the only way of “being a psychologist” through therapy with a problem individual, had the effect of distracting psychology from one of its roles, that of intervention in social contexts. Psychopathology, in the versions borrowed from psychiatry, of which the DSM was and is the clearest and most disturbing expression, takes the place of a psychological interpretation of the problems that make individuals, groups, and social organizations of the most varied kinds contact a psychologist.

I agree with Mecacci in his desolate conclusion about the theoretical foundations of psychology, still considered a questionable science today. While psychology as a science is questionable and, I would add, ignored by the cultural system in our country, the profession of the psychologist is discredited and highly problematic.

Looking at the four historical phases of Italian psychology proposed by Mecacci, what is clear is that most of the academics are profoundly isolated from the demand that the social system made and makes of psychology. This detachment has had only one interruption, with the foolhardy establishment of degree courses. That was the period when professional psychology moved away from academic psychology; in that period professional psychology was handed over to psychiatry and medically-oriented psychotherapy, with few exceptions. Mecacci is not aware of the importance that clinical psychology has had, in good ways and bad, for the development of the psychology profession and for the attention that some components of clinical psychology have paid to the social demand. This means ignoring the orientation towards clinical psychology of the great majority of Italian psychologists, with the often difficult, often interesting, consequences that all this has entailed.

If the recent history of Italian psychology is made to coincide with the events, the conflicts, the reconciliations of a handful of academics, all of which is irrelevant both for the professional fortunes of psychologists as well as for the stature of psychology in the country’s cultural system, all that remains is the desolating pettiness of the events narrated. To understand something more on the topic we have chosen, we need an analysis of the models of psychological intervention, as they have acquitted themselves in the past thirty years in Italy. That is what I will try to do in the second part of this article.

SECOND PART: MODELS OF THE CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY INTERVENTION

Introduction

The lack of importance of psychology and psychologists in our country is an obvious fact. The great number of psychologists on the professional register corresponds to an unemployment rate among psychology graduates that is so high that it makes one wonder about the irresponsibility of whoever allowed and encouraged all this, in the name of purely academic interests. Not only was there the multiplication of teaching chairs with the resulting use of the degree courses in academic power games, the foundation and growth of psychology faculties in a self-referential dynamics that took absolutely no account of the problems of professional training or of the possible professional uses of the degree, but also the muddled planning of training programs for psychologists, which all contributed to the inadequate professional preparation of the young students. It is also the main cause of the difficult professional placement of graduates in the cultural, social, economic and professional system.

The factors that led to the crisis of the professional psychology system in Italy are complex and have distant origins. I have tried to analyze them in the first part of this article. In actual fact, the creation of psychology degree courses and later with the psychology faculties, triggered, from the early seventies, an irrational training system, not suited to developing a profession which till then had been decidedly minor in our country. The starting of the degree courses in psychology was an anomalous event, conceived and implemented during an anomalous historical period, never seriously reconsidered by those involved, with very few exceptions. But I have already dealt with that.

Now it is time to look at how the psychology profession is structured, starting from the experiences of training and professional practice which have little by little been built and refined, often independently of the university training context, which still seems to perpetuate a process unto itself, free of any feedback, connection or consistency with the professional system of psychologists.

Psychology broadly operates in our country following two precise operative models:

a – to change *behavior* or *cognitive processes* (beliefs, thoughts)

b – to establish thinking about the emotions so as to construct an alternative to *emotional acting-out*

These are two very different perspectives on intervention, both in the methodology used and in the initial analysis and definition of the situation in which the models of intervention are about to be applied.

The two styles of psychological intervention correspond to two different demands on the part of the context. The change in behavior or of cognitive processes is consistent with the assessment of behavior or cognitive processes: right or wrong, normal or pathological, pleasant or unpleasant, adequate or inadequate. The person asking for the change in behavior usually differs from the beneficiaries of the intervention. An example of this is the boy affected by autism where the psychologist intervenes to organize behaviors appropriate to the basic needs of autonomy³ such as dressing, taking care of his personal hygiene, feeding himself. In such cases the person requesting the psychological intervention usually comes from the family or from the health team that has taken on the autistic boy's case. To acquire social legitimization, the intervention designed to change a behavior must be based on the *diagnosis of a disorder*, whether it is mental, psychological, neurological, psychiatric or medical in the broad sense. The change in behavior means that, before the intervention, there is, let's say, a diagnosis of incorrect, inadequate, socially unacceptable behavior to be changed, for example aggressive behavior, and of the correct behavior to pursue as an alternative. In the cognitivist intervention, in parallel, the categories to diagnose the disorder to be corrected are established, for example, the DSM categories for the disorder of panic attacks, anxiety and depression. Changing a behavior or a cognitive situation, is actually an act that, independently of the techniques that are used for this purpose, entails the exercise of power towards the person subject to the intervention. The change in behavior involves a relationship between a strong and a weak power, where the therapist's strong power influences the patient who is presumed to have weaker power. This is the same

³ It is interesting to notice the connotation taken on by the word "autonomy" in this and similar cases: achieving autonomy, in fact, means pursuing conformist behaviors; with autonomy, therefore, one fulfills the expectations of the context.

relation of strong to weak power that governs the medical action, where the patient depends on the physician's decisions in a sequence of diagnosis – prognosis – therapy.

Thinking of emotions, on the other hand, involves the suspension of acting-out, in a relationship that helps fantasies to emerge and these fantasies to be analyzed, according to interpretative models that give a meaning to the phantasmic re-elaboration of the emotions.

Thinking of emotions therefore interrupts the sequence of event – affective symbolization of the event – emotion associated with the symbolization – reaction acted out, motivated by these emotions. We are all part of contexts that we experience as sequences of events: meeting other people, reading the papers, watching television, relations in the workplace, the family, school, all the contexts in which we live that can be defined as *events that arouse emotions*. With the affective symbolization of the events, we know the events themselves and we can categorize them emotionally.

Here, the problem that can give rise to a request for an intervention of clinical psychology originates in the *emotional acting-out* caused by the experience of difficulty or dysfunction. This experience depends specifically and irreplaceably on the person, the group or the organization that is the protagonist of the experience, according to the goals to be pursued and achieved in the context, and according to the way “others” respond to the emotional acting-out.

In the case of emotional acting-out following the failure to think of emotions, it cannot be established externally and using diagnostic categories whether or not the acting-out is dysfunctional. There are instances of emotional acting-out that are deliberate, implemented by the person as a function of specific processes of adjustment. Similarly, there are highly dysfunctional instances of acting-out, both for the actor and the person subjected to them. In the case of thinking of emotions, in other words, the psychological intervention depends on the demand that is addressed to the psychologist. This demand has little to do with the diagnosis of a disorder or an “illness”, with a dysfunction that can be categorized using common systems designed to classify mental disorders or psychopathology.

The demand may arise from the experience of the difficulty that an unexamined emotional acting-out can cause in some people, who are then able to transform this experience into a demand designed to build a relationship with the psychologist. The same emotional acting-out can in other cases create a gratifying experience of triumph; it can involve a feeling of conflict with the context, sought and pursued in a systematic, repetitive way; it can, as we said, create distress and lead to an experience of understanding of the emotionality with which one responds to events. In this last case, and only here, it can be organized in the mind of the individual, in the group reflection, in the dynamics of the organizational system, becoming a demand for the clinical psychologist.

The approach that seeks to change behavior or cognitive processes must be based on a definition of what is acceptable and what is not, in the individual's adjustment to his context. This entails two fundamental conditions:

- the object of diagnostic assessment must be the *individual*, since the categories used to define the (mental) disorder on which the intervention will be made or the cognitive process that is to be changed, always concern only the single person. One of the best-known and widespread assessment checklists for mental disorders, the DSM, concerns problems related systematically and irreversibly to the single individual.
- The diagnosis, which is the basis of and which justifies the psychotherapy of this kind of orientation, is the aspect that *forces* the implementation of the therapy. If a disorder is diagnosed, then the individual affected by the disorder is forced, in certain respects obviously, to have psychotherapy. This leads to the question of the therapeutic alliance: it must be verified whether the patient accepts the therapeutic relationship prescribed by the physician or the psychologist who made the diagnosis.

All this makes psychotherapy seem similar to a medical action. A clear distinction is made between the person affected by the disorder and the healthy, normal person without problems. In fact, it follows that the social system is not interested in this kind of approach, which is the preserve of individuals affected usually by anxiety disorders or depression, in the case of cognitive disorders; or individuals that can benefit from conditioning to adapt behaviors in the case, for instance, of disabilities.

The specifically “medical health” connotation of this kind of intervention, performed by psychologists or more often by psychiatrists, restrains psychology into a role that no longer concerns the life of people in

contexts, the relations and the social dynamics characterizing groups and organizations. As in medicine, the approach we are referring to aims to intervene to correct a deficit and therefore to rectify what is lacking or wrong, and therefore to bring back to normality cognitive patterns or behaviors that are diagnosed as faulty. This might shed light on the profound confusion between medicine, psychiatry and psychology entailed in this mode of intervention. In fact, behaviorist psychotherapy and even more so, cognitivist psychotherapy, were imported and advocated in our country by psychiatrists. Psychologists tagged along after this psychotherapeutic movement, in the hope of being able to use intervention techniques very similar to those of medical practice, at least in the way of providing the service and of relating to the patient.

The other approach, based on thinking about emotions, arose from psychoanalysis. But it differs from psychoanalysis in the exclusive sense of “treatment”, especially of neurosis: this kind of psychoanalysis is also largely practiced by psychiatrists and gradually became a medical practice that aroused a preconceived opposition from psychoanalysts towards psychologists and their entry to the field of psychoanalytical psychotherapy. This opposition was in clear contrast with the presence of many psychoanalysts in the degree courses in psychology. In their teaching, these psychoanalysts tended to present psychoanalysis as the only possible profession for psychologists.

Thinking about emotions, as we said, is the alternative to emotional acting-out. Let me recall the two possible results of emotionally symbolizing events: affective symbolization can be acted out or thought. This refers to single individuals but also to a number of people in collusive systems. Let me repeat that there is no functional or dysfunctional acting-out that can be diagnosed by “third parties” empowered to decide. The experience of the individual or much more often of the people sharing relationships in a context, gives a motivation to verify the difficult nature of some collusive acting-out and therefore, if the system envisages and allows it, gives a motivation to make a demand to the psychologist for intervention. To the psychologist, I said. Because the medical-psychiatric system is not competent in this field, it does not have suitable tools to intervene in collusive acting-out.

We have repeatedly asked what the “key word” is to define clinical psychology and to differentiate it from behavioral and cognitive psychotherapy of medical-psychiatric orientation; well, *collusive emotional acting-out* is the specific area of the intervention of psychoanalytically-oriented clinical psychology.

Control and creativity

We are used to looking at *social* events from a historical perspective, seeking the motives of the human situation in a sequence of events: think, for instance, of the vicissitudes of many African countries between the 1800s and 1900s and of the cause-and-effect links with the decline of colonialism in the continent. However, we use psychological categories when we look at the reasons for *individual* behavior: mental disorder, motivation, the cognitive structure of the context, and the emotions are all categories through which we “explain” the reasons for individual behavior, with which we make sense of the emotions that a person can manifest in the social relationship.

History and psychology, if we look closely, are sciences that are very close to each other: both have the aim of explaining the reasons for events. The study of the “motives” for an event, on the other hand, belongs more generally to the human sciences, to medicine, which makes a “historical” reconstruction of an illness as the initial step towards a diagnosis (the anamnesis), to economics, which also analyzes the historical series of events and behaviors relevant to the economy, to anthropology and to sociology. The strong sciences, in contrast, base their procedure on aspects that are unvaried, therefore a-historical, at least within certain limits.

There is no need to go into the debate between the nomothetic and idiographic approach to knowledge; in the scientific field the debate between the models of knowledge envisaging invariance or contingency is still going on.

This debate, in my opinion, has had deeply harmful effects on psychology. In fact, assuming that the individual’s behavior can depend on personality variations (or other kinds), psychology has shifted away from issues that can make it contribute to the broader social system. Psychology’s claim that it is fully entitled to belong to the “nomothetic sciences” has distracted psychologists from the social demand which existed and still exists for their services, and has channeled them into self-referential studies unconcerned with the issues of relations between people or between organizational systems. See, for instance, the many irrelevant research works designed to find correlations between invariant factors so as to construct

descriptive personality models. The belief in being able to rely on invariant psychological dimensions has led psychology up a blind alley. This has led many critics of psychology to hypothesize that psychology is a science of uncertain epistemological foundations, a science incapable of offering innovative aspects that contribute to the evolution of social systems and human groups⁴.

As I stated many years ago, psychology is not capable of making laws about human behavior or the emotional dynamics of the individual and of the society, following causative processes such as: if ... then ... Think for instance of the theory of cognitive dissonance and of the hypothesis that in the individual, the lower the extrinsic motivation to support unpopular points of view, the more effort the individual will put into advocating them. This theory seemed to respond to the rules of regularity, in expressing a “law” that could help to give a meaning to human behavior. But the theory could not withstand the criticisms.

The “real” nomothetic sciences have helped to identify the type of problems to which the sciences have in some way given a solution. Think of the discovery of “bacteria”, the causal element of specific illnesses that the discovery of antibiotics has helped to cure. Psychology – it should be pointed out – has not, with its analyses, its discoveries, its proposed interpretations, posed any “problem” in the system of the individual’s life and even less, in the life of the social system; psychological research has not identified any socially recognized “problem” that then involved a psychological intervention designed to solve it.

Psychology, and specifically psychoanalysis, has instead had a huge cultural influence. It has helped, for example, to attenuate the exaggerated control of the emotions typical of the “Victorian” culture of the late 1800s. Thanks to the spread of psychoanalytic knowledge there was an alternation of cultural movements that can be connected, for instance, to the often very harsh clash between enlightenment and romanticism. This confrontation was divided in various ways, not least the organization of the difference between nomothetic and idiographic models that we have just mentioned.

But I am not going to dwell on these issues. Instead, I would like to look at the consequences for psychology of a failure to contribute to the definition of problems consistent with its research and its theoretical and experimental proposals. I am referring to problems that are socially relevant. Insofar as psychology has proposed “problems”, namely important constructs for the social system, such as the construct of intelligence and the tools that psychology has elaborated to measure it; think also of the construct of field-dependence and field-independence and the tools proposed for the measurement of this feature which is not merely individual, but has important socio-cultural implications. We could continue at length. The important thing, however, is the difficulty that psychologists have encountered in giving these constructs a socially useful definition. Let’s go back to the discovery of bacteria and the possibility of pinpointing specific bacteria as the “cause” of socially relevant infectious diseases like pneumonia, acute rheumatism, polio, intestinal infections and the frequent complication of peritonitis. The list could go on. Nobody has ever doubted that the fight against these bacteria, responsible for illnesses that are often mortal for man, must be approved because it is socially desirable.

In other words, the construct of bacteria responsible for a serious infectious disease, involves two important features. It refers to harmful bacteria, in contrast – for instance – to the useful gut bacterial flora. This means it is possible to discriminate between innocuous bacteria that are helpful to man and harmful ones, a source of serious illnesses. Moreover, it has been discovered that the clinical problem caused by harmful bacteria

⁴ Common feeling is often evoked to define the false problems from which psychology, trapped in a vicious circle, moves away from the possibility of generating its own commonly accepted “social” use. On this point, I wish to recall the difference between common sense and the common feeling. For the common feeling it is important to question the often self-referential developments of scientism, to pose a crucial question : “what is all this for?”. “The results produced by a specialist practice and discourse must be able to answer the question of the common feeling: “what is all this for?”, or: “what does all this mean?”, when they are meant in the deep sense of determining the contribution to solving the problems of Life ... for this to be possible it is also necessary for the discourse and specialist practice to be concerned with a *translation* of their results into *common language*. This is not with the absurd expectation of using non-technical language to express what has been achieved and to express it correctly by using technical concepts and language, but with due concern to let people understand the aspect of one’s results that can improve the unit of experience available to all, and therefore to improve the very contents of the common feeling. This is different from regarding it as a naive store of a-critical, unreliable beliefs ... (some of the ways it is seen), which has made it particularly relevant now to understand the common feeling exactly, in its contrast to scientific knowledge, thought to be the only authentic form of understanding and explanation of reality.” (pp. 33-34) (Agazzi, 2004, pp. 33-34).

can be changed: it can be opposed using the tools that microbiological and pharmacological research has made available to medicine, such as the antibiotics that target specific bacteria⁵.

Let's return to our problem. The conditions just described characterizing the construct of bacterium and antibiotic, are not found in the construct of intelligence, or – for different reasons – in the construct of field-dependent or independent cognitive style. Why? Intelligence – even accepting Binet's definition, which says: "intelligence is the thing that is measured by my test" – can be measured but mostly cannot be modified. This has important consequences for its measurement: for instance, that related to asking who has requested the measurement for specific individuals and in particular contexts. Field-dependence/field-independence is not a construct that distinguishes a useful feature from a harmful one; it indicates "just" two ways of adapting to reality, each different but capable of achieving "adaptation".

I think these two features of psychological constructs, (the non-modifiability of variables that can be divided into useful/non-useful; the differently adaptive function of the components of the construct) has hindered the social credibility of coherent "psychological" interventions, because they are based on constructs formulated by psychology.

In other words, psychological research has enabled a detailed knowledge of psychic functioning in many domains, from perception to motivation, from social and group interaction to cognitive processes in their many forms; it has not however established emotional or behavioral areas to relate to specific problems of human existence, in which it is possible to make an intervention consistent with the modellistic interpretation of the problem itself.

This has nothing to do with the construct of bacteria, a construct that can define the problem of mortality due to "infections", and with the remedy to bacteria, discovered in antibiotics.

If we look closely, psychology presents itself as a science designed for knowledge, more than a science designed to base an intervention to help solve problems identified with that same knowledge. At the same time, it has been presented as the science of intervention, promoting a psychology profession that has, especially in our country, reached very large numbers.

This is the situation that in my opinion, led to the critical, highly dangerous development of the psychology profession.

To examine this statement in greater depth, let us return to the example of infectious diseases, bacteria and antibiotics. The discovery of bacteria as pathogenic agents of illnesses that are major threats to man's life expectation given their often endemic or even worse, epidemic, diffusion, has made us take it for granted, in both the medical field and in public opinion, that there is implicitly someone that makes the request for the search for solutions to the problem of infectious diseases.

Let us remember that as regards illness, the citizen is obliged to get treatment and at the same time to go to specialized staff that can identify the problem – based on the etiopathogenic diagnosis – and to prescribe the treatment for the problem in the most suitable form. The relationship between physician and patient is a reciprocal one, which obliges both of them to provide and use the treatment that is suited to the illness. Not all the treatment offered by medicine obeys this rule of reciprocal obligation but certainly most of the therapy offered in the medical area does. In some way, the problem of the figure requesting the intervention in the case of an acute peritonitis, a compound fracture, or a heart attack, is not expressed in the usual terms of the relation between the one requesting and the beneficiary/client. The patient affected by such illnesses, or many other illnesses, is obliged to go to the right place to get skilled care, based on a strict social rule that we take for granted and which we rarely notice.

Let us now think about intelligence, in its different forms, or about personality traits, and about the official request that can justify their "measured" recording. This is where the problem gets more complicated. Intelligence and personality, for instance, have usually been recorded and measured in the case of the selection of staff for a firm. With varied critical support, psychometric tools are used today when there is the

⁵ In 1948, I went with my father to the Arena in Verona, my hometown, to see a performance of the opera "The Barber of Seville". Before the performance, I saw the whole audience stand up – many clearly feeling emotional – to applaud a white-haired gentleman who had entered the royal box: my father – moved like everyone else – told me it was Sir Alexander Fleming, who had discovered *penicillin*, the first antibiotic. Three years earlier Fleming had won the Nobel prize for medicine, along with the Australian Florey and the German Chain. Fleming discovered penicillin after having proposed lysozyme for the fight against bacteria (it proved to be effective on useful bacteria rather than on harmful ones) and *mercurochrome*, useful but too harmful for man. Penicillin triggered research in the field of antibiotics, effective in targeting harmful bacteria, and at the same time relatively innocuous for the human organism.

need to “select” the applicants for specific “jobs” offered by businesses, public organizations, and a great variety of social bodies. In this case, on the other hand, it is the organizations themselves who are making the request: the head of human resources want to take on the “best” people to carry out the task involved in the job. It is also supposed that the people aspiring to the job, accept the obligation to undergo psychometric measurement. Measurement (of IQ or personality traits or many other things) is carried out on the job applicant, while the figure requesting the measurement is the firm, often embodied in the head of human resources. We will leave aside the various difficulties inherent in these statements: what it means to measure and what guarantees are given by measurement in the context in which it is carried out; the problems raised by a methodology that is based on the predictive value of the psychometric or motivational variables about working behavior in that particular organization; the way the figure making the request uses the measurements made by the psychologist and much else besides. There remains, however, the split between *the figure making the request and the beneficiary* in recording intelligence or personality: a split that has long been the basis of a major area of the psychology profession and that still characterizes its dynamics, not only in selection but also in many other components of psychological work in organizations. The results of this split between the figure making the request and the beneficiary were and are of great relevance for the image of the psychology profession; in particular the problem is posed for labor psychology, in that the psychologist has taken “sides”, has sided with the firm between two parts (firm and union/workers) long in sharp conflict and still in difficult competition today, despite the changed market conditions and working dynamics in industries nowadays.

Let us think of another psychological construct, that of parenthood. It is a construct that is puzzling for two reasons: psychologists propose parenthood as the couple’s capacity to care responsibly for the newborn child. Many psychologists remember that the birth of a child increases the complexity of the relationship of the couple or the family relationship; it is pointed out that with the arrival of a child, the generational difference increases within family bonds; there is the warning that being a parent is “forever”. The two people who have a child may even separate as members of the couple, but the parenting role of both of them will last, beyond whatever happens in their life as a couple. Comments could go on at length, with observations that are sensible and in many ways true. This does not mean that these observations are not related to “psychological” categories, but to good sense (not to common feeling, we must stress). Aspects of good sense that could apply, with the necessary adjustments, to other relations such as the physician-patient relationship, that between teacher and pupil, or between the head of human resources and the employee. One could therefore talk about medical competence, teaching competence or management competence, just as one talks about parenting competence.

What’s the difference? For parenting competence some important conditions are set which reveal, as is also possible for the other competences, psychological categories. As is often stated, in parenting competence there is the interweaving of “giving affection” and “providing limits and direction for growth”, according to socially accepted norms. It is observed that without the function of giving affection, difficult situations can be generated due to affective deprivation; without containment and the development of a sense of limits, situations of maladjustment and omnipotence in the child’s socialization can be created. This is not far from *prescribing* competence. Parents in responsible parenthood “must” be competent in giving affection and in performing the function of containment. There is no interest in why parents may have difficulties in performing this function. The rules for responsible parenting are set and, from the point of view of evaluation, they distinguish responsible parents from less responsible ones.

What is the possible outcome of all this?

Who will be the advocate, the figure making the request for responsible parenthood?

This is the question that, in my opinion, totally underlines the image and the function of psychology, at least in our country. It is clear that the conformist social system, the prevailing culture of respectability, those people who hope for an orderly, functioning society, who pay more attention to social position than to the difficult reality of individuals, families, social groups, and cultures at different times – a reality of good sense and good intentions, actually clearly false – cannot but hope for competent parenthood. This hope, on the other hand, can become important when there is a power relation between social system and parenthood: this is the case in fostering and adoption. And so we see psychologists throwing themselves at this fragment of power, to seize the right to assess whether couples aspiring to foster or adopt a child are suitable for the task, through the “*diagnosis of parenthood*”. I will not examine the analysis of the methodology of this “diagnosis” based on categories proposed by attachment theory, though it would be very interesting. I would like, however, to examine the meaning of this “diagnostic” act: it is not a diagnosis in the medical sense,

based on orienting the medical therapeutic act towards the patient's illness. Here instead it is an authentic exam of the suitability for parenthood, given to those forced to submit to psychological power in order to get access to a child (fostered or adopted). It is an act of social control.

It seems that many psychologists have long wanted to exercise this function of social control. This social control is divided into three phases:

1st phase – A socially desirable state of psychological reality is defined, easily accessible for the good sense of the conformist culture: intelligence, responsible parenthood, organizational well-being, proactiveness, prevention of psycho-social risk. The list could go on at length.

2nd phase – The social system is motivated to take these desirable aspects as a goal to pursue and control.

3rd phase – Control systems are set up, based on the psychological “diagnosis”, giving the psychologist the power to decide who has appropriate psychological features and who doesn't.

The process just described clearly has one difficult phase, the second. It is in the second phase in fact that a collusive bond between psychology and the conformist social system must be established. For this reason the system of acquiring the power of control on the part of psychology can only come about in specific areas of living together and in particular historical-cultural moments.

The other role that psychology can assume is that of responding competently and efficaciously to the social demand for intervention in situations of difficult adjustment. To continue the example just given, there may be people - mothers, fathers, couples – who go to the psychologist due to difficulty in playing the role of parents.

Here the figure requesting the intervention coincides with the beneficiary of the psychological intervention.

On the one hand there is identification of a value system with the definition of what is correct and what is not (think of the definition of response to “adequate” stimuli like food for the dog's salivation, and to “inadequate” stimuli like the sound of the custodian's keys, for the same salivation). On the other hand, there is the understanding of “why” what is recorded takes place, for instance in perception or social behavior. They are two models of defining the psychological function that, at various times in history and in different cultural contexts, have gone in very different directions, leaving traces that are still followed in different ways: either correcting a deficit or responding to a demand for psychological intervention.

In the first case the psychologist is the guarantor and controller of the normality of the behavior; in the second case, he/she acts as the facilitator to understanding the problems that adjustment poses in the emotional domain. Remember that behavior can be regular and rule-governed while in the emotional field this is not possible.

Brief epilogue

The influence of psychologists on the culture and ways of living together in Italy, as I have said repeatedly, is negligible. Academic competence has been frittered away in countless unrelated directions which have little interest in the serious problems facing society. The professional component, largely unemployed or underemployed, seem to seek solutions to their employment problems in psychotherapy alone, practiced by psychologists with a weak, confused identity, with many physician-psychiatrists guiding psychotherapy schools and working in the field.

A minority of psychologists are devoted to promoting reflection on emotional acting-out in relationships with single individuals as well as with a range of social organizations.

It is, we stress, a minority. Let me repeat, it is a minority. It is a numerical minority, which however embodies a cultural movement of great importance. It should be underlined, by the way, that one of the worrying issues for our country's culture is the constantly decreasing importance attached to cultural and political participation in matters that affect living together. Political participation has practically disappeared; the media serve as mouthpieces for politicians, representing conflicts in which very few people now believe, and this minority, increasingly disenchanted, shows flagging attention. Cultural movements, amidst the prevailing conformity, are isolated and incapable of promoting innovation. Corruption is rampant in the country, fostering resignation and lack of confidence in people, increasingly excluded and without

interlocutors. It is a pessimistic picture, in which psychologists participate with their own problems, rather than with a proposal to revitalize culture. One might say that psychologists are the mirror of the Italian situation.

We mentioned a minority that promotes reflection on emotional acting-out as a relevant contribution to single individuals as well as organizational systems. We feel that offering an ironic view of acting-out can provide an opportunity for emancipation from the passivity that permeates the feeling of impotence.

The *Rivista di Psicologia Clinica*, we hope, is a means of expression and participation offered by the minority I am talking about.

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Appendix

Basic document for the conference "Regulating the psychotherapy profession" (Centro nazionale di prevenzione e difesa sociale) Milan 9 January 1982

prof. Cesare Musatti

The activity of psychologist is not exactly in itself a professional activity, just as those of zoologist or physiologist and so on, are not professions

Psychology is in fact a scientific discipline with many branches and particular specializations. It is extremely difficult to create order out of this subject.

One of the main present-day Italian psychologists, prof. Gaetano Kanizsa of Trieste, is a specialist in what he calls perceptology, which is the study of the phenomena of perception. He expects in fact to be called a perceptologist, not a psychologist. If a neurotic approaches him, or even just a person with a disturbed emotional life, to ask his opinion, he immediately says: I know nothing of psychopathology, I do not deal with psychotherapy or psychoanalysis, so go somewhere else. On the other hand, if one asked an eminent psychologist like the occupant of the psychology chair at the University of Milan, prof. Franco Fornari, for explanations of apparent movements, consecutive images or of the

details of tactile sensitivity, he too would answer that he does not deal with such things at all because they are outside his interests.

So not only does the profession of psychologist not exist, but psychology does not exist either. It includes a corpus of ideas common to all those who claim to be psychologists, where one can specialize in one particular field or another, always from a shared cultural foundation.

In these conditions, after many decades when in our country the very possibility of psychology possessing its own dignity has been denied, there has been a boom in psychology, a hunger for psychology and the establishment at university of three pathways to become a psychologist.

1) The mere fact that one has degree in philosophy specializing in psychology.

This exists in many faculties of letters and philosophy. These faculties do not create *psychologists*, but graduates in philosophy with special emphasis on psychological culture.

2) The second is by attending a post-university school of specialization in psychology. One can enter with either a degree in medicine or in letters and philosophy. This is the only course that issues a diploma as *specialist in psychology* (with some variation from University to University).

3) The third way is by doing a degree in psychology, for which there are courses in only two faculties: that of Education at the university of Rome and Padua. Given the huge number of students, who cannot attend because of lack of space, the two degree courses have turned into a kind of correspondence school.

Strictly speaking, those who attain a specialization should possess a qualification allowing them to practice (it is not clear what) higher than the mere psychology degree. But on the other hand, psychology graduates claim to be more specifically psychologists because their university studies are so totally devoted to the various chapters of psychology, and to supplementary subjects that may be useful for those wanting to be psychologists. The qualification however is academic and does not entitle them to practice anything.

But independently of all this, whichever track they took to get here, what can these psychologists of different derivation do professionally?

The matter is very confused. Are they to compete with social workers, benefiting from the fact that although the latter work in the social sphere, they do not have a degree?

But a good school for social workers provides more concrete training, and the very fact that they do not offer anything to the ambitions arising from having a degree better suited to training staff to work in the field, means the social services, which are still scarce in our country, could be very useful. But what then are these other psychologists, graduates or even with specializations, supposed to do?

The temptation to launch into private practice as a psychotherapist is very strong, even though in the courses in the Schools and university Faculties they have received no preparation for this. It would be impossible anyway, because any form of psychotherapy cannot be learnt using scholastic methods, but only by individually submitting to an investigation of one's own profound reality, conducted by an expert.

Since the techniques that have acquired the best reputation in the field of psychotherapy are those of psychoanalysis, many choose to take either normal paths with someone's help, or without help, towards this destination.

In Italy the clientele that asks for help from the psychoanalyst, or self-proclaimed psychoanalyst, has greatly increased in the recent years.

Traditionally there are different schools of psychoanalysis: the classical Freudian school, but also the Jungian and the Adlerian schools. Moreover, the field is such that many sub-species have been established: there is the Kleinian school, and a school of Lacan, etc.

There are also people of greater or lesser caliber, who may invent their own methods, calling them by various names or also sheltering under the general name (more accepted by the public) of psychoanalyst.

The kind of action, for any form of psychotherapy, is such that it becomes very difficult to determine exactly which elements characterize it.

However, since it is a therapy, it would seem indispensable for the psychotherapist to be a doctor. But the psychotherapist's way of working is totally different from that of any medical specialization.

And it is also very difficult to determine when a person subjects another person to psychotherapy. If I dissuade an individual from performing an action that may be harmful to him, my action may be psychotherapy. But in all interpersonal relationships there may be a psychotherapeutic factor at work.

The psychic disorders which make the public have psychotherapy are very varied. It is sometimes possible to make distinctions and say: this is a medical issue, because what is needed is an intervention with psycho-pharmaceuticals, or with measures that are certainly the domain of the physician.

But many other times it is not. In fact the physician may be the person least suited to intervening because he tends to focus on the functioning of the organs, while the origin of the disorders lies elsewhere, and the reactions of the organism are simply ways in which psychological complications are expressed (*Die Sprache der Organe*, the language of organs, as Freud said), about which the physician, unless he is a psychoanalyst, knows absolutely nothing.

The problem is therefore very complex. And first of all it must be established whether legislative regulation is necessary and possible. Or is it preferable to leave freedom of action to those who declare themselves psychotherapists, as happens for astrologists, clairvoyants, etc? The various schools already operating would be left to organize themselves; they have made their name with their own hard work, offering a guarantee of competence and professionalism for those

that have learned the job with them. Such schools could possibly be recognized after operating seriously for a good number of years (from twenty to thirty)

Otherwise, could there be a federation amongst the Associations (even of different approaches), which however all require training that is at a guaranteed level? And should this Federation retain the right to attest the qualification corresponding to the school of origin? Should freedom of action be left to those who want to perform a role of psychological help, independently of the training provided by the Associations of, as it were, classical psychotherapy? These are the problems that should be openly debated by the experts.