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An Interview with Marco Bacciagaluppi

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Copyright © 2015 by Dr. Costanza Palmitessa, Via Marecchia, 131, I- 47921 Rimini; E-Mail: costanzapalmitessa2[at-symbol]gmail.com and by Dr. Marco Bacciagaluppi, I-20125 Milano; E-Mail: m.bacciagaluppi[at-symbol]marcobacciagaluppi.com.

I met Marco Bacciagaluppi in 2009 through Romano Biancoli, with whom I had carried out my personal analysis. Romano Biancoli, who died in 2009, had worked with Jorge Silva-Garcia, a Mexican psychoanalyst who had trained with Erich Fromm. Bacciagaluppi and Biancoli had a long friendship. Biancoli told me Bacciagaluppi had a close knowledge of many neo-Freudian psychoanalytic themes and of many British and American authors. Biancoli added that this eclectic training led him to ask Bacciagaluppi to cooperate in 1990 in drawing up the “Alternative program of psychoanalytic studies” for the Erich Fromm Institute of Bologna, of which Biancoli was the Director. He thus described in Bacciagaluppi a readiness to cooperate and exchange. I started to read his papers. They were more than 100. I started by reading “Frommian themes in a case of narcissistic personality disorder”, written jointly by Bacciagaluppi and Biancoli and presented at the 34th Winter Meeting of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis in San Antonio, Texas. This paper, later published in *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* (Bacciagaluppi & Biancoli, 1993), was recently placed in the Single Case Archive. I then read some papers pertaining to attachment theory, such as “The relevance of ethology to interpersonal dynamics and to wider social issues” (Bacciagaluppi & Bacciagaluppi Mazza, 1982) and “The role of aggressiveness in the work of John Bowlby” (Bacciagaluppi, 1989). These papers suggested the importance for the advancement of psychoanalysis of an approach integrating biological and cultural evolution. Other papers integrated Frommian themes with attachment theory. I found this was a new and fruitful approach, so I contacted Marco Bacciagaluppi by e-mail. Many exchanges followed, and I was encouraged by his promptness in replying.

Bacciagaluppi told me to read Bowlby’s trilogy in the original English, and other books by British authors such as Ian Suttie. He suggested the most recent writings in English, not yet translated into Italian. I started to read books on the latest trauma research. Bacciagaluppi thus contributed to my cultural training.

I was struck by how clearly he answered my questions. I realized that this was not merely a formal way of expressing himself, but depended on a special feature of his approach. The fact of making explicit the theories behind his reasoning and his clinical work was the result of constant reflection, which included self-analysis. Bacciagaluppi had addressed this subject in the paper on “Self-analysis as an appropriate ending”, given at the AAPDP/OPIFER Joint Meeting held in Florence in 2009 (Bacciagaluppi, 2010). This is also a way of becoming aware of the dangers of ideology in psychoanalysis.

In 2010 Bacciagaluppi started to send me the drafts in English of his book *Paradigms in Psychoanalysis: An Integration*, published in 2012 by Karnac Books, London. He asked me to cooperate in the Italian edition by translating the numerous case studies in the book. I promptly accepted. The book was published in Italian in 2012 by ETS, Pisa, with the title *Paradigmi in psicoanalisi. Un modello integrato*.



In the interview I mean to give special attention to this book. I shall not deal with the events in the personal and professional life of Marco Bacciagaluppi, since they have been accurately reported in an interview carried out in 2005 by Marco Conci and published in 2006 in Volume 15 of *International Forum of Psychoanalysis* (Conci, 2006).

The principal aim of the interview is to elaborate the most interesting passages in this book.

C.P.: First of all I wish to remark that the language used in the book is clear and understandable, even if the reader does not have a specific psychoanalytic training. How is this?

M.B.: I think the clarity comes from the habit of writing in English, with short and clear sentences, without many coordinate and subordinate clauses.

C.P.: If one follows the epistemological principle according to which the study of the foundations of psychoanalytic science, in the light of recent research, requires to change the classical object of psychoanalysis, what are the changes you emphasized in your book?

M.B.: The main change is the adoption of the relational model, which was distinguished from the Freudian drive model in 1983 by Greenberg and Mitchell. In the second place, I attach great importance to real-life traumas, after Freud denied their importance in 1897.

C.P.: In your book you use the term “paradigm”. What led you to make this choice, rather than the terms “pattern” or “model”?

M.B.: In using the word “paradigm” I follow Thomas Kuhn, the author of a famous book of 1962, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

C.P.: You discuss nine paradigms. How can the integration of these paradigms be fruitful at a theoretical and clinical level?

M.B.: The paradigms address various aspects, at different temporal and systemic levels, that are useful in fully understanding patients. I think that the suffering of patients comes from unnatural family and social structures. I therefore look for the historical origins of these deviations from our evolutionary past.

C.P.: You therefore adopt an evolutionary paradigm. In the first chapter, on genetics, you suggest a general explanatory model of the two major psychoses, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. You claim that genetic predisposition to psychopathology is not sufficient to give rise to it, and that it requires other systemic levels. Which are they, and how does the interaction take place?

M.B.: To begin with, in some cases the genetic predisposition is itself sufficient. A well-known example is the American psychiatrist Jamison. If she does not take lithium she suffers manic attacks, as she herself describes in her book of 1995, *An Unquiet Mind*. In most cases, the predisposition must interact with a traumatizing relational environment, at the level both of the family and of society.

C.P.: In the same chapter you mention an extragenic transgenerational transmission. How does that occur?

M.B.: Through cultural evolution. For instance, if in society the dominant character structure is authoritarian, it will also show in the family, thus giving rise to an unfavorable relational environment with which the biological predisposition may interact.

C.P.: It seems that the key word in your book is “integration”. In connection with the discoveries of neurobiology, which you examine in the second chapter, what are the effects of the integration between neurobiology and psychology?

M.B.: The salient fact is that in the first year of life the brain is still immature. Relational traumas in this period may then lead to damage of the cerebral structure.

C.P.: You claim that psychotherapy itself could act as a means to improve the integration of cerebral functions. How?



M.B.: Luckily, the brain is characterized by plasticity. Therefore, by providing an alternative relational environment, psychotherapy may establish new connections between neurons and repair the previous damage.

C.P.: Research on attachment suggests crucial themes for your book. You speak of two innate behavioral sequences: at first, attachment to the caregiver, then the search for autonomy. What conceptual corrections does the attachment paradigm make to Freudian metapsychology?

M.B.: The child's primary need is for relationship, to be distinguished from the need for nourishment. In primates one can see this distinction in Harlow's 1965 experimental observations on infant rhesus monkeys. In birds, one can see it in the fact that chicks follow the hen even if they are able to pick food for themselves.

C.P.: Again in connection with the attachment paradigm, how does the concept of defense change, from the interpersonal point of view and also from that of cognitive mechanisms?

M.B.: If the attitude of the parent is unfavorable, the child may avoid processing the stimuli that would lead it to attachment, thus becoming avoidant.

C.P.: Infant research, which you discuss in the fourth chapter, has provided empirical data to the knowledge of child behavior, providing heuristically more useful concepts compared to the classical ones. How do you explain the tendency, in classically oriented schools, to retain unproven concepts and to ignore the data of empirical research?

M.B.: Traditional schools follow an authoritarian style, whereby new concepts are viewed as deviations to be disapproved. A typical example is the disapproval of Ferenczi when he rediscovered the reality of trauma.

C.P.: One of the crucial themes of your book is trauma, discussed in the fifth chapter. In particular, you claim that dissociation is the typical reaction to real-life childhood traumas. This hypothesis had been upheld by Freud, who later abandoned it. According to

you, what effect did this change have on the development of psychoanalysis? What research in fields different from psychoanalysis have contributed, instead, to restore authority to the hypothesis of a causal link between pathological defenses and real-life trauma?

M.B.: The effect was to replace dissociation, namely a vertical split between different self-states, with repression, namely a horizontal split between conscious and unconscious psychic processes. Ferenczi's rediscovery of the reality of trauma, and of dissociation as a reaction to trauma, was taken up after World War Two by two strands: American feminists and Vietnam veterans.

C.P.: Also the relational paradigm plays an important role in your book. You examine it at length in the sixth chapter. You claim that trauma should always be considered relational trauma. Could you comment on this?

M.B.: There is also trauma from natural catastrophes, but the effects of man-made traumas are worse because they destroy faith in fellow humans.

C.P.: In the seventh chapter, on the family, in connection with the strategic approach of Palo Alto and the systemic approach of Selvini's Milan School, you remark that they have moved away from the relational approach. From the perspective of your book, what recent developments have allowed an integration of the systemic model with a renewed interest in individual therapy?

M.B.: In a hitherto unpublished seminar by Bowlby, edited by me (Bowlby, 2013), two Italian contributors, Agnetti and Barbato, arrive at a synthesis between the systemic school and attachment theory.

C.P.: In the eighth chapter you arrive at an interesting integration of Bowlby's attachment theory and Fromm's studies of the influence of socio-cultural variables on character development. Could you give an example of an integration between these two systemic levels, the relational one (individual and family) and the socio-cultural one?

M.B.: In 1985, Grossmann and co-workers found that in North Germany, where mothers



are less affectionate, there was a high percentage of avoidant children. I suggest that this is the origin of the authoritarian character, described by Fromm in 1941 in *Escape from Freedom*. This establishes a link between attachment theory and Fromm's analytic social psychology.

C.P.: The work by Arieti which you cite in Chapter Eight provides an empirical methodological base in the field of social psychiatry. Which are the most important contributions that highlight the way in which different cultures lead to the development of specific psychiatric disorders? Moreover, is it possible that cultural changes could imply a decrease in psychopathology?

M.B.: In 1959, Arieti saw that in a Puritan sect oriented to patriarchal values there was a high frequency of depression. Modern culture could lead to a decrease in this pathology by weakening patriarchal structures.

C.P.: The ninth chapter of your book, on prehistory, is very innovative. It addresses the issue of the relationship between biology and culture. To begin with, I would like to know the origin of your evolutionary orientation.

M.B.: I assimilated the theory of evolution in the two years I spent at the Institute of Genetics of Pavia University after my degree in Medicine. There I held a seminar on Darwin, in which I presented *The Origin of Species* chapter by chapter. Later, I found the theory of evolution in those whom I consider as my three teachers: Arieti, Bowlby and Fromm. Arieti and Bowlby, without knowledge of one another, read the books by Lorenz and Tinbergen in the Fifties. Fromm, by training a sociologist, read Lorenz towards the end of his life in order to write his 1973 book, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*.

C.P.: How, in the course of the book, does the need arise to trace the continuities and discontinuities between biological and cultural evolution?

M.B.: In order to understand how we arrived at present-day society, a source of individual and social pathology.

C.P.: How and why have we passed from a

natural (so to speak) model to the present one?

M.B.: The most important reason for discontinuity was the domestication of plants and animals, around ten thousand years ago. Human beings passed from the condition of nomadic hunter-gatherers, with few children, to that of sedentary farmers and breeders, with many children.

C.P.: What are the reasons for this discontinuity?

M.B.: We must distinguish between two discontinuities. The first, described above, took place in the Early Neolithic. The first human communities were peaceful and still practised the cult of the Mother Goddess, as in the Upper Paleolithic. The second discontinuity took place in historical times, around 5 thousand years ago, and was due to invasions of nomadic pastoralists from Central Asia, who imposed a predatory patriarchal culture on the preceding matriarchal culture.

C.P.: What concept of mind emerges if biology and culture converge?

M.B.: The hunter-gatherer culture was characterized at a biological level by the evolution of altruism, as was shown in 1999 by Boehm in *Hierarchy in the Forest*, and at a cultural level by matriarchy, first described by Bachofen in 1861.

C.P.: How has patriarchy influenced the relationship between biology and culture in psychoanalysis?

M.B.: Matriarchal culture (but I prefer to call it "maternal", to avoid the implication of the domination of one gender over another and referring back to the Mother Goddess) arose in prehistory and therefore is part of our genetic heritage. The patriarchal culture is too recent to have entered into our genes and remains a purely cultural development. Therefore, at every generation it has to impose itself on the innate maternal culture through the violent and traumatic socialization of children. Freudian psychoanalysis is a typical authoritarian patriarchal structure, that does not tolerate dissent and punishes it by excommunication. This is what happened to Ferenczi when he rediscovered the



reality of trauma. I think that with Ferenczi, Bowlby and Fromm the original maternal culture is re-emerging in psychoanalysis.

C.P.: Thank you very much.

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