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## The review of the Italian association of psycho-neuro-endocrine-immunology

Edited by Francesco Bottaccioli

# PNEI NEWS

The new knowledge of science and health

80 years after Freud's death: a thriving time for science and psychology



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*Francesco Bottaccioli*

### INTERVIEW

#### **Page 5. Fonagy talks about Freud's legacy to psychology and clinical practice**

Freud's model for the mind is far more complex and richer than any other one that was later developed. However, says the famous psychoanalyst in his exclusive interview for Pnei News, it is necessary to revisit thoroughly those traditional psychoanalytical categories that are not valid anymore.

*Paola Emilia Cicerone*

### 80 YEARS AFTER FREUD'S DEATH

#### **Page 8. The fences are falling**

Nowadays there is not anymore one psychoanalysis but many. Several psychoanalytic methods standing beside the cognitivist galaxy. This situation represents an optimal condition for a transversal enrichment.

*Paolo Migone*

#### **Page 11. Psychologic treatment: an epigenetic medication**

An excerpt of the recent book published by David Lazzari "La psiche tra salute e malattia" (Psyche between health and disease) Edra, Milan 2019, showing how psychology can be scientifically endowed and fostered by the new biology.

*David Lazzari*

### NEUROLOGY: NON-PHARMACOLOGICAL TREATMENTS

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A pilot study: osteopathic treatment for patients affected with chronic tension-type headache.

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## EDITORIAL

### **A thriving time for science and psychology**

Francesco Bottaccioli, Director

The title of this PNEI News issue states that nowadays, 80 years after Freud's death (23<sup>rd</sup> September 1939), sciences and psychology are thriving in the present time. Two simultaneous phenomena occurred for this to happen (there is actually a third one that I will describe later): on one side the failure of biologic psychiatry (based on the reductionist branch of the contemporary neurosciences) and on the other side the collapse of orthodoxy in psychology which favours a convergence about to be a contamination among the several psychological traditions.

#### **The failure of biologism in psychiatry and of reductionism in the neurosciences.**

In a recent editorial published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*<sup>1</sup>, Caleb Gardner and Arthur Kleinman, respectively from the Psychiatry and the Anthropology Departments at Harvard Medical School, write that "biologic psychiatry has failed the objective to produce a comprehensive theoretical model of any major psychiatric disorder, any test that can be used in a clinic to diagnose clearly such disorders, or any guiding principle for somatic treatments to replace the empirical use of medications".

In our opinion such unquestionable failure lies on the reductionist paradigm of neurosciences which reduces the mind to cerebral circuits and its complex symbolic dynamics to molecules and electric phenomena as I have repeatedly written<sup>2</sup>.

In his interview to Pnei News (page 5-6) Peter Fonagy, the renowned exponent of contemporary psychoanalysis, confirms this opinion. He claims neurosciences as part of his formation and he does not certainly wish to diminish their importance, however, in the last twenty-five years the focus has been mainly on localizing the functions of the different areas of the brain and this has not led us to understand much of the mental disorders. Thomas Insel, director of the National Institute for Mental Health (2002-2015) affirmed that he felt responsible for having spent the money of tax payers - \$20 bn - in research projects that actually did not result in a better understanding of human suffering and mental disorders. Is this an admission of defeat in the field of neuroscience research? It does not seem the case. Fonagy claims his formation in neurosciences, the same one I have followed and that we are both carrying on: PNEI cannot exist without neurosciences and molecular biology: PNEI is a systemic paradigm with a molecular basis. This means that we do not limit ourselves to the mere description of the mental phenomena. We want to see the whole, encompassing thus also the biologic dimension of these phenomena since they are the product of the entire organism, including the brain, of course. However, understanding biology does not mean demeaning psychology. The functional MRI allows us to see the amygdala area lighting up and this is essential to understand which paths an alertness stimulus takes to involve strategic areas of the brain and the rest of the organism and thus basically the entire body, including the musculoskeletal system. However, in order to understand the mental (cognitive and emotional) characteristics of this stimulus it is necessary to shift from the neuroimaging exam to the investigation of the mind of the individual by using

the tools and the language of psychological sciences. Only then it will be possible to ascertain why that lit-up amygdala got translated into an increased vigilance for one individual whereas for another individual it was a feeling of fear. The behaviour of these two individuals will differ and on the long term also their amygdala will be different: in the second case, the persistent feeling of fear and anxiety may increase the connections among its nuclei, enlarge its area and become epigenetically marked in a hyperactive sense. This phenomenon represents the retroaction of mental states on biology from which they emerge.

To quote the editorial from the New England Journal of Medicine: "our mind arises from brain function and both conscious and unconscious mind feed back continuously to shape that function". Here the necessity of a fundamental rethinking of psychiatry that, still according to Gardner and Kleinman, "needs to be rebuilt".

### **The collapsing of orthodoxy in psychology**

Since decades, Paolo Migone, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, co-director of the review "Psicoterapia e scienze umane" has been carrying on a critical observation on the psychoanalytic tradition. In his article (page 9-11) he describes how the different psychotherapeutic approaches are going through a shuffling the cards with a transversal enrichment which cannot be other than beneficial since this involves the collapsing of old fences. Particularly thanks to the spreading of Bowlby's theory of attachment, to the advancement achieved by evolutionistic epistemology, by the infant research and research in psychotherapy, many sectors of psychoanalysis draw closer, sometimes overlapping, to the development occurred inside the cognitivist tradition.

We are living a dynamic situation open to receive messages of others that once were rejected as default. However, we cannot linger, it is time to act.

### **The role of theory for the renewal of sciences and psychological professions**

Criticizing biologism and reductionism does not mean getting rid of biology. Psychology and psychiatry need a new biology and a new pathophysiological paradigm. Both of them exist already: epigenetic and psychoneuroendocrineimmunology.

The first one studies the genetic network and its responsiveness to the internal and external environment, the latter studies the human network and its responsiveness to the physical and social environment. Adopting these models enables to reorganize the production of the theory on fundamental themes: human nature, the role of psyche, emotions and cognition, the role of the organism as a physical and biological system, the role of behaviours and social relationships. Furthermore, it allows to revisit the roles and characteristics of psychotherapy which is one of the tools, but not the only one, to help a person with mental disorders. Thus, the psychotherapist needs to work in a team with other healthcare professionals who are bond by the same scientific paradigm. Such integration has been favoured also by the legal recognition of the psychologist who is now considered as a fully-fledged healthcare professional. And this is the third phenomenon contributing to a thriving time for sciences and psychology.

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2. Just to quote one of the latest examples, see my postface “I nuovi occhiali dello psicologo” to the book of David Lazzari (2019) “La psiche tra salute e malattia”, Edra, Milano.