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# Human behaviour, benign or malevolent: understanding the human psyche, performing therapy, based on *affective mentalization* and Matte-Blanco's *bi-logic*

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**Abstract.** In the light of Ronald Britton's and Peter Aylward's ideas, possible relationships between basic principles of Matte-Blanco's psychoanalytic theory and the key elements of *affective mentalization* process according to Peter Fonagy and co-workers, are briefly discussed from an epistemological point of view. Possible considerations on psychotherapy are finally mentioned as well, to the end of having suggestions on the side of public healthcare policy just centred on family and its structure.

Roughly, the key concept of Ignacio Matte Blanco's *bi-logic* is basically the unavoidable but variable<sup>1</sup> presence of primary process (symmetric thought) in the secondary one (asymmetric thought) ruling consciousness, for every human being. The former irrupts into the latter by means of affectivity which, accordingly, should be suitably treated to be rightly modulated, regulated and symbolically represented to accomplish the aims of secondary process. This last event, has been usually called *affective mentalization* according to Peter Fonagy and co-workers. Accordingly, any therapeutic intervention should take into account these facts, trying to treat the impetuous affective charge to accomplish this, through analytical or psychotherapeutic setting.

In what follows, we start trying to link together the work of Matte Blanco with that of Fonagy and co-workers. Matte Blanco, also on the basis of the previous work of Melanie Klein, has formalized the relationships between primary and secondary process within Freudian theory, describing in what relationships consists the indissoluble link between these. Fonagy and co-workers have then worked out, along the pathway traced by post-Kleinian school, a functional framework with which to may operate clinically and therapeutically within the familial triad just to reach the right mentalization of affects and their regulation to avoid psychopathologies, stressing the central role played by mother in the primary relation child-mother, and explaining the guiding lines to be followed pedagogically.

Finally, we have also add, to this frame which has seen involved together Matte Blanco, on the theoretical side, and Fonagy and his co-workers, on the pedagogical-clinical side, the considerations by Ronald Britton and Peter Aylward which improve and complete this framework through the claiming of the as much unavoidable role played by father in the dyad child-mother for reaching the

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<sup>1</sup> And just this allows us, by therapeutic intervention, to convert suitably the symmetric thought in the asymmetric one.

highest degree of psychological wellness of child from infancy onwards. All this, therefore, from a policy of social welfare standpoint, should encourage to put attention too, just from a pedagogical-clinical perspective, to the *triadic* structure of family for a better and healthy growth of children, so for a better and healthier society.

## 1. The work of Ignacio Matte Blanco: a brief overview

Following (Murtagh, 2014) and references therein, the work of Ignacio Matte Blanco deals with the intertwinements between conscious reasoning and unconscious thought processes, his great achievement having been to develop a theoretical framework which embraces both. In relation to Freud's work, Matte Blanco largely reformulated basic Freudian opposition pair *conscious-unconscious* in terms of the pair *asymmetry-symmetry*, whose elements have to be interpreted as two modes of being. The interplay of symmetry and asymmetry has been, so to speak, the *red string* of the whole Matte Blanco's work, which builds up as a new theoretical system termed *bi-logic*. His ideas have been first exposed, systematically and organically, in (Matte Blanco, 1975).

The two basic modalities of symmetry and asymmetry, are the two fundamental modes of being which exist within the psychic unity of every human: respectively, that of the "structural" *Id* (or unrepressed unconscious, or symmetrical being) which is ruled by the *principle of symmetry*, and that operating in the conscious thinking, which is ruled by the *principle of asymmetry* of the well-known Aristotelian logic. So, with Matte Blanco, Freudian consciousness and unconsciousness are respectively reformulated in terms of asymmetrical and symmetrical modes of being, and the development of Matte Blanco's theory, is nothing but an attempt at putting in logical-mathematical terms the findings of Freudian theory.

The principle of symmetry gives rise to a cluster or class of things. Within a class of things, as conceptualized by the thinking person, there is perfect equivalence of class members, implying the following: absence of negation; displacement; condensation; no time; no relations of contiguity; no order. How a class is defined in practice, or is known to the thinking person, is described in these terms. Firstly, because, as elaborated on in Matte Blanco, one class member is – in terms of class membership – indistinguishable from another class member, there holds the statement for which the unconscious does not know individuals but only classes or propositional functions which define a class.

Furthermore, the only unity for the (symmetrical) unconscious, as defined above, is the class or set, in which all individuals belonging to it are included. The unconscious cannot, therefore, deal with parts, except in the case they are treated as classes or sets. Consciousness, thus, when considers a whole class, can only see it in two ways: either it focuses on the limits (or definition) of the class – that is, on those precise features which characterize it and distinguish it from all other classes – or it concentrates on the individuals which form the class.

A class comes about through condensation, namely, two impulses, which appear incompatible in Aristotelian logic, may be joined together in one expression by condensation. The principle of generalization then relates different classes. If we assume various classes, then the principle of

generalization and the principle of symmetry are both taken just for their explanatory capability in regard to these classes. In this way, the generalizing part [in the human] leads to symbolic function, since symbols arise out of knowledge of, or awareness of, classes. Classes are structured as, what might be called, “bags of symmetry” and also “levels”.

Counterposed to symmetrical principle, in Matte Blanco is the asymmetrical principle, which acts or operates in conscious thinking. It can roughly be comprehended in, or expressed through, Aristotelian logic. To be precise, asymmetrical being perceives reality as divisible or formed by parts and, as such, related to a spatial-temporality dimension. Symmetrical being can be known only through the glass or prism of asymmetrical being, as thinking requires asymmetrical relations. Analogously, so does consciousness towards empiricism and analytics.

First, we consider the attempts of measurement of the symmetrical. For Matte Blanco, symmetrical being alone is not observable in humans. Even delineating, it is already an asymmetrical activity. In regard to affects, the magnitude of emotion is understood in terms of the right proportion between symmetrical and asymmetrical thinking; and just this latter aspect, will be retaken in the next section. Unconscious psychological events are not intrinsically immeasurable *per se*, although, when compared with a physical event susceptible to just one finite series of measurements, the unconscious events instead is a matter of being susceptible to an infinite series of measurements.

Reasoning, for analogy, on the basis of well-known Cantor argument whereby a whole set, being in a bijection with a part of this same set, implies the same countable infinite cardinal for both whole and part sets, then it follows that, by making the individual identical to the class, the principle of symmetry, as seen from an asymmetrical point of view, leads to an infinite set. In any case, we must always keep in mind the possibility that, if things are viewed in terms of multidimensional space, then symmetrical being can actually unfold into an infinite number of asymmetrical relations. Indeed, consciousness cannot exist without asymmetrical relationships, because the essence of consciousness is just to distinguish and to differentiate, and this cannot be done with symmetrical relations only.

Symmetrical being is transposed into asymmetrical terms by means of words. Words (i.e., their meanings) are the asymmetrical tools of the translating-unfolding function. So, we have that words and abstract things, fulfil the function of differentiating between concepts and also between other things. They are constrained to be, therefore, highly asymmetrical in their structure. To further support Matte Blanco’s view here, consider the following. Text is, so to say, the “sensory surface” of the underlying semantics, so, following (Murtagh, 2014) and references therein, words are a good starting point for further analysis and how this can even go towards accessing aspects of underlying symmetrical being. This, of course, holds too for analytic setting of psychotherapy, as we shall see in another forthcoming paper on *CCRT method* by Lester Luborsky and co-workers (Luborsky and Crits-Christoph 1990), in which we shall analyze the computational aspects of this method.

Finally, Matte Blanco (1988) tries to lay out his theory on bi-logic within the wider philosophical framework, so casting a conceptual parallelism between the dialectic pairs *symmetry–asymmetry* and *feeling–thinking*, this last as mainly constituting the *being*, and said to be the *fundamental*

*antinomy* of the being. The latter transposition gives rise to an understanding of the unconscious logic in terms of logic of affects: the affective appraisal mechanisms, in other words, operate symmetrically, preferring sameness, aversely to difference in respect to the individual's evolving set of preferences, while the development of Ego-functioning means that affect is contained, so individual can bear difference, separation and frustration of their preferences (West 2007, pp. 103-104). Just in discussing undifferentiated mental states, a central moment of Matte Blanco's clinic is turned out to be the stimulation of organizational factors of *thinkableness*, like time and the corporal space, to activate mental experiences and growth in every individual subjectivity (Lombardi 2007). And this last clearly may be put into correspondence with the so-called *affective mentalization* as defined in the following section.

Actual sequences of thinking are the core of psychoanalytic trade, as thinking and disturbances are present in every clinical minute of a psychoanalytic therapist's day. Freud was the first to fill that gap between feeling and thinking which held since much time, giving same dignity of study to both. Matte Blanco, from his decennial clinical experience, identified the infiniteness character owned by many strong affects (above all, emotions, like love, hatred, anger, and so forth) felt by patients; he furthermore retraces an unconscious presence in every affective manifestation, whose marker is just this infiniteness feature impressed to affect. The omnipresence of unconscious aspects in every affective manifestation entails the possibility to access to unconscious realm by means of conscious psychic elaboration. So, emotion and unconscious, although distinct categories, are closely tied together according to Matte Blanco's bi-logic (Ginzburg 2007)

Matte Blanco (1988) identified, in the primary relationship child-mother, the deepest roots of the being of every individual, in which predominates indistinctness and concreteness, mainly through projective introjections according to Melanie Klein, which are, in turn, characterized by symmetry. This makes possible, and easier to be established, the relationship patient-therapist in the analytic setting, allowing a communication between them just due to their indistinctness at the unconscious level, like in the past child-mother relations, where bodily and emotional touches are at the same archaic level. Their right separation, above all by means of caregiver (mother) action, will take place to a next differentiation of higher psychic functions (Ginzburg 2007).

In any case, what stands out from most of clinical cases treated within Matte Blanco's framework<sup>2</sup>, is a revival of those unresolved Œdipal conflicts mainly due to a inexact and unbalanced ratio between asymmetric and symmetric thought whose regulation starts just in infancy with the primary relationship child-mother, according to a process very similar to the *affective mentalization* one, as described in the next section, and then proceeds with the intervention of a third person (father). However, the central key of Matte Blanco's teaching is that the fundamental, constitutive antinomy between thinking and feeling is a constant, perennial presence in every act of each individual life. It allows us to have a vision of reality which is, at the same time, seen as indivisible and unitary (symmetry) as well as divisible and heterogeneous (asymmetry). The balancing of symmetry and asymmetry is just an affective regulation with a consequent modulating mental elaboration, which

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. (Ginzburg 2007) and (Grotstein 2007).

should be driven first by mother, then by analyst; it tries to make predominating asymmetry on symmetry, so mentalizing proto-emotions<sup>3</sup> (Ginzburg 2007, p. 59; Grotstein 2007, p. 72).

James S. Grotstein proposed to consider unconscious as the place of emotions rather than drives, which are, instead, pushed or animated just by the former. To reach normally consciousness, the emotions should leave their primitive fashion, their non-neutralized proto-emotive state, through a neutralization process which eliminates their initial aggressive and libidinal charge, to give rise affective representations symbolically expressed. This should be accomplished by a psychotherapy just centred on the right symbolic interpretation (hence, belonging to asymmetric thought) of the heterogeneous and chaotic materials (of symmetric thought) issuing from analytical setting, and suitably settled by analyst in such a way to modulate and regulate affective charge irrupting from unconscious. This preliminary and basic transformation of symmetric thought into asymmetric one, as theoretically claimed by Matte Blanco, has been masterly reformulated by Peter Fonagy and co-workers to give rise to an operative disciplinary scheme to be followed pedagogically and clinically in treating psychopathological illnesses. Finally, further completions to this frameworks, come also from Ronald Britton and Peter Aylward ideas and considerations on the triadic structure of family.

## **2. Affective regulation, mentalization and Self's development: a very brief outline of Peter Fonagy and co-workers ideas in comparison with Ignacio Matte Blanco's bi-logic, via Ronald Britton's and Peter Aylward's perspectives**

First, we briefly discuss basic ideas on *affective mentalization* following Peter Fonagy and co-workers, sketching a very first comparison with Matte Blanco's main ideas on bi-logic. Then, we continue in discussing affective mentalization in the light of Ronald Britton and Peter Aylward points of view on some related arguments which can encounter both Matte Blanco and Fonagy.

### *2.1 A first comparison between P. Fonagy and co-workers ideas and I. Matte Blanco's ones*

Peter Fonagy, György Gergely, Elliot L. Jurist and Mary Target (2002) have worked out a new and interesting psychodynamic theory whose experimental bases have been provided by the well-known John Bowlby's *attachment theory*. The key idea of this new theory, is that the sense of the *Self* of the child basically springs out from the affective quality of the basic object relationships with the primary caregiver who shall led from the *co-regulation* (between child and caregiver) to the *self-regulation* of affects, with the child as regulatory agent of own affects, pursued also through introspection, in such a manner to become aware of the own mental states. Such a basic affectivity regulation, in turn, entails a *mentalization* process which refers to the widest psychic function of the human mind to establish relationships with others; the operational aspect of mentalization being properly called *reflective function*.

Mentalization has a metacognitive nature as it is a higher psychic function which is able to handle, use and organize memories and past experiences, by means of certain *internal operative models* whose precursors are acquired since birth. Mentalization is closely related to the development of

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<sup>3</sup> A process similar to the conversion of *beta* (irrational) elements in *alpha* (rational) ones, according to W. Bion (Grotstein 2007, p. 72).

the Self in its representational aspects as well as in its active component, that is to say, as a mental agent. Therefore, it is related respectively to the representation of the Self, that is to say, to the symbolic interactionism *Me*, or *empirical Self*, as well as to the Self as a mental agent, i.e., to the symbolic interactionism *I*, or *psychological Self*, which has been quite neglected by psychological studies. The mentalization is a process which has a deep social origin, that develops, since early childhood, in touching and interacting with other senior minds.

These last interactions take place with the discovery of affects<sup>4</sup> into the primary relationships with primary objects, first of all, caregiver. This exiting experience implies a process of (co-)regulation of affects, that is to say, the capability to modulate affective states, which is strictly related with the mentalization process occurring along the next development of either the *sense of Self* and the *sense of being* active through self-regulation of affect. This affective regulation modulates affective states which, in turn, will regulate, accordingly, Self itself. This latter complex process, is said to be *affective mentalization* (roughly, *mentalization* plus *reflective function*), and concerns a *mentalized affectivity* denoting a mature and autonomous capability to discover those subjective meanings to be assigned to own affective states, starting from the first object relationships (from Melanie Klein onwards).

Mentalized affectivity is the central core of any successfulness therapeutic enterprise, which is also the experiential comprehension of own feelings, in a manner which goes beyond simple intellectual understanding. Affective mentalization is given by tuned interrelationships with the parents or the caregivers, who allow the so-called *affective mirroring* or *reflection* mainly through facial looks and vocal expressions for representing, in the child, those feelings that caregivers deem to be licit to show in order to calm and reassure child, instead to intensify or amplify her or his emotions. Only in this manner, caregivers, with such a *psycho-feedback* child-caregiver occurring with IIM, may offer that important possibility to the child to build up *second order representations* of the (Freudian) secondary process, then belonging to the symbolic realm (linguistic, iconic, etc.), upon *first order representations* springing out from (Freudian) primary process.

But, in order to affective mirroring be effective and operative in providing right and correct second order representations (at cognitive level), caregiver should however try to communicate to the child that her or his affective expression is not real, that is to say, it should not be a sign of her or his real affective state. We call this particular feature of the caregiver's mirroring, a *marking*, that, where missing, induces, the child, to believe that caregiver really feels that affective state which becomes so contagious or is deemed to be universal. The child, in so doing, perceives emotion as a real one, whose energetic amount often perturbrates instead to modulate and regulate her or his affective tone, leading to the trauma instead to the modalities of emotional restraining and stemming<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> *Affects* comprehend *emotions*, which are categorical, biological and universal, as well as *feelings*, which instead are subjective, individual and depending on living environment, culture, society, family, personal idiosyncrasies, etc.

<sup>5</sup> All this, might be usefully related with the *double bind* model of Gregory Bateson and co-workers, whose breaking (see, for example, (Iurato 2015)) may be put into correspondence with the breaking of the psychic equation between internal and external reality, considered above. See also what will be said later, just in regard to this latter point, when we shall talk about Peter Aylward's ideas.

The repeated experience of affective regulation by means of caregiver's mirroring and marking process, help the child to learn that own feelings do not flow inevitably in the external world, so splitting own internal world from the external one, hence breaking the pathological symmetry of the *psychic equation*<sup>6</sup> between internal and external, that is to say, between represented and effective mental states. Impairments in this caregiver's marked mirroring are then closely related with certain psychic disorders, among which are the borderline and narcissistic ones. Therefore, one of the main aims of psychotherapeutic setting is just to try to restore the right equilibrium between external and internal psychic reality, distinguishing between concrete and splitted ("to pretend") modalities of psychic functioning. Once this equilibrium has been re-established, then the child may understand and consider others as autonomous psychological entities with their own individuality, so the child acquires the first rudiments of *otherness*<sup>7</sup>; from here onwards, the rising of the various, further components of the Self may take place.

This process of Self development may be pursued only through mentalized affectivity, filling the gap in the psychological Self through the re-establishment of the right connections between the consciousness of affective states (occurring through second order representations used to think or reflect about affects) and their primary experience at the level of constitutional Self<sup>8</sup>, so associating a meaning (semantics) to the contextual and contingent experience (pragmatics), that is to say, for giving a meaningfulness to the experienced life which will allow an experiential comprehension of sensations, a crucial and basic psychic element for a normal psychic behaviour. So, focal attention on the emotions, warrants that the connections among second order representations for thinking and reflecting, are restored, as well as for re-establishing and correcting those wrong connections between a certain type of affective expression and another different type of unconscious affect.

The right and (psychically) normal connections, if any, among the first order and the second order representations of an affect, are related, on its turn, with a healthy caregiver mirroring, which is the result of a correct and right maternal mirroring, the unavoidable basis for the mentalized affectivity. This last takes place through the *mentalization* process and its *reflective function*, which give rise to the *interpersonal interpretation mechanism* (IIM) of above, that allows the child, as a moderator, to rightly interpret the various reality experiences which occur along her or his infancy; it rules the fundamental transposition from genotype to phenotype, characterizing the genic activation from DNA to RNA, in dependence on environment and how this has been interpreted by child during the passage from co-regulation to self-regulation of affects, thanks to the right contextualizing help of caregivers in establishing the first object relationships.

Therefore, in a few words, affective mentalization is the indispensable psychic means to establish the right and normal connections between second order (conscious – asymmetric) and first order (unconscious – symmetric) psychic representations, in perfect agreement with Matte Blanco's basic principles on asymmetric and symmetric thought of *bi-logic* (cf. section 1), whose psychotherapy

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<sup>6</sup> Just ruled by Matte Blanco's symmetry principle.

<sup>7</sup> It opens the way to socialization. It is established by caregiver, with her or his first object relations with child. The caregiver will be just who shall open the way to interpersonal relations of the child, if such object relations have been rightly carried out just according to Fonagy and co-workers ideas.

<sup>8</sup> In which converge all the individual experiences, biologically determined, and associated with emotional expressivity and with the temperamental manifestations of affect. It mainly relies on unconscious realm.

mainly consists *not* in deleting symmetry from asymmetry (which is impossible to do), but rather in re-establishing the right and balanced relationships between these two agencies, just through a restoring of a well-posed *affective mentalization* according to the theory of Fonagy and co-workers, as for instance pursued along any analytic setting that, in any case, has an unavoidable transference component, typical of any psychological therapeutic intervention (Gill 1982).

As Matte Blanco claims – as one of the main principles of his clinical intervention – the possible therapeutical access to unconscious realm just through the emotional/affective window of symmetric thought, to restore or re-establish the right, balanced *ratio* between (infinite) symmetric (emotive/affective) and (finite) asymmetric (rational) thought<sup>9</sup> in such a way to convert disorder of symmetric thought into the rational order of asymmetric one, so Fonagy and co-workers point out the crucial and pivotal role played by affective mentalization process in separating and equilibrating first order and second order psychic representations, the key for a normal psychic development, a process, therefore, in its essence, similar to the asymmetrization of symmetric thought according to Matte Blanco.

The affective mentalization is based on the *psycho-feedback*, as initially conceived by G. Gergely. According to this, the second order representations of epistemic and motivational states of the mind, spring out from the interiorization of mother responses to the discomforts of the child, so giving rise to a psychic internal state. The empathic emotion of the mother, in the corresponding mirroring, provides a feedback to the emotional state primarily felt by the child, which is so internalized to give rise a second order representation whose *signifier* is the empathic face of the mother, while the *signified* is the corresponding affective expression by the child. Therefore, mother's expression modulates child's emotion till to reach a net different position with respect to what has been felt primarily by child. This tuning between child and caregiver (mother, primarily) also entails the more or less sense of *contingency* by child.

Nevertheless, mother's expression itself, is not recognized as belonging to mother, but is meant as an organizer of the own internal state of the Self, just as the corresponding result of the mirroring process, carried out by mother's caregiving, of the various expressions of the primary feelings felt by child. At the first early stages, the child is not aware that others (beyond herself or himself) have too own affects, that is, the child does not have the capability to comprehend others as autonomous psychological entities, or else, the child does not have the sense of *intentionality* as the basis for the intersubjectivity. This last will be gradually acquired with the arising of the other components of the Self starting from the (social) psycho-feedback established between child-caregiver, hence after that mentalization and reflective function have been settled.

Fonagy and co-workers, have exemplified their theory on the basis of two chief clinical models, one referring to borderline disorders, the other to psychic phenomenology regarding anomalies of projective identification process. Both are however related to the above mentioned *psychic equation* between internal and external reality, these latter being recognized just thanks to the right affective

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<sup>9</sup> The structural unconscious according to Matte Blanco, is considered subdivided or organized into different levels or strata in dependence on the different proportion between symmetry and asymmetry giving rise to bi-logic structure of human psyche from the highest asymmetric level of net and clear perception to levels even more in-depth gradually affective-emotive charge increases (Lombardi 2007, p. 40).

regulation established between caregiver (mother) and child. Now, Matte Blanco has deeply studied and discussed just what main role plays symmetry principle in the projective identification process and its anomalies in distinguishing between intersubjectivity and intrasubjectivity (Lombardi 2007), which are, according to Fonagy and co-workers, right the two main psychic needs of human beings, just acquired by means of primary object relationships involving child.

Indeed, Fonagy and co-workers claim the fundamental importance of psychotherapeutic practice to re-establish the right connection between first order and second order representations of affects. In fact, through the right integration of affect and cognition, to be established along psychotherapy, we reach second order representations of emotional states which allow us to experiencing psychic life according to these two main needs of human psychic life, to be precise, on the one hand, the intrasubjective need to maintain an internal psychic equilibrium among mental forces (according to orthodox Freudian theory), on the other hand, the need to integrate ourselves into the social world in which we live, in such a manner to respect other minds, with some of which one might establish intimate emotive relationships. Fonagy and co-workers just say that *mentalized affectivity* is the key psychic process in pursuing this basic integration, meant as an unavoidable basis for the next Self development and its normal psychic deployment; accordingly, therapeutic clinic should try to renew this lost mentalized affectivity by means of analyst's metacognitive intervention.

In conclusion, the *affective mentalization* process of Fonagy and co-workers, which includes the over-ordered means for identifying, modulating, and expressing affects, allows to may change our own affects and regulate them, to give rise representations of either own ideas and others, so giving the right place to the centre of the own Self in such a manner to allow introspective ability, intimacy and separation. It is therefore the core of any psychotherapeutic cure. It might be furthermore considered as a kind of real operative-therapeutic actuation of the basic bi-logic principle of Matte Blanco's theory on the unavoidable and inseparable *ratio* between symmetric (affective) and asymmetric (rational) thought of human psyche (cf. Section 1), from which the central notion of mentalized affectivity may arise from a psychoanalytic epistemology standpoint and understood as a metacognitive ability to change mental models of behaviours and relationships. So, the clinical results of the therapeutical practice carried on by Fonagy and co-workers school, on the basis of their new psychodynamic theory, may be seen too as an indirect empirical confirmation of the validity of the original Matte Blanco ideas on bi-logic just applied to *infant research*.

### *2.1 A second comparison between P. Fonagy and co-workers ideas and I. Matte Blanco ones, through R. Britton's and P. Aylward's considerations*

In the previous subsection, we have briefly pointed out, following Fonagy and co-workers, what primary role plays caregiver in raising the subjective psychic world of the child with the breaking of the *psychic equation* between internal and external reality, with the distinction between first order and second order psychic representations, hence putting this in an analogical comparison with main principles of Matte Blanco's ideas on bi-logic. Nevertheless, Fonagy et al. (2002, Ch. 7) point out as well<sup>10</sup>, the further importance that child, once acquired this basic distinction between first order and second order representations, should be further aware of the fact that these representations

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<sup>10</sup> See also (Target and Fonagy 2002).

which he or she has of external world, are not the unique possible ones, but are only a possible, subjective replica of external world. To accomplish this, Fonagy et al. (2002, Ch. 7) just invoke the basic psychoanalytic hypothesis on the functional role played by the Oedipal triad on the cognitive development of the child, invoking the important works of Ronald Britton (1989, 2000, 2014), as well as, among others, of Michael E. Lamb (1981), Kyle D. Pruett (1987), Donald Meltzer (1988), Natasha J. Cabrera et al. (2000), Mary Target and Peter Fonagy (2002), Paolo De Pasquali (2002) Judith Trowell and Alicia Etchegoyen (2002), Peter Aylward (2012).

In a few words, Fonagy and co-workers stress the main fact for which the parents involvement in the internal psychic world of the child, should push the latter beyond her or his own mental conceptions, so allowing to the child to be aware that what he or she are thinking is only a possible subjective representation of external world, so meant as a simple but not unique replica of it. So, Oedipal phase acts just to bring child beyond that basic psychic state created by the simple breaking between first order and second order representations by primary caregiver, enabling child to be further aware of the fact that these her or his own internal psychic representations are not unique but subjective and multiple, as well as they are a possible replica of external world. Just to this end, the right overcoming of Oedipal complex is a further, basic step to be pursued for a normal development of the own Self, assigning the right weight and role to the psychic representations of internal and external world. As we shall briefly see later, this may occur by means of the action of the father into the dyadic relationship child-mother, inside familial triad (Aylward 2012; Britton 1989, 2000, 2014; Iurato 2015); his importance has been stressed from time (Lamb 1981; Pruett 1987; Meltzer 1988; Cabrea et al. 2000; Target and Fonagy 2002; Trowell and Etchegoyen 2002).

Indeed, in the normal psychic development, if the perception of the conjunction of both parents is felt, by the child, as independent of herself or himself, then she or he shall acquire a unitary psychic world. This perception creates a world in which different object relationships can occur, rather than monadic serial worlds each with its own object relationship per parent. The primal *family triangle* provides the child with two main links connecting her or him separately with each parent (two sides of the family triangle,  $C(\text{child}) \leftrightarrow F(\text{father})$  and  $C(\text{child}) \leftrightarrow M(\text{mother})$ ), which allow the child to be put into comparison with the third link  $F \leftrightarrow M$  (third side of family triangle) from which she or he is excluded. Initially this parental link (third side) is conceived in primitive part-object terms, and in the psychic modes of the child's own oral, anal and genital desires, as well as in terms of her or his hatred expressed in oral, anal and genital terms. If this link between parents, perceived in love and hate, will be tolerated in the child's mind, then it provides the child with a prototype for an object relationship of a third kind in which he or she is a witness and not a participant. This gives rise to a *third position*, from which object relations can be observed and established. This will allow us to observe and to be observed, to see ourselves to interact with others, to consider other standpoints and, at the same time, to keep our own standpoint. This *mental freedom*, so acquired by child, is said to be *triangular space*. From all this, it follows the importance of father (Britton 2000, Ch. 4; 2014).

A *third position*, therefore, may take place, thanks to which object relationships can be observed. Once given this, we can also envisage to being observed, so giving rise to first forms of subjectivity. This equips us with a capacity for seeing ourselves in interaction with others and for entertaining

another standpoint while retaining our own – for observing ourselves while being ourselves. As has been said above, Britton speaks of the *mental freedom* provided by this process, also occurring into the psychic space of analytic setting in which triangular familial structure is re-established. This is a capacity, one hopes, to be retained and to be found in the patients during analysis. But there are besides analyses in which, for some time, or at certain times, this seems to be impossible for either patient and analyst, and it is just at these times, that one realises what does it mean to lack the *third position* of analyst in the therapeutic setting. All this, however, relies, and is built up, on the triadic structure of nuclear family, so highlighting the fundamental role played by the parent (in general, the father) who shall occupy *third position* within this family triadic structure (Britton 2000, Ch. 4; 2014).

On the other hand, Peter Aylward (2012), in his criminological and forensic analyses, starting from the objective causes and data which have triggered many various crimes and offenses, has yet gone even more in-depth until to reach the unconscious bases underlying these, with the nice, socially useful and praiseworthy intention to may take in cure such persons in analytical setting for making them aware, with conscious reflection, of what have they done, what has happened them, and what have they felt, hence, with the aim to try to re-establish first that *affective mentalization* lacking to them, according to Fonagy and co-workers psychotherapeutic clinic. Aylward has tried to bring on this his task via psychoanalytic methods and therapy, bearing in mind the ever present unconscious influence on conscious counterpart according to Matte Blanco, as suggested by his supervisor, Gerald Wooster. This framework, was then contextually applied to the family triangle, likewise Britton, since what is common to most of the criminological and forensic studies made by Aylward is however a very critical and difficult childhood and adolescence of the offenders grow up within a careless, poor, compromised and shattered familial background, in either environment, function and structure. This is an almost universal datum which emerges from the criminological archives and reports of every country and nation<sup>11</sup>.

In analysing some violent crimes and shameful offenses, Aylward identifies a typical psychic process occurring in these, that is to say, the re-enactment of certain deep psychic trauma underwent by criminal or offender, unconsciously repressed but ever ready to emerge to consciousness, mainly by compulsion to repeat, with its strong and violent power, so disrupting any possible affective mentalization of it. Even this time, Aylward identifies in a bad familial (Œdipal) triangulation the early roots of these, a pathological condition<sup>12</sup> that he calls a *perverse triangulation* (Aylward 2012, Ch. 2). His considerations agree with Britton's ideas on the central role of triadic structure of family and the related Œdipal situation there involved. Aylward points out that a triangle, just from a mathematical standpoint, collapses into one of its three sides when one vertex is absent or a corner is lacking, so giving rise to a double link only, corresponding, again in agreement with Britton (see above), to a single object relationship between child and caregiver which, in pathological cases, may degenerate.

Just this geometric degeneration of a triangle into a single straight line (one side) psychologically corresponding to a possible degenerative psychic behaviour, is rightly said to be, by Aylward, a

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<sup>11</sup> As regard Italian scene, see, for example, (De Pasquali 2002).

<sup>12</sup> See also (De Pasquali 2002).

*perverse triangle*. Along this side, it is still possible to have a right affective mentalization process according to Fonagy and co-workers but, as said above, a third position necessarily should occur, besides affective mentalization. On the other hand, the normality condition is re-established through psychotherapeutic intervention just re-introducing a *third position* (according to Britton), so breaking the higher (geometric) symmetry of a single straight line (one side of perverse triangle formalizing the embroiled dyad child-mother) to a lower (geometric) symmetry of a non-degenerate triangle with three distinct elements (corresponding to the right, normal triadic familial structure<sup>13</sup>). This is besides confirmed too by latest researches on computational psychoanalysis. Indeed, only with, at least, three distinct elements it is possible, a priori, to consider formally an *ultrametric structure* of unconscious and related psychic phenomenology, coherently with Matte Blanco's ideas (Murtagh 2012a,b).

In symmetrical logic, indeed, subject and object are interchangeable. The exchange of subject for object inverts the situation. Britton (1998) thinks that this is based on a particular form of projective identification which in dynamic terms is continuously oscillating or, in terms of an image, would be represented by a half-subject/half-object figure. In this pathological organisation, a *dual parallelism* has been substituted for a *triangularity* in the Œdipal phase and in every other next interpersonal situation. All the relationships based on this dyadic relationship (child-mother) are seen as essentially the same and owe their partiality, not to the integration of other perceived relationships, such as that between the parents, but only to a splitting in the subjective self, with a partial identification with each parent and oscillation between them. A true capacity for subjective and objective experience of the Self is therefore not achieved but, rather, a mechanical, alternating subjectivism which offers balance instead of stability – *equilibrium*, as Betty Joseph describes it, rather than *change* (Britton 2000, Ch. 5). So, to break this dangerous oscillation alongside the child-mother axis, a third person should occur<sup>14</sup>, i.e., the father – meant in its widest sense – who shall exert an effective action psychologically valid only when this is possible, that is to say, when the firstly established child-mother tie becomes quite flexible to allow next father intervention<sup>15</sup>.

This next flexible intervention of the father, however, in establishing a right triangulation, requires a preliminary *flexibility* of the dyadic relation child-mother, as Wooster has pointed out (Aylward 2012, p. 26). This flexibility geometrically just corresponds to elastically deform a single side (namely, child-mother tie) to give rise a triangular configuration. Indeed, a net rigidity, a priori, would rule out any possible elastic deformation of a certain straight line to give rise a triangle configuration<sup>16</sup>. This latter *flexibility* of the dyad child-mother, we suppose furthermore, would just correspond to the occurrence of a right *affective mentalization* according to Fonagy and co-workers. Afterwards, as said above, once this latter flexibility of child-mother dyad is feasible, then a further

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<sup>13</sup> See also (Iurato 2015). Moreover, Britton (1989, 2014) has stressed on the dangers coming from the absence of the side M↔F, corresponding to the absence of the third position, in the Œdipus triangle identified by the vertexes F(ather), M(other), C(hild). See also next footnote<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. (Target and Fonagy 2002, p. 49).

<sup>15</sup> In Lacanian terms, this means that, prior, mother should possess herself the Name-of-the-Father, in such a manner child shall be able to unconsciously recognize the future actuation of this law by the intervention of the third person, i.e., the father usually. See also (Britton 1989) and the introduction by Adriano Voltolin to (Britton et al. 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Roughly, pulling up the middle point of a segment of a straight line, imagined as an kind of an elastic with fixed extremes, so giving rise to a triangular configuration, not to an exact geometric triangle with three distinct sides. Of course, a segment of a straight line is not topologically homeomorphic to a triangle (Bell 2006, Ch. 6, pp. 239-240).

step besides affective mentalization is needed to have a full, normal development of the Self, namely, the intervention of the father, meant in its widest symbolic meaning (i.e., the Lacanian *Name-of-the-Father*<sup>17</sup>).

From the clinical experiences reported by Britton (2000, 2014) and Aylward (2012), it seems that the main task of therapist should be create a reflexive psychic space in which bring the patient to be aware of her or his deep affective conflicts coming from a wrong resolution of Œdipal complex, so putting he or she in the right triangulation to overcome it, with the need insertion of father figure. But, as seen above, before we proceed on with this step, a preliminary one is needed to be pursued, that is to say, to restore the right *affective mentalization* according to Fonagy and co-workers, then to go on with the establishment of the right *Œdipal triangulation*. Hence, from a psychotherapeutic standpoint, we are of the opinion that this sequence should be pursued according to this order, first restoring affective mentalization, according to Fonagy and co-workers clinic, then going on with an analytical setting to re-establish the right *triangular space* as, for example, claimed by Britton and Aylward.

This sequence of two main steps is fundamental to be pursued just in this order. Indeed, we have already discussed deeply the preliminary importance to establish the right affective mentalization process along the primary relation child-mother, hence we have stressed the need to overcome next the Œdipus phase within a triadic context, since, as Britton (2000, Ch. 5; 2014) has pointed out, the strong tie child-mother is besides featured by a great amount of symmetric relations – like object/subject, internal/external, etc. – which make oscillating, ambiguous and undecidable such a dyad, and that are meant just in the sense of Matte Blanco; they establish only parallelisms and are intended as analogous of each other. Only with the intervention of familial triangulation, it is possible to have *other* relationships which go beyond the nonviable ones of child-mother tie, and are characterized by asymmetry, still in the sense of Matte Blanco; and also Aylward (2012) confirms just this. Anyway, once again, besides what has already been pointed out by sociology<sup>18</sup>, the crucial importance of classical nuclear triadic family for the right and normal psychological development of a child, has been stood out also from a psychoanalytic stance.

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<sup>17</sup> See also (Target and Fonagy 2002, p. 49).

<sup>18</sup> See (Donati 2013).

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