

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

Fionn Murtagh¹, Giuseppe Iurato²

¹University of Derby, and Goldsmiths, University of London, UK; ²University of Palermo, Palermo, Italy

Correspondence to: Fionn Murtagh. Professor of Data Science, University of Derby, Derby DE22 1GB, UK. Email: fmurtagh@acm.org.

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Introduction

The key concept of Ignacio Matte Blanco's bi-logic is the unavoidable but variable presence of primary process (symmetric thought) in the secondary one (asymmetric thought) ruling consciousness, for every human being. This variable and dynamic presence allows us, by therapeutic intervention, to convert suitably the symmetric thought into the asymmetric one. The former erupts 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 transition has been termed affective mentalization by Peter Fonagy *et al.* Accordingly, any therapeutic intervention should take into account these facts, aiming to treat the impetuous affective charge to accomplish this, through analytical means or the psychotherapeutic setting.

In what follows, we link together the work of Ignacio Matte Blanco with that of Fonagy *et al.* 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 there consist the indissoluble link between these. Fonagy *et al.* have then worked out, along the pathway traced by the post-Kleinian school, a functional framework with which one 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 guidelines to be followed pedagogically.

We have also added, to this frame which has seen

involved together Matte Blanco on the methodology side, and Fonagy *et al.*, on the pedagogical-clinical side, the considerations by Ronald Britton and Peter Aylward which further develop this framework through the essential role played by the father within the child-mother dyadic relationship, for reaching the highest degree of psychological wellness of the child from infancy onwards. All this, therefore, from a policy of social welfare standpoint, should encourage to orientate attention, just from a pedagogical-clinical perspective, on the triadic structure of family for a better and healthy growth of children, and so for a better and healthier society.

The foundational work of Ignacio Matte Blanco

Bi-logic, symmetrical and asymmetrical being in the human unconscious and conscious states

Following (1) 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 the 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 is the foundation of all of Matte Blanco's work, which builds up as a new theoretical system termed bi-logic. His ideas were first exposed, systematically and organically, in (2).

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 the very enlightening and insightful 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 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 of such parts being treated as classes or sets. Consciousness, thus, when considering 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 the 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 at 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 event 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 (1) 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 other future work of ours on the CCRT method (Core Conflictual Relationship Theme) by Luborsky and Crits-Christoph (3), in which we shall analyze the computational aspects of this method.

Finally, Matte Blanco (4) lays 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 latter as mainly constituting being, and stated 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 the individual can bear difference, separation and frustration of their preferences (5). Just in discussing undifferentiated mental states, a central moment of Matte Blanco's clinical practice turns 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 (6). And this last clearly may be put into correspondence with the so-called affective mentalization as defined in the following section.

Emotion and affective mentalization

Actual sequences of thinking are the core of psychoanalytic work, since 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 for a great deal of 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 gain access to the 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 (7).

Matte Blanco (4) identified, in the primary child-mother relationship, the deepest roots of the being of

every individual, in which indistinctness and concreteness predominate, 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 lead towards a subsequent differentiation of higher psychic functions (7).

In any case, what stands out from most of clinical cases treated within Matte Blanco's framework (7,8), is a revival of those unresolved Oedipal conflicts mainly due to an 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 should be driven first by mother, then by analyst; it tries to make predominating asymmetry on symmetry, so mentalizing proto-emotions (7,8). Mentalizing proto-emotions is a process similar to the conversion of beta (irrational) elements into alpha (rational) ones, according to Wilfred Bion (7).

Grotstein (8) proposed to consider unconscious as the place of emotions rather than drives, which are, instead, pushed or animated just by the former, emotions. To reach normal 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 to affective representations symbolically expressed.

This may even be accomplished by a psychotherapy just centred on the right symbolic interpretation (hence, belonging to asymmetric thought) of the heterogeneous and disparate infinity (of symmetric thought) issuing from an analytical setting, and suitably settled by the analyst

in such a way to modulate and regulate affective charge erupting from the unconscious. This preliminary and basic transformation of symmetric thought into asymmetric thought, as theoretically developed by Matte Blanco, has been masterfully reformulated by Peter Fonagy *et al.* to give rise to an operative disciplinary scheme to be followed pedagogically and clinically in treating psychopathological illnesses. Finally, further completions of this framework come also from the perspectives of Ronald Britton and Peter Aylward, and considerations on the triadic structure of family.

Affective regulation, mentalization and self's development

In this section, we describe Peter Fonagy *et al.*'s concepts relative to Ignacio Matte Blanco's Bi-Logic, and Ronald Britton's and Peter Aylward's insight.

First, we present basic ideas on affective mentalization following Fonagy *et al.*, sketching a very first comparison with Matte Blanco's main theory of bi-logic. Then, we continue in discussing affective mentalization in the light of the Britton and Aylward conceptualization of related aspects which encounter both Matte Blanco and Fonagy.

The primary caregiver, emotion, affective mentalization

Fonagy *et al.* (9) have developed psychodynamic theory whose experimental bases have been provided by the well-known John Bowlby attachment theory. The key idea of this new theory is that the sense of the Self of the child basically springs from the affective quality of the basic object relationships with the primary caregiver who shall lead 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 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 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 from early childhood, in touching and interacting with other senior minds.

These last interactions take place with the discovery of affects into the primary relationships with primary objects, first of all, caregiver. 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. This existing 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 termed affective mentalization (in effect, 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).

Self-development, socialization and therapeutic practice

Mentalized affectivity is of central relevance to therapeutic practice, 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 and appropriate to show in order to calm and reassure the child, therefore to intensify or amplify her or his emotions. Only in this manner, caregivers, with such a psycho-feedback child-caregiver occurring with IIM, interpersonal interpretation mechanism, 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 from (Freudian) primary process.

The caregiver's affective mirroring must often be a marking, that is, the recognition of second order representations (at cognitive level). 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* (just ruled by Matte Blanco's symmetry principle) 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 the psychotherapeutic setting is just to try to restore the right equilibrium between external and internal psychic reality, distinguishing between concrete and split ("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; from here onwards, the rising of the various, further components of the Self may take place. Otherness opens the way to socialization. It is established by caregiver, with her or his first object relations with the child. The caregiver will be just she or he who shall open the way to interpersonal relations of the child, if such object relations have been rightly carried out just according to Fonagy *et al.*'s concepts.

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, 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.

Briefly, 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. The foundational work of I. Matte Blanco), whose psychotherapy 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 (i.e., mind processes of modes of being), just through a restoring of a well-posed affective mentalization according to the theory of Fonagy *et al.*, as for instance pursued along any analytic setting that, in any case, has an unavoidable transference component, typical of any psychological therapeutic intervention (10).

Clinical models, clinical intervention

As Matte Blanco states—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 in such a way to convert the infinity of reasoning of symmetric thought into the finite rational order of asymmetric thought, so Fonagy *et al.* 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 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 to 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 the child's emotion until a net different position is reached with respect to what has

been felt primarily by the child. This tuning between child and caregiver (mother, primarily) also entails the greater or lesser sense of contingency by the 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 the child. At the first early stages, the child is not aware that others (beyond herself or himself) have own affects too, 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 *et al.* 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 regulation established between caregiver (mother) and child. Now, Matte Blanco has deeply studied and discussed just what main role is played by symmetry principle in the projective identification process and its anomalies in distinguishing between intersubjectivity and intrasubjectivity (6), which are, according to Fonagy *et al.*, rightly the two main psychic needs of human beings, just acquired by means of primary object relationships involving the child.

Indeed, Fonagy *et al.* 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 through psychotherapy, we reach second order representations of emotional states which allow us to be 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 *et al.* just indicate 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 may need to try to renew this lost mentalized affectivity by means of analyst's metacognitive intervention.

Beyond the primary maternal stage to the secondary paternal stage: triadic nature of affectivity in the psyche

It has been pointed out above, following Fonagy *et al.*, what primary role the caregiver plays 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 a close association with the main principles of Matte Blanco's theory of bi-logic. Nevertheless, Fonagy *et al.* (9) point out as well, the further importance that the child, once having acquired this basic distinction between first order and second order representations, should be further aware of the fact that these representations which he or she has of the external world, are not the unique possible ones, but are only a possible, subjective replica of external world. To accomplish this, Fonagy *et al.* (9) 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 (11-13), as well as, among others (14-21).

Fonagy *et al.* 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 is thinking is only a possible subjective representation of the external world, so meant as a simple but not unique replica of it. So, the Oedipal phase acts just to bring the child beyond that basic psychic state created by the simple breaking between first order and second order representations by the primary caregiver, enabling the 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 that they are a possible replica of the external world. Just to this end, the right overcoming of the 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 see below, this may occur by means of the role of the father in the dyadic relationship child-mother, inside a familial

triad (11-13,21,22); his importance has been stressed for some time now (14-18,20).

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, $C(\text{child}) \leftrightarrow F(\text{ather})$ and $C(\text{child}) \leftrightarrow M(\text{other})$], 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 (12).

A third position, therefore, may take place, thanks to which object relationships can be observed. Once given this, we can also envisage 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 indicated above, Britton notes 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 it means to lack the third position of analyst in the therapeutic setting. All this, however, relies on, and is built upon, 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 (12).

Criminality and other relevant actions

Peter Aylward (21), in his criminological and forensic analyses, starting from the objective causes and data which have triggered many and varied crimes and offenses, has yet gone even more in-depth until reaching the unconscious bases underlying these, with the socially useful intention to maybe take in cure such persons in an 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 in them, according to Fonagy *et al.*'s psychotherapeutic clinic. Aylward has brought psychoanalytic methods to forensics and murderous crime, with relation to therapy, bearing in mind the ever present unconscious influence on the conscious counterpart according to Matte Blanco, as noted by Peter Aylward's former supervisor, Gerald Wooster. This framework, was then contextually applied to the family triangle, likewise by 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 growing 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 (19).

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 undergone by the 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 (Oedipal) triangulation the early roots of these, a pathological condition (19) that he terms a perverse triangulation (21). His considerations agree with Britton's principles on the central role of triadic structure of family and the related Oedipal situation involved there. 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 side 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 stated to be, by Aylward, a perverse triangle. Along this side, it is still possible to have a right affective mentalization process according to Fonagy *et al.* but, as indicated 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). This is confirmed too by the latest research on computational psychoanalysis. Britton (11,13) has stressed the dangers coming from the absence of the side $M \leftrightarrow F$, corresponding to the absence of the third position, in the Oedipus triangle identified by the vertices F(ather), M(other), C(hild).

This consequent 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 (21). This flexibility geometrically just corresponds to elastically deform a single side (namely, child-mother tie) to give rise to a triangular configuration. Indeed, a net rigidity, a priori, would rule out any possible elastic deformation of a certain straight line to give rise to a triangle configuration. (Roughly, pulling up the middle point of a segment of a straight line, imagined as a kind of an elastic with fixed extremes, so giving rise to a triangular configuration, not to an exact geometric triangle with three distinct sides. This flexibility of the dyad child-mother, we suppose furthermore, would just correspond to the occurrence of a right affective mentalization according to Fonagy *et al.* Afterwards, as indicated above, once this latter flexibility of child-mother dyad is feasible, then a further 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, cf. (18)].

Clinical consequences

From the clinical experiences reported by Britton (12,13) and Aylward (21), it seems that the main task of the

therapist should be to create a reflexive psychic space in which to bring the patient to be aware of her or his deep affective conflicts coming from a wrong resolution of the Oedipal complex, so putting him or her in the right triangulation to overcome it, with the need for insertion of father figure. But, as seen above, before we proceed onwards with this step, a preliminary one is needed to be pursued, that is to say, to restore the right affective mentalization according to Fonagy *et al.*, then to go on with the establishment of the right Oedipal 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 a Fonagy *et al.* clinic, then going on with an analytical setting to re-establish the right triangular space as, for example, described 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 Oedipus phase within a triadic context, since, as Britton (12) 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 non-viable ones of child-mother tie, and are characterized by asymmetry, still in the sense of Matte Blanco; and also Aylward (21) confirms just this. Anyway, once again, besides what has already been pointed out by sociology (22), the crucial importance of classical nuclear triadic family for the right and normal psychological development of a child, has been set out also from a psychoanalytic stance.

Conclusions

In this paper, very fundamental aspects for therapeutic care have been at issue, and for guiding our understanding of social practices, both benign and malevolent. In particular, we have stressed, from different psychological standpoints, the crucial importance played by familial history and context in the general psychological growth of every human being belonging to societies or communities in which there holds a basic triadic family structure. Briefly, we now

consider further, potentially impactful, initiatives.

Described in this article has been the essential nature and origins of the maternal pairwise relationship, and of the maternal and paternal triangular relationship. Aylward (21) covers, additionally a sibling relationship, which is subsequent to all that has been described in this article. Aylward describes in detail the attributes of the mother-daughter relationship, and the mapping of events in parallel between parent and child.

In social care contexts, therapeutic care, therapy generally, or other investigation such as for serious crime, or in contexts of intellectual innovation, it may be feasible to have access to discourse and dialogue, to recorded reflections or other event and activity recording, above all oriented primarily in re-building up and contextually evaluating the related familial history, which therefore becomes a key step in any possible therapeutic pathway to be undertaken.

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Footnote

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