

## The contribution of the Argentine School of Psychoanalysis to Fairbairn's metapsychological theory

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**ABSTRACT.** – Over the last few decades, the theory and clinical intervention model of William Ronald Dodds Fairbairn (1889-1964) has become widely known throughout the world. Argentina stands out as one of the countries where its influence has been particularly strong. In this work, the author reconstructs the main stages of the contribution made by the exponents of the Argentine Psychoanalytic Association to Fairbairn's work, focusing particularly on José Bleger (1922-1972). In fact, the original theoretical model of this Author, with its concepts of "glischro-charged position", of "agglutinated nucleus" and of the "psychotic part of personality", may be closely related, through the concept of "schizoid splitting" commonly used by both of these authors, to the model of the "endopsychic structure" proposed by Fairbairn, to the point that it can now be considered as a logical and clinical premise essential for a more complete and coherent psychoanalytic conception of the processes involved in the structuring of human personality.

**Key words:** schizoid splitting, agglutinated nucleus, psychotic part of the personality, glischro-charged position, endopsychic structure.

Over the last few decades, the theory and clinical intervention model of William Ronald Dodds Fairbairn (Edinburgh, 11 August 1889 - Edinburgh, 31 December 1964) has become widely known throughout the world. One of the countries where its reception has been particularly strong is undoubtedly Argentina.

As Mercedes Campi and other Argentine psychoanalysts point out (Campi *et al.*, 2014), it is precisely through Fairbairn's model that we can today broaden our clinical understanding – for instance, to gain a deeper comprehension of "borderline and emptiness pathology". To achieve this, these authors argue, it is necessary – extrapolating from Fairbairn – to assume that "the pathology of emptiness" represents the clinical indicator

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of a psychological manoeuvre, an unconscious technique pertaining to Fairbairn's transitional stage of development, aimed at recovering and preserving an object relationship (link) with an object possessing specific (narcissistic and transitional) qualities of badness or emptiness (for example, a breast, a mother, or the analyst in transference). Although these objects are bad and empty, they provide the patient with a defense against the experience of object loss and against the systematic increase of separation-abandonment anxieties: a bad object, and the relationship with a bad object, are still, according to Campi and colleagues, better than no object at all.

Furthermore, in this same work and still drawing on Fairbairn's model, the authors propose that this specific psychic organization can be understood as a resistance to becoming aware of the loss and abandonment of the object that underlie the experience of emptiness. Clinically, the sense of emptiness is proportionally greater the less frequent the lost object and the relationship with it are. For example: a) an increase in contact with the analyst tends to reduce acting out, and; b) feelings of emptiness in borderline patients – or delusions and hallucinations in psychotic conditions – decrease when the lost object reappears.

This suggests that feelings of emptiness, in Fairbairn's terms, can be interpreted as a resistance to making the unconscious conscious, the unconscious content being the abandonment and loss of the object. This explanation is particularly relevant to the experience of emptiness typical of schizoid depression, as described by Bleger (1963).

Finally, according to this same group of scholars, Fairbairn's theoretical model makes it possible today to postulate that "borderline and emptiness pathology" should be understood primarily as the clinical expression of a painful and unsuccessful attempt to work through the schizoid position – that is, what Fairbairn specifically describes as the "schizoid conflict". It thus becomes evident, even in this work, that Fairbairn's model can still represent a fundamental tool for understanding and intervening, especially in that broad spectrum of individual psychopathological conditions that occupy an intermediate position between full-blown psychoses and the "neuroses" theorized and explored above all by "classical" Freudian psychoanalysis.

At present, within the Argentine Psychoanalytic Association, the *Ronald Fairbairn Space* is composed of the following members: Kamran Alipanahi, Adrián Besuschio, Gladys Neumann de Roij, María Cristina Milite, Celeste Tarrió, Miguel Padilla, Susana Pedernera, Elsa Irungaray, Guillermo Montero, Luis Oswald (who serves as Coordinator), Stela Maris Cutain de Tebaldi, Raúl Tebaldi, and Adrián Ventura. The main topic this group is currently exploring concerns a theme that is, in fact, particularly central to the Scottish psychoanalyst's contribution – namely, *Psychoanalysis and the Object*. In this regard, the working group is focus-

ing in particular on the hypothesis that, precisely through the concept of the *object*, psychoanalysis has also made a fundamental contribution to epistemology, that is, to the general theory of knowledge, since the object itself, before it can be known, must first be the object of psychology and psychoanalysis. Moreover, from the logical-formal standpoint of psychoanalysis, these scholars maintain that for the object to exist as such in the psychoanalytic sense, it must first and foremost be the object of libido.

As stated on the official website of the Argentine Psychoanalytic Association:

“This concept is one of the most important contributions of psychoanalysis. From here arises the psychoanalytic common denominator of the object, giving rise to the various psychoanalytic theories:

- The deficit of good objects, present throughout the work of M. Klein (producing coherence and cohesion in psychic structures);
- The excess of bad objects, produces not only psychopathology but also normality through primitive dissociation (the schizoid phenomenon), in Fairbairn's model;
- The absence of an object, there is no worse object than the one that is not possessed, which is the fundamental factor in mental illness (Bion).

All of them give priority to the relationship with the object: more important than the object itself is the relationship with the object (*bond*).” (*Asociación Psicoanalítica Argentina*, 2024)

Furthermore, according to Mercedes Campi and colleagues:

“The most important theoretical and technical theme in Fairbairn's work (Hughes, 1990; Skolnick & Scharff, 1998; Sutherland, 1989) is splitting, studied in relation to the schizoid phenomenon (a double dissociation in both the ego and the object), which is universal, foundational, and structuring for the psyche, and underlies all object relations (Fairbairn, 1952). For Fairbairn, the endopsychic situation – whose psychogenesis lies in primitive dissociation, originating in the splitting of the psychic structure of the ego and of the object rather than in repression – is no longer merely a psychopathological schema useful for psychoanalytic understanding of the schizoid condition. It becomes a universal model of the psychic apparatus based on the dissociation of psychic structure (the ‘third topic’ in the sense of Morgan, Bleger, and Faimberg, or, today, Hagelin, within the *Argentine Psychoanalytic Association*). This development is essential for fulfilling Freud's aspiration that psychoanalysis should be a general theory of the mind and not merely a theory of psychopathology.

In clinical work today, Fairbairn's model is indispensable for understanding patients – especially those who are seriously ill.” (Campi *et al.*, 2014, pp. 108-109)

Among the most important promoters of Fairbairn's ideas in Argentina are, without doubt, José Bleger and Otto Kernberg. This probably stems from the fact that both authors were initially trained based on the theoretical frameworks – at that time absolutely innovative compared to the original

views of Sigmund Freud – introduced above all by Melanie Klein and supported by that broad movement of professionals that later spread widely throughout the rest of the Western world, known mainly as the “British School of Psychoanalysis”. Both, however, went on to develop more autonomous theoretical and clinical approaches; and for both – although in ways that are by no means comparable and, in some respects, even divergent – the reference to the theoretical framework of W. R. D. Fairbairn appears today absolutely inescapable.

The theories of Melanie Klein and W. R. D. Fairbairn are, in fact, both original and important psychoanalytic theories that still exert a huge influence on modern psychoanalysis, where they are often intermingled and, at times, even difficult to distinguish from one another.

Fairbairn’s theories, of course, change over time within his major works, due to the progressive development of his thinking. Yet one important point has practically always remained the same: the internalizations of object relations have a compensatory function for unsatisfactory real object relations.

Klein is generally considered the most important theorist of object relations. In fact, she represented a one-person model: for Klein, the Object is regarded as preformed by universal hereditary drives and predispositions, present in varying degrees in all human personalities. Since the child has previously projected its destructiveness, Klein argues, idealization derives from a schizoid defense mechanism aimed at warding off persecutory anxieties.

However, while Klein regards these processes of psychic development as immediate, referring to the very earliest phases of individual psychic activity, Fairbairn sees them as a secondary compensatory phenomenon. He, in fact, considered the original Object to be the Other, who exerts influence and co-determines every aspect of life, the development of psychic structure, emotional health, and even psychopathology.

To understand Fairbairn’s conception of the development of the psyche, it is necessary to be clear about his notion of “endopsychic structure”. By this term, he means a sub-organization of the self (separate from the main “body” of the ego/self).

For Fairbairn, moreover, repression is the key mechanism in the psychological development of the child and in the creation of the endopsychic structure, with the internalization of unsatisfying objects not caused by internal fantasies but rather by negative experiences with real-world objects. With Fairbairn, clinical emphasis shifted from the horizontal repression of drives to the vertical splitting of internal objects and their corresponding egos. In his system, repression is actively used by the mind. He finds no essential feature that distinguishes hysterical dissociation from ego-splitting in schizoid states. The psychic organization described by Fairbairn, the “endopsychic structure”, derives from the schizoid position but is also compatible with borderline personality structures, as has often

been emphasized. Fairbairn's theory, particularly his description of the endopsychic structure, can also be useful for understanding both severe psychic disorders, such as narcissistic and borderline conditions, and hysterical personality disorder, as well as other neurotic structures.

For W. R. D. Fairbairn, therefore, the endopsychic situation, whose psychogenesis lies in primitive dissociation, originating not through the mechanism of repression (as originally proposed by Sigmund Freud) but rather in the early splitting of the psychic structure of the ego and the object (what Fairbairn also calls the "fundamental schizoid factor [...] invariably present at the deepest mental level"), is no longer simply a schema useful for understanding the schizoid condition in particular, but an extremely suitable model both for outlining a tripartite structure of personality applicable to every human being, even in the absence of clinically significant mental disorders, and for effectively intervening in a variety of severe individual situations, starting with the whole complex of pathologies and psychological problems manifested in those who are today generally referred to as "borderline patients", and then extending its field of application to a wide range of other serious behavioral and personality disorders.

From the outset, Fairbairn's theoretical and clinical contribution was directed toward relating the internalization of object relations to the gradual development of the tripartite structure of the mind, though with slightly different characteristics and fundamental theoretical assumptions from those of Sigmund Freud. Indeed, the psychoanalytic theory of affects was still in its infancy when Fairbairn began to develop his own independent theoretical framework. From the very beginning of its development, Fairbairn's theory implicitly links temperamental affective dispositions with the activation of object relations, and consequently with the development of internalized psychic structures. In this sense, Fairbairn's original model appears to contain within itself a whole series of conceptualizations later developed and widely disseminated by Winnicott – including the notion (in fact wrongly attributed to the latter, and today almost universally known) of the "transitional object".

"In a note (1958, p. 313), Winnicott writes that he had observed Fairbairn's use of the word 'transitional' in many passages. Transitional objects in Fairbairn are inherent to the transitional stage, in which total objects that were treated as partial objects in Freud-Abraham's oral stage II are treated as oral, anal, and phallic-urethral contents. We postulate that this occurs in borderline patients, for whom the transitional object is the analyst, whereas in psychoses it is the outpatient structure. In object relations in these latter two pathologies, the object is a partial object. Fairbairn's model provides us with a technical, theoretical, clinical, and metapsychological tool for understanding and applying these clinical milestones in severe real-life pathologies. For this reason, we teach Fairbairn as 'the analyst of borderline patients'. Extrapolating from Fairbairn, we have proposed to define behavior psychoanalytically as a bridge that unites an internal object, an external

object, and the relations with both, something we also observe in transference-countertransference interactions.” (Campi *et al.*, 2014, p. 105)

Fairbairn’s model, therefore, provides us with a technical, theoretical, clinical, and metapsychological instrument for conceiving of the psychoanalytic process as the progressive construction of a kind of “bridge” linking an internal object, an external object, and the relations with both – a process that we also observe in the *transference-countertransference* interaction. Within this framework, Otto Kernberg in particular has, over the past few decades, become, within the relational approach, one of the foremost proponents and promoters of Fairbairn’s theoretical and clinical formulations.

“In the last thirty years, Kernberg has visited the APA [Argentine Psychoanalytic Association, author’s note] and given courses and lectures on severe personality disorders. His work articulates four theoretical models: two based on the British object-relations theory (M. Klein and Fairbairn) and two based on ego psychology (the developmental model of M. Mahler with contemporary contributions, and others based on Jacobson’s theory of self). He postulates that ‘borderline’ pathology is a pathology of dissociation and aggression (although Fairbairn believes that aggression is always acquired, whereas Kernberg considers it also innate). Kernberg has become an important promoter of Fairbairn’s ideas in Argentina.” (Campi *et al.*, 2014, p. 105)

The conception of unconscious conflicts as constantly active among contradictory, idealized/exciting and punitive/persecutory internalized object relations, which constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of Fairbairn’s model, has, thanks also to the contribution of Otto Kernberg, by now certainly assumed crucial implications for psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic technique throughout the so-called “Western world”.

“We can interpret behavior together with speech, which is essential in borderline and psychotic pathologies. It is necessary to interpret the unconscious and make it conscious, not only in digital language but also in analogical language (Lieberman, 1962); for example, by analyzing the *acting out* of borderline patients. This conceptualization of behavior allows us to investigate, for instance, why the patient has brought this *acting* into the session (whether in or outside the session) and what they are communicating to us.” (Campi *et al.*, 2014, p. 105)

But the scholar who perhaps most fully embraced and developed Fairbairn’s theoretical thought in Argentina, probably even more so than Kernberg himself, is, in my view, José Bleger (1922-1972). He began to take an interest in Fairbairn’s work as early as the late 1950s: indeed, in his 1958 volume *Psicoanálisis y dialéctica materialista* (as noted by Maria Elena Petrilli), there already appears a direct quotation from one of Fairbairn’s statements, namely: “Psychoanalytic technique constitutes in

itself a valid experimental method" (Fairbairn, 1952a, p. 25, Italian ed.; quoted in Petrilli, 2009, p. 14).

In his later volume *Psicología de la conducta* (1963), Bleger also shows particular interest in Fairbairn's theoretical model, for example when he declares – while continuing to regard himself as a psychoanalyst broadly working within the Freudian and Kleinian tradition – that he shares, within the theory of "object relations", which finds its main references in those two authors, Fairbairn's view that it is necessary to go beyond and completely abandon the concept of "drive" as used by Sigmund Freud and Melanie Klein.

In this regard, Maria Elena Petrilli and Mauro Rossetti state: "We believe that the less one resorts to drives, the better it is for the scientific task" (Bleger, 1963), Bleger argues, echoing a statement by Fairbairn" (Petrilli & Rossetti, 1991, p. 34).

Further references and explicit quotations from Fairbairn's work can be found in many of Bleger's writings throughout his career, up to 1972 (the year of the death of this distinguished Argentine psychoanalyst). In *Criteria of Treatment and Aims of Psychoanalysis* (1972), for example, José Bleger shows substantial agreement with at least some aspects of Fairbairn's conception of psychoanalytic treatment, stating the following:

"For Fairbairn, the fundamental aim of analytic treatment is to promote the greatest possible synthesis of the ego; this also implies minimizing infantile dependence and hatred toward the libidinal object, and making the closed system of the internal world accessible to the influence of external reality. All the aims mentioned so far do not appear to be mutually exclusive and are, moreover, correctly formulated." (Bleger, 1972, p. 303)

But the work by Bleger, which probably constitutes, at least in my view, the most significant expression of the contribution that this leading figure of the Argentine School of Psychoanalysis made to Fairbairn's metapsychological theory, and which above all could prove useful for any further possible integrations, is undoubtedly his volume *Symbiosis and Ambiguity* (1967). In it, the author identifies the existence, alongside the two "positions" considered fundamental by the Kleinian school, of an additional mode of psychic functioning. This fundamental position, which, during the course of an individual's life, precedes the other two introduced by Klein, is named by Bleger (1967, p. 98) the "glischro-caric" position (a term formed from two Greek roots: *glischro* = viscous, and *caryon* = nucleus). At the intrapsychic level, it is characterized by the persistence of a "syncretic ego" incapable of distinguishing between the "ego" and the "non-ego" (and consequently also lacking discrimination within the "non-ego" itself). This position, Bleger writes (1967, p. 98), would represent the point of fixation for the formation of personalities marked by ambiguity, viscosity of character ("Glischroidia",

“Ixothymia”, “Epilottoidia”), a tendency toward confusional states, and the clinical manifestations of epilepsy.

As Campi *et al.* specify in the previously cited essay: “Bleger (1967), drawing on Fairbairn, proposed the ‘glischro-caric’ position, which precedes the schizoparanoïd position. He also coordinated a study group on Fairbairn at the José T. Borda Psychiatric Hospital, attended by many prominent psychoanalysts” (Campi *et al.*, 2014, pp. 101-102).

The distinctly Blegerian theoretical construct of the “glischro-caric position”, together with those closely linked to it, namely, the “agglutinated nucleus” and the “psychotic part of the personality”, or P.P.P., first needs to be clearly defined and examined here, in order to be later related to Fairbairn’s model.

According to Bleger, the glischro-caric position belongs to that period of life which, in the traditional Kleinian framework, would instead be characterized by the earliest stage of the schizoparanoïd position (that is, the very first period after birth), and perhaps even by the final phase of intrauterine life (Bleger, 1972, p. 133). In Bleger’s view, it plays a fundamental role in determining affective and attachment patterns of a symbiotic kind.

Bleger himself defines symbiosis as “a defence against confusion and annihilation, the alienation of a part of oneself in order to go on living” (Bleger, 1972, p. 104). “*Symbiosis, which is ultimately the immobilization and control of the agglutinated object, protects against a destructive, annihilating psychotic fragmentation (Zerspaltung)*” (Bleger, 1972, p. 120, [*italics in the original*]). In this, in my view, there is a not insignificant correspondence with what Winnicott expressed in his theory of “unthinkable anxieties”.

Overall, the use of Bleger’s theory – not yet fully accepted by the international psychoanalytic community, though no less noteworthy for that – requires, in my view, several essential cautions and considerations. Compared with classical Kleinian theory, within whose scope most of the contributions of both Bleger and Fairbairn undoubtedly fall, it seems to me first of all evident that Bleger’s perspective decisively downplays the impact of the schizoid-paranoïd position in normal individual psychic development. Instead, in studying the more archaic processes of psychic life, it gives greater weight both to the cultural advances achieved as a whole by the Freudian psychoanalytic school (thanks also to contributions from non-psychological disciplines such as linguistics and anthropology) and to certain studies of European experimental psychology – particularly those of Wallon and Piaget -regarding the “syncretic” and “animistic” modes of functioning of the human mind during the earliest stages of its development.

According to Bleger, there are therefore three fundamental stages or positions in individual psychic development. I will now summarize the main characteristics of each.

1. The glischro-caric position, in which the Ego exhibits an essentially syncretic mode of functioning that confers upon it the specific condition of "ambiguity". This fundamental psychic position is manifested above all in the so-called "oral sucking phase", which Abraham places in the very first weeks of life, describing it as "pre-ambivalent". Bleger, however, prefers the term "pre-divalent", in order to emphasize the aspect of "divalence" which, in his view, is typical of the subsequent schizoid-paranoid position (whereas ambivalence, according to this author, is reached only with the further transition to the depressive position).

During this initial period of psychic activity, Bleger states (1972, p. 96), object relations in the usual sense of the term are not yet possible, since "objects" cannot be discriminated by the Ego from the Ego itself; put more simply, the Ego has not yet begun to operate a distinction between Self and non-Self. Thus, only affective relationships with a particular kind of object are possible, an object which the author initially describes as an "agglutinated object", later replacing this term with "ambiguous object", precisely because it would contain within itself, as if "fused" together, both the features and components proper to the affectively invested object and those belonging to the Subject.

"In the agglutinated object, there is, in fact, no real object relationship between the objects and the ego nuclei contained within it, but rather a primary identification, to use the term given by Fairbairn to those states in which no differentiation has been made between the object and the part of the ego bound to it. It therefore seems preferable to speak of an *Agglutinated nucleus* and not of an agglutinated object, as I have done so far." (Bleger, 1972, p. 133, [*italics in the original*]).

Bleger's explicit reference to Fairbairn – one among many in this volume – confirms, in my view, the existence of several points of convergence between the specific and original theories of these two authors. The introjection (that is, the establishment within the Subject's psyche) of this "ambiguous object" would, according to Bleger, lead to the formation of the "agglutinated nucleus" of the individual Ego, which, he states (Bleger, 1972, pp. 137 ff.), constitutes in every human being the "psychotic part of the personality".

The anxiety that may develop within this particular mode of psychic functioning is described by Bleger as "confusional anxiety" (Bleger, 1972, p. 136). The defensive mechanisms that the Ego is able to employ at this level are, according to Bleger, "fragmentation" or psychotic disintegration (corresponding to Bleuler's *Zerspaltung* and Bion's *splitting*), "immobilization" of the agglutinated nucleus or of one of its fragments abruptly projected outward "without the accompaniment or alternation of reintrojection" (in order to maintain better control over it), and finally "cleavage", that is, the separation between what is undifferentiated and syncretic and what the Ego

gradually learns to distinguish from itself and to recognize as belonging instead to external reality.

Using Bleger's own words:

“What I have called, in previous works, the agglutinated nucleus is nothing but the persistence of nuclei of ambiguity (persistence of the primitive undifferentiated psychological organization) that remain highly cleaved from the personality which has achieved a variable degree of ego integration. [...] Symbiosis coincides with the persistence of an ambiguous structure.” (Bleger, 1972, pp. 220-221)

2. The schizoid-paranoid position, through which the subject acquires an initial possibility of relating to a true Object, even if only a “partial” one (both in the sense of a “univalued object”, that is, “all good or all bad”, and in the sense of a “spatially partial object”, as the maternal breast may be in relation to the mother), thus represents, according to Bleger, a more advanced and integrated level of functioning than that typical of the glischro-caric position. The fundamental feature of this subsequent mode of mental functioning, Bleger maintains, is “divalence”, that is, the impossibility of opposite characteristics coexisting within the same object (Bleger, 1972, p. 220). The anxiety is essentially paranoid in type, the principal defensive mechanism becomes splitting (“dissociation”), and this developmental phase constitutes the point of fixation of schizophrenia (Bleger, 1972, p. 136).

The evolution from the “ambiguity” of the earlier position to the “divalence” of the schizoid-paranoid position (that is, in other words, the establishment of the so-called “schizoid splitting”) would occur at the intrapsychic level, according to this author (Bleger, 1972, p. 134), through the progressive internalization and dissociation of the pre-divalent agglutinated object.

In Bleger's view (1972, p. 134), it is only with the transition from the glischro-nuclear position to the schizoid-paranoid position that the individual acquires the capacity to employ the four defensive techniques characteristic of the “stage of transition between infantile dependence and mature dependence”, in Fairbairn's framework (1952b), namely the hysterical, phobic, obsessive, and paranoid techniques.

3. According to Bleger, the depressive position corresponds to the “recomposition of the object as a total object” (both in the sense of a “spatial total object” and in that of a “bivalued” or “ambivalent” object). Bleger associates depressive anxiety and the corresponding manic defenses with this position (denial, devaluation, disdain, domination, triumph, etc.). Fixation at this stage would constitute the basis for the pathological evolution toward manic-depressive psychosis (Bleger, 1972, p. 136).

In my view, there is an interesting compatibility between Bleger's general theory and what Fairbairn proposes regarding the dynamics through

which the split is structured between the central ego on the one hand, and the nuclei of the original ego on which the antilibidinal Ego, on one side, and the libidinal Ego, on the other, will be formed and consolidated. It is thus through the not insignificant persistence, in many subjects characterized by “personalities founded on ambiguity” (Petrilli & Rossetti, 1991, p. 44), of modes of functioning typical also of the archaic syncretic ego (and of the related defensive techniques against unimaginable anxieties of fragmentation and disintegration) that the “psychotic part of the personality” (Bleger, 1967, pp. 137 ff.) proves decisive in conditioning their object relations in the direction of ambiguity and symbiosis.

As Bleger writes:

“In all cases of ambiguity, the ego and the objects have not yet been stably internalized or differentiated: in fact, if the subject had reached discrimination and internalization, they would have had to face highly persecutory and therefore very destructive experiences. [...] Ambiguity and its persistence ‘soften’ persecutory situations (determined mainly by greed and envy), not allowing them to be discriminated or recognized. [...] The child needs a symbiosis that allows him to rely on a depositary, on a ‘supplementary ego’ that enables him to face his greed and destructive envy. [...] Symbiosis (and ambiguity, which is one of its characteristics) is not, in itself, a defense against danger, but can become one through regression. *The danger arises if ambiguity and symbiosis become separated, and for this reason they must remain inseparable.*” (Bleger, 1967, pp. 266-267 [*italics in the original*])

According to Maria Elena Petrilli and Mauro Rossetti, “Personalities founded on ambiguity can present themselves in at least four particular forms: 1) the ambiguous personality proper; 2) the phatic personality; 3) the psychopathic personality; 4) manichaeism, which in its extreme form may take shape as an authoritarian personality” (1991, p. 44). Within the group of phatic personalities, according to the same authors, we must also include the personalities referred to in 1942 by H. Deutsch as “as-if” personalities (Petrilli & Rossetti, 1991, p. 45).

Summarizing the findings of a round table of the American Psychoanalytic Association held in 1965 and specifically dedicated to the theoretical and clinical aspects of “as-if” personalities, Bleger (1967, pp. 278-279) cites, among other things, N. Ross’s observation that one should not isolate the “as-if” personality as a differentiated syndrome, but rather consider a *range* of as-if states. At the same meeting, moreover, R. Greenson proposed recognizing a *variety* of as-if states: numerous characterological types present as-if phenomena, and one may speak of as-if symptoms, as-if mechanisms, as-if character traits. In Greenson’s view, the fixation underlying these psychopathological manifestations “takes place around a year and a half of age, that is, in the period in which the child separates from the mother” (Bleger, 1967, p. 279).

According to Bleger, considerations, in some respects analogous to those of Greenson and Ross, may be formulated for the phenomena of ambiguity and the false self. Within this broad group of states, moreover, one must always keep in mind the virtually infinite range of individual variability: that is, one must acknowledge the validity of Bleger's indication that "in psychology and in dynamic psychiatry we can neither continue nor should we continue to conceive of illnesses as entities; we must understand them as mobile, mutable organizations or structures of behavior and personality, in dynamic interrelation" (Bleger, 1967, p. 281).

Drawing also on Bleuler's (1911) already-cited distinction between *Zerspaltung* (psychotic, destructive, annihilating fragmentation) and *Spaltung* (schizophrenic reorganization or readjustment), Bleger further explores the relationships between the false self, the as-if personality, and ambiguity on the one hand, and between ambiguity and the schizoid split on the other.

"The concept of ambiguity makes it possible, in my view, to characterize a large number of phenomena in a unified manner, and to recognize different types of personality organization based on different types of organization of ambiguity. This conception represents progress compared to other terms used to define personality, such as H. Deutsch's 'as-if' or Winnicott's 'false self', because these apply only to the countertransferential reaction, whereas the phenomenon itself contains nothing false or 'as-if'; it is a natural phenomenon that must be described on the basis of its own characteristics." (Bleger, 1967, p. 280)

"Above all, I believe that one cannot superimpose the schizoid personality described by Fairbairn and H. Deutsch's as-if personality. The former, in fact, is characterized by three fundamental traits – the omnipotent attitude, isolation and detachment, and concern with inner reality – which do not appear in the as-if personality, where there is no trace of isolation or detachment and inner reality has not been structured. If, from a clinical point of view, there are differences that prevent these pictures from being superimposed, the same holds for the structure of these two personalities, because the former is characterized by the schizoid split, whereas the distinctive feature of the latter is ambiguity. However, it is possible that the schizoid personality is the consequence of a splitting that has occurred within the ambiguous personality, and that schizoid tendencies or schizoid character traits represent an attempt at a schizoid splitting, an entry into the schizoparanoic position starting from ambiguity; this transition, however, would not have been carried out fully or adequately." (Bleger, 1967, p. 281)

The close links between Bleger's theoretical vision and the overall model of human psychic structure proposed by Fairbairn in his *Synopsis of the Theory of Object Relations Applied to the Personality* (1963) are already evident, at least in my view, in Bleger's statements that the agglutinated nucleus is structured from the very earliest moments of development through the subject's primary identifications. It consists of a "concentration

of frustrating and gratifying experiences lived by the infant with varying degrees of intensity and at different moments in the early part of life, across all stages of development (oral, anal, genital). These experiences are marked by a lack of stratification and sequence among them; they involve the most diverse aspects of external reality and a small nucleus of the ego, which nonetheless forms an agglutinated whole, undifferentiated and undiscriminated" (Bleger, 1967, p. 132).

This agglutinated nucleus, which according to Bleger is present in every person from birth, constitutes that "psychotic part of the personality" that will always remain present – albeit to varying degrees – in every human being. It is therefore precisely to this nucleus that, at least in my opinion, we can attribute the fundamental basis for the emergence of Fairbairn's libidinal Ego and antilibidinal Ego.

"This agglutinated nucleus, which in the adult constitutes the psychotic part of the personality, would be nothing other than a residue of the most primitive organization of the personality, genetically prior to the schizophrenic position, which I have termed the glischrocaric position" (Bleger, 1967, p. 138).

As Bleger emphasizes, "an indifferentiation in the most primitive states of development is often mentioned in psychoanalytic writings (including in some works by Freud, M. Klein, Fairbairn and Fenichel); my hypotheses, therefore, are simply a continuation and deepening of these theses" (Bleger, 1967, p. 139). Moreover, he specifies, the agglutinated nucleus may be defined as "a non-discriminated part of the personality genetically linked to all ambiguous experiences that have not given rise to defined patterns in the organization of the personality, since the fundamental discrimination at the deepest levels of the Oedipal situation (between the parental objects and the patient's own ego) has not occurred" (Bleger, 1967, p. 167). "From a genetic point of view, the agglutinated nucleus is the result of an agglomeration of multiple primary identifications that are neither discriminated nor stratified. I believe that this normally occurs in the development of the earliest stages of the Oedipus complex" (Bleger, 1967, p. 168).

It is precisely on the basis of these clarifications by Bleger concerning his innovative concepts of the "agglutinated nucleus" and the "glischrocaric position", and their close connection with the notions of the "psychotic part of the personality" and the "early stages of the Oedipus complex", that the connection between Bleger's model and Fairbairn's becomes, in my view, inevitable. This connection may provide a fundamental contribution to understanding the genesis of the "endopsychic structure" as described by Fairbairn in a way that is even more comprehensible and convincing than has been shown so far.

If, in fact, one accepts the existence, in the very earliest stages of individual psychic life, of both the "agglutinated nucleus" and the "glischrocar-

ic position” introduced by Bleger, together with the immediately subsequent transitions toward the establishment of the schizoparanoic position and the development of the first stages of the Oedipus complex – transitions which, as Fairbairn himself points out, take place through the action of the “primitive schizoid splitting”, which, according to the Scottish author, is common to all human beings – then the more archaic splitting of the original ego, as well as its subsequent tripartition into “central Ego”, “libidinal Ego”, and “antilibidinal Ego”, which constitutes the fundamental essence of the “endopsychic structure” model proposed by Fairbairn, can also be explained very easily, at least in my view.

The concepts of the “glischro-caric position”, of the “agglutinated nucleus” (and, consequently, of the “psychotic part of the personality” as described here), which are to be attributed to the work of the Argentine psychoanalyst José Bleger, not only appear, therefore – through the series of quotations cited above – to be perfectly compatible with the general model of “endopsychic structure” proposed by Fairbairn, but also seem to constitute, at least in my view, a logical and clinical premise that has now become indispensable for a more complete and coherent psychoanalytic understanding of the overall modalities through which human Personality is structured.

The general aims of a psychoanalyst who draws on Fairbairn’s model are, first, to help the patient free themselves as much as possible from the negative influence of the internal “bad objects”, by dissolving their unconscious bonds with the split-off parts of the ego (the libidinal Ego and the antilibidinal Ego), and subsequently to promote the reintegration of these split-off parts into the central Ego (thus making – as Minolli would say – the ego-subject more “present to itself” and therefore more effective and functional in its capacity to interpret reality and to manage its own behavior). To this end, the analyst must first replace the patient’s dysfunctional relational model, derived from a similarly dysfunctional relationship with the mother, with a more adequate form of relationship, positioning themselves as a substitute model for the mother. However, this is not sufficient, because at the basis of the patient’s dysfunctional relationship with the mother lies, as both Mahler and Bleger clearly emphasize, an inadequate (incomplete or even counterproductive) resolution of the original symbiotic relationship, which had been established and developed through deep reciprocal investments and counter-investments grounded in primitive unconscious mechanisms such as introjection, projection, and splitting (not to mention their coordinated psychic actions, which give rise to the processes of projective identification and introjective identification).

Fairbairn rightly identified, at least in my view, splitting as the fundamental mechanism that leads to the “tripartite” psychic structure comprising the libidinal Ego, the antilibidinal Ego, and the central Ego, and he located this individual psychic experience (which he considers inevitable for every

human being) during the period dominated by the schizophrenic position that every person undergoes in the very earliest stages of life. Yet it must be recalled that this is precisely the period in which the action of symbiosis is at its most active and powerful - a symbiosis which, in cases where the individual later develops psychopathological tendencies or psychological and behavioral problems requiring analytic treatment, was evidently not resolved positively nor adequately addressed. Therefore, to remedy an imbalance among the three ego agencies during the psychoanalytic process, only in the less severe cases (those that Bleger would describe as primarily concerning the treatment of the "Neurotic Part of the Personality") may the therapeutic action of the "good object" represented by the analyst be sufficient. Where, instead, the core of the patient's problems lies at a deeper level - such that the roles of the libidinal Ego and the antilibidinal Ego overwhelm the capacity of the central Ego to act - the function of the analyst as "good object" almost always needs to be accompanied by the activation of a new and more workable "existential symbiosis", which allows the patient, through a more functional process of separation-individuation than the original one, to emerge into a 'new psychological birth' leading to a renewed and more appropriate inner equilibrium.

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