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The Idea of „Whole Man”, „Total Humanity”, and Its Clinical Applications

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Introduction: „Man is not only a member of society, but he is also a member of the human race“

An individual is a member both of society and of the human race. Authoritarian religions and reductive and schematic naturalistic ideas do not consider society important, thus depriving their vision of human life and its expressions of colour and richness. But the human race speaks through its cultures, which vary in their myths, religions, arts, languages and in their material ways of life. The influence that society has on the individual can never be overestimated, since it is „social character“ (Fromm, 1932) that shapes a person’s psyche right from birth. The power of ideologies is pervasive and so subtle as to infiltrate even the most apparently objective and neutral knowledge. All this does not necessarily mean that a common human denominator cannot be found in historical and cultural relativities, as if it were impossible to refer to a general human „we“ (Rorty, 1996). Every group of people can recognise a transcultural humanity in other groups (Savater, 1995); a recognition that comes about not so much through intellect as through experience.

It is my intention here to again put forward the frame of reference of radical humanism, according to which there exists a human nature which is characteristic of the human race, common to all people. All humans have the same anatomy and the same physiology; it would never occur to a doctor to use different cures depending on the race or colour of the patient. Since all humans have the same psychic structure, the human race is a whole and that is why we can understand different cultures, even the most distant, their arts, myths and dramas (Fromm, 1962, p. 55).

This differs from the social-constructivist view, according to which human nature is not universal but relative. It is not possible to separate human beings from their culture and history and study them outside the context of their life. Consequently, it is not possible to derive universal laws of human nature (Cushman, 1991). The premise of the social-constructivists is true and is compatible with the Frommian concepts of „social character“ and „frame of orientation and devotion“ (1950, 1955). Moreover, it is right to denounce the „ideological purposes“ of „some psychoanalytic facts“ (Lesser, 1996). Marx (1861-1863) had already accused economists of hypostasis, of surreptitiously transforming the ideological defences of historically determined interests into absolute truths.



This did not, however, stop Marx from keeping two concepts distinct: that of „human nature in general“ and that of „human nature as modified in each historical epoch“. Social-constructivists are very acute in their analyses and they invite a radical criticism of theories. However, by not allowing for the theory of „human nature in general“, they risk losing the unitary sense of human totality and the intuition of human essence which led Fromm to write: „Man is not a blank sheet of paper on which culture can write its text; he is an entity charged with energy and structured in specific ways, which, while adapting itself, reacts in specific and ascertainable ways to external conditions“ (1947, p. 23).

„Unconsciousness represents universal man, the whole man“

The issue of an individual's belonging both to the human race and to a particular culture is a tortured one which both the Enlightenment and Romanticism continue to debate. The former emphasises the universal aspect of human beings, the latter insists on their ineradicable roots in culture, ethnic group, traditions, language and so on. The Enlightenment, by reminding human beings of their universality, redeems them from the narrowness of individual cultures, from closed ethnocentric visions and frees them as citizens of the world. Being a citizen of the world corresponds to the humanistic ideal of not repressing and dissociating anything human in oneself. This means making the unconscious conscious, experiencing not only one's original culture but also one's human universality (Fromm, 1962). Terence's motto „Nihil humani a me alienum puto“ (Nothing human is alien to me) expresses the same idea. Enlightened humanism is antithetical to every form of xenophobic nationalism, racism and prejudice.

Savater (1995) believes, however, that it is not only the Enlightenment that is modern, because this would reduce Romanticism to a simple anti-modern reaction whereas it too puts forward proposals. The excesses of the Enlightenment can be dehumanising when they lead to contempt for traditions, folklore, habits and customs. The objections of Romanticism to the quantification and exploitation of human faculties are just as modern as the Enlightenment positions they criticise. Moreover, these objections place the debate on a higher level and lead to a new awareness in the Enlightenment point of view.

A Romantic concept of the unconscious is that of Georg Groddeck (1923). Romanticism, especially German Romanticism, offered a cultural environment particularly suited to the study of myths and symbols. Vitalism and the philosophy of nature favoured the idea of the unconscious as the root and genesis of all manifestations of universal life (Ellenberger, 1970). Thinkers and philosophers such as Friedrich Schlegel, Creuzer, Schelling, Carus, von Schubert, and the poet Novalis, laid the foundations for the Romantic psychology of Gustav Theodor Fechner. They also valued the symbols of ancient art and mythology, allowing Johann Jakob Bachofen (1861) to put forward his original interpretation of the history of humanity.

Romantic vitalism and irrationalism are part of the totality of human experience and contribute to the understanding of human potentiality, provided that individuals are seen as the root of all their expressions, and therefore of their dreams, symbols, myths, religions and rites too.



Fromm believed that the unconscious includes the totality of human potential, his „whole man“ is unconscious. However, this is a concept that takes only its raw material from Romanticism, the idea of a universal vital ferment, which is then elaborated according to radical humanism. Fromm sees the Enlightenment idea of human universality in the totality of the immense and colourful panorama of civilisation. He extols the value of quality and difference, and criticises the processes of quantification and abstraction in postindustrial societies.

The conscious part of the individual psyche is mainly social, historically relative. There are active filters (Fromm, 1960, p. 321-326) which let through only those psychic contents that are compatible with the needs of society. Consciousness and unconsciousness are qualities of psychic contents, assigned mostly by social processes which are themselves unconscious. Thus, the conscious area of the average person is mainly an illusion, collectively produced and shared. The universal human aspects, the biological, Psychological and spiritual wholeness of man „rooted in the Cosmos“, remain unconscious. Non-consciousness represents the plant, the animal and the spirit in humans. In any culture: „man... has all the potentialities; he is the archaic man, the beast of prey, the cannibal, the idolater, and he is the being with the capacity for reason, for love, for justice“ (Ibid., p. 106).

From the most distant past to the potential future, whole man remains unconscious.

At times, dreams can also show us „universal symbols“ in which there is an intrinsic relationship between the symbol and what is symbolised (Fromm, 1951). Their analysis is never conclusive (Silva-Garcia, 1982) but it can lead us to distant lands, miles from everyday consciousness. This „forgotten language“ speaks of subjects that are as universal as they are repressed, at times so repressed that, when they surface, they may not even be recognised as human. There is the ever present temptation to give in to what we presume to be superhuman messages, to a guide who speaks to us from „above“. Radical humanism, on the other hand, ascribes all human experience to human beings, even if this experience is only potential and no matter how distant, foreign or strange it may seem to the consciousness of everyday life.

Repression and dissociation.

Fromm believed that a great deal of both individual and collective human experience remains unconscious because it is blocked by social filters. Some of the filtering functions are carried out by language. A language may not have the words to express certain experiences and yet have a wide range of vocabulary to express others, which become conscious in all their subtleties. Grammar, syntax and etymology also provide the various languages with different ways of perceiving and taking in experiences. Logic is another filter. On the basis of rules of thought it leads to the rejection from consciousness of everything that seems illogical. A third filter is represented by the contents of experience, insofar as every society has its taboos which prevent the awareness of certain feelings or thoughts (1960, 1962). Fromm quotes Benjamin Lee Whorf on this theory but according to Burston (1991, pp. 147-48) the main sources are probably Herder and Max Scheler.

Fromm's contribution to the subject of repression especially concerns social repres-



sion, which he held to be much more important than individual repression. „It seems that individual repression, due to the particular experience of the individual, is marginal by comparison, and furthermore, that individual factors are all the more efficient when they operate in the same direction as the social factors.“ (Fromm, 1992, p. 56).

These two aspects of repression, the social and the individual, must be understood together because they act together (Fromm, 1959, p. 4). Fromm also combines social and individual aspects in his discussion of dissociation, especially when he talks about marketing character orientation. He uses Marx's distinction between the „use value“ and „exchange value“ of goods. Use value is determined by the real utility of the goods, while exchange value refers to their price. The „personality market“ turns people into goods in that only their image, their exchange value, is considered and it is separated from their human contents, their non-commercial qualities. The result is a social character based on the dissociation of appearance from human aspects such as tenderness, love of justice, love of freedom and independent judgement, capacity for love, a willingness to share and so on. The experience of one's own identity is lost - „I am as you desire me“. An interior emptiness is functional to rapid and uninhibited role changes (Fromm, 1947, pp. 46-47), the „separation from reason and heart is almost complete“.

Contemporary western societies are characterised not only by the generalisation of market relations among people, but also by the imposing development of technology, particularly information technology. This has even led to the development of an unconscious „cybernetic religion“ (1976). „Cybernetic man“ thinks but does not feel. „Perhaps the most striking trait in him is the split between thought-affect-will“ (1973, p.319). This type of individual dissociates intellect from feeling and emotion. He believes he is feeling, but he is only thinking of a feeling; he believes he is experiencing emotion, but he is only thinking of emotion.

The totality of the patient and the totality of the analyst

Analysis is a dialogue between analyst and analysand which aims to establish who the latter is and why (Silva-Garcia, 1988). The dialogue is based on mutual communication of emotional answers and reactions. The analyst reacts emotionally to what the analysand expresses and in turn expresses his or her own reaction (Fromm, 1968): both identities enter into play. Understanding comes to the analyst in answer to the patient's global communication. By globally activating a dialogue the analyst shows the patient what he/she has understood.

Fromm suggested that the analyst address, as far as possible, the totality of the patient, the totality of the latter's experience (ibid.). The patient's world should not be allowed to break up into many separate problems, to be dealt with one by one, as if it were a machine being repaired. A divided human being is a figure presented by contemporary society. Humanism asks psychoanalysts not to see patients as individuals with a problem to solve, even if that is how they see themselves, but to understand the function of the problem in the total personality.

It is not enough to know things about the patient, to explore his or her environment. A person can be objectified, information can be gathered about them and then put together in a hypothetical reconstruction of their life, but the nucleus, the „center“ of this



person will remain inaccessible. In fact, information about the patient, knowledge of his or her periphery may pave the way for an understanding of the totality in action, but alone it does not allow us to see the living, whole person in front of us, in the sense of seeing „a person as the hero of a drama, of a Shakespearean drama, or a Greek drama, or of a Balzac novel“ (Fromm, 1959, p.26).

It is necessary to feel what the patient is feeling, to place oneself at his or her centre, thereby seeing the living totality as a functioning totality, the internal movement that expresses external manifestations (1968). This allows the analyst to feel what the patient is feeling but which he or she is not yet aware of.

Seeing another person from inside is paradoxical because it is necessary to become that person while at the same time remaining oneself. It is necessary to experience what another individual is experiencing.

The analyst can understand the totality of the patient because of the analyst's own totality. Even if the patient is of a completely different character or temperament to the analyst, the analyst can understand because everything is in him or her, as it is in every human being. „What I mean is, everything is in us - there is no experience which another human being has which is not also an experience which we are capable of having“ (Fromm, 1959, p.20).

It is the humanistic premise that allows us to work in this way: „There is nothing human which is alien to us. Everything is in me. I am a little child, I am a grown up, I am a murderer, and I am a saint. I am narcissistic, and I am destructive. There is nothing in the patient which I do not have in me. And only inasmuch as I can muster within myself those experiences which the patient is telling me about, either explicitly or implicitly, only if they arouse and echo within myself can I know what the patient is talking about. Then something very strange happens: The patient will not have the feeling I am talking about him or her, nor that I talk down to him or her, but the patient will feel that I am talking about something which we both share“ (1994, p.100).

As a member of the human race, each individual has the potential to experience the totality of human experiences (Fromm, 1960). Analyst and patient are both members of the human race and live its contradictions; the experience of one could have been the experience of the other, they are above **all** two individuals facing each other.

Transference as a function of the total personality

The theoretical vision of radical humanism finds an important clinical application in the „center-to-center“ correlation between analyst and patient (Fromm, 1960; Biancoli, 1995), according to which the analyst can understand the patient insofar as he or she experiences what the patient experiences.

Psychoanalytic treatment inspired by radical humanism proposes to change the patient from an orientation to interior passivity and ownership, to an orientation to activity, moving from the having mode towards the being mode. Seen in this light, change in analysis reduces and could even eliminate transference, insofar as transference is the expression of a deep need for an idol, an omnipotent and omniscient figure to depend on. An idol is an invention of human beings on to which they transfer their faculties and their strengths.



Fromm asks if transference is a question of the repetition of infantile experiences or of „the mobilization of the ‘idolatric passion’“ (1992). He compares the genetic and the functional points of view, which alternate in the work of psychoanalysis (1968). The former considers the history of a person and the psychogenesis of his or her current aspects. The latter is transversal and looks to the functioning totality, to the overall movement in action at the present time. The psychogenesis is useful, as all information is useful, but it is with the functional perspective that each aspect of personality emerges in relation to all the other aspects and is captured in its active function. It is like seeing a personality in an X-ray and understanding the function of the transference in the current global humanity of the analysand. In this way it is also possible to see the social connotations of the transference (Silva-Garcia, 1995).

It is still true that the deep, remaining ties with parent figures are continually re-lived with other people and other situations, and on this subject too, as on many others, Fromm acknowledges the value of Freud’s discoveries. However, he emphasises how transference is common in all aspects of social life (1979, p.292) and not only limited to the psychoanalytical relationship. The fact that transference concerns all areas of relationships contributes to the idea that it is an expression of the „human condition“.

Fromm also accepts Sullivan’s idea of „parataxic distortion“ (1940, 1953, 1956), but he sees it from a functionalist point of view. He always asks himself what function a certain distortion has at a given moment. Sullivan’s concept has been popular in interpersonal psychoanalysis.

Gaetano Benedetti defines it as follows: „A parataxic distortion takes place when in a certain interpersonal situation at least one of the two participants reacts to a ‘personification’, that is to an image of the other which exists only in the imagination, to a human figuration, which has already been formed by past experiences and is thus evoked by some real current aspects of the other“ (1961, p. XII) (translation mine).

The most intense distortions are caused by mother fixation, which can be seen as „one of the ‘spiritual’ answers to the human existence“ (Fromm, 1992). The deep longing for a powerful figure to trust and submit to. for a „magic helper“ to take care of them, leads to regression in human beings who feel the path to individuation is too difficult. Transference reveals the strategy for survival that a person has adopted. Fromm (1968) considers transference a microscopic method of observation of the relationship of human beings to the world.

From the „idologic“ perspective, transference is treated in analysis by continually confronting the infantile, sick part of the patient with the adult, healthy part. The analyst offers him or herself on two levels: on the level of transference as required by the distortions and needs of the patient, and on the level of a real person who talks to another real person sitting opposite.

While there is transference there cannot be freedom in any human relationship, only interior compulsion. Love does not lie in the reality of the transference, since love can only grow out of freedom. Given that its aim is to reduce and eliminate transference, psychoanalytic treatment is essentially an attempt to make a person capable of loving.

Conclusions. Humanism in psychoanalysis and the current debate on the analytic relationship



Radical humanism is biophilic. The love of life is the feeling that everything is in movement, that everything is being born. (Schweitzer, 1947; Dolci, 1965). Psychoanalytic treatment that is not inspired by biophilia may gather information and impose interpretations and reconstructions but it is unlikely to capture the living, pulsating unity of a person's total humanity. Psychoanalysis is an art because it is applied to the living. The word „art“ is the most appropriate for the treatment living beings and it is in this sense that the application of psychoanalysis is an art, in the same way that the appreciation of poetry is an art.

An art is practised according to the constitutive rules of its technique. According to Fromm, the term „technique“ has, however, undergone a subtle and important change: its meaning has shifted from that of putting into practice rules concerning living subjects, to the reference of rules to mechanical objects. It is therefore not always appropriate in psychoanalysis to speak of technique, as psychoanalysis concerns human beings, not dead things (1991, pp.225-226). The most acceptable definition of the word 'technique' is its original meaning as a collection of rules to be followed.

Defined narrowly as a technique, psychoanalysis runs the risk of rigidity and crystallisation (Lesser, 1992). of becoming a „party line“ (Fromm, 1958).

Radical humanism asks that psychoanalysis be biophilic and therefore an art, that it go to the 'centre' of the patient, always seeing his or her whole being, and offering the whole being of the analyst, and that it see the human root of everything.

This approach can legitimately enter the debate that has recently developed in contemporary psychoanalytic literature (Bacciagaluppi, 1989) on the factors involved in cure (Loewald, 1960; Gill, 1983; Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983; Hoffman, 1963). Hirsch (1987) points to two basic factors in therapy: insight and experience of a new kind of human relationship between analyst and analysand. The second factor is missing from the classical view, according to which the analyst gives the patient a detached presence, not his or her personality. In order to maintain neutrality, the analyst withholds his or her emotional world from the relationship with the patient. This blank-screen model has been criticised by many writers, who Hoffmann (1983) divides into conservative critics and radical critics. The radicalism of some of the latter even goes so far as to consider the patient as therapist to the analyst. Already in 1972 Searles wrote a paper entitled „The Patient as Therapist to his Analyst“. In this paper, Searles cites both Ferenczi and (Groddeck, who, in his „The Book of the It“, was the first who „explicitly describes the patient's functioning as therapist to the doctor“ (1972). Groddeck speaks of the inversion of the doctor-patient relationship in other writings too (1926, 1928): „Here I am faced with the strange turning point where the relationship of doctor and patient is reversed, where the patient becomes the doctor...“ (1928, p.215)

Groddeck was also the first to see how the patient could become the analyst's teacher: „The patient is the doctor's teacher. Only from the patient will the doctor be able to learn psychotherapy“ (1928, p.221).

The study of the relationships between Groddeck and Fromm (Biancoli, 1995) and Ferenczi and Fromm (Silva-Garcia, 1983; Bacciagaluppi, 1993) is relatively recent. Fromm never speaks of „mutual analysis“, but he does praise the clinical work of those two masters of psychoanalysis at every opportunity. There is no direct relation between „mutual analysis“ and the Frommian ideas of the „total humanity“ of patient and ana-



lyst and their „center-to-center“ correlation. These operational concepts are the translation of radical humanism into clinical practice and are Fromm's own.

Ferenczi develops the idea of „mutual analysis“ in his 1932 „Clinical Diary“ (Dupont, 1988), where he describes the case of „R.N.“, in which both the role of the analyst and that of the patient enter into play. However, Groddeck's writings on this subject precede Ferenczi's by some ten years.

Blechner (1992) refers to Ferenczi's mutual analysis as „an extraordinary democratisation of the psychoanalytic process“ and proposes a modification with a procedure he calls „working in the countertransference“. But it is necessary to return to Groddeck:

„In my view, there is, through what I have come to call 'working in the countertransference', which is an outgrowth Groddeck's (1923) thinking on the transformation of the doctor's 'It' by the patient...“ (1992, p. 164).

Aron (1992) appreciates Blechner's attempt to go forward in the exploration and experimentation of psychoanalytic technique but he insists on a previous (1991) position of his own: „I have described that the analytic process is best thought of as mutual but asymmetrical“ (1992, p.189). Aron therefore believes that mutual analysis must take place with the roles of analyst and patient clearly separate and distinct.

Mutuality should be understood in the sense that both analyst and analysand are two people facing each other, two totalities engaged in a dialogue. The asymmetry lies in specific nature of what the analyst is offering, that is to say in the peculiar competence of being the patient while remaining oneself. The analyst's way of being is also asymmetrical. He or she is like a midwife who assists the patient in a new birth, causing things to emerge that the patient was not even aware of knowing.

When an analyst listens, it is not only to words, it represents a way of being present. According to Fromm, the attitude of fluctuating attention advocated by Freud (1912) is not sufficient. A vitalising presence on the part of the analyst is also necessary to create an atmosphere of interest. The analysand must feel that the analyst feels. The analyst does not feel only the patient but also him or herself, in an interior activity that grows and becomes sharper with the practice of discovering one's own humanity in the other, of experiencing the human universal in oneself and in others. In this sense it is true that the patient is therapist and teacher to the analyst.

The unconscious of the analyst resounds with the contents of the patient's unconscious, with the result that the analyst continues and deepens his or her own personal analysis.

Humanism is the civilisation of listening, of comparison, of dialogue. It is for this reason that it finds one of its most suitable expressions in the relationship between analyst and patient.

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