



THE YEARNING FOR COMMUNITY AND THE ROLE OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

Comments on the book by Juan B. Fuentes (2009),
La impostura freudiana. Una mirada antropológica crítica sobre el psicoanálisis freudiano como institución (The Freudian deception. An anthropological critique of Freudian psychoanalysis as an institution). Madrid: Encuentro

Marino Pérez Álvarez

Freud and psychoanalysis have been criticized from all sides and in all ways, most commonly in relation to the scientific status of psychoanalytic theory and the efficacy of the psychotherapeutic technique. However, a more fundamental criticism, aimed at the role of psychoanalysis as a social institution and made from an anthropological perspective, was first voiced in this work by Juan B. Fuentes, Professor of Philosophical Anthropology at the Madrid's Complutense University.

The criticism is levelled at what psychoanalysis does – beginning with Freud – in the face of the demoralization of individuals resulting from the dissolution of community life in its transition to modern society, characterized by a way of life without the sense of community based on individuals' *concrete* social relations. The situation of the Freudian patient would be one of rootlessness and flotation, in a society dominated by *abstract* social relations, due to the "great transformation" resulting from the logic of the market. The Freudian patient is caught in a state of ambivalence, in fluctuation between, on the one hand, the ultimate yearning to restore one's family and community life, with the strength and sense of moral responsibility to do so, and on the other, a psychological tendency to eschew any kind of moral effort in that direction. What psychoanalysis does is to "embroil" its patients in the situation of moral repudiation and dissipation of any personal responsibility to restore their interpersonal, family and community life.

This is the Freudian deception: to convert the situation of the patient into a supposed unconscious, metapsychological, universal and abstract conflict, detached from its concrete situation and the root problem (yearning for community). In other words, the deception consists in "satisfying" patients' tendency to repudiate all

personal responsibility, entangling them in an interminable analysis, as illustrated in documentary fashion in the book.

Although Fuentes focuses above all on the doctrinal embroilment in the therapy as a frustrated yearning for community life and as a means of eluding personal responsibility, the involvement in the psychoanalytic therapy could be seen as an exercise in itself and as a source of the sought-after sense of community, echoing Gustavo Bueno's conception of psychoanalysis as a "soteriological heterie" or salvational community, analogous to the Epicurean communities [Gustavo Bueno (1981-1982), *Psicoanalistas y epicúreos*. Introductory essay on the anthropological concept of "soteriological heteries", *El Basilisco*, nº 13, pp. 12-39]. If this is the case, it would also support Fuentes' thesis in relation to patients' yearning (satisfied in part by the therapeutic relation itself) and to their readiness to avoid personal responsibility (satisfied by the psychoanalytical interpretation).

It is interesting here to consider other social and clinical phenomena, such as drug-addiction, insofar as, apparently, the problem derives from the disintegration of community life (in this case, falling into the drug habit instead of onto the psychoanalyst's couch), and drug-addicts find the "solution" in the community in which they "hang out", with its rituals and subculture of drug-taking, as a substitute for the natural community that is lost, even before, in some cases, the "therapeutic community" as a social institution. This is in line with the idea that the psychological problem represents in some way the search for a lost community, and that the therapeutic situation is in itself a solution, albeit prosthetic, in the form of a psychoanalytical relation or "therapeutic community", and ultimately a substitutive solution more than one which



restores moral responsibility, as Fuentes would advocate.

Fuentes' book is of interest to psychologists, beyond matters of Freud and psychoanalysis, in relation to two fundamental issues involving nothing less than the nature of psychological disorders and the social role of psychotherapy. As regards the nature of disorders, the book notes the passage of community to society (according to the distinction made by Ferdinand Tönnies in *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, or *Community and Society*, in 1887), and more particularly the destruction of community in furtherance of a society of rootless and floating individuals, who will need intermediation to replace the sense-of-community that the traditional community provided. Thus, psychological disorders would derive not from supposed dysfunctions in the brain, the psyche or the mind of individuals, but from people's situations given the "great transformation" (alluding to Karl Polanyi's work, *The Great Transformation*, 1944) – the fundamental change that occurred as the self-regulating market replaced the economy integrated in social relations of traditional societies, in this case the community. The example of drugs, as studied by Bruce K. Alexander (2008) in *The globalisation of addiction. A study in poverty of spirit* (Oxford University Press), would provide another test of this thesis. Alexander explains the phenomenon of the globalization of addiction in relation to the "disruption" of psychological integration provided by the sense of belonging to a community, in reference to the indigenous community he studied in Canada.

With regard to the social role of psychotherapy (of all kinds, not just psychoanalysis), Fuentes proposes their consideration as a new type of institution, and specifically as "intermediate institutions" between the basic social institutions (economic, political, educational, religious, family, etc.) and individuals, who would attempt to remedy the problems that these institutions create and fail to resolve, resulting in a need for new institutions such as those represented precisely by psychological therapies. The question now would be whether we are talking about therapeutic institutions that embroil individuals and lead them to elude their responsibility and commitments, or that resituate them vis-à-vis their lives with the responsibility and capacity to take charge of their future. Psychologists themselves will know which therapies tend toward one direction or the other.

Having summarized like this the Freudian deception, in its minimum expression, and bearing in mind the implications outlined, it should be made clear that

Fuentes' perspective has the scope of a whole philosophy of history, Freud being in reality nothing more than a testing ground, though indeed an important one, which is at the basis of modernity, the epitome of the modern conception of psychology. The philosophical background to this "assault" on Freud is established by the author in another work (Juan B. Fuentes, *De Kant a Freud: La formation del sujeto modernista en el seno de las crisis románticas del pensamiento kantiano* [From Kant to Freud: The formation of the modernist subject within the romantic crises of Kantian thought], submitted for publication).

This philosophy of history identifies the universal historical problem in the relationship between the ideas of "community" and "universality". Community and universality are involved in the inception, genesis and internal constitution of human societies. Whilst community is a requisite condition for human beings and, so to speak, their natural historical form (if readers will excuse the contradiction), universality is found in the actual propagation and expansion of communities beyond themselves to make up other communities in the "image and likeness" of the previous ones. In any case, in terms of universal history, the author highlights three eras: pre-Christian, pagan classical antiquity; old or medieval Catholic Christian civilization; and the modern era (modern and contemporary).

Fuentes gives pride of place to the old (or medieval Catholic) Christian civilization, insofar as it is "the only civilization so far capable of combining and balancing to the optimum extent these two ideas of universality and community," as a "virtually limitless universal community", in contrast to others which, each in its own way, are limited by a high degree of economic reductive abstraction of community life, particularly in the modern case. In the Christian civilizations mentioned, economic relations would be subordinate to and integrated in community relations and in reference to individual human bodies, irreducible in their singularity as concrete corporeal individuals.

The point is that the process of dissolution of *traditional* community life, which had reached its height in Christian civilization, would occur at the hands of the project of modernity, in which human relations and people would become subordinate to abstract economic relations, thus giving rise to rootless and floating individuals of the type that become, for example, Freudian patients. This philosophy of history, like any philosophy of history



worthy of the name, regardless of its mythology, has its *original sin*, in this case, of course, in the aforementioned reductive abstraction of economic-abstract relations, while the *fall* would be the breakdown of community life, which can lead to drug-addiction, the psychoanalytic institution or other, similar situations.

Fuentes' anthropological perspective finds an ally, in principle, in the "romantic rebellion", which is also critical of modernity. Indeed, romanticism stands as a countercurrent to modernity, and there are actually versions of romanticism fully in line with Fuentes's view (Michael Löwy & Robert Sayre, 2008, *Rebelión y melancolía. El romanticismo como contracorriente de la modernidad* [Rebellion and melancholy. Romanticism as a countercurrent of modernity], Buenos Aires, editorial Nueva Visión). However, Fuentes is not fooled by either the romantic rebellion or avant-garde modernist culture, since the rebellion is itself abstract, and often purely aesthetical – "art for art's sake", without content and lacking a practical project for the restitution of community life. In truth, as Fuentes argues, the rebels in question are "rebels without a cause". In this sense, Fuentes' critical anthropological conception not only resists aligning itself with apparently kindred movements (or at least kindred to a certain extent), but also refuses to be seduced by psychoanalysis, as a supposed procedure for enlightening us on the subject of the human psyche.

Even so, Fuentes' perspective could also be seen as somewhat romantic, both for its criticism and rebellion against modernity and for its longing for and vindication of community life, rooted in the flesh-and-blood person,

neighbourhood relationships and custom. It would be interesting to ask Fuentes – and indeed this is an aspect yet to be developed in his formulation – whether we should expect a reversal of modernity, or more realistically, how some form of restoration of community life might be possible in the era of the great shopping malls. Furthermore, his approach demands a new consideration of technology, situating it in opposition or in relation to the way it is conceived by Heidegger, Ortega and Sloterdijk. In any case, Fuentes' brilliant exposition, so critical of modernity, itself utilizes modern technology, albeit the computer and Internet, to propagate and assert the reasoning behind his highly original and well-justified critique of modernity, taking Freud as a touchstone.

Many psychologists may be unfamiliar with Fuentes' form of argumentation and philosophical vocabulary, despite the fact that a large part of his work concerns psychology, and has indeed been published in psychological journals (*Revista de Historia de la Psicología*, *Psicothema*, *Spanish Journal of Psychology*, etc.). Those who are not familiar with it would do well to make the effort and put their intelligence to good use. This book will lead them along untrodden paths that are opened up through argumentation and vocabulary which exploit the Spanish language in the richest, most nuanced and most precise fashion. The route is often in the form of a spiral, so that each reiteration adds something more, which not only completes what precedes it but also extends the perimeter of the argumentation. Reasoning cannot proceed without *logos*, that is, without reasons or the appropriate words.

