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A quest for truth or solidarity? A third way ahead for psychoanalysis

MIGUEL ANGEL GONZALEZ-TORRES*

Abstract
Today, there are two ways of conceiving psychoanalysis, a classical one focused on the search for truth within the internal world of the patient, and a contemporary one perceiving the patient–therapist relationship as the axis of exploration. Rorty's criterion, which divides disciplines into either truth-based or solidarity-based, may be applied to this dichotomy. These conflicting positions come from two different historical periods: the Enlightenment and the contemporary world. They inhabit a sterile environment without theoretical discussion or comparison. The Renaissance relocated man at the centre of creation and urged him to seek encounters with others as well as with the truth concealed in nature. Possibly, these elements of truth and solidarity, initially designed as complementary, integrative, and nonconflicting, can be found in the work of some psychoanalysts, specifically in Otto Kernberg's proposals. Kernberg makes a creative integration of object relations theory, especially in its Kleinian approach, and ego psychology. In addition, Kernberg's consideration of affects as key elements of the human's internal world reflects a third psychoanalytical "way," exposing the centrality of relational experiences from the earliest stages of life, alongside constitutional drive forces that link us to our biological make-up and determine much of our inner world and behaviour.

Key words: *truth, solidarity, integration, affects*

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Fatti non foste a viver come bruti, ma per seguir virtute e conoscenza
(Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, Canto XXVI)

General perspectives in psychoanalysis: classical and contemporary

Two general perspectives can be outlined within the complex system of current psychoanalytic models. One of them is referred to as classical and is related to the pre-eminent position of the mainstream of American psychoanalysis, in accordance with so-called "ego psychology." Its postulates are Freud's main concepts, interpreted by his daughter Anna and the main authors of this school of thought, Hartmann, Kris, and Lowenstein, and firmly established by Eissler (Wallerstein, 2014). As essential features, we can point out the primacy of drives within its model of mental functioning, and the maintenance of the tripartite structure of the psychic apparatus. This theoretical concept and its correlate therapeutic practice has exerted a powerful influence among analysts, especially in the USA, and remains as a basic reference point, a sort of counterpoint for all the other trends that have emerged over the last few decades. It is interesting that, outside the USA, this traditional way of conceiving psychoanalysis has often had less presence in clinical practice than in the collective imaginary. In Europe or Latin America, many analysts today would not adhere to this traditional model, although they often compare themselves with a classical image of psychoanalysis from which they deviate.

In the last few decades, a movement has been developing, one that we could consider to be contemporary, diverse, and heterogeneous psychoanalysis, although with some shared central aspects. Drives disappear from the theoretical vocabulary, and with them the link to biology and constitution, watchwords of our discipline in its initial stage. On the other hand, structural theory – the basis of classical psychoanalysis – is played down if not altogether deleted. From indifference to outright rejection, many current authors exclude from their proposals any mention of the former components of the psychic apparatus: the id, ego, and superego.

This rather dichotomous approach between a unipersonal psychoanalysis, focused on the truth of the patient's inner world, and the psychoanalysis in which the link of the patient with his objects (especially with the analyst) occupies the main field of exploration, has a chronological aspect. It seems that that the relational view is posterior in time, more contemporary than the former, more focused on the

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instinctual life of one of the participants. A parallel could be drawn between the development of the current interactional approach and the triumphant entry of countertransference into the theoretical field.

The different conceptions of countertransference reflect different ways of understanding the analyst's role in the therapeutic process. We can trace a path from the "blank screen" therapist's view of the early days, to the more interactional conceptions of today. It is worth noting that Ferenczi's pioneering work (Ferenczi & Rank, 1924/2012), with proposals based on a more active and symmetrical role for the analyst, had a key role in guiding this long journey, implementing a shift from truth/objectivity toward solidarity.

We can clearly distinguish three stages of countertransference. After the Jung–Spielrein affair (Lothane, 1996), Freud himself launched the first. It was advocated to maintain a neutral internal and external position before the patient, and the countertransference was always considered to be the result of a therapist's error that must be corrected by reflection or even by the clinician's reanalysis. A second stage was brought about by the contributions of Heimann (1950), Racker (1957), and others; in this, countertransference is no longer considered to be the result of an error, but rather to be an inevitable and natural phenomenon in such a peculiar, asymmetrical helping relationship as that of psychoanalysis. Finally, a third and more current stage was launched by the contributions of Kernberg (1965), emphasizing the useful role of countertransference on two fronts: to achieve a deeper diagnostic (structural) view of the patient, and to guide the analyst's interventions in the therapeutic process.

This latter vision gives a prominent role to a theoretical view of patient and analyst receiving more equal attention. It coincides in time, according to Baranger (2012), with concepts such as Ogden's "analytic third", "working as a double" by Cesar and Sara Botella, which allows the analysand to access the representation through the union of two complementary psyches, Bollas's "intermediate area" between the patient's and analyst's subjectivities, Baranger's "field theory" itself, or the role of setting in the construction of the "analytic object," noted by Green. In this spirit, de M'Uzan (1978, p. 93) states: "the analysand and the analyst form a sort of new body, a 'monster', a psychological chimera with its own *modus operandi*."

A recent proposal conceives the participants in the analytical task as systems that influence one another through the action of "fields of influence" (Cherbuliez, 2013). Each relational system has a field of influence that exerts pressure on the world around it by forcing it to operate with the same modes of behaviour. The field of influence represents the tendency of a system to recreate the functional components of its own inner environment in its immediate surroundings. These effects are timeless, unconscious, and not normally perceived by the members of the system, or by the external receivers.

This conception of the analytic process, which provides the members of the therapeutic partnership with a much more symmetrical position, demands a different view of the nature of therapeutic action. Interpretation – and in particular transferential interpretation – is no longer seen as the singular or key element of the process. Based on Winnicott's reflection (1986), Gállego (1997) emphasizes the need to work at the holding *and* interpretation levels, focusing on a certain degree of integration of theory and technique that generates a working method which is more focused on the pathology and the patient's needs rather than the analyst's theoretical affiliation.

Application of Rorty's criteria to psychoanalysis: Truth-based and solidarity-based perspectives

In his extraordinary text *From classical to contemporary psychoanalysis*, Eagle (2011) shows us how the contemporary conceptions of psychoanalysis also reflect socioeconomic factors and philosophical changes in broader cultural terms. Classical psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on the attainment of insight, awareness, and self-knowledge, at least partially reflects a true vision of the Enlightenment. The recommendation to "know thyself," a value from the Enlightenment, was identified with the path towards healing. Eagle states that the profound skepticism towards the enlightened statement that self-knowledge and the learning of "truths" about oneself are curative poses a difficult challenge for the classical psychoanalytic model. This skepticism is a further expression of the general suspicion of the value and even the practicability of searching for truths, either about the external world or about oneself. Eagle also discusses the philosopher Richard Rorty (1991) and his criticism of the idea of seeking the truth, besides his position in favour of aspiring to solidarity above objectivity as a supreme cultural value. According to Rorty, Western civilization has fluctuated between two epistemological attitudes: one pursuing truth and the other pursuing solidarity.

It is worth noting that Rorty draws on historical ideas here. The Enlightenment, and its daughter the Industrial Revolution, places truth as a central element of progress, around which science and culture evolve. Men are explorers of the unknown, and the task of the researcher is that of a tireless explorer that constantly reduces the unmarked areas

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of our maps. Nonetheless, the Industrial Revolution also led to skepticism, disappointment, war, and destruction. It was painfully proven that culture does not make man better, only more efficient. The response to the Industrial Revolution is modernism (Kandel, 2012), which reflects a movement of men withdrawing to embrace their proven weaknesses, imperfections, and defects. It is clear that truth will not make us free. We should look instead to a much more fundamental virtue, solidarity, the unity movement that pushes us towards exchange, towards relationships, towards a knowledge of the other. In this shift of perspective, there is a deep desire: that war should not return, that destruction should not take our loved ones from us.

At every historical crossroads, we experience a struggle between these two positions. Those who pursue truth focus on discovering quite absolute values, which can be detected by any observer regardless of his point of view. These values reflect existing, self-contained, and eternal concrete realities. Proponents of solidarity perceive their environment in a more relativist manner, considering that the point of view of the observer must be taken into account in assessing what is observed. These thinkers consider that there are no immutable, independent, and timeless truths – at least, we have no way of knowing whether the realities uncovered are immutable and eternal, or simply depend on a somewhat deliberate consensus among observers.

This dilemma recalls the traditional opposition between epistemologists. Taking a classical approach, Popper (2002) proposes that knowledge advances steadily based on conjectures and refutations that lead us to a deeper knowledge of reality. Subsequent epistemologists, such as Kuhn (2012), Lakatos (1976), and especially Feyerabend (2010) with his epistemological anarchism, clearly maintain a relativistic attitude, considering that every area of knowledge in every age originates from a central paradigm that explains a part of reality. That paradigm or central belief is based on a tacit agreement among researchers, which is shattered when other researchers successfully propose a new paradigm to replace the previous one. Often, these "scientific revolutions" start from movements more closely related to sociology, group dynamics, manipulation, and propaganda than to the austere methodology of scientific research. The theoretical proposals of psychoanalysis, and the clinical practices deriving from them, operate just as any other area of knowledge, and as such are subject to the tensions described.

Freudian theories are heir to the central European Zeitgeist within which they arose (Makari, 2010), and have deep roots dating back to the Enlightenment. Parallel to the disjunction in Enlightened thinking between reason and passion, we find the dilemma between neurosis and repression, or between cure and knowledge (insight, awareness, self-knowledge), inherent to Freudian or classical psychoanalysis. Here, the search for truth is seen as the cornerstone of scientific activity. Critical thinkers consider truth as being less relevant, and focus on communication and agreement between individuals when determining what is valid or otherwise. It is important to bear in mind that the current shift in psychoanalysis from objectivity towards solidarity is not only the result of a progression in psychoanalytic theory, but also the product of a change in the Zeitgeist of our time, more skeptical and more akin to the concrete, familiar experiences of interaction. With his relational approach, Mitchell (1988) is perhaps the prototypical psychoanalyst, abandoning the quest for truth and focusing on the bonds that the patient establishes with the analyst and with others. Mitchell thus proposes so-called "interpretive constructions" and provides the patient with an organization and reorganization of experience, promoting the therapeutic relationship above insight, awareness, and self-knowledge.

Summarizing the above, we can distinguish two theoretical-practical positions in psychoanalysis: a classical approach, rooted in Enlightened thought and promoting a search for truth through the objective exploration of the patient's psyche and biography; and a contemporary approach, linked to a postmodernist perspective, which promotes the construction of new points of view with the patient–therapist collaboration at its heart, and which minimizes the possibility of finding truth or even an objective point of view. Truth versus solidarity, objectivity versus relativism, Enlightenment versus modernity.

Is it possible to explore the strengths and weaknesses of the different theoretical positions within psychoanalysis? Can we compare theories? How does someone taking a fresh, unbiased look at psychoanalysis (if such a thing is indeed feasible) decide which school of analysis best meets the needs of the patient? David Tuckett (2008) points out the desperate need to contrast theories and to consider which has a greater content of truth, which is more useful, or which is experienced by patient and therapist as more authentic and a better match to the individual's internal life. Few have endeavored to do so, and their task is far from complete. Nowadays, ideas in psychoanalysis are still very often mere opinions, and "there has been a collective intellectual failure to establish secure consensually agreed and demonstrable propositions concerning key questions of theory and technique" (Tuckett, 2001, p. 643).

To conclude this section, we should note that the distance between schools and the avoidance of

theoretical debate in psychoanalysis has also played a protective role for the different points of view. The distance between them allows each one to protect its integrity, and permits the coexistence of mutually incompatible views. Years ago, Isaiah Berlin (1994) pointed out that there were values whose incompatibility – as well as the ideological disagreement that accompanied them – could not be resolved through reason. Must we accept the contradictory views in psychoanalysis as though we were choosing between freedom and social justice? How then is it possible to decide on the most useful perspective, or on the one that best reflects what happens in the session and in the life of the patient?

A useful historical review: Renaissance integration as an example of truth plus solidarity

History, which Rorty uses as a guide to analyse attitudes towards knowledge in different eras, can also be of use in this examination of the variety of psychoanalytic concepts and difficulties in comparing them. Rorty contrasts the enlightened vision, in which we take for granted an absolute truth that humans can come to know through science and the objective examination of reality, with the postmodernist vision, in which truth does not exist or cannot be known, and the objective examination of reality is only an unattainable desire given the inevitable subjectivism of any observer. For this postmodernist world, the relationship between individuals is both the focus of our quest for answers, and the mechanism for finding them. Contemporary psychoanalysis would largely be the result of this new perspective, which involves a relativistic position and perhaps a certain melancholy before the impossibility of the absolute, as a Kleinian depressive position in the social order. However, let us go back in time, tracing the path of history towards our origins.

A somewhat naive but nonetheless widespread historical view of Western civilization presents the classical Greco-Roman antiquity as a golden age. A long and, allegedly, dark period called the Middle Ages followed, in which Western knowledge was suspended and no one reached beyond the point reached by the classics. The West sailed with difficulty throughout these dark centuries until attaining a position where Europe recovered its past, and the explosion of creativity and optimism of the Renaissance came about.

The Renaissance meant a huge shift in perspective for the West and the end of the ancient world. Several characteristics delineate the spirit of the new period (Weinstein, 1990). Human nature has truly become a central object of study; man is the centre of the universe. All philosophical and theological systems are perceived as united and compatible (syncretism). There is a new emphasis on the dignity of man. Creation and man's domination of nature are exalted. Finally, there is a new hope in the recovery of lost wisdom and human spirit. Humanist philosophy, an intellectual product of the Renaissance, causes man's break with religious orthodoxy, advocating free inquiry and criticism, and inspiring a new confidence in human thought and its creations.

Returning to Rorty's dilemma between truth and solidarity, we can verify that Renaissance humanism considers this a false choice. The Renaissance does not choose between truth and solidarity, instead focusing on the two goals simultaneously. The search for truth is an obligation for man, lord of the universe. At the same time, however, respect towards others and their values, opinions, and knowledge is imperative. In addition, a range of perspectives of reality and different paths to knowledge are accepted as multiple possibilities.

A "Renaissance" position in psychoanalysis today?

Some contemporary authors have resisted this choice between objective approaches, focused on the search for truth, and other subjective approaches considering the relationship as the only source of knowledge agreed on by the parties.

There are important leading figures that fit within this group. A precursor of Kernberg, Edith Jacobson (1964), would be placed at the theoretical end of the traditional approach, as through her concept of the "representational world" she progressed on the path connecting relational aspects with classical metapsychology. Greenberg and Mitchell (1984) classified Kohut and Sandler's proposals as "mixed model strategies." Largely through his publication *The restoration of self* (1976), Heinz Kohut distanced himself completely from the traditional model, even if he did continue to consider it as complementary to his own self-psychology model. Joseph Sandler (1976) quite openly stated that the drive impulse or wish always entails a particular kind of object relation, that is, a role of oneself in interaction with a role for the other. Andre Green (2003) can also be qualified as an integrator. A contemporary author with great international influence, mainly outside the Anglo-Saxon environment, he makes an effort to incorporate Melanie Klein, Bion, or Winnicott into his theoretical work without playing down the importance of drive, sexuality, and the key concepts of psychoanalysis.

Due to the dissemination of his work and its impact on our discipline in the last few decades, we

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should emphasize as an exponent of this integrative perspective Otto Kernberg, who tries to combine core aspects of the two perspectives. Kernberg's work is too broad to address within the limitations of this article, but we can outline some fundamental aspects of his propositions. They occupy, from our point of view, an intermediate position between the classical proposals of traditional ego psychology and the current intersubjective proposals.

It could be said that, in Rorty's disjunction between the Enlightenment position, represented by classical psychoanalysis (ego psychology, Independents, Kleinians) and contemporary positions, represented by intersubjectivism (self psychology, culturalism, intersubjectivism in the strict sense, relationalism, etc.), Kernberg (and other integrative analysts in some measure) assumes a "Renaissance" position, that is to say a fruitful integration between the search for truth and objectivity without leaving the spirit of solidarity.

Some key concepts in Kernberg's work (Durieux, 2003; Kernberg 2005, 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2013) provide evidence for this. Setting constitutes the scenario in which the analytical process is undertaken, and interpretation is the keystone that supports it. Interpretation could be defined as a demonstration of latent meaning. The patient will convert any intervention by the analyst into either a true interpretation or a mere comment. Kernberg's work displays a constant effort to build bridges, to integrate apparently distant positions, such as ego psychology, mainstream American psychoanalysis, and the contributions of Melanie Klein. This integrative position shares with those schools a preference for transference interpretations, the utilization of countertransference material, which is incorporated to enrich the interpretation, an interest in character analysis, and a focus on the here-and-now. In addition, material to work with is chosen taking into account the dominant affect in the session. Finally, object relations theory becomes the key conceptual foundation.

Kernberg accepts the existence of drives, which are expressed through affects. These, in turn, shape the internalized object representations that constitute the "building blocks" of our inner world. Kernberg also makes the effort to integrate ego psychology and object relations theory into an approach rooted in Freud's dualist theory of drives, connected at the same time with the contemporary theories about affects. These constitute the primary motivational system and are organized into hierarchically superordinate motivations (Freudian drives). Drives reveal themselves through unconscious fantasies constructed from emotionally charged object representations (Kernberg, 2009).

One of Kernberg's key contributions is the theoretical intrapsychic conflict as a clash between object relational dyads. Drive-defense configurations are the configurations of internalized object relations, instinctual and defensively invested. Unconscious intrapsychic conflicts are reactivated as transference dispositions revealing the original internalized object relations.

One of the key contributions of this author is the theoretical development and the clinical proposals related to the so-called "borderline personality organizations" (Kernberg et al., 2008). As a therapeutic approach to this complex clinical problem, Kernberg proposes his so-called transference-focused psychotherapy (TFP), a psychoanalytic psychotherapy, empirically validated by Doering et al. (2010) and Clarkin, Levy, Lenzenweger, and Kernberg (2007). Within a framework of technical neutrality, the integration of the object and self-representations are promoted in TFP through the systematic use of clarification, confrontation, and interpretation, all focusing on the here-and-now, and with a close eye on transference phenomena and the countertransferential therapist's response. In TFP, an integrative view is clearly discernible, both at a theoretical level and in the interest in the empirical research into and the dissemination of psychoanalytic knowledge beyond institutes.

In other words, a highly creative synthesis can be observed in Kernberg's work. On the one hand, we find drive forces, biologically based and closely linked to affects; on the other hand, there are the individual's relational experiences, leaving a trace in the internal world, generating relational configurations that will seek expression in transference.

Kernberg's position is clearly "objectivist," in the sense that there is a real search for truth, truth that helps the patient to know him- or herself better, to cure conflicts better, and to understand their origin better. That search for truth is related to the analyst's "third position," unfolding in a participant role (in the transference and countertransference) and an observer role. This third position, coupled with the general conditions of the setting and technical neutrality, would constitute the precondition for the patient's discourse. In this approach, Kernberg considers interpretations to be hypotheses, and therefore they must be subject to confirmation or refutation by the new material (patient's discourse, "acting," transference and countertransference, etc.) that arises afterwards. Evidently, this search for truth would be fully incompatible with the famous Bionian dictum " without memory or desire." Finally, structural change would be pursued through modifications to

the nature of the object relations enabled by and through transference.

Over a long period, the various psychoanalytical schools and orientations have observed one another with detached suspicion, considering each other as heresies to be eliminated, demanding repentance and sacrifices, or at the very least attributing errors of perspective, well-intended but doomed to failure. We are guilty of too much complacency, or too much indifference, or too much fear. As such, we remain attached to very basic concepts of our group, and are unwilling to contrast or to compare our ideas with those proposed by others. The disjunction between the search for objective truth and the consideration of solidarity as a supreme value is false. We can choose virtue and knowledge, truth and solidarity, drive, structural theory and object relations. Just as the Renaissance showed a path of integration, which was later truncated, so some psychoanalytic authors propose a creative fusion that allows the pursuit of truth in our internal world without sacrificing the fundamental role of the object in the construction of the psyche and in the understanding of the analytical process. Truth and solidarity. *Virtute e conoscenza*.

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