

Tenderness and aggressiveness in Psychotherapy

(Agresividad y ternura en psicoterapia)

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Aggressiveness and tenderness, sometimes in the highlight, sometimes a taboo, have always revolved around the psychotherapy session. The possibility of an aseptic clinic, in the beginning of the twentieth century intended, in a positivist and Comte-like approach, that they could be banished from the consulting room. That is what would've pleased to an exacerbated *freudism*, as well as the exaggerated behaviourism.

Now, and since Adler, we know these are feelings that involve the patient along with the psychotherapist.

Besides, to make use of a newfound concept in psychology, *resilience*, we should establish that aggressiveness in one hand and tenderness in the other are what turn out a resilient subject. Even from a cognoscitive point of view –I mean (Gnoseology) the philosophic branch that takes care of the theory of knowledge and not the vulgar term used in a psychological sense–, it is necessary to unite affection and discernment. A precursor of our theories, Kant, indicated that «all understanding is knowledge adjusted to our intention». That means that knowledge and intention are interwoven in affection. Then again, Ortega y Gasset showed us that «an idea is clear if it presents in a new order into a set of ideas we already had». This is the great node, still unexploited, between psychology and psychotherapy. I am obviously referring to the strictly Adlerian psychology.

As life itself is more expressive than books and lectures, let's remember the conflicting versions of those who knew Adler personally. He was styled sometimes as “tough” and sometimes as “charming”. It was one mode of positioning in the therapeutic setting, taking into account that «many patients lacked tenderness, that's why I must become like a mother», but performing as a surgeon who, without sadism, is not afraid of using the scalpel.

What determines the necessary proportion of aggressiveness and tenderness, moreover than the knowledge the therapist possesses and the condition of the patient, is the “*art*” of psychotherapy. Psychotherapy has as its goal the change or acceptance, which is achieved by a restructuring of the affective cognitive unity in the patient. As Adler was the first empirical existential therapist, let us take notice of what a philosophical eminence as Martin Heidegger says with “Questions are paths toward an answer. If the answer could be given it would consist in a transformation of thinking, not in a propositional statement...”^[1] There is no need of a comment and the lector will do the didactic transposition from philosophy and psychology of learning to psychotherapy.

There is no effectual therapeutic process that eludes the three great tasks of life: social life, work and love, adding a fourth, which is the art. Adler called attention to the «Experience (which) has a real value, but art grasps more than experience».

This causes a distance from the symptomatic, behaviourist or focal treatments. Adler's psychotherapy was and still is an *insight therapy*. Let's recall the case of an obsessive and

[1] Martin Heidegger (1969) . The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking.

hesitant young man of whom he commented: «freeing him of that strange alibi wouldn't have been enough, for he would've found another one instantly».

How do we enclose all this in an ethical context, furthermore, in the ethic of the twenty-first century?

Long time ago, round here, Rodó wrote from his social interest, with a very native optimistic evolutionism, «As humankind moves forward, the moral law will be taken as an aesthetic of conduct. We'll avoid evil and error as dissonant, and we'll seek the goodness as a pleasant harmony». In the same string, our inspiring numen, Dostoyevsky, had written that beauty would save the world. And a few days ago, my friend from Spain, the Dr. Zurrón, told me that any essay on ugliness that excludes an adlerian perspective must be an impaired essay, because there isn't ugliness without inferiority and compensation, whether from an objective or subjective point of view.

The challenge of our time is to be very tender, very aggressive, but very consistent...

However, in the mean time, we can achieve a happy ending if we use correctly the interpretation as a non-violent aggressiveness, mixed with encouragement which is a kind of objective demonstration of tenderness.

I think that Ferenczi, guided by Adler got to affirm that «the patient doesn't heal without the therapist's love», a circumstance that nowadays has been rediscovered by the Gestalt psychology and others.

Do not fail to remember this, aggressiveness is necessary and can be beneficial, violence and torture, never!

It seems that the challenge of paradox has led the authorities of the Congress of the International Association of Individual Psychology to join together two contrasting concepts. But let Adler enlighten us again: «people think that left and right are contradictions, that man and woman, hot and cold, are opposite, weighty and light. However, from a scientific perspective, they are not contradictions but varieties. They are degrees on a same scale, ordered according to their vicinity to an ideal fiction». That's why the moment I saw the Congress heading I couldn't help thinking about Schiller, who maintained that the «opposition of two needs gives birth to freedom. The antagonism of forces gives birth to culture». In the labyrinth of aggressiveness and tenderness (where the extreme of the former is violence and sexuality the extreme of the last, though hardly can be both blended) there are the *safeguards*, an Adlerian construct that later Freud would use to describe the defence mechanisms.

It comes to my mind the story from a disciple-patient of Dreikurs, who provoked in him an authentic therapeutic shock. He daringly asked Dreikurs: «You meant that I choose, I choose the neurosis and the way of stirring? ». Dreikurs, standing with arms folded and severe expression, repeated dryly: «Yes, you choose»

As Adler had the purpose of transforming the psychotherapist into an educator, I'm musing on the assertion of Federico de Onís: «It's worthy of being called teacher, only who once in life at least has been able to give us a lesson on love».