

Le médecin espagnol Juan Rof Carballo (1905-1994) a apporté une contribution importante à la philosophie de la médecine. L'article souligne les éléments théoriques les plus significatifs de la médecine anthropologique proposée par l'auteur. Elle est fondée sur une anthropologie médicale originale, élaborée dans le dialogue avec certains des plus célèbres philosophes européens du XXe siècle. Dans cette anthropologie prend une grande importance la notion de *urdimbre*, « réseau » des relations que l'homme établit depuis le petite enfance. C'est la urdimbre qui, plus que toute autre réalité psychique ou sociale, affecte la manière d'être de la personne humaine. À la naissance, l'homme est « invalide » plus que tout autre être vivant, et il a besoin de l'amour et de la tendresse des figures parentales pour achever le développement biopsychosocial et s'ouvrir à la vie spirituelle.

1. *A singular intellectual path, from organicist to holistic medicine*

The *philosophy of medicine* arose in the first half of twentieth century. A fundamental contribution to this discipline has been given by some German authors. The internist and neurologist Viktor von Weizsäcker, numbered among its founders², criticizes the medicine of his age and means to place the sick man in the centre of medical theory and practice, as a *subject*, that is the real dialogical partner for the physician as well as the protagonist of therapy. The physician is his fellow-traveller (*Weggenossen*). According to Weizsäcker, in diagnosis and therapy the interview with the patient and the medical examination are as important as laboratory results. Weizsäcker borrows some theoretical elements from *dialogical thinking* proposed by his friends Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig in order to work out his *anthropological medicine*. He thinks that the conversation with the patient – that may begin with the simple question: «How are you feeling?» - is aimed to reveal the meaning of illness in his *biography*. Weizsäcker's anthropological medicine is focused on *pathic* component of the patient's subjectivity, particularly troubled when he is ill.

In the nineteenth century, besides Germany, also Spain offers a remarkable contribution to philosophical reflection about medicine. Already in the Middle Ages a celebrated tradition of humanistic medicine developed in this country. In the last century, the most eminent authors who renew this tradition are Laín Pedro Entralgo, Gregorio Marañón and Juan Rof Carballo³.

Juan Rof Carballo is one of the most important Spanish scholars with regard to psychosomatic medicine and psychoanalysis, but isn't well

known abroad⁴. He has written about thirty volumes and a lot of scientific articles. Yet also in his country the quantity of critical literature is rather poor⁵.

When completing his studies in the most prestigious European Universities, Rof Carballo focuses his attention to pathological anatomy and neurophysiology. His PhD thesis, published in 1933, inquires into the metabolism of unsaturated fatty acids (Juan Rof Carballo, 1933). In the years of full maturity he studies the nervous structures that make up the *visceral* or *inner brain* (*inneres Gehirn*, in the neurologist Karl Kleist's language⁶). Rof Carballo pays attention to the scientific researches about the anatomy and physiology of this structure, whose great importance is recognized since several decades as regards the memory of experiences and the emotional life (Id., 1952, pp. 1-94). It has been called *limbic system* by the American scholar Paul D. MacLean from 1952 onward. This denomination can also be found in Rof Carballo's writings from 1970 on⁷.

Already in the 1920s the author begins to read Freud's works, whose Spanish translation is promoted by José Ortega y Gasset (Sigmund Freud, 1922-1934). Later on, he reads also the writings of the authors who are considered to be the most important Freud's heterodox disciples, Carl Gustav Jung and Alfred Adler. His clinical experience – in which he proves the failure of a medical practice founded only in a naturalistic consideration - leads Rof Carballo to deepen the study of psychoanalysis and psychosomatic medicine. Within the psychoanalytic movement, he appreciates particularly the Swiss psychiatrist Gustav Bally, and other authors of varying geographical origin, which in Anglo-Saxon countries propose a psychoanalytical theory basically equidistant from the opposing positions held by Anna Freud and Melanie Klein. Generally speaking, they are counted by scholars of the psychoanalysis in the *middle group*, and among them Rof Carballo often quotes Michael Balint, Marion Milner and Donald Winnicott.

The Galician internist pays attention also to psychological currents of humanistic footprint developed in Europe and North America in the mid-1900s. Rof Carballo does not estimate, however, Jacques Lacan, considered by him as a narcissist who tries to accredit his thought as original by means of incontrovertible assertions in an almost unintelligible language full of mannerisms (Juan Rof Carballo, 1975, p. 247). Conversely, he recognizes to Erich Fromm - although in his opinion he proposes a reductive form of psychoanalysis (ID., 1972, p. 61) - the merit of placing in light the importance of the oblique character of love, that is a cosmic power aimed to protect and promote human life, more than any other one, and can be considered a personal attitude which is possible to «learn» (Id., 1973, pp. 276-277).

In the professional practice of maturity, Juan Rof Carballo, similarly to Viktor von Weizsäcker, adopts a holistic approach towards any disease.

The author questions the sense that it takes in the biography of the person, and criticizes the one-sidedness of the organic approach that still prevails in medicine. He considers this attitude as the coherent outcome of his studies and previous experience. On the contrary, his friend Pedro Laín Entralgo recognizes a «turning point», from organicist to psychosomatic medicine, in his human and professional path. According to him, Rof Carballo has contributed to the «building of an anthropological medicine, the conquest of a medical knowledge tensed as the span of a bridge between two orders of reality that are apparently very distant from each other: the biochemical process of disease and the psychological and social fact of human society» (Pedro Laín Entralgo, 1993, p. 49⁸).

2. *Biology and psychoanalysis in Rof Carballo's work*

The spirit of the English language helps us to express in a precise way what Juan Rof Carballo perceives in the inconvenience of the patient, that any treatise of medical pathology denominates *disease*. Besides this, he pays attention to subjective symptoms that configure the *illness* as well as its implications and social consequences that constitute the *sickness*. For Rof Carballo, the doctor may adopt the perspective of psychosomatic medicine not only in diseases that are considered "psychogenic" and in those where he sees the competition of a psychological problem but also, obviously in a different way, in the affections of organic nature (e.g., the defect of a heart valve). In his opinion, the psychosomatic medicine may be exercised by the doctor whose experience allows to distinguish in the sufferer the organic disease from what cannot be «explained» by an organic perspective. Therefore the internist and the general practitioner are entitled to exercise it, rather than psychiatrist.

The holistic consideration requires the fundamental attitude *to comprehend* rather than *to explain* any illness. Here Rof Carbally refers directly to the dichotomy between *Verstehen* and *Erklären* pointed out by Karl Jaspers in his celebrated psychopathology⁹. He remembers that his Galician fellow Domingo Garcia-Sabell used to clear up this dichotomy with regard to an episode of lipothymia. The clinician can *explain* it underlining that a massive influx of blood to the abdomen has caused a reduction of the blood supply of the brain, and then the faint. He may go beyond this explanation and try to *comprehend* the lipothymia. The interview with the patient can bring to light that he suffers from a strong fear to perform a certain task, such as to hold a lecture before a large audience. In this new perspective, the fainting is no longer considered as a mere consequence of an alteration of

the blood circulation. Conversely, it is a phenomenon of psychical relevance that is related to other psychical phenomena in a meaningful connection. Therefore it reveals a *sense* in the patient's *biography*.

Laín Entralgo writes that the anthropological thought proposed by Rof Carballo is based on the belief that man transcends the biopsychosocial reality as he is sharing the spiritual life. In this regard, the reflections of the Galician author are scanty and fragmentary, since he does not forget to be a physician and ascribes to scholars of other disciplines the investigation into man's own spiritual reality. In his perspective, however, it is the «spiritual bond» - *das Geistige Band* which even Goethe's Mephistopheles recognizes in every man – to bring unity to the different dynamics and complex structures of human being. In his late years, in a retrospective consideration of psychoanalysis, the author sees an outgrowth of the spirit in its thwarted emergence within Western culture. Furthermore, in an interesting dialogue with Paul Ricoeur, Jürgen Habermas, Michael Polanyi, Gaston Bachelard and Gerard Radnitzky, he offers a remarkable contribution to the debate about the epistemological statute of psychoanalysis, which in his view approximates that of hermeneutics (Juan Rof Carballo, 1975).

If you examine the extensive bibliography of Rof Carballo, you understands the breadth of his theoretical interests. One of the most remarkable works is a monumental treatise of psychosomatic medicine (ID., 1949), which will results in different editions. The book marks the beginning of an intellectual activity that lasts for over forty years, attested by numerous books, essays and lectures in Europe and Latin America. This activity reveals the vast Rof Carballo's culture as well as his rare ability to assimilate methods and contents of several sciences and to exploit the possibilities of an interdisciplinary approach to the problems that he takes into examination.

The diachronic consideration of Rof Carballo's writings highlights the constant refinement of theoretical tools aimed to investigate the possibilities and limits of psychoanalysis and several forms of psychotherapy that have arisen in its wake, including group therapy. In the biographical notations of the essay *Autopercepción*, the author offers an overall reflection on his scientific production, identifying a fundamental unity within it, by virtue of a «secret fidelity» that has marked his life from the «naïve childhood promises», through «the decision for anatomical pathology» until the psychosomatic medicine (ID., 1993, p. 36). More or less widely, in almost all his works he expresses the conception of psychoanalysis as a discipline that extends the knowledge of man as well as a therapeutic practice.

The books *Biología y psicoanálisis* and *Cerebro interno y mundo emocional* reveal the complexity of a theoretical project that when Rof Carballo conceives it may seem foolhardy. However, just this project is

perhaps the main point of interest for the scholar who nowadays reads them. It is the recovery of a research outlined by Freud in a paper of 1895 as well as in some letters to his friend Wilhelm Fliess, and then dropped out in order to study the neuroses in the perspective of the psychoanalysis, choosing the language as access route to the psyche. In this *Entwurf*, published posthumously (Sigmund Freud, 1950), the author proposes a psychology that can interest particularly neurologists, because it ascribes the conscious mental activity to neurons that differ from those that rule over the unconscious phenomena. Rather than for the highly hypothetical theory, the essay concerns the history of science as the young author foresees the fruitfulness of a research about the mental processes led with the methods of neurophysiology.

Nearly half a century later, Rof Carballo undertakes a similar study. In *Cerebro y mundo emocional* and other writings, the investigation of the emotional life carried out with an implicit phenomenological attitude intertwines the study of the correlated brain activity, performed with the experimental method of anatomy and physiology of the nervous system. Nowadays the *brain imaging* and other techniques of investigation in neurosciences have opened up a wider knowledge about changes in brain activity that are related to emotional or cognitive processes and operations, as well as to mental illnesses, from obsessive-compulsive disorder to schizophrenia and *borderline* personality disorder. The reader can appreciate in Rof Carballo the far-sightedness of the precursor and a reasonable caution in formulating his theories (Consuelo Martínez Priego 2012). The author is aware of the hypothetical nature of many of them and avoids dogmatism in any research about human being as he thinks - as Pascal, who he often quote - that «Man infinitely surpasses man».

In his anthropological reflection Rof Carballo leads a dialogue with some philosophers of the twentieth century. He pays attention to the philosophical anthropology proposed by Xavier Zubiri, one of the most important Spanish thinker of this century. Zubiri's anthropological reflection is focused on emotional life, but also on cognitive and adaptive processes. Even authors such as Martin Buber, Jürgen Habermas, Paul Ricoeur, Martin Heidegger and José Ortega y Gasset are rather frequently quoted by Rof Carballo. He appreciates the reflection about the relationship between psychoanalysis and phenomenology led by Paul Ricoeur (Juan Rof Carballo, 1973b, pp. 277-279; 324-325) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Id., 1972, pp. 60-61). If Ricoeur, as a philosopher, stresses the importance of this discipline as an interpretation of human reality, the Galician author notes that only experience can teach that in clinical psychoanalysis the patient's *transference* to the therapist and the latter's *countertransference* are much more important

than any interpretative attitude in order to achieve a good relationship and significant positive outcomes of therapy.

It should be added that other disciplines, as well as psychology and philosophy, contribute to the development of the *anthropological* and *dialogical medicine* proposed by Rof Carballo, which presupposes a theory about man, that is a *medical anthropology*. The study of folklore and myths of Galicia (Id., 1957), of cultural anthropology and ethology, the interest in the visual arts as well as the reading of several writers and poets of the twentieth century – above all Rainer Maria Rilke - are drawn together into his anthropological reflection.

3. *The urdimbre and its main functions*

In Rof Carballo's medical anthropology is of utmost importance the notion of *urdimbre*. This word, that means "warp", refers to the texture of relationships - with other men, with the beings of nature and Transcendence - that man establishes in the course of his life. This texture constitutes the core of human being from the very beginning.

The quality and compactness of this warp condition, more than any biographical further event, the *theme* of every human life. In this perspective, nothing is more important for a man than a solid *urdimbre*. In this case, his life will be well founded, like a house built on the rock. However, the quality of *urdimbre* affects not only the character of man's relationships, but also his way of life, the system of his preferences and idiosyncrasies, his vulnerability to diseases and his ability to deal with them. In this regard, it is particularly meaningful the title of a remarkable book published in 1961, *Urdimbre afectiva y enfermedad* [*Affective urdimbre and illness*]. Also in psychopathology, therefore, one can perceive the importance of the *urdimbre*. Man is not banally «subject to» illness, he is also «subject of» it because the conscious and unconscious psychical dynamisms contribute to modulate its symptoms, its time course and even the prognosis.

Rof Carballo distinguishes three different layers of the "warp", that make up at different stages of his life. They are denominated: *primary urdimbre*, *urdimbre of order* and *urdimbre of identity*. The importance attributed by the author to the layers of this warp shows that he pays attention above all to the *constitution* of the human being. In this regard, the physician and biologist have much to say to all the scholars who, within their own discipline, are concerned with man.

It is legitimate to ask why Rof Carballo has chosen the word «urdimbre» to designate the whole of human relations. An answer can be found in this passage:

the fate of men, among the ancient Greeks, was always symbolized as an operation performed with a spindle which involved the three Fates: Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos. In the primitive Northern sagas this spinning turns into a real weaving. It is no longer a thread to symbolize the fate of humans as a plot, an urdimbre... Also among the primitive Anglo-Saxons destiny was woven, *gewif*. Both in Celtic literature as among the invading Aryans of India - and among the slaves as well as the Greeks themselves - laces, knots or chains are often a symbol of fate or ligatures the gods subdue humans with. Behind these «ties of luck» «ties of love» always underlies the primitive idea: human being is «woven» by gods. (Juan Rof Carballo, 1964, pp. 162-163)

The primary urdimbre – qualified also as *constitutive* or *affective urdimbre* – is the most important «warp» in human life. It is the «plot» that from the very beginning of life wraps up any human being, as a result of the more or less adequate relationship with the mother or the most important parental figure. In the first months of life, child has still no relationship. He lives in a symbiosis with the mother, in the condition that Freudians call *oceanic state*, Jungians *uroboric state* and Martin Buber names *undifferentiated world*. Later on, the mother-child relationship arises. It is extremely important for its biological function, because it modulates the development of child's nervous structures.

For Rof Carballo, the notion of primary *urdimbre* is similar, but not identical, to those of *object relation*, *relational network*, *primary experience* and others, proposed by other psychoanalysts and psychologists to designate the child's first relational context. In his view – perhaps too strict - the authors who have coined such expressions do not shed light on the *transactional* character (Id., 1973b, p. 372) of human being's primary relationship.

The second layer of warp which constitutes man is called by Rof Carballo *urdimbre of order* (Id., 1952, pp. 241-255). This is forming a thickening plot - from the stage called «oedipal phase» by Freudian psychoanalysis - in a wider relational context, where the father plays a prominent role. Whereas in the years of the primary urdimbre relational events take place between two parties – mother and child - now the relational context becomes triadic. In the relationship with the parent who mainly embodies the principle of authority, the child internalizes - «introjects» for

psychoanalysis - the value system of his family and the educational institutions he grows in. Rof Carballo pays less attention to this urdimbre than to the primary one.

The third level of the urdimbre, called *urdimbre of identity*, develops during adolescence and early adulthood, when the individual is structuring and strengthening self-image in continuous interaction with the image that the others form of him. In the analysis of anomalies of the third warp, the author often calls into question the responsibility of the family, that is sometimes the «absent sick» (ebenda, p. 557). For example, the family in which stubbornly symbiotic relationships prevail, can inhibit the progress of the young towards an authentic relational life.

It is appropriate that we mention the main functions carried out by the primary urdimbre, among which the most important is the protection of an absolutely «invalid» being, born with an immaturity that is much more serious than in the individual of any other animal species at its birth. As we have already said, first of all the primary urdimbre has a biological function, even before the deployment of its effects in the child's social life. It plays the role that in animals is generally carried out by *imprinting*.

The «invalidity» of the newborn is particularly evident with regard to the central nervous system. Only after the birth the myelin sheath of the cerebral cortex completes its development and the functional articulation of the limbic system with the cortex itself begins to work. In the newborn are still immature even two systems of vital importance in the homeostasis of the organism, the enzyme and immune systems (ebenda, p. 333). Like the nervous system, they develop in a normal way mainly due to the stimuli offered to the child by the parent figure, which must therefore be constant, adequate and informed by a *love* that here is declined primarily as *tenderness (ternura)*. This is the parental attitude the child has the greatest need of. It corresponds, as a providential «counterpart», to his most basic needs. One of the most conspicuous books by Rof Carballo is entitled *Violencia y ternura*. He criticizes the most authoritative studies which deal with the relationship between mother and child during the first years of life because they do not pay enough attention to the importance that tenderness reveals in it.

It may be added that a similar inattention is also reflected in the philosophy of the twentieth century, which anyway investigated other aspects of emotional life, scantily explored in the previous ages. You can browse weighty philosophical encyclopedias without finding the word «tenderness». Conversely, Rof Carballo focuses on specific expressions of tenderness, such as *kiss* and *caress*. His reflection can therefore validly urge the

philosophical and scientific thought to take adequately into consideration tenderness, that is «the culmination of love» (Id., 1993, p. 43).

Freud saw in tenderness a mere expression of human *eros*. Rof Carballo thinks that *eros* presents two aspects. There is the *eros* that arises from an ontological failure that only the other can fill, that is the *eros* aimed to reproduction. There is another form of it, that is the attitude revealed by the adult's care of children. This attitude, called *diatrofica* by the author, is proper to the human being as such. It permeates the constitutive urdimbre in offering the necessary protection (*amparo*) to a living being that is absolutely unprotected, *desamparado*, as Rof Carballo writes. If the relationship with the parent figure is adequate, the child acquires a fundamentally positive attitude towards what the *world* will later be for him. This remarkable attitude is denominated by the author *basic trust* (*confianza básica*).

The primary urdimbre may be deficient or abnormal, as is found in children raised in orphanages without affection, or in broken families. The lack of love from which they suffer can not really be filled by further relationships. The resulting mental distress will be expressed in different ways, such as anxiety neurosis, depression, affective disorders and social apathy up to the several forms of aggressive behaviour. In this regard, Rof Carballo quotes the studies of René Spitz, an Austrian psychoanalyst who lived in the United States. This author notes that in children grown in orphanages the lack of the maternal face and smile causes the inability to perceive «the other just as other» (René Spitz, 1957). The lack of the first close relationship, that is between the child and the parental figure, prohibits later on the fundamental experience of man, the relation with *neighbour*. Rof Carballo affirms that neighbour is a «consubstantial reality» of ego. According to him this is «the great discovery» of philosophical and scientific thought in the early twentieth century, just when man often experiences, more dramatically than in any other age, the difficulty of establishing authentic relationships.

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¹ «The first event that occurs to the child, and occurs to every man, is to be appealed. A smile is turned to him, he is prayed, cradled, soothed, reproached, he is presented with something, is satiated, *first of all he is a Thou* for a mighty external being; first of all for parents». The translation is by Nunzio Bombaci. I mention the English edition: *Practical Knowledge of the Soul*, Argo Books, Norwich-Vermont 1988.

² The collected works by the Germany neurologist were published in ten volumes (Viktor Von Weizsäcker, 1986-2005).

³ Juan Rof Carballo (1905-1994) was born at Lugo, in Galizia. He attended the Faculty of Medicine at Santiago de Compostela, and pursued his studies in Barcelona and Madrid. In 1926 he wrote his first essay, *Biología e Espírito* (in Galician language). The title of the essay, now disappeared, expresses in a synthetic way the two feature matters of interest to the author's thought. Rof Carballo completed his medical studies in Viena, Cologne, Berlin, Paris and Copenhagen, availing himself of a study grant offered by Spanish government to the most brilliant students. In his full maturity of years the author pursued the profession of internist and promoted the knowledge of psychoanalysis and psychosomatic medicine in Spain. He founded the first Service of Psychosomatic Medicine in Madrid. Only from the sixties onward the scientific authorities of his country recognized the value of his research in biology, medicine and psychoanalysis.

⁴ Out of Spain, one of the widest studies about Rof Carballo's thought has been published in Italy: MARIA TERESA RUSSO, *La ferita di Chirone. Itinerari di antropologia ed etica in medicina* [*Chiron's Wound. Paths of Anthropology and Ethics in Medicine*], Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2006. The section of the book entitled *Ermeneutica ed etica del mito nell'umanesimo medico di Juan Rof Carballo* [*Hermeneutics and Ethics of Myth in Juan Rof Carballo's Medical Humanism*, pp. 57-103] takes into consideration the author's anthropological thought.

⁵ The review "Anthropos", Barcelona, has devoted the n. 141, issued in february 1993, to the author's thought: *J.R.Carballo: Una medicina dialógica. El prójimo como constitución del ser. Una visión crítica y multidimensional de la realidad* [*A dialogical Medicine: The Neighbour and Constitution of Being: A critical and multidimensional Perspective of Reality*]. Among the "Suplementos" of the same review, n. 138 [J. R. Carballo. *Medicina, sociedad y cultura*, may 1993] offers an anthology of his writings and moreover the primary and secondary bibliography (pp. 183-191).

⁶ See Karl Kleist, 1934.

⁷ See, for instance, Juan Rof Carballo, *Presentación*, "Anthropos", Suplementos, n. 38, pp. 2-14, and especially p. 13.

⁸ The translation of this passage, as well as that of Rof Carballo's ones, is by Nunzio Bombaci.

⁹ The first edition of Jasper's *Allgemeine Psychopathologie* is quoted in JUAN ROF CARBALLO, 1972, p. 146.