

Book review

Review of the book entitled Psicanálise e sexualidade: tributo ao centenário de “Três ensaios sobre a teoria da sexualidade” – 1905-2005

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Ane Marlise Port Rodrigues*

* Child, adolescent and adult psychiatrist. Member of the Sociedade de Psiquiatria do Rio Grande do Sul. Assistant Professor, Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy, Centro de Estudos Luís Guedes, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil. Child Psychiatry Supervisor, Fundação Universitária Mário Martins, Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil. Member of the Instituto de Psicanálise da Sociedade Brasileira de Psicanálise de Porto Alegre, Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil.

A tribute to the centenary of “Three essays on the theory of sexuality” (1905), by Sigmund Freud was issued as an initiative by the board of the Sociedade Psicanalítica de Porto Alegre for 2005, through the coordination of Dr. Sérgio Lewkowicz.

It is an appropriate homage to one of the most original and impacting texts by Freud, especially if we consider its context in the rigid moral of the Victorian age, in which the children’s “innocence” was considered unquestionable, and there was a predominant idea that the sexuality would only manifest itself after puberty, due to the maturity of the sexual organs. Freud’s boldness and courage by revealing his theory caused a strong criticism by the Viennese medical society and years of reclusion.

As Dr. Sérgio Lewkowicz puts it in his introduction to the book: “It is an article that, due to its innovative character, caused a definitive impact on the Western culture of that time, by launching a new understanding on the emotional development of the human being, both with regard to normality aspects and psychopathology.”

Freud’s modern and instigating text is revisited by 10 renowned authors. Three of them are foreigners – Antonino Ferro (Italy), Ethel Spector Person (USA) and Dana Birksted-Breen (United Kingdom) – and the others are Brazilian, members and training analysts of the Sociedade Psicanalítica de Porto Alegre.

1 - In the introduction, Dr. Raul Hartke recalls Strachey’s (1953) statement that the “Three essays”, along with “The interpretation of dreams” are Freud’s most transcendental and original contributions to human knowledge. Based on Aristophanes’ myth about the nature of Eros, the author highlights Eros as an energy, a deficiency always in search of plenitude, perpetually dissatisfied and restless, a subject in search of the object. From the merely biological connotation of sexuality (instinct), Freud goes on to the dimension of psychosexuality, moved by a drive that seeks an object to reach its objective. He considers that the current pressures originated in the neurosciences, social psychology and spiritualist practices, exclusively or predominantly focused on biological and social factors, attempt to promote a defenestration of psychic phenomena. The psychoanalysis still defends this psychic being, whose unconscious rules much more than the conscious. Freud’s discoveries related to the psychosexuality and to the unconscious have generated strong resistance, even nowadays.

2 - Dr. Ethel Person, after revising the libido theory and its connection with the drive theory, discusses four themes as contemporary perspectives: (1) the object relations theory; (2) the gender theories; (3) the origins of heterosexuality and homosexuality; and (4) the impact of culture on sex and gender. She emphasizes that the current issue on bisexuality is whether it should be understood as a sexual interest in both genders or as a feeling of being a man and a woman at the same time. Both neuroses and perversions started to be seen as the result of a conflict inherent to the sexual

development. She highlights that, in the “Three essays”, Freud creates a unified theory of mind, in which the sexual life is seen as active since childhood.

3 - Dr. Luiz Carlos Mabilde considers that a fair homage to this classic work by Freud starts by studying it again and thinking over it, finding new angles to approach it. He stresses the three crucial sexual findings: component or partial drives, child sexuality and the complementary series. The dynamic unconscious, the child sexuality and the Oedipus complex are three great findings that changed the world and are still crucial for the psychoanalysis. The author revises the different approaches to “Three essays” and recalls that perversion is nowadays not only seen as a defense against the drive derivatives, but also against the object-relationship.

4 - Next comes Dr. Antonino Ferro’s question: “What type of sexuality concerns us as analysts?” and his “radical hypothesis” as well. He emphasizes the sexuality as a narrative gender, or dialect, in the consulting room. He brings more personal ways of thinking, always based on Freud and Bion, as is reported by the author himself. Therefore, he discusses the mental mating between the analyst and the patient during the session, the oneiric functioning of the mind, the development of the ability to transform “tangles” of sensoriality and proto-emotions (β elements) into emotions, thoughts and affections through the α function. He lists several examples in which he considers that the report of “sexuality” is a “narrative derivative” of the sleep-wake oneiric thought of the analyst and patient, who also narrates the quality of his continuous mental mating, according to many modalities (♂♀ , ♂♂ , ♀♀ , ♂♂♂♂ , etc.). The characteristic of psychoanalytical “narrative” lies in its fluidity, temporariness and in validating itself only from within. He relativizes the phenotype of couples that may be heterosexual, but are actually quite homosexual, or vice-versa. The psychoanalysis thus still opens “scandalous” lines of thought, in which it is clear that there are truths truer than those that appear (♀♂).

5 – In “Sexuality, post-modernity and contemporary psychoanalytic practice,” Dr. Cláudio Eizirik considers that the “Three essays” provide us solid bases for the building that represents the current psychoanalytic perspective about sexuality. Issues regarding gender identity, specificities of

masculinity and femininity, neosexualities, the different forms to understand perversion, the sexual states of mind, the sexual peculiarities of each stage of the life cycle and how to contextualize homosexuality are new developments concerning the theme of sexuality. In his intense relationship with culture, he stresses that the psychoanalysis presents a growing theoretical pluralism, in which there is an interchange of different theories, in contrast with closed hegemonies in previous decades; a wider space to learn, discuss and face complexity, fragmentation and uncertainties, which are features of contemporary culture, and other current characteristics. He ends with Kafka's and Roth's characters and a clinical vignette to illustrate the *homo freudianus* and the post-modern man, the latter desperately seeking a sexuality without limits and no consideration for the object, in an intense emotional emptiness. In times of fragmentation, uncertainty and loss of spaces for subjectivity, the psychoanalysis stands out as a theory and as a treatment method for the modern subjectivity in crisis.

6 - In "Sexuality and psychic structure", Dr. Carlos Gari Faria emphasizes the association between sexuality as a expression originating life and the process of creation and organization of the structure as an internal production of sexuality. The creation of the structure as a sexual product is seen through narcissistic and object drive investments, which develop in investing and receiving movements, symbolically repeating the biological model of conjugation between male and female. The identification processes are identified as expression and components that form the dynamic balance of the structure, which is seen as a product and guardian of sexuality. Therefore, the structure operates in the sense of maintaining the possible stability. Dr. Faria correlates the perverse organizations with the closest pole to the biological level (of mental discharge), the psychotic structures with the narcissistic pole (of self confusion/object originated from processes of dissociation and projective identification) and the neurotic structures with the object pole (of differentiated relations between self and object by an ego that is organized around repression, with possibilities of sublimation). He considers that the genital development stage is marked by the creative activity of the synthetic function of the ego, when the structure, by reaching its most

elaborate level of structure, represents, in the internal and symbolic dimension, the equivalent to the biological level of procreation.

7 - Dr. Roaldo N. Machado raises “The issue of originary masochism” to make us think about the “puzzling problem of masochism.” Based on Empedocles (action of two essential principles in eternal fight), the author considers Freud and highlights the two essential properties of libido – viscosity and mobility – and the constant fight between life drive and death drive. In the original erogenous masochism, or primal sadomasochism, the self is destroyed by the silent action of the death drive. He stresses the importance of the presence of anxiety as a sign of rupture of this first unit of the absolute narcissism (undifferentiation self/other; destruction of the self). Anxiety would thus be the first expression of the presence of Eros, indicating this essential primary projection, in which the internal seeks the external as a form to operationalize the creation of the representational psychic space. The basic model of masochism is the libidinal investment on a given excitation (quantity), without the transformation into registers of pain experience or satisfaction (quality). Therefore, there is the creation of a libido adhesiveness to the toxic stimulation and a non-fulfillment of self-preservation, as seen in drug addiction, psychosomatic conditions, with a predominance of the operational or overadapted thinking, clinically exemplified by the author.

8 - In “The sexuality disorders in adults”, Dr. Joel A. Nogueira shows his concern with regard to the liquefaction suffered by several core concepts of psychoanalysis, such as the dynamic unconscious and repression, perverse and polymorphic child sexuality, Oedipus and castration. He points to a sympathetic and “politically correct” settlement of several psychiatrists and psychoanalysts, in an attempt to bring culture and psychoanalysis closer. The example given is the issue of homosexuality, which would have lost its connection with the pathology, simply becoming a personal option that is often idealized. The denial of the intense emotional suffering, the homosexual adaptation to maintain an emotional stability that avoids the mental disintegration and

psychosis are also highlighted by the author. The formation of the adult sexuality is based on the child sexuality and its vicissitudes.

9 - Dr. Dana Birksted-Breen adds her clinical experience and theoretical thinking by discussing the “Unconscious representation of femininity.” She makes a theoretical summary, based on the Freudian concept of penis envy in women, of how femininity is seen in Klein and in British, French (Lacan and others) and American psychoanalyses. She contributes to the idea of a duality that is in the core of femininity, in the contradiction between the negative femininity (which is based on the experience of loss) and the positive femininity (which refers to the richness of experiences connected to the fact of having a woman’s body). Through a clinical case, Dr. Birksted-Breen states that the women who envy men the most are those who cannot value their femininity (strongly connected to the oral and anal aggression). The defensive character of femininity denial is related to the escape from the confrontation with the rival and envious mother, as well as with severe anxieties over the damaging potential of the vagina and the uterus. The phallic attitude represents an escape from the loss (both male and female) and frightening feminine. Femininity goes through a negotiation between the acceptance of the loss and the acceptance of the feminine body.

10 - Dr. Nara A. Caron, in “The sexuality disorders through ages – the baby,” historically contextualizes, along these 100 years, how several psychoanalysts have dedicated themselves to the treatment of increasingly younger children until reaching the moment of primitive relationships (parents/children and mother/baby). She privileges the contributions given by Winnicott, who considers that the baby’s life and psyche are driven by the fact that the baby is alive and have in itself the innate tendency to integration, from which the tasks and basic needs are originated, namely, the needs to continue to be and mature. To do that, the baby depends on a special and primitive relationship with its mother, which does not depend on the Oedipal situation and which is not an object-relationship yet, since the baby is not a unit yet. Therefore, the baby has no desires, but needs, and the instinctive forces are as external to him as the natural phenomena. Through the

report of treatment of mother-baby dyads, the author stresses the crucial importance of the primitive bonds and the space of “coming to be”, which is basic for the development of sexuality. She considers that the issue of the baby sexuality is very complex, since the baby (a total dependent being) does not have it, besides the healthy or pathological interference of the environment in the development of sexuality.

As can be seen, it is a reading that contributes to an up-to-date review of Freud’s thinking in the “Three essays” and brings new perspectives with regard to sexuality, which is still modern and controversial.

Correspondence:

Dra. Ane Marlise Port Rodrigues

Rua Germando Gündlach, 127/15

CEP 91330-350 – Porto Alegre – RS, Brazil

E-mail: anempr@via-rs.net