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La Psicoterapia Vista por los Médicos

Héctor Fernández Alvarez

Buenos Aires, Argentina: Grupo Editor Latinoamericano

Reseña por:

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El Dr. Héctor Fernández-Alvarez nos tiene "mal acostumbrados. En cada uno de sus escritos y presentaciones logra integrar una amplia erudición en el tema con una sustancial cuota de creatividad. Por ello, a través del tiempo, el autor se va dejando a sí mismo la vara cada vez más alta, generando a su vez crecientes expectativas en quienes lo conocemos y valoramos.

Confieso que el tema del libro que nos ocupa **La Psicoterapia Vista por los Médicos** no me resultaba particularmente motivante. De las temáticas abordadas por el Dr. Fernández-Alvarez en su trayectoria profesional no habría elegido ésta en las prioridades de mi interés personal. De este modo, mis mecanismos *feed-forward* trabajaron inicialmente en una dirección negativa, por contraste con otras temáticas interesantísimas abordadas por Fernández-Alvarez en otras instancias. Poco a poco, sin embargo, le fui encontrado al libro una aportación muy superior a la esperada. Incluso el tema central del libro me fue pareciendo más relevante; por la necesidad de trabajo interdisciplinario entre médicos, médicas, psicoterapeutas en beneficio del/de la paciente y por el insoslayable poder social de los médicos y médicas en el ámbito de la salud. De este modo, las necesidades conceptuales, teóricas y prácticas confluyen en el sentido de hacer necesaria una "correcta" perspectiva desde la medicina hacia la psicoterapia.

El autor aporta al dar énfasis a la relevancia de la psicoterapia misma. Tras una breve reseña histórica, Fernández-Alvarez aborda en forma directa la temática del aporte efectivo de la psicoterapia. Con la medida que le es característica, analizan los pro y los contra de las evidencias, para luego recalcar la importancia de estudiar los efectos terapéuticos en condiciones naturales y de ir reduciendo la brecha entre la investigación y la práctica clínica.

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Luego de considerar la actitud genérica de la población hacia la psicoterapia, se desprende que la percepción social hacia la disciplina es claramente positiva. De este modo, la psicoterapia no sólo es bien evaluada a la luz de la investigación de resultados terapeúticos, sino también a través de la percepción de la clientela potencial o de quienes consumirán el “producto”.

Al detenerse en el tema de las relaciones entre psicoterapia y medicina, Fernández-Alvarez va mostrando la creciente independencia de ambos campos, así como la lenta y también creciente madurez a nivel de sus interacciones. No obstante esto, deja entrever que queda mucho camino por recorrer en particular en el campo relativo a las aplicaciones psicoterapeúticas a los/as pacientes físicos.

Con el bagaje contextual ya mencionado, Fernández-Alvarez pasa a centrarse de lleno en la encuesta aplicada a los propios médicos y médicas. Entre los muchos datos significativos aportados por la encuesta cabe destacar que en comparación con la población general, los médicos y médicas tienen una percepción más definida de los fines de la psicoterapia, ligándola principalmente a la eliminación de síntomas. Por otra parte, tienden a sostener que las diferentes terapias conducen a resultados también diferentes, lo cual va en apoyo de una valoración de los factores específicos en desmedro de los así llamados “factores comunes”. En general, los médicos y médicas muestran una marcada disposición a recurrir a un/a psicoterapeuta al momento de pensar en la derivación de un/a paciente. De particular relevancia es el hallazgo de que dos terceras partes de quienes participaron de la encuesta encontraron que la terapia es, en general, algo beneficioso; este hallazgo coincide con la percepción de la población general y con los resultados de la investigación científica en estos dominios.

Fernández-Alvarez recalca la relevancia que tiene para el desarrollo de la psicoterapia, el papel de los médicos y médicas; una valoración positiva por parte de estos/as facilita enormemente el desarrollo de la disciplina en el ámbito social. Desde esta perspectiva, los datos de la encuesta resultan particularmente alentadores.

En suma, el libro aporta un marco conceptual, un estudio de campo y un análisis psico-social. Está escrito en un lenguaje claro y directo. Constituye un aporte sustancial para quienes se interesen en la dimensión social de la psicoterapia y en las opciones viables para su desarrollo futuro.

Ética de la Intervención Social

Alipio Sánchez Vidal
Barcelona, España, Editorial Paidós

Reseña por:

Isaac Prilleltensky¹
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This is a much needed book. The author made a major contribution to the field of social intervention by systematically exploring its ethical dimensions. Alipio Sánchez Vidal shows vast erudition in the fields of social intervention and ethics, a perfect combination of skills to write such a book. Hitherto, community psychologists have relied on sketchy treatments of ethics. With the publication of **Ética de la Intervención Social**, many of us will have an accessible resource for consultation. I hope the author will consider translating the book into English.

I write this review in English to share the merits of this important work with our non-Spanish speaking colleagues. I begin by describing the overall structure of the book, followed by its key contributions. Towards the end of my review I offer an interpretation of the main issues raised by the book.

The book consists of six main parts. The author starts with the social and historical context of social intervention. Sánchez Vidal situates social intervention in the uncertain intellectual landscape that lies between the false certainties of modernism and the aggravated uncertainties of post-modernism. Such is the scene in which social interventionists try to promote the social good, a scene in which the very term social good is contested. The author avoids the unwarranted extremes of modernism and post-modernism and articulates a justification of social intervention based on a set of values and ethical principles. In the second part the author discusses the links between the scientific, technical, and ethical dimensions of social intervention. An illuminating discussion of how these three

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elements complement each other takes place. The section concludes with a critique of dogmatic positions inherent in technocracy (technical answers to value questions) and fundamentalism (value-laden arguments to technical questions). Throughout the book, as in this section, the authors strives to maintain the dialectical relationship between disparate positions in optimal tension. In this portion of the book the tension between the technical and the ethical is played out very well.

The third part of the book deals with the ethical structure of social action. He opens by stipulating the pre-requisites of an ethical action. For an act to be deemed moral or ethical in nature: (a) the agent ought to be able to exercise freedom, (b) the act should contain intentionality, (c) there should be deliberation of the consequences of said act, and (d) the agent ought to assume responsibility for his or her actions. Expanding on previous work, Sánchez Vidal postulates a series of seven phases of ethical decision making processes. Agents of social intervention are to scrutinize their work by articulating the ethical implications of their (i) basic assumptions, (ii) values, (iii) principles, (iv) norms, (v) decisions, (vi) actions, and (vii) consequences of their actions.

In parts four and five the author applies the framework presented in part three to specific situations. Sánchez Vidal delves here into concrete examples and conflictive situations that will resonate very much with the experience of workers in the field. The last part of the book offers tools for anticipating and confronting ethical dilemmas in social intervention. The book ends with helpful recommendations for the social interventionist.

Overall, the book makes some notable contributions. First and foremost, the book is written in the spirit of critical pragmatism. In other words, the author considers the ethics of social intervention in light of social necessities. There is a clear exposition of the political dimensions of social intervention, and there is no attempt to hide the complicated relationship between one's personal values and those of clients and communities. Agents' subjectivities are taken into account and the discussion of ethics is not limited to codified rules. The book opens doors for the exploration of the intersection among values, interests and power of all players.

Sánchez Vidal is very comprehensive in his coverage of related models of ethics in social intervention. However, the multitude of models imported by Sánchez Vidal makes it difficult at times to discern the main line of thought in a particular section. While I appreciate the diverse perspectives offered by the author, more integration of various opinions would have helped me, as a reader, to synthesize the body of knowledge presented. From a pedagogical point of

view, my preference is for more road maps into the forest. In my work, I have found it useful to synthesize the ethical dilemmas of social interventionists in a model comprised of values, interests and power (VIP) (Prilleltensky, 2000). I argue that each player, or group of players in a social intervention, espouses certain values, has vested interests in outcomes, and has a degree of power to exercise in the process. Conflicts occur within and between individuals and among groups. Each person possesses certain values, has vested interests, and wields a certain amount of power. Values relate to ethical principles deemed desirable for other people and for the community at large. Justice and self-determination are examples of such values. Personal interests may or may not be in line with values. I may espouse distributive justice in the abstract, but when it comes to sharing my resources, my personal interests may be in opposition to my values. Reconciliation between values and interests is related to social power. We cannot expect people to act compassionately when their own needs are not met. Their ability to meet personal needs and interests depends on their social power. A certain degree of power is required for reconciling personal interests with values of beneficence. The tripartite relationship among values, interests and power within a person is the domain of subjectivity.

The picture gets really complicated when my own personal values, interests and power come into contact (and conflict) with the values, interests and power of other individuals and groups. This is the domain of politics and inter-subjectivity. Ethics is intermingled with inter-subjective politics and with values, interests and power of multiple players.

Although the possible combination of conflictive forces is numerous, we have in this model a way of analysing opposing forces shaping the ethical course of an intervention. We can translate this simple model into questions to guide interventions. First, questions for the agent of social intervention:

- 1- What values do I hold that will guide my efforts to help other people in a social intervention?
- 2- What personal interests do I have that may inhibit the enactment of values?
- 3- What power do I have to promote my values or to reconcile potential conflicts between my values and my personal interests?
- 4- Next, there are parallel questions for the people we work with:
 - 5- What values do the people that I work with espouse?
 - 6- What personal or group interests do they have that may

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- inhibit the enactment of their stated values and of my preferred values as well?
- 7- What power do they have to foster or inhibit my values or their own values?

Practical answers to these questions require elucidation of personal values, private or group interests, and private or group power. I suggest that this exercise be repeated at several points during the intervention. In doing so, agents of social intervention ensure that their own interests, or the interests of their collaborators, do not remain unchecked.

This schematic interfaces well with Sánchez Vidal's suggestions for action towards the end of the book, although he elaborates considerably more on issues of responsibility, which in my view is the use of power for advancement of social values.

With few exceptions (Doherty, 1995; Dokecki, 1996; Dudgeon, Garvey, & Pickett, 2000), the ethics literature in psychology tends to focus on personal values such as self-determination and personal empowerment. I agree with Sánchez Vidal's broader conceptualization of values that includes justice and democratic participation. I find it useful to distinguish among values for personal wellness (autonomy, health), relational wellness (respect for human diversity, collaboration and democratic participation), and collective wellness (social justice, support for community structures, solidarity) (Prilleltensky, in press). Although Sánchez Vidal does not talk about values in these terms, I think that this analysis reflects his position on values. We can use this classification to ask (a) what type of values do partners in the social intervention favor and (b) what values do they neglect? If we realize that most people espouse personal values of self-determination and personal empowerment, chances are that the good of the collective will suffer. On the contrary, if we realize that most people lean towards collectivist values, there is a risk that personal liberties may be curtailed due to pressure to conform with group norms.

Sánchez Vidal offers us an entry into the values, assumptions and practices implicated in social intervention (Prilleltensky, 1997). His attention to power, politics and subjectivity brings this work very close to the field of critical psychology (Prilleltensky & Nelson, in press). In fact, this book sits well at the intersection of community psychology, social work, ethics, and critical psychology. Social workers, psychologists, urban planners, and policy planners will benefit greatly from this unique perspective on social intervention. Now more than ever, after modernism conditioned us not to talk about values, and postmodernism accused us of forcing our values onto others, Sánchez Vidal offers a well-reasoned and argued case for value-based practice in social intervention.

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