

“The Faustian spirit of the technical world”. Mental illness and cultural criticism in Franco's Spain

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ABSTRACT: Taking into account the almost constitutive affinity of mental medicine and cultural criticism, it should not be surprising that, given its particular conflict with modernity, General Franco's dictatorship was a period of intense flowering of conservative psychiatric essay writing. Starting from the fears of a possible physical and moral regression of “Hispanity” due to the artificiality of modern life, the infiltration of liberalism and the erosion of traditional values, the genre shifted its interest towards an analysis of the contemporary “neurotic society” that, with philosophical reference points such as Ortega or Heidegger, pointed to the excesses of instrumental reason, “mechanization” and the “hyper-technification” of the modern world as one of the main sources of malaise and psychic suffering.

KEYWORDS: Psychiatry; Cultural criticism; Science; Technology; Spain; Franco.

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RESUMEN: “El espíritu fáustico del mundo técnico”. *Enfermedad mental y crítica cultural en la España de Franco.*— Teniendo en cuenta la querencia casi constitutiva de la medicina mental por la crítica cultural, no debe sorprender que, dentro de su particular litigio con la modernidad, la dictadura franquista fuese un periodo de intensa floración del ensayismo psiquiátrico conservador. Partiendo de los temores de una posible regresión física y moral de la “Hispanidad” a causa de la artificiosidad de la vida moderna, la infiltración del liberalismo y la erosión de los valores tradicionales, el género fue desplazando su interés hacia un análisis de la “sociedad neurotizada” que, con referentes filosóficos como Ortega o Heidegger, apuntaba a los excesos de la razón instrumental, el “maquinismo” y la “hipertecnificación” del mundo moderno como una de las principales fuentes de malestar y sufrimiento psíquico.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Psiquiatría; Crítica cultural; Ciencia; Técnica; España; Franquismo.

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INTRODUCTION

In March 1935, a group of young doctors of strong Catholic convictions working at the Sanatorio Psiquiátrico Provincial de Valencia, all of them former scholarship holders at the Colegio Mayor del Beato Juan de Ribera in Burjassot, founded *Norma*, a “university exaltation” magazine. In its first issue, Juan José López Ibor, future Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Madrid, argued that the mission of universities should go far beyond the mere transmission of “scientific creation techniques” to primarily attend to “the vital needs of men in [each] historical moment” (López Ibor, 1935, p. 9). Next, Francisco Marco Merenciano, future director of the Valencian mental hospital, called for the promotion of a “comprehensive education” that, rather than “introducing individuals to scraps of all the different sciences”, would bring together the contributions of “experimental science and humanism” and would lead them safely to the “concept of totality” (Marco Merenciano, 1935, p. 24). And finally, Pedro Laín Entralgo, future Professor of History of Medicine at the University of Madrid, wrote about “the human sense of natural science” in a more significant essay with arguments that are worth studying in more detail. After deploring the fact that “liberalism” had weakened “the tight bond that linked the cultivation of the various disciplines with each other, with a community of purpose and meaning”, Laín examined the reasons why “the sciences of the Renaissance are today uncoordinated and aimless” (Laín Entralgo, 1935, pp. 26, 35). In his opinion, and after a period of (medieval) splendour “in which the world of culture [had been] a structurally harmonious whole,” the “Reformation virus” had contaminated the “pristine *nova scientia* of Newton, Kepler and Galileo” and had paved the way for an “anorganic and inconsistent Encyclopaedia,” “scientific liberalism” and the “innumerable conventicles of specialization” (Laín Entralgo, 1935, p. 31). Fortunately, and as recent holistic and vitalist approaches in the fields of biology or medicine were revealing, it was possible to find “reactive attitudes against this Babelic dispersion”, and Catholicism was ready to “bring the university back to its primitive ecumenical mould [and] Newtonian natural science to a focused and consistent position within the whole architecture of our conception of the universe”.

Only one more issue of *Norma* was published, in April 1936 (Laín Entralgo, 1976, pp. 134-136),¹ but, bearing in mind the subsequent leading role of its promoters, its contents are undoubtedly of great interest when it comes to tracing the genealogy of the issues that would be predominant in the intellectual production of Spanish psychiatrists after the Civil War. As is well known, over a period of decades, a significant part of this production was in the form of essays and was markedly ideological (Castilla del Pino, 1977; González Duro, 1978), so that during the dictatorship years some of the most prominent mental health professionals consistently cultivated a genre which at first focused on the enthusiastic exaltation of the “new State” but gradually shifted towards the (somewhat more

propositive and tempered) realm of conservative cultural criticism.

In a rigorous and well-documented study, Juan Casco Solís a few years back offered a preliminary cartography of the main topics and concepts in the psychiatric essays of the early Franco regime (Casco Solís, 1999, pp. 99-101). Thus, the most combative and openly militant studies frequently included a generalized rejection of the psychiatry of the republican years, (Freudian) psychoanalysis, communism, liberalism and democratic values. In this regard, the ineffable “psychological research” of Antonio Vallejo Nágera and Marco Merenciano’s hyperbolic statements on the essentially pathological and depraved nature of Marxism are notorious (Bandrés and Llavona, 1996; Huertas, 1996; Campos and Novella, 2017), as well as López Ibor’s harsh contestation of pre-Civil War psychiatry in his inaugural speech at the Congreso Nacional de Neurología y Psiquiatría held in Barcelona in January 1942 (Huertas, 2017). As to other studies, they were largely focused on identifying, highlighting, or glorifying the true features of “Hispanity”, or on unravelling the constitutive problem of “Spanishness”—tracing the origins and potential remedies to its recent “decadence”—, while others aimed at revitalizing the old equation—already formulated by 19th-century hygienism (Campos, 1995; Novella, 2010)—which assimilated the observance of the principles of Catholic morality to the promotion of public health and the maintenance of individual psychological balance. Vallejo Nágera’s fervent musings on “Hispanic eugenics” and López Ibor’s more subtle disquisitions on Spaniards’ “inferiority complex” (Cayuela, 2015, pp. 134-146) are also worth noting here, as well as the various attempts to “adapt” psychotherapy and the postulates of mental hygiene to the premises and cultural particularities and psychology of the “Spanish man” (González Duro, 1997; Novella, 2016; Novella and Campos, 2017).

However, as anticipated in the pages of *Norma* and in line with the intellectual concerns of the time—especially in Germany (Bollenbeck, 2007, pp. 199-232; Raulet, 2009, pp. 133-141)—, a further issue which was always and remarkably present in the work of a great number of Spanish psychiatrists, and which has been scarcely noted so far, is the belief that science and technology were among the main factors responsible for the (alleged) decline, impoverishment and/or spiritual disorder of the contemporary world and were thus a source of psychic unrest or suffering. Initially, and insofar as the promotion of technical-scientific activity had constituted a major hallmark of the *regeneracionismo* [regenerationism] and political progressivism of the first third of the 20th century (López-Ocón, 2003, pp. 304-378; Otero Carvajal and López Sánchez, 2012), it was to be expected that some of the most pro-regime psychiatrists would be ready to question their alleged virtues, to challenge some of its conceptual standpoints or mark its purported damaging effects both at the collective and individual level. But once the period of post-Civil War “ideological adjustment” and emphatic self-assertion was over (Casco Solís, 1995), psychiatric essays did not abandon the reflection upon

the cultural and psychological implications of science and technology; they rather shifted towards a more sober analysis of a “neurotic society” which, with José Ortega y Gasset and Martin Heidegger as philosophical authors of reference, pointed to the excesses of instrumental reason, “machinism”, and the “hyper-technification” of the modern world.

Taking into account the virtually constitutive affinity of psychological medicine and cultural criticism (Roelcke, 1999, pp. 11-30; Novella, 2013, pp. 33-35),² and also the central place that the analysis of the distinctive attributes of modernity’s technical-scientific worldview has traditionally had in cultural criticism (Habermas, 1986; Tarnas, 2008, pp. 356-366), this article attempts to reconstruct the starting point, the evolution, and the different nuances of the discourses on science and technology in the intellectual production of Spanish psychiatrists during Francoism. First, we will review the place of these discourses in the framework of a willingness to introduce a radical break with the recent past and of the anti-modern, traditionalist, and reactionary mentality which dominated the rebel side during the war and through the early post-war years. Then, a more detailed analysis is presented of the frequent allusions to the bases and consequences of modern science and technology within the conservative cultural criticism consistently cultivated by some of the most renowned and influential professional actors at the institutional level. Finally, the loss of relevance and dilution of this essay sub-genre in the context of the technocratic and modernizing fervour of the 1960s is examined, as well as the (highly significant) reappearance of an incisive socio-political critique of science within the approaches of some progressive sectors in psychiatry over the final years of the dictatorship.

THE IMPUGNATION OF LIBERAL SCIENCE

When he joined the “glorious National Movement” on 18th July 1936, medical commander Antonio Vallejo Nágera, then director of the mental asylum in Ciempozuelos, left on the desk of his house in Madrid the manuscript of a “Racial Hygiene Programme” in which he proposed nothing less than to combat the “exhaustion of the sources of energy and vitality of the once virile Hispanic race” (Vallejo Nágera, 1937, pp. 5-7). Kept safe by his family and sent to the rebel-held area, the text was published in Burgos in 1937 under a new title, *Eugenesis de la Hispanidad* [Eugenics of Hispanity] (1937), and was the first in a long series of works of exaltation and militancy which would distinguish his author through the following years (Huertas, 1998; Richards, 2004; Campos and Huertas, 2012). As he wrote in these pages, Vallejo Nágera was certain that, along with the “abject democratic and Marxist virus”, science, technology, and the industrial civilization had played a major role in the “degeneration of the race” and in the erosion of the “moral health” of the people. In a strongly Rousseauian passage, the head of the Servicios Psiquiátricos del Ejército Nacional [the psychiatric services of the rebel army] wrote:

Scientific progress and the culture that goes with it have provided man with material goods, they have improved in certain aspects the conditions of his existence, but they have fostered selfishness, cruelty, perversion, deceit, tyranny and so many other tendencies in society that have their substratum at the bottom of the human psyche and that civilization seems to encourage, instead of banishing them. [...] Unruliness, criminality, licentiousness and misery reach their peak when peoples reach the height of their material progress. The materialization of consciences has created a civilization that brings with it the tyranny of the factory and the office, the sacrifice of moral dignity to economic interest, and first of all the barbarous conditions of life in the big cities. Materialistic civilization has diminished the physiological, intellectual and moral values of the race, instead of endowing it with personality and making it great (Vallejo Nágera, 1937, pp. 96-97).

Furthermore, Juan José López Ibor, who also joined the rebel side from Valencia,³ published a *Discurso a los universitarios españoles* [Discourse to Spanish University Students] in 1938, which, in his own words, came directly from his early contributions to *Norma* (Gómez-Santos, 2007, pp. 55-56). In his *Discurso*, which was re-issued a number of times through the subsequent decades, López Ibor claimed that the “dehumanization of modern man” was largely the result of the spread of a “predatory concept of the world and of life” inherent to post-Renaissance science and technology, which had turned the human being into “a small prosthetic God with multiple claws with which it collects its booty and multiplies its power” (López Ibor, 1938, pp. 27-29). With an expression which seems borrowed from the German philosopher and historian Oswald Spengler,⁴ López Ibor—like Pedro Laín Entralgo—situated in the Reformation the origins of this “Faustian man”, who, just as in the legend, sells his soul in exchange for knowledge and technical expertise; the Protestant rebellion, then, was only the first act of the sacrilegious “cosmic conquest spirit” that had led directly to the “excesses of rationalism and scientism” of the modern world and had placed humanity at the “crossroads of sorrow”: “amidst so much mechanical greatness, men are increasingly losing their specifically human dignity and feel lonely, horribly and inconsolably lonely. [...] Science leaves men glutted with knowledge, but perplexed before life” (López Ibor, 1938, pp. 33-41).

Though with nuances, both Vallejo Nágera and López Ibor would have plenty of opportunities to disseminate their ideas along those years. In his *Política racial del nuevo Estado* (1938) [Racial Policy of the New State], for instance, Vallejo Nágera insisted on attributing the “decay of the specific ethical racial values” of Hispanity to a “mephitic spiritual environment” and to the “rationalist and materialistic rottenness” of the Enlightenment. As “our great writer Menéndez Pelayo” had shown, as long as Spanish culture actively resisted “foreign influence” and preserved *its* science and its “religious foundations”, it had been able to circumvent the “path to immorality” and the decline of the “genotype”; but, with the appearance

of the “impious influence” of “Voltairean and positivist *encyclopédistes*”, the age-old Hispanic race had been dragged into a torrent of “ruin and mediocrity” (Vallejo Nágera, 1938a, pp. 9-10). On this account, Vallejo Nágera showed great animosity towards “progressive and liberal intellectuals”, especially towards the “98 cenacle”, to whose “treason and inhibition” he dedicated, also in 1938, one his most fierce *Divagaciones intrascendentes* [Trivial Digressions], (Vallejo Nágera, 1938b, pp. 72-74).

Regarding López Ibor, a lecture given in 1941 in the framework of a cycle commemorating the centenary of the Instituto Médico Valenciano provided an opportunity to return to the ideas of his *Discurso* and to reflect upon “the new image of medical doctors and the reform of medical studies” as a “consequence of our war”. Openly criticizing Ortega, López Ibor vindicated the status of medicine as a “cultured profession” (as opposed to “mere technique”) and noted that the hegemony of its “Faustian spirit” should by no means be regarded as “eternal and imperishable”:

Technique—he claimed—represents in medicine, as in all spheres of man, a supplementary activity, given that there is a scale of values that is above it. When men become technicians, they ultimately become barbarians as technique, just like dynamite, is an instrument [...] that can serve to do good or to do evil (López Ibor, 1941, p. 16).

Therefore, and in as much as “weights and measures are not enough to understand a patient and approach a disease”, the practice of medicine was one more privileged scenario which reflected the “crisis of modern man” (a “distressed” being whose “mastery of the cosmos is not enough to offer a moment of rest”) and which called first of all for the urgent promotion of a “correct assessment of technique” (López Ibor, 1941, pp. 18, 23).

In a much harsher and more direct style, Francisco Marco Merenciano gave another lecture at the same event on “the temporary and the eternal in medical morality”, whose contents were on the exact same lines. In the first place, Marco Merenciano fully agreed with Vallejo Nágera’s diagnosis in terms of the causes of the “enormous crisis” their generation had gone through. “Adrift among other cultures—he claimed—we have inadvertently de-Christianized ourselves, and our Catholic, Spanish, and medical being has gradually lost specific weight” (Marco Merenciano, 1941, p. 42). Furthermore, he also endorsed López Ibor’s words in relation to the role played by the “Faustian spirit” in the “dehumanization”, the “resentment”, and the “immorality” which in his view were embedded in modern medicine:

Technology—he said—has sheltered all the sins of our civilization [...]. With technology, medical doctors, men of science, lose their military and theological-metaphysical spirit to become industrial and commercial [...]. Let us raise our voices against the burden of this so-called modern science and against barbaric technology. [...] Let us not forget that vitality values are above utility values and that men are at the pinnacle of life, always

bearers of eternal essences (Marco Merenciano, 1941, pp. 49-50).⁵

In short, the racial, cultural and professional drift promoted by the spread of the premises and implications of modern science and technology called for a spiritual rearming that inevitably involved full commitment to the “eternal values” of the Francoist Movement, that is, Catholic fundamentalism and Spanish nationalism (Raguer, 2001; Núñez Seixas, 2018, pp. 65-77).⁶ “As the race is immersed in a materialistic, mechanized and industrialized environment—claimed Vallejo Nágera in this regard—it is bound to perish unless it fights and protects itself with the powerful dam of religious and patriotic ideals” (Vallejo Nágera, 1938a, p. 14). López Ibor, for his part, and in view of the havoc caused by something so symbolic and distinctive of “that de-Catholicized West which is not us”, called for cultivating the “autarky of intelligence” and the “ecumenical, imperial, and Catholic Spanish spirit” (López Ibor, 1938, pp. 39, 73, 103). And, as for Marco Merenciano, his intellectual motto was the imperative “re-Christianization” of medicine and science and “the absolute affirmation of our Catholic principles”: “The Catholic spirit has to reborn so that science, which abandoned it in pursue of a better life, does not die suffocated by merchants and the Jews” (Marco Merenciano, 1941, p. 52).

Certainly, all these strong proclamations fall within the doctrinal and institutional crystallization process of what came to be known as National Catholicism (Burrieza Sánchez, 2019), which had precisely as one of its major aspirations the foundation of a *new* science embedded in the glorious tradition of “Spanish humanism” and in harmony with the axioms of the Catholic faith (Negró Acedo, 2014). It is well known that this patriotic and “missionary” view of science, completely detached from the dominant internationalism and secularism of the previous decades, initially legitimized the purge carried out in academic institutions and the “cleansing” of the Spanish scientific community when many were severely punished and/or were forced into exile (Otero Carvajal, 2006; Claret Miranda, 2006; López Sánchez, 2013). However, in spite of the fact that this ideal gradually lost its original roughness, it undeniably continued to inspire the activity and contributions of some renowned Spanish scientists and medical doctors. In the case of the three psychiatrists that concern us here, and especially of López Ibor (by far the most erudite and refined of them), the mark of the “eternal values” is clear throughout his whole production of essays and popularization activities (Espino y Casco, 2006), and also in some of his most famous theoretical conceptualizations. As Ángel González de Pablo has insightfully revealed, concepts such as *angustia vital* [vital anguish] or *timopatía ansiosa* [anxious thymopathy] can hardly be understood without his commitment to a “salvation knowledge” which was much above the mere “mastery knowledge” of natural sciences and the futile “cultivated knowledge” of philosophical speculation (González de Pablo, 2017, 2019, pp. 27-31).⁷

In any case, it is important to note that—occasionally—bold exhortations were accompanied by more or less nuanced epistemological reflections. In this regard, the focus was primarily on the more (easily) questionable postulates of what some liked to label as “progressive positivism” (Laín Entralgo, 1941, p. 50), and on the support—already reflected on the pages of *Norma*—to the holistic and vitalist approaches which had been gaining ground in different spheres of knowledge since the first decades of the 20th century.⁸ Vallejo Nágera, for instance, claimed that the “great error of positivists” had been their willingness to “exorcise” metaphysics and religious tenets under the pretext of breaking with everything that prevented “the world escaping from the responsive laws of science”. Fortunately, there was a “reaction against mechanistic civilization” which was based on the conviction that “totality comes first” (Vallejo Nágera, 1937, pp. 99-100). In a “Pequeño periplo en torno al concepto de totalidad” [Short journey around the concept of totality] (written under the pseudonym of “Juan Pablo Marco”) for *Jerarquía*, the *Revista Negra de la Falange* [Falange Black Review] published in Pamplona during the Civil War, López Ibor claimed that holistic epistemology was a logical answer to the “dessication of modern science”, which—after isolating “provinces of reality” with the “plural dagger” of its empirical methods—sought in vain to “reconstruct the reality of the world and of life through the assemblage of the dessicated provinces” (Marco, 1937, p. 149); fortunately, however, it had been gradually “discovered that the whole precedes the parts, not just through the course of time, but also in its categorical value” (Marco, 1937, p. 150).⁹

In the case of medicine, it is worth noting here that this type of observation seasoned the positive reception given by a large number of Spanish post-war psychiatrists to the new anthropological current promoted by a prestigious group of German internist doctors led by Ludolf von Krehl and Viktor von Weizsäcker (Sarró, 1956; González de Pablo, 2016, pp. 58-59). According to the enthusiastic opinion of Ramón Sarró Burbano, who would later teach psychiatry at the University of Barcelona, these authors had revealed “the limits of mechanistic natural science” and the inadequacy of “an exclusively physicochemical substantiation of medicine”, and had thus “definitively” opened the doors to “psychological and psychotherapeutic thinking” (Sarró, 1940, pp. 10-11). And Marco Merenciano himself applauded “this emerging modern conception of medicine”, though he was convinced that this “totalizing concept” was “ultimately” a “return to a Christian conception of man”. “Totality in medicine—he concluded—is also Catholicism in medicine” (Marco Merenciano, 1941, p. 52).¹⁰

THE PSYCHOPATOLOGY OF THE FAUSTIAN MAN

As was to be expected, the strengthening of Franco’s regime after the post-war years tempered the spirit and the rhetoric of the most exalted professionals and placed

Spanish psychiatry on the path to an institutionalization process that, in spite of enormous limitations, promoted a series of important developments at the academic, corporate and care levels (Casco Solís, 1999, pp. 102-114). However, even though modernity’s technical-scientific worldview was no longer seen as a factor in the degeneration of the race or as a product inevitably attached to the abominable democratic and liberal mentality, psychiatric essays still often focused on the assumptions and the implications of this worldview. The prolific López Ibor was the undisputed protagonist throughout this phase. His intensive work as a publicist and lecturer through the 1950s and 1960s meant that his essays on cultural criticism were remarkably disseminated not only among specialists but also among the general public.

In the context of the late 1940s debate on the (rather hackneyed) “problem of Spain” between Laín and Opus Dei philosopher Rafael Calvo Serer (also a former scholarship holder at the Colegio Mayor del Beato Juan de Ribera) (Raja, 2016), López Ibor in 1951 published *El español y su complejo de inferioridad* [Spaniards and their Inferiority Complex], one of his most famous essays. Based on Alfred Adler’s renowned theory on the genesis of neurotic behaviour, López Ibor’s thesis was certainly controversial; in spite of Menéndez Pelayo’s strenuous efforts to prove it otherwise, and of the achievements of some (few) exceptional individuals, Spaniards suffered from a genuine “inferiority complex” in relation to technical-scientific activity and from a tragic “incapacity or disability to cultivate it”, which sadly kept them out of the “colossal machinery” operating in most European countries (López Ibor, 1954b, pp. 27-34). Somewhat paradoxically, López Ibor intended to actively fight against a “complex” which certainly curtailed the great potential of the “Spanish man”, but, on the other hand, he maintained his perception of “Faustian science” and “the evil of technology” as “one of the central problems of modern man”:

The world is now approaching a Cape—he explained—and, in its anguish, cannot say if it will be the Cape of Storms or of Good Hope. The bright times of the ‘Enlightenment’ have brought this dark night. The senseless and anti-vital primacy of reason has destroyed ethics. [...] The current super-technical world will be corroded and devoured, because evil lies in its soul (López Ibor, 1954b, pp. 109, 47).

It is no coincidence then that at a lecture given in December 1950 at the Ateneo de Madrid, López Ibor again blamed the “process of secularization of thought” for the “demystification” (*Entzauberung*) of the modern world and for two of its most problematic correlates: nihilism and “the inflation of the ego”. In his view, the life of the “technical man” (he expressly cited here some of his most accomplished descriptions such as Ortega’s “mass-man” and Heidegger’s *man*) was so “impoverished” from the spiritual point of view that he was now condemned to grope around amidst “the distressing lights of internal levels” (López Ibor, 1952, pp. 60-61). Significantly, this

“swaying towards inwardness”, symbolically embedded in Rousseau’s figure and work, had not led to vitalize and strengthen individuals with the “truth of feelings”, but it had rather trapped them in an upward spiral of solipsism and emotional distress: “closed in on himself, today’s man has discovered that his self, isolated, lonely, is at the same time something [...] that threatens to shatter, to break” (López Ibor, 1952, p. 75). Therefore, if—as the title of another lecture given in 1952 stated—the analysis of “lifestyles” was essential for a real understanding of the “ways of getting sick” (López Ibor, 1954a), cultural criticism of the Faustian spirit was little less than essential for the clarification of the (psychopathological) problem of anguish as the core symptom of neurosis in contemporary society.

In other times, he claimed, neurotic conditions had manifested themselves mainly at the level of human relations through motility and sensitivity disorders traditionally associated with hysteria, but the “hypertrophy of the self” resulting from the “eagerness for knowledge” and the “Faustian concupiscence” of modern science and technology (one of whose most conspicuous expressions in this field was precisely psychoanalysis) had “internalized” emotional conflicts to such an extent that they now affected primarily the “nervous system of intimacy”: “on the verge of harrowing disintegration, the self, overwhelmed by conflicts and unbearable situations [...] disintegrates the functional eurythmic of the vegetative nervous system” (López Ibor, 1952, pp. 84-85).¹¹

Against this background, the fact that López Ibor’s most substantial psychiatric contributions—as well as the largest part of his lucrative private professional activity—focused on this type of conditions does not seem fortuitous. Indeed, both his extensive monograph on *La angustia vital* (1950) [Vital Anguish] and his important treatise *Las neurosis como enfermedades del ánimo* (1965) [Neuroses as Mood Disorders] include numerous references and digressions on the “historical plasticity” of neurotic conditions (López Ibor, 1965, pp. 607-611) and, very specifically, on the pervasiveness of “exhaustion and anguish in modern life” (López Ibor, 1950, pp. 659-662). In the first of these works, in which he introduced his famous thesis of the “tymopathic circle” as a pathology of the so-called “vital layer” of personality,¹² López Ibor justified his interest in the subject claiming that “to speak of anguish means not [only] speaking of a fashionable subject, but of an experience” whose “morbid crystallization” had become much more frequent “as a consequence of modern life” (López Ibor, 1950, p. 14). Thus, his “technical” analysis of the “aetiologic constellations” of pathological anguish differed little from the argumentative framework of his essays and lectures: “Man had, in other times, a palliative system for anguish constituted by his idea of the world and of his own destiny. Society changed, that world of ideas fell into decline and, against what was expected, that was not decadence but rather a cataclysm” (López Ibor, 1950, p. 13). In spite of being well aware of the main innovations in psychiatric therapy (López Ibor, 1944), the remedy he proposed against this “cataclysm” was, again, the “leap of faith” that he had started advocating as a young man (López

Ibor, 1952, p. 75): “We will have to search for a way of life which lessens anguish [and which is not] merely based on medicine”, but on “transcendence, directly related to Divinity” (López Ibor, 1950, p. 661-662).¹³

In a further step, López Ibor could not resist the temptation to adopt the opposite strategy in his contributions to cultural criticism, and turned to psychopathology and, more specifically, to the very concept of neurosis. As he stated in 1964 in an essay on the *Rasgos neuróticos del mundo contemporáneo* [Neurotic Traits of the Contemporary World], we were at a point where “we can no longer restrict ourselves to stating that the number of neurotic patients has increased; we need to consider that perhaps *society itself has become neurotic*” (López Ibor, 1964, p. 9; emphasis in original). Of course, illness in this field had to be understood metaphorically and there was no certainty that more “neuroticizing factors” were currently operating when compared to the past; but, in his view, the remarkable “decrease” in society’s resilience to neurosis was unquestionable (due to the fact, among other things, that “material well-being” provided by technology was turning human beings more “helpless in the face of adversity”), so that it increasingly showed “similar structures to those of neurotic patients” (López Ibor, 1966, pp. 612-614). First, the disturbing “proclivity” to anguish and guilt of modern life was patent, but the “defence mechanisms” and the collective attitude when facing the “pain of living” also had to be considered as clearly neurotic: death-denial, excessive preoccupation for the body, commodification of happiness, retreat to *dulcedumbres edipianas* (*sic*) [Oedipian sweetness], corrosion of authority, etc. (López Ibor, 1966, pp. 639-646). In view of all this, it was again necessary to be wary of mere “technical” palliatives (such as those offered by medicine, psychiatry or psychology), devoid of any trace of moral elevation or spiritual greatness; if nihilism was the “evil of the century”, and if it was a product of the very “flowering of technical progress”, then it was absurd to think that the wounds of modern society could be healed through “technical paradises” and without invoking “the presence of mystery in life and history” (López Ibor, 1964, pp. 29, 48). Ultimately, modern science not only projected an “outrageously reductive image of man”, it was also essentially incapable of alleviating the growing “depreciation” of the “human adventure”. “Never have we known so much about man,” he concluded in another essay published in 1965, “but we have never been so ignorant about who he is” (López Ibor, 1965, pp. 50, 78-79).

As pointed out before, López Ibor’s ideas had a remarkable echo in Spanish intellectual life through the mid-20th century, but his was by no means an isolated case among psychological medicine professionals. In fact, interventions and essays with a similar approach were then relatively common in the production of other Spanish psychiatrists, to the point that it cannot be ruled out that, beyond expressing ideological affinity (or loyalty), these contributions responded to a corporate need to adopt a certain intellectual profile within the framework of the cultural and academic life of the time.¹⁴ Thus, in

May 1952, for example, Marco Merenciano did not miss an opportunity to lecture on “The human and the demonic in technology” in a talk given at the Escuela Industrial de Valencia in which, even when he was addressing an audience of experts and engineers, he again insisted on the unfortunate fate of technical-scientific civilization: “The splendour of science and technology today coincides with a maximum destitution of the spirit. What kind of man is it that holds in his hands all that magic of modern technology?” (Marco Merenciano, 1958, p. 241). Referring to Ortega’s famous “Meditation on technology” (1935),¹⁵ Marco Merenciano was convinced that humanity was walking with a firm step towards “catastrophe” because—as opposed to “chance” and “craftsmen” techniques—“technicians’ technology” no longer aspired to give material form to a “life project”, but had become an end in itself. Nevertheless, and despite its “intrinsic danger”, the growing sophistication of technology was not the main reason for this drift, but rather the diabolical series of historical events and currents of thought that had “spiritually prepared it”, among which—always loyal to his ideals—Marco Merenciano highlighted “the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, German idealism and Marxism” (Marco Merenciano, 1958, p. 241). But the exceptional circumstances of the Cold War and the ongoing (technological) confrontation between Russia and “the Americans” called for the interposition of a “spiritual and civilizing axis” which, encouraged by the “Christian conception of history”, would promote a “Catholic baptism of technology”. And he further argued that “all efforts in technology, like all efforts in science [...], should involve helping creation to gain ontological fullness and to reach the day when all things can truly be recapitulated in Christ” (Marco Merenciano, 1958, p. 253).

With similar bombast, other less-known professionals such as Francisco Llaveró Avilés and Miguel Rojo Sierra, who would later become professors of psychiatry at the universities of Salamanca and Valencia, respectively, also emulated López Ibor’s analysis of the alarming “neurotization” of contemporary society. In a paper presented at the VII International Catholic Congress of Psychotherapy and Clinical Psychology held in September 1957 in Madrid, Llaveró, for example, described neurosis as one of “the evils derived from materialistic conceptions and the Faustian deification of modern man”, fatally “uprooted” and “dissociated” from “three of his original and specific dimensions: nature, loving communication, and faith in its broadest sense”:

Driven by the Faustian spirit of our technified age [...], this distancing displacement from the world of values and beliefs irremissibly leads to an alternating circle of intense desire, saturation and boredom [...] and to anguishing states that cause neurotic psychic imbalances. [...] When man and society try to radically replace the silence and individual retreat of temples with the crackling of the cogwheel and collective anonymity, they will soon fall into the nets of Faustian deception (Llaveró, 1959, pp. 243-246; italics in original).

Unlike López Ibor, however, Llaveró—a great admirer of Central European culture and a fervent promoter of “brain repopulation in Spain”—¹⁶ did believe in the concerted action of technicians in order to “mitigate the danger that threatens our society”, to the extent that he called for “theologians, psychiatrists, sociologists and psychologists”, guided by “Divine Grace”, to jointly seek “viable formulas and effective measures” to ensure “a better psychic integration of the modern man” and protect him from “the growing divide between the cold and calculating ratio and the authentic pathos of love”.

For his part, Rojo published in 1962 an extensive article on the “Psychopathology of society” in the Granada journal *Actualidad Médica* in which, through a seemingly dispassionate study of sociological, anthropological and psychoanalytical literature, he posed the possibility that, “being individuals intrinsically healthy”, their psychic problems could be a consequence of the fact that “the social environment in which they live is pathological” (Rojo Sierra, 1962, p. 468). Based on recent formulations of the concept of mental health such as that by British psychoanalyst James Arthur Hadfield (Hadfield, 1952), Rojo not only had no doubt that societies could lose their “harmony,” neglect their “purposes”, and thus become sick just as individuals do, but he even postulated an aetiology of “patho-sociological conditions” centred on the irruption of “cultural crises” vaguely anomic in nature, and established a nosography of them based on the conventional clinical distinction between neuroses (“morphosocial” syndromes) and psychoses (“onto-social” syndromes) (Rojo Sierra, 1962, pp. 561-585).¹⁷ In any case, all his efforts culminated in a totally apocalyptic prediction of the fate of humanity, which, thanks to technology, had managed to “master the secrets of matter”, but had forgotten “its intimate nature”: “Man aspired to be the author and organizer of life without the help of God, [...] and now, devoid of a solid basis, he stands in a state of terrible emptiness [...] and collapses into a cosmic infinity. [...] The pale horse of death is about to be unleashed” (Rojo Sierra, 1962, pp. 586-587; italics in original). Rojo concluded that, providentially, “modern psychiatric trends” such as existential analysis had warned that “only love can heal” and were “preparing the human soil so that the seed of good would bear fruit”, thus contributing to the development of a “wholly authentic” Christian society (Rojo Sierra, 1962, p. 588; italics in original).

As these words reveal, and as Ángel González de Pablo has rightly pointed out, the attraction that the works of Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Ludwig Binswanger exerted on Spanish psychiatry along those years should be understood in the framework of their potential to amend the anthropological foundations of (problematic) doctrines such as psychoanalysis and of their convergence with the values of Christian spirituality (González de Pablo, 2016, pp. 69-71). But, beyond their undeniable psychopathological interest, it could well be that a further reason of their popularity in wide sectors of the profession was, especially in the case of Heidegger, the climate of affinity with their critique of natural-scientific “reduc-

tionism”, the “technification” of existence and the “inauthenticity” of modern life (Sarró, 1958).¹⁸ Leaving aside the more well-known contributions by Luis Martín-Santos (an author whose ideological and political positions greatly differed from those of the authors analysed in this article),¹⁹ this point of view is reflected, for example, in some studies by the director of the Provincial Asylum of Murcia and Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Valencia Román Alberca Lorente, who in a course held in 1960 in Santander was grateful to “existential philosophy” for having kept medicine away from its “atomizing objectivism” and for finding the deep roots of anguish in the contemporary world:

Medicine, by dint of being objective and scientific, has neglected immense parts of the totality that man is; in a way, it has objectified man, [...] making him lose the best of his human quality. [...] Today’s man is fleeing from himself and is living in tremendous anguish, in essence, because he has lost his confidence in the future [...] perhaps because he has lost the confidence to rise above our extreme situation and reach Transcendence (Alberca Lorente, 1961, pp. 394, 409).

THE BASIS OF ALIENATION

Inevitably, the important transformations experienced in the political, social and intellectual climate in Spain throughout the 1960s (Di Febo and Juliá, 2012, pp. 81-111) had an impact in the field of psychiatric discourses and practices. Thus, the new mental health rhetoric from the English speaking world began to permeate the doctrinal production of many Spanish psychiatrists (Novella and Campos, 2017), while, on the other hand, authors with links to the health administration carried out a series of initiatives in the domain of training and the structure and management of care institutions (Novella, 2019; Simón Lorda, 2020). In a context marked by “developmentalism” and technocratic authoritarianism, it was logical that warnings about the (alleged) evils of the technical-scientific worldview of modernity would no longer have a significant place among the concerns of the already declining conservative psychiatric essay writing tradition²⁰. But clearly, the most striking aspect of this process was that after a few years cultural criticism witnessed a radical change in ideological terms, and the socio-political questioning of science and technology became part of the approaches of some progressive sectors of psychiatry through late Francoism and the Transition period.

Thus, and just as fast as the regime that emerged from the Civil War entered its “terminal crisis” (Di Febo and Juliá, 2012, pp. 113-135), the question of the “sick society” (and, within it, the assumptions and implications of modern science) was no longer present within the framework of a discursive strategy that vindicated the “values” of tradition (in the face of the “dangers” of civilization) and became a springboard for the criticism and contestation of the political and social order (be it Francoism,

consumer society, or world capitalism). From this point of view, the problem was no longer the “Faustian deification” of the modern man, but rather his profound defencelessness in the face of a dense network of economic, political and ideological domination in which science played a crucial legitimizing and instrumental role. According to an actor involved in the innovative experiences of those years and author of a reference work on the discourses of “Francoist” psychiatry, it was precisely “bourgeois capitalist society” itself that was “sick in its social and economic structure and in its historical conditioning factors”, to the point that it was “unquestionably alienating and disturbing for the psychic equilibrium of individuals” (González Duro, 1978, pp. 278, 294). And, from this point of view, psychiatry, medicine, and science as a whole could not but reveal their true face as devices and technologies of social control:

The psychiatrization of society’s problems is nothing but a technocratic ideology to cover up in an aseptic and scientific way the injustices and contradictions of a world divided into antagonistic blocks, into rich and poor countries, into ruling and dominated classes, and to justify the supposed ineffectiveness of any social or economic change (González Duro, 1978, p. 295).

Quite logically, and as pointed out by Ramón García, another prominent figure of the psychiatric dissidence in the final years of the dictatorship (Comelles, 1986), it was virtually impossible to transform psychiatric institutions in an emancipatory sense without a “radically critical attitude towards what science has done in terms of the mentally ill” and without seeing in “technology” the “body of knowledge and practical means that *defends*—separates, distances and at the same time reassures—exclusion” (García, Serós and Torrent, 1972, pp. 11, 16; italics in original). “The technical-scientific process” —he argued in a lecture given in March 1972 at the Autonomous University of Barcelona—constituted the “basis of alienation” insofar as it actively and (crypto-)normatively intervened “in the shaping and maintenance” of the “conditions of existence” prescribed by the “social structure”: “Science [...] is a force of production, it is a driving force for growth [...]; at the same time it is an ideological force at the service of the system and, as such, it hides the contradiction [...] in favour of an order that in practice enables [...] uninterrupted material growth” (García, 1979, p. 62).

These approaches undoubtedly need to be seen in the context of the criticisms of “bourgeois” science and technocracy posed by the “Situationist International” and other counter-cultural movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Roszak, 1970, pp. 15-56; Echeverría, 1989, pp. 224-234).²¹ However, and as we have attempted to show throughout this article, they were also articulated (rather inadvertently and not without paradox) within a rich, protean and versatile intellectual tradition. Certainly, and as far as the historical period studied is concerned, it is by no means a minor shift that what had begun with the (psycho) pathologization of the political adversary

(highest exponent of the impious culture and the *hybris* of “Faustian” science), now closed with a new recognition of the mentally ill as a political subject (emblematic victim of the alienation and exclusion caused by the capitalist “system” and its science). But it is also necessary to recognize that, argued in one way or another, the “set of problems” posed by social and cultural modernization seems to constitute an invariant of the singular approach to madness and psychic suffering embodied by psychological medicine.

NOTES

- 1 In his particular *Descargo de conciencia* (1976) [Disclaimer of conscience], Laín evoked his contributions to *Norma* in these terms: “If I were to make the exceptions demanded by the mental and literary immaturity of my poor creations, I would still subscribe much of it today [...]. A large part, however, seems to me petulant and wrong. [...] I now find this reversal of my balance excessive and naive or ineptly informed by the ‘right-wing scholar’ still in me in those days.” (Laín Entralgo, 1976, p. 136). In this regard, it is fair to point out that, even when he remained firm in his conviction of the need to overcome positivism and to promote—especially in the case of medicine—an epistemology focused on meaning and values, Laín soon abandoned this notion of “Catholic science”. On *Norma* and the evolution of Laín’s thought in this regard, see Gracia (2010, pp. 180-181, 461-462).
- 2 Throughout this article, I use the concept of cultural criticism in a broad sense, i.e. within the highly influential tradition of critical reflection on the problematic nature of culture and modern civilization consistently cultivated by the European *intelligentsia* since the late 18th century. Among the (extremely vast) bibliography available, and to name just a few titles, see Bollenbeck (2005), Konersmann (2008) or Ebert (2009).
- 3 López Ibor, who in 1932 had obtained the Chair of Legal Medicine and Toxicology at the University of Santiago de Compostela by competitive examination, held the position in Valencia until 22nd March 1937, given that the holder of the Chair, Juan Bautista Peset Aleixandre, had been elected Deputy. On 15th March 1938, now in the Franco-held area, he was reinstated in the system and two years later he was temporarily appointed Chair of Psychiatry at the University of Madrid, a position he held until Vallejo Nágera replaced him in 1942 (Mancebo, 1994, pp. 388-389; Gómez-Santos, 2007, pp. 35-54).
- 4 *The Decline of the West* (1918-1923), Spengler’s monumental essay on the (inevitable) fate of the “Faustian civilization”, was translated into Spanish by Manuel García Morente and published (with a prologue by Ortega) in four volumes between 1923 and 1932. As Raúl Morodo (1985, p. 115) and José-Carlos Mainer (2013, pp. 26, 51) have pointed out, this work was widely read in the Falangist and Catholic circles in which López Ibor was then active.
- 5 A great connoisseur of Max Scheler’s work (“the finest spirit since Nietzsche to be found in Germany”), Marco Merenciano made “resentment” the main axis of his essay production; in fact, this concept is at the root of his critique of the “bourgeois, capitalist, democratic, liberal and Protestant spirit” (Marco Merenciano, 1941, p. 52), of his psychopathology of Marxism, and of his own conception of mental hygiene (Marco Merenciano, 1958, pp. 97-99). See Campos and Novella in this regard (2017, pp. 74-75).
- 6 In a booklet published in Burgos in 1938, Vallejo Nágera explained the *primum movens* of the National Movement in the following terms: “The Movement has a popular spiritual origin, [...] and emerged from the desire of the true Spanish people to recover their universal values, hampered by Marxist materialism” (Vallejo Nágera 1938c, p. 11).
- 7 This distinction also comes from Max Scheler (*Die Formen des Wissens und die Bildung*, 1925), and was early on assumed by López Ibor with a clear programmatic intention: “Mastery knowledge [...] is the knowledge of the Faustian man. Cultivated knowledge would be that of Renaissance man in its first phase, when he cultivated his own spirit through the Humanities. Salvation knowledge is different and more profound. [...] It is heroic knowledge, the truest and most authentic knowledge, because any other kind is degraded knowledge, an accident or appendix in life since it does not provide it with meaning and does not raise it to a more worthy plane” (López Ibor, 1938, pp. 151-152).
- 8 These include Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Köhler and Kurt Koffka’s *Gestalt* theory, Constantin von Monakow and Kurt Goldstein’s holistic neurology, and Jakob von Uexküll and Hans Driesch’s environmentalist biology, as well as Viktor von Weizsäcker’s psychosomatic medicine. See in this regard the remarkable book by Anne Harrington (1996).
- 9 López Ibor returned to these questions in a series of studies, an essay originally published in *Arbor* (1951) and later compiled in *El descubrimiento de la intimidad* (1952) [The Discovery of Intimacy] on “La idea del hombre en la biología moderna” [The idea of man in modern biology] being worth highlighting here. As he explained, the importance of von Uexküll’s environmentalist biology (*Umweltlehre*), for example, lay in the fact that it had enabled questioning the “dangerous” Darwinist theses “based on biology *itself*”, thus offering an example of how Christian scientists should proceed: “The mission of a Catholic scholar is to fight on the very front of scientific progress, since his rearguard is well covered” (López Ibor, 1952, p. 190; italics in original). In a lecture given in 1952 at the Ateneo de Zaragoza, López Ibor even stated that “Darwinism was to biology what Marxism was to sociology” (and psychoanalysis to the field of psychology), namely, a doctrine “superseded from the intellectual point of view” whose “conceptual bases are either false or insufficient” (López Ibor, 1954a, pp. 7, 9, 12).
- 10 Although he had already abandoned his early dedication to psychological medicine, it is necessary to remember here Laín’s very important role in the dissemination of Weizsäcker’s ideas during the 1940s and 1950s (Laín Entralgo, 1958). It seems that Laín was initially motivated by the anatomist, neurologist, psychiatrist and neurosurgeon Juan José Barcia Goyanes, who—after reading his first article in *Norma*—invited him to teach a summer course on “Anthropological medicine” which could not take place due to the outbreak of the Civil War. On Weizsäcker’s notable influence on Laín’s work, see Gracia (2010, pp. 184-192, 369-371, 474-476).
- 11 At this point, it is interesting to note that Lopez Ibor also formulated a very similar interpretation of the historical roots of schizophrenia as a condition closely linked to the “internal rupture of modern man”. Just as through anguish, “the lifestyle of a contemporary mind that, having lost its faith in the clear light of reason, begins to obscure its vision of the world with the panoramas of internal chaos” would be expressed through it. Ultimately, schizophrenia would be –like “the new artistic manifestations of abstract painting and surrealism”– a consequence of modern man’s desperate attempts to “find again his vital source in pure subjectivity, which, when it wants to show itself so pure, eventually gets sick” (López Ibor, 1954a, pp. 34-35). On the link between schizophrenia and the artistic avant-garde see Sass (2014) and Novella (2018, pp. 106-124).
- 12 López Ibor based himself fundamentally on Ortega’s famous essay “Vitality, Soul, and Spirit” (1925), on Max Scheler (in this case, through the work by German psychiatrist Kurt Schneider), and on German psychologist Philipp Lersch (whose *Structure of Personality*, with a prologue by Ramón Sarró, was widely read in Spain in the 1950s and 1960s), to develop a “tectonic” conception of personality according to which it is constituted vertically through a series of “layers or provinces” to which the different phenomena and types of psychic illness can be attributed. As opposed to the soul and spiritual layers, the vital layer (also called “endotypic background”) involved what the classics defined as the “entrails of the soul”, that is, the vegetative and emotional phenomena

- linked to the disposition of the body. See López Ibor (1950, pp. 165-205).
- 13 López Ibor stated on numerous occasions his conviction that, when appropriately redirected and healed, anguish could be an incentive and an opportunity for spiritual growth and redemption: “Philosophical reason has led to the meaninglessness of existence, and from there a man can leap, impelled by an inexorable need, to the supra-reason of faith and mystery” (López Ibor, 1952, p. 75; italics in original). See here, again, González de Pablo (2016, pp. 59-61) and González de Pablo (2017, pp. 59-62).
- 14 It is difficult to clarify this issue, but it is certainly no coincidence that the cultivation of (conservative) cultural criticism was mainly carried out by psychiatrists with academic vocation and/or university career and that it coincided in time with the institutionalization of the discipline and the creation of specific chairs in the main Spanish schools of medicine. See Casco Solís (1999, pp. 102-107).
- 15 This important essay, which was promptly translated into numerous languages and was widely circulated, was originally published in 1935 as part of a series of articles in the Buenos Aires newspaper *La Nación*, although its content dates back to a course taught in 1933 at the recently inaugurated Summer University of Santander. With the rise of studies on technoscience, the theses of Ortega’s “meditation” have received much attention in recent years. See De Haro (2004).
- 16 In fact, Llavero also published an article under the same title in 1957 (which became an extensive monograph in 1962) in which he expressed his conviction that Spain’s decline had begun when “syllogism” replaced “heroism” and that “in modern times [...] the possibilities of a nation do not lie exclusively in its natural wealth, but rather in the number of patents and the scientific level of its universities” (Llavero, 1962, p. 352).
- 17 It is interesting to note here that it was precisely during the 1960s when the first allusions to the concept of anomie appeared in Spanish psychiatric literature. See, for example, Yuste Grijalba (1962).
- 18 It is important to note here that, except for some allusions to his notion of “limit situation” (*Grenzsituation*) (for example, in López Ibor, 1952: 73-74), Karl Jaspers’ “philosophy of existence” did not particularly figure in the cultural criticism cultivated by Spanish psychiatrists through the mid-20th century, a fact which is certainly striking as Jaspers was, along with Kurt Schneider, the most influential author in the “psychopathological order” of those years (González de Pablo, 2015).
- 19 Martín-Santos’ works on existential analysis were compiled in a book published by Triacastela in 2004, but they originally appeared during the second half of the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s.
- 20 With the notable exception of López Ibor (who continued publishing newspaper articles and cultural criticism essays all through his career) and of some individual studies devoted to the analysis of the phenomenon of “anti-establishment youth” (González Duro, 1978, pp. 286-291), it would be safe to state that the essay production of Spanish psychiatrists declined notably over the first half of the 1960s.
- 21 The fact that some of the Spanish psychiatrists who were most critical of science as an “ideological force” over the 1970s were also the most interested in counterculture and anti-psychiatric ideas is clearly significant. (Irisarri, 2017). However, a deep analysis of this question exceeds the scope of this article.
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