

Article

The Psychologist as a Public Intellectual. The Work of Marino Pérez Álvarez

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the biographical and intellectual career of Marino Pérez Álvarez. Starting with an analysis of his main influences, the aim is to show the internal coherence of his work and the reasons that explain its popularity. He is considered a public intellectual, and it is concluded that a good part of his success is due to his controversial positions in different current debates. Likewise, his criticism of “individualism” is identified as the Ariadne’s thread that ties his work together and gives it meaning. His publications are therefore coherent from beginning to end and not merely a collection of juxtaposed topics.

El Psicólogo Como Intelectual Público. La Obra de Marino Pérez Álvarez

RESUMEN

Este artículo examina la trayectoria biográfico-intelectual de Marino Pérez Álvarez. Partiendo de un análisis de sus principales influencias, se trata de mostrar la coherencia interna de toda su obra y el motivo de su popularidad. En este sentido, se lo considera un intelectual público y se concluye que buena parte de su éxito se debe a sus polémicos posicionamientos en distintos debates de actualidad. Asimismo, se identifica su crítica del «individualismo» como el hilo de Ariadna que la anuda y da sentido. Sus publicaciones son, pues, coherentes de principio a fin y no una simple colección de temas yuxtapuestos.

Palabras clave

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Marino Pérez Álvarez is one of the most renowned psychologists in our country. Recently retired, he developed his career at the University of Oviedo. This is how I met him, as I had the pleasure of attending his classes during my final year of my degree. Marino was, at that time, already an institution, both inside and outside the Faculty. Within the Faculty, Marino was a kind of sage—a *rara avis* in the ecosystem of contemporary psychology. He was up to date with the latest psychotherapeutic approaches and was well versed in the classics of the discipline. He also frequently quoted the latest publications in his field, but this topicality did not prevent him from incorporating all sorts of literary and philosophical references into his classes. To a large extent, this was what made his lectures so attractive. He gave the impression that everything he said was merely a small part of what he knew, of what we had yet to learn. Aware that his students barely read four pages, he encouraged us to make that, instead of four, five pages, maybe six, affirming that it was better to know this or that anecdote than not to know it.

This stimulus, together with that of some other professors of the Faculty and a certain intellectual effervescence in our country, contributed to the fact that many students and readers of psychology also became interested in philosophy. As Marino likes to remind us, quoting Karl Jaspers: one cannot escape from philosophy. The denial of philosophy is a philosophical position, and can only lead to bad philosophy. Aware of this situation, it is rare to find a book by Marino in which his philosophical presuppositions are not made explicit.

However, this philosophical concession, which many of us may find so enriching, is not the reason for his popularity. It has certainly contributed to his popularity but should not be entirely attributed to it. After all, if Marino has stood out for anything, it is for his ability to remain at the forefront of public debate. He has always been against the proposals and projects that, based on philosophical assumptions that he considers questionable, have nevertheless become "fashionable": individualism, the happiness industry, cerebrocentrism, the biomedical model, the psychopathologization of normality, or transfeminism. For this reason, more than merely a psychologist, Marino Pérez is an intellectual; a "dramatic intellectual" for psychology in the sense in which authors such as Pérez Jara and Camprubí (2022) have been working recently from the point of view of "cultural sociology".

Public intellectuals have to deal with volatile current affairs, positioning themselves in trending debates. The success of their ideas is often not so much due to their internal coherence or brilliance as to the author's ability to navigate the tortuous sea of public opinion. This is the reason why even geniuses like Russell have made a simplistic and Manichean language or narrative their own, and why the coordinates of political debate today, but also historically, have moved in terms of "meta adversaries": good vs. evil, left vs. right, communism vs. fascism. The result of this cultural dynamic is the formation of "ideological packages", in which enjoying bullfighting becomes incompatible with the defense of abortion or progressive taxation, as if one thing had to do with the other.

In this context, the work of Baert (2012) and his positioning theory is of particular interest, recovered by Pérez Jara (2015) to analyze how the famous Russell Tribunal, but also other institutions and cultural products, are able to achieve a high degree of dissemination and popularity. In his opinion, "positioning oneself

in the various current debates is nothing more than a type of "speech act", in the style of Austin; one, however, that has much to do with the ability of a work or an idea to be disseminated. This paper argues that Marino's popularity in the panorama of Spanish psychology is due precisely to these acts of positioning and not only to his philosophical uniqueness.

Halfway Between Psychology and Philosophy

As already mentioned, Marino is noted for making philosophy a fundamental part of his work. To a large extent, many of his works are more about practical or applied philosophy than psychology. He himself has sometimes acknowledged himself as a philosophy "user". But which philosophy? Marino began studying at the University of Oviedo. At that time, when psychology and philosophy were not unconnected, he was able to meet and receive classes from Gustavo Bueno. Precisely, Bueno's "philosophical materialism" underlies many of the fundamental assumptions of Marino's psychology.

However, despite this commitment to philosophical materialism, Gustavo Bueno's work is not his only influence. In this sense, Marino does not commit himself once and for all to any system of philosophical ideas; for this reason, he declares himself a user rather than a follower of philosophy. Thus, Pérez Álvarez, in addition to a materialist principle, also embraces phenomenology, raciovitalism, existentialism and even the new realism— an approach that may seem eclectic. Nevertheless, Marino has always made an effort to make all these pieces fit together in a complex puzzle in which his training as a psychologist also plays a fundamental role. The result? What Pérez Álvarez (2004) himself has called a "philosophical behaviorism" or "phenomenal-behavioral". What does Marino collect from each of these traditions?

From philosophical materialism, Marino takes a materialistic and pluralistic ontology that allows him to confront the biological reductionism of neurosciences. Thus, in *El mito del cerebro creador [The myth of the creator brain]*, Pérez Álvarez (2022) borrows the theory of the three kinds of materiality to criticize "cerebrocentrism": "the tendency to explain human activities as if they were a matter of the brain" (p. 21). This position, contrary to the neuroscientific trend, also has implications for his conception of psychopathology. Mental disorders can no longer be seen as diseases of the brain, which is always situated in a body and in a culture, but will necessarily be psychological phenomena. These phenomena have more to do with our way of relating to the world, including ourselves, than with what happens inside our heads. From philosophical materialism, but also from behaviorism, Marino also retrieves the conception of the subject as "operative"; that is, as a corporeal organism that does things with its body and, above all, with its hands and vocal apparatus. He also assumes its "sphericity": its characterization in terms of "concavity" and "convexity", which makes it possible to avoid the aporias, so common in psychology, to which the "internal/external" pair leads. However, Marino resorts to phenomenology to complete or fill in the concavity of the operative subject.

From phenomenology, Marino recovers the intentional correlation and the Heideggerian notion of being-in-the-world. These ideas allow him to reinterpret the Skinnerian concept of "behavior" in holistic rather than mechanistic terms. Following the

analyses of Merleau-Ponty and, in Spain, Ortega y Gasset (2021) or Yela (1974), Pérez Álvarez (2021) conceives behavior as a dynamic or dialectical structure involving both the individual and the environment, thus breaking with the old subject-object or internal-external dualism that underlies contemporary cognitive psychology. The human being is no longer a brain that controls a body; rather, "I am me and my circumstance, and if I do not save it, I do not save myself" (Ortega y Gasset, 2021, p. 77). From phenomenology, he also inherits, as opposed to the biomedical model, an interest in the individual experience, listening to the patient and not just focusing on the symptoms or the medication. By conceiving psychological phenomena as relational or intentional phenomena, what matters is no longer an impersonal collection of symptoms, but the mundane, vital, and existential experience of the patient. This, as we shall see, affects the understanding, on the one hand, of the origin of mental disorders and, on the other, their possible treatment.

From raciovitalism and existentialism, he inherits a dramaturgical conception of the person and an approach to the conception of mental disorders as, above all, existential problems. For Pérez Álvarez (2003 and 2012), the matter of which mental disorders are made consists of the problems or issues of life. For this reason, it is necessary to answer, precisely, the question of what life is. Following the Orteguian tradition, Marino understands that life is what we do and what happens to us. The problem of human life, both for Ortega and for existentialism, is that it does not come to us once and for all, but must be made *in media res*. This is why life is always open to the future, to what is yet to come; man's condemnation, as Sartre believed, is his freedom. One is always obliged to program or project one's life, to decide at every moment who one wants to be, the character one wants to represent. In this sense, Marino echoes the long philosophical and etymological tradition of the idea of person. As is well known, "person" comes from the Latin "personare", and this in turn from the Greek "prosopon", the mask used by actors in the theater to be recognized and to project their voice. For Orteguian ethics, this project that constitutes each individual's life has the texture of a dramatic work; theater, as Calderón well knew, is a metaphor of our human existence. Aware of this rich tradition, Pérez Álvarez (2004), elaborates a dramaturgical reinterpretation of some of the main notions of radical behaviorism. He aims to articulate what he considers a vision or a dramatic theory of psychology, based on the trio actor-action-scenario or, in more familiar terms, subject-behavior-situation.

From behaviorism and psychology in general, Marino draws on the Skinnerian analyses of operant behavior, both public and private, as well as an exhaustive knowledge of its history and, in particular, psychopathology and psychotherapy. Specifically, his training as a behavioral psychologist opens up the possibility of analyzing human behavior functionally, giving "scientific" packaging to the classical analyses of phenomenology. The result is a phenomenology of behavior that combines the conceptual precision of behaviorism with the depth of understanding and analysis of phenomenology, following the line of Fuentes Ortega (1989) and moving away, on one hand, from the more mechanistic interpretations of radical behaviorism and, on the other, from the objectivist and subjectivist readings of phenomenology. In any case, despite this affinity with Skinner's work, Marino is far from being

an ordinary behaviorist. Far from advocating the primacy of therapies derived from behaviorism, his conception of psychology as a human rather than a natural science, his rejection of monism, and his affinity with phenomenology and existentialism have brought him closer to other, more "humanistic" forms of psychotherapy. Recognizing the famous "Dodo" effect or phenomenon—according to which all families of therapies are more or less equally effective—Marino has emphasized the more human dimension of therapy as a *sui generis* interpersonal relationship. This ability to find in each theory its "fulcrum of truth" makes Marino a psychologist who does not adhere to any school and who is not afraid to point out the light and shadows wherever he looks. This ability may have occasionally earned him the label of an eclectic psychologist. His eclecticism, however, is more apparent than real. His psychology is not built by juxtaposition; instead, its various influences are interwoven into a framework where each is reinterpreted in the light of the others.

From literature and popular culture, in addition to various references and supports, Marino draws on figures that accompany and clarify his theories. Sometimes, literature has the advantage of expressing or revealing certain aspects of reality that would otherwise go unnoticed. Marino resorts to passages and characters from literature, especially from Cervantes, to illustrate or give names to certain psychological phenomena and effects. Undoubtedly, this "effectism", together with the constant interest in current issues or problems, has contributed to a great extent to his popularity and influence within the panorama of psychology in Spain. This rhetorical strategy serves Marino to present himself as an author who knows about psychology, yes, but also about something else. His texts are enriched by an uncommon cultural depth. As was the case in his classes, one can always extract from them a certain added value that was not initially expected.

In the eye of the Hurricane

The Biomedical Model vs. the Contextual Model

The first truly controversial stance in Marino's intellectual biography has to do with the critique of the biomedical model of mental health. In *Las cuatro causas de los trastornos psicológicos [The four causes of psychological disorders]*, Pérez Álvarez (2003) applies Aristotelian hylomorphism and its theory of causality to create an analysis of the nature of mental disorders from different psychological conceptions or schools. Until then, his criticisms had been directed, from behaviorist coordinates, against the rise of cognitive psychology. With the new century, however, Marino began to turn his attention to the field of psychotherapy and the debate about which psychological treatments are better or more efficient. This interest eventually crystallized in the series of *Guías de tratamientos psicológicos eficaces [Guides to Effective Psychological Treatments]* (co-edited with colleagues from the same department), all of which are linked to the medical movement or, in this case, evidence-based psychology. It is paradoxical that Marino himself has ended up becoming a critic of such approaches to psychotherapy. This paradox is resolved in the *Guides* themselves when he states how they were part of the "road traveled", a simple instrument to place psychological therapies, at least on an equal footing with the psychiatric guides that had previously sidelined them.

This shift likely resulted from his critical positioning with respect to the biomedical model and can be said to be dependent on the conception of psychological phenomena that Marino had been defending since before the publication of *Contingencia y drama [Contingency and Drama]* (Pérez Álvarez, 2004).

The biomedical model understands mental disorders as diseases, "breakdowns", imbalances, or specific and internal dysfunctions. According to Marino, both biological psychiatry and evidence-based psychology are part of the biomedical model. For biological psychiatry, mental illness is attributed to the brain; for evidence-based psychology, where the "gold standard" is cognitive behavioral therapy, the breakdown affects the psychic system. In both cases, mental disorders are considered natural entities. This psychopathological model, together with the associated diagnostic systems (DSM-5 and ICD-11), has the advantage of placing the clinician in the role of specialist and offering a pseudo-explanation of what is happening to the patient. The consequence is the idea that there are specific treatments for specific problems, whether in the form of therapies or, predominantly, in our health system, through psychotropic medications. It is precisely the latter that are the main object of criticism by Pérez Álvarez and González Pardo (2007). Far from understanding psychological problems as illnesses to be treated chemically, they defend the idea that mental disorders are interactive entities. They denounce how the pharmaceutical industry has become, since the DSM-III, the main reference when it comes to understanding and treating mental disorders; that many of the categories that appear today in the diagnostic manuals, whilst real, have in fact been made real. This implies a position in favor of a constructivist, functional, and contextual perspective. Mental disorders would no longer be internal malfunctions but rather responses to what people do to try to solve problems in living—problems we all have. Some strategies may be functional and adaptive, but others are not. Hyper-reflexivity and psychopathological loops, failed strategies, and entanglements, in short, are the real cause of mental disorders. In this sense, Marino recovers the analyses of psychopathology and phenomenological and existential psychology to complete this conception of mental health, advocating contextual type treatments, which attend not only to the inner world of the individual, but also to their relationship with their circumstances and situation. To the extent that the pharmaceutical industry, the media, social networks, or the individualism and narcissism of our time contribute to reinforce this dynamic and, therefore, to construct and fabricate these disorders, Marino, in the rest of his works, focuses his criticism on these institutional complexes that promote the psychopathologization of contemporary societies.

This position earned Marino the support of part of the psychology and psychiatry scene in Spain, as well as the rejection and criticism from opposing factions. He questioned what was being done in the field of mental health and joined the long list of names critical of the psychiatric status quo, from Oliver Szasz to Guillermo Rendueles, in Spain. It is well known that today, the enemy of my enemy is my friend, and in this dynamic of "meta-allies" and "meta-adversaries", of ideological packages and stubborn alignments and alienations, Marino became a celebrated figure as a critical and combative psychologist. An enemy of the pharmaceutical industry and of a psychiatry often allied to political and economic power, he could only be "one of us": a "left-wing" psychologist.

The Case of Hyperactive Children

Along the same lines, Pérez Álvarez (2018) hit on a new hot topic when he lambasted a particular diagnostic category: ADHD. This disorder was, and still is, one of the most frequent among school and high school students. In Marino's view, ADHD has no clinical or etiological basis. Almost anyone, he says, adult or child, can meet the diagnostic criteria of the DSM¹ without great difficulty. Thus, the following happens with ADHD: it medicalizes what are nothing more than personal, relational, and behavioral problems or characteristics, all of which are perfectly normal and, in any case, can be dealt with without the need for medication. Under these premises, Marino points out how these alleged diagnostic entities continue to be maintained, despite their little or no basis *in re*, because they satisfy all those involved: the pharmaceutical companies, who do business; the health professionals, who appear as experts; the families and teachers, who find an explanation for what happens to children and adolescents in the classroom; and the patients themselves, especially when they are adults, who can somehow justify their own academic and professional history. Needless to say, this stance by Marino has left no one indifferent. In 2019, a Conference at the Regional Hospital of Axarquía, in Vélez, was canceled due to protests from associations and groups linked to patients diagnosed with ADHD. Their representatives claimed not to share the position of Marino, who, in their opinion, was going there "to talk a load of nonsense" and to deny what they consider a genetic disorder, with scientific support and ontologically incontrovertible. As is evident, and as the Spanish philosopher Gustavo Bueno said, "thinking is always thinking against someone", and Marino's "polemical" positions, although no less rigorous for it, have won him as many followers as detractors.

An Attack on Cerebrocentrism

The prevalence of the biomedical model is not accidental. It responds to a reductionist trend that has taken hold of medicine, of course, but also of psychology. The 1990s was declared the decade of the brain. Neurosciences became fashionable, along with a whole series of disciplines that adopted the prefix "neuro" as their own. Aware of this situation and its implications, Pérez Álvarez (2022) sought to denounce what he called "cerebrocentrism": the tendency to attribute psychological functions of the organism as a whole to its brain. According to Marino, what lies behind this tendency is a monistic, if not dualistic, philosophy. The alternative? That unique blend of Gustavo Bueno's materialism and phenomenology. The brain does not think; the person thinks. The brain does not feel; the person feels. The brain does not direct the body, because we are not something distinct from our body: we are, above all, corporeal subjects, such that our whole body, including our brain, is always situated, to begin with, in a culture. This culture—what we learn—shapes the functioning of the brain itself. All these questions led Marino to propose a sort of "psychological diallellus". Any psychological research that aims to focus its attention on the cerebral bases of what we do must necessarily start from those processes that it initially intended to explain. Anyone seeking to study the biological basis of memory will have to start from the

¹ I encourage anyone to check it out for themselves. If they do not strictly comply with them, they are sure to satisfy at least a few.

psychological phenomenon itself. Thus, argues Marino, neuroscience depends much more on psychology than psychology on neuroscience. It is not that the brain is unimportant for psychology; without a brain there is no behavior. The point is that the functioning of the brain does not explain the functioning of behavior; and this because it is its correlate, not its cause. From Marino's contextual psychology perspective, the cause of behavior should not be sought either inside or outside the subject but in their interdependence and interrelation. Again, these "revolutionary" approaches were welcomed by many and rejected by many others. The critique of cerebrocentrism and neuroscience is a critique of established psychology. The cerebrocentrists, logically, cannot agree with this defense of ontological pluralism and constructivism. They are naturalists in the strict sense, and although they may recognize that environmental factors "also count", the truth is that this acceptance is usually purely nominal, with no real influence on their clinical and research practice. This fact is paradoxical considering that neuropsychologists of the caliber of Luria, to whom modern neuroscience owes so much, were well aware of the ever-dialectical relationship between the brain and psychological functions.

Individualism, Social Networks, and the Happiness Industry

If the 1990s was the decade of the brain, the 2000s marked the birth of Positive Psychology (PP). Since 2011, some figures linked to the Faculty of Psychology of Oviedo began to investigate the emergence and background of this "new" psychology (Cabanas & Sánchez González, 2012). As of 2013, Pérez Álvarez (2013), who had already been working for some time on some issues related to the modern subject, culture, and city life, as well as the growing individualism of our contemporary Western societies (Pérez Álvarez, 1992 and 2012), joined this critical trend. The result was a collaborative work written by three authors: *La vida real en tiempos de la felicidad [Real Life in Times of Happiness]* (Pérez Álvarez, Cabanas, & Sánchez González, 2018).

The structure of the book is clear to anyone who knows its authors. The first part, which analyzes the scientific pretensions of PP, is written by Marino Pérez. The second part, which points out the link between this new psychology and individualism and consumer capitalism, denouncing PP as a true industry of happiness, is indebted to the work of Edgar Cabanas, both alone and together with Sánchez González. The pen and psychology of the latter are behind the third part of the book. In it, after the *pars destruens* of the first two authors, the *pars construens* of the work is developed: an alternative theory of happiness based on constructivist coordinates.

Once again, this position, which went against the establishment, won Marino broad support. He reemerged as a dissident intellectual and psychologist, capable of rejecting the scientific claims of PP and, at the same time, denouncing its ideological dimension. In this work, moreover, Marino revives the idea of the *floating individual*, taken from the philosophy of Gustavo Bueno, to characterize the man of our time: a person who, due to an excess of possibilities, has lost all reference and finds himself adrift, enclosed, and turned in on himself; narcissistic, hedonistic, light, and superficial; an idiot in the etymological sense. These analyses were continued by Pérez Álvarez (2023) in his latest publication, entitled, precisely, *El*

individuo flotante [The Floating Individual], but it is important to note that, at its core, his entire psychology is in some way a critique of individualism and of the society of our time. This is undoubtedly the Ariadne's thread that runs through his work.

For Marino, psychology as a discipline arises alongside the modern subject, urban life, and the growing rise of capitalism and its ideology: individualism. In this context, man becomes an individual; a free individual who must seek happiness until he "becomes himself". In this process, the old collective bonds that once provided meaning gradually disappear. Thus, the contextual vanishes. Cerebrocentrism becomes just another step in the process of individualization, where one ceases to be an individual and becomes merely their brain. The biomedical model, a consequence of this reductionism, also fails to take into account social and cultural factors, paradoxically labeling the person as "sick" in an unfortunate attempt to free them from all responsibility. The normative dimension of mental health, the nature of mental disorders as primarily social dysfunctions, disappears, along with the possibility of analyzing how the conditions of our societal life determine the problems that later, when entrenched, end up being pathologized. In *The Floating Individual*, Marino deepens this critique, highlighting the role played by social networks in this whole process. The result is a society of isolated and alienated individuals, a *solitary crowd*, glued like moths to the screens of our cell phones, wanting and seeking to be happy, but getting further and further away, increasingly alone. For this reason, Marino advocates depathologization, the recovery of the collective meaning, and the development of a more human and less individualistic psychology; because psychology is a discipline of subjectivation, yes, but there are many ways to be and exist as a subject.

The "Trans" Issue

However, between *La vida real en tiempos de la felicidad (Real Life in Times of Happiness)* and *El individuo flotante (The Floating Individual)*, Errasti and Pérez Álvarez (2022) ventured into turbulent waters when they published the controversial and successful *Nadie nace en un cuerpo equivocado (No one is born in the wrong body)*. In an agitated political and social context—marked by post-pandemia as well as rupture and confrontation within feminism and the government coalition—the project for what would become the well-known "trans law" was taking shape. Identifying themselves as psychologists with political commitment, Marino, but especially Errasti, took sides in the debate between transfeminists and radical feminists in favor of the latter "side". The book must be read for what it is: a committed work. So committed, in fact, that it is preceded by a *Prologue* by Amelia Valcárcel and unleashed a whole maelstrom of criticism, cancellations of events and presentations, threats, and protests that eclipsed even those of the ADHD associations in 2019. Far from making the book go unnoticed, as often happens, these reactions made it a bestseller. However, this time, the controversy was "internal". Up to this point, Marino's public and intellectual positions had always fallen on the same side; our protagonist had always managed to stay on the same "side", namely that of criticism of the established norms, of the institutions of control, of individualism, of consumerism, and of the capitalist system and its allies. He had his "left-wing" audience,

whatever that may mean, but now his work fell on that audience like a guillotine: splitting it in two.

It should be noted, however, that Marino's position on the trans issue is merely a corollary of what he had been advocating up to this point. As with other disorders, Marino's position on gender dysphoria advocates its de-medicalization and contextual consideration. In his opinion, gender dysphoria, especially that which is usually called "rapid onset", is acquired rather than inherited, and social networks and problems, more or less frequent during adolescence, linked to the construction of one's own identity and, in particular, gender identity, play a fundamental role in its appearance. For this reason, he advocates watchful waiting rather than affirmative therapies as the first approach. In this sense, hormone therapy and surgical transition are medical treatments that, paradoxically, rest on the idea, erroneous in the opinion of the authors, that gender dysphoria is a kind of "curable disease". Nevertheless, the combative nature of this work conceals some conceptual weaknesses that are worth highlighting. As the aim of this paper is to examine the character of Marino Pérez as a public intellectual, we will focus on Chapter 5 of *No One is Born in the Wrong Body*. In it we discuss the theoretical coordinates that illustrate transactivism. However, as we have noted, public intellectuals end up being recognized more for their controversial stances than for their theoretical theses. *No One Is Born in the Wrong Body* is a good example of this and is Marino's work that best illustrates this sociological dimension. In the following pages we will see how and why, despite some theoretical imprecisions, the book by Marino Pérez and José Errasti was, all in all, a critical and commercial success.

First of all, only a portion of transactivism (because, yes, there are many ways of being transactivist), defends the idea that it is possible to be born in the wrong body. This form of transfeminism has been referred to on multiple occasions by the philosopher Ernesto Castro as "gender platonism". And yes, this is a dualist transfeminism, non-contextual and supportive—consciously or unconsciously—of its medicalization. It would suggest, then, that one's self, soul, or brain has ended up in a body that does not correspond to it; and in the absence of being able to change that soul or that brain, the most logical solution, evidently, would be to change the body to make it coincide with the "felt identity". But this is not the only way to be a transfeminist. In fact, the book's main adversary is not this transfeminism but rather what the authors understand as queer theory, led by Judith Butler and Paul B. Preciado. The issue is that the label "queer theory" is used ambiguously. For example, the intersex movement referred to by Butler (2006) in *Undoing Gender* is not the same as the transgender movement, nor are these the same as Judith Butler's queer theory. The current that Butler calls the "intersex movement" specifically argues that it is not necessary to make the transition, among other things, because doing so would be to conform to normative expectations.

Intersex activists work to rectify the erroneous assumption that every body harbors an innate "truth" about its sex that medical professionals alone can discern and bring to light. The intersex movement holds that gender should be established through assignment or choice, but always without coercion, a premise it shares with transgender and transsexual activism. The latter opposes unwanted forms of gender

assignment and, in this sense, calls for a greater degree of autonomy, a situation also parallel to intersex claims. However, both movements find it difficult to establish the precise meaning of autonomy, since choosing one's own body inevitably involves navigating between norms that are either drawn in advance and prior to personal choice or articulated in coordination with the agency of other minorities (Butler, 2006, p. 21).

Both proposals—although especially the transsexual one—have the problem of having to choose within the margins of a certain normative ecosystem: gender binarism. The queer theory of Butler or Preciado, on the other hand, opposes all forms of identity. From the very premises of queer theory, reassignment is meaningless, at least unless it is reinterpreted, perhaps somewhat forcibly, as an exercise and a desire for mere transformation, for pure becoming. Butler (2007), following Foucault, argues that gender is not determined by sex; rather, sex is a generic construct, an effect and not a cause. Gender, in constant flux, is something performative, a way of configuring the body in constant transformation. When Butler defends the interests of the transsexual movement, they do so as a matter of obligation. It is more of an instrumentalization and an exercise of empathy than of theoretical coherence. From a Foucauldian perspective, reassignment can be interpreted, as the intersex movement does according to Butler, as a capitulation to gender normativity, an imposition and embodiment of the norm. Nevertheless, Butler (2006) sometimes questions whether scars from mutilation can be considered "normal", referring to cases such as David Reimer's but also to practices within the "Drag" movement. These examples contribute to destabilizing the categories at play in the debate. The parody, perversion, discomfort, and scandal produced by all these realities serve to highlight the inability of gender norms to account for them. In Butler's view, like Preciado's, the important thing for queer theory is to displace gender rules and manifest difference. For this reason, Butler argues that queer theory can form a common front with the transsexual and intersex movements, in a sort of strategic alliance—although not one based on shared principles. All three movements advocate for the free possibility of sex and gender transition or reassignment, albeit for different reasons. The transsexual and intersex movements remain imprisoned, in Butler's view, by a metaphysics of substance and identity—the very concepts that queer theory seeks to challenge. However, within these reassignments or perversions of the norm, queer theory finds an attempt at destabilization, a way of questioning the norm; because the people who undergo such procedures or dramatic representations (transvestites and drag performers) are no longer either men or women in the strict sense, but something else that the norm is not able to normalize.

For queer theory, therefore, what matters is the deviation from the norm, the creating of escape routes, as post-structuralism sought; the establishment of new forms and practices of freedom for our desiring or libidinal potential. The question, of course, is who or what could be the subject of these practices, given that queer theory itself rejects of any stable or monolithic identity. Following Nietzsche, the individual is nothing but a proliferation of masks, a confluence of knowledge, powers, and practices of subjectivation. That is why, for Paul B. Preciado, for example, the ideal is to be a "monster", something that escapes the norm and

affirms itself in its difference. What we remains to be asked is whether this perversion of the norm does not itself become normative; whether the commitment to radical constructivism is the only option in philosophy or whether, on the contrary, it represents a loss of contact with reality. Or, also, why should this liberalization of desire be better than its repression? Are all forms of repression essentially bad? Not all desires are desirable, just as, when criticizing positive psychology, not all positive emotions are necessarily good. Sometimes sacrifices have to be made, and a psychology or a philosophy that forgets the other side of the coin, its underside, is a psychology or a philosophy that abandons half of what is real.

In essence, Errasti and Pérez Álvarez (2022) are not criticizing queer theory, but gender Platonism, when they state that *no one is born in the wrong body*. Moreover, as we have seen, it is questionable whether reassignment surgery is a coherent option, without conceptual gymnastics for the so-called "intersex movement" or for Judith Butler herself, who, on the other hand, also maintains an ambivalent position towards diagnosis and psychiatrization.

A more challenging point of contention to address is the supposed individualism of queer theory. Butler and Preciado see and postulate themselves as anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, anti-colonial, etc. Marino and Errasti, on the other hand, point out the profoundly individualistic and even liberal undertone of their theories. But, of course, how could a theory that seeks to destroy the metaphysics of identity and essentialism, including the modern idea of the subject, be individualistic? Queer theory also claims to seek freedom, but freedom for whom or from what? Certainly, queer theory is paradoxically individualistic, but its individualism is problematic and fragmented. And this is the main point of friction with the contextual perspective of Marino Pérez. Let us recall the critique of the "floating individual" way of life. Indeed, a floating individual—uprooted, monstrous, alien to any fossilized, secure, and solid identity—is what queer theory defends. In contrast to this desiring liquidity, Marino's work is a call to restore collective meaning. This is why he draws so heavily from phenomenological and existential psychology, because his main concern is the reclamation of the sense of meaning that has been lost in contemporary societies. Hence is reference to that famous quote by Nietzsche, cited by Viktor Frankl: "He who has a why to live can bear almost any how."

This is why Marino Pérez is opposed to queer theory, despite having elements in common (de-medicalization, critique of the psychiatric status quo, denaturalization of individuals and their problems, critique of the individualism of contemporary societies and consumer capitalism, recovery of the body, a certain constructivism, and a certain dramatic and performative understanding of personality): because his fragmented individualism, in line with the postulates of postmodernity, represents the image of the floating individual. This tension between buoyancy and collective rootedness is the true point of divergence with queer theory. The strategic affinity of queer theory with transfeminism then serves as a pretext to direct criticisms at gender Platonism instead. And why is this important? Because to a certain extent it reveals the type of positions that have been contributing Marino Pérez's popularity as an intellectual, both within and beyond psychology in Spain. In criticizing transfeminism, Errasti and Marino make "individualism" their

enemy. But this inevitably leads to the kind of language that, according to Pérez Jara and Camprubí (2022), public intellectuals often end up falling into: a language or narrative of "meta-allies" and "meta-adversaries." In this sense, the "meta-adversary" that underpins the whole of Marino Pérez's psychology is individualism and the consequent loss of collective meaning. This individualism is the foundation of what will later become the critique of the biomedical model in mental health, the reductionism of neurosciences, positive psychology, industry, and the imperative of happiness and, finally, what Errasti and Pérez Álvarez (2022) call queer theory's "genderism". The problem with these positions is that, while they make one popular, they do so at the cost of stirring passions.

Conclusions

So far we have seen how Marino Pérez, as a public intellectual of psychology, has positioned himself in relation to some open debates both within and outside his discipline, but which in any case concern him. The following conclusions can be drawn from this biobibliographical overview:

1. All the themes in the works of Marino Pérez are related. From his initial concern with life in the city and its repercussions on the psychology of individuals to *No One is Born in the Wrong Body*, the critique of "individualism" has always been the central thread of his thinking. Individualism and the way of life of contemporary societies, characterized by the type of the "floating individual", are closely tied with the origin of mental disorders. The hyper-reflexivity to which this form of individualism leads, augmented by the use of social networks, and the consequent loss of meaning, end up making the challenges and problems of living, which we all have, pathological. Mental disorders, therefore, are linked to normative conflicts, being interactive rather than natural entities. For this reason, Marino Pérez criticizes the reductionist tendencies of neurosciences, attempting to resituate the person, from a contextual perspective, as an organic whole in constant interaction with its environment. This "resituation" implies putting the person back in contact with sources of meaning. The problem of individualism is that it causes the uprooting of the person, which the happiness industry only exacerbates. What Errasti and Pérez Álvarez (2022) define as transactivism, on the other hand, is also a dualistic ideology—often reductionist and individualistic—and, although queer theory, to which they attribute such evils, does not defend exactly that, the truth is that it does advocate for the figure of a floating or fugitive individual. In this sense, the work of Marino Pérez is perfectly coherent.
2. From the theoretical coordinates we are dealing with, Marino Pérez's success as a public intellectual must be attributed to his ability and vision to position himself in this whole series of open debates. Often, the popularity of his works, as in the case of *No One is Born in the Wrong Body*, depends more on these stances than on their depth and analytical precision. Moreover, to a large extent, his work echoes the language of "meta-allies" and, above all, of "meta-adversaries" as

referred to by Pérez Jara and Camprubí (2022). In this case, as we anticipated, the main meta-adversary targeted by his psychology and philosophy is "individualism", understood in the atomizing, expressive, and self-sufficient sense that began in Romanticism and continues today. His position with respect to this individualism has earned him the support of many, but also the rejection of many others. That is the burden of the public intellectual: having to deal with the ever-volatile opinion of the public.

3. What, then, is the alternative? Pérez Álvarez (2023) outlines it in his latest book: *The Floating Individual*. Against capitalist neoliberalism and individualism, but also against the identitarian liberalism of the new left and the floating individualism of queer theory, Marino advocates for classical liberalism. In this sense, Marino is, clearly, highly influenced by Ortega y Gasset. Recall the famous quote from *The Revolt of the Masses*: "To be on the left is, like being on the right, one of the infinite ways that man can choose to be an idiot: both are, indeed, forms of moral hemiplegia" (Ortega y Gasset, 2014, p. 49). Marino defends a kind of liberalism along the lines of Dewey (2003) or Ortega himself, which, paradoxically recognizing the necessary contingency of individualism, seeks to modernize it by addressing the human need for community and collective meaning. What he proposes, then, is nothing less than the re-transformation of the *individual* into a *citizen*; that quintessentially modern figure popularized by the French Revolution.
4. Finally, throughout this paper it has been evident how philosophy, psychology, medicine, psychiatry, and society are intertwined. Behind the different conceptions of what constitutes mental health and mental illness, how human behavior should be studied, or what truly matters in relation to it lies a complex world of ethical, political, and even ontological ideas. Indeed, Pérez Álvarez (2023) himself points to the role that the human and social sciences—but also philosophy—can play in this, among the solutions for this world of floating individuals, from which, as we have already noted, there is no escape.

However, Marino Pérez's critical stances should not make us lose sight of the *pars construens* of his thought. His cultural or radically human behaviorism; the recovery, together with other professors of the Faculty of Psychology of the University of Oviedo, of psychological therapies through the *Guides to Effective Treatments*; the introduction of third-generation therapies in Spain; his conception of psychological disorders as problems of life; the understanding of psychotherapy as a human science rather than a technological one, and his attempt to go beyond the war of psychotherapies; as well as his interest in philosophy from within psychology—all these are contributions that, whilst also carrying a destructive side, have contributed to forge and build the panorama of contemporary Spanish psychology, in the heat of controversy. In a way, this work serves as both a recognition and an expression of gratitude for the road we have traveled and for the one that lies ahead.

Conflict of Interest

There is not conflict of interests.

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