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Review of the book Thinking About Schizophrenia by Pau Martínez Farrero (this book is available at the COPC library)

The book *Thinking About Schizophrenia* presents a study of schizophrenia through the biography of the famous mathematician and 1994 Nobel Prize winner in Economics, John Forbes Nash, written by Sylvia Nasar and adapted into a film by director Ron Howard under the title *A Beautiful Mind* in 2002.

John Nash was diagnosed with schizophrenia when he was 31 years old, during his first psychiatric hospitalization. Over the next 10 years, he was admitted four more times, all of them involuntarily. Before his first hospitalization, he had already written and published major works on "Game Theory," for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize at the age of 66.

"Game theory" is a field of mathematics that deals with negotiation strategies, primarily in the field of economics. According to the pioneer of this discipline, John Von Neumann, "A game as trivial and playful as poker can hold the keys to human and social interests of great significance." In fact, from his childhood and throughout his life, John Nash "played" with mathematics, a game for which he possessed a gifted mind.

According to mathematical logic, that which is true cannot also be false. However, in the logic that governs human relationships, something that is true can also be false, or only partially true, or true depending on certain criteria. Nash had great difficulty understanding this other logic, this other "game." Due to his strange nature, he did not make any friends during his elementary and high school years. But at university, an event occurred which changed his life. Nash always wanted to prove he was smarter than everyone else and decided to challenge his classmates in the mathematics department to solve complex mathematical problems. Many did not think twice and took the opportunity to bring him their homework. It was the first time a classmate had been interested in approaching him. It is true they did it out of selfishness, but from then on, Nash was always surrounded by people who valued, above all else, his prodigious mind, and who were there during the most difficult and trying moments of his life.

Therefore, mathematics not only represented a source of satisfaction but also a bridge through which Nash was able to connect with others and the world in general. In fact, between the ages of 40 and 60, mathematical reasoning was buried by "irrational reasoning," and Nash lost his ability to relate to others, while simultaneously falling into a deep state of depression and loneliness.

John Nash did not conceive schizophrenia as an illness or disorder but rather as "an invasion of irrational thinking." This "first-person" view of schizophrenia provides a different way of approaching it. In fact, after more than 20 years of solitude and suffering, Nash managed to recover when he was able to keep mathematical and irrational thinking separate from each other and without interfering with one another. Nash explained that thanks to irrational thinking, he was able to believe that he was someone very important, something he could not achieve in the real world, but which he envied. Freud showed in the "Schreber case" that every delusion fulfils a function.

Nash did not view schizophrenia as an illness or disorder and was not trapped under the weight of a psychopathological diagnosis, which may have contributed to his recovery, which began several years before receiving the Nobel Prize.

According to Nash, his recovery did not occur spontaneously but by his own decision, once he decided to distance himself from irrational thoughts, as they caused him great intellectual exhaustion. He realized that ideas related to politics were responsible for triggering the rest of his irrational thoughts and managed to keep those ideas out of his mind.

But the decision to push away irrational thoughts did not come spontaneously either, but rather after a series of circumstances, including the fact that the people who cared about him, like his parents and sister, never abandoned him. Nor did his ex-wife, Alicia, who allowed him to move back in with her when Nash's mother, with whom he was living, died. The decision to push away irrational thoughts also came after colleagues in the mathematics departments at the universities where Nash studied and worked had always stood by him, finding him teaching jobs whenever he found himself in precarious financial situations or when he was released from psychiatric hospitalization. These jobs, moreover, Nash always ended up abandoning. His recovery also came after the heads of the mathematics department at Princeton University allowed him to "roam" freely through the common rooms, despite his unkempt appearance and the fact that he never responded to anyone's greetings. And being allowed to write whatever he wanted on the hallway blackboards, where strange hieroglyphics appeared every morning in the form of mathematical formulas, which was Nash's way of trying to break out of his isolation and communicate with the world. His recovery also came after his publications gained increasing international recognition and John Nash's name was increasingly cited in mathematical and scientific journals. Curiously, his recovery also came after he began to take an interest in mathematical calculations using computers, which the department allowed him access to, confirming that the digital world can play a stabilizing role in severe psychological disturbances. And his recovery also came after young students in the Princeton mathematics department, aware of the legend that Nash personified, began approaching him, talking to him, and asking for his help with academic assignments, which he gladly undertook.

The delusional thinking appeared before his first psychiatric hospitalization at age 31, but it did not prevent him from continuing his mathematical research, even during his stays. However, at age 37, he abandoned his mathematical research and began to take an interest in numerology. This period, which lasted approximately 20 years, coincided with the period of his life's greatest decline, isolation, and self-abandonment. At approximately age 60, in relation to the circumstances explained above, Nash decided to abandon the cryptic language of hieroglyphics and numerology, which only he understood, and to return to human language, the language shared by all, through which it is possible to reach out to others, initiate coexistence, and abandon isolation. He also recovered mathematical reasoning, which, like language, responds to a shared logic and cannot be altered by one's own desire.

Winning the Nobel Prize, at the age of 66, brought Nash international recognition for his career as a mathematician and his contributions to scientific development. But it also allowed him to put an end to the financial hardship he had endured since his youth. Thanks to the money he received from the Nobel Prize, he learned what it meant to have a credit card or "pay for a coffee at Starbucks." Nash's work is invaluable, but he was not able to make a living from it until he was 66. Capitalism

and neoliberalism only value *profitable work*, not *work well done*, and this was a major obstacle in Nash's life.

Taking advantage of Nash's travel to Sweden to collect the Nobel Prize, Uppsala University invited him to give a lecture "on the possibility that the universe is not expanding." Nash had been interested in this topic as a young man and was now returning to it after realizing he had made theoretical and calculation errors. A year later, he received a generous offer to publish his complete works, but he declined, claiming, "I want to consider myself and adopt the attitude of a mathematician who remains actively engaged in research and is not simply resting on his laurels, as is often said." This attitude demonstrates that mathematics was not only a game for Nash and a bridge to the world, but also a passion!

On May 23, 2015, at the age of 86, Nash died alongside his wife, Alicia, in a car accident in New Jersey. The taxi driver who had picked them up at the airport lost control while overtaking and hit a guardrail. The Nash were returning from Oslo after receiving the Abel Prize in Mathematics from King Harald V.

As its name suggests, this book proposes thinking about schizophrenia, but John Nash's biography suggests that a concept so saturated with connotations is more a matter of *rethinking* than of thinking.