

IS 'BACK TO VYGOTSKY' ENOUGH? THE LEGACY OF SOCIO-HISTORICOCULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT. Is 'back to Vygotsky' enough? Vygotsky's psychology has its roots in Marx's writings. Thus, Marxism is indispensable to the study of Vygotsky's theory. That is why, we assert in this paper that, back to Vygotsky is back to Marx and Marxism. Furthermore any attempt to modify Vygotsky's uses of Marxism with some extraneous element is not only objectively anti-Vygotsky but also distortion of his theory. Vygotsky brought into prominence the dialectic movement of social totalities, within which a complex interaction takes place between forces of production, social relations of production, means of production, mode production, consciousness, alienation, and activity. In these complex interactions that human mental life is formed and shaped. Aware of these pitfalls, Vygotsky did not try to build a Marxist psychology that lies on the side of the economic determinism theory. Vygotsky's efforts were directed, instead, to locating psychological aspects in Marx's writings and making one of these aspects a new point of departure for examining the same totality with which Marx was concerned.

Key words: Vygotsky; Marxist Psychology; Dialectical Method.

VOLTAR PARA VYGOTSKY É O SUFICIENTE? O LEGADO DA PSICOLOGIA SÓCIO-HISTÓRICO-CULTURAL

RESUMO. Voltar para Vygotsky é o suficiente? A psicologia de Vygotsky tem suas raízes nos escritos de Marx. Assim, o marxismo é indispensável para o estudo da teoria de Vygotsky. Por isso, afirmamos neste trabalho que, ao voltar para Vygotsky também volta-se para Marx e para o marxismo. Além disso, qualquer tentativa de modificar o uso que Vygotsky fez das idéias do marxismo com algum elemento estranho não é apenas objetivamente anti-Vygotsky, mas também a distorção da sua teoria. Vygotsky trouxe em destaque o movimento dialético das totalidades sociais, dentro do qual uma complexa interação ocorre entre as forças de produção, relações sociais de produção, os meios de produção, modo de produção, consciência, alienação e atividade. E é nessas interações complexas que a vida mental humana é formada e moldada. Ciente destas armadilhas, Vygotsky não tenta construir uma psicologia marxista, que fica do lado da teoria do determinismo econômico. Os esforços de Vygotsky foram dirigidos, em vez disso, para a localização de aspectos psicológicos nos escritos de Marx e fazer, de um desses aspectos, um novo ponto de partida para a análise da mesma totalidade com a qual Marx estava preocupado.

Palavras-chave: Vygotsky; Psicologia Marxista; Método Dialético.

VOLVERSE A VYGOTSKY ES SUFICIENTE? EL LEGADO DE LA PSICOLOGÍA SOCIO HISTÓRICO CULTURAL

RESUMEN. Volver para Vygotsky es suficiente? La sicología de Vygotsky tiene sus raíces en los escritos de Marx. Así, el marxismo es indispensable para el estudio de la teoría de Vygotsky. Por eso, afirmamos en este trabajo que, al volver para Vygotsky también se vuelve para Marx y para el marxismo. Además, cualquier intento de modificar el uso que Vygotsky hizo de las ideas del marxismo con algún elemento raro no es sólo objetivamente anti-Vygotsky, pero también la distorción de su teoría. Vygotsky trajo en destaque el movimiento dialético de las totalidades sociales, dentro del cual una compleja interacción ocurre entre las fuerzas de producción, relaciones sociales de producción, los medios de producción, modo de producción, conciencia, alienación y actividad. Y es en esas interacciones complejas que la vida mental humana es formada y moldada. Ciente de estas armadillas, Vygotsky no intenta construir una sicología marxista, que se queda del lado de la teoría del

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determinismo económico. Los esfuerzos de Vygotsky fueron dirigidos, en vez de eso, para la localización de aspectos psicológicos en los escritos de Marx y hace, de uno de esos aspectos, un nuevo punto de partida para el análisis de la misma totalidad con la cual Marx estaba preocupado.

Palabras-clave: Vygotsky; Psicología Marxista; Método Dialéctico.

"To be radical is to grasp things by the root. But for man the root is man himself" (Marx, 1844, p. 52).

Contribution to the critique of Hegel's philosophy of right. In *Early writings* (pp. 43-59). NY: McGraw-Hill, 1963.

La psychologie ne détient donc nullement le "secret" des faits humains, simplement parce que ce "secret" n'est pas d'ordre psychologique [Psychology by no means holds the "secret" of human affairs, simply because this "secret" is not of a psychological order]. Georges Politzer, 1929, p. 170

When, on June 10th 1934, Lev Semenovich Vygotsky died at the age of thirty-seven Marxist psychology suffered the loss of a great mind whose work opened new avenues in the field of psychological science.

Beginning with *Educational Psychology* (1922-23), his thought evolved through a number of stages finally to arrive at refined theoretical conceptions (1927) which transcended the Marxism dogmatism of the Second International in Soviet psychology. Vygotsky was well engaged in the conceptualization of Marxist psychology. He centered his energies upon the scientific study of human higher mental functions to which he brought his greatest and most lasting contribution: the discovery of the specific character of cultural historical activity in the development of human mental life. It is clear that Vygotsky was not only a psychologist, but also the expounder of an educational doctrine, an outstanding educator of individuals with special needs (defectologist), and a socio-historicocultural psychologist of the first rank.

In a long series of volumes (see the collected works in six volumes) which appeared in the last two decades (in Russian, English, Spanish, French, German, among other languages), Lev Vygotsky opened a new world-view in psychological science, the specific cultural historical character of human higher mental functions. This was entirely unsuspected by the competing schools of classical psychology and the so-called Marxist psychology because they applied the categories of German

materialist physiology (Fechner and Helmholtz), British empiricist philosophy, and French Cartesian dualism. These competing schools (behaviorism, psychoanalysis, reflexology, associationism, mentalism, etc.) were committed to the belief in unilinear evolution and an unchangeable essence of human mental nature. In contradistinction to these ideas, Vygotsky firmly established the relativity of the categories of human thought and the impossibility of reducing our rationale and our elements of experience, to the rationale and elements of experience of physical nature.

It is much too early for us to grasp the significance of Lev Vygotsky's thought. His writings, of course, remain, as well as a myriad of traces of his vision of psychological science. He was the fearless opponent of dogmatism in the Marxist tradition hoped, by way of a recovery of Marx's unwritten psychology, to inaugurate a renewal of scientific psychology (Marxist psychology). Above all, for Vygotsky, this meant that scientific knowledge is won only after a long and difficult struggle –there is no short cut to scientific knowledge-, by a transformative theoretical practice. To be a Marxist psychologist is not a matter of applying the concepts and principles bequeathed by Marx and his disciples to psychology. Rather, it is a matter of both recovering and developing a provisional, flawed and incomplete legacy; of producing new concepts and analyses appropriate to the investigation of human mental life.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION OF VYGOTSKY'S IDEAS

For Vygotsky, German materialist physiology (Fechner and Helmholtz), British empiricist philosophy and French Cartesian dualism represented the attempts of the greatest Western thinkers to grasp the nature of human higher mental life. Their categories and methods of thought gave the highest theoretical expression to the contradictions of social relations of production of their socially organized practical activity.

In this section, we will attempt to reconstruct the pertinent theses of Vygotsky's work with a view to freeing them from the dogmatic presentation of

mainstream psychology. The first concern is the emancipation of *Vygotsky* from the cognitivist and semiotic heritage which has grown up around it under the banner of “sociocultural or sociohistorical theory”. The emancipation of *Vygotsky* implies at the same time the understanding of *Marx* (and Marxism) as *emancipating*. We regard *Vygotsky's* research program as a self-reflection on human potential that clears the way towards a defetishised and emancipated social world.

Anyone trying to grasp the ideas of Lev *Vygotsky*--and today that effort is needed more than ever--faces a number of obstacles. Most serious is the after-effect of the distortions which made up the tradition known as “organismic cultural anthropology”, “social constructionism”, or “sociocultural relativism”, or, more accurately, “anthropological cognitivism relativism”. This was compounded by the writings of cognitive psychologists and cultural anthropologists, whose widespread influence in the 1960s and 1970s added significantly to the mystification. As if these weren't enough, the fragmented outlook known as “social constructivism”, which so well expresses the chaos and confusion of our own day psychological science, has muddied the field still further.

Not so long ago, *Vygotskian* psychologists strove to give theoretical expression to the Soviet School of cultural-historical psychology but now they seem to have accommodated themselves to the postmodern fashion. Postmodernism does more than present a fuzzy picture of concrete reality: it denies both reality and truth. For this denial, a special array of concepts is needed.

We were not looking for an accommodation of *Vygotsky's* ideas to mainstream psychology, but for a negative theory of mainstream version of *Vygotsky* in which the human higher mental functions would not be explained by the fragmentation of 'scientific' discourse, but of the totality of human make-up. In *Marx's* view

The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness (*Marx*, 1971, pp. 8-9).

Similarly *Vygotsky* argued that “The first form of intellectual activity is active, practical thinking. This thinking that is directed toward reality. It is a basic form of adapting to new or changing conditions in the external environment” (*Vygotsky*, 1987, p. 63).

In “*Consciousness as a problem in the psychology of behavior*” (1925) and “*The problem of consciousness*” (1933), *Vygotsky* concluded that the Hegelian-Marxist dialectic shows that knowledge of social and mental life is not a science (as a natural science), but consciousness, and that implies the possibility of a Marxist psychology. *Vygotsky* used *Marx's* dialectic in different spheres of his thought. It is through dialectics that psychology becomes human science. In this regard, *Henri Wallon* argued that “It is dialectics that has given psychology its stability and its meaning” (1951, p. 34). Dialectical materialism is “the most rational explanation for psychology” (*Wallon*, 1954, p. 127). Dialectical materialism “is relevant to the entire realm of knowledge, as well as to the realm of action... psychology... must, more than any other science, find in dialectical materialism its normal base and guiding principles” (*Wallon*, 1951, p. 34). These guiding principles have enabled psychology to understand and comprehend human higher mental phenomena and its environment that are in constant interaction, as “a single unified whole” (*Wallon*, 1951, p. 34). *Vygotsky* pointed out that “Dialectics covers nature, thinking, history - it is the most general, maximally universal science. The theory of the psychological materialism or dialectics of psychology is what I called general psychology” (1997a/1927, p. 330). In other words, dialectical methods are particularly suited to dealing with conceptual and theoretical problems arising from such research in psychological studies. The dialectical method is “always *genetic* and, like every human reality, is both *material* and *psychic*: the genetic study of a human fact implies in every case and in the same degree its material history and the history of the doctrines which concern it ... one of the basic theses of the Marxist method is that any serious study of human reality leads back to thought when its material aspect has been taken of the point of departure and to social and economic reality when one has begun with the history of ideas” (*Goldmann*, 1966, p. 62). According to *Goldmann* human individual is a “living and conscious being placed in a world filled with realities that are economic, social, political, intellectual, religious and the like. He sustains the whole effect of this world and reacts upon it in turn. This is what we call a dialectical relations” (1966, p. 87). *Goldmann* outlined three major structural elements of social life: 1) the specific

importance of economic life, 2) the predominant historical function of social classes, and 3) the existence of potential consciousness. He argued that social class is defined by 1) its function in production, 2) its relations with the members of other classes, and 3) its potential consciousness which is a world-view.

It is through creative and concrete application of dialectical materialism that psychology can escape the ossification and the orthodoxy that frequently grips it. It is a psychology in crisis because it is drained from its dialectics and is ignored consciousness.

In this perspective human mental functions are formed and transformed by the real material life. Wallon, Politzer and Vygotsky were similar in many ways; they wanted to promote an essentially materialist psychology, embedded in actual social structure, historical process and cultural development.

Vygotsky's socio-historicocultural theory is a set of extensions of the writings of Marx and Engels. Delving into the hidden nature of higher mental processes and consciousness, Vygotsky analyzed the role of culture, history, material conditions, social positions, social interaction, tools and signs in the development of human thought processes and consciousness. Vygotsky was impelled in this quest by dissatisfaction with his present-day psychology: Western bourgeois psychology and the so-called Soviet Marxist psychology, its aims and its methods.

WHY READ VYGOTSKY?

Why study Marxist psychology? Both Marx's writings and Marxist psychology are dying disciplines. How many Marxist psychology groups are there now? How many *to create psychology's own capital* psychologists involved in this project? How many courses on *To create psychology's own capital* are taught in universities and debated in seminars? How many Vygotskian psychologists are ploughing on their own through the *German Ideology*, *Grundrisse* and *Das Kapital*?

I am associated with Vygotsky's approach usually known as Marxist approach to psychology (or sometimes scientific approach to psychology), which I have tried to work out in my writings. My main concern in this approach has been to understand human activity as socially organized practice, or, in other words, to understand the categories of human mental life as open categories, categories which conceptualize the unpre-determined process of human development.

Vygotsky bases himself on the *Theses on Feuerbach*. In his magnum opus, *Historical Meaning*

of the Crisis in Psychology (1927) Vygotsky presented an interesting reflection on Marx's monism, which throws light on the Marxist approach to psychology. In this respect, Vygotsky's system is the highest stage of Marxist approach to psychology. This account of approach has met criticism, not least from Marxists (positivism-scientism versions of Marxism) who wanted to study psychology without committing themselves to a cultural, historical and social scheme. Classical psychology took the acting individual out of history and replaced him with cognitive processes. Overtheorized present-day mainstream psychology takes cognitive processes out of history and replaces them with structures. Vygotsky finally noticed that human individuals are not really historical subjects with a single consciousness. Human individual is "not an organism in a social environment or context, but a moment in a social totality, the ensemble of social relations" (Shames, 1988, p. 131). Vygotsky argued that social formation, mode of production, forces of production, and social relations were better concepts than gender, race, ethnic groups, etc. This social formation (mode of production, forces of production, relations of production, means of production) consists of economically, politically, culturally and historically forms within which reside the conditions of existence of the relations of production. In Marx's method, these concepts (mode of production, forces of production, relations of production, mean of production) can only be understood in reference to each other, and particularly in relation to human consciousness. According to Marx, the derivation of these concepts from each other makes possible the understanding of socio-historical change.

Whenever we speak of production, then, what is meant is always production at a definite stage of social development -- production by social individuals. It might seem, therefore, that in order to talk about production at all we must either pursue the process of historic development through its different phases, or declare beforehand that we are dealing with a specific historic epoch such as e.g. modern bourgeois production, which is indeed our particular theme. However, all epochs of production have certain common traits, common characteristics. *Production in general* is an abstraction, but a rational abstraction in so far as it really brings out and fixes the common element and thus saves us repetition. Still, this *general* category, this common element sifted out by comparison, is itself segmented many times over and splits into different determinations. Some

determinations belong to all epochs, others only to a few (Marx, 1973, p. 85).

Contemporary psychologists base their theories and research practices on an individualistic philosophy as well as on individual concepts of higher mental functioning. The part often played by *the survivals* of concepts and trends inherited from earlier generations of classical psychology and preserved only by research tradition is discussed at length in Vygotsky's writings. Furthermore, psychological theories draw their inspirations from the zeitgeist of the socially organized nature of social relations of production.

For Vygotsky, the Marxist concept of "social relations of production" is the appropriate unit of analysis of human mental life. Human higher mental functions, personality and consciousness are an ensemble of social relations, mediated by social relations, tools, and concrete social-cultural-historical environment.

SOVIET PSYCHOLOGY: WHAT WENT WRONG?

In my view Soviet Marxism after Lenin's death is much more a product of the Russian reaction to the West than a direct result of Marxism itself. Vygotsky's analysis brings us to the center of what Marxist psychology is all about. According to Vygotsky, Soviet psychology of the 1920s was precisely a hybrid product of local competing schools in Russia and the West (psychoanalysis, behaviorism, Darwinism, and phenomenology). These hybrid products have been presented and elaborated by the leading Soviet psychologists under the banner of Pavlov's materialist psychology, who was billed as a materialist and revolutionary. Pavlov theoretical rigor commands admiration by those who were looking for a short cut to build a Marxist psychology.

What is Marxist psychology? At first glance, Vygotsky seems to be pursuing a similar research question like his colleagues in Soviet Union. Not surprisingly, perhaps, for a well erudite Marxist intellectual, his answer is neither eclectic nor superficial nor epithetic but principled – with respect to Marxism. In Vygotsky's view

The entire complexity of the current situation in psychology, where the most unexpected and paradoxical combinations are possible, but also the danger of this epithet (incidentally, talking about paradoxes: this very psychology contests Russian reflexology's right to a theory of relativity). When the eclectic and unprincipled,

superficial and semi-scientific theory of Jameson is called Marxist psychology, when also the majority of the influential Gestalt psychologists regard themselves as Marxists in their scientific work, then this name loses precision with respect to "Marxism." I remember how extremely amazed I was when I realized this during an informal conversation. I had the following conversation with one of the most educated psychologists: What kind of psychology do you have in Russia? That you are Marxists does not yet tell what kind of psychologists you are. Knowing of Freud's popularity in Russia, I at first thought of the Adlerians. After all, these are also Marxists. But you have a totally different psychology. We are also social-democrats and Marxists, but at the same time we are Darwinists and followers of Copernicus as well (Vygotsky, 1997a/1927, p. 341).

Vygotsky pointed out that human individuals are the result of historical, cultural and social development rather than the starting point of our explanation. For Vygotsky, human higher mental functioning does not lie ossified in the inheritance past, it is still to be created in our future development (human individuals are full of potentialities, see Vygotsky's zone of proximal development). Psychologists have only tried to understand the make-up of human mind, while the point is to change it. But the human mind cannot be understood until it is changed.

THE IMPACT OF MARXISM ON VYGOTSKY

In philosophy, there was the period of Descartes and Locke, then the period of Kant and Hegel, and since then there has been the period of Marx and Engels. In psychology, there was the period of Helmholtz and Fechner, William James and Skinner, then the period of Jean Piaget, and then since the mid-1970s there has been the period of Lev Vygotsky. If Piaget drew his inspiration from Kant, Vygotsky drew his inspiration from Marx. Marx's ideas are salient and of notable significance in Vygotsky's theory. The discovery of Vygotsky is that, socially organized practical activity is the true foundation on which higher mental functions are organized. Vygotsky's understanding of Marxist psychology involves five assertions:

- Psychology remains within the concepts of historical materialism and class struggle, which means the rejection of all non-materialist and non-Marxist theories;
- Psychological individual means that the subject study of psychology is the concrete human individual formed and shaped by specific social relations;
- Materialism, which means that, human mental life and rule-governed behavior are derived, formed, and shaped by the material conditions of social reality;
- Dialectics, which means that everything, is in flux; nothing is unchangeable or constant;
- Activity, which means that a human individual acts to change concrete reality and in so doing changes him or herself.

The concept of activity occupied central role in Marx's theory. Marx explains

Even when I am active *scientifically*, etc. — an activity, which I can seldom perform in direct association with others — then my activity is *social*, because I perform it as a man. It is only the material of my activity given to me as a social product — such as the language itself which the thinker uses- which is given to me a social product. My *own existence* is a social activity, and therefore what I myself produce, I produce for society and with the consciousness of acting as a social being [translation slightly altered] (Marx, 1963/1844, pp. 157-158).

At this point in our inquiry of a Marxist approach to psychology, we can conclude the following. Just as Marxism begins with dialectical materialism as a socio-historicocultural analysis of human development, it also begins with dialectical materialism as a theory of cognitive processes, as a means of obtaining knowledge. Similarly, just as Vygotsky's higher mental functioning theory of human development is materialist, so his—what perhaps can be called here—“socio-historicocultural development of human higher mental functioning” is also materialist. In the connection of this issue, Georgy Lukács concluded that

Historical materialism eclipses all the methods that went before it, on the one hand, inasmuch as it conceives reality as a whole consistently as a *historical process*, and on the other hand, inasmuch as it is in a position to understand the starting point of knowledge

at any one time. Knowledge itself is understood to be just as much a product of the objective process of history (Lukács, 2000, p. 105).

Vygotsky tried to renew Marxist thought in psychology; in so doing, he modeled himself on Marx. That is, he analyzed the transformation of Soviet socialist society after 1917, as Marx analyzed the capitalist societies of the nineteenth century.

How Vygotsky did approach the crisis of psychology? The following passage will shed light on how Vygotsky's turned psychology on its head. He stated that,

We do not want to deny our past. We do not suffer from megalomania by thinking that history begins with us. We do not want a brand-new and trivial name from history. We want a name covered by the dust of centuries. We regard this as our historical right, as an indication of our historical role, our claim to realize psychology as a science. We must view ourselves in connection with and in relation to the past ... That is why we accept the name of our science with all its age-old delusions as a vivid reminder of our victory over these errors, as the fighting scars of wounds, as a vivid testimony of the truth which develops in the incredibly complicated struggle with falsehood (Vygotsky, 1997a/1927, pp. 336-337).

In the crisis of psychology, Vygotsky turned his attention to Marxism. While he devoted much space to the competition between schools of psychology, he succeeded to formulate the conceptualizations of a scientific psychology or Marxist psychology. He thought that the competition had unveiled the final crisis of individualistic psychology that based its theoretical space on private internal sphere, independent of the material world. He noted that problem with the competing schools that dominate the field of psychology in the 1920s -and present day psychology also- is that psychologists succeeded to remove the human from psychology.

HUMAN INDIVIDUAL IS FULL OF UNDEVELOPED POTENTIAL

Lev Vygotsky, the founder of Marxist psychology in mid-1920, recognized that human potentialities display many features that are not adaptations and do not promote the nature of social organization directly. This is because: (a) human higher mental functions

have capacities beyond what they were selected for by the nature of social relations of productions and the distribution of socially organized activities; and (b) because human higher mental functions are integrated systems in which an adaptive change in one part can lead to a non-adaptive change of some other feature.

Marxist psychology thus embodies the dialectical category, actual development versus potential development. In other words, human individuals are full of potentialities but these potentialities are shaped by the nature of social relations of production. The full development of human potentialities is achieved only when individuals recognize each other mutually. As long as the distribution of human cognition is predetermined by the socially organized social classes, this recognition is practically impossible. In my view, Marxist theory of intersubjectivity is capable of creating a fully developed human being, transformed into an achieved human nature and humanity. Consciousness is, thereby, a reflection of concrete reality. As Marx put it:

For Hegel, the process of thinking ... is the creator of the real world...With me the reverse is true: the ideal is nothing but the material world reflected in the mind of man and translated into forms of thought (Marx, 1977, p. 102).

Human higher mental functions go through a real historical cultural and social development.

WHY PSYCHOLOGISTS ARE ATTRACTED TO VYGOTSKY?

Just as Vygotsky was one of the first Soviet psychologists to recognize the importance of Marx's writings for creating a scientific psychology (Marxist psychology), so Vygotsky was one of the first Soviet psychologists to be appreciated in North and West European, and North American universities. But for the North and West European, and North American psychologists, as for the rest of the world (Elhammoumi, 1997, 2001), Vygotsky has meant very different things in different times: in the 1960s, Vygotsky was understood as the leading psychologist of a cognitive revolution in psychology. His ideas were absorbed in the wave of testing and measurement psychology. In the 1970s, Vygotsky was understood as an exponent of a cognitive cultural anthropology that was viewed firstly as a combination of cognitive psychology and cultural anthropology with the concepts of linearity of time and relativity of cognitive

development, and viewed secondly, as a pioneer of Marxist psychology (Sève, 1975; Zazzo, Fraisse, Piaget, & Galifret, 1971; Caveing, 1969; Fraisse, 1977; Mecacci, 1979). In the period of the 1980s, psychology in the Soviet Union in the Vygotskian vein continued to focus on editing and circulating of many of Vygotsky's early works concentrating on education, epistemology, defectology, etc. The 1980s could be characterized as a period of collected archives and manuscripts of Vygotsky. The 1990s could be characterized as a decade of explosive application, interpretations and extensions of Vygotsky's theory (Elhammoumi, 1997, 2001).

With the editing and translation of Vygotsky's collected works into English, Spanish, French, German, etc., a new appreciation of Vygotsky's immense receptivity and curiosity began to dominate the world psychology. But under the weight of thousands of pages (six volumes of Collected Works, Educational Psychology, Psychology of Art, and scattered articles in different journals), Vygotsky intellectual achievements divided into dozens of specialized studies in the field of psychological science (special education, child cultural development, speech development, semiotic, mediation, signs, tools, memory, zone of proximal development, cultural-historical theory, activity theory, higher mental development, spontaneous and scientific concepts, inner speech, stages of cognitive development, theoretical foundations of psychology, etc.). In my view Vygotsky can be characterized as systematic psychologist, for whom nothing makes sense except in the light of everything else. It has become clear that the new trend in Vygotsky studies is the recovery of Vygotsky as a systematic psychologist. In this paper I have shown the image of a Vygotsky who is not a great rejecter but a great absorber of the ideas of his day, whither literary critics, aesthetic, philosophic, scientific, psychological, sociological, anthropological, linguistics, medical, physiological, or political.

What makes a treatment of any subject truly Vygotskian? In my view it is the use of that special array of Marxist concepts that goes under the heading of "historical and dialectical materialism".

Vygotsky repeated and justified this perhaps too well known phrase many times: *psychology needs its own capital*. This phrase deserves, on one hand, to be taken seriously, and, on the other hand, to be subjected to a critical reflection in order to place it within the context of Vygotsky's psychology. One will notice first that Vygotsky has purposely chosen a new term for psychological studies, scientific psychology or

Marxist psychology, which did not belong to the vocabulary of classical psychology. In this respect, the conceptual matrix of the *Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology* gives us the possibility, the tools, and the rigorous means to verify the validity and content of each concept in use within the scientific psychology (Marxist psychology) corpus.

When Vygotsky declared in his magnum opus, *the historical meaning of the crisis in psychology*, that within 5 or 10 years Soviet psychology would catch up with the advanced disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, and anthropology, it meant that in the space of one decade Soviet psychology had achieved what took French psychology, American psychology and British psychology over 50 years of struggle to establish psychology as an independent scientific discipline. When Vygotsky and his colleagues built their theoretical panoply, they had to start from numerous scattered passages of Marx in which he comments on the nature of psychological science and on general questions of psychological methodology. There are also several places in which Marx compares his own historical, economic and political studies with the kind of research carried out by social scientists of human mental development. Vygotsky and his colleagues did not start from tabula rasa base, but they were in constant interaction with the classical schools of Russian psychology and world psychology.

VYGOTSKY'S CONCEPT OF SOCIAL RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION

Society does not consist merely of individuals but expresses the sum of a series of enduring relations. Marx distinguished between three aspects of social organizations. They are:

- First, the “material forces of production”, or the actual method by which people produce their livings;
- second, the “relations of production” that arise out of them and that include property relations and rights;
- and third, the “legal and political” superstructures and the ideas, or “forms of social consciousness”, that correspond to the first two (Marx, preface to the contribution to the critique of political economy, 1971/1859).

Marx argued that in the social production of their means of existence human individuals

- enter into definite ... relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of

development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation.... The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. (Marx, preface to the contribution to the critique of political economy, 1971/1859).

The concept of social relations of production occupied a central role in Vygotsky's theory. He argued that ‘the mental nature of man represents the totality of social relations internalized and made into functions of the individual and forms of his structure... we see in this thesis the most complete expression of everything to which our history of cultural development leads’ (Vygotsky, 1997c, p. 106). It is through this concept that Vygotsky conceptualized his cultural historical theory. According to Vygotsky (1994, p. 176).

The entire psychological makeup of individuals can be seen to depend directly on the development of technology, the degree of development of the production forces and on the structure of that social group to which the individual belongs .

It is here that Vygotsky integrated in a dialectical way his historical-cultural-psychosocial studies, and appeared as the first well-defined socio-historicocultural theory in scientific psychology (Marxist psychology). Vygotsky's vision of psychology was totally opposed to that of his contemporary, and he had a poor opinion of Freud as a man of psychological science. Marx was the pioneer of scientific psychology, alongside three others: Henri Wallon, with his conception of psychology as a science of human individuals in act and action; Georges Politzer, with his investigation of psychology as a science of concrete mental reality, conflict and drama (Vygotsky argued that ‘Psychology must be developed in the concepts of drama, not in the concepts of processes’ (Vygotsky, 1989, p. 71); and finally Vygotsky himself, with his study of ‘the formation and appearance of economic activity, which underlies all historical development’ (Vygotsky, 1997b, p. 211). The fundamental causes of all social, mental and behavioral changes ‘must be sought not in people's mind ... but in changes in the means of production and distribution. ... Thus, in mankind the production process assumes the broadest possible social character, [which] ... encompasses the entire world. Accordingly, there arise the most complex forms of organization of human behavior’ (Vygotsky,

1997b, p. 211). Vygotsky drew heavily on Marx's theory that the forces of production and social relations of production, means of production, and the conflict between them, on which the class struggle is the most obvious manifestation to penetrate the complex structure and formation of human higher mental functioning. Human behavior is a 'dialectical and complex process of struggle between man and the world, and within man' (Vygotsky, 1997b, p. 53).

Engels wrote in 1874 in the preface to his book *The peasant war in Germany* that there are three forms of class struggle: First, class struggle in the economic front, second in the political front, and third in the theoretical front. When class struggle is fought in the theoretical field it is called philosophy. From my reading of Vygotsky's writings, I learned that he carried out the class struggle in the field of psychology and education. Class struggle was reflected in his articles, books, and speeches that deal with educational practice, pedagogy, pedology, defectology, mental illness, cognitive education in school (i.e., zone of proximal development), and psychotherapy. Vygotsky did exactly what Lenin noted in his famous speech that reviewed the achievement of the five years of the Russian revolution. He stated that the most important thing for comrades to do is to sit down and study. He placed greater emphasis on the need to continue the class struggle and he characterized socialism as the continuation of class struggle in a new form. In this vein Vygotsky argued that

The concepts of the social category of class and class struggle, for instance, are revealed in their purest form in the analysis of the capitalist system, but these same concepts are the key to all pre-capitalist societal formations, although in every case we meet with different classes there, a different form of struggle, a particular developmental stage of this category. But those details which distinguish the historical uniqueness of different epochs from capitalist forms not only are not lost, but, on the contrary, can only be studied when we approach them with the categories and concepts acquired in the analysis of the other, higher formation (Vygotsky, 1997a, p. 235).

Vygotsky's psychology is very much closer to Marx, Wallon and Politzer than to Mead, Dewey, and Piaget, whose cultural historical theory contradicts the individualistic worldview of Western psychology. He rejected its philosophical foundations for neglecting social conflict and emphasizing on general abstraction.

What Vygotsky provides here is a well-defined theory of how human higher mental functioning forms in the process of cultural development.

FOR A VYGOTSKIAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATURE OF HUMAN HIGHER MENTAL FUNCTIONING

What is the nature of human higher mental functioning? It seems to me that this is what is fundamentally at issue in considering the relationship of cultural historical theory and Marx's theory. The great merit of the former is that it offers us a deeper understanding of the cultural development of human higher mental functioning. It is not a substitute for Marx's theory, and indeed it was grounded inside the framework of the Marxist world-view. Cultural historical psychology can easily become a path to social constructionism, social constructivism, socioculturalism, cultural anthropological relativism, and semiotic. In that sense, cultural historical theory has a similar type of relationship to Marx's theory as Darwinism does. Darwin made a great contribution to materialism, which, in antagonistic classes based society, tends to get perverted by ideological distortions. Just as Piagetian psychology needed to be rescued from cognitivism, Marxism needed to be rescued from Stalinism, Darwinism needed to be rescued from the social Darwinists, so Vygotskian psychology needed to be rescued from socioculturalism. As I noted (Elhammoumi, 2001, 2006), important efforts were made by a number of Marxist psychologists in this passing century (Henri Wallon, Geroges Politzer, Lev Vygotsky, Alex Leontiev, Alexander Luria, Lucien Sève, René Zazzo, among others). Their works deserve to be revived, developed and expanded as part of the overall struggle for a renewal of a scientific psychology or Marxist psychology in the psychological science.

The study of the nature and genesis of "human higher mental functioning," however, seems to require a multidisciplinary philosophical view. This philosophical view of human individual and his higher mental functioning is grounded in a given social organization. Marx, of course, famously rejected Feuerbach's abstract concept of "human individual" and defined the "human individual essence" as "the ensemble of the social relations." (Marx, 1998, p. 573). But as brilliant as this insight was, Vygotsky certainly didn't consider it the final word on the subject of human mental life and rule-governed behavior. In *Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology* (1927), he argued against the trends of his present-day

psychology and the narrow view of human higher mental functioning, stating that “Genetically social relations, real relations between people, underlie all higher functions and their relationships.” (Vygotsky, 1989, p. 58).

Just as Marx and Engels discovered the basis of cultural evolution, Darwin discovered the basis of biological evolution, so Vygotsky discovered the cultural evolution of human higher mental functioning. According to Vygotsky, the essential defining characteristic of human individual is his/her ability to labor with the use of and development of tools. These tools are means of production, which are used by the forces of production. These forces of production create necessary social relations of production. It is the dynamic of social relations of these interconnected factors that is the real source of all cultural, historical, social and mental development. It is these interconnected factors that form the base that is the real source of human’s social consciousness. The contradiction between the social relations of production and the productive forces underlie all human mental make-up. This contradiction is the source of human conflict, and the driving force for social and psychological development. It is the development of the forces of production and the social relations that are the integral part that play a central role in creating a new principle which enables every individual to reach his/her rightful potential. And that bring us back to what Vygotsky himself considered to be a learning process. Vygotsky’s approach to learning (dis) abilities started from the potential of the (dis) abled child (or individual) rather than from his/her (dis) ability. Human abilities can reach its potential only in a society based on *each according to his/her needs*.

YGOTSKY: THE FEUERBACH OF MARXIST PSYCHOLOGY

For the last eight decades since 1920 Marxist psychology has not achieved its goals. Most of its leading psychologists such as Lev Vygotsky, Georges Politzer, Henri Wallon, Alexis Leontiev, Alexander Luria, Serge Rubenstein, René Zazzo, Klaus Holzkamp, Lucien Sève, among others operated within the categories of the pre-Marxist research program. In other words, Marxist psychology, at its present form, operates at the level of Feuerbach, not yet Marx. Three stages were identified in the evolution of a Marxist psychology. The first stage (rebellion) which can be characterized to some extent to that of the left young Hegelians (Wilhem Reich, Alexander

Luria, Alexis Leontiev, Georges Politzer, Henri Wallon, René Zazzo, Lucien Sève, Klaus Holzkamp, among others); the second stage can be characterized to that of Feuerbach’s pre-Marxist categories (Lev Vygotsky), and the third stage is Marx’s radical categories. In my view, Marxist psychology has not been able to move from the Feuerbachian categories to Marxist categories. In this critical review, I focus on Marxist psychologists and their theoretical inspirations. Since the 1920s, Marxist psychologists presented their concepts and ideas “in a much more artful form and confused by the use of a ‘new’ terminology, so that these thoughts may be taken by naïve people for ‘recent philosophy’” (Lenin, 1908/1972, p. 20). Freudo-Marxism, Pavlov-Marxism, Soviet Psychology, Frankfurt School, Berlin Critical Psychology, Western Marxist Psychology, and other forms of Materialist Psychology have been taken by naïve radical psychologists for truly a Marxist psychology.

As Marxism controlled the social organization in the Soviet Union to a great extent, the early goal of the Marxist psychologists was to establish a psychological model following Marxist philosophy. They part from the assumption that; changing the social relations of production that govern the patterns of society can change human nature. This theoretical framework led Vygotsky to emphasize the role of various social relations (social relations of production, social interaction, cooperation, collaboration, etc.) in individual development. He developed the concept of the zone of proximal development in which the axis individual-society is dialectically constituted. The chicken egg dilemma of priority of the individual or the society has been solved according to the following formula: in *potentiality*, the human individual is prior; in *actuality*, society as an expression of social relations is prior. This bring us to the Marxist argument that human individuals are full of undeveloped potential and that can only be released after the structural reorganization of the social relations of production of the entire social organization of the society. In other words, human potential can be fully developed only in a society in which the social relations of production is regulated by the formula, each according to his/her needs.

SOVIET AND WESTERN MARXIST PSYCHOLOGISTS: ARE THEY MARXIST OR YOUNG HEGELIANS?

In the mid-1920s Lev Vygotsky formed the Troika, a group of "young" Marxist psychologists who

gathered at Moscow University in the turbulent years of the rise of Stalinism from 1925 to 1934. The central figures were Lev Vygotsky, Alexander Luria and Alexis Leontiev. Many others were attracted to their ideas.

The Troika was an intellectual group of psychologists whose common theme was the ongoing application of Marx's dialectical method and philosophical conclusions to the study of human higher mental life. Their views of psychology were radical and critical of the competing schools within Soviet psychology.

Vygotsky's initial formation was as a member of the radical 'young Marxist' school of social criticism which emerged in Russia after the revolution of 1905, which contributed to the ferment of ideas leading to the revolution of October 1917. Initially influenced by Marx, his earliest writings were devoted to the critique of art, literary critics and philosophy from a radical humanist perspective. However, he soon came to appreciate Marx's ideas that human consciousness, rule-governed behavior, and activity have their roots in material conditions and socially organized practical activity. Henri Wallon and Georges Politzer were reaching similar conclusions as a result of their experiences with psychology in France (*Wallon's dialectical psychology* (1925), and *Politzer's concrete psychology* (1928)). Vygotsky collaborated in a number of works attacking his contemporaries who drew their theoretical inspirations from Pavlov's physiology, Freud's psychoanalysis, Darwin's natural selection, behaviorism, hermeneutic, Hegel's idealism, and positivism-scientism for their idealism. From this emerged the 'cultural-historical theory of human higher mental functions', the theory which, Vygotsky says, served as the guiding thread for his psychological studies throughout the remainder of his life.

Vygotsky and his colleagues made an important contribution toward a Marxist psychology, but their efforts were at the level of Feuerbach, not yet Marx (Shames, 1984, 1988, 1990, Elhammoumi, 2001). Vygotsky and his colleagues (Lenotiev, Luria among others) were similar to the young left Hegelians who tried to put an end to Hegel's idealistic philosophy. The same ambition attracted Vygotsky and his colleagues to put an end to the idealistic schools of psychology that dominated psychology and brought it to a deep crisis. In his critical review of Hegelian philosophy Vygotsky pointed out that

When Hegel strives to subordinate the unique activity of man to the category of logic -- arguing that this activity is the "conclusion",

that the subject (man) plays the role of a "component" of the logical "figure" "conclusion" -- this is not only stretching the point, it is a game. There is a profound points there, a purely materialistic one. We must reverse it: man's practical activity must bring the repetition of various logical figures a billion times in order for these figures to become axioms... And further: 'Man's practice, repeated a billion times, anchors the figures of logic in his consciousness' (1987, p. 88).

And he added that

What is man? [Human being] for Hegel, he is a logical subject. For Pavlov, it is soma, an organism. For us, man [human being] is social person = an aggregate of social relations, embodied in an individual (psychological functions built according to social structure) (1989, p. 66).

Vygotsky suggested, correctly in my view, that what drew Marx to Hegel was apparently Hegel's ability to anchor the realm of human freedom in the vicissitudes of human history.

In this respect, Vygotsky is the Feuerbach of Marxist psychology. According to Vygotsky

L. Feuerbach's wonderful phrase might be taken as the motto to the study of development in abnormal children: "That, which is impossible for one, is possible for two." Let us add: That which is impossible on the level of individual development becomes possible on the level of social development. (1993, p. 218).

It was Feuerbach who prepared the road to Marx and the conceptualization of Marxist philosophy. In his article *Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic*, Marx viewed Feuerbach as "the only one who has a *serious, critical* attitude to the Hegelian dialectic" and credited him for having "laid the foundation of genuine materialism and real science" (Marx, 1844/1963, p. 197). If Vygotsky is the Feuerbach of Marxist psychology, who will be the Marx of Marxist psychology? In my view, Marxist psychology is in need of its own Marx, a Marx who will rework and rebuild on the Feuerbach (Vygotsky) of Marxist psychology. In conclusion, Soviet psychology and Western materialist psychology have produced the Feuerbach of psychology (in this case Vygotsky), but not yet the Marx of psychology.

CONCLUSION

Vygotsky, whose premature death at the age of thirty-seven in 1934 was a serious loss to Marxist psychology. He will be remembered for three things. Firstly, he played a major part in reviving the Marxist approach to psychology which had been suppressed by the positivism-scientism versions of Marxism. Secondly, in his major works, Vygotsky made a positive and original application of Marx's method, which in Marx's works often suffered from vulgar dialectical materialism. Thirdly, Vygotsky is the Feuerbach of psychology, but not yet the Marx of psychology.

Vygotsky had read many texts by Marx and on Marxism. His ideas were grounded in a philosophy that was both dialectical and materialist. Doubtless, he did possess the necessary philosophical, political, literary, economic, history and culture to bring to a successful conclusion the extremely complex and difficult task he had set himself. This task was to create psychology's own Das Kapital.

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