

# THE COLLECTED WORKS OF L. S. VYGOTSKY

Volume 6  
Scientific Legacy

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## PROLOGUE

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### 1. Preamble

*Scientific Legacy* is the title of this collection, which was published in Russian after Vygotsky's death. This volume is divided into three sections, ranging from tools and signs in child development to emotions, ending with an analysis of the emotions of actors. Before beginning this prologue, an introduction will be offered in memory of Lev Semonovich Vygotsky as a Russian first, a man who lived only until 1934, and who died at the early age of thirty-seven. Readers are encouraged to position his thoughts within the framework of *phenomenological bracketing*, or suspending one's own perspective, in order to gain an understanding of Vygotsky through his Russian roots. Vygotsky did not separate deeper levels of psychology from European (in particular, German and Spinozian) philosophy, all of which can be labeled non-classical psychology.<sup>1</sup> D. B. Elkonin was of the opinion that

. . . L. S. Vygotsky's transition from the interpretation of social environment as a 'factor' to the understanding of the 'social' as the 'source' of personality development symbolizes the beginning of *non-classical psychology of consciousness*.<sup>2</sup>

In speaking metaphorically, much of *classical* psychology can be compared with Newtonian physics, where Vygotsky's thoughts would then relate to newer areas of physics, such as complexity-chaos theory.<sup>3</sup> Vygotsky's vision was for the next century,<sup>4</sup> and has been called *height psychology* (viewing the potential future of an

<sup>1</sup>A. Asmolov (1998, pp. 6-24).

<sup>2</sup>A. Asmolov (1998, p. 21).

<sup>3</sup>"It seems almost certain that he [Vygotsky] used—and the editors have deleted—his favorite quotation from Trotsky: 'Man is himself *stikhia*,<sup>1</sup> *stoicheion* or elemental chaos, which is yet to be shaped into an authentic human being or superhuman . . .'" (Joravsky 1989, p. 263).

<sup>4</sup>V. S. Sobkin and D. A. Leontiev (in: Cupchik and Lázló (eds.), 1992, p. 192). "Vygotsky treated human psychology not as a natural science but rather as a synthetic science, integrating natural, humanitarian, and social knowledge. That is why so many of Vygotsky's enlightening hypotheses and insights have not yet been realized in concrete research on and knowledge of the human being. Vygotsky moved toward a new psychology . . . Perhaps it is the science of the human mind for the next century, which is expected to be the age of psychology. The more time has passed since Vygotsky's death, the more we see him ahead of us, lighting our path." It should be stated that within Asmolov's understanding of *non-classical* psychology, Freudian descriptions of the unconscious in psychoanalysis are viewed as an important source; however, within the parameters of *height* and *depth* psychology as described by A. A. Leontyev, the Freudian psychoanalytic treatment of the unconscious deals with personal problems for the most part.

individual), as opposed to Freudian (inter alia) *depth psychology*.<sup>5</sup> Vygotsky was a *meaning-seeker*, as opposed to a *rational formalist*,<sup>6</sup> focusing attention on the entire formation of *individual personality*.<sup>7</sup> He was a Marxist philosopher, and although it has been claimed that his Marxism could be compared to Althusser and Habermas,<sup>8</sup> Vygotsky lived in modern revolutionary times, implementing his psychology-philosophy as a guideline for ultimate societal change, especially in the development of the individual personality. And just as most contemporary interpreters of Descartes leave out his numerous references to God, many interpretations of Vygotsky have not attempted to position him within a Marxist framework. Even when this attempt is made, the *dialectic* often serves as the ultimate positioning of Vygotsky's thoughts (together with other concepts such as "cell"); however, there was another, higher level within which Vygotsky placed his overall theoretical framework, which was Spinozian *monism*. For example:

Monism was one of the central assumptions of the truly scientific . . . Marxist methodology; mind and body constitute a single reality in the functioning human being; therefore a single science must ultimately describe and explain the unity.<sup>9</sup>

In other words, Vygotsky truly transcended the concept of *dualism* while accepting it as a necessary point of departure for dialectical change. Readers are now encouraged to view Vygotskian thought as an attempt at synthesis, outside of Cartesian polarity. It is with this *double vision* that the reader is asked to view this collection of works from two perspectives simultaneously: the *dialectic* within a *monistic* framework. Vygotsky used variables such as *structure, function, organization*, etc., as instruments of dialectical analysis; however, dichotomies were placed within a unified whole. In other words: *one of the highest realms of Vygotskian psychology-philosophy is not located with the polarities of Cartesian dualism, but within Spinozian philosophy, which is ultimately monistic*. Within this perspective, the concept of *determinism* needs to be redefined. For example:

Since Spinoza was an eminent determinist, it followed from Vygotsky's presentation that a new form of determinism was generated in the philosophy of Spinoza—as a methodological base of a new psychological theory free of the birthmarks of the Cartesian method of thinking. According to Vygotsky, this theory has as its subject man as an integral and active psychophysical being, striving toward self-development, motivated only by bodily-spiritual needs. Its key category is the concept of motivation (Yaroshevsky, this volume, p. 264).

Vygotsky did not remain at the level of opposing dualities, such as conscious vs. unconscious, relativism vs. determinism, continuum vs. transitional break, etc. Higher ground is taken by Vygotsky in this volume (and in all of Vygotsky's works), which lifts his psychology-philosophy beyond many contemporary scientific theories of today.

Vygotsky's thoughts are situated within a Russian context and should not be directly compared with the Cartesian understanding of life. There is an overall continuity of Vygotsky's works from the very beginning, emerging in aesthetics, art,

<sup>5</sup>A. A. Leontyev (1992, p. 42). "If 'superficial psychology' (for example, behaviorism) passes appearance off as essence, and if 'depth psychology derives psychical existence from the sphere of the unconscious' and the 'unconscious itself does not develop,' that is, if depth psychology is in principle antisocial and antihistorical, then only our 'height psychology' is a truly scientific, social, and historical psychology."

<sup>6</sup>A. Asmolov (1998, p. 21).

<sup>7</sup>A. Leontiev (1996, p. 9): "Vygotsky is the creator of this 'new look' in psychology based on the priority of personality and on the idea of a constant dialogue between man and the world, man and culture, man and another people, man and himself."

<sup>8</sup>J. Bruner (1987, p. 2).

<sup>9</sup>D. Joravsky (1989, p. 264).

theater, literature, semiotics, poetry, etc. Vygotsky's untimely death prevented him from completing one of the most important articles explaining his detailed understanding of Spinoza. At the same time, Vygotsky was not totally uncritical of Spinozian philosophy related to his own psychology-philosophy. The last chapter of this volume is a fitting close to all of the *Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky*, with a return to Vygotsky's love of aesthetics and the theater. This volume is a tribute to the continuity of Vygotsky's thoughts and life, and to the organic and systematic valuing he not only wrote about, but also lived.

## 2. Tool and Sign in the Development of the Child

Vygotsky discussed Bühler's attempt to compare human and anthropoid behavior, concluding that this is not possible (except at the genetic level) because of the inclusion of speech and practical thinking. The discussion turns from the development of work, connecting tools, speech, and practical intellect to that of signs, child development, and symbolic activity. Vygotsky stated clearly that "the symbolic activity of the child is not invented by him and is not memorized" (p. 9). The question remains as to the sign: is it first mediated within the lower mental functions, or the higher mental functions? Vygotsky answers this question consistently:

The sign arises as a result of a complex process of development—in the full sense of the word. At the beginning of the process, there is a transitional, mixed form that combines in itself the natural and the cultural in the behavior of the child (p. 9).

Therefore, sign and meaning are not congruent at the beginning, but develop with the transition of the function of a word, ultimately turning inward, which transforms the whole structure.

Vygotsky's conceptualization of *word* can be used in understanding the relationship between the externalized/internalized *dialectical* whole. This example also offers insight into Vygotsky's use of *explanatory* psychology. *Word* for Vygotsky implies a socialized context that never stands alone. *Word* for him is a central feature of consciousness with an invisible, but constant circular relationship between *word-thought-word*. *Word*, according to A. A. Potebnya (1835-1891), is composed of sound, inner form (which consists of image-representation), and meaning.<sup>10</sup> Potebnya's theories contained a core element of the *asymmetrical*, necessary for the *dialectical process*. Each *word* was viewed by Potebnya as a *theory* within a socialized context, never standing alone. Once again, the example of Potebnya (a philosopher and linguist whom Vygotsky read in depth) reflects to some degree the *doubling experience* that one finds throughout Vygotsky's writings, and regarding *word*, it is understood here from a Russian perspective.

Often within linear, symmetrical models, development is assumed to progress continually; however, Vygotsky is of the opinion that for development to proceed from the social-intermental stage to the individual-intramental stage, the functions of simpler laws must be activated first, allowing for periodic regression:

Social forms of behavior are more complex and develop earlier in the child; becoming individual, they drop to functioning according to simpler laws (p. 11).

Another way of stating this is that transition from the *collective* to the *individual* form of behavior "initially lowers the level of the whole operation" (p. 53). Speech and symbolic signs are used for transformations from natural laws to higher mental

<sup>10</sup>See M. Yaroshevsky (1989, pp. 77-78); L. Matejka in R. W. Bailey et al. (1978, pp. 146-172); A. Kozulin (1990, pp. 19-20).

functions. Allowing for *asymmetry* is a key feature of Vygotsky's thoughts in many of his works, as in the following example: ". . . speech and action are related to each other and form a mobile system of functions with an unstable [hence, asymmetrical] type of interconnections" (p. 23). With speech, behavior can be controlled, in particular when the *planning function* is used to anticipate the future. In dividing the *planning function* from the *reflective function* of speech, many psychologists of Vygotsky's day viewed these aspects as being opposed to each other, while Vygotsky affirmed that there is an internal connection between these two functions. They actually connect the lower to the higher functions of speech, which helps to explain their true origin, while uniting the higher mental processes located within *origin, structure, and function* (p. 40). Once again, the paradox resurfaces, in which Vygotsky claims that one must be clear that the "history of development of each of the higher mental functions is not the direct continuation and further improvement of the corresponding elementary functions . . ." (p. 42). The higher mental functions *permeate* the lower mental processes, and *reform* all of them (p. 44). In studying the higher mental functions, Vygotsky is of the opinion that the only path is experimentation (p. 45), which demonstrates that he does not side with descriptive psychology, while at the same time placing his theories within philosophy. The path to understanding the unity of all mental functions is *development*. His concept of development is neither *intellectualist* ("discovery") nor *mechanistic* ("habits"), both of which serve only a subordinate position. In the beginning stages of child development, both natural and cultural components can be observed, and with this, *play* is considered to be the path of development of the child, along with the growth of sign activity. Development then proceeds from external to internal mediation, with Vygotsky cautioning the reader that a necessary regression usually takes place, as mentioned before:

Development, as frequently happens, moves not in a circle in this case, but along a spiral returning on a higher plane to a point that was passed (p. 53).

In touching upon the topic of perception, Vygotsky rephrases his understanding that

the laws that hold in psychophysiology of natural perception are not abolished with the transition to the higher forms that interest us but move as if to the background and continue to exist in a contracted and subordinate form within the new patterns (p. 28).

The older functions continue to exist as *subordinate units of the new whole*. From early stages, speech functions as an active part of perception, all of which includes movement. In the beginning of childhood, the initial focus is *direct* perception, without mediated speech, where the child perceives the *whole*. In the article "From the Notebooks of L. S. Vygotsky" (1983), there is a discussion of Asya (Vygotsky's oldest daughter) regarding perception, where Vygotsky stated that

speech dissects perception, pushes it along the way of analysis; it does not see ears plus eyes, etc., but enumerates like this. At first there is a verbal enumeration (analytical), which was taken for the atomistic character of perception itself (from the part to the whole); now it becomes clear . . . that this is not the case, that perception goes from the whole to parts. Our problem: Why does Asya, after perceiving the whole, enumerate just the parts in speech? (p. 11).

The natural positioning of perception and movement changes when the *word*, or another sign, appears in this process, with an *indirect, mediated* character being assumed. The description of perception follows the same developmental line of other theories, from centripetal to centrifugal, with an asymmetrical dialectic being included, and much room left for development from the whole to the center, returning to the whole.

### 3. Emotions

In Volume 1 of this series, Lecture 4 offers introductory thoughts on emotions, with an excellent summary by Jerome Bruner (pp. 11-13), much of which applies to the section in this volume. In the chapter on emotions, there is a long, detailed discussion regarding the James-Lange theory, and the general problem of deriving an understanding of emotions from physiological reactions. Although the James-Lange theory freed emotions from their phylogenetic roots (see Vol. 1, p. 11), the problem of emotions was still tied to primitiveness. W. B. Cannon (a physiologist and student of James), "rejected the concept that there is any simple connection between an emotion and its physical expression" (Vol. 1, p. 12). The fact that this chapter was not completed by Vygotsky, with the needed explanation regarding Spinozian theory, is disappointing in many respects (see p. 261 for an explanation). This chapter begins with a long and detailed discussion describing various animal operations in which Sherrington severed nerves, sometimes the spinal cord, internal organs, and at times, other groups of skeletal muscles in gruesome experiments, yet the dogs still experienced emotions after being operated on. Vygotsky was quick to point out that the *functional* consequences of emotions as a result of these experiments were not real emotions themselves; meaning that the animals only experienced *impotent emotions* in reality, not being able to respond appropriately with action, such as fleeing as a result of fear. Another example of the lack of correspondence of physical reactions being equivalent to emotions was given regarding patients with facial paralysis who could experience an internal sense of laughter.

The problem in general is that the theory of emotions has traditionally been positioned within an *anti-historical* (p. 155) understanding, without the inclusion of theories of *development* (p. 158). Vygotsky strongly felt a need to overcome Cartesian principles, with a link being made between the philosophical tenets of Spinoza, even though Vygotsky clearly believed that Spinoza did not have all of the answers to solving future psychological problems of emotions. Cartesian principles could not solve the problems of emotions/passions within a dualistic understanding, according to Vygotsky, who stated: "But passions, this basic phenomenon of the human soul, are the primary manifestations of the dual human nature combining the spirit and the body in one being" (p. 162). Instead of opposing one side with the other, Vygotsky stated that the duality between the lower/higher nature, body/soul, passion/will are natural occurrences; however, it was felt that although passions are situated within duality, they may be overcome.<sup>11</sup> Vygotsky's overall framework remains consistent, offering the final blow to the theory of Descartes. Vygotsky simply took Cartesian thought to its logical conclusion, which runs counter to human intuition:

The soul is localized and, thus, it is materialized and mechanized. Moving and activated by the body, the soul must itself be bodily; it is made of material substance regardless of all protestations that it is a thinking substance completely different from the body (p. 189).

... if the soul is involved in the mechanical circuit of passions and acts as a mechanical force, it must be subject to the basic laws of mechanics (p. 170).

At the same time what actually arises is a parallelism of *spiritual* and *bodily* facets of human passions. The soul is then viewed as functioning outside of life (p. 197).

<sup>11</sup>He [Spinoza] believed that human freedom was not, as was commonly held, indeterminacy of choice, but was self-determination, entirely by one's own nature, free from external compulsion. This, for him, was action proper, while determination by extraneous causes was passion, the subjection to which he called bondage" (Harris, 1992, p. 6).

Put together, Cartesian dualism leads to body/spirit, animals/humans, consciousness/life (p. 198). V. F. Asmus, with whom Vygotsky agreed, stated that the Cartesian doctrine is consistent with the church teaching of the day, namely *that the world from the beginning was created in all its perfection* (p. 199) for humans. Therefore, Cartesian philosophy is not only mathematical and mechanical, it is simultaneously metaphysical. Since Descartes' understanding of emotions can be traced back to embryonic development, originating close to the digestive tract, there is the conclusion that complex passions result from the embryonic states, with passions being innate (p. 202). If one accepts this position, then there is no real capability for *development*, with the *appearance* of emotions being able to change, but not the emotions themselves (p. 205).

In general, the James-Lange theory incorporated Spinoza's thinking while actually being linked to the thoughts of Descartes. The next position was represented by Dilthey, who returned to Spinoza's thoughts of *definition, precise nomenclature, and classification*, in order to focus on descriptive philosophy-psychology. Vygotsky voiced his surprise at the fact that the backward, *dead* issues of Spinoza were taken up by Dilthey, as opposed to other Spinozian future-oriented explanations that were *naturalistic, deterministic, materialistic, and causal* (p. 219). The problem here is that Lange's explanatory theories and Dilthey's descriptive theories both claim that their ideas lie within a Spinozian framework, while being opposed to each other. In the end, Vygotsky concludes that ". . . something of Spinozist teaching is contained in each of these theories that fight each other" (p. 222); however, Vygotsky goes beyond description and explanation, with what he calls *reconstruction, reestablishment, recreation of the whole concreteness of what is experienced* (p. 225). An overall summary of emotions is given on p. 227, paragraph 3, which would be an excellent starting point for understanding the entire chapter.

Although Vygotsky saw the need for both descriptive and explanatory psychology, he was most disturbed by the inherent *determinism* (here Cartesian, not Spinozian) within introspective psychology. By using Spinozian philosophy, Vygotsky was consistent when he avoided the attempt at splitting the mind-spirit-soul into bodily *elements*, since it is the preservation of the whole that is important. For Spinoza, the drive toward homeostasis did not represent equilibrium only but *self-development* (p. 263), being future-oriented. If more time would have been allowed Vygotsky, he would have written in more detail on Spinoza, including a critical analysis as well (e.g., perhaps regarding the lack of inclusion of *historicism* within Spinozian naturalism, see p. 264).

In conclusion, Vygotsky defended explanatory psychology; however, when separating *explanation* from emotions, experience needs to be viewed within historical development. Vygotsky's causal explanation of emotions is labeled *sociodeterminism* (p. 265) by Yaroshevsky.

#### 4. On the Problem of the Psychology of the Actor's Creative Work

The last section is a fitting close to the *Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky*. There is a discussion of different theories, for example, those of Stanislavsky<sup>12</sup> (whose

<sup>12</sup>K. S. Stanislavsky lived from 1863 to 1938. "His [Stanislavsky's] concept of acting, which he called the theory of emotional experience, was essentially opposed to the two dominating systems of theatrical performance of the time: the craft theory and the performance theory. Neither system needed active human communication and therefore did not study it. The adherents of the craft theory reduced every role to mere reproduction of certain clichés established in theatrical practice by generations of actors and completely ruled out the very idea of meaningful communication between actors on stage. Nor did the performance theory (D. Diderot, V. Meyerhold, and others) make a connection between partner communication and acting standards . . ." (Berkin, 1988, p. 7).

acting method was used in Hollywood during the 1940s-1950s); T. Ribot (who within the psychology of emotions replaced *dualism* with a *monistic* hypothesis of parallelism and interaction (p. 228)); and Diderot (who did not believe that the real passions of the actor were necessary for good acting). Two opposing positions regarding acting are presented: Stanislavsky's *internal justification*, or finding the *truth of the feelings on stage*, and Diderot's (in which the actor brings the audience to emotional heights, being devoid of personal emotion). Vygotsky quotes L. Ya. Gurevich in stating that "... the solution of the problem ... lies not in the middle between two extremes, but on a different plane that makes it possible to see the subject from a new point-of-view" (p. 243). This position represents the core of overall Vygotskian thought on various levels. It is argued that in order to understand Vygotsky's psychology, one must be versed in Vygotskian aesthetics.

By closing this volume with a return to the theater, including aesthetics, there is final closure to Vygotsky's thoughts and life, which recaptures the spirit of his first book *The Psychology of Art* (1925). It seems appropriate to end in a way Vygotsky loved best: Dobkin (in: Levitin, 1982, p. 31) remembers that "he [Vygotsky] even grew more fond of Tyutchev's poetry in those years. And with Tyutchev too he was able to find 'his own' lines, which were not purely lyrical but had a philosophical message. He would often recite:

We still believe in miracles  
For all the lessons and the Truths  
That life has taught us;  
We know there's beauty that won't pall  
And strength that cannot be exhausted;  
That flowers of a loveliness unearthly  
To earthly withering will not succumb.  
And dewdrops, fallen on them in the morning,  
Will not be dried up by the midday sun.  
It is a faith that won't deceive you  
If you live by it alone from first to last;  
Not everything that flowered once must wilt,  
Not everything that was must pass.

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