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consonant with my own 'theoretical orientation', but also singularly appropriate to a larger national and international scene, where different aspirants for national leadership seek, mainly through their verbal discourses, to define, regulate, and control, for all, the way (sociocultural) things are, why they are the way they are; who or what is responsible for the current (invariably unhappy) states of affairs; what ought to be done to bring about more optimal states of affairs, etc.

Given a modest metaphorizing disposition or the slightest penchant for parody, one may easily see, writ large, in the realm of the struggles for power, prestige, and hegemony among politicians in the narrow sense, processes which bear an uncanny ('unheimliche') similarity to the ones operative in academic conferences and in the academy at large. Hence, the route I have chosen in writing this preface, piggy-backing on the kinds of discourse which characteristically occur in political campaigns, enables me to by-pass either synopsis or criticism of any and all of the articles contained herein, and to focus, instead, on general advice to the diverse readers into whose laps this volume may fall.

In this light, let me begin with the assumption that each of the scholars who has contributed a paper to this volume has the underlying goal of persuading one or more of the readers of that paper to adopt his/her ways of looking at things, of representing things, his/her aversions and perversions, etc. In other words, I assume--and would urge every reader to assume--that all of the papers, however laundered to appear dispassionate and value-neutral, are rhetorico-political moves (symbolic actions) intended to affect what the reader thinks and does and how the reader thinks and acts. What I would like to call to the reader’s attention [whoever that reader is] is that, behind and in the symbolic actions which are verbally represented in these papers, are living, situated, passionate people, who have one or more axes to grind.

I hope thus to provoke in the readers a posture toward each of the various texts which would oblige them to ask: "Who is doing the representing, and under what aegis or banner?" "Why--for which purpose or purposes--is that Agent representing?" "What is the scene of representation?" "Who are the intended readers for this symbolic act?" "What effects does the speaker-author hope to institute by issuing this formulation at this time?" "What kinds of current practices, or putatively 'dominant doctrines', in that amorphous domain we call 'psychology' does the author hope to annihilate, exalt, marginalize or foreground by his/her verbal intervention?" And, finally, "What is at stake--is it of any importance to anyone--if I accept or reject what is said or what is proposed as a course of action?"

There are many other questions a skeptical and/or resisting reader ought to address to the articles in this volume, but these should start the ball rolling.

Caveat lector.

Bernie Kaplan
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THE RECEPTION OF VYGOTSKY'S IDEAS IN
THE NINETEEN THIRTIES

René van der Veer

SUMMARY: In this paper the author presents a selection of the criticisms
levelled against Vygotsky in the nineteen thirties. He defends the view that
while most of these criticisms were biased and scientifically unsound several of
them may serve as a starting point for the present-day assessment of Vygotsky's
ideas.

"Fashion exists in scientific research as it does in the creation of ladies' dresses and hats"
-Janet (1928, p. 321)

Lev Vygotsky is becoming something of a fashion in developmental
psychology. His work is invoked, for instance, when researchers wish to make
the trivial statement that children develop in a social context, or when they wish
to criticize alleged defenders of maturational theories (e.g. Piaget). Most of these
references are rather shallow and based on a limited knowledge of Vygotsky's
work. Characteristic of these references and even of more detailed analyses is the
virtual absence of any critique of Vygotsky's ideas. This is very unfortunate, for
there must be quite a few psychologists critical of his work and science would
benefit from open-minded debates between opponents and proponents of
Vygotsky's theories.

It is of some interest to know that criticism of Vygotsky's writings was
much more prevalent in the late 1920s and 1930s, that is, during Vygotsky's
lifetime. Unfortunately, this criticism had a strong ideological background and
Vygotsky and his co-workers were in no position to respond in scientific
journals. Hence, neither in the present nor in the past has a scientific debate
ensued over Vygotsky's ideas. In this paper, several of these historic points of
critique will be discussed in the hopes that they will stimulate the scientific
appraisal of Vygotsky's ideas.

Early Criticism: The Concepts Of Social Class And
Culture

Anan'ev (1931, pp. 341-342) was one of the first to attack Vygotsky and his
colleagues in the scientific press. Himself the victim of the anti-reactology
campaign he recanted in an article in "Psikhologija" and in an attempt to
diminish his own "guilt" he accused several of his colleagues of having
committed similar sins (Cf. Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). Vygotsky and
Luria, in particular, had espoused an unfortunate mixture of behaviorist and
psychoanalytic ideas and, most important, their theory lacked the concept of
social class. To some extent this criticism was justified but only if one ignored
the fact that Vygotsky's and Luria's ideas had changed considerably between 1920
and 1930. Indeed, Luria had been one of the most prominent propagators of psychoanalytic theory in the Soviet Union but his views had changed and in 1930 he was very critical of psychoanalysis. And, it is true, Vygotsky several times very positively referred to the work of, among others, Watson and Lashley but he never identified with behaviorism and explicitly stated that "Marxist psychology can only to a certain point follow the same road as American behaviorism and Russian reflexology. Being yesterday’s allies in the general war against subjectivism they may turn out to be our enemies of tomorrow" (Vygotsky, in prep.). The accusation that Vygotsky’s work lacked the concept of social class seems equally unfounded. In several of his works, for example, he paid special attention to the particular problems of working-class children and his and Luria's cross-cultural work investigated precisely the influence of social milieu on mental processes. Apparently, Vygotsky’s work was too general to the taste of Anan’ev and the critics who would follow him: instead of giving us a grand vision of child development as the mastering of cultural instruments he should have sketched the poor prospects of a proletarian child in a bourgeois society and instead of referring to bourgeois psychological theories he should have used Marxist catchwords such as "production means", "surplus value", etc.

Talankin's (1931a; 1931b) criticism of Vygotsky’s views was both more cautious and more sound than Anan’ev's. In two talks he attacked, among other things, Vygotsky’s concept of culture. In his first talk he stated that Vygotsky’s concept of culture was "crudely mechanistic" as it conceived of culture "as the sum of things, instruments, and symbols" (1931a, p. 15). In his second talk he slightly varied this theme claiming that Vygotsky and Luria thought of "culture as a system of things that organize the person's behavior. Of course, such a thing-like understanding of culture is a non-Marxist understanding" (Talankin, 1931b, pp. 39-40). Ignoring the question whether Vygotsky’s concept of culture was Marxist, we might do well to understand this criticism. Was Vygotsky’s concept of culture indeed selective, or biased towards "things, instruments, and symbols?" I believe this claim can be defended when one considers Vygotsky’s cultural-historical writings (e.g. Vygotsky, 1929; Vygotsky & Luria, 1930). Children’s cultural development was seen by Vygotsky and Luria as the mastering of sets of cultural instruments that are discarded at times for newer, more powerful ones. It is quite clear that in this context culture was seen by them as an arsenal of tools, artifices, and devices that enhance the level of performance. Likewise, societies were seen to differ in terms of the quality of the tools or intellectual instruments they provided to individuals and could be rank-ordered accordingly. Thus both in the case of child development and in the case of societal development we can speak of clear cultural progress in terms of the available sets of qualitatively different instruments. It was this conception that led Vygotsky and Luria to speak of "primitive", "natural", or "pre-cultural" children, and of Uzbek women as standing on a "low", or "very primitive" level of cultural development (Vygotsky & Luria, 1930, p. 123; p. 154). Vygotsky (1929) argued that the Uzbek people had to "take a grandiose leap on the ladder of their cultural development, jumping over a whole series of historical levels".
Such a leap was judged essential in order to reach "a unified socialist culture" (p. 367).

Indeed, it may have been the tendency to narrow down the concept of culture to the development and mastering of tools and instruments that led Vygotsky to these very questionable comparative remarks. For if we take a broader look at culture and include religious practices, moral doctrines, various ways of child care and other phenomena, the intuitively appealing idea of cultural progress loses its attractiveness and we are forced to acknowledge that cultures vary across different dimensions of which technological advancement is only one. Had Vygotsky taken into account other aspects of culture than the technology-like concepts of tool and instrument, he might have refrained from labelling children and cultures as primitive, or pre-cultural (see Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991 for a more detailed account). In this sense, then, Talankin's critical remarks seem justified in pointing to the need for an analysis of Vygotsky's concept of culture and its implications for the comparison of cultures.

Later And Posthumous Criticism: Eclecticism

The criticism of Vygotsky's ideas continued in the early thirties and was clearly orchestrated by competent Party centers. In 1932 the major journal "Pedologija" announced a series of articles critical of Vygotsky's ideas and the first two of these were judged too mild by the editorial board (see Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). However, this series came to an abrupt stop in 1932 when the journal was closed down.

It was Razmyslov (1934) who continued the attack against Vygotsky's and Luria's writings. Razmyslov partly repeated the accusations of earlier critics but also introduced a new element into the "debate" (Actually, there was no debate as Vygotsky and Luria never answered their critics. They were possibly not given the opportunity to reply in the scientific journals). According to Razmyslov Vygotsky was severely indebted to the writings of the "neopositivist" Durkheim. Of course, this claim took the form of an "accusation". Razmyslov held that simply stating the role of the collective in child development and emphasizing the role of cultural tools as Vygotsky had repeated after Durkheim was not sufficient. One had to make clear that children were living in very different collectives, or social classes. In Razmyslov's words this critique sounded as follows:

Everywhere, where it would have been necessary, from our point of view, to speak about the class, [and] production environment of the child, about the influence of the school, the Pioneer vanguard, and the Komsomol movement as bearers of the influence of the Party and the proletariat on the children...Vygotsky...simply speaks of the influence of the collective, not deciphering about which collective he is speaking and what he means by collective (Razmyslov, 1934, p. 81).
The suggestion that Vygotsky took inspiration from the writings of Durkheim is interesting. Indeed, Vygotsky had thoroughly studied Durkheim's work and several parallels between the writings of the two authors can be discerned. First, Durkheim (1985, p. 5) as well as Vygotsky defended the idea that any real explanation of complex social phenomena rested on the reconstruction of their development.

Second, Durkheim resisted the idea that complex mental functioning can be derived from the individual person. In his view each society shared a set of "collective representations" that imposed themselves on the individual. These collective representations were the carriers of the accumulated experience of many generations of people and could be compared to tools (Durkheim, 1985, p. 27). These tools were: "clever instruments of thought, that the human groups have... forged in the course of centuries and where they have accumulated their intellectual capital" (Durkheim, 1985, pp. 23-27).

Human individuals living in specific societies master the collective representations of those societies. In order to understand their mental functioning, then, it is not sufficient to study the individual, "it is outside ourselves that we have to look, it is history we have to observe" (Durkheim, 1985, pp. 27-28). It is not at all difficult to see that Durkheim's concept of "collective representations" resembles that of Vygotsky's "cultural tools". In both cases it is argued that individual mental functioning cannot be fully understood without analyzing the cultural heritage of the society the individual belongs to. In both cases this cultural heritage is seen in terms of a set of cultural instruments that fundamentally shape the mind of individuals.

Durkheim's influence on Vygotsky was more profound than can be related in these few pages (see Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991), but these few remarks will probably suffice to demonstrate that there are close affinities between aspects of the theories of Durkheim and Vygotsky. Razmyslov's (1934) suggestion that Vygotsky borrowed heavily from Durkheim deserves further investigation.

It is quite remarkable that the attack against Vygotsky's ideas continued after his death. Major journals published articles in which the authors fulminated against the author and his writings mainly because his views were deemed to be anti-Marxist and eclectic. This sad development was brought to a peak by Rudneva (1937), who in a brochure of 32 pages used all the means of rhetorics to invalidate Vygotsky's views. Distorting Vygotsky's views and attacking the author she concluded that his cultural-historical theory was counterrevolutionary as it was not compatible with the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Kirov, and Zhdanov (sic). She urged her colleagues to condemn Vygotsky's views "all the more as some of his followers (Luria, Leont'ev, Shif, and others) have not yet been disarmed" (Rudneva, 1937, p. 32).

Rudneva may have been overly worried, because after the Pedology Decree in 1936 Vygotsky's work was effectively banned (Cf. Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). His books were no more available in libraries and references to this work were no more allowed. It would take several decades before this ban was lifted and the first republications of his work became possible.
Conclusions

Drawing on sources from the 1930s we have presented a selection from the articles critical of Vygotsky's ideas. Most of the criticisms levelled against Vygotsky in that time were heavily biased and unfair. But there is no clear-cut dividing line between ideologically inspired and scientifically sound critique and the (base) motives of critics are not relevant for the judgement of the validity of their critique. With some hesitation, then, we suggest that several of the questions raised as to the validity and sources of Vygotsky's thinking deserve our careful attention. In particular, it was suggested that Vygotsky's concept of culture may be unsatisfactory and that his intellectual debt to Durkheim—and the French sociological school in general—deserves further study.

To some extent arguments that were advanced against Vygotsky's theories in the 1920s and 1930s may serve as a starting point for the critical assessment of his thought. Rather than claiming that Vygotsky was "a genius fifty years ahead of his time", we would do well to study his writings very critically and to acknowledge his indebtedness to other major thinkers. To proceed otherwise would be to do injustice to one of psychology's major thinkers and to turn his work into just one more of science's fashions.

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