Commentary

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Taking a cue from the title of Glassman's article, let us examine the motive and goal of its author. The goal seems to be to reunify Vygotsky's and Leontiev's theories and demonstrate that Leontiev's work represented an authentic extension of Vygotsky's approach that eventually contributed to the better understanding of Vygotsky's original theoretical position. There is a certain irony in the author's defending this thesis at all. In Soviet psychology of the 1960s and 1970s, it is the standard account of the relationship between Vygotsky's and Leontiev's theories. Only in the 1980s did this account begin to receive more critical scrutiny both in Russia and in the West.

Against such a background, there is a need to identify certain points that seem beyond doubt. One is an obvious dependence of Leontiev's work on Vygotsky's theory. Both the sociocultural orientation of Leontiev's work and its emphasis on activity are inherited from Vygotsky. Moreover, even in their critique of Vygotsky's theory, Leontiev and other members of the Kharkov group remained dependent on the theory, which served as their standard reference point. A second widely recognized fact is that Leontiev's research projects of the 1920s and early 1930s are so well integrated into the Vygotskian canon that they cannot and should not be removed from it.

Yet if one compares Vygotsky's and Leontiev's theoretical motives and goals from the sociocultural point of view, they seem quite different from one another. In his search for a new psychology, Vygotsky conducted a very broad and open 'dialogue' with representatives of various theoretical positions. This dialogue involved such interlocutors as Spinoza, Hegel, Marx, Freud, James, Levy-Bruhl, Piaget, Stern, Kohler and many others. Enough textual evidence exists to prove that though Vygotsky was certainly influenced by Marx's writings, Marx never had a privileged position in the above mentioned 'dialogue'. In this sense Vygotsky was never engaged in building a Marxist psychology.

Leontiev's sociocultural position was quite different. Almost from the very beginning of his independent career, Leontiev's theoretical choices were quite limited. In the Stalinist state where Marxism was declared as the one and only permitted philosophy and where any open dialogue with Western thinkers could lead to imprisonment, the search for a new psychology was by necessity full of half-truths, internal censorship, and outright opportunism. One should also note the tempting vistas of administrative advancement which led Leontiev in the 1940s to the most prestigious position of Dean of

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Moscow University's School of Psychology. Thus, with respect to Vygotsky, if the question is what might have been his theoretical development if he had lived longer, in Leontiev's case the question is to what extent did his published works express his true thoughts and intentions.

With the wisdom of hindsight, Vygotsky's and Leontiev's approaches seem mutually complementary. Vygotsky focused on the mediating role of symbolic tools that transform the individual's higher psychological processes. Leontiev, in turn, focused on those activities that eventually lead to the internalization of external human actions in the form of inner mental processes. Leontiev's major problem was developing a coherent theoretical model in which labor as a paradigmatic human activity becomes a source of psychological development of the individual. Working within the sociocultural and political constraints noted earlier, Leontiev was hardly capable of thoroughly exploring the motives underlying human activities. Whatever his original intentions, he produced no research that would elucidate the sociohistorical influence of labor on cognition.

The only area in which Leontiev and his students were consistently successful in linking external actions to internal psychological development was the sphere of education. But even within this sphere Leontiev's model worked successfully only as long as the motive of learning activity was taken for granted. For a large enough population of students that seemed to be true: Learning for the sake of learning was indeed a dominant motive of Russian primary school students in the 1950s and 1960s. However, as the sociocultural theory might predict, that was a historically and culturally specific phenomenon. When activity-based educational studies moved to older groups of students, and when the very fabric of Russian society started changing because of *Perestroika*, it became clear that motivation to learn cannot be taken for granted. Leontiev's followers discovered that learning potential developed in adolescent students was not realized: Students learned how to learn, but they were not interested in using this skill.

In a sense it is impossible to ascertain whether Leontiev's theory is helpful in elucidating Vygotsky's theoretical intentions, because Leontiev's theory itself remained poorly articulated. Those interested in pursuing Leontiev's theoretical paradigm confront the following formidable problems: (a) elaborating the relations between the material and symbolic aspects of labor activity and their reflection in psychological development; (b) identifying the relations between labor-related motives and interpersonal motives in a given cultural-historical context, and (c) identifying the culturally specific composition and sequencing of leading activities across the life span and their relation to emergent (or regressing) cognitive processes.

Each of these problems is both important and intellectually challenging. Yet, there is a feeling that their resolution may depend on the further development of such concepts as practical cognition, apprenticeship, and 'thick description' (explored by theorists such as Lave, Rogoff, and Geertz, respectively), rather than on resuscitation of Leontiev's theory.

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