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Personality, Culture, Language

*To the memory of two great philosophers
whom I was fortunate enough to know personally:
Evald Ilyenkov and Meraba Mamardashvili.*

What is personality?

The concepts referred to in the title of this article can be defined—
and have been defined—in a multitude of different ways. It would
be impossible to introduce all of these definitions here and discuss
their strengths and weaknesses. We will therefore attempt, with-
out giving definitions or categories, to simply explain the possible
interpretations we accept—and why.

We will begin with personality [*lichnost´*]. Our interpretation
of this category is rooted in the last works of L.S. Vygotsky as-
sociated with "height" psychology. In a manuscript from 1929,
"The Concrete Psychology of Man" [Konkretnaia psikhologiia
cheloveka] (Vygotsky, 1986), Vygotsky expressed an original
view of personality as a psychological category that is primary
in regard to activity and consciousness. It is not only activity and

consciousness, but, first and foremost, personality that is socially (culturally) determined—its essence is social.

In many recent works devoted to the ontogenesis of language and to the human mind overall, there are a variety of interpretations of the process of interiorization. In the majority of these works, however, this process is reduced to the interiorization of cultural facts or (and) culturally determined operations. In a well-known book by M. Cole and S. Scribner (1976), the "role of culture in mental development" is understood only as the influence of culture on cognitive processes. In a study by P. Tul´viste (1987), categorization is understood as being within human experience that varies and develops under the influence of a particular ethnic culture. Something similar (with the exception of their view of values as the result of cultural determination) can be found in the works of J. Bruner, even in his article about Vygotsky (1985). Of course, there is no doubt that "the world is a world of symbols in the sense that it consists of conceptually organized, rule-based systems of knowledge about what exists, how to achieve goals, and what should serve as an object of evaluation" (Bruner, 1985, p. 32]. However, can one believe that this is only a world of symbols, confined to concepts, goals, rules, and so on?

In jotting down notes about a personal conversation he had with the famous writer, V.F. Tendriakov, A.N. Leontiev once wrote, "I find (have) my 'I' not in myself (it is others who see it in me), but outside myself, existing in a conversation partner, in a loved one, in nature, and also in the computer, in the System" (1983, p. 241). Here "System" means the social structure, removed from a specific person—people can only personify the "System."

Another thought of Leontiev: "a return to the construction of the image of the external, multidimensional world in the consciousness of the individual, of the world as it is, in which we live, in which we act, but in which our abstractions do not 'reside' in and of themselves" (ibid., p. 255).

At the same time, for Bruner, Cole, and many other psychologists, that is exactly what the world is—abstractions "residing" in it—only a conceptual construct—it is a theoretical world.

I know of only three major thinkers who understand the world another way: L.S. Vygotsky, A.N. Leontiev, and M.M. Bakhtin. Let us hear what Bakhtin has to say.

"The world, where the act truly transpires and is performed, is the unified and unique world that is concretely experienced: seen, heard, felt, and conceived. . . . The recognition of my unique involvement in it, of my non-alibi, guarantees reality the unified uniqueness of this world" (Bakhtin, 1985, p. 511). If I do not put myself in this position, if I do not perform the act in a specific time and space, guided by specific emotional-volitional and motivational factors that are effective, and, at times, form here and now, then this world "disintegrates into the abstract-general, the only-potentially-possible moments and relations that can be reduced to that same only-potentially-possible, abstract-general unity" (ibid., p. 512). This is the world in which our abstractions "reside"; however, we live in another, real world.

Bakhtin goes on to talk about "large" and "small" experience.

> With a small experience, there is one perceiver (everything else is an object of perception), one free subject (everything else represents something dead), one thing living and open (everything else is dead and closed), and one who speaks (everything else is dumbly silent).
>
> With a large experience everything is alive, everything speaks— this is experience that is deeply and essentially dialogic. The world's thought is about me, the thinker; it is actually I who am objective in a subjective world. (Ibid., pp. 519–20)

My personality is the process (and the result) of placing myself in this key position in the world of a "larger experience." It is an interiorized "one and only" world in its interrelations, with my perception and my act, with my motives and my will, with my social experience and my values. The process of perception only reflects a part of the process of internalization: it forms an orienting basis for my activity in the world. These processes of perception are subordinate to personality, which defines and regulates them.

But, what is psychological personality? The answer can be found in the works of Vygotsky: it is the dynamic meaningful system

that incorporates motivational, volitional, and emotional processes, the properties of action and the properties of thought. All of these components have different relationships to one another and can form different "alloys." "In the process of social life . . . there arise new systems, new alloys of mental functions, unities of a higher order, which rule particular laws, particular interdependencies, and special forms of connection and movement" (Vygotsky, 1984, p. 328).

In the 1929 manuscript cited above, we find a somewhat different answer to the question raised: personality is fundamentally dialogic, it is always a drama, and not a simple (perhaps even contradictory) process or system of processes. For example, a person's activity is determined by different social roles "played out" by that person. Dramatic conflict may arise between my role as a judge ("I must condemn him") and myself as a human being ("I understand him") (Vygotsky, 1986).

To summarize: personality is the process of a person's constant self-definition in the real world that regulates the processes of perception, act, experiences, and so on. Personality is primary in relation to activity and consciousness.

Once the leader of the Georgian school of set theory, A.S. Prangishvili, once asked me, half in jest, "What is more important—our set or your activity?" I answered, as I recall, "If we say that personality is more important, then I do not think we will have any disagreements." Only much later did I realize that this was no joke.

What is culture?

The understanding of personality described above greatly narrows the spectrum of possible definitions of culture. We cannot accept any of the interpretations where culture is synonymous with "a world of symbols," and is interpreted as the aggregate or even a system of facts of culture that exist in a certain "social space" outside and apart from a particular person.

R. Brislin provided the simplest of all definitions: "'Culture' relates to those aspects of society in which all of its members

participate and that they all possess it and pass it down to the next generation. 'Personality' correlates with the unique combination of features . . . that differentiates individuals within a given society" (Brislin, 1981, pp. 51–52). Actually, this definition is deeper than it may appear at first glance. If personality is a self-definition in the "large," real world, then culture is a generalization of the same type as personality itself.

According to Hegel and Marx, the ideal essence of external things "immediately exists only as the form (manner, image) of an activity of a social person" (Ilyenkov, 1964, p. 220). Correspondingly, culture is a system of ideal phenomena that has its own real existence in the process of social activity of human beings.

A more consistent interpretation of the concept of "culture" in this sense is provided in the books and articles of the Armenian philosopher and ethnographer, E. Markarian (1969, 1973, 1983). For him, culture is the specific means of human activity. Cultural phenomena are any nonbiological means that make human activity goal oriented, allowing for the actualization of this activity in various situations and spheres of its application (Markarian et al. 1983, pp. 3, 4). Culture is always a dynamic unity of two currents: (a) the negotiation of existing standards and stereotypes, and (b) the standardization and stereotyping of innovations accepted by society (Markarian, 1969, p. 50). These ideas closely parallel Vygotsky's thoughts regarding the dialogic essence of human personality.

Not all social experiences or phenomena are cultural. Culture is function, but not substance: man as a social subject "is in control of himself" in a certain way that can and should be described in cultural terms. The same thing is true about social structure, social groups, and so on. There are at least three levels of culturally determined features of activity: (a) culturally determined features of individual mental processes and operations, in particular, categorization; (b) sociocultural norms, social roles, meanings overall that are associated with the consciousness of a given person; and (c) manners of behavior that are cultural in nature and are determined by particular features of one's personality. In traditional

Adygei society, there are, according to B.Kh. Bgazhnokov, two constructive principles that regulate decision making in various social situations. One is "honor" (*namys*), the other is "adygeism," that is, the complex of personality traits attributed to a "true Adygei."

Expressed metaphorically, culture is a type of indicator of the optimal way of acting in the world and of understanding the world, and an indicator of the boundaries that influence the selection of experience in this optimal way.

What is language?

Let us start with the concept of the quasi-object, or the ideal object, first developed in the course of Hegelian ideas by K. Marx, and further refined by the Russian philosophers E.V. Ilyenkov and M.K. Mamardashvili. This ideal object serves in social activity as a conversion of real connections and relations. These connections and relations, carried out in the process of activity, are transferred and projected onto a material object, which is, by nature, alien to them. They are reflected in this material object and somehow push aside those properties that were previously inherent and that reflect its functioning as a material object. The object begins to play the role of a substitute for the connections and relations that are transformed in it, but the object is not a direct and immediate reflection of these connections, relations, and properties. A typical example is money, in which materiality is completely subordinate to function, and which is a conversion of economic relations in society. It is not surprising that in one of Marx's manuscripts, money is compared with the sign, and in another manuscript, Marx writes, "Logic is the money of the spirit." From here an extremely important epistemological problem associated with the analysis of the quasi-object as converted into real connections and relations: how can we separate what is associated in the quasi-object with its "substance," its own properties, and its qualities, from what is carried over onto it and reconstructed within it? (Ilyenkov, 1964; Mamardashvili, 1970).

The quasi-object has its own "material existence." But, being used as an "immediate body of an ideal image of an external thing" (ibid., p. 224), this quasi-object, can then be converted into a sign. In signs, according to Marx, "functional existence . . . so to speak, absorbs their material existence" (1960, p. 140). The sign is an "object that in and of itself has no meaning, but only represents and expresses another object with which it has nothing immediately in common" (Ilyenkov, 1964, p. 224).

Of course, this last citation does not strike us, at first glance, as something fundamentally new in comparison with the traditional understanding. However, if language is understood as a system of such ideal objects, of linguistic signs in which a transformation replaces real connections and relations, we must not forget that between linguistic signs and quasi-objects overall, on the one hand, and phenomena of the external world, on the other, there is no direct and immediate correlation. We must not forget that a truly scientific analysis of the nature of the quasi-object demands that we introduce a mediating link, as Marx has done: this link is the system of social activity (Mamardashvili, 1968).

In language, what is presented to consciousness does not begin to fully encompass the essence of linguistic meaning. The meaning that represents the ideal aspect of the sign is the result of the transfer and transformation (in the Marxist sense) of connections and relations of actual reality that occur in activity. Consequently, the classical "triangle" of semantic relations, stemming back to Ogden and Richards, do not appear to be complete to us (see Leontiev, 1975, 1976).

Most linguists associate meaning only with the linguistic sign. But in reality there are at least three types of meanings: (a) linguistic (verbal) meanings; (b) meanings of images (images of perception, of memory, or imagination, that is, material meanings; and (c) meanings of operational components of human activity as immediate properties of this activity, for example, social roles as meanings. We will examine the second type of meanings, in particular, in the works of Vygotsky ("the meaning of things"), as well as the works of A.N. Leontiev in the article, "Perception and

Activity" [Vospriiatie i deiatel′nost′], and his last manuscript, "Image of the World" [Obraz mira]. Similar ideas can be found in the works of S.L. Rubinshtein, D.N. Uznadze, and many others, including Western psychologists.

In what way is the meaning of the word "table" associated with the meaning of an actual table that presents itself to our consciousness as an image of one type or another, or that we attribute to such an image? As a philosopher, I might answer this way: this image is by no means a sign, but a type of ideal object projected onto a real object, and subjectively merged with it into a unified whole (Vygotsky's object "duplication"). As a linguist, I might answer: the word "meaning" has two meanings—a narrower one (actual linguistic meaning) and a broad one (a linguistic plus an objective meaning). In some situations, we mistakenly equate linguistic meaning with material meaning, and vice versa. But as a psychologist, I cannot give a definitive answer to just how these two types of meanings are connected: as strange as it may seem, this problem has yet to be studied seriously. In any event, in a normal individual, operations with linguistic objects (words) and corresponding presentations of objects were essentially identical in an (unpublished) experiment by L.A. Dergachev.

It is paradoxical but true: a multitude of practical problems associated with teaching (and not only foreign-language language teaching) require the development of a comprehensive theory of meaning, for example, the problem of illustratability or the problem of the so-called visual semantization of a foreign word.

We will attempt to summarize the positions stated above: language is the entire system of meanings, including both linguistic and material meanings, that reflect the qualities and properties of the real world. Exactly how they reflect it can be described in terms of "transformation" and "transference," or as vehicles, which require a consistent distinction between real objects, quasi-objects, and signs.

But, in talking about meanings, are we talking truly (and only) about meanings?

In 1947, A.N. Leontiev first made reference to the fact that "sense" is a broader concept than "meaning." Meaning is a type of

core of personal sense. In a manuscript discovered after his death, we find the same idea about the image of the world, but formulated in a different way. In all of his works, Leontiev used the concept of a "sense field," which he borrowed from Vygotsky. In this field, objective meanings exist and function. These meanings, which represent more "sense" than "meaning," are potentially and actually "built into" human activity, and reflect the motives, experiences, and values of real people; they also form a unified and unique "larger" world, which is interiorized. Between the "larger" world and myself as a personality, there is a constant dialogue. And language (in the broad sense) is the means of this dialogue.

One of the most important premises of the Cartesian approach to scientific thinking is the clear distinction between an internal (mental) world and the World. We ask ourselves: how is the World reflected in "me," in my internal world? However, in asking this question we are not able to understand that "I" is also a part of the World, and that this World exists only under the condition of my existence and my activity in it. I am an inseparable, integral part of this World.

Otherwise, it is a different World.

It is difficult to continue this reasoning today, at the very least because, while we understand the problem overall, we lack the answers to a multitude of specific questions. And, not least of all because, while working on this article, I arrived at a point where I realized with horror that a discussion of even the most fundamental problems associated with the synthesis of approaches formulated above demands an entire book, and not a brief article. So, for better or worse, it will be necessary to stop.

Nevertheless, this article is necessary for me in order to enable those readers who are inclined to agree with its main theses to make further, independent steps in the proposed direction.

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