

LEV S. VYGOTSKY: THE MAN AND THE ERA

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ABSTRACT: Our interpretive essay situates the life and thought of the famed psychologist-educator, Lev S. Vygotsky within the confines of the frequently deadly political and ideological struggles taking place in the Soviet Union during the 1920s and 1930s. We analyze from a psychological point of view Vygotsky's rise and fall in a situation of revolutionary social change, "class struggle," "class hatred," ideological warfare, deliberately induced mass starvation, and the development of a totalitarian state based on the systematic use of terror. Whereas most Western psychologists have given minimal attention to the political and educational purposes for which Vygotsky's psychology was created, we emphasize that his Marxist orientation had a central influence both on his scientific preoccupations and on the course of his life. His revolutionary identity was anchored in a highly dynamic community with shared goals possessing a semi-sacred quality. Consequently, he experienced his later exclusion from this community as a kind of social and spiritual death.

My entire generation was infused with the energy of revolutionary change—the liberating energy people feel when they are part of a society that is able to make tremendous progress in a very short time.

Alexander R. Luria,
*The Making of Mind: A Personal Account
of Soviet Psychology*

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A quarter of the rural population, men, women, and children, lay dead or dying, the rest in various stages of debilitation with no strength to bury their families or neighbours.

Robert Conquest,
*The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization
and the Terror-Famine*

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1950s, Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky has been widely considered a key figure in 20th-century Russian psychology, an influential thinker and a prolific writer, who with his cultural-historical theory explored sociocognitive development. According to the main idea of this theory, the development of all higher cognitive processes and functions is by nature social and all social development has a cognitive basis. Social and cognitive processes are intertwined due to the processes (mechanisms) of internalization and externalization. The social basis of higher cognitive processes, in turn, is intertwined with the economic conditions prevailing in a given society. Using Marxism as a starting point Vygotsky developed a three-fold vision focusing respectively on phylogenetic, socio-historical, and ontogenetic development (Vygotsky & Luria, 1930/1993). The three processes of development could be brought together by a common Marxist vision based on the concepts of general and societal evolution, dialectical materialism, determinism, and the central importance of labor and of physical and psychological tools. Within this Marxist vision Vygotsky's special focus was on children's development and education within their historically and culturally constituted environments.

Vygotsky claimed that internalized signs mediate between environment and behavior, and that these sign-tools act as "psychological tools" which structure memory, attention, self-control, intentional behavior, and other higher psychological processes and functions. Prominent among the internalized signs is that kind of thinking which is shaped by or derived from the interiorization of speech. Speech, in turn, develops out of social communication and social interaction. To arrive at this way of thinking, Vygotsky followed a complicated route which led him from the arts to philosophy and on to the experimental sciences. His knowledge of the arts, various fields of science, world

literature, and the philosophical literature enriched his thinking and made it both unique and very progressive for the time.

In this essay we use the example of Russia's greatest psychological thinker to trace the situation of psychology research during the 1920s and 1930s in order to arrive at a better understanding of the societal situation of those decades. Describing the early years of the Soviet society we briefly examine the creative life of a gifted person in a situation of revolutionary change, "class struggle," "class hatred," ideological warfare, and the development of a totalitarian state based on the systematic use of terror. Our interpretive essay is concerned with social psychological, historical, and moral questions rather than with the details and scientific validity of Vygotsky's theory.

Our emphasis on Vygotsky's Marxist identity derives in part from the observation that this central aspect of his identity has frequently been neglected by his American followers. When beginning in the 1960s, American psychologists began to rediscover Vygotsky they often shoved aside the Marxist basis of his theorizing. We may note, for instance, that when his important work *Thought and Language* (Vygotsky, 1962) was first translated into English it was shorn of its Marxist references. Perhaps this is not too surprising in a country that had just gone through the rabidly anti-Communist McCarthy era. Other Vygotskyites in the West have considered his Marxist ideas to be of limited intellectual value when compared to the richness of his psychological legacy (1). Today, many of the more pragmatically oriented American psychologists treat Vygotsky's work as a kind of psychological gold mine that exists to be plundered for nuggets of insight and wisdom and hints for new research. In contrast, they tend to pay insufficient attention to the question how and for what purpose this gold mine came into being in the first place.

An example may suffice. Recently, many American psychologists have appropriated Vygotsky's concept of a Zone of Proximal Development, together with his idea that learning leads development. They use this concept to explain how under the guidance of adults children learn to accomplish actions that they later accomplish independently (Vygotsky, 1978). For the Marxist educator Vygotsky—but not for modern American psychologists—the idea of a Zone of Proximal Development contained political implications (Bodrova, personal communication, June 1997). The idea could be used to lend support to the proclaimed goal of Soviet education: to create the new Soviet Man, the kind of being that would be needed in the Soviet society of the

future. In this context it may be maintained that the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development has a subtle authoritarian tinge which distinguishes it, for instance, from Piaget's more democratic and individualistic emphasis on discovery learning.

Vygotsky considered himself first and foremost as a Marxist thinker who wished to contribute in theory and praxis to the construction of the newly evolving socialist society. He never doubted his commitment to Marxism and to the new society, and when toward the end of his brief life he was confronted with the threat of "excommunication" he grew despondent and disintegrated psychologically and physically. At the same time Vygotsky lived in an era when millions of people starved to death, were sent to labor camps, were murdered, and fought each other both physically and ideologically. In this unfolding tragedy Vygotsky was both an accomplice and a victim, sleepwalking through the creation of a monster state, which at the end of his life was ready to destroy him. His early death kept him from fully realizing that Marxism-in-theory and Marxism-in-Soviet-reality were and had to be two entirely different things (2). In this limited but fundamental sense he and his coworkers were poor psychologists, since they failed to comprehend the psychological mechanisms set into motion by the Bolshevik revolution, though it was just those mechanisms which would soon determine their lives. Instead, they preferred to live in a kind of Marxist ideological fog that protected them from seeing the harsh realities of Soviet life and their role in helping to create them.

The Revolution and its aftermath had liberated Vygotsky from the stifling restrictions of ghettoized life in a provincial town, and he responded to this liberation by eagerly committing himself to the idealistic revolutionary goals, as he understood them. At the same time his commitment prevented him from seeing that he was lending his support to a cause that destroyed the lives of perhaps 24 million people between the start of the 1917 Revolution and the end of his life in 1934 (Conquest, 1986; Figes, 1996). More bloodshed and more misery were to follow.

THE SON OF THE SILVER AGE

Vygotsky came from a rather well-to-do Jewish family and spent his early childhood in Orsha, a provincial place between Minsk and Gomel, Belarus. His heritage was both Russian and Jewish, and he

shared both cultures equally. Vygotsky viewed himself as a son of the Silver Age of Russian culture, looking back with admiration to the Golden Age of Russian literature during the 19th century, but also looking forward to a future when Russia's general backwardness would be overcome through decisive revolutionary action accompanied by social and cultural transformation.

During childhood Vygotsky's most important books were the *Talmud* and the *Torah* in Hebrew. They taught him how best to conduct one's life thereby shaping his worldview. Combined with his brilliant mind, Vygotsky's knowledge of the *Talmud* and the *Torah* continued to exert a considerable influence on his civilian and everyday activities as well as his scientific approach. Later, he would endorse a historical and dialectical approach which reflected a similar dramatic emphasis on cultural-historical development, the struggle between good and evil forces, collective action, the hope for collective salvation, insight into the ultimate meaning of history, and the same comprehensive quality that he had learned to appreciate in the *Talmud* and the *Torah*. Historical materialism and dialectical materialism became the centers of his worldview and his chosen methods (3) to approach the decisive questions of social existence.

When tracing Vygotsky's biography, one comes to realize that he could have succeeded in almost any area of human activity and any field of human knowledge. And he did. He received a very broad education that left many alternatives open to him. At the university he enrolled first in medicine for one month but then switched to law. Later to come were philology, then linguistics, then philosophy, and finally, psychology. Though he did not receive a systematic education in psychology, he studied both historical thinkers and many of the most important thinkers of his time. Influenced by most of the psychological and philosophical trends of his time, he was enriched by them but never became a simple follower of any of them.

Vygotsky became a significant force in Soviet psychology following his move to Moscow in 1924 (Daniels, 1996, p. 49), where in the late 1920s he worked together with a group of talented collaborators. Though still young, the well read, charismatic, ever talkative but fragile Vygotsky provided the central theoretical inspiration for this group (Luria, 1979). These included Alexander Luria, Alexei Leontiev, Lidia Bozhovich, Alexander Zaporozhets, Natalia Morozova, Rosa Levina, and Liya Slavina.

Vygotsky completed most of his work on psychology in a mere ten years while suffering from bouts of tuberculosis. But no matter how

difficult his environment and how debilitating his illness, Vygotsky continued writing under an inner creative compulsion. Given these conditions and his essentially literary imagination, many of his writings possess a sketchy, hurried, and impressionistic quality. His work remained an unfinished torso, with much of it unpublished for many years because of political and other reasons.

Vygotsky's explorations started with the arts, proceeded to the natural sciences, and ended up with experimental psychology. They were highly fruitful. First, he wrote what remains to this day one of the best books on the psychology of art (*The Psychology of Art*, which remains underestimated by both Russian and American researchers). It focuses on Hamlet, his favorite character (see below). Later, Vygotsky wrote *Thinking and Speech* and *Mind and Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*.

Vygotsky wrote successively about experimental psychology, "defecology," Kornilov's reactology, Pavlov's theory (a critical appraisal), and Freudo-Marxism (an attack), to finally develop his cultural-historical (or historico-cultural) theory which makes contributions not only to psychology but also to cultural anthropology. Vygotsky developed ideas about concept formation and the relationship between thought and speech and between thought and motives, thereby making contributions to psycholinguistics and sociocognitive theorizing. Some of his main ideas and findings remain actual and valuable even today. More generally, Vygotsky's talent enriched three major areas of knowledge of the time: Linguistics, Psychology, and Anthropology.

A HAMLETIAN SPIRIT WITH MARXIST DISPOSITIONS

While attending gymnasium in the town of Gomel, Vygotsky began to write his most passionate and personal work, an analysis of Shakespeare's Hamlet which he later submitted successfully as his doctoral dissertation. Russian intellectuals have often sublimated their religious strivings in literature and art, and the young Vygotsky followed this time honored tradition. He was in so many ways a Hamletian type of personality referring, for instance, to "My Hamlet" when defending his dissertation in 1916, and also afterwards. In his dissertation Vygotsky exhibited a fine feeling for the seemingly metaphysical forces that manifest themselves in Hamlet's mysterious encounters with ghosts and shadows, and he fully identified himself with the death-haunted, existential hero. Given Vygotsky's early debilitating

encounters with tuberculosis, the romantic opposition of the forces of life and death in Hamlet's youthful character found a ready echo in his lively adolescent soul. He responded deeply to Hamlet's brooding melancholy and to his awareness of the solitariness of human existence which time brings soon to its inevitable end (Kozulin, 1990).

On the eve of the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, Vygotsky seems to have suffered from a deeply rooted existential alienation in which, perhaps, personal discontent and discontent with the seemingly disastrous course of Russian society were intermingled. Given this psychological situation Vygotsky was ready to listen to the Bolshevik siren calls for national (and ultimately universal) redemption and societal reconstruction. For him, the bloody destruction of the old society ushered in a new era of passionate commitment and hope. (4) Like others, Vygotsky seems to have become attracted to Marxism because he perceived it as modern, scientific, and future-directed in contrast to the dismal conditions under the Czarist regime which was reactionary, dogmatic, anti-Semitic, and lagging behind West and Central European political developments. In this context it was natural that Vygotsky should have become a Marxist scientist, adopting Marxist versions of determinism and dialectics as his analytical tools. Vygotsky believed that the Marxist perspective provided the key for solving crucial scientific dilemmas and for overcoming the "crisis of psychology" (Bühler, 1927) of those days. Having as a Jew endured all the fears of progroms and oppressions in Gomel, his hometown, he looked at Marxian ideology and at Bolshevik promises of proletarian freedom as representing rational, humanistic, and European promises of salvation and redemption.

Two directions in Jewish thought were then widespread representing the evolutionary and the revolutionary ways of trying to overcome Russia's general backwardness. Vygotsky belonged to the revolutionary wing.

In the early 1920s, discussions about the best way to use Marxism were still in progress. For about 15 years after the Bolshevik revolution the role of and various perspectives within Marxism continued to be debated more or less openly. The social democrat Martov, for instance, was discussing Marxian political issues in a European style of discussion. In a letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party in January 1921, Martov expressed his doubts as to the relevance of Marxist economic doctrine to the post-war world: "The state of the world is at present so exceptional that it does not at all fit into our usual schemes of Marxist analysis; to infer the main line of devel-

opment requires fresh scientific study which would significantly add to and might possibly change the economic conceptions of Marx" (Getzler, 1967, p. 225). (The young Vygotsky, too, derived from Hegel, Marx, and Engels more a general approach than a specific theory concerning psychology, which in his view remained to be developed.) Martov was soon accused of violating Party discipline, exiled for disobedience, and died in exile in 1923. His party comrade V. I. Lenin played a major role in that. The suppressing mechanisms in the Party, the systematic exploitation of class hatreds, and the calculated use of terror were not invented in one day, but they were nevertheless inherent to the Party. They constituted the chief aspects of the Bolsheviks' Party discipline and of their approach to dealing with political disagreements and problems.

Marxist-Leninist discussions and "dialogues" were becoming usual for psychology, and naturally prevailed also in ideological debates, politics, and economics. At times, they appeared to have a hidden agenda, namely to discover the intellectuals and important thinkers in the various intellectual fields and areas of activity, to set them against each other, and to ensure that they would destroy each other (5). In politics the end of relatively free Marxist discussions occurred already in the early 1920s, in political economics in the second half of the 1920s, in pedagogy and psychology in the mid-1930s, and in biology during the late 1930s. Thus, in the early 1930s, restrictions of Bolshevik scientists against freethinking about social issues appeared. Many in the new generation of Bolsheviks were poorly educated, resented those with higher education, and were suspicious of them. They could easily enforce their restrictions in a fragile society, which for a brief period had been trying to become open.

As a result of local party meetings and "scientific discussions," great thinkers were turned into victims and scapegoats, helping the Bolshevik/Communist Party to "reveal the hidden enemies of the people." In this context Vygotsky's foremost coworker, Luria abandoned his study of cultural psychology to concentrate on the clinical aspects of neuropsychology, which saved him from getting involved in most of the ongoing ideological and political disputes (Luria, 1979). Vygotsky himself was not attacked directly, but nevertheless was implicitly perceived as a *persona non grata*.

Between 1929 and 1934 (the year of Vygotsky's death), the Communist Party waged war against the "reactionary" peasantry of the U.S.S.R., who made up four-fifths of the population. Following Leninist-Stalinist theory, the leadership decided to destroy the peasantry

through the twin processes of “dekulakization” and collectivization, since they perceived an independent peasantry as posing a major threat to the rule of the Communist Party. Dekulakization meant the deportation or outright killing of millions of kulaks, a term which in practice referred to those peasants who either owned small plots of land or who resisted the Party’s plans in any way (Conquest, 1986). Most surviving peasants were concentrated in kolkhozes (collective farms), under the control of the state. These events were followed by a deliberately induced terror-famine, resulting in the additional deaths of millions of surviving peasants and members of the kolkhozes. In the Ukraine and in parts of Soviet Central Asia (such as today’s Kazakhstan), perhaps one-fourth of the population lost their lives during this terrifying sequence of events, which should be considered one of the great crimes of the century (Conquest, 1986).

While these events were beginning to unfold, Vygotsky prepared and, in 1931 and 1932, Luria organized two psychological expeditions to Soviet Central Asia to validate Vygotsky’s Marxist hypothesis about the close connection between the political-economic and the social-cognitive dimensions of human existence. Vygotsky predicted that the ongoing change from the “feudalistic” conditions prevailing in the traditional villages of Uzbekistan and Kirgizia to the more modern, scientific, and collective forms of agricultural production in the kolkhozes would induce former peasants to think in less “primitive” and more modern, “scientific,” and logical ways about cognitive and social issues and problems. Many years later, Luria (1974, 1976) would publish in more detail some of the results of these expeditions. They seemed to prove that, for instance, the traditional, mostly illiterate Muslim peasants and pastoralists in his study were unable to solve simple syllogisms or to engage in counter-factual thinking, because their minds remained wedded to the concrete circumstances of their lives. In contrast, some of the more modern and better educated persons gathered in the kolkhozes and elsewhere comprehended many of the syllogisms and could also engage in counter-factual thinking and in thinking about hypothetical situations. In Piagetian terms, the latter findings would seem to indicate the presence of some kind of formal operational thinking.

Vygotsky and Luria, however, were sharply criticized for their “cross-historical” and cross-cultural interpretations of the expeditions’ results, which they had published in two brief, preliminary articles (see below).

Vygotsky and Luria’s experiments and their interpretations of their

results were based on Marxist assumptions about the evolution of society, an evolution that "Socialist Reconstruction" was trying to hurry along in a forceful way. While celebrating their experimental results as providing important support for their cultural-historical theory, the two psychologists conveniently overlooked the endless suffering, naked terror, and brutal Russian imperialism that went hand in hand with "Socialist progress" in Uzbekistan, Kirgizia, Kazakhstan, and elsewhere. Their Marxist convictions and their (implicit) Marxist "idealism" blinded them to the sheer inhumanity of Socialist Reconstruction and to the strangeness of the idea that proletarian freedom could be won by starving peasants into submission, sending them to the gulags, or killing them outright.

It might be useful in this context to try explaining how Vygotsky's humanistic idealism demanded that he close his eyes to the deeply destructive nature of Bolshevik revolutionary action. Idealism is in general based on a person's unwillingness and motivated inability to perceive his or her Jungian shadow and the shadows of idealized others, that is, both one's own and the others' inherent potential for deception, self-deception, indifference, destructiveness, and cravings for power. Such tendencies are then unconsciously projected onto one's (perceived) adversaries, enemies, and members of various outgroups and outcasts (e.g., capitalists, "enemies of the people," traitors of the Proletarian cause, Muslim and other clerics, kulaks, conservative thinkers declared to be reactionaries, etc.). Seen in this light, idealism goes hand in hand with a form of self-deception that helps the person maintain a more acceptable picture of oneself and certain others. It points to a lack of a special form of courage, which otherwise would guide the person "to face the music" and to see self, others, and life as they are rather than as one wants them (and fears them) to be. For all his creative psychological theorizing, Vygotsky tended to be such an idealist for much of his life, neither fully understanding himself, nor his complicity in the supposedly liberating but in fact highly destructive drive toward a Communist society, nor Lenin and Stalin and their henchmen and apparatchiks (6). The task of understanding his rapidly changing society was made more difficult for Vygotsky because there was no historical model of how a Communist society might develop and go astray.

A further reason for Vygotsky's (and Luria's) refusal to seriously question what was going on lay in their privileged position as members of the Soviet intelligentsia. Although Marxist intellectuals typically claim that they act and think on behalf of "the people," they are in fact (or implicitly expect to become) part of the power elite of their

country. The deeply corrupting influence of this kind of power pervades the whole history of Communist nations, and though Vygotsky was more resistant to such influences than his coworkers Leontiev and Luria, he could not escape them altogether. In addition, Vygotsky had for medical reasons remained in Moscow during the expeditions, and so he was not directly exposed to the events then beginning to take place in far off Central Asia or in Ukraine. The expeditions' leader, Luria, however, apparently wished to remain oblivious to the mass destruction perpetrated by the Soviet State to the end of his life in 1977. Like many others before and after him he engaged in willing suspension of disbelief. The two quotes by Luria and Conquest at the beginning of this essay demonstrate the enormous gap between the horrifying realities of life in the Soviet Union and Luria's non-seeing perception and enthusiastic evaluation of what had indeed occurred. While for Luria society was progressing in leaps and bounds, for the kulaks and many others this "progress" meant famine, exile to Siberia, death, destruction of their traditional form of existence, and servitude as serfs of the state.

In 1936, The Central Committee of the Communist Party issued a special Executive Decree banning "tests" (*testi*) and outlawing "pedology" (Takooshian & Trusov, 1992). Pedology was a kind of action-oriented educational psychology emphasizing a psychological approach to child development, testing, and certain kinds of intervention by educators. Because Vygotsky was both a leading representative of pedology and a central figure behind the expedition to Soviet Central Asia, he had committed two deadly sins. On one hand, he wanted to "classify" Soviet children into groups according to their thinking abilities; on the other hand, he tried by his theory to prove that some peoples or social classes within an "absolutely free country" were more advanced than others. This decree meant that Vygotsky's ideas, in general, were now considered "bourgeois" in nature and as lying outside Marxism-Leninism.

Vygotsky may serve an example of a kind of Marxist thinker who is in search of Marxist truth, while trying to develop a metacognitive dimension of human learning in relation to development (Ivic, 1989). Because he was a cosmopolitan thinker, he was bound to become a target for the attacks of the new Bolsheviks, who themselves were slavophilic, ideologically and politically intolerant, and enmeshed in the mechanisms of political power which were evolving into an ever more totalitarian state. Furthermore, some of the slavophilic proponents used code language to hide anti-Semitic ideas and purposes.

While the time of "open and free" discussions was coming to an end,

the stage of revolutionary scapegoating was beginning. In the early 1930s, the time for creating victims in the field of psychology had arrived. Unable to understand why this should be so, Vygotsky nevertheless realized that he was now considered to be outside Marxism. In this context, Bluma Zeigarnik, Vygotsky's assistant in a psychiatric clinic, remembers how Vygotsky ran to and fro in the clinic, saying, "I do not want to live any more, they do not want to consider me a Marxist" (Joravsky, 1989; Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). While it may be difficult for non-Marxists to understand Vygotsky's despondency, it is useful in this context to remember the powerful descriptions by Koestler and others of the psychological disorientation that former Marxists tend to experience when they leave the Party, or are excommunicated from it (Crossman, 1950; Koestler, 1941). For the sensitive and highly social Vygotsky, the Party provided a home and Communism a philosophy of life that provided hope and meaning to his suffering. When he realized that he had been placed outside this home, his hopes dwindled, the meaning of his existence evaporated, and he had to face death alone. It must have seemed doubtful to him that the legacy of his brief life would survive in the face of rapidly mounting political hostilities.

Vygotsky also realized that according to the values now prevailing around him, "Man was created for Sabbath, not Sabbath for Man." By this he meant that ideas exist to serve man, rather than man being the servant of ideas; Marxism should serve society and the people, rather than the other way around. As a free thinker, he liked to cite the New Testament but such citations were now becoming more and more dangerous; they meant that one would be blamed for religious feelings and for the unforgivable sin of idealism in a society where materialism and atheism had become the obligatory way of scientific thinking. Given that philosophical materialism is in direct conflict with philosophical idealism, Vygotsky's use of independent ideas (including his use of religious or psychological concepts) was perceived as a threat to Marxist-Leninist ideology and its conception of class warfare.

IN SEARCH OF A CENTRAL ORGANIZING FORCE

According to Vygotsky's theory, culture organizes human cognition, and human conduct is intertwined with all higher psychological functions, as they emerge in ontogeny.

The Soviet policy-makers declared that the Communist Party was the only organizing force of Soviet life, which meant that the Party had to be involved in every facet of Soviet life. The Soviet State viewed itself as the principal source of the arts, the sciences, and the everyday life of its citizens, who were becoming now tools of the state.

Both the dominant leaders of the Bolshevik Party and Vygotsky were in search of "a true organizer," that is, the one and only organizing principle. In this sense both sides were true Marxists. Their ways diverged, however, when they discussed the functions of Marxism, which, in Vygotsky's words, concerned the question of whether Man was to serve Sabbath, or Sabbath Man. The Bolshevik leaders did not oppose Vygotsky's "culture-organizing force" as such, but in a supposedly modest way they "had to" admit that they were indeed the source and core of the Soviet culture. The leaders' satellites and followers, in turn, supported the claims of their leaders and were eager to prove their loyalty and ideological purity.

The search for a central organizing principle and for ideological purity created an air of almost religious zeal, fanaticism, and intolerance together with many inner anxieties. Marxism-Leninism became a kind of *Ersatzreligion* (literally, replacement-religion), that is, it functioned like a monotheistic religion in its first, most revolutionary, and most intolerant stage of development. Marxism-Leninism combines a more or less scientific political, economic, and sociological analysis of society with an irrational, secular mythology of salvation and redemption derived from Judaeo-Christian sources. Based on a linear view of history, it assigns special importance to the Party (the central organizing principle), that is, a group of believers whose eschatological task it is to establish the kingdom of Communism on earth. Because it is derived from and functions like a monotheistic belief system and faith, Marxism-Leninism encourages the same kind of intolerance that has been endemic to dogmatic monotheism with its basis in canonical writings (7). Its believers are encouraged to search for a true understanding of the canonical writings of charismatic figures such as Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin, and this sets into motion a process of ideological debate and disagreement, ideological warfare, ideologically driven soul searching, accusations of heresy, threats of excommunication, and the formation of emotionally charged groups of believers dedicating themselves to the salvation of humankind in the face of external and internal evil which must be destroyed. The presence of internal evil demands special vigilance, and heretics must

be ferreted out and ruthlessly persecuted if Communism is to be victorious.

Many Soviet Marxists found in the Party a home where they formed intense if frequently conflicted and ambivalent bonds with each other. In Eriksonian terms they assumed a "totalistic identity," an identity anchored in a highly dynamic, struggling community with shared goals possessing a semi-sacred quality. Their lives were now focused on a powerful and deeply moral purpose lifting them out of and above their otherwise quotidian existence. For Vygotsky as well as for many others, to be excluded from such a community meant a kind of social-spiritual death, and a confrontation with the stark fact that they had staked their existence on a chimera. Few were ready for such a confrontation with their illusions and distorted self-perceptions. Furthermore, Marxist thought does not encourage psychological thinking about one's self, since it focuses the mind on political, economic, and sociological categories rather than on obscure psychological processes occurring within one's unique self. For hardened Communists, too much introspection implies bourgeois selfishness and a kind of softness unbecoming to true working-class fighters engaged in a life and death struggle. Instead, the needs of the self must be submerged in the service of collective higher goals. In exchange for this submersion, the self feels itself enlarged and as a part of a struggling community of believers shaping the destiny of the nation and of humanity. As the French sociologist Durkheim pointed out long ago, religion relies on very much the same "sociological" mechanisms that were at work in those supposedly scientifically based Communist communities (Durkheim, 1926).

Since few of the believers were fully prepared to face the stark realities of Soviet life, and since there is always a ready supply of pragmatically oriented persons in search of advancement, it was easy to find scholars ready to serve the developing Leviathan, the Soviet State. Alexei N. Leontiev (1903–1979), the former coworker of Vygotsky and later the leader of Soviet psychology, was one of them. "We all know that Marxist psychology is not one of many directions, one of many schools, but a new historical stage, the stage that is the beginning of a truly scientific and logical materialist psychology. We also have always been sure that in the contemporary world psychology has an ideological function, it serves class interests" (Leontiev, p. 4, cited in Yaroshevsky, 1996, p. 176). While it was not exactly obligatory to claim that Marxism is the only true science that has ever existed in this world, it surely was useful to do so, because, by repeating that

false phrase, one could become more secure and powerful, destroy others, assume authority, and acquire many worldly items. In addition, one could feel oneself to be in the vanguard of a world historical movement toward a classless society which served the true interests of the formerly dispossessed.

From official Soviet sources we learn that in 1930 a constellation of circumstances forced Alexei Leontiev to resign from the Academy of Communist Education in Moscow (Leontiev, A. A., 1983, p. 11), but he continued working in Kharkov, then the capital of the Ukraine, together with A. Zaporozhets, L. I. Bozhovich, A. Zaporozhets, and P. Zinchenko. They established a program in developmental psychology focusing on the problems of the internalization of cognitive operations and the relation between the external activity of a child and the mental operations corresponding to it. While Vygotsky had focused on the mediation role of signs and symbols, the Kharkov group devoted their entire attention to the psychological aspects of concrete activities, emphasizing the internalization of sensorimotor schemes in higher mental functioning. Alexei Leontiev's (1932) study of natural and instrumentally mediated memory and attention remains a classical example of such an approach. Subsequently, he developed his activity theory which represented, at least in part, a response to immediate political circumstances. The Kharkovites were attempting to develop the analysis of mediation through activity in such a way that it would fit into the dominant interpretation of Marx arising in the latter part of the 1930s in the Soviet Union (Daniels, 1996, p. 8; Kozulin, 1990, p. 247). Their understanding and interpretation of the determination and organization of higher mental functions diverged from Vygotsky's, because they emphasized the direct, "psychophysiological" internalization of class-based, productive activities in the process of labor. Because this theory sounded so wonderfully Marxist in character, the emerging gap between Vygotsky's original ideas and the Kharkovites' scientific orientation served to ensure the political survival of the Kharkov group.

The Communist leaders succeeded in a masterful way in making scientific schools fight each other. Once a winner had emerged in these struggles, his position would then be declared the only truly Marxist and scientific one by the dominant leaders. Such a sequence of events occurred in many different fields including philosophy, biology, linguistics, political economics, and psychology (Solzhenitsyn, 1973, p. 50). The Party had only limited interest in science, unless it gave the Party leaders power and control over the citizens or led to

fame in the international arena. In this way, Soviet science tended to become an instrument for political manipulation and suppression. A key mechanism for glorifying one scientist or group while suppressing other scientists or groups was the Communist local organization meeting where one scientist and thereby his group was criticized, while another group was extolled. In this way, the Kharkov group became politically accepted and grew to be dominant over Vygotsky's group.

THE THEATER OF THE ABSURD

According to a general notion prevailing in the former Soviet Union, Marxism-Leninism serves two functions: the scientific function, indicating that it represents the only true methodology of research, exploration, and investigation; and the ideological function, which means that it is the proper instrument for fighting against the enemies of the people, in the name of the revolution. The battle would help overthrow the old society and usher in a new and better world. In the presence of class struggle and class hatred, Marxism in the hands of the Soviet leaders became a notoriously useful weapon of destruction.

The first function of Marxism-Leninism manifested itself in the form of debates in the sciences, humanities, arts, and so on, which depended on covert inner mechanisms of conformism and masochistic respect for authority. The debates were both of a primitive and an aggressive character, and scientists were frequently ridiculed for or accused of not being atheists, since scholars were expected to be "combative atheists." There was no privacy at all. The Communist leaders of local organizations had or took the right to instruct both developing communists and various Party nonmembers within their organization or in their community, teaching them how to live, behave, and think.

These debates were first carried into the Communist cells existing in all organizations, such as faculties, institutes, the academy's party organizations, and also into the mass media which were instructed to agitate and disseminate communist propaganda. This way the debates were carried into the sciences. For instance, the "crisis of Western psychology" (Bühler, 1927) was explained by claiming that Western psychological theories were idealistic rather than materialistic and atheistic. Vygotsky with his vivid and creative imagination was frequently viewed as a conflict-ridden person and scientist, attacking both Freudo-Marxists (those who wanted to enrich Marxism with

Freudian ideas and epistemology), and the principles of Pavlovian physiology. Pavlovian physiology, however, was later declared the officially correct form of psychology. In this tense atmosphere, the scientific debates frequently took on the form of personal battles. They exhibited a special intensity because the contestants' personal welfare and survival were frequently at stake. At the same time few dividing lines separated scientific disagreement from ideological warfare, since Marxism encourages one to interpret all social scientific activity from an ideological point of view. Few seemed to realize that the scientific approach is inherently incompatible with any Marxist ideology claiming to be based on "Truth."

Labeling was an accepted form of scientific activity, and during his last years Vygotsky was among those who at times used this kind of "explanation" and criticism in his writings. For example, he likened Piaget to Mach and Bogdanov, who had already been ideologically and logically "crushed and ground" by Lenin in his famous *Materialism and Empiriocriticism* (1908). In Vygotsky's view Piaget, like Mach and Bogdanov, was "a prisoner of philosophical agnosticism, which begins with attempted reduction of mind to biological functions and ends unavoidably in idealism . . ." (Joravsky, 1989, p. 361) (8). It was so modern and so tempting to simultaneously label and accuse a scientist of being a reductionist and an idealist. Vygotsky, in turn, was soon labeled and accused at the Communist Academy of Education's party meetings because he "offended Soviet children." (Note: Vygotsky, not his theory.)

Besides labeling, however, Vygotsky was also in search of the "psychological cell," which for him meant the search for *the* basic unit of analysis and ultimately, *the* central psychological truth. Vygotsky was a monist rather than a pluralist who believed that he or one of his successors would one day crack the nut of psychology and discover once and for all the fundamental psychological cell. When he criticized others he usually meant that their theories did not constitute "the psychological cell," since they obviously failed to solve key "methodological" (= basic metatheoretical) problems in psychology. What he did was not mere labeling in the sense discussed above; rather, it represented his wish to improve the criticized theory.

Marxism in its second function is a program to destroy capitalism through the use of class struggle and class hatred. Such a program clearly relies on psychological mechanisms. In the Marxist view, the resulting destruction will automatically result in a new and ideal world.

At the local party meetings, the scientific-methodological and the

ideological functions of Marxism were being manipulated in such a way that few could see (or wanted to see) Vygotsky's search for truth and his fruitful approach in solving psychological problems. Vygotsky was becoming dangerous because of his free way of thinking, which was considered a kind of disease at the time. In addition, Vygotsky was physically dangerous to his surroundings: he was suffering from contagious tuberculosis, then an incurable disease.

Because intellectual talent has only rarely been considered important in Russian culture, Vygotsky's openness, sincere faith in Marxism, genuine search for truth, and depth of thought were understood by only a few of his contemporaries. In contrast to Vygotsky's intellectual honesty, many of his peers and successors began to shape their psychological theories according to the Party's ideological wishes and requirements. They grew into more or less willing members of a "self-suppressing society."

THE SELF-SUPPRESSING SOCIETY

How could Stalin suppress so many people? One explanation is that by manipulating his enemies, Stalin did not destroy party comrades directly, rather, he used to set up "his enemies to destroy each other" (Rigby, 1966, p. 17). Citizens, peasants, artists, scientists, friends, bureaucrats, all social groups and classes were both his enemies and also enemies to each other. In the name of class struggle and for the sake of socialism, Russian culture, and international patriotism they were all too willing to destroy each other just to be loved by the Communist Party and by Stalin, the father of the peoples of the Soviet Union. "The established impression that he [Stalin] slaughtered, tortured, imprisoned, and oppressed on a grand scale is not an error. On the other hand, it is impossible to understand this immensely gifted politician by attributing solely to him all the crimes and suffering of his era, or to conceive him simply as a monster and a mental case. From youth until death he was a fighter in what he, as many others, regarded as a just war" (McNeal, 1988, p. 312). Stalin's conception of a just war, however, did not exclude a kind of instinctive paranoia, utter ruthlessness, and a powerful streak of opportunism. Still, it should be kept in mind that Stalin did not create Soviet society; rather, it was Soviet society which created Stalin and allowed him to live out his suspicious and dark impulses seething beneath the veneer of a seemingly humanistic ideology (9).

To understand the psychological picture of what was happening we must follow the activities of *Leading Bolsheviks*. This, in turn, will help us understand better the social psychological orientation of Bolshevik small groups of all levels. Each Bolshevik was considered a leader of a group, and every Bolshevik within the group was expected to educate new Bolsheviks in the way of true Marxism-Leninism (by “illuminating” them). All the members had to think the same way as the Leading Bolshevik since the latter’s tools were the unbeatable and only true way of thinking—Marxism-Leninism. Those unable “to think the right way” had to keep silent or the Leading Bolshevik would become angry or sarcastic. Should the situation be an especially important one for the Leading Communist or the Party, then the others were soon declared *vragi naroda*, that is, enemies of the people. These enemies had to be destroyed in the interests of the Party, the State, and the people, and these interests were perceived to be one and the same.

Both the leading and the developing Bolsheviks would declare that they were fighting against the supposed class enemies but for the true class interests. In reality, however, they frequently fought each other to protect their own interests. A newly developing Bolshevik might be striving to become the leader of his or her group and a beloved person for his or her superior. Any Leading Bolshevik might also be trying to attain nationwide importance so that he or she might be noticed by the Party’s highest leaders, and perhaps even by the father of the peoples of the Soviet Union himself. On the whole, the actions of Leading Bolsheviks did not represent mere conformism or bad faith. It is more likely that these people “bought their own line.”

Such was Vygotsky’s social environment which tacitly expected him to become a Leading Bolshevik, too. In this context one can understand why his colleagues kept their distance and failed to support him emotionally when his political situation became unbearable during the early 1930s.

In many respects the Russian intellectuals created the myth of Stalin and supported the development of Leading Bolsheviks. Vygotsky, however, could not develop such a personality, since he lacked both the necessary desire and the ability to deceive himself in the necessary ways, nor was he given to the demagogical use of Marxist slogans (Valsiner, 1988, p. 125). His conflict was not with Marxism (as he understood it), but only with those who called themselves Bolshevik scientists. Vygotsky’s future conflict with Stalinism was

unavoidable. But the Bolsheviks' cunning political mechanisms consistently undermined strivings for honor and openness. Therefore Vygotsky had to be driven into deep intrapsychic conflict, rendering him incapable of fighting the injustices overtly. The suppressive mechanisms were already set into motion, and Vygotsky became a convenient target. Keeping silent, fulfilling definite political functions without thinking, and "fighting for the bright future of the working people" were now considered the sacred goals of all true Soviet citizens. The people of the Soviet Union were told that if one were to openly state one's thoughts, turmoil in the community or in the whole nation would be the inevitable consequence. Neither Vygotsky nor his friends guessed that those mechanisms would soon swallow many of them and grind them into the dust.

The further decline of Vygotsky's civil and scientific activities coincided with the intensification of Stalin's dictatorship, which was built upon three pillars: "(a) Total control over all aspects of social life through a system of interlocking bureaucratic hierarchies, directed by members of the dictator's entourage, who were responsible to him alone; (b) prophylactic terror exercised by a secret police network endowed with arbitrary powers of arrest and punishment; and (c) a dogmatic and mythologized ideology, centering around the cult of the leader" (Rigby, 1966, p. 16).

In the last months of his brief life, Vygotsky had to struggle not merely for his life, but above all for some form of moral and psychological existence. He suffered under the indifference of his friends, from loneliness due to his physical isolation, and from the scientific and political criticisms of his position at the Party meetings which took place in his absence at the Institute. If one is to believe Vygotsky's close collaborator Bluma Zeigarnik, Vygotsky at the end of his life "did everything not to live."

CRITICISMS OF THE CULTURAL-HISTORICAL APPROACH AND ITS LATER FATE

During his lifetime and afterward, Vygotsky's theories and legacy were criticized from at least four corners, which have already been touched upon (10).

One decisive source of criticism was the Communist Party's 1936 Decree condemning and outlawing pedology and banning tests (Taikooshian & Trusov, 1992). It represented a strong trend to repress all

liberal and independent thought in Soviet psychology. As a group, psychologists were unable to mount any resistance against such decrees because they, as skillfully advancing Leading Bolsheviks, were engaged in a bitter struggle with each other for survival's sake. Since Vygotsky was one of the founders of pedology, and since the latter was attacked by the leading Soviet ideologists, Vygotsky's whole legacy was banned, and pedology and Vygotsky's cultural-historical theories were declared to be identical. Meanwhile, Vygotsky's colleagues and followers were branded as some kind of groupthink victims. Given these developments, his theory remained poorly known until the mid 1950s, when after Khrushchev's denunciations of Stalinism, Leontiev and Luria managed to publish many of Vygotsky's main works.

The second line of criticism, which represents a continuation of the first one, emerged as a result of the Kharkovites' attitudes toward Vygotsky's ideas. When the Party's restrictions were still in their beginning stage, the Kharkov group of psychologists, both because of political considerations and also because of scientific disagreements and misunderstandings, managed to create a certain scientific and ideological distance between Vygotsky and themselves. For instance, Leontiev claimed that the "development of the consciousness of a child occurs as a result of the development of the system of psychological operations; which in their turn, are determined by the actual relations between a child and reality" (Leontiev, 1935/1980, p. 186). Similarly, Peter Zinchenko (1939/1984) claimed that concrete, practical, sensuous activity provides the crucial mediation between the individual and reality whereas Vygotsky had insisted that such an activity, in order to fulfill its role as a psychological tool, must necessarily be of a semiotic character (Kozulin, 1996, p. 113). The principle of the importance of "actual relations with reality," which was in contradiction to Vygotsky's semiotic, historico-cultural ideas, was becoming highly popular among psychology aparatchiks and generally accepted by the orthodox Marxist-Leninists. "Vygotsky understood the Marxist perspective idealistically," Zinchenko (1939/1984, p. 67) would write in 1939—and thus condemn him.

Beginning in the 1950s, Leontiev, the author of activity theory, became the official interpreter of Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory and of his legacy at least as far as the influential "Moscow school" of psychology is concerned. Leontiev claimed falsely that activity theory, which stresses the "activity-consciousness unity principle," represented the authentic interpretation of Vygotsky's ideas on the role of

mediation in human activity. In some psychology departments and institutes, this interpretation became the only acceptable version of the history of Soviet psychology. For many psychology students and Ph.D. candidates, citations from A. N. Leontiev (and from Vygotsky as interpreted by Leontiev) became obligatory.

As long as Leontiev's theory was circulating among his peers and followers, it was considered to possess great socialist, Marxist-Leninist value. He became the most frequently cited psychologist within the Soviet Union, and this made a powerful impression on both Soviet and Marxist-oriented Western psychologists. In the 1970s, however, the psychologists Vasili Davydov and Vladimir Zinchenko and the philosophers Eric Yudin and Georgy Schedrovitsky demonstrated through analyses and through various avenues of research that Leontiev's theory possesses little innovative value either for theoretical or for applied psychology. The critics pointed out that Leontiev's theory attempts in a circular way to explain activity via activity (Schedrovitsky, 1982), and that Hegel's concept of activity, in its role as the ultimate explanatory principle, cannot be reduced to the manifestations of individual consciousness, as Leontiev had assumed (Yudin, 1976).

A third attack against Vygotsky focused on his international orientation and cosmopolitanism. For Vygotsky the center of psychological ideas lay in Central and Western Europe (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France), and he creatively absorbed psychoanalysis, Gestalt psychology, Piaget's (and Baldwin's) cognitive-developmental approach, various philosophical trends, and some of the cultural anthropological thought of his time. He liked to cite authors such as Freud, Wertheimer, Koffka, Köhler, K. Lewin, Piaget, C. and K. Bühler, Stern, Werner, Janet, Baldwin, Lévy-Bruhl, and Thurnwald, while critically using their theories to support his own outlook. But in the eyes of the Soviet leaders, the Western theories were of a "bourgeois" nature, and were thus denounced as hostile and dangerous to "Soviet consciousness." While Vygotsky was not openly criticized for his cosmopolitan orientation—that would have been contradicting the official ideology of the Communist Party during the 1920s-1930s—he was instead accused of relying on bourgeois, anti-Marxist theories. Such hidden attacks were mostly coming from forces representing "international patriotism," forces that were in essence reactionary and anti-Semitic. (After Vygotsky's death, attacks on the "cosmopolitans" became the official Party line during the 1940s-1950s.)

The fourth attack against Vygotsky and his legacy emerged as a

consequence of Luria's psychology expedition to Soviet Central Asia, which was discussed above. The scientific results of the expedition were severely criticized not so much because of (the very real) scientific uncertainties, but for the sake of Marxist-Leninist ideological purity. The Soviet apparatchiks of the time declared that even a discussion of the results of the Central Asian studies could be interpreted in a racist way, and therefore they forbade it. It should be recognized that on one hand the results could have served the ideological function of justifying the collectivization of the farms, while on the other hand they contradicted the official myth that in the proletarian paradise of the Soviet Union all "liberated" peoples were both equal and (cognitively) at an equal level. The second argument won out in debates among the Party members of the Moscow Psychology Institute, who seem to have recognized the political danger inherent in publishing potentially controversial results.

It should be added that from a scientific point of view, the studies had three types of limitations, including language differences between the Russian-speaking researchers and their Central Asian interviewees, which led to distorted communication; cultural gaps between the two groups resulting in pronounced misunderstandings; and a refusal to recognize the social psychological condition of the Uzbek peasants, many of whom were probably suspicious toward the Moscovite bearers of a foreign and colonialist culture ready to destroy them. Later, American authors such as Scribner and Cole (1981) and the Estonian psychologist Tulviste (1991) (who had been trained by Luria himself) would argue that "it would be more accurate to interpret subjects' performance in these studies in terms of the demands of particular task settings than in terms of the general level of subjects' mental functioning or of a culture" (Daniels, 1996, p. 64). It remains an open question whether these arguments can fully account for the results of Luria's expeditions and similar results obtained in other cross-cultural studies.

POSTSCRIPT

Aleksander I. Solzhenitsyn, the prominent Russian nationalist writer, is sadly perceptive when he says: "It has always been impossible to learn the truth about anything in our country—now, and always, and from the beginning" (Solzhenitsyn, 1973, p. 92). This also applies to Vygotsky's life and creation. There are many lacunae in our

knowledge about Vygotsky, and especially so about his life in the years immediately after the Revolution and in the last two years of his life. Consequently, our essay has been at times speculative, and future new information on Vygotsky's life may suggest somewhat different interpretations than those developed here.

The fate of the cultural-historical theory developed by Vygotsky provides a representative indicator of the place of psychology among the other branches of science and the humanities in the Soviet Union. It exemplifies how the ideological and personal battles among various Soviet representatives of Marxism-Leninism shaped the fate of a psychological approach that between the late 1930s and 1950s led a mostly underground existence, only to be slowly resurrected after Stalin's death.

One may raise several questions in this context such as: What was, is, and should be the relationship between psychology and political ideologies and institutions in Russia/Soviet Union/Russia and elsewhere? Would Vygotsky's theories have been equally fruitful had he not used Marxian concepts and lines of reasoning? How central were Marxist notions to his conception of psychology? Would his theories have survived and developed within the Soviet psychological tradition without the impact of foreign interest and interpretations? How much are Vygotsky's Marxist-inspired ideas distorted when they are selectively adopted by Western psychologists most of whom show little if any interest in Marxist ideas?

Throughout the 20th century psychology in Russia has existed in the shadows of politics, enjoying true scientific independence only very rarely. As a recent example of the unhealthy relationship between Russian psychology and politics we may cite President Boris Yeltsin's unusual Executive Order in 1995, which places psychoanalysis under the protection of the state—something possible only in Russia. The Order appears to offer a kind of redemption for the fact that for a long time psychoanalysis had been banned and ridiculed in the Soviet Union. (In this context, it may be remembered that Vygotsky was severely criticized by various Soviet theoreticians for his psychoanalytic treatment of Hamlet.) Many Russian scientists continue believing that society can be improved by such decrees. In addition, it should be remembered that psychological research and teaching in Russia and the other post-Soviet countries remain more or less centralized, a fact that tends to facilitate government control.

Modern Russian psychologists need to strike a balance between following their own (partially corrupt) traditions and becoming more

open to international trends in psychology. Decades ago most ties between social scientists in the Soviet Union and the West were cut, a process that was reinforced during and after the *Destalinization Period* by the duplicity of many career-oriented scientists. Given that today only a few powerful psychological traditions exist in Russia, Vygotsky's theories may serve as a bridge not only between East and West, but also between the older Soviet and the more recent post-Soviet approaches to psychology. His theories remain full of insights, in part because they tend to be less politicized than those of many of his peers, in part because he was a synthesizer and an aesthetically oriented thinker, and in part because he was open to many European trends in psychology without losing his ability to critically evaluate them.

Vygotsky's scholarly activity was closely intertwined with his unique and brilliant personality, and both his life and his scientific activities have exerted a certain fascination on some Western psychologists, who rarely criticize his theories in depth. Today, he is one of the few Russian psychologists regularly cited by Western developmental and social psychologists and cultural anthropologists. Ironically, some of his ideas are now being turned into one more paradigm supposedly representing an important advance over (or an alternative to) Piaget. Whether this is the best way to make use of his theories seems doubtful to us. While Vygotsky theorized in the grand style, his approach contains numerous underdeveloped ideas and contradictions. His Marxist identity could not fuse together either his own divergent ideas or his own ideas with those of his collaborators and those of the various European psychologists that he liked to cite. But while his attempt to juxtapose and integrate phylogenetic, cultural-historical, and ontogenetic lines of development may not have been completely successful, it continues to pose an important challenge for modern social scientists who otherwise would tend to shy away from such broad comparisons.

It is Vygotsky's general approach to psychological questions rather than the details of his theories and experimental studies that remains of value today.

NOTES

1. For different reactions to the legacy of the cultural-historical school, see some of the writings of the Marxist-inspired representatives of the "Critical Psychology" school in Germany (see Thielen [1981] for references).

2. Marxism is a very difficult theory to define, in part because Marx himself changed his conceptions over time, and in part because later Marxist thinkers developed a broad variety of viewpoints. In the present context it is important to note that Vygotsky's free appropriation of Marxist ideas stood in contrast to the "hard-boiled" attitudes of the leaders of the Party (Trotsky, Lenin, Zinoviev, Stalin), for whom Marxism became an organizational ideology well suited to the establishment of a totalitarian state able to crush all opposition. Because our essay focuses on Vygotsky's life and position in the developing Soviet society, we cannot describe here in detail the various Marxist positions that came to the fore in the U.S.S.R. during the 1920s and 1930s. For instance, the essay contains an implicit emphasis on historical materialism rather than dialectical materialism because such an emphasis is useful for a description of Vygotsky's personal and ideological struggles.
3. Russian psychologists tend to mean by the term "method" the overall approach they are taking to psychology. For Vygotsky and his followers, the cultural-historical approach constituted a new and superior method or "paradigm" that avoided the reductionism inherent in the objective and positivistic schools of Pavlov, Bekhterev, and Watson, while also steering clear of Wundt's narrow focus on the structural analysis of immediate conscious experience.
4. Vygotsky's *Weltschmerz* and his alienation from society on the eve of the 1917 Revolution were hardly unique among the Russian intellectuals and artists of that time. A. N. Leontiev would later claim that Vygotsky had already become a Marxist before the Revolution, but he may have advanced this claim in part for political reasons (Yaroshevsky, 1996, p. 162). Consequently, it remains unclear how deep Vygotsky's ideological understanding of and his commitment to Marxism were before and around the time of the Civil War, or what the nature of his political involvements were (see Ivanov [1968] for a brief discussion of Vygotsky's early activities). He did, however, have a better understanding of Marx and Engels than many of his peers who had shown limited if any interest in Marx before the Revolution, but later tried to hide their ignorance beneath a veneer of Marxist-Leninist quotes and slogans.
5. Stalin was certainly skillful at setting up situations in which potentially powerful Party members could and would neutralize and destroy each other. Still, it is not always clear to what degree he deliberately planned these situations and to what degree he merely exploited them. Similar questions may be raised about Mao's incitation of, and reaction to, the "Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom" movement taking place in China during the 1950s.
6. Similar mechanisms of self-deception and motivated inability to fully understand the destructive and inherently authoritarian nature of Marxist revolutionary action may be discerned among some Western sympathizers with and observers of the unfolding events in the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, and elsewhere. The utterly ruthless Lenin, in turn, contemptuously referred to the more naively idealistic among those sympathizers as "useful idiots."
7. For a perceptive cross-cultural analysis of monotheism and its inherent tendencies toward intolerance, see Hsu (1981; especially chapters 9–10).
8. In another time and place, Vygotsky's observations could well be considered perceptive and going beyond mere labeling. Given the then prevailing politics in the Soviet Union, however, his observation placed Piaget in the company of those who had already been branded for their unacceptable views. In this sense, Vygotsky was indeed labeling Piaget, and many of his peers would have understood him that way. In general, however, Vygotsky considered Piaget's work on the development of cognitive structures in children as the foundation for anyone entering the field, himself included (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991). This did not keep Vygotsky from arguing against Piaget that "egocentric speech" does not mean so much "autistic" withdrawal but rather socially oriented expansion. In his view, it represents a de-

- velopmental stage in the socially-mediated internalization of speech which is derived from the child's efforts at social communication and self-control.
9. When Lenin died, he and his followers had already created the basic structures of the Soviet State machinery and of Soviet political culture. These included the one-party state, the systematic use of terror, the systematic instigation and exploitation of class hatreds, the continual use of invectives against the supposed enemies of the just cause of Bolshevism, the tendency to think in Marxian socioeconomic and political abstractions thereby dehumanizing people, the personality cult, the state's propaganda machinery designed to perpetuate this cult, and above all the willingness to destroy millions of people in order to achieve political goals (Figes, 1996). Supported by the Bolshevik political culture of the day, Stalin took over this state machinery and bent it to his personal and political goals.
 10. Other important critics of the culture-historical school include the philosopher-psychologist Rubinstein and some of his students such as Brushlinsky. Rubinstein (1957) pointed out that the culture-historical school overemphasizes the external-social influences on psychological experience and functioning at the expense of inner subjective factors and correlated higher nervous system activities (a Pavlovian concept). Rubinstein's almost scholastic approach was much appreciated not only in the Soviet Union but also in East Germany.

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