

Where should we go? (On the promising directions of the development of psychology of personality in Russia)

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This is an extended abstract of the paper that was written in response to the articles of A.L. Venger and E.I. Morozova, and, another one, by I.V. Latypov, titled respectively “Cultural-historical psychotherapy” and “Cultural-historical psychotherapy: In search of its niche” (PsyAnima, Dubna Psychological Journal”, 2012, issue 3, pp. 1-19 and pp. 20-28). In my commentary on these two papers I discuss two main issues:

- (1) the problem of *wholeness* and *integrity* of L.S. Vygotsky’s views on personality in his early and later works, in the works of his Russian predecessors V.M. Bekhterev and A.F. Lazurskii, and, broader, in the oeuvre of several of the most notable representatives of Soviet psychology. In the second part of the paper I provide my analysis of the observational data that was collected in a case study with one infant. The ensuing discussion of these data seems to refute a few postulates of Soviet psychology, particularly such as the postulate of the social essence and social determination of personality development;
- (2) the actual contemporary problem of the *methodological foundations* of the theory of personality and related promising *directions for the future research* in the psychology of personality.

Comparative analysis led the author to the conclusion that Vygotsky (in his early works) and his immediate scientific predecessors presented a more holistic and profound understanding of the essence of personality, its structure and the factors of development, than in the works of Vygotsky of the later period and in the writings of the majority of the Soviet psychologists and their followers (for the most recent scholarship on the chronology of Vygotsky’s works see Yasnitsky, 2011a, 2011b). I argue that the transition to one-sided social reductionism that was mandatory for many Russian psychologists was determined by the enormous pressure from the Marxist-Leninist ideologues. As a result, the inclination to survive and preserve workplace would become outweigh the scientific principles of unbiased analysis of reality. Thus, for instance, the chief architect of the Marxist psychology in the Soviet Union A.N. Leontiev failed to attribute the characteristics of personality even to the two years old child.

In order to demonstrate the presence of the essential characteristics of personality even in infants this paper presents the brief analysis of the empirical data conducted in the course of the observation of the girl named Sofia (nicknamed *Feia*, i.e. Fairy), at the age between 5 and 12 months. This case-study, based on systematic observation of the girl and several other children, revealed the whole set of important characteristics of personal self-organization of behavior, including deliberate and goal-driven communication and object-based interaction with the immediately available adults. General conclusion from these observations can be summarized as

follows: infants from the onset have and operate main structural units, aspects of personality. In other words, people in fact *are born and become personality*. Their behavior clearly demonstrates the core features of personality that are determined mainly by their genetic make-up such as: the causal and directing impact of *needs* (and related motivations), uniting and generalizing impact of the *primary I*, abstract stylistic *features* (activeness, aggression, etc.), *primary emotions*. The infants have the apparatus of the *operative I*, which is a situation-bound and goal-driven organization of diverse behaviors aimed at realization of their actual wishes and goals. Also, the children efficiently use the *mechanism of concretization* that helps them reflect primary general directedness of their wishes in meaningful images and mental representations.

All these already operating or only developing in infants components of the structure of their personality are *fundamental* since they are determined primarily by inheritance and in fact reveal themselves virtually from the very first moment of their lives (and, quite possibly, as early as in the prenatal period of their development). Such generalized primary functions of psyche operate during the entire life-time of individuals. These facts run contrary to the traditional for Soviet psychology postulate about the late emergence of personality not earlier than during the preschool period.

Systematic observations over the behavior of infants also allowed to draw the conclusion about the leading factors of *real* learning of the child that contradict the traditional view on the leading role of external social influences of an adult upon the process of the development and learning, the initiation of the process of the internalization of behavior that is novel for the child during which the external and observable behavior becomes internal psychological function. It is notable that the child from the onset plays an active and cooperative role in organizing the direction and the character of their interaction with the adults, with themselves, and the physical and natural environment. The child's *interest* to the new form of behavior—in case this interest coincides with the pedagogical aims of the adult—initiates and realizes actual, productive process of learning. Thus we can see that it is *primarily the child's motivation that leads learning and development*. Thus, motivation also sanctions the unfolding of the processes of internalization.

Observational data also allow claiming that the child from the very beginning has the *mechanism of spontaneous self-instructing* that frequently works without interaction with other people and allows to master new kinds of behavior. It is getting apparent that key notion about personality shared within Soviet psychological paradigm, according to which personality is a set of social relations, is essentially wrong and limiting the actual *endless sphere of the person's relations* with self and the world. Final conclusion that I draw from the analysis of the observational data: internal personal factors constitute the main mechanism of the development of the infant's development, learning and self-learning.

On the basis of the overview of the ideas of Soviet psychologists and the analysis of the behavior of the children I formulate actual methodological principles for the establishment of the theory of personality and the program of future research that would address the unresolved problems of the psychology of personality. In my opinion, the most promising are a few methodological principles of the research into personality development such as: the *holistic* approach to personality, the *fundamentality* of the features of the core of personality, identification of the functional and neurophysiological *specificity of personality*, identification of the *main components of the theory of personality*. Also of actual interest are such directions as research into the particularities of *needs* and *values*, the *apparatus of the I*, *intra-personal* and *person-environment interactions*, *development* of the functions of personality, *neurophysiological mechanisms of personality*.

In conclusion I briefly discuss my view on the nature of personality. Personality is defined as a controlling unit of the psyche, in charge of central organization and regulation of behavior aimed at realization of actual needs and goals. It has biocultural and subjective nature, and this is what people are born and become.

References

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