

## **ON SOME DIFFICULTIES IN THE DIALOGUE WITH FOREIGN COLLEAGUES**

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Russian psychology which had been cut off from the world science for the greater part of the 20th century is now facing a challenge to join the international mainstream. To facilitate the integration of Russian psychology into the international mainstream, a certain hermeneutics is needed, applied to the explicit methodology and terminology Russian scientists used, as well as to the system of implicit beliefs and assumptions concerning human nature "embedded" into the Russian psychology. The latter is compared to its counterparts in major Western psychological theories. Russian psychology, which has been cut off from the international science by the "iron curtain", is now facing a challenge to join scientific mainstream. A difficulty in the dialogue with foreign colleagues emerges from the fact that they have virtually no idea of what kind of research Russian psychologists were making for the most of the XX<sup>th</sup> c, what theories they developed and whether these theories are coherent with theoretical reasoning of other schools. That results in treating Russian psychology as a "developing" area of international psychological science lacking its own theoretical foundation and traditions.

For Russian psychology, contemporary period is at the same time:

- a period of integration with worldwide psychological science which Russian psychology is a part of;
- a period of disintegration of the psychological school which was developed in the former Soviet Union.

Psychology has been boosted in Russia since "Perestroika". The number of graduated psychologists increased dramatically. In 1984 there were only three universities in Russia: Moscow, Leningrad and Yaroslavl, - (nine in the USSR), providing education in psychology for about 500 students altogether. Nowadays, there are about 300 institutions of higher education in psychology in Russia with 5 000 students annually graduating.

Most rapidly developing areas of contemporary Russian psychology are those being virtually abandoned during the Soviet period: counseling Psychology, social psychology etc. Naturally, Western psychological theories are generally recognized and widely employed. Majority of textbooks translated into Russian have no references to Russian authors whatsoever.

This state of affairs challenges the survival of scientific tradition that developed during the Soviet period. It seems now about to fade away turning into somewhat like artefacts of a gone civilization.

Should we be sorry for that? Was there a tradition worth talking about?

The history of psychological science in Russia is long and dramatic. Before the Revolution of 1917, Russian psychology was an integrative and a well-established part of international science. Russian psychologists communicated freely with their foreign colleagues and took part in the European psychology development. In 1879 the world's first experimental psychological laboratory was founded by W. Wundt in Germany and as soon as in 1885 a psychological laboratory of V.M.

Bekhterev was founded in Russia, in Kazan city. A popular Russian scientific journal "Vestnik Znaniya" regularly published works of leaders of new European experimental school: W. Wundt "Natural History and Psychology" (1907), W. Jerusalem "Handbook of Psychology" (1907), J. Baldwin "Psychology and Its Methods" (1908), T. Ribot "Experimental Method in Psychology" (1911) and others as well as those by Russian scientists. Full-size psychological research centers were established: the Psychoneurological Institute in Saint-Petersburg (1905) and the Institute of Psychology in Moscow (1912).

At the beginning of the 20th century, Russian psychology comprised a number of different trends. The first one is a spiritual or moral and religious approach. This trend was developing at University history, philosophy and philology departments as well as at the Russian Orthodox Church Academies and seminaries. Representatives of this approach are S.L. Frank, L.P. Karsavin, I.A. Ilyin, N.A. Berdyaev, L.M. Lopatin, sociologist P. Sorokin, B.P. Vysheslavtsev.

The second trend (the empirical trend it is called) was based on the works of W. Wundt, on his concept of psychic life and research methods. We can note here such scientists as G.I. Chelpanov, N.Y. Grot, M.I. Vladislavlev, etc.

The third trend is associated with those who followed I.M. Sechenov and shared his concept of objective experimental research in psychology. The contribution of Russian physiologists I.M. Sechenov, A.A. Ukhtomsky, L.P. Pavlov is of basic importance. I.M. Sechenov came up with an idea of objective research of mental phenomena. He meant that objective factors causing psychic acts should be discovered and analyzed. First of all physiological acts were supposed to be objective indications of mental phenomena. The theory of conditioned reflex (Pavlov) was developed in this framework. We can mention also V.M. Bekhterev, S.S. Korsakov,

I.A. Sikorsky, N.N. Lange and others as adherents. This approach carried great authority both in Russia and abroad. Thus the classics of American behaviorism recognized the works of Pavlov and his conditioned reflex theory to be the base of their theoretical approach. M. Wertheimer, G. Murphy, I. Kovach acknowledged that Russian physiology in the end of the 19th and in the beginning of the 20th centuries had a basic impact upon the formation and development of behavioral approach in the international science.

After the victory of Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution 1917 the situation in Russia changed radically. The new government put control on all spheres of social life including science. The period of "political history" of Russian psychology began. The destiny of the three mentioned above trends turned different. First of all, the totalitarian state struck a blow to the "spiritual" trend. As soon as by the beginning of 1920s situation in Soviet Russia stabilized and political opposition was crushed, Bolsheviks went on to "getting things put in order", which meant the ensuring of ideological unanimity in scientific and cultural life of the country. Dialectical materialism of Marx, Engels and Lenin was supposed to be the base for this unanimity. Idealism was outlawed. In August 1922 psychologists sharing the idealistic views were exiled - S.L. Frank, L.P. Karsavin, I.A. Ilyin, N.A. Berdyaev, L.M. Lopatin, sociologist P. Sorokin, specialist in the irrationality B.P. Vysheslavtsev and others. The idealistic spiritual trend in psychology came to an end in Soviet Russia. The deportation of a number of prominent scientists delivered a heavy blow to Russian science.

The next step on the road of violent conversion of Russian psychology into a monomethodological trend was an abolishment of the empirical trend in the course of "discussions" in 1923. Marxist K.N. Kornilov took the place of the head of the Psychological Institute instead of former leader G.I. Chelpanov. The development of non-Marxian psychology in Soviet Russia was terminated.

At the same time many advanced scientists such as V.M. Bekhterev, L.S. Vygotsky and A.R. Luriya greeted enthusiastically social reforms carried out with catchwords "Social Justice", "Liberty", "Brotherhood" and "Equality". They sincerely believed that Russia was standing at the edge of social and cultural rebirth, and tried to take an active part in the creating of a new life. 1920s in Russia saw a wonderful splash of creative activity in science. It was the time world-renowned L.S. Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory appeared. The rise of psychology was caused by a huge demand of practical Work and the need for a new scientific methodology based on Marxism<sup>1</sup>.

Great expectations of the Soviet government were laid on psychological Practice. Two great tasks were put forward, both concerning the ideology as well as economical life of the country: to increase labor productivity<sup>2</sup> and to up bring a new human type - the one of proletarian culture.

The new Soviet regime gave an unprecedented support to the development of psychology in Russia. In 1918 (just after the devastating First World War, after the period of Civil war which followed the October revolution 1917) the Human Brain and Psychic Activity Research Institute was opened in Petrograd, equipped with the best possible apparatus in Europe. At the beginning of 1920s one by one psychological departments and laboratories were being opened throughout the country. In 1921 Soviet government issued a special regulation to support the laboratory headed by I.P. Pavlov. Applied psychology also rapidly developed.

From the mid-1930s till 1960s, it was a hard period for Russia and Russian psychology. Repressions and political persecutions of psychologists in the 1930s followed as a result of their failure to accomplish the both unrealistic tasks set by Soviet government. These repressions "interrupted" the development of applied and practical psychology in Soviet Russia.

Then hardships of the World War II came up. Strange as it might seem, that was a time of the most fruitful and intensive development for Soviet psychology. The necessity to take part in the struggle against fascism which united all Soviet people, the need for psychological knowledge to be applied for war purposes as well as for rehabilitation of wounded soldiers and a greatest amount of empirical data - all these contributed to facilitate development of psychology. New advanced theoretical approaches such as neuropsychological theory of A. Luria and theory of individual development in adulthood by B. Ananiev (unfortunately the latter remains basically unknown for the world scientific community) appeared.

Another hard blow Russian psychology experienced in the course of its vulgar "materialization" in the 1950s, when physiology of higher nervous activity aggressively broke in the science. Humanitarian branches such as social psychology were terminated, personality and differential psychology turned into psychophysiology.

Totalitarian ideology treated psychology as a gardener shaping his tree: letting only those branches grow which fit his plan. Many branches were cut off and many lives were ruined. Russian psychology became a mono methodological trend, based on Marxist philosophy and oriented to the standards of natural sciences. But this trend was lively developing and many talented scientists contributed to it. Among those western colleagues recognize Vygotsky and Bechterevev who worked in the 1920-s before the iron curtain fall down, but many others who worked later remain unknown outside Russia.

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<sup>1</sup> L.S. Vygotsky was a fervent Marxist. Being blamed for ideological sabotage in 1930s, he is reputed to say the words: "I don't want to live if I'm not considered to be a Marxist". His early death from tuberculosis, which he refused to treat, is interpreted by a number of scientists as suicide.

<sup>2</sup> It is an essential thesis of Marks theory that evolution of society is determined by labor productivity and socialism is deemed to concur capitalism for that should be higher.

Behind the "iron curtain" several "branches" of Russian psychology were successfully developing. The more substantial those developments were the further apart were their results from findings of other psychological "Schools" (behaviorism, psychoanalysis etc.). This was the common fate of psychological "Schools" through the major part of the XXth c, but for Russian psychology the situation was aggravated by the linguistic barrier and by the fact that, although Soviet psychologists were encouraged to study western authors, the international dissemination of their own results was restricted. So they had been dropped out from the view of their western colleagues.

To facilitate the integration of Russian psychology into the international mainstream now a hermeneutics is needed, applied to the explicit methodology and terminology Russian scientists used as well as to the system of implicit beliefs and assumptions concerning human nature 'embedded' into the Russian psychology.

Assembling psychological knowledge implies recognition of differences in implicit cultural background of psychological theories. Things which are not stated in scientific reasoning but taken for granted must be taken into account to facilitate mutual understanding between psychological schools.

A system of implicit beliefs about human nature embedded in Russian culture of the 20<sup>th</sup> c which is underlying Soviet psychology is compared here with their counterparts in Western psychological theories in Tables 1-3.

It should also be mentioned that Russian scientific tradition differs greatly from the Western one in the way bio-social nature of human personality is treated. "Biology" and "culture" factors are viewed as non-derivable one from another and potentially abrogating one another's influence. The overlapping between contradictory biological laws and cultural regulations is viewed as a basis for the flexibility of development of human personality, its uniqueness and freedom of will. The interrelation of biological and cultural factors in individual development was the main area for psychological research and theoretical reasoning in Soviet Russia and essential results were achieved which could contribute to current discussions and rapidly developing fields in contemporary international psychological science, like Life-span human development, development in adulthood, self-realization and self-determination, personality effects on psychological and psycho-physiological processes and others.

Becoming a part of the worldwide science after a long period of isolation behind the "iron curtain" implies a challenge for Russian psychology:

*Table 1*

<b>The impact of culture and ideology ("dominant groups" values) on psychological theories of the XX cent.</b>		
	Russian Psychology	Western psychology
Culture and ideology demands.	The demand for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• theoretical proof of the parity of all people;</li> <li>• indulging in research on the impact of the social surroundings on personality development</li> </ul>	The demand for: - theoretical justification of the social inequality and declining social mobility alongside with the declaration of the "society of equal opportunities"
Constitutive implicit	Heredity does not play the	Heredity is the main factor

beliefs regarding human nature embedded in Psychological theories.	main role in the development of human mind and personality. They are shaped by the interaction of an individual with society. Instincts are suppressed by socialization.	determining the development of human mind and personality. Instincts form the basis for all types of human behaviour. Instincts are developed and diversified with socialization.
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Table 2

<b>The impact of culture and "dominant groups" values on psychological theories of the XX cent</b>		
	Russian Psychology	Western psychology
Culture and ideology demands.	The ideal of collectivism was proclaimed by Marxist philosophy. It is also characteristic to Russian cultural tradition.	The ideal of an independent, self-willed, self-acting, self-contained individual, naturally endowed with "human values".
Constitutive implicit beliefs regarding human nature embedded in Psychological theories.	Best human features are shaped by the interaction of an individual with society and trend to serve society.	Individualism. Best human features are endowed to an individual by nature and social interaction can rather harm human nature than better it.

Table 3

<b>The impact of culture and "dominant groups" values on psychological theories of the XX cent</b>		
	Russian Psychology	Western psychology
Culture and ideology demands.	Eschatological character of Russian culture brought to the light the conflict between the spirit and the natural drives in a human being, who is striving to get free from his own weaknesses and passions.	Pragmatism and rationalism.  The concept of a "Natural Man", spontaneous and complacent, for whom freedom is just an absence of compulsion.
Constitutive implicit beliefs regarding human nature embedded in Psychological theories.	Purposeful and system type of determinism.	Causal or statistical type of determinism

- Should it be regarded as school, non-derivable from other theoretical approaches and self-consistent, and go on developing on it's own theoretical bases,
- or should it be viewed as "developing" area of the international science, having no theoretical background of its' own?

Of course there is no chance and no need for Russian psychology to preserve its mono methodological trend. Many of Russian psychologists today cling to other theoretical approaches.

Nonetheless, I believe that the scientific tradition that was developed behind the "iron curtain" can still contribute substantially to the world science. Shall it? Today this is the main question for Russian psychology, determining its future. This is a question only Russian psychological community can answer which demands from us a new self-assessment, a look from aside at ourselves, viewing our theory and methodology as an integrate but specific part in the structure of world psychological science.

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