

The First Commentary on L.S. Vygotsky's Papers at the II All-Russian Congress of Psychoneurology in Petrograd (January 1924)

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At the Second All-Russian Congress on Psychoneurology in Petrograd (January 1924), Vygotsky delivered three papers. The first paper (“Methodology of Reflexological and Psychological Research”), was printed separately, but the text of the other two reports (“How Psychology Should Be Taught Now” and “Results of a Questionnaire on the Moods of Students of the Graduating Classes of the Gomel Schools in 1923”) has not survived. A brief account of these two reports, which appeared in the magazine *Krasnaya Nov’* in 1924, is reprinted here for the first time. The author was the revolutionary M.I. Ginzburg (1877–1940), a researcher at the Moscow Psychological Institute in the mid-1920s. He wrote under the pseudonym G. Dayan. Ginzburg-Dayan was severely criticised in 1935 on charges of Trotskyism.

Keywords: L.S. Vygotsky, M.I. Ginzburg-Dayan, II congress of psychoneurology, Trotsky, Gomel’.

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Первый комментарий к докладам Л.С. Выготского на II Всероссийском съезде по психоневрологии в Петрограде (январь 1924 г.)

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На Втором Всероссийском съезде по психоневрологии в Петрограде (январь 1924 г.) Выготский прочитал три доклада. Первый доклад «Методика рефлексологического и психологического исследования» был напечатан отдельно, но тексты двух других докладов («Как надо сейчас преподавать психологию» и «Результаты анкеты о настроениях учащихся в выпускных классах Гомельских школ в 1923 году») не сохранились. Краткое изложение этих докладов, появившееся в журнале «Красная новь» в 1924 году, перепечатывается здесь впервые. Автором был революционер М.И. Гинзбург (1877–1940), научный сотрудник Московского психологического института в середине 1920-х годов, писавший под псевдонимом Г. Даян. Гинзбург-Даян подвергся резкой критике в 1935 году по обвинению в троцкизме.

Ключевые слова: Л.С. Выготский, М.И. Гинзбург-Даян, II съезд по психоневрологии, Троцкий, Гомель.

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Introduction

In the years after the October Revolution, the most important public events in the history of Russian psychology were perhaps two Congresses on psychoneurology, the first in Moscow, held from 10 to 15 January 1923, and the second in Petrograd from 3 to 10 January 1924 [15; 16]. The second congress is especially famous for the participation of Lev Vygotsky and the interest the young psychologist raised in the participants (Alexander Luria's testimony: "When Lev Vygotsky took the podium to begin his speech, he had neither a printed text nor an outline. However, he spoke smoothly, without stops, easily moving from one thought to the next. I found his manner of presentation exceptional because of the persuasiveness of his style. I was even more impressed by the content of the report. Instead of discussing any minor issue, as befits a young man of twenty-eight, speaking for the first time before such an honourable assembly, L.S. Vygotsky chose a difficult topic on the relationship between conditioned reflexes and conscious human behaviour" [12; p. 25]. Although in the past there was confusion about the title and content of his reports, today we know for sure that there were three of them: "Methods of Reflexological and Psychological Research", "How Psychology Should Be Taught Now", and "Results of a Questionnaire on the Attitudes of Students in the Graduating Classes of Gomel Schools in 1923". The text of the first report formed the basis of an essay published in 1926 [4] (as is well known, this essay should not be confused with the essay "Consciousness" published in 1925 [7], as it has been in the past [problem and it is discussed in 2; 11; 18; 19]). Unfortunately, the text of the other two reports for January 1924 has not survived. However, there is an extensive commentary on the third report, now reproduced here in full as an important source for the study of Vygotsky's first steps in psychology. We also reproduce a brief commentary on the second report. The two commentaries appeared in the journal *Krasnaya Nov'* and were signed by G. Dayan, the pseudonym of Moisei Isaakovich Ginzburg (as a publicist he used various pseudonyms, including G. Dayan).

Moses Ginzburg was not a mere columnist or reporter [1]. He was born on 1 January 1877 in Nizhyn, Chernigov province. Associated with the Bund Syndicate, he participated in anti-government demonstrations, was arrested and in October 1903 sentenced to imprisonment in various places in the Russian Empire until February 1905, when he managed to escape from Pinega, Arkangelsk region. He took part in the armed uprising in Donbass in 1905, then was arrested again and sentenced to exile in Eastern Siberia for three years. We have less information about his education and activity as a scientist-philosopher and psychologist. He studied for some

time at the University of Berlin, and also studied at the philological faculty in Kharkov. He was first in the ranks of the Bund, then joined the Jewish Communist Party and from 1922 the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks). In Moscow he collaborated with the Psychological Institute and the 1st Moscow University, where in 1925 he received the title of professor of pedology and psychology (title confirmed in 1927). In 1934 he moved to Crimea, where he became director of the Sevastopol Museum Association and the Chersonese Historical and Archaeological Museum. He also led a seminar on dialectical materialism. In 1935, during the repression against Trotskyism, he was expelled and dismissed from his job on the charge that he had never self-criticised the positive position towards Trotsky that he had already expressed ten years earlier in his review of Trotsky's book on Lenin [10]. He died in 1940.

As for Dayan's interests in psychology, we have found no information about the specific research or activities he carried out during the above-mentioned three-year collaboration at the Moscow Institute of Psychology [1; 13]. However, it is reliably known that he knew Vygotsky personally (in the report on the Institute's activities for 1924, he is listed in the same list of "second-class research coworkers and free coworkers" that included Vygotsky [14; p. 86]), and he was also present at Vygotsky's papers at the 1924 Petrograd Congress. It is interesting to note that Dayan's favourable position on Trotsky's political-philosophical views is consistent with Vygotsky's references to Trotsky's writings in support of his own theses [3; 11; 19]. These references to Trotsky were censored in reprints of Vygotsky's works or in the first editions of unpublished works. Take, for example, the long quotation that concludes "Pedagogical Psychology" (1924) [5; p. 347–348] is an excerpt from Trotsky's "Literature and Revolution" [17; p. 193–194]. In the 1991 reprint, because of the removal of inverted commas, one can erroneously conclude that Vygotsky wrote this passage [6; p. 371–372]. In this regard, from the analysis of the results obtained through a questionnaire on the personal and social life of young students of Gomel schools (18 years old), a complex picture emerged: strong individual differences due to (1) pre-existing social and cultural factors and (2) to the great political and social changes of those years were evident. Dayan wondered what the evolution of this youth – who would have to build the "new Soviet man" – would be: the goal posed in the last pages of "Pedagogical Psychology", on the basis of Trotsky's net and utopian words.

Dayan G. Second Congress of Psychoneurology [8; C. 164–166]

Among the speeches of those psychologists of the "intermediate" trend who have taken the path of scien-

tific objectivism, but have not yet taken a decisive step towards dialectical materialism, the paper of the young psychologist L.S. Vygotsky on the methodology of reflexological research is worthy of mention.

The method of reflexological research of a person is becoming more and more close to research techniques long established in experimental psychology (simple reaction, association experiment, etc.). This convergence is not accidental, and the similarity of research forms is not only external. Since reflexology seeks to explain all human behavior as a system of reflexes, it invariably deals with the same material as psychology. Reflexology indeed excludes the consideration of mental experiences, but psychology is not at all limited to one internal side of the psyche, but also includes consideration of the objective side of mental processes (all the reactology, etc.). Thus, reflexology is one of the methods of psychology.

The current state of both branches, says L.S. Vygotsky, persistently raises the question of the necessity and fruitfulness of the closest interweaving of both methods, their general application in experimental psychological and reflexological research. In addition to the general theoretical and methodological foundations for the merging of these two sciences, practical experience in the holistic study of any phenomenon also speaks for this.

For any reflexological study, it is necessary to consider the data and personal report of the subject about inhibited speech reflexes (inner speech: verbal thinking), because if they are not considered we risk getting a completely false and distorted picture. The technique of reflexology has come close to including in the system of its techniques this evaluation of *inner speech as inhibited reflexes, according to the personal report of the subject, and it is logically inevitable for it to take this step.*

In the experiments cited by L. S. Vygotsky, the purity of the reflexological principle was not violated in any way: everywhere he used only reflexes, considering those that were inhibited. The subjects themselves should be considered as reflexes, because they report the presence of inhibited reflexes. If the technique allows for the establishment of inhibition with the help of instructions and the choice of the speech apparatus as a reacting organ, then it should probably allow for a complete study of the inhibited reflexes of the speech organ. The general theory of reflexology about conscious processes as inhibited reflexes, that arise when establishing new connections, inevitably obliges to consider inhibited reflexes (fully, in the form of subject's reports), because without their activity correlative activity cannot be understood and explained. In addition, a general view of the mind is required, which rejects the theory of parallelism and affirms the unity of mental and nervous processes.

The considerations about teaching psychology in secondary schools expressed by L. S. Vygotsky were interesting.

The teaching of psychology in secondary schools is currently experiencing a crisis. On the one hand, the very place of this subject in the curriculum is not clear, and in the vast majority of provincial schools it is abolished altogether. The virtual liquidation of psychology in secondary schools is taking place before our eyes. On the other hand, where this discipline is preserved, the most pressing issues of teaching remain unclear: the program, the number of teaching hours and years allocated for it, the necessary educational material, its location, general guidelines and concepts on which the course should be based, the textbook, etc. There is no less confusion in pedagogical educational institutions (technical schools) in this matter.

It is necessary, says L.S. Vygotsky, to take all measures to put an end to such a vague and uncertain situation. First of all, it is necessary to maintain psychology in the course of general and special pedagogical secondary schools. Data from the teaching experience of Russian teachers, reported in the survey of the Moscow Psychological Society, as they were summarized by P.P. Blonsky, established that psychology is an irreplaceable subject from a pedagogical point of view. The experience of Western European school speaks for the same thing. In the modern school environment, psychology is called upon to occupy a very prominent place in the curriculum.

L.S. Vygotsky is undoubtedly right when he demands that the psychology course in the secondary school system play the role of a link between the cycle of natural sciences and the humanities. Psychology should be taught as a part of biology, closely related, on the one hand, to physics, physiology, zoology, and on the other, to political economy, history, and literature. Such introduction of data from other disciplines can only be useful in the sense of creating a living connection between disparate sciences. Psychology should become a node that connects the natural and human sciences. Depending on this, the course should be built on the basic data of reflexology, as a doctrine of the correlative activities of physiology and comparative psychology.

General definitions of the tasks, principles and methods of psychology should proceed from psychology as the science of the behaviour of living beings, considering the latter as a special type of adaptation and integrating the course with biological and social points of view on the subject. The role and significance of the mind must be clarified in accordance with the data of the natural sciences — without referring to existing scientific hypotheses of parallelism and interaction — on the principle of the unity of the psycho-physical process. All hypotheses of idealistic philosophy must be eliminated from the course.

**Dayan G. Second Congress of Psychoneurology
[9; C. 234–238]**

In connection with the methods of studying personality, L. S. Vygotsky's report on the study of the subjective and mental moods of our students using the questionnaire method is of significant public interest.

Despite all the imperfections of the questionnaire method, it is still necessary to put forward it as almost the only way to get acquainted, at least in the most general terms, with what our students are like. As a basis for developing the questionnaire, the speaker proposed a questionnaire that he used when examining students in the graduating groups of all second-level schools in Gomel. The questionnaire was conducted in May 1923 by the Psychological Laboratory at the Pedagogical Institute with the participation of students of social education courses in 7 groups of different schools. A questionnaire was administered using the same methodology with precisely developed instructions for filling out and a very specific explanation of each question. Needless to say, the anonymity of the questionnaire was guaranteed, and the majority of students believed in its observance. We present this questionnaire as an exemplary basis for this type of survey, and as such we recommend it.

Here is the text of the questionnaire:

I. External data: Age. Sex. Nationality. What did parents do before and after the October Revolution? Parent education.

What serious changes and events occurred in connection with the revolution in your family?

II. Family. Do you have a personal-psychological relationship with your family and of what kind? What kind of relationship do you have with your parents and there is mutual understanding and closeness between you? Do you want to have your own family? Do you help the family and how?

III. School. If you were in the old school, do you find advantages in the new one and what exactly? What subjects interest you mostly and why? What did school give you in terms of education? What has school given you in terms of camaraderie and friendships and how do you feel in the school environment? What did the school give you in other respects? How do you feel about the co-education and why? Are there people of a different sex among your closest friends? Do you participate in the public life of the school and how do you feel about self-government?

IV. Society and politics. How do you consider politics and political parties and how do you imagine your role in public life? Do you read political literature and newspapers and what interests you in them? How do you consider communism?

V. Religion and nationality. What place does religion occupy in family life? How do you feel about rituals, religious feelings and faith? Do you agree equally with peo-

ple of all nationalities or do you prefer your own? How do you look at nationalism?

VI. Profession and future life. What profession do you intend to choose and why? How do you imagine your future life?

VII. Love and sexuality. Have you experienced falling in love and is it related to your school friend? How do you look at sexuality and love and what place do they occupy in your life?

VIII. Extracurricular life. What books do you like to read and why? Your favorite writers and why you love them? What is the most interesting thing in life for you? Your favorite entertainment and games. Do you have intimate friends from your schoolmates and not from them, and what place do they occupy in your soul and life?

IX. Mental interests and emotional moods. Do you have any inclination towards any worldview and which one? How do you feel about life? Do you feel the joy of life or loneliness, loss of spirit, fatigue? Do you strive for personal happiness and where do you see it? How do you view individualism? What oddities, weaknesses and addictions do you notice in yourself? How do you feel about this questionnaire, how sincerely and truthfully did you fill it out and with what feeling?

The last question was posed for control purposes, and, as the speaker testifies, it gave positive results. Each time it was like an assessment by the participants themselves of the truthfulness, sincerity and degree of accuracy of their answers. Almost everyone answered this question. There are answers showing that the questionnaire was filled out completely truthfully and sincerely. There are gradations and degrees of these signs and assessments, there are also frank indications of omissions, distortions, inability to answer, and stereotyped answers. There are indications of feelings of heaviness, difficulty, awkwardness, and some violence against oneself when filling out the questionnaire; but there are much more indications of the opposite nature. Participants say that the questionnaire prompted them to a number of questions in their own lives that they needed to understand, forced them to ask themselves some important questions, often for the first time to formulate things that they had not previously dared to admit to themselves. The questionnaire gave a lot to the participants themselves: that is their general idea. The majority points even more persistently to the desire to share much of the content of their mental life, albeit with an anonymous questionnaire. For the first time, the opportunity to have a heart-to-heart talk, to pour out oneself. This allows you to look at each sheet as a letter without a signature, as a human document. The questionnaire was an impetus and release in the spiritual life of many, and this is its positive pedagogical qualities.

But its value is even greater in the sense of studying the mind of our youth.

The first thing that catches the researcher's eye when looking at what results were obtained is the incredible variety of answers to each question, huge ranges in polar opposite directions, with minor age, national, social and school differences. An outwardly approximately homogeneous or close to this environment, taken on the same day as extremely close in terms of the conditions of school life, is striking in the simultaneous presence of concepts, ideas, judgments, and tastes that are distant from each other on the same issue. On the question of religion, in the questionnaires collected by the speaker, we encounter lines of fiery faith, Komsomol-style "opium for the people" and personally suffered disbelief. Moreover, all this is in the most sharp, extreme, expressive forms. In questions about nationalism, politics, sexuality, we face the same thing. All possible types of logical opposition are presented here. It seems as if we are looking at profiles from completely different eras and nationalities. Meanwhile, these are people sitting together on the same desk and sending their "papers" to the University in the same envelope. This first impression — the absence of any correct, logical conformity, of correspondence with external data, of any regular pattern, of typicality — all is full of the most unexpected fragmentations, contrasts, polarities — could be called the psychological asymmetry of our student youth.

Moving from this general impression, from the entire questionnaire as a whole to group analysis, we come across within individual groups, already united according to a well-known general principle we found, again the same phenomenon: mental asymmetry within each group. If we take separately believers or non-believers who stand for a completely unrestricted sexual life or for completely erasing this issue from the life of a young human being, we will notice within each group the enormous range of opinions, as if these answers are counted on a giant pendulum of the social mind. Again, we would have to substitute entire eras and various social groups under these differences in order to find their external justification and explanation. The matter is further complicated by the fact that between the groups there is a most unexpected interweaving, again of a completely asymmetrical order. Their political views do not seem to be connected by any regularity with their religious ones, and their views on their future life and profession, with their beliefs, tastes, and moods. Inside the groups, everything spreads out and appears in the most unexpected places, as if someone had cut the sheets of paper into separate questions and then mixed them up about the most whimsical and bi-

zarre disorder. And, finally, we get the same impression from the individual analysis of each questionnaire, as if it (and, therefore, the person filling it out) was cut and sewn from a variety of scraps. It is entire pieces of the mind that suddenly seem to have fallen from another sheet, brought from the outside, and if we were to graphically depict the relationship, the internal correlation of the students' mind, as it was reflected in the questionnaires, we would get a curve of the most unexpected and sharp zigzags, turns and angles, and if we were to draw a diagram in colors, it would be a real *blanc et noire*...

Thus, mental asymmetry, atypicality, discrepancy in personality, counter-feelings are revealed as the first and most obvious result of Comrade Vygotsky's survey. First in a general quantitative analysis, then in a group review of the answers, and finally in an individual sheet for every student.

These results are not unexpected or inexplicable, as they might seem at first glance. The speaker dealt with graduating groups, with young students 18 years old on average, i.e. people whom the revolution found at 11-12 years of age, and the war at 8-9 years of age. Here were people who had experienced social changes, social disruption in the most decisive years of their lives. All this is the generation that, in their personal turning points, captured the great shifts in socio-political life, culture, and history. This is where, undoubtedly, different centuries speak in their biographies. In fact, in their 18 years, entire centuries and eras met: pre-war urban life in the northwestern Russian province, war, pogroms, revolution, war communism, NEP. In psychological asymmetry it is easy to see a trace of the social asymmetry of a generation. And, if we add to this, that in terms of social composition these are, for the most part, also intermediate, asymmetrical, mixed groups of the population, those who, in eras of disruption, manage to unite and combine the most seemingly incompatible features — then the path to the correct sociological explanation will not be difficult to find.

The task of subsequent surveys is not so much to consider every scrap of the remaining and determined structure of the mind of our youth, but to capture the dynamics of its shifts. The main thing is the tendencies of these dramatic processes: what dies in them and what strengthens and sprouts.

Everything flows in the mind of this generation.

Where does it flow? This is the main question for future surveys, which should be organized on a mass scale and carefully studied.

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