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## On L.S.Vygotsky's Conception of Concrete Human Psychology — in relation to G.Politzer —

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### 1. L.S. Vygotsky's manuscript entitled "Concrete Human Psychology"

A manuscript written in 1929 by L.S.Vygotsky was published for the first time in bulletin of Moscow University (*Vestn. Mosk. Un-ta Ser. 14. Psikhologiya*, 1986, No. 1, pp. 52-65; English version: *Soviet Psychology*, 1989, 27 (2), pp. 53-77). The title of the manuscript given by the editor A. A. Puzyrei at the time of publication is "Concrete Human Psychology." It is evident that this manuscript is a preliminary sketch of Vygotsky's main work published as "History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions" (1960; written in 1931) in which he proposed the systematic theory of human development (we usually call it cultural-historical theory). Therefore, in this manuscript we can find the outlines of Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory.

The manuscript is very interesting for two reasons. One reason is that we can trace the process of construction of Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory. For example, Vygotsky writes down the following words: "Hence my underestimation of the role of whispering, secrets and other social functions. I neglected the external fading away of speech" (p. 54: in the English version, p. 57). In the light of his own well-known theory of "inner speech," these words are quite surprising to us, because he was later able to establish the theory of inner speech by discerning the importance of the role of egocentric speech (soliloquy, whispering, etc.) and focusing on the external fading away of social speech. Therefore, these words indicate the traces of trial and error in Vygotsky's thinking process.

The other reason is that the manuscript contains a very important conception which was not developed further in Vygotsky's later works. It is the conception of Concrete Human Psychology as a drama. Vygotsky got this idea from G. Politzer who proposed concrete psychology as a human drama. For instance, Vygotsky notes down,

See Politzer: psychology = drama. . . . But drama truly is full of *such connections* : the role of passion, niggardliness and jealousy in a *particular* personality structure. . . . A *drama truly is full of internal struggle which is impossible in organic systems* : The dynamic of the

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individual is drama. . . . *Psychology is "humanized."* . . . The content of the individual. The individual as a participant in a drama. The drama of the individual. Concrete psychology. (pp. 59-60 ; in the English version, pp. 67-68)

According to M.G. Yaroshevsky (1992), just this conception of Concrete Human Psychology remained "an immature germ" in Vygotsky's research plans. No matter how immature this conception is, it is a matter worthy to be examined, because through this examination we will be able to find what new aspect Vygotsky wished to add to his cultural-historical theory as of 1929. Namely, we can understand Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory more profoundly by reading the notes written in the manuscript. For example, Vygotsky notes down in the manuscript: "Excursus! See Politzer: psychology = drama. Concurrence: concrete psychology and Dilthey (on Shakespeare)" (p. 59: in the English version, p. 67). Here "concrete psychology" means the psychology as a drama which Politzer proposed. These notes indicate that Vygotsky is in agreement with Politzer's idea of concrete psychology and places a high value on it as a whole. In this context, Vygotsky remarks that Politzer's concrete psychology is concurrent with W. Dilthey's psychology, especially with his typology of characters in Shakespeare's dramas. Consequently, we can confirm here that Vygotsky sympathizes with not only Politzer's psychological thought but also Dilthey's. This fact surprises us, because we already know how Vygotsky criticized Dilthey's spiritualistic (comprehensive) psychology in another important work entitled "Historical Meaning of Psychological Crisis" (written in 1926-27; published in 1982). We can see Vygotsky's ambivalent attitude toward Dilthey. Hence, we can reason that Vygotsky in those days intended to accept not only Politzer's idea but also Dilthey's in order to enrich his own cultural-historical theory.

## **2. G. Politzer's work entitled "Critique of the Foundations of Psychology"**

### **a) Politzer's Non-Marxist ideas at the end of the 1920s**

Why did not Vygotsky develop the conception of Concrete Human Psychology as a drama based on Politzer's idea further in his later works, though he was strongly attracted to it? The main reason we have found is that Politzer constructed his concrete psychology as a drama based on Freudian psychoanalysis, not on Marxism. In general, Politzer is known as a powerful Marxist who entered into the revolutionary movement and was killed by the Nazis. Therefore, most people who are not sufficiently aware of his works in detail tend to think that Politzer's conception of concrete psychology as a drama must be based on Marxism and for that reason Vygotsky must have paid attention to it in making efforts to construct a Marxist psychology. However, the fact is, Politzer had not yet become a Marxist when he published his work entitled *Critique of the Foundations of Psychology* (1928; English version, 1994), which Vygotsky obtained and read.

Except those in the area under the influence of French culture, most of us are not aware of the fact that Politzer had not yet become a Marxist at the end of the 1920s. His Marxist life was too glaring and vivid for us to imagine a non-Marxist Politzer. For instance, in the foreword of the English

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version of Politzer's above-mentioned work, A. Giorgi writes a short biography of Politzer in the following way:

. . . He studied philosophy and psychology in France and obtained his doctorate with a dissertation on Bergson that was published in 1929 and was entitled "Bergsonism: A Philosophical Mystification." This dissertation was essentially a critique of idealistic philosophy. Politzer was a committed Marxist-Leninist philosopher and, as much as anyone during that time, lived according to the principles of that system of thought. He also taught courses on dialectical materialism annually to workers at Workers' University founded in Paris in 1932 by a small group of professors for the explicit purpose of teaching Marxist thought. When the Nazis invaded France and occupied Paris, Politzer became one of the first and most consistent resisters to the occupation. He also emerged as one of the leading French spokesmen for Communism. . . . In February 1942, the Nazis rounded up about 140 French patriots, among whom was Politzer. He was given the choice between "reforming the values of French youth" as a collaborationist teacher, or being shot. He chose the latter, with equanimity and peace, it is reported, and was killed in May 1942, by a Nazi firing squad. (1994, pp.xxiii - xxiv )

Indeed, it is very difficult or impossible for us to pick out non-Marxist Politzer from this short biography. Most people who were not aware of Politzer till then, after reading this biography, would believe that he had been a consistent Marxist at least since his student days. In fact, even Yaroshevsky, who is one of the most influential psychologists in Russia, writes as follows:

Being a Marxist, Politzer relied on the idea of social determination of the individual's behavior. After reading Politzer's work *Critique of the Foundations of Psychology*, which appeared in 1928 in Paris, Vygotsky remarked in one of his manuscripts of 1929: "Dynamics of the individual = drama. . . ." (1989, p. 217)

Work entitled "Critique of the Foundations of Psychology" (1928) by G.Politzer, a French Marxist-philosopher. . . . (1993, p. 233).

However, as we will be able to confirm again in the next sections, the fact is that Politzer had not yet become a Marxist, when he published his work *Critique of the Foundations of Psychology*. In this connection, the Japanese psychologist R. Terauchi, who studies Politzer, cites the following words of H. Lefebvre who is Politzer's best friend:

At around 1928, when most of his friends studied K. Marx and F. Engels, Georges [Politzer] who had never read their texts, always obstinately and firmly rejected shifting his own ground. When his friends entered the complicated struggles against idealism, Georges wanted to exist as a psychologist, psychoanalyst, existentialist. . . . (cf. Terauchi, 1995, p. 38)

Therefore, in those days it was impossible for Politzer to write his work *Critique of the Foundations of Psychology* based on Marxism. Indeed, in this work Politzer made an attempt to understand the structure of individuality (personality) within the framework of psychoanalysis, that is, on his own existential psychoanalysis.

Already at the end of the 1920s in the USSR (under the reign of I.V. Stalin), it had become impossible for Russian scholars to admit and study any theory other than those based on Marxist principles. A national demand for immediate construction of a Marxist psychology did not allow Vygotsky to create it by adopting any useful ideas based on non-Marxist principles. Instead, at that time Vygotsky concentrated his whole mind upon studies of the relation between the development of higher mental functions and sign mediation. On the analogy of the role of labor tools which mediate between nature and human beings, he called attention to the role of signs (especially, speech) which mediate between interpsychological (social) and intrapsychological (individual) planes. In short, he realized an essential relation between human mental development and sign mediation by getting a hint from Marxist analysis of labor processes.

Let us examine briefly the content of Politzer's work *Critique of the Foundations of Psychology* (English version, 1994).

#### b) Critique of classical psychology

First of all, Politzer proposes to reform S. Freud's psychoanalysis. To be sure, Politzer criticizes not only classical, introspective, experimental psychology founded by W. Wundt but also Freudian psychoanalysis. But, there is a substantial difference between his critical stance toward the former and that toward the latter. According to Politzer, the former is the completely false psychology that cannot claim the name of psychological science, because it "works with notions that correspond to the psychological facts considered outside of their constitutive relationship with the first person and that later serve as the starting point for the attempts of mechanical explanations" (p. 27). In such mechanical explanations the first person never appears and only models in the third person are used. Politzer calls this way of classical psychology "abstraction." "Abstraction eliminates the subject and assimilates the psychological facts to the objective facts, that is, to the facts in the third person" (p. 26).

Why does classical psychology adopt this abstract "third person method" as its own effective and inevitable way? According to Politzer, instead of studying human reality (the multiplicity of individual persons and dramatic events), classical psychology studies "mythical entities" such as perception, memory, will, intelligence, etc., that are the manifestations of spiritual nature. Then, classical psychology creates spiritual nature composed of processes and phenomena that are parallel to physical nature but at the same time are *sui generis*. In effect, classical psychology studies the manifestations of spiritual nature in the same way as physics studies the manifestations of physical nature. That is, it adopts the third person method. Politzer calls this method of classical psychology "realism." Here, realism means the constitution of mythical entities based on "the metaphysics of the soul." Realism

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implies abstraction, because it allows psychology to consider psychological facts of the first person in the third person by abandoning the multiplicity of individual persons and their dramatic events. A psychology which departs from the dramatic multiplicity of individuals and makes the first person disappear is an abstract psychology. According to Politzer, abstraction and realism characterize all of the experimental psychologies (including gestalt theory and behaviorism).

### c) Positive evaluation and critique of Freudian psychoanalysis

On the contrary, Politzer gives a very positive evaluation to Freudian psychoanalysis as a whole, even though he criticizes some of its issues severely. Politzer finds the possibility of his own concrete psychology in it. He writes as follows:

As far as we are concerned, it is by reflecting on psychoanalysis that we have perceived true psychology. This could have been an accident, but it is not, because today only psychoanalysis can rightfully give a vision of true psychology, because it is already its unique incarnation. (p. 16)

What aspect of psychoanalysis does Politzer consider most essential for constructing his own concrete psychology? Concerning the exigencies indispensable to his own concrete psychology as a drama, Politzer first of all emphasizes that psychological facts exist in the first person and that psychology can never abandon this particular relation to the first person. According to Politzer, the "hypothesis of the first person" must be constantly indispensable for the whole being and for the whole signification of the psychological facts. Then, what is the particular relation to the first person concretely? Politzer writes,

Now, psychology, if it has a reason for being, can only exist as an *empirical* science. . . . Needing to be empirical, the "I" of psychology can only be the *particular individual*. . . . Also, this "I" cannot be the subject of a transcendental act like insight, for we need a notion that is on the same level as the concrete individual. . . . Thus, the act of the concrete individual is indeed *life*, but the singular life of the singular individual, in short, life, in the dramatic sense of the word. . . . The individual is singular because his life is singular, and this life, in turn, is singular only by its content: its singularity then is not *qualitative*, but *dramatic*. (p. 34)

Thus, according to Politzer, "drama" means the singular life of the singular individual, which is full of its singular contents. The very psychology which remains on the level of this drama can have the right to declare itself "true psychology." Indeed, Politzer names it concrete psychology as a drama opposed to abstract psychology.

Analyzing Freudian psychoanalysis, especially its theory of the dream, Politzer confirms that it satisfies in principle the above-mentioned exigencies indispensable to concrete psychology as a drama.

As a proof of this Politzer states as follows:

It is not difficult to guess that it is precisely in this direction that psychoanalysis is going. It is the meaning of the dream that Freud seeks. He is not satisfied with just the abstract and formal study of its elements. He does not seek an abstract and impersonal script in which the actors are physiological excitations and the plot consists of their walk in the brain cells. And what he wants to reach by interpretation is not the abstract “me” of psychology, but the subject of individual life; that is, the support of a group of unique events, the actor, we can say, of the dramatic life and not the subject of introspection; in a word, *the me of daily life*. . . The dream is thus a segment of the life of the particular individual: it can only be explained by being related to the “I”; but to relate the dream to the “I” means then the determination of its meaning as being a moment in the unfolding of a group of events of which we call the totality a life, the life of the particular individual. (pp. 35-36)

Thus, Politzer’s conception of concrete psychology as a drama entirely agrees with the idea of Freudian psychoanalysis with respect to the methodology. Both Politzer and Freud think that the psychological fact is a segment of a drama of a particular individual, that is, an act having a personal meaning. And both of them assert the necessity of an interpretative method as “the first person method” in order to grasp the personal meanings of the segments of the life of the particular individual. Therefore, if there had not been any other problem, it must never have been necessary for Politzer to propose his own conception of concrete psychology as a drama apart from Freudian psychoanalysis.

However, according to Politzer, Freud could not carry through the above-mentioned positive aspect of his psychoanalysis. In the process of constructing his own psychoanalysis, Freud was torn between concrete psychology and abstract psychology under the strong temptation of “an explanatory science paradigm.” That is,

We understand, then, in the *Traumdeutung* [work written by Freud] the antagonism between two tendencies in psychology: the antagonism, on the one hand, of official psychology whose fundamental procedure is abstraction, and, on the other hand, of the Freudian tendency that is an orientation toward the concrete, . . . (p. 46)

The fundamental antagonism between the two forms of psychology can be found in the heart of psychoanalysis itself, which thus appears as if torn between the old psychology and the new psychology. (p. 71)

Consequently, having yielded to this temptation and forgetting more and more that his theory is true only to the extent to which it participates in the concrete, Freud substituted the explanation of psychological mechanism of a dream for the interpretation of the personal meaning of a dream. In order to explain the psychological mechanism of a dream, he created the hypothesis of the unconscious

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and introduced formal notions such as repression, resistance, displacement, condensation, censorship, etc., into his own theory. After all, Freudian psychoanalysis could not purge itself of "realism" and formalism (abstraction). As Giorgi points out, "Politzer's critique is that Freud used concrete procedures and abstract explanations. The duality is in psychoanalysis itself and Politzer wanted to purge psychoanalysis of this duality" (1994, p.xxxii ). This is why Politzer proposed to reform Freudian psychoanalysis.

Now, after examining the content of Politzer's work *Critique of the Foundations of Psychology*, we can confirm again that Politzer's idea of concrete psychology as a drama is based on his own psychoanalysis, not on Marxism. In fact, we could not find there even the names of Marx and Engels, not to mention their ideas.

### 3. What did Vygotsky intend to learn from Politzer's idea ?

Since Politzer's concrete psychology as a drama was conceived on the methodology of an interpretative science, not on that of an explanatory science, it is natural in a sense that Vygotsky could not adopt Politzer's whole idea, even if he felt sympathy toward it and placed a high value on it. This is because in those days Vygotsky made efforts to construct developmental psychology of man's higher mental functions on the methodology of explanatory science from the viewpoint of dialectical materialism. Here was the fundamental difference in methodology between Vygotsky and Politzer. Nevertheless, what did Vygotsky intend to learn from Politzer's idea of concrete psychology as a drama?

In the process of drawing an outline of his cultural-historical theory, in those days Vygotsky already made it clear that "*the psychological nature of man is the totality of social relations shifted to the inner sphere and having become functions of the individual*" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 54; in the English version, p.59: written in 1929). He found the essence of human psychology alien from animal psychology in that human behavior is determined not by nature but by society. From this point of view Vygotsky made his efforts to construct a human psychology that cannot be reduced to animal psychology, that is, to humanize psychology. Vygotsky notes down in his manuscript:

What is man? For Hegel, it is a logical subject. For Pavlov, it is a soma, an organism. For us, man is a social personality = *a totality of social relations embodied in an individual* (psychological functions built according to social structure). (ibid., pp. 58-59; in the English version, p. 66)

Going a step further from this viewpoint, Vygotsky intended to clarify individual concrete manifestations of internalized social relations which are transferred to the individual personality. Then, he got a hint from Politzer's idea of concrete psychology as a drama. He writes the following statements in the same manuscript:

. . . on the psychology of roles. See Politzer: drama. Social role (judge, physician)



determines a hierarchy of functions: i.e., functions change the hierarchy in different spheres of social life. Their conflict = drama. . . . (concrete psychology) to study the different spheres of behavior (professional complex, etc.), the structure and the hierarchy of functions there, their relation and conflict. . . . The general laws of a dream and thought (sublated category) take a unique form in the different hierarchies of the individual.” (ibid., p. 61: in the English version, pp. 69-70)

Vygotsky calls a sphere of behavior in which the individual performs a social role “complex.” There can be various stages of a drama such as the professional complex, familial complex, gender complex, etc., corresponding to the social roles of individual persons. Thus, individual psychological functions, which are internalized social relations, should take a unique form in the different hierarchies of complexes. It is Vygotsky’s thought in his manuscript that we cannot construct Concrete Human Psychology without knowing the individual concrete manifestations of internalized social relations, that is, particular psychological functions of the particular individual.

We can confirm Vygotsky’s above-mentioned conception of Concrete Human Psychology by his following statements:

*It is not thought that thinks: a person thinks : . . . Since a person thinks, we ask: what person (Kaffir, a Roman with an omen = dream, the rationalist Bazarov, the neurotic Freud, an artist, etc. etc.,)? The process will be different, although the laws of thought are the same (see Hoefding: the laws of association and thought), depending on in what person it takes place. Cf. not natural (the cortex, the subcortex, etc.) but social relations of thought (its role in a specific individual). Consider the role of a dream. It is not a matter of indifference who dreams, what person dreams. (ibid., pp. 58-59: in the English version, pp. 65-66)*

Thus, we can find that Vygotsky in 1929, who had already outlined the mechanism of transformation of social functions into personal functions by the medium of sign (especially, speech), intended further to grasp the concrete psychological features peculiar to the individual which characterize him/her as a unique singular being. Vygotsky thought that it is indispensable for humanization of psychology to know not only the general difference between human psychology and animal psychology but also the concrete differences among individual persons. This is why Vygotsky is in agreement with Politzer’s idea of concrete psychology as a drama.

#### **4. Our next focus**

But, unfortunately, there is no further discussion on the conception of Concrete Human Psychology in the manuscript. After all, as we previously pointed out, Vygotsky did not develop it further on Politzer’s idea. However, in an original “theory of inner speech” propounded in Vygotsky’s latest work based on the methodology of dialectical materialism, we can find a good possibility that

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he might have been able to realize his original Concrete Human Psychology. Analyzing genesis, functions and the structure of inner speech, Vygotsky clarifies the characteristic of its semantics in Chapter 7 of his work entitled *Thinking and Speech* (1934). He asserts that the very system of inner private meanings of words, that is, the very system of senses, is central to inner speech, because inner speech has no sound and a maximally omitted sentence structure. Therefore, the most essential function of inner speech is the operation of inner private meanings (senses) of words.

Furthermore, in the same work Vygotsky says that each person always can develop the system of inner private meanings (senses) of words in his inner speech inexhaustibly beyond the system of their determinate literal meanings depending on not only his understanding of outward things but also his internal conditions such as affections, attitudes, sense of values, character, etc. Therefore, we can regard the system of semantics of inner speech which implies both cognitive and affective contents as a concrete form of personal psychological functions (that is, consciousness) of the particular individual. Thus, we can discover the germination of Vygotsky's new original conception of Concrete Human Psychology in his theory of inner speech. It will be our next challenge to study Vygotsky's inner speech theory more profoundly in relation to the exploration of new (that is, different from Politzer's idea based on psychoanalysis) Concrete Human Psychology.

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エリ・エス・ヴィゴツキーの「人間の具体的心理学」の構想について  
—— G. ポリツェルとの関連で ——

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1929年に書かれたヴィゴツキーの覚え書きには、フランスのポリツェルのドラマとしての具体的心理学にヒントを得て着想された、「人間の具体的心理学」とも呼ぶべきメモ的構想が見出される。しかし、その構想はその後の彼の諸著作において練り上げられることなく終わった。なぜヴィゴツキーはポリツェルのドラマとしての具体的心理学に注目したのだろうか。また、なぜポリツェルの考えに共鳴しながらも、その後この構想を具体化しなかったのだろうか。

本稿では、後者の問いに対しては、ポリツェルのドラマとしての心理学の提案が基本的に精神分析理論に依拠したものであったこと、1920年代の末にはスターリン主義の強まる影響下で、マルクス主義的ではないとされる思想は受け入れ難かったことが考察され、前者の問いに対しては、この時期には人間の心理の社会的起源について明確に定式化していたヴィゴツキーが、さらに心理学の人間化を進めるためには、人間一般に共通の心理学的構想だけでなく、それぞれの個人に固有な具体的な心理学の構想を打ち立てる必要性を自覚し、そのためのヒントをポリツェルから学ぼうとしていたことが分析されている。

(付記)

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