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III. On the Vygotsky and Luria Group

The Vygotsky and Luria group is undoubtedly talented. But it represents the danger of positivism and of uncritical transfer of various Western European psychological theories that are especially fashionable now, especially those that are very influential in the West. In one period this was Freudianism; next came Gestalt psychology; then came cultural psychology, and, finally, the current stemming from Karl Bühler.

The conception of Vygotsky and Luria is a cultural-historical one. Their merit is that they pose the problem of development in Soviet psychology. However, the solution they provide to this problem cannot be regarded as satisfactory within the methodology of Marxism. Vygotsky and Luria think that we can understand the problems of development simply by observing how man learns to use tools, takes them from the external environment, and then adapts his behavior to an instrumental organization of the external environment.

Instruments are not tools as Marxism understands them, but are often handles, a chair, pieces of paper, blocks, etc. This is Spencerism when one discusses behavior in the sense of adaptation of internal conditions to external conditions. Moreover, culture is understood in a crude, mechanical way as the sum total of things, instruments, and symbols, and then there are the elements of real instrumentalism. True, Vygotsky and Luria do distinguish themselves from the instrumental school of the West. Of course, one cannot say that they are consummate instrumentalists. But in their view as well, concepts that, from the perspective of Marxism, reflect the surrounding reality and are the objective tools of the process of cognition are transformed into the same sort of instruments as, for example, a pencil. Instrumentalists have carried this business to its extreme, i.e., they divorce a concept

English translation © 2002 by M.E. Sharpe, Inc., from the Russian “Diskussii o položenii na psikhologicheskom fronte” [Discussion of the turnaround on the psychological front]. *Sovetskaia Psikhonevrologiia*, 1931, No. 2–3, p. 15.

from actual reality. Vygotsky and Luria did not do this. Nevertheless, their conception of cultural psychology must be opposed. It has not yet been subjected to criticism. It must be shown that a Marxist approach to the problem of the development of mental processes, on the basis of the history of labor, indeed differs radically from the approach to the problem we find in Vygotsky and Luria.