

## Spinoza in cultural-historical psychology

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### ABSTRACT

The article retraces the fate of Spinoza's ideas in cultural-historical psychology, from the late works of Lev Vygotsky to Evald Ilyenkov. Following Spinoza, Vygotsky considers affect to be the alpha and omega of all psychic development. The central problem both of *Ethics* and of Vygotsky's last manuscripts is the way to freedom by means of the rational mastering of affects. Vygotsky died before he could carry out his project of a "new psychology" based on Spinoza's idea of man. His students were not able to continue his work.

Benedict Spinoza was Vygotsky's first love in philosophy, and in the last years of his life he dreamed of "reviving Spinozism in Marxist psychology" (Vygotsky, 2017, p. 256). In the margins of his copy of Spinoza's *Ethics*, Vygotsky wrote: "From the great creations of Spinoza, as from distant stars, light reaches us after several centuries. Only the psychology of the future will be able to realize the ideas of Spinoza."<sup>1</sup>

With these words Vygotsky summed up *his own* experience of scientific research. Spinoza was the star that illuminated his way from his very first steps, and Vygotsky tried to bring scientific psychology to this starlit road. After the death of Vygotsky, however, the thread of Spinozist thought in psychology was interrupted. In the works of his disciples, the name Spinoza is almost never mentioned, though the matter is not in the name, of course. It is not an easy task to look at the world through the lenses of Spinoza's categories and axioms.

Some "psychologists of the future" even consider the ideas of *Ethics* hopelessly outdated. As the biographer of Vygotsky, and the editor of his collected works, Mikhail Yaroshevsky, assured the reader,

the philosophy of Spinoza belonged to another century, the century of the triumph of mechanistic determinism and uncompromising rationalism, and it could not solve the problems that required a new methodology, in spite of Vygotsky's hopes (he was a passionate admirer of Spinoza from his student years). (Yaroshevsky, 1993, p. 97)

But why do we not assume that Vygotsky retrieved something important from the works of Spinoza, some ideas that were missed by his followers? In previous works, I have traced the Spinozist motifs in Vygotsky's main texts.<sup>2</sup> Here, I would like to examine the unfinished project of a "new psychology," grounded in Spinoza's "idea of man,"<sup>3</sup> and to discover why his disciples said farewell to Spinoza.

### Appetite and affect

By the beginning of the 1930s, Vygotsky came to the idea of a dual determination of human mental activity: Society forms the mind from the outside by means of *signs*, first of all *words*, while appetite<sup>4</sup> determines the mind from within by means of *affects* (*emotions*). Now Vygotsky focuses on the

affective, motivational determinant of mind: “The affective and volitional tendency stands behind thought. Only here do we find the answer to the final ‘why’ in the analysis of thinking” (Vygotsky, 1982b, p. 357, 1987, p. 282).<sup>5</sup>

In his last full length manuscript, dated 1933, Vygotsky (1999) proceeded to the study of affects—the topic that occupies a good half of *Ethics*. Spinoza developed his theory of affects as an alternative to Descartes’ doctrine of the “passions of the soul.” Vygotsky decided to advance his own theory in a similar way.

Descartes explained the lower, sensual emotions with physiological causes, and considered free will of the human mind as the source of higher, rational emotions—wonder, love, anger, and others. In the modern psychology of emotions, Vygotsky discovered a product of semi-decay of the Cartesian dualistic doctrine. Some schools continue to develop the idea of physiological determination of emotions; others confine themselves to the teleological description of higher spheres of emotional life, rejecting the possibility of their causal explanation.

Being a Spinozist, Vygotsky sought to understand the *immanent cause* of emotions. Such a cause should not be sought in the physiology of living bodies. The physiology of emotions needs a causal explanation, as well as the “teleology” of mental life. It is necessary to establish their common, single substance and then to trace how it expresses itself in various “modalities.”

Spinoza took man’s striving to preserve one’s own life, *appetite* (*appetitus*), as the substance of all corporeal and mental phenomena. Appetite “is nothing but the very essence of man, from whose nature there necessarily follow those things that promote his preservation” (*Ethics*, III, proposition 9, scholium) (Spinoza, 1994).

“Preservation” (*conservatio*) is not the most appropriate word, especially if we speak about a human person. Vygotsky (1999) preferred to talk about the development of “forces” and “motives,” meaning the self-realization of the nature of a human being. The fullness of life, the maximum possible power and diversity of one’s own actions, is what all things strive for, or have an “appetite” for.

Appetite manifests itself, simultaneously, in corporeal (hunger, sexual desire, etc.) and in mental (conscious desires, *cupiditates*) affects. *Appetitus* is the striving to act, and affects are the psychophysical forms that increase or decrease the potential of acting (*agendi potentia*).

Simply speaking, emotions regulate the level of motivation for acting. “Emotion” and “motive” are both derived from the Latin *motio*, motion. Emotion is a direct and immediate expression of the *active need* of a living being. Where there is no emotion, there is no motive for action.

The activity-oriented (or, as Vygotsky himself preferred to express it, “dynamogenic”) understanding of the nature of emotions is the “great philosophical idea” that is capable of resolving the historical impasse at which modern psychological theories of affects had arrived (Vygotsky, 1999, p. 105), and it was Spinoza who first formulated this idea in the Part III of *Ethics*. Vygotsky believed that this idea finds its verification in Walter Cannon’s theory of “homeostasis” (compare it with Spinoza’s notion of preservation of the self). Affect prepares mind and body for acting in a problem situation to preserve their own being.

If we recall the definition of affects cited above, given in *Ethics*, we cannot but see that experimental evidence of the dynamogenic effect of emotions that raise the individual to a higher level of activity is at the same time empirical evidence for the idea of Spinoza, which defines affects as states of the body which increase or decrease the capacity of the body itself for action, promote or limit it, as well as ideas of these states. (Vygotsky, 1984b, pp. 101–102, 1999, p. 78)

The difference between higher, human affects and animal affects is determined by the nature of the objective conditions of activity. As an animal psyche serves for adaptation to the natural habitat of living beings, so is human consciousness, with all its ideas and affects, a form of active adaptation to the artificial environment in which every thing has some social meaning. Human affect arises as the effect of “ingrowing” (*vrashchivanie*) of an individual into culture. It is the reaction to a social meaning of the object of activity, while the natural affect is a reaction to the biological value of things.

Higher affects are not states of the *organic* body and psyche of the individual. They are the states of the *social* “quasi-body,”<sup>6</sup> ideally represented in the body and mind of the individual. *Appetitus socialis* is the very essence of man, as far as it determines all specifically human activities, by means of signs and higher affects. This conclusion is not formulated explicitly in the works of Vygotsky, but it necessarily follows from the logic of cultural-historical theory, indicating, at the same time, the growth point of Spinoza’s theory of affects.

For Spinoza, the most useful of all human appetites is the physical and mental attraction between human beings, for *homini nihil homine utilius*—there is nothing more useful to man than another man. Social appetite impels people to act jointly, and “all should so agree in all things that the minds and bodies of all would compose, as it were, one mind and one body” (*Ethics*, IV, proposition 18, scholium). All higher, cultural human emotions stem from this *appetitus socialis*. They are the modes of its action and the means of determination of human behavior, in the same way as signs.

Most of all, Vygotsky is focused on the specific conditions for transforming organic affects into human ones. He intended to solve this problem in his last, unfinished manuscript. In addition, he considered it necessary to create a new classification of emotions, since the nomenclature of *Ethics* seemed to him “obsolete” and “lifeless” (Vygotsky, 1999, p. 219). These tasks Vygotsky bequeathed to the Spinozistic psychology of the future: “The problems of Spinoza await their solution, without which tomorrow’s day in our psychology is impossible” (Vygotsky, 1984b, p. 301, 1999, p. 222; Spinoza, 1994).

### Affects, freedom, and object-oriented activity

Vygotsky can hardly be called a consistent Spinozist, but he always tried to think along the lines of Spinoza, and he really deepened his insight into Spinoza’s philosophy, especially towards the end of his life, when he turned to the core problem of the *Ethics*—the study of the relationship between concepts and affects. The key to *human freedom* lies here.

Vygotsky’s thoughts constantly revolved around the problem of freedom. He considered freedom to be the distinctive, and much more significant than intellect, attribute of “cultural man” in comparison with higher animals.<sup>7</sup> The highest practical purpose of scientific psychology is to understand the conditions of individual freedom, which involves harmonious unity of such opposing forms of human activity as concept and affect.

In Vygotsky’s notebooks, freedom is defined, in the spirit of Spinoza’s *Ethics*, as *conceptualized affect*.

The concept of affect is an active state, *freedom* as is.

*Freedom*: affect within the concept.

*The central problem* of all *psychology* is freedom ...

*The grandiose picture of the development of personality*: the path to freedom.

(Vygotsky, 2017, pp. 255–256).

The contradictory unity of concept and affect, of reason and passion, of thought and speech, is the main theme of Vygotsky’s latest works.<sup>8</sup> In animals, intellectual behavior is absolutely incompatible with affects and communication.<sup>9</sup> Humans managed to combine these mutually exclusive forms of activity, consequently gaining freedom.

This neo-Spinozist turn in research met, already during Vygotsky’s lifetime, active rejection on the part of Aleksey Leontyev. The latter recalled, three times at least, the “confrontation” which happened in 1931.

In his earliest reminiscence, presumably in the beginning of the 1940s, Leontyev recognized the significance of Vygotsky’s “new step of thought,” but regarded this step as a departure from the original intention—linking consciousness to life in order to find the key to human subjectivity. In light of this fundamental problem of psychology, the turn to investigating the relationships between concept and affect “was in a sense a step backward” (Leontyev, 1994, pp. 39–40). Instead of looking

for primary sources of consciousness in the objective world, in the practical activity of men, Vygotsky tried to explain consciousness from affects. “Affect? But affect is not a driving force,” Leontyev objected.

For his part, Vygotsky considered affect, as a manifestation of appetite, to be exactly *the driving force, the determinant, the “proximate cause”*—as per Spinoza’s terminology— of the behavior of all living beings. The specificity of human activity consists in the *cultural, practical mastering* of this force, in subordinating it to the integral interests of mankind. It is through this process that the higher, ideal, socio-historical affects arise, including my awe of the starry sky above me and the moral law within me.

In Leontyev’s opinion, the turn to affects was a mistake. He called for a return to the study of man’s objective activity, of our practical life, from which human consciousness and all other psychological phenomena must be deduced.

The internal arrangement of the members of Vygotsky’s school was dramatic—confrontation of two lines for the future.

My line: the return to initial theses and developing them in a new direction. Study of the *practical intellect* (= *objective action*). [...]

Vygotsky’s line: affective tendencies, emotions, feelings. They are behind consciousness. *The life of affects: hence the turn to Spinoza.*

I myself: practice. (Leontyev, 2005, pp. 375–376)

In his 1976 memoirs, Leontyev recalled how upset Vygotsky was when he learned about this divergence of “lines.” The confrontation reached its apogee at the beginning of 1933, when the research programs of Leontyev and Vygotsky separated definitively. “Vygotsky has retained everything, I have to start all over again” (Leontyev, 2005, p. 376).

At that very time an ideological campaign against Vygotsky and his school was gaining momentum. Cultural psychology was condemned as anti-Marxist. “I am ceasing to exist in psychology,” Vygotsky said to Luria and Leontyev in the Summer of 1933. He began to lose the will to live. Leontyev remembered how Vygotsky visited him in Kharkov in the last winter of his life. It was cold, but he, a chronic tubercular patient, came in an open topcoat and ... began to smoke. He, who had never smoked in his whole life. “In these months he lived, regardless of health” (Leontyev, 2005, p. 377–378).<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless Vygotsky did not stop working. He continued to write a Spinozist book on affects (Vygotsky, 1999) and, in parallel, the texts on child psychology and defectology.

What answer to the criticism of Leontyev can be made from Vygotsky’s standpoint?

Objective activity, practice, “the history of industry” must certainly be an “open book” —to paraphrase Marx— for scientific human psychology. But a psychologist examines the material being of men not at all like an economist, and the problem is how to determine the *specific character* of psychological research.

Leontyev could not find a sound, working definition of the subject matter of psychology, either at the moment of confrontation with Vygotsky, or 40 years later.<sup>11</sup> By now, the problem of activity has turned into a “verbal shadow” only, as Leontyev’s closest associate Piotr Galperin told him face to face during a discussion in Arthur Luria’s flat at the end of 1969.<sup>12</sup> Galperin made the following bleak prediction:

If we continue this line of research, which lasted through the 1950s and the entire 1960s, we shall only come to what we, actually, have already come to, namely, that the concept of activity is completely emasculated. [...] *The nature of the psychic activity itself was still unknown*, and therefore, despite all the talk about the meaningful activity of the subject, it was the common practice to appeal to physiological processes in explaining these psychic processes. Is it not typical that all the studies, being conducted today under the guidance of Aleksey Nikolaevich [Leontyev], are focused on the study of physiological processes: in the field of perception, in the field of emotions, stress, etc.<sup>13</sup>

Thus Leontyev’s turn to practice took him beyond the bounds of psychology.<sup>14</sup>

As for Vygotsky, he really sought to understand that “unknown” *X*—the nature of psychic activity itself. He was looking for the “germ cell” of the psyche, and he found it, at the prompting of Spinoza, in *affect*.

“Nothing great in the world has ever been accomplished without passion,” Hegel used to say (Hegel, 1953, p. 29). I would say more: There is no activity without passion. And nothing other than affect is a *specifically psychological* component of any vital activity.

“Affect is the alpha and omega, the first and last link, the prologue and epilogue of all psychic development,” Vygotsky declared (Vygotsky, 1984a, p. 297, 1998, p. 227).

So far as affect is the primary, elementary “cell” of psyche, scientific psychology must begin with its analysis. At the end of his life Vygotsky moved along this path of Spinoza. In his last manuscript, the history of psychology is viewed through the prism of two great theories of affects, created by Descartes and Spinoza. The author’s death cut short this work on the threshold of rediscovering Spinoza’s psychology.

## Farewell, Spinoza

After the death of Vygotsky, the theme of affect shifted to the far periphery of research. The problem of the relationship between affects and concepts virtually disappeared from cultural-historical theory. Together with it, the “*central problem* of all psychology” was lost—the problem of freedom, as it was formulated in the *Ethics* of Spinoza and in Vygotsky’s last works.

Aleksey Leontyev, as it appears from his archival records, considered the problem of connecting affect and concept “fundamentally not solvable” and believed it would lead cultural psychology into an impasse.

He [Vygotsky] tried to solve it in his *Spinoza*, I do not know these attempts well enough. I know that it was not solved in the sense of *the reverse movement of affect—intellect. And it could not be solved.* (Leontyev, 1994, p. 39)

Taking up the recently published lectures on general psychology by Luria or Galperin, one will find that the theme of affect is simply absent there, and that even the term “affect” hardly ever occurs.<sup>15</sup> In Leontyev, there is a lecture on affect towards the end of the course, but his concept of affect, as a “mark” for things and situations, has nothing to do with that proposed in *Ethics* and accepted by Vygotsky. Spinoza’s name does not appear at all, but even more strange is the absence of any traces of the thinking of his teacher, Vygotsky.

This is not a simple omission or an accident. The reason lies in the shift in perspective on the subject of psychology to a different, more narrow and one-sided understanding of the nature of psyche. The orienting function of activity, cognitive processes, and images of the external world came to the fore, while affects remained deep in shadow, on the other side of the moon. The affects do not figure in Leontyev’s impressive picture of the evolution of psyche: sensory–perceptual–intellect–consciousness. That is quite natural, because the notion of affect he proposed is weak and worthless for constructing big theories.

At the beginning of the 1960s, Evald Ilyenkov cherished the idea of a Spinoza renaissance in Marxist philosophy and psychology. However, in his studies of Spinoza, including his writings on the problem of freedom of will, Ilyenkov does not touch on either the theme of affects or the problem of the interrelation of concept and affect, which forms the living nerve of the last three parts of *Ethics*. And in his own psychological research, Ilyenkov ignores the problem altogether. At the same time, Ilyenkov takes the idea of interpreting psyche as the form of orienting activity in the surrounding, external world to its logical conclusion more persistently and consistently than Leontyev or Galperin.

According to Ilyenkov, the elementary unit of psyche is a *sensory image*. For the acting subject, the image is an “individually correctable schema of external action,” and on the side of the object, the image is a spatial “contour” of the world, inasmuch as it is involved in the process of the activity of things.

The direct sensing of these *external* contours of things as the goal, as well as of the means/obstacles on the path to its attainment, *is the image*, and is the cellular form of psychic activity, its simple abstract schema. (Ilyenkov, 2009, p. 98)

Ilyenkov disregards the simple fact that any image is emotionally charged, positively or negatively. An object which does not cause any affect, which remains affectively neutral, does not leave the slightest psychological trace, no image. We simply do not notice such objects. An image as such is a reflection (representation) of this or that external object of activity in the affective state of the acting body.<sup>16</sup>

From a psychological perspective, life is a stream of emerging and fading affects, replacing each other in the process of objective activity and regulating the activity's intensity. *Psychology*, in the Spinozist sense, *is the science about the production of affects* (in the process of objective activity) *and the exchange of affects* (in the process of communication).

According to Leontyev, psyche begins with *sensation*, an orienting reaction to a neutral, abiotic stimulus. Ilyenkov makes the point of departure in the history of the psyche “an organized system of sensations—an *image*” (Ilyenkov, 2009, p. 96).

In the 1930s, Leontyev believed that “sensation arises as a feeling, as a vague sensation—an affect” (Leontyev, 1994, p. 164). In his later works, as already noted, the meaning of the term “affect” sharply narrows, and the term itself is rarely found. The problem of the origin of sensations *in ontogenesis* is never raised, nor is resolution.

According to Ilyenkov, “the first form of *psychically shaped* actions” occurs only half a year after birth, when a child begins moving towards the mother's breast (Ilyenkov, 2009, p. 95).

An, an animal can move independently from birth, indicating that its psyche is innate. A human baby, cannot move by itself and lacks the ability of self-orienting in the surrounding world.

If we accept the definition of psyche as orienting activity, offered by Ilyenkov (following Galperin, it seems), then the psyche of the newborn will be at zero. Not only puppies or foals but even insects are born capable of self-movement in space and of searching for nutrients. The human newborn has no such ability; therefore, from the point of view of Ilyenkov, it is an *inanimate body*. Indeed, is it possible to talk about the psyche in the case of a creature that does not have any images of the external world and is unable to orientate itself in space?

All that we have at birth are organic needs plus purely physiological, “vegetative” functions providing the metabolism. Such are the “prehistorical premises” of psychic activity, as Ilyenkov puts it. A child acquires them at the very moment when the first image of an external thing is being formed. Henceforth he is a full-fledged animal. Initially, his brain regulated only *physiological* processes in the body (breathing, circulation, digestion, etc.). Now the brain turns into the control center of movement in some external environment and into an organ directing the objective activity of the body. By doing that, the brain begins to perform *psychical* (orienting) functions.

Such is the scheme of the ontogenesis of psyche in Ilyenkov. Surprisingly, he considered Spinoza to be the forerunner of this view,<sup>17</sup> although he completely eliminated affects from the psychological scene and, thereby, *crossed out* the main, essential problem of the *Ethics*: how we could master our affects to become free. For Spinoza, sensory images are nothing but a particular sort of affect, viz. the affections of the human body (*humani corporis affectiones*), confused with the affections of external bodies interacting with the human body and directing its activity.<sup>18</sup>

If we refuse to consider affects as psychic phenomena, they automatically fall into the category of purely physiological processes. It follows then that Spinoza, reflecting “on the origin and nature of the affects” (the title of Part III of *Ethics*), invaded the field of physiology. And Vygotsky at the end of his life, when he was absorbed with the theories of affect, turned to physiology too.

The foundations of the physiological interpretation of the affects were laid at the end of the 19th century by William James and Carl Lange. In Vygotsky's unfinished manuscript, he gave a detailed critique of their “organic” theory of affects. Unfortunately, this manuscript was not published in Ilyenkov's lifetime.

Let us confine ourselves to one simple question: Does the human infant experience affects? Spinoza, no doubt, would answer this question in the affirmative. And Vygotsky wrote:

The presence of affective impulses is an indispensable adjunct to every new stage in the development of the child from the lowest to the highest. It might be said that affect opens the process of the child's psychic development and construction of his personality and itself completes the process, concluding and crowning the development of personality as a whole. (Vygotsky, 1984a, p. 296, 1998, p. 227)

Ilyenkov would hardly object to that, but he believed that primary, innate affects are purely vegetative states of the human body.

The newborn baby is here still wholly like a *plant*. He lives for so long as the “external” conditions of the metabolism “come to him themselves”—the mother. He is not yet an animal, and there is no need here for the psyche. [...] The baby possesses neither image nor psyche for the simple reason that while he possesses an organic need (for his mother's milk) he does not *demand* it—just like a plant. He is not a *subject of taking food* but only an *object of feeding*. (Ilyenkov, 2009, pp. 94–95)

The baby is fed, indeed, but he eats only when he is hungry. If he is replete or sick, he turns aside from food, spits it out, and whimpers—he does not eat *actively*. Just try to feed him, this “object” ... The plant does not turn away its leaves and does not spit out the water, no matter how much it is watered. Thus, the definition of the psyche, adopted by Ilyenkov, turns out to be theoretically blind to ordinary, commonly known facts.

The child starts screaming and crying with the first breath of air, smiling after a couple of weeks, and soon he responds to the *emotions* of adults and keeps eye contact, plays with rattles, etc. Is it an inanimate being that demonstrates all these tricks? A piece of meat? An anthropomorphous plant?

If once we accept the *affect*, and not the *image*, to be the required “germ cell” of the psyche, the chimera of a “human plant”<sup>19</sup> evaporates at once. Refusing to see in affect a psychic phenomenon, psychologists cut off any opportunity to understand the genesis of psyche, its primary source, not to mention the problem of freedom in “peak psychology” (young Vygotsky's term), aimed at the active mastering of our affects and personal interrelations.

The line of development of Soviet psychology, associated with the names of A. N. Leontyev and A. R. Luria, P. Ya. Galperin, and E. V. Ilyenkov, has given us many remarkable discoveries but veered far away from Spinoza understanding of the relation between affect and concept. Vygotsky, in the course of his theoretical evolution, approached Spinoza, while his disciples moved away from Spinozism.

## Perezhivanie and affect

In recent years, commentators often place the concept *perezhivanie* in the forefront of Vygotsky studies. In his works on child psychology, written literally in the last few months of his life, Vygotsky called *perezhivanie* a “dynamic unit of consciousness” (along with *word meaning* as “an indivisible unit of thought and speech”).<sup>20</sup> In Spinoza's terms, *perezhivanie* is, apparently, nothing other than a special kind of affect, viz. *affectus, qui animi pathema dicitur* (the affect, called a passion of the soul).

Vygotsky defined *perezhivanie* as the inner relation of a person to reality.<sup>21</sup> This relation is affective, but *perezhivanie* constitutes only one, *phenomenal* side of affect. In affect there is also another, *objective* side, namely, an external action, behavior. Thus, the unity of consciousness and behavior finds its concrete, direct, and immediate expression in affect.

Vygotsky defends “the understanding of affect as an integral psychophysiological reaction that *includes in itself perezhivanie and behavior* of a certain type and represents a unity of phenomenal and objective sides” (Vygotsky, 1984b, p. 214, 1999, p. 159).<sup>22</sup> Vygotsky opposed this Spinozist monistic conception of affect to the Cartesian “dualistic approach to affective life.”

Further, it should be noted that *perezhivanie* is an elementary form of *consciousness*. And in cultural-historical psychology, consciousness is a purely social phenomenon. In this regard, it makes sense to examine how Vygotsky characterizes the newborn period of life. First, Vygotsky insists that the newborn has a psyche, despite the fact that it leads a vegetative life and “still has

no such basic animal feature as the ability to move independently through space” (Vygotsky, 1984a, p. 271; 1998, pp. 208–209). Since that moment when the body of the child separates (though yet only physically, not biologically, as Vygotsky specifies it) from the mother, the “individual mental life of the newborn” starts (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 211). Vygotsky disputes the statement of researchers who belong to the reflexological school about the lack of psyche in a newborn.

Secondly, Vygotsky defines this primary psyche as a *form of consciousness*, although all of its content is confined by “appetites, instincts and simpler affects,” and any intellectual and volitional phenomena are completely absent.

The only thing that we can assume with certain reason is an obscure, unclear state of consciousness in which sensible and emotional parts are still inseparably merged. (Vygotsky, 1984a, p. 277, 1998, p. 212)

The same obscure, unclear state is also present in the lower animals. The reason why we consider them as *phenomena of consciousness*, i.e. *perezhivaniya*, is the *social character* of infant psyche. From the moment of birth, the whole life of a newborn child takes cultural forms, so that it is a 100% social creature, though possessing a passive sociality at first.

Definitely everything in the behavior of the infant is intertwined and interwoven into the sociale. [...] In this sense, the infant might be called a maximally social being. Every relation of the child to the outside world, even the simplest, is always a relation refracted through the relation to another person. The whole life of the infant is organized in such a way that in every situation, visibly or not, there is another person. (Vygotsky, 1984a, p. 281, 1999, p. 215)

What was said about the behavior of the infant is entirely true of his psyche as well, because psyche is the reverse side of behavior. And the social psyche is, by definition, consciousness.

Hence, *perezhivanie* is a social affect, considered from its internal, “phenomenal” side. Human consciousness, in the view of the father of cultural-historical psychology, consists of affective “germ cells,” which he calls *perezhivaniya*.

For Vygotsky, *perezhivanie* is not a “mental function” like memory, attention, will, etc., nor a “special type of *meaning*,” to say nothing of a “universal category of human development.” *Perezhivanie* is the *mental mode of affect*, along with the corporeal mode of its being.

The criticism of Vygotsky’s concept of *perezhivanie* in Aleksey Leontyev and his subsequent attempt to define the subject of psychology as the “unity of activity and *perezhivanie*” (Leontyev, 1994, p. 163) deserves a special discussion. But such a discussion goes beyond the scope of this article.

## Epilogue

In the works of Vygotsky, we see an almost continuous dialogue with Spinoza. He always keeps in mind Spinoza’s “idea of a man,” checking against it every important step of his own thought. Vygotsky did his utmost to justify this ideal in psychological theory and experiments. Throughout his short life, Vygotsky was working on the creation of a scientific system where everything is brought under a single principle, having before his eyes the *Ethics* as a model of scientific thought and the image of its author, Spinoza, as an example of an “ethically perfect personality” (Vygotsky, 1982a, p. 131, 1997, p. 107).

The problem of constructing a modern Spinozist theory of affects was bequeathed by Vygotsky to the psychological science of the future. The concept of affect, as a simple “germ cell” of psyche, is intended to become a unit of analysis of all psychic phenomena, without exception.

This is not enough, however. As Vygotsky said, psychology needs its own *Capital*. It is necessary to *deduce the essential forms of psychical life* from the concept of affect, just as in *Capital*, Marx deduces the forms of commodity exchange from a “cell” concept of commodity, with its internal contradiction of abstract and concrete labor. It is required to *theoretically grow* the evolutionary tree of psyche from the “germ cell” of affect, as was done by Mother Nature herself. After all, there is no



other way to make sure that we discover the really primary and universal or, so to speak, a “stem cell” of psyche.

## Notes

1. This marginal note was discovered by Alexander Surmava, but he mistakenly gave a reference to Vygotsky’s notebook (see Surmava, 2009, p. 114).
2. See Maidansky (2008), and Maidanski (2005).
3. “Spinoza managed to form an idea of man, etc. This idea can be guiding for the psychology of man as a science. ... Speaking Shakespearean language, it shows a man, taken for all in all. Thereby it points to the psychology of man as its true subject matter. *Ecce homo*” (Vygotsky, 2017, p. 260). Spinoza’s teaching “will help contemporary psychology in what is most basic and major—in the formation of the idea of man, which would serve as a type of human nature for us” (Vygotsky, 1984b, p. 139, 1999, p. 105).
4. Spinoza’s term *appetitus* is translated into Russian (also in Vygotsky’s texts) as *vlechenie*.
5. In translating the quotations, here and below, I refer to *The Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky*, but with minor refinements.
6. Spinoza’s expression: *quasi corpus, nempe societatis*.
7. See Vygotsky (1983, pp. 250–251, 1993, pp. 235–236).
8. However, already in his early works we can find the following judgments: “[A]s Spinoza correctly said, the knowledge of our affect changes it and modifies it from a passive state to an active one. That I think about objects that exist outside myself does not change anything in them, but that I think about my affects, that I place them in other relationships to my intellect and other faculties, changes much in my mental life. To put it more simply, our affects act in a complex system with our concepts...” (Vygotsky, 1982a, pp. 125–126, 1997, p. 103).
9. “Emotional and affective states are a behavioral domain rich in speech manifestations but extremely unfavorable for the functioning of intellectual reactions. Köhler noted many times that emotional, and especially affective reactions, completely destroy the chimpanzee’s intellectual operation” (Vygotsky, 1982b, pp. 99–100, 1987, p. 108).
10. Another disciple, Bluma Zeigarnik was sure: “Vygotsky actually killed himself, or, I would say: he did everything to not live. He deliberately refused to receive treatment” (quoted from Yaroshevsky, 1993, p. 16).
11. In his later works, Leontyev defined psychology as the science of “psychic reflection of reality.” One can meet a great many similar tautologies in the Soviet literature on psychology.
12. The nearest pupils of Vygotsky held that discussion by the proposal of Luria. There were five lectures over three days—by A. Leontyev, V. Zinchenko, A. Zaporozhets, P. Galperin, and D. Elkonin. For some reason, Luria himself did not give a lecture, although he initiated the discussion and formulated its aim: to sum up what has been done in activity theory after Vygotsky. The speeches were extremely frank. The shorthand record of the discussion, with Leontyev’s marginalia, was published in Leontyev (2004, pp. 303–338).
13. Quoted from Leontyev (2004, pp. 329–330) (italics mine).
14. The similar sad fate befell the “activity approach” in late Soviet philosophy (see Maidansky, 2014).
15. See Luria (2007); Galperin (2002).
16. Cf. Spinoza’s definition of image: “The affections of the human body whose ideas represent external bodies as present to us, we shall call images of things, even if they do not reproduce the figures of things” (*Ethics*, II, proposition 17, scholium).
17. And nowadays the majority of Ilyenkov scholars share this misconception.
18. “[T]he images of things, as we have said, are the very affections of the human body, or modes by which the human body is affected by external causes, and disposed to this or that action” (*Ethics*, III, proposition 32, scholium).
19. “*L’Homme-Plante*” is the title of the treatise written by the philosopher sensationalist de La Mettrie in 1748.
20. See especially Vygotsky (1984a), pp. 382–383.
21. “*Perezhivanie* must be understood as the internal relation of the child as a person to one or another element of reality” (Vygotsky, 1984a, p. 382, 1998, p. 294). In the English edition, *vnutrennii* is mistakenly translated as *external* instead of *inner*.
22. Italics mine. In the text above, commenting on Gregorio Maranon’s experiments, Vygotsky regards *perezhivaniya* and “bodily manifestations,” or “psychical and somatic components,” as two sides of the “full affect.” And on the page below he writes about “an internal interweaving of *perezhivanie* and organic reaction in the composition of affect” (see Vygotsky, 1984b, pp. 122–123, 1999, p. 93).

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