
THE HUMAN ACTIVITY AS AFFECTIVE-COGNITIVE UNIT: A HISTORIC-CULTURAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT. This article puts in question the affectional-cognitive unit which sustains the human activity, with the purpose to light incorrectness of approaches which dichotomize reason and emotion. It asserts that such dissociations are founded in theoretical-methodological principles which set bounds for explanations about the human psychism, so that the overcoming of referred dualisms puts on as a method matter. For making explicit that assertion, it resorted to Historic-Cultural Psychology, based on that it explains about the psychism as subjective image of objective reality, of Vygotskian criticisms to Cartesian dualism and the need of a historic-cultural approach on emotion studies, intend to analyzing the human activity as a affective-cognitive unit and the imbricated relations that are waged, within it, among affections, emotions, feelings and thoughts. Once presented the interrelations between emotions and cognitions this exhibition argues that the concepts are necessary as a minimum unit of analysis both of thought and feelings.

Keywords: Activity; affection; cognition.

A ATIVIDADE HUMANA COMO UNIDADE AFETIVO-COGNITIVA: UM ENFOQUE HISTÓRICO-CULTURAL

RESUMO. Este artigo coloca em questão a unidade afetivo-cognitiva que sustenta a atividade humana com o objetivo de aclarar a impropriedade de enfoques que dicotimizam razão e emoção. Assevera que tais dissociações radicam em princípios teórico-metodológicos que balizam explicações sobre o psiquismo humano, de sorte que a superação dos referidos dualismos se impõe como uma questão de método. Para a explicitação dessa assertiva, recorreu à psicologia histórico-cultural, à luz da qual se explana acerca do psiquismo como imagem subjetiva da realidade objetiva, das críticas vigotskianas ao dualismo cartesiano e da necessidade de um enfoque histórico-cultural no estudo das emoções, tendo em vista analisar a atividade humana como unidade afetivo-cognitiva e as imbricadas relações que se travam, nela, entre afetos, emoções, sentimentos e pensamentos. Uma vez apresentadas as intervencções entre afetos e cognições, a presente exposição advoga que os conceitos se impõem como unidade mínima de análise tanto do pensamento quanto dos sentimentos.

Palavras-chave: Atividade; afeição; cognição.

LA ACTIVIDAD HUMANA COMO UNIDAD AFECTIVO-COGNITIVO: UN ENFOQUE HISTÓRICO-CULTURAL

RESUMEN. En este artículo se pone en tela el juicio la unidad cognitivo-afectivo que sustenta la actividad humana con el fin de aclarar la insuficiencia de los enfoques de la dicotomía entre la razón y la emoción. Afirma que tales disociaciones tienen sus raíces en los principios teóricos y metodológicos que guían las explicaciones sobre la psique humana, de modo que la superación de este dualismo se impone como una cuestión de método. Para la aclaración de esta declaración hizo un llamamiento a la Psicología Histórico-Cultural a la luz de lo que se expuso en la psique como imagen subjetiva de la realidad objetiva, la crítica vigotskiana del dualismo cartesiano y la necesidad de un enfoque histórico-cultural para el estudio de las emociones con el fin de analizar la actividad humana como unidad cognitivo-afectivo y las

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complejas relaciones que se libran entre los afectos, emociones, sentimientos y pensamientos. Una vez presentadas las interrelaciones entre las emociones y cogniciones esta exposición argumenta que los conceptos son necesarios como unidad mínima de análisis tanto del pensamiento como del sentimiento.

Palabras-clave: Actividad; afección; cognición.

Introduction

Despite the many advances that mark psychology as science and profession today, the treatment given to the affective-cognitive phenomena still contains undeniable theoretical-practical challenges. The mark of the rigid dualisms so well carved out by the logical-formal hegemony since the origins of modernity, remains, orienting approaches that now lead to the affective centrality to the detriment of the cognitive aspects, and vice versa.

The concepts in agenda, affection and cognition, circumscribe fundamental questions in psychology in all its fields of application, since it determines greater clarifications about the former, as also affirm Machado, Facci and Barroco (2011), Toassa (2012), Martins (2013), Monteiro (2015), among others. These authors, by focusing on such concepts, they evaluate that, despite the advances of psychology throughout the 20th century, the dual view about the psychic phenomena that marked its origins in the 20th century still perseveres in it. In this direction, they point out that the overcoming of it is still a challenge to be overcome by this science. Moreover, it should be emphasized that also under a neuroscientific approach, the Cartesian dualism between affection and reason is widely questioned by Damásio (2011, 2012, 2014, 2015), for whom the being and its several forms of manifestation, need to be understood in an integrated way.

It is affirmed, in the works cited, the artificiality of the Cartesian approaches by postulating that the impacts of feelings in the mental life require thought and consciousness and vice versa, because only in conjunction affections and reason modulate human behavior. Nevertheless, we observe that the methodological approach adopted by this author overlooks the social and dialectical nature of the human development.

From the outset, we deemed pertinent that the innumerable scissions existing in the studies of human phenomena, among which the dichotomy between emotion and reason stands out, reflect different methodological principles of investigation and not merely interpretative differences, being linked to the pathways of structuring of psychology itself and neurosciences. However, a comparative analysis of these methodological principles flees from our objectives, since we aim at the exposition of elements that corroborate the understanding of the affective-cognitive unit proper of the human activity in light of the dialectical-historical materialistic method, according to the precepts systematized by Paulo Netto (2015) and Tonet (2013).

The treatment we will give to human activity as an affective-cognitive unit is based on Leontiev (1978a, 1978b) and Vygotski (1995; 1996), for whom the psychism is a material/ideal unit that is responsible for the formation of the subjective image of the objective reality to, within the core of the explanation of this process, highlight the affective-cognitive properties of the human activity and the characterization of the subjective experience in its relationships with what affection, emotion and feeling means.

Psyche as a subjective image of the objective reality

In affirming the dialectical materialistic method as a requisite for the study of man in his multiple determinations, the Historical-Cultural Theory announced the scientific possibility of explaining the psyche as, at the same time, organic structure and subjective image of reality, correlating psychic phenomena and material world. This approach enabled the overcoming of fragmentary and dichotomous interpretations between internal and external experience, between subjectivity and objectivity, between emotion and reason, among others. In the same way, it made possible the overcoming of biologizing models, centered in the organic unilaterality, and/or psychologizing, representative of the introspectionist

idealism proper of the origins of psychology, which were harshly criticized in all the Vygotskian production, especially in the essay *Theory of the Emotions: Historical-Psychological Studies* (Vygotsky, 2004).

By characterizing the psyche as a subjective image of objective reality, dialectical materialism has shed light on the understanding of psychic processes that confer objective existence to the reflection of reality in the consciousness. He emphasized that this understanding has as its mainstay the subject-object active relationship, clarifying the dynamics by which the object, existing outside and independently of the consciousness of the subject, also gains a subjective existence.

Marx (2010) pioneered the proposition, according to which reality has an autonomous existence in relation to the consciousness that men have of it, and it is up to them to know it in order to dominate it. This principle represents one of the bases upon which Historical-Cultural Psychology has been built up and expressed strongly in the assertion of Leontiev (1978b), for whom the human psyche is identified with the conscious reflection of the concrete reality.

Subjectivity, thus conceived has, in turn, objective correspondence, since its nuclear function is to operate as a parameter and criterion of the concrete activity that links subject and object, guiding the man in the objective conditions that sustain his life. Consequently, there must be a maximum degree of adequacy between the image and the object it reflects or aims to reflect. However, the image is not a mechanical copy of the real and this correspondence does not accomplish in a natural way, but rather by appropriation of the culture.

As stated by Vygotsky (1995), the process of internalization, from which the image results, does not promote the figurative mimesis of the object, but its *representation*, allowing the image to occupy the place of the object composing the subjectivity of the individual. Hence, internalization represents, ultimately, the appropriation of signs, of meanings. The fidelity of the representation results in the achievement of the mediation of signs, assuming objective, real and concrete dominion of the subject over the object.

It was in the light of the explanation of these dominions that Vygotsky (1995, 1996) postulated the distinction between psychic properties, naturally instituted – denominating them as *elementary psychic functions* – and properties, culturally formed, called *superior psychic functions*. By this way, he identified the psychological development with the movement engendered by internal contradictions between the natural and the cultural legacies, in which the psychic functions transform themselves and allow the self-control of the conduct required to the dominions of the subject over the object.

As products of the social development of humanity, the higher psychic functions establish themselves as supra-organic forms of conduct resulting from the use of signs and the use of tools, thanks to which the behaviors become consciously planned and controlled. Therefore, the system of human activity is determined, at each stage, by the degree of its organic development and by the degree of its mastery over cultural objectifications. These two different systems evolve together forming a third system, innovative, and of a very special type of system that points to the psyche as a *subjective image of the objective reality or psychic reflection of reality*.

According to Vygotsky (1995) and Leontiev (1978b), the cultural formation of such *image* corresponds to the transformation of the primitive natural psychic structure towards new and more complex structures. Besides, the construction of the psychic image, as a conscious phenomenon, denotative of the real, is determined by a conjugation, built on the *human activity*, of material and psychological processes and, not being mere stamping of the objective reality, it reveals itself as alpha and omega of man/nature relationship, in which the very human nature is included. The objective reality reflected in the form of psychic phenomena constitutes *human subjectivity as a psychic reflection of reality*.

This assertion led the aforementioned authors to analyze the instituting psychic properties of the psychic reflection, that is, to the analysis of the functional processes that form the subjective image of the objective reality – sensation, perception, attention, memory, language, thought, imagination, emotion and feeling. The punctual treatment of each of these processes goes beyond the objectives of this manuscript. However, we must briefly indicate the role they play in the formation of the subjective image.

As stated by Luria (1991), taking the subject/object active relationship as founding reference of the formation in question, we need to recognize in the sensorial-perceptual capture of the object its primary condition. In this direction, the sensation reflects partial aspects of the objects and phenomena, while the

perception allows the construction of a unified image on them. The attention, in turn, makes possible the formation of the focal image on the perceptual field, while it is task of the memory the formation of the image by evocation of mnemonic traits.

Language and thought requalify all these formations, as the representation of the object is established as a sign by the language, opening the possibilities for the construction of the image in the quality of idea. By the action of thought, thanks to which it is mediately apprehended what is immediately given by sensory capture, the connections existing between the objects are placed uncovered, thus unveiling their essential properties, not made available by the immediate sensitivity (Vygotsky, 2001).

Still in accordance with Vygotsky (2001), the thought allows the *construction of the image of the object in its internal connections and abstract interdependences*. This process, however, from a historical-dialectical perspective, not only represents the transmutation of the object in a subjective form (in idea), but also the transformation of the idea into a new object, a result of the imagination, which is responsible for the formation of the anticipated image of the product to be achieved by the activity.

In synthesis, sensation, perception, attention, memory, language, thought and imagination are placed directly at the service of the formation of the *image of the object in view of its concreteness*, that is, of the image faithfully representative of the existing reality; they aim, therefore, the reflection of the objective reality. These functional processes represent the so-called *cognitive functions*, whose quality parameter is revealed in the intelligibility of the real that they promote (Martins, 2013).

However, what occurs is that all of this dynamics of internalization encompasses only part of the process, since no image is established in the absence of a *particular relationship between subject and object*. In order to have a sensory capture of the object and consequent institution of the psychic image that corresponds to it, the first condition is that the object affects the subject, so that the mentioned image will contain, in addition to the properties of the object, the singularities of the relationship of the subject with him. From this, results the impossibility of any relationship between subject and object to exempt from *affective* components, as postulated by both Vygotsky (2004) and Leontiev (1978a).

Therefore, understanding the dialectic between the cognitive and affective processes – as inner opposites to one another, rather than as dichotomous processes – is a methodological requirement for understanding of *human activity as an affective-cognitive unit* and, also, the first step for the historical-dialectical materialistic study of the emotions and feelings. The affective-cognitive unit that sustains the human activity demands the affirmation of the emotion as a data inherent to the cognitive act and vice-versa, since no emotion or feeling, as well as no act of thought, can express itself as *pure contents*, exempt from one another. It was advocating this materialistic and systemic focus on the psychism that Vygotsky (2004), pioneeringly, made radical criticisms of the Cartesian dualism, calling into question the impropriety of the scissions between emotion, feeling, and thought – issue on which we will deal with below.

Criticisms of the Cartesian dualism and the historical-cultural focus on the study of emotion, feeling and thought

The attention devoted by the Historical-Cultural Psychology to the emotions, feelings and thoughts turned, first, to the analysis of the impropriety of the precepts that focused the affective and cognitive dimensions by the logic of the *either this or that*, as well as the nature and the role of the emotions and feelings in the dynamics of the human activity, since their very existence is conditioned by the social experience of the individual, through the *affection* of the world over him.

Vygotsky (2004) made it clear that for the correct understanding of the interwoven relationships established between emotions and other psychic functions expressed in the structure of the human activity, the first task was to overcome the Cartesian approach, which dichotomized mind and body, opening the possibilities for explanations sometimes idealistic, sometimes mechanistic materialistic. For him, the field of studies on emotions was still an area under-explored by the Historical-Cultural Psychology and, from this gap, mainly the organicist approaches, such as the propositions of James and Lange, emerged and gained strength.

According to Vygotsky (2004), the investigations of the psychologist William James and the physiologist C. G. Lange, although conducted independently in the late 19th century, converged on their

propositions, becoming matrix references in the studies on emotions. Their focus – establishing linear relationships between emotions and organic functioning –, circumscribed them to a fundamentally corporeal nature, dichotomizing them (relationships) from human feelings. With this, they established direct links between emotions and body, feelings and *soul*. That, for Vygotsky (2004), is the origin of the theories of a material-mechanistic and/or ideal-metaphysical nature that have populated the psychology of emotions and feelings.

James and Lange, when explaining the emotions by placing in the foreground their organic-biological base, have imposed physiological modifications as their only conditioning factors, converting them into psychophysical epiphenomena that prepare the organism for action. The immediate bodily manifestations would constitute the substance of the emotions, in such a way that they would express themselves more purely and genuinely in the animals than in the man, in the primitive man more than in the developed man, and therefore, in the child more than in the adult (Vygotsky, 2004).

Since that doctrine, it was established a dispute between irreconcilable opposites, in the face of which the pendulum of the balance remains oscillating between body and soul, between matter and idea, between objective and subjective, and so on. For this reason, Vygotsky (2004) asserted that James and Lange, with their organicist theories of emotions, did not escape the Cartesian tradition by seeking to find in the body modifications the pineal source of the emotions.

These researchers, when proposing that the emotional process develops meeting the path *perception – organic changes – emotion*, made clear the conception of emotion as internal perceptions of organic changes, reducing them to the reflection, in the consciousness, of such transformations – that is, to the perception of *emotional sensations*. Besides, in the face of these propositions, the nature of these sensations when coupled to mental processes – such as thought, reasoning, will, etc., remained to be unveiled.

According to Vygotsky (2004), in no other field of investigation the scission between natural processes, *lower* (such as emotions) and *higher* processes (such as feelings and thoughts), from which resulted the innumerable impasses that marked (and still mark) the studies on the development of human emotions and feelings, showed to be so clear. However, it is important to note that the Russian psychologist did not oppose the proposition of the organic foundations of emotions, but he conferred on James and Lange the merit of highlighting the specific organic changes of the emotional reactions, opening a fruitful path for the empirical investigations on them, data that gives to such propositions an undeniable scientific value. The Vygotskian criticism was centered fundamentally on the scissions imposed on the psychic dynamics and the ahistoricism of such propositions.

The ahistoricism highlighted by Vygotsky (2004) rests on the assertion that the real bases of human emotions and feelings do not rely, unilaterally, on physiological mechanisms. By devoting themselves to the study of emotions, James, Lange and followers took as reference the material foundations of the emotions of the animals that, however, according to Vygotsky (2004), do not provide the necessary elements for the study of the human emotions. Thus, this author brought in issue the distinct nature of man and animal, as well as the impropriety of explaining the *superior* – the most complex, from the *inferior* – the simplest, as he advocated in the proposition of the inverse method (Vygotsky, 1995).

To Vygotsky (2001) and Vygotsky (2004), the biological theory of emotions is incorrect if, from the animals we move to the man, as proposed by James, Lange and followers. By leaving aside the radical differences between them, they limit the understanding of the human emotions to their most archaic rudiments, to the primitive *instincts*. Under such point of view, the emotional reactions are converted into *frozen* inheritance, refractory to the profound transformations arising from the life in society. Along this path, their manifestations are usually taken, as a rule, as destructuring of the human behavior, as a type of *animal invasion* whose destiny should point to the direction of the containment.

Vygotsky (2004) considered that the dualistic logic of the *either this or that* prevented effective advances in explaining the emotional phenomenon, letting the structure of the activity in which the emotion performs different functions escapes *through the fingertips*. The author affirmed that the ahistoricism had placed itself as a central trace of the Cartesian-organicist theory, despite its proponents aimed to find, from it, the key to the historical explanation of the emotions.

By affirming the social-historical development of the human psyche and seeking an ontogenetic study of the emotions, Vygotsky (2004) synthesized two fundamental features of the ahistoricism of the

organicist explanatory models. The first refers to the sensory and reflexive nature given to the emotional reaction, and the second relies on the hypothesis that such reactions represent the most stable nucleus of the set of elements of the emotional behavior.

According to Vygotsky (2004), the Cartesian-organicist theory overlooks the historical-social development, even in what concerns to the organic apparatus itself, depriving the emotional nucleus of any bond with the historically developed conscience. By linking the emotions to the most archaic and most stable organic structures, such theories isolated emotions from the general context of the human development, making it impossible to unveil the unity between emotions and their psychological contents. As a result, they converted the emotions into “an island separated from the main continent of consciousness, surrounded on all its sides by an ocean of purely vegetative and animal, purely organic processes, in whose context they acquire their true meaning”. (Vygotsky, 2004, p.136).

The abovementioned author also pointed out that the unilaterality of the organicist approaches of emotions did not take long to become the object of severe criticisms, which congregated other researchers, such as S. Freud, A. Adler, and K. Lewin. Rejecting the causal *explanations* of the biological approaches, the propositions of these scholars appealed to psychology their role in the universe of the *understanding* about these phenomena, whose only goal would become the understanding of the emotional links directly experienced by each individual through the unveiling of their contents.

In attempting to overcome the classical explanatory theory of emotions, the emerging positions in the late 19th and early 20th centuries ended up enclosing the human emotions in *psychological complexes*, that is, in units of processes that unite associatively by a subjective act of personality. As a result, Vygotsky (2004) analyzed that the dual focus was preserved, since, if under the angle of the organism it was rejected its subjective sense to preserve the materiality of emotion, in the second case it was refuted the materiality of life to preserve the experience of sense.

Thus, the author concluded that only the overcoming of the Cartesian dualism, whether in its materialistic or idealistic orientation, would promote a truly new approach to the study of human emotions. An approach that could take psychology out of the *blind alley* in which, by establishing the causal nexus between the physiological manifestations and the emotional experiences, the possibility of establishing the intelligible and logical nexus between emotion, feeling and the other psychic processes and, likewise, between them and the historical-social contents of consciousness, was lost. To Vygotsky (2004), this initiative required another logic in the study of human activity.

Human activity as an affective-cognitive unit

The systemic approach that Vygotsky (2004) defended in relation to all functional processes reappears in relation to emotions and feelings, in which the author also emphasized the role of the internalization of signs and, especially, the formation of concepts. To him, the system of concepts includes feelings and vice versa, since the human being does not simply *feel*, but perceives the feeling in the form of its content (fear, joy, sadness, etc.). Therefore, the author affirms that the feelings are experienced as judgments, always keeping a certain relationship with the thought, to the same extent that the thought itself is not exempted, in different degrees, from the affection of the object on which it is dealt with.

The treatment that Vygotsky (2004) gave to the affective-cognitive unit of the human activity was substantially influenced by the Spinosian philosophy, which, for the author, radically illuminated the Cartesian contradictions and limits. Vygotsky (2004) referred to Espinosa as someone who criticized not only the dualism of Descartes but also the prevailing spiritualist and teleological interpretations at that time.

Recalling one of the propositions of this philosopher of the 17th century, according to which man has power over affections, and the reason can alter the order and the connections of the emotions – leading them to tuning with the order and the connections given by consciousness –, Vygotsky (2004) stated that the knowledge about affection is capable of modifying it, transforming it from a *passive* to an *active state*. According to Russell (1979), in the Spinosian philosophy, the expressions *passive states* and *active states* refer to the dispositions that emanate from the subject-object relationship. In the passive state the subject undergoes the action of the object, refluxing his activity in face of him; in the active state the subject acts on the object, potentiating the activity that acts upon him.

Vygotsky (2004) then affirms that the affections act in a complex system of concepts and, situating them as to the reason and to the other psychological instances represents one of the conditions for the explanation of the psychic life. He thus affirmed the historical-cultural nature of feeling, which he also calls *complex emotion*, which is instituted and modified by virtue of the ideological and psychological environment, that is, by the internalization of signs from which the formation of concepts results.

Reaffirming the historical-cultural nature of the affective functioning, this author proposed the need to focus on it in the *psychic system* that contains it, that is, to apprehend it in the interconnections with all other functional processes. However, despite the exegesis that he undertook on the theories of emotion that marked his time, Vygotsky (2004) did not systematize something that we can take as his own *theory of emotions*, but he left us a legacy that, in our judgement, has spread in the Historical-Cultural Psychology by the hands of the researchers who gave continuity to the project of construction of *scientific psychology* materialized in the Historical-Cultural Psychology.

We understand that Leontiev (1978a) contributed significantly to the understanding of the affective-cognitive unit by placing focus on the internal dynamics of human activity in relation to needs, motives and emotions. This author first emphasized that such phenomena correspond to the dynamic background of the personality, operating through the close connections that they establish between themselves. In his treatment of this question, Leontiev (1978a) defended the initial need to distinguish between needs and motives – contents of consciousness, often taken as synonyms in psychology.

According to Leontiev (1978a), the need corresponds to a profoundly emotional and deficiency state generator of stress that mobilizes action, existing, from the starting point of the development, a biological radical common to the needs and emotions. As much as animals, men are born endowed with vital needs that are met, initially, by other people. It is in accordance with the action of the subject himself on the surrounding objects that bonds between the deficiency state (necessity) and the object capable of serving him are established. Therefore, the necessity in itself does not have properties apt to orientate or direct the activity. Its internal content needs to be *fulfilled*, which means to say: only as a result of the discovery of the object of the deficiency that the need achieve objectivity. For this reason, the states of necessity, as a rule, are experienced as feeling of emptiness, lack, and undifferentiated lack.

However, the action of the subject on the world enables him a reorientation of the necessity according to the discovery of what corresponds to him satisfactorily, that is, the object capable of responding to the deficiency state needs to be found. This process of discovery reconfigures the subject-object relationship, on the basis of which the necessity becomes motive and the object achieves positive affective valuation. The motive therefore encompasses the unit between necessity and its corresponding object, which acquires a stimulating and guiding function of the activity (Martins, 2015). Therefore, it is necessary to note the role of the affection of the object over the subject in the construction of the motives and, consequently, the social order of his formation.

To Leontiev (1978a) the truly human needs result from a long process of formation. The common radical between needs and emotions confers an emotional tonicity to the needs, so that their satisfaction or frustration will hardly be free of emotional correlates. The same subject-object relationship that promotes the construction of the motives, which confers objectivity to the need and arouses emotional experiences, occurs on a dynamic psychological background that permanently confronts the motives of the activity and its results.

For this reason, Leontiev (1978a) affirmed, emotions impose themselves as instigators of activity and consciousness, fulfilling the role of sanctioning, positively or negatively, the motives of the activity in the face of its results, that is, in the face of the compliance with the purposes of the actions that aim to meet objectively given need.

In accordance with Leontiev (1978a), the differentiation of the emotional states, in turn, results from the development of the primary sensoriality, in which all psychic aspects merge with emotion. Thanks to this development, to which the very development of consciousness is linked, the emotional states specialize, so to speak, giving different emotional tones to the experienced.

This is, according to this author, a differentiation that affects the image of the real, between its objective content and its affective resonance. This resonance, called by the author as "*affectogenesis of the object*" (Leontiev, 1978a, 156, [italics added]), is neither static nor stable, conditioned by the complex mediations required to human activity. In this direction, this author also affirmed that emotional states are

not archaic rudiments nor rigid cores that rule over the subject-object relationship, always possessing a history, a development.

Throughout the history of development, to meet the influence of the emotions on the experienced, the emotional bonds with the motive of the activity become tighter. With this, Leontiev (1978a) warned that the motive could be diluted in the feeling, thus losing its objectivity. From this type of relationship, in which emotion encapsulates the motive, it emerges the – false – idea, according to the author, which attaches to the personal sense of experience, a fundamentally hedonistic and therefore abstract nature. In the words of the author:

For this reason, undoubtedly, it is necessary to overcome the traditional subjectivist conception of motives, which leads to confuse very heterogeneous phenomena and completely different levels of regulation of the activity.... The subjective experiences, the will, the desire, etc. are not motives because they are not capable of engendering on their own an *oriented* activity (Leontiev, 1978a, 153, [italics added]).

With such considerations, the author was not relegating the role of the affective states, but calling into question that human activity is, strictly speaking, an activity oriented towards certain purposes, supported by a multiplicity of determinations and, among them, affective states are included. It is unreasonable to assume, therefore, that human activity is subordinated merely to the increase of positive emotions and decrease of negative emotions. If that were the case, we should necessarily conclude that pleasure makes history, but the history itself makes us see the contrary.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that emotional states emanate from the activity that is, in the case of human activity, mediated by consciousness. For this reason, the course of the development and expression of the emotional states presuppose concrete conditions and circumstances of life and education, which condition their innumerable changes and qualitative particularities.

The propositions of Leontiev (1978a) meet the postulates of Vygotsky (2004), since both highlight the development of thought and consciousness as a factor linked umbilically to the formation of the emotional states. Equally, these authors converge when considering that human emotions accompany positively the process of humanization, opposing the classical conception of emotions as a fossilized nucleus, as archaic rudiments, of the existence of man.

With these considerations in mind, which aimed to affirm the historical-cultural nature of emotions and feelings and provide theoretical-methodological subsidies for the understanding of the affective-cognitive unit proper to human activity, we now have to clarify the conceptual distinctions between affection, emotion and feeling.

Subjective experience: affection, emotion and feeling

We shall mention, at first, that we did not find in the authors who based the Historical-Cultural Psychology a consensus on their use of the terms affection, emotion and feeling, often adopted without great distinctions between each other. We even infer that, particularly Vygotsky, Leontiev and Luria did not dwell on such terminological distinctions. For this reason, we opted first to explain the historical-social nature of emotion and feelings, as well as the affective-cognitive unit of activity, since these precepts represent the common ballast on which the attention given to the affective functional processes in the field of Historical-Cultural Psychology is built.

Throughout this text, it was demonstrated that man *reacts* to the objects and phenomena of reality and this reaction is the primary constraint of the construction of their reflection in the consciousness. In these reactions the whole psychic system is mobilized, that is, it reacts to the world through sensations, perceptions, attention, memory, thought, language, imagination, emotions and feelings. There is not, therefore, a *status* that differentially qualifies such processes in the formation of the psychic image; instead, there is a dynamics between them, an amalgam conditioned by the nature of the activity in progress, which confers specificity to the expression of each function and to what extent participates in the activity in question.

The product of this amalgam affects the individual in different ways and to different degrees, depending on which he establishes his experiences. Therefore, we define as *experience* what is

experienced by the subject in the face of the object that culminates represented in the form of subjective image. The life of the individual will then include an infinity of experiences and, therefore, will gain distinct intensities and play different roles in the life of the subject. Some will be superficial, fortuitous and casual, operating as *passers-by* in the history of the person, that is, they will pass without leaving more vestiges.

Others, however, will modify the attitude of the subject in view of the object, and will do so by a change of the reactive tone determined by it (object) – these will be the *affective experiences*. Such modification results from a wide range of factors that comprise the immediate circumstance of the confrontation with the object, its meaning, the motives and ends of the activity that involves it, the demands that the subject imposes himself in this activity, the implications of its result in the person's life, etc.

Despite the multiplicity and complexity of affective experiences that directs subjectivity, they can be categorized by taking as criterion the prevalence, in them, of *emotions or feelings*. Thus, what we question is the existence of *affective experiences nucleated by emotions and affective experiences nucleated by feelings*. In our judgment, locating emotion and feeling in the context of the affective experience helps to understand the social nature of both, since the experience will always be of a social being, and also reduces the risks of artificial scissions between these phenomena.

It is a matter of considering them united in human activity, since emotions are laden with feelings, that is, feelings give them *contents*, just as emotions give feelings their affective tone. In this direction, both are *found* in the human functioning, in a figure-background dynamics, remembering that there is no figure without background or background without figure. This premise, of a methodological nature, gives support to our proposition of affective experiences nucleated by emotions and/or feelings.

As such, the affective experiences accomodate a system of signs instituted by *impressions*, by marks of the experience that are preserved as parameters, as models in the memory by reason of their emotional nuances. The quality of these nuances arises both from the fact that certain stimulations induce physiological changes of well-being or malaise, and from the immediate relationship between the motives of the activity and their results for the subject, thus unifying *organic and psychological* components.

The dualism that still prevails in innumerable approaches on emotions and feelings, in our view, corroborates a series of misunderstandings about the subjective life. Defending the systemic approach of these phenomena, we consider that it is appropriate, in order not to separate the inseparable, to deal with them from the point of view of their own identity traits and their particular expressions, remembering that they can only be formally treated separately.

The expressions of emotions include, certainly, several somatic manifestations through the action of neuro-vegetative processes. These processes involve the reticular formation, thalamus, hypothalamus, limbic system and subcortical ganglia. According to Blagonadezhina (1960), such expressions are linked to the fulfillment of organic needs that relate to the very conservation of life. They are also linked to specific forms of reactions to sensations, giving them a positive/pleasant, or negative/unpleasant emotional tone. The author emphasized that these reactions do not lose, also, the character of preservation of the organism.

The emotional manifestations, essentially characterized by impressions associated with well-being or malaise are, therefore, sensations. As such, they are mobilized by specific stimuli, by elements or properties isolated from the objects or phenomena. Sensory capture represents the *gateway* of the world into the consciousness, since it demands the recognition of the emotional sensations in this same condition. Not by coincidence, when referring to functional indistinction proper to the psychic system in its initial stages of development, Vygotsky (2001) highlighted the strong emotional appeal present in the formation of all psychic functions and, consequently, in the behavior of the child.

The fact that the emotions are mobilized by isolated qualities of the objects and phenomena confers them two basic characteristics. The first concerns their immediate irrationality, that is, the fact that they express themselves in an unrelated way to volition and to the evaluations that synthesize the various characteristics of the context from which they emerge and the second, to their transience.

The emotional reactions arise from the subject-object immediate relationship, are marked by vicissitudes of this relationship and, with that, they can both potentiate the stimulating force of action and reduce it, weakening the vital activity of the subject. Such possibilities are updated in view of the concrete situation given and the history of the individual. However, any actions under exclusively emotional determinations take into account only partial aspects of the situation.

The second characteristic, which is closely dependent on the former, refers to the transience of the emotional commotion, that is, its character is intense and deep, but circumstantial. This transience relies on the biological and psychological radicalism of the affective mechanisms. From the biological point of view, the organism will tend to the return of the functional balance, being, in this case, a neuro-vegetative tendency of organic preservation. The absence of this return, that is, the prolonged experience of this state of psychophysical alterations and resulting tension, is one of the conditions that engender the stress.

From the psychological point of view, the psychism will tend to the systemic functioning, represented by the psychic multifunctionality as mainstay of behavior and, in this direction, of the attention to the corresponding mediations. This proposition finds support in Vygotsky (1997), for whom the mental illness corresponds to the *disintegration of the psychic system*, reason why, although the psychological functions remain singly intact, they no longer play their role in the mentioned system. Psychologically, the functional balance is identified with the overcoming of isolated capture and, consequently, with the action of the interfunctional psychic unit.

Another aspect that stands out in the emotional manifestations refers to their expressivity, that is, they converge in the direction of expressive traits stamped on the body, in the speech and in the own thought, instituting the expressive movements that accompany the activity. According to Rubinstein (1967), such movements have an ancient origin and fulfilled, since the anthropoids, an essentially communicative function. Thanks to their firm connections with the physiological and cerebral mechanisms, they preserved themselves in their physical plasticity, as in the corporal expressions of fear, anger, joy, sadness, astonishment, etc.

However, the author also questioned the imbrications that are established between human expressive movements and their significations, since the primitive reflex communicative reaction became, in the process of humanization, a semantic act, a type of language that orientates the social action. This *wordless language*, of an imminently emotional nature, is connected with the language of words, giving it an emotional tone, an emotional expressiveness.

The emotional manifestations thus become *language of feelings* in which, as any language, embraces both the relationship with *the other* and the thought itself. However, the transmission of the thought through this language does not prioritize the contents of the thought, the ideas themselves, but what is felt in relation to them. This is another demonstrative element of the artificiality of the scissions between emotions and thoughts – and, likewise, between emotions and feelings.

The very feelings are formed in the unit instituted by the emotional manifestations and thought, since its contents are none other than ideas. The emotional sensations gain *names*, become concepts, contain judgments and, as such, will be taught and learned. For this reason, they characterize only the human life. As affirmed by Blagonadezhina (1960, p.359):

The feelings are specific to man: they have a historical character, since they arise in the historical development of humanity and change in the course of this development. The changes in social conditions of life change the attitude of man toward the world and consequently change his feelings.

It therefore appears that the feelings relate to the needs and motives created in the course of the historical development, subordinating themselves to the conditions of life of man in society and, as an immanent data of the relationships between people, it spreads in many directions.

If the emotional manifestations are analytical, the feelings are synthetic, mobilizing themselves by the set of properties of the object or phenomena. This characteristic allows them a more prolonged and constant character, since they do not result only from positive or negative traits captured in isolation, but from the correlations between them. The affective experience comprises continuous contradictions to the resolution of which others will come, so that the affective life is realized as a continuous movement marked by oscillations between greater and less tonal stability in relation to the experienced.

In this dynamic lies the alternation of the nucleus of the affective experience, when then the prevalence of given feelings can induce emotional manifestations – or emotional commotions make themselves be followed by certain feelings. What is important in this process is that emotion is neither a fossilized reflex nor a disruptive force of behavior, to be contained or repressed. However, as affirmed

Vygotsky (2004), Leontiev (1978a) and Rubinstein (1967), if it is erroneous the imperative to its repression, its regulation becomes a necessity in view of the objective and cultural directivity of the human action.

In the regulation of emotional manifestations, feelings play a role of first magnitude. However, this is not a task that they can perform by themselves. It is also at service of this regulation that the development of the *self-mastery of conduct* is placed, a major objective of the formation of each functional process itself and, consequently, of the psychic system itself. Vygotsky (1995) repeatedly stated that the confluence of the psychic functions could only be verified in the *personality* of the individual, in the properties that it acquires by becoming a *way of being* of the individual.

In this socially constructed way of being, the higher psychic functions are objectified as mainstay of acts intentionally directed by conscious purposes. Thus, the volitional act is produced in the developed personality, that is, able to supplant the natural legacy and that immediately available by him. Therefore, self-mastery of the conduct was not instituted in the absence of the knowledge about itself and the about world, since this fact requires the transformation of the natural impulses into purposes and motives of the social activity.

Thus, the regulation of the emotional manifestations cannot be resolved merely from the *affective field*, determining the formation qualitatively superior of the complex human personality, which is the major goal of the development of all *higher psychic functions*.

Final considerations

For the Historical-Cultural Psychology, the understanding of the affective functional process demands the overcoming of dualisms in all their expressions. Overcoming the oppositions between biological and psychological, reason and emotion, emotion and feelings, are imposed as a first requirement in the affirmation of the social nature of man.

In the activity that links being to nature, which places him face to face with the objective conditions of his existence and through which it is sought the fulfillment of the motives that sustain it, it is synthesized his capacity to represent the affective-cognitive world. Thus, we may conclusively state that it is not the thought who thinks or the feeling who feels, who does so is the *person*, who can only be arbitrarily and artificially compartmentalized.

In our judgment, psychology, as a science and profession, turns to the analysis of the psychic development or behavior, in order to corroborate the quality of life of people and assist them in coping with the existential challenges, among other issues, contributing mostly, for the formation and optimization of the capacities of people. In addition, it contributes, from its theoretical *corpus*, with other areas of knowledge, diversifying itself in rich interfaces. Thus, the fields of theoretical influence of psychology and of action of the psychologist are innumerable and can vary in several aspects; however, there will be among them a common data, from which we cannot escape: the object of the psychological science!

For this reason, we advocate that the understanding of this object in the perspective of totality is a basic scientific requirement, a broad contribution, and the affective-cognitive unit, in this scope, a general explanatory principle for all and any psychological phenomenon. We consider that the theoretical challenges of the knowledge and the practical demands continuously and historically intertwine each other, propelling the construction of a scientific and living psychology.

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