

Evald Ilyenkov on the Freedom of the Will

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Evald Ilyenkov's works explore the issue of free will within the framework of activity theory. According to him, the concept of freedom is linked to the general activity of living beings in the external world and to the purposeful nature of this activity. Human freedom, or the 'freedom of the will', is treated as acting in accordance with the "purpose of the species", that is, the interests of human society. The will is a psychological function that subordinates an individual's activity to the goals and norms of social life. Alternative doctrines postulate free will as an immediate "fact of consciousness", discovered through introspection and underlying human activity. This is where traditional empirical psychology intersects with the physiological doctrine of the unconditional reflex of freedom. Ilyenkov regards such a conception of free will as a "psychological illusion" and examines the implications of this illusion in the classic experiments of academician Ivan Pavlov. The article offers a cultural-historical perspective on the development of the human mind as a process of increasing free will: the emancipation of mental activity from the captivity of natural affects through the use of cultural tools and man's rational understanding of the world and himself.

Keywords: freedom, will, "thinking body", "reflex of freedom", "psychological physiology", Spinoza, Vygotsky, Ivan Pavlov.

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Э.В. Ильенков о свободе воли

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В работах Э.В. Ильенкова проблема свободы воли решается в традициях деятельностной психологии. Понятие свободы вообще он связывает с универсальностью движения живых существ во внешнем мире и с целесообразным характером их деятельности. Человеческая свобода, или «свобода воли», трактуется им как действие в соответствии с «целями рода», т. е. интересами человеческого общества. Воля есть психологическая функция подчинения деятельности индивида целям и нормам общественной жизни. В альтернативных учениях свобода воли постулируется как непосредственно данный «факт сознания», открываемый интроспекцией и лежащий в основе человеческой деятельности. В этом пункте с традиционной эмпирической психологией смыкается физиологическое учение о безусловном рефлексе свободы. Ильенков расценивает такое понимание свободной воли как «психологическую иллюзию», показывая, какими последствиями эта иллюзия оборачивается в классических опытах академика И.П. Павлова. В заключение статьи формулируется культурно-исторический взгляд на эволюцию человеческой психики как процесс возрастания свободы воли: освобождение психической деятельности из плена природных аффектов с помощью культурных орудий и разумного познания человеком мира и самого себя.

Ключевые слова: свобода, воля, «мыслящее тело», «рефлекс свободы», «психологическая физиология», Б. Спиноза, Л.С. Выготский, И.П. Павлов.

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Introduction

Philosophy has bequeathed many forms of thought to other sciences, including the concept of freedom in its various semantic registers. Lev Vygotsky decided to make this notion the capstone of cultural-historical psychology: “*The central problem of all psychology: Freedom... The grandiose picture of personality development: the path to freedom. To revive Spinozism in Marxist psychology*” [3, pp. 255–256].

Evald Ilyenkov wanted the same. In the last years of his life he tried to draw a thread from Spinoza’s philosophy into Marxist psychology, and this thread was the notion of free will. Oddly enough, Ilyenkov ignored Vygotsky’s teachings on human freedom and his understanding of the will, the “volitional functions”, although he wrote about “the superiority of Vygotsky’s school over any other scheme for explaining the psyche” [9, pp. 69–75]. He was obviously referring to the “activity” branch of the school.

For our part, we shall try to evaluate Ilyenkov’s solution of the problem of free will in comparison with Vygotsky’s solution. Let us compare these two courses in “Marxist Psychology”. Since both considered themselves Spinozists, it makes sense to turn to the common source of their reflections — Spinoza’s *Ethics*.

I. “The Kingdom of the Will”: Freedom and Labour

Ilyenkov, like Vygotsky, begins with the Stoic definition of freedom as recognised necessity. This formula of freedom is often attributed to Spinoza, although it is not found in his writings. On the first page of his *Ethics*, Spinoza provides a different definition: “That thing is called *free* which exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone” [13, p. 9].

As we can see, there is no question here of the *recognition* of necessity. Spinoza considers *every thing* to be free, whether animate or inanimate, rational or not, to the extent that it is determined to act by itself, i.e. it acts by virtue of internal, not external causes. Freedom

= self-activity. It is not limited to the realm of reason or “recognised necessity”. Necessity itself is either “free” or “compelled”¹. Any action that contributes to the preservation of the being of a thing, arising from its inner nature, is a free action or “free necessity” (*libera necessitas*). On the other hand, “compelled necessity” (*coacta necessitas*) makes a thing a puppet of external causes and circumstances that are hostile to its nature. Man becomes a slave to the “passions”, passive affects that cloud the mind and destroy his life.

Another thing is the highest *human* freedom, or the freedom of the *will*. Here we cannot do without rational cognition, for “the will and the reason are one and the same” [13, p. 80]. Thus spoke Spinoza. “Recognised necessity” (with the obligatory specification: *free, inner* necessity) is a valid definition for *free will*, but not suitable for freedom in general.

According to Vygotsky, volitional action arises from a rational mastery of one’s behaviour, from the taming of affects by concepts. The thesis of genuine Spinozism: “Volition is a concept that has become an affect” [3, p. 562]. The motive for volitional action is *active* affect, such as rational desire, reasonable pleasure, feelings of beauty, friendship, generosity, etc., rather than “blind” affect — impulsive, instinctive desire. “Rational” for Vygotsky means “cultural”, created by humans themselves, through human labour. Hence the conclusion: “The will, i.e. mastery of one’s own processes of behaviour, is born out of labour and is the psychological basis of labour... Labour is the realm of the will” [5, c. 100, 167]. This is already Marxism, not Spinoza, of course.

Ilyenkov does not relate the concept of will to the problem of the collision of reason and affect, to which three of the five parts of the *Ethics* are devoted. As if unaware of this concrete psychological doctrine, Ilyenkov focuses exclusively on Spinoza’s *theory of cognition* and its significance for activity psychology.

Ilyenkov views the problem of free will through the prism of two opposing positions: Descartes and Fichte versus Spinoza. The former separate will from reason and regard it as a fact of consciousness, an innate attribute of the *I*. In Fichte’s case, the whole world (both external nature and the *I*) is first created by *Tathandlung*

¹ Spinoza makes this distinction in a letter to G. Schuller (October 1674).

(the deed-action) of free will and then comprehended by reason. Free will is postulated as a fact discovered in “contemplation of the *I*”, introspection. “The appearance of freedom is an immediate fact of consciousness and by no means a consequence of any other thought”, Fichte insists [14, p. 88]. As for his general notion of freedom, it is defined as “self-determination” to action, in full agreement with Spinoza’s definition quoted above.

From the notion of the free *I* Fichte deduces the existence of the external world, the *Not-I*, and subsequently, from their interaction, all further definitions of consciousness and the world, subjective and objective reality. In contrast, Spinoza deduces consciousness with all its contents from the body’s locomotor activity. Interpreted in this way, Spinoza becomes a forerunner of the activity theory of “internalisation” (Vygotsky preferred the term *vrashchivanie*, “ingrowing”).

“Here you have to choose: *either* Fichte *or* Spinoza. Either first ‘internalisation’ of external actions in the external space (Spinoza), or from the very beginning *exteriorisation of the whole ‘external’ world* from a priori conditions laid down *inside* (it is indifferent whether they are called ‘brain’ or ‘soul’, cerebral structures or existentsia)” [9, p. 75].

Ilyenkov describes the mechanics of the internalisation of external action in Essay Two of *Dialectical Logic*. Spinoza’s “thinking thing” (*res cogitans*)² is here interpreted as a “thinking body” — thereby making Spinoza a materialist. What remains to be understood is how the body generates thoughts, ideas, in the process of its movement.

Many materialists to this day attribute this function to the grey matter of the brain. Ilyenkov’s Spinoza solves the problem differently: to understand the process of thinking, it is necessary to investigate the nature of the body’s movement in the external world, in the circle of other bodies.

“*Man, as the thinking body, constructs his movement according to the shape of any other body... The thinking body goes freely round any obstacle of the most complicated form*” [6, p. 34]³. This is what freedom is: it is the ability of the body to round obstacles and construct its movement according to the shape of any body encountered in the external world. Such freedom is given to the “thinking body” by Nature (or, what is the same, by God). You just have to develop this gift of freedom in your body.

Vygotsky reads exactly the opposite truth from Spinoza: “*NB!* On Spinoza. According to the laws of nature, man is not a free being: People are not born free... Free-

dom does not lie in the plain; it is not accessible and within easy reach for everyone. It lies not at the beginning but at the end of a person’s path. It is inaccessible to the child. It is not located in the depths but in the summits of the mind” [3, p. 435]. Vygotsky calls his doctrine of the man’s ascent to freedom “height” psychology.

In the last lines of his *Ethics*, Spinoza says how difficult the path to freedom is for human beings and how rarely they find it. “Still, it can be found”. Such freedom is not given to us by nature, as in Rousseau — “man is born free” — or in the academician Pavlov with his “reflex of freedom”. *Human* freedom is acquired from nature through *work*, hardly and dropwise...

Realising the scheme of its own movement along the contours of external bodies, the “thinking body” thereby forms an “adequate idea” of these contours, Ilyenkov continues. In his opinion, this is how the materialist Spinoza depicted the process of thinking, and this is the *highest* form of thinking, “intuitive knowledge”.

Indeed, in the *Ethics* there is something similar to the described scheme of “internalisation” of movements. According to this scheme, *sensory images* arise in every living body, not only in a human being. It is the *lowest* form of thinking — imagination — that makes its judgements basing on sensory images. Every single idea of the imagination is inadequate. It conveys the spatial contours of external bodies, but is incapable of adequately expressing cause-and-effect relationships and the laws of nature. The spatial contour of a body only partly expresses its own, internal nature; partly it expresses the nature of many external bodies acting upon that thing. Therefore, the recognition of the spatial properties of a thing (the idea of imagination) can only give a “vague, confused” knowledge of the nature of that thing.

Active movement in accordance with the geometry of the external world is the principle of action of our natural organs of touch and sight. This is the working scheme of *sensory perception*, in which there is nothing specifically human, created by labour, cultural, i.e. nothing “ideal” in Ilyenkov’s sense. Every animal is capable of copying spatial forms, storing them in its memory and using them for orientation.

There is undoubtedly a certain degree of *freedom* in moving along the contours of external bodies, a freedom in both the physical and psychological sense, but Spinoza had a much deeper and more intelligent concept of *thinking*.

Criticising the materialists — “those who think that ideas consist in images which are formed in us from encounters with bodies” (this is the idea Ilyenkov attrib-

² Spinoza inherited this term from Descartes, who defined the *mind* (*mens, ego*) as *res cogitans*, in contrast to the body as *res extensa*, the “extended thing”. Descartes was criticised by the materialist Hobbes, who argued that *res cogitans* is the body. In this debate Spinoza took Descartes’ side, but with one fundamental reservation: the mind and the body, for all their difference, are not two different things; they are two different *modes of action* of one thing — the human being. Still, the thinking takes place in his *mind* and not in his body.

³ The italics in “free” are mine. — A.M.

uted to Spinoza himself) – the author of the *Ethics* urged that the sensory images of bodies should not be confused with the ideas of thought. “An idea (since it is a mode of thinking) consists neither in the image of anything, nor in words. For the essence of words and of images is constituted only by corporeal motions, which do not at all involve the concept of thought” [13, p. 81].

It is doubly wrong to take sensual images as *adequate* ideas. The latter express the laws of nature and the causes of things “under a species of eternity”, and not some changeable, spatio-temporal contours of bodies.

Ilyenkov himself believed that the correct definition of man was that given by Benjamin Franklin and endorsed by Marx: “Man is a being that produces tools of labour”. But what about the “thinking body”? Such a ‘somatic’ definition of man is as far from Marxism as the moon. It is undoubtedly materialistic, but there are different kinds of materialism. Marx’s “practical materialism” (and with it the whole cultural-historical psychology) is based on the understanding of man as the subject and effect of social labour. The definition of a “thinking body” is no more theoretically valuable than “a biped without feathers”. Both definitions abstract *from the essence* of man, from his social and labour nature.

The human organism becomes an organ of thought when it is included in the vital activity of society, becoming a part of the world of culture. Thinking is a cultural function of the individual, understood as a micro-society, as my and your personal “ensemble of social relations” (Marx).

To form an idea, it is not enough to move along the contours of external bodies. This is not a sufficient condition. Until the body begins to work, Ilyenkov taught, there can be no thinking, no adequate ideas and, in general, no ideal. At the very end of the essay, he corrects his Spinoza’s error on behalf of Marx: the real subject of thought is the *process of labour*, not the physical body. “Labour – the process of changing nature by the action of social man – is the ‘subject’ to which ‘thinking’ belongs as a ‘predicate’” [6, p. 54].

As we can see, the Marxist Ilyenkov understood the matter more correctly and more deeply than the ‘Spinoza’ he painted. Those who regard this figure as Ilyenkov’s alter ego lose the opportunity to understand both Ilyenkov himself and Spinoza’s work – not to mention the cultural-historical theory of thought and freedom.

II. Freedom as “Awareness of the Purpose of the Species”

Freedom in man, unlike in animals, consists not so much in moving along ready-made contours as in break-

ing them and giving other, cultural contours to external bodies. Ilyenkov made the fact of the practical “anthropomorphisation of nature” by the human labour the basis of his doctrine of free will. Man changes the external world according to his own purposes, and all his higher mental functions and ideas arise as components and reflections of this purposeful object-oriented activity.

Acting according to purpose has always been considered a distinctive feature of free will, and Ilyenkov remains faithful to this principle. He endeavours to make the notion of purpose more concrete. After all, it is hard to deny that animals and plants have purposeful arrangements of their bodies and that their life processes are purposeful. So what is the specificity of human purposes?

In this point Ilyenkov turns to Kant for help. No direct answer can be found in Spinoza’s writings: he moved the very notion of purpose was from the realm of intellect (which thinks things strictly logically, *sub specie aeternitatis*) to the realm of empirical and inadequate knowledge – imagination. Purposefulness, as Ilyenkov wittily pointed out, is transformed by Spinoza into wholeness⁴, i.e. the causal conditionality of the parts by the whole to which they belong.

The idea of “wholeness” may well be concretised and developed in a cultural-historical spirit if we take *society* as the ‘purpose whole’ and understand human life as a wave and a particle of “social being”. The activity of each person is conditioned by society, by the social relations in which he is included *as a human being* (and not as a biological organism or a physical-chemical ‘laboratory’, as any natural being is). The entire set of such relations, from the family to humanity as a whole, was called “species” (*Gattung*) in German philosophy.

For Kant, according to Ilyenkov, “freedom coincides with the right awareness of the purpose of the species or with the idea of the purpose of the species as an end in itself... Therefore, each individual person only then and only there acts as a Man, when and where he consciously, i.e. freely, perfects his own species” [7, p. 72].

This statement has become a postulate of cultural-historical psychology. Vygotsky calls the “higher psychological functions” those which the individual owes not to his organic body, but to his ‘species’. This term refers only and exclusively to those functions that serve the purposes-interests of the ‘whole’, the human community, in which the personality is formed and all our vital activity takes place, from the moment of birth to death.

The inclusion of the child, his or her object-oriented activity and physical life, in the cultural “species-life” (*das Gattungsleben*) initiates the process of liberation of the individual from the power of natural forces and elements, both those that oppose him in the external world and those that are embedded in his own body, namely

⁴ In Russian, there is a play on words here: *tselesoobraznost* – *tselosoobraznost*. The words *tsel'* (purpose, goal) и *tseloye* (whole) are cognate.

affective reactions and innate behavioural programmes. Vygotsky calls this process “cultural development”, while “will” is the psychological function through which it is realised.

Society provides the child with the means of cultural development, signs, which at the same time serve as stimuli for mastering his behaviour. Through signs, the child, with the help of adults, in co-operation with others, takes control of his organic needs, drives and affects. Like all higher psyche, the will is a social function. Initially, the will is dictated to the child by other people, by society in their person. My freedom begins with obedience to others and is essentially the *coercion of the self* into a cultural behaviour and way of life.

“In this sense Blondel rightly says that the roots of the will must be sought in the social life of man, and that in its real function the will is obedience rather than freedom. It is this ability to direct one’s behaviour in accordance with social stimuli that manifests itself in the development of the will” [5, p. 166].

Traditional psychology placed the will in a common row with other mental functions, such as attention, memory, speech, etc. Vygotsky treats the will as a form of implementation and regulation of all functions and behaviour as a whole⁵. Sometimes he speaks of will as a “stage” in the development of psychological functions, and for different functions this stage occurs at different times — when a child or adolescent becomes aware of his functions and masters them more or less freely. Elsewhere, two “genetic stages” are distinguished in the development of the will itself: the initial, “hypobulic” stage and the higher stage of “purposive will”. The difference between the two lies in the nature of the purposes. In the first stage, the will serves affective life and draws its energy directly from affects (pain, hunger, fear and rage, etc.). “In primitive psychic life, will and affect are identical”, Vygotsky quotes Ernst Kretschmer [4, p. 403]. In the second stage, already in adolescence, the source of the will becomes thinking in concepts, which replaces thinking in complexes. As Vygotsky shows in detail, when the function of forming concepts is disrupted (e.g., in cases of aphasia or hysteria), the purposive will inevitably disintegrates.

Ilyenkov begins with the study of free will in abstraction from the “social situation of development”, in the naturalistic system of coordinates “thinking body — external world”. In this system he searches for the primary ‘germ cell’ of freedom, and this cell turns out to be the purposeful action of an individual, carried out by him in accordance with the “cumulative world necessity”, which appears in the form of a purpose.

“The action which overcomes the slavish dependence

on the *nearest* (random singular) circumstances, conditions, is an *elementary act of freedom*, the action according to the *purpose* (conscious need)... The will is the ‘stronger’ (the ‘freer’) the clearer is the idea of the whole set of circumstances — both immediate and remote — within which the activity (whole set of actions) is carried out. This is Spinoza of the purest water” [9, p. 73].

But Ilyenkov would not have been the purest Marxist if he had been satisfied with the flat coordinate system “thinking body — external world”. He adds a third axis — the social one: in the form of purpose, “not ‘my’ (individual-egoistic) need is expressed, but a universal (collectively determined) need that has become *mine, personal*”. Therefore, freedom of will is a collective, social-historical feature of human activity. An individual does not possess such freedom from birth, but acquires it to the extent that he becomes a subject of “common need”; and his will is free precisely to the extent that his way of acting corresponds to the ideal goals and norms of social life. Ilyenkov calls this amendment to his Spinoza “the deciphering (concretisation) in Marxism of the concept of the *thinking body*” [9, p. 75]. The place of the moving body is taken by the “ensemble of social relations”, the personality...

It seems to me, however, that it is hardly legitimate to regard cultural-historical psychology in general and the doctrine of free will in particular, as a “deciphering” of the naturalistic concept of a “thinking body” endowed with the “freedom to round obstacles” in the surrounding space. Although such an ability is certainly a necessary natural *prerequisite* for cultural development — just as having an upper limb with a large number of mechanical degrees of freedom and, preferably, five fingers is a prerequisite for sewing or playing the piano.

III. The Illusion of Freedom and the “Psychological Physiology”

Among the notes and drafts on psychology in Ilyenkov’s personal archives there is a highly interesting one that links the problem of free will to the famous experiments of Ivan Pavlov.

As is well known, the academic Pavlov considered the desire for freedom, along with “slavish obedience”, to be an unconditional reflex inherent in both humans and animals. He studied this “physiological reaction” in dogs, experimenting with the position of the restraint and the strength of the body fixation, first trying to suppress the “freedom reflex”, then — to revive it. Finally, he tried to find out what happened when it collided with the food reflex in an unusually freedom-loving mongrel [12].

⁵ The concept of will as a “regulative factor of mental life” was developed earlier by Mikhail Basov [see: 1]. Vygotsky mentions Basov’s study of the will in his notebook of 1931 [3, p. 244].

Ilyenkov finds an inner affinity between this seemingly materialistic position of Pavlov and the subjective-idealistic attitude of Fichte. In both cases, free will is taken as an *unconditional* fact. Freedom is postulated “as something which is not only inexplicable, but which generally underlies ‘explanation’ of all other phenomena of consciousness” (in Fichte) or of various forms of behaviour (in Pavlov). “Spinozism certainly obliges us to treat the freedom of will, *understood in this way*, as a pure psychological illusion, behind which there is always an *unconscious cause*” [9, p. 70]. What is this cause? “The real activity of the thinking body”, answers Ilyenkov.

Freedom of will is an illusion if the will is considered as something different from the mind, as a special function or ‘ability of the soul’ to control our body and direct our mind. Such freedom would in fact be pure arbitrariness or willfulness. Behind this illusion there is always a slavish submission to stereotypes, to facts and circumstances which we do not understand. They force us to perform actions which, because we do not know their causes, are perceived as acts of ‘free will’.

In science, such arbitrariness, a wilful break with the logic of things, is doubly harmful. Ilyenkov regards the experiments that made Pavlov famous as an example. They “establish a completely unnatural (perverted) connection between meat and... a light bulb”. In fact, these experiments only prove that “*there is no real connection*, neither within the organism nor in the environment... That is why the connection can be established absolutely *any way — purely arbitrarily*, without any physiological or ‘environmental’ logic; and therefore the connection between meat and light bulb is a matter of arbitrary decision, ‘free will’, i.e. ‘psyche’ in its subjective-idealistic, introspectionist interpretation” [8, pp. 277–278]. So here again, without suspecting it, Pavlov extends his hand in support of Fichte and ‘empirical psychology’.

In Pavlov’s experiments, the dog acts as an *object* of external stimuli, not as a *subject* of search and orientation activity, which Ilyenkov considers to be “psychical” in the true sense of the word. The subject of activity here is “Pavlov’s psyche, not the dog’s psyche, for the latter is switched off by the conditions of the experiment together with the ‘spontaneous movement’ of the dog’s body, which is immovably tied to the restraint device” [8, p. 279]. By depriving the dog of its freedom to move, Pavlov thereby deprived himself of any possibility of understanding *its* psyche.

Purposeful, and in this sense “free”, is only and exclusively the behaviour of Pavlov himself. It is *his* actions that condition the animal’s behaviour, so that the reflex arc closes not in the animal’s brain, but *between* it and Pavlov’s brain.

The whole of so-called “Pavlovian psychology” is, in this light, a kind of introspection. The dog’s body acts as a ‘mirror’ in which the scientist observes the acts of *his*

‘free will’ — the neurodynamic connections he has arbitrarily created in the laboratory animal’s brain.

To prevent the dog’s own psyche from interfering with the process of introspection, it must at least be immobilised. Pavlov wanted to take away the dog’s ability to perceive anything other than the stimuli he presented to it — food, metronome tones and flashes of light. For this purpose, the Tower of Silence was built, “where Pavlov’s ‘free will’ is the supreme law” [8, p. 279].

Behind the walls of the tower, every mental connection and every conditioned reflex that realises it are determined by *objective conditions of activity*, i.e. by active contacts between a living being and the object of its need.

The psyche is only necessary when the innate programmes of vital activity, imprinted in the genome and brain structures, are not sufficient to satisfy the need, and therefore an active effort is required to establish the necessary connection between the organism and the external world. For example, breathing does not usually require mental work, but hunting does not do without it.

At the time of Ilyenkov, a similar criticism against Pavlov was being made by Konrad Lorenz, the founder of ethology. While observing semi-wild goats in the foothills of Armenia, in a prisoner-of-war camp, he suddenly realised that a conditioned stimulus acquires biological, evolutionary significance only if it is in a real causal relationship with an unconditional stimulus. Pavlov deliberately severed this link and replaced it with an anthropogenic ersatz. The peculiarities of the behaviour of “social canids” were also ignored.

“I do not wish in any way to diminish the importance of Pavlov’s experiments”, Lorenz diplomatically stipulates, but when we analytically “*cut out a piece of the system*” (of the animal’s behaviour), as Pavlov did, we should not assume that “the system now consists of only one isolated part and that this one part is already sufficient to understand all the properties of the system as a whole” [10, p. 320]. Conditioned reflexes are the indispensable component of behaviour, but by far not the only one, and it is by no means the only one that determines the character of a complex psychological system. Meanwhile, most of its components are “switched off” when a dog is “tied up in a leather harness that barely allows him to move” [ibid.]. Without *freedom of movement*, the normal functioning of the psyche is impossible.

Even earlier, before the war, Nikolai Bernstein was thinking along the same lines, but from the point of view of the physiology of nervous activity. He pointed out the fact that the fixation of the dog in the harness leads to a loss of plasticity in the central nervous system: it becomes “tight on switching” (in a highly developed animal!) and “so easily susceptible to hypnotic and neurotic morbid reactions. Is this really *higher* neural activity here? Is it a normal activity?” [2, p. 252].

Reflexes must be seen in the context of the “whole situation”, which includes the external world, life experience, available ekphoria (activated memories), and the mass of external and internal sensations at a given moment. “I think that the persistent soporific effect of conditioned-reflex experiments on dogs is most likely explained... by the deadening, hypnotising effect of the unnatural and to them indifferent environment of these experiments”, Bernstein concludes [2, p. 210].

So, a philosopher, a biologist and a physiologist, each in his own way, came to the same conclusion: Pavlov’s experiments distorted the object of psychological study. The psyche is a derivative of the active, free movement of the body in the external world. With the cessation of the *free self-movement* of the body, the psyche inevitably dies out.

Ilyenkov’s reflections on Pavlov’s experiments are crowned by the ‘Spinozist’ statement that mental activity and higher nervous activity are forms of manifestation and realisation of external object-oriented activity. He defines the system of conditioned reflexes as “an internalised... complex of *schemes of external activity*, relegated to the level of automatism” [8, p. 277].

What is the relationship between these two activity forms (Spinoza would say “modes”)? Are they equal and symmetrical, like magnetic poles, or do physiological and psychical, reflex and search, automatic and free activities form two different levels of movement — the lower and the higher? In Ilyenkov’s works this problem is not explicitly discussed, but he is clearly inclined to the second solution. Let us recall his words about the activity “relegated to the level of automatism”. The arguments in favour of such a solution can be found in a report by Vygotsky.

In 1931, the famous American scientist Carl S. Lashley came to the Soviet Union, and the Society of Materialist Psychoneurologists invited Vygotsky to participate in the debate on Lashley’s lecture. At the end of his speech⁶, Vygotsky shared his vision of the main line of development of modern psychoneurology. If Wilhelm Wundt sought to build up a “physiological psychology”, we are now witnessing the emergence of a “psychological physiology”, whose purpose is “to reveal the physiologi-

cal organisation of complex living psychological formations”. In doing so, the physiologist should “proceed directly from the data discovered in psychology” and only secondarily from the data of the physiology of nervous activity (this sounds like a reproach to the schools of Pavlov and Bekhterev, to which most of the listeners, “materialist psychoneurologists”, belonged).

Vygotsky draws a parallel with biochemistry, in which a chemist solves the problems of biology by orienting himself to the modern doctrines of the living nature, i.e. on the theory of a higher form of natural development than the world of chemical reactions. Apparently, Vygotsky sees the relationship between body and mind, physiology and psychology in the same way. This is the relationship between two levels of development in living nature, the lower and the higher. The mental ‘floor’ is higher already for the simple reason that it arises later and not otherwise than on a physiological basis, but not vice versa.

Those who wish to understand the *process of development* from the lower to the higher must look at this process ‘from the top down’. The anatomy of the psyche is the key to understanding the functioning of the higher nervous system. This, we believe, is how the credo of “psychological physiology”⁷ could be formulated.

Conclusion

In his time, Hegel characterised world history as “progress in the consciousness of freedom”; Marx then presented the history of society as an ascent through the stages of economic formations to the “kingdom of freedom” (*Reich der Freiheit*). Nothing prevents us from extending the same principle of freedom to the evolution of the world as a whole. Each new, higher step on the evolutionary ladder, from the elementary particle to the community of intelligent beings, multiplies the number of degrees of freedom of movement many times over. The evolution of the human mind is the process of its liberation from the “bondage of passions” by means of cultural tools and the improvement of reason, or, what is the same, the process of increasing our freedom of will.

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⁶ The transcript of L.S. Vygotsky’s speech, personally edited by him, is kept in the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The editorial board of the journal “Cultural-Historical Psychology” plans to publish it in No. 3 for 2024.

⁷ In the future, this line of research was followed by Aleksander Luria, who also borrowed the term “psychological physiology”. He associated the first attempts of its creation in our country with the works of Nikolai Bernstein and Pyotr Anokhin [see: 11].

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