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Taking Sève Seriously

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by

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Chapter Titles

Chapter One: The Problem	9
Chapter Two: Marxism, Psychology and Human Personality	18
Chapter Three: Lucien Sève and the theory of personality	48
Chapter Four: TSS in subjective time preference (STP)	104
Chapter Five: TSS and constructivist IR theory: removing the Fear, filling the Void	126
Chapter Six: Marxism, Sève, and the theory of promising	158
Chapter Seven: How Should a Marxist Biography Look?	177
Chapter Eight: Conclusion	194
Appendix: Correspondence with Lucien Sève	201
Bibliography	228

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Lucien Sève.

List of Abbreviations

- CF Cashflow – the expenditure or receipt of cash in discrete time periods.
- FHI Forms of Historical Individuality. The manifestations of class society in individual personalities and their biographies, according to Lucien Sève.
- IR International Relations.
- MTP *Marxisme et théorie de la personnalité*. Book by Lucien Sève.
- NPV Net Present Value. The value today to an individual or organisation of future cashflows.
- SDR Social Discount Rate. The exchange rate between the present and the future adopted by governments for discrete time periods.
- STP Subjective Time Preference. The rate at which an individual is prepared to exchange present for future benefits in discrete time periods.
- TSS Taking Sève Seriously. The application of the work of Lucien Sève to real world problems.

Abstract

This thesis examines ways in which the Marxist theory of individuality developed by Lucien Sève can be applied to academic research. Using four case studies from Economics, International Political Economy, Philosophy, and Literature, it describes what the consequences of ‘taking Sève seriously’ are, and to what extent they are unique to Sève’s work.

‘...if we take Sève’s argument seriously, as I suggest we should’

Ian Burkitt, *Social Selves (2nd Edition)*, 2008, p.141.

Chapter One – The Problem

Purpose of the thesis

What psychology is has been variously and certainly not uniformly defined (Henriques, 2004), some authors even denying that it can be defined at all (Reber, 2009), but the science of mind and behaviour is how dictionaries and many practitioners see it. The first hypothesis to be tested in this thesis is whether there is a specific contribution to any part of this science of psychology from Marxism, and within it, an identifiably distinct contribution made by Lucien Sève. So, an individual theoretician (Lucien Sève in this case) must have distinctive theoretical ideas and positions (which however may alter over time). These ideas and positions can be described, examined and presented as a theoretical framework derived from a corpus of work where ideas can be distinguished from - or identified as in accord with - those of other Marxists theorising about the theoretical and practical terrain of psychology. I borrow a term from contemporary political discourse to call these together the *clear blue water* hypothesis and I aim to test these in the theoretical part of the thesis.

Secondly, the empirical chapters concern the *consequences* of this theoretical framework on the terrain of the social sciences. By this is not meant the impact of Marxism in general on the social sciences, which has been analysed before, and which I term *the general consequences hypothesis*. The main aspects of Marxism that have been held to be of significance for social science is first, that of dialectical materialism. This has been defined as ‘A metaphysical position held by many Marxists. It asserts that matter is primary or fundamental, and states general laws governing the motion and development of all matter’ (Flew, 1979:94). Second, historical materialism, which is ‘the Marxist theory of history,

dealing with the more particular laws governing the development of human society and thought' (Flew, 1979:94). In the social sciences 'taking Marx seriously' has therefore chiefly meant an insistence on the historical character of all phenomena, and on the fact that historical change proceeds in certain complex but defined ways, e.g. the quantity/quality inter-relation, the importance of 'internal contradiction' etc. (Hobsbawm, 1957:29). The influence of Marxism on economics and sociology has been identified (e.g. by Bukharin *et al*, 1935), including by the observation that by linking ideological phenomena such as Protestantism with the forces and relations of production, 'the Marxist teaching on basis and superstructure gripped with immense force' (Tröltzsch, 1925:122).

The general consequences hypothesis has its detractors. The suggestion has been strongly made that there are not such measurable consequences in social science from adopting a Marxist perspective, or applying Marxist principles, at least from Marxism as handled by Soviet philosophers. Hence for example the assertion that 'Spirkin repeatedly emphasises 'the great methodological importance' of 'diamat'...but he never seems to tell us how the Marxist method can be useful. It is always only a matter of why but never how, and the usefulness of the Marxist method is never explained. The whole thing is a chocolate box of appetising assertions that turn out to be display dummies' (Baronovitch, 1981:357).

This thesis is not though about the general consequences hypothesis, or interpretations and developments of his work in areas such as psychology and ethics by authors such as Spirkin and many others. Or even the impact of psychology in its entirety on social science. Much more narrowly, the second hypothesis is that utilising the work of Lucien Sève uniquely, which I have termed taking Sève seriously (TSS), has identifiable consequences – at least for academic research, i.e. that TSS will result in academic research being in some ways at least conducted differently. I call this the *specific consequences hypothesis* and I aim to identify and test this in the empirical part of the thesis.

This hypothesis is in turn divided into three forms. The strong version is that Sève's own presentation makes a *different* difference – the weak version is that it does not, but that it shares the consequences with other Marxist psychologists. Thirdly, in the concluding chapter of the thesis the possibilities of theoretical overdetermination are examined: that there are other non-Marxist routes to the same, or similar, consequences, as TSS.

So just as to write the theoretical chapters of this thesis there must be some theoretical terrain created by the intersection of Marxism with psychology, to be able to write the empirical chapters of this thesis there must be discernible results of this terrain. First, distinguishing what psychologists who identify as Marxists, or recognise the influence of Marxism on their work, think and do from the theory and practice of all other psychology, critical psychology in particular as it is arguably close in intent and approach. Second, identifying a contribution, at least, specifically attributable to the juncture and mutual contribution of Marxism and *psychology itself* (as presented by Sève).

Interventions by Psychology into the Social Sciences

A question to review immediately is whether psychology *in general* has been introduced to the terrain of contemporary politics, or to philosophy. This is principally the domain of what has come to be termed political psychology, and as the empirical chapters of this thesis will demonstrate, detailed case studies are virtually non-existent. Sève himself asked why did psychology not 'intervene' in the political debates over e.g. absolute impoverishment in capitalist regimes or Gaullist educational politics (Sève, 1978). Psychology of a diametrically opposite orientation *did* intervene, and massively, in a negative way in politics during the pre-World War II era and it is most interesting to examine how and why the science of eugenics reached a climax during that period with the work of e.g. Eysenck (1952) and of

course standing behind him the entire subjugation of practical psychology in Germany to the Nazi cause (Gonen, 2000). This is a perfect example of precisely the course of scientific idealism that Sève feared for psychology (Sève, 1978) and which in the contemporary focus on ‘innate ability’ (Howe *et al*, 1998) and ‘evolutionary psychology’ has never really left the stage. Though it has been claimed that ‘The new Darwinian social scientists are fighting a doctrine that has dominated their fields for much of this century: the idea that biology doesn't much matter — that the uniquely malleable human mind, together with the unique force of culture, has severed our behaviour from its evolutionary roots; that there is no inherent human nature driving human events, but that, rather, our essential nature is to be driven’ (Wright, 1996:5), the reality is that now it is the Darwinian scientists who seem to occupy a leading role within psychology as practised in contemporary capitalist societies (see e.g. Wright, 1996; Rose, 2000; Pinker, 2002; Gangestad & Tybur, 2016).

The Marxist riposte, in debate that can unfortunately all too easily become sterile, is that this kind of idealist position itself is historically and socially determined. It is certainly hard to avoid the conclusion that a notion of immutable human nature and associated concepts of individual innate abilities – what Sève called ‘*Les Dons*’ [natural aptitudes] (Sève, 1964) - are highly useful to capitalism (Geras, 1983).

As for the consequences of a Marxist theoretical framework for psychology, Sève himself strongly argued that there would be consequences in a range of areas. In his view, the absence of a scientific theory of personality (specifically) was an obstacle to the scientific elaboration of such huge questions as the relations between historical necessity and individual freedom, and those between psychology and epistemology, ethics and aesthetics (Sève, 1978:20). Success has been considered important: ‘the future of Marxism depends on its engagement with the psychology of everyday life, and the future of psychology depends upon its insertion into and comprehension of social life’ (Hayes, 1996:155). Yet it should not be

presumed in advance that the application of TSS would be even possible, let alone significant, in every area of the social sciences, including those where Sève himself has not himself engaged (Sève, 2015a:7). This leaves open the question of whether a Marxist theoretical framework for psychology, TSS in particular, has some qualities that disbar it from application to social science research in particular areas, or different suitability, at least, in different areas. But answering this I defer until the relevant chapters, as each subject may be differently appropriate for an ‘intervention’, in Sève’s term (Sève, 1978).

Organisation of the Thesis

The thesis is therefore organised in eight chapters. This first chapter has explained the task, and will present the organisation and the case study methodology that will be employed. The task of the second chapter is the literature review, which will serve to provide an overview of the contribution made by Marxism to psychology and then identify the extent to which this may be differentiated from a Marxist approach to social science generally. The third chapter is devoted to an explanation of the individual contribution of Sève’s work to the development of psychology and therefore is the elucidation of the theoretical framework: what TSS *means*. Testing of the consequences of TSS in turn constitutes the second empirical part of the thesis, so there follow the four substantive case study chapters of the thesis, and then a conclusion.

Methodology

First, is it correct to suggest that a comprehensive analysis of the implications of TSS for social science research are beyond the scope of a thesis? It seems straightforward enough to answer yes to this question. Any such analysis at the length of a thesis would be superficial

and run the risk of merely repeating the ‘preliminary’ work of Sève himself (Sève, 1966, 1978). The thesis aims to go *beyond* this preliminary work to achieve some progress in the *actual* work of applying a theoretical framework for psychology drawn from Marxism, in this case to the social sciences. A narrower focus is therefore required.

Second, however, in view of the impossibility of a comprehensive study, is a case study approach appropriate for the thesis? There is no evidence of a unique use or procedure for a case study approach in a thesis ‘in the Marxist tradition’ or ‘written from a Marxist standpoint’ that might raise especial concerns. Outside the Marxist tradition, however, there is plenty of guidance that it does not seem unreasonable to follow. This question divides into three. First, what is a ‘case study approach’? This approach is what has been described as a ‘tradition’ of social science research with certain defined characteristics, involving the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting (Yin, 2009) or ‘a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information’ (Creswell, 2012:97). It has however been noted that a case is ‘a unit of activity embedded in the real world which...merges in with its context so that precise boundaries are difficult to draw’ (Gilham, 2000:1). Whether the case study approach is a ‘methodology’ has been debated (Stake, 1995, 2005, 2006; Creswell, 2012), but certainly, case study research has been evident in many disciplines over many decades of social science research (Creswell, 2012:97). Although the focus of case study research has clearly been in social science, rather than philosophy, recent published work in philosophy has included examples of the case study approach in analytic philosophy (Gutting, 2009) and the philosophy of art (Matravers, 2014). Much of the literature on just war, to take a completely different example, consists of several case studies (e.g. Byers, 2006; Chesterman, 2001; Wheeler, 2000).

What makes the case studies of this thesis different, however, is that they will be, at least in significant part, *meta-case studies*, research into how TSS research would be done differently, rather than case study research themselves. In a sense, therefore, each meta-case study is a self-contained academic ethnography.

All the case studies relate to what might affect research and activism within a contemporary capitalist society. Some mention, however, should be made in each case of the way in which change in the subject, and the consequences of TSS, might alter under conditions of socialism and even communism.

Third, then, the choice of case studies. It has been suggested that qualitative research should encompass no more than four or five case studies (Creswell, 2012:100). This thesis uses four: hopefully a sufficient number to range across different subject matter, but not too many to prevent a detailed analysis. But how should the case studies be selected? I have used three criteria. First, there must be a significant and accessible academic literature on the subject. Second, the subject must be sufficiently ‘bounded’ to allow its study as a single thesis chapter. Third however, there must be a ‘point of entry’ for psychology into the subject, a way in which, at least on first inspection, the study of the subject may be altered by TSS.

Many areas of academic research met these criteria, so unlike many research problems, the choice of case studies for this thesis was vast. The eventual choice was guided by three – inevitably subjective - further principles. First, that they should be drawn from different social science disciplines. Second, the need to discover, and then analyse, research areas where the role of the individual was likely to be significant, if not paramount, and where that role could be analysed from the standpoint of psychological theory, especially Sève’s work. Thirdly, for TSS to meet the challenge of the consequences hypothesis it should have an impact in social science research. The four case studies chosen meet these criteria.

The first, on subjective time preference (STP), is an important area of concern for public finance professionals, environmental scientists, and a wide range of other economists and psychologists concerned with crucial questions of the way in which individuals value costs and benefits to themselves over time. The way governments make decisions about investment projects is influenced both directly and indirectly by this research, which has a clear psychological element that has been recognised by a range of scholars. Moreover, a debate exists over the extent to which different forms of economic organisation influence time preference, making the issue doubly relevant as a case study.

The second case study, on international relations (IR) theory, was initially selected for unashamed personal reasons, the role of individuals in Marxist IR theory having been a personal interest for decades (Roche, 1984). It is an appropriate area to research, moreover, because of the recent ‘psychological turn’ in IR theory (Shannon & Kowert, 2012) and the continued lively debate in academia and elsewhere on the significance of ‘Great Men’ in history. This is a subject in which early Marxists exhibited a close interest (e.g. Plekhanov, 1898) and on which biographers in the Marxist tradition such as Deutscher (1963:241-252) and commentators such as Callinicos (2009) have dwelt.

The third case study, the theory of promising developed by Prichard, is intended to provide a sense of balance, as TSS ought to be relevant for a wide range of different disciplines, including moral philosophy. There is added interest from the fact that theories of promising from the intuitionist school of thought are rarely put to any psychological test, let alone a Marxist one.

Finally, the fourth case study draws out how TSS would affect the writing of biography, a subject in which Sève has had a particular interest and wrote himself (e.g. Sève, 2008, 2015). In this case, there are examples of actual biographies written by Marxists on which to draw (e.g. Deutscher, 1954,1959, 1963, 1970).

Conclusion

This thesis analyses the work of Lucien Sève to determine whether clear blue water can be found between his work and that of other writers on psychology, especially those in the traditions of Marxism and critical psychology. It then uses the case study approach to answer the question of whether, in four specific areas of social science research, the intervention of psychology, and specifically the work of Sève, entails specific consequences, and if so, what they might be.

Chapter Two – Marxism, Psychology and Human Personality

Introduction

This chapter aims to perform the function of a literature review, but with the principal objective of providing a sufficient background – and a justification - for the subsequent analysis of Sève’s own work in Chapter Three that will be the theoretical framework for this thesis. A starting point is to recognise that most social scientists are not writing as Marxists, nor as psychologists. Far from all social, and even critical psychologists, feel any need to identify themselves as Marxists, still less to accommodate a Marxist theory of personality. There are few, and possibly progressively fewer, social scientists who adhere to Marxism, even in for example a developing country like South Africa where one might perhaps expect it (Hayes, 2001). Thus, even on a statistical basis, one would not expect many studies following an explicitly Marxist approach in *any* social science. The task of detection even amongst those social scientists who describe themselves as Marxists, or in recognising the impact of Marxism, is complicated by the subtle process of the assimilation of many Marxist tenets and lines of thought into mainstream scholarship described below. This is exemplified by the fact that in some cases even the very word ‘Marxism’ is excised by editors from the title of texts (Teo, 1999). Moreover, particularly in earlier decades, many psychologists who were Marxists believed that practical political action should take precedence over academic publication, so they have left little trace, whilst more recently Marxist scholars have tended to be critical of individual psychology rather than envisaging a progressive science (Abma and Jansz, 2000).

Social psychology though might on first thought be expected to be rich terrain for Marxists. Contemporary social psychology has been defined as ‘the scientific study of the way in which peoples’ thoughts, feelings and behaviors are influenced by the real or imagined

presence of other people' (Allport, 1985), although its practice has not necessarily met general approval, one leading writer going so far as to describe psychologists in general as 'social ignoramuses' (Moscovici, 1984:67-68). However, it is clear that at least officially, overtly, Marx has no role even here. A leading social psychology textbook (Aronson *et al*, 2007) has just one reference to Marx, and that on a page mainly about cockroaches. There are no references at all to leading Marxist psychologists such as Politzer or Vygotsky, let alone Sève. Culture, race, gender, evolution, sustainability – all these find a place in the textbook, along with pictures of actresses, gorillas, and footballers, but the concepts – even the words - capitalism, class – even inequality - do not, even in explaining why people do not help each other (Aronson *et al*, 2007:3) and even though 'The task of the psychologist is to try to understand and predict human behavior' (Aronson *et al*, 2007:3).

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that this is no accidental omission, and critics of mainstream western psychology in both its individual and social forms have therefore suggested that it is a tool of the capitalist system and a means of control and oppression (e.g. Parker, 2007). Moreover, the implications of introducing a Marxist theoretical framework into psychology might be quite considerable in a variety of ways, threatening to established social sciences and their theoretical underpinning, in particular traditional concepts of the individual. This perception, however remotely and dimly held, may itself be quite sufficient to deter such a project. Critics, who do not always themselves identify as Marxists, suggest that most psychologists are content to ignore not merely the cultural and historical context of their research investigations, but often even the more immediate social and political context (Parker, 2007; El-Hammoumi, 2012). Such critics claim for example that the way people think and act in capitalist society is influenced, one may say warped, by the capitalist mode of production. In this view, individual consciousness assimilates these distortions, consequently 'naturalising' them and giving them the appearance of being characteristic of human life in general, as

opposed to the particular characteristics of capitalism (Tolman, 2013:48). Hence 'the conceptual separation and external opposition of the individual and the society in bourgeois psychology ... are, in fact, the unconscious theoretical expression of the actual separation of the private and societal processes in the reality of bourgeois society' (Tolman, 2013:50). Equally, critics observe that 'It should be mentioned that cultural-historical, neo-Marxist and other critical approaches in the West have acknowledged the primacy of praxis but have often remained in the comparatively safe environment of academia (e.g. Edwards, 2011). In response, critical theorists have advocated that research, if not emancipatory itself, should at least have an emancipatory intention (Habermas, 1972; Teo 2012:7). This can certainly be said of what has been described as liberation psychology, firmly rooted in Latin American social practice and directly concerned with the emancipation of the underprivileged in capitalist economies (Martin-Baró, 1996), or other psychological critics of racial oppression (e.g. Fanon, 1961).

But admittedly, the historical genesis of critical psychology is not undisputed and many researchers have claimed different sources for its intellectual and historical origins (Teo, 2012:238). Even liberation psychology has drawn on much wider inspiration than Marx (Burton & Kagan, 2005) and so did Fanon (Hilton, 2011). Only a token few references to Marx remain in contemporary psychology reviews (e.g. Yasnitsky *et al*, 2014). Even when critical psychology, which represented an attempt to break free of intellectual constraints imposed by capitalism, attempted to identify an 'object' of psychology, 'it was drawn into the gravitational field of a peculiarly bourgeois construct even at the very same moment that it aimed to dismantle it' (Parker, 2009:74). Parker points to the lack of collective authorship, and the drive to 'produce' academically as leading to what has been described as 'The uncannily close concordance between the requirements of contemporary capitalism and some of the nostrums of critical psychology' (Parker, 2009:78). This is despite, or perhaps even because, critical

psychology, and more particularly Klaus Holzkamp's work and *Kritische Psychologie*, emerged amidst radical political and social movements. This in turn leads Parker to be sceptical about accepting any universal Marxist credentials for even critical psychology, let alone social psychology as currently practised in capitalist societies.

Marxism and psychology

Perhaps the fault is not entirely that of psychology, however. Why have Marxism and psychology had such a distant and uneasy relationship? The antagonism of capitalism to Marxist theory in general has been put forward as a sufficient explanation as to why Marxism was not admitted into the official centres of scientific psychology. The name and thought of Karl Marx remained almost unmentioned in the works of psychologists for more than 50 years after the publication of his basic work (Leontiev, 1978). However, the stand-off was not entirely one-way, as Marxists – even those working as psychologists themselves – have been suspicious, and have frequently ignored, a discipline that has focused on individuals (Parker, 2009:71; Hayes, 2004). Psychology – psychoanalysis in particular – has frequently been seen by Marxists as essentially reactionary (Brooks, 1973; Brown, 1974; Parker, 2009), so that ‘among Marxists there are great reserves of distrust with regard to psychology’ (Sève, 1978:11) because: ‘They [Marxists] know...that...psychology is often the indirect way by which ideology introduces bourgeois ideas and the way that idealists try to revise historical materialism and scientific socialism in a subjective direction’ (Sève, 1975 :11).

A truly Marxist approach to psychology would anyway have to inject something *different* into conventional, ‘bourgeois’ psychology, if only to overcome such distrust. So enter Marx into the terrain of psychology, and his conceptualisation of the mind has indeed

influenced psychology in the 20th century even though his explicit charge was to change the world, not just understand it. He and his colleagues inspired the cultural historical (CHAT) school, Politzer and Vygotsky amongst many others. Stetsenko & Arievitc (2004), Roth (2004), Tolman (2013) and other scholars imply, and sometimes explicitly state, that critical psychology and activity theory require Marx, as they derive their assumptions from dialectical and historical materialism. And although not only overtly Marxist psychologists criticise contemporary mainstream psychology, it has been argued that the wider discipline of critical psychology has at least been where Marxists in psychology, always a beleaguered minority in the discipline have found their voice (Parker, 2009:74).

What is a Marxist theoretical framework for psychology?

It is perhaps easiest to characterise what Marxist psychologists believe by considering what they do not. They do not believe in mere behaviourism, which attempts to reduce the richness of human life to an elementary stimulus-response schema. They definitely do not believe in Freudianism, which posits instinctually determined unconscious processes as the foundation of all forms of human behaviour and regards human life as a continuous struggle with society, which controls those instincts. Psychoanalysis has often been seen by Marxists as essentially reactionary (Brooks, 1973; Brown, 1974). Nor do they believe in cognitivism (idealism) as Marxists have argued it is incorrect to posit mental processes divorced from real human life, in terms of their internal logic, viewed as a system unto itself (Lomov, 1981:3).

But if not any of these, what? A good starting point is widely recognised to be, what did Marx and Engels themselves have to say about psychology? It is in early work (Marx, 1844 [1961], 1845 [1976]; Marx & Engels, 1846 [1974]) where the original Marxists drew up the program for a critique of the *status quo* as well as a framework for critical inquiries and

practices, and where Lee (1985) identified a series of fundamental assumptions of a scientific psychology implicit in Marx and Engels' own early writings and embedded, he argued, in all subsequent Marxist work on psychology.

First is the emphasis placed on the importance of *practical activity* - a human individual acts to change concrete reality and in so doing changes him or herself (McLeish, 1975). Marx believed that it was productive *work* that distinguished man from animals.

‘Nature builds no machines, no locomotives, railways, electric telegraphs, self-acting mules etc. These are the products of human industry: natural material transformed into organs of the human will over nature, or of human participation in nature. They are organs of the human brain, created by the human hand, the power of knowledge objectified’ (Marx, 1858 [1973:706]).

In his later work (Marx, 1859 [1977], 1867 [1976]) he began to stress the purposive character of labour which distinguishes it from animal activity: ‘Man not only effects a change of form in the materials of nature; he also realises [*verwirklicht*] his own purpose in those materials’ (Marx, 1867 [1976:284]). So, Marx argued, ‘general social knowledge has become a direct force of production’ (Marx, 1858 [1973:706]). It is therefore in practical interaction between humans and the environment that both objects and the human subject are created – and the most ‘practical’ activity of all is work, which in capitalist society means alienated labour. Marxist psychologists, unlike earlier theorists such as Comte who explained human development primarily as a function of education (Sève, 2008:129), turn to the structure and practices of socially organised labour to provide the context as to how the human individual perceives, thinks and acts. Through labour and social interaction, other people and nonhuman objects too are assimilated into our consciousness. As Marx and Engels said, ‘there appears a division within the life of each individual, insofar as it is personal and insofar as it is determined by some branch of labour and the conditions pertaining to it’ (Marx & Engels, 1846 [1974:83-

84]). Yet we must be careful here: even if one wished to follow the arguments of the more traditional historical materialists, and understand all social relations as determined by relations of production, Marx and Engels recognised that the personality must still be formed in relations other than those of production as well.

‘The self, therefore, cannot be understood simply on the basis of social labour, or its relations, alone, as labour as mere performance of services for the satisfaction of immediate needs has nothing whatever to do with capital, since that is not capital's concern. If a capitalist hires a woodcutter to chop wood to roast his mutton over, then not only does the wood-cutter relate to the capitalist, but also the capitalist to the woodcutter, in the relation of simple exchange. The woodcutter gives him his service, a use value, which does not increase capital; rather, capital consumes itself in it; and the capitalist gives him another commodity for it in the form of money. The same relation holds for all services which workers exchange directly for the money of other persons, and which are consumed by these persons. This is consumption of revenue, which, as such, always falls within simple circulation; it is not consumption of capital. Since one of the contracting parties does not confront the other as a capitalist, this performance of a service cannot fall under the category of productive labour. (Marx, 1858 [1973:208]).

It is evidently a difficult path to tread successfully.

Secondly, for Marx, the dominant, most influential ideas in society are also the ideas of the ruling class. Marx and Engels therefore refer to the 'real intellectual wealth' of individuals being about their social connections (Marx & Engels, 1846 [1974]). Not exclusively labour, and not without mediation through a wide range of superstructures, but sufficiently that, in these famous words, ‘Psychology by no means holds the ‘secret’ of human affairs, simply

because this 'secret' is not of a psychological order' (Politzer, 1929 [1969:170]). So, for example, Marx saw no innate conflict between impulse and reason and no necessary antagonism between infant and parents (Parsons, 1995a:30). On the contrary, Marx identified a set of problems solvable through social change – in particular, revolution. Marx implies, but never states, that the personality can be liberated with 'understanding and becoming conscious of personal, interpersonal, social and economic conditions and then acting - within groups and as classes - to change the environment, in order to remove the repressive obstacles' (Feigenbaum, 1995:103).

Third, analysis should be functionalist, showing what role or effect [an] item has in some system of which it is a part (Lee, 1985), although his use of the term should not suggest any wider adherence to functionalism as a social theory, notwithstanding similarities with Marxism that have been pointed out (Sztompka, 1979).

Fourth, consciousness is an emergent aspect of this interaction. Consciousness has a dialectical and developing character. Later Marxist philosophers stressed the importance of consciousness, albeit at a collective level, as a decisive force in human progress (Parsons, 1995).

Fifth, cultural development must be distinguished from natural development. Society is not a community of individuals or social groups, but the totality of their interrelationship (Ratner, 2011; Sève, 1978, 2005; Tobach, 1999). In other words, 'Society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand' (Marx, 1857-8 [1973:265]). In this view, society is the sum of the relations in which individuals stand, so human beings are fundamentally social, and their mental capacities derive from their lives led in association, cooperation and conflict with one another. Social lives are practical, a process of transforming the world through labour, which in turn forms and changes the individual (Jones, 2013).

Marx further advanced the idea that humans may have false understandings of social reality because they belong to, or align themselves with, a social category that benefits from misrepresentations. To follow Marx is to agree that this false understanding – alienation - is not estrangement from some imaginary inner core, because the human essence was now seen as social relations. Rather, alienation was understood as the separation of most individuals from the social heritage they have helped to create – the assimilation of which is limited for them, not by their own personal needs, but by the needs of capital (Clarke, 1991). Alienation is not a cause of a surfeit of information arising from the division of labour, as sociologists like Simmel (1900) believed, where the collective culture of humanity outgrows what any one individual can hope to assimilate in a lifetime. Instead, alienation occurs because of the particularly limited tasks people perform in the capitalist division of labour. Here, the development of personal capacities is not determined by the individual's need for self-development, but by the need of capitalists to make a profit from the production process in order to accumulate more capital (Burkitt, 1991). In more recent words that however chime closely:

‘for Marxists, the isolation of individuals from one another is the breeding ground for distrust and fear of collective action and social change. When Marxists talk about ‘false consciousness’, they do not mean that individuals are making some kind of cognitive errors, mistakes in their reasoning. It is rather that people are making conscious choices based on life conditions that are ‘false’ and every false option available to them serves to confirm their alienation and sense that nothing can be done to change those conditions’ (Parker, 2007:83).

Alienation is thus essential to understand human consciousness in any given society (Lukács, 1923 [1971], 1925 [1966]) although this should not be taken as an indication that the concept is not contested: for example, alienation has been argued to have at least two meanings in Marx's own work, as it may be translated into either *Entäusserung* and *Entfremdung*, one

conveying the sense of renunciation or relinquishment, and the other, estrangement (Torrance, 1977).

A Marxist framework for psychology must therefore be at root humanistic, seeking not just to describe or explain, but to liberate: ‘The higher we ascend the ladder of biological evolution, the more complex become the life manifestations of individuals, and the more their organisation expresses the differences in their innate and acquired characteristics, the more, if this can be said, the individuals are individualised’ (Leontiev, 1978:106).

Here, however, we stumble. Although Marx and Engels outlined the sociological factors that could bring about a change in consciousness among human individuals, and sketched something of what communism would involve (Marx & Engels, 1846 [1974]) they provided no specific blueprint as to the material nature of the transformation that can take place within individual mental functions. It would have been difficult for them to do so (El-Hammoumi, 2002:99) for at least two reasons. First, psychology, psychoanalysis and psychiatry were nascent disciplines at the time they wrote, and they themselves neither were, nor claimed to be, psychologists themselves. Second, the nature of the changes that these sociological (and ultimately, economic) factors could, and would, bring about are of necessity shrouded in uncertainty from their future location. As Vygotsky said explicitly, all we can really be certain of is that Marxism, at least as originally conceived, adheres unconditionally to the political forms of classless society, which is the eventual form of human nature (El-Hammoumi, 2012:7).

At the level of any theoretical framework derived from Marx and Engels, therefore, a consistent view of what it is to be human is relatively straightforward to elucidate. Human mental powers and their expression are not innate or identical, but on the contrary historical, developing and changing according to individual lives lived in particular historical times. Hence ‘Marxists scoff at psychologists who find an aggressive instinct responsible for war or

racial conflict' (Coe, 1978:47). So far, all those wishing to be at once both Marxists and psychologists, and probably many others too, can agree; but is it possible to provide a more detailed analysis of how Marxism can shape the theory, and influence the practice, of psychology itself?

Psychology in the Soviet Union

Marxists, or those who sympathise with Marxism, may work as psychologists in capitalist or socialist societies, and taking Marx seriously may be important for them, but this surely no more enables the identification of a 'Marxist psychology' than for any other science (Sève, 2015a). The very question of what constitutes the application of Marxism within psychology in practice is therefore more than a little fraught. Several possible avenues suggest themselves for throwing a ring around the subject. One might be the collected work of those psychologists who accept the basic tenets of dialectical and historical materialism. No more than the basic tenets, though. If philosophers as distinct as Althusser and Garaudy can at various times both be described and describe themselves as Marxists (Geerlandt, 1978; Wolff, 1998), then it is little wonder that psychologists of very different intellectual traditions can equally well be described as and describe themselves as Marxists. Thus it can be quite plausibly argued that 'the diverse and sometimes sectarian disputes that riddle Marxism mean that it is quite impossible to believe that there could be only one authentic Marxist voice, let alone one position that would alone be a legitimate pretender to be a 'Marxist psychology' (Parker, 2009:72; Mather, 2003). There are therefore several possibilities. Should 'Marxist psychology be confined to some hypothetical psychology of a distant communist future? Or is 'Marxist psychology' what psychologists who identify themselves as Marxists do? In that case, one potentially promising approach will be to study what happened in psychological science in the

Soviet Union, the leading state that professed Marxism as a state-sanctioned ideology. Only *potentially* promising, however, and certainly not exclusively so, as numerous sources exist to discredit the Marxist credentials of the former Soviet Union, or for that matter any former socialist country, not least from other socialist countries themselves at the time, as the Sino-Soviet split testifies (Ribao *et al*, 1970).

That said, in the early years after the Bolshevik Revolution, Soviet psychologists, in common with Soviet social scientists in other disciplines, wrestled with whether to reconstruct the whole system of psychology on the philosophical base of Marxism, and if so how (Cole, 2004). So, for example, Chelpanov proposed there should be a social psychology based on Marxism, and an individual psychology as an empirical science following older, Western traditions (Nikolskaia, 1995). Soviet psychologists' interests often lay significantly in the way human beings differ from animals, a point fundamental to Marxism and stated explicitly by Marx himself, who ranked the worst architect above the best bee, because 'he builds it in his head before he builds it in wax' [*'er die Zelle in seinem Kopf gebaut hat, bevor er sie in Wachs baut'*] (Marx, 1867:198). In social psychology, Marxists distinguished humans from animals through the concept of *appropriation*: 'The spiritual, mental development of individual men is the product of a quite special process, that of appropriation, which does not exist at all in animals' (Leontiev, 1959:265). A close parallel may be observed here with economics: 'For Marx, 'pure' economic theory, that is economic theory that abstracts from a specific social structure, is impossible. It would be similar to 'pure' anatomy abstracted from the specific species which is to be examined' (Mandel, 1976:12).

Others believed that the arrival of Marxism would herald the eventual unity of the 'two irreconcilable halves' of psychology that Vygotsky perceived in his view of the 'crisis in psychology' - the 'natural science' branch that could explain elementary sensory and reflex process, and the 'mental science' that could describe, if not explain, higher psychological

processes (London, 1949; Cole & Scribner, 1978:5; Andreeva, 2009). It is scarcely surprising that one of the leading Soviet psychologists referred to the task of Soviet psychologists as being to avoid falling into the twin traps of idealistic and mechanistic biological concepts (Leontiev, 1978:2) as early Soviet psychological theory also had two aspects. A dichotomy of views of human nature ran through Soviet thought. On the one hand, those regarded as ‘nativists’ frequently forecast a future science which would reveal the genetic code underlying the realisation of the intellectual and physical capabilities of any individual, but on the other, ‘nurturists’ quoted Marx to prove that the collective wisdom of the community was responsible for the qualities of particular individuals (Mikhailov, 1995:77).

So a ‘nativist’ like Kornilov (1930) sought the mapping of dialectical materialism across to psychology (Rubinstein, 1945), stressing the ‘dialectical’ nature of psychical processes and laws by presenting them as examples of fundamental and universal philosophical laws such as the law of the mutual penetration of opposites, the law of the transformation of quantity into quality and the law of the negation of negation (Kornilov, 1930). This in turn led to ‘reactology’ and a perceived identification of early, and even later, Soviet psychology with Pavlov’s ideas (Payne, 1966). A ‘nurturist’ like Zalkind (1924), however, believed that human behaviour was plastic and that a new communist personality could be formed, a view that persisted in Communist writing, including in the West (e.g. Novack, 1935; Geras, 1983). Early Soviet scholars, it has been argued, further believed that it was psychology that must become ideological, a servant of the new regime, helping to transform the human personality consistent with the achievement of communism (Bauer, 1952). This was a view still held by one leading Marxist scholar over sixty years later and with all the experience of socialist failure to go by, that ‘social change in the mode of production, the elimination of private property, a change in social relations, class structure, institutions, and the division of labour can enhance human higher mental functions and reduce (sic) tensions between social classes’ (El-Hammoumi,

2015:273) with the implicit proviso that the ‘new proper social concrete reality’ (El-Hammoumi, 2012:6) was not the Soviet Union.

Efforts were made, certainly, to sketch out the human nature of socialist man – New Soviet Man – and what this would signify across a range of human endeavour (Macleish, 1975), and not only in the Soviet Union. ‘Perhaps the greatest change will be the reduction of egocentrism or self-centeredness. We cannot become true individuals unless feelings and thoughts about ourselves are integrated into a total life perspective expanding beyond personal interest to the whole of mankind’ (Coe, 1978:31). A range of Soviet endeavour, including art and architecture was viewed from this utopian perspective (see e.g. Mayakovsky, 1972; Guggenheim Museum, 1992). However, New Soviet Man would only ever be the flawed result of equally flawed socialist economic development in a world full of contradictions with capitalism, not the ‘human nature’ that could properly only flower under communism. The future structure and function of the human personality – the potential of the human mind – in the absence of alienation (Mészáros, 1972) liberated from self, community and class interest is perhaps the stuff of science fiction (and religious), speculation – and cannot be empirically analysed in the context of a world dominated by capitalist economic relations (Quiniou, 2011). Very recently, scholars have implicitly suggested that this is not so (El-Hammoumi, 2012) but the assertion remains unaccompanied by studies of the practical implications.

What is the case, is that: ‘Although the majority of Soviet psychologists shared the utopian objectives of their time and preached the mechanistic transformation of human personality towards a communist ideal, this ideal was itself extremely vague. No more clear-cut was the question of which methods of study could be regarded as Marxist and which were bourgeois, or even that scientific, Marxist psychology must have a single correct methodology’ (Kozulin, 1984:19). At the same time Soviet psychologists wanted to make very significant claims, such as that psychology as practised in the Soviet Union was not just a different

direction or school but a new historical stage with real significance for class interests. Vygotsky's fundamental assertion that 'Marxist psychology' is not a school amidst schools, but simply the only genuine psychology as a science - and the other way around, that everything that was and is genuinely scientific belongs to 'Marxist psychology' (Vygotsky, 1927:343), should therefore be placed alongside his assertion that Marxist psychology does not yet exist, and should be understood as a historical goal, not as something already extant (Vygotsky, 1927:340). By the 1950s, social psychology was seen as a science involving the study both of mass mental processes and the position of the individual in groups (Andreeva, 2009), whilst gradually, international dialogue occurred. Soviet social psychologists looked e.g. to Western analysis of small groups (Rahmani, 1973) and the work of Soviet psychologists was disseminated, initially in specialised academic circles in the West but then more widely (Blunden, 2011).

Vygotsky and the cultural-historical school

Scholars have suggested that the main psychology worth retrieving from the Soviet years, at least, is Vygotsky's cultural-historical school, initially at least a struggle against psychology's failure to recognise the centrality of culture and history to human psychological functioning (Cole, 2004) and Leontiev's (1959,1978,1981) and Rubinstein's (1959) theory of activity, arguably itself based on Vygotsky (Andreeva, 2009) which both drew on the same underlying Marxist generalities and may be said to complement one another (Leontiev, 1994:58).

Vygotsky agreed with the general view of Marxist psychologists, that the social relations of production are the appropriate 'unit of analysis' for human mental phenomena (El-Hammoumi, 2002:89) and therefore for psychology itself (El-Hammoumi, 2012:7). It is with

regard to his specific psychological theories where there is no consensus. Vygotsky argued that the higher cognitive functions are mainly culturally determined, the outcome of internalising external cultural devices and representational systems (Vygotsky, 1934; Goldberg, 1990:2) such as the development of technology and productive forces, and the structure of social class (Vygotsky, 1994:176 [1930]). He therefore derived the general law of cultural development, which means that human higher mental functions have their origin in the processes of social relations of production. He also developed a law of semiotic mediation: human higher mental functions can be understood only if we understand the mediating role of signs and tools, and the genetic method, which means that human higher mental functions can be understood only in the processes of their development and growth, and thus social in origins (Vygotsky, 1983, translated into English: Vygotsky, 1978, and French: Vygotsky, 2014). Though derived especially from labour, these are mediated through internalised culturally produced signs (Zaporožec, 1980:106; Cole and Scribner, 1978:7), albeit characterised by a dialectical process of abrupt change (Vygotsky, 1983:246). For Vygotsky, thought is a special process formed in the course of social and historical development as a result of the role which language plays in mankind's social history (Levitin, 1980:45). This was a point recognised by Marx and Engels themselves, who said that 'Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical consciousness that exists also for other men, and for that reason alone it really exists for me personally as well; language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men' (Marx & Engels, 1846 [1974:51]), a position hardly unanimously endorsed by many contemporary psychologists (e.g. Khalidi, 2007).

Such an interpretation of the problems of general psychology has been claimed to provide a solid basis for the solution of specific social psychological problems (Andreeva, 2009) as well as seeking correlations with neurophysiology by Luria (1966) of the premise formulated earlier by Vygotsky (1934), a claim that the higher psychological processes go first

through a 'biological' phase and then through a 'cultural' phase. Many of the psychological functions examined by Soviet psychologists, such as attention, memory thinking and especially learning, are viewed as emerging out of the child's social interaction with adults (Wertsch, 1981:29). And in practice, this led Vygotsky to develop developmental 'bypasses' to assist e.g. blind children to learn (Gindis, 1999).

Is the cultural-historical school (CHAT) really Marxist?

But is any of this exclusively Marxist? Socially determined psychological traits, do not of themselves a Marxist theoretical framework for psychology make. Anglo-Saxon critics pounced, by arguing that the Vygotskian emphasis on the infant as a social being has a 'surprisingly modern touch', i.e. a non-Marxist one, at least in a Soviet sense (Van der Veer, 1986:531). They raised serious doubt about whether Vygotsky really does stand completely, or even firmly, in the Marxist tradition (e.g. Moscovici, 1996, 1998; Ratner, 2004). Criticism of the cultural-historical school as non-Marxist was contemporary with its development: Talankin (1931:22) emphasised Marx and Engels' idea that it was labour that created man, suggesting that Vygotsky and Luria overemphasised 'culture', even to the extent of denying its root in human class activity. Razmyslov (1934) criticised the cultural-historical theory as being 'far too much based on a broad current of European thinking...to be called a Marxist or Communist theory' (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991:382). Rejected under Stalinism, the cultural-historical school was exonerated only in the 1960s, although that is not to suggest it became mainstream, and criticism endured. In fact the cultural-historical theory was not Marxist, certainly at least in the sense ascribed to that word in the early 1930s. A recent analysis of CHAT described his work as '*also* [my emphasis] a Marxist psychology, concerned with understanding how people use conceptual tools to act on the world to shape it' (Edwards,

2011:2) although how this concern differentiates any theory as uniquely Marxist is surely elusive (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991:383) and certainly contentious, others having suggested that bourgeois, psychologists such as Lévy were a major influence on Vygotsky (Jones, 2013:3). Kozulin, for example, summarised Vygotsky's 1924 position as a challenge to almost all leading Soviet behavioural scientists, from Pavlovians to Bekhterev and Blonsky (Kozulin, 1986), numbers of whom rejected the category of consciousness as an 'idealist superstition' (Kozulin, 1984:103). But other scholars do not even agree with this: 'it would be misleading to paint Vygotsky as an opponent of reflexology, taking reflexes to 'provide the foundation for behaviour' though adding that 'we can learn nothing from them about the 'building' that is constructed on this foundation' (Jones, 2013:4).

Here, what is undoubtedly striking throughout CHAT is the elevation of Vygotsky to 'supra-Soviet' status, a psychological theorist who transcends not only his epoch, but Marxism itself. So for example the majority of analysis of even Vygotsky in the West is 'drained of its dialectics and consciousness is ignored' (El-Hammoumi, 2002:93), a position with which as we shall see Sève wholeheartedly agrees. This is despite the fact that, as Wallon in France stressed in an earlier generation, dialectics has given to psychology its stability and its meaning (Wallon, 1951 [1972:79]). One article discussing Vygotsky's contribution to developmental psychology succeeded in avoiding the word 'Marxist' altogether (Wertsch & Tulvise, 1992), and it has been pointed out that when Vygotsky *is* taught in the West, at least the Anglophone West - thanks to the translation of Françoise Sève the Marxist foundations of Vygotsky's work are more widely appreciated in France than they are in the Anglo-Saxon world (Vygotsky, 1934a [2003]) - it is typically in piecemeal fashion, discarding its revolutionary political roots whilst accepting some attractive notions about the influence of culture and history (Wertsch, 1995; Sawyer, 2014). This reinforces the criticism that Western psychologists have developed a version of Vygotsky's thought that has the same form as psychology before, or without,

Marxism altogether, fitting neatly into the same academic categories: cognition, motivation, perception, intelligence, attention, development, agency, subjectivity etc. (El-Hammoumi, 2012:9). It disregards what Vygotsky, and others (e.g. Simon, 1977), actually believed in: the transformative power of the human will, accompanied by an educational system oriented toward collective social goals. This is beginning to change for the better (Packer, 2006, 2008; Ratner & Silva, 2017). Certainly, however, some of Vygotsky's colleagues, notable for example Bozhovich, might reasonably be described as non-Marxist psychologists in their emphasis on the individual personality independent of social, let alone economic, influence, and by extension in their research, oblivious of forms of what Althusser described as forms of historical individuality (Robbins, 2004; Stolze, 2015).

So on the one hand are those such as Cole and Scribner (1978:6) who suggest that Vygotsky's theory amounted to the application of dialectical and historical materialism to psychology, whilst on the other stands the view that the 'Vygotskian project' was an entirely collaborative effort with agreement dominating dissension (Stetsenko & Arievidtch, 2014). Perhaps a fair summing up, notwithstanding the use of the contentious term 'Marxist psychology', a term with which Sève objects, would be that: 'Vygotsky claimed it was his mission to develop a Marxist psychology. Although in most areas he did this by adopting Marx's ideas, he also modified them where he believed they were no longer viable. This particularly applies to his idea as to the downward influence of signs, consciousness and self-consciousness on practice in the middle period of development' (Langford, 2012:245). In sum, Vygotsky appealed most to a wider audience, not only because of the apparent originality of his ideas but because of the 'social psychology' he advocated, shorn or at least pruned of its Marxist basis. Vygotsky is the Marxist psychology that it is safe to consume in capitalist society (Spears & Parker, 1996:11).

What seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, is that neither the cultural-historical theory itself, nor examples of the application of Vygotsky's individual contributions to psychology, notably the concept of the zone of proximate development – the difference between what a learner can do with and without help (Vygotsky, 1978), a concept widely used in contemporary educational psychology worldwide (Chaiklin, 2003; Schousboe & Winther-Lindqvist, 2013) - can be regarded as a failsafe demonstration of the application of a Marxist theoretical framework to psychology. 'Taking Vygotsky Seriously' is *not* sufficient as a Marxist theoretical framework for psychology, not least because as a practising psychologist much of Vygotsky's work was just that – actual psychological work. Moreover, as the ever-expanding quantity of 'Vygotsky studies' demonstrates, he already *is* taken seriously, if not taken in context or correctly – and certainly not always as a Marxist.

Activity Theory

Supporters argue that Vygotsky's theory of human activity recovered the Marxist concept of reflexive subjectivity from the complete oblivion into which it had fallen in the positivised version of Marxism (El-Hammoumi, 2002:96) which has been subjected to the criticism that 'A totalising, scientific [sic], and structuralist Marxism only had place for human agency as the (passive) effect of social processes and relations' (Hayes, 2001:41).

The foremost proponent of activity theory in Soviet psychology, however, was not Vygotsky but his collaborator Leontiev, for whom the concept of activity replaces the division between mental process and behaviour, interposing an entire universe between the mechanical and the idealistic. Psychology therefore ought to broaden its focus to the relationship between subject and object. Yet in his view this must be done without making a sharp distinction between inherited and individual, localised development. He identified a series of stages of

activity starting with discrimination of things, through image memory and animal intellect through to human consciousness, in particular the division of labour (Leontiev, 1959). There is further recognition of the way in which motive, in particular, 'object motive' - the object of activity, gives activity a determined direction (Leontiev, 1978:17). But according to one interpretation at least, this is merely the rather unexceptional recognition that the same role can be interpreted differently by individuals depending on their circumstances (Edwards, 2011).

Striking in Leontiev's work, as in that of Vygotsky, is the insistence on the explanatory force of Marxism. It alone is sufficient to allow 'a penetration into the real nature of the psyche, the consciousness of man' (Vygotsky, 1930; Leontiev, 1978:2), to resolve the question of how to study mental and physical (brain processes) together, and to show that consciousness is not a mystical, yet at the same time reflexive, manifestation but instead 'a product of those special - that is, social - relations into which people enter and which are realised only by means of their brains, their organs of feeling, and their organs of action' (Leontiev, 1978:19). The suspicion remains, however, that there is very little exclusively Marxist about this formulation.

As theory developed through the 1960s, activity theory was consolidated into a mature version of - that term Sève rejects again - a 'Marxist psychology' - the focus was on external, practical activity - making activity ontological, and situated at the centre of psychology - leaving little room for a theory of the personality (Rey, 2014) or even, some argued, anything else at all. 'The main difference is that for cultural-historical psychology, the central problem was and remains the mediation of mind and consciousness. For the psychological theory of activity, the central problem was object-orientedness, in both external and internal mental activity' (Zinchenko, 1995:41) 'Unwilling to use the categories of culture or praxis as explanatory principles, Leontiev and his colleagues doomed themselves to the vicious circle in which material activity as an object of study is explained through material activity as an explanatory principle' (Judin, 1978). Leontiev did, however, theorise individual personality

and was the first theorist to elevate its importance within activity theory (Leontiev, 1978; Rey, 2014:73). This text is where Leontiev suggests that:

‘The concept of personality, just like the concept of the individual, is expressed by the wholeness of the subject’s life; personality does not consist of little pieces, it is not a ‘cluster of polyps’; personality represents a whole formation of a special type. Personality is not a whole, conditioned genotypically: one is not born a personality, one becomes a personality’ (Leontiev, 1978:107).

Labour is not highlighted here, and critics have suggested that for Leontiev, as for Vygotsky, ‘Labour activity was seen as just one factor of development rather than the source’ (Veresov, 2005:41), and that there was never a unified concept of ‘activity’ in Soviet psychology – whilst Leontiev meant the term *Tätigkeit* (деятельность) Vygotsky meant *Aktivität* (активность) (Veresov, 2005:40).

According to Roth (2004), who developed this critique, it would seem that Anglo-Saxon scholarship has appropriated activity theory in a particular way, grafting a fundamentally dialectical theory onto an equally fundamentally dualistic epistemology. Such a move comes with a cost in the sense that important aspects no longer make sense in the new context. Perhaps there is a need to take on board more than some concept words and other selected parts of activity theory — particularly the dialectical approach that is central to the work of the fathers of activity theory, beginning with Marx and Engels, via Vygotsky and Leontiev, to Engeström. Proponents of activity theory therefore see it as the solution to the problems of static dualism that – allegedly – exist in Western thought, which a Marxist envisages as theoretical and even practical contradictions in activity that Roth (2004) suggests may well dissolve in the context of a dialectical approach. For ‘once we recognise activity systems for what they are, we do not need to accept them as they are, but instead continuously contribute to changing them’ (Roth,

2004:7). Either way, activity theory itself, like CHAT, does not represent a comprehensive approach to psychology that can be described as distinctively Marxist.

International perspective

Tracing a line of development from Marx and Engels themselves through Soviet psychology, and the work of Vygotsky and Leontiev in particular, should not, however, be allowed to create an illusion that psychology has not been theorised, practised and developed by Marxists in other countries. Scholars and practitioners such as Pagès (1962), Duarte (2004, 2006), El-Hammoumi (2012), Ratner, (2011), González-Rey (2009), Ping & Yongquan (2012) and Painter *et al* (2015) and activity theorists such as Engeström (1987) - as well as in the work of other scholars that he draws on including Holzkamp (1983), Eskola (1992), and Hyden (1988) have put forward both Marxist theory and practice in other countries, ‘without which activity theory makes little sense and gives rise to misunderstanding, perhaps even misconceptions’ (Roth, 2004:2).

So not every psychologist decided they were no longer Marxists when history ended. The revival of interest in a Marxist theoretical framework for psychology almost seemed to *require* the demise of the USSR and the end of the Communist political experiment in order for the dead hand to be released and theoretical foundations rebuilt.

But whilst the causes of individuality may be accepted by Marxists, and CHAT (and activity theory) the preferred theories of many psychologists, others have still pointed to the 'gap' in Marxism where a theory of the individual should be. As Sartre famously wrote, ‘So long as Marxism fails to do it, others will attempt the coup in its place’ (Sartre, 1963:82). Whilst much Marxist theory has recognised that individuals can and do constitute themselves in terms of their collective agency as members of their class or group, feeding into the psychological

concept of social identity (Spears & Parker, 1996), others have complained that this is far from sufficient. Sartre referred to this as the problem that 'Marxism lacks any hierarchy of mediations which would permit it to grasp the process which produces the person and his product inside class and within a given society at a given historical moment' (Sartre, 1963:56). And even after virtually the entire historical experience of the Soviet Union, one of the few Western scholars outside France who had studied Sève (1978) could claim that '...there does not yet exist any satisfactory materialist theory of the individual' (Leonard, 1984:102). His argument continues that 'The analysis of class and gender relations, the central role of production and reproduction, the controlling operations of the modern state, the place of the mass media in the production of 'moral panics', have all been seen as highly determinant in relation to individual consciousness and behaviour...[but]..within this alternative, the individual has often been relatively untheorised within the result that [for example] many social workers tend to see welfare recipients only as victims of an oppressive and monolithic social order' (Leonard, 1984).

Conclusion

Perhaps the Marxist argument about human individuality - that the human personality was created by social relations that had at their basis the production and distribution of commodities was indeed a striking and radical insight (Burkitt, 1991). It appeared to turn conventional psychology on its head, questioned all notions of innateness, opened many potential avenues of research and implied, though it did not prove, that human personality, formed by history, could be changed by it, if capitalist society were to be replaced, first by socialism and then by communism.

Striking insights may be deceptive, however, especially given the persistence of capitalist economic and social relations. What we can say about Marxism and psychology, as

with Marxism and economics, is that there is agreement about the generalities, but ferocious disagreement amongst Marxists about the specifics. There may be agreement about what Marx said, but disagreement about what he meant: agreement that a truly scientific psychology informed by Marxism must differ from its bourgeois counterpart, but disagreement on the margins. Over time, psychology has adopted a range of Marxist concepts, ranging from strict adherence to the notion of 'New Soviet Man', to a generic adoption of Marxist principles, which is capable of integration with mainstream Social Psychology (Doise, 2012; De Sá 2013:95). From the 1970s onwards, in fact, a distinctive Soviet psychology began to disappear, aided by Soviet psychologists' participation in global science. By the 21st century the claim was advanced that even basic concepts of Soviet society, let alone Soviet – and by extension Marxist - psychology, such as collective property, lost their meaning over time (Andreeva, 2009). Although there was recognition of what had been achieved in the West, the modern perception that Soviet psychologists were ever seeking to escape Marxism is not borne out, certainly, by reviewing the work of leading Soviet psychologists.

An optimist might therefore say with Sartre that 'Far from being exhausted, Marx's idea of psychology is still very young, almost in its infancy; it has scarcely begun to develop' (Sartre 1963: 30). A pessimist might conclude the opposite. The point Teo made about critical psychology in general, that those working within different 'frameworks' were not able to establish a working communication with one another, that the elaborate discussions no longer attracted a wider social movement, that critical psychology became more academic and provided no immediate solutions, techniques or applications to attract practitioners, could just as well serve as a depiction of Soviet psychology and the subsequent work of Marxist psychologists (Teo, 1998:246). In the absence of practical evidence to the contrary, the suspicion must surely rise up that Marxist theory has found itself in the position of becoming

one of many 'languages' or 'methods of discourse' presented by the Left generally in the face of hegemonic capitalism.

The obvious gambit for a non-Marxist determinist, on the other hand, has always been to concede the importance, but deny the centrality, of economic relations in determining social structures, and by extension, in forming the dominant influence on human personality. Feminist critics for example focused primarily on the social role of gender as a substitute for economics (Greer, 1970); social anthropologists have dwelled on culture and even race as alternatives (Mead, 1928); alternative notions of culture and society have been variously advanced (e.g. Durkheim, 1893 [1997]); Weber, (1925[1947]), both discussed in Giddens (1973), Lyotard (1974) and Bourdieu (1986) amongst many others. Critical approaches in the tradition of these streams of thought (e.g. feminist standpoint studies) have analysed the role of social interest in knowledge production and dissemination, and reflect on the knowledge producer's social existence and the potential ideological and practical biases that it might produce (Teo, 2012) as well as the potential failure of the economic system as a whole to reflect individual priorities, commitments and interests.

Likewise, however, debate can prove fruitless: at any one point in history different groups and individuals take different views as to the priority or otherwise of economic conditions in the development of social conditions and the individual personality. Perhaps this is unavoidable, but it does little to assuage doubts that Marxism has anything other than a vague hope of eventual human improvement via political action and economic transformation, rather irrelevant for psychologists studying and working with individuals in the (very persistent) capitalist world. As has been observed of activity theory, it is certainly a tall order to bring it down to a level of specific, empirically testable concepts (Shames, 1989). 'What has the new psychology yielded so far? Not much, as yet' (Levitin, 1980:32). It is evident that there is no clear 'route map' to follow. That is partly, because whilst critical psychology, activity

psychology or in particular any psychology using a Marxist theoretical framework may have a liberating effect, they must first break free of the theoretical shackles that are emplaced by capitalist society itself. As has been pointed out, 'The objective, contradictory thought-forms that arise from the capitalist mode of production are ...are also manifested in societal practice as thinking about these forms, thereby creating the possibility of seeing beyond the privacy that conceals the historical form of exploitation' (Tolman, 2013:48-49). In Parker's view, a Marxist, or at least a revolutionary, psychology would analyse how dominant forms of psychology work, how alternatives develop, how psychological ideas develop culturally within capitalism, and finally how everyday life can form a resistance to capitalist psychology (Parker, 2009). But even then it may *not* have a liberating effect: it is not even clear what the consequences of adopting it would be. Assertions have been made that the contributions of South and North American Marxist psychologists have been 'very impressive' (El-Hammoumi, 2002). But might, in fact, the consequences be negligible – whether under contemporary socio-economic conditions or not? The Soviet Penal Code, for example, was written with the full force of Marxist understanding in general and Marxist psychology in particular. Yet it was not really very different in most of its important particulars from a typical Western penal code, retaining the death penalty for instance, and only the defence that it was constituted for a *transitional*, socialist society can be raised.

There is some evidence that Marxism has influenced psychologists in practical areas e.g. clinical psychology, but evidence of its actual 'use' in the West is limited, not least because multiple frameworks may inform the structure of decision-making in practical psychology, of which Marxism may be just one. However, most Marxist psychologists are outside the Anglo-Saxon academic publishing ambit. For example, there is a substantial body of literature emanating from Brazil on Marxist theory and psychology (e.g. Martins, 2007; Duarte, 2004), whilst Sève's later work was reviewed and analysed throughout Europe (Wolles, 2012). None

of this is obvious to a reader confined exclusively to the Anglo-Saxon literature on psychological practice. But what are they? An example is the account of cultural-historical psychology in Brazil (Tuleski *et al*, 2013) where arguably ‘The appropriations of Vygotskian-inspired practices in Brazil have had a stronger Marxist foundation than elsewhere’ (Cole, 2015). It is evident that Vygotsky’s work is closely read and evidently presented with some fervour, along with other Marxist psychologists, but it is tautological to suggest that ‘doing Marxist psychology’ amounts to nothing more than repeating the usual Marxist commonplaces discussed above. There ought to be an actual impact on psychological education: yet all appears to reduce to nothing more than support for ‘a psychology which subsidises school and other institutions in a serious practices of teaching science, culture, arts, among other subjects, establishing positive values for the formation of a cultural and freedom for man, against a broader movement to deny the full development for a large portion of humanity’ (Tuveski *et al*, 2013:200). This is a theoretical position that could equally be attributed to many religious educators, for example: there seems little very Marxist about it, let alone anything specifically derived from the juncture of Marxism and psychology.

What is also important, but not immediately obvious from theoretical Marxist texts on psychology, is how a Marxist theoretical framework for psychology will help psychologists tackle, or at least assist them in tackling, the wide range of practical psychological issues with which social psychology engages, such as aggression, self-esteem, how groups function, and how relationships between individuals are created, sustained, developed and influenced. So when we read for example that ‘The task of the Marxist therapist is to expose false consciousness, relating it to traditions and institutions, past, present and future’ (Coe, 1978:48), we may ask, what would this mean for treating schizophrenia, for example? Does a Marxist framework admit mental illness of this kind, or not, and either way, how does it help individuals in capitalist society who psychologists deem need it? This is perhaps not surprising when

Vygotsky did not even research something so apparently fundamental as the functioning of class in school (Panofsky, 2003). The argument has also been implicitly put that changes in the status of different psychological theories – in particular, the status of Pavlov – had its main significance in a quite different, political way, in influencing the policy debates of Communist Parties (García, 2009), as if any practical significance should not even be *expected*.

One might be tempted to give up on a Marxist theoretical framework for psychology altogether. But then, one reads an impassioned criticism of the ‘mindless use of psychological tests, most often imported from the United States’ (Leontiev, 1978:4) and that there is ‘frequently inappropriate use of animal experimentation as a basis for conclusions about human behaviour’ (Leonard, 1984:32). Or one reads that for Marxist psychologists in Brazil there is a radical intent, for example work, ‘to test the hypothesis that an intensification of the interaction between children or between children and adults could under certain conditions fill the handicap that children from less advantaged backgrounds were suffering from’ (Doise, 2013:9). Then one recognises that perhaps, there are real, specific, political implications of Marxism for psychology, and perhaps especially in education. However, if so, however, these are glimpses: they are not clearly, regularly or consistently elucidated.

A resolution, or at least the injection of some clarity into this puzzle in any area must therefore rely on two steps. First, the identification of what theory we propose to work with, and the second, to put it to the test through case studies. What is perhaps surprising is how little of this kind of clarification has been attempted. Do Marxists show a cult-like access to truth, or are they able to incorporate other intellectual developments (Teo, 1999) in a way that critical psychologists such as Parker (2007) consciously do, raising, evaluating and judging different aspects of Marx and Engels' own work as well as how it has been variously interpreted by others? A way of conceptualising the problem is to see the Marxism forming the theoretical framework of any given psychology as two-fold: one, the self-identification by the author or

group with Marxism (a test that, for example, Vygotsky passes) and second, more important, the extent to which the psychology relies (in a causal sense) on the central tenets of Marxism as a whole, the degree to which it is 'Marxist'. This may be measured by the extent of direct reference to Marx and Engels' own ideas, although that is not a perfect mechanism either. In that important second sense, CHAT, at least as represented in the Anglophone West, is much more open to criticism – need there be Marxism for it to exist? For a theoretical framework for psychology that does require Marx, and which may be less easily so criticised, we should return to sterner stuff, as Burkitt (1991) explicitly recognised in separating his prior chapter on 'Marxist psychology' from that of Vygotsky and CHAT. The selected theoretical framework for this thesis is the same as Burkitt chose as representative of 'Marxist psychology': that of Lucien Sève.

Chapter Three – Lucien Sève and the theory of personality

Introduction

This chapter is a review of the contribution made by Lucien Sève (b. 1926) towards what he described as the development of a Marxist theory of the personality. TSS entails using a Marxist theoretical framework for psychology, so the aim of this chapter is to present Sève's theoretical contribution in a comprehensive and hopefully clear fashion. The aim is that this exposition of his work can serve as the theoretical framework for the empirical chapters that follow, which will be, to paraphrase the words of Lucien Sève, *an intervention by psychology into academic terrain*.

Sève is one of the leading Marxist philosophers in France, a former long-standing member of the French Communist Party, and a key Marxist theoretician, particularly on questions of psychology. He is most well-known for his magnum opus, *Marxisme et théorie de la personnalité* (5th edition, Paris 1981, henceforth MTP), in which he sought to develop a Marxist theory of human individuality, and which was translated into more than 25 languages (El-Hammoumi, 2012a), although he has written much of note subsequently, including a projected four volume contemporary engagement with Marx, three volumes of which have already been published, including one specifically on psychology (Sève, 2008).

Sève's work has enjoyed a renaissance in the last decade as part of the more general engagement by scholars with Soviet psychologists, Vygotsky in particular, but also Leontiev (e.g. El Hammoumi, 2002), not just in the Anglophone world but elsewhere even more so and arguably more accurately (Sève, 2015a:2). Sève's work itself has been reviewed and commented upon over the past decades (e.g. Sica, 1980; Shames, 1981; Wolles, 2012) and there have been theoretical advances by dedicated scholars, including in the most surprising

places (e.g. El-Hammoumi, 2002, 2012). Sève's work was originally introduced to an English readership by three authors: Leonard (1984), O'Donnell (1986), and Burkitt (1991), but they all had wider purposes in mind. Moreover, none had the benefit of Sève's later work, notably Sève (2008, 2015) on which to draw, and none of them entered into a dialogue with Sève himself. Although more recently Vygotsky may be stealing the show, Sève has his protagonists. For example:

‘A relatively recent summary of the work of contemporary psychologist working in the Marxist tradition, if not all self-professed Marxists, refers to the work of several authors. First and foremost amongst them is Sève’ (El-Hammoumi, 2002:98, 2012a), whilst others have suggested that ‘Sève's work represents an impressive contribution to the development of a materialist understanding of the individual’ (Leonard, 1984:83) and even that ‘when you look at what Sève had to say about psychology, especially the theory of personality, there was overlooked a very important breakthrough in how to think about and analyse man’ (Kavelaars, 2001 [no pagination]).

More recently, MTP has been recognised by Marxists as having made a major contribution to psychology: a leading critic has declared that:

‘it significantly enriched the discussion when it appeared four decades ago. Supporters argue that MTP was a truly innovative departure from different versions of West European Marxism (the Frankfurt School, different trends of Marxist structuralism, Marxist humanism, existentialism, etc.), showing how Marx's psychological idea might enhance our understanding of human life and nature’ (El Hammoumi, 2012:988).

On the other hand, in the disparaging view of O'Donnell, Sève's work should be understood entirely in political terms, as a contribution to the Althusser-Garaudy debate within the PCF, and not as a real contribution to psychology. What then was Sève's distinctive theoretical contribution?

Sève's starting point

Sève's premise in MTP was that a scientific psychology compatible with Marxism does not yet properly exist – Vygotsky's work being an important contribution - but it *could*. And because the world needed it, not least because under communism, 'politics itself will disappear, but psychology will not' no more than any other science (Sève, 1978:21), it *should*. He then followed Politzer (1928) in wishing to develop a distinct and characteristically Marxist conception of the personality. Sève treats personality as, although does not actually define it as, the ensemble of individual psychological characteristics - and also introduces what he termed biography, the trajectory of the personality through history and its determination (Sève, 1978). Both of these he believed to be the proper subjects of psychological analysis (Legrand, 1992:499). He therefore defended the idea of psychology in principle against criticism that it was redundant, and in doing so generated a lively debate with other French Marxist intellectuals. In delivering what has been described as a telling critique of two extremes (Forbes, 2015:50), on the one hand Sève opposed 'anti-humanist' theories that in his view conceptualised the self as an illusory subject, created and maintained by ideological, linguistic or cultural structures, in turn within capitalist society functioning as supports and enhancements of forms of capitalist production (Althusser *et al*, 1965). It is little wonder Sève had continually to engage with Althusser in particular (Sève, 1978: 161-167, note 27; Forbes, 2015:8), having been told by him back in 1969 that the concept of a personality itself is not a Marxist concept but a bourgeois ideological notion (Sève, 2008:123), implying *inter alia* that Sève's entire life's work was a misconception, and a counterproductive one at that. This was a view shared by other structural Marxists (Sève, 1978:27) e.g. Balibar, who refused even to read MTP (Sève, 2015:36). On the other hand Sève also rarely refrained from taking a swipe at Fromm and Lewis (Sève, 2008:142), Garaudy (Sève, 1978:158-160, 2008:522-525), Schaff (Sève,

2008:64-66), Godelier (Sève, 1978:165, note 27) or Sartre (Sève, 2008:17-19) all of whom in his view in portraying Marx as just a champion of a ‘modern form of humanism’ [*‘humanisme moderne’*] (Sève, 2008:142), focused too greatly on his early works and ignored or misconceived historical materialism to a greater or lesser extent, essentially *failing to be Marxists*. Sève sided with those who argue that the 1844 Manuscripts are still ‘upside-down’ and not Marxist (Sève, 1978:50; Rockmore, 1980; Burkitt, 1991:116) although the *Theses on Feuerbach* already deliver the fundamental lesson that the ‘human essence’ is no abstraction, but is in reality the ensemble of social relations (Marx 1845 [1976:4]). Thus the core of the problem in the social sciences is the mediation between the general movement of society in history and the lives of individuals (Burkitt, 1991:114). Sève himself therefore emphatically rejected any idea that he compromised theoretical for political reasons between the two ‘simplistic’ positions, dismissing the ‘spatial metaphor’ of political positions (Sève, 2015a:4), which he characterised as those of Stalin and Garaudy (Sève, 2015:28). He preferred to characterise the debate as an unproductive dispute above which, if the spatial metaphor were to be retained, rises Marx’s (and by implication, his own) work (Sève, 2008:396).

The humanists could be excused, though, as for the early Sève at least, the theory of personality, as well as the whole field of psychology, was immature (Sève, 1978:3). Amongst other failings, it had not kept pace with science. ‘Far from following their trajectory of development, the psychology of personality notoriously marks time at the level of inconsistent and now antiquated theories’ (Sève, 1978:442). For Sève, the theoretical immaturity of psychology was expressed first in its inability even to establish its own correct subject matter, a problem that if solved Sève believed would bring decisive progress in the field. In his view the uncharted theory of personality was of extreme importance, as ‘many political problems consist at least in part of a psychological problem which arises for many millions of men’ (Sève, 1978:13). Inability to identify the correct subject matter was expressed in traditional

psychology in such ‘problems’ as the dualism of mind and body, in retreating from a genuine psychology back to biology, as did Pavlov, or in suggesting that psychology and neurophysiology formed a unity, a solution which in Sève’s view could allow for the creation of specifically psychological terrain, which exists, qualitatively different but materially identical:

‘In short, while there is nothing in psychism which is not nervous activity it is nevertheless clearly necessary for it to be distinguished from it in some way, at least if one is to grant psychology a specific object. Similarly, there is nothing which is not social in the personality, and yet its singularity must be clearly understood as essential if the psychology of personality is not a false science. In other words, the concept of *social individuality* being a contradiction in terms, there is no alternative but to recognise the dialectical nature of the personality, a unity embracing the real difference’ (Sève, 1978:31).

This is a view to which he has continued to adhere. Individuals – in contradistinction to the Althusserian position that assigns to individuals only a supportive and constitutive ‘*Träger*’ role (Stolze, 2015:201), are both supports for structural relations that dominate them and actors of social dynamics that make them move (Sève, 2008:121)

although

‘Unfortunately, the precise nature of this quality of the psychological personality, which qualitatively distinguishes it from all social facts, although it is social through and through, has so far proved elusive’ (Sève, 1978:31-32).

And hence ‘the whole basic demarcation of the human sciences in the domain of the psychism of individuals which is so radically problematic’ (Sève, 1978:33) and his contention that ‘it is

primarily this unresolved problem of demarcation, i.e. of definition, which still stands between the psychology of personality and its full development' (Sève, 1978:33).

Throughout both Sève's early work (Sève, 1976; Backès-Clément *et al.*, 1973), MTP (Sève, 1978) and his much later text, *L'Homme* (Sève, 2008) he therefore sought to 'liberate' psychology from the service of capitalism. As Sève put it in the English translation of a shorter version of MTP, 'They [Marxists] know...that...psychology is often the indirect way by which ideology introduces bourgeois ideas and the way that idealists try to revise historical materialism and scientific socialism in a subjective direction' (Sève, 1975:11).

How is this to be done? At root it is the contradiction between the individual and society which traditional psychology fails to conquer at the theoretical level, but which 'haunts the relations between psychology and the biological sciences on the one hand, and the social sciences on the other' (Sève, 1978:37). But it is a false dichotomy, Sève claimed in MTP, because the difference between innate and social, nature/nurture are not opposites, dialectically, although they may be 'external opposites' (such as physical geography and political structures for a nation) whose reciprocal relations cannot be determined by an internal dialectical law of growth. And in this case, because Sève believed that there must be an object of study for psychology, these false dichotomies cannot be the basis of a science of personality, whether approached qualitatively or in some unrealistic mathematical formula of relative influence. In reality, these are really social facts, so that the alleged contradiction between the biological and the social becomes an illusion. So that, 'far from expressing a primary contradiction the conventional opposition between individual and society in psychology is itself a secondary form of society's opposition with itself' (Sève, 1978:38).

Psychology, Sève was saying, seemed to be satisfied indefinitely with 'the juxtaposition of fragmentary and contradictory models' (Sève, 1978:39), but so long as it does not possess 'its own Capital' – 'the equivalent of political economy's law of necessary correspondence

between forces and relations of production, the general law of capitalist accumulation, or the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, it will no doubt be progressing down the scientific road – as has been the case for quite a long time now - but it will not be a fully developed science’ (Sève, 1978:39). So, it is not surprising, he says, that its right to existence is questioned (e.g. by Lacan, 1966). And so – despite Freud’s insistence, which Sève quoted, that the concepts cannot be clear-cut – Sève’s view was that ‘psychology will not reach complete scientific maturity *without also doing philosophy*’ (Sève, 1978:40).

Sève then moves on to analysing what philosophy – Marxist philosophy in particular - can offer in the way of a framework for scientific psychology. He starts by arguing that ‘the great scientific truths established over the past hundred years – for example, those which we owe to Pavlov (a positive view not shared by humanists such as Sartre) and his successors – substantially fitted with dialectical materialism, while themselves broadening this framework, and this is a fact of primary theoretical significance’ (Sève, 1978:43). But ‘one cannot hold conversely that, like a Sleeping Beauty, scientific truths were lying dormant in Marxist philosophy from the beginning’ (Sève, 1978:43). This, he remarked, would be rather like saying the French language contains future literary masterpieces. It is impossible, he argued in MTP and still argues, to base an entire science on dialectical or historical materialism *per se*, and it is not the ‘fault’ of Marxist philosophy that psychology remains an immature science. So there should not be and cannot be a ‘Marxist psychology’ (Sève, 1978) any more than there can be a ‘Sèvien psychology’ or a Marxist biology, physics or any other science – an important view that he has consistently maintained (Sève, 2015a:6). He did however say in MTP that ‘Scientific work necessarily has an *ideological orientation* and a *class character*, especially when it concerns human sciences’ (Sève, 1978:46), hence he believed that it was legitimate to speak of bourgeois and Marxist psychology in that particular sense of both terms. This means that to tackle the problems of the psychology of personality in the spirit of Marxism, is ‘above

all to pose the problem of organising for the full psychological development of all men, which straight away implies a revolutionary political perspective' (Sève, 1978:47). The normative position and the intent is clear from the start: all those who do not share the Marxist world view, should get off the bus at this stop. It is worth noting that scholars sympathetic to Sève do not feel the need to make this distinction. Nor as a result do they display reluctance to use the term 'Marxist psychology' (e.g. El-Hammoumi, 2015) despite the force of Sève's argument and the further objections that have been made to the use of the term (Parker, 1999).

Perhaps a surprising admission from a Marxist but nevertheless an obvious one, his next argument is that the basis of human life is to be found in the biological constitution of humanity – 'one acknowledges unreservedly that psychic life is *material through and through* or one forgoes all scientific rigour' (Sève, 1978:177). He also claims in places that consciousness is not a social formation but is a biological fact that remains constant throughout the human species (Sève, 1978:143-4,183). From there on, however, Sève parted company with the biologists, as his conclusion is that traditional psychology was not even able to provide basic concepts such as its object of study, let alone understand the relationship between the individual and society. The main reason, Sève argues, was that its ideology is the idealist dogma of an invariant individual personality (Sève, 2008:20). So he saw in the examples he selected, the work of Linton (1947) and Dufrenne (1953), that psychology was 'haunted by an unthinkable concept: the general [i.e. idealistic] individual' (Sève, 1978:233) and therefore in thrall to the notion of an abstract humanity that Marx decried, denounced and despoiled. This in turn had led to artificially defined psychic functions such as 'general intelligence', measured by IQ (Sève, 2008:21) and the incapacity of traditional psychology to understand e.g. the 'times of growth' [*reprises de croissance*] of a personality (Sève, 2008:22). For Sève it is not the geographic model of the personality that makes sense, but a temporal one (Sève, 1978:333, 2008:41). There is a growing body of scientific evidence to suggest that Sève had it right when

he stressed the fact that an individual personality changes over time. Researchers have agreed that the main personality traits identified by psychologists (conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness and extraversion) change (Srivastava *et al*, 2003; Boyce *et al*, 2013). But there is a contradiction: ‘positive’ scores, wanted by employers in a capitalist society, are strongly correlated with equally positive economic experiences, denied to all but a minority under capitalism (Hahn *et al*, 2015).

It follows that it is not natural propensities nor genetically inherited talents which determine the development of every individual, but the relation of each person to the social heritage through the division of labour and what Sève terms use-time within the person’s biography (see below). It cannot be denied that there are huge practical implications here, most notably in respect of the concept of ‘innate ability’ which has frequently been the target of criticism from Marxists. They have seen the appropriation of surplus value by capitalists as entirely an historical process: ‘it did not exist for tens of thousands of years of social life on the part of *homo sapiens*’ (Mandel, 1976:50). Sève himself delivered criticism of the concept of natural aptitudes early on in his career, and regarded this as an important practical consequence of his philosophical intervention onto the terrain of psychology (Sève, 1964, 1978:3). It was a view he maintained consistently: ‘There is nothing ‘natural’ in academic failure’ ‘*Il n’y a rien de naturel dans l’insuccès scolaire*’ (Sève, 2015:26f) and he has continued to criticise this waste of human talent in the name of innate abilities to regard this as of critical importance in practical terms (Sève, 2015a:7). For the purposes of this thesis, though, it is interesting to note that this practical objection relies only on the most general objection to the abstract concept of an individual, not itself an exclusively Marxist preserve, and not to the larger intellectual edifice Sève subsequently created and has subsequently ameliorated and defended.

Sève then took issue with the sociobiological view (e.g. Wilson, 1975) although Wilson’s work was published after Sève and he himself aims at much older work: Sheldon

(1942), (Sève, 1978:214-219) and Kretschmer (1925, 1931), (Sève, 1978:220) which argue that 'instinct' - biology, and standing behind it, genetics - determine not just physical qualities but psychological ones such as talent, intelligence, and preferences (Lorenz, 1937; Tinbergen, 1951). Sève on the contrary pointed to 'the crying fact of the individual's total pre-established insertion into a determinate world of social relations' (Sève, 1978:141), so in Sève's view psychological qualities are 'handed down and transformed from previous generations through social relations [in Marx's sense of the term]' (Burkitt, 1991:111). The mind-body distinction is also therefore an ideological illusion: the person can neither be detached from social relations nor removed from history, so there are no isolated 'minds', or 'bodies' to study (Sève, 1978:38).

As a solution to what he perceived as a theoretical impasse, Sève again looked for assistance for psychology from philosophy, more specifically from the Marxist theory of historical materialism (Teo, 2005:111), arguing that 'the science of concrete human individuality, the psychology of personality, must necessarily be articulated with the general scientific conception of man which constitutes historical materialism' (Sève, 1978:51). Marxism is there, then, to ground and site psychology in relation to the general scientific conception of what it is to be a human being. Hence the title of Sève's later book on Marxist psychology, which he wrote as the second in a series of books engaging with Marx's thought in the early 21st Century: *L'Homme* (Sève, 2008).

The theses of MTP

Psychology may have its problems, but can Marxism help solve them and develop psychology itself? Predictably Sève's theory of personality is grounded on the social (and at root, labour) origins of personality, the function of social relations in developing psychological

traits, the ways in which psychology could and would develop under socialism and eventually communism. Leonard (1984) argued that starting from Marxism, Sève suggested in MTP that one can advance a number of propositions that can form the basis of a solution:

‘The first is that people are the most important of the productive forces in an economy, because as labour power they are the subjective factor in production and when they use these productive forces, such as tools and machines, they develop their individual capacities’ (Leonard, 1984:83). Hence both the need and the importance of a Marxist theory of personality (Sève, 1978:10).

Second, the relations of production into which people enter, including the division of labour, are not only necessary to their continued existence, but moreover determine the general development of individuals, their labour, their leisure activities, their consumption patterns and their incomes (Leonard, 1984:83). As Sève says in MTP, ‘humanity (in the sense of ‘human-being’) is not a given, naturally present in each isolated individual: it is the human social world and each natural individual becomes human in being ‘humanised’ through his real-life process within social relations’ (Sève, 1978:139). And again, ‘what makes man essentially man in developed humanity is not a natural given in each isolated individual but a product of human activity – forces of production, social relations of all kinds, cultural heritage – built up in the social world in the course of history’ (Sève, 1978:443).

Relations are not external to the self, but are internal, in that they make the personality what it is in each historical epoch (Shames, 1981). The social relations between acts, is the object Sève calls personality – ‘the total system of activity of a given individual, a system which forms and develops throughout his life and the evolution of which constitutes the essential content of his biography’ (Sève, 1978:451). This in turn determines the structure of the individual’s activity and therefore the development of their personality.

More than that, Sève argued in MTP that that becoming human is and always was about social relations, so that these factors are not external to the development of personality, but are the very essence of personality (Leonard, 1984:84). As Sève says, the essence of the human individual is not originally within himself but outside in what Sève called in MTP an ‘excentric’ (*excentrée*) position in the world of social relations (Sève, 1978:139, 2008:71). It is perhaps surprising that a Marxist should talk of the human essence, or of the human soul, but Sève’s whole point is that there is no contradiction here: destroying the illusion that the human essence is individual is a necessary pre-requisite to human emancipation (Sève, 2008:169). He made clear in MTP that ‘it is not a phenomenology of the human essence which makes clear understanding of social relations possible, but, on the contrary, it is the scientific investigation of social relations which makes possible an understanding of what up to that point was mistaken for the human essence’ (Sève, 1978:68).

Sève argues for what might seem virtually tautologous, or at least obvious to any Marxist: that human beings are always, inescapably, acting in the material world, almost always do so with other people and the social relations that they have – up until now, anyway – been forced to live within. So ‘the psychology of personality should not be – in fact cannot be – a science of a single object, an isolated individual, detached from the social world – but must instead be a science of relations – relations where the personality develops and which ‘underlie the psychic acts of individuals’ (Burkitt, 1991:120). Psychology must always be in a secondary position until it admits this and crosses its own Rubicon (Sève, 1978:446). For Sève, it has even been suggested – but this goes too far - a person is a social construction: ‘it [personality] is attributed to every human being because he is a human being; and a person is a historical product, a result of the progress of humanism’ (Baertschi, 1998:481).

For non-Marxist commentators, all this is not an obvious series of deductions, but a chain of thought that needs defending. But given this Marxist view of what it means to be

human, one might have expected that Sève – or at least his critics – would take a close interest in Robinson Crusoe, Mowgli and all other similar stories, histories or examples of individual human beings reaching an age where the influence of society on the individual human personality could be clearly identified and analysed. Mowgli acquires a personality, but certainly not a fully *human* personality – at best, it can be a ‘quasi-human personality’, a hybrid of human biological constraints (and potential) with animal social relations. This is what is so interesting about this type of story: the ideological underpinning is frequently that of unlocking a ‘hidden human personality’, providing a strut to theoretical notions of innateness and hence social conservatism. It is perhaps not stretching the point too far to observe that Kipling, author of *The White Man’s Burden*, was a racist and strong supporter of the British Empire (Brantlinger, 2007). From the contrary, Marxist, perspective, however:

‘If it is indeed true that, as opposed to the whole animal world, the nature of man is to be born a man in the biological sense of the word, but to be a man in the psychological sense only in so far as he is humanised through the assimilation of the human heritage objectively built up in the social world, it follows that while there is, of course, a continuity between nature and culture it also happens that the relations between them are reversed, so that theory can only derive the cultural from the natural and therefore, also, the psychological from the biological, through an extraordinary optical illusion’ (Sève, 1978:34).

An individual discovered as an adult with no previous exposure to any form of society could therefore represent an interesting ‘test case’ for the Marxist hypothesis about the personality: an even more extreme example of the work in Central Asia carried out by the Kharkov School (Vygotsky, 1927a). In his later work, wider in scope, given his view on the role of social relations, work especially, in creating a human being, Sève does take an interest (Sève, 2008:106) in anthropological accounts of the personalities of individuals who have ‘grown up

outside society' [*'ayant grandi hors société'*] (Sève, 2008:134). Sève mentions the well-known case of Victor de l'Aveyron in support (Sève, 2015:25). He says: 'One could not imagine clearer empirical confirmation of the 6th thesis on Feuerbach' [*'On ne pouvait imaginer confirmation empirique plus éclairante de la 6e Thèse sur Feuerbach'*] (Sève, 2015:26) - although recent scholarship has cast doubt on the authenticity of this and other cases, suggesting that, overwhelmingly, the claims of life outside society are false (Aroles, 2007), which potentially reduces the significance of appeals in this direction. Sève also suggests that the views of Levi-Strauss, e.g. that religion has universal forms, such as the respect of the dead, cannot be substantiated (Sève, 2008:200), even suggesting that in primitive societies, the very idea of the individual did not exist (Sève, 2008:207).

Third, however, because human consciousness is a social product, Sève held that an individual's consciousness cannot generally go beyond the limits characteristic of their class or of the general degree of historical development of productive forces. Social institutions and their heritage, in other words, are appropriated by and determine the life processes of individuals (Leonard, 1984:83; Burkitt, 1991:110). Sève went further, arguing that social relations do not mean relations between individuals: on the contrary, 'human beings, in as far as they are developed personalities, are in the last analysis produced by social relations' (Sève, 1975:39). What is essential to humans, then, is not located in each separate individual, but rather 'in the social relations which form the social and historical heritage through which individuals develop as personalities' (Burkitt, 1991:111). All of this amounts to what might be described as a Copernican revolution in psychology (Sève, 1978:263). Marx, Sève argued, has thus inverted the traditional view of the relationship between individuals and society: it is not the individual, but social relations which are the basis for the real-life processes in which personalities develop (Burkitt, 1991:111) recognising that '...this view has its roots firmly planted in the theories of Marx' (Burkitt, 1991:111). According to Burkitt (1991), Sève

therefore ‘forces us to think in a dialectical way about human nature, social relations and activity, for the active and needful structure of the organism always lives within, appropriates and expands the social structure. This is to be thought of as a dialectical relation because the two structures - organic and social – are not actually separate, but part of the same unity’ (Burkitt, 1991:115).

Fourth, for Sève (as a Marxist) labour in a Marxist sense is fundamental to social relations. Sève therefore argued that a scientific psychology must start from the Marxist theory of the dialectical contradiction between abstract and concrete labour (Sève, 1978:153). In the system of activity which constitutes an individual biography, . He hoped that psychology, thus based, would be capable of understanding ‘the whole structure and development of real human personalities’ (Sève, 1978:299) in the context of their lived experience. This would be primarily in terms of the productive activity in which physical and intellectual activity in which physical and intellectual capacities develop and which, after all, takes up the majority of waking time for most adults. Hence Sève claims that ‘if a man is a being who produces himself in social labour, it is at once obvious that *the psychology of personality is founded on the analysis of social labour or it does not exist*’ (Sève, 1978:148). From this position Sève sought to explain human personality in terms of the whole range of activities structured at least at root by the prevalent, contradictory, relations of production in which the individual lives out their life. Hence, as Sève noted in relation to psychoanalysis, ‘How could a science which in principle neglects labour and therefore the determinant role of the relations of production, be the general science of that being who is defined in his very essence by his labour, who is produced in his very essence by these relations of production?’ (Sève, 1978:149). This is a raw, disconcerting Marxism that as we shall see has generated many protests and objections. It is probably also fair to observe that it is a theory of the personality that is even further from general acceptance in the early 21st Century than it was when Sève first elucidated it, not that this fact is evidence

of the extent to which it is correct.

In his later work, sensitive to this, Sève advances a critique of ‘the ages of man’ that in his view supports this argument. Towards the beginning of *L’Homme*, Sève cites scholars (Thiercé, 1999, following Ariès, 1960) promoting adolescence as a socio-historical construction (Sève, 2008:30). Toward the end – perhaps not accidentally - of the same book, Sève makes the point with elegant force, as an octogenarian author himself, that whereas when de Beauvoir railed against the treatment of old people in France (in 1970) and counselled continued engagement with ‘social life’ [*rappports vivants*] (Sève, 2008:541) she meant people over sixty-five, whereas this was now, largely, reserved from those over eighty.

Following Marx, Sève then took up two radical, but well-known, Marxist positions. First, that there has been ‘an essential corruption of the personality by money’ (Sève, 1978:63). Second, that individuals can only be radically emancipated – become properly human - through the abolition of private property (Sève, 1978:63). The implications for psychology of these and other similar claims are very significant. At a theoretical level there is an implication that under capitalism (and even, to a lesser extent, under socialism) every individual, imprisoned within the structure of commodity relations is unable to reach their full human potential and in fact is inevitably *disturbed* – everyone, to a greater or lesser extent, is mentally ill. There is no ‘normal’ psychology on which to work. In practical terms, the influence of money, and the underlying commodity relations, on the human personality becomes an important field of study in psychology. As Sève pleaded with his readers in MTP, ‘How can one not see that the real life of the personality is inwardly deeply haunted by abstract things like money, labour-time or wages’ (Sève, 1978:190), and in fact all the reified forms of social relations. So under capitalism, the characteristic contradictions of a capitalist social structure, as with its predecessors, produce in people basic contradictions, including between needs and their satisfaction and between labour as a means of subsistence and as self-expression (Leonard,

1984:83), none of which is conducive to their mental health and well-being.

To rebalance psychology and align it with Marxism, Sève therefore concentrated on social labour, i.e. that which produces commodities (in a Marxist sense), arguing that ‘the essential fact for the life of a real individual [is] that a concrete activity is carried out by him as wage-labour rather than as a private person’ (Sève, 1978:188). A capitalist society and its body politic may choose to ignore these findings for several reasons. Some may accept the theoretical conclusion, but deny its possible application due to more important considerations of economic efficiency. Others may take issue more fundamentally with the importance of labour, but Sève was adamant that the development of the personal capacities of each social individual takes place within productive activity organised by the division of labour. Every activity, whether woodwork or metal-work, driving a car, or teaching a child, falls within one or the other category, and there is a gulf between them as a result even though they are the same, from the perspective of behavioural science (Sève, 1978:189), which in turn creates a fundamental opposition between personal and social life (Sève, 1978:197). This is one of the key contradictions of personal life, other examples being those between abstract and concrete personality, and between personal consumption and reproduction of labour power. All of which, according to Sève, ‘open up immense perspectives for reflection on the laws of development of personalities’ (Sève, 1978:198). We always have to take his word for that, though, as he does not ever investigate them himself, and we must also recognise that he has subsequently taken the view, after criticism from Oddone (1981), that a stark dichotomy between concrete and abstract activity was ‘an insufficiently dialectical representation, and even to some extent a questionable part of the structures of use time’ [*‘la dichotomie activité concrète/activité abstraite telle que je l’avais proposée était une représentation trop peu dialectique et même pour une part contestable des structures de l’emploi du temps’*] (Sève, 2015a:1). We can remain with the distinction, however, even if we modify it to envisage

different proportions of abstractness and concreteness in any *one* activity, rather than distinctions between them, and also recognise the complexity of institutions within capitalism and their influence on activity and personality (Blunden, 2017).

Juxtastructure of the personality

Having advanced the principles that ought to underlie a scientific theory of psychology, Sève believed he has shown sufficiently that it is not a single social science which ought to replace the investigation of individual lives with that of social relations; rather, it shows the unity between psychology, politics and economics. To designate this unity, he argued that the object of a Marxist theory of personality should be 'social individuality'; that is, the individual who develops socially into a personality. It must be remembered here though that Sève was not arguing that individuals can be *reduced* to the level of simple products of social structure, or deprived of their active role in society and their individuality, which would negate psychology *ab initio*. No: according to Sève individuals are not just a product of the social base – just a superstructure - but are part of the 'social base' (Burkitt, 1991:116). So, it is the forces and relations of production that produce not only objects for consumption, but also the political relations and ideas in which people in that era are enmeshed. (Sève, 1978:144). Trapped, or at least enmeshed, by and in the relations of production and reproduction, most importantly, individuals are transformed by being empowered and disempowered in the temporal organisation of the activities that make up their biography. Thus:

‘It is clear for two reasons in particular that even in this broad sense the concrete individual is *not* a superstructure of the social relations. In the first place, while being radically functionally determined by the *social base*, *social individuality* does not occupy a superstructural position with regard to it, since it is an integral part of the base

and its processes of reproduction; the basic individual life-processes do not appear *on the basis* of social relations, they are part of them. In the second place, social individuality itself develops within biological individuals who as such are not at all the product of the social base and its contradictions but of a quite distinct reality. Thus although they are functionally determined by the social base (and its superstructures) *quite as much* as the superstructures themselves, individuals do not arise on this base with superstructural characteristics but are as it were *laterally meshed in* with it and become wholly subordinated to it – although it is not their actual source. To designate this specific type of essential connection...I suggest the concept *juxtastructure*. (Sève, 1978:144).

With this awkward but theoretically necessary formulation Sève ‘tries to get round the problem [that all psychology is ideological just as all humanism is speculative] by arguing that the issues of individuality and anthropology do not necessarily disappear but that concepts like need, consumption, labour and freedom describe economic relations and individuality simultaneously’ (Spears & Parker, 1996:9). He attempts to crystallise this relation between the biological organism and social relations - in which the individual develops into a personality in a way that he hopes will see him through either biological or social reductionism (Sève, 1978). On the one hand, individuals are not products of the social base because they are biological beings who are the main elements of both the forces and relations of production. On the other, just as individuals are not produced by the social base, neither are they produced as superstructures, because, as social individuals, they are a fundamental component of both base and superstructure. Sève continued by saying that while social individuality is not a direct product of the social structure, in the end it is wholly dependent on it, for the juxtastructural relation is an ‘oriented circularity’ in which social relations are always determinate over the biological structures of the individual ‘in the last instance’ (Sève, 1978). This is an attempt by

Sève in MTP to underline the fact that social relations always determine the forms of individuality in society, not *vice versa*, even though individuals are not the direct product of those relations. For Sève, then, in order to understand the nature of social individuality we need basic psychological concepts which can be found in human activity and relations over time. This explains why, in his view, the concept of unalterable needs that transcend history cannot ever be a primary psychological concept (Sève, 1978:33). Needs *appear* natural, but they are functional for capitalism. Self-appointed humanists such as Sartre failed to appreciate that labour generates needs, not the other way round. Such ‘materialism of need’, even if expressed as a biological ‘deviation’, is therefore just another version of idealism, equivalent to taking consumption as fundamental and not production, i.e. a typical pre-Marxist error (Sève, 1978:33). So, psychological theory based on need is disproved, or at least dismissed, and there must be a search for basic concepts situated on the terrain of productive activity itself (Sève, 1978:35). The same goes for other allegedly basic concepts such as desire – (Sève, 1978:35) which also alters over time, one point on which Sève did find common ground with Althusser (1969), although desire as treated in Freud, Lacan and Althusser (1996) is no longer biological, but it is linked to what Sève calls a ‘homeostatic schema of the individual’ (Sève, 1978:36). Nor can concepts such as behaviour, conduct, pattern, structure, attitude, role etc. be basic. This he says is because basic concepts ‘must express in themselves or their *relations the determinant contradictions which characterise the essence of its object*’ (Sève, 1978:36).

Equally, they must take second place to the concept of the expanded reproduction of activity – needs, as Marx argued, are produced, and production, in turn, meets human needs in social history. It is thus that we grasp that psychology should not and indeed cannot be based on static concepts such as need, instinct or desire, because these things evolve with history and production. This is where the Marxist theory of the personality should begin: with development and change (Sève, 1978:35; Burkitt, 1991:117-8), and not with an invariant ‘human nature’

(Sève, 2008:198-201). Sève argues that ‘in their developed form human needs are not at all the expression of a pre-historical, sub-social human nature, absolutely primary with regard to the psychic activity of which they are supposed to be the basis, but are themselves essentially produced by human history, by men in the course of their history, i.e. in the first place, of their labour’ (Sève, 1978:34). In his later work, he cites Leontiev (1959) making the distinction between human nature as a set of biological limits, and the possibilities defined for individuals by history (Sève, 2008:197) And so, not need-activity-need, but activity-need-activity.

All this understanding of what it is to be human will be required for a mature science of psychology. Unlike current psychology, which is ‘exceedingly weak when it is a question of understanding the general economy of the normal, adult human personality’ (Sève, 1978:56), this mature science ‘should be principally concerned with everyday, adult activity’ (Burkitt, 1991:118). As Sève powerfully says,

‘Until now psychology has sought above all to understand man by way of the animal - as Pavlov did (Sève, 1954), who was identified only with the earliest form of Soviet psychology - the adult by way of the child - as Piaget did, who sided with Althusser’s structuralist view of the Marxist dialectic (Piaget, 1968:106) - the normal individual by way of the sick [like Freud] and the content of the personality by way of certain forms of activity. We think the time has come to supplement this unfruitful effort by a real effort in the opposite direction (Sève, 1978:285).

Psychoanalysis

For Sève, what this real effort at a psychology of personality is concerned with, is the scientific investigation of the social relations that contain the heritage which individuals appropriate in their activity (Sève, 1978). The human subject therefore becomes a part of the

totality of social relations, something which Sève believes we can see the realisation of in psychoanalysis, where it is the relation between nature and human cultures which produces the structure of the personality' (Burkitt, 1991:118). So, however non-Marxist at root, psychoanalysis gets a good deal of its theoretical interest from analysing opposites (conscious/unconscious, life/death, transference/counter-transference, etc.). And Marxists, he said, have underestimated the contribution of psychoanalysis, even if Freud's failure, which Sève caricatured by way of demolishing the logic of a book allegedly explaining adolescent geniuses (Sève, 1978:380) is of course to fail to understand the real underlying economic and social causes of personalities (Nahem, 1981). Notably, psychoanalysis, like interactionism, also understands and sees the adult in the child, whereas a more fruitful approach would be the reverse: alienation is first seen in parents (Sève, 2008), whilst play itself is dominated by a prefiguring of adult roles, especially work. What adult job shall we play at doing today?

General and Historical forms of the personality

If all this be so, what is the next step to be? If Sève was right to deny the all-importance of the 'early stage', how did he explain the development of individual personalities? Sève argued in MTP that the specific social relations of an epoch explain something about the *general forms of individuality* that develop therein. This allows, but also demands, the rejection of a generalised form of human personality, about which Sève said:

'Almost all current concepts of the human personality are based on the belief that the individual personality is a particular example of the general personality, in other words, the concrete individual is understood as a singular example of the human genus...This logical monstrosity, the abstract 'general individual', is the skeleton in the cupboard of the psychology of personality' (Sève, 1975:12)

and to which - as it has proved a remarkably durable, not to say influential skeleton - he devotes considerable time in his later work again to criticising (e.g. Sève, 2008:71). In MTP, Sève presented ‘categories of individual activity created within capitalist relations, which describe the activities of certain individuals rather than types of personalities’ (Burkitt, 1991:119), a position which Sève partly qualifies in his later work (Sève, 2008), where he states: ‘However, what is formed in the capitalist as a result of these structural necessities is not covered by any biographical necessity’ [*Pour autant, qu’il s’inscrive en capitaliste dans ces rapports nécessaires ne relève d’aucune nécessité biographique*]. (Sève, 2008:27).

Much more recently, he has argued that

‘The forms in which we become developed humans are no longer natural forms (such as biological sex, physical type, etc.), but extremely varied and evolutive forms of history (e.g. schoolchildren, salaried workers, married women, retiree, etc.), under which, less obvious but more fundamental, there are others more radically constitutive such as relations of money, relations of property, relations of power These forms determine how we become individuals in a given historico-social world, they are historical forms of it. And it is from them that one can account for personality (a very elaborate social form of individuality), and that one can think of biography (a very elaborate social form of life)’ (Sève, 2016).

Although Sève has continued to regard Althusser’s *particular* view of the forms of historical individuality ‘a very reductive formula’ [*formule très réductrice*] (Sève, 2015:30), substituting his own subtle reversal of the formula, *historical forms of individuality* [*les formes d’individualité*] (Sève, (forthcoming) [2008]), henceforth FHI, he has certainly written throughout as if we can identify capitalists as distinct individuals. We can thereby develop an understanding of some of the contradictions inherent in these categories of activities which will translate into personal dilemmas: for example, the capitalist faces a Faustian dilemma between

accumulation and enjoyment (Marx, 1844 [1961]) which Sève describes as ‘a contradiction characteristic of the form of individuality of the capitalist’ (Sève, 1978:207). Likewise, he viewed the family as representing ‘a system of the division of labour, relations of domestic activity, dependent on the relations of social production’ (Sève, 1978:204-5). This, he said, is the most direct source of idealistic perceptions of families and indeed love, in a capitalist economy, as the bourgeois family is ‘a scaled-down model of a capitalist society (Sève, 1978:205). And finally, Sève stressed the alienated experience of the worker in capitalist society, which echoes throughout the whole of Marx’s work from 1844 onwards from which Sève quoted liberally and which he adopted enthusiastically (Sève, 1978:194-198).

Sève’s concept of the ‘act’

For Sève, as for Leontiev, the key to extending Marxism to the concrete activity of human beings is the understanding that to be human is to act in the world, activity that takes place in determinate, historically developing and economically conditioned relations. Sève has drawn on Leontiev (1978, 1979), Wallon (1951 [1972]) Politzer (1928) and Pieron (1959), in formulating his explanation of activity as the material form of human life, demonstrating the clear continuity between their work and his own. His major advance, it has been suggested, is to integrate this concept within the dialectic of the forces and relations of production, together with the contradictions in their historical motion (Shames, 1984). Indeed, there is evidence that the relationship was reciprocal. Leontiev paid particular respect to the development of psychology in France; indeed he said that ‘In psychology outside the USSR, this [sociological trend in psychology] is most represented in the French literature’ (Leontiev, 1959), by which he meant principally Wallon and Politzer (El-Hammoumi, 2002:90). This is scarcely surprising, perhaps, as ‘The existence of a strong Marxist-democratic tradition in France is

almost unique in Europe' (Baertschi, 1998:482). The 1966-1969 series of Sève's articles (e.g. Sève, 1966) played a major role in the fifth chapter of 'Activity and Personality' (Leontiev, 1975) which was written in the light of Sève's formulation of the Marxist theory of personality (Shames, 1981; El-Hammoumi, 2000), such that Leontiev had successfully absorbed and integrated Sève's formulations in his own theoretical framework. Leontiev himself explicitly noted that 'The principal incompatibility of [the] bourgeois psychological theory of personality with Marxism is thoroughly explained by L. Sève' (Leontiev 1978:149fn), a further acknowledgment being that 'The true way to investigate personality lies in the study of those transformations of the subject (or, using the words of L. Sève, 'fundamental revolutions') which are the result of the self-movement of his activity in the system of social relations' (Leontiev 1978:154).

For Sève's concept of the psychology of personality, the act became the first basic theoretical concept, for it is within activity structured by the ensemble of social relations that individuals appropriate the human essence. An act 'goes out into the entire circuit of social activity' (Burkitt, 1991:121) and returns to itself 'through the vast mediations of social relations' (Sève, 1978:304) so that 'Acts are the pertinent elements – and the only pertinent ones – of the theoretical ordering of the biography' (Sève, 1978:311). Burkitt suggests that Sève's use of the 'appropriation' is quite deliberate, for Sève is not arguing that individuals simply 'internalise' their social acts, assimilating them into an already prepared psychological plane, rather the term appropriation refers to the way individuals 'build by incorporating' (Ollman, 1976:89). Acts cannot be separated from personality: they are its building blocks. For Sève, activity is constitutive of the personality, and yet an act is always social because it is locked into the whole system of activity in society which stretches far beyond the conscious reach of any single individual.

Capacities

The second theoretical category Sève introduced was that of capacities, which he defined as ‘the ensemble of actual potentialities to carry out any act’ (Sève, 1978:312), what Burkitt (1991) describes as the knowledge that an action has had an effect on the world (and can be so used again) and which Sève claims to derive from Marx’s own formulation of a capacity for labour (Sève, 1978:312). He reasserted that ‘human capacities do not exist only as the subjective activities of individuals but also under an objective form, or more precisely an objectalised form [*vergegenständlichter Form*], of ‘productive forces’ – tools and machines in which know-how, scientific knowledge and technological procedures are accumulated and reasoning is crystallised – an extra-organic supply which grows historically through an always unique individual appropriation of which each generation of personal capacities is formed’ (Sève, 2008:40). Burkitt agreed with Sève that this insight of Marx ‘turns the whole theory of personality around’ (Burkitt, 1991:122) for in Sève’s view, the motivation to act does not have an internal, organic source but rather depends largely on the product that activity has in the social world. In wage labour the individual cannot fully develop individual capacities, they are only developed incidentally, given the deep and persistent contradiction between the forces and relations of production that generates the alienated lives of those who live in capitalist societies (Leonard, 1984:86; Sève, 1978).

Alienation

Sève conceptualised social relations as the structured medium through which individuals act, irrespective of their awareness of them. And it is through social relations that the consequences of one’s actions will return, reshaping the self in the process (Burkitt, 1991:121). Social relations and actions are therefore the necessary ontology of alienation: capitalism exhibits highly developed productive forces on the one hand, and yet the impoverishment - and therefore, the alienation - of individuals on the other (Burkitt, 1991:119).

Think not then of Need/Product but Product/Need – the act produces the motivation to act. Product Need is the third basic concept. Sève sees a dialectical relationship between acts and capacities, as a person's activity always generates capacities that are expressed in activity. Sève divided acts, following Marx and Engels in the *German Ideology* (as noted in Chapter Two), into two types:

- Sector I acts – those that generate new capacities
- Sector II acts – use already learned capacities to carry out activities.

As with the distinction between abstract and concrete activity, however, 'In real life processes, these acts will overlap, some acts belonging to both sectors at the same time, as no single act is produced in isolation from those already possessed. Of prime interest to those practising Sève's psychology of personality will be the balance between these two sectors of activity within a person's biography, for this will show how successfully or unsuccessfully that person is developing within the structure of their activity' (Burkitt, 1991:122).

Those individuals with a high proportion of Sector I activity will be appropriating more of the social heritage, and developing capacities, than those with a low proportion, though individuals need a balance between I and II. Academics, for example, have such a precisely defined balance in their work, between *research* and *teaching*.

However, what is also important to individuals in the structure of their activity is where they stand in the class hierarchy and within the division of labour. So according to Sève e.g. working class people have in their biographies a high proportion of 'abstract activity', which is controlled, aimed at creating profit and accumulating capital, not at fulfilling the worker's needs. It will be a Sector II activity, repetitive, and little time will be given over – not enough time, anyway, and that is no accident – to learning new capacities which enhance the personality. Abstract and concrete activity is therefore reflected in abstract and concrete aspects

of the personality. Personalities develop when their capacities increase, the ‘development of the fixed capital of the personality’ (Sève, 1978:315) but inevitably this is rarely possible for a worker in a capitalist society that Sève describes as ‘bestial’ (Sève, 1978:325) in its inability to create the conditions for the personal development of the majority of individuals. Certainly, however, those higher in the hierarchy of organisations will have a better working life, and be more able to engage in ‘concrete activity, i.e. activity directed at the learning of new capacities and individual development.

Sève also made especial mention of a concept that in its general form is very familiar, but which he places in context: what he calls ‘the tendency of the falling rate of progress in the developed individual which is expressed in the very general tendency of personalities to stagnation and ossification as the years pass’ (Sève, 1978:360), and which he held is a function of the division of labour in capitalist economies. He makes the point more pithily when he is himself old: ‘If the individual has the age of his arteries, the personality has the age of his use of time’ [*‘Si l’individu a l’âge de ses artères, la personnalité a l’âge de son emploi de temps’*] (Sève, 2008:547).

So psychological ageing is not inevitable: as he observed even in MTP, with a less personal emphasis that may be telling, ‘psychological longevity is also broadly a matter of social regime’ (Sève, 1978:361). Yet within capitalism to some extent all work will be to some extent abstract activity, for even capitalists themselves see the larger proportion of their time governed by the need to accumulate capital, rather than the needs of their personal development. All people in capitalist society try to avoid this inescapable truth, but unfortunately leisure time provides no escape, as in Sève’s view, under capitalism, ‘abstract activity is no more than a *means* of earning one’s concrete living which...plays the part of illusory *compensation* for the alienation of abstract life’ (Sève, 1978: 364). Sève explained this as suggesting that ‘Eating, sleeping and weekend leisure centre on the necessity to be ready

and able to work' (Leonard, 1984:85). Capitalist relations are often dressed up as psychological 'facts' (Sève, 1978:364), but the grim reality is that most people end up stunted and alienated in their personal growth as a result, for their talents and needs cannot be developed in a full and meaningful way.

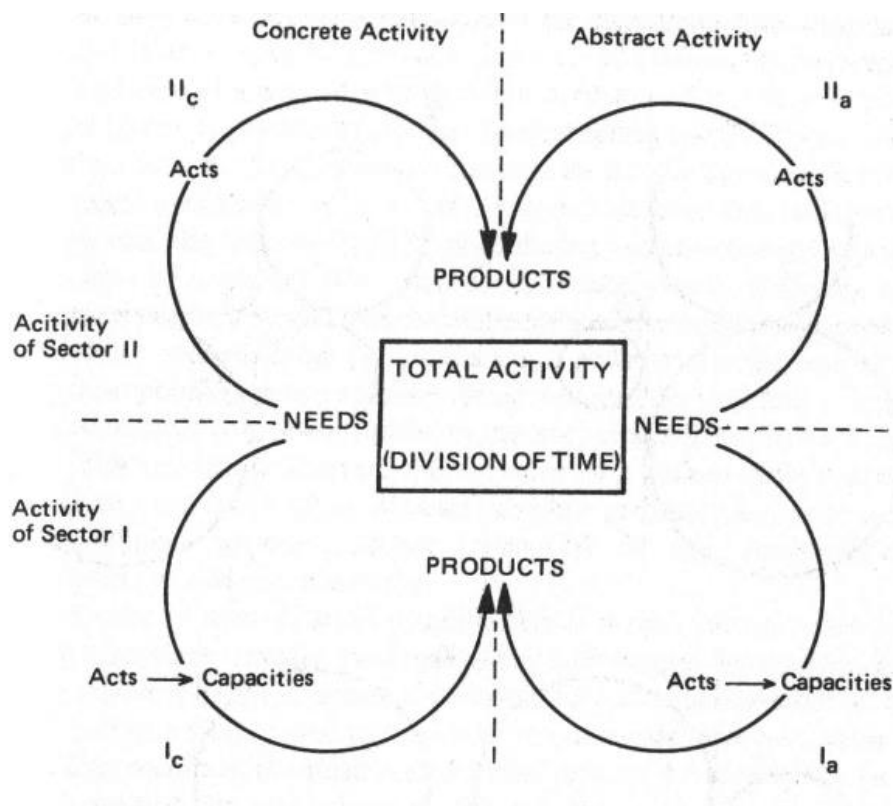
Time

A persistent theme in Sève's work is the importance of time, and more especially the use of time, as the dimension in which activity occurs: 'Human activity is distinguished by time-dependence' [*L'activité humaine outillée...se distingue par sa temporalité*] (Sève, 2008:297). Theories such as cultural anthropology or Freudianism, according to Sève, fail to account for the temporal aspect of the development of the personality, and in particular, use-time [*l'emploi du temps*], the basic elements of the biography, the acts which constitute what Sève calls 'the real infrastructure of the developed personality' (Sève, 1978:334). By this he really meant the forms of activity in which people are involved at different stages in their lives and depending on their position in society), in particular their work, whether labour-time in production in a capitalist economy or, more happily, socially emancipated labour in a socialist society which, he implied, does not prevent the accumulation of capacities at an individual level. The critical importance is that the degree to which one of the forms of activity Sève identifies is dominant in the personality, will depend on the use-time a person has within their biography to give over to one or the other form of activity. Those with a high composition of abstract activity will be more alienated for their personalities will have more abstracted (alienated, in fact) personalities. Time is important to Sève, because:

'What we are looking for...is the structure of activity itself, in others the dialectic of its development in time, which represents the unity of its functioning structure and its laws of historical movement. And in addition, if this dialectical structure, i.e. the *real* activity

of the concrete individual, is indeed what we are seeking, it is necessarily a reality which men constantly have to deal with in their life, therefore a *practical* reality, the empirical aspects of which are quite visible even if the elaboration of its theory and the construction of its topology present great difficulties. I put forward the hypothesis that this reality which is absolutely basic, and in a sense which has always been perfectly familiar, is *use-time* [*'l'emploi du temps*']' (Sève, 1978:333).

Time is in fact *central* to Sève's work, therefore, because it structures the field across which the activity of the individual unfolds within their social relations. As these form the basis of a person's biography, so the structure of use-time, as it unfolds, also marks out the 'fundamental law of development' of the personality. Sève portrayed the concepts of abstract and concrete activity across his two sectors as a diagram (Sève, 1978:347) representing the acts within a biography.



Source: Sève, 1978:347

Here, the basic divisions and contradictions in a person's biography under capitalism are presented as a simple schema. The right-hand column of the diagram represents the abstract, alienated activity of the person, while the left-hand column represents the concrete activity in the biography. The two rows are Sectors II and I acts. So, 1a – sector 1 activity which produces capacities but in abstract, alienated conditions. 2a – practising those capacities. And of course on the left side as well. 'Activity in all four quadrants generates products, and these serve as the motives for individuals to engage in these activities, creating in them certain needs' (Burkitt, 1991:125; Sève, 1978:347).

According to Sève in MTP, this diagram could be used for any one individual to illustrate contradictions in their lives. So, for a child at school, most would be 1c and 2c, as most time is spent learning and practising potentially useful capacities. Little time is left in 1a or 2a. For an industrial worker: the opposite, most time in 2a, repetitive sector 2 activity. Little time is left for the development and practice of new capacities outside of abstract activity, or 1a, learning new capacities of abstract activity (Sève, 1978:348).

Sève also believed there was a third category of activity, which he termed intermediate, characterised as acts performed for others, but not abstract, not for wages, and with no individual profits generated. This category of activity would therefore include the face-to-face (and now online) exchanges that occur between people in their everyday lives.

'Sève includes these acts in what he refers to as the infrastructure of the personality because they are productive of capacities in the individual, and also because they involve all the facets of a person's sociality. In this category, Sève would place family relationships, interpersonal and communal relationships and love relationships. It is within these relations that the child grows and learns, so that 'the concrete personality first presents itself as an ensemble of personal, indeed inter-personal, non-alienated

activities, unfolding as self-expression' (Sève, 1978:341). However, this is destroyed as the young adult increasing becomes occupied with abstract activity' (Burkitt, 1991:126).

The superstructure of the personality

Sève's later work presents a further distinction, between productive, objectifying activity using tools that create products (frequently, commodities in a Marxist sense) that are inseparable from corresponding activity on the one hand, and subjective, individual activity, which does not lead to the development of social capital (Sève, 2008:158). This is a refinement of his earlier work, whereby on the basis of this infrastructure of activity there arises what Sève calls the 'superstructure' of the personality, which he divided into 'spontaneous' and 'voluntary' controls. These superstructures play an organisational and regulatory role within the personality, but they do not play a productive role, generating new capacities. Spontaneous controls arise on the basis of concrete activity – including intermediary activity – and these controls include the emotional responses to others within interpersonal activity. The structure of the emotions as they develop in interaction would be involved here. However, the voluntary controls are those that arise on the basis of abstract activity, and these include the controls exercised over the personality which are external to its concrete development. In this sense, the abstract rules which govern behaviour, the conduct and decorum that must be adhered to, some of the self-images we feel we must aspire to but do not fit, are all voluntary controls. These controls will feel more alien within the personality, as they are not related directly to concrete personal needs, nor to the individual's everyday interactions (Burkitt, 1991:126). The basic structure of personalities within capitalism are dominated by the reality of exploitative class relations which produce a *positive lack of awareness*. This lack of awareness is an objective illusion in so far as it stems from the *actual* externalisation of the human essence through the fetishism of commodities. At the same time, this lack of awareness is also *ideology* in so far as

it justifies alienating social relations and the corresponding forms of use-time between concrete and abstract activities as part of the purposeful legitimating world-view of the ruling class and so is resistant to attempts to demystification (Leonard, 1984:97).

At present, many people try to evade the many contradictions in their individual lives by retreating into private activity (Sève, 1978). But any personal solutions, such as a retreat into personal life, leisure activities, or interpersonal relations, all of which have the superficial appeal of being more immediately rewarding and more concrete, can only fall victim to the falling rate of progress and ossification of the personality, despite their ostensible similarity to genuinely unalienated, 'true' human relations (Sève, 1978:373).

So 'is consciousness of self and of the world necessarily rationalisation or ideology, 'a mystified interpretation of reality, the true nature of which remains misunderstood, thus enclosing man in illusion, alienation and dependence?' Or is it possible, and under what conditions, to reach demystified self-consciousness, a true knowledge of objective reality within the limits set by the stage of historical development achieved?' (Leonard, 1984:97).

The militant, or at least the committed, life

Yes, Sève answers optimistically (at least in MTP), all these contradictions within personalities under capitalism are forces which potentially contribute to the ways in which, as Marx predicted, social classes eventually overcome them by revolutionary activity. This is engendered at the individual level by the experience by real working people of the contradictions that dominate their lives and result in the low level of accumulation of capacities, the falling rate of progress, and their alienation, that leads to the establishment of a socialist and then a communist society.

In the period before socialism, Sève in MTP presented the view that there is therefore in fact no other way for individuals to resolve contradictions in their personal lives, as they are inescapable in capitalist society, except through political activity, 'to participate in the conscious transformation of social relations, the real human essence, is to be in the best position to penetrate the secret of their origin and consequently one's self-origin: within the historically existing limits it is to accede to freedom' (Sève, 1978:355-356). Working towards the elimination of alienation at the level of society as a whole becomes the means to eliminate it at the individual level. For Sève, at least the early Sève, 'Actually, the strivings of a real militant life rest precisely on becoming aware of the fact that the general satisfaction of personal needs can only take place via the carrying out of a number of social changes, the objective logic of which more or less completely subordinates the limited, immediate satisfaction of personal needs taken in isolation' (Sève, 1978:318).

The distinction between spontaneous and voluntary controls is a parallel, says Burkitt, with Mead's social instincts and social consciousness. Sève claims that the emotions would be included in the category of spontaneous controls and that these are endogenous to the personality. Voluntary controls, however, arise on the basis of abstract activity, and in that sense they are exogenous, being destroyed when abstract activity is abolished by revolution. As for Sève's rigid distinction between abstract and concrete activity, so also between voluntary and spontaneous controls. But Sève did not see, Burkitt claimed, that social instincts and social consciousness are two sides of the same psychic processes, and that social instincts or spontaneous controls are conditioned and organised by social relations through the individual's consciousness of those relations. Sève might say they are part of the same dialectical unity.

So it is meaningless to say that voluntary controls will go when alienation and the abstract activity that cause it disappear. There will always be some aspects of social interaction,

some actions or rules, which do not relate to each individual's concrete needs or actions (Burkitt, 1991:131). Sève (1978:110) admitted that social rules will still exist under communism, but he argues that these will be democratically controlled, so although they will still have to be obeyed, they will reflect to some degree as voluntary controls within the personality. Because the self develops through its sociality, it is inevitable that some degree of voluntary control is necessary within the formation of a self-conscious identity. In the development of personality, it is very hard to distinguish spontaneous from voluntary controls because what are learned socially as capacities, or as restrictions and inhibitions, will come to feel as if they are spontaneous. At the same time, many impulses or reactions which are spontaneous (e.g. joy, anger) will come under voluntary control and it may become difficult for individuals to express them spontaneously. In different historical epochs the balance between this socially determined unity may well be different, but we must presume the balance will still exist under socialism and even communism.

The Sève who wrote MTP evidently believed that the individual who has the good fortune to live in future more equal, more democratic conditions will not experience the rules that govern conduct as a repressive force. The spontaneous impulses that the voluntary controls move to censure will also be experienced as no longer alien, intimidating, and backed by the force of the State, but rather as an integral part of the self. At the same time, consciously self-determined activity will have developed relative to preconscious, unreflective impulses, so the voluntary control of actions will grow in authority over individual actions under socialism and eventually communism. By the time he wrote *L'Homme*, however, all this conviction has been subsumed in the necessity to rebut critics of Marx's view of humanity such as Nietzsche, Freud and Heidegger (Sève, 2008:225-307). It is little wonder that such defence, however well conducted and useful, has attracted relatively little interest (especially in the Anglo-Saxon world) by comparison to the bold, optimistic vista of psychology sketched out in MTP, written

as it was at an equally bold, optimistic time for Marxist theory as a whole, especially in Continental Europe. In the future, however, this may well reverse itself.

Criticism and Response

Sève's work has been described as 'difficult' (Leonard, 1984:83) for two reasons. First, because as a philosopher Sève is engaged in the task of laying foundations upon which psychologists might build, and is therefore concerned with theoretical rigour rather than providing supporting empirical evidence. Second, because he engages in dense polemic with other French philosophers (Leonard, 1984:83).

I would add two more. The first is that part of the problem in reading Sève, for a Marxist, is perhaps that so much of what he says is simply taken for granted, that he often appears to be fighting theoretical battles that were won long ago. So for example when he reminds us that Marx himself pointed out that there was no abstract capital, but always manifested in individual capitalists (Sève, 2008:27) this does not seem remotely remarkable for a Marxist. But for others it may seem intensely radical, not to say disquieting, especially when Marx goes on to say that such a capitalist personality is 'alien to the worker' [*'étrangère au travailleur'*] (Sève, 2008:28). A critic might wonder, if personality is to correlate so closely with labour (and social class) then what might remain of the theory if rigid social classes – or even labour itself – were to disappear, or at least recede, in human lives? If for example pressure for social change did not come from a proletariat, but from a precariat? (Standing, 2011). Sève has nothing to say on what issues of personality emerge from *contemporary* economic conditions.

Sève himself stressed the '*emploi de temps*' and is always keen to point to the havoc wreaked by work, even salaried work, on human lives, although the average working day, at

least in the West, and even accounting for often extended commuting, is significantly less than it was in Marx's time. Yet the principal concerns of psychology have far from diminished – it might even be argued that mental illness, for example, has expanded into the space that has been vacated by labour for it. Further, the failure of New Soviet Man to emerge along with that of State socialism as a whole has reinforced the powerful idea that, on the contrary, there can never be a 'New Man' of any sort, as commodity relations and money are so permanent that they have become indelible ink on the human psyche, rendering Sève's entire life work – and that of any Marxist – otiose and futile.

Marxists themselves, however, have also taken issue with Sève. His work was severely criticised in contemporary English Marxist literature at least once (O'Donnell, 1986). In O'Donnell's view, Sève refused to engage with empirical psychology in detail either in the Soviet Union or the West and hence: 'The image of western psychology put forward by Sève is both idiosyncratic and anachronistic' (O'Donnell, 1986:8). However, O'Donnell simply dismisses Sève's work, he does not engage with it, e.g. his statement that the GDR contributors referenced by Sève in the postscript to the English edition of MTP regarded his suggestions for research dismissively is scarcely born out by their balanced critique: some strong points and some weaknesses and unresolved problems, which were included by Sève himself in the English translation of MTP (Sève, 1978:483).

In response to this range of criticisms, complicating the question of the application of Sève's theory of personality, Sève himself has changed his views over (and indeed with) the times, albeit subtly, as he himself has readily admitted (Sève, 2015a:1) and been prepared to exercise a much wider (and very erudite) intellectual scope. He has paid far more attention, at least, to Vygotsky in his later than in his earlier work, and has emphasised gender roles far more in his later writing. Hence his observation that 'We are here at one of the sources of the historical production of sexual differentiation, its self-representation as a demand for

recognition by the other' [*Nous sommes ici à l'une des sources de la production historique du genre sexué, de sa représentation de soi comme de son exigence de reconnaissance par l'autre*] (Sève, 2008:31), at which point he quotes de Beauvoir's aphorism that one is not born a woman, one becomes one, with approval (Sève, 2008:32).

One of the key ways Sève's views have changed is that he now talks of 'the committed life' [*la Vie engagée*] (Sève, 2008:510). In the past, Sève would have recommended militant political activity: but it is now entirely unclear how this 'engagement' relates to revolutionary activity or the Communist Party, which Sève left in 2010, and in fact Sève bluntly states that it does not, as under current conditions party activity is 'obsolete' (Sève, 2015a:2). This reformulation may be appealing – even logical in current conditions, but it surely has some serious potential consequences for psychology, for example in recommendations for action designed to reduce the contradictions in an individual life. His most prominent English language critic in his own later reflections largely however agrees, and suggests a stopgap solution: because we can feel alienated in some areas of life, and know that this is wrong, means that we have capacities for practical intellectual engagement with the conditions of our lives [in capitalist society], and can act to change them using capacities established in other biographical locations and activities. We are subject to norms, but different norms govern different activities within our biographies, and we can become aware of their contradictions. This does not mean that we necessarily reach a full awareness of the social conditions that structure our lives, or of the contradictions within them, nor that our lives do not involve fantasy, illusion and ideology as attempts to resolve those contradictions: however, in practical, intelligent engagement with the conditions in which we live, it is possible for humans to gain some level of insight. Indeed, without this, it would be impossible for those humans who become social scientists to analyse peoples' lives and the social conditions that govern them, and to write their books and articles (Burkitt, 2008:147).

Sève goes much further, though, than this. In suggesting that retirement is, or can be, ‘a life without capitalist logic at its heart’ [*‘une vie soustraite en son cœur aux logiques exploiteuses du capital’*] (Sève, 2008:553), for which working life could be just a preparation, Sève almost seems to suggest that ‘the third age’ is – or can be - a sort of ‘personal Communism’. Maybe: or is it that the vigorous old, especially in the West, have become part of a new capitalist class, whose life liberated from the exploitative logic of capital (Sève, 2008: 552) comes at the expense of a ‘lost generation’ of youth, for example in Europe, whilst anyway the average worker in the developing world has a life expectancy still significantly lower than in the West. Moreover, whilst it is true that ‘having something to do’ and ‘a purpose in life’ helps ward off Alzheimer’s and is generally recommended - ‘Act, Belong, Commit’ is the Australian Government’s slogan for old age¹ - it is not revolutionary acts the Australian Government has in mind for its retirees, nor belonging to a revolutionary party or committing time and resources to the revolutionary struggle. We are left with what looks suspiciously like a reformist agenda, linked to an implicit view of the development of the individual personality which threatens no one, let alone international capitalism, and is very distant from Sève’s original conception of the militant life as the only sane one. Sève has thus made himself a moving target in this respect, making criticism difficult, and generally founded on his earlier, more dogmatic work, not least though perhaps because criticism of Marxist approaches has become as intellectually unfashionable as the approaches themselves.

Those who have criticised Sève broadly divide into three categories: the anti-humanists such as Althusser with whom he conducted his original polemics in the 1970s, and critics, often from the Left, but who consider his views overly mechanistic and who much prefer, usually, to look to Vygotsky and CHAT as the true standard-bearers of Marxism so far as psychology is concerned. Hence Burkitt *followed* his chapter on Sève with a chapter on Vygotsky who he

¹ See www.actbelongcommit.org.au

believes presents a richer, more nuanced approach to the individual personality. In stark contrast, in his later work Sève chooses to ignore criticism of Vygotsky, praising him as the most Marxist psychologist of his era (Sève, 2008:315), and arguing that he was not developing a 'Marxist psychology' – he was a Marxist who happened to be a psychologist (Sève, 2008:316) and suggesting that criticisms of Vygotsky were the product of Soviet – more particularly Stalinist - dogmatism (Sève, 2008:350) as if this excused Vygotsky from detailed cross-examination of his Marxist credentials.

From the humanist critics came a wave of commentary focusing on Sève's alleged narrow concept of humanity, that in studying the learning of capacities within biography, Sève concentrated only on the capacities learned in social labour. And Sève's concepts of general forms of personality forms one of the main bases for one of the earliest detailed criticisms of Sève (Laufenberg *et al*, 1975) who took the view that Sève has fundamentally misunderstood the concrete nature of the formation of capitalist personalities – that he has done exactly what he said he would not do and which Marx and Engels denied they were doing, confuse general forms with concrete individuality (Sève, 1978:90) - and that in attempting to decry the general concept of man, he has reintroduced it through these concepts of general personalities, and in so doing overlooked the development of Marx's own thought, seeing only a methodological, rather than a qualitative, change in *Das Kapital* (Laufenberg *et al*, 1975:30). In particular, Sève 'downplays the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, the first results of the analysis of real conditions, in a way that can't be taken seriously as prescientific' (Laufenberg *et al*. 1975:30). [*'kehrt die ökonomisch-philosophischen Manuskripte, die erste Resultate der Analyse der wirklichen Verhältnisse darstellen, in nicht mehr ernstzuehmender Weise als vorwissenschaftlich unter den Tisch'*]. Sève himself has to some extent accepted the force of these criticisms, now insisting that the general forms of individuality should be seen not as abstract forms, but as the concept he has now incorporated more fully into his theoretical

universe, that of FHI.

The argument for FHI would not have saved Sève from those of his critics who argued that he sees personal relationships within the family as secondary, not giving as much attention to domestic labour as to abstract social labour. He ‘defends himself by maintaining that he is not trying to reduce personality to the study of social or ‘productive’ labour, but he is *basing* it on such a study’ (Leonard, 1984:84), but ‘in Sève’s defence we must acknowledge the importance of his contention that to understand family relationships one must begin by examining the material exchanges which it consists of, or which support it, namely the domestic economy’ (Leonard, 1984:86). Sève concentrates on the division of labour within the family as the key to understanding its psychology (Leonard, 1984:86). But as Burkitt himself says, Sève realises this, and ‘hopes to forestall charges of economic reductionism by claiming that ‘one must consider the system of the division of labour in all its aspects, technical and economic, domestic, political, cultural, etc.... as an ensemble of objective social facts indispensable for understanding the temporal topology of concrete personalities in a determinate society’ (Sève, 1978:274). But, says Burkitt, this is exactly what Sève does not do: in his view Sève does not consider the division of labour in all its aspects when he studies personality formation. Burkitt claimed that Sève’s analysis ‘leaves many individuals out of the analysis altogether, such as those who do not work, or who do not work for wages...Nowhere does he consider the domestic, political or cultural factors mentioned above, instead focusing solely on the division between abstract and concrete labour’ (Burkitt, 1991:128). This leads to ‘the most important problem in Sève’s approach’ (Leonard, 1984:100), which is that Sève has virtually ignored the domestic division of labour, the whole field of the inequality between men and women, and how this all reflects in the personality development of the sexes (Burkitt, 1991:128). This line of criticism was of its time: it came loaded with the feminist, gay rights, minority liberation agenda of the 1980s which Sève attempts to appropriate to the Marxist

cause in his later work (Sève, 2008). In Sève's view, at least in his later work, one can apply De Beauvoir's mantra, *one is not born a woman, one becomes one*, to all the general figures of individual humanity, including race. In his later work, Sève points to Marx's recognition that the role of women is determined by capitalism (Marx, 1867), that gender and sexual roles are socio-historically determined (Sève, 2008:30-31) although he recognises that Marx never mentioned the latter in his earlier work (Sève, 2008:30) and nor, in fact, did he. In relation to women's' struggles under capitalism, the later Sève observes that 'We are here at one of the sources of the historical production of gender distinction, its self-representation through its demand for recognition by the other'. [*Nous sommes ici à l'une des sources de la production historique du genre sexue, de sa représentation de soi comme de son exigence de reconnaissance par l'autre*'] (Sève, 2008:31).

Sève's view about Sector I and II activity has also been criticised. According to O'Donnell, Sève's distinction between activities that produce new cognitive structures and those that are the simple exercise of already existing capacities is based on Piaget's distinction (Piaget, 1937 [1954]) between assimilation and accommodation in cognitive development (O'Donnell, 1986:10). I doubt O'Donnell is right to suggest an exact parallel: but it would certainly be stretching a point to suggest that the absence of this distinction in Sève's later work derives from his own assimilation of Vygotsky's different perspective on learning: the concept of the falling rate of progress, which he retains, likewise does not depend on established psychological thought.

One has to remember though, Sève is always writing a polemic. He has envisaged the use of a psychology based on a Marxist theoretical framework, i.e., a truly scientific psychology, in practical, political ways, and the ways in which 'idealist' conceptions of the personality could be used as part of an ideological struggle against the recognition of abstract FHI and the development of socialism e.g. in the realm of the family (Zaretsky, 1976). He is

therefore engaged in what he envisages as a rebalancing, as well as a proposal for a new basis for a psychology of personality. He says, start with social life, and within that, work, and the division of labour, instead of starting somewhere else, and so missing a colossal set of facts, relations and conclusions.

Sève (and Marx) make the heroic assumption that personal development is stunted under capitalism: the demand, especially on the working class, to pursue abstract labour and ‘Sector 2’ activities prevents the flowering of individual abilities. But might many individuals be deluding themselves about their potential? The frustrated artist who is actually talentless is a stock figure of comedy that can be replicated many times across different allegedly stunted biographies. Sève could retaliate by saying that those very capacities are repressed, that the definition of talent itself may be a function of social relations – but the lingering doubt may remain that not even communism can deliver such results. Moreover, Sève’s analysis sweeps with an extremely broad brush across activities, classifying them as either more, or less, abstract, when the reality may be that even within his own terms some elements of an activity may assume great importance, irrespective of how much ‘use-time’ is spent on them.

Burkitt also criticised Sève for he calls Sève’s uncritical incorporation of Marx’s division of society into a social base and a political and ideological superstructure (Burkitt, 1991:117). Sève says that a future task for the psychology of personality will be to study why certain people develop the interests they do and are thus directed to specific functions in the division of labour, i.e. how FHI develops in different individuals. But for thinkers like Bourdieu (1986) the material conditions of life and the cultural conditions of life go hand-in-hand. This is something that Sève does not and perhaps cannot accept – he says (Sève, 1978:348-9) that a child at school will have a large proportion of concrete activity in their biography and therefore more room for personal development. ‘The traditional Marxist emphasis on production – central to Sève’s thesis – profoundly affects the whole of his work’ (Leonard, 1984:100). Sève

gives ideology a very subordinate role in the creation of personality, so that socialisation to abstract labour, especially during childhood, is reduced to relative insignificance (Leonard, 1984:100). Sève argued against Althusser that the origin of the developed personality lies outside childhood in the influence of parents, but stressed that the ideological preparation for labour began during childhood. This does chime with the observation that, as many have shown, ‘a large number of young working class people feel their lives at school are highly abstract, with little concrete relevance to the realities they will have to face as workers’ (Burkitt, 1991:133). At home, education is often scorned, or ignored. Children at school can feel alienated from their studies, and working-class students may feel academic work is too abstract and not related to their cultural background or their possible future, ironically ensuring that they are destined for the unskilled work for which capitalism needs them, or at least used to, as a British study that it is hard to imagine would be repeated indicated (Willis, 1977).

Critics however argued that Sève undervalued the role of the family (Leonard, 1984:100), that he cannot accept that family relations and the domestic economy can be an effective area of struggle, because economic production is the dominating centre of his vision (Leonard, 1984:100), a criticism again so much of its time. Sève takes the ‘orthodox’ Marxist position that only labour which assumes the fully abstract form functions as socially productive labour. But look at other views of domestic labour (e.g. Smith, 1978), Sève’s critics say. Domestic labour is necessary to reproduce labour power. ‘It is not Sève’s distinction between domestic labour and productive labour which is problematic but his failure to acknowledge sufficiently the socially necessary role of domestic labour and its importance in the development of personality, as studies of depression in women must surely suggest (Leonard, 1984:101). Equally, in a more positive light, the social heritage can be appropriated outside the labour process, where vital cultural capacities of accountability, responsibility and moral judgement are learned or denied in the micro-politics of the family or interpersonal relations.

Depending on the nature of these relations and the creation of a person's experience within them, these sites of micro-political relations can be experienced as entailing concrete and abstract activity: that is, activities or duties to which we feel a special connection and which are personally fulfilling, or alternatively activities and duties performed out of compunction and which are alienating and unfulfilling (Burkitt, 2008:146).

All this amounts to the fierce criticism that 'Sève regards the effect of culture on the personality as only of secondary – superstructural – importance, [which] is much to the detriment of his whole theory of personality formation' (Burkitt, 1991:133). In this view, the main problem with Sève's method is that he envisages the appropriation of the social heritage purely in terms of the individual's relation to social labour – in other words, their relation to the production process through the division of labour. This leads Sève to claim that the psychology of personality is founded on the study of social labour or it does not exist. However, as Sève also says (Sève, 1978:98-99), in a study of Marx's *Das Kapital*, it is not human labour in general which is the real human essence, but the 'particular forms of social relations' typical of each historical period. This means that the forms of social relations in society are more than the relations of production, and are not simply a superstructure of those relations

In fact, under whatever socio-economic system they live, for many individuals the split between concrete and abstract activity is not identical with the split between concrete and abstract labour (Ashcroft, 1982). So, whereas according to Sève, activities like caring for family and friends, or learning in school, would be examples of concrete activity, or certainly intermediary activity, as they are not performed for wages but for personal rewards which count towards self-development, critics would suggest that domestic labour can become alienated and become abstract, whether it is performed by men or women (Burkitt, 2008:148). There is force in Burkitt's criticism, which could be taken further. For example, some activities that are themselves alienating may impart skills and knowledge that can be used in fulfilling work.

Theoreticians of labour for example suggested that Sève had previously given too little attention to the concrete conditions of work (Schwartz, 1988) and had failed to exhaust all the necessary complexities of work through the simple distinction between abstract and concrete. Yves Clot for example has argued that Vygotsky's approach to childhood and adolescent development is equally applicable to the workplace, and quite specifically that 'These 'pathways' from the individual to the group are decisive in understanding how the activity of the worker can develop and create new competencies' [*Ces <<passages>> de l'individuel au collectif sont décisifs pour comprendre comment l'activité de l'ouvrière peut ici se développer et de nouvelles compétences se former*] (Clot, 2008:37), which, if true, cuts across Sève's original overly clear distinction between abstract and concrete labour. In his later work Sève accepted (Sève, 2008:430; Schwartz, 2014) that experience of work is far more complex and multidimensional than Sève had allowed in MTP. For example, *in extremis*, the abstract quality of particular work itself may be essential to the liberating effect that the work possesses, an ironic juxtaposition with which Sève would surely not feel comfortable and which explains to a degree his subsequent theoretical re-evaluation.

Burkitt suggests that perhaps this failing can be traced to Sève's attempt to base personality development in the 'infrastructure' of activity, which in traditional Marxist terms means the economic base of society. Personality development is then conditioned by one's labour activity and the capacities and skills it demands. But this leads to the mirroring of one of the dichotomies in Marxist theory (says Burkitt) that between base and superstructure. Some say that the base wholly determines the superstructure, others that it is at least partially autonomous. Burkitt thinks that dichotomy surfaces in Sève which is why he 'tends to relegate the study of domestic, political and cultural factors to only minor importance in his psychology of personality' (Burkitt, 1991:129). The same applies to language, Sève's enthusiasm for social labour as a determinant of personality likewise leads to what Burkitt characterises as a

reductionist failure to appreciate the important role of communicative interaction and language, in terms of the role they play in personality formation and the development of consciousness (Burkitt, 1991:134). Sève himself merely quotes Marx in the *Grundrisse* that it is ‘language is by way of which the personality constructs itself’ (Sève, 1978:224). From Sève’s perspective, as a Marxist, the root of humanity is the use of tools for labour, not language (Sève, 2008:302). The later Sève seems however to adopt the Vygotsky concepts of signs and the zone of proximal development, that CHAT is a recognisable – and Marxist - style in psychology: what distinguishes humanity from the animal kingdom is the use of mediators (principally tools and signs) in productive activity (Sève, 2008:98), creating further mediators (effectively, social capital) for further activity.

However ‘excentric’ his conception of humanity, Sève could be criticised as insufficiently attentive the effects of culture, interposed between material existence and consciousness, how we view ourselves and our experience, and, far from being merely ‘superstructural’ might also be regarded as essential in the intercourse between human beings, including that involved in social labour. As a leading ethnographic observer of the transition of working class youth into labour suggested, ‘Social agents are not passive bearers of ideology, but active appropriators who reproduce existing structures only through struggle, contestation and a partial penetration of those structures’ (Willis, 1977:175). Thus Sève’s distinction between the biological individual, the personality, biography and ethical-legal personality arguably do not sufficiently allow for cultural distinctions. Further, how can an ‘infrastructure’ of the personality possibly be separated from a ‘superstructure’, elements of which must be bound together at every moment e.g. Sève says that humans do appropriate a part of their social heritage as capacities learned in social labour, but those capacities must evidently be learned through language, communications with other generations (Burkitt, 1991:130). What Sève calls humanity’s ‘inorganic body’ is not just a reflection of physical but psychological

capacities. Activity enters the body as capacities, but these would be useless and would not even arise in a complex form without the self-consciousness constructed in language and in wider social interaction, which enters the body as self-consciously applied steering media, designing action and directing and applying capacities. In sum, therefore, ‘There is no infrastructure and superstructure of the personality’ (Burkitt, 1991:131; Laufenberg *et al.*, 1975).

These are criticisms that the later Sève meets head on, rejecting the applicability of the concept of base and superstructure to the development of the personality (Sève, 2008), insisting on something which does suspiciously resemble CHAT. ‘So the human psyche is doubly social: through its external accumulation in a human world and its internal ownership through education’ [*‘Ainsi le psychisme humain est-il doublement social: par sa cumulation externe en un monde humain et par son appropriation interne à travers des pilotages pédagogiques’*] (Sève, 2008:107), with the further distinction that ‘The symbolic world, subjected to the technical division of activities is also exposed to the alienation of meaning, but it does not itself generate a social division of labour, feeding exploitation and the class struggle’ [*‘Le monde du symbolique, soumis à la division technique des activités, est exposé aussi à l’aliénation du sens, mais n’est pas par lui-même générateur d’une division du travail où s’alimentent exploitation de l’homme et lutte des classes’*] (Sève, 2008:160).

Really, however, all these are criticisms of Marxism itself – not of Sève in particular, who would not be inclined to disagree at all with the impact that the social conditions of life have on the development of individual biographies. But Sève is a Marxist and sees culture in a Marxist context: his critics appear to be demanding that he stop being one and pay his respects to e.g. Bourdieu (1986) and other cultural theorists, who introduce the idea of the ‘social habitus’. Concern over the interpersonal transmission mechanisms of social humanity led Sève eventually to Vygotsky. If the production of commodities owes as much to mind as to body:

Burkitt may be right in wanting to pay more attention, in the deterministic flow down from material socio-economic conditions, to the level of culture in the determination of the individual personality. But this runs the risk, from any Marxist standpoint, of ignoring, or at least watering down, the socio-economic formation of culture and as a by-product of destroying the psychological significance of revolutionary, or at least engaged, personal life altogether. Certainly however there is a need for an explanation, perhaps many explanations, as to why individual biographies differ so substantially even amongst people of the same socio-economic class: even minute cultural differences may explain at least some of these. To this criticism might be added that Sève could have done more to criticise 'bourgeois' psychology in its many different forms (Rockmore, 1980).

Focus by leading critics on the Left during the decades immediately succeeding Sève's earlier work on his alleged failure to analyse correctly issues such as domestic labour and gender, or the relative role of culture and economics in creating and transforming the personality, should not obscure what is perhaps a much larger, and certainly a more fundamental, third objection to his work from the political Right. This is that his concept of emancipation rests squarely and unavoidably on a Marxist concept of progress. For Sève there is an unbridgeable gulf between the lived experience of the metal-worker in Detroit and in Gorki (Sève, 1978:335), an assertion the plausibility of which has been exhaustively analysed from many angles (Haynes, 2006) and on which critics of the Soviet system (e.g. Dallin, 1992) would certainly be entitled to pounce. From a 21st Century perspective there is a fundamental problem underlying Sève's conception of Marxism, which is that it is itself not a theoretical monolith – as he himself recognised in MTP when he took issue with the Chinese cultural revolution as making a psychological (as well as theoretical and political) mistake in imagining that consciousness could ever advance beyond the real bases of social life (Sève, 1978:367). Whilst contemporary reviews of his earlier work criticised his 'voluntary decision to wear the

ideological blinders' (Rockmore, 1980:287), Sève himself is no longer a member of the dwindling French Communist Party, which means inevitably that the lodestar he follows in analysing the problems of the personality in capitalist society, if Marxist, must now be an individual interpretation of general theoretical principles, not a reading of texts created as part of a collective Party intellectual endeavour. This is not necessarily a crippling objection to the implementation of a process of seeing political problems such as biographical writing or educational policy through a Marxist lens – with Marxism as an indispensable theoretical guide, as the earlier Sève may have put it. But it does mean that there is a risk, at least, that this lens may become itself subjective: without a Party to centralise thinking as well as political action, this is almost inevitable. Why is it plausible, the Sève of MTP might reasonably be asked, that a worker in a Soviet factory would have any more opportunity to develop their capacities than in the West? And whilst in MTP Sève denied any possibility that Marxism can be in any sense part of a wider truth - 'Marxism is not a voice, even the bass, in the speculative polyphony of an ecumenical humanism' (Sève, 1978:126) – that is exactly how its role is mainly perceived, if at all, in the 21st Century. Critics from the right – who have in practice ignored Sève altogether - would develop their arguments much further, certainly finding fault with his supposed 'explanation' of the nature-nurture divide and defending anything from sociobiology to inherited genius, pointing no doubt to numerous accounts of individual success against the odds and the influence of random events on markets and hence individual lives (e.g. Taleb, 2001).

Human beings and animals

It is worth noting at this point what from a 21st Century perspective seems more significant than it did last century, Sève's inevitable crucial distinction between man and

animals. In his view, ‘To imagine that it is possible to exhaust the knowledge of such a being, truly to reach his essence, to grasp his soul, in a way which is basically identical to that which is suitable for animals, is an extraordinary aberration’ (Sève, 1978:182) This is a species-specific claim about the particular form of human social (and economic) relations as being of a qualitatively different nature from the animal kingdom, that ‘in a sense human psychology must be the reverse of animal psychology’ (Sève, 1978:191). It is also most interesting that now that animal societies have been so closely studied and animal rights are a frequent concern of Western moral philosophers, Sève even chose to include his sideswipe at the animal rights activists, that ‘anthills have no social history’ [*il n’y a pas d’histoire sociale des fourmilières*] (Sève, 2008:91). He further clarified this position in correspondence as representing a position that whilst there may be a general injunction not to do harm, animal rights make no sense (Sève, 2015a:5). Do they really not, a critic would ask? Reflection will indicate – and it is most surprising that Sève gives no attention to this objective fact – some animals form packs and herds, and almost every individual animal’s life is lived throughout as part of this ensemble of *animal* social relations, and it is difficult to ignore certain important social parallels, at least, discernible between animal and human collective life (such as social hierarchy). And Sève’s argument brings more in its train: if a human being becomes only properly, or fully, human, as a result of assimilating the human heritage, why is the same not equally true of any other animal? And what does such an argument enable us as psychologists to say about animals, or even people, who have never had contact with any other members of their own species? Does it suggest that special rules of conduct should be applied to them e.g. that it is not reasonable to expect them to appreciate such ideas as conscience, justice, etc. Might this argument not also apply in principle to different individuals and societies? This position might have significant (not to say disturbing) ethical, as well as psychological, implications for Marxism, if ethical obligations were in any consistent and hierarchical way linked to psychological characteristics.

Sève's response is to argue ethically about obligations to others, views which although certainly defensible and widely held, do not sit easily with the ethics and behaviour of many political leaders who have professed Marxism in the past. It is surely hard to avoid the conclusion that this view, which serves well to protect Sève against such disturbing implications, owes more to a general secular humanism than to his own theory of personality, and strongly suggests that both are needed in a balanced theoretical framework.

Conclusion

Summing up Sève's earlier work only, but from a much later vantage point, Burkitt observes that 'Although the approach fails to highlight the capacities that are developed or destroyed in interpersonal relations – such as accountability, normative regulation and rule-breaking, and powers of agency and responsibility – nevertheless Sève does foreground exactly what others ignore: the important ways in which our lives are governed by the workings of a capitalist economy and how this structures the biography in which the self is formed (including the experience of unemployment and why it can be so negative in a world where work determines how most people spend their time and earn their money)' (Burkitt, 2008:146). But in his view Sève's view is simply too narrow, reductionist, and in the end, insufficiently human – that 'Sève theorises individuals as nothing more than the vessels of teleological historical processes' (Burkitt, 1991:127) and is therefore 'less interested in the concrete individual than in seeing the life of each personality as the means by which the Marxian dialectic of history brings about its final change – the culmination of the process of history in the communist society' (Burkitt, 1991:127). Even Leontiev thought the idea that the personality is determined by the biography unduly fatalist (Sève, 2015:39). The limited practical usefulness of such an

approach appears stark: just how viable a proposition for psychology is his theoretical hypothesis?

The conclusion of this chapter is that the main service Sève has performed is to insist on what a Marxist theoretical framework for psychology must be, rather than to apply it. He himself said that he has sought to present ‘an idea of what Marx’s analyses may bring to psychology if taken seriously’ (Sève, 1978:64). But what he produced was a filter, not a methodology, still less a theory in the conventional sense of the term. Sève’s own work should therefore be seen as the application of general Marxist ideas of the nature of man, and of psychology, to those subjects. Unless we are to say, either that scientific psychology ‘today’ is just CHAT, or that it was buried with the fall of the Soviet Union, it is not unreasonable to identify Sève’s work as the core of a mainstream project for the provision of a theoretical framework for psychology, veering neither towards mechanical Pavlovian concepts of man as his earlier interventions argued against (e.g. Sève, 1954) nor towards voluntaristic existentialism or the dehumanising fragmentation of anti-humanism. Thus one may see Sève, as does El Hammoumi (2012), as a ‘keeper of the flame’, seeking for the Marxist theoretical framework that should underlie and help create a scientific psychology a position that neither loses the importance of human consciousness altogether, as Sève believes did the structural Marxists, nor slips away from a Marxist perspective whilst continuing to pay lip-service to it, as he conceptualises the Marxist humanists. He may therefore be justly regarded, to mix metaphors, as having demonstrated that the clearest blue water is found by steering between the Scylla of Althusser and the Charybdis of Garaudy. To take Sève seriously means, therefore, to take mainstream Marxism seriously. So far, so good.

But Sève did not take the Marxist view of man as he developed it, as a distinctive, innovative corpus of thought, and apply that to theoretical and practical subjects as a psychologist would certainly do and as a social scientist would be expected to do. Rather, Sève

as a philosopher expressed the need for a materialist science of personality, and explained what it could and could not be, but left to others to determine what this means in practice for social science. Sève has indeed been criticised for reaching a complete impasse in a practical sense (Legrand, 1992:503), with the leading critique of his work in English also commenting:

‘It remains to be seen in full what the psychology of personality will be like when informed by this type of Marxian theory. So far, Sève has only outlined a theory of the general forms of individuality. Now he must detail the way in which concrete, singular personalities arise as moments of the logic of social relations in which they are enmeshed, and how the contradictions of capitalist society cut to the heart of peoples’ lives’ (Burkitt, 1991:120) – which he never did.

So it ‘remains to be seen in full what the psychology of personality will be like when informed by this type of Marxian theory’ (Burkitt, 1991:120). Unfortunately, we are not much the wiser after several decades (Sève, 2008:114) – we yearn for the application of the theory, not its reiteration. As Sève himself admitted, his critics have said to him, as they said to Politzer, ‘if the psychology that you paint in glowing colours is not a myth, show us a little concretely what it would look like’ [*si vraiment la psychologie que vous faites miroiter n'est pas un mythe, montrez-nous un peu concrètement de quoi elle aurait l'air*] (Sève, 2015:33).

The question therefore asked is, ‘if we...try to understand social individuality in terms of the way that social relations and activities translate into the logic of individual lives, *what can social relations actually tell us about individuals?*’ (Burkitt, 2008:141) [my italics]. Burkitt’s question goes to the core of the project of a scientific psychology with a Marxist theoretical framework but Sève himself does not. For whilst a leading commentator suggested that Sève turned Vygotsky on his head’ in applying Vygotsky’s theory of the crisis of psychology to a new area, such as the political realities of the crisis of communism after the

fall of Berlin Wall (Sève, 1999; El-Hammoumi, 2002:98) what we find in Sève's own writings is sparse reference to the practical implications of a Marxist theory of the personality. One example is his observation that 'inequality in educational abilities is itself substantially predetermined by inequality in social conditions and its system of cumulative effects' (Sève, 1978:13), an insight which, whilst it may well be true, does not seem to depend exclusively on Marxism. It is worth noting that Sève does not seem to have contemplated that his *own* work could lead to an ethical justification of unequal treatment under capitalism, as his focus on potential rather than actuality may not be universally shared.

On the contrary, the main advocacy Sève appears to have made during his tenure as the sole secularist on the *Comité consultif national d'éthique* (CCNE) was, as he said, being conscious as a Marxist of greater power to humanity being the end goal of history, to exercise maximal vigilance against any new form of alienation towards humanity, especially that driven by private profit (Sève, 2006: 14-15), e.g. the selling of blood and body parts, and repudiating the 'cold' utilitarian view held by Singer and others of the usefulness of any individual (Sève, 2006:46): Sève coined the neologism '*ascrire*' and '*ascription*' to the person who is endangered in our society especially by the tendency to put a price on man and his parts. But these arguments appear not to rely so much on *psychology* as on *ethics*. The blue water is muddied, at least.

It is the task of the chapters that follow to begin, at least, to attempt that provision of a Marxist theoretical framework for psychology, guided by Sève – TSS - without transcending the limitations observed by its critics, into practical, empirical terrain, as Burkitt wanted: *to test the consequences hypothesis* with regard to some major issues in different social sciences.

Chapter Four - TSS in subjective time preference (STP)

Introduction

The task of this chapter is twofold. First, briefly to explain what STP is and why it matters. Second, to test the specific consequences hypothesis by showing what the implications of TSS would be for STP theory and empirical studies. What is STP and why does it matter? Intertemporal choices - costs and benefits at different times - are both important and ubiquitous. (Frederick *et al*, 2002:351). Adam Smith noted their importance for the wealth of nations (Smith, 1776). One contemporary expert introduced a volume on ‘impulsivity’ by arguing that many of the most pressing problems facing the United States, such as obesity and global warming, have their roots therein (Loewenstein, 2010:xi), it being defined shortly afterwards as a dichotomy between ‘the impulsive mind that lives for the moment and the self-controlled mind that considers the long-term consequences of our decisions’ (Madden & Bickel, 2010:3). Another expert went even further, arguing that ‘Self-defeating behavior has been accounted the greatest preventable cause of death in the modern world’ (Ainslie, 2002:3).

Psychology has never been far away from STP. Early proponents of discounting, such as Böhm-Bawerk (1889) and Pigou (1920) viewed STP essentially as a failure of imagination, the persistent underestimation of the problems of the future, whilst Ramsey (1928) sought to rationalise time preference by introducing a formula based on projected productivity growth as well as pure time preference. So ‘in the early part of the twentieth century, ‘time preference’ was viewed as an amalgamation of various intertemporal motives’ (Frederick *et al*, 2002:355). Once however the problem was encapsulated the problem into the determination of a single variable, the discount rate (Samuelson, 1937), this approach became entrenched as the dominant theoretical framework for modelling intertemporal choice by individuals, companies

and governments 'due largely to its simplicity and its resemblance to the compound interest formula and not as a result of empirical research demonstrating its validity (Frederick *et al*, 2002:352). The simple exponential discount rate is indeed the direct inverse of compound interest, being defined across specific time periods in a formula very well known to economists and financiers alike as:

$$NPV = \frac{CF_1}{(1+r)^1} + \frac{CF_2}{(1+r)^2} + \dots + \frac{CF_n}{(1+r)^n}$$

Where NPV = Net Present Value), i.e. the value now of a stream of discounted cash flows, CF = Cash Flows in specified time periods, and r = the discount rate used to reduce cash flow values in each period.

The discount rate and NPV formula however, could be derived from and applied to a great many different areas of economics, most obviously in contributing to the decisions of individuals and groups acting as investors and consumers, thereby forming the bedrock of financial analysis in capitalist economies. Discounting also serves in the role of the cost of capital for business in investment decision-making, thereby making discounting equally important for corporate and other forms of finance. Equally importantly, it serves as an input for capitalist governments in determining the social discount rate (SDR) to be used in public investment projects. STP did not feature in the economics of state socialist economies, in significant measure because the extensive investment programmes of these countries effectively part-nationalised STP. Stalinism, in particular, was forward-looking to the point of virtually denying Soviet citizens consumer goods enjoyed in the West (Nove, 1993) although more recent research suggests that organisational and political failures more than adversely compensated for any benefits that such 'zero-discounting' brought about (Cheremukhin *et al*, 2013).

The theory of STP

STP theorists view individuals as sufficiently alike that cross-sectional studies of STP are of worth. So it is possible for scholars to conclude that there are ‘social facts’ (Gilbert, 1989) on this subject. These are, first, that for an individual (that is, an abstract individual), consumer goods (not necessarily all states of mind or experiences are necessarily included) are valued more highly in the present than in the future, and less highly as the time of their consumption recedes into the future. The extent of actual valuation depends on the current value ascribed to the goods, the discount rate, and finally the time horizon, i.e. how far into the future an individual looks (Krebs & Rapport, 2012:531). Secondly, subjective perceptions of value decline more rapidly in the near than in the far future, a concept known as hyperbolic discounting (Weitzman, 2001), the formula for which (in the most general terms) is:

$$NPV = \frac{CF_1}{(1+r)} + \frac{CF_2}{(1+rg)} + \dots + \frac{CF_n}{(1+r(g^n))}$$

Where NPV, CF and r as before and g is the general operator on the discount rate reducing it over time. In the formal hyperbolic model g itself grows exponentially. One early researcher favoured hyperbolic discounting because 'most of us are 'born' with [this] discount function' (Strotz, 1956:177), A second early researcher noted that deeply bowed discount curves predict that people will regularly form temporary preferences and thus that the self at any given moment will be in a relationship of limited warfare (Schelling, 1960:53-80) with expectable future selves. Theorists of STP (and behavioural finance) introduce social psychology into their analysis, but in a very general fashion, for example the claim that ‘To some extent social forces can exert pressure against impulses, as when a competitive market raises the stakes for being careful and consistent with money. However, this strategy is vulnerable to impulses that strike everyone together, leading to ‘the madness of crowds’ (Ainslie, 2002:7). The connection to biological determinism is absolutely explicit: Ainslie quotes animal research experiments of his own (Ainslie, 1974) and Darwin’s views about human emotions (Darwin, 1872) in defence

of his view about self-control and thresholds of self-confidence whilst one paper refers to ‘animals, including humans’ (Axtell & McRae, 2007:1). There can be surely little doubt that the spectre of ‘man’, Sève’s criticism of psychology in general, lurks behind this type of explanation of impatience and impulsivity, regret and resolution.

Recognition of hyperbolic discounting has already had consequences in practice. The environmental movement, including in academia, has campaigned in support of low, or no, discount rates for long-term projects with adverse environmental consequences and indeed arguments for the non-applicability of any form of discounting to inter-generational environmental issues (e.g. amongst many, Hellweg *et al*, 2003). Some progress has been made, to the extent that governments apply lower discount rates to long-term projects. On the other hand, one of the arguments advanced in favour of declining social discount rates for long-term projects is still that they reflect amalgamated individual STP.

Hyperbolic discounting has even been argued to have significance for international relations (IR) theory, where it has been suggested that ‘scholars of international relations have proceeded in seeming ignorance of findings, from psychology and behavioural economics, exploring how ‘people’ actually make intertemporal tradeoffs (Krebs & Rapport, 2012:530). This is only a first-stage criticism, however, equally liable to the charge of ignoring actual individuality, and some subjectivity may derive from sub-additive discounting, the finding that STR increases as the interval is more finely partitioned (Read, 2001). Further, IR theories ‘presume that actors reason the same way about temporally distant and near events, even if they discount the former more heavily. A wealth of experimental evidence, however, suggests that this presumption is wrong’ (Krebs & Rapport, 2012:530), though it is perhaps however stretching a point to suggest, as the authors do, that e.g. the lack of planning for postwar Iraq was a function of what other authors have called impetuosity (Krebs & Rapport, 2012:532). And thirdly, individuals confronting long-term challenges persistently underestimate the

difficulties and costs involved in fulfilling them, demonstrating an ‘optimism bias’ that influences action (Frederick *et al*, 2002).

Empirical studies of STP

Although there are a significant (and sharply increasing) number of them, existing non-Marxist studies (in the sense that the authors did not identify as Marxists or have any overt Marxist political agenda) exhibit a wide difference in the way they incorporate differences between individuals in their analysis. A summary of major steps in the development of the theory is as follows:

- Flora (1966) set out to clarify the role of STP in influencing the decisions of investors and its relationship to alternative rates of return on capital, by determining empirically STP of a sample of US forest owners in New England.
- Other early work (e.g. Hausman, 1979; Gately, 1980) used observed household choices among consumer durables (air conditioners and refrigerators respectively) with different purchase and operating costs to deduce discount rates. Dramatic variation with respect to income levels was observed, as the table below shows:

ESTIMATED DISCOUNT RATES USING MEAN POPULATION ESTIMATES

INCOME CLASS	NUMBER OF OBSERVATIONS	β_2	IMPLIED DISCOUNT RATE
1. \$6,000	6	-0.118	89%
2. \$10,000	15	-0.075	39%
3. \$15,000	16	-0.061	27%
4. \$25,000	17	-0.049	17%
5. \$35,000	8	-0.039	8.9%
6. \$50,000	3	-0.031	5.1%

- Thaler (1981) asked his subjects to identify an equivalent sum to a cash amount in a month, a year and ten years; his median results implied large annual discount rates that

however dropped sharply as the size of the prize or the length of time increased, i.e. supporting the theory of hyperbolic discounting. Similar results were found for choosing between high and low-quality viewing (Read *et al.*, 1999). Thaler also identified the paradox that losses were discounted less steeply than gains, a finding also of Loewenstein (1988).

- Researchers have found, perhaps predictably, that smokers have higher discount rates (Fuchs, 1982), a finding repeated for other addicts (Bickel & Marsch, 2001). Addicts tend to invest less in human capital (Munasinghe & Sicherman, 2000); heroin addicts discount both drugs and money more steeply when they are craving heroin than when they are not (Giordano *et al.*, 2001).
- Lawrance (1991) found a positive correlation between poverty and high discount rates. This study has been frequently cited, and its conclusions are gradually finding their way into contemporary academic discourse on STP. For example, Hoel *et al.* (2015) in their study of Ethiopian subjects cite then recent research (Mani *et al.*, 2013) suggesting that poverty impedes cognitive function in support of their conclusion that higher income subjects were more resistant to the effect of measures taken to induce self-control fatigue.
- Kirby and Maraković (1995) and Cairns and van der Pol (1997) used 'matching'-type questions which allowed estimation of individual STPs, and found evidence for hyperbolic discounting, but did not investigate heterogeneity in terms of any observable individual characteristics.
- A common conjecture is that time preference is generally highest for the extremely young and the extremely old, but much lower for the middle-aged (Mulligan, 2007:26). Children have high time preference because of their limited cognitive development (Hoppe, 2001:4).

- In one of the most influential papers on possible ways to determine an SDR, Weitzman (2001) surveyed 2000 professional economists. He found that individual expert opinions about social discount rates vary rather substantially, but his interest was in the way one social discount rate could be formulated from many individual STPs, and in justifying hyperbolic discounting, not in explaining why individual STPs vary. ‘Had Weitzman collected the characteristics of each of his sample of economists, he might have fit a regression-type model to explain the differences in their subjective social discount rates. However, he only differentiated between 50 ‘leading’ economists and other economists who answered his survey’ (Cameron & Gerdes, 2005:9).
- In another influential paper, Warner and Pleeter (2001) examined the decisions of several thousand individuals who were given the choice between a lump sum or an annuity on leaving the US military: ‘over half of the officers [with college education] and over 90 percent of the enlisted personnel [mostly without college education] took the lump-sum payment, implying that the vast majority of personnel had discount rates of at least 18 percent’ (Pleeter & Warner, 2001:33). Moreover, individual discount rates declined with age as well, which reinforced similar findings by Gilman (1976) and Black (1984) in earlier military studies. The results of the study had considerable practical importance: as the authors noted: ‘Since government borrowing rates are far below these personal discount rates, we estimate that offering lump-sum payments saved taxpayers \$1.7 billion in severance costs’ (Pleeter & Warner, 2001:33). Whilst this research has been criticised on the grounds that the authors could not ‘compensate for non-random selection into the military in the first place, which may render these samples very different from the general population in terms of unobservables’ (Cameron & Gerdes, 2005:11fn), this criticism itself rests on the ‘general population’ and its underlying non-Marxist concept of homogenous individuality.

- Harrison *et al* (2002) employed a smaller field experiment using a representative sample of 268 people in Denmark between the ages of 19 and 75. Cameron and Gerdes (2005) asked a sample of 2,000 survey participants from a wide variety of classes at universities throughout the United States and Canada their preferences between lump sum and annuity for hypothetical lottery winnings. A selection of socio-demographic characteristics was elicited after the various choices in the survey had been recorded, including age brackets, gender, educational attainment, field of study, whether courses have been taken in economics, work status, political ideology, and family income bracket. Some less conventional variables were also collected. To proxy for individual capital market constraints, they asked for an estimate of the largest sum of money the individual believes they could qualify to borrow, without collateral. The survey software also kept track of timing as respondents progressed through the survey. In contrast to earlier work, they concluded that ‘the larger the annual payments being considered, the higher is the estimated discount parameter for the individual’ (Cameron & Gerdes, 2005:21). Their sample, however, was both self-selected and confined to university students.
- Chesson *et al* (2006) in another cross-sectional study found a strong correlation between risk-taking behaviour amongst adolescents and high discount rates when they were surveyed. They found that STP decreased with age and were lower amongst white university educated females. They recognised, however, that this finding might be attributable to differences in income, as higher incomes are also predictors of lower discount rates (Lawrance, 1991, Chesson *et al*, 2006). They also noted that previous life events, especially poor outcomes from previous risky behaviour, were associated with higher STP, suggesting that learning at the individual level was being impeded.

- Ikeda and Kang (2015) classified respondents with hyperbolic discount rates as naïve if their answers reveal them to be time-inconsistent procrastinators, based on how likely they were to procrastinate in doing onerous homework assignments during school vacations during childhood and otherwise sophisticated. They found that naïve respondents with more steeply declining impatience were more likely to be debtors. The observation that people exhibit time-inconsistent borrowing behaviour has also been observed (Laibson *et al*, 1996). It worthwhile comparing Ikeda and Kang's approach to disparities within the population, which was to standardise with reference to the Japanese population as a whole, with Hausman (1979)'s deconstruction of the discount rate into its income-dependent components.
- In a cross-sectional study of economics students in 45 different countries, Wang *et al* (2016) found hyperbolic discount rates universally, but that higher GDP was correlated with lower STP. They also found that cultural factors as captured by the Hofstede dimensions (Hofstede, 1991) also significantly affected STP.
- Studies of hyperbolic discounting have not been without critical commentary. Based on fitting a quadratic function to the premise of investor overconfidence, Daniel *et al* (1998) noted two well-known psychological biases: investor overconfidence about the precision of information, and biased self-attribution, which causes asymmetric shifts in investor confidence. At least part of the intertemporal-choice anomalous behaviour documented in the experimental literature of economic psychology can therefore be attributed to subjective incorrect valuation of the compounding and discounting process represented by the exponential function. According to Benzion *et al* (2004), it is not certain that subjects generally properly understand the exponential function, that they are indeed 'naïve'. For example, the larger the cash sum offered, the lower the observed discount rate. Researchers have also suggested that individuals display greater

confidence in the likelihood of a positive outcome in the further future, regardless of whether the task depends on skill or chance (Trope and Liberman, 2003:411) and tend to prefer high-probability, low-payoff gambles in the near term and low-probability, high-payoff gambles in the long term (Sagrignano *et al*, 2002) which is at least consistent with the wish of environmental activists to enforce low discount rates at the government level for long-term environmentally sensitive projects. Trope & Liberman (2010) suggest that construal level theory is useful to explain these apparent inconsistencies, as it theorises that ‘temporal distance results in unwarranted optimism about the future effects of one’s actions’ (Krebs & Rapport, 2012:531).

- In a recent study, Loveridge & Komarek (2016) accept that ‘It seems plausible that an individual’s attitude could be influenced by opinions that prevail in the community’ (Loveridge & Komarek, 2016:3), but their regression analysis works the other way round, examining STP as a leading indicator and suggesting that local policies might be conditioned by impatience, rather than that local economic conditions, with possibly a lag, might influence STP.
- Earlier research concluded that a child’s capacity to delay gratification is highly correlated with later academic success and self-worth (Mischel *et al*, 1988), work which bore more on social relations than individual psychology, albeit not explicitly. Scholars in the field of STP, especially those drawing on behavioural economics, have however recently started to come to grips with the issue of biography that Sève sketched out in MTP. So for example there is a focus (mainly in the journal, *Psychology and Aging*, which devoted a special issue to the subject in 2016) on how STP changes in older people is at least in part explained by an age-related tendency to perceive one’s future emotions as more continuous with present feelings (Löckenhoff *et al*, 2011), whilst research on younger adults provides direct evidence for a link between lower STP and

what other authors have described, with perhaps some circularity of reasoning, at least as applied to STP, as self-continuity (Bartels & Urminsky, 2011; Ersner-Hershfield *et al.*, 2009; Rutt, J.L. & Löckenhoff, 2016).

Psychology and STP

Empirical research into STP has not therefore entirely neglected differences between *groups* of people. Discussion of STP has also surfaced in social psychology (e.g. Antonides & Wunderlink, 2001). But by its very nature the empirical research has been ‘anti-psychological’, in the sense of providing evidence about groups – to the extent, in fact, of neglecting the available opportunities for displaying differences between individuals (such as distribution curves of results). In fact, most existing empirical studies on STP rely on implicit assumptions about the homogeneity of individual preferences.

Virtually since the concept of discounting was first employed, however, precisely this homogeneity has been challenged. Attacks on ‘homo economicus’ have been frequent and forceful: Samuelson himself observed in relation to the supply of savings, that ‘it is extremely doubtful whether we can learn much from considering such an economic man, whose tastes remain unchanged, who seeks to maximise some functional of consumption alone, in a perfect world, where all things are certain and synchronised’ (Samuelson, 1937:160). It has been observed for decades, for example, that STP may depend on others’ decision-making (Feldstein, 1964). There is also the Platonic view that personal subjective time preferences could be accounted for by a less fixed view of personal identity, put simply because our future selves are not the same as our present selves, and we do care about them less as a result, much as we care less about other people than ourselves (Parfit, 1971). In truth, the rational individual has always been a theoretical construct, which defined an ideal world against which mundane reality could be judged, and in whose likeness it could be reformed (Clarke, 1991:5), and

moreover ‘It is the private appropriation of the means and products of social production which constitutes interests as private, exclusive, and opposed’ (Clarke, 1991:46). A libertarian view is quite different. It has been argued that decreasing property rights will raise the rate of STP, with interest rates rising, which the author specifically opposes to ‘the formerly ascendant Marxian view which associated collective ownership with a higher state of civilization’ (Mulligan, 2007:43).

It has also been recognised that an adequate understanding of the decisions of investors involves more than just assumptions of maximising net present value (NPV) (Flora, 1966). Empirical research has also revealed a number of anomalies or inconsistencies with behaviour predicted by the Discounted Utility model. For example, inconsistent preferences, a magnitude effect (large outcomes discounted at a lower rate than small ones), a sign effect (gains are discounted at a higher rate than losses), and people prefer improving sequences to declining ones (Frederick *et al*, 2002:360). Moreover, any assumption that investors will follow time preferences in their valuation decisions may involve a circularity, if those time preferences are derived at least in part from interest rates that are themselves shaped by time preferences. Flora (and others) argue that ‘economic’ decision-making and present-value maximisation are identical, but this is surely tautologous. In reality, economic activity is a much wider concern than just one theory: a theory, moreover, that assumes a particular human psychology.

Psychology in general focuses on individuals, however, and pretends, at least, not to distinguish between different forms of economic organisation in the realisation of insights about individual behaviour, which are therefore more a result of taking psychology generally seriously, rather than taking Marx or Sève in particular seriously.

What significant insight can TSS bring?

How can a Marxist psychology intervene? On first consideration, the relationship of Marxist philosophy of any kind, let alone the Marxist psychology of Lucien Sève, to STP may seem otiose. What connection can there possibly be? Examining subjective time preference (STP) in more detail, however, reveals that there are several points of intersection.

First, that individuality matters. TSS suggests that STP is a function of individual circumstances, in particular class and use-time. Existing studies have already presented clear evidence that a range of factors work to influence personal, and group, discount rates. The empirical evidence suggests that education (*ceteris paribus*) acts to lengthen STP horizons (i.e. diminishing the discount rate) often with striking effect in a developing country setting (Kirby *et al*, 2002; Bauer & Chytilová, 2010), and as noted above, research has generated regression models that have attempted to demonstrate the influence of different ‘psychological’, that is to say, environmental, aspects of personal development. Quite noticeably, however, studies of this kind more recently emphasise education rather than income, despite problems with higher levels of inflation during earlier periods (Fuchs, 1982:113). Much more recently, Joshi and Fast (2013) developed a concept of power and associated it with lower STP, arguing that the experience of power enhances one’s connection with the future self, which in turn results in reduced temporal discounting.

But *no* studies have used household wealth as a proxy or social class directly as a regression input. Generally, however, although existing research does not group results in such a way, the associated indicators do seem to suggest that the lower the class, the higher the discount rate. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that some scholars, even those from analytical traditions outside Marxism altogether, are striving to introduce a deeper, more nuanced concept of individuality, and in particular individual decision-making, than either ‘homo economicus’ or ‘homo sociologus’ would allow. So for example in a review of US health decision-making, where the role of the individual might be expected to be paramount, there is mention of

‘*stakeholders* [my emphasis] involved in these [health-related decisions]...the individual whose health is in question, his or her family and other concerned social network members, and the immediate health care providers’ (Tucker *et al*, 2010:297), quite apart from the various organisations involved through the involvement of the wider capitalist economy, such as employers, insurers, doctors and hospitals, and the local, State and federal governments. Whilst it is reasonable to call for an organising framework to approach this complex set of variables (Tucker *et al*, 2010:297) what is missing in the conventional approach is the realisation, first, and then the working through of the implications, of the way in which individual decision-making about time and delay are formed *from social relations*.

So whilst there has been research into the relationship between individual behaviour (e.g. smoking, diet, exercise, approximations to general health) and intertemporal choice, e.g. Fuchs (1982), he and others researching in the same vein looked only at what they described as individual *behaviour*. They did not research the underlying causes in social relations of the predominance of particular kinds of events in lives led by individuals: the consequences of class and experience are on STP remain unresearched. TSS for STP would therefore further suggest the development of empirical studies that investigated how discount rates varied with different aspects of individuality. At the most fundamental level, a capitalist may be expected to have a lower discount rate than a worker. Cameron and Gerdes (2005) found that STP differed with age and/or life expectancy, gender, income, access to capital, and with exposure to economics training, among other things. They even suggested that ‘Perhaps Weitzman’s ‘leading economists’ subsample displays slightly higher discount rates than the broader population of economists simply because the individuals on Weitzman’s list are older and exclusively male. They are also likely to have higher family incomes and greater access to capital’ (Cameron & Gerdes, 2005:38), a view echoed by observations on the lower discount rates for health observed in health care professionals by comparison to the general public (West

et al, 2003). What regression analysis of this kind has not yet done, however, is employ independent variables *derived from TSS* to determine STP. This would focus in particular on the influence of particular kinds of social relations on the individual, notably whether they own and control the means of production, or are workers, unemployed or in other particular social, including family, relations. This is not to suggest that the identification of these variables would be an easy task. Sève himself as we have seen in Chapter Three ran into criticism when he attempted to categorise lives as those of ‘workers’ or make stark divisions between abstract and concrete activity, and there can be little doubt that part of the difficulty with Marxist analytics in the 21st Century has been serious difficulty in identifying, delineating and even obtaining individual acceptance of class positions. Recognising that there is a problem which may be hard to solve, and upon which unanimity of opinion may even be impossible to reach, even amongst Marxists, is not however a necessary justification for inaction. As Lawrance (1991) demonstrated, linear variables such as poverty can be used, and these if combined with other variables such as educational background and attainment, employment, and wealth, may combined to present quite an accurate series of proxies for use-time in an individual biography and amongst a collection of subjects.

The collective of experts featured in Arrow *et al* (1996), typical of the literature on discounting, argue that discount rates should be based on how individuals decide between present and future consumption, and that these rates are indeed likely to differ contextually, a point also recognised by other contributors to the debate: ‘There is no reason why marginal rates of time preference should be any less individual, or less context-specific, than marginal rates of substitution between contemporaneous goods’ (Cameron & Gerdes, 2005:3).

However, whilst economists have traditionally relied significantly on revealed preferences (Cameron & Gerdes, 2005), they are a psychological oxymoron as they can only ever reveal collective preferences. In reality, however, decisions such as investment or

regarding health are rarely taken individually. TSS would therefore encourage the analysis of group STP. Groups formed by employment and social class would be of especial interest. There is a fusion of research between STP and group decision making (reviewed by Kerr & Tindale, 2004). If, as been suggested, the research and policy environment may now gradually be moving in favour of empirical research into indicated individual (family and group) preferences (Manski, 2004), this would certainly be supported by TSS.

Second, biography and STP. It is characteristic of the cross-sectional research done to date that ‘No longitudinal studies has been conducted to permit any conclusions about the temporal stability of time preference’ (Frederick *et al*, 2002:391). Even Austrian economists recognised that: ‘Time preference falls whenever the environment changes, or is expected to change, in a slower or more predictable manner’. (Mulligan, 2007:22f) Still, however, even with the recent studies following the behavioural economics approach noted above, the approach is cross-sectional, comparing different cohorts of individuals at different ages, rather than tracing through the same cohort over their own aging process. Again this is probably best explained as a function of the demands of contemporary academic activity.

By contrast, unhindered by such demands, and throughout his work, Sève has utilised the concept of the biography to emphasise the change of individuality throughout a lifetime. TSS would entail recognising that no one is born with an embedded discount rate, whether low or high, questioning the argument that ‘Learning to be future oriented and to choose actions with a postponed reward is an essential part of our upbringing and educational process’ (Bauer & Chytilová, 2010:644) – not just of growing older itself.

Mapping STP out as an arbitrary and wholly predictable structure over a lifetime would indeed be equally alien to Sève. TSS would suggest that something as critical to life choices as STP will be found to be caused by, and therefore correlated with, life experiences, especially class and work experience. This view can be contrasted with a view that impatience is innate.

Following this up in terms of research, empirical analysis of STP where researchers are TSS would be not only cross-sectional, interesting and politically significant even at an international level as some definitely are, (e.g. Wang *et al*, 2016) but historical, examining e.g. the way in which STP changes for different individuals, with different combinations of changing abstract and concrete activity over time, in response to what combination of external influences, as well as cross-sectional comparisons between individuals from different social classes. TSS therefore entails not understanding STP as fixed, and encouraging ‘snapshot’ cross-sectional studies, but on the contrary, an obligation to research how it changes over an individual lifetime. For example how retirees view STP, as researchers have done in other areas e.g. the charting of individual lives in the UK every seven years, in particular from a class standpoint, in *7 Up*, (1964) up to the latest, *56 Up*, (2012), and studying the way significant events in individual lives may change time preference. Or what Mulligan (2007:26fn) describes as the ‘Ikiru effect’ based on the Kurusawa film of that name that depicts the behaviour of a municipal bureaucrat faced with the end of life (*Ikiru*, 1950). This work is clearly nascent in existing studies, such as on the valuation of the remaining years of life (Hartwick, 2012) but scholars seem unable to jettison the cross-sectional approach to analysing STP, quite possibly because of the structure of academic life and the contemporary demand for article production (Landes *et al*, 2012). TSS would demand much finer-grained research into this kind of question, however, for example not just into spot correlations between individual socio-economic variables and STP, but into the way that *changes* in those variables influence STP over time. To take Sève seriously, it would seem, is to take differentiation as a tool of socio-economic analysis seriously as well: what has changed over time in an individual’s life, and how have those changes influenced their attitudes to e.g. STP.

As work as varied as military payoff programmes (Warner & Pleeter, 2001) and studies of literature (Lewis, 2009) demonstrate, biography and class is not a view of individuality, or

investment horizons, unique to Sève, or to Marxism in general. Even traditional fund management has always noted that, viewed from an individual perspective, risk-taking should diminish over time as the opportunity to recoup losses diminishes and the need for regular income in retirement draws closer, subject matter generally known as lifecycle theory (Modigliani, 1966). Mapped onto the terrain of STP, this would suggest, entirely in accordance with the empirical studies, that STP starts high in childhood, declines with age, and then rises again with impending mortality. What would render TSS in STP studies unique, then, is the *combination* of the biographical approach to risk taking and STP – even age itself is as Sève has stressed, a largely subjective factor for such individual characteristics – together with the recognition that quite specific socio-economic variables, such as use-time, will play a decisive role in their determination and should therefore be the key variables investigated in longitudinal studies of STP.

Third, the deconstruction of STP. A conclusion of TSS is that there should not necessarily be any expectation that individual STP would remain constant across different activities. This thought has occurred to scholars already, in an analogous way that ‘intelligence’ as a unitary concept has been deconstructed (Frederick *et al*, 2002:390). This has led to the suggestion that reintroducing psychology and a multiple-motive approach into intertemporal analysis would help in understanding intertemporal choices observed in the real world. This would help not just in analysing differences between individuals, but within the decision-making of an individual, who may exhibit different, even contradictory, STP across different decision-making domains (Frederick *et al*, 2002:393) although there is as yet no empirical research to support the contention. TSS would entail studies of individuals and groups aimed at investigating not merely how individuals behave as consumers, with generalised assumptions about homogeneity of analysis and decision-making, but on the contrary, how STP varies across activities. For example, individuals who pursue a ‘militant life’, in Sève’s

terms from MTP, might therefore be expected to have a lower discount rate for what matters to them – political engagement and results – than others. At the other end of the political spectrum, landowners with intergenerational perspectives may have lower discount rates for decisions related to land than to other investments. These are the types of choices that empirical research based on TSS might be expected to investigate.

Fourth, the subject matter of STP. TSS suggests that individuality shaped by capitalism is likely to warp decision-making. The presentation of STP in a capitalist society, almost invariably using money as the yardstick by which discounting is to be judged, cannot be regarded as a permanent feature of human activity. On the contrary, Sève would see STP, along with many other exhibited preferences, as a function of how individuals function in a capitalist society, not an invariant characteristic of human activity.

Finally, at a general level there might be a strong presumption that discount rates would be lower in a socialist society, as the factors that contribute to short-term individual time preference would decline. A lower standard deviation might also be expected, reflecting greater homogeneity of views between individuals. TSS may also produce a potentially quite different relationship between individual and social discount rates in a socialist society: where the differences between individual STPs can be understood, and changed, a socialist society may be better placed, at least, to construct social discount rates on a basis different than simply an amalgamation of individual discount rates. It is already the case that ‘People recognise a more secure future for society than for themselves, and this is reflected in their choice of lower discount rates for public decisions than for private decisions’ (West *et al*, 2003:34).

It might even be a defining characteristic of a communist society that STP, along with debates over altruism and the creation of discount rates parallel to STP based on perceived social distance, again based on money (Rachlin & Jones, 2008) would disappear altogether, perhaps as a result of the fact that as one scholar suggested would happen under socialism,

‘With the creation of a free association of individuals who consciously plan out the production and distribution of the social product, labor ceases to be subject to time as an external, abstract and impermeable force governing them irrespective of their will and needs. Time, a product of contingent history, ceases to confront us as an abstract, immutable force to which we must submit. The abolition of the dictatorship of time as an abstract form of domination makes it possible to distribute the social product on the basis of the actual amount of time that individuals contribute to society, since production relations have been transformed in such a way to make that possible’ (Hudis, 2015:349).

This, Sève would certainly expect, would have the result that just as the pursuit of individual welfare at the expense of others would eventually become an historical rather than contemporary phenomenon, the interests of future generations would stand equally with those of the present, exactly as environmentalists would wish. It will then no longer be necessary to ‘elect to override the discount rates that are implicit in the unconstrained choices of this current generation’ (Cameron & Gerdes, 2005:3).

Conclusion: TSS, STP and politics

TSS allows a framework in which the whole subject of individuality can be introduced, or reintroduced, in a rich way into decision-making. TSS for STP, therefore, in providing a theoretical psychological framework for the kind of work that would be necessary to deconstruct homogenous discounting of money values based on consumer sovereignty, rational choice and utility maximisation, could represent a major contribution along the lines that economists conclude should be undertaken (Frederick *et al*, 2002:394). If the rule of unitary

discount rates were to fall, there would be very significant implications for a wide range of economic activities, including investment choices by individuals and governments.

TSS also involves front-paging the significance of STP: not simply regarding the way individuals compare present and future benefits and make choices as a purely academic consideration, but on the contrary, integrating the study of time preference into radical politics and the militant, or engaged, life. Scholars have already recognised how significant ‘impulsivity’ is for many decisions (Loewenstein, 2010) – what TSS demands is to connect this recognition to the wider political domain.

Under capitalism, at an immediate practical level, there are problems of how to combine STP for the purpose of producing a series of collective discount rates to be used by society, both business and government. Second, given that TSS for STP is therefore of necessity a militant activity, there is a need to resolve the political implications of higher discount rates for the disadvantaged sectors of society. This is another empty area of research where public policy has been ad hoc and confused (e.g. in the introduction of compulsory savings) and that TSS would like to see better analysed and gaps filled.

A start would be for public authorities at least to appreciate, and act on, the realisation that STP is subjective. But TSS implies that STP, no more than capitalism itself, is neither innate, nor unchangeable. The research agenda proposed by Frederick *et al* (2002), disaggregating the components of STP and determining their cause, when combined with the Marxist understanding of individuality that TSS implies, is a transformatory research agenda. So it turns out that the simple statement that ‘the ‘Man’ of today is not the end of history’ ‘<<*L’homme*>> *d’aujourd’hui n’est pas la fin de l’histoire*’ (Sève, 2008:118) may have significant implications for STP, just as we shall see it does for theories of international relations.

Chapter Five – TSS and constructivist IR theory: removing the Fear, filling the Void

Introduction: Filling the Void

The task of this chapter is threefold. First, briefly to outline the main theories of IR and to emphasise the distinctiveness of constructivist IR theory. Second, to examine what has been described as ‘political psychology’ and record how it has intervened in IR theory to date. And third, to test the specific consequences hypothesis by showing what the implications of TSS would be for IR theory and research. The core of this chapter is the assertion that traditional psychology, of the type described above, does not ‘sit’ well with IR theory. This produces *the fear* – that discussing individuals *at all* would deprive the researcher of adequate theory, as well as some amorphous sense of academic credibility. It is as if IR theory – along with much else in social science - were permeated with the ghost of Althusser. All talk of individuals is therefore to be eschewed, even if this has the consequence of reducing the researcher’s capacity to explain why anything actually happens, or what may be its consequences. The consequence of the fear is the quite remarkable and almost complete absence of individual personalities in IR scholarship, hence creating *the void*.

IR theory – essentially, explanations of how the world works has for many years has been divided into what have been variously described as ‘schools’, ‘paradigms’, ‘approaches’, or ‘theories’ (Carlsnaes *et al*, 2013). So for example there has been realism (Morgenthau, 1946), and neo-realism (Waltz, 1979). According to their critics, non-constructivist theories in political science typically assume a materially unambiguous world (except for informational asymmetries) populated by agents with clear interests whose realisation rests on available resources, barriers to collective action, and further information restrictions (Abdelal *et al*, 2010:11). Realist or materialist theorists would of course argue that this caricatures their

arguments, but certainly, with the alleged failures of realist theory to predict the radical changes in IR of the late 20th Century, ‘Constructivism thus emerged in the more fluid disciplinary context of the immediate post-Cold War period’ (Phillips, 2007:62).

What was this new theory? The central insight of constructivism is that collectively held ideas shape the social, economic and political world in which we live (Abdelal *et al*, 2010a, 2). It has been suggested that ‘Human dependence on meaning and interpretation is the foundation of most explicitly constructivist scholarship...the opening for socially constructed variation in action lies not in the unpredictability or complexity of the material world but in its inert, almost meaningless relationship to human existence and choice’ (Abdelal *et al*, 2010:8-9; Onuf, 1989; Wendt, 1999). So, therefore, as Epstein (2010) notes that for constructivism, first, as the world we live in is ‘of our making’ (Onuf, 1989), relations between states being equally so (Wendt, 1999), ‘the deep imbrications amongst social facts are precisely what distinguishes the social world from the natural world [and are] emphasised as part of the explanation itself rather than eschewed in the search for discrete causal factors and a sequence of independent and dependent variables’ (Wendt, 1999: 83–89; Epstein, 2010:3). And second, constructivist scholars must consider ‘the sets of meanings they bring to these interactions; that is, the ideas they hold (Blyth, 2002), the cultures to which they belong (Katzenstein, 1996; Weldes *et al*, 1999) and the patterns of rules and norms regulating these exchanges (Kratochwil, 1989; Onuf, 1989; Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). ‘Meaning is thus central to social agency’ (Epstein, 2010:3). Constructivists therefore see such phenomena as ‘irrational exuberance’ and ‘irrational pessimism’ as both social responses to economic conditions (Abdelal *et al*, 2010a:227).

Notwithstanding their differences in emphasis, most constructivists emphasise the logic of obligatory action, where social identities influence decision-making whilst also themselves being created by the interaction of actors within IR (Goldgeier & Tetlock, 2001:82).

Constructivists ‘assume to varying degrees that the world is held together – whatever that means - by social ideas and inter-subjective understandings which constitute and are constituted by social identities’ (Steele, 2007:25). They ‘emphasise the importance of identities, ideas, norms and meanings, and how they are socially constructed, reproduced, and changed through repeated interactions’ (Levy, 2013:323n). Hence ‘Modernist constructivist research focuses on the role of norms and identity in the constitution of interests and cause of behavior in world politics’ (Shannon, 2012:13) building on the original constructivist insight that actors construct an identity as part of a given social order, itself constructed by the interaction of the actors in the system (Wendt, 1999). For constructivists, then, the role of psychologists is to ‘make progress in our understanding of how identities and beliefs influence both individual preferences and societal practices’ (Abdelal *et al*, 2010:2). Maybe though, ‘Every individual in society has many identities. Each identity has associated with it a collection of discursive practices, including a language with a vocabulary, written or verbal, and characteristic physical behaviors, such as gestures, dress, customs and habits’ (Hopf, 2002:1). However, whatever their relationship with interests, for constructivists all identities are socially constructed, and they ‘share the stage with a whole host of other ideational factors that emanate from the human capacity and will of which Weber wrote’ (Ruggie, 1998:856). Social facts (Gilbert, 1989) include such ‘things’ as money, property rights, sovereignty, marriage, football and Valentine’s Day. They and the norms supporting them can be changed: an interesting list of examples assembled from the literature included the demise of duelling and slave trading, the rise of human rights norms, especially the sensitivity to racism, environmentalism, and the non-use of weapons of mass destruction and other constraints on the conduct of war (Goldgeier & Tetlock, 2001:83). These examples, the same authors suggest, support the contention with which ‘Most psychologists would probably agree that most political actors (psychopaths excluded) will gradually internalise the norms of fair play implicit

in international institutions' (Tetlock & Goldgeier, 2000:93) even if they are less optimistic than most constructivists (Tetlock & Goldgeier, 2000:94). So protagonists argue in as value-neutral terms as they can muster that 'In short, constructivism is about human consciousness and its role in international life' (Ruggie, 1998:856).

Not all constructivist theory is crafted alike, however. Adler, for example, divided the constructivist literature into modernist, linguistic, radical and critical. 'Modernist (or neoclassical or conventional) constructivism accepts the precepts of positivist inquiry and has 'a cognitive interest in understanding' and uncovering 'causal social mechanisms and constitutive social relations' (Adler, 2001:97; Reus-Smit, 2001). At the other end of the spectrum critical theory, for Adler, combines an emancipatory mission based on power-linguistic structures with a pragmatic approach. Subjective, or critical, constructivists maintain that 'what is 'truly believed' by the subject is less important than what is made possible, or impossible, by the position of oneself in a particular discourse' (Abdelal *et al*, 2010:13), although 'Critical theory's assumption that all social relations are instances of hierarchy, subordination, or domination ironically appears similar to the expectations of realists and neorealists about world politics' (Hopf, 1998:185). Constructivists who emphasise Foucault and Bourdieu do not see norms as simply regulative or constitutive features of the world. 'Rather, norms are seen as expressions of power in the world insofar as adherence to a norm excludes particular actions by defining what it is possible and impossible to say and thus do in a given context' (Abdelal *et al*, 2010: 13). Thus 'social constructivists view culture and social convention as producing emotion, whereas psychological constructivists view primitive psychological processes with a biological basis as central to emotion' (Mercer, 2014:357-8). Not only do constructivists see the world as involving fixing meanings, and creating, sustaining and destroying norms, but, of more direct significance as an entrance point for TSS, they are also cognitive in approach, so that constructivist scholars recently noted that: 'Many

experimental psychologists have long argued that human beings depend on heuristics and shortcuts to organise action and choice' (Kahneman, Slovik & Tversky 1982; Swidler, 1986). Their core observation is not that agents search for significance and purpose, but that human beings filter information from the environment via heuristics and bases and consider it in highly selective ways that vary across social settings (Abdelal *et al*, 2010:10).

It could be argued that the debate between constructivists and realists mirrors, at least partially, that between Althusser and Garaudy within the French Communist Party (Geerlandt, 1978). So whilst on the one hand the accusation is made that critical realism is 'characterised by a positivist approach, rooted in the realist view of science implicit in Marxism' (Bobulescu, 2011), on the other critics have pointed the finger of reductionism, suggesting that 'Constructivism tends towards reductionism in favour of values' (Dunn, 2009:52). Thus 'it often appears that states are simply moulded and remoulded by norms, which are the autonomous, independent variables' (Dunn, 2009:54) so that 'Constructivism is perfectly suited to the task of testing and fundamentally revising the democratic peace' (Hopf, 1998:192). Little surprise then that as this proved to be illusory, and these norms failed to achieve universal status, they left constructivist scholars searching for alternative explanations of IR and showed constructivism for what TSS would always have indicated it was, an historical product of capitalism at a particular stage of development. Given this, it is perhaps not surprising to find that individuals do not surface in constructivist IR scholarship.

Of interest at this point is the criticism made of constructivism that it commits a 'fallacy of composition', that is, the assumption that what applies to the individual self must apply to states as well (Epstein, 2010:4). This criticism has been developed further, to suggest that 'constructivists seek to ground IR constructivism anew onto stable, centred foundations, which are always ultimately pinned onto unconstructed, given universals. Human nature in particular functions as the recurring universal on the horizon of constructivist theorizing' (Epstein,

2013:502). If this criticism is along the right lines, then the choice of self is vital for IR theory. Which self is it to be? For Epstein, there is merit in criticising Wendt's 'naïve biologism' (Epstein, 2010:6) and in advocating a more contemporary, nuanced notion of the physical body, as the existence of alternative ontologies of identity have been largely ignored by constructivism (Epstein, 2010:8). But for Epstein the most appealing alternative is that of Lacan (1966). Not only Marxists have identified, and criticised, the concept of 'self' that IR theory has imported from psychology. But the alternative posed is of significance: to replace this admittedly ill-defined idea with a Lacanian 'concept of the 'speaking subject' (Lacan, 1966; Epstein, 2010:2) is to refocus from the self to the subject and insist that language, rather than any other social fact, is the defining feature of social life, which creates the possibility for an emphasis on discourse as a way of understanding identity in IR (Epstein, 2010:9).

Unfortunately for this speculation, whether or not constructivist theories of the state could be reformulated with a Marxist theory of the personality, Sève would not see the choice of Lacan as accidental. He would surely want this approach blocked off at its source: the Marxist theory of the individual is concrete and specific, and not translatable back to states, or for that matter classes. Moreover, it should be compatible with a Marxist theory of IR. But is it? Or did Marxism's problem with personality surface again?

Marxism and IR theory

The success of constructivism was in part due, it has been suggested, to 'the dearth of other perspectives offering fruitful lines of critique. In particular, the Marxist tradition was weak, both numerically and in the predominance of relatively strong structuralist interpretations' (Dunn, 2009:49). This had begun to change even at the time of writing: as noted in the most recent collection of articles devoted to 'Marxist IR theory', the collapse of

Communism, superficially paradoxically, produced a resurgence of popular interest in Marx and Marxism, which in turn was followed by greater attention by IR theorists to Marxist explanations of international relations (Anievas, 2009a:1). There are many Marxist approaches to world politics, and it is perhaps as equally false to hold out a distinctive ‘Marxist’ theory of IR as for psychology. But what holds Marxist theorists together, it has been suggested, is ‘a radically ‘historicist’ and social-relational ontology of world politics – one which situates (though in no way necessarily reduces) international relation within the context of capitalist social relations’ (Anievas, 2009a:2). For Marxists, there can be no IR theory without an understanding of capitalist social relations. Marxists therefore oppose any ‘methodological assumption positing bifurcated social realities of opposing spheres as exemplified by Waltzian realism’s artifice of the domestic and international or Wendtian constructivism’s binary conception of the ‘material’ and ‘ideational’” (Anievas, 2009a:2), although Callinicos has suggested that Marxists and realists will find themselves on the same side against Wendt, at least against ‘idealist conceptions of the international’ (Callinicos, 2009a:26f).

Class, then, in a constructivist view of the world, is that a ‘social fact’? It would appear so: in his constructivist analysis of the Soviet Union in 1955, Hopf mentions class as a constituent element of identity, because of Marxism-Leninism ‘It is not surprising to find class analysis in Moscow in 1955; the Soviet Union was a Marxist-Leninist state’ (Hopf, 2002). But in his subsequent analysis of Russia in 1999, class gets no mention at all. It is as if class is a sort of switch that different ‘types of state’ can turn on or off, because class only figures as part of a discourse. If we close our eyes tightly enough, Hopf seems to be suggesting, class will go away completely. Marxists would of course beg to disagree.

On the other hand, Marxist IR theorists – in common with Marxist theorists in other fields – are especially sensitive to charges of economic reductionism. They seek to defend against the accusation that Marxist IR theory has been characterised by an ‘evacuation of

agency..that characterised the Marxian appraisal of the subject as produced exclusively by material/social structures’ (Epstein, 2010:17), thereby recognising ‘the need to break with economic reductionism/economism when formulating an adequate theory of world politics’ (Hobson, 2009:110) and frequently developing entirely different ontologies, such as World Systems theories, in the effort, which it is not possible to mix and match (Hobson, 2009:111). What Marxists find relatively uncontroversial, however, is that to situate IR within the context of capitalist social relations is also to make the demand for a holistic methodology in understanding and explaining world politics. ‘This strong conception of ‘totality’ sets Marxist thought apart from much conventional IR theory’ (Anievas, 2009a:2).

IR theory and psychology

According to a leading scholar in the academic discipline of political psychology, these ‘Longstanding but gradually receding conceptions of the International Relations (IR) field as a series of paradigmatic clashes among realist, liberal, Marxist, and constructivist approaches, or even between rationalism and constructivism, leave little if any room for the beliefs, personalities, emotions, perceptions, and decision-making processes of individual political leaders’ (Levy, 2013:301). This is a view reflected by sociologists critical of the ‘asocial’ ontology of IR theory: which ‘continues to ignore [the fact that] that social relations, including international relations, are realised and produced by people such as UN officials, management consultants, Libyan refugees and Ugandan child soldiers’ (Adler-Nissen, 2013a:8). Theories ranging from realism to constructivism, and not excluding views held by Marxists, have eschewed individuality, and with that, avoided engagement with psychology, the science of its study. Quite noticeably therefore, IR theory has not engaged with the debate over ‘Great Men’ in history discussed below, or even much discuss individuals at all. Certainly, individuals make

only rare appearances in IR theory or research, and with similar lack of psychological analysis, in a work devoted to Marxist IR (Anievas, 2014) as they do in constructivist or indeed realist or neo-realist analysis. There are more individual scholars mentioned in these works than individual actors in IR, whilst psychology is used to anthropomorphise the behaviour of states, rather than examining the role of individuals within them, or to defend and promote particular theories of IR. The problem evidently is not the lack of psychology in constructivist IR theory, but within IR theory *in general*. As Levy, one of the leading scholars in the field, himself notes, ‘Political psychology occupies an uncertain place in the study of international relations’ (Levy, 2013:301). After all these decades, this is surely a noteworthy contention.

This is not to suggest, however, that all IR theory is likely to be equally susceptible to the introduction of concepts or methodologies derived from psychology. Realism in particular, with its emphasis on national states as simple homogenous actors, is never likely to be a fertile field of intrusion. Indeed, the founder-father of the school was quite explicit: ‘one can consider all decision-makers to be alike’ (Morgenthau, 1948:6).

Constructivist theory, on the other hand, might be expected to be a better opportunity for psychology to make an intervention. According to its protagonists, constructivist IR theory does not have – or need - an explicit theory of the individual personality, no more than - at least overtly - it has a political position: ‘Constructivism is not anchored within a distinctive political philosophy’ (Phillips, 2007:67): but all the evidence points to an implicit conception of the individual as precisely the kind of immutable singularity criticised by Sève.

Evidence of Agency

Constructivist approaches, which should in principle be open to the inclusion of psychological variables, have until recently given little attention to individual agency (Shannon

& Kowert, 2012), reviewing which Abe concurs (Abe, 2012:683). Other scholars have equally noted that 'Constructivism's neglect of individual psychology is reflected in standard typologies of systemic, norm-centric, rule-based and societal forms of constructivism' (Hopf, 2002). Alexander Wendt's (1999) claim that international politics is socially constructed, was theoretically transformative because it highlighted the cultural basis of realist power politics and therefore the possibilities for sustained and deep cooperation through the formation of collective identity' (Rathbun, 2009:346). In Rathbun's view, sociology was the discipline from which constructivism successfully borrowed, but that although the importation of social psychology had not yielded similar success, it would be most useful 'if it can tell us something new about trust' (Rathbun, 2009:346). It has been further suggested that the pervasive study of ideas, identity and beliefs within constructionist IR theory occurs at 'such a general level that it ignores, or is poorly grounded, in the workings of the human mind' (Rosati, 2000:54). The emphasis on ideas and norms within constructivism has the – not necessarily deliberate, but clear - effect of 'blocking' individuals from IR, replacing them with higher 'levels' of concern, most notably the nation state. Wendt (1999), one of the most influential constructivists in international relations, explicitly adopted a state-as-unitary-actor framework that neglected domestic and individual-level influences (Levy, 2013:323f), taking a – rather unremarkable - position of reciprocity, whereby structures and agents become mutually constituting: social structures affect the individuals within them, and institutions, values and practices transcend any individual (Dunn, 2009:52). Yet despite this recognition of the process, where individuals *are* mentioned, the origin or development of their views never is.

This drastic neglect requires an explanation. There may be many reasons, but it may be the case, it is surely worth arguing, that *one* reason is the very absence of a plausible theory of the personality which rests easily with constructivist (or other) IR theory. Examples abound. For example, even in a discussion of the way in which constructivist IR theory has utilised the

analogy between the human body and states in IR, and the Lacanian concept of identity, and even where the author stresses the importance of ‘speaking actors’ (Epstein, 2010:18), the fear prevails, there are no individuals and no one speaks. Likewise, in texts containing Marxist approaches to IR theory themselves, *none* contains either a chapter on political psychology, which could serve as an entrée to the role of individuals and the extent of their influence over events or even some explanation as to underlying theories of the personality. This is scarcely surprising when we are told that for Marxist IR theory ‘the key agents and structures are not simply the nation-state units and international systems of (neo-) realist and (neo-) liberal analysis, but also classes, ideological movements, economic market forces, ideas, identities and norms operating at the international and often connected transnational and global levels’ (Anievas, 2009a:3). In fact, there is nothing here about people at all: as with constructivist texts, the authors appear to be dominated by an Althusserian anti-humanism, where terms such as class and institutions such as the IMF may be mentioned, but not a single individual other than the authors themselves (e.g. Chigora & Ziso, 2010) and no attention to FHI either. Unfortunately, it would seem that Marxist IR theorists are as equally gripped by *the fear* as their constructivist colleagues and therefore equally work in the void.

It is worth noting that Marx himself felt no such fear, nor perceived any such void. It is striking that, even in *Das Kapital* itself there is reference to a specific individual, Mary Ann Walkley, worked to death (as adapted by Brecht in the Threepenny Opera) (Marx, 1867); and in the 18th Brumaire he refers to individual political actors throughout, in what appears to be a strikingly conventional historical manner.

This discrepancy, and the potential problems of the void, would imply, at least, that psychology in general and a theory of the personality in particular has *something* to offer constructivism. But then, if that be so, how useful can TSS actually be in understanding IR and contributing to debate within IR theory?

The Great Men of History

From where derives *the fear*? Sartre's warning, that if Marxism does not fill the gap where people should be, others will take up the challenge in its place, is amply reflected in the Great Men of History debate. Individuals may be absent in IR theory, but they have not disappeared from the world. Hence for example those who have espoused the 'Whig view of history' exemplified by Carlyle (1841) and the heroic school of thought exemplified by Woods or Emerson, as well as by German scholars such as Lamprecht (1905), drawing their inspiration from Nietzsche. They have avoided the type of theory evinced within IR altogether, subscribing instead to the view that history is shaped primarily by heroic individuals through their wisdom, power, charisma and skill (Carlyle, 1841; Hook, 1943). This body of theory and research, has been largely confined to historians, where the question of individual personality is raised as integral to the argument (e.g. Grinin, 2010), since 'the question *always* arises as to the role of historical personalities' (Grinin, 2010:96). [my emphasis].

In this approach, which has led some scholars (Hermann *et al*, 2001) to say 'who leads matters', and another scholar to argue that 'The role of individuals and incidents in historical events is the first and immediate element; and those who deny this role must prove that they are right' – (Aron, 1993:181).

The tension between the Great Men hypothesis and IR theory has already been noticed: 'At the same time, however, explanations of many consequential historical events give considerable causal weight to the role of individual political leaders' (Levy, 2013:301), as 'In reality, countries do not act; people act. States (and organisations) are made up of individuals who act on their behalf' (Rosati, 2000:47). Hence the existence of 'a tension between the goals of generating 'parsimonious and generalisable theoretical explanations of international

behaviour and of providing nuanced and descriptively accurate explanations of individual historical episodes' (Levy, 2013:301). In the search for parsimony, the neglect of individuals has been collateral damage.

Enter political psychology

Where both contemporary Marxism and IR theory fear to tread, the emerging discipline of political psychology has emerged. The discipline of political psychology aims squarely at the hole where individuals ought to be in IR, as well as in other political theory. 'Political psychology, at the most general level, is an application of what is known about human psychology to the study of politics' (Huddy *et al*, 2013a:1). Moreover, it has done so with a political agenda. Lavine makes the point that just as Plato and Aristotle developed political theories that took account of citizens' passions and intellectual capabilities, so too Hobbes thought that 'man' in a state of nature must be naturally self-interested (Lavine, 2010:xix). Political psychology therefore 'addresses political elites' (Huddy *et al*, 2013a:1), and 'deals with the dynamics of mass political behavior' (Huddy *et al*, 2013a:3) within 'a specific political system (Huddy *et al*, 2013a:3), which usually means a bourgeois democracy. This is made explicit in some cases (e.g. Borgida *et al*, 2009). Indeed, the entire thrust of both volumes concerns 'democratic' societies and 'the positive forces of cooperation, tolerance and respect on which modern democratic societies pivot' (Huddy *et al*, 2013a:16). There is plenty of idealist psychology available to assist: the absence of a Marxist theory of the individual is equally apparent in contemporary political psychology with its strong emphasis on game theory.

The choice of theory is itself important, as 'Some theories are more appropriate than others for analysing certain political phenomena' (Huddy *et al*, 2013a:5). But what are these

theories said to be? Rational choice, biopolitics, personality and psychodynamics, cognitive and affective psychology, what is described as ‘intergroup relations’ (Huddy *et al*, 2013a:14). It is an extraordinary fact that in these theories, yet again, there are no people. No case studies of individuals, beyond Lasswell’s Freudian caricatures (Lasswell, 1930). The richness of individual development is never presented. This would involve biography; and the intersection between social psychology (and constructivist IR) and biography is barren. Sartre’s empty space was perhaps much wider than he believed.

Where individuals surface is in psychobiography. Here, Post notes that there are many different psychoanalytic theories, but ‘all derive from Freudian psychoanalysis’ (Post, 2013:464). These may be an exaggeration but are certainly born witness to by the observation from a leading biographer of Stalin that ‘A background characterised by adverse emotional circumstances in early life may form a rock of inner security by forming an idealised self-image’ (Tucker, 1988:63), the (unsupported) claim that Nixon launched a bombing campaign against Cambodia because of his deranged personality (Volkan, 1999, 2014:86) or the same author’s conclusion that Milosević ‘exhibited characteristics of a narcissistic personality organisation mixed with schizoid characteristics’ (Volkan, 2014:96).

The originators of political psychology applied psychoanalytic theory to a broad range of political questions, seeing politics as a displacement activity for individual motives and emotions and presenting bizarre and extreme Freudian ‘biographies’ where parents and childhood loom large but work is entirely absent (Lasswell, 1930). Subsequent work in political psychology was also broadly rooted in neo-Freudian tradition where ‘the political preferences of ordinary citizens and the actions of political elites are seen as manifestations of deep-seated (and often unconscious) psychological conflict’ (Lavine, 2010:xx) and ‘an orientation towards isolationism in foreign policy flows from low self-esteem’ (Sniderman and Citrin, 1981). Adorno *et al* (1950) for example saw future authoritarians as repressed children.

Perhaps little wonder that despite all the efforts of these psychologists, conflict worldwide continues unabated, exactly as Sève would expect, as the primary causes of injustice, inequality and conflict, driven by capitalism, are far more dominant in terms of generating activity than any kind of ‘psychological DNA in the child’ (Volkan, 2014:22).

As if this were not enough to engender Marxist scepticism about contemporary political psychology, Sève’s warning against eugenics in politics have been noted above (Sève, 1978:3) and it should not be thought that this heavily ideological school of thought died with the defeat of Fascism and the end of the Second World War. On the contrary, ‘the growing field of social neuroscience’ and ‘the increased use of functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) technology [which has] revolutionised the field of psychology’ (McDermott, 2012:50) and the suggestion from Zeki that even concepts of justice will eventually be explained (or reduced) to neurobiology (Bennett & Hacker, 2003:398-99) should be compared to the fact that in neither the index to the *Handbook of Political Psychology* (Huddy *et al*, 2013), nor in that of *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Political Economy* (Nesbitt-Larking *et al*, 2014) *is there a single reference to class*. Political psychology as it is developing evidently ‘finds no need of that hypothesis’, even in a modified contemporary form such as that of Standing (2011).

Quite to the contrary, aided and abetted by the spread of biological approaches throughout the social sciences (Wilson, 1975; Wright, 1996; Pinker, 2002) in what is now described as ‘evolutionary psychology’ (Gangestad & Tybur, 2016), political psychologists have begun to look to behavioural genetics, neuroscience and evolutionary psychology to explain the distal roots of political preference and behaviour. For example, several studies have now demonstrated a strong genetic influence on political attitudes, voter turnout, voting behaviour and partisan attachments (Lavine, 2010). The first theory and research area cited in a leading international collection of articles on the subject is ‘biopsychology’. Even more telling, there is an article on the ‘Genetic Foundations of Political Behavior’ (Funk, 2013).

Therein it is announced that ‘We are entering a new era for political behavior research – one in which we begin to fully integrate biological, behavioural, and environmental factors into our theoretical models and understanding of political behavior’ (Funk, 2013:237) and that ‘While earlier models of political behavior focused mostly on the social environment, newer research has led to a renewed interest in the role of individual characteristics such as personality..and a new focus on the role of genetic influences’ (Funk, 2013:237 [my emphasis]).

Political psychology, or at least those authors who engage with this kind of thinking, has not left IR theory alone. In particular, evolutionary psychology has made significant inroads into contemporary analysis of international conflict, in particular (Rosen, 2004; Johnson, 2004; Sidanius, 2004; Thayer, 2004; Sidanius & Kurzban, 2013; Payne, 2015). For example, whereas Thayer (2004) believed that a Darwinian view of international relations supported rational choice theory by explaining the nature of rational egoism as ultimately caused by natural selection in the evolutionary competition of human beings for scarce resources, Rosen (2005) argued that a biological understanding of human nature implied that rational choice theory is only partly true, as it ignored the emotional dispositions of fear and honour as factors shaping individual decisions in IR. All of this activity was explicitly described by Sève as an ‘absurd task’ (Sève, 1978:38) but there is no evidence of its decline, quite the opposite.

Psychology and constructivism

Political psychology in general has already been linked with constructivism, at least by one group of scholars, as they noted it was ‘striking how rarely they speak directly to one another’ (Shannon & Kowert, 2012:v). Yet although ‘Divided by terminology and a certain mutual wariness, constructivists and political psychologists nevertheless share an interest in many of the same research questions’ (Shannon & Kowert, 2012:v). Both have a ‘shared

premise about international relations as importantly determined by how decision makers perceived and constructed reality' (Shannon, 2012:1). Hence the need for a 'long-overdue synthesis' (Shannon & Kowert, 2012:v). According to Shannon, although in theory constructivism claims to transcend either agent or structure to provide the 'middle ground' for each level's influence on the other, in his view it fails, neglecting the role of individuality, and hence the need for political psychology to bring back agency into the agency-structure construction (Shannon, 2012:4). The *grounds* for the synthesis are conceived is of great interest, however, 'These common threads linking psychology and constructivism – the focus on ideational factors and process, the importance of identity, and the importance of understanding how agents view the world rather than assuming or imputing the analyst's presumptions – provide grounds for an ideational alliance against prevailing rationalist/materialist approaches' (Shannon, 2012:7). It is not a materialist psychology that will fit here, but something else, a psychology that is itself 'ideational', i.e. a bourgeois psychology. So it proves: for Shannon, from the multiple threads of different psychological theories, three general categories of research organise this discussion: (1) personality studies, where studies at the individual level focus on factors varying across individuals. These include belief system, personality, emotional makeup, political socialisation, learning from history, information processing, leadership style, attitude toward risk, time horizons, gender, *et al* (2) cognitive psychology and (3) social psychology (Shannon, 2012).

Social psychology, which is described by Shannon as 'how individuals' thoughts, feelings and behaviors are influenced by other people or social situations' (Shannon, 2012:11), may be thought to be the most promising source of useful input: 'Social psychologists have long recognised that individuals can be influenced in their decisions and behavior by factors outside their consciousness'. (McDermott & Lopez, 2012:198). This is a point echoed in political psychology, with the recognition that individuals 'do not act within a vacuum. Their

behaviour varies with, and responds to, differences in political institutions, political cultures, leadership styles, and social norms' (Huddy *et al*, 2013a:3), so that 'contemporary political psychology is defined by a bidirectional influence: just as the psyche influences political orientation, the polity leaves its mark on who we are (Ward, 2002; see also McDermott, 2004)' (Lavine, 2010:xx). However, discussions of 'personality traits' (Funk, 2013:248) are situated within the democratic electoral politics that pervades the political psychology literature, at least at the moment. The discipline's approach seems to have been set down in Sears *et al* (2003) and developed over the subsequent decade in Huddy *et al* (2013): concerns with public opinion and mass political behaviour, IR and the psychological study of political elites, and intragroup relations and political violence. Thus political psychology presents a synthesis of democratic focus and genetic theory. The profound antipathy to any form of revolutionary change, let alone Marxism, is evident. Yet it is precisely this synthesis which scholars have proposed to deploy in aid of IR theory.

There are however problems with contemporary political psychology, of which even a non-Marxist such as Shannon is well aware. He identifies (1) the reductionism of its individualist premises, excellently illustrated by the quote from Lavine above (2) the universal, transcultural claims about human psychology, which he later characterises as 'The presumed universality of the human cognitive and affective machinery' (Shannon, 2012:19-20), and (3) the static nature of their models and findings (Shannon, 2012:18). He identifies that 'the criticism has been made that psychology 'tends to approach puzzles of decision making from a static point of view. A slice of time is analysed for what beliefs and perceptions framed a policy debate, and then how the process led to a decision is traced. But beliefs, values and perceptions are rarely traced for their change or origins, leaving open a large question regarding the origin of preferences and beliefs' (Shannon, 2012:20) – all of which comes very close to part of TSS.

These criticisms, typical of critical social psychologists, are from a Marxist perspective hardly surprising, as social psychology, it will be recalled, excludes class altogether (Aronson *et al*, 2007). In fact, none of Shannon's three areas of potential input include a concept of class or stresses the role of labour in the creation of personality. This has been mirrored by other political psychologists, who claimed that although Marx's 'direct influence on psychology has been relatively slight' (Jost & Sidanius, 2004:3), his idea of ideology has supposedly been woven together with pre-Marxist psychology, for example to analyse 'what psychological characteristics led followers to flock to right-wing political movements' (Jost & Sidanius, 2004:3). But even this was a problematic focus, for several reasons. First, it was so of its time that the evaporation of dictatorial regimes, whether of the left or right, gave it no more space. Second, it provided little nuanced critique of why individuals behaved as they did in postwar societies, especially in the West, for which radicals turned to other theorists such as Habermas (1968 [1972]) and Marcuse (1964). And thirdly, it made political psychology dependent on psychology which owed nothing to, and recognised nothing of, Marxism, instead contributing to a failed attempt to bury Marxism along with the fall of the Berlin Wall. This is unhelpful, to say the least, from any Marxist perspective, but also means that none certainly could not therefore substitute for TSS, which moreover aims to provide a materialist theory of the *individual*. It does seem as if Marxism is *invisible* here.

Whilst these criticisms seem entirely to chime with Sève's criticism of bourgeois political psychology, Shannon, along with many other constructivist scholars implicitly, subscribes at least in part to the immutable conception of individuality: according to him, despite criticisms from cultural studies, 'some universal claims in political psychology still apply' (Shannon, 2012:20). So although he mentions a 'fourth critique' regarding the positivist premises of psychology made by critical psychology, it is not explored, and is only referred to

through critiques such as Bakhurst and Shanker (2001) and Nightingale & Cromby (1999) rather than directly, let alone Marxism in particular, such as the work of Sève.

This should be recognised when observing Shannon's view that constructivism may *strengthen* political psychology, whereas TSS, aimed at correcting precisely these problems, would seem to have anticipated this, as it treats the problem at its source, *an inadequate and flawed conception of what it is to be a human being*.

A typology of relevance

It has been suggested that it is possible to select 'which literature in psychology should be of greatest interest to different kinds of international relations scholars' (Goldgeier & Tetlock, 2001:67). For constructivism, a number of psychological lines of research are suggested. First, the concept of tradeoffs, ranging from the routine tradeoff which is 'the type of reasoning one deploys whenever one goes shopping' (Goldgeier & Tetlock, 2001:84) as opposed to taboo and sacred tradeoffs which involve adherence to norms that lie beyond mere mercantile comparison, but which defy explanation and appear to float beyond their historical, let alone economic, origin, and whose ability to control what individuals do is never explained. Second, the potential role of prospect theory, which appears to stand in for historical materialism in seeking to explain how 'competing social conceptions of fairness ultimately rest on competing perceptual encodings of the appropriate endowment reference point' (Goldgeier & Tetlock, 2001:85) and which, the authors claim, are compatible with work on bargaining games that demonstrate that 'emotions, coupled with strong, deeply internalised intuitions about fairness, can shape strategic interaction' (Goldgeier & Tetlock, 2001:85), for example in trade negotiations. The third and final suggestion as to how psychology may influence constructivist IR theory is in helping to specify the conditions under which different groups

view different norms as applicable, a problem identified for constructivism (Checkel, 1998), either through the principles of fuzzy logic or taxonomies of norms that can regulate relationships among individuals or groups. However much as all these insights may demonstrate inconsistency with neo-classical economics, the underlying psychology remains however entirely consistent with capitalism, posing no threat to any existing order, and nor is there any perceived need for a Marxist theory of personality.

Marxist IR theory and psychology

Next then to identify a series of interfaces between psychology and IR, where psychology may play a role for Marxists. Levy's inclusion of Marxism in his accusation against IR theory (Levy, 2013) is understandable: we know that Marxists themselves have been sceptical of psychology and that Marxism has not had a developed psychology to deploy consistently. However from everything Marx, Sève and others have written, it ought to be quite clear that a properly Marxist evaluation of IR should also place individuals into the decision-making process. Marxist IR theorists are not unaware of this: for example in a chapter on Marxist IR there was recognition of an underlying view of psychology, where it was suggested that that 'If contemporary humans appear to be self-interested individuals, then, it is a result not of our essential nature but of the particular ways we have produced our social lives and ourselves' (Rupert, 2010:159).

What did Marxists historically say about individuals in history? Marxists have addressed the problems identified by Plekhanov for over a century. It was of particular interest, in relation to TSS, that Sève himself pointed specifically to Plekhanov's work, with evident approval, as having provided a satisfactory theoretical synthesis of individuals and society in history (Sève, 2015a:6). Sève especially recommended this formulation: 'It follows, then, that

by virtue of particular traits of their character, individuals can influence the fate of society. Sometimes this influence is very considerable; but the possibility of exercising this influence, and its extent, are determined by the form of organisation of society, by the relation of forces within it. The character of an individual is a “factor” in social development only where, when, and to the extent that social relations permit it to be such’ (Plekhanov, 1898 [no pagination]).

But this formulation, and the recognition from a leading socialist that individual historical figures are both the products of, and creators of, the environment in which they lived (Rappoport, 1899:47) is unfortunately unhelpfully vague. Nor were these the only 19thC Marxist formulation of the relationship. Engels’ view, that the historical epoch generated the individual, that if Napoleon had not lived history would have created another to fill his place (Engels, 1890, [no pagination]), led to ‘a tendency to understate the role of an individual’ (Grinin, 2010:101), and to the dominance of ‘providentialism’ and determinism in understanding individuals in history. The suggestion has been made that the nature of the historical epoch itself affects the seriousness with which the problem of individuality in history and IR is considered, hence for example attention given to it in the earlier part of the 20th Century. This tendency could also at least in part be explained by a reaction by Marxists against the then emerging discipline of psychoanalysis as well as in response to political events. This is where TSS, perhaps as subsequently elaborated and researched, could make a difference: if Marxism no longer has a void where the theory of personality should be, there should be less reason for Marxists to argue that individuals (principally as agents of class interests) do not matter, and fewer arguments that moreover do not convince, and which only have the quite counter-productive effect of raising suspicions about the credibility of Marxism in other respects,

The role of the individual in history *has* been theorised by other Marxists, even without a clear psychology of individuality to assist them. According to them, an individual can

accelerate or slow down the way historical laws play out. Mikhailovsky (1882) attempted to produce theories of crowd manipulation, taking the view that regardless of personal qualities, particular individuals can 'seize the moment' through a bond between a particular psychology and a mass reaction which multiplies the force of the individual will. Kautsky (1896 [1931]) echoed Engels by noting that on the other hand, individuals cannot stop history, and if one individual had not performed a particular role, another would have done. These views, whilst useful early synthetic accounts, were not based on TSS (and could not have been, as they wrote before even Vygotsky), and are far from any comprehensive Marxist 'solution' of the problem. Sève was however continuing a Marxist tradition in arguing from within Marxism that a scientific theory of individual development would 'help to rescue it [politics, and by extension IR theory] from the persistent cult of the leader, the superstition of the wonderful great man' (Sève, 1978:16), what has been described as an 'optical illusion' (Deutscher, 1963:246).

Although political psychology has not been without its critical exponents, especially in the postwar Federal Republic of Germany (Lohl *et al*, 2012) where psychological arguments were advanced to explain political processes, including for example the student movement, little of this work was even translated into English (Brunner *et al*, 2014:796) and then 'The decline of the social movements in the 1990s also led to a decrease in debates in political psychology' [of a critical kind, in Germany] (Brunner *et al*, 2014:796). Critical psychology seemed unable, or unwilling, to connect either to IR theory, amongst others, or even prevent what has been described as its own 'institutional eradication' (Brunner *et al*, 2014:797). None of this thinking is therefore alien to Marxism well before and around the time that Sève has worked.

More recent scholars have argued that it is 'right from the methodological point of view to include the personality's role as one driving force of historical development' (Grinin, 2010:114) and that 'the only entities to which purposes may properly be assigned are...human

agents' (Callinicos, 2009:91). But 'many of the leading research programs in the international relations field today' (Levy, 2013:301) give 'little or no causal weight to the role of individual political leaders' (Levy, 2013:301). If this be so, then a theory of the personality would be crucial to understanding historical development, just as a theory of historical development is essential to understanding the personality. But without it, theorists of IR have chosen to ignore personalities in favour of broad sweeps of history, happily impaled on one of Plekhanov's horns without appearing to care much about the other. Grinin goes further to identify key aspects to be included in the analysis of whether an individual can be considered as 'outstanding' (Grinin, 2010).

TSS as Trojan horse

As according to Sève individuality is of a quite different form to that stated, or implied, by evolutionary psychologists, part of the significance of TSS is evidently to create and develop a political dialogue, and potential conflict, with the type of psychological explanation prevalent in contemporary political psychology (e.g. Huddy *et al*, 2013). This political conflict is itself not without political significance: not only in the ideational identification of evolutionary psychology with reactionary politics (if 'human nature' is unchanging, the hierarchical system of capitalist democracy is inevitable, wars will forever be with us, etc.) and the ways in which the 'norms' of constructivist theory may correctly be analysed very differently between individuals, but also in terms of the basis for practical political activity. Constructivists have 'concomitant faith in the susceptibility to change of even the most seemingly immutable practices and institutions in world politics' (Phillips, 2007:60), and in the case of Habermasian constructivists, they 'infer far greater possibilities for expanding the moral boundaries of political community than may be discerned in realism or all but the most radical streams of

liberalism' (Phillips, 2007:70). Deflating this enthusiasm, or at least grounding it only in revolutionary change, is a potential intervention of great significance for both IR theory and practice and one of the major contributions that TSS can make to IR theory.

Whatever problems it solves, however, TSS implicitly blocks out some avenues of approach within IR, quite consistent with its militancy. For example neo-realists in particular (Mercer, 1996) e.g. that 'It is this ubiquity of the desire for power which...constitutes the ubiquity of evil in human action. Here is the element of corruption and sin which injects even into the best of intentions at least a drop of evil and thus spoils it' (Morgenthau, 1946:194–195; Mercer, 1996) or the conclusion that 'individual and large-scale psychology of human beings, whatever large-group identity they may have, are the same everywhere' (Volkan, 2014:102), all of which TSS entails rejecting. Nor would those psychologists who are 'typically sympathetic to policies of reassurance that stress the need to establish conciliatory atmospherics and the preconditions for each side acquiring a more accurate understanding of the other' (Tetlock & Goldgeier, 2000:91) find much favour if IR theorists were to take Sève seriously, since according to Sève, under capitalism, in short, individuality entails militancy. Moreover, TSS equally involves at the very least substantially ameliorating attempts to fill the void without overcoming the fear, which have often drawn on Bourdieu (e.g. Bigo 2011; Adler-Nissen, 2013), whose criticism of rational choice theory is buttressed by an ontology that however conceived the habitus of an agent as a collection of diverse experiences coming from its life in diverse social universes, as a collection of different practices which are not unified or even necessarily coherently integrated, thereby denying certainty in the prediction of individual behaviour (Bourdieu, 1988). It may be noted that Sève's attitude to Bourdieu is noticeably sympathetic in his later work (Sève, 2008).

Is TSS theoretically consistent with different IR theories? I argue that despite appearances to the contrary, constructivism, is, or at least can be modified (and improved) to

do so. TSS has some effects that it shares with other political psychology in terms of its impact. Whether individuals are considered as largely genetically or socially determined, they are still individuals, and their role within IR is of greater interest once a synthesis between constructivism and *any* sort political psychology is undertaken. So whereas constructivism stresses ‘the importance of ideational factors over material ones’ (Shannon, 2012:7), the implications of TSS as a *materialist* psychology for constructivist IR would be to diminish the scope for *purely* ideational concepts. Individual people whose personalities are determined socially through FHI, as Sève suggests, and whose actions are principally a function of capitalist social relations, can be integrated into IR theory only at the expense of diminishing the autonomy (although not necessarily the operational significance at particular historical junctures) of idealist conceptions of ‘norms’ and ‘rules’. As has been observed, ‘attitudes do not always predict relevant behavior’ (McDermott & Lopez, 2012:198), which raises the important question of what *does*, about which Marxism has a great deal to say. TSS therefore entails a relentless *compensating* focus on the individual without losing a Marxist perspective on economics, or international relations.

Yet if we were to think that TSS and Marxist IR theory, or for that matter any ‘realist’ school of thought, would be a much easier synthesis, then unfortunately we would be greatly disappointed. It is worth recognising that TSS represents a potential threat, as well as an opportunity, to Marxist IR theory as it is currently enacted as well: the problem is directly analogous to the theoretical debates between Althusser and Sève, and Marxist IR theory does seem, at least currently, rather marooned in Althusserian territory, whether consciously or not.

Testing the Consequences Hypothesis

This leads therefore to the question of what difference TSS makes rather than the type of synthesis of different psychological theories proposed by Shannon and Kowert (2012). How

would TSS lead scholars better to analyse the role of individuals in IR? Constructivism can take on board real people. But what happens to it when it does?

Is the result of this proposed synthesis that the problem has already been solved? That TSS can add nothing to a sensible compromise between two different schools of scholarship? Does TSS offer *anything in particular*, moreover, beyond Marxism in general, to constructivism? Does a different concept of the personality make a difference to constructivist IR theory? Here is the core of the matter in question.

Part of the difficulty is that precisely in the absence of psychological studies of IR, or of the integration of personalities into IR theory, it is virtually impossible to point to a change in the way research would be conducted: *there is almost no research to analyse how it would be different.*

But in general TSS seeks to answer the implicit question posed by McDermott and Lopez (2012) with a Marxist science of biography – quite differently however than in the Freudian sense that ‘to fully understand [sic] a leader’s personality and political behavior, it is imperative to understand the manner in which the life course shaped the leader, that is, the psychobiographic influences’ (Post, 2013:485), which is to address the manner in which *formative* life experiences shape the adult personality (Post, 2013:486), an approach specifically rejected by TSS where the continuing effect of external influences, especially labour, in shaping the personality, is stressed (Sève, 1978:384). TSS, then, involves recognising that individuals and the influences on them change over time, so there should be less searching for invariable personality traits and more perception of the individual as different over time. Second, the class position and interests of the individual, and the task that ‘a certain mythology of genius the magic of which must be dispelled so that the demand for democracy can grow sharper’ (Sève, 1978:16) should contribute to the normative significance of IR theory. Third,

IR theory should link to how individuals can and should develop, e.g. in the promulgation of an ethical view on IR itself, on imperialism, colonialism and how individuals are treated.

One clear effect of TSS – not of Sève’s work itself, that is, but of psychologists working in the Marxist tradition who are TSS as a philosophical basis for their work - is to remove psychological explanations of individual actions based on alleged invariable human traits. The most obvious, glaring example of this is the persistent attempt by psychologists who certainly do not TSS to explain war and violence by these kinds of means. If this kind of analysis is removed from serious consideration, space is opened for much more detailed consideration of how individuals, groups, and ultimately entire societies are led into mutual opposition by competition for resources and the international capitalist system.

Constructivism itself as well as Marxist IR theory has undermined the realist conception of states as unitary actors. What has claimed to be political psychology has assisted in this process, for example by identifying very different conceptions of ‘national interest’ between individuals, examining such issues as ‘images, myths, religious beliefs and collective identities’ (Kriesberg, 1994:806). But as Kriesberg observes, these are not all the exclusive preserve of psychology.

How useful though in analysing foreign policy decision-making can a distinction such as that between abstract and concrete activity really be, especially as we now know the strict dichotomy has been waived by Sève himself?

Concerns and problems

I argue that the fear is at least partly responsible for the void. TSS means looking at real individuals and their biographies, not the consideration of individuality in an abstract, idealist way. This standpoint could enable *the fear* to be dissipated. Once personality is understood as

itself socially determined, and questions of class interest and FHI are brought in, however, such discussion becomes more possible in an IR context as the fear subsides. Once the individuals are themselves conceptualised as the ensemble of social relations, as occupying FHI - that 'A historical figure is both a driver and a product of historical development' (Rappoport, 1899:47). The logic of introducing specific historical individuals as explanatory factors in IR becomes psychologically easier for scholars determined to resist conventional 'Great Men of History' theories whilst simultaneously opening the way to a more consistent explanation of social, economic and political events. The very few such attempts in IR theory that have yet been made (and not on the basis of TSS) such as Rosati (1993) may therefore be expected to increase. The goal of developing an understanding of the extent to which particular individuals – not necessarily Great Men, either, but even individuals at 'street level' who may have significant ability to shape policy (Lipsky, 1993) – may also thus be significantly promoted. And thus granted that individuals play a role in IR, academic interest can be expected to be generated in the reciprocal influence of the external environment on individuals, which may in turn require a more generous conception of how to analyse the development of events given different decisions by individuals than at present if it is to provide any useful results. *TSS is therefore as much about the psychology of IR scholars as of their subjects.*

Conclusion

Just as Bourdieu helped question the choices of puzzles and research questions that were accepted as legitimate within International Relations (Bigo & Walker, 2007) so TSS may be expected to do the same. The shift to a Marxist paradigm of personality rather than a bourgeois one through TSS has three main consequences for academic research in IR.

First, if individuals are no longer feared, but welcomed back into IR, not just ‘people’ but real, living individuals, properly understood in the sense that Marx and Sève understand them, then current abstract IR scholarship would be severely challenged. Opportunities for biography to integrate with IR theory would increase. Significant opportunities to reconfigure case studies in IR, introducing the role of individuals not just at senior levels, but also at ‘street-level’ (Lipsky, 1993) and acting together in bureaucracies, workplaces, and in decision-making at all levels of government, the private sector, NGOs and between citizens, would open up much wider, and potentially more useful, IR research that recognised, and analysed, the full role not just of classes, states and other group actors, but also individuals themselves. This kind of research, however, *would be very hard*: which is quite conceivably part of the explanation as to why psychology in general, and TSS in particular, has not been integrated into IR theory, even though it helps understand what makes individuals who and what they are.

Second, then, the psychology that is to be employed is very different from that which permeates the current discipline of political psychology. In place of reactionary concepts such as ‘social neuroscience’, would come the identification of individuals in their class and other social relations. Gone would be unvarying concepts of the individual personality charged with dogmatic and often deeply reactionary concepts of innate characteristics such as aggression (Volkan, 1999), often unhelpful in understanding how individuals evolve in response to their changing environment. In their place would come not only ‘the Marxist belief that wars are not to be understood in terms of aggressive tendencies inherent in the genes of all individuals’ (Robinson 1993:170) but more richly a biographical approach (in Sève’s terms) in which individuals and the social causes of their individuality merited careful study. This, TSS suggests, would improve not only understanding, but forecasting. And in place of claims that as ‘more attention to the interaction between individual and political and social groups is recognised’ (Shannon, 2012:19) and ‘constructivism can help in this project’ (Shannon,

2012:19), TSS would help transform constructivism itself into an analysis more grounded on real people, what makes them how they are – with economic and social relations to the forefront - how they change, and their role in IR.

Third, one of the most important contributions TSS can make to IR is to remove Marxism completely from the list of theories against which psychology is to be set, a false theoretical dichotomy, and instead begin to think of psychology itself as a further contribution of Marxism to the understanding of IR, as with politics and history in general. Viewing Sève, the idea of a separate ‘political psychology’ would seem anathematic. The ‘levels’ question then becomes less divisive and the entire discipline of political psychology would experience far greater integration with the study of IR after the removal of the fear. And if both political psychology and Marxist IR theory alter their trajectories, however, the discipline of Marxist IR could be reinforced, so that it could yet pose a serious challenge to prevailing IR theory. TSS therefore represents a threat *both* to existing political psychology *and* to IR theory: in fact, it threatens a *revolution* in both. That would be the most important contribution of all, were it to happen.

The potential significance of TSS for IR theory across the discipline is therefore considerable. Without the fear, a reformulated Marxist theory of IR would therefore move to fill the void. There has been a ‘constructivist turn’ in IR (Checkel, 1998), and there is now perhaps a ‘psychological turn’ (Goldgeier & Tetlock, 2001; Shannon & Kowert, 2012). The question is, how is that turn to be made? If Bourdieu (Adler-Nissen, 2013) and Foucault (Kiersey & Stokes, 2013) deserve recent books on their influence as sociologists on IR theory, which has modified constructivist scholarship to take more account of violence, hierarchy and power, Sève’s work could equally form the basis for collecting work on the impact of psychology on IR theory and for influencing the ‘psychological turn’ in IR theory. It would be

easier to expect such work to be produced in a socialist society, but unlike the case of STP, there would not be a change in *subject matter*.

The research that TSS would create would not just explain what could be done, as this chapter has done: it would create a potentially rich empirical literature that would allow individuals to speak and to influence events, *inter alia* filling part of the void where the persistent void of agency within constructivism still lies. Such research would demonstrate a close attention to the way in which individuals developed their positions, interacted with each other, modified their positions and spoke and acted differently. The individuals studied would not, however, necessarily always be those at the apex of organisations. Street-level bureaucrats, amongst others, would finally find their voice in IR. Significantly, the theoretical chasm between state and individual would stand a chance of resolution through detailed empirical study. It is remarkable to think that a neglected theoretical breakthrough in psychology could create such a change. It is understandable why it has not happened, and the route forward is scarcely either clear or easy. But the possibility remains there to be grasped, that the study of individual lives within IR theory, as more widely, may cease to be detached from theory and practice, and instead become actually *useful*, as one Soviet biographer suggested it should be (Trukhanovsky, 1974). On the other hand, the capacity of IR, or historical, scholarship to generate that usefulness depends on such detailed biographical research that so long as scholarship remains an individual, rather than a collective, endeavour, it may remain half-fulfilled at best, a chimera at worse.

Chapter Six – Marxism, Sève, and the theory of promising

Introduction: TSS and promising

Can TSS tell us anything about philosophical issues that are relevant to ordinary life? This chapter examines how a particular moral theory advanced by the English philosopher H.A. Prichard can be subjected to TSS, and found wanting, not least because of the underlying theory of the individual that permeates Prichard's work (along with many others) for which TSS provides a demolition charge. Marxism in general is not of great use here: 'Unfortunately, Marxism overlooks the significance of psychological factors in the domain of morality' (Churchich, 1994:31). This chapter is an attempt to contribute to rectifying the deficit. In particular, the concern of this chapter is promising, specifically whether TSS and Marxism in general can add anything to the philosophical debates about what promises are, how they might differ from other aspects of ethics, and to answering such questions as whether – and under what circumstances - individuals, groups or organisations have moral obligations as a result of making them. Why study promising? Simply because 'Few moral judgments are more intuitively obvious and more widely shared than that promises ought to be kept' (Habib, 2014) and that therefore promising is a suitable subject for an examination of the ethical implications of TSS.

Unusually perhaps, in responding from a Marxist perspective to Prichard's view of promising, because promising is usually made by individuals, it is psychology first, Marxism second, and therefore TSS first, and the consequences of Marxism and Marxist ethics in general second. First, then, does TSS enable something to be said about this particular aspect of morality irrespective of the wider debate about Marxist ethics? Yes, Sève responds emphatically. 'Marxist historical materialism is *causal*, but not *determinist*, which is to say that

what pertains to general laws is achieved only through an infinite multitude of particular chains of events and accidents. There is definitely therefore room for individual freedom, and therefore also for *the responsible commitment that is ensconced in a promise* [*le matérialisme historique marxien est causaliste, mais non pas déterministe, c'est-à-dire que ce qui relève de lois générales ne s'accomplit qu'à travers une foule infinie de causalités singulières et de hasards. Il y a donc bel et bien place pour une liberté personnelle, et donc aussi pour l'engagement responsable qu'énonce une promesse*] (Sève, 2015a:6, my emphasis). TSS therefore entails carving out 'room' where other Marxists, including Althusser, would not necessarily allow it. An examination of the nature of promising from a Marxist standpoint is therefore *demanded* by TSS which becomes a gateway into the examination of the problem. So the further questions asked in this chapter are whether our conception of what it means to be an individual matter to our understanding of promises? Would any concept of an individual, their personality and biography, and the social relations in which they live make any difference? And then in particular, does TSS make a difference, and if so, what?

Intuitive views

Intuitionism, like Marxism, is not a monolithic, or even entirely homogeneous, collection of thought. The views of all intuitionists with regard to even one issue such as promising is not perhaps suitable for an individual case study. Better then to examine the views of a prominent intuitionist thinker as representative of intuitionist thinking on promising: in this case, the Oxford philosopher H.A Prichard. Prichard's most famous intuitionist view is that the sense of obligation the sense of the rightness of, an action of a particular kind is both *absolutely underivative* and *immediate* (Prichard, 1940; Hurka, 2010). To come to recognise that an act is a duty, an individual – Prichard assumes the black box of the individual and that

morality is an individual affair, so it is almost impossible to come to grips with his account without some understanding of individuality - need only concentrate on the relevant non-moral facts, facts about the state of affairs that one will, if successful, originate (including any consequences) and facts about the relations in which one stands here to others and to oneself. Then, by an act of specifically moral thinking, one deduces that those facts together make a claim on one to respond in a specific way, and that the claim made is stronger than any competing claim thrown up by other features of the situation.

Prichard's views were neither unique nor completely in accordance with his contemporaries. Ross, for instance, took the view that duty was 'highly personal, as was goodness, in the sense that when a promise is kept, a valuable relationship between promiser and promisee is instantiated' (Ross, 1930:36). Ross however thinks that keeping promises is because of the rightness of promise-keeping in itself, a truly intuitionist view. Extremely interesting from the Marxist point of view is the separation of utilitarianism from intrinsic duties (Ross, 1930:27). A repugnant conclusion lurks here – if the sum total of virtue in the world is increased by keeping promises, a better world would be created by increasing the number of kept promises *ad infinitum*, which Ross himself neatly avoided by pointing out soberly that whilst keeping promises is a duty, making them is not.

Promises and Obligations

Promises, for Prichard, are a specific category of moral obligations that merit particular examination (Prichard, 1940). He believed that if you promise another that you will do an action, then you bring into existence an obligation on you to do that action. This is just an assertion, with no justification, unlike later work (e.g. Searle, 1969) especially as Prichard does not subscribe to the expectations theory of promising. To start with, as he recognised, many

actions generate expectations of other actions. Using one of several examples he drew from capitalist economics, he illustrated this principle by saying that 'Otherwise an employer who, on learning that his men hesitated to put their backs into their work for fear that if they did their time rates of pay would be reduced, argued them into believing that he would not be such a fool as to do this, would be said to be promising not to do it' (Prichard, 1940:258). Prichard did not recognise any implicit promise. For him, promising is inextricably, and intricately, linked up with the word 'promise'. Even if the workers in Prichard's example acted as if they believed they had been promised, even if they used the term amongst themselves, none of this would suffice. In Prichard's view of promising, *social relations are denied*.

Nor did Prichard believe that an obligation to do an action arises from having produced the expectation. Otherwise clearly enough inadvertently generated expectations would *always* generate such obligations, rather than according to some other moral principle such as the extent of loss caused by reliance on the expectation.

Prichard and the abstract individual

Prichard's position has been characterised as arguing that 'The final level is that of specific deontological duties such as duties to keep promises' (Hurka, 2010:111) and that 'For Prichard, these duties do not derive from a more general consequentialist duty to promote good consequences. The main reason we ought to keep our promises or not harm others is just that we ought to; those duties, like the normative realm as a whole and moral duty in general, are self-standing' (Hurka, 2010:111).

Prichard's argument proceeds in several stages. First, that a promise to do some action seems to create a binding obligation to do that action. As he said:

‘In promising, agreeing, or undertaking to do some action we seem to be creating or bringing into existence the obligation to do it, so much so that promising seems just to be binding ourselves, i.e. making ourselves bound, to do it, and the statement ‘I ought to keep a promise’, like ‘I ought not to steal’, seems a mere pleonasm. Once call some act a promise and all question of whether there is an obligation to do it seems to have vanished’ (Prichard, 1940:258).

Second, perhaps unfortunately but certainly paradoxically, an obligation seems not to be a fact that we can create or bring into existence; we can create an obligation only by creating or bringing into existence something else.

Third, the only way to avoid the paradox is to show that the act of promising creates something other than an obligation, which nonetheless binds us to perform the action in question.

Fourth, then, what might this be? After considering and rejecting various options such as the promisee's expectation and the promisor's resolve, Prichard locates the bindingness of a promise in a prior general promise, which allows the noises we make when promising to generate an obligation to perform the promised action.

Prichard's view of promising

Prichard makes explicit a distinction that may not be clear between *stating an intention* and *making a promise*. According to Prichard, ‘Promising requires the actual use of the word ‘promise’ or else of some equivalent, such as ‘undertake’, ‘agree’, ‘give you my word’, or ‘will’ in ‘I will’ (Prichard, 1940:260). Prichard wants to limit promises to specific words because he believes that promises are *sui generis*, but as demonstrated above, this is far from

the case. Promises surely neither depend on the use of a specific word, nor need they be explicit, although Prichard specifically argued just this, that if the employer in his example used the word ‘intention’, or ‘resolve’, this would not produce a promise, and that ‘*anyone in the employer’s position* [my emphasis] would recognise that in saying this he was not promising’ (Prichard, 1940:258). According to Prichard, the difference does however rest at least in part on a difference in expectation. If it be mere resolve, the expectation would be only of the truthfulness or otherwise of the utterance, and the likelihood or otherwise of a change of mind. In the case of a promise, however, Prichard believed that the expectation would be based ‘at least in part on the belief that the employer thinks that he has bound himself simply by promising, whether he produces the expectation or not, together with the belief that since he is a comparatively moral, i.e. conscientious, being he is likely to do whatever he thinks he is bound to do’ (Prichard, 1940:259).

But turn the argument around, and how happy would Prichard have been? Suppose a trade union official were to say to their employer, ‘We have resolved not to strike’, the employer makes a financial commitment on the basis of this resolve, and then the trade union official announces a strike which causes enormous financial loss to the employer as a result of that failed commitment? Would Prichard be so lenient about the existence or otherwise of a promise? Or would he then turn to the existence of an implicit contract? Resolve, for Prichard, can be either true or false – either the employer has resolved not to do X, or he has not. A promise, however, is made either in good or bad faith, that the employer, speaking truthfully, has bound himself not to do X and being a moral being he will not do what he is bound not to do. To make a promise in good faith, he implies, means intending to perform the action promised whilst concurrently denying oneself the option of changing that intention in the period until the action is performed. A resolve could be changed, Prichard thinks, so that the beliefs generated in listeners by hearing ‘I have resolved not to’ do X are different from those

generated by 'I promise not to do X'. Prichard wants us to believe that the difference is about being 'bound': that in the former case, it is a question of likelihood, whereas in the latter case there is a self-imposed obligation – a denial of the option to change one's mind. The wording of the example, however, is what allows this to be the case: if the employer says, 'I say categorically to you all, that for the period between A and B, no matter what happens, I, the only person with the power to do X, will not do it, and I will ensure that should I become incapacitated for whatever reason, no one else will be able to do X either', it is surely hard to see any real difference in the belief generated by this and the equivalent explicit promise, 'I promise not to do X between A and B, and I further promise to ensure that should I become incapacitated for whatever reason, no one else will be able to do X either'. Whatever differences introducing the specific word 'promise' into the remarks of the employer makes, they are not to be found in different expectations generated in the listeners by the different language. This objection is not fatal to Prichard's argument: promises are not the creation of expectations: they may have that effect, once uttered (or deduced from actions, documents, words or a combination of them, Prichard avoids that possibility) but they are not themselves defined by the creation of expectations. But the objection is surely fatal to the idea that promising introduces anything additional to intention except an additional intention not to change it; and promises get broken, of course, when that intention itself changes.

Bringing an obligation into existence

Prichard wishes us to allow that it is impossible to create or bring into existence an obligation what he calls 'directly' (Prichard, 1940:258). By this he really means, 'through the use of language'. Allowing this is necessary for him to create the philosophical space for a problem to exist in the first place. In fact, Prichard is evidently perilously close to a

performative ethic (Austin, 1955), much as he may have disapproved in principle of such an approach to ethics. For Prichard, promising consists not in making a statement but in doing something, in the sense in which we oppose doing to mere talking (Prichard, 1940:259). In such a view 'We' become bound by using the linguistic convention: the speech act of representing ourselves as being morally obliged is what creates the obligation itself. It would be consistent with this reasoning, though Prichard does not follow through to arguing thus, that 'we' would be guilty of some kind of 'bad faith' if we used the word 'promise' without meaning it. After all, any explanation of promising must include a sufficient explanation of promises made without any intention of keeping them, indeed with the explicit intention – though not usually expressed to the promisee – of not doing so. There are no doubt a range of general moral commitments that in many instances appear reasonable, although Prichard mentions some prior obligations that do seem integral only to capitalist society, such as not to refrain from affecting those material things with which a man has 'mixed his labour' (Prichard, 1940:262).

Prichard's general argument

Because Prichard believes that promises contain moral obligations between individuals and groups, which are not immediately obvious from any specific promise, he must create that obligation. He does so by arguing that *there exists a general obligation to keep promises* which underpins any specific promise. From where, however, can this derive? Prichard believes that when an individual makes a promise, they bring into existence an obligation to do something, as a result of their being a prior general agreement in society to keep promises. Therefore, when an individual makes a promise, they bring into effect an obligation indirectly, in a manner akin to the responsibilities an individual has when they become a parent.

Prichard's view of society, starting with simple tasks such as moving a log, involves co-operation between individuals (Prichard, 1940:262). Prichard then appears to be a closet rule utilitarian here (Prichard, 1940: 262) – there must be a belief that is easily intelligible, widely known and universal: in other words, a general agreement to keep promises - mutual understanding of the term 'promise' is evidently required for Prichard's hypothesis to be plausible. In sum, therefore, Prichard's view amounts to this: that because a general obligation *ought* to exist, to make capitalist society work better, it *does* exist.

What exactly does exist? Prichard's central argument is that promising to do X depends upon, and is made on the basis of, a general promise made earlier. This is an 'agreement to agree' which amounts to a commitment by all individuals to follow through on a proposed course of action if that action is accompanied by a statement to another individual that it is a promise to do that action, and conversely, never to make a statement that it is a promise to do that action unless there is no firm commitment to follow through wherever possible. Prichard's argument that promising creating an obligation where there was none before, transferring the problem to his hypothesised general promise does not, however, lead him to question whether such a general promise does, or even could, exist. On the contrary, believing that such a general promise *must* exist, he argues that this is a proper terrain for discussion of the problem. He also rejects the infinite regress argument, on the basis that the general agreement is not an agreement to keep our agreements, but an agreement to do what is ordinarily called keeping our agreements, i.e. not to make a certain noise in connexion with the phrase for some action without going on to do the action (Prichard, 1940:260). For Prichard, to hear the words 'I promise' is to open a door into a world in which prior agreements have been made, prior understanding exists that connect the use of the word 'promise' and moral obligation to follow through. And the reason that the moral obligation exists to perform a specific promise is because of that previous general promise (Prichard, 1940:260). So the real promise, for

Prichard, is not when the word is used, but in adherence to the general promise and the associated linguistic conventions. But even presuming that I am no Misanthrope, the option remains open to me to insist that I do not, in fact, consider myself bound by all promises I make, and in practice, this is much closer to reality, even in capitalist society with so many legal sanctions to contract-breaking, than any such general promise. Prichard must therefore rely on an implicit promise on my part. He does not say from where this general promise can have arisen, but there are several possibilities. The general promise may arise as function of my participation in the society (Narveson, 1988). A general obligation to keep promises would be consistent with a duty to obey the law, respect other peoples' personal space, and a host of other social obligations. Clearly however individuals can pick and choose which implicit contracts they wish to adhere to within society – whether to respect the law of private property, for instance, or to refrain from littering. Keeping promises is one example of such an implicit contract and it is likely that as with others, not all individuals will implicitly sign on the dotted line. More especially, if an individual rejects the social codes of the society in which they live, for example for reasons of social justice, they are unlikely to accept any implicit contract to keep promises or the very similar one of telling the truth, especially to agents of the State.

However, society is fairly evidently not perfect and Prichard's view that 'duty is underivative' does seem highly questionable on purely factual grounds. Different people perceive the same activity as either their duty or not. On occasion, moral duties directly conflict between individuals: I believe it is my duty to do X, and you believe it is your duty to stop me. Of such disagreements are conflicts made. Part of the reason why the non-naturalist account of ethics has become more accepted is the 'end of history': where there is widespread consensus on the desirability of continuing very broadly with the existing social and economic arrangements within society, there is less likelihood of finding directly conflicting senses of duty. The activities of jihadists, for example, who really *do* have a different perception of their

social duty, have conveniently been intellectually isolated - as were revolutionaries before them - to create the impression that, for example, promises to pay money to those who are already rich are morally binding. If there is no obvious conflict over duties, it is surely much easier to suggest that they represent a singular truth.

Promises in society

One does not need to be a Marxist, let alone be a psychologist TSS, to see there are problems with Prichard's account of promising. For example little attempt either is made by Prichard or any other intuitionist to discuss clashes between duties, and even between promise keeping. An additional, and quite different, moral virtue – fidelity – must be introduced to deal with this distinction (Zimmerman, 1996), but for a Marxist, there are many further problems with Prichard's view. He further suggested that promising has this sense of entailment in common with other kinds of acts, such as hurting another's feelings, which similarly entails an obligation to assuage them, misleading someone, which entails an obligation to correct the misconception, and starting a family, which gives rise to the obligation to feed and educate it (Prichard, 1940: 258). From whence does this sense of entailment arise, in Prichard's world view? TSS, obligations to society and other people derive from *actual* militancy, not from abstract and universal conceptions of obligation, which are an alienated product of a capitalist society which attempts to impose such obligations on individuals – the obligation to pay debts being a very good example – in order to try to protect and enforce the *status quo*. Real individuals do not necessarily face universal obligations not to hurt others' feelings, are not necessarily obliged to correct misconceptions, and even, on occasion, may place other obligations above those to family – the militant life may demand all three.

A Marxist would argue that in general the value of a promise depends on the contribution the fulfilment of that promise makes to the betterment of the world. This makes all Marxism antipathetic to an intuitionist position that renders moral judgements independent of time and place, or a contractual position that suggests that promises form part of a social world in which some form of general agreement to keep promises exists (Scanlon, 1998).

Prichard, duress and capitalism

For Prichard, 'The main reason one ought to keep one's promises is just that one ought to' (Hurka, 2010:112). But there are surely some exceptions to this general rule that even Prichard would allow. One is factual error. For example, suppose that I make a promise to shoot otters on sight because I wrongly believe otters carry a disease deadly to human beings. It is surely doubtful that Prichard would accept that I had a moral obligation to carry out this promise. Rather, one suspects, he would place the moral obligation on the requirement to be fully informed about otters and the diseases they may or may not carry before making rash promises of such a nature. Next, suppose that I make a promise whilst under the influence of a mind-influencing drug, such as alcohol. Prichard would surely have admitted that I am not obliged to keep such a promise either. This exception can easily be extended to promises made under clear duress, obviously such as those made by captives forced to make them to the outside world by their captors. If a gun is pointed to my head and I am told to promise to vote Conservative at the next election, then Prichard would happily concede that if I were a Labour voter, I would make such a promise in bad faith. Likewise, the case of the *marginal* Conservative voter under such circumstances. The promise is still given in bad faith because I reserve the right to change my mind before the election. But what of the *dedicated* Conservative, who can genuinely promise to vote Conservative come what may? Does the gun

to the head make any difference to the good faith of the promise? The answer is crucial: if yes, then Prichard has admitted that compulsion renders the obligations of promises invalid, as it does contracts at law; if not, then free choice is not central to promise-making and the door is open to the creation of obligations to fulfil promises without good faith. For Prichard, Ross and others like them there is a sharp line that can be drawn between duress and ‘normal’ social and business dealings. The capitalist legal system exists in part to identify e.g. contracts signed by one party under duress, and there is extensive case history as well as legislation designed to identify ‘duress’ or ‘compulsion’ for contracts.

For intuitionists such as Prichard, promises are self-standing, therefore, only under certain psychological conditions about which Prichard is silent, but which one may reasonably assume include correct information and an absence of such influences. ‘Normal’ promises between ‘free’ individuals and groups should be kept and the range of promises that should not be can be ring-fenced through legal and psychological mechanisms. Here, Prichard and the non-naturalists would like the argument to stop.

Prichard’s problem, from a Marxist standpoint, is that he writes as if such a heaven on earth was actually with us in the here and now – that we are living under communism - so intuitionism becomes a natural solution to moral problems. But what happens to Prichard’s general obligation to keep promises is that on investigation it starts to apply to a progressively smaller number of ‘unalienated’ promises, and eventually disappears altogether. This leaves specific promises as being made ‘in good faith’ – statements of intent with additional intent not to change one’s mind.

Alternative, promises must fall into place as part of a moral theory that Prichard would reject, which is that I can only be obliged to keep a promise if doing so will contribute to making myself a better person and the world a better place. Obligations to do actions should

arise from much more than a statement by an individual: they should arise from a complex web of socio-economic relations, in which society generally benefits from the action concerned.

Prichard's view is that a 'thought' of obligation and 'duties' must predate promising. And that 'promises can only be made between members of a group of men — which need not consist of more than two — each of whom believes, and in acting to some extent relies on the belief, that the others are beings who not only think they have certain obligations but are likely to do what they think themselves bound to do' (Prichard, 1940:261). In other words, promising can only exist within society. Promising is a social relation, which must, therefore, be contingent on specific economic relations. Promising by individuals within a capitalist society must therefore have a class character. Prichard presents his view about promising in the form of obligations placed on entirely hypothetical individuals who experience no social relations and have no class, let alone family or social, background. Whilst for Prichard what is required for promising is the existence of a 'group of men who think they have certain obligations to others' (Prichard, 1940:261), such an abstract group does not - and cannot - exist. All individuals, TSS demands that we admit, have their individuality, including their moral perspective, created, shaped and developed by the social relations into which they are born, through which they live, and that they influence through their actions. TSS therefore demands a situational ethic, which demolishes the idea of a general, pre-existent agreement within 'society' – by which Prichard means, capitalist society, to keep promises. There is, TSS demands we accept, no such prior agreement, and cannot be, as no individual is ever automatically party to *any* general agreement within capitalist society.

Promises and society: enter Marx

At first sight, the general consequences hypothesis has a lot to contribute, none of it conducive to a moral point of view. Does not historical materialism already suggest that when an individual makes a promise, they do so from a specific point in history? That therefore the promises they make are the result of their historical and social position, and in particular their class position both in terms of where they start and how they evolve as human beings? That promises, therefore, stand a good chance of sinking into the moral quagmire in which Marxism is often accused of being mired, unable to extricate ethics from a lethal charge of historical relativism, and therefore, ultimately, of no moral worth?

There are three possible routes out of this quagmire for the question of TSS and promises. One would to defend against Althusserian Marxism, and against just a caricature of the morality of Marxism, so that Marxism can stake out its own moral position, one with which Sève would feel comfortable. There are several interpretations of Marxist ethics: probably that which sits most easily with Sève's own relatively conventional Marxism (in MTP) yet which is consistent with the views he espouses later (Sève, 2008, 2015, 2015a) is that 'Marx is best understood as an ethical thinker who is a stern critic of moralism, where ethical theory is understood to be socio-historical in character and concretely grounded while moral theory involves abstract imperatives to action' (Blackledge, 2015:308). Not an unthinking adherence to a class-based morality that excuses all individual responsibility, nor yet a privatised morality that rests on that abstract 'man' which Sève (2008) cuts away, but wholly dependent on clear class divides nonetheless. It is a precarious perch on which to sit for any length of time: there is certainly evidence that Sève himself in his later work found refuge in wider humanitarian goals and much less in class warfare and militancy. Clearly, therefore, the general consequences hypothesis appears to confront promising rather uneasily.

Enter Sève.

Prichard himself recognised that his explanation was tentative, really just ‘a problem for consideration’ (Prichard, 1940:266) not a completely satisfactory or even comprehensive solution. Consideration by whom, though? If Marxists consider the problem, they cannot allow the argument to stop at this point. In fact, for Marxists, the argument has only just begun. The sharp line separating ‘normal’ promises from examples such as those above can successfully be challenged. In a wage economy where economic and social inequality is widespread, individuals and groups are not ‘free’ to negotiate their wage contracts, deal with other members of their families, or relate to other human beings as equals. Many contracts, for example, are negotiated under hugely imbalanced conditions between the parties (Zigen, 2012). Alienated labour, alienated individuals, cannot be described as truly ‘free’: rather, they are acting under duress for much, if not all, of their activity. The necessary psychological underpinning for a general theory of promising is not there in capitalist society. Moreover, large numbers of promises, both explicit and implicit, bring about injustices. Only in a society without financial and other forms of oppression, in which individuals are genuinely free and where the consequences of promise keeping do not reinforce an oppressive social structure, could there ever be a successful *general* theory of promise keeping, under which my promise to do a thing would be the result of a general perception of my moral obligation to do it. Under the quite opposite present circumstances, each promise must be judged on its merits as to whether an obligation has been formed as a result of making it. What are the benefit or disadvantages of keeping the promise are to the individual, those other individuals whose interests they care about, and what may be the legal sanctions for breaking the promise? The evidence that the general consequences hypothesis is correct is certainly strong. And in practice, this kind of rational calculation is exactly what individuals do.

Promises, contracts and TSS

The very existence of contracts demonstrates at the very least that Prichard's general agreement is far from sufficient in capitalist society to suffice as a way of identifying individuals who are bound to do what they say they will do. The very lack of a general agreement explains why society, capitalist society in particular, has need of e.g. commercial contracts, for example, which work when both parties understand themselves to be bound by them irrespective of their perception of individual self-interest or even wider concerns at the point of execution. It has been suggested that contracts are 'legally enforceable promises' (Shiffrin, 2008), but if promises are no more than strongly worded intentions, with no special moral qualities attached to them, then the way is at least open to reveal contracts in capitalist society for what they really are, State-sanctioned determinations as to the allocation of resources with no moral significance in themselves and therefore no universal obligation on individuals to adhere to them.

Prichard, promises and communism

Prichard does not admit that co-operation in society is not between free and equal individuals – rather, he assumes so. Perhaps ironically therefore, given that Prichard himself was no socialist, it is possible to imagine that Prichard's idea of why promising entails a moral obligation is more plausible in a communist society. Under socialism, where individuals' interests are harmonised, any one individual's interests are congruent with those of another. Moreover, even if there were official, public commitments of general agreement on attaining adulthood (and perhaps many other things) in such a society, there would be no nation states. There would therefore be no geographical constraints on the global applicability of such

agreements, as there might well be in contemporary global conditions. Doing philosophy with abstract individuals obviously makes much more sense when any individual can be substituted for any other. A communist society might well, therefore, possess a general agreement to keep promises, and a valuable asset to society it might well prove to be. Even then, however, whilst self-interest might not allow for promises to be broken, challenges to individual promises based on the greater good might well succeed.

Conclusion

Prichard's argument about promising, therefore, is far from the objective, neutral piece of moral philosophy it purports to be. It actually represents a none-too-subtle contribution to the conservative landscape of moral philosophy and is therefore open to a radical critique. This is not to suggest that there are not many benefits in capitalist society for individuals to keep promises, for example in the context of trades unions, families, or schools and hospitals. Teams must work together in numerous situations, and a significant measure of trust is essential between them to be effective. But it is to suggest that there can be no successful *general* argument to keep promises in a society where there are fundamental disagreements between groups and individuals.

What Prichard has actually identified, in his search for that 'something implied in the existence of agreements', is not an agreement, but what he fails to see, a social relation. Promises are made because of individuals' relations with another, and the ethics of those promises must, therefore, lie not in some abstract idea of a general agreement, but in the practical actions that individuals take.

Put another way, it may now be possible to turn back to Prichard's conviction that it is impossible to create or bring into existence an obligation 'directly'. Perhaps this impossibility

is contingent, not absolute. Is there not more than a hint in this contention of an alienated world, in which individuals cannot create obligations because of their psychological distance from one another – a distance that Prichard may have regarded as an inevitable aspect of human existence, but which TSS would suggest could be removed? And that therefore in contemporary capitalist society, there may be a paradox, but that if capitalism were to be removed, the paradox would be removed with it. That a philosophical dilemma turns out in fact to have its origin in psychology and its solution in political transformation.

But if the general consequences hypothesis is evidently quite powerful for opponents of Prichard's view of promising, and if promises in capitalist society are therefore not as morally straightforward as Prichard would have us believe, as reference to Marx shows, is there any more if we return to TSS? Whilst TSS may be useful in demolishing Prichard's conception of a promise, it does not automatically suggest a substitute. TSS may mean, however, that other accounts of promising, may at least be easier to accept. For example, the idea of a *promise as pathfinder*, which 'recognises that life is complex. Here a promise is seen as 'a strong intention, a best guess, an expression of sincere hope, a promising moment' (Vitek, 1993:23). Sève's recognition of the complexity of human individuality, and of biography, would seem to have found an echo here, even if the author did not identify as a Marxist.

Chapter Seven – How Should a Marxist Biography Look?

Introduction

There is a dearth of literature on how biography written from a Marxist standpoint - Marxist biography - ought to be written, even on the very basic question of whether a Marxist biography ought to be distinctive, or how. This can probably be explained by much the same reasons as the uneasy relationship between Marxism and psychology. This chapter in aiming to fill the breach examines the implications of TSS for how a Marxist biography should be written and how actual biographies should be evaluated, and compares them with contemporary theory on the writing of biography and actual biographies that Sève himself has reviewed.

There is support for biography from Soviet scholars, for example that ‘the experience of Soviet historians and of their colleagues abroad shows that the reading public welcomes books in which the history of various countries is illuminated via the lives of statesmen. They make historical narrative livelier, more particularised and easier to take in’ (Trukhanovsky, 1974:6). This supports the contention that, for example ‘A study of Eden makes possible a better understanding of the course of these events [from the thirties to fifties]. His life is to some degree a part of the diplomatic and political history of Britain’ (Trukhanovsky, 1974:5).

Psychology and biography

The starting point for what follows is that psychology is relevant to the writing of biography. Both concern individual lives, both seek to explain individual decisions, opinions and actions. If you really believe biography has no need of that hypothesis, then I suppose you can look away now: but few do believe that, including Marxists. Unfortunately for a Marxist

who takes a close interest in individual lives and the writing of biography, as noted above in Chapter Two, Marxism and psychology itself have never enjoyed a close and harmonious relationship.

Marxists are often quick to point out that the idea of an individual is arguably a relatively recent term in any event: ‘The self has a complicated and intricate history’ (Hadfield, 2014:372) but there is at least widespread recognition outside Marxism that the growth of privatised narratives of the self has formed a parallel trajectory, at least, the rise of capitalism (Eakin, 2008). For Marxists, recognising the ideological nature of conceptions of individuality, society does not consist of pre-existent individuals, but on the contrary, expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within these individuals stand, the founder of Marxism famously concluding that ‘the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations’ (Marx, 1845 [1976:4]). Hence, for example, Marxist scepticism about the role of the persistent cult of the leader, the superstition of the wonderful great man, and of a certain mythology of genius (Sève, 1978:16) – which might seem ironic in view of the Stalinist and Maoist cults of the personality. Although notably heterogeneous, much of Marxist thought has therefore been distant from, if not openly antagonistic to, the study of individuals and their psychological processes. And not only Marxists have felt this kind of tension: perhaps as has been suggested, ‘There is an underlying tension between the disciplines of history and psychology’ (Runyan, 1988:3).

This scepticism and suspicion in significant measure explains why most Marxist scholars have eschewed biography as an explanatory method, and why biography has not been theoretical terrain much approached by Marxists. In the absence of clear direction from Marxist theory, biographers create and use different theories and write biography anyway in response to real or perceived needs, especially since the ‘revival’ of biography (Lässig, 2008:1-4) that coincided with the decline of Marxist thought towards the end of the last century. Yet because

the neglect has in fact been mutual, the consequent loss has been equally felt within biography, whether consciously or not. As has been observed, 'The recent resurgence of interest in biography is in part an attempt to capture the openness, the contradictions, and lived reality of human lives. The problem of course with the focus on biography is that the accounts can end up highly descriptive, eulogising (in their individualism), and atheoretical' (Hayes, 2001:50). Biography therefore runs 'the natural risk of over-personalizing complex historical developments, over-emphasizing the role of the individual in shaping and determining events' (Kershaw, 1998: xxi). That biographers err in these ways comes as no surprise to a Marxist, who would therefore necessarily disagree with the contention that 'Biography is 'a profoundly nontheoretical activity' (Monk, 2007:527), in the sense that theory provides an explanation for the cause of human activity. For a Marxist, the best way to explain human activity is by reference to social relations and their determination, currently at least mainly through the capitalist system of production, distribution and exchange. No biographer can therefore escape theory: they can only admit or deny it.

Whether this assertion means that there must be a specific 'philosophy of biography', however, is quite another matter. On the contrary, as Soviet scholars recognised in relation not just to biography but also to literary studies more widely, 'What is called for is a lucky synthesis of various elements, of the man and the world, of the personal and the universal, the kind of synthesis that opens access to the historical' (Kalugin, 2015:356). If Marxism is to exert influence here, and not to lose ever more cultural and intellectual influence on biography, it must engage with biography and not retreat into blanket condemnations, muttering 'a plague on all your houses' as it disappears from both theoretical view and practical significance. Hence the potential importance of a Marxist theoretical intervention in the terrain of biography. So where can common ground be found?

The theoretical foundations of a bridge between Marxism and biography has been consistently made by Lucien Sève. In MTP he sought through the development of a Marxist theory of personality to provide a theoretical explanation for the category of ‘biography’ and an analysis of the relationship between personality and biography. Adhering much later still to similar, if less dogmatic, Marxist views, Sève decried the incapacity of traditional psychology to understand the idea that a human being was above all a biography and so to comprehend e.g. the ‘times of growth’ [*reprises de croissance*] of a personality (Sève, 2008:22). Attempting to generate a concrete individual by way of ‘universal, albeit existential, psychoanalytic ‘schemas’ is never going to work – even Sartre falls under this criticism – because it is reductive, both in terms of reducing the adult to the child and the human being to their unconscious. Sève’s own theory of personality, which he hopes avoids the same charge, is grounded on the social (and at root, labour, in a Marxist sense) origins of personality, the function of social relations in developing psychological traits, and the ways in which psychology could and would develop under socialism and eventually communism.

For Sève, as granted for many others (e.g. Sribastava *et al*, 2003; Boyce *et al*, 2013; Hahn *et al*, 2015)., an individual is not some unchanging, and somehow obvious, static personality, with fixed traits which can be abstracted from history and the events that shaped the development of the personality. Sève would therefore, I suggest, be suspicious of any narrative interpretation that biographers – and autobiographers - can make of lives, intruding retrospective purpose where there was none, and abstracting an individual from what created them. Instead, Sève would wish a biographer to appreciate, analyse and evaluate the extent to which events can and do influence the trajectory of what Sève calls the biography, by which he means as noted above, the trajectory of an individual personality through history. In terms of artistic genre, by analogy, more of a film than a sculpture. Sève would surely therefore view sceptically, the concept – in the context of literary biography - of a 'composite implied author

assembled by a reader from the reading of several literary texts' (Holden, 2014:920), seeing this as an ahistorical, idealistic abstraction: potentially unhelpful and certainly inaccurate. On the other hand, a Marxist biography would not expect to follow Rodrigues (2015) in privileging collection over selection, expecting to find and develop from detailed data collection the perception, at least, of multiple identities within a given subject. This project becomes from a Marxist perspective both unremarkable if viewed historically, but solvable, as a problem, if viewed cross-sectionally across the data.

Sève and biography

Sève's views on writing biography flow directly from this view that there is no unchanging human personality – no genetically determined abilities or permanent character traits independent of personal life experience. For Sève (at least in MTP, if not his later more broadminded work) there are therefore some identifiable tasks for the science of biography: to grasp the structures, the contradictions, the dialectic of the personal life through which particular personalities are formed and transformed and through which activity unfolds, he says. But what are these? Sève says the concepts to be analysed in a biography are: 'quantitative and qualitative development of the fixed capital of capacities; infrastructures of activity, general P/N [Product/Need] and Use-time; superstructures and forms of consciousness; internal necessities of correspondence between capacities and division of time; contradictions with external social necessities and forms of individuality; the main effects of contradictions at each stage, taking into account the social conjuncture in which the life in question develops, periodic crises of use-time and possible transformations of the general logic of development' (Sève, 1978:383). Sève's concept of use-time, composed of individual acts which constitute what Sève calls 'the real infrastructure of the developed personality' (Sève, 1978:334) are divided

crucially between abstract and concrete labour. They derive, he insists, from the historical logic of the personality combined with the division of labour. He says that the concept of use-time should play an equivalent role in psychology to that of class in the theory of social formation (Sève, 2015:22) and extends the argument to suggesting that the acquiring of new capacities has shown a tendency to fall over time in individual lives, akin to the falling rate of profit for an economy. A sympathetic commentator says that evidently this entails the study of actual biographies as they are divided between time for various work activities, work and leisure, domestic duties, interpersonal relations, and how the contradictions between these various activities and the capacities they create is the setting for the development or the alienation of self (Burkitt, 2008:146).

But what Sève does not explain is how these concepts are to be translated into the writing of actual biography, still less incorporated into analysis of such qualities as leadership or structures such as biography. The division of time may be important for an individual biography: how much learning, how much repetitive activity – but in what way does Sève imagine that this should actually be reflected in a biography? In some sort of list, or table? Should the biographer aim to compile a breakdown of the individual's activity over time, hour by hour, day by day? Is that what biography should do? What would be the benefit of this kind of minute analysis? Likewise, the idea that biography should focus on acts, in the sense of psychological activity, rather than behaviour (Leontiev 1978; Sève, 2015:22) - 'biographical activity and use-time are to be analysed not in terms of behavior or conduct but in terms of acts' [*l'activité biographique et son emploi de temps sont à analyser non pas en termes de comportements ou de conduits mais en termes d'actes*] (Sève, 2015:22). What - if anything - does this mean in practice for a biographer?

It would appear that Sève's work cannot help solve the problem that Marxism as a general theory has both the advantage of providing a guiding explanation for the events

depicted in a biography but also the disadvantage that its very generality may not offer much practical help to the biographer. In fact, it is possible to argue, at least, that Sève implicitly insists that a Marxist biography must be quite conventional. In Holden's terms, it should abide by a 'biographical pact' between author(s) and subject(s) (Holden, 2014:924), albeit that the Marxist biographical pact involves a host of joint assumptions about history, society and personality between author and reader that other biographies, and other readers, may well not share. Whilst a Marxist biographer would never conceal, let alone deny, the importance and inevitable effect of the socio-economic, historical standpoint of the individual biographer, the pact would seem to exclude, for example, unwarranted intrusions of the author into the biography, e.g. in the form of imaginary conversations between the author and the subject, or even – perhaps – counterfactual digressions into how the subject 'might have been' should events have been different, this being a task equal in difficulty to writing another biography altogether. At least, there is no implicit advocacy of these kinds of techniques in any such pact. Sève does not provide the tools to translate the concepts into a workable structure for a biography, let alone attempt the task himself. And to confuse matters further, Sève's own beliefs have evolved: he has himself acknowledged, in particular, that the sharp division he originally envisaged between abstract and concrete labour, expressed in use-time, was too simplistic – 'Concrete, useful work and abstract labour are interwoven in a very subtle dialectic' [*la concrétude de l'effet utile et l'abstraction du temps de travail d'interpénètrent dans une bien plus subtile dialectique*] (Sève, 2008:510). Moreover, the 'working experience' brings knowledge as well, including for political struggle (Sève, 2015:46), although for Sève, a worker's life is still, in the end, a worker's life, and to think otherwise is something of a utopian illusion (Sève, 2015:48).

It is, however, evident that Sève's proposed detailed approach to time and knowledge in a biography – reminiscent in a sense of Victorian biographical endeavour prior to the

coruscating criticism levelled at it by Strachey (1948 [1918]) and others, what have been described as ‘uncritical, unenlightening, fact-filled, two-volumed works’ (Monk, 2007:562) – or four volumes, indeed (Cecil, 1921-32) - should be contrasted with a biography written as a Marxist, which can be a much more modest endeavour, including in respect of data collection. Trukhanovsky’s *Anthony Eden*, (Trukhanovsky 1974), McLellan’s *Karl Marx: A Biography*, (McLellan, 2006), Deutscher’s *Stalin* (Deutscher, 1970 [1949]), or even his acclaimed *Trotsky* (Deutscher, 1954, 1959, 1963) - these are biographies written by Marxists – but are these single volumes truly Marxist biographies? In Sève’s complex, relentless and arguably dogmatic depiction of the term, no. None of them discusses their subject’s infrastructure of activity, analyse their use-time, still less place them into any kind of pre-determined analytical framework related to the social forms of individuality.

Sève’s interest in actual biographies derives from his development, over many decades, of his own Marxist theory of the personality. Sève’s thoughts on the writing of biography and what makes a ‘good’ biography are especially interesting therefore, if only because he is one of the few Marxist philosophers who has written about this subject over several decades. It is perhaps not surprising to discover first that in his view, because there is no proper Marxist theory of the personality, there is no biography which wholly solves what he sees as the extraordinarily complex ensemble of problems with which biography is faced, as a result of not being able to look for support to a coherent and complete theory of the development of personality and to a corresponding methodology (Sève, 1978:378). In Sève’s view therefore, biographies written by Marxists (it would seem) are usually all we can hope for: true Marxist biographies await a proper science of individual personalities and biographies, and for the time being can only be piecemeal successes (Sève, 2016) .

Certainly, as Davidson (2004) observes, the balance required by Marxist biographers in relation to their subjects is extraordinarily difficult to achieve. It is not entirely surprising,

therefore, that there are very few biographies among the Marxist classics (Davidson, 2004), not least perhaps because would-be Marxist biographers become daunted by the task and unwilling to expose themselves to the kind of excoriating criticism that Sève and other critics of popular biography such as Löwenthal (1973) deliver. Sève for example ridicules one purported biography as ‘A series of biographical notes on twenty ‘adolescent geniuses’ placed side by side in the most baldly factual way and crowned with ill-considered interpretations taken solely from psychoanalysis’ (Sève, 1978:378). On the contrary, Sève insists, ‘Like every specifically human fact, genius is fundamentally a relation, a social relation’ (Sève, 1978:381). In general he observes

‘How, for example, can one fail to be astonished by the common naivety of those beginnings in which ‘in order to take the social facts into account’’, the biographer tells us in detail about the economic) political and cultural situation as it was at the time of the birth of the individual in question – as if the child could in general have any direct relations whatever with these elements in his first years – while the same biographer, apparently rid of ‘social facts’ once and for all, having uselessly referred to society as it was at the time of the birth, afterwards fails to bother about it just at the time when the individual reaches adolescence or adulthood, i.e. a stage in which these elements play a role of the highest importance’ (Sève, 1978:384).

Sève himself finally did devote some effort to sketching out what a Marxist biography should look like, singling out for constructive criticism three extremely well-received biographies: Sartre’s *L’Idiot de la Famille* (Sartre, 1971-72), Ian Kershaw’s *Hitler* (1998, 2000), and Le Goff’s *Saint Louis* (1996). It is little surprise who wins this staged competition: ‘the first ‘passes the test’ rather well, though with reservations; as to the second, I’m not saying that it ‘does not pass the test’ but alas we know so little about Hitler’s childhood and early youth that we do not have most of the elements necessary to make such a biography valid’ (Sève, 2016).

It would not be difficult to identify at least a level of uncertainty here in the development of Sève's own thinking regarding the importance of childhood: economics and the outside world do, after all, influence the lives of children as much as adults, as the later Sève now explicitly recognises.

More broadly, however, Sartre's effort is of especially interest to Sève as 'an attempt to synthesise what can be understood today about an individual life [and] the discovery of that point at which all constraints - external accidents, the miseries of psychic determinism and social conditioning – are suddenly transformed into the active gestures and free choices of an individual' (Jameson, 1981). Between Freud and Marx, Sartre hoped to find all of the truth, with the conclusion that Flaubert's 'leap into the imaginary' was what could be described as overdetermined: on the one hand by his personal neurosis, and the other, by objective social and historical forces. Yet Sartre is of course always bound to lose any competition set up by a conventional Marxist, and Sève is no exception, so he is duly savaged for his dubious invention of psychological categories (Sève, 2008:440) and his retrospective assignment of direction and structure into a biography (Sève, 2008:443). This compares to the comment of a more sympathetic reviewer that Sartre's attempted union of phenomenology, psychoanalysis and Marxism was highly significant, breaking new ground, his sole reservation being the contrast between Sartre's scientific method and his apparent uncritical acceptance of Flaubert's fiction (Fuller, 1977:324).

Where Sartre and Sève are on common ground, however, is their emphasis on facts and theory to understand an individual – completely, or almost completely (Sartre, 1971:7; Sève, 2008:438). This places both of them on the opposite side of a divide that on the other side sees those holding the view that a biography is impossible for anyone who does not have a close cultural affinity with the subject (Monk, 2007:553), a position from which any Marxist would surely recoil as opening the door to bias and subjectivity to a possibly unacceptable extent.

Sève does not spare Kershaw, either, despite praise for his work from other Marxist analyses (e.g. Perry, 2002). His basic complaint is that Kershaw the historical biographer is enmeshed in the debate over the role of the great man in history, attempting to disentangle the strands of the problem over more than two thousand pages of biography. But in the author's absorption in the question of the character of Hitler's power, not his personality, as the author himself says he will do (Kershaw, 1998:xxvi), we are left 'in the dark' (Sève, 2008:456n) as to important questions of how Hitler's development brought him to such oratory, such powers of persuasion, that he was able to rise to power (Sève, 2008:456n). In Sève's view, Kershaw has not explained the development of the individual, for all that he has magisterially placed him in context and described his relationship with others, in particular the enthrallment of the German people that spurred the writing of the book. What is still not clear from this criticism, however, is how anything that Sève himself has written in relation to psychology would actually have helped Kershaw, or any other biographer, given that a biographer's ability to answer these questions is not helped by the fact that 'For the formative period so important to psychologists and 'psycho-historians', the fact has to be faced that there is little to go on which is not retrospective guesswork' (Kershaw, 1998:11) – as Sève notes, this is a problem for all posthumous biography.

Goff, too, is seeking to present and explain the role of an individual in history, and likewise expresses his 'dissatisfaction with most of those anachronistically psychological, rhetorical, superficial, or excessively anecdotal works' (Le Goff, 1996:xxi), but he is careful to recognise that the very concept may be hard to elucidate in a medieval context, a time when 'certain historians have thought they could detect the emergence or the invention of the individual' (Le Goff, 1996:xxix). So for example Goff is keen when arguing for 'the exceptional emotional ties that bound the son to his mother' (Le Goff, 1989:369) to place Louis' grief in comparative and historical terms. Every act, especially those reported of a king,

must have its place in the economic, social and cultural background of the time, but at the same time there is no shame about the personal, no rejection of psychology, and a deliberate attempt to draw out the character and life of St Louis from all around him.

So the winner is: Jacques Le Goff's *St Louis*, a piecemeal success, which is all very well, except that Le Goff, however much admired by Marxists, was not himself, in fact, any more than Kershaw, a committed Marxist, and moreover went out of his way to argue that St Louis 'did not have any conscious ties to the economy' (Goff, 1996:544) and consequently devoted just five pages out of almost a thousand to economics. It would therefore appear that a biographer can write a good Marxist biography by paying proper attention, as Sève says, to the history, the way the individual has been created in society, without devoting enormous attention to economics or necessarily being a Marxist. Sève thus at least opens the door to a practical *rapprochement*, if not a full alliance, between Marxist and social biography. There is a connection here to criticism of Sève's theory of the personality, which has come principally from those whose view of the determinants of human personality is broader than his. They argue that although Sève does grudgingly accept the significance of interpersonal relations, their aspects do not feature as important concepts in his scheme of individual biography (Leonard, 1984; Burkitt, 2008).

In contemporary psychological theory, this had led to many Marxist psychologists, and theorists of the self, to lean towards the work of Vygotsky (e.g. Vygotsky, 1978) as representing a more nuanced, sophisticated approach to the individual than that of Sève. This approach, often identified as the cultural-historical theory (CHAT) might dilute Marxism: and this in turn raises the important potential twin criticism that, in practice, a Marxist biography does not differ from any other well-written biography, and that moreover, Marxism as a theoretical framework is too narrow. Better therefore would be a 'social biography', 'one that intended to explore both the individual and the broader social context' (Salvatore, 2003:189), rich in data

(Rodrigues, 2015) and celebrating 'A recognition of the complex and mutually constitutive relationship between life, art [for a literary biography] and self-making' (Holden, 2014:922) with perhaps (explicit only if required) CHAT as the supporting theory of the individual – a view wholeheartedly supported by the very biographer Sève cites with most approval (Goff, 1989). The often heard expression is 'background', which is an interesting choice of word in itself, with connotations of unimportance and insignificance.

But this in turn risks overlooking the importance of the division of labour, and social class, in biography. Sève has suggested that the advanced capitalist societies of the early 21st Century have shifted the psychological terrain of the individual and rendered unacceptable conversation and judgements that decades earlier, in a more favourable period for socialism, would have been commonplace. He may have a point: if a small diversion into fictional biography may be forgiven at this point, then looking around some of the great 20th Century novel cycles in English, for example Anthony Powell's intricate *Dance to the Music of Time* (Spurling, 2005) or C.P. Snow's more sober *Strangers and Brothers* (Snow, 1984 [1940,1947, 1951, 1958], 1983 [1964, 1968, 1970], and 1983 [1951, 1954, 1956, 1960],) the class position of the central figures in the stories is absolutely explicit; there is no doubt that the social origins of the individuals concerned drives their actions (and frequently dominated their thoughts). For example, a commentator described the lead protagonist, Lewis Eliot, as 'the bright young man from the lower reaches of the provincial middle class' (Lewis, 2009:8). If such a description of a character is not to be expected in the literature of the 21st Century, and was even derided around the time Snow finished writing (Lewis, 2009:11) it can hardly be expected that biographers would find it necessary, desirable or even possible to incarnate him.

Nor even if he were would he escape contemporary criticism, however noted as a straw man, from at least some quarters: that of biographical glossing, potentially at least analytically reductive, stripping the literary text of its distinctive literariness (Holden, 2014:917), creating

a view of texts as 'discursive products caught in complex networks of cultural production, distribution and consumption, or that might unite politics and aesthetics' (Holden, 2014: 917-8). This would be equally applicable to a Marxist biography as to one grounded in social culture (e.g. Hunter & Calihoo, 1991) or the environment viewed from a non-Marxist perspective. This type of criticism has been expressed very forthrightly: 'biographers start to write fiction as soon as they imagine that biography can be written as the application of some general theory' (Monk, 2007:555. He follows earlier writers from widely different traditions such as Strachey (1948 [1918]) and Stephen (1893) when he argues that the theoretical 'thicket' (Monk, 2007:528) should be removed so that the subject, rather than the author, can dominate the text and be better understood by the reader (Monk, 2007:567).). It is against precisely these kinds of positions that any Marxist must take a stand: a theory of the personality – whether Sève's or not - is one part of the underlying theory a Marxist brings to the biographical task that Monk explicitly rejects.

Whilst critics may seek to argue that 'the facts' can be presented without any ideological bias or theory, what is omitted in such rejections are the political implications of so doing. Even Strachey argued that a biographer needed a point of view, but for a Marxist, all biographers have a point of view – first and foremost, a class point of view - which means that, for Sève as for other Marxists, all biography takes a political stand. That is far from the end of the matter: as with all activity, whether theoretical or practical, a Marxist such as Sève goes much further, placing the biographical activity in the context of 'the militant life' (Sève, 1978:318), or at least 'the committed life' [*la Vie engagée*] (Sève, 2008:510).

Conclusion

Sève's view of biography as political action may be as deeply unfashionable as mention of class, or Marxism itself, but Salvatore does not say that the more theoretically inclusive (but less politically demanding) social biography will be easy, at least if done properly. 'To evoke a life in full motion with the world requires a broad and extensive research strategy, one that recognises that the particular is in fact the prism that reveals social as well as personal meaning' (Salvatore, 2003:190). It may even be as difficult, or even more difficult, than a Marxist biography, which according to one author appears to be largely contiguous with social biography, in that: 'Far from Marxism rejecting biography, what distinguishes Marxist biography is a greater theoretical clarity about the role of the individual in history' (Perry, 2002:9). Deutscher may stand in relation to Sève as Salvatore does to Vygotsky – though neither makes explicit reference to their psychological, as opposed to political standpoint – but the practical difference turns out to be negligible. Sève has never said whether in his opinion it is really possible to design an actual 'test' or more properly a 'set of rules' for writing a Marxist biography: there may not be any. It is even a reasonable question to ask whether writing a Marxist biography differs – in practice, for an actual biographer - from just saying with many others, 'the more background [environment] the better'. The practical implications of the distinction between the personality as conceived by Sève and that implicitly by social biographers, remains elusive.

There is however another problem with writing biography in this proposed way, which Sève does not discuss. It is the sheer scale of the necessary endeavour. Goff's *St Louis* took 992 pages and fifteen years. Kershaw's *Hitler*, which falls so far short of Seve's ideal, is two volumes, 880 and 1115 pages (Kershaw, 1998, 2001) and also took more than a decade to complete. Sartre – though admittedly quite advanced in years when he commenced the work – was unable to finish *L'Idiot de la famille*. How can one possibly examine everything in sufficient detail in so few words? As Sève himself says, without answering the question,

‘But...’how does one select the relevant facts?’ (Sève, 1978:383). And after all this prolonged effort, at such length, it is not always clear that even the most erudite of reviewers even reads all of them, so that conclusions may be drawn from facts that are at the very least contested, such as the veracity of a particular incident (Hitchens, 1999; Kershaw, 1998:53).

What is clear though, a proper Marxist biography of an individual is at the very least extremely difficult, precisely because of the need to incorporate so many external influences throughout the account, at least in the conventional sense of writing biography, which is that it must be the work of one person about one other person, and so must not 'plagiarise'. The Marxist biography must be in a sense the consequence, and at the same time the mirror image of the point that authors did not always work alone, so that ‘Perhaps we should try to think about clusters of lives and biographies, not ones rooted in a single author’ (Hadfield, 2014:378). For the Marxist biographer, at every point, every stone turned up reveals more, and yet more, social relations and issues of production, class, and culture which need analysing and including in the determinants of each and every decision, opinion and action of the individual. This may in practice be a call to excellence beyond the capacity of most and sits ill with contemporary capitalist academic activity - unless Wikipedia be the prototype - let alone the concept of the individual biographer writing about the individual subject. What the contemporary biographer in capitalist society must do, as their predecessors in Soviet biography had to do, even across thousands of pages in many volumes, is compromise, compress and conceal: challenges that biographers such as Deutscher and Salvatore take in their stride, but with which it is evident that Sève still feels uncomfortable.

Is there then something in some sense quixotic about the whole attempt? Would any biography that would really pass Sève’s stringent test inevitably expand into becoming ‘a history of everything’? An extreme conclusion might therefore be, there cannot be a real Marxist, or even perhaps a social biography, the task is simply too large. Only if a biography

were to be thought of as a living, collective (rather than a successive individual) endeavour, incorporating - not just referring to, but actually incorporating - numerous texts, something that might only come to fruition in a socialist society, then the task might be possible. Such a biography would in turn surely become extremely difficult for any one individual to have the time to read, and also potentially suffer from different personal or even group perspectives on the individual, even in a socialist society. What would be their purpose, even?

But Sève himself has said, this is too stringent a conclusion. Under present circumstances, Sève believes, it is possible to write credible biographies (Sève, 2016) but even so, what we therefore have, and perhaps are destined for the foreseeable future to have, whether from Marxist or social biographers, are just sketches of what the real biographies of the future, intricately woven into their surroundings, should eventually be. That is not say that such biographies are not excellent: each of the three biographies Sève reviews achieve high standards in terms of redaction, comprehensivity and explanation. They all incorporate extensive discussion as to the external environment of the subject of the biography. However, only when the individual is understood socially both as the creator of a biography, as well as its subject, can real progress be expected in the field of Marxist biography. For that, we may have to wait until capitalism itself no longer controls the process of writing ‘completed’ biographies for the market. For the time being, we must content ourselves with biographies written by Marxists, or at least social biographies, not true Marxist biographies.

Chapter Eight – Conclusion

The theoretical chapters of this thesis have sought to demonstrate that there is clear blue water between a Marxist theory of the personality and alternatives. The evidence in Chapter Three of this thesis has suggested that TSS represents the closest approximation to a theory of individuality aligned with Marx's own vision of what it means to be a human being, and therefore not only the right starting point for study of the changes in social science research, but also a sufficient body of theory for empirical research to begin.

As to the specific consequences hypothesis, this thesis has demonstrated that TSS is not the same as to take the concept or practice of 'Marxist psychology' as a whole seriously. Sève himself as we have seen explicitly rejected the idea of Marxist psychology: his Marxist orthodoxy, at least in his earlier work, and his confinement to a theoretical, preliminary space are both initial discouragements to TSS in the social sciences.

Another important caveat should be made, which can be perhaps called the caveat of theoretical overdetermination. Whilst much in the social sciences changes through TSS, an approximately equal, and certainly very similar, set of changes can be derived from, for example, taking Leontiev, Vygotsky or MacPherson seriously, taking Fromm (1971) or perhaps even Marcuse (1964) seriously, or even by accepting the theory of individuality developed by Jennifer Nedelsky, which shares important similarities with that developed by Lacey. For example, compare Nedelsky's introductory summary of her concept of 'relational individuality':

'The individual self is, then, constituted in an ongoing, dynamic way by the relationships through which each person interacts with others. The values that people experience as central to their selfhood, to the possibility of their flourishing, are made

possible through relationships. Autonomy, for example, comes into being (or is harmed) through relationships with parents, teachers, and employers' (Nedelsky, 2011:3)

or Stetsenko's summary of the CHAT view:

'...humans come to be and come to know each other, themselves and the world while jointly enacting collective practices mediated by cultural tools (starting with the tools of labor, all the way to complex symbolic systems such as language), building on the efforts of each other and on the achievements of previous generations, while cumulatively expanding on and amplifying these achievements' (Stetsenko, 2013:9)

with Sève's Marxist formulation, that

'humanity (in the sense of 'human-being') is not a given, naturally present in each isolated individual: it is the human social world and each natural individual becomes human in being 'humanised' through his real life-process within social relations' (Sève, 1978:139).

There are differences of emphasis, certainly, between the three authors and the approaches they espouse, just as there are between the earlier and later Sève himself. But what seems evident is that a Marxist theory of the individual shares much with other, similar, radical theories of the individual. These similarities make it possible to develop an even weaker version of the specific consequences hypothesis, which is to suggest that certain changes in social science research (and much else besides, such as the law in practice, as Nedelsky argues) can be expected from the move away from the liberal concept of the individual, by a shift in thinking about what individuals are in the most general sense, not by anything specific Sève wrote. For example, the claim that 'Most of Western thought has gone into determining the moral obligations of individuals towards other individuals, which generates a variety of rules' (Sherwin, 2012:20)

leads Sherwin to argue that these rules, which were designed to deal with other humans who were ‘relatively close and often relatively similar’ (Sherwin, 2012:21) cannot meet contemporary global challenges and fail to examine responsibilities between different types of agents.

As noted above, for a Marxist, as Politzer (1928) observed, the secret of human affairs is not of a psychological order. Much more than a theory of human personality, more than TSS, is necessary for Marxism to tackle in any complete way such varied disciplines as international relations, moral theory or economics. A Marxist would therefore expect that the general, rather than the specific, consequences hypothesis, is likely to have greater effect. It turns out, however, that the significance of TSS (the strong consequences approach), of taking a Marxist approach to psychology in general (the weak consequences hypothesis) or of taking a relational approach generally to individuality vary not so much in terms of the change in direction that they would cause for researchers, but the different emphasis that each theory places on the determinants of individuality would cause a parallel difference in the focus of research on the causes of actions and the influence of individuals.

So in Chapter Four, examining STP, the choice of theoretical framework between, for example, Sève and Nedelsky, hinges on the wish of the researcher to analyse particular influences on individual preferences. TSS certainly suggests that STP will have socio-economic determinants, in which researchers are now interested. A researcher TSS would also be inclined, as the conclusions of Chapter Four suggested, to be interested in the changes in STP over an individual’s lifetime, the key socio-economic determinants and events that shaped that individual’s biography and therefore their STP. As noted in Chapter Four, this has now become the subject of initial studies. And finally, likewise, the application of STP under different non-monetary conditions and to non-monetary values such as health. A researcher following Nedelsky’s agenda, or for that matter Vygotsky or other theorists of the social self

(Burkitt, 1991) would be more inclined to look at socio-cultural influences, questions of gender and the family, as well as life experience and employment. There are differences in emphasis, but similarities in approach.

In Chapter Five, recognising the relative absence of actual individuals in IR, and especially within constructivism, TSS was proposed as a method to re-introduce individuals into international relations theory (and IPE more generally). The conclusion was reached that this would certainly be greatly assisted by TSS, so that the specific consequences hypothesis has greater relevance than the general. However again it is certainly plausible to suggest that to reintroduce individuals into IR, other theoretical frameworks that embrace relational individuality would provide the same key to calm, and perhaps eventually to overcome, the fear of individuals that permeates IR theory. The difference, again, turns on emphasis, not principle.

Chapter Six brought out by contrast a marked difference in approach between TSS on the one hand, and non-Marxist approaches to individuality on the other. TSS entails a very sceptical look at some theories of promising, including that of Prichard, and a radical conclusion regarding the scope of enforced promises under capitalism.

Chapter Seven reverted more to type. It is hard to disentangle even from Sève's own study of biographies the particular significance of TSS by comparison to a much more general and widely-held insistence on the historical, social and economic determinants of individual biography. True, the writing of biography fits exceptionally well with Sève's conception of individuality and his own use of the term biography itself. But jettisoning idealistic concepts of 'man', rejecting liberal individualism and accepting the importance of social, especially economic, determinants on the development of the adult personality to go well beyond just 'telling stories' is to be found, as Chapter Seven demonstrated, in other contemporary biographers and critics who are not themselves Marxists. The Chapter concludes that Marxist

biography should be distinctive, and that Sève has presented a credible sketch of what a Marxist biography should look like. Unfortunately, he has also laid down an incredibly difficult set of criteria for success in which Marxists themselves (let alone others less ideologically driven), fail to satisfy in their biographical writing, and perhaps unsurprisingly no one does, or perhaps could ever, fulfil all the criteria of such a biography, however potentially worthwhile the effort.

So what in conclusion does it mean to take Sève seriously? Sève's work, meeting a very different fate of that of Vygotsky, was first attacked by Marxists themselves both for overly and insufficiently stressing the role of the individual, and then because it lacks any bridge between itself and even academic activity, let alone practical life in a capitalist economy. But does this demonstrate that a theoretical proposal of what a Marxist theory of the individual would resemble turns out to be of very limited practical use in academic research? As it turns out, no. TSS may not provide a fully-fledged theory of personality and biography that is a complete answer to a range of academic questions, so the strong version of the specific consequences hypothesis is not only as difficult to prove as to disentangle Sève's work from other such as Vygotsky. It is moreover hard to avoid the conclusion that the reason Sève is less translated than hitherto is the widespread perception that the usefulness of theoretical categories for a Marxist theory of the personality, or the influence of Marxism on psychology in general, is extremely limited under conditions where any Marxist political programme is severely circumscribed. TSS clearly has severe limitations in capitalist society: as the case studies have indicated, not all the ways it can develop and improve research are even possible. Precisely the reason why Vygotsky's work has reached a much wider audience, and why CHAT has become adopted, is because it has some, albeit limited and contentious, practical application in education within capitalist society, and not because of its siting within the Marxist tradition.

But none of this is to suggest that TSS, including taking Vygotsky and others seriously, precisely as Sève himself would want, does not have important implications for social science. The investigation of TSS in academia has provided some insights avenue of future research. Some limited real change in social science can therefore be intimated. The first is the – extremely important - reintroduction of the individual personality into social science, which, it may be claimed, runs scared of true, historical individuals in the sense that Marx (and Sève) identified them. Whether in the form of rational economic theory, constructivism, economic theory, theory deals with individuals much as Hegel did – as abstractions (Clarke, 1991). Introducing concrete historical individuals, bounded by social, especially labour, relations, does have an effect on social science: paradoxically for a theory that emphasises class and collective action, accepting and using a Marxist theory of personality enables social scientists to treat individuals with more confidence – to shake off the fear that dealing with individuals and their role is in some sense ‘unscientific’ or inferior to discussion of concepts, ideas, abstractions or collectives. There is an undoubted risk here though, of which Sève was well aware, that of paying theoretical lip service to the concept of the historical individual yet slipping back in practice into bourgeois liberal analysis of individuals (MacPherson, 1962). There is another problem, too, equally serious but in a sense opposite: the research programme indicated as essential by TSS, Marxism and even relational individuality in general turns out to be *very hard to do*.

However, Sève blazed a trail, as he intended to do, and this thesis has shown that TSS can result in some powerful arguments and real differences for research in the academic areas analysed. TSS provides *encouragement, support and one theoretical framework of choice* not only for introducing individuals in a full historical sense into academic analysis, with considerable potential benefits, not least a ‘short-cut’ on occasions to what eventually becomes

academic terrain, but also for plenty of analysis of the historical, and ultimately economic, rationales for individual decision-making, both theoretically and in practice.

It is also the case that not only have views of individuality with similar consequences to TSS have been developed, but that versions of the weak and even sometimes the strong form of the specific consequences hypothesis can be held unconsciously by scholars without being Marxists, or even psychologists. TSS, it would seem, implies as much a research programme generated by a state of mind shared by all scholars who either explicitly recognise social individuality, or act as if they did, as one that relies on militancy, let alone a proclamation of Marxist faith. People are as Marx and Sève say they are, products of social relations, and when scholars throughout the social sciences open up to these powerful ideas, their work can be enriched. Yet as this thesis has demonstrated, decades after Sève originally published MTP, there is so much more work to do.

Appendix: Correspondence with Lucien Sève

Julian Roche to Lucien Sève, 16 September 2016

At last, after several decades *with Marxism and the Theory of Human Personality* beckoning from my bookshelf after an early reading in my youth, I am able to turn my attention properly from business and economics to Marxist psychology. Thank you very much for agreeing to answer my questions, it is really an honour (and the best news I have had all year). I am hoping my work (a thesis at Hull University) will be published, as you rightly say the Anglophone world is largely ignorant of the continuing Marxist tradition in France and I hope to have a chance to help in correcting that.

Here are my questions relating in particular to *L'Homme* (of course I have other books and articles of yours to read, [*Qu'est-ce que la personne humaine ? : Bioéthique et démocratie*](#) is waiting for me in Scotland as soon as I can get there), but this seems the most pertinent.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. I realise that the answer to this question is implicit in the entire volume of *L'Homme*, and at various points (e.g page 501, note 582) explicit, but for the avoidance of doubt (as they say in English) please could you summarise how your thought has changed since 1969, and under what influence. Obviously this can only be a summary, bullet points perhaps - I ask really to ensure that my inadequate French does not result in my missing something crucial. Further, it is not many years, but would you say your views have changed since you wrote '*L'Homme*'? How might you write anything differently now? Aside I imagine from noting with satisfaction the shift in sociological discourse from Bourdieu to Ricoeur (Truc, 2011). Anything to add?

2. Some language does definitely seem to have changed. Why did you change from ‘the militant life’ to ‘the engaged life’ for example? I do not understand the explanation you provide (page 511). Again, do you still agree with the distinction between the personality and its biography that you outlined in *Marxism and the Theory of Human Personality*?
3. Burkitt (1991) - in a textbook that became famous in England - portrays your view in *Marxism and the Theory of Human Personality* as a dogmatic Marxist one, focused exclusively on labour as the mainspring of the personality, and Vygotsky *by contrast* (in the *following* chapter) as developing a much richer, more nuanced theory of what it is to be human. In other words, he (like others) seeks to ‘rescue’ St. Vygotsky from the Marxist devil. I do not agree, but the part of your book on Vygotsky does read to me like a genuflection to recent times and, apart from a few remarks on pages 364-367, you do not choose to address the big question of whether what Vygotsky wrote is really consistent with the materialist theory of history at all, and in particular whether he would agree with your view about the dominant importance of labour in creating human personality. We do know that Vygotsky has been accepted by those who are not even Marxists at all. So I must ask: do you think critical psychologists and proponents of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) have stolen Vygotsky’s (Marxist) clothes (e.g. English writers like Ian Parker)? Is not Vygotsky now all things to all men (to be cynical, *Герой нашего времени*)? Is there not a real gap between your views and those of Vygotsky? Does he not belong with Fromm, Garaudy and Lewis?
4. I read with interest your vigorous riposte (Sève, 2008:396) to Matonti, but in one way is she not right? For we English a ‘compromise’ has positive connotations anyway, but is it not fair to characterise your view as neither an extreme anti-humanism nor a speculative idealistic Marxism, but a realistic, central Marxist position. After all, I must

justify why I have chosen to ‘take Sève seriously’ (Burkitt, 1991) rather than to base my thesis on Leontiev, or for that matter, Vygotsky.

5. *If the individual has the age of his or her arteries, their personality has the age of their use of time. (L’Homme: 547).* Here is the genesis of what you call for, a real theory of old age. How can Marxism help here: you almost seem to suggest that ‘the third age’ is – or can be - a sort of ‘personal Communism’. Maybe: or is it that the vigorous old, especially in the West, have become a new part of the capitalist class, whose life liberated from the exploitative logic of capital (*L’Homme: 552*) comes at the expense of a ‘lost generation’ of youth, for example in Europe, and indeed also lower life expectancy for workers in developing countries?
6. One other question, which if I miss it out, these days, will label me old-fashioned, and that is your attitude to ‘animal rights’ (from the standpoint of Marxism), which I see discussed here – but although you point out inconsistencies and absurdities in the views of the utilitarian Peter Singer and others, you do not actually answer the question: what obligations – if any - do human beings owe animals? Are there *ethical* implications of the extensive differences you outline between animals and human beings? As you say, anthills have no social history: does that mean human beings owe them nothing, have no social obligations towards them? Right now in France there is a particular case of a man who buried a dog alive, I believe: what has Marxist psychology to say to the law in this case, if anything?

QUESTIONS FOR PRESENT WORK

1. As a true boring Anglo-Saxon, but also now like you a radical disappointed at the persistence of capitalism since World War II, I am naturally looking at the practical applications of Marxist psychology in a capitalist world. *Suppose I agree with everything you write, what then?*

2. Therefore, I have decided to start by trying to build a bridge between theory and practice. My first step, this thesis, concerns the application of your ideas, as the best analysis (in my opinion) of Marxist psychology to 4 specific, very different, areas of academic research.

- **The writing of a biography as a Marxist.** On this you have already written. I was delighted to read your pages on Goff's *St Louis*, and Ian Kershaw's *Hitler*, because I had for many years wondered what a 'proper' biography would be, in your opinion. Am I right that at least in a sense the former 'passes the test' and the latter does not, despite its length and erudition? But is it really possible to design an actual 'test' or more properly a 'set of rules' for writing a biography? How does your 'advice' differ – in practice, for a biographer - from just saying with many others, 'the more *background [environment]* the better'. So could there be 'a letter to would-be biographers from Lucien Sève', at least? Or is there something in some sense quixotic about writing such a biography – the task is simply too large, any true biography becomes 'a history of everything'.

Now, three other case studies close to my academic experience where the application of Marxist psychology is less obvious and therefore can create, I hope, new theoretical work for the thesis.

- **Constructivism in international relations theory.** The theory of international organisations in particular seems to exclude human beings altogether, as if mention of individual people were an embarrassment, as they were to some Marxists in the past. The best we can do seems to be this (Levy Foreign Policy). How might your view of individual personalities and biographies help restore individuals to their right place, without falling victim to the 'Great Men of History' theory?

- **Promising.** How does Marxist psychology help us to understand the morality of individual promises? I am looking in particular at the view of promising of the Oxford philosopher Prichard and I enclose his own theory (Prichard Promising). It seems to me fertile ground for criticism, perhaps even the sweeping criticism that Marxist psychology undermines the entire basis of his work. In a capitalist society, is not *all* promising ‘under duress’?
 - **Subjective time preference (for money) – discounting.** Discounting future value (cashflows) has been at the centre of financial analysis for decades, As an finance economist I have to teach it all the time – it seems the whole capitalist world revolves around it. English philosophers such as Sidgwick and Bentham at least thought about it. Do you think that Marxist psychology, and your own views in particular, have anything to say to economists who investigate peoples’ subjective time preferences, which have been much studied and have often found to be irrational over time, e.g. that subjective discount rates become lower for the far future (see Subjective Time Preference). Marx himself seems silent on the matter of how to value the future, as opposed to how to achieve it. Of course, with the environmental movement and suggestions of fixed natural resources, this is a very contemporary issue. Could we say perhaps that Marxist psychology suggests that the failure to take into account the future is another example of alienation? That future peoples’ interests are just as important as our own, in a truly engaged life?
3. It is always difficult to second guess what others would say, but do you think the authors you cite in *L’Homme* (pages 427-432), which I found extremely interesting, would make any difference to the answers the critics would give to these questions?

QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

4. I hope to address later the really practical application of Marxist psychology (e.g. in Brazilian education) – your page 393 was fascinating – and of course I agree about the militant/engaged life (page 510) although ‘getting it right’ is very difficult in practice. However your references to actual practical matters seem exclusively to refer to education, e.g. IQ testing, which you rightly deplore. What other practical aspects of psychology, will be different if one adopts your view of man rather than the conventional bourgeois view? Or is it permissible to consider the question of ‘L’homme’ as a theoretical one which should not be expected to have much practical effect beyond perhaps education? Surely not – the point is not just to analyse the world, *but to change it.*
5. Do you think that these practical aspects are different if one adopts your view rather than e.g. that of the Frankfurt School, Althusser, Garaudy, or leading critical psychologists such as Ian Parker?

Any and all comments on these questions – which I think may seem to you very pedestrian - will be most greatly appreciated. I will be happy to present the final work to you – I hope in early 2017 - for your opinion and correction of any translation. It will be dedicated to you.

Fraternally,

Lucien Sève to Julian Roche, 17 November 2016

Answers to Julian Roche

Let me say first, before answering, that your French is almost excellent, I'm very impressed. Occasionally, I will indicate your very few mistakes, assuming that it can be useful to you, but the rarity of my remarks will confirm the quality of your mastery of our language.

1. These are basically three criticisms, at the same time both sympathetic and yet strong, that made me evolve since *Marxisme et théorie de la personnalité* (a book conceived and written from 1964 to 1968). In chronological order: the criticism of Daniel Bertaux (1976), that of Ivar Oddone (1981), that of Yves Schwartz (1983-1988). Daniel Bertaux led me to consider biographical realities as comprising even more socio-historical variables that I had seen. Ivar Oddone forced me to see that the dichotomy concrete activity / abstract activity which I had proposed was a representation insufficiently dialectical and even a questionable part of the structures of the use of time. Yves Schwartz pushed me in the same direction, but he further questioned the same principle of a "singular science" in a way that did not convince me but stimulated me into thinking more deeply about this crucial issue. These three main criticisms (less relevant seemed to me Leontiev's criticism, who rejected the idea of determining the personality through biography, because in my eyes he underestimated how important biography is) were the main driver of progress that I have sought to develop in "*L'Homme*", which was written between 2004 and 2008 but conceived throughout the nineties. To these external drivers, it is necessary to add an internal motivation: I did not stop working and thinking about *Marxist categories of thought* (the result of this reflexive work is particularly

revealed in Chapter Two of Volume III of *Penser avec Marx aujourd'hui, "La Philosophe?"*) so that if the strong criticisms I mentioned pushed me forward, reciprocally this work on categories made me actively receptive to the need for a substantive reworking. Have I have shifted since the publication of "*L'Homme?*" In 2008, do you ask. Yes of course, because I still read a lot, work and make myself think (as I enter my ninetieth year, and despite the state of my brain being as old as I am, that is to say physiologically not very good, which translates itself in many regressions of basic functions, I am fortunate enough to have preserved intact my ability to think, probably because I still read and work a lot, and I thus experience the profound correctness of the views of Vygotsky on the fundamental specificity of what he calls the higher psychic functions, a specificity that seems to me has still not encompassed the extensive ongoing research on the human brain ...). Have I written anything that demonstrates how my thought has evolved since 2008? Not really. But perhaps this was reflected at least in part on the last text I published in this area, that is to say my preface to the fourth German edition of *Marxisme et théorie de la personnalité* to be published in German in early 2016, a text which first appeared in French in the form of a small book published by les Editions sociales, entitled *Pour une science de la biographie* (Sève, 2015). But in truth I think I ought to go back very carefully on various aspects of what I call the science of biography that I did not properly elucidate. Only I must hurry if I want to get to thinking about and then writing the fourth and final volume of *Penser avec Marx Aujourd'hui* on "*Le communisme*", an enormous task of reading, thinking and design in which I've been substantially buried for most of a year. And I think it will take me another two years at least ... so even if I'm not dead before I can publish the fourth volume, I doubt very much that I could return once more to the science of biography...

2. Why, on page 511 of "*L'Homme?*" did I go from the "militant life" formula to that of "a

committed life"? For a reason that does not relate at all to psychology but to politics. "Militant life" is a formula that refers pretty strictly to the activity in the ranks of a party - "militant" comes from Latin miles, meaning soldier ... - and I consider – it's a common view - that the classic party structure is fundamentally obsolete for any radical emancipatory transformation project of society and of individuals (that's the basic reason why in 2010 I left the French Communist party in which I was an active member for sixty years, and in which I led a protest activity for twenty-six years ...). "The committed life" formula says simply that personal involvement in socio-political struggles is not limited at all to the party structure. This changes nothing about the way of conceiving the relationship between personality and biography.

3. What you tell me about the views of Burkitt and Ian Parker is totally new for me. I did not even know their names ... This will tell you my ignorance of contemporary English psychology. I must stress once again here that I'm not a psychologist, which means first of all that, of the huge international bibliography in this area, I have rather a very fragmented knowledge, with large gaps. I'll try to answer your point 3, notwithstanding the serious risk that I have not properly understood you. Incidentally, in this point 3, I note in your text, not an error in your French, but rather some bizarre formulations very difficult to understand for a Frenchman: specifically 'the part of your book on Vygotsky appeared to me like a genuflection to recent times'. I can't understand these last four words, because one can only kneel before a person, maybe before some things, but before times, I don't see it.

Further down, your expression 'Is Vygotsky not now all things to all men?' must be, I suppose, an English way to say what in French could be expressed, at least if I understand it, for example, saying 'a little bit of anything', or 'a Spanish inn, where you find all that you brought in'. Another subaltern note about this subject: in English you transcribe

‘Vygotsky’.with a y the end, but the final ‘i’ of the Russian name has no need of a ‘y’, at least in French; so I write systematically Vygotski, like Dostoievski, or Trotski.

I think the content of your item 3 reflects a very broad and deep dispute, which I can well estimate, between the anglophone Vygotskism (which I know only in its American and Canadian versions, you reveal to me the original British dimension) and the francophone vygotskism. This is a pretty huge deal, culturally and ideologically, which I can’t dwell on here as much as it deserves. Suffice it to say: when Vygotsky began to emerge in the USSR out of the Stalinist shadow after 1956, the first foreign country that paid attention to what was beginning to be published in Russian was, if I am not mistaken, the USA. But the way Vygotsky was translated, read and understood in the USA is quite astounding. The first English translation (US) of *Thought and Language*, by Eugenia Hanfmann and Gertrude Vakar (1962) is only a digest of some 300,000 words of a book that in its original version has about 1,000,000 words, which allows [the authors] to censor completely references and quotations from Marx, Engels, Lenin, in other words, amputating Vygotsky’s thought from his fundamental Marxian dimension. This major misunderstanding, bordering on treason, became the rule throughout the English-speaking vygotskism which I am aware. My wife, who was the great French translator of Vygotsky, was amazed to see to what extent the thought of Vygotsky was betrayed in it, and still to a large extent by the latest translation of Kozulin (1984), not to mention the incredible redaction which was the famous *Mind in Society* of Michael Cole *et al* (1978). These "vygotskiens" (I can only put the word in quotes) have absolutely not understood, have even refused to understand the specific theoretical culture of Vygotsky, which combines Spinoza with Marx and Lenin. Not understanding, they tried to force Vygotsky’s psychology into the classic American perspectives: behaviourist, culturalist, more recently structuralist (that's what Anton Yasnitsky (Yasnitsky, 2011, Yasnitsky *et al*, 2014) is looking to do right now in Toronto), which leads to major misunderstandings of Vygotsky, as a result of profound

ignorance of dialectic, anthropology, and of Marxian historical materialism. I have been able to discuss this with the best Russian Vygotskian, Ekaterina Zaverchneva, and I found that we share the same critical perspective on it. In France, in part precisely from the translation work of my wife (her complete and very careful translation of *Thought and Language* was [originally] published in 1985 (Vygotsky, 2003 [1934a]), followed by several other major translations), to which can be added my own work, has developed a rich school of Vygotskian psychology, of which I think the English vygotskisme takes little or no account, despite the fact that in my opinion there is in that body of work a more authentic and deep understanding of the Vygotsky thought - I am thinking particularly of the work and publications of Michel Brossard, Yves Clot, Jean-Yves Rochex Gerard Vergnaud, etc., and also of the francophone psychologists of Geneva, Bernard Schneuwly, John Paul Bronckart, Christiane Moro, Janette Friedrich, etc. If you want to know more about the huge divide that has formed between the Anglophone and the Francophone vygotskisme, I would refer you to the lengthy presentation I made of it in Vygotsky's *Histoire du développement des fonctions psychiques supérieures* (Vygotsky, 2014), where I paid especial attention to the fundamental Marxist dimension of Vygotsky's psychology. More broadly I refer you to two books that gather contributions to two international conferences organised in Paris by Yves Clot on the work of Vygotsky, *Avec Vygotski* (Clot, 2002), and *Vygotski maintenant* (Clot, 2012). All this is to tell you that the Vygotsky whom I hold in such high regard is not the result of some personal wishful thinking but of a vast collective work that frankly speaking I hold much more reliable, and more authentic than what I've read so far in English, including the very learned – and on a number of points, incontestable - book *Understanding Vygotsky* by Van der Veer and Valsiner (1991) but which has a stark and complete omission of the role of Marxist thought in Vygotsky's psychology. What sets apart, and in my eyes very advantageously, the French vygotskiens from their Anglophone colleagues that I have read, is not that they are all

"Marxists" – they are not, and even those who like I try to think with Marx have long ceased from calling themselves adherents to a doctrine called "Marxism" - but all have a strong Marxist culture and are therefore able to discern among Vygotsky everything can be understood that 'in the light of this Marxian training - starting with the constant use of dialectic and the anthropological vision that underlies historical materialism as a whole. This means that when you ask 'Is there not a real gulf between your views and those of Vygotsky', I cannot answer anything else other than this: the gulf is not at all between Vygotsky's thought and mine, but between Vygotsky's thinking and how apparently it is understood (or rather misrepresented) in an anglophone vygotkism to which I'd like to give a tip: if you want to appreciate Vygotsky properly, please, first study a little more Marx, and if possible in the light of reliable commentators on Marx. If you do, you will discern how comical for example the approximation of Vygotsky is with 'humanist' interpreters of Marx such as Fromm, Garaudy or Lewis; I would go almost to this incongruity: rather read someone like Sève, *Marxisme et théorie de la personnalité*, or better yet '*L'Homme?*'.

4. On your question about Frédérique Matonti (It's a woman) : What ,in my eyes, is outrageous in what that lady wrote about me, is not to put me in a 'central 'position between speculative humanism and Althusserian anti-humanism – although to believe that we can characterise a complex theoretical positioning with a simple spatial metaphor suggests very shallow thinking - but it is to attribute this "positioning" to a careerist view - that this stance would have the effect of promoting my ascension in the hierarchy of the PCF, which in my view is the lowest form of slander, free from the slightest proof. What is lacking in Madame Matonti is a minimal intellectual honesty - she has the nerve for example to dedicate a biographical box to me which contains enormous un-truths about me, un-truths that she never had even the elementary decency to rectify after I pointed them out to her. This deserves only contempt.

5. About views I have outlined in "*L'Homme?*" On the question of old age. Would what you characterise as "individual communism" - an interpretation that goes far beyond what I have advanced on my own account - if we broaden our perspective, be integrated into the operating logic of Capital: a privilege granted at the expense of younger generations, and even people who live in developing countries, you ask. I answer that not only the right to retire as it operates in countries like France today is not an 'entry in the operating logic of capital' but all the policies inspired by the capital tend severely to limit, control and drastically reduce this third life, which in principle escapes exploitation (it can of course become so on the basis of the consumption of retiree, but in itself their life eludes it). There is a huge class battle that is played around the issue of retirement, since it is for millions and millions of people decades of life which are withdrawn from direct capitalist exploitation, and I tried to show how this situation can also have consequences before old age, how in sum there is revolutionary potential there. Is it a question of a social conquest that would come at the expense of younger generations? Not at all, and this in two ways: on one side, because the paid pensions are financed by "employer contributions", in other words, Capital must give up a share of the surplus value that is continually derived from work. That's why Capital attacked so vigorously the PAYG system (not funded) that works in France; on the other side, because if pensions are paid for by contributions levied on the wages of those generations at work, as a result of this payment these younger generations give to themselves the right to benefit later from their own retirement. Today's youth are tomorrow's retirees, so there is solidarity between all and not conflict of interest. And in what way would such a system would be even slightly predatory on the peoples of developing countries? Not at all, precisely because it is not a predatory social conquest for anyone. It is not even "communism" (the level of pensions paid is frighteningly low overall) but it is true that it is already a sketch of what can flourish in a society without classes, that

there is the germ of communism there. Hence, I repeat, the violence of social conflicts around these issues, the harshness with which the forces of Capital are seeking to stem a historical movement that puts it fundamentally at risk.

6. This is the question of "animal rights". A question on which neither Marx nor any Marxist of note ever said anything to my knowledge, and on which we must take a leap into the dark. To me, the issue is not about displaying an elementary sense of humanity towards animals. It has been long since said very rightly that living beings in general (which even includes plants, trees, etc.), let alone animals, especially those that are capable of suffering, emotion, memory, etc., require from us behaviour as much as possible free from abuse and violence, let alone cruelty, and even command us to care for them. I am for myself, like many people, perhaps even more than many, scandalised by failure to pay scrupulous respect to these ethical principles. The dispute relates exclusively to the concept of animal 'rights'. I think this concept as it is used here is unacceptably ambiguous. If we say that these beings have a *right* to our care, to decent treatment from us, then this way of speaking makes these demands a *moral obligation on us*, and I totally agree. We can even, and without doubt we should, go further: we can, we must register in law penalties for inhuman behavior toward animals. This has wide application, if we consider for example all behavior that lead to the threat of extinction of a particular species of great apes. But here the idea of a right is confined to moral and ultimately legal obligations, which are *our* responsibility in the matter. Others, however, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, want to enshrine *animal rights* in the sense that there are human rights, that is to say, we treat at least some species animals as *legal subjects*. This is the idea that for my part I disagree with, and I even judge meaningless. Because one cannot be a subject of law, in a precise legal sense, unless one is a conscious and free actor, to whom it therefore makes sense to *impute* prerogative or responsibility. I consider that no animals, not even the great

apes, are in that category. No monkey can convince any human court to respect its 'rights'. The right word is here purely mystifying. And if we imagine *a body of lawyers for animals* charged with taking legal action to assert their 'rights', one is enmeshed in a contradiction, since that would be to admit that they cannot argue for themselves, and so cannot without a radical abuse of language be qualified as subjects of law themselves. I think it makes no sense to want to circumvent this evidence: concern for animals (more broadly for all living beings) is *a concern that is absolutely incumbent on us*, just as concern for infants, the insane, and those in a coma. And not only do I dismiss the idea of 'animal rights' in the sense that I have advanced it, but I do wonder about the deeper meaning, sometimes perhaps the hidden meaning, of this intellectually inconsistent claim. Here one may criticise the position of Peter Singer, for example, someone who advances claims for great apes (Singer & Cavalieri, 1993) but at the same time proposes to euthanise human babies who do not seem to be up to scratch, which would save unnecessary expense. I find this a monstrous attitude. And I have a lot to say on the subject (I was for seventeen years a member of the National Consultative Ethics Committee for Life Sciences and Health), but it really would take me too far from the subject.

Then come the questions you say refer to 'your current job'.

1 and 2. In the concrete matter of writing a biography. A very good question, because here we notice, it's not just about concepts but of seeing how it is done. A first remark on the two examples you mention, the *Saint Louis* of Jacques Le Goff (Goff, 1996) and *Hitler* by Ian Kershaw (Kershaw, 2001, 2004). You say to me 'the first passes the test but not the second'. I would correct this to: the first 'passes the test' rather well, though with reservations; as to the second, I'm not saying that it 'does not pass the test' but alas we know so little about Hitler's childhood and early youth that we do not have most of the elements necessary to make such a

biography valid. But this is not the fault of Kershaw, on the contrary - I find what he says for example the genesis of the future Führer as a rabble rouser very illuminating. That said, you wonder if there might be 'a letter to future biographers of Lucien Seve' - the phrase is ambiguous: do you mean a letter to my future biographers or rather (what I assume) a letter by me to future biographers in general? If that's the second, you point your finger directly on what I am conscious of not yet having quite expressed. But you push me then to tell you a secret: if I must have still time (when we approach 90 years, we really know that time is strictly counted), I intend to return to this subject by considering *my own political life* - that is to say, in particular: in the first place, how and why did I become a communist activist in 1950 at the age 24 (and not before)? There I would put myself on notice, and I'm motivated to do so. But will I have the time? ...

3. You then mention three other case studies close to your academic experience where the application of Marxist psychology is less obvious. A note first: you say "Marxist psychology." I challenge the formula, and in two senses. First, although I of course am inclined to believe that my views are well founded in psychology from the perspective of Marxist thought, it would be too much to baptise them 'Marxist psychology'; for the time being in any case it is only 'sèviennne psychology'. Second, and more importantly, I am an opponent to the idea of 'Marxist psychology' (this was also precisely Vygotsky's position): the goal is a scientific psychology, and if it really succeeds in being so, to call it 'Marxist' would be as absurd as to speak of 'Marxist cosmology' or 'Marxist physiology': it is one thing to believe that the way of thinking derived from Marx may prove fruitful in the creation of a science, in which case it is certainly relevant, but to characterise it as 'Marxist' would only cast doubt on the objective scientific validity of its contents, since any validity that can only be independent of any philosophical position.

First question: the role of individuals in history. A classic question. You probably know the answer of the great Russian Marxist Plekhanov to this question (Plekhanov, 1898). This classic argument is summarised in the following paragraph: ‘as a result of its peculiarities the individual can influence the fate of society. this influence is sometimes very considerable. But the possibility of this influence as well as its intensity are determined by the organisation of society, by the relation of social forces. The individual's character is a ‘factor’ of social evolution only where social relations permit, as long as they permit and only to the extent that they allow’ (Plekhanov, 1898). I recommend you read this if you do not know it; it abounds in concrete historical examples, and can be quite relevant for a venture like yours.

Second question: the morality of personal promises. I'm not sure I understand the reason why you raise the issue, and I have not looked at Prichard's views on this subject. Any response is therefore difficult for me. Nevertheless, when you ask: ‘In a capitalist society, are not all promises made under duress?’, I wonder if what underlies this is a scarcely defensible wholly deterministic vision of social life, and which in any case is not that of Marx: Marxist historical materialism is *determinist*, but not *deterministic*, that is to say that what pertains to general laws is accomplished only through an infinite multitude of singular events and chance. So there is indeed room for personal freedom, and thus also for the responsible commitment set out in a promise.

Third question: on subjective preferences about the future - and here you refer to Sidgwick and Bentham. I must admit that here too I am devoid of any really solid answer, the question is probably hard fought where you are but hardly debated in France. You say that Marx himself seems silent on how to assess the future. I think this is both obvious and questionable. In a similar vein to my previous comment (Marx did not at all have a

deterministic view of the course of history), he always eschewed any prognosis on the concrete future, what would happen in what he called ‘the cauldrons of the future’ But the same Marx clearly took for granted that in the future lies the historical overcoming of capitalism, the last form of class society, in that highly developed classless society he called communism. In this sense, Marx did not at all refrain to portray the future (only these views are deliberately vague, where nothing is specified as to periods, or concrete forms ...). Is it still too ambitious? Many of those who "think with Marx", including myself, are now of the view that our future is in the form of a giant either-or: either we will reach in this century an end to an increasingly uncontrollable capitalism, which is leading us to unprecedented catastrophes (environmental disaster, but also political, anthropological ...), or we face the apocalyptic end of civilised mankind. There are *current conditions* (a significant Marxist idea, reworked from Hegel) in favour of one of these possibilities rather than the other. In sum, I would say both a fatalistic attitude is wrong (because we can act more or less aware of causality) and also a ‘contingent’ attitude (because there is indeed at work a powerful historical logic which does not depend on our goodwill). So I am inclined to answer your formulation at the end of the paragraph: ‘Could we say perhaps that Marxist psychology suggests that the failure to take into account the future is another example of alienation?’ by saying that undoubtedly reasoning in a Marxist way in psychology (a formula I prefer radically to ‘Marxist psychology’) leads to the conclusion that in fact not taking into account the future (within reasonable limits where it is possible to predict) is a typical form of alienation, in its dual dimension of unconsciousness and helplessness.

Finally ‘questions for future work’.

Possible practical applications of the psychological views in question. I fully endorse your idea: certainly there are very theoretical questions here, but not in the sense that it would mean that there would be no need here to worry about practice. On the contrary: these are enormous issues at the same time at the biographic-personal and the social-collective level. You say not only study but change the world. Exactly. And there are truly revolutionary issues here. You quote first potential applications in education, and indeed it seems to me that this is a crucial area. The mass destruction of individual potential under the guise of common sense teaching continues quietly in our world, under cover of the naturalist-fatalistic vision of individual destinies, and what's more in a seemingly democratic spirit, according to the view which in France is called equal opportunity; Children who as a result of their biographical trajectory are already very unequally developed are in the same academic position, and we say, may the best person win, the huge inequalities that are observed are then blamed on an alleged unalterable *inherent inequality of individual capabilities*. Authentic democratic teaching proceeds from a totally different principle: 'All are capable,' but on condition that the means to deploy these capabilities are provided, which in the last analysis relates to the *lived experience* of learning activities for *each and every person*. And so here the question of a "science of the biography" becomes really crucial. Incidentally, did you pick up the notable role in my thinking from the 1960s on "inherent ability" played by a study of an English Marxist psychologist Brian Simon, 'Intelligence tests and the comprehensive school (Simon, 1953)? It was a remarkable study, very penetrating, of great educational significance, in my recollection.

Can you think of other practical applications? Yes, and how! In fact, there is no dimension of life, whether individual or social, which is not directly concerned. I have tried to show this in relation to old age and retirement, and as you have seen it seems to me that creating the conditions for a real third independent life in retirement weather can change the entire logic

of working life, right back to the beginning. In fact, I would venture to say that *the life of each individual person will be completely reinvented*. "Great men" are not stunning natural exceptions, they are rather rare examples of what each individual could really become, if not for the fact that the overwhelming majority is condemned to a more or less stunted development by socio-psychological conditions which are still universally dominant in our class societies. There is everything to change for example in *working life*, which, freed from exploitation, could and should become incredibly creative both in the field of productive, inventive capacity and that of human relations - which would moreover allow a fantastic development of the productivity of social labour. In that sense, Communism is anything but a utopia, and with the technology of today there is even a way to reach it - but the terrible question is to achieve a real transcendence of the politico-social processes of our persistent prehistory. I should add that the 'science of the biography' is in itself a genuinely key dimension of any *communist* vision in this sense. One of the most tragic mistakes of what was called in the twentieth century 'Marxism' is to have been reduced to sociology, a matter entirely of politics, we can even say an obsession with the collective, in a complete loss of the perspective that was absolutely critical for Marx: the individual, the person - no definition of communism can be valid whilst underestimating this crucial element: *the emancipation and full development of each individual*. This why these two expressions are literally inseparable: change the world, change lives. *One loses all meaning without the other*. By persistently working towards what I intended to be the 'science of biography', I do not feel I am working in a marginal enterprise, but rather have the conviction of contributing to a full restoration of meaning to the same Communist vision, beyond its appalling adulterations of the last century. It is not necessary to rely on this to justify work on problems of personality and biography, which can justify attention entirely by themselves. But if we reflect properly on the practical scope of the thing, in the widest sense

of the word practice, then it is the future of Man in the widest possible sense of the term that is obviously at stake.

Your plan to dedicate your future work to me touches me.

My turn to finish, as you did: fraternally.

November 16, 2016”5 *Julian Roche to Lucien Sève*

As promised, here is the draft of my thesis. I would be delighted if you could comment - by Email would of course be perfect.

I look forward to your response, which would be the best Christmas present possible.

December 13, 2016: Lucien Sève to Julian Roche

Some observations on the thesis '*Taking Sève Seriously*'

I have pretty much read your entire thesis. I say 'pretty much'" for two reasons: the first is that I do not read English fluently, I often have to use the dictionary, and I sometimes fear I have misunderstood what I have read; Moreover, in recent times, a rather heavy permanent workload has added an additional source of tasks: I have just turned 90 and, besides the family initiatives on this subject, a two-day scientific symposium on the whole of my work was organised at the *Ecole Normale Superior* (of which I am a former pupil) and *at La Sorbonne* with, at its core, a number of exchanges and obligations of which I am not yet quite done. So I haven't had long periods of rest to read your thesis under the best conditions. The consequence of these two difficulties is that what I am going to tell you about your work may be inaccurate, or at least approximate, and therefore of limited use to you. I do hope not to err, but I am far from sure that what I am going to say will be completely relevant.

My overall impression is that you have done a very remarkable job, both in terms of what you describe as TSS and CHAT - I have taken special care to read Chapter Three and then Chapter Seven - and also to ask judicious questions about the views expressed in *Marxisme et théorie de la personnalité*. I am not sure that, at the time of writing this note, I have come to a very accurate and comprehensive view of the questions and criticisms you raise about my views on personality and biography, which especially risks limiting the usefulness for you of the remarks I will make. I hope to benefit from your indulgence.

The analysis in Chapter Three of my "theory of personality" is remarkable for its mastery, and I would like to compliment you. Do I have any critical remarks to make? Yes,

basically one. It seems to me related to the fact that you mainly consider this book of almost fifty years ago, *Marxisme et théorie de la personnalité*. Not at all that I disown it: I still hold to its general tone and many of the more particular ideas therein. Important criticisms have been made of me, especially three (those of Bertaux, Oddone and Schwartz, not to mention Leontiev's more limited one), I have presented them in the little book of 2015 *La biographie* (Sève, 2015), and I have said which elements of these criticisms I regard as well-founded - for example the duality of concrete activity / abstract activity is treated in *Marxisme et théorie de la personnalité* in an insufficiently dialectical way. But in spite of their importance, these challenges do not, in my opinion, call into question the most general consistency of the book.

What, then, is the critical remark I have to make? It is this: in my book of 1969 I hardly mentioned, and very insufficiently examined, a concept of the utmost importance, a key element of theory as it has developed: that of historical forms of individuality. And as it hardly appears *en clair*, it's quite excusable for you not to have mentioned it and developed it in Chapter Three. But as a result there is an important gap in the theory as it presents itself. In fact, it was after the publication of the book that I myself better perceived the importance and the role of historical forms of individuality (I shall abbreviate as FHI). I mention the concept in the postscript of the 3rd French edition. But even here, the analysis is far from being pushed sufficiently. In order to see what it concerns and how this is a very important concept, we must go to *L'Homme* (Sève, 2008:111-121) and to the text I published in the Annex to the *la biographie* (Sève, 2015:69-86). The only major shortcoming in your presentation of my theory of personality and biography is that, if I am not mistaken (and it is possible that I am wrong), you are not talking about FHI.

What is the idea, and why is it of prime importance? I summarise here very briefly what is being developed on this subject in the more recent works that I have mentioned. As examples of *homo sapiens* we are simply primates. This is a first dimension of our humanity. But, as

Marx and Engels had already remarked in the *German Ideology* (Marx & Engels, 1846 [1974]), what defines historically-socially developed humanity is that by producing its means of subsistence, it has gradually produced a *second humanity*, no longer a biological-internal organism but social-external: it is the human world, a world of tools and languages, of social relations and representations, a rapidly accumulating world that individuals have to *biographically appropriate* to become not only copies of the *human species* but members of the *human race*. For example, they must learn their mother tongue, which is not given at birth. The socio-culturally developed form of humanity comes to us from outside and no longer from within, like our primate nature. The forms in which we become developed humans are no longer natural forms (such as biological sex, physical type, etc.), but extremely varied and evolutive forms of history (e.g. schoolchildren, salaried workers, married women, retiree, etc.), under which, less obvious but more fundamental, there are others more radically constitutive such as relations of money, relations of property, relations of power These forms determine how we become individuals in a given historico-social world, they are *historical forms of individuality*. And it is from them that one can account for personality (a very elaborate social form of individuality), that one can think of biography (a very elaborate social form of life).

Is this important for the question that your Chapter Seven deals with: how to write a biography? I fully agree that I have not responded in a very concrete way to this crucial question in *Marxisme et théorie de la personnalité*, and even in later publications. If I understood your Chapter Seven correctly, you are saying that there are some difficulties for which I have not provided an answer. And I grant that, but it is not a structural deficiency of the theory, it is only an insufficiency of my work ... At this moment, I am beginning to think about a future book which will be titled: *Comment penser une biographie?* And I want to give you at least an idea of what I intend to develop. It seems obvious that a biography must follow the chronological order of a life - any biography begins with the birth of its character, it seems obvious ... But

this evidence covers a deep illusion, since, beginning with birth, one believes (and it is believed) that it is the individual who will gradually produce his life. But in truth the forms in which this life is going to take place, it is essentially not the subject who produces them, they find them all already made beforehand in the historico-social world of their existence. For example, I was a student of letters, then a professor of philosophy in a public high school, a communist militant in a party of the Third Stalinist International, a non-university researcher, and more I can't recall ... I did not produce these forms of individuality! *My life is inscribed there*, and it has taken its forms, it has internalised the logics ... If I wanted to write my biography, I should start not by my birth, but rather by the presentation of these forms historical histories of individuality, which have played in my life the role of powerful *biographical attractors*. In fact, a childhood, a youth, is to a large extent the path an individual makes towards FHIs that dictate in large part their trajectory.

But stopping there would be absolutely insufficient. Because of course, the question remains of why my biography made me 'enrol' in *these* forms and not in others, and also in what way, in what terms I have enrolled myself. And here, the biography must turn to the child, to their *early identifications* (a Freudian concept of great importance, provided one extends much of it), to the formation of their personal motivations, The individual *will determine for themselves how they will be shaped by the world in which they live* - we are here in a non-deterministic conception of biography which nevertheless places the determining role of social relations squarely at the centre ... As you see, the concept of FHI is truly irreplaceable in thinking about the dialectic of biography. That is why I am of the opinion that it should take an important place in your Chapter Three. An important place that in my book of 1969 I did not yet know how to give.

I hope that these few indications too quickly drafted may be at least somewhat useful. Look at it as a sign of the great interest I have taken in reading your rich work, which includes many things and poses many questions which what I have just written does not take into account.

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