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*Corresponding author

Augusto Charan Alves Barbosa
Gonçalves, Department of Education,
University Center Estácio of Brasília,
Brazil

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Opinion Article

A Short Essay about the Problem of Human Behavior and Conscience

Augusto Charan Alves Barbosa Gonçalves*

Department of Education, University Center Estácio of Brasília, Brazil

Opinion

First of all, I would like to say that I am entirely responsible for the mistakes and successes that I can make here about what I am going to write. Secondly, inspired by Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Theory and Spinoza's Monist Philosophy, I want to make it clear that this essay is the result of some reflections that I have been making on the possible differences between conscience and human behavior. Thirdly, due to the short time I have at this moment, I commit myself to write another article soon, delving into the issue. That said, let's begin. Well, Lev (Lion) Semyonovich (Son of Simeon) Vygotsky, psychologist, belarusian, jewish, marxist and spinozist (it is good to say that), believed that, like emotion and aesthetic emotion, conscience, in psychology as a whole, has not yet given its last word. That is, we need, as researchers of psychology, to still study it (conscience) in a rigorous and methodical way so that we can understand it more and more and better. The conscience, for Vygotsky (1962) [1], can be understood as the structural component of human behavior. With this, he means, among other things, that the conscience, the experience of the radical experiences, deepens, becomes more complex to each activity, to each interest, to each need, to each social relationship, in short. If conscience is the structural component of human behavior, the relationship of unity between consciousness and behavior is established. Every human activity, for Vygotsky (1962), arises from a need and each activity implies the constitution of a type of conscience that is unique and insurmountable.

In other words, the teaching activity implies one conscience, sexual activity, another, and so on. According to Vygotsky, the conscience is systemic and semantic. So, for him, we know the objective and social reality through the concept, we experience the world mediated by the word! The psychological system (with all its networks in connection) is integrated and is related to other systems: respiratory, endocrine, reproductive, etc. Behavior, like conscience, becomes more complex with every activity, every social relationship we have with people and the world. However, I think that we need to make very clear the identity of human conscience and behavior. Despite being an inseparable unit as is the body and the mind (Spinoza, 2002), they keep (conscience and behavior), each one in its own way, its singularities [2]. I believe that one of the biggest problems in psychology is not only conceptualizing what conscience and behavior become. But, explain the particularity of one and the other. The great task of psychological science, in my view, is to understand and explain human behavior as it is and not just as we would like it to be. This implies ensuring that the behavior does not maintain a harmonious relationship with conscience, for example. The conscience does not guarantee the "realization" of behavior. In other words, conscience often speaks A and behavior, B. The conflict, the dialectic, the shock, the dissonance between one thing and another - that helps us to see how incredible human behavior is. The individual (social) is the only being, until the contrary is proven, who can do "meaningless" things, such as, for example, accepting death in honor of his homeland (when a non-human animal feels threatened he runs away).

No non-human animal surrenders to death under any circumstances except by strict biological defense instinct. Weaving a parallel that is still quite imperfect, we would say that the mind would be the conscience and the body, the behavior. The mind moves and rests only ideas (consciences) and the body moves and rests only matter - behavior (Inspired by Spinoza's Monist Philosophy). Thought and body, ideas and matter, conscience and behavior. Two different sides of the same coin... Not everything we think, we do, we know well. Not everything we imagine, not all ideas we have, are embodied, take shape. That is why, being aware of something does not guarantee that our behavior will not contradict the conscience. People around the world are aware that smoking can cause cancer, but they don't stop smoking. During the worldwide epidemic (Covid-19), people know that they need to take care of themselves and wear masks and yet, even though they are aware that they can acquire the virus, they do not take care of themselves, sometimes. This contradiction between behavior and conscience is what can be most profound in behavioral psychology, in my view. Contradiction that makes us human in the culture.

Could behavioral psychology help us to understand the psychological mechanisms involved in "shortening" our behavior with our conscience, that is, what we think with what we do, making us probably more coherent with our thoughts and actions? Or is this question too idealistic or even false? Wouldn't this contradiction between behavior and conscience be the key to explaining human behavior in its entirety? I think so... We know that the articulate language, the active speech, the superior psychological and / or cultural functions (voluntary perception and memory, among other things, is what distinguishes us from other animals). However, it seems that what also makes us different is this contradiction that exists between what we think and what we do. The non-human animal, when it thinks about drinking water, it drinks. After all, it is conditioned only by biological (and not social) laws. However, human behavior is unique, we can feel fear and say or disguise that we are feeling absolutely nothing, we can be thirsty and declare or "rehearse" that we are not thirsty, including repressing this vital need, etc. Everything suggests that the conscience (if we can say that) of the non-human animal is its own behavior: what the animal thinks, does. But, in the case of the human being, no. That is why psychology should not dehumanize the human being by placing him as a being of coherence (conscience = behavior). The essence of human behavior may be the incoherence of your actions, your attitude.



Unlike the non-human animal, we can decide other paths for the development of our behavior that is, above all, social, unpredictable, in constant progressive and regressive development. We are free to contradict ourselves or not. Non-human animals do not have the same freedom of choice...

Finally, I would like to propose the following argument: the contradiction between conscience (what is thought) and behavior (what is accomplished) as a product of social relations between human beings in the midst of culture, is a fundamental characteristic of particularity and universality of human attitudes, needs and activities in society.

References

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