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## Translator's foreword and acknowledgments

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### Citation

Veer, R. van der. (1997). Translator's foreword and acknowledgments. In R. W. Rieber & J. Wollock (Eds.), *The collected works of L.S. Vygotsky. Vol.3. Problems of the theory and history of psychology* (p. v-vi). New York-London: Plenum Press. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/10610>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)  
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**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

# THE COLLECTED WORKS OF L. S. VYGOTSKY

Volume 3

Problems of the Theory and  
History of Psychology

Including the Chapter on the Crisis in Psychology

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Bibliotheek

**Wassenaarseweg 52  
2333 AK Leiden**

PLENUM PRESS • NEW YORK AND LONDON



## TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The strength of a chess move in a certain position must be judged against the background of the statics and dynamics of the position and the moves made in similar positions in earlier periods of chess history. The same holds true when we want to evaluate Vygotsky's genuine contribution to psychology. We cannot reach a proper understanding of his work without knowledge of the situation in psychology in the 1920s and 1930s and the history of psychology. An adequate assessment of Vygotsky's achievements comes after our understanding of the finer details of these developments and situations. That is why I have tried to restore this historical landscape as far as possible by supplying historical notes, references, etc. Together with the notes to the Russian edition they should enable the reader to come to a historical understanding and evaluation of Vygotsky's works.

Various colleagues and friends have assisted me by finding references, clarifying parts of the Russian text, etc. These included Igor Arieievich, Ellen Bakker, Guillermo Blanck, Peter Keiler, Siebren Miedema, Carl Ratner, Anna Stetsenko, and Jaan Valsiner. Igor Arieievich suggested many improvements to the translation of the "Crisis" and clarified obscure passages in the text of the whole volume. Finally, Carl Ratner read a substantial part of the text in translation, corrected mistakes, and suggested changes which improved the readability of the text. I have not always followed his advice but am very grateful for the work he did.

After I had translated the whole volume I carefully checked my translation against the German and Spanish translations of the same volume (see Vygotsky, 1985, 1991). This saved me from making a number of mistakes. I found the necessary information for the notes in my own stock of old psychology books, in numerous libraries, and in the usual dictionaries and encyclopedias. Throughout the book I have checked Vygotsky's quotations of foreign and Russian authors and in the case of English or American authors I have not retranslated Vygotsky's translation but used the original texts. English translations (e.g., in the case of Pavlov) I have sometimes changed somewhat if this seemed necessary. Vygotsky's way of referring to other authors was very sloppy, and I have tried to supply book titles, page numbers, names of authors (in cases where Vygotsky referred to "a psychologist"), and (sometimes) information about authors. In addition, I tried to explain some terms. This resulted in the information given in square brackets in the text, in the notes to the English edition, and in a list of references which is three times as long as the original one.

I have not attempted to improve Vygotsky's style of writing although it was at times difficult to refrain from doing so. It is clear that Vygotsky—unlike, for example, William James—never rewrote a text for the sake of improving its style and readability. Hence the redundancy, the difficulty to follow the thread of his argument, the awkward sentences, etc. However, I feel there is a (sometimes vague)

boundary between translating and editing a text and I have set myself the task of providing a scholarly translation and no more than that. The readers will judge to what extent I have succeeded.

Finally, let me end this foreword in a typically Vygotskian fashion by quoting "a well-known psychologist" who once apologized for his imperfect English in the following fashion: "It is needless to say that in spite of the helpful retouching of my language, the whole cast shows the style of the foreigner who is a beginner in the use of English and who must thus seriously ask for the indulgence of the reader."

*René van der Veer*  
*March 1994, Leiden*