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Developmental Psychology in the Soviet Union by Jaan Valsiner

Review by: Michael Cole

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about that rise, and its rapid spread into 42 laboratories by 1900? That question is still not answered well. Dedicated archival and other historical research, not found in this book, is necessary to answer it.

Some well-written articles are found here. Laurel Furumoto's chapter, focusing on sexism in the early days of this discipline, gives some of the best information, in this volume, on aspects of early experimental psychology. Gail Hornstein gives a good summary of early psycho-physics, and then explains early experimental psychology's concern with quantification as coming from psychologists' struggles to separate from philosophy departments. In quantitative techniques, she argues, they found a device that served cosmetically to distinguish psychologists from philosophers. Hornstein's (dubious) implication is that if early psychologists had not wanted so much to appear different from philosophers, then their quantitative methods would not have arisen. Jill Morawski's introduction gives the book's purpose as presenting the psychology laboratory "not as a place admitting those who have faith [in the natural sciences], but as a place where we can begin to understand the nature and consequences of this faith."—Arthur L. Blumenthal, *Psychology, University of Massachusetts, Boston*

Handbook of Clinical Assessment of Children and Adolescents, Vol. 1 and 2. Clarice J. Kestenbaum and Daniel T. Williams, eds. 1170 pp. New York University Press, 1988. \$75 set.

The present volumes provide an overview of recent advances in the child and adolescent psychopathology. That such a substantial work cannot hope to be exhaustive reflects both the considerable progress made in recent years and the significant limitations of current knowledge. Areas of disagreement and controversy reflect both the relative youth of the field and its multiple origins in the mental hygiene movement, the juvenile court system, pediatrics, developmental psychology, and psychoanalysis, as well as in adult psychiatry. Clinical assessment of children and adolescents with mental disorders must draw on knowledge from all these disciplines in the attempt to integrate biological and psychosocial factors within a developmental context. Given the magnitude of this task, works of this kind are particularly needed.

These two volumes include 54 chapters divided into nine parts. In addition to expected chapters on specific psychopathological syndromes, special situations, and treatment, other chapters address more general issues of evaluation and assessment, special assessment techniques, and normal development and its variations. The number of chapters and

contributors reflects the current diversity and activity of the field and also makes for a certain inconsistency in depth of coverage and sophistication between chapters.

These volumes will be of greatest use for the clinician who seeks adequate, but not exhaustive, coverage. Professionals not in the mental health field may find the volumes stimulating. For the trainee, coverage of certain topics may be excessive. For investigators in the field, works of this kind tend to be less useful given the degree of current scientific activity and productivity. For example, the official American psychiatric classification system underwent considerable change in 1987 and it is not surprising that such changes could not be reflected in a major work of this kind.—Fred R. Volkmar, *Child Study Center, Yale University*

Developmental Psychology in the Soviet Union. Jaan Valsiner. 398 pp. Indiana University Press, 1988. \$37.50.

At various times in its history, American psychology has been influenced by intellectual events in the Soviet Union. The first, and perhaps most famous, case is the influence of Ivan Pavlov's ideas about reflexes, which shaped the ideas of founders of American behaviorism. In recent decades, however, it is Soviet ideas about human development which have captured the imagination of American psychologists, particularly the ideas of the "cultural-historical school" associated with the names of Lev Vygotsky, Alexander Luria, and Alexei Leontiev.

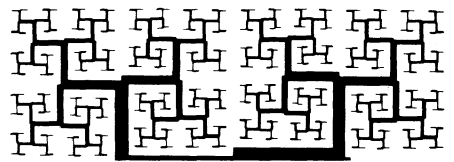
American understanding of Soviet ideas has suffered several shortcomings, in both the early, Pavlovian era and now as the works of Vygotsky and his colleagues have come into vogue: only parts of the authors' works are published, the translations have been done by scholars whose grasp of Russian (like my own) is severely strained by the task, and works of the important Soviet scholars whose work forms the immediate context for the production of the translated work are absent. As a result the way in which the work is interpreted often misses important insights contained in the original, no matter how productive the transmuted ideas might become in the culture into which they are introduced.

American scholars can therefore be grateful to Jaan Valsiner, trained as a Soviet psychologist, for this lucid and engaging account of Soviet developmental psychology. In the opening chapters, Valsiner points out that four themes are characteristic of Soviet psychology as a whole: an emphasis on development, an epistemological stance that focuses on mind as an interindividual phenomenon, a broad systemic approach to theory, and a fusion of scientific and social discourse. He traces the origins of these emphases

back into the history of Russia and shows how they were appropriated by developmental psychologists in the postrevolutionary period.

I found the book particularly informative in its discussions of work that has been seriously underrepresented in the translated literature (in particular the work of Mikhail Basov, Vladimir Vagner, and Alexei Severtsov from the 1920s, cross-cultural research from the 1930s, and modern work on infancy). Valsiner makes a convincing case that Soviet developmental psychology is best understood as a branch of European thinking that has developed its special characteristics within historical conditions of the USSR. The book should be of interest not only to psychologists, but to historians of science and social theorists interested in the relation between science, ideology, and social practice.—Michael Cole, *Psychology, University of California, San Diego*

Mathematics and Computer Sciences



Archimedes' Revenge: The Joys and Perils of Mathematics. Paul Hoffman. 285 pp. Norton, 1988. \$17.95.

In recent years, the "intelligent layman" has been blessed with a good handful of readable, well-informed introductions to contemporary mathematics. Among the most recent are *The Mathematical Tourist*, by Ivars Peterson, and *Mathematics and the Unexpected*, by Ivan Ekeland. Now this book can be added to the list.

The usual dilemma of mathematics popularization is that it is done either by a mathematician or a journalist. If by a mathematician, he or she probably has difficulty writing for a lay audience. If by a journalist, he or she probably has difficulty acquiring a very deep or very accurate knowledge of contemporary mathematics. This dilemma can be broken in several ways. One way is for a journalist to make effective use of advice and criticism from mathematicians. This, I surmise, is what Paul Hoffman has done in this book. The reader will learn about some novel, unfamiliar concepts: infinite minimal surfaces, Arrow's voting paradox, and massive parallel computers. He will also encounter some less fascinating material, for instance, "Archimedes cattle problem," a system of seven Diophantine equations with two geometric constraints.