

S. L. RUBINŠTEJN AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SOVIET PSYCHOLOGY. By *T. R. Payne*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1969. x, 184 pp. Distributed by Humanities Press, New York.

There was a time, from the mid-thirties to the mid-fifties, when the discipline of psychology was threatened with extinction in the USSR. All schools of psychological thought were virtually condemned as "bourgeois," and it seemed impossible to satisfy the bosses' demand for a completely nativist science that would be of practical use in education and medicine, with practicality to be determined according to their own anti-intellectual intuition rather than autonomous professional standards (*tsekhovshchina*). But, somehow, scattered psychologists managed to keep their diverse schools of thought alive, if only barely—making a variety of compromises between professional standards and political expedience. The thaw of the mid-fifties eased their situation by relaxing official insistence on such mystic beliefs as the worthlessness of foreign scholarship, the infallibility of Pavlov, and the great significance of Marxism-Leninism for the science of psychology.

The reader who thinks it unfair to call Marxist-Leninist psychology a *mystification* should read Payne's book, or at least ponder a representative passage: "As the unifying principle in psychology Rubinštejn sees the so-called Marxist-Leninist theory of determinism. As a general theory, applicable to all parts of the material world, it is formulated as follows: the outer cause works through, and is refracted by, the inner conditions of the object on which it acts. In the light of this principle psychic events are the result of the interaction of the individual with the outer world" (p. 75).

It is not entirely Payne's fault that Rubinshtein appears to be a tedious, vague thinker, platitudinous when he is not inane. Nor is it entirely Rubinshtein's fault. He chose to concentrate on the connection between philosophy and psychology at a time when the two disciplines were sullenly divorced, each fancying itself well rid of the other. At such a time Rubinshtein's chosen task would have been difficult anywhere, but he had the additional disadvantage of working in a country with an established church, whose authorities denounced the fragmentation of modern knowledge as ideological subversion.

That situation explains Rubinshtein's tendency to be platitudinous and inane. The vaguer his thought and the closer his approach to statements that no one could dispute, the greater was his chance of persuading Stalinist ideologues and scholarly psychologists that they could live with each other. We can honor him for that contribution to the life of the mind in Soviet Russia, but it is hard to read him without yawning. My wandering fancy recalled P. D. Iurkevich, who was called from the Kiev Spiritual Academy in 1861 to re-establish the discipline of philosophy at Moscow University. (Nicholas I had suppressed it as incorrigibly subversive.) Between the nihilist passion for physiological psychology and the clerical inclination to suppress it Iurkevich interposed tedious essays, arguing, for example, that physiology only seems to picture the heart as nothing more than a pump. Properly interpreted, modern physiology supports the ancient belief that the heart is the seat of the soul.

Payne seems to find such homilies interesting, and occasionally he almost persuaded this profane reader. Those were the occasions (see pp. 106, 122, 139–40, 162–63) when he suggested a similarity between Rubinshtein's ideas and some doctrines of Christian scholasticism. If he had developed those comparisons more

vigorously—as, say, Kołakowski does in “The Priest and the Jester”—his book would have been greatly improved. If he had also tried to relate the homilies he was analyzing to the social and political context that gave them meaning, the book would have been even better.

Evidently Payne avoids sociology of knowledge for fear of being unfair. To correlate official stimuli and scholarly responses, and vice versa, seems to cast aspersions on both sides, to engage in ad hominem attacks on thinkers rather than irenic analysis of thought. Unfortunately there are some kinds of thought that are meaningless if abstracted from their social and political contexts. And as for fairness to Rubinshtein, stripping his thought of meaning may be a greater insult than revealing its acrobatic balancing between the know-nothing passions of his Stalinist bosses and the intellectual requirements of his colleagues in psychology and philosophy.

DAVID JORAVSKY
Northwestern University

CHILD PSYCHIATRY IN THE SOVIET UNION: PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS. By *Nancy Rollins, M.D.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972. xx, 293 pp. \$12.95.

This is the first book in English dealing with the theory, practice, and organization of child psychiatry in the Soviet Union. Despite the modest title, the observations are considerably more than preliminary. Not only is this study of interest and value in the area of professional therapy, it also provides numerous insights into Russian cultural attitudes which have an effect on character and personality development. It should therefore attract the attention of an audience considerably beyond the scope of medicine. Dr. Nancy Rollins was by professional standing well qualified to take on the project. In addition, she prepared herself for the task by learning Russian and becoming thoroughly familiar with the Soviet psychiatric literature. She is successful in achieving her aim of elaborating our knowledge in the areas of theory, diagnosis, and treatment of psychiatric disorders of children.

Reporting in full detail the bureaucratic organization of services is scientifically necessary, but it makes for slow reading. Also, the Russian predilection for accounting for psychic disorders as ultimate sequellae of infections, such as la grippe, tonsillitis, infantile dysentery, and especially rheumatic involvement of the central nervous system, must be puzzling to the general reader and of dubious validity to the psychologically oriented therapist. The text would flow with more grace if the case material appearing in the appendix were brought back into the body of the volume. In exchange the neurological and possibly pseudo-neurological extrapolations could be relegated to the appendix.

The sections on historical and social perspectives, treatment methods, and the interrelation of the social environment and psychiatric disorders are of particular value. Assimilation of the material by psychotherapists of our culture will inevitably influence therapeutic procedures and increase our awareness of psychosocial factors in psychological functioning.

ALEC SKOLNICK, M.D.
San Mateo, California