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The Forgotten Contributions of Mikhail Basov

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John F. Kennedy and the Soviet Union

The Organization of Knowledge of Statistics

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Editor's Note

As readers of *Soviet Psychology* are aware, it has been my policy over the years to present historical materials that are pertinent to understanding contemporary Soviet and world psychology. By and large, I have come upon such materials through discussions with Soviet scholars or by following the lead in relevant articles. When I first read Jaan Valsiner's lucid and informative book *Developmental Psychology in the Soviet Union*, I was immediately struck by the gold mine of materials to which Professor Valsiner had succeeded in gaining access. First among these was the work of Mikhail Basov, to whom Valsiner devoted an especially illuminating chapter in his monograph.

In conversations with Professor Valsiner, we made plans for a number of articles and special issues of this journal making use of the materials he has painstakingly gathered over the years.

My special thanks go to Professor Valsiner and Professor van der Veer for their efforts in bringing the work of Mikhail Basov to our attention. Readers interested in the classics of Soviet psychology should be on the lookout for van der Veer and Valsiner's monograph on the work of L.S. Vygotsky, to be published by Blackwell later this year.

MICHAEL COLE

Introduction

In this and the next issue of *Soviet Psychology*, the international readership will have an opportunity to gain access to the work of Russian developmental psychologist Mikhail Basov, whose relevance for developmental psychology in Russia and, later, the Soviet Union has been profound (see Valsiner, 1988, chap. 5). Basov's intellectual development paralleled that of his contemporary Lev Vygotsky, whose ideas are currently increasingly mentioned in the international discourse of psychologists and educators, and whose synthesis of ideas from various sources in international social sciences continues to command respect (see Kozulin, 1990; van der Veer and Valsiner, 1991). Basov's ideas in developmental psychology—or within the discipline pedology, with which he identified himself (Russian: *pedologia*, better known in English as the "child study" tradition)—had a significant influence on Vygotsky.

Basov, however, entered developmental psychology from a totally different background than that of Vygotsky: from formal education in psychoneurological sciences within the progressive higher education and research institutions set up by Vladimir Bekhterev (see below). As a result, many of Basov's concerns with which readers will become acquainted in the next two issues of *Soviet Psychology* (and in a third one, to be published in 1992) are closer to the interests of present-day psychologists (especially those interested in observational research on children) than Vygotsky's high-flying discourse about the cultural-historical and dialectical nature of development.

Publication here of a collection of papers by Basov and his colleagues constitutes an important step toward overcoming the uneven representation of the work by different Russian psychologists of the

Jaan Valsiner is with the Developmental Psychology Program, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Davie Hall, CB #3270, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3270. René van der Veer is with the Department of General Education, University of Leiden, Leiden, The Netherlands.

past in publications accessible to contemporary scientists. Aside from Basov's work, a number of other Russian psychologists' work is expected to be made available in the near future—the appearance of a translation of Vladimir Bekhterev's *Collective Reflexology* (Strickland and Lockwood, 1992, in press) being the most noteworthy among them. It seems very productive—at a time of high uncertainty of a social kind (covered conveniently by catchwords such as *perestroika* or *glasnost*)—to turn back to the history of Russian psychology and make it possible for our present endeavors to be informed by related efforts of the past, which may help us surmount various impasses and find alternative ways of constructing theories and methodologies.

JAAN VALSINER
RENÉ VAN DER VEER

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JAAAN VALSINER AND RENÉ VAN DER VEER

Mikhail Basov: An Intellectual Biography

Mikhail Iakovlevich Basov was born on 3 November 1892 in a village near Pskov. After receiving his secondary-school diploma, he moved, in 1909, to St. Petersburg and entered Bekhterev's Psychoneurological Institute in order to study natural sciences. The formative years of Basov as a developmental psychologist were spent at that institute—first, as a student, later, as a research associate. It was in the mid-1920s that Basov moved to other institutions in the same city (by that time renamed Leningrad). First—in 1924/25—he became one of the co-founders of the State Institute of Scientific Pedagogics (or GINP—Gosudarstvennyi Institut Nauchnoi Pedagogiki); subsequently (also in 1925), he became the Chair of Pedology at the Pedagogical Institute (now called the A.I. Herzen State Pedagogical Institute—Gosudarstvennyi Pedagogicheskii Institut imeni A.I. Gertsena). He stayed at the Pedagogical Institute until his sudden death, from blood poisoning caused by an accident at work, on 6 October 1931.

Basov's developmental context: Bekhterev's Psychoneurological Institute

The intellectual climate of Bekhterev's Psychoneurological Institute was highly relevant for Basov's development from 1909 on. That institute was undoubtedly the most progressive, internationally and liberally minded institution of higher learning and research in pre-1917 Russia.

The institute grew out of the dissatisfaction of the progressive intellectuals in Russia, at the turn of this century, with the organization of higher education by the czarist government. Vladimir Bekhterev led

the efforts to establish the new institute. The idea for the organization of such an institute for psychological and neurological investigations had been in the minds of Bekhterev and some of his close associates (e.g., A.P. Nechaev and A.F. Lazurskii, among others) since 1903. On 9 July 1907, the founding of the institute was approved by the Russian Minister of Public Instruction, after which the faculty of the institute became established. The lectures at the institute were planned to start in Spring 1908 (see *Psikho-Nevrologicheskii Institut*, 1908).

The Psycho-Neurological Institute immediately became a highly progressive academic institution in Russia, attracting many major scientists in different disciplines to its faculty. For instance, the zoopsychologist Vladimir A. Vagner (or Wagner—as his name has usually been transliterated in German publications) was listed as a faculty member from 1 November 1907; he later even served as its director. Alexander F. Lazurskii, the personality psychologist whose method of “naturalistic experiment” was one of the intellectual bases for Basov’s work from the moment of entering the institute, was among the core organizers of the institute. The sociologist Evgenii V. DeRoberti was listed as also joining the faculty of the institute on 1 November 1907 (see Gerver, 1912). Another sociologist, Maksim M. Kovalevskii, entered the faculty in 1910. The institute also drew to its faculty a number of major Russian philosophers (e.g., Nikolai Losskii and Semyon Frank—both as of October 1907), linguists (e.g., Lev Schcherba and I.A. Boudoin-de-Courteney—both in 1910), and lawyers (e.g., Mikhail Reisner—later an important figure in the Socialist Academy and Moscow Institute of Psychology [see van der Veer and Valsiner, 1991]).

The faculty of the Psycho-Neurological Institute was the foundation for Bekhterev’s ambitious goal of building an institution that would succeed in interdisciplinary study of human beings. Basov already joined in that effort during his study years. It was precisely during the year of his entrance into the institute that Lazurskii established therein the Psychological Laboratory, which served as headquarters for an active research group whose members were interested in the variability of different people’s psychological adaptation to their environments (see Korot’ and Rabinovich, 1913). This general question involved both the differential-psychological aspect (the classification of personality types—Lazurskii, 1906, 1908, 1915) and the general-psychological focus on a person’s development within structured environments

(Lazurskii, 1916). Methodologically, Lazurskii's research group tried to combine laboratory-based and "real-world" settings in obtaining relevant information about the ways in which active people (of different types) relate to their environments. In this research, the developmental orientation came clearly into focus, and the general explanatory scheme for psychological activities was greatly influenced by Bekhterev's general conception of the role of transformed energy in causing psychological processes (see Bekhterev, 1904; Lazurskii, 1912). Together with the philosopher Semyon Frank, Lazurskii proposed an extensive "program for the investigation of the relationship between the personality and the environment" and advocated use of the "naturalistic experiment" (Russian: *estestvennyi eksperiment*) as the principal means of collecting data on personalities-within-environments (see Lazurskii, 1912; Lazurskii and Filosofova, 1916). Discourse centered on issues concerning the "naturalistic experiment" was very active in Russia in the 1910 decade, and Lazurskii's research group actively led the way in propagation of this extension of traditional experimentation (e.g., see overviews of the congresses on "experimental pedagogics"—Basov, 1914a; Markarianz, 1911, Shchelovanov, 1916).

Basov's early work was clearly within Lazurskii's general paradigm. His first empirical publications (Basov, 1914b; Basov and Nadol'skaia, 1913) reflect both the ecological- and the differential-psychological concerns that were characteristic of Lazurskii's research collective. Basov was also active in reviewing existing research activities and presentations by others (Basov, 1913, 1914a). After the death of his teacher Lazurskii, Basov participated in editing the publication of the second edition of the latter's book [*The classification of personalities*] (Lazurskii, 1923).

In 1920 Basov began to work in another new institute, the Brain Research Institute, created by Bekhterev, where, at the time, pioneering work by the investigators of early ontogeny (M. Denisova, N. Figurin) was in progress. Basov continued to be interested in general issues of volition and in observational research on preschool and school-age children. The emphasis on observational research became particularly strong when Basov started (in 1921) to work in another institutional part of Bekhterev's empire—the Psychology Division of the Psychoneurological Academy (Basov, 1922b). This work resulted in a carefully constructed manual for study of children's behavior in

everyday-life settings (Basov, 1923) that, in its careful examination of methodological details, would be valuable even in our modern day of videotapes and computer-based data-analysis programs. He continued his research on the organization of volitional processes, which resulted in a treatise on that topic (Basov, 1922a). In the early 1920s, particularly in connection with his individuation from the Bekhterevian research network (by way of moving his work to other institutions), Basov created a small, but active, research group.

Basov's research group and its activities

Basov's empirical orientation toward observational and experimental study of children's behavior in everyday-life settings led to the development of a strongly focused research group within which different members studied different aspects of development, still within the general theoretical framework that Basov had been developing, which emerged from the intellectual traditions of the Bekhterev-created research institutions. For instance, the topics of research of Basov's collaborators included study of preschoolers' perceptual processes (Filosofova, 1924; Nekliudova, 1924), structural organization of the process of free play at preschool age (Zeiliger and Levina, 1924, 1930) and in the context of a whole day in a child's life (Filosofova and Gefter, 1930), and methodological issues of observational research in kindergarten settings (Shapiro and Gerke, 1930; Nekliudova and Vol'berg, 1930). Aside from behavioral-observational research, Basov initiated a large research program for the study of children's conceptions of social issues (Basov, 1930a; Merlin and Khriakova, 1930); a similarly basic empirical research program on children's activities in work settings was created by Basov and his colleagues (see results in Basov and Kazanskii, 1931). Of course, questions of importance in developmental research for educational practice constituted an important area of publication by Basov's research group (Basov, 1924, 1925, 1926; Levina, 1925; Zeiliger, 1925).

Basov's main theoretical integration of ideas took place in the second half of the 1920s and resulted in two editions of *Obshchie osnovy pedologii* [General foundations of pedology] (in 1928 and, especially as Basov's work, in 1931a) and a number of shorter articles (Basov, 1928—for an English translation, see Basov, 1929a,b). The contributions presented here come from that fruitful period of Basov's life and activities.

The end: Basov under ideological criticism, and beyond

Like all intellectuals in the Soviet Union at the turn of the decade 1929–30 (see van der Veer and Valsiner, 1991, chap. 16; also Valsiner, 1988), Basov's cosmopolitan stance came under heavy, ideologically oriented criticism in the early 1930s. The major wave of criticism that Basov had to face started in April 1931, and was initiated by a "brigade of postdoctoral students" in his own department at the Leningrad State Pedagogical Institute (see Levina & El'konin, 1931). Basov was publicly accused of "formalism" in his theory (Feofanov, 1931) and chastized for not using Marxist slogans and not looking at child development from a "class perspective." He was "invited" to respond to this wave of "criticism" within the genre of "self-criticism." However, this request for self-damning was not accepted by the well-integrated scientist that Basov was: the supposed "self-criticism" article (written in August 1931—two months before his sudden death) leaves little doubt that Basov did not receive the ideological criticism in the way his critics wanted (see Basov, 1931b). The editors of the journal *Pedologia* tried their best to present him (after his death) as a person who had "seen the light" (shown to him by his critics), but this is highly doubtful. It seems more likely that Basov viewed the avalanche of ideological criticism with the same contemplative, observational attitude that characterized his style of research.

Later events in Soviet psychology (see Valsiner, 1988) guaranteed that Basov (like other pedologists, like Vygotsky) would become *persona non grata* in Soviet psychology, though he was occasionally mentioned for his contributions to observational methodology. His theoretical contributions and all the wealth of the empirical analyses that he and his group had obtained have been forgotten since the 1930s; and the very limited examples of republishing of Basov's work in the USSR in the 1970s (see Basov, 1975) largely misrepresented his contributions to developmental psychology. International readers were not much more perceptive; although Basov's work was partially available (Basov, 1929a) and reviewed (Luria, 1930) in English and in German (Basov, 1928b), it gained very little attention. It is therefore noteworthy that here, in an international context, readers will have an opportunity to decide for themselves what aspects of Basov's ideas may be of interest to them.

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