

	JHBS	jhbs21615	Dispatch: May 8, 2013	CE:
	Journal	MSP No.	No. of pages: 3	PE: XXXXX

Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences, Vol. 00(00), 1–3 xxxx 2013  
View this article online at Wiley Online Library (wileyonlinelibrary.com). DOI: 10.1002/jhbs.21615  
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## BOOK REVIEW

**Jaan Valsiner.** *A Guided Science: History of Psychology in the Mirror of Its Making.* New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2012. 388 pp. \$49.95 (hardcover). ISBN-13: 978-1-4128-4290-7.

Jaan Valsiner is a well-known scholar, author, editor, publisher, and scientific entrepreneur. He has authored a few books on developmental psychology, such as his earlier *Culture and the Development of Children's Action* (1987), classics in the history of Soviet and, specifically, Vygotskian psychology—*Developmental Psychology in the Soviet Union* (1988), *Understanding Vygotsky: A Quest for Synthesis*, and *The Vygotsky Reader* (in collaboration with R. van der Veer, 1991 and 1994, respectively)—and theoretical oeuvres with explicit focus on the idea of sociogenesis in cultural and semiotic psychology (*The Guided Mind*, 1998; *The Social Mind: Construction of the Idea*, in collaboration with R. van der Veer, 2000; and *Culture in Minds and Societies*, 2007). In a certain sense, all of these books, to varying extents, deal with issues of the history of psychology, human development, sociogenesis, culture, and semiotics that in the work of this author can hardly be separated from each other. In addition to extensive lecturing all over the globe, Valsiner is presently editing the journals *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science* and *Culture and Psychology* (the latter as founding editor). As a publisher and scientific entrepreneur, Valsiner currently supervises two book series: *Advances in Cultural Psychology: Constructing Human Development* at Information Age Publishers and the *History and Theory of Psychology* series at Transaction Publishers that also released his latest book, *A Guided Science: History of Psychology in the Mirror of Its Making*. Quite characteristically, the whole range of issues of holistic, dynamic, idiographic, and nonreductionistic science that are treated in these two series under Valsiner's supervision can be best summarized by a title of another publication—*Methodological Thinking in Psychology: 60 Years Gone Astray?* (edited by Aaro Toomela and Jaan Valsiner, 2010)—which forcefully advances the idea of the enormous contemporary relevance of the history of psychology for the present mainstream methodological thinking in this field of knowledge. All of these various activities do not reflect the whole list of Valsiner's projects and commitments, but they do give us an impression of the wide range of his activities. One might wonder if this biographical information about the author is relevant to his latest book that is the subject of the present review. The answer is that it is most relevant, indeed.

Valsiner's most recent book, *A Guided Science*, deals with the issue of the “social guidance of science” and, given the range and intensity of the author's social activities, it is definitely written by an expert on the topic. The whole book, by the author's admission (see p. xi), started as a lecture that he gave several years ago and was motivated by an attempt to discuss a hardly original or novel issue, the so-called “crisis in psychology.” This foundational topic, which constitutes the basis of the book, is covered in Chapter 8, but in order to do so properly some additional discussions were needed. Thus, the preceding seven and following three chapters may be regarded as a “superstructure” that constitutes the body of the book. On quite a number of occasions, Jaan Valsiner points out that he is a “cultural psychologist with a consistently developmental axiomatic base,” which for him implies development understood fairly broadly: as child development; human lifespan development; the historical development of science and society; and, generally, dynamic, cultural, and historical bias in scientific research. This bias

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3 makes it virtually impossible to classify this book within the nomenclature of established  
4 professional and institutional “divisions” of psychology as it equally embraces educational  
5 and developmental psychology; cultural psychology; history, methodology, and theory of  
6 psychology; and many other mostly unconnected fields of contemporary psychological science,  
7 fragmented as it is now. It seems that this versatility of the book only adds to its potential  
8 appeal to a wide range of readers who seek a narrative at the intersection of different human  
9 sciences.

10 The issues of social guidance, consumerism, conformity, social canalization, and the  
11 tension between creating new pathways versus using socially and intellectually available oppor-  
12 tunities in science are discussed in the three parts of the book that reflect its cross-disciplinary  
13 and programmatic orientation. Thus, part I, “Societies and Sciences: Presentations and Histories,”  
14 lays out a broad sociological framework that provides the author with conceptual tools to  
15 deal with psychology as “a guided science” in the subsequent parts. Part II, titled “The Mirror  
16 in the Making: Psychology as a Liminal Science,” is perhaps the most notable contribution  
17 to the discussion of the history of psychology as announced in the book’s subtitle, *History*  
18 *of Psychology in the Mirror of its Making*. Here, the author keeps his promise to address the  
19 issue of the perpetual crisis of psychology, which is discussed in the four middle chapters  
20 that will be of most interest to readers with some background in the history of nineteenth to  
21 early twentieth century European continental psychology. Finally, Part III, quite in accordance  
22 with its title, programmatically discusses ways of “Facing the Future—Transcending the  
23 Past.” In order to do so, the author engages in a discussion of the history of chemistry  
24 (Chapter 9) and the issue of the methodology of psychological research (Chapter 10), and  
25 concludes this part with a delightful yet brief overview of historical global trends in psychol-  
26 ogy over the last couple of centuries (Chapter 11, “Globalization and Its Role in Science”).  
27 Owing to Valsiner’s transnational activities and firsthand familiarity with various global  
28 trends in psychological research in a wide range of geographical localities and non-North  
29 American research traditions, this chapter that addresses a number of issues of indigenous  
30 and international science and discusses the examples of Indian, Philippine, and Japanese psy-  
31 chologies is, in the opinion of the present reviewer, a gem that crowns the whole book-length  
32 argument.

33 One does not have to agree with everything the author states with characteristic  
34 confidence and vigor. The book is challenging, thought-provoking, and explicitly provocative,  
35 and appears to be aiming to create a stir rather than consensus. Valsiner’s book would definitely  
36 have benefited from extra effort put into proofreading and text editing in order to minimize  
37 regrettable minor stylistic errors of grammar and punctuation, and to reduce even further  
38 the author’s self-acknowledged “tendency toward concentrated abstractness” in his writing  
39 (p. viii). On the other hand, a number of Valsiner’s generalizations look too hasty and  
40 ungrounded, and definitely require more substantial support in concrete historical and  
41 cross-cultural data than the present book provides. Therefore, at times the reader might be left  
42 with an uneasy impression that despite the author’s unambiguous criticism of the mainstream  
43 tradition and, on the other hand, his acknowledgment of a number of alternatives to this  
44 mainstream that can be found all over the globe (Chapter 11), Valsiner somewhat overestimates  
45 the global role and importance of the North American brand of psychology in his discussion  
46 of contemporary psychological science as such. These relatively minor drawbacks and  
47 deficiencies notwithstanding, Valsiner’s *A Guided Science* provides a nice discussion of a  
48 wide range of issues on the history and contemporary status of psychology as a “a guided  
49 science” and will be of interest to a large audience of practitioners and scholars—using

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Valsiner's phrasing, those "well-behaved rebels" (p. 250). Well, all too "well-behaved," perhaps.

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