Book Reviews

Blossoms of 100 Flowers in Soviet Genetics

Some Problems of Evolutionary Genetics and Darwinism. Yu. M. Olenov. U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences, Moscow, 1961 (in Russian). 163 pp. 83 kop.

Communication between biologists of the East and West appears to be increasing apace. English translations of Russian periodicals are appearing with greater frequency in our libraries. In turn, our Russian colleagues are becoming more closely acquainted with what is being accomplished in the laboratories of the Western world, especially in fields which have been recently dormant or undeveloped in the Soviet Union. In the area of genetics and evolution, the 1948 party line is no longer binding, and Mao's hundred flowers are apparently encouraged to blossom. This policy obviously requires that information in many hitherto neglected areas be supplied to Soviet research workers. Indeed, as may be learned from the volume under review, texts by Brachet, by A. J. Cain, by Villee, and by Wagner and Mitchell have recently been published in Russian-language editions. Olenov's book itself is in the main directed toward bringing the reader abreast of the times in several important areas. It consists of five essays. The first two comprise a chapter headed "On the material basis of heredity." The remaining three, organized in two chapters, deal with speciation and several other questions of broad evolutionary significance.

The 90 pages of the first chapter provide a comprehensive, up-to-date review of a number of aspects of molecular biology, including such topics as the self-reproduction and synthesis of deoxyribonucleic acid and ribonucleic acid, the basis of antibody formation, the complex nature of genes and genetic regions, the various peculiarities of the hereditary apparatus of bacteria, the epigenetic systems in cellular differentiation, and the like. That the purpose of this section is didactic and that molecular genetics is new to the U.S.S.R. is testified to by the fact that, out of some 350 bibliographic citations, 90 percent are of non-Russian origin. Of the 32 Russian references, 24 are dated 1958 or later. For that matter, some 90 percent of the foreign material quoted has been published, as might be expected, within the last decade.

The remainder of the book seems entirely unrelated to the first chapter, and the bibliography pertaining to the two essays in that chapter in no way overlaps with the more than 200 references cited in the concluding three. Here the proportion of Russian material runs to nearly a quarter of the total, but it may be worth noting that close to 70 percent of the foreign citations, contrasted with 20 percent of the Russian ones, are of 1951 or later vintages.

The main conclusion of the first two essays in the second section affirms the primacy of natural selection as an evolutionary force. Random drift is viewed as unproven and of unlikely significance, while geographical isolation is adjudged to be only an ancillary process to selection. In the course of developing these theses, much current literature is reviewed. The argumentation is always carried on within the framework of genetic and evolutionary evidence, and the discussion is at a high level of sophistication. Whether or not one agrees with the deductions reached, the author wins respect for his fair statement of the issues and the evidence.

The final essay deals with the question of whether or not organic evolution is a progressive process. The discourse is vaguer and less data-based than in the earlier parts, but even here the guidelines are more biological than philosophical.

The overall impression of this book is a very favorable one. It originated in the Soviet Academy's Institute of Cytology, and the contrast in this institution's scientific level and methods of presenting ideas compared with those to be found in the publications of such a sister organization as the Institute of Genetics is refreshing. One would seek in vain in the present work (except for two lapses in citing a nonbiological authority) for the earmarks of dogma so universally found when Russian genetics lived in the penumbra of late-model Stalinism. In fact, instead of judging the validity of data by their canonical conformity, a characteristic of many biological debates of that era, there is an attempt here to bolster Darwin's own authority by appeal to modern data!

Whatever disagreement, with either details or the author's main conclusions, there may be, this work can only be saluted as one of the recent significant signs of the rebirth of Soviet genetics. It serves admirably to inform our Soviet colleagues of the developments in many areas of molecular genetics, which came to fruition while they were *hors-de-combat*.

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Psychopathology

The Myth of Mental Illness. Thomas S. Szasz. Harper, New York, 1961. xiii +337 pp. $7.50.

Thomas Szasz's volume is enormously courageous and highly informative, and it makes fascinating reading for anyone with a serious interest in the problem of psychopathology. But it is a difficult book to review, because it involves a number of strong, more or less independent "themes" rather than a single sustained argument. Thus, in order to avoid quite serious logical complications but at the same time retain the sense of vitality which the book unquestionably has, I propose to examine it here, so to say, thematically, rather than as an organic whole.

"I submit that the traditional definition of psychiatry, which is still in vogue, places it alongside such things as alchemy and astrology, and commits it to the category of pseudo science" (page 1).

Coming as they do from the pen of