

**PIAGET, JEAN** (1896-1980). Swiss child psychologist and epistemologist. Piaget is universally known for his studies of the development of intelligence in children. (...) Piaget thus studied the growth of intelligence, by which term he meant chiefly the capacities, structures, and notions that make scientific thought possible. He described development as a sequence of stages from birth through adolescence. The stages appear at variable ages in different cultures and settings, but their order is invariable. (...) Piaget was born in 1896 in the French-speaking Swiss city of Neuchâtel to an agnostic medievalist and a religious mother with socialist leanings. He precociously became a professional in mollusk classification and was published in specialized journals. After a doctoral thesis on the taxonomy of Alpine mollusks (1918) and studies in psychology and philosophy in Zurich and Paris. He joined, in 1921, the Jean-Jacques Rousseau Institute of Geneva. founded by Edouard Claparede (1873-1940) as a center for research on child development and education. (...)

In Recherche, Piaget sketched a theory of organic, psychological, and social phenomena based on the idea of equilibrium between parts and wholes. Real-life disequilibria (within a society, for example, between individual and collective interests) tend toward an ideal equilibrium that preserves the integrity of parts and wholes alike.

In the early 1920s, Piaget devised a "clinical method" that combined the use of items from intelligence tests, new problem-solving situations, and open-ended conversations with school-age children. In his first five books (1923-1932), he studied the child's language, reasoning, conceptions of the world, theories of causality, and moral judgment. He found that children are at first "egocentric" (ie., experienced difficulty to take another person's point of view) and attached to concrete appearances but that they gradually move away from egocentrism and become capable of thinking abstractly and logically. Earlier child-study examined mainly the contents of the child's mind and inventoried age-related behaviors. The novelty of Piaget's research was that it concentrated on the main features of the child's "mentality"; in so doing, it drew inspiration from work by the French ethnologist Lucien Levy-Bruhl (1857-1939), who described "primitive mentality" as prelogical and mystical.

(...) In his first books, Piaget considered the development of intelligence as a process of socialization of thought, and he attributed great developmental import to social interactions among peers and between children and adults. (...) In all domains, development went from egocentrism (largely manifested as children's dependence on perceptual appearances and acceptance of external authority) toward logical thinking and cognitive and moral autonomy. Piaget saw such development as a progress from the child and the primitive to the adult and the modern. (...)

Particularly in *The Origins of Intelligence*, Piaget elaborated links between biological, epistemological, and psychological theories. He defined human intelligence as a form of adaptation that prolongs organic adaptation and functions according to the same mechanisms, "assimilation" and "accommodation." Piaget asserted the primary role of activity and sought to avoid both nativism and empiricism. He later termed his approach constructivist because it assumes that the concepts and structures of intelligence are successively constructed and reconstructed by means of the physical and mental activities whereby the organism adapts to the external world.

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