ISSN: 1816-5435 (печатный) ISSN: 2224-8935 (online) Cultural-Historical Psychology 2024. Vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 89–96 DOI: https://doi.org/10.17759/chp.2024200210 ISSN: 1816-5435 (print) ISSN: 2224-8935 (online)

# G.I. Chelpanov and the Concept of the Subject of Psychological Science

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The article describes the results of a study of G.I. Chelpanov's ideas about the subject of psychological science. We applied comparative historical and bibliographic methods, categorical analysis; the source base of the study was monographs, textbooks and articles by G.I. Chelpanov, published in the first quarter of the 20th century, as well as the works of his scientific opponents. In the first part of the article devoted to his methodological views in the pre-revolutionary period, it is argued that the scientist included psychic (mental) phenomena of consciousness to the concept of "subject of psychology", which caused rejection by most representatives of philosophical and natural fields in Russian psychological science. The second part of the article examines the methodological views of G.I. Chelpanov in the 1920s, he kept his views on the subject of psychology as they were before the Russian Revolution. The article captures his confrontation with the proponents of the "behavioral turn" in psychology, who tried to carry out a Marxist restructuring of psychology based on behaviorism. There are two possible interpretations of G.I. Chelpanov's commitment to psychic (mental) phenomena as a subject of psychology: according to the first, the scientist appears to be a fighter for truth, not ready to sacrifice principles for political conjuncture, in the second, his position is assessed as conservative, supporting outdated scientific ideas.

**Keywords:** the history of psychology, the history of concepts, the subject of psychology, G.I. Chelpanov.

For citation: Mazilov V.A., Vlasov N.A. G.I. Chelpanov and the Concept of the Subject of Psychological Science. Kul'turno-istoricheskaya psikhologiya = Cultural-Historical Psychology, 2024. Vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 89—96. DOI: https://doi.org/10.17759/chp.2024200210

# Г.И. Челпанов и понятие предмета психологической науки

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В статье описаны результаты исследования представлений Г.И. Челпанова о предмете психологической науки. В ходе исследования были применены сравнительно-исторический и библиографический методы, категориальный анализ; источниковую базу исследования составили монографии, учебники и статьи Г.И. Челпанова, изданные в первой четверти XX века, а также работы его научных

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оппонентов. В первой части статьи, посвященной его методологическим воззрениям в дореволюционный период, утверждается, что в содержание понятия «предмет психологии» ученый включал душевные (психические) явления сознания, что вызывало неприятие со стороны большинства представителей философского и естественнонаучного направлений в русской психологической науке. Во второй части статьи рассматриваются методологические воззрения Г.И. Челпанова в 1920-е годы, сохранившего свои взгляды на предмет психологии с дореволюционных времен. Показано его противостояние со сторонниками «поведенческого поворота» в психологии, пытавшихся осуществить марксистскую перестройку психологии на основе поведенчества. В заключение делается вывод о двух возможных вариантах интерпретации приверженности Г.И. Челпанова душевным (психическим) явлениям как предмету психологии в течении более чем четверти века: согласно первой ученый предстает борцом за истину, не готовым поступиться принципами в угоду политической конъюнктуре, в рамках второй его позиция оценивается как консервативная, поддерживающая устаревшие представления в науке.

Ключевые слова: история психологии, история понятий, предмет психологии, Г.И. Челпанов.

**Для цитаты:** *Мазилов В.А., Власов Н.А.* Г.И. Челпанов и понятие предмета психологической науки // Культурноисторическая психология. 2024. Том 20. № 2. С. 89—96. DOI: https://doi.org/10.17759/chp.2024200210

#### Introduction

There is an opinion that the problem of the subject remains important for psychological science and has a fundamental character [13]. In the conditions of post-modern turbulence, when relatively clear guidelines in various fields of knowledge are blurred, the definition of the subject of a particular science becomes critically important for its survival.

For past several years, we have published a number of works that assert the importance of studying the concepts of psychological science [6; 14]. One of these concepts, and the basic one, is the concept of "psychology", which reveals its content through the definition of its subject: "psychology as the science of ...". The study of the history of psychology through the prism of analyzing changes in ideas about its subject is not new in Russian historiography, however, one or more hierarchically organized levels of context affecting it — socio-political, general scientific and specifically scientific, are often overlooked. And in this sense, the study of the history of the concept of the subject of psychology is of particular interest.

The figure of Georgy I.Chelpanov (1862-1936), a major Russian philosopher, psychologist and logician, organizer of psychological science and researcher, looks both majestic and tragic. In the historiography of Russian psychology of the Soviet period, he appears as an idealist (which at that time was almost the most terrible sin), a retrograde, an enemy of Marxism in psychology and philosophy, an opponent of scientific progress [4; 18; 34]. In post-Soviet historiography, researchers give him a more balanced assessment, recognizing his organizational and pedagogical talent, highly appreciating the scientific school he created [8; 19; 22].

The purpose of this study is to identify G.I. Chelpanov's ideas about the subject of contemporary psychological science of his time; to achieve this goal, comparative historical and bibliographic methods, as well ascategorical analysis were used; the source base of the study was monographs, textbooks and articles by G.I. Chelpanov published in the first quarter of the twentieth century, as well as the works of his scientific opponents.

## G.I. Chelpanov's Ideas about the Subject of Psychology in the Pre-revolutionary Period

The socio-political conditions in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century had a certain impact on science, but this influence was not so significant compared to the Soviet period. The coexistence of both ideologically close to the regime of philosophical (spiritualistic) psychology and more "suspicious" natural science ("experimental") psychology was allowed; empirical psychology in this sense took rather a middle, generally neutral position.

The three directions in Russian psychology of that time differed primarily methodologically — in subject and method. The subject of the study of philosophical psychology was the soul, and the main instrument of its cognition was the speculative method; representatives of empirical psychology considered their subject the states of consciousness, mental phenomena, for the study of which the method of introspection was primarily used; Finally, natural science psychology focused on the study of externally observable, "objective" manifestations of brain processes, using mainly the experimental method [4; 18].

Being not just a representative of the empirical trend in Russian psychology at the beginning of the twentieth century, but its actual leader, G.I. Chelpanov, in an introductory lecture, later published as an article, said the following about the subject of psychological science: "Philosophical consideration of the soul, therefore, for

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psychology, as the science of mental phenomena, turns out to be completely superfluous. Moreover, the nature of mental phenomena can be studied even if we do not recognize the existence of the soul at all. Thus, the notorious psychology without a soul arises, that is, psychology without the assumption of the hypothesis of the soul" [30, p. 73]. Six years later, he confirmed this thesis: "Psychology," G.I. Chelpanov points out, "is a Greek word and means "the doctrine of the soul." Since the existence of the soul is not obvious, the latest psychologists define psychology as the science of mental phenomena or the laws of mental life" [25, p. 3]. By mental phenomena, the scientist understood human feelings, ideas, thoughts, desires, etc., and considered introspection to be the main method of studying them with the auxiliary function of the experiment.

In these definitions of the subject of psychological science, two main points should be noted. Firstly, the author seems to be starting from the spiritualistic (philosophical) approach in psychology, refusing to consider the nature, the essence of the soul, as the subject of psychology. Secondly, there is a closeness of the positions of G.I. Chelpanov and W. Wundt — both here and there consciousness plays a decisive role (after all, mental phenomena are how mental processes or abilities "appear" in a person's consciousness). This position regarding the subject of psychological science was shared by A.P. Nechaev [15; 16], the only major Russian psychologist of the empirical field alive at that time (by 1900 M.I. Vladislavley, M.M. Troitsky and N.Y. Grot had already died); G.G. Shpet, a student of G.I. Chelpanov, also stated the transformation of the subject of psychology: "Psychology has turned from the science of the soul into the science of the soul phenomena" [33, p. 36].

This position of G.I. Chelpanov and his supporters, naturally, provoked criticism from opponents from other scientific camps. The first line of criticism belongs to representatives of the philosophical trend in Russian psychology. S.L. Frank expressed it most significant in the book "The Human Soul: An Experience of Introduction to Philosophical Psychology" published in the revolutionary 1917: "We are not facing the fact of changing some teachings about the soul by others ones (in content and character), but the fact of complete elimination of teachings about the soul and replacing them with teachings about the laws of the so-called "spiritual phenomena", detached from their inner world and considered as phenomena of the external objective world. Current psychology recognizes itself as nature study science" [24, p. 422]. The philosopher accuses representatives of the empirical trend of having "stolen" the very concept of psychology, appropriated someone else's, brought experiment into the sphere in which the speculative method prevailed and should prevail: "The beautiful designation "psychology" — the doctrine of the soul — was simply illegally stolen and used as a title for a completely different scientific field; it has been stolen so thoroughly that when you now reflect on the nature of the soul, on the world of the inner reality of human life as such, you are engaged in a business that is destined to remain nameless or for which you need to come up with some new designation [24, p. 423]. S.L. Frank himself considered the true subject of psychology to be the human soul, which he understood as his inner world.

The authors of the second line of criticism of G.I. Chelpanov's position on the subject of psychology were representatives of the natural science ("experimental") direction. Back in 1903, the physiologist I.P. Pavlov, whose influence on scientists of this orientation was noticeable, in his speech at the XIV International Medical Congress in Madrid answered decisively "no" to the question of the need for a naturalist to enter the inner world of animals, to represent their sensations, feelings and desires [17, p. 92]. At the same time, it would be wrong to assume that he denied the value of subjective, that is, empirical psychology; so, in his Nobel Speech, I.P. Pavlov pointed out that a person is interested in life only in his mental content, and he himself apparently dreamed of "finding such an elementary mental phenomenon that could be considered entirely and rightfully at the same time a pure physiological phenomenon, and starting with it — studying strictly objectively (like everything in physiology) the conditions of its occurrence, its various complications and disappearance, first to obtain an objective physiological picture of the entire higher nervous activity of animals" [32, p. 322]. Also well known is the congratulation that I.P. Pavlov sent to G.I. Chelpanov in honor of the opening of the Psychological Institute is also well-known.

The creator of "objective psychology" V.M. Bekhterey, as if separating his approach from the empirical one, wrote: "In objective psychology, which we intend to devote this work, to there should be no place for questions about subjective processes or processes of consciousness" [2, p. 3]. He denied the scientific value of a person's subjective experience and, accordingly, the method of introspection as the way of obtaining data about this experience; only facts obtained objectively — by "external" observation and experiment — were recognized as truly scientific. Although N.N. Lange did not take such an extreme position, he still preferred objective cognition of the mental: "[...] mental life, although subjective (in our personal experience), must be conceivably objective in order for psychology to be possible. Whoever admits psychology as an objective science must admit the possibility that subjective mental experiences are, however, objective real facts among other facts of objective reality, and in accordance with this postulate he must determine the relationship between the concepts of subjective and objective" [11, p. 58].

However, despite the criticism, the authority of G.I. Chelpanov, both as the founder and director of the first Mazilov V.A., Vlasov N.A. G.I. Chelpanov and the Concept...

psychological institute in Russia, and as a researcher and professor who created his own scientific school, was so high that his position on the subject of psychology was shared (or at least recognized as a fact) even by scientists belonging to other fields of this science L.M. Lopatin, referred by historians of psychology to the philosophical wing of Russian psychology, wrote: "In relatively recent times, the situation has changed. This question of the essence of the soul has receded into the background or even been completely thrown out of psychology. The phenomena of the soul have been recognized as the subject of psychological research, in addition to the question of who and what experiences them... Psychology without a soul began to be built. With this point view, psychology as a science will have to be defined as follows: psychology is the science of mental phenomena ... Psychology is the science of the laws and processes of mental life" [12, p. 3-4]. Speaking in approximately the same way, in "Psychology without any Metaphysics" (1915), the neo-Kantian philosopher A.I. Vvedensky, points out that modern psychology in its empirical version characterizes itself "as a natural science of mental phenomena or as a natural history of mental phenomena" [5, p. 3]. A.F. Lazursky, a representative of another wing of Russian psychology, natural science, also recognizes as correct the position shared by G.I. Chelpanov: the subject of psychology is mental phenomena and the laws governing them [10].

As follows from the above, G.I. Chelpanov's positions on the subject of psychological science in pre-revolutionary psychology were quite strong, since they were recognized not only by supporters of the empirical trend, but also by a number of adherents of other directions.

# G.I. Chelpanov's Views on the Subject of Psychology after Russian Revolution

After 1917, G.I. Chelpanov continued to remain faithful to his views on the subject of psychology, despite the changing socio-political conditions. In the next edition of his "Textbook of Psychology" (1918), the scientist writes: "Therefore, recently another definition of psychology has been proposed, namely, they say that psychology is the science of mental phenomena or the laws of mental life" [31, p. 9]. For many years, openly acting as an opponent of materialism in philosophy [26], G.I. Chelpanov could not help but incurring troubles caused by the Bolsheviks, coming to power.

The historiography of Russian psychology describes in sufficient detail the struggle between G.I. Chelpanov and the newly appeared Marxist psychologists, some of whom (P.P. Blonsky, K.N. Kornilov) were his students and shared his views on psychological science in the prerevolutionary period [4; 18]. Already in January 1923, at the "First All-Russian Congress on Psychoneurology", K.N. Kornilov made a thesis about the "coming Marx-

ist system of psychology", and by the end of the year G.I. Chelpanov was dismissed from the post of director of the Psychological Institute. So he was defeated in the administrative struggle for "commanding heights" in Russian psychology [23].

Attempts to build Marxist psychology on a methodology close to behaviorism led to a "behavioral turn" in Russian science in the 1920s — many prominent scientists began to believe that the subject of psychology should be behavior, and this concept was interpreted quite broadly, it also included the concepts of reaction, reflex. This position was stated in the works of P.P. Blonsky [3], K.N. Kornilov [9], L.S. Vygotsky [7], M.Y. Basov [1] and other psychologists of that time, although the tradition of "objective" research of the psyche itself went back to the works of V.M. Bekhterev and I.P. Pavlov.

The conditions of the NEP allowed G.I. Chelpanov, using private printing houses, to speak out in the press against the "behavioral turn" in psychology. He wrote in 1925: "Rejecting the reality of consciousness and at the same time the permissibility of the subjective method in psychology, the Russian reader creates in his mind a psychology that, instead of the phenomena of consciousness, studies various reflexes using an objective method. He proposes to replace the old psychology with such a scientific discipline. In addition, he is convinced that such a scientific discipline has already been sufficiently developed and is contained in the works of Bekhterev and Pavlov. I want to show that in the works of Bekhterev and Pavlov he will not find what he is looking for, because Bekhterev's "objective psychology" or "reflexology" is nothing more than the former psychology with the addition of only an attempt to reduce various types of mental life to reflexes; and Pavlov's doctrine of conditioned reflexes is, according to his own opinion, nothing more than the pure physiology of the brain. As such, of course, it cannot replace psychology" [27, p. 5].

G.I. Chelpanov considered the main "sins" of behavioral psychology to be (1) the substitution of the subject of psychology, (2) the rejection of introspection as the leading method of cognition of the mental, and (3) the reduction of the mental to the physiological. Regarding the first thesis of Marxist psychologists (and his former students), he wrote in the same 1925 in the work "Psychology and Marxism": "Scientific psychology in Russia in 1922 had to undergo reform in accordance with the ideology of Marxism. Some persons (Blonsky, Kornilov) proposed to carry out such a reform in such a way that instead of psychology, supposedly containing some idealistic elements, reflexology should be introduced. In other words, psychology, which has an internal experience as its starting point, should be replaced exclusively by an objective study of physiological processes and external manifestations" [29, p. 7].

Even in the pre-revolutionary period, G.I. Chelpanov clearly distinguished mental phenomena and phenomena of the physical world. In the "Textbook of Psychology",

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he pointed out that the former can not be perceived and cognized through external senses, and, unlike the latter, are accessible only to self-observation; mental phenomena were accessible only to the researcher himself, unlike physical ones, which can be observed by a large number of persons; finally, matter, unlike the psyche, it has the property of material extension [31]. So it is wrong to apply objective, that is, methods external to the content of consciousness, in the study of the mental. The scientist kept this position in the 1920s.

Well understanding the situation in the country, G.I. Chelpanov tried to fight his opponents with their own weapons. In the first post-revolutionary decade, there was a tendency in the scientific community, which later became the rule, to confirm arguments not only with logical and objective constructions, but also with references to the classics of Marxism. This technique was used not only by G.I. Chelpanov's opponents, but also, involuntarily, by himself. Thus, responding to accusations of idealism, he wrote in "Psychology and Marxism" (1925): "Attempts to reduce mental phenomena to material ones or replace the study of mental phenomena with material ones are mechanical materialism. Marx, Engels and Marxists have always treated mechanical materialism, otherwise called vulgar, in a decidedly negative way" [29, p. 15]. Criticizing his critics for refusing to study consciousness and study through consciousness, G.I. Chelpanov wrote that "Reflexology, which attempts to reduce mental phenomena to physiological ones, is a kind of mechanical materialism and is in decisive contradiction with Marxist philosophy. Any attempt to reduce the mental to the physiological was negatively treated by Feuerbach, Marx himself, Engels and Dietzgen. Their humanistic materialism demanded recognition of the reality of consciousness to the same extent as the reality of matter" [29, p. 15]. In his last major work, "Essays on Psychology" (1926), G.I. Chelpanov remains true to his principles and writes that "psychology studies mental phenomena in contrast to the natural sciences, which study natural phenomena" [28].

However, the scientist's attempts to "save" the subject of psychology, as he imagined it, failed. Even a concession in the form of a "sacrifice" of social psychology in favor of Marxism did not help [4]; the fate of psychology as a science, in the end, was largely decided not so much in the subject-logical, as in the socio-political plane. From 1928 to the end of the 1930s, in the works of major Russian psychologists, mental phenomena were not included in the content of the concept of "subject of psychology".

### Conclusion

Considering G.I. Chelpanov's ideas about the subject of psychological science, the following conclusions can be drawn. The methodological views of the scientist, at least at the end of the 19th — beginning of the 20th century, corresponded to the global ones, assuming that N.N. Lange's "Troy" existed. The subject of psychology was understood as the content of consciousness, introspection was used as the main method of studying, and the experiment performed an auxiliary function. The institutional role of G.I. Chelpanov and his merits as a researcher were so important, that he could be called "Russian Wilhelm Wundt".

His commitment to mental phenomena as a subject of psychology, the tenacity with which he defended his position not only in pre-revolutionary times, which allowed for relative freedom of thought in science, but also after the establishment of the Marxist dictate in science, risking, if not his life, but freedom and the opportunity to work in his professional field, all this does an honor for him as a scientist, an ordinary J. Bruno and S.I. Vavilov (but being faithful to the subject of psychology, he changed his views on the path of its study, eventually becoming highly appreciative of systematic experimental self-observation (the W rzburg School), and then the analytical phenomenological method).

On the other hand, G.I. Chelpanov's position on the subject of psychology can be characterized as conservative, inhibiting the development of psychology. Back in the 1910s, foreign psychological science was gripped by a methodological crisis, the Wundt system was challenged by psychoanalysis, behaviorism and Gestalt psychology, each with its own specific subject of study, and by the 1920s introspective psychology looked like an anachronism.

Combining these two points of view, the following conclusion can be drawn: G.I. Chelpanov courageously, despite everything, defended his idea of the subject of psychology in conditions when not only the socio-political, but also the concrete scientific context of the existence of psychological science has changed.

Finally, it should be said that G.I. Chelpanov's views continued to live even after he was forced to retire from scientific activity. Accusations by V.M. Bekhterev and K.N. Kornilov of adherence to vulgar materialism and mechanicism were again voiced in the late 1920s and early 1930s during reflexological and reactological discussions, as a result of which research in both these areas was curtailed.

Partial rehabilitation of the concept of "mental phenomena", although with a slightly modified content, was carried out in the years preceding the Great Patriotic War. Thus, the textbook by K.N. Kornilov, B.M. Teplov and L.M. Schwartz (1938) indicates that psychology studies perception, sensations, attention, memory, thinking, imagination, will and emotions as forms of manifestation of the human psyche [20]. An even closer point of view to G.I. Chelpanov is expressed in his "Fundamentals of General Psychology" (1940) by S.L. Ru-

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binstein pointing out that "A specific range of phenomena that psychology studies stands out distinctly and clearly — these are our perceptions, thoughts, feelings, our aspirations, intentions, desires, etc. — all that makes up the inner content of our life and that as an experience seems to be given directly to us. Indeed, belonging to the individual experiencing them, to the subject, is the first characteristic feature of the entire psyche. Mental phenomena therefore act as processes and as properties

of specific individuals; they usually bear the stamp of something particularly close to the subject experiencing them" [21, p. 5].

Thus, G.I. Chelpanov's ideas about mental phenomena as a subject of psychological science (or at least as an integral part of it) turned out to be of great vitality tenacious in Russian psychology, and his methodological legacy as a whole seems to be "not exhausted" to the end.

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Получена 01.05.2024 Принята в печать 19.06.2024 Received 01.05.2024 Accepted 19.06.2024