

BOOK REVIEW

A Review of N.I. Chuprikova's the Mental Activity of the Brain, Language and Consciousness: In Search of Mental Reality and the Subject of Psychology (Moscow: YASK Publishing House, 2021)

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Abstract. This review examines N.I. Chuprikova's monograph *The Mental Activity of the Brain, Language and Consciousness*, which offers a systematic solution to the mind–body problem by redefining mental reality as the reflective and regulative activity of the brain. Chuprikova draws on Aristotelian, Spinozist, and Russian psychological traditions to advance an ideal-material monism: mental processes are ideal in content (embodying external reality) and material in implementation (spatially extended neural events). The review highlights the monograph's key contributions: a radical reinterpretation of reflexes as intrinsically mental phenomena, a seven-subsystem functional architecture of the mind, an evolutionary-linguistic account of consciousness as arising through language's analytical capacity, and a unified descriptive framework using two complementary languages (content and embodiment). The monograph is positioned against contemporary reductionist, epiphenomenalist, and dualist theories, and its heuristic power is demonstrated through applications to attention and space perception. While some aspects remain speculative (e.g., the biochemical basis of qualitative diversity), the work is commended for its conceptual rigour, historical depth, and potential to resolve long-standing theoretical fractures in psychology.

Keywords: Mind–Body Problem, Mental Reality, Reflection, Consciousness, Language, Ideal-Material Monism, Reflex Theory, Functional Systems, Attention, Space Perception, Russian Psychology

1. Introduction

In the landscape of modern psychological science, a peculiar paradox persists. While the discipline has amassed an extraordinary wealth of empirical data, from the molecular dynamics of synaptic transmission to the intricate choreography of large-scale brain networks, its conceptual core remains curiously elusive. Psychology, as N.I. Chuprikova bluntly states in the opening pages of her ambitious new monograph (Chuprikova, 2021), has yet to define its proper subject. This is not a mere terminological quibble but a foundational crisis that has

fragmented the field into incommensurable subdisciplines, warring theoretical camps, and what William James once called "a great blooming, buzzing confusion" (James, 1890, p. 488). The question that has haunted psychology since its inception as an experimental science is deceptively simple: what is the mental reality that we purport to study?

The present review aims to provide a critical analysis of Chuprikova's monograph, examining its central theoretical contributions, assessing its methodological foundations, and

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evaluating its significance for contemporary psychological science.

2. Method

The review is based on a comprehensive reading and analysis of the monograph's twelve substantive chapters. The analytical approach involves: (1) reconstruction of the monograph's central argument and its philosophical and empirical foundations; (2) critical comparison with alternative contemporary approaches to the mind–body problem, including neuro-reductionism (Swaab, 2014; Myers, 2013), epiphenomenalism, liberal dualism (Chalmers, 1996), and global workspace theories; (3) evaluation of the heuristic power of the proposed framework through its application to specific psychological domains (attention and space perception); and (4) identification of the monograph's limitations and open questions. The review draws on the primary sources cited by Chuprikova as well as the broader philosophical and psychological literature relevant to the issues addressed.

3. Results

The analysis of Chuprikova's monograph reveals a coherent and systematically developed theoretical framework with several major contributions.

First, the monograph offers a substantive resolution of the mind–body problem through what Chuprikova terms ideal-material monism. Chuprikova's book enters this conceptual maelstrom with a bold thesis that is both deeply traditional and radically revisionist. She argues that mental reality is nothing other than the reflective and regulative activity of the brain, activity that, following Francis Crick, can rightfully be termed "mental activity of the brain" (Crick, 1994). This formulation, however, is not the reductive materialism one might expect from a neurocentric perspective. Instead, Chuprikova draws upon an intellectual lineage that stretches from Aristotle through Spinoza to the Russian

psychological tradition of Sechenov (1863/1965), Rubinstein (1957), and Leontiev (1975), weaving these strands into a sophisticated monistic framework that refuses to collapse mind into matter or to exile it into an inaccessible subjective realm.

The book is organised as a systematic unfolding of this central thesis across twelve substantive chapters, each addressing a critical dimension of the problem. Chuprikova begins by retrieving the classical conception of the mind as reflection, not in the passive, mirror-like sense that critics of the "Leninist" theory of reflection have caricatured, but as an active, adaptive process of modelling the world. She traces this idea from Aristotle's astonishing insight that sensation is the reception of the form of objects without their matter ("as wax receives the imprint of a seal without the iron or gold") (Aristotle, *De Anima*, 425b18–24), through Hegel's dialectic of subject–object interaction (Hegel, 1817/1970), to the evolutionary epistemology of Konrad Lorenz (1973) and the reflex theory of Ivan Sechenov (1863/1965). The continuity she establishes is not merely historical; it provides the philosophical bedrock for her central claim that the brain is, in its essential function, an organ of reflection, an organ whose ultimate biological purpose is to construct, with ever-increasing fidelity, a working model of the world in which the organism must navigate.

This brings us to the conceptual heart of the monograph: Chuprikova's resolution of the mind–body problem. Unlike the identity theory (which collapses the mental into the physical) or psychophysical parallelism (which postulates two separate but correlated processes), she offers what might be called an ideal-material monism. The mental and the physical, she argues, are not two different kinds of things, but two irreducible aspects of one and the same substance, or, more precisely, of one and the same process. Mental processes are ideal in their content, because they

embody a reality that exists beyond themselves; they are material in their implementation, because they are, from beginning to end, spatially extended neurophysiological events. This is Spinoza's dual-aspect theory brought to life with contemporary neurobiological specificity (Spinoza, 1677/1994). The "conceptual gap" that Thomas Nagel identified as the scandal of philosophy of mind is thus not a chasm between two ontological realms but a tension between two complementary languages of description: the language of content (the world-as-reflected) and the language of embodiment (the world-as-neural-activity) (Nagel, 1998).

Second, the monograph provides a systematic re-evaluation of the reflex concept that has profound implications for understanding the role of the mind in behaviour. One of the monograph's most distinctive contributions is its systematic re-evaluation of the reflex concept. In standard textbooks, the reflex remains what it was in Descartes and Marshall Hall, an automatic, machine-like, apsyche response. Chuprikova demonstrates, through a careful reading of both historical and contemporary evidence, that this conception is no longer tenable. Drawing on ethological and neurophysiological data, she shows that even simple reflexes involve the detection and discrimination of stimulus parameters; they depend on the formation of neural models of stimulation. Her proposed redefinition is audacious and potentially transformative: a reflex is a response that is mediated by the nervous system's reflection of the quality, structure, and intensity of the eliciting stimulus. In other words, reflexes are not apsyche at all; they are, at their core, mental phenomena. This move has profound implications: it re-inserts the mind into the causal nexus of behaviour, dissolving the ancient Cartesian division between the mechanical and the mindful.

Third, Chuprikova constructs a comprehensive functional architecture of the psyche consisting of seven principal

subsystems. She identifies seven principal subsystems, cognitive, need-motivational, emotional, mnemonic, communicative, integrative-regulatory, and activation-energetic, that collectively constitute the mental activity of the brain. What distinguishes this classification from conventional textbook inventories is its derivation from function: these subsystems are not merely empirically observed but logically necessary for adaptive behaviour. They correspond to the informational demands that the environment places upon any organism capable of flexible, goal-directed action. Chuprikova shows that this model aligns remarkably well both with the known anatomical-functional organisation of the brain (from the hypothalamus to the prefrontal cortex) and with P.K. Anokhin's theory of functional systems (Anokhin, 1968). The result is a unified conceptual framework that bridges psychological and physiological levels of analysis without reducing one to the other.

Fourth, the monograph advances a novel evolutionary-linguistic theory of the origin of consciousness. Perhaps the most philosophically challenging chapter concerns the nature and origin of consciousness. Here Chuprikova advances a thesis that will be both provocative and illuminating: consciousness arises because of language. Drawing on the linguistic-epistemological tradition of A.A. Potebnya (1993) and L.S. Vygotsky (1934/1986), she argues that words are not merely tools of communication but instruments of analytical reflection. Language allows us to dissect the fluid, holistic stream of sensory experience into discrete, manipulable elements; it enables us to abstract properties, relations, and categories from the seamless flow of perception. More crucially, language introduces a new object of reflection: the contents of other minds and, eventually, our own. Consciousness, on this account, is not a mysterious emergent property of neural complexity; it is the capacity for articulated, generalised reflection, a

capacity that becomes possible only when the reflective system gains access to its own operations through the mediating structure of language. This evolutionary-functional explanation stands in striking contrast to both the reductionist search for neural correlates of consciousness and the idealist traditions that treat consciousness as a primordial given.

Fifth, the monograph demonstrates the empirical applicability of its framework through detailed analyses of attention and space perception. The empirical implications of this framework are explored in the later chapters through detailed case studies of attention and space perception, two classic domains of psychological research that have suffered from theoretical fragmentation. In the case of attention, Chuprikova cuts through the "Babylonian confusion" of competing definitions (attention as selection, as resource, as control, as interest, as energy) by situating it within her systemic model: attention is a special state that emerges when the cognitive subsystem interacts with the activation-energetic subsystem. It is the dynamic tuning of cognitive processing to environmental demands, mediated by local increases in neural excitability and suppression of competing inputs. This operational definition preserves the phenomenological reality of attention (clarity, distinctness, concentration) while grounding it in concrete physiological mechanisms, thus avoiding the homunculus problem that has plagued so many theories.

The chapter on space perception is a tour de force of explanatory clarity. Chuprikova demonstrates that the "cues" for depth and distance, linear perspective, binocular disparity, motion parallax, are not arbitrary signals but functions of distance reflected on the two-dimensional surfaces of receptors. The visual system does not "interpret" these cues in some mysterious cognitive act; it detects them through neural mechanisms that have evolved precisely because they register invariant relationships between the

external world and the receptive surfaces. The same principle applies across species: scorpions detect distance through the temporal delay between two vibrational waves, bats through echolocation, bees through optic flow. This universal mechanism, the detection of a difference in excitation that is a monotonic function of distance, provides a unified account of spatial perception that is both elegant and empirically grounded. It is a vivid illustration of what Chuprikova means by "reflection": the nervous system does not construct space out of nothing; it recovers the spatial structure of the world by detecting the traces that this structure inevitably leaves on its own receptive surfaces.

Finally, Chuprikova calls for a fundamental revision of our concept of matter itself. The monograph concludes with a synthesis that is as much a manifesto as a summary. Chuprikova calls for a fundamental revision of our concept of matter itself: the mental is not an immaterial essence but a special, ideal-material form of existence, a form that embodies, in the material processes of the brain, the content of a reality beyond itself. This is not panpsychism, nor is it substance dualism; it is a claim that the categories of "physical" and "mental" are insufficient to capture the ontological richness of neural activity. What is required, she argues, is a unified science of mental activity of the brain, a discipline that would describe its subject in two complementary languages (psychological and physiological) without privileging either as more fundamental. This would be, in Pavlov's prophetic words, the stage of human thought at which "the painful contradiction or opposition between my consciousness and my body is actually resolved or naturally falls away" (Pavlov, 1957, p. 582).

4. Conclusion

The significance of Chuprikova's work can be appreciated by contrasting it with other contemporary approaches to the mind-brain problem. Unlike the

neuro-reductionism of figures like Dick Swaab (2014) or David Myers (2013), who declare the soul a "misunderstanding," Chuprikova insists that the mental has genuine ontological status and causal efficacy. Unlike the epiphenomenalism or radical behaviourism that would expel mental concepts from scientific discourse, she treats psychological language as an irreducible, necessary medium for describing the content of brain activity. Unlike the liberal dualism of David Chalmers (1996), she offers no inscrutable "hard problem" of consciousness, but a theoretically tractable account of how reflective awareness emerges through the historical-evolutionary invention of language. And unlike the "global workspace" or "higher-order thought" theories that dominate cognitive neuroscience, she provides not merely a correlation of consciousness with neural activity but a functional-explanatory account of why consciousness exists and how it works.

That is not to say the book is without vulnerabilities. Some readers will find Chuprikova's reliance on the "reflection" concept too indebted to a philosophical tradition that, in the West, has been largely abandoned under the influence of post-structuralist and constructivist critiques. The author anticipates and addresses this objection, arguing that constructivism, when it denies the possibility of faithful representation, is not a scientific theory but an ideological gesture. Still, her defence might have been stronger if it had engaged more deeply with the genuinely difficult questions raised by perceptual ambiguity, cognitive bias, and the historical contingency of conceptual schemes. Similarly, her hypothesis that the qualitative diversity of mental states has a biochemical basis, while bold and potentially fruitful, remains speculative and would benefit from more extensive empirical grounding. The chapter on needs and emotions, though insightful, is somewhat less developed than the earlier chapters,

perhaps because the relevant neurochemical data are still fragmentary.

Nevertheless, these are limitations of execution in a work of extraordinary ambition and erudition. Chuprikova has produced a monograph that deserves to be read not only by psychologists but also by philosophers of mind, cognitive neuroscientists, and anyone interested in the deepest questions about human nature. She has taken the scattered, contested fragments of psychological theory and shown how they might be assembled into a coherent, internally consistent framework, a framework that respects both the materiality of the brain and the irreducibility of subjective experience. Her central thesis, that the brain's activity is essentially reflective, and that this reflective activity constitutes the psyche, offers a genuine way out of the impasse that has paralysed theoretical psychology for over a century.

Whether this synthesis will be accepted by the broader scientific community remains to be seen. What is certain is that Chuprikova has made it impossible to ignore the question: if psychology is not the study of the mental activity of the brain, then what is it? And if this mental activity is not a special form of material existence, then what is its ontological status? Her answers, whether one ultimately agrees with them or not, are formulated with such clarity, scholarly depth, and conceptual rigour that they demand a serious engagement. This is the mark of a work that does not merely contribute to the field but redefines its terms of discourse. The 2021 publication of this volume marks a significant milestone in the long and tortuous journey of psychological science toward a genuine understanding of its own subject.

Highlights:

- Chuprikova proposes an ideal-material monism in which mental processes possess both content (ideal) and neurophysiological embodiment (material).

- Reflexes are redefined as responses mediated by the nervous system's reflection of stimulus quality, structure, and intensity; this makes them inherently mental processes.
- Consciousness emerges through language, which enables analytical reflection by dissecting holistic sensory experience into discrete elements.
- The mind is modeled as a functional system of seven interacting subsystems:

cognitive, motivational, emotional, mnemonic, communicative, integrative-regulatory, and activation-energetic.

- The "conceptual gap" is resolved by describing mental reality in two complementary languages (content and embodiment) without reducing either to the other.

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Рецензия на монографию Н.И. Чуприковой «Психическая деятельность мозга, язык и сознание (В поисках психической реальности и предмета психологии)»

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Резюме. В рецензии анализируется монография Н.И. Чуприковой, посвящённая обоснованию онтологического статуса психической реальности и определению предмета психологии. Исходным и системообразующим положением работы выступает трактовка психики как отражательной деятельности мозга, регулирующей поведение и деятельность живых существ. Опираясь на учение Аристотеля о душе, концепцию психофизического монизма Спинозы, рефлекторную теорию И.М. Сеченова, эволюционную эпистемологию К. Лоренца и сложившиеся в отечественной психологии представления о психике как отражении

действительности, Чуприкова развивает концепцию идеально-материальной природы психических процессов: психические процессы идеальны по содержанию, поскольку воплощают в себе вне них существующую действительность, и материальны по способу существования, поскольку от начала до конца являются пространственно-развёрнутыми нейрособытиями. В монографии последовательно раскрываются основные следствия данного подхода: рефлекс переосмысливается как акт, опосредованный отражением в нервной системе качества, структуры и интенсивности вызывающего стимула, что вводит психику в качестве необходимого звена в причинную детерминацию поведения; психика предстаёт как целостная функциональная система, включающая семь взаимосвязанных подсистем (когнитивной, потребностно-мотивационной, эмоциональной, мнемической, коммуникативной, интеграционно-регуляторной и активационно-энергетической); сознание трактуется как возникающий на основе языка качественно новый уровень отражения, обеспечивающий аналитическое расчленение чувственных образов и рефлексии содержания собственной психики и психики других людей; обосновывается необходимость сопряжённого описания психической деятельности мозга на двух языках – языке содержания (отражённая действительность) и языке его материального воплощения (нейрофизиологические процессы). Эвристическая значимость предлагаемой концепции демонстрируется на материале исследований внимания и восприятия пространства. В рецензии отмечается, что, несмотря на гипотетический характер отдельных положений (в частности, гипотезы о биохимической природе качественного многообразия психических состояний), монография предлагает последовательное монистическое решение психофизической проблемы и создаёт концептуальную основу для преодоления теоретического кризиса психологической науки.

Ключевые слова: психофизическая проблема, психическая реальность, рефлексия, сознание, язык, идеально-материальный монизм, рефлекс, функциональные системы, внимание, восприятие пространства, русская психология

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