



DOI: 10.22363/2313-1683-2023-20-4-914-921

EDN: YHGWWI

UDC 159.922

Biographical article

Russian Trace in the Second Wave of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy Methods: To the 130th Anniversary of Vladimir N. Myasishchev's Birth

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Abstract. In 2023 year, the world scientific community celebrates the 130th anniversary of the birth of the outstanding Russian scientist Vladimir Nikolayevich Myasishchev (1893–1973). The preservation and integration of his heritage into modern Russian and world science remains a pressing issue. This study allows us to assert that A. Adler's individual psychology was a common source in the genesis of psychotherapy methods of V.N. Myasishchev and A. Ellis. The material of this research consists of previously unknown correspondence documents of V.N. Myasishchev, stored in the Central State Archive of Scientific and Technical Documentation. V.N. Myasishchev's works were of great interest to American psychotherapists and psychologists. This fact was confirmed by A. Ellis's invitation to V.N. Myasishchev in 1964 on a month-long scientific tour to the Ivy League University and leading psychotherapeutic centers of the USA. This clearly indicates a certain contribution made by V.N. Myasishchev to the formation of the second wave of cognitive behavioral therapy methods.

Key words: history of psychology, cognitive-behavioral therapy, relationship psychology, history of psychotherapy, rational-emotional-behavioral therapy, St. Petersburg school of psychotherapy, Leningrad school of psychotherapy, American Academy of Psychotherapy, V.N. Myasishchev, A. Beck, A. Ellis

Introduction: great and unknown

In 2023, the world scientific community celebrates the 130th anniversary of the birth of the outstanding Russian scientist, corresponding member of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of the USSR, Doctor of Medical Sciences, Professor Vladimir Nikolaevich Myasishchev (July 11, 1893 – October 4, 1973) (Figure 1). The preservation and integration of his heritage into modern Russian and world science remains a pressing issue, which is complicated, paradoxically, by the breadth of his scientific interests.

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Figure 1. Vladimir Nikolaevich Myasishchev (1893–1973)

Source: photo from the archive of Vladimir Yu. Slabinsky.

It is well known that Myasishchev left a bright trace in psychiatry and medical psychology (Levchenko, 2003). There have appeared a number of publications about the scientist's contribution to labor psychology and social psychology (Zhuravlev, Pozdnyakov, 2018). However, Myasishchev's works on psychotherapy (Myasishchev, Yakovleva, 2018) are much less known, and without their knowledge, the understanding of historical events that occurred in the world psychotherapy in the mid-twentieth century and had a crucial impact on the further development of this field of knowledge, is distorted (Slabinsky, 2016; Slabinsky, Voishcheva, 2018)¹.

The material of this study consists of previously unknown correspondence documents of V.N. Myasishchev, stored in the Central State Archive of Scientific and Technical Documentation.

¹ Slabinsky, V.Yu. (2021). *Psychotherapy. Textbook for universities. Standard of the third generation*. St. Petersburg: Peter Publ. (In Russ.)

Russian and American psychotherapy in the mid-twentieth century: antagonism or commonality?

Was there an approach in psychotherapy in the mid-twentieth century that might have influenced Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck's views on psychotherapy?

In the 50–60s of the last century, there was a cognitive revolution in psychology, as a result of which the school of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) took a leading position in the world, which it maintains to this day. In the history of psychotherapy, this event is called the stage of formation of the second wave of CBT methods, and the key date is considered to be September 11, 1956, when a special group consisting of George Miller, Herbert Simon, Allen Newell, Noam Chomsky, David Green, and John Sweets gathered and began working at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

However, the very process of forming the second wave of CBT methods stretched from 1955, when Albert Ellis developed his method of rational-emotional-behavioral therapy (REBT) (Ellis, 1957), to the publication of Aaron Beck's *Depression: Causes and Treatment* in 1967 (Beck, 1967, 1972), or even to 1977, when CBT was proven to be more effective than imipramine in treating depression.

In the middle of the last century, V.N. Myasishchev was an influential figure in the scientific world; he was the director of the V.M. Bekhterev Psychoneurological Institute and an expert of the World Health Organization (WHO). Let us illustrate this with a concrete example. Thus, on July 2, 1970, he received a letter from Norman Sartorius from the World Health Organization (WHO), in which he was asked to prepare a working document of about 15 typewritten sheets (27,000 characters) for a workshop of the WHO working group on the development of a new version of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) on *Experimental neuroses and psychosomatics: implications in the classification of neurotic disorders*. The letter stated that the workshop would discuss the impact of the existence of experimental neuroses on traditional systems of disease classification².

Is there a genetic link between V. N. Myasishchev's psychotherapy and the methods of the second wave of CBT?

Regarding the issue of a possible genetic link between the methods of V.N. Myasishchev and A. Ellis, it is necessary to recall that Albert Ellis himself, in his 1957 article *Rational Psychotherapy and Individual Psychology*, indicated that the approach that most influenced his work was Alfred Adler's individual psychology (Ellis, 1957). However, this method was also seriously studied by V.N. Myasishchev. Thus, as far back as 1927, he published two large works devoted to the presentation and criticism of Adler's individual psychology, and later argued that Adler's students came closer than other foreign scientists to a correct understanding of the psychology of relationships (Myasishchev, Yakovleva, 2018). It is therefore no coincidence that in a letter dated June 3, 1966, Professor H.L. Ansbacher of the University of Vermont wrote: "Several years ago, in 1962, we were struck by the similarity of your approach to psychotherapy with our own... Your recent article entitled *Treatment*

² Sartorius, N. (1970). Letter from Norman Sartorius, World Health Organization, Switzerland to V.N. Myasishchev dated 02.07.1970. *Central State Archive of Scientific and Technical Documentation of St. Petersburg (CSASTD)*. F. 403. Op. 1. Ed. Khr. 109.

of *Neurosis: Soviet and American Pluses and Minuses*, in *The Soviet Life*, May 1966, has again vividly demonstrated this similarity to me.”³ (Ansbacher).

Were the authors of the methods of the second wave of CBT familiar with V.N. Myasishchev's publications and his method of psychotherapy?

Despite the authority of V.N. Myasishchev as a scientist and the commonality of his theoretical basis with that of A. Ellis, this is a key question. Let us get down to the facts.

In 1960, the main work of V.N. Myasishchev in the field of psychotherapy was published in the USSR: it was his monograph *Personality and Neuroses*. And a year later, in a letter dated December 5, 1961, the American psychologist Joseph Vertis informed him that “as an editor of the international series of behavioral sciences” he “recommended the book *Personality and Neuroses* to the publisher for translation”⁴ (Vertis, 1961).

On June 15, 1963, V.N. Myasishchev received from the American Academy of Psychotherapists a letter of such interesting content that we will present it almost in its entirety (Figure 2).

The authors of the letter, President Carl A. Whitaker and Vice-President Albert Ellis, invited V.N. Myasishchev as a representative of Soviet psychotherapy to a one-month tour from June 10, 1964, to July 10, 1964, to the cities of the United States with lectures and professional seminars. The following leading psychotherapy centers were included in the tour/

1. Department of Psychiatry, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia – Moderators, Dr. Albert Stunkard, pioneer in the psychotherapy of obesity, scientific director of the psychiatry department at Stanford University (1973–1977) and Dr. J. Edward Taylor.

2. Private Pennsylvania Hospital (Philadelphia) – Moderators, Dr. J. Martin Myers and Dr. J. Edward Taylor.

3. Chestnut Lodge Private Psychiatric Hospital, working on the principles of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, located near Washington, D.C. — Moderator, Dr. Dexter Bullard, Jr. who argued that thinking errors lay at the root of any illness.

4. Atlanta (Georgia) Psychiatric Hospital – Moderator, Dr. Carl A. Whitaker.

Also scheduled as part of the tour was a meeting with American colleagues in New York on July 1, 1964, and a seminar at Arden House in Harriman, New York, July 2–7, 1964.

The American Academy of Psychotherapists, in collaboration with local professional societies in the various geographical areas visited, sponsored this project and undertook to finance the entire program from the time V.N. Myasishchev arrived in the United States until his departure. In accordance with the usual practice of cultural and professional exchange accepted at that time, the Soviet side was offered to pay for the transfer.

³ Ansbacher, H.L. (1966). Letter Prof. H.L. Ansbacher, University of Vermont (USA) to V.N. Myasishchev dated 03.06.1966. *Central State Archive of Scientific and Technical Documentation of St. Petersburg* (CSASTD). F. 403. Op. 1. Ed. Khr. 109.2.

⁴ Vertis, J. (1961). Letter of J. Vertis – Editor of the International Series of Behavioral Sciences (USA) dated 05.12.1961 – 1. *Central State Archive of Scientific and Technical Documentation of St. Petersburg* (CSASTD). F. 403. Op. 1. Ed. Khr. 104.

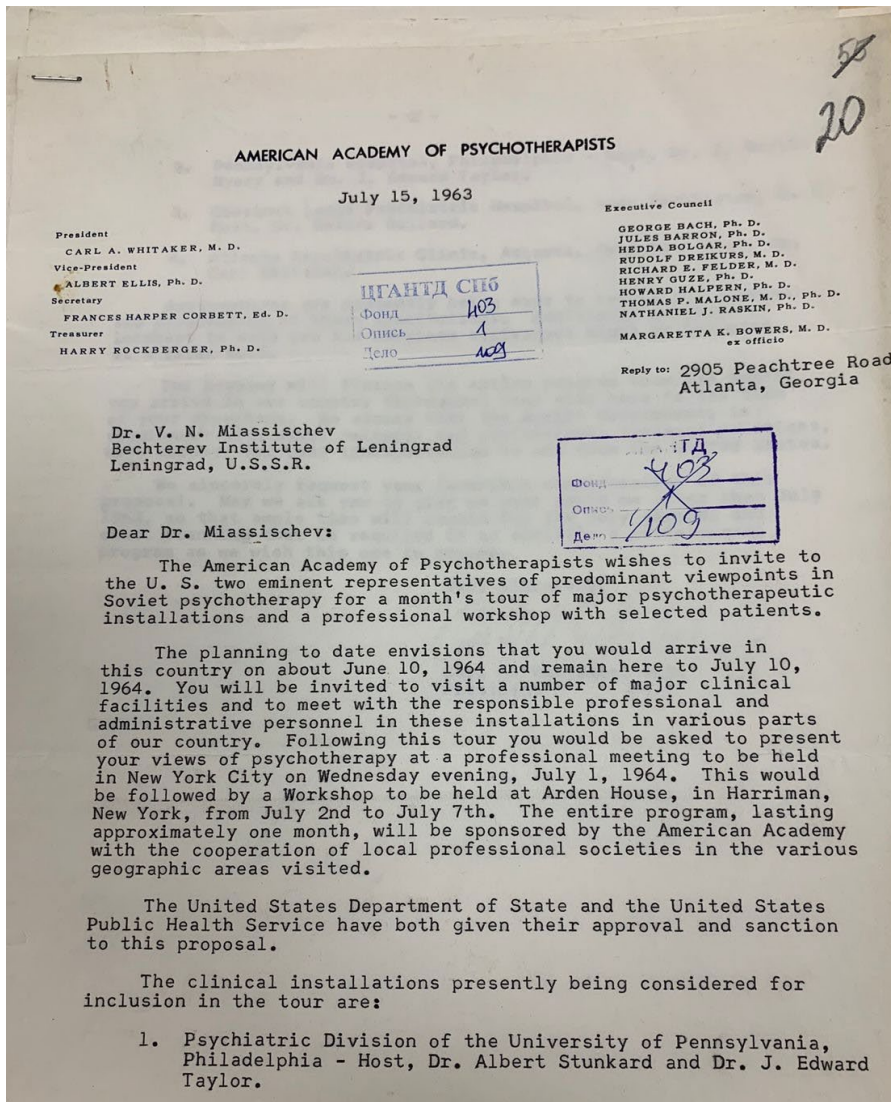


Figure 2. The first page of a letter to V.N. Myasishchev from the American Academy of Psychotherapists dated June 15, 1963. (photo from Central State Archive of Scientific and Technical Documentation of St. Petersburg)⁵

The project of V.N. Myasishchev’s tour of U.S. cities was approved and sanctioned by the State Department of the United States of America and the US Public Health Service⁶.

On October 30, 1967, V.N. Myasishchev received a letter from Ivan D. London from the Center for the study of World Psychologies, in which he was informed that “The City University of New York has organized a special Center for the study of psychology at Brooklyn College – in the form in which psychology has developed and continues to develop, as a scientific discipline, in various

⁵ Whitaker, C.A., & Ellis, A. (1963). Letter from President Carl Whitaker and Vice-President Albert Ellis, American Academy of Psychotherapists (Atlanta, USA) to V.N. Myasishchev dated 15.06.1963. *Central State Archive of Scientific and Technical Documentation of St. Petersburg (CSASTD)*. F. 403. Op. 1. Ed. Khr. 109.2.

⁶ Ibid.

countries of the world. The leadership of the Center hopes to promote the development of psychology as a truly universal discipline and to foster fruitful mutual relations among psychologists throughout the world.”⁷

For this purpose, a special library fund was formed. The author of the letter further reported that “The Brooklyn College Library already has a good selection of Soviet journals in psychology and related fields, as well as a large number of interesting articles and monographs translated from Russian into English.”⁸ Ivan D. London also asked, “Can they hope to obtain from V. N. Myasishchev reprints and a bibliography of his previously unavailable articles?”⁹

In a letter to V. N. Myasishchev dated February 1, 1971, psychiatrist Isidor Samuilovich from Los Angeles reported that “he has already begun writing a monograph on Soviet psychotherapy and hopes for another meeting and discussion after the manuscript is completed”.¹⁰

Conclusion

The introduction into the scientific circulation of previously unknown archival documents – correspondence of V.N. Myasishchev with his foreign colleagues – opens up new opportunities for understanding and describing the history of the development of psychotherapy in the 20th century. The conducted research allows us to assert that analytical psychology of A. Adler is at least one of the sources in the genesis of psychotherapeutic methods of V.N. Myasishchev and A. Ellis.

V.N. Myasishchev’s monograph *Personality and Neuroses* and his articles on psychotherapy were not only known to American psychotherapists and psychologists but also enjoyed great interest. This fact was confirmed by V.N. Myasishchev’s invitation to a month-long tour (June 10 – July 10, 1964) to the Ivy League Universities and leading psychotherapeutic centers in the United States.

The fact that one of the organizers of V.N. Myasishchev’s invitation was A. Ellis (his signature is in the letter) indicates that he knew the works of his Soviet colleague and found the ideas expressed in them so interesting that he was willing to discuss them during the tour. All of the above suggests that V.N. Myasishchev made a significant contribution to the formation of the second wave of CBT methods.

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⁷ London, I.D. (1967). Letter from Prof. Ivan D. London (USA) to V.N. Myasishchev dated 30.10.1967. *Central State Archive of Scientific and Technical Documentation of St. Petersburg (CSASTD)*. F. 403. Op. 1. Ed. Khr. 105.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Samuilovich, I. (1971). Letter from Isidor Samuilovich (USA) to V.N. Myasishchev dated 01.02.1971. *Central State Archive of Scientific and Technical Documentation of St. Petersburg (CSASTD)*. F. 403. Op. 1. Ed. Khr. 109.

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Article history:

Received 17 September 2023

Revised 18 October 2023

Accepted 19 October 2023

For citation:

Slabinsky, V.Yu. (2023). Russian trace in the second wave of cognitive-behavioral therapy methods: To the 130th anniversary of Vladimir N. Myasishchev's birth. *RUDN Journal of Psychology and Pedagogics*, 20(4), 914–921. <http://doi.org/10.22363/2313-1683-2023-20-4-914-921>

Conflicts of interest:

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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DOI: 10.22363/2313-1683-2023-20-4-914-921

EDN: YHGWWI

УДК 159.922

Биографическая статья

**Русский след во второй волне
методов когнитивно-поведенческой терапии:
к 130-летию со дня рождения В.Н. Мясищева**

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Аннотация. В 2023 г. мировая научная общественность отмечает 130-летие со дня рождения выдающегося отечественного ученого – Владимира Николаевича Мясищева (1893–1973 гг.). Актуальной проблемой остается сохранение и интеграция его

наследия в современную российскую и мировую науку. Проведенное исследование позволяет утверждать, что в генезисе методов психотерапии В.Н. Мясищева и А. Эллиса в качестве общего источника обнаруживается индивидуальная психология А. Адлера. Изучены ранее неизвестные документы переписки В.Н. Мясищева, хранящиеся в Центральном государственном архиве научно-технической документации. Работы В.Н. Мясищева пользовались большим интересом у американских психотерапевтов и психологов. Подтверждением этого факта стало приглашение А. Эллисом В.Н. Мясищева в 1964 г. в месячное научное турне в университет Лиги плюща и ведущие психотерапевтические центры США. Приведенные факты позволяют предположить наличие определенного вклада В.Н. Мясищева в формирование второй волны методов когнитивно-поведенческой терапии.

Ключевые слова: история психологии, когнитивно-поведенческая терапия, психология отношений, история психотерапии, рационально-эмоционально-поведенческая терапия, петербургская школа психотерапии, ленинградская школа психотерапии, американская академия психотерапии, В.Н. Мясищев, А. Бек, А. Эллис

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История статьи:

Поступила в редакцию 17 сентября 2023 г.
Принята к печати 19 октября 2023 г.

Для цитирования:

Slabinsky V.Yu. Russian trace in the second wave of cognitive-behavioral therapy methods: To the 130th anniversary of Vladimir N. Myasishchev's birth // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Психология и педагогика. 2023. Т. 20. № 4. С. 914–921. <http://doi.org/10.22363/2313-1683-2023-20-4-914-921>

Заявление о конфликте интересов:

Автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

Сведения об авторе:

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