

ENGLISH SUMMARY

The human sense

An essay on the object of psychology

Chapter One presents the general subject-matter of this treatise. It is demonstrated that psychology in the western world is characterized by a crisis of identity which is intimately connected with a lack of conceptual and methodological maturity and, following from that, a limited practical effectiveness.

Through a comparison with more developed sciences it is concluded that psychology above all requires a definition of its specific object in distinction to other sciences, and furthermore that this object must be defined in terms of the connection between man and his environment.

An investigation of this connection must start with a discussion of how psychology has understood the connection so far. The psychology of the sensory processes, i.e. the psychology of perception, provides an obviously explicit formulation of this connection between man and his environment.

In Chapter Two five schools in the psychology of perception are discussed, viz. sensory psychophysics, gestalt psychology, Gibson's "perceptual psychophysics", "new look" psychology, and cognitivism.

It is demonstrated how it is a fundamental common trait in these schools that sensation, which connects man with his environment, is considered a mechanical process, described by "universal" sensory categories. This implies further that the specific human conceptual understanding either is denied de facto or explained by reference to unscientific and pure-

ly subjective entities such as "comprehension" or "logical necessity".

The specific characteristics of man's connection with his environment cannot be defined scientifically on this basis.

Chapter Three discusses the attempt of the Soviet psychologist and philosopher S.L. Rubinstein to define the human mind on the basis of the marxist-leninist theory of knowledge.

It is demonstrated that Rubinstein is applying this theory of knowledge in an a priori way, which does not succeed in bringing to light the specific traits of the human mind in a sufficiently concrete way to be the starting point of an empirical branch of science.

Chapter Four presents the theory of another Soviet psychologist, A.N. Leontiev. His theory considers the development of the human mind in the history of the species, of society and of the individual.

Like Rubinstein, Leontiev builds on the marxist philosophy's conception of man, but in contrast to Rubinstein explains man's connection with his environment on the basis of man's practical activity. The psyche or mind is then explained as a necessity for the realization of this activity.

It is demonstrated how Leontiev through his understanding of the production and use of tools as mediating parts of man's activity, and through his description of the specific process of "appropriation", by which the social meaning of the tools is transferred from generation to generation, is able to explain essential characteristics of the development of the specific human mind.

However, it is concluded that Leontiev has not succeeded in describing human activities and the connections between man and his environment in a sufficiently general way to be able to explain how the process of "appropriation" is possible at all, including man's "appropriation" of nature, i.e. the creative transformation of nature into new tools for the human subject.

At last it is claimed that the "appropriation" of both the products of man and nature is based upon an until now disregarded specific human sense of the concrete, which is related to the psychological phenomenon called "object conservation".

Chapter Five presents a precise and formalized description of the specific human sense of the concrete, and it is demonstrated how the mechanistic approach, which characterized the traditional western psychological theories of sensation, is supplanted by this description. In this way it is also demonstrated how these theories can be explained as over-generalizations of certain well-defined experimental paradigms.

For this formalized description, some concepts and methods are used from mathematics and the theory of sets. At the same time this chapter is a further development of formal logic to an "infinite logic".

It is concluded that the specific human sense of the concrete constitutes a discrete structure in man's activity and psychic reflection which corresponds to the specific appearance of the mental as ideal or spiritual.

In Chapter Six it is concluded that the human sense of the concrete can be the basis for a first, provisional defini-

tion of the object of human psychology, but that further theoretical and practical investigations are necessary to confirm the usefulness of the definition and to give it a precise formulation.