

## **Representations of the Nature and Origin of Human Psyche in the Early Works of A.N. Leontiev**

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### **Abstract**

**Background:** The issue of the nature and origin of human psyche as a universal puzzle does not have a final solution for today. So, ideas about the subject matter of psychology, the issue of nature and the origin of human psyche discussed by A.N. Leontiev have not lost their significance for modern psychology.

**Objective:** Objective is to introduce the original assumptions of A.N. Leontiev that he coins discussing the nature of human psyche and its origin in the course of the evolution of living beings.

**Design:** In this paper, the early representations of A.N. Leontiev about the nature and origin of human psyche are analysed. The heuristic assumption of A.N. Leontiev about some living beings possessing the ability to react to external influences by displaying deep emotion or changing their primary sensation of various modality, which can be considered a pre-mental (biological) reflection, which further sets as reflection. The external objective activity of living beings changes their feelings as if they refer organism condition. The activity allows not only to create a motor image of the behaviour space, but also to use the primary experiences (feelings) to create ideas about the objects.

**Results:** These assumptions make it possible to view the psyche as a representation of the subject of activity and perception about the objective conditions and integral objects of the behavioural space that create the illusion of opening up the space for one's behavior. Such illusion arises due to the actual physical interaction of the subject of behaviour with the real objects of the external world.

**Conclusion:** A.N. Leontiev's assumptions about the nature and origin of human psyche allow to elaborate a number of important provisions on this issue, which will be of great interest for modern psychologists and will occupy a worthy place in the theory of psychological science.

**Keywords:** *Image; Activity; Experience (Primary Sensation); Pre-Mental Reflection*

The authors of the preface to the book of A.N. Leontiev's "Philosophy of Psychology", where his previously unpublished works were first presented, rightly wrote that the ideas expressed in these works did not lose their significance for modern psychology. This applies to the problem of the subject of psychology, to the problem of activity, the problem of personality and the problem of the nature and origin of the psyche ([1], S. 5-20). This article contains an analysis of the proposals of A.N. Leontiev about the origin of the psyche, which is understood as the reflection of "directly not useful properties", "display of the environment as a reality of things" (ibid., P. 170).

The problem of the nature and origin of the psyche as a world mystery does not have a final solution to this day. The concept of the soul, introduced in ancient philosophy, was evaluated as a hypothesis, i.e. as a theoretical construct, not denoting some kind of reality. The concept of the psyche that came to replace the concept of the soul turned out to be vague in its content, posing psychology with questions about the nature and origin of the psyche in the evolution of living beings. These tasks became the subject of thoughts of A.N. Leontiev.

The first assumption introduced by A.N. When solving the problem of the origin of the psyche, Leontiev consists in the fact that some living beings are able to change their states in response to physical or chemical influences of the environment so that they appear in the form of primary “experiences” or primary “sensations” (feelings) of various modalities.

We should not be confused that the meaning of these terms does not coincide with the meanings of the terms of today’s psychology. Recall the words of A. De-Saint Exupery that trying to capture the world of today, we draw from the dictionary that has developed in the world of yesterday.

A.N. Leontiev did not find adequate new terms to denote the reality allocated to him and uses the existing ones, changing their content. He writes: “The reflection by the subject of reality is that particular state of it (the “internal” state of matter, the internal, of course, not in the sense of parallelism...), which is called experience. Feeling, sensation, thought are the essence of the form of experiences” ([1], p. 163). Therefore, for him, “sensation arises as feeling, as a vague sensation - affect. His subject is not objectified, i.e. does not exist as an object that causes sensation...” (ibid., p. 164).

“Sensation - writes A.N. Leontiev, as a product of the activity of the sensory organs, is primarily physiological. It - in itself - is not yet the psyche” (ibid., P. 169). Or, he writes on the next page: “As a state of an organism, it (sensation - V.I.) is, of course, only physiological” (ibid., P. 170). He further writes that: “the distinction between the pre-psychic and psychic depiction follows from here” (ibid., P. 170).

From the assumption of A.N. Leontiev follows that it is possible and necessary to distinguish two types of irritability of organisms: irritability by influences directly related to the survival of the organism and influences not directly affecting the survival of the organism (neutral in utility). This irritability can be manifested not only in the reactions of living beings, but also in such changes in their states, which can be called experience (feeling), and which do not correlate with the external influences themselves. Later A.N. Leontiev will call them biotic and abiotic influences [2].

In pre-mental reflection, it is customary to distinguish two types of reflection today: physical and biological. Physical effects on receptors lead to changes in their state in the form of physico-chemical traces of interaction (physical reflection). These primary traces are transformed into bioelectric impulses (secondary traces), isomorphic to physical effects on receptors, and characterizing a new form of reflection - biological [3]. It is still not very clear how, why, and why secondary traces cause a change in the state of the body (tertiary traces of exposure to the receptor) in the form of an experience (feeling, primary sensation) of some kind of modality. These traces, according to the logic of A.N. Leontiev, too, must be understood as a biological (pre-mental) reflection (i.e. as a change in the state of an organism that is incompatible with the effect itself).

The process of reflection (reflection, in the terminology of A.N. Leontiev) begins with external influence, for example, with electromagnetic radiation on the human eye. At the same time, we get three traces of this effect, including the primary sensation (feeling of a non-psychic nature - tertiary traces) as a manifestation of a certain property of a living body. But, if the light reflected from the table, then the person will see not the light, but the table with which his eye did not directly interact. And this raises the question of the reasons for the appearance of the image of the table or the question of how the primary sensation (feeling) turns into a reflection of the properties of external influence or into a holistic image of the object from the outside world.

It is clear that there can only be one answer - no way. The experience of the primary light sensation can in no way turn into a table image, but without it is impossible to build a table image [3,4].

The difference in sensation as a state of an organism (feeling) and as a mental reflection of external influence, A.N. Leontiev sees that “sensation itself is always an experience of the properties of an object related to this subject. Feeling is experience related to the attitude itself...” ([1], p. 164), that is, it is only a state of a living being.

The experience itself, as a state of an organism, cannot be transformed into a sensation of external influence, as the properties of a thing (object), or into an image of an integral object of the environment. Understanding this, A.N. Leontiev argues that only the inclusion of the primary sensation (feeling) in the activity of a living creature can translate it into the fact of perceiving external influence (into the image of the subject conditions of the field of adaptive activity of the subject of activity). Analysing the sensation, he writes: “It appears as psychological only to the extent that it enters into activity” ([1], p. 170). And further: “Only in the case when through the sensation the relation to the object is established, does this relation become a fact of perception - a psychological fact” (ibid., P. 171).

Here A.N. Leontiev accepts the position of L.S. Vygotsky, who analysed the problem of the biological significance of the psyche: “We think that the insolubility of these problems lies in their false formulation. It is absurd to snatch a certain quality from the whole process and then ask about the function of this quality, as if it existed on its own, completely independent of the holistic process, the quality of which it is” ([5], p. 139). Therefore, A.N. Leontiev writes: “In psychology, one must start from activity, and not by any means study earlier experiences, and then raise the question of their significance for activity” ([1], p. 163).

Unfortunately, A.N. Leontiev did not leave us a detailed description of how the activity of a living creature allows him to move from primary sensations, as the properties of special matter, to the psychic display of the environment, i.e. to create images of the subject conditions of their field of behavior (objective behavioral space). In the scientist’s later works, this transition from biological to mental reflection was only outlined [2,6].

A.N. Leontiev suggested that the primary sensation (feeling), as the state of the body, can become a reflection of the individual properties of objects (food or danger) when they are included in the subject’s activity as landmarks. The appearance in the evolution of living creatures of behavior as a means of adaptation to uncertain environmental conditions (i.e., the appearance of activity as a solution to the life tasks of a natural individual) has given such a property as irritability to directly useless effects (light, sound waves, odorous substances etc. which does not have direct benefits for the body), the ability to be a guide to their behavior among life-important events or environmental objects.

The ability of organisms to move in space and use this for adaptive purposes makes them a subject of activity and opens up the possibility for them to allocate the space of their behavior for themselves, resting upon their movement in objects of the field of activity as obstacles. These results of movements in space are the basis for the first image as a motor (motor) representation of the subject space of its activity. A.N. Leontiev noted „the paradoxically early appearance in the evolution of animals of the perception of space and the estimation of distances” ([7], p. 253).

The image of space and its subject conditions, as the first image of the subject’s behavioral field, is created with the help of what is directly subject to the living being - with the help of his own physical activity, in which the behavior subject encounters objects located in the field of behavior. This physical interaction with objects of behavioral space, accompanied by primary tactile sensations (feelings), serves as the initial basis for representing the subject about the subject conditions of the field of his behavior (motor image of the activity space).

At the same time, the movement in space naturally changes the characteristics of the primary sensations of other modalities (approaching or moving away from an object changes the volume of sound emanating from this object, the intensity of smell and heat, as well as tactile, visual sensations, etc). These changes in primary sensations (feelings) allow the subject of activity to use them as landmarks of objects in their behavior space, and then as material for creating an image of the subject conditions of their field of activity (as the subject’s idea of them).

In parallel, in a laboratory experimental study, A.N. It was shown by Leontiev that the construction of a motor spatial image by a subject of activity is possible only if he has the task of constructing an image and his own activity aimed at solving this problem ([1], pp. 106-108). Passive movement of the subject's hand by another person did not lead to the creation of an image of the object on which the hand moved. This idea of the existence of a task and the activity of the perception process has become one of the main provisions of Soviet psychology. This is confirmed in the works of S.L. Rubinstein, who wrote: "Behind the relationship of an idea, image and thing, consciousness or cognition and being, there is a different attitude - a person in whose cognitive activity only an image, idea, and being that he cognizes" ([5], S. 255). The task of „discovering“ your own behavioral space, i.e. creating an image, is put to the subject by his activity [8].

In one of his last works, A.N. Leontiev writes: "The thesis I defend is that in psychology the problem of perception should be posed as the problem of constructing in the individual's mind a multidimensional image of the world, an image of reality" ([7], p. 254). This means that the image of the subject conditions of the behavioral space does not arise by itself, but is built (constructed) by the subject of activity, as a solution to the problem of discovering your own field of activity.

The primary sensations (experiences or feelings) included by the subject in the activity become a sensation of the properties of objects of behavioral space and the material from which sensory images are built. Analysing the image of the world of the deaf-blind, A.N. Leontiev wrote: "The image of the world of the deaf-blind is not different than the image of the world of the hearing-impaired, but woven from another building material, from material of other modalities, woven from another sensual fabric" ([7], p. 261). "Overlaid" on the primary motor image of objects, sensations of various modalities serve as a sensual language for describing the properties of objects, duplicating them with different modalities - the polished surface of an object glistens in the light, smooth, slippery and cold to the touch" ([7], p. 257).

The construction (construction) of the image is the work of the subject of activity and perception of creating his idea of the subject conditions of his behavioral space (field of activity), which becomes the basis for managing his activities. A.N. Leontiev wrote on this occasion: "The decisive circumstance: a person [is alive (otherwise)] does not respond to the environment, but to his "understanding" = to the environment, as it appears for h (spruce) ka (or is alive (otherwise))" ([1], p. 212) This can be understood as a statement that the image of the subject conditions of the field of activity is not a picture of objects (their mirror image, unknown by anyone), but "understanding" by the subject of the subject conditions of his behavioural space. It is born on the basis of changes activities of the subject of their own sensory representation's knowledge (in the language of various modalities) about his field of external activity during its interaction with the available individual objects in the behavioral space.

This situation gives rise to agreement with the position of L.S. Vygotsky, who noted that the psyche distorts the outside world under the tasks of the subject's behaviour. An image is a representation of the subject about the subject conditions of his field of activity in the material of sensory experiences. Therefore, it is conditional and incomplete - it represents the subject in a way that is convenient for activity.

Therefore, the activity of living beings is determined not by the environment in itself (which is stated in the directive of directness), but by the representations of the subject of activity on the subject conditions of his field of behaviour.

By A.N. Leontiev, the main condition for the generation of images by the subject, "revealing" to him the subject conditions of his field of activity, is the presence of adaptive activity. It sets the subject of activity with the task of opening his behavioural space and translates the primary sensations (feelings, feelings) from the state of the organism (biological reflection) into the reflection of the properties of the object with which it physically directly or indirectly interacts (mental reflection). The ability of some living beings to respond to external influences by experience (primary sensation, feeling), as a state of an organism, is understood as a special property of these organisms, given to them by nature.

1. The stated position of A.N. Leontiev on the nature and origin of the psyche allows us to formulate several important points on this issue.

2. The psyche, as the language of the subject's description of the world's activity and the image of the subject conditions of life (as a representation of the subject), does not exist by itself as an independent reality. She is the product of the activity of a living being. The appearance of the psyche in evolution is based on the presence of certain types of living creatures of a special property - the ability to respond to external influences by changing their state in the form of primary experiences (primary sensations or feelings) and activity, as a behavioural way of solving life problems (way of life), which sets the body's task - take into account the subject conditions of the behaviour space in advance, before directly interacting with them. Therefore, the image of the subject environment can be created by the subject of activity and perception only when it interacts with the real physical world.
3. The translation of primary sensations from the position of pre-mental reflection into mental reflection is carried out by the subject of activity, who receives from his activity the task of "discovering" the subject conditions of his behavioral space (as a requirement of the subject's activity) based on his own motor (behavioral) activity, which naturally changes characteristics of primary sensations and including them in activities as guidelines.
4. The image of subject conditions is "built, constructed" as a representation of the subject of activity about his behavioral space and his subject conditions on the basis of physical interaction (direct or mediated by some kind of radiation, for example, light flux) with them. The material for the construction of representations are primary experiences of various modalities that serve as sensory languages to describe the various properties of objects.
5. The same property of objects can be described in different sensual languages (in languages of various modalities). This description provides the subject with adequate information about the properties of the subject. The task of sensory representations (images) is not the subject's cognition of the nature of the object, but the consideration of the characteristics of the latter in his activity.
6. The image creates the illusion of observation and perception of real objects of behavioral space by the subject of activity. This illusion arises because the subject of activity always really (physically) interacts with real objects, and the image is always built in the place of direct or indirect interaction of the subject with the object.
7. As a person develops his activity (creative, collective, and instrumental), he has a new conceptual language of images, as ideas about the subject conditions of behavioral space and as scientific ideas about the space of one's own life as a social being and person, ensuring the conditions of his life on Earth [9-30].

### Conclusion

A.N. Leontiev's assumptions about the nature and origin of human psyche allow to elaborate a number of important provisions on this issue, which will be of great interest for modern psychologists and will occupy a worthy place in the theory of psychological science.

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