PHENOMENOLOGICAL DESCRIPTIONS
AFTER THE MANNER OF
EDGAR RUBIN

I. K. Moustgaard

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The title of this paper allows for various interpretations as to the purposes of the author. I feel, therefore, that I owe it to my readers to start at once to restrict the field of possible interpretations so that the uninterested reader may quickly find another and more fruitful occupation, while the interested reader can acquaint himself with the theme and treatment of the topic.

I shall not try to give an historical account, and still less one more article in honor of a departed epoch or person. Quite the opposite, I shall occupy myself with ideas that are still very much alive. I shall not aim at strict objectivity based on historical criticism. On the contrary, the following account of the ideas and achievements of the persons involved is based on the subjective interpretation of the author. Further, I shall not aim at a restricted and abstract epistemological treatment of the complex of problems connected with description. Rather, I shall try to emphasize the necessity for the psychology of description to develop in close connection with concrete psy-
Motives

Till now nothing has been said about the author's motives for publishing an article on this subject, or about his reasons for expecting that they will be of general interest to psychologists. Both the motives and reasons will, I hope, appear more and more clearly as the article proceeds. Here I will make these few remarks only. When for professional purposes one visits foreign research centers and spends some time among colleagues, exchanging scientific experience and discussing methodological problems, one is often struck by the surprising uniformity which seems to characterize the opinions, problems, experimental methods, etc. Disregarding the part of this uniformity which a closer acquaintance with persons and places reveals to be illusory, there often remains a good deal. This is that genuine common stamp which imperceptibly and without putting him in a straightjacket supplies the individual investigator with that necessary frame of reference which can in rare cases lead to a lasting sense of community in the efforts to advance the science of psychology.

Colleagues—mostly from the other Nordic countries—have often been so kind as to tell us Copenhagen psychologists that we possess such a clear common language. Regrettably it turns out almost as often that there is a discrepancy between the characteristics seen by our foreign colleagues and those which we attribute to ourselves, and which naturally seem to us to be founded on solid empirical evidence. This discrepancy may, when one encounters it sufficiently often, act as an irritating spur, so that at last one overcomes any aversion to self-observation and gets instead strongly engaged in an attempt to give an account of the main features of the "genuine common stamp" referred to above.

As for the discussion of the reasons to expect that the problems of description in psychology are, or ought to be, of general interest, a considerable change has taken place with us. Previously it was regarded as unnecessary to argue in favor of one's opinions on problems of description. The most recent works have another strategy in the professional controversy on this question: They try to show as concretely as possible that