THE ILLUSION OF PERSONALITY*

By H. G. WELLS

THE integrality of the individual in the higher Metazoa is a 'biologically convenient delusion'. The expression 'psycho-analysis' implies a mental unity which can undergo analysis. This is the delusion. The reactions of the human machine are loosely linked behaviour systems, participating in a common delusion of being the self. Most lower animals react to stimuli without hesitation. As we ascend the scale inhibition appears. There is no longer a mere algebraic summation of stimuli. There is reference back to a storage organ, a 'brain'. According to the record of that storage organ, the organism, not as a whole but as much of it as is affected by the recorded stimuli, reacts. Circumstances may have changed and it may act disastrously, or it may 'profit by experience'.

The conception of self appears most evidently in gregarious animals, which have to conduct themselves with regard to the flock or pack. The sub-men seem to have been gregarious running animals, less like the solitary great apes than the baboons. Self-consciousness and a conception of other individuals as consistent persons are necessary to gregariousness. The self-conscious social individual, *whatever it does and however much of it does it*, will ascribe its behaviour to its self, the same self, in continuous operation.

A man awakening from sleep imagines, when he has rubbed his eyes and yawned, etc., he is 'all there'. He is not. The evanescent impressions of dreamland give way to a more vivid reaction-memory-and-event-system which has established a by no means perfect control over what are called the voluntary muscles of his body. Body holds mind together and not mind body. The body goes as the dominant system in the neuro-sensitive apparatus directs, but other reaction systems are either deflecting or ousting the dominant system.

There are endless variants of 'John Smith'. He will admit in ordinary speech that he 'has his moods' and sometimes 'forgets himself'. It is John Smith No. 214, John Smith who had a dispute with his employer yesterday, who wakes up, the indignant employee. He rehearses a spirited conversation with his 'gov'nor'. He sees his wife's portrait on the mantel and succumbs to resentment and jealousy. The recalcitrant employee is simply not present. John Smith, under control of No. 618, goes down to breakfast in a dark, unloving mood. All the Smiths, from No. 1 to No. 5,000 or No. 5,000,000, have a common belief that John Smith is really one person, because they are not only all aboard the same body, but also built round a similar conception of himself, his *persona* as Jung has it. *In fact, they are a collection of mutually replaceable individual systems held together in a common habitation.*

If the systems vary widely, John Smith is a moody man. If still more widely, you have at last a 'double personality'. Whatever system dominates at the time owns John Smith and believes itself to be wholly and solely John Smith.

Conduct systems of reaction require a fable to hold

our selves together and put them over to others. The neuro-sensitive apparatus in social animals cannot do a thing and forget, cat-fashion. Our conduct systems, whenever they invade simpler systems of reaction in us, set about attacking the independence of these other impulses and drawing them together. They go about like governesses, drill-sergeants, imposing an impossible uniformity of discipline upon the mute unconscious elbowing of our other drives and reactions.

In order that the *persona* should be as consistent as possible in its autobiographical effort, these conduct systems, which concern themselves with the reputation of a human body, ignore aberrant impulses, push them away into what the analyst calls the unconscious, that is, a multitude of reaction systems out of contact with the main directive system. The psycho-analyst says they are below in a dungeon; the behaviourist says they are at large outside. The contradiction is flat.

Jung called this excluded stir the *anima*. It may contrast markedly with the material in the *persona*. It stirs, says the psycho-analyst, beneath the conscious life. It skulks, says the behaviourist, on the edge of the waking life.

That the integrality of the human individual is illusory does not sweep aside continuity from life. The individual belongs to his species, which existed before he appeared in the world, and will outlast him. Generally a man does not realize that. He may refer himself to a family, to a tribe, to a school, to a real or imaginary 'race', to a creed—indeed to a vast variety of larger aggregations. He may fluctuate in his terms of reference. So he thinks and feels. The biological reality is that while he can interbreed with every variety of human being, he goes on as a unit in the whole species, and, whatever frame of community he adopts, it can, from the ecological point of view, have no narrower boundary than the species. Every individual is in the nature of a unique experiment. There is no experimenter nor question behind it; it is an unpremeditated experiment.

It may be rejected at once; or it may have survival value in itself. By surviving it changes the totality of the species by its individual difference. In the generality of cases the difference is slight, and such individual cycles are called *normal*. Their collective effect is that of confirmatory experiments.

A marked and sudden difference is called a variation. The causes of a variation will almost certainly be acting not merely in one case but also upon groupings of similarly situated genes. So long as the individual variation has the qualities that enable it to survive and reproduce itself it will do so.

There is no benevolent bias in that survival. A species may go on varying and surviving through its individuals for a long time, although it is accumulating a variation that will disarm it against some conclusive danger. Most variations have no survival value at all; but when a species has drifted into disharmony with its surroundings—and that is the case with ours at the present time—then abnormalities which would have been suppressed in the humdrum days of security may stand a chance of temporary establishment. Palaeontology shows repeated evidence of a sort of flurry of abnormalities before the collapse and obliteration of some dominant group which has outstayed its welcome. This seems to be the case with man to-day.

From its first appearance, the human animal was too widespread and too thinly spread to produce a

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homogeneous *Homo sapiens* throughout the earth. There has been more homoplasmy and less of diffusion in *Homo* than is commonly believed.

Migrations began only in the past ten thousand years or so, when the social structure had developed means of conquest and exploitation. At a far remoter period exiguous human races ranged seasonally over wide territories, incapable, for lack of transport or organization, of sustained aggression or enslavement. The seasonal movement of gregarious food animals, horses, cattle and the like in response to pasture may have led to seasonal gatherings of these far-flung tribes from considerable distances, with little or no spirit of feud or aggression.

The leavings of Solutrean men suggest a gregariousness in which the individuals were more self-reliant and socially tolerant than their descendants. These early nomads exchanged goods at these primordial fairs, as the distances of many early artefacts far from their sources testify. With the dispersal of the food beasts this human gathering dispersed again, with quite possibly a woman or so and an artificer going off with a new party. He or she would not need to learn a new language, when grunts and gestures remained the language of mankind.

Time estimates of these periods defeat even geologically trained imaginations. Our grip on big quantities is a feeble one. We have got beyond any other animals by checking with our digits, but our sense of a hundred is foggy, and few will agree whether a crowd was a thousand or three thousand strong. Beyond these limits we *concertina*. We have a 'gibus' sense of time. A thousand years is a huge succession of yesterdays beyond our clear apprehension. If we reflect on the changes in social life since the Christian era, we may achieve an intellectual if not a realistic comprehension of the remoteness of these wanderers from whom we spring. Many people believe that our ancestors were like the Australian aborigines. These 'primitive peoples' are imagined as having been marking time for a hundred thousand years. But in that interval they have been subjected to climatic changes, changes of food, new environments. They have experienced dark ages and phases of recovery. Anthropologists underestimate the intervals in which these systems have decayed and revived and changed and become something quite different. The 'primitive' Australian *talks*, and he has a complex grammar. He betrays traces of admixture, and, if we bring geographical shifting into consideration, we are forced to conclude that in the past there must have been trading, a 'pigeon' language, and ideas and imitative stimuli from other drifting peoples. One may doubt if one can exaggerate the mental remoteness of these creatures whose lives are the basis of our thought and feeling. The makers of eoliths and of Chellean implements gave place to Acheuleans, to Mousterians, to Aurignacians, Solutreans and Magdalenians. Meanwhile every species of large animal contemporary with the Acheulean had become extinct. Can we imagine, then, that the ascent of man has been simple and straightforward from Neanderthal to Beckenham, Paris and the Riviera?

We make our way painstakingly to the fact that the mind of ancestral man was essentially unlike ours, and that the species was living under conditions still mostly unimaginable. He was not only different from anything human we can talk to, but, from the very beginning, he was also different *inter se*.

A species is a species so long as it can interbreed

and its kindred varieties, however divergent, can be recognized. There never was an original dog. Dogs are anything but select in their emotional phases. If an end came to dog fanciers, *Canis* would go back to a variety of mongrels, reflecting the regional opportunities in which they found themselves.

Gregariousness is a subordination of the individual to the herd. The individual merges into a wider synthesis, a vast sentient web overspreading many acres; becomes shareholder in faculties always awake, eyes that see in all directions, ears and nostrils that explore a broad belt of air; a super-individual occupying every bit of ground whence the approach of an enemy can be detected. Each individual receives a maximum of security at the cost of a minimum of individual animation. When an animal which has been accustomed to a gregarious life is isolated, it feels itself exposed to danger from every part of the circle around him, except the one point on which his attention is momentarily fixed. His glance is restless and anxious, and is turned in succession to different quarters; his movements are hurried and agitated, and he becomes a prey to the extremest terror. The blind instincts evolved under those conditions have been deeply ingrained into our breed, and they are a bar to that freedom the forms of modern civilization could assure. A modern community must be held together by stronger forces than are derived from the purely gregarious instincts. It cannot be a mob of slaves, clinging together, incapable of self-government and begging to be led; because it will always be led to disaster. It must consist of vigorous, self-reliant men, knit to one another by a strong, tense and elastic community of will and understanding.

The personal life of the individual will still continue, held together by the individual body. Within its conditions that may be a very intense and passionate existence. Many of the bodily phases that constitute John Smith may be preoccupied with sex. The sexual stir of the contemporary *Homo* is renewed monthly, unlike so many of the larger *Eutheria*, which have their annual rut. These phases are dependent upon the secretion of gonads, which again seems to be determined by the fluctuations of innate rhythms under climatic and correlated physical influences.

There has been an enormous and biologically unserviceable over-development of those aspects of life in the handy and intelligent Primates. The release of hand and brain by the adoption of the erect attitude during the human dawn, and the revival or continuation of some primitive monthly breeding cycle among the sub-human and human series, stimulated a recurrent or almost continuous interest in the orgasm that is only too manifest in a cageful of monkeys or any over-fed and idle social group—both confined and unemployed groups. But while the monkey's interest is unabashed, contemporary man is in a state either of defiant indulgence or passionate suppression that disorders all his social life. Christianity, Islam and Judaism are all phallic religions, and 'morality' over a large part of Christendom means nothing more than values attached to sexual behaviour.

But we do not know how long this stress on sex as 'morality' has lasted. Dawning man, except under deprivation, may have been as shameless and casual as a monkey. Those primordial fairs were amiable corroborations, free of competitive or possessive ideas. We may describe man, in those sparse days, as under-

sexed. The male and the female of the species excited one another and achieved a mutual or substitutional relief; it was all over in no time, and that was all about it. The manner in which the sexual urge lies in wait, so to speak, and seizes upon and makes use of any unemployed mental energy in *Homo sapiens* has still to be worked out in detail.

There have been and still are wide and rapid variations in the relationship-phases of men and women, and nowadays a woman will be either a subjugated meretrix or a hard-minded and responsible equal, just in the measure that her sexual impulses and status dominate or are secondary in her *persona*. The decision rests upon womankind and the atmosphere they will create.

Every living thing, in obedience to its hormic urge, seeks to assert itself over other things that move about—over other life or over inanimate things that are imagined as having life. "This," in effect says life, emerging to a consciousness of others, "is not going to beat me." This primitive uneasiness to reassure oneself that one has the upper hand of the not-me is still far more persistent than any other urge. We assert these selves through a huge miscellany of claims. The claims we make depend upon our upbringing and the ideas imposed on us. We pride ourselves on 'race', country, class, family, 'set' or dollars, intuitions, exceptional muscles or remarkable characters. We gravitate to the groupings in which these are key values.

Man in his dawn was certainly not so collectively maladjusted as the man of our own time. Contemporary man *en masse* is definitely a degenerate creature, in the sense that he presents no collective resistance in the face of change. He experiments only feebly in adaptation; he persists in his follies.

But since we have some two thousand millions of him varying about the average cases of *any particular quality*, whatever it may be, the exceptional instances are likely to have a wider range than in any previous period. These exceptional types will include, among others less biologically favourable, types of self-forgetfulness in some impersonal interest.

The factor in the individuals of this emergent *élite* is a development of the natural curiosity, the picking and searching hands and eyes of our ancestors. The dominant phases of the unrestrained man, as distinguished from the suppressed individual in our now disintegrating modern communities, are those of an inquirer and maker. His unrestrained phases discover an innate desire for mastery; in invention (artistic or 'practical') and construction, according to his aptitude. The profounder disposition of mankind is to make, and to sublimate self in the discovery, each man, of his own idiosyncratic creative possibility.

In the case of an intellectual *élite* there will be recurrent phases in their lives when an ecstasy of discovery will possess them. They will stand "silent upon a peak in Darien". They will be looking upon something, hitherto hidden, which will now be the property of all mankind. They must descend again from that great moment into the shadow of their personal selves, but the achievement will remain as an enduring contribution to the human synthesis.

The spreading realization that personality is illusory will not abolish the practical reality of individual living. This warp and woof of hallucination provides the fabric on which lives are lived, just as the cinema screen supplies the fabric on which personal dramas are played out. To realize that the drama is hallucinatory will be to escape from ultimate

'explanations' of life, from priestcrafts and mental muddles that have embittered human relationships hitherto, but it will not release human beings from 'conduct'. It will, however, lift them into a new atmosphere, and mitigate profoundly the confused motivation of that long "Martyrdom of Man" which is now drawing to an end.

OBITUARIES

Sir John Farmer, F.R.S.

By the death of Sir John Farmer on January 26 biology has lost an outstanding figure, one who did much for the development of botany and for the extension of its applications.

John Bretland Farmer was born on April 5, 1865, at Atherstone and was for a time at the Atherstone Grammar School, but was later educated privately. A country upbringing and a knowledge of the farmer's outlook was of great value to him in his later efforts to use botany for the advancement of agriculture. He went to Magdalen College, Oxford, in 1883, and took a first-class in the Honours School of Natural Science in 1887. In that year he was appointed demonstrator in the University, for Bayley Balfour, who was then Sherardian professor of botany, early recognized Farmer's intellectual gifts and fostered his botanical development in every way. Farmer would often speak in warm tones of the inspiring influence of his old teacher, who was both botanist and gardener. In 1889 he was elected to a fellowship at Magdalen.

When Huxley retired from the headship of the Biology Department of the Royal College of Science at South Kensington the chair was replaced by two assistant professorships, the botanical one being filled by the late D. H. Scott. When Scott retired in 1892 he was succeeded by Farmer, the position being raised to a full professorship in 1895. Farmer remained at South Kensington for thirty-seven years, retiring only in 1929.

Farmer's long period at the Royal College of Science (later to become an integral part of the Imperial College of Science and Technology) was one of remarkable development and expansion of the department. In Farmer's early years at South Kensington the department was housed in two rooms at the top of the building in Exhibition Road and the staff was a professor and one demonstrator. When he retired in 1929 the department occupied two large buildings in Prince Consort Road and consisted of five sub-departments, each with a professor at its head.

Farmer was not only a scientific investigator but also a man of vision who had his own distinctive idea as to the direction in which the department should develop. Fifty years ago academic departments of botany held aloof from the practical application of their subject. Farmer, however, early realized how much trained biologists (plant pathologists, geneticists and plant physiologists) could do not only for agriculture in Great Britain but also for the plantation industries overseas and for tropical agriculture generally. He therefore set himself to provide such a training in pure botany as would equip men for work in applied botany abroad. This aim he fully achieved and his students were soon occupying important positions in Colonial agriculture. Some measure of his success may be gathered from the