

## PERSONALITY AND EVOLUTION

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### PERSONALITY

WHILST the doctrine of evolution, as applying in an optimistic sense to all things and events within the Universe, can hardly be said to have been quite definitely established it must be admitted that the heavy balance of scientific opinion is in its favor. Such application will, throughout this essay, be assumed, and especially will this be so with reference to the world of life and growth. Evolution, therefore, will be regarded as a process within which real qualitative differences arise, and of which the tendency is to produce results that are qualitatively higher than are their apparent starting-points.

Having said this much, it seems natural to attempt to make clear what should be understood by "personality." Such an attempt is attended by grave difficulties. In a world of which, in spite of all our boasted advances, we really know extremely little, some things have still to be accepted rather than explained. Among such, psychical individuality, which comes in the experience which we call personality to so sharp a focus, is an outstanding example. This much we can afford to admit, whilst at the same time denying that we are quite without any significant knowledge bearing in this direction.

To describe personality in terms purely physical or mental, is a patent impossibility. A person may be pre-eminently mind; but the fact still remains that he is body as well. Nor do we know that under any conditions he could be mind alone. So far as our knowledge serves us, the body which is organic to mind is indispensable, alike to the growth of that mind, and to its mature functioning. We know of no exceptions. Even granting the existence of Divine, which is perhaps Universal, Mind, the entire material universe may

well be organic to it. Keeping such reflections as these steadily in view, we need not fear to assert that the mind of personality is of greater significance than is its body. The seed, the blade, the ear are alike necessary; but it is the full corn in the ear for which we crave, and it is for this that the soil is tilled and the seed sown.

It might be thought a short-cut to take mind as being equivalent to awareness or consciousness. To do so, however, would be to describe the mind of personality in beggarly inadequate terms. How far down in the scale of existence awareness is to be found is debatable: if we take into liberal account all instances of organic response to the stimuli of the environment, we shall indeed have to go very far. Again, the personal mind is characterized not only by consciousness but also by inferential conditions, some dynamic, others relatively static, which are usually referred to what we call, for want of a better term, subconsciousness. But yet again, the human mind is almost certainly not alone with respect to the possession of such structures and processes. It is in the consciousness which is also self-consciousness that the mind of personality may be said to come into its own—in the consciousness which implies distinctions, syntheses, and the emergence of values. A person can say "I," "Thou," and "We"; perchance he can also say "God," thus evidencing his conception of a vaster and a more enduring unity than can be expressed in terms of any society of himself and his fellows. And the more he realizes the meaning of the first three (at least) of these terms and shapes his life accordingly, the more must we hold that he is a person.

It was Boethius who defined a person as "the individual subsistence of a rational nature." In his Gifford lectures on *God and Personality*, Mr. C. C. J. Webb, commenting on this definition, states that he regards it "as the best, taking it all in all, that we have." To assert, however, that mere rationality differentiates personal existence from other individual existences is to plunge blindly into error. That not all animal reactions can safely be labelled instinctive—that it is indeed the height of rashness to draw hard and fast lines of demarcation in this connection—is evidenced by the fact that, as Dr. Rivers so emphatically puts it, "the behavior of animals, even such animals as the insects, which are regarded as pre-eminent patterns of the instinctive, shows many features, such as adaptability to unusual conditions, which can only be explained by qualities of the same order as those belonging to intelligence."<sup>1</sup> It is, however, in

<sup>1</sup> *Instinct and the Unconscious*, p. 40.

the life of man that reason may be said not merely to work but to make its bid for supremacy of directorship. To put the case briefly, it is because this is so, and still more so because of the level of the intelligence thus manifested, that human individuality is personality.

Viewing the matter thus, that mind at a certain level, associated, as we must never forget, with a certain bodily structure, becomes personality, we now have to ask if this entity is something which exists in its own right. The body assuredly does not do so. It is too dependent, not only on its mind, but on its material environment. Alike for its genesis, its growth, and its sustenance, it is obviously in close necessary relationship with a world of material objects. Nor is the mind in better case: it is dependent upon its own proper body, upon other minds—upon, in fact, a mental and material universe. The recognition of such facts as these renders impossible the holding of any crude doctrine of realism on the one hand or of idealism on the other. Neither as body nor as mind, nor as both taken together in their concrete actuality, can personality stand alone. It has its setting in a world. Thence it draws its inner life, and its sustenance: thence it derives whatever value it may possess.

Hitherto, we have spoken of personality in general terms. When we come, however, to the uniqueness of individuality possessed by any particular person—an aspect which no survey of personality, even so brief as is to present one, can afford to ignore—we are confronted with the mystery of the Cosmos itself. We have every right to be in earnest with the great principle, enunciated by Leibnitz, of the identity of indiscernibles. But why are no two individuals precisely identical? Whence comes this all-marvellous uniqueness? We cannot say. Nevertheless, is it not just here, in the heart of an apparently insoluble mystery, that we must look for at least a portion of personality's value? That friend whom we love—we love none the less because he may chance to possess certain pleasing qualities, but also because he is he. The good, the universal value, in a person, is not something that can be legitimately abstracted from that person's personality. Abstractions, whether of particulars or of universals, move us but little. Concreteness makes an appeal that is irresistible. Truth, beauty, goodness—these may have their eternal reality; yet what are they but for their embodiments? In the individuality of, let us say, a just, or a good, person, the universal makes its appearance, and uniquely so, in the particular. Such appearances challenge our immediate attention and response—as

Felix knew, to his dismay, when in the presence of one who "reasoned of temperance, righteousness, and judgment to come." In some way, within the life of each person, it would seem that the universe itself finds, as it can do within no lower form of existence, an individual, and unique expression. It would seem also to be ultimately to this fact that personality owes its charm, its mystery, and its value.

### PERSONALITY AND ITS INHERITANCE

Assuming that the facts which have served as the data for evolutionary theory have the right to be interpreted after an optimistic fashion, it is fairly obvious that any attempt to explain the latter in time in terms of the earlier is bound to result in grotesque failure. To take a simple illustration—does the child explain the man? The former has temporal priority, and, as a relative starting-point, is necessary; but to bring the latter into existence it takes a society of living beings and an environment of natural objects. Nevertheless, we cannot refuse to admit the fact that at however early a stage we take the child, there is something there already. Any attempt to throw light upon what that "something" is, involves the asking of two questions: (1) What does a person owe to an ancestry admittedly "human"? (2) Does he inherit also from non-human existence?

(1) That a person's body is a heritage from generations past and gone, is evidenced by the simple facts that the germ-cell from which it is evolved was formed by the conjugations of the spermatozoon of the male-parent with the ovum of the female and that these interacting cells were themselves derived from other and prior individuals. Thus our primal physical stuff is of racial tissue. Is it, however, mere body that the individual inherits—mere body, possessing, in some inexplicable fashion, the power to urge the individual in certain directions which are connected, in the first instance, with the immediate care of the organism but which ultimately go considerably further?

Along several lines we can argue that the overwhelming weight of evidence is in favor of a negative answer.

Firstly, we can point to the significant fact that the freshly-fertilized germ-cell immediately starts to do the best it can with respect to the situation created by itself plus its environment. It begins a process of subdivision resulting in the production of many millions of cells, each having its own place and function within a single organism which by means of specialized structures and systems of organs can breathe, move, digest, and even think. We can attempt to account for such creation and development by the assumption of some directive power working at a level below what we usually call consciousness, or by that of mechanism pure and simple; and the former assumption appears to risk less than does the latter. After birth, what we may call, without too serious a risk of error, organic consciousness, which, though it does not usually, at all events, enter into the stream of ordinary consciousness, it is reasonable to suppose is not discontinuous with the latter,<sup>2</sup> sees to it that the organism develops after a manner that has become stabilized by the long working of the evolutionary process which has given to the human body its present structures and functions, and sees to it also that the organism, as a fully developed affair, is, barring accidents and various inroads of disease, maintained at a sufficiently high level of efficiency. Nor can we, it would appear, do otherwise than suppose that it is this same directive and organizing principle that has been operative from the first.

Secondly, with respect to the instincts—these, together with bodily structures and functions, appear to constitute the most strongly-marked features of the individual's ancestral inheritance. That behavior has its root in instinct, appears impossible to deny. "Directly or indirectly," writes Professor McDougall, in his *Social Psychology*, "instincts are the prime-movers of all human activity. . . . Take away these instinctive dispositions with their powerful impulses, and the organism would become incapable of activity of any kind; it would lie inert and motionless like a wonderful clock-work whose mainspring had been removed, or a steam-engine whose fires had been withdrawn. These impulses are the mental forces that maintain and shape all the life of individuals and societies, and in them we are confronted with the central mystery of life, mind, and will." Further, our instincts manifest themselves, one and all, as psycho-physical processes. And by a psycho-physical process we mean that the psychical aspect is relevant and not merely inciden-

<sup>2</sup> As evidenced by such facts, to go no further, as those relating to "mental healing."

tal to the physical one.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, psycho-physical processes would appear to imply psycho-physical dispositions, and suggestions of continuity would certainly seem to point to the hypothesis that such dispositions of double aspect must in some way be attributed to the individual's primal germ-cell. Thus, again, the inference is clear that the germ-cell is not capable of a purely physical explanation.

All biologists may be said to agree upon the thesis that evolution depends upon heredity and variation. That the former factor, understood as implying the handing on of acquired modifications, plays so important a part as was assigned to it by Lamarck and Spencer, the Neo-Darwinian school has made it impossible for us to believe. The broad fact of average individual regression towards average racial qualities, as established by the statistical data of Pearson and Galton, points in a similar direction, and at the same time serves as a corrective to views which would make the conception of progress too individualistic. We are not bound, it is true, to accept the view that acquired modifications are in no sense or degree transmitted; if we do so, we are, indeed, faced with the difficulty of accounting for any evolutionary progress. Neither are we bound to accept variation as being ultimately inexplicable in the sense of being entirely independent of ancestral influences; for in this connection the suggestion of Galton that influences, if such act through several generations, may have a cumulative effect which manifests itself by giving rise to an apparently sudden variation, is, after all, too significant to be laid lightly on one side. The point is that even if we accept, as it seems that we should be wise to do, the main outlines of the teaching of Neo-Darwinism, we are, nevertheless, strictly within our rights in claiming that the primal germ-cell links us not only physically but also mentally with the past. Our heritage is both body and mind. That the latter is of the order of the "subconscious" makes no difference in principle; for the evidence, supplied by both normal and abnormal psychology, to the effect that this is continuous

<sup>3</sup> It has been claimed that there are instinctive bodily actions in which relevant mentality (relevant in the sense of playing some part in the process) is absent. But to admit some appreciation of the situation, which is expressed by appropriate bodily action, seems to offer more continuity and to raise fewer difficulties as one deals with a subject which is not too amenable to psychological treatment. Such views as those to which we are referring pushed to their logical conclusions, would lead us to regard instinctive bodily actions as being merely more complicated forms of reflex actions. Yet, even so, it is difficult to see how the psychical side (implying something more than mere awareness of the action itself) is to be altogether ruled out; for in such cases we can regard it as being subconscious rather than conscious.

with "clear" consciousness, is too abundant and weighty to be ignored.

(2) The tide of life is to be regarded, from a thorough-going evolutionist point of view, as being continuous from the amoeba to man, and possibly—though here we are on very uncertain ground—from the inorganic to the organic. As we pause to reflect on the continuity thus suggested, we cannot but realize something of its tremendous significance. We see life in connection with organisms so lowly that it would appear that what is usually termed consciousness cannot by any stretch of the imagination be held to have lot or part; and yet, even here, there appears to be awareness of environment, adaptation, response. Again, as we pass higher up the scale, in the lives of non-human living creatures we are confronted with manifestations which we cannot refrain from calling behavior, although such is for the most part at the level of instinct. With regard to no phase of life-manifestation do we appear to be justified in speaking of absolute unconsciousness, only of degrees of consciousness or of difference of mind-level. It is, however, as we have already suggested, in the life of man that consciousness may be said to come into its own; and on the significance of this fact the enlightened upholder of evolutionary continuity will lay sufficient emphasis to bring him into companionable proximity to the staunchest upholder of the hypothesis of "breaks." When this consciousness appears, it undoubtedly comes on the top of much that has gone before, and from which it has in no real sense severed its connection. How far, however, we are indebted to a possible non-human ancestry, is difficult to say. Certain displays of the subconscious, for example, those associated with telepathy and with dissociations of personality, may conceivably be held to have their origin in instinctive reactions of animal ancestors. The latter phenomena, as Dr. Rivers very significantly suggests,<sup>4</sup> may link us with individual creatures which had occasion to make repeated and fundamental changes in their environment. Within the limits of this present article, however, we can hardly pursue such speculations at greater length. It is sufficient to say that behind man is a past of life and energy that is incalculable. If, here and there, he is linked to it by fetters, he yet owes it infinitely more than he knows.

That the individual, newly-arrived on the world's stage of thought and action, is equipped with physical material and with certain general and particular tendencies to behavior which are, how-

<sup>4</sup> *Instinct and the Unconscious*, p. 80.

ever we view the matter, a heritage from his complete ancestry, we have every reason to admit. That the kind of individual he is to be is irrevocably determined by these tendencies, we have, in spite of the pronouncements of extreme adherents of Weismannism, every right to deny. It is, or should be, a well-known fact that instincts may be allowed to develop after an "all-or-none" fashion or may be modified even to the point of practical repression. It is possible, therefore, to accomplish much in the direction of encouraging the instincts to develop after a systematic, orderly fashion, their indulgence being regulated by a system of valuations. This is brought about by the acquisition of sentiments, the abiding feeling-attitudes of the individual with respect to particular objects. It is only thus, indeed, that instincts with their propelling emotions come fully into the movement of our lives. Instincts are hereditary; sentiments are acquired characters. The importance of the formation of the latter cannot be over-rated; and it is our social experience which makes that formation possible. Let us repeat, the education of the sentiments is closely related to the acquisition of valuations. And our valuations make us what we are. They tend to pass from the more subjective order, connected with the immediate needs of the organism, to a more and more objective one. It is even thus, by way of continuous progression, that we come at length to the conception of goods that are intrinsic. In this process, the part played by the environment appears to be enormous. Here, in our world of things and persons, we see in the activities of others the working out of instincts similar to those which we ourselves possess. We see the efforts of men attended by failure and by success; and the lessons implied therein we are able to some extent to learn and to turn to our advantage. We are beckoned here, warned or sternly forbidden there;<sup>5</sup> we act and are acted upon. It is as we make acquaintance with the customs, institutions and traditions—which may be said to mark the self-consciousness of the race-life—of our social "universe"—as we breathe, in fact, the whole spiritual atmosphere in which our beings are bathed—that we are enabled to become persons as distinct from individuals. It is, therefore, in the environment that we have to seek for that portion of our inheritance which we most highly value—a portion, indeed, which is not lightly entered upon, but which has to be bought with a great price.

<sup>5</sup> We violate the laws of nature and of morality at our peril. There are, indeed, in respect to each of these, important senses in which violation is impossible.

## PERSONALITY AND THE FUTURE

The consciousness that shows itself within personality must mark for us, from one point of view, a climax of mental evolution. But to it we dare not ascribe finality. Organic awareness, and the behavior that is dictated by instinct, with its marvellous power of response, have given pride of place to the controlling power of reason—reason which pursues its hesitating way with errors not a few, but which yet has an infinite capacity of development. The line of that development we may perhaps endeavor to forecast, taking the main indications, as we find them in a survey of mind's evolution, as consisting in the harmonious development of capacities inherent in personality's very nature. This, after all, is only the old idea, familiar to us since Aristotle, of the passage from the potential to the actual. Such potentiality must, however, be referred to more than the mere individual existent; and such passage, whilst it is necessarily difficult and hazardous, is aided by the resources of an infinite Universe. To put our thought in yet other words, the line of advance is from subconsciousness to self-consciousness, taking the latter term in its fullness of meaning, and thereby implying a conscious filling of one's proper place in a world which is nothing less than the ultimate Cosmos.

It has been suggested, e. g., by such writers as Bradley and Bosanquet, that the advance of finite personality must ultimately involve personality's dissolution in the sense of being irremediably lost in that which is higher than itself. It is doubtful, however, if such an idea is really necessitated even by an Absolutist metaphysic. It is also doubtful if experience furnishes us with sufficiently impressive analogies in support of the contention that personality is essentially adjectival to some greater individual. Bosanquet, writing in this connection,<sup>6</sup> lays great emphasis upon the social analogy. The human person, he rightly contends, is, apart from the social whole, but an abstraction; for the state is a more comprehensive individual than is any single person. This, one would hardly wish to gainsay. But most certain it is that the counter-fact also remains, that the State, apart from its individual members, has no

<sup>6</sup> *Principle of Individuality and Value*, Chap. viii.

life that it can call its own. The social analogy, one would not seek to deny, has great significance for such a view as Bosanquet's on the relation in which finite selves stand to the Absolute; but nevertheless it appears to have still more significance for other points of view which, recognizing to the full the uniqueness of personality, claim that to the part played by a person within the Absolute no theory of adjectivity can possibly do adequate justice. It is open to us to contend that the indications provided by the field of experience to which we are now alluding point to the conclusion that individuality of personality and social unity advance and recede *paripassu*. It is surely no fusion of lesser individuals that the conception of the State indicated or demands, but the bringing of many and diverse gifts into one common service. It is thus that each individual, if he only will, can perform a task which, just because he is he, none other could perform so well; and, in so doing, sustains, and is sustained by, that which is greater than himself.

The case for the supporters of an adjectival theory of personality is admittedly not exhausted by the illustration just criticized. It will, however, be found that the principles implied in that criticism are capable of a sufficiently wide application.

Personality is something which, in actual experience, shows itself fractionally, and in greater or less degree. We cannot, therefore, suppose that persons, as we see them, are otherwise than as yet in the making. It is obvious that we cannot point to any level, or stage, as being final. All of which can only mean that what personality is capable of becoming, or, in other words, really is, is something on in front—in the nature of an ideal rather than an actuality. It is when we turn to a consideration of the world's great individuals or persons that we get a glimpse of the heights to which personality is capable of ascending. It is towards such individuals as these that we must direct our gaze if we desire to have vision of what personality may become in its uniqueness and yet concrete universality. Our highest ideals—truth, beauty, goodness—are with personality inextricably interwoven. These, whilst they cannot be said to depend for their being upon the part played by persons in isolation from the action of the rest of the Universe, nevertheless depend in a very special sense upon persons to appreciate them and to give them effect in the world of Becoming. Their progressive attainment, it would seem, demands individual knowledge, feeling and conation, of the kind which we can only call personal, together with social co-operation amid a responsive cosmic environment.

Reasoning thus, and bringing together the threads of our foregoing arguments, we shall surely find it infinitely more intelligible and stimulating to regard the future evolution of finite mind as proceeding within personality rather than as involving a non-reversible passage of personality with some form of existence higher and other than itself.

As we survey the wide fields of psychology, biology, and philosophy, we are not without indications that the human individual is better equipped for his further upward journey than he commonly realizes. At the extent of his capacities of mental storage and creation we can but dimly guess; we only know that it far exceeds what we have commonly supposed. We are only just beginning to suspect that through the uncharted areas of his "subconsciousness" the human person is not merely connected with his racial past but also with a present environment of inconceivable immensity. To put the matter in few and closing words, we see, within the life of personality, indications of powers that suggest with respect to personality itself vast possibilities—possibilities of immeasurably increased scope of thought and action and of a nearer approach to ideals that belong to an eternal world of reality. Further than this, it is difficult and unsafe to speculate; but most certain it is that when we speak of personality we can give to this idea no more than a partial content. For, to use the oft-quoted words of T. H. Green, "it is only little by little, as we gain fuller knowledge of the soul's capacities, that we can give the idea of self-realization its filling." And by "self-realization" must be understood that personality which is progressively attained by way of evolution.