

THE FACE OF THE MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES*

BY JOHN HELMER

THE question I mean to ask is this: Is a man without qualities imaginable?

Let me explain what the question means. We may speak of men's *properties* when we mean anything which can be predicated of men. Of course, men will share many properties with other things, so that we are not to know what distinguishes them from other things by such shares.

Many properties and many kinds of properties are required before we may say that we have the *necessary* properties which describe men *sufficiently*—men, that is, as distinct from other entities. Now it may be—and there is philosophical dispute about this—that we can never provide a list of *essential* properties of, say, men, which in comparison with all other properties and all other entities, distinguishes the example from everything else. Generally, however, the community practices an economy which limits the list, which, if a full one were required, would be infinitely long (or short); and the community accepts and confirms conventions of meaning, according to which a few properties and a symbolic (generally verbal) definition are accepted as signifying the “essential man.”

The kinds of properties which we deal with have their own classes and subclasses. Let me distinguish two: *intrinsic* properties and *extrinsic* properties. By the first I mean a property which belongs to, say, a man and which may be attributed to him and possessed by him independently of any other entity. For example, “man is a biped without feathers or wings” describes properties of the intrinsic sort. We may need to have seen or

* For Huège de Serville.

heard of birds in order to know what wings and feathers are like, but man possesses the properties of "having two feet," "being without feathers" and "being without wings" independently of the existence of any bird.

If, however, we attribute to a man the property, say, of being a lawyer, then we shall say that the property is an extrinsic one, since, both in order for us to understand what the property means *and* in order for the example to possess it, we must describe several other entities besides the man, and he may be said to possess the property only by virtue of his *relation* to these other things: we speak of the training of a lawyer, the qualifications and requirements necessary to become a lawyer; a code of legal ethics, perhaps; the lawyer's duties to clients and his role in the courts, and so on. It is consequent upon each of these things that we speak of a man as a lawyer, and for this reason we shall call the property extrinsic. In his papers on the "generalized media" Professor Parsons has turned chiefly to the concept of institutionalization in order to explain how extrinsic properties of various entities are acceptable to people and may be used definitionally in place of the entities to which they belong and which they are intended to describe; this enables us to speak of processes of legitimation and institutionalization rather than the term I used above, "conventions," in order to illustrate how such predicates are readily usable in symbolic communication. In itself this is not a question that we shall consider here.

We can say more about the property of "lawyer": it also describes a *relation*, or the product of a relation, between our example and other men and other entities (law school, the courts, the Bar Association, etc.); therefore, we can call it an extrinsic and relational property.

There are all manner of relations in the universe and of men many kinds of relational properties. In the sciences of men's behavior, to take only one example, there are many sorts of relations and each science is concerned with a selection of them,

MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES

549

and restricts itself to identifying only a limited list of relational properties. As we narrow the scope of our concern, however, and as our viewpoint takes an object of man which appears to be more and more precise, being concerned with a smaller portion of the sum of his acts, then the nature of the properties remarked becomes increasingly contentious: this is a familiar intellectual phenomenon and an important one.

It is a matter of contention, therefore, to identify the nature of man from the list of special properties adumbrated by one science or from a different list of another science. It is not without difficulty either that the theoretician attempts to demonstrate equivalents of the properties of one list in properties listed elsewhere. This, for example, is what Parsons has attempted to do with economic theory in his "media" papers, and I have considered some of the conceptual problems raised by such an attempt in another essay.¹

The well-known result, however, of this form of identification of a collection of special properties—an identification of a special science and its "essential man"²—is a large number of identities: *homo oeconomicus*, *homo politicus*, and, of special interest to us here, *homo sociologicus*.³

The chief property of *homo sociologicus* is *role*; there have been many attempts made to apprehend this property, and to combine and relate it with others—role-set, status, prestige,⁴ and

¹ "The Mystique of the Middle: An Essay on Professor Parsons' Four Papers on the 'Generalized Media,'" unpub. MS. Harvard University, 1968.

² In his *Topica*, on which I have drawn, Aristotle warns that the essence of an entity cannot be inferred from one, or a list of its properties. "Essence," "quality" and "relation" are three quite distinct categories in Aristotle's discussion; the distinction between "quality" and "extrinsic-relational property" is not to be confused with these. (Cf. Aristotle, *Categoriae*, 5-12; *Topica*, *passim*.)

³ This term is coined in the essay of Ralf Dahrendorf translated and revised by him in *Essays in the Theory of Society*, Stanford, Calif., 1968.

⁴ See, for example, R. K. Merton, "The Role-Set: Problems in Sociological Theory," in *British Journal of Sociology*, viii, 1957, 106-120; N. Gross and N. McEachern, *Explorations in Role Analysis*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1958; M. Banton, *Roles*, N.Y., 1965; and R. Turner, *Propositions in Role Theory*, mimeo., 1965.

related concepts such as role-strain, role-distance, role-differentiation and role-consensus.⁵ In these efforts there are many purely analytical problems (quite apart from the empirical problems), which have not been solved and which concern my term "relational property."

This term is rather vague; for it may mean the property of an example relative to other entities. Relative to or compared with tortoises, hares are fast runners; relative to sports cars however, hares are quite slow. Speed here is what we may call a relative property, a property, that is, of the example in a specified relation.

On the other hand a relational property may mean the property of a relation, and we may conceive in addition of the "relative property of a relation," that is to say, the property of a relation in some further specified relation to something else. What is difficult to understand on a number of occasions in the sociological treatments of, say, role or exchange, is which of these three possible kinds of "relational property" is being proposed. Is a role, for example, the property of an individual seen in the light of his relation to others? Or is a role the property of the selfsame relation, or is it—when viewed as one of a "role-set"—the relative property of a relation? Finally, is a role the relation *per se*?

An example of this confusion is once more the papers of Parsons which I have mentioned, in which it is exchange rather than role which is the subject. The notion of medium which is, as Parsons himself insists,⁶ the premise on which his theory of exchange is based, is defined in one place as the property of the economy (as a functional subsystem), in another as the property of exchange relations, and in yet another, as the exchange relation itself.

But I do not intend to undertake a critical investigation of the

⁵ Especially, R. Turner, *op. cit.*; also R. Coser, "Role Distance, Ambivalence, and Status Systems," *American Journal of Sociology* 72, 2, 1966.

⁶ *Sociological Theory and Modern Society*, New York, 1967, p. 330.

MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES

551

use of the analytical products of sociological thinking, and we shall leave aside their examination. Whatever the manner in which they are used, I want to distinguish the kind of *categorical thinking* which is first involved in creating such concepts as role, exchange, interaction, etc., and the kind of method of thought which is required to answer the question which I set down at the beginning of this article.

Let us reflect once more on this fact that the *homo sociologicus* is constituted exclusively of extrinsic relational properties; whatever is to be understood by "relational" does not affect the extrinsic nature of these properties. By means of these, the sociologist attempts to show how the description of a man, on this occasion a specific and particular individual, as possessing a certain number and kind of properties of this type, leads to inferences concerning his behavior in many social situations, which may not have been observed by the investigating sociologist, to predictions concerning his behavior in situations that have not yet occurred, and to further inferences putatively explaining why this behavior has occurred, or does or will occur.

This is a commonplace which would scarcely bear repetition, were it not that it is rather unusual for a man, even the imagination of a concept of man, to be constituted in this manner out of extrinsic relational properties alone. This type of property is not the only one which may be predicated of man, of course, nor is it the only kind of property which may be used for making the sort of inferences about future behavior and about the origin and causes of behavior which I have indicated. Historically, the sciences of man (including, naturally, the study of society) have employed theories composed of intrinsic properties for the very same explanatory and predictive purposes. When Julius Caesar declares in Shakespeare's play:

Let me have men about me that are fat,
Sleek-headed men and such as sleep o' nights.
Yon Cassius has a lean and hungry look,
He thinks too much; such men are dangerous. (I, ii, 192).

he is making the kind of attribution of intrinsic properties and the kind of inference from them which we are accustomed to making countless times in our everyday experience, and which, on that account, we may mistakenly reckon as trivial or insignificant. The development, however, of a taxonomy of these particular intrinsic properties—a systematization of them—has not lasted into contemporary times especially well. If we identify a systematic taxonomy of such properties as a science, then one such science, physiognomy, is quite clearly neither the respectable nor the theoretically challenging concern that it was little more than a century ago. But though this may be so—and the reasons for the decline are far from obvious—the mode of categorial reasoning employed by so-called physiognomical science, is used as often as it was, is as ancient and no less purposeful than the first categorial mode we considered, and—it should be emphasized—is intended to serve the same explanatory and predictive, that is, scientific, purposes.

Let us be clear about the distinction which we are making: “quality” and “extrinsic relational property” are distinct categories of *predicates*, not distinct types of things. That is to say, when we describe a social group or social interaction generally, by means of qualities or intrinsic properties, we are not describing entities which are different from those about which we predicate extrinsic relational properties. Rather does our viewpoint, our mode of categorial thinking, illustrate in each case different aspects of the same phenomenon; the aspect so-called is, as the meaning of the word suggests, a way of looking rather than a mode of (phenomenal) being. I am not saying then that one categorial mode will uncover “things” or phenomena which the alternative categorial mode will leave concealed, though I find this uncomfortable implication in some of the phenomenological approaches to social interaction. Nor do I mean to imply that one method has a greater explanatory or predictive value than the other, though this is a commonplace of theoretical disputation. Finally,

I cannot say whether one method is analytically more developed than the other.

What, I think, is important for us to notice is that one method or categorial mode is more *popular* than the other, and certainly in the special field that we have been considering, social interaction in small groups, the extrinsic relational mode seems to be so; I shall return to consider it shortly.

The science of qualities is not diminished by the popularity of the science of extrinsic relational properties; we still continue for most of our experience to make use of qualitative concepts, though in eccentric and unsystematic forms, and most psychological theories make use of them systematically. It is interesting, however, to consider those social occasions and those societies, which at points in their history exhibit and even enforce one mode of scientific thought alone and to the exclusion of the other. A Marxist-Leninist society, for instance, is especially antagonistic to qualitative description, to what I am calling the science of qualities, which is not surprising when one considers the extrinsic-relational nature of Marxist theory and Marxist-Leninist ideology.⁷ It does not affect the nature of the sensibility cultivated by and for such a mode, what the substance of the relational properties is which composes an extrinsic-relational theory; but the effect of the enforcement of a mode of thinking, description and analysis, which employs only such properties, is very clearly to be seen in the peculiar quality and nature of, say, Soviet literature. In Soviet cultural policy, there is such opposition to literature which describes and evokes feelings of characters, or any quality of a character, without at once defining the social relation and purpose of such things, that it has been rare for the Soviet cultural regime to permit what it has called "the literature of feelings." As Nathan Leites pointed out in *A Study of Bolshevism*, Bolshevik theory has always expressed a fundamental mistrust of what we are calling intrinsic properties,

⁷ N. Leites, *A Study of Bolshevism*, Glencoe, 1953.

and the distinction that is often made between conservatives and liberals (or radicals) in Soviet literary politics may best be seen as a distinction not of subject so much as of the method of imagination.⁸

It is not correct, however, to say that the hero of Soviet literature, the exemplar of these theoretical premises, has no qualities; nor do the personifications of Christian allegory (another great system of relational thought), in the early and medieval period, lack qualities. There is the suggestion about these, or about intrinsic properties, that they represent in a person a dimension of interiority, of "innerness," while the extrinsic relational properties refer to a dimension of exteriority—both dimensions being of social space, and "inner" and "outer" being treated figuratively as dimensions of that space. This imagery is not lacking in these literatures, nor is the "inner" without importance; images of "inner" and "outer" are also important in the work we shall consider shortly, especially to signify the nature of the properties attributed to men, but for the moment we indicate only how they are related to the meaning of our question.

Enough, then, of a preamble; let us ask the question again: Can we imagine a man without qualities? We can imagine a man without extrinsic-relational properties, and in both sociological theory and in literature this figure is known—as the anomic individual, to call him by Durkheim's name, or the "alienated hero" of literary invention. The deprivation of relations seems, however, easier to imagine and describe than the kind of deprivation that I am suggesting; I might add that I am not considering for the present whether our imagination produces a fiction or identifies a "real person"—for a purpose that will become apparent as we continue, the important test I wish to make is to consider whether we can imagine a man without qualities, and the dis-

⁸ See my *Politics and Poetry: Soviet Literary Politics and Yeugeny Yevtushenko, 1953-1965*, unpub. MS., Department of Political Science, University of Melbourne (Australia), 1966.

MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES

555

inction between fiction and "real" description is irrelevant to this.

Henry James in *The Private Life* makes the interesting attempt to imagine such a man. Here is Lord Mellifont when first introduced:

The handsomest man of his period could never have looked better, and he sat among us like a bland conductor controlling by an harmonious play of arm an orchestra still a little rough. He directed the conversation by gestures as irresistible as they were vague; one felt as if without him it wouldn't have had anything to call a tone. This was essentially what he contributed to any occasion—what he contributed above all to English public life. He pervaded it, he coloured it, he embellished it, and without him it would have lacked, comparatively speaking, a vocabulary. Certainly it wouldn't have had a style, for a style was what it had in having Lord Mellifont. He *was* a style.⁹

However, as the tale progresses, the narrator discovers with shock that to Mellifont's public life—that is to say in the language we have been using, extrinsic relational properties—there was no corresponding private life. So long as there were others, a public, a network of relations, Lord Mellifont existed, playing his roles as brilliantly as James first describes them. Without these people, however, he had no role and from that moment ceased to exist:

He couldn't have been, in the time, anywhere but just where I had left him. Yet the place was utterly empty—as empty as this stretch of valley in front of us. He had vanished—he had ceased to be. But as soon as my voice rang out—I uttered his name—he rose before me like the rising sun.¹⁰

This is a rather extraordinary idea, is it not? In literature as in other fields of learning, this phenomenon has rarely been sought after and James is perhaps the first to have imagined it.¹¹

⁹ The New York edition of Henry James's *Works*, Vol. XVII, p. 227; published by Scribner's, 1909.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

¹¹ One theme of literature comes to mind as signifying perhaps this imaginative effort, the theme of Narcissus. From Ovid to Gide and Rilke, this figure of the youth who died (apparently) on gazing upon his own image leaves hints of the man without qualities and the fate that befalls him.

Robert Musil's large novel is given the title, *The Man Without Qualities*, but his imaginative object is not quite the same as James'. I should say that the latter has imagined a man without qualities, certainly, but the former has attempted to do more—to imagine not only how such a man appears (and disappears), but how and why he behaves, how he reasons and what he feels. We can see from the following passage that Musil had a perfectly clear conception of the extrinsic-relational properties of his character but denied him any qualities:

. . . the inhabitant of a country has at least nine characters: a professional one, a national one, a civic one, a class one, a geographical one, a sex one, a conscious, an unconscious and perhaps even too a private one; he combines them all in himself but they dissolve him, and he is really nothing but a little channel washed out by all these trickling streams, which flow into it and drain out of it again in order to join other little streams filling another channel. Hence every dweller on earth also has a tenth character, which is nothing more or less than the passive illusion of spaces unfilled. . . .¹²

Ulrich, Musil's protagonist, is more exceptional, being in a more advanced state of decomposition with fewer illusions:

Such a man is by no means an unambiguous matter. Since his ideas, insofar as they are not mere idle phantasmagoria, are nothing else than as yet unborn realities, he too has a sense of reality; but it is a sense of possible reality and moves toward its goal much more slowly than most people's sense of their real possibilities. He wants, as it were, the wood, and the others the trees; and the wood in itself is something that it is very difficult to express, whereas trees mean so and so many cubic feet of a definite quality. . . .

. . . .

And since the possession of qualities presupposes that one takes a certain pleasure in their reality, all this gives us a glimpse of how it may all of a sudden happen to someone who cannot summon up any sense of reality—even in relation to himself—that one day he appears to himself as a man without qualities.¹³

¹² Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*, tr. from German by E. Wilkins & E. Kaiser, Vol. I, Part I, New York, 1953/65; p. 34.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES

557

It is not difficult to give a description of this thirty-two-year-old man, Ulrich, in general outline, even though all he knew about himself was that he was as far from all the qualities as he was near to them, and that all of them, whether they had become his own or not, in some strange way were equally a matter of indifference to him.¹⁴

There is unfortunately an incompatibility in this curious achievement that we are seeking to understand. This became evident when one day, of all things, Ulrich smiled:

And all at once, in the midst of these reflections, Ulrich had to confess to himself, smiling, that for all this he was, after all, a "character", even without having one.¹⁵

For an instant, then, across the vacancy of character, Ulrich manifests a spasm of consciousness, and it is clear that the man without qualities is depicted as having qualities, even if he is constantly changing them and releasing them, even if they are so many winks at the night; and sardonic indifference is a quality, even if it is of a special kind (and I rather think it is not). Ulrich, then, is a man without extrinsic-relational properties, the *effect* of which is *Ulrich's* imagining that he is without qualities; but this is not the same thing as Ulrich's being without qualities, a state which clearly describes Lord Mellifont. James' character is therefore more the one we have been seeking, though about him we do not know enough—merely a few details of his appearance and the fact of his disappearance.

The fiction here is less than adequate for us: but it is a first step that we must undertake to answer our question. It is a first inspiration and a first answer—a simple affirmative. But there is more to be sought, and I believe that sociology, being especially concerned in an analytical manner with extrinsic-relational properties, has begun to develop this peculiar imagination in a fashion that is perhaps not well enough appreciated and certainly ill-used.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 175–176.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 175. Cf. the chapter on the smile of science, pp. 358–365.

I have reproduced substantial portions of Musil's characterization in order to be able to draw a contrast between the kind of imagination which these inventions, Ulrich and Mellifont, exhibit, and the kind of imagination which the sociological work which we are about to consider exhibits. The imagination—and I mean the most general sense of the word, as synonymous with "conception" or "thinking"—has two forms that I wish to distinguish: the image and the model. Roughly, the image as a mode of thought (and hence what might be called a methodology) gives the appearance of what it describes; it shows what an entity looks like. The model, on the other hand, may give no idea at all of the appearance of an entity but indicates how it works, the principles of an object's construction or the laws of its being. An obvious example is the difference between two architectural drawings of a single structure—one renders how it will look when completed, the other defines its structural components and interrelations in order to illustrate how it is to be built. This distinction has been made more exactly by the philosopher Suzanne Langer:

An image may be—and usually is—built up on entirely other principles than the phenomenal character of its subject and its construction may be utterly different, while the created semblance confronts us like the phenomenon itself.

A model, however,

always illustrates a principle of construction or operation; it is a symbolic projection of its object which need not resemble it in appearance at all, but must permit one to match the factors of the model with the respective factors of the object according to some convention.¹⁶

Accordingly we may say that physiognomy uses images with which to infer the intrinsic properties of persons and to explain behavior. James' Mellifont and Musil's Ulrich are also imaginatively conceived, though they are putatively without intrinsic

¹⁶ S. Langer, *Mind, An Essay on Human Feeling*, Vol. I, Baltimore, Md., 1967; pp. 68, 59. Cf. Roland Barthes' "interested simulacrum" in his essay "The Structuralist Activity," *Partisan Review*, Spring, 1966.

MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES

559

properties. The limit we seem to have reached to our imagination of a man without qualities is that we have no *model* of such a man, with which to understand the principles of his being.

Homo sociologicus is a model; and if we think of image and model as opposing points of one dimension of thought, and intrinsic and extrinsic properties as similar points of a second, then the mode of imagination whose product is this *homo sociologicus*, may be called modular-extrinsic (-relational); it may be that this is the proper mode for conceiving the answer to our question. By comparison with such a mode, physiognomy represents the imagistic-intrinsic mode, and the characterization of James and Musil, the imagistic-extrinsic mode.

When we ask, then, whether a man without qualities is imaginable, we intend to investigate both analytical dimensions, and what remains to be done is to see whether a model of a man without qualities is imaginable.

This ambition has always been treated with very considerable caution and on occasion open hostility. In part this is an ethical problem: for the consequences which seem to follow from the attempt to formulate a model of a man without qualities in many eyes damage the autonomy of individual action in the real world. The ethical consequences of social theory have always been the subject of bitter contest and were most clearly formulated in the tradition of modern sociology in the famous "Value Debate" of Max Weber.¹⁷

Recently there has been another form of opposition to answering this question. In part it is concerned with the ethical issue, in part it is a philosophical objection to sociological theories founded exclusively or generally upon extrinsic-relational properties. I take it that Professor Homans' "bringing man back in" is to an important degree an argument for renewing the study

¹⁷ See R. Dahrendorf's discussion of this in the third essay, *op. cit.*, and Weber's papers on the topic in *The Methodology of the Social Sciences: Max Weber*, ed. and tr. by E. Shils, Glencoe, 1949.

of intrinsic properties, qualities (i.e., psychology), in theories of social behavior, and indeed for regarding these as causally and logically prior to extrinsic-relational variety.¹⁸

Inasmuch as it makes this kind of argument, I have no particular objection to Homans' call, and while there is much to be said about the philosophical issues involved, these cannot concern us here. Nor do I want to object to or overlook the value debate and the implications for autonomy and conformity (as ethical concepts) of products of certain modular imaginations.¹⁹

The question I have proposed is whether it is *possible* to imagine a man without qualities. Is this not an exciting possibility?—one which few men have ever imagined, and which, if the possibility were realized, would represent a new form of knowledge. And since what we are describing are the categories of knowledge and the analytical possibilities among their products, the answer to the question will represent a possibility of the *imagination* (thus, it has been appropriate to consider fiction). Furthermore, such a possibility may exist as a possibility and as either type of concept independently of the existence of "real men." If then we are speaking of ideas and of theoretical possibilities—and we shall be careful not to overstep those boundaries of the imagination—the very serious ethical and logical objections that I have briefly represented escape us. If, however, we were to describe the properties of "real men" as signifying this possibility, then we would either have to admit that we would be speaking of a fiction (and retreat) or we would need to attempt an answer to these objections (and most likely be defeated).²⁰

¹⁸ See Homans' paper "Bringing Men Back In," in *American Sociological Review*, 29, 1964, pp. 809–818; and his *The Nature of Social Science*, New York, 1967.

¹⁹ See my "Constraints and Social Interaction," unpub. MS., Harvard University, 1968.

²⁰ One of the nicest logical objections to this form of reasoning was made by G. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London, 1949), p. 18; he referred to the "category mistake"—which is the kind of mistake involved in regarding the properties of an invention, a theoretical paradigm, for example, as being the properties of real men. The category mistake is the mistake of regarding the truth of facts concerning one logical category as entailing the truth of facts of another category.

MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES

561

Perhaps I shall make myself clearer if I represent what I have said with the aid of a diagram. The lines represent the dimension of properties and the dimension of imagination.

intrinsic property imagistic conception	intrinsic property modular conception
extrinsic property imagistic conception	extrinsic property modular conception

The question we are asking is whether the lower right-hand square of the diagram is imaginatively possible. It is logically possible, as the diagram tells us; but what kind of idea would it be? What kind of theories of the individual, of the self, and of interaction would be needed (and would be compatible) in order to describe the idea (a model, note) of a man without qualities? These questions we shall now take up; what is of considerable significance is the role that sociological theory has played in developing the idea of a man without qualities and the theory of self and interaction upon which the model of such a man is based. What I want to illustrate in a brief thematic sketch is the development of this theory and model from imagistic-intrinsic origins to the goal that we seek, the modular-extrinsic (-relational) idea; that is to say, the development from the top left-hand corner of the diagram by a changeable route to the bottom right-hand corner.

Let us begin with a remark of William James, made in the chapter, "The Consciousness of Self" in his *Principles of Psychology*, for it was he who first began to shift modular thought beyond the top left-hand corner of our diagram:

It is to the imperishable glory of Hume and Hebart and their successors to have taken so much of the meaning of personal identity out of the clouds and made of the self an empirical and verifiable thing.²¹

What James set out principally to do was to reconceive the self as much as seemed to him possible and true in terms of

²¹ *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. I, New York, p. 336.

extrinsic-relational properties. The theory of the soul was the orthodox account of the pure self and represented it as a quality,²² as a property intrinsic to each individual and distinct from and closed to the self and soul of any other individual. It had the advantage for philosophical ethics that in being intrinsic, it could serve as the locus of ethical responsibility of a man, providing him with enough constant qualities to maintain individual identity through the duration of time, and an untrammelled platform upon which to exercise his freedom.

To James, however, the theory of the soul suffered great disadvantages when considered as descriptive and analytic of such notions as the nature of the self, of identity, and of consciousness. He described it as metaphysically unobjectionable, but as a description of physical phenomena, he thought it either described nothing or described something in too vague a manner to be useful.

“The definitely closed nature of our personal consciousness,” he argued, “is probably an average statistical resultant of many conditions, but not an elementary force or fact; so that, if one wishes to preserve the soul, the less he draws his arguments from that quarter the better.”²³

Which is to say that however one might identify and describe the self intrinsically or qualitatively, the theory of the soul was inadequate for that purpose; not only that, one property attributed to the soul—“the closed nature of our personal consciousness”—could be more accurately described as a property extrinsic to the self, the nature of which James considered at length.

He did not accept Hume’s view of personal identity any more than he accepted the orthodox one. Hume held that “. . . the mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, repass, glide away and mingle in an

²² Aristotle, in the works cited, regarded the soul as substance and essence, not as quality. As I have said, my use of the latter term is not identical with Aristotelian “quality.”

²³ W. James, *op. cit.*, p. 350.

MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES

563

infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no simplicity in it at one time, nor identity in different; whatever the natural propension we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity.”²⁴

This did not imply that the self had no quality nor that we could not describe the self as possessing intrinsic properties; Hume simply rejected the view that these qualities provided a proof of identity:

I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind that they are *nothing* but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in perpetual flux and movement.²⁵

What James replied was that it was clear from everyday practice that men do preserve a sense of their own identity from one sensation to the next, and from one point in time to another:

We found among the objects of the stream certain feelings that hardly changed, that stood out warm and vivid in the past just as the present feeling does now; and we found the present feeling to be the centre of accretion to which, *de proche en proche*, these other feelings are, by the judging Thought, felt to cling.²⁶

There is, then, an intrinsic self in James' view, but it is neither the soul nor the transcendental ego, I, of Kant. The difficulty with the latter concept, according to James, was that if it was true, it was also unhelpful to treat the primary quality of the self as an “utterly empty idea.” James was not prepared to accept the theory of intuition which Kant advanced, and proposed in place of the complex Kantian orders of thought, a simple mind, and in place of Kant's outer but empty reality, a complex network of relations:

In the function of knowing there is a multiplicity inside the mind. The Reality becomes a mere empty *locus* or unknowable, the so-called Noumenon; the manifold phenomenon is in the

²⁴ “On Personal Identity,” *Treatise on Human Nature*; quoted by James, *op. cit.*, p. 352.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ W. James, *op. cit.*, p. 352.

mind. We, on the contrary, put the Multiplicity with the Reality outside and leave the mind simple. Both of us deal with the same elements—thought and object—the only question is in which of them the multiplicity shall be lodged.²⁷

Kant's transcendental ego had no properties, and since nothing could be deduced from it, James regarded it as of little intellectual value. What he was after were those properties of the self which could be observed, described and verified, the "location" of which he defined as "outside" the mind rather than within it. This had an important consequence, for it meant, as we shall now see, that James' concept of the self was deliberately founded upon the formulation of its extrinsic properties rather than upon those *intrinsic* properties or qualities which his predecessors had employed. In doing this, in announcing what he called "the naturalistic point of view" (and what we might call "empiricism"), James achieved a major departure from the categories of thinking by means of which men and the self had previously been conceived. To what degree his theory of the self approached the idea of a man without qualities, we may evaluate by considering it briefly.

It is clear that James' concept of the "empirical self," the "me," is, in the terminology I have been using, founded upon extrinsic relational properties. The constituents of the self which he calls the "material self" and the "social self" are both composed of types of relations between the individual and elements of the external world: the "social self" is most clearly so:

A man's social self is the recognition which he gets from his mates . . .

. . .

Properly speaking, a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind. To wound any one of these his images is to wound him.

. . .

. . . My social self-love, my interest in the images other men have framed of me, is also an interest in a set of objects external to my thought.²⁸

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 363.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 293, 294, 321.

MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES

565

What James means when he defines "me" and "self" as "objective designations"²⁹ is that these concepts possess relational properties whose extrinsic nature—and I hope the meaning of this is clear from the preamble—makes possible their description and verification. What is "scientific," then, about the concept, its verifiability, for instance, is the result of the type of predicative category which James uses, and I venture to say that the sociology of small group interaction, which is the chief concern of this essay, follows from the categorial direction given by James, taken up and pursued by others. For what occurs, as we shall see, is that given this analytical or theoretical orientation—an orientation which is a preference and cannot be represented as having a greater or lesser logical or scientific validity than the alternative categorial method—the sociologists interested in the self and in interaction developed the conceptualization of these properties, identifying them by name and defining their interrelations within general analytical systems or theoretical paradigms.

This is well-known and I shall touch on certain points of the development in a moment. James, however, did not limit himself to the description of the self extrinsically. Both the third and fourth orders of the self, the "spiritual" and the "ideal," are defined in terms of their qualities; they are intrinsic properties:

By the spiritual self. . . . I mean a man's mind or subjective being, his psychic faculties or dispositions, taken concretely. . . . These psychic dispositions are the most enduring and intimate part of the self, that which we most verily seem to be. We take a purer self satisfaction when we think of our ability to argue and to discriminate, of our moral sensibility and conscience, of our indomitable will, than when we survey any of our other possessions.³⁰

Psychology, of course, has continued to be concerned with such properties, though James' names and concepts are no longer accepted. It is not our task to consider this development, but simply to show how psychology and sociology seem to have parted

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

company since James' time very much according to the categorial method through which the general phenomena of self have been viewed—the former in the direction of qualities, the latter in the direction of extrinsic properties.

In James' psychology the two stand side by side, until the author attempts a description of the pure ego and consciousness. Whatever these are—and James makes a number of attempts at imagining them (each a little different from the next)—they are described as so central to the self that there is and can be nothing more central; the ego or pure self is that on which all else concerning the self is predicated, the nucleus of personal identity:

The Thought never is an object in its own hands, it never appropriates or disowns itself.

And it has intrinsic properties:

It appropriates *to* itself, it is the actual focus of accretion, the hook from which the chain of past selves dangles, planted firmly in the present, which alone passes for real. . . . It [the present moment of consciousness, the Thought] may feel its own immediate existence—we have all along admitted the possibility of this, hard as it is by direct introspection to ascertain the fact—but nothing can be known about it till it be dead and gone. . . .³¹

Now from our point of view, the man without qualities could not accommodate such a feeling entity as this, unless he were to begin to have qualities; and, while it may be more useful for the science of living men to study these—Professor Homans' point—we cannot if we are to investigate the possibility of imagining a man without them. It becomes evident, though, that however we evaluate James' view of the spiritual self, the pure ego and Thought, this man we seek must be without consciousness, at least as this is understood here. The paradox which this of course immediately introduces is only partially solved by Henry James, who, as we have seen, described Mellifont as ceasing to exist when his relations with others were broken.

And yet it seems to be paradoxical at a further remove to

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 341.

MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES

567

attempt to provide a model of what we admit lacks consciousness. For what can the model of a nonentity be? We are familiar with images of nonentity—Mellifont is one—though even these are very dubious, since an image of a nonentity is always an image of something, and a nonentity is nothing. Images of nothing liken nothing to something, which is an error, and so the unpleasant chain goes on.

I can interrupt this and say that a man without qualities may be a nonentity but he is not nothing. Of course, the *idea* of a nonentity is an entity and since it is an idea that we are after, this is a sufficient proof of the existence of what we seek. What is more, the character Mellifont does exist for part of the time, even though he does not for the remainder; such a partial existence ought still to provide sufficient information for us to imagine the model of such a man in order to surpass the mere image, which typifies but does not explain, the man without qualities.

William James' "I" has qualities; his "me" has extrinsic properties. Therefore, his theory of the self is only of partial assistance to us. It is interesting in another respect, however, for though James made a unique step toward the bottom right-hand corner of the diagram, insofar as parts of the self are extrinsically conceived, his conception remained very much an imagistic one rather than modular. The imagery of inner and outer is the chief device by means of which James elaborates the constituents of the self and distinguishes the "exteriority" of the material self, the social self, the me, from the "interiority" of the spiritual self, thought and the ego. The spiritual self, for example, is called "a sort of innermost centre within the circle," a "sanctuary within the citadel," "the home of interest"; in other places he speaks of "the nuclear part of the self," "the birthplace of conclusions," "the starting point of acts," "the innermost sanctuary." The manner in which the ego is described is entirely imagistic and—though this is not the same thing—highly figurative. Its properties are likened to animal warmth, the thread through a chaplet, the brand on a herd of cattle, the center of gravity in physics, the

lasso of a herdsman, the elasticity of balls, a kernel, and finally, the most famous image of all, the hook from which the chain of past selves dangles.

As I suggested in the preamble, these images suggest how the ego appears, but leave to us the task of inferring how the ego works, what it does (apart from suffering identity with the list of things above), and how it is to be explained. The closest James comes to a modular description is the figure of the hook and the chain, for this suggests to some degree what functions the ego performs; but of course, such an image does not explain this performance; James' best explanation is his account of the social self and its relation to the sum of interactions in which an individual is involved.

But though he claims that an individual's self-image is related to the image that derives from the variety of his social interaction, James does not explain how this derivation occurs. He barely touches on the concept of socialization, which is a major concern of later theorists, but notices only that "it comes to pass" that individuals develop these self-images and an order of values among a range of different ones, and that moral education from childhood "accelerates enormously" this process of development.³²

He states clearly that men have ideal conceptions of themselves, and that these are internalized in the individual, though again the nature of internalization is left vague: ". . . all progress in the social self is the substitution of higher tribunals for lower; this ideal tribunal is the highest; and most men continually or occasionally carry a reference to it in their heart."³³ But socialization and internalization are concepts of properties extrinsic to the self and they are descriptive of relations between selves; even in the embryonic form in which they are presented in James' theory, they are associated with the kind of concepts which our search must attempt to do without. It is to the *sociological* development of these notions, then, that we must go next.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 315.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES

569

Once the fundamental nature of the properties which *homo sociologicus* possesses were understood, the development of the sociological theory of this man has been a matter of refinement and sophistication of this first nature—the extrinsic-relational nature of the man. The theory of socialization, role theory, reference group theory, the theory of symbolic interaction, formal sociology in Simmel's sense, are essentially theoretical refinements, and this in no way minimizes their importance or their usefulness; they are the products of the choice of a categorial mode of thinking, which alone makes possible the imagination of a man without qualities. I am not proposing to consider or describe the nature of these refinements, either as regards their theoretical coherence or their empirical truth; the latter is entirely beyond our ken. But let me illustrate briefly the point at which the categorial choice was made and the direction toward our goal begun anew—the work of G. H. Mead.

Mead³⁴ collapsed the hierarchy of James' selves, dissolving the corporeal and spiritual into a single social self, and pushed the setting of the problem of the self further into the external social milieu than James was willing to allow, into interaction and away from the (intrinsic) individual. His view of the exteriority of the self is evident in this question and its important answer:

How can the individual get outside himself (experientially) in such a way as to become an object to himself? This is the essential psychological problem of selfhood or of self-consciousness; and its solution is to be found by referring to the process of social conduct or activity in which the given person or individual is implicated.³⁵

But Mead's solution is not a psychological one at all, at least inasmuch as it avoids the consideration of any properties intrinsic to the self. His is primarily a sociological theory, and unlike James, Mead is unwilling (for the most part) to accept any qualitative description of the self whatsoever:

³⁴ G. H. Mead, *On Social Psychology, Selected Papers*, ed. A. Strauss, Chicago, Ill., 1964.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

The individual experiences himself as such, not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group as a whole to which he belongs.³⁶

It is of course essential that a non-qualitative theory of the self either dismiss feelings and consciousness or assimilate them to extrinsic-relational concepts, treating feeling, let us say, as a phase or aspect of social interaction. This is what Mead attempted to do, and in the place of such qualities we find the crucial relational idea, role:

. . . the exercise of what is often called "social intelligence" depends upon the given individual's ability to take the roles of, or "put himself in the place of" the other individuals implicated with him in given social situations and upon his consequent sensitivity to their attitudes toward himself and toward one another.³⁷

Such a view does not mean, nor does the idea of a man without qualities mean, that there are no such things as feelings, emotions, consciousness, mind or even self. There are occasions, admittedly, when this kind of conclusion is implied by sociologists, and one as philosophically acute as Durkheim intimates at times a view which I can only describe as social solipsism.³⁸ What is implied by Mead and by others using this categorial mode is that *the way we characterize* feelings, emotions, and so on, is as extrinsic-relational properties, and not, as James had done in part, as qualities of an intrinsic self. Such a viewpoint does not exclude the other, though it makes possible the explanation or attempt at explanation of a number of issues which the qualitative mode was unable to deal with, or uninterested or unwilling to recognize. Mead states:

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, n. 3, p. 205.

³⁸ Cf. Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Collier Books ed., New York, 1961; for example, consider this statement: "Now in order to maintain itself, society frequently finds it necessary that we should see things on a certain angle and feel them in a certain way. . . ." p. 83.

MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES

571

The unity of the self is constituted by the unity of the entire relational pattern of social behavior and experience in which the individual is implicated and which is reflected in the structure of the self.³⁹

Hindsight shows that this kind of theoretical orientation has made it possible to investigate the nature of the social experience, to break up more general terms such as "society," "social process," "*milieu social*," into conceptually more limited ideas, so that we may better understand the relations between individuals and the societies which they compose. And, given this kind of goal, it makes sense for the sociologist to regard the self as in some sense the "reflection" of social structure and process, at least as a hypothesis worth pursuing. The value of such a procedure should be obvious to all sociologists, but the value of a somewhat different aim, the one we have been proposing, is less appreciated. For it is one thing to pursue the question of the relations of selves to society and incidentally adumbrate an image of the self; it is quite another thing, having a different purpose, to develop a model of a self without qualities.

Mead was chiefly concerned with the first task, though by doing so he encouraged the development of the second. If what has followed Mead—though only a small fraction of it is intentionally premised upon his work—has had the effect of developing the image of *homo sociologicus*, this constitutes the kind of material with which our question can be answered. Yet *homo sociologicus* is still to the sociologist incidental to his chief purposes, which are the analysis of societies and their components. *Homo sociologicus* is not an element of any society; he is the idea by means of which the elements may be construed; primarily, he is an abstraction of the theory of role and has heuristic value or none at all.

This is the most tender part of my concern, for it seems to me that the alternative—either the idea is useful or it is no idea at all—is an insensitive one, too curious to be credible and too

³⁹ G. H. Mead, *op. cit.*, n. 4, p. 208.

exclusive to be true. An idea may have no pragmatic value (or appear in that light) and yet be valid, and an invalid idea may have great pragmatic value; aesthetic ideas seem to be examples of the former, racist ideas examples of the latter. Pragmatic values are essentially judgments of hindsight—what seems to have worked before ought to be useful now; and for that reason they are especially conservative: they preserve the legitimacy of existing theoretical models and yoke deviant, perhaps revolutionary, steps to modes of explanation and proof characteristic of the theoretical *status quo*.

The trouble with an idea such as the *homo sociologicus* is that, having pragmatic value, it remains the attendant of analytical concerns other than its own development. It is rather like the shadow of a man, which always attends him, alters its shape as his shape is altered, is comforting to him and useful perhaps, but is never considered for its own nature, in its own light so to speak. This is then the point of my question, for if we attempt to imagine a man without qualities, we are attempting to provide the image of *homo sociologicus* with a theory of its own, independent, that is, of the sociological purpose which the idea has served. We will not achieve a theory in a short time, but our first promptings in that direction may persuade the reader of the need to strike out in that direction and make the attempt. And though I do not claim to be taking either a deviant or a revolutionary step, it may be said that were such a theory of a man without qualities possible, it would constitute not only an original product of thought (although to Henry James must go the credit for having devised the first image), but it would constitute also an original form of thought, a pure example of which (i.e., extrinsic-modular thought) I have never seen. What is more, depending upon the degree of popularity of this thought form, its application may bring about rather novel ways of *characterizing* experience, a development which in that hypothetical future time would doubtless (though mistakenly) be celebrated as a novel *form* of experience.

MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES

573

This kind of prospect, the prospect of the man without qualities, clearly disturbed Mead. He was happy to develop from James' social and empirical self the more general concept of the "generalized other," and he was prepared to attack the intrinsic nature of James' account of thought. Mind, he argued,

can never find expression and could never come into existence at all, except in terms of a social environment;

but he made this point more precisely:

Mind presupposes, and is a product of, the social process. . . .

An organized set or pattern of social relations and inter-actions (especially those of communication by means of gestures functioning as significant symbols and thus creating a universe of discourse) is necessarily presupposed by it and involved in its nature.⁴⁰

He stated, moreover, that such a theory of mind was

a functional, as opposed to any form of substantive or entitive, view as to its nature.⁴¹

By "functional" Mead meant what we have been defining as extrinsic and relational.

However, a mind which received the impression of society upon it, as a wax tablet receives characters, and a consciousness that was the sum of such characters, were not the kind of entities which could be involved in an individual's exercise of freedom, nor did an ethic of freedom appear to be compatible with the possession of such entities. This raised sufficient difficulties to cause Mead to introduce a qualitative "I" to deal with them. Mead's "I" has the appearance of a defensive device; it has fewer qualities than James' "I," and little analytical effort is spent on it:

The "me" represents a definite organization of the community there in our own attitudes and calling for a response, but the response that takes place is something that just happens. . . . The two ["I" and "me"] are separated in the process [i.e., behavior], but they belong together in the sense of being parts of a whole.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

They are separated and yet they belong together. . . . Taken together they constitute a personality as it appears in social experience. The self is essentially a social process going on with these two distinguishable phases. If it did not have these two phases, there could not be conscious responsibility and there would be nothing novel in experience.⁴²

This argument represents an important concession on Mead's part to qualitative description, and though the reasons he gives may not be those which more modern sociologists or social psychologists give, the concession itself is generally always granted; that is to say, we are generally prepared to concede a qualitative nature to *homo sociologicus* and qualities to acting, living men. Now the latter seems perfectly appropriate in order to explain the natural forms of behavior,⁴³ but if we accept the former we endanger the possibility of completing our task here. It appears that, for reasons peculiar to its history, sociological thinking is best suited to this task and *homo sociologicus* is the most advanced modular idea—and in that sense more advanced and more suitable than the fictions Mellifont or Ulrich—of the man without qualities. It is perhaps not surprising then that a work of a contemporary sociologist may most deservedly be regarded as a success in this respect; there may be other sociological efforts of equal achievement although this work seems unique: "On Face-Work," by Erving Goffman.⁴⁴

Goffman refers not to selves and rarely to individuals, but instead to "persons"—which is conceptually a better term, and superior to the word I have used, "man." For "person" is derived from the Latin *persona*, which—and this often appears in sociological texts—meant the mask used by a player or a character in a drama, and hence any dramatic role. The noun is principally derived from *personare*, literally "to sound through, speak through," and by transference the verb came to describe

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 233.

⁴³ Cf. the discussion of "the intervening psychological variable" in A. Inkeles, "Psychology and Society" in S. Koch, ed., *Psychology, Study of a Science*, VI, 1963.

⁴⁴ In *Interaction Ritual*, New York, 1967.

MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES

575

the performance of any role or part. The first uses of "person" in English were applied to the character assumed and played in a drama. This implies a distinction between that which is played, or the role, and the vehicle, literally the sounding board, of the role. But such a distinction implies, of course, that the actor is merely a vehicle; his part is given to him; he performs it in relation to a whole not of his design. In other words, inasmuch as a man is a person in this sense of the term, he has no qualities as a man, and to speak of him as an actor is to describe not himself (intrinsically) but his relation to others.

This is not so in our word "individual." The Latin *individuus* (from *dividere*) was uncommonly used and meant "indivisible, undivided"; Cicero used the substantive *individuum* to mean the atom of Democritus' theory, and Quintillian used the phrase *pietas individua*, which we might translate as "impartial duty." English adapted the medieval form *individualis*, and the word continued to have this restricted meaning. The Oxford English Dictionary offers the following definitions: 1. one in substance or essence, forming an indivisible entity; 2. that cannot be separated; 3. existing as a separate indivisible entity; single, as distinct from others of the same kind; 4. distinguished from others by attributes of its own. This last definition is especially interesting.

As the substantive "individual," and a term used in logic, the word has meant "an object which is determined by properties peculiar to itself and cannot be subdivided into others of the same kind." It was first used to refer to human beings fairly recently (1626) and then it meant a single man as opposed to society, many men, the family, a crowd, etc.

What this digression into semantics tells us is that traditionally the word "individual" has always been associated with an intrinsic concept while the word "person" has been associated with an extrinsic-relational concept. It is thus especially apt for Goffman to have chosen the latter term and to have been consistent in this usage. Furthermore, he makes clear that he is not concerned with

an intrinsic concept of the individual nor with describing qualities; when he does speak of individuals, he uses the term "individual actors":

I assume that the proper study of interaction is not the individual and his psychology, but rather the syntactical relations among the acts of different persons mutually present to one another. Nonetheless, since it is individual actors who contribute the ultimate materials, it will always be reasonable to ask what general properties they must have if this sort of contribution is to be expected of them.⁴⁵

It is Goffman's achievement to have described extrinsic-relational properties in such a way as to formulate a model of a man without qualities. "What minimal model of the actor is needed," he asks initially, "if we are to wind him up, stick him in amongst his fellows and have an orderly traffic of behavior emerge?" Such a man, or such an actor, is the very object of our search—not now a mere image, or so we are promised—that will reveal the principles of his working and being. "Face," Goffman's crucial concept, is no longer that sign of the intrinsic qualities of men; it is very plainly extrinsic to the man and the property of his relations:

One's own face and the face of others are constructs of the same order; it is the rules of the group and the definition of the situation which determine how much feeling one is to have for face and how this feeling is to be distributed among the faces involved.⁴⁶

Feelings are not the intrinsic properties of the self. Rather, they are properties of the network of relations in which face is involved; they are "attached" to a face. Emotions, another stumbling block to formulating the man without qualities, are also represented extrinsically by Goffman; they "function as moves, and fit so precisely into the logic of the ritual game that it would seem difficult to understand them without it. In fact, spontaneously expressed feelings are likely to fit into the formal pattern

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES

577

of the ritual interchange more elegantly than consciously designed ones." ⁴⁷

What had been in William James' view an intrinsic element of the self, the ideal self, is in Goffman's view a self-deception; not only does he empty (as it were) the interiority of the self, he reveals the hollowness of its sounds (much like Musil's "tenth character," "the passive illusion of spaces unfilled"):

Whatever his position in society, the person insulates himself by blindnesses, half-truths, illusions and rationalizations. He makes an "adjustment" by convincing himself, with the tactful support of his inner circle, that he is what he wants to be. . . .⁴⁸

This is a somewhat unusual view, for Goffman is not suggesting that men, that is, real men, do not have qualities, but rather that their qualities so-called are delusions, self-deceptions. The very idea of feeling is a pathetic fallacy. But of what nature is the self that deceives?

There is a brief suggestion, though perhaps it is unintended, that the man without qualities has at least one quality: the faculty of self-deception, though a man who has no cause to disbelieve what he says or thinks and has no intention of doing so is scarcely to be called self-deceiving. This may be an unfortunate blemish upon an otherwise almost fully realized idea. Yet we may see in it, as in Goffman's paper generally, the sense of obligation once more to concede qualities to men. As he says, after depicting the extrinsic nature of a person's face and social place:

. . . there will be no objection to his furnishing this place at his own discretion, with all the comfort, elegance and nobility that his wit can muster for him.⁴⁹

From our point of view this is a damaging admission, for the man without qualities can exercise no discretion, and comfort,

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

elegance, nobility and wit are all beyond him. He may appear *to us* to have those attributes, but to speak thus of such a man is on our part to commit the pathetic fallacy; it is as true as saying the sun is regal, good-natured and smiling.

Goffman attempts to explain this away by stating, later in the essay, that whatever qualities he has recognized and whatever qualities are imputed generally to men, are put there, impressed, so to speak, by the force of social ritual:

. . . he is taught to be perceptive, to have feelings attached to self, and a self expressed through face, to have pride, honor, dignity, to have considerateness. . . . These are some of the elements of behavior which must be built into the person if practical use is to be made of him as an interactant. . . .

This is a clever move, and it succeeds. I believe that we do find in Goffman's essay, certainly by the time we reach the conclusion, a model of the man without qualities. His admissions are not finally damaging, for he draws them together into an account of human nature which unambiguously rejects the existence of qualities, treating them as the properties of extrinsic relations:

Universal human nature is not a very human thing. By acquiring it, the person becomes a kind of construct, built up not from inner psychic propensities but from moral rules that are impressed upon him from without. These rules, when followed, determine the evaluation he will make of himself and of his fellow participants in the encounter, the distribution of his feelings and the kind of practices he will employ to maintain a specified and obligatory kind of ritual equilibrium . . . if a particular person or group or society seems to have a unique character all its own, it is because its standard set of human-nature elements is pitched and combined in a particular way.⁵⁰

I have said earlier that were it possible to imagine the man without qualities, the model rather than the image, since it tells us more, a new form of knowledge would be available to us. That Goffman's achievement in this respect has not yet been recog-

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

MAN WITHOUT QUALITIES

579

nized as such, may perhaps be attributed to a belief that the author himself encourages, a belief which denies the uniqueness of the invention in order to claim that it is true.

This is an unfortunate error and one which may readily be corrected. Once we do this, and we appreciate where our theory has brought us, to the bottom right-hand corner of the diagram, then we shall better be able to explore the characterization of experience from within that diagram. Experience beyond it is, of course, no more real, but is out of bounds.