

Chapter Analysis: Chapter XI

Some Functions and Ideals of Personality

1. Chapter Position and Central Claim

Position in the Work

Chapter XI concludes Smuts's extended treatment of Personality, which occupies Chapters IX–XI. Following Chapter X's structural analysis of Personality as a whole, this chapter shifts from ontological description ('what Personality is') to functional analysis ('how Personality operates'). The chapter applies the holistic categories developed in Chapter VI—Creativeness, Freedom, and Wholeness—to the practical functioning and ethical development of Personality.

Smuts explicitly brackets the category of Creativeness (which generates ideal Values) as 'beyond the scope of this work,' concentrating instead on Freedom and Wholeness/Purity as the two correlative ideals that govern personal development. This deferral signals that *Holism and Evolution* lays foundations rather than erecting the full superstructure of holistic philosophy.

Central Claim

Personality's fundamental function is holistic self-realisation through freedom and purity. As the supreme whole, Personality operates through will (primary), intelligence (instrumental), and feeling (supportive) to achieve internal harmony and eliminate alien elements. Freedom and Wholeness/Purity emerge as correlative ideals—ultimately identical expressions of holistic character.

The chapter's animating insight is that the ethical life flows naturally from Personality's holistic nature. Self-realisation is not selfish egoism but alignment with 'universal Holism.' The whole knows no end beyond itself; therefore Personality's end is simply more wholeness—'the end of a whole is more wholeness, in other words, more of its creative self.'

2. Key Concepts Introduced or Developed

Self-realisation

Personality's immanent telos—not the pursuit of external goods (pleasure, abstract 'Good') but the internal achievement of wholeness. 'The end of Personality does not lie outside it but is given inwardly.' Self-realisation differs from egoism: 'earnest men will always find that to gain their life they must lose it; that not in self but in the whole (including the self) lies the upward road.'

Will as Primary

Smuts reverses the traditional intellectualist hierarchy. Will or voluntary activity constitutes the fundamental movement of Personality; intelligence evolved as its instrument to 'discover and co-ordinate means to the end of self-realisation.' Feeling supports will by providing 'strength and impetus.' This voluntarist psychology places Smuts closer to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche than to rationalist traditions.

Spiritual Metabolism

The most striking concept of the chapter. Just as organisms metabolise food into their own substance, 'the Personality through perception, intuition, conception, emotion, etc., assimilates the influences of its environment and works them up into its own substance—its inner world of thought and will and emotion.' Failure to assimilate produces 'impurity'—alien material that clogs the Personality's functioning.

Purity (Reinheit)

'The absence of all elements alien, heterogeneous and disharmonious to the Personality.' Smuts derives moral purity from this fundamental meaning: 'If a person keeps out of his nature any warring or jarring elements or complications, keeps himself free of all moral or spiritual entanglements, and is nothing but himself—whole, simple, integral and sincere—he will also be pure in the vital holistic sense.'

Holistic Freedom

Freedom reconceived as self-determination of the whole rather than arbitrary caprice of the will. 'Freedom means holistic self-determination.' The organism 'absorbs the cause as mere material, and emits the movement as the resulting action of itself as the real cause.' Freedom thus 'arises creatively inside the process of natural causation'—the 'holistic miracle which happens between cause and effect.'

Holistic Determinism

Smuts's resolution of the free will problem. Wholes are 'self-determined in their characters as wholes... theirs is holistic as distinguished from mechanical determination.' Neither mechanical necessity nor capricious indeterminism: 'Freedom, not in the sense of individual caprice of choice, but in the sense of self-determination of a whole; or holistic determinism, is an inherent character of Personality.'

Personology

The proposed discipline from Chapter X, here applied. Personology would study Personality 'as a vital organism, as the organic psychic whole which par excellence it is,' tracing 'the laws of the growth of this unique whole.' Smuts hints at untapped research territory: 'One cannot read the lives of the great Personalities without feeling that a vast field for first-class scientific and philosophic research remains still unexplored.'

3. Dialectical Context: Views Critiqued

Mechanical Determinism

Personality is not 'a mere link in the chain of natural causation.' Physical causation holds within organisms, but 'on the basis of these natural conditions and factors Holism proceeds to bring about results which are impossible in the case of mere mechanisms.'

Free Will Indeterminism

'Capricious individual behaviour seems unworthy of such a world, and would certainly not accord with Holism such as we see it in the course of cosmic Evolution.' Freedom cannot mean 'unmotivated decision' that 'would be an exceptional capricious element in the orderly procedure of the universe.'

Intellectualism

Intelligence is 'subordinate and instrumental'—not primary. Against the Socratic-Platonic tradition that identifies virtue with knowledge, Smuts places will at the foundation: 'The power of Holism in us moves at first unconsciously and blindly, as in other organisms, and later on consciously and purposively.'

Abstract Ethical Ends (Hedonism, Intuitionism)

'The Pleasure of the Hedonist, the Good of the Intuitionist, and all the other abstract formulations of the Ethical End appear partial and one-sided from the holistic point of view.' The end of Personality 'does not lie outside it but is given inwardly'—as Goethe said, 'Der Zweck des Lebens ist das Leben selbst.'

Egoistic Self-realisation

Holistic self-realisation is not selfish: 'to gain their life they must lose it; that not in self but in the whole (including the self) lies the upward road to the sunlit summits.'

Asceticism

Moral discipline is not 'the ascetic suppression of primitive healthy human instincts, but their refinement and sublimation, their subordination and co-ordination in the growing whole of the Personality under the hegemony of the later and higher ethical factors.'

4. Main Arguments

Argument 1: Personality as Self-Realising Whole

Premises:

1. A whole's end is more wholeness—self-completion
2. Organisms repair mutilations through central holistic control
3. Personality is the highest form of whole

Reasoning:

'As in the case of the growing or mutilated organism the whole manifests itself by bearing through all obstructions and overcoming all obstacles in its efforts to realise and complete itself... so too the Personality has, as its central end, the straightening out of all difficulties and the elimination of all elements which militate against the attainment of its own immanent ideal.'

Conclusion: Personality is fundamentally 'an organ of self-realisation'—eliminating alien elements, developing pure wholeness, achieving 'inward spiritual grace and unity.'

Argument 2: Will's Primacy Over Intelligence

Premises:

1. Personality is fundamentally an active whole
2. Intelligence evolved as an instrument of purposive action
3. Voluntary activity underlies self-realisation

Reasoning:

'In its endeavour to realise its conscious or unconscious ends the Personality qua will has developed the intellectual or thinking power as a subsidiary activity which prescribes the means by which that realisation has to be effected.'

Conclusion: 'The primacy of the will or active nature of the mind, and... the instrumental character of the intellectual or thinking power.'

Argument 3: Personality as Internal Legislature

Premises:

1. Personality resembles 'an organised society or state with its central executive and legislative authority'
2. Kant rightly called man 'a legislative being'

Reasoning:

'Just as in a well-organised society or state there is a central legislative and executive authority which is for certain purposes supreme over all individuals composing that society or state, and controls their activities in certain definite directions deemed necessary for the welfare of the state, so the human Personality is distinguished by an even more rigorous inner control.'

Conclusion: Personality exercises conscious and subconscious control over impulses and tendencies—an 'inner kingdom or sovereignty.'

Argument 4: Spiritual Metabolism as Essential Function

Premises:

1. 'Metabolism and assimilation are fundamental activities of organic wholes'
2. Personality depends on intellectual, social, and environmental sustenance

Reasoning:

'The Personality through perception, intuition, conception, emotion, etc., assimilates the influences of its environment and works them up into its own substance—its inner world of thought and will and emotion.'

Conclusion: Unassimilated material becomes 'impurity'—'any element of a foreign, alien or hostile character introduced into the Personality creates internal friction, clogs its working and may even end in completely disorganising and disintegrating it.'

Argument 5: Freedom as Holistic Self-Determination

Premises:

1. Organisms transform external stimuli into self-initiated action
2. Consciousness reveals the self between stimulus and response
3. 'Holism is freedom' (established in Chapter VI)

Reasoning:

'The organism absorbs the cause as mere material, and emits the movement as the resulting action of itself as the real cause... Consciousness interpolates the self between all causal stimulus and all resulting response, and reveals the self as the free creator or prompter of the response.'

Conclusion: 'Freedom arises creatively inside the process of natural causation'—the 'holistic miracle which happens between cause and effect.'

Argument 6: Freedom and Purity as Correlative Ideals

Premises:

1. Freedom = self-determination of the whole
2. Purity = absence of alien elements
3. Both express the character of wholeness

Reasoning:

'The function of the ideal of Freedom is to secure the inward self-determination of the Personality, its riddance of all alien obstructive elements, and thus its perfection as a pure, radiant, transparent, homogeneous self-activity.'

Conclusion: 'Freedom and Purity... are at bottom identical. They are both but aspects of Wholeness.'

Argument 7: Degrees of Freedom Correlate with Personality Development

Premises:

1. Personality is 'still a growing factor in the universe... merely in its infancy'
2. Personality is 'imperfect as a whole even in the highest individuals'

Reasoning:

'In proportion as the Personality fails to achieve the character of a perfect whole, in the same proportion it is merely mechanical in its action, and therefore in the same proportion it becomes externally determined or un-free in its actions.'

Conclusion: 'Weak characters have much less freedom than strong characters.' Freedom admits of degrees, correlating with wholeness of character.

5. Evidence and Examples

Phenomenology of Assimilation: The Goethe Example

Smuts offers Goethe as the paradigmatic case of successful spiritual metabolism:

'A Goethe could absorb and assimilate all science and art and literature, and in addition take part in much of the practical administration of his little state, and in other work of all kinds without finding himself oppressed by a load which must have killed a lesser man; he could... gather up into himself not only all the knowledge of his day, but all the richness and variety of experience which makes his life one of the most interesting records in the history of the world; he could drink of the deepest fountains of passion and arise to the loftiest heights of ideal aspiration—he could do all this and not only preserve his spiritual manhood unimpaired, but actually deepen and broaden and enrich it in every direction.'

Contrast Cases: Strong versus Weak Personalities

The chapter repeatedly contrasts strong and weak characters:

'Temptation to the strong Personality finds itself enmeshed in and defeated by the transforming power of a great system of central control which will actually turn it into a stimulus to the higher life; while the same temptation operating on a weak Personality finds little to withstand its force, and the resultant moral lapse is almost a mechanical equivalent of the temptation.'

Moral Recovery

Smuts parallels organic self-healing with moral restoration:

'As the organism heals itself after a mutilation, so the Personality through identically the same functioning of Holism saves and purifies the personal character often even by means of the sins and excesses of which it has been guilty.'

The Testimony of Consciousness

Freedom is not merely theoretical but phenomenologically evident:

'Consciousness interpolates the self between all causal stimulus and all resulting response, and reveals the self as the free creator or prompter of the response after it has absorbed the stimulus.'

Comparative Evolutionary Time-Scales

'Personality is still a growing factor in the universe, and is merely in its infancy. Its history is marked by the thousands of years, whereas that of organic nature is marked by millions.' This explains philosophical disagreement: 'Nature herself is not yet certain about these fundamentals.'

6. Key Quotations

On Self-Realisation:

'As an active living whole, Personality is fundamentally an organ of self-realisation; the end of a whole is more wholeness, in other words, more of its creative self, more self-realisation.' (p. 287)

On the Primacy of Will:

'The will or active voluntary nature of Personality is its predominant element, and the intelligence or rational activity is subordinate and instrumental—it has to discover and co-ordinate means to the end of self-realisation.' (p. 287)

On Spiritual Metabolism:

'Personality is not only a self-restorer; it is a supreme spiritual metaboliser; it absorbs for its growth a vast variety of experience which it creatively transmutes and assimilates for its own spiritual nourishment.' (pp. 287–288)

On Holistic Freedom:

'Freedom arises creatively inside the process of natural causation... holistic freedom is a continuous organic or psychic miracle which happens between cause and effect.' (pp. 302–303)

On Holism and Freedom:

'Holism is freedom, and in so far as Holism has realised itself in the universe, in so far as the universe is of a holistic character and consists of holistic entities, to that extent the universe and these entities are themselves free.' (p. 305)

On Freedom and Purity:

'Freedom and Purity... are at bottom identical. The function of the ideal of Freedom is to secure the inward self-determination of the Personality, its riddance of all alien obstructive elements, and thus its perfection as a pure, radiant, transparent, homogeneous self-activity.' (pp. 311–312)

On the Summum Bonum:

'Learn to be yourself with perfect honesty, integrity and sincerity; let universal Holism realise its highest in you as a free whole of Personality; and all the rest will be added unto you—peace, joy, blessedness, happiness, goodness and all the other prizes of life.' (p. 312)

7. Tier 1 Concept Development and Contemporary Connections

Holism

Development:

Chapter XI applies Holism to personal ethics. The 'inner call of Holism' is 'to unity, freedom and free plastic power for the Personality.' Holism becomes not abstract principle but lived reality in moral struggle—the warfare in the Soul, which issues either in the attainment of Wholeness and Freedom and membership in the immortal Order of the Whole, or otherwise in defeat, enslavement and death.'

Contemporary Connection:

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan): Identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as fundamental psychological needs. The theory's core claim—that authentic self-expression requires integration of external demands into coherent self-structure—directly parallels Smuts's spiritual metabolism. SDT's distinction between 'controlled' and 'autonomous' motivation maps onto Smuts's contrast between mechanical and holistic determination.

The Whole

Development:

Personality exemplifies the whole as 'balanced whole or structure of various tendencies and capacities which are maintained in mutual and reciprocal harmony by the holistic nature of the Personality itself.' The internal legislature model—a central legislative and executive authority—governs components toward unified action.

Contemporary Connection:

Executive Function Research: Cognitive science has validated Smuts's 'central control' model through research on executive functions—the cognitive processes that regulate thought and action. Kahneman's System 1/System 2 architecture shows the mind requires integration across processing levels, with 'deliberate' (System 2) oversight of 'automatic' (System 1) processes—precisely Smuts's picture of conscious will coordinating unconscious tendencies.

Freedom

Development:

Freedom is reconceived as self-determination of the whole, not caprice of will. 'Holistic determinism' reconciles freedom with order. Crucially, 'weak characters have much less freedom than strong

characters'—freedom admits of degrees correlating with integration of character. Freedom is thus achievement, not given.

Contemporary Connection:

Frankfurt's Hierarchical Model of Will: Harry Frankfurt's distinction between first-order desires (wanting something) and second-order volitions (wanting certain desires to be effective) parallels Smuts's contrast between mechanical and holistic determination. A person acts freely, for Frankfurt, when their first-order desires align with second-order volitions—precisely the internal harmony Smuts describes as holistic self-determination.

Creative Evolution

Development:

Evolution continues on the personal plane through 'conscious co-operation of those powers and agencies which have been evolved in the higher evolutionary processes.' Moral discipline supplements natural selection: 'The contest is no longer left to be carried on by the blind activity of natural forces and animal instincts; but reason and conscience take a deliberate hand in the great issue of Holism.'

Contemporary Connection:

Cultural Evolution Theory (Richerson & Boyd): Demonstrates that human evolution increasingly operates through cultural rather than genetic transmission. *Not by Genes Alone* shows how 'cultural group selection' enables intentional modification of evolutionary trajectories—precisely what Smuts describes as moral discipline supplementing natural selection. Humans become co-creators of their own development.

Wholeness/Purity

Development:

Purity emerges as central ethical ideal—'the absence of all elements alien, heterogeneous and disharmonious to the Personality.' Not repression but 'harmonious correlation of higher and lower.' The ideal Personality achieves 'pure, radiant, transparent, homogeneous self-activity.'

Contemporary Connection:

Narrative Identity Theory (McAdams): Dan McAdams's research demonstrates that psychological health requires constructing a coherent life narrative that integrates all significant experiences—including failures and traumas—into a unified self-understanding. This 'narrative integration' directly parallels Smuts's spiritual metabolism: experiences must be assimilated into personal wholeness or they become alien elements creating internal friction.

Summary: Tier 1 Concepts and Contemporary Validation

Tier 1 Concept	Chapter XI Development	Contemporary Validation
Holism	Applied to ethics: 'inner call of Holism' to unity, freedom, self-realisation	Self-Determination Theory (Deci/Ryan)
The Whole	Internal legislature model; central control of tendencies	Executive Function; Kahneman's System 1/2
Freedom	'Holistic determinism'; freedom admits degrees; whole's self-determination	Frankfurt's hierarchical model of will
Creative Evolution	Moral discipline supplements natural selection; conscious evolution	Cultural Evolution Theory (Richerson/Boyd)
Wholeness/Purity	Absence of alien elements; integration not repression	Narrative Identity Theory (McAdams)

Concluding Assessment

Chapter XI represents Smuts's application of holistic metaphysics to practical ethics. Where Chapter X established Personality as the supreme whole, Chapter XI shows how that whole functions—through spiritual metabolism, internal governance, and the correlative ideals of Freedom and Purity.

The chapter's most enduring contributions are its reconception of freedom as holistic self-determination (rather than arbitrary caprice) and its concept of spiritual metabolism (personality's transformation of experience into its own substance). Both ideas have found extensive—if largely unacknowledged—validation in contemporary psychology and cognitive science.

Smuts's resolution of the free will problem through 'holistic determinism' remains philosophically sophisticated: rejecting both mechanical necessity and libertarian caprice, he grounds freedom in the self-determining activity of integrated wholes. This position anticipates compatibilist accounts that have dominated subsequent philosophy of action.

The chapter deliberately brackets questions of value creation and religious significance—'beyond the scope of this work'—while establishing the ethical framework within which such questions would eventually need to be addressed. Holism thus remains a foundational rather than completed philosophy, its full superstructure awaiting construction.