

## Exploring the 'Everyday' in Colin Wilson's *The Black Room* and *The Personality Surgeon: A Phenomenological Perspective*

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### Introduction

The English existentialist writer Colin Wilson explores different dimensions of human consciousness in his fictional works to understand the nature of consciousness. Wilson professes the doctrine of "affirmation" and contends that beneath the surface of everyday triviality, which generates pessimistic nihilism and ennui, there is an ever-refreshing reality to which every individual must get access so as to bring value and purpose to life. He believes that this triviality is a result of the narrowness of consciousness. In this state, we take life for granted, and instead of living, we drift. This state resembles how Husserl describes consciousness in its 'natural attitude' — a state which is characterised by inattention and unreflectiveness. In this state, one fails to comprehend the experience at hand, thereby losing its meaning and essence. The recognition of this naïve attitude is one of the basic tenets of Wilson's philosophy. Both Husserl and Wilson show a deep concern with the perception and the perceiver and their fate in all modes of consciousness, which are inextricably linked to human will and imagination and crucial to the evolution of consciousness. Wilson, like Husserl, rose against cultural pessimism engendered by earlier philosophies and envisaged phenomenology as a potent tool to overcome this failure and crisis. Both believe in the spiritual power of phenomenology, which provides new insights into human subjectivity and its sense of bestowing achievements. Wilson's phenomenological pursuit is an endeavour to solve the existential meaninglessness of life. With a focus on the question of what makes up human values, Wilson's new existentialism entails a phenomenological analysis of consciousness. His phenomenology of life devaluation is the most relevant area of study because moods of insight and optimism are less accessible than moods of everyday consciousness. Like Husserlian phenomenology, Wilson's new existentialism lays bare the different layers of human consciousness. In his *The New Existentialism*, he avers that the 'new existentialist' "accepts man's experience of his inner freedom as basic and irreducible" and 'the new existentialism' concentrates the full battery of phenomenological analysis upon the everyday sense of contingency ... it uncovers the complexities and safety devices in which freedom dissipates itself" (180). And therein lies the first step towards understanding the nature of consciousness. Husserlian phenomenology, with its implicit existentialist concerns, too begins with this recognition of the prejudiced consciousness which flattened under the triviality of everyday life characterises our 'natural attitude'. Both Wilson and Husserl contend that 'normal' consciousness is partial, and it is not possible to make any sense of life from this partial mode of being. There is only a dull acceptance of how things apparently seem to us from our 'natural standpoint'. Wilson conveys this state as the problem of 'Robot', which engenders an empty, meaningless and mechanical life where we act with passive intentionality and where the possibility of moving to other modes of being is reduced and thus limited.

Wilson gives us a fresh and clear picture of man's position in what Husserl calls the 'natural standpoint' or what he himself terms the 'fallacy of insignificance' — man's inability to find meaning or significance in life. It is the everyday state of consciousness which Wilson calls the 'Robot.' Gnostics would call this Robot 'Duality', Gurdjieff calls it 'sleep', and Nietzsche labels it 'Mechanical Intentions'. Heidegger would call such an existence 'inauthentic'. It is Blake's 'Spectre' — a stronghold of one's own identity, personality, habits, etc. It is the concept of man as "an empty consciousness that passively receives data from the outside world" (Tredell Web). Robot is a human psychic condition which has become more complicated in modern culture. According to Wilson, "the Robot" is how our consciousness operates on 'auto-pilot', narrowing our perception so as to enable us to handle everyday life and least concerned about the need to get beyond it. He believed that "the Robot" controlled the part of our brains that, in our modern culture, has become over-used and over-developed.

The contemporary mind, with its dispositions, motivations and impulses, further strengthens this Robot and creates a sort of psychasthenia. Gary Lachman states the nature of this “Robot” is “that ... it tends to allow our energies to leak,” which in turn produces a distinct feeling of “life failure,” the boredom and apathy that erode our sense of values (Lachman 143).

The Robot is a state of ‘upside-downness’, which acts as an over-active servant that maintains the indifference threshold. Wilson defines the ‘indifference threshold’ as the margin of human consciousness that can be stimulated by pain but not by pleasure (Lachman 32). The indifference threshold has become a primary characteristic of modern consciousness. All human beings take their happiness for granted and only question life when they are in pain. Wilson terms it as a curious inadequacy of human consciousness. It has given birth to a ‘life world’ in which human consciousness has turned more passive, lukewarm and acutely caught in what Heidegger calls the “triviality of everydayness” (Moran 242). Wilson often employs the image that we are “like grandfather clocks driven by watch springs,” to convey this human condition. Because of his habit-bound lifestyle, the average man is destined for a kind of blindness in which he plods through life like a horse with blinkers on, never seeing much more than the tip of his nose. He behaves like a sleepwalker.

Wilson makes a diagnosis of this disease, called Robot, and lays bare the different dimensions of everyday consciousness. Man has exhausted his higher impulses and his lower self and lingers in a decadent civilisation where his ‘natural’ (in Husserlian sense) tendencies are strengthened and perpetuated by the ways of modern life, which, particularly in the prevailing conditions are enslaved by the world of internet, social media and artificial intelligence. Wilson desperately wants the answer to the existential question — where is the life we have lost in living? His response is that it is with the Robot. Wilson, a libertarian philosopher, sets a lofty goal for himself: to identify and treat humankind’s ills.

Both Husserl and Wilson contend that our perception of the natural attitude is vague and hazy, and we never pay attention to the ‘I’ and the way it perceives the world. It gives rise to a narrower state of consciousness, which encourages a “worm’s eye perception,” to use the Wilsonian expression. Husserl contends that natural attitude affects our thinking and understanding of the nature of reality and consciousness. So, in order to overcome the natural attitude, it is necessary to first make this stance of everyday life explicit.

Wilson discusses the ‘everyday’ in its varied dimensions, highlighting the different madresses of human consciousness. According to Wilson, in order to understand the nature of consciousness, one first needs to understand it in its everyday state (Husserl’s natural attitude). To understand the Husserlian notion of the ‘general thesis of natural standpoint’ is to understand the world in its materiality and actuality; it is to understand the life-world, which is both objective as well as subjective. In this attitude, human beings act with a narrowed awareness, which Wilson believes forfeits our will and imagination and ultimately leads us to life-failure. Wilson’s fictional characters reflect that ‘natural attitude’ is characterised by a tendency to devalue life and sink into passive states. In his *The Strength to Dream*, Wilson states that human consciousness has been caught in an anthropocentric prison yard which needs to be stirred into a new kind of perception (120). This ‘prison yard’ is our everyday state of consciousness, which is characterised by a natural attitude.

The paper tries to capture and analyse man’s position as caught in the ‘Natural Attitude’ — states of everyday consciousness; it contextualises different dimensions of the state of mind of the characters in the Husserlian notions of natural attitude. The novels are analysed and understood in terms of these notions from a phenomenological perspective. The two novels recognise and analyse this natural or practical attitude by employing different images and symbols. Wilson shows how the casualness of ‘everyday’ acts as the major impediment to man’s growth to some higher form. It prevents mankind from investigating its existential mysteries. It binds an individual to the contingency, limits the perspective and creates a spiritual vacuum, conditioned by what Wilson terms as the “fallacy of insignificance”

(Wilson, *New Pathways in Psychology* 10). It is all about how consciousness has stuck in the trivialities and the detection of the causes that perpetuate such an existence.

### The Natural Attitude

Phenomenology reflects upon everyday experiences to gain a sense of their order and structure. These everyday experiences are lived from what Husserl terms as the 'natural standpoint'. Husserl's study of consciousness begins with the recognition of this standpoint — a state of consciousness with which we live our everyday routine lives. It is our life-world wherein, immersed in the transactions of the world, we forget ourselves and hardly take any reflective stance to gain awareness of anything.

Natural attitude is characterised by a loss of subjectivity. It steeps man into the objective world, wherein the person remains oblivious to his inner world. 'Natural attitude' is one of the significant concepts of Husserlian phenomenology, which Husserl first discusses in *Ideas I* and later elaborates and recognises as the life-world in *The Crisis*. In order to get a clear picture of life-world, we need to analyse and describe its different structures so as to know the phenomena of everyday life in its mundanity. Our analysis and description of the everyday consciousness encompasses both concepts, especially for understanding Wilson's conception of narrow consciousness and its existential concerns, which implicate the Husserlian notions of the 'natural attitude', that is, the everyday horizon of our experience.

According to Husserl, the world we ordinarily perceive in the natural attitude is an unconscious assumption that we take for granted. He considers this world as 'naïve' with 'blinkers on'. This kind of life is asleep and unaware of itself. In our everyday lives — natural attitude or being-in-the-world — we hardly bother to reflect on our own actions and go on with our pre-understandings, assumptions and biases unquestionably. This life has a certain 'casualness' in its engagement with worldly affairs, which, devoid of any theory, is full of surprises. It is a practical world and not a theoretical world. Its opinions and beliefs are relative, and so Husserl calls this life "dogmatic, which permeates our daily life" (Zahavi 68).

In natural attitude, we normally engage with the facts and facticity, which is superficial and seemingly simple and straightforward, involving a naïve way of thinking. This naivety of the natural attitude, according to Sebastian Luft, not only consists in the fact that "being in the natural attitude I do not know of being in it, but also in the fact that, since I do not know of it as an attitude, I live in the belief that it is the only possible 'way of life'" (Luft 159). It is our usual, everyday, ordinary attitude toward the world — a world of our daily activities and praxes. In principle, a natural attitude is nothing but everyday life prior to pursuing philosophy, meaning it is pre-scientific and pre-philosophical. It is the Heideggerian Dasein, which is embodied in the everyday world — a 'world at hand' wherein one is bound to live an 'inauthentic' existence. It is the state of everyday consciousness, where we transact with the life-world, a common natural and material world which exists separate from our own egos. According to Sartre, in this 'contingent' spatio-temporal world, human beings often act in 'bad faith', and such a world is characterised by 'nausea' or what Wilson calls 'indifference threshold' — a state of psychological passivity or habituation that takes existence for granted. Tim Dalglish points out that "what Sartre calls bad faith; Wilson verbalises as the common acceptance or '*taken for granted*' of existence (both one's own and the world's)" (33). In these states, we remain oblivious to how our consciousness operates and functions in the outer objective world and the inner subjective world. We lose the true self and suffer from self-division.

In his natural attitude, man lives what Socrates calls an *unexamined* life. This results in the man having almost entirely unrealised potentialities. Husserl considers such a life to be absorbed in the facticity of the psychical ego, which fails to fulfil human possibility because it remains caught in the attitude of "transcendental blindness" (Fink 130). In this state, Wilson believes we do not have any true values but are characterised by a devaluation of ourselves. In this regard, Marc Applebaum remarks:

It is a truncated life in which one's flowing bodily and affective responses to the world are lived naively and one's reflection and imagination are characterized by instrumental responses to pragmatic, immediate needs or transitory desires. (30)

In the 'natural attitude', consciousness acts passively and carries out its activities mechanically. In his *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Syntheses*, Edmund Husserl says that "passive intentionality is an egoless form of intention where the experiencing subject is not fully active to create the understandable meanings" (26). Due to inactiveness of the ego or the 'I', we fail to focus, and consequently we go on encouraging human habit of vagueness and the tendency to waste time on trivialities. Our mind flickers inattentively, and this brings dullness and meaninglessness to our lives. Mankind heavily relies on ordinary assumptions, which are the encumbrances of the spatio-temporal world. We take these supports in the beginning, which we gradually take for granted, and never question them without ever standing alone. These supports which constitute our personality are illusory and keep us oblivious to the essence — the pure consciousness. Howard Dossor states:

Consciousness is the instrument which man seeks to illuminate the world. It follows that if man operates his consciousness at a reduced level of intentionality, he will see less of the world than is available to him. In a profound sense, the world he sees will be devaluation of the real, full world. It would be as if he tried to examine the riches of an art gallery lit by nothing more than a candle. (62)

It is our habitualities which create such modes of being and pin us to the execution of day-to-day affairs, thus strengthening our 'passive intentionality', which ultimately gives rise to what can be called contingent consciousness. Man is a creature of different 'horizons', which constitutes his *Lebenswelt* — the horizon of all horizons. According to Wilson, we normally and 'familiarily' dwell in the sexual, emotional and social horizons (which he calls 'circuits') and seldom pay attention to our higher horizons, which are poetical and mystical. The 'natural attitude' strengthens our emotional and social horizons and keeps us oblivious to the poetical and mystical. Wilson believes that human beings, like animals, live mechanically on reflex and habit. These habits are deep-rooted and often overlooked. The man remains unaware of his subconscious forces and only becomes aware of them in moments of crisis or emergency. Man functions as a slave to these habits and acts in passivity. This tells upon man's willpower of imagination and sense of purpose, which constitute the very foundation of man's evolutionary urge. Wilson, like Husserl, lays bare the nature of consciousness, which the former believes to have a web-like structure. In our everyday states of consciousness, this web is smaller and broken, which consequently fails to make the connections and draw the meanings. Such a state gives rise to 'nausea' or what Wilson terms as the "fallacy of insignificance" (Wilson, *New Pathways in Psychology* 10), which characterises our 'everyday'.

### **'Everyday' in *The Black Room* and *The Personality Surgeon***

Wilson's *The Black Room* is an experiment that brings oneself into direct confrontation with our everyday states of consciousness, which we otherwise take for granted. Everyday sense of reality erodes our identity and we become demoralised and passive. Wilson uses the novel as a device to bring the realisation that there is something fundamentally wrong with our consciousness. At the superficial level, *The Black Room* is an espionage story, but its real premise is to put forth Wilson's philosophical ideas of mind and consciousness in a fictionalised form. Wilson uses the black room as a philosophical symbol for discipline and urgency to pay attention to our own inner worlds, and in this exercise, he does throw some light on the outer, which consumes most of our energies and keeps us overwhelmingly preoccupied. Kit Butler, the protagonist of the novel states:

All men are stuck in a kind of fog. They're surrounded by a wall of fog. They think this is perfectly normal, but it is not. It means that because they can't see much beyond their little situation, they tend to vegetate. They need some immediate stimulus to keep

them alert ... This is so fundamental in human nature that you might call as original sin. It is a kind of disease we all suffer from. (Wilson, *The Black Room* 19)

This realisation comes to Kit after the black room experiment, and it becomes clear to him that the conditionings of the 'natural standpoint' make one complacent and put one in a half-awake state. Initially, Kit is terrified in the black room as he confronts 'himself', but gradually, he develops his concentration and sense of self. Kit, in his analysis, reveals that the poor quality of human life — and consciousness — is due to the feebleness of the beam of attention that we direct at the world. Ordinarily, in our day-to-day life, our attention shifts around from second to second; we do not really have the trick of focusing and concentrating the beam. These states of consciousness are the product of the lack of discipline in our routine daily lives. Wilson uses different ideas and images to show how man drifts in the natural attitude, and only in a crisis situation is one shaken out of this complacency. But these situations, which can become the other possible horizons of human consciousness, slip away from man's grip, and he lingers in boredom and absurdity. Man is prone to forgetting because the human body is so weak and floppy. The majority of men are little more than leaves on a stream; they drift along, hoping for the best rather than being self-controlled, self-driven animals. That is what Wilson means when he says that men are like grandfather clocks that are driven by watchsprings.

Through the experience of Kit Butler, who literally and symbolically lives in a narrowed state of consciousness, the novel depicts that ordinarily, boredom and tiredness are the common features of our everyday life. But this tiredness is false. "The fatigue is a kind of confidence trick" (Wilson, *The Black Room* 70), which pins us to triviality and states of passive consciousness. Wilson conveys this state in another image when he says, "My consciousness is usually narrow, muffled, limited, like playing a piano with your feet on the damper pedal" (*The Black Room* 71). The black room is an experiment to bring oneself into direct confrontation with these states, which we otherwise take for granted. It erodes our sense of identity, and we become demoralised and passive. Intelligent people face this situation in everyday life. Kit recognises that the human mind is a dodgem at the fair, constantly racing in different directions. Most individuals give up attempting to control their ideas because they become so tired of it and let their thoughts do what they want. And this is awful in the black room.

Most people avoid moving inward. They get frightened by the uncontrollable rush of thoughts and prefer to drift into the 'natural attitude', which saves their effort to develop a disciplined subjectivity. Wilson reinforces the idea (of passive consciousness) with another image when Kit asks, "have you ever seen small crystals of glass when the windscreen of a car is shattered? Most human beings are like that inside — full of disconnected crystals, different feelings, thoughts, impulses" (*The Black Room* 80). This means that our personalities are disintegrated and have no unity inside. It reveals a fragmented subjectivity that makes it impossible to comprehend a given experience in its full meaning and significance. Black room is a device to bring this realisation that there is something fundamentally wrong with human consciousness. "Consciousness is like a leaky bucket. And in the black room, it begins to leak so badly that it loses all compression" (*The Black Room* 110). And it is "our moods of boredom and blankness" (*The Black Room* 110) that causes the leakage. It means that the life forces that are at our disposal slip away from our hold, and in the triviality of everydayness, we fail to utilise them to the optimum. These moods are an impediment to the evolutionary imperative of man as they stick him to the present. Wilson labels man as "an evolutionary error" (*The Black Room* 131). Wilson says that it causes our will to slacken, and "we don't live; we drift" (*The Black Room* 170). Human beings, during their everyday activities, build a wall around their ordinary consciousness, which leaves no room for any peace or contemplation and thus reduces any chances of evolution of consciousness. Such an existence hinders any access to 'unknown modes of being' and dilutes the sense of purpose and value.

Husserl, throughout his career, thematises the concept of natural attitude in different ways. However, while responding to Heidegger's *Being and Time*, he explicates it more clearly when he remarks that it is an exploration of the being-in-the-world in the natural attitude, of what is given in the moods of everydayness (anxiety, boredom, anonymity, and so on) (Moran 191) and this is exactly what Kit does. He explores these states in the black room and comes to the conclusion that man, in the everyday state of consciousness, perpetually drifts in these moods and remains oblivious of the reality that constantly lurks beneath human existence.

In his *Introduction to the New Existentialism*, Wilson states that "The world itself is a gigantic 'dark room' that proves that we are too dependent on physical stimuli" (125). Man is stuck in the big black room of this world where his consciousness acts mechanically at the mercy of external stimuli. If this stimulus disappears, he becomes blank and possesses nothing substantial, what one may call consciousness. Human beings cannot maintain an independent self without support from the external environment because there is nothing, they can call the self. But in our everyday lives, we mostly live in what Heidegger calls the 'forgetfulness of existence' and take our consciousness for granted. In the natural attitude, being degrades itself in the mediocrity of everyday life and suffers from the forgetfulness of existence, which means we become so bogged down by the actualities of just surviving day by day that we forget to enjoy the knowledge and feeling of being alive in the world. The black room situation is significant as it lays bare our Robotic self, which has predominantly taken charge of all our activities and, by inhibiting our free will, kept us oblivious of the real self. It usually results in less "conscious" action, which casts reality in shadows and renders existence inauthentic. Gary Lachman points out that "The black room shows the limitations of consciousness in high relief. But these limitations, Wilson argues, are really habits we have developed" (Lachman 207). It looks as if some Blakean spectre catches hold and imprisons in the habitus: a complex of habitualities shaped by experiences, repeated practices, and attitudes that are laid down or *sedimented* through the person's embodied history. Habits turn our lives mechanical, and we fail to reflect back on our conscious self. The black room brings our attention back to this conscious self.

Husserl observes that "The Ego always lives in the medium of its 'history'; all its earlier lived experiences have sunk down, but they have after effects in tendencies, sudden ideas, transformations or assimilations of earlier lived experiences" (Husserl, *Ideas* 350). We live in this attitude unreflectively and regard it as our normal condition. Human beings direly need to adopt a phenomenological attitude so as to pay attention to their own subjectivity because the state of our consciousness affects the way we perceive the objects of experience. In an independent consciousness, imagination and will work at their optimum, which brings a qualitative change in our perception as it is our imagination and will that emanate from our true self. An integrated subjectivity brings a sense of identity and makes experiences meaningful. Through the black room, Wilson wants to release the powers of mind by detaching it from the Robot and thereby restoring the pristine quality of consciousness.

The contemporary world takes more interest in personality development in order to make it a sellable commodity in the marketplace. It focuses more on its utilitarian dimension, but all this happens at the cost of forfeiting one's essential being. Wilson's novel *The Personality Surgeon* makes a phenomenological analysis of the cult of personality, which is fraught with myriad ills that act as the major impediments in man's journey to self-actualisation. The novel primarily deals with the explorations of its protagonist, Charles Peruzzi — a psychological detective, into human personality. It follows Dr. Peruzzi and his associate, Dr. Erik Topelius, on their uncharted journey of personality analysis. At the beginning of the novel, Topelius tells Charles that "mental health depends on the sense of identity. When people don't know who they are, they become confused and distressed" (Wilson, *The Personality Surgeon* 12). This state of confusion is the primary characteristic of a 'natural attitude'.

Our personality springs out of our preoccupation with the 'natural standpoint', the everyday life-world. Husserl claimed that the ego always existed within the confines of its

history, with all of its past experiences having vanished but leaving behind inclinations, tendencies, and assimilations of past experiences. This is what constitutes the human personality. The complexity of personality is highlighted when someone realises that the person he has always taken for granted was actually composed of habit patterns and layer upon layer of geological responses to past experiences. Personality is a product of a 'natural attitude' and has its own limits, which betray the 'essence'. It is the outer self, the part that has learned to cope with other people and with the world. Personality as a bundle of impressions does not give a unified view of self, which gives rise to the problem of personal identity. It reacts mechanically to events and circumstances. Charles Peruzzi engages himself in "helping people to come out of their narrowness and trivial personal limitations and bring them the glimpse of that immense richness that lay out there in that world beyond the immediacy of here-and-now" (213). Charles analyses different states of emotion and thought, which have a bearing on the type of personality, and subsequently moulds them to the desired ones. Wilson implicitly refutes many of the ideas of earlier psychologies and puts forth his own ideas of existential psychology by exploring human personality in its different dimensions. Being a social animal, a human personality knows itself through interaction with other personalities, which creates its self-image. Every experience gets filtered through this personality, and in the process, reality is stained by the mediocrity of everyday existence. Ordinarily, man lives with a pseudo self-image. He needs a mirror to find out his existential reality — an image which would be true to his self. Ordinarily, personality takes over people and cages them into a fixed identity. This identity is put in our heads by other people, which we take for granted and never question. Certain ideas and emotions freeze us, and we get trapped in them. Gabriel Marcel terms this situation as 'crispation' — a tensed, encrusted shape in life as if everyone secretes a kind of shell which gradually hardens and imprisons them (Bakewell 91). Such a mode of life gives birth to a false personality. "And most people spend their lives being dominated by this false personality; overreacting to problems, feeling upset or angry or vulnerable when it is quite unnecessary" (Wilson, *The Personality Surgeon* 194). Wilson's novel, *The Personality Surgeon*, reflects these modes of being through the portraiture of its characters, who, during the course of life, get oriented to a utilitarian aspect of life, which is, above all, social. But in this process, they perpetually remain caught in the spatio-temporal world, which reduces their 'conscious activity' and renders them mechanical. This mechanicalness brings different ills in its wake as it adversely affects their will, imagination, and sense of purpose, which constitutes the fundamental basis of the human impulse to evolve. Charles, while working on Duncan Baron, frees the latter from hesitancy, who gradually recognises his hidden powers and becomes more confident and focused. Bob Engledow, who, after his retirement, lost his identity and purpose and developed a persistent rash, is suddenly cured by his desire to see her daughter alive again. A surge of vitality springs forth, and the shell of sloth and passivity is broken. Similarly, the air hostess, Sharon Engstrom, who, due to disfiguring facial scars and an eyelid twitch, suffers from a weak self-image — of seeing herself as a freak, is suddenly changed when she hears of the prospect of her getting cured. Charles also restores the self-image of Engledow's daughter Lesley and Ben McKeown's son Nicky by adjusting them to their suitable engagements in drama school and chess, respectively.

Charles' experiences with several patients led him to some important conclusions. He finds that most of them suffer from mental problems rather than physical ones. They are the victims of a weak subjectivity — "a certain inner collapse, like letting the air out of a tire ... a collapsed human being can be destroyed by almost any illness" (Wilson, *The Personality Surgeon* 80). Personality is no more than a mask. When a person talks to another person, he is a different person than when he talks to his wife or his patients. But some people get fixed in a mask and are unable to get out. The mask becomes their identity, which generates a typical and constant habituality, thereby becoming the victim of their own personality. It eventually gives birth to what Heidegger calls the 'inauthentic existence', where we live with all our falsifications and deceptions. In the 'everyday', we forget the reality of our true self and get lost in the appearances which are endless, arbitrary and ephemeral. In our ordinary states of natural attitude, we remain the victims of different emotions like anger, envy, timidity and

other passive states. Sometimes, this passivity can push the individual to certain disordered states where the mind fails to draw the meanings adequately. Dossor points out that although schizophrenia and neurosis are serious illnesses, their milder forms occur every day to almost everybody (110). Charles confronts such personalities in the novel, captures their moods in facial expressions and gestures, and brings them recognition of their disordered personalities. He realises and concludes that in lower states of consciousness, the ideas that could be quickly dismissed when we are by ourselves cling like leeches, which render our consciousness passive. Husserl says that thoughts and conjectures sully the consciousness, which makes the consciousness passive and hinders the pure 'seeing' by which we make our experiences meaningful. Charles sums this up in the following words:

It now seemed self-evident that the trouble with most human beings is a kind of modesty, a conviction of their own helplessness, and that this in turn is due to a failure to grasp their own potential. They feel passive, as if they were victims of fate or circumstance. This attitude means that they make no real attempt to control their lives, it is rather as if a driver insisted on sitting in the passenger seat and tried to control the car from there. Obviously, it would be ten times as difficult as sitting behind the wheel. In most human beings, self is displaced, sitting in the passenger seat instead of the driver's seat. (Wilson, *The Personality Surgeon* 257)

This depicts a state where man seems to be a mechanical being who lives at the mercy of the external environment and other people. He learns entirely for their sake, and the mind eventually recedes from reality and, in turn, becomes almost entirely socialised and a victim of the physical world. This creates disharmony in one's being, which leads to the loss of identity, which ultimately engenders meaninglessness and boredom.

## Conclusion

The most remarkable thing about Wilson and Husserl is that their ideas have an important practical aspect. Their phenomenological analyses involve a method that can transform the existential status of human beings in terms of perception and consciousness. The first step in this direction is the recognition of naivety and taken-for-grantedness, which characterises the 'natural attitude'. And therein lies the first step towards understanding the nature of consciousness. Husserlian phenomenology begins with this recognition of the prejudiced consciousness, which, flattened under the triviality of everyday life, characterises our natural attitude. Husserl and Wilson agree that "normal" awareness is limited and that existence cannot be understood in its entirety from this limited perspective. The way things seem to us from our "natural standpoint" is everything that is accepted with a dullness. Wilson describes this condition as the Robot issue, which results in a life that is hollow, pointless, and mechanical, where we act with passive intentionality and, consequently, have fewer and fewer opportunities to move to different modes of being.

Wilson's *The Black Room* is an experiment that lays bare how consciousness functions mechanically in its everydayness. It brings into our knowledge how we take our existence for granted, which has a direct bearing on the value and purpose that we bring to our experiences. In such states, we lose our real sense of identity and become demoralised and passive. Wilson uses the novel as a device to bring the realisation that there is something fundamentally wrong with our everyday consciousness. It is only in the crisis situation that we act with full consciousness. Otherwise, our consciousness always acts in response to the external stimuli. In the absence of any stimuli, man feels lost and falls victim to ennui and meaninglessness. Ordinarily, there exists a gap between the mind and reality. This gap is widened by the boredom and meaninglessness that characterise our ordinary states of consciousness, which results in the slackening of the will. Sartre calls this state as "nausea." *The Black Room* brings into light the fact that man remains trapped in everyday existence, and this important recognition paves the way for getting out of it, not in terms of any escape, but by bringing a qualitative change in one's own consciousness so as to perceive the things with new eyes. Wilson saw the Black Room as a crucial symbol because it represents a crisis situation on the



brink of daily existence where people can either rise above or fall deeper by moving toward the independence of the physical world through the release of latent mental powers — a trait that Wilson believed to be unique to the next phase of human evolution.

The novel *The Personality Surgeon* unmask the different appearances of the 'everyday' with which we live our lives and analyses them in their different manifestations. The novel reflects a dichotomy of personality and individuality and highlights the need to go beyond all the deceptions created by the former. The paper examines these different deceptions to see things as they really are. It penetrates the idiosyncrasies of the empirical self to reveal the self in its essence. In the 'natural attitude', we lose this essence and defeat the evolutionary urge. Human beings need to develop their personalities in synchronicity to their essential being, which would lead to their evolution.

Both novels convey that human beings should not make their consciousness subordinate to the parallel being they have created to carry out the business of the 'everyday' but must go beyond the Robot or mechanical self to keep the essential being alive, which is the source of our existence and which brings value and purpose to our lives. Unfortunately, we never reflect back to maintain the vitality in our consciousness. According to Husserl, human beings are perpetually held in the thrall of 'natural attitude'. In the present times, the entrenchment of this attitude is reinforced by advances in the post-human era, such as the internet, social media, and artificial intelligence. It has resulted in an unprecedented automatization of human beings — a terminal state of Husserlian natural attitude. Colin Wilson seems right in equating this state of consciousness to the Christian concept of original sin, wherein the 'natural attitude' fetters human consciousness and keeps us oblivious of the reality of self. Wilson wants human beings to come out of the triviality of their everyday lives, which is not the final truth, and strive to access another order of reality which imbues meaning and freedom into our lives.

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