



Union of God and Man

Josiah Royce

For better or for worse, the investigation to which our two series of lectures have been devoted now draws to its close. Our case has been presented. A theory of Being, itself founded upon an interpretation of human experience, has been applied to special problems, such as human life constantly offers to our notice. The result has been an outline of the basis of a Philosophy of Religion. We began our first series of lecture by stating our general problem as that of the World and the Individual,—of their nature and their relations. As we close, we are chiefly interested in that aspect of this problem which now, in view of the immediately preceding lectures, lies nearest to us; viz., the question as to the relations between God and Man.

I

Our account of the human Self has endeavored to be as just as our space permitted to the complexity, the temporal instability, and the natural dependence, of Man the finite being, when he is viewed in the context of the physical world. There is a sense in which man is a product of Nature, and in which his life is but one incident in a vast process of Evolution,—a process whose inner meaning in great part at present escapes us. We have tried to see the extent to which just this is true. There is also a sense in which man's life as a Self appears to be a mere series of relatively accidental experiences, and of shifting social contrast-effects. We have attempted to show how far this also is the case. There is a philosophical truth in saying, as tradition and common sense long ago said, that man is a prey of fortune,—that his life is a shadow, that all his essence seems insubstantial, transient, and uncertain, and that, so far as you find law governing his life, it appears to the external observer to be a merely natural law, indifferent to the meanings and ideals that man himself most prizes. And to such truth also we have endeavored to be just. But when we were led to emphasize all these limitations of human nature, our interpretation of them was from the outset determined by the inevitable consequences of our general theory of Being. None of these aspects of man's existence could appear to us startling or strange, or even disappointing, because we had long since learned in what sense, and in what sense only, these very facts could possess any Being whatever. For in thinking of this world, where his natural place in the temporal order is so insignificant, man finds that the very link which binds the whole universe to this instant's knowledge is a link that predetermines what meaning the whole must itself possess, and consequently what meaning man's life, despite its apparent pettiness, must illustrate.

To the individual man we have accordingly said: Conceive yourself, in the light of your

science, as this seeming plaything of natural destiny. Know your frame. Remember not only that you are dust, in the ancient sense of that word, but also that you are in your inner life, in the way that psychological analysis has now rendered familiar,—an insubstantial series of psychical conditions, physically and socially determined, precisely in so far as such determination is possible,—a being whose nature has only such permanence as may prove to be involved in the permanent meaning of those fleeting conditions themselves, in case they indeed may possess any such meaning. View yourself as an incident, or at best an episode, in the world-embracing process of evolution. And then, when you have done all this, ask afresh this one question: How can I know all these things? And how can all these facts themselves possess any Being? You will find that the only possible answer to your questions will take the form of asserting, in the end, that you can know all this, and that all this can be real, only by reason of an ontological relation that, when rightly viewed, is seen to link yourself, even in all your weakness, to the very life of God, and the whole universe to the meaning of every Individual. In God you possess your individuality. Your very dependence is the condition of your freedom, and of your unique significance. The one lesson of our entire course has thus been the lesson of the unity of finite and of infinite, of temporal dependence, and of eternal significance, of the World and all its Individuals, of the One and the Many, of God and Man. Not only in spite, then, of our finite bondage, but because of what it means and implies, we are full of the presence and the freedom of God.

But now, emphasizing the especially human aspect of our ontology, and the especially ethical significance of our theoretical results, we must expound a little more fully some of these our characteristic theses. And the particular further task of this closing lecture must be to bring together the various threads of our argument, in so far as they bear upon the doctrine of the individual Self, and of the more practical aspects of this its union with God. We have laid our basis. Let us indicate some of the consequences of our theory.

II

And next, as to our whole definition of the nature of the Divine Life. If our foregoing argument has been sound, our Idealism especially undertakes to give a theory of the general place and of the significance of Personality in the Universe. Personality, to our view, is an essentially ethical category. A Person is a conscious being, whose life, temporally viewed, seeks its completion through deeds, while this same life, eternally viewed, consciously attains its perfection by means of the present knowledge of the whole of its temporal strivings. Now from our point of view, God is a Person. Temporally viewed, his life is that of the entire realm of consciousness in so far as, in its temporal efforts towards perfection, this consciousness of the universe passes from instant to instant of the temporal order, from act to act, from experience to experience, from stage to stage. Eternally viewed, however, God's life is the infinite whole that includes this endless temporal process, and that consciously surveys it as one life, God's own life. God is thus a Person, because, for our view, he is self-conscious, and because the Self of which he is conscious is a Self whose eternal perfection is attained through the totality of these ethically significant temporal strivings, these processes of evolution, these linked activities of finite Selves. We have long since ceased, indeed, to suppose that this theory means to view God's perfection, or his self-consciousness, as the temporal result of any process of evolution, or as an event

occurring at the end of time, or at the end of any one process, however extended, that occurs in time. The melody does not come into existence contemporaneously with its own last note. Nor does the symphony come into full existence only when its last chord sounds. On the Contrary, the melody is the whole, whereof the notes are but abstracted fragments; the symphony is the totality, to which the last chord contributes no more than does the first bar. And precisely so it is, as we have seen, with the relation between the temporal and the eternal order. God in his totality as the Absolute Being is conscious, not *in* time, but *of* time, and of all that infinite time contains. In time there follow, in their sequence, the chords of his endless symphony. For him is this whole symphony of life at once. Moreover there is indeed, for our doctrine, no temporal conclusion of the world's successive processes,—no one temporal goal of evolution,—no single temporal event to which the whole creation moves. For as, even in the finite symphony, every chord restlessly strives after a musical perfection that in itself it only hints, and that it does not yet finally contain, but as nevertheless this very perfection is in the whole symphony itself, viewed as a whole,—so, in the universe, every temporal instant contains a seeking after God's perfection. Yet never, at any instant of time, is this perfection attained. It is present only to the consciousness that views the infinite totality of this very process of seeking.

Such has been our doctrine concerning the divine life, when taken in its character as the life of the Absolute. That a conception of an endless temporal process which nevertheless constitutes one whole, present to one consciousness, is a possible conception, and that this conception is free from the self-contradictions which have usually been ascribed to the idea of the Infinite,—all this I have endeavored to show at length. But in consequence of this endlessness which I ascribe to the temporal order, and in consequence of the fact that no last event, no final occurrence in the sequence of the world's life, is to my mind possible, and in consequence of the wholeness of meaning which I nevertheless attribute to the divine consciousness itself, I am led to add here a word as to the general significance of historical progress, and of the evolutionary processes of the universe,—a word that will prove necessary for the purposes of this our concluding lecture.

At every instant, in the temporal order, God's will is in process of expressing itself. Now since this is true of every instant of time, it follows that every stage of the world-process, viewed as God views it, stands in an immediate relation to God's whole purpose. Hence there is, indeed, always progress in the universe in so far as at any instant some specific finite end is nearing or is winning its temporal attainment. Yet those are wrong who lay such stress upon the conception of progress as to assert that, in order for the world to attain a divine meaning at all, it is necessary to suppose whatever comes later in time to be in all respects better, or to be in every way nearer to God's perfection, than is what comes earlier in time. To make this assertion is to declare that in the divine order of the universe there is a Law of Universal Progress in time, so that all temporal things grow, by God's will, in all respects better as the world goes on. But our view does not make this assertion. Unquestionably, in the temporal order, if this is indeed, as we have asserted, a Moral Order, there is always in some respects Progress, because there is always a seeking of some new form and partial expression of Being, and a passing on towards such new forms and expressions. Moreover, as we have seen, there are new Ethical Individuals originating in time, and thenceforth adding their significance to the world's process. But if the temporal world thus always contains progress, it none the less obviously always involves, for any

temporally limited conscious view, decay. Temporal progress, then, is only one aspect of the temporal order. For, as we pass on into our own future, we lose closer conscious touch with our own past. The growth of the man involves the death of his own childhood, with its special suggestions of divine beauty. The maturity of age means the loss of youth. For us mortals, every new temporal possession includes the irrevocable loss of former conscious possessions. Now this same tendency, as we have earlier seen, seems to hold true of all the irreversible process of universal Nature. For in Nature, too, nothing recurs. The broken china will not mend. The withered flowers bloom no more. The sun parts forever with its heat. Tidal friction irrevocably retards the revolution of the earth. And all these things, while they include the very conditions of progress, also involve decay.

In brief, it is, with the occurrences of the successive movements of time, or with the stages of life, precisely as it is with whatever else in the universe you learn to conceive as an individual fact. One finite individual, taken as such, never possesses the precise and unique perfections of its fellow, *i.e.* of any other individual. Hence whenever you have to pass, in your finite experience, from a partial view of one individual fact to a similar view of another individual fact, you lose something as well as gain something; and of this truth you become more clearly aware the nearer you come to an insight into the true natures of the objects concerned. Nothing can really be spared from the whole, *i.e.* from the universe. Hence every transition, such as we make in our finite experience, is a loss as well as a gain. No progress therefore is mere progress. Every growth is also a decay. Every attainment of temporal good is also the suffering of a temporal ill. And just that is what every mother observes when she learns to mourn because her children win the very maturity that she has all the while longed and striven to help them win. Just such is our experience too when we listen to music. In hearing the Heroic Symphony of Beethoven, how easily, during the Funeral March,—yes, even during the triumphant glories of the closing movement,—how easily, I say, may not the hearer wish himself back again in the midst of the striving life that the opening theme of the first movement introduces. Finite gain is also finite loss. This is the axiom of the temporal world, in so far as you view its events under the conditions of any finite span of conscious survey. Hence mere Progress,—Progress without any admixture of temporal decay and loss,—is not the law of the sequent events of the world.

On the other hand, in so far as any finite consciousness seeks, in its own future, a temporal goal that it has not yet won, and then approaches that goal,—for just this consciousness, in view of just this goal, there is indeed Progress. Now from our point of view, the general rationality of the world's temporal processes assures us that at all times there is, on the whole, and despite countless hindrances and evils, precisely this sort of attainment of significant goals occurring in the world. Hence Progress is, in one sense, but by no means in every sense, a fact always present in time. It is always present in the sense that at every moment of time some new and significant goal, that never before was attained, is approached by the finite agents whose will is just now in question. They seek new good, and, despite all evil, they always tend to win good, and always have some measure of success in striving intelligently for such good. On the other hand, Progress is not universal, if by universal Progress you mean a condition in which the temporal world should be in all essential respects better at any one moment than it ever was before. On the contrary, you can always say that in *some* respects the finite universe of any one temporal instant is worse than it ever was before, since it has irrevocably lost all those perfections that the

past contained, and that now are sought for in vain, while with every new temporal instant of the world more and still more of such perfections become lost beyond recall in the past. For instance, Progress for mankind here on earth is not universal; for, remember, we have lost, beyond earthly human recall, the Greeks, and the constructive genius of a Shakespeare or of a Goethe; and these are, indeed, for us mortals, simply irreparable losses. Yet, on the other hand, Progress in a sense is universal for mankind; for daily civilization, retaining some of its ancient treasures, adds new ones; and, aiming at goods never yet won, attains them.

The one most essentially progressive aspect of the temporal order is that which is due to the appearance of new Ethical Individuals. For their perfections are additions to the world's stock of ideal goods; and they, as we shall see, do not pass away. Yet it has to be remembered that a new Ethical Individual, considered in any one temporal stage of his life, is not *merely* an added perfection, that the world never possessed before. He is *also* an added problem,—a new source of conflict and of often painful endeavor. Only from the eternal point of view is he finally viewed as a perfection. In time he may appear, for a long while, as a new evil.

Now, it is worth while to recall such considerations, simple as they are, whenever we are concerned to conceive the relation of Progress, or of that still more generally conceived realm of processes called Evolution, to the divine life. As a fact, all ages are present at once as elements in an infinite significant process to the divine insight. Every age therefore has, as the historian Ranke once said of the ages of human history, its “*unmittelbare Beziehung auf die Gottheit.*” All things always work together for good from the divine point of view; and whoever can make this divine point of view in any sense his own, just in so far sees that they do so, despite the inevitable losses and sorrows of the temporal order.

III

So much, then, for some results of our general view of the divine Personality, and of the relation between the temporal and eternal aspects of its life. And now, in the next place, for our view of the human Person. Man, too, in our view, is a Person. He is not, indeed, an Absolute Person; for he needs his conscious contrast with his fellows, and with the whole of the rest of the universe, to constitute him what he is. He is, however, a conscious being, whose life, temporally viewed, seeks its completion through deeds. That from the eternal point of view this same life of the individual man, viewed as intentionally contrasted with the life of all the rest of the world, consciously attains its perfection by means of the knowledge of the whole of its temporal strivings,—this is, indeed, a corollary of our foregoing doctrine, a corollary which we have yet more precisely to develop. It is just this corollary which constitutes the basis of the philosophical theory of Immortality,—a theory which we have here briefly to characterize and to explain.

The human Self, as we earlier saw, is not a Thing, nor yet a Substance, but a Life with a Meaning. I, the individual, am what I am by virtue of the fact that my intention, my meaning, my task, my desire, my hope, my life, stand in contrast to those of any other individual. If I am any Reality whatever, then I am doing something that nobody else can do, and meaning something that nobody else can mean; and I have my relatively free will that nobody else can possess. The uniqueness of my meaning is the one essential fact about

me.

But when with this consideration in mind we turn to ask about the relation of the human Self to Time, our first impression is that our doctrine gives no positive decision as to how long a temporal process is needed for the complete expression of the whole life and the entire meaning of any one human Self. And as a fact, if we take the term "Self" with reference to those varieties of meaning that before engaged our attention when we discussed the empirical Ego, we see at once that there is a sense in which what can be called a particular finite Ego gets its temporal expression, so far as you view that expression apart from the rest of the universe, only within some very limited portion of time. The Self, as we said, can be arbitrarily limited, if you will, to this instant's passing selfhood, taken as in contrast to all the rest of the universe of Being. The Self of this finite idea, of this passing thrill of Internal Meaning, is, indeed, if you choose so to regard it, something that, from God's point of view, and in its relation to God, is seen as a genuine Self,—an Individual. For, as we have from the outset observed, the Self of this instant's longing has its true and conscious relations to all the rest of the infinite realm of Being. We men are, indeed, just now not wholly conscious of the true individual meaning of even this passing moment. But in God this meaning becomes conscious.

For this instant has its twofold aspect, the temporal and the eternal. Viewed temporally, it is just something that now occurs, and that, seen as God sees it, has its own unique contrast with every other event in the universe, and that also is in so far no other event, and no other Self. Nowhere else in time will its precise contents recur. Viewed eternally, it finds the complete and individual expression of its whole meaning in God's entire life. In so far as it is conscious of its true relations to the divine, it is this unique prayer for the coming of the kingdom of heaven. And in the eternal wholeness of the divine life, this prayer is answered. Browning's wonderful little poem, *The Boy and the Angel*, well expresses this aspect of the twofold meaning of every instant of finite individuality. Here and now, and not merely elsewhere and in the far-off future, this instant's song of praise, this moment's search after God, is the temporal expression of a value that is unique, and that would be missed as a lost perfection of the eternal world if it were not known to God as just this finite striving. The temporal brevity of the instant is here no barrier to its eternal significance. And in so far, the lesson of our whole theory is that, when you are viewed as just this momentary Self, working here in the darkness of your finitude upon the task of your earthly life, you have not to endure temporally, for a long time, in order to be linked to God. In him you are even now at home. For you here mean, by every least act of service, infinitely more than you find presented to your human form of consciousness; and in God this meaning of yours, just as the true meaning of this temporal instant's deed, wins its eternal and self-conscious expression.

But now, of course, as we have long since seen, the Self of the single temporal instant is far from being the whole human Self as we rightly come to contrast that Self of the Individual with all the rest of the world. The whole human Self, as we have seen, is the Self of the unique life-plan. And this Self needs a temporally extended expression, which no single instant of our human experience contains. The Self thus viewed has a meaning that seeks unity with God only through the temporal attainment of goals in a series of successive deeds. And of course the Self, taken in this sense, is a far truer expression of what we mean by our individuality than is the Self of any one temporal instant. Yet here again the

length of temporal expression that is required for the embodiment of any one type of finite individuality varies with the temporal significance of the ideal that may be in question in defining the Self. A life-plan, in so far as it is conscious only of brief temporal purposes, needs only a brief life to accomplish its little task. The Self that merely reads this lecture to you, on the present occasion, is indeed, from the eternal point of view, an individual. But it is so far an individual of limited finite duration. The Self of the mere reader of this lecture has no endurance beyond to-day. It is defined by a contrast with the rest of the universe that is especially determined by the conditions of just this temporal academic appointment. Its particular social contrast is with your present Selfhood as hearers. Its work is done when the hour closes. Nowhere else, in time, has just that individuality its task, its duty, its deed, or its expression. On the other hand, the ethical continuity of just this selfhood with the selfhood of other tasks, of former lectures, of the writing of these lectures, and of my personal obligations to you and to the University, is so essential a fact in my life, as I *ought* to view my life, that here the sundering of one fragment of temporal processes from other processes seems especially arbitrary and useless. Yet, whenever we undertake any task, however transient its temporal expression, that view of the union of God and Man, of the Eternal and the Temporal, upon which our whole teaching here depends, requires us steadfastly to bear in mind that every fragment of life, however arbitrarily it may be selected, has indeed its twofold aspect. It is what it temporally is, in so far as it is this linked series of events, present in experience, and somehow contrasted with all other events in the universe. It is what it eternally is, by virtue of those relations which appear not now, in our human form of consciousness, but which do appear, from the divine point of view, as precisely the means of giving their whole meaning to these transient deeds of ours. To view even the selfhood that passes away, even the deeds of the hour, as a service of God, and to regard the life of our most fragmentary selfhood as the divine life taking on human form,—this is of the deepest essence of religion. From this point of view it is indeed true that now, even through these passing deeds, we are expressing what has at once its eternal and its uniquely individual Being. Here God's will shall be done as elsewhere in the temporal universe it can never again be done, and has never yet been done:—so to resolve is to view our daily duty as our duty, and this passing selfhood, even in its transiency, as possessing eternal meaning.

Yet not thus do we discover the adequate view of the relation of the Human Self to time. For the Ethical Self, as we have already seen, has its meaning defined in terms of an activity to which no temporal limits can be set without a confession of failure. When I aim to do my duty I aim to accomplish, not merely the unique, but such a service that I could never say, at any one temporal instant: "There is no more for me to accomplish; my work is done. I may rest forever." For that is of the very essence of Ethical Selfhood, namely, to press on to new tasks, to demand new opportunity for service, and to accept a new responsibility with every instant. It follows that the same considerations which imply the intimate union of every temporal instant's passing striving with the whole life of God, equally imply that an individual task which is ideal, which is unique, and which means the service of God in a series of deeds such as can never end without an essential failure of the task, can only be linked with God's life, and can only find its completion in this union with God, in an individual life which is the life of a conscious Self, and which is a deathless life. And thus at length we are led to the first formulation of our conception of human Immortality.

IV

As a fact, the sense in which the human Individual, taken in his wholeness, as one ethical Person amongst other Persons, is to be viewed as Immortal, may be more precisely defined, at the present stage of our inquiry, by means of three distinct yet closely linked considerations.

The first is a consideration founded upon our whole theory of the nature of Individuality, as we set forth that theory in defining the doctrine of Being.

We know Being from three sides. Whatever is, is something that in one aspect forms a content of experience. Nothing has a place in the realm of Reality which is not, in one aspect, something presented, found, verified, as a fact known to God, and given as a datum of the Absolute Experience. This is the first aspect of Reality. But secondly, nothing is real which is not also, in another aspect, an object conforming to a type,—an object possessing definable general characters, and embodying Thought,—an object expressive of the ideas that the Divine Wisdom contemplates. These two aspects of Being we studied at length in our foregoing series of lectures. But we found that these two aspects of Being are not the only ones. A third is not less essential, and is in fact the most significant of the three. What is real is not only a content of experience, and not only the embodiment of a type, but it is an individual content of experience, and the unique embodiment of a type. And we found, as the most essential result of our whole analysis of Being, that neither in terms of mere experience, which contains only contents immediately given, nor yet in terms of mere abstract thinking, which defines only general types, can the true nature of this third aspect of Being, viz. of the individuality of any given fact, be expressed or discovered. Individuality is a category of the satisfied Will. *This fact* is an individual fact only in so far as *no other* fact than this could meet the purpose that the world as a whole, and consequently every fact in the world, expresses. I can then never merely experience that *this fact* is unique, or that this individual is unique. Nor can I ever merely, by abstract thinking, define what there is about the type of *this fact* which demands that it should be unique, or should be an individual at all. In so far then as I merely feel the presence of contents of experience, I can postulate that they stand for or hint the existence of individuals. But as mere observer I never empirically find that this is so. In so far as, once having thus felt the presence of facts of experience, I proceed, as for instance in my study of science, to describe the types and the laws of these contents of my experience, I can once more postulate that I am indeed thinking about realities which, in themselves, are individual. But I can never discover, by my thinking process taken as such, what constitutes their individuality. When I become aware of the presence of one of my fellow-beings, I never either feel or abstractly conceive why this being is such that no other can take his place in Being. For if I observe how he looks and acts, I so far do not observe in him any reason why another might not look and act precisely as he does. And if I proceed abstractly to conceive the fashions and laws of his behavior, I expressly define only general types. It is precisely the *no other* character, the uniqueness, of this individual, the character whereby he is this man and nobody else, which neither my observation nor my description of my fellow can compass.

Hence, as we long since saw, for us, creatures of fragmentary consciousness, and of dissatisfied will, as we here in the temporal order are, the individuality of all things remains a postulate, constitutes for us the central mystery of Being, and is rather the object that our exclusive affections seek, that our ethical consciousness demands, that love presupposes,

than any object which we in our finitude ever attain. Now this, our relation to the true individuality of the beings of our whole world, holds as well in case of the Self of each one of us, as of the remotest star or of God himself. The individual is real; but under our finite conditions of dissatisfied longing, the individual is never found.

Just here, however, lies the first of the three considerations whereby our general theory of Being has a bearing upon the doctrine of Immortality. The Self, however you take it,—whether as the Self of this instant’s longing, or the Self of any temporal series of deeds and of experiences, is in itself real. It possesses individuality. And it possesses this individuality, as we have seen, in God and for God. In its relation, namely, to the whole universe of experiences and of deeds, this Self occupies its real and unique place as such that no other can take that place, or can accomplish that task, or can fulfil that aim. Now the consciousness which faces the true individuality of this Self is, by our whole hypothesis, continuous with, and directly one with, the finite and fragmentary consciousness that the Self possesses of its own present life. The Self can say: “As human Self, here and now in time, I know not consciously what my own individuality is, or what I really am. But God knows. And now God knows this not in so far as he is another than myself, *i.e.* another individual than the Self that I am. He knows me in so far as, in the eternal world, in my final union with him, I know myself as real. In him, namely, and as sharing in his perfect Will, my will comes consciously to find wherein lies precisely what satisfies my will, and so makes my life, this unique life, distinct from all other lives. Here, now, in the human form, my life so imperfectly expresses for my present consciousness, my will, that I indeed intend to stand in contrast to all other individuals, and to be unique; but still find, in my finite dissatisfaction, that I am not here aware *how* my will wins its unique expression. But in God’s Will, and as united to him, my will does win this unique expression. What is, however, in the idealistic world, is somewhere known. The knowing, however, that my will wins unique expression in my life, and in my life as distinct from all other individual lives, is, *ipso facto*, my individual and conscious knowing. Hence in God, in the eternal world, and in unity, yet in contrast with all other individual lives, my own Self, whose consciousness is here so flickering, attains an insight into my own reality and uniqueness.”

The inevitable consequence is that every Self, in the eternal world, wins a consciousness of its own individual meaning, by virtue of the very fact that it sees itself as this unique individual, at one with God’s whole life, and fulfilling his Will through its own unique share in that Will. However mysterious our individuality is here, in our temporally present consciousness, we, in the eternal world, are aware of what our individuality is. We ourselves, and not merely other individuals, become, in God, conscious of what we are, because, in God, we become aware of how our wills are fulfilled through our union with him, and of how his Will wins its satisfaction only by virtue of our unique share in the whole. “I shall be satisfied,” the finite and dissatisfied will may indeed say, “when I awake in thy likeness.” And in our union with God, we are, in the eternal world, awake.¹

So far, however, we make a statement of the conscious aspect of our union with God,—a statement that, in its reference to the temporal endurance of the Self, appears still ambiguous. What we so far assert is that, in God, every individual Self, however insignificant its temporal endurance may seem, eternally possesses a form of consciousness that is wholly other than this our present flickering form of mortal consciousness. And now, precisely such an assertion is indeed the beginning of a philosophical conception of Immortality. In brief, so far, we assert that individuality is real, and belongs to all our life,

but that individuality does not appear to us as real individuality in our present human form of consciousness. We accordingly assert that our life, as hid from us now, in the life of God, has another form of consciousness than the one which we now possess; so that while now we see through a glass darkly, in God we know even as we are known. This doctrine, as we shall soon find, implies far more regarding the temporal endurance of the Self than we have yet made wholly manifest.

V

But now this first consideration may be supplemented by a second. By the arbitrary selection, and isolation, of any one finite Internal Meaning, you can, as we have said, regard any temporally brief series of conscious finite ideas as a Self. And so regarded, this arbitrarily selected Self appears as implying, so far, no long continuance. It dies with its own moment, or hour, or year, or age, of the world's history. We have indeed just seen that in order to be at all, however transiently, such a Self has to be an individual fact in the realm of Being, and that, as an individual, it is inevitably linked in God with a form of self-consciousness in which its own life and meaning and place in the universe become manifest to it as its own. Even such a Self, then, possesses, in the eternal world, a form of consciousness far transcending that of our present human type of momentary insight. In your eternal union with God you see what even your present life and purposes mean; and they mean, even as they are, infinitely more than your human type of consciousness makes manifest to yourself. But there is, indeed, another aspect of even your most transient life as a changing and apparently passing Self. And this aspect comes to light when you ask in what way, and in what sense, any finite Self can come to a temporal end, can die, can cease to be.

A very neglected problem of applied metaphysics here awaits our treatment. In our seventh lecture of the present series we touched upon it briefly in speaking of the selective process in nature and in conscious life. It recurs here in another form.

This problem is the one of the very Possibility of Death. The statement of the problem in these terms may surprise. Yet what is our whole metaphysical inquiry but a seeking to comprehend the possibility of even the most commonplace facts? That death occurs, we know. What death is, common sense cannot tell us. I propose to take up the question here in its most general form, and as a question of metaphysics. The physical death of a man is but a special case of the law of the universal transiency of all temporal facts. We have studied that law, in former lectures, in several aspects. The most universal law of Nature we found to be that of the constant occurrence of events that, once past, are irrevocable. We found that the most general reason for this irrevocableness of every temporal event is simply the individual character of that event as a real fact. What once has occurred can never occur again, simply because whatever is real is individual, is unique, and therefore, in its individuality, is incapable of repetition elsewhere in the world than precisely where it occurs. The very reason that makes us often regard the past as dead beyond recall is then the fact, presupposed, but never experienced by us in our finite capacity, namely, the fact that the past is a realm where unique and individual occurrences have found their place. Because all temporal happenings, or real events, are incapable of being twice present in the world, therefore new times must always bring new happenings; and what has once taken

place returns not. In this sense, in the temporal world, individuality and transiency are intimately linked aspects of the universe.

In dealing with the problem of time, we have therefore already dealt, in a sense, with the general problem that underlies this whole question about death. But here we indeed undertake this problem in a more concrete form. In a sense, indeed, the life of every temporal instant dies with that instant, yet what interests us at present is the fact of the temporal termination, not of any and every instant's life, but of certain significant series of life-processes, whose continuance from moment to moment, from year to year, from age to age, we indeed often desire, or regard even as necessary, if our human world is to win for us any adequate meaning, while nevertheless, as a fact, these processes prove to be, from our human point of view, of limited duration. Thus springtime dies, youth passes away, love loses its own; evolution, as we have just seen, goes hand in hand with decay; and above all, the lives of human individuals meet with a termination in physical death,—a termination which is, from our point of view, so meaningless and irrational that it stands as the one classic instance of the might of fate, and of the apparently hopeless bondage of our human form of existence.

And now, taking these concrete instances of death in our temporal world, and viewing them as peculiarly impressive and pathetic examples of temporal transiency, I once more ask, How, from our idealistic point of view, is such death possible at all as a real event? Here is a finite fragment of life,—I care not what it is, so long as it shall possess, for our present human purposes, some deep internal meaning. It may be the life of a mother's love for her infant; it may be the life of two lovers, dreaming of a supernatural happiness; it may be the enthusiasm that inspires a soldier's devotion for his flag, or an artist's longing for his ideal; or finally, it may be the whole personal human life of a hero, of a statesman, or of a saint. Now the law of our human realm of experience is that any such life some day, so far as we can see, comes to an end, and is lost beyond human recall. The mother's love for the present infant becomes a dear memory, while the infant, perhaps, grows into an evil and pain-inspiring maturity. The lovers part, or perhaps forget. Fate of all sorts cuts short, sooner or later, the soldier's, the artist's, the hero's, the saint's activities. Now in all such cases, whether or no what we call physical death intervenes, the same essential problem appears. This is the problem of death in a concrete, but still generalized form. Something with a meaning comes to an end *before* that meaning is worked out to its completion, or is expressed with its intended individual wholeness. The problem presented by such cases is not to be answered by the purely general statement, already made,—the statement that everything temporal is transient, and that only the eternal whole passes not away. That most general statement, by virtue of our theory of the temporal order, does indeed point out that the eternal perfection of the world of the divine Will can only be expressed in a realm of temporal deeds, each one of which, as temporal, is transient, and, as an individual deed, is irrevocable. But what now is our problem is furnished by those series of events in which something individual is attempted, but is, within our ken, never finished at all. We ask about the death which does not apparently result from the mere nature of the time-process, from the mere necessity that every finite and individual event should occupy its one place in the temporal realm. No, the death which here concerns us is the ending that seems to defeat all the higher types of individual striving known to us. And now, we state this problem, as idealists, thus, How can such death as this have any place at all in Being?

Our clew to the answer is, however, furnished to us by our whole Theory of Being. A realist would not venture to raise our question, if once he recognized the fact of death as a real fact at all. For him, death would be an independently real fact; and of no such fact could he consistently ask the reason. A mystic would indeed not leave unanswered our problem. He would reply, "Death is an illusion." But then, for the mystic, *all* is illusion. A critical rationalist would simply say: "It is the valid law of Being. All finite things pass away." But we, as idealists, have another task whenever we attribute Being to any object. For us, to be means to fulfil a purpose. If death is real at all, it is real only in so far as it fulfils a purpose. But now, what purpose can be fulfilled by the ending of a life whose purpose is so far unfulfilled? I answer at once, the purpose that can be fulfilled by the ending of such a life is necessarily a purpose that, in the eternal world, *is consciously known and seen as continuous with, yes, as inclusive of, the very purpose whose fulfilment the temporal death seems to cut short*. This larger purpose may indeed involve, as we have long since seen, the relative inhibition and defeat of the lesser purpose. But in our idealistic world it cannot involve the mere *ignoring* of that lesser purpose. The thwarting of the lesser purpose is always included within the fulfilment of the larger and more integral purpose. The possibility of death depends upon the transcending of death through a life that is richer and more conscious than is the life which death cuts short, and the richer life in question is, in meaning, if not in temporal sequence, continuous with the very life that death interrupts.

Or, to put the case otherwise: A conscious process, with a meaning, but with a meaning still imperfectly expressed, is cut short, and left with its purpose still disembodied. So far we have a fact, namely, the fact of death, but so characterized that its Being is stated in merely negative terms. We, as idealists, ask, What is this death? If real, it is a positive fact; it is not something merely negative. But what positive fact? For us, all facts are known facts, are facts of consciousness and ultimately of the consciousness of the Absolute. The defeated purpose is such only in so far as it is known, and then is known as terminated. But is known, I insist, by whom? In terms of what individual conscious life does even the Absolute know of the finite life that has ended? I answer, the defeated purpose is known by some conscious being who can say: "This was my purpose, but temporally I no longer seek its embodiment. I have abandoned it. It is no longer a purpose of my life." The life that is ended is thus viewed by the Absolute as followed, at some period of time, by another life that in its meaning is continuous with the first. This new life it is which says, "No longer is that terminated purpose pursued by me." But now, in our world, where only the fulfilment of purpose has any Being whatever, the new consciousness, in and for which the old life is terminated, must say, "That ceasing of my former purpose, that ending of my past life, has its meaning; and this meaning is continuous with my own larger meaning. My former Self is dead, only in so far as my new Self sees the meaning of that death." Or in other words, the new Self is really inclusive of and able to transcend the meaning of the old Self; or, in fact, the two Selves really form stages in the development of one Individual. Thus from our point of view, even the selective process which we before studied in Nature is a process involving survival as well as death.

Not otherwise, in our idealistic world, is death possible. I can temporally die; but I myself, as larger individual, in the eternal world, see *why* I die; and thus, in essence, my whole individuality is continuous in true meaning with the individuality that dies. The lovers may part, but in the eternal world, individuality that is temporally sequent to theirs,

and continuous in meaning with theirs, is found as consciously knowing why they parted. Was it faithlessness? Then it was sin; and in the eternal world, this larger individuality is found viewing the parting as their fault, for which, as for all sin, atoning deeds are needed. Was it wisdom that they should part? Then, in the eternal world the sorrow of their parting is continuous with a willing bearing of this parting, as one of time's sorrows. It is so with the mother's loss of the infant, or with the hero's or artist's pursuit of his ideal. It is so too with physical death. How, and in what way, the deathless individuality sees itself as including and fulfilling the selfhood whose struggles death terminates, we do not in any detail at present know. That this larger selfhood is in the end in unity with the divine Selfhood we know; but we know too that it is not as something lost in God, that the dead Self of our human life wins its unity with the divine. For our theory implies that when I die, my death is possible as a real fact only in so far as, in the eternal world, at some time after death, an individual lives who consciously says: "It was my life that there temporally terminated unfinished, its meaning not embodied in its experience. But I now, in my higher Self-expression, see why and how this was so; and in God I attain, otherwise, my fulfilment and my peace."

The Possibility of Death, as a metaphysical fact, in a world where all facts are facts of consciousness, and where even the worst sorrows and defeats exist only as partial expressions of a divine meaning, depends, then, upon the deeper fact that whoever dies with his meanings unexpressed, lives, as individual, to see, in the eternal world, just his unique meaning finally expressed, in a life sequent to, although not necessarily temporally continuous with, the life that death terminated. I shall finally die, in time, only when I come to say of myself, "My work is consciously and absolutely accomplished."

VI

But this brings us to our third consideration, which, in fact, has been already expressed in our former words, both in this and in foregoing lectures. An ethical task is essentially one of which I can never say, "My work is finished." Special tasks come to an end. The work of offering my unique service, as this Individual, to God and to my fellows, can never be finished in any time, however great. For always, at any future moment, if I know my union with God, I shall know, whatever my form of consciousness, that there are my fellows beyond me, different from myself, and yet linked by the ties of the divine unity to my life and my destiny. I shall know then that I have not yet accomplished all of the relations to them which my ethical tasks involve. To be an ethical individual is to live a life with one goal, but contrasted with all other lives. Every deed emphasizes the contrast, and so gives opportunity for new deeds. A consciously last moral task is a contradiction in terms. For whenever I act, I create a new situation in the world's life, a situation that never before was, and that never can recur. It is of the essence of the moral law to demand, however, that whenever a new deed of service is possible, I should undertake to do it. But a new deed is possible whenever my world is in a new situation. My moral tasks spring afresh into life whenever I seek to terminate it. To serve God is to create new opportunities for service. My human form of consciousness is indeed doubtless a transient incident of my immortal life. Not thus haltingly, not thus blindly, not thus darkly and ignorantly, shall I always labor. But the service of the eternal is an essentially endless service. There can be no last moral deed.

And thus, in three ways, our union with God implies an immortal and individual life. For first, in God, we are real individuals, and really conscious Selves,—a fact which neither human thought nor human experience, nor yet any aspect of our present form of consciousness, can make present and obvious to our consciousness, as now it is. But since this very fact of our eternal and individual Selfhood is real as a conscious fact, in God, we too, in him, are conscious of our individuality in a form higher than that now accessible to us. And secondly, the death of an individual is a possible fact, in an idealistic world, only in case such death occurs as an incident in the life of a larger individual, whose existence as this Self and no other, in its individual contrast with the rest of the world, is continuous in meaning with the individuality that death cuts short. No Self, then, can end until itself consciously declares, “My work is done, here I cease.” But, thirdly, no ethical Self, in its union with God, can ever view its task as accomplished, or its work as done, or its individuality as ceasing to seek, in God, a temporal future. In Eternity all is done, and we too rest from our labors. In Time there is no end to the individual ethical task.

VII

But now these considerations lead us, in our closing words, to dwell briefly upon an aspect of the life of the Ethical Individual which has grown more and more obvious as we have proceeded.

We have often spoken of the Human Individual as a finite being. In the temporal order, he everywhere remains so; for he has a temporal beginning; and at any moment of time he has so far lived but for a finite period, has so far accomplished but a finite task, and seeks, as one whose life is unfinished, his own temporal future, which is not yet. The same can be said of any temporal being, of whatever degree of dignity or of wisdom, whose life is considered from any period of time onwards, and up to any point of time. But now what of the completed Self, of the Ethical Individual, as it comes consciously to distinguish itself from all others, in the eternal world, and as it finds itself fully expressed in its own unique aspect of the life of the Absolute? Is it still to be called a finite Self?

The plain answer of course is that, as the complete expression of a Self-representative System of purpose and fulfilment, it is there, viz. in the eternal world, no longer finite, but infinite. Yet it differs from the Absolute Self in being *partial*, in requiring the other individuals as its own supplement, and in distinguishing itself from them in such wise as to make their purposes not wholly and in every sense its own. It is, as Spinoza would have said of his divine attributes, “infinite in its own kind”; only that, to be sure, its existence is not independent of that of the other Individuals, as the Spinozistic attributes were independent of one another. For it is not related to these other selves *merely* through the common relation to God; on the contrary, it is just as truly related to God *by means of* its relation to them. Its life with them is an eternally fulfilled social life, and the completion of this eternal order also means the self-conscious expression of God, the Individual of Individuals, who dwells in all, as they in him.

There is needed a convenient term for expressing the nature of an individual being which, although “infinite in its own kind” (that is, infinite as a complete expression of its own self-representative purpose), is still essentially but a part of a larger system, involving still other purposes and beings. The word “finite” suggests, indeed, the character of *needing a relatively external Other*. In *this* sense, however, it remains certainly true that the Ethical

Individual profoundly needs, in the eternal world, as its Other, without which it can neither be nor be conceived, the universe of the other Ethical Individuals. And it needs them not merely as parts of itself, but as its comrades. If then the term “finite” could be used without ambiguity in this special sense, one could indeed say that in contrast with the Absolute Individual, who is the sole *completely integrated* Self, the single Ethical Individual remains finite, since it is, even in the eternal world, essentially dependent, even for the expression of its own will, upon the other Individuals beyond itself, in contrast with whom it defines itself. But since the word “finite” is, with technical accuracy, used for systems that are *not* self-representative in type, the best way is not to attempt any unauthorized use of the term, but to characterize the eternal ethical Individual as *infinite but partial*. Its fellows, in the self-conscious organism of the Absolute, are, as we have seen, infinite in number, since the Absolute must possess an infinite wealth of self-representation. On the other hand, the various individual Selves may, and in an infinite number of cases *must*, as the various self-expressions of the same system, interpenetrate in the most manifold ways, sharing in countless instances the same immediate contents of experience, even while viewing these contents in different orders, and as the expressions of different, although interrelated, individual life-purposes. The possibility, and in fact the necessity, of some such structure, in the completed self-representative system, we discussed, in a very inadequate fashion, in our Supplementary Essay.² Had we time here to illustrate the complications which the recent investigations of self-representative systems have shown to be characteristic of their structure, we should see clearly that, although the world of the Absolute Individual is, from our point of view, an individual selection from an infinitely wealthy realm of unrealized possibilities, its internal structure, in order that it should be self-representative at all, must involve the sort of formal complexity here suggested, and must therefore make inevitable that interpenetration of the lives of countless and various Selves which our own theory of the origin and social nature of the ethical Self demands. It is this interpenetration, in various ways and degrees, of the lives of the completed Selves in the eternal world which, according to our hypothesis concerning Nature, would presumably be manifested, in a phenomenal way, in the temporal world, by the processes of intercommunication amongst the various members of any social order, or amongst what to us seem widely sundered regions of Nature. For according to our hypothesis, no actual relations of various minds are merely external and mechanically determined; but all are due to the fact that every Self, representing in its own way the Absolute, represents also other Selves in a way and order that may, in the temporal world, appear to any extent as a process whose individual instances are determined by special physical conditions.

The *infinity* and the accompanying *partial* character of each Ethical Individual suggests, however, still one more consideration that older theological doctrines have very generally failed to recognize as a possibility. Yet the modern theory of Infinite Assemblages makes it almost a commonplace of exact thinking, when once any system has been recognized as infinitely complex in structure, to take note of this consideration in dealing with such a system.

To an infinite collection of objects, as we saw in the Supplementary Essay, *the axiom that the part cannot be equal to the whole does not apply*. There is a perfectly definite sense³ in which a part of an infinitely complex system can remain, not only a part that excludes from itself *some* portion of the whole, but a part that is only one of an infinite number of mutually exclusive parts of this whole. Thus, to give a purely formal instance

of what I here have in mind, let me ask you to consider the whole numbers. Amongst the whole numbers you can select at pleasure a relatively very small sub-class, or *part*; viz., *those whole numbers which are powers of 2*, that is, 2 itself, as the *first* power, the *square* of 2, the *cube* of 2, and so on. You can then select *another* part; viz., *the whole numbers which are powers of 3*; and a third part; viz., *those which are powers of 5*. You can suppose this process of selection carried on so that each one of the demonstrably infinite collection of prime numbers, 2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13, etc., shall form the basis of a selection of a partial collection of whole numbers, viz. its own powers. Thus the powers of 7, of 11, of 13, and so on, would form a system of collections of whole numbers. Now consider these resulting *partial collections of whole numbers*. Each collection is *precisely as infinite* as the entire series of whole numbers. For 2, or 3, or 5, or whatever other prime number you have taken, has a *first* power, a *second* power, a *third* power, and so on without end. For every whole number defines a new power of the prime numbers in question. Each of the partial collections of whole numbers thus defined has, in consequence, one number to correspond to *every whole number* without exception, namely, its first number, its second, its third, and so on without end. And yet no two of these partial collections contain *any* whole numbers in common; for no power of any prime number is equal to any power of another prime number. All of the partial collections contain nothing, however, *but* whole numbers; and there are an infinity of these infinite partial collections, although each of them is, in its own internal complication, precisely equal to the whole from which they are all alike selected. Nor do even they, if taken together, in the least exhaust the original collection of whole numbers; since there are countless equally infinite collections of whole numbers which are *not* powers of any prime number, but which are products of various powers of prime numbers. And so we can define an infinite system such that it contains an infinity of mutually exclusive parts, while each of these parts is equal to the whole in internal complexity of structure, and in the multitude of its own parts.

This instance, taken by itself, is formal and seemingly trivial. It assumes metaphysical importance, however, as soon as you remember that, from our point of view, the infinity of the real system of the Self, whether in case of the Ethical Individual, or in case of the Absolute, is an actual, and, in the eternal world, a completed infinity. We see then that, from our point of view, the Ethical Individual, however small a part of the infinite System of Individuals he may be, yet may be conceived as strictly equal in infinity of structure and of variety of content to the Absolute, having a series of experiences precisely as rich in its details, a knowledge precisely as multitudinous, a meaning precisely as complex, as the Absolute Self in its wholeness. Yet the Ethical Individual may be none the less *only* a part,—*only* one of an infinite number of equally partial Individuals, whose lives, to be sure, are not in every respect mutually exclusive, but who are not at all confounded either with one another or with the Absolute in its wholeness.

We therefore *need not conceive the eternal Ethical Individual, however partial he may be, as in any sense less in the grade of complication of his activity or in the multitude of his acts of will than is the Absolute*. And thus we see, in a new way, how the individual Self may recognize that in God it finds its own fulfilment, while still it clearly distinguishes other Selves, within the Absolute, as in one sense beyond it. It may be conceived then as a Part equal to the Whole, and finally united, as such equal, to the Whole wherein it dwells.

—But we must turn from the eternal back to our temporal world. The special, the very finite, and imperfect task of these lectures is indeed accomplished. We have dealt with the nature of God, with the origin and meaning of man's life, and with the union of God and

Man. Our result is this:—Despite God’s absolute unity, we, as individuals, preserve and attain our unique lives and meanings, and are not lost in the very life that sustains us, and that needs us as its own expression. This life is real through us all; and we are real through our union with that life. Close is our touch with the eternal. Boundless is the meaning of our nature. Its mysteries baffle our present science, and escape our present experience; but they need not blind our eyes to the central unity of Being, nor make us feel lost in a realm where all the wanderings of time mean the process whereby is discovered the homeland of Eternity.

Josiah Royce. *The World and the Individual*. Vol. 2. New York: Macmillan, 1901.

© SophiaOmni, 2009. The specific electronic form of this text is copyright. Permission is granted to print out copies for educational purposes and for personal use only. No permission is granted for commercial use.