

# Chapter 24

## The Time-Process and the Value of Human Life (Part II)



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**Abstract** In this article, Ellen Bliss Talbot affirms the reality of both time and change in individual human lives, asserting that moral growth is possible because an individual is a unity in and through time.

In our first article we considered the way in which men's estimate of the values that are realized in a human life is affected by the temporal position of the various realizations. We commonly estimate the worth of life in terms of the four values—moral, intellectual, aesthetic, and affective.<sup>1</sup> These four, we found, differ in the extent to which they can be separated from the life of the individual and considered by themselves: the intellectual and aesthetic values are more impersonal, and thus more readily detached, than are the moral and affective. That aspect in which they are most completely fused with the personality is revealed in intellectual and aesthetic activity, as distinguished from its products. And if we take this activity in the broadest sense, as including such mental alertness and sensitiveness as may characterize even persons of ordinary ability, we have these two more impersonal values in a form in which we can compare them fairly well with the more personal ones, goodness and pleasure.

Now we found that when men try to estimate the value of a particular human life, the question of the temporal relations plays an important role. The worth of an

<sup>1</sup> Whether religious value, as distinct from moral, should be added to this list is a question upon which we did not enter. For the purposes of our discussion it seemed permissible to leave it undecided, for the reason that even if the religious value is quite distinct, it stands in precisely the same relation to our problem as does the moral value, so that no new point of view would be gained by considering it separately. Throughout the discussion, moreover, the term 'moral value' has been used to designate inner attainment, the worth of the personality, rather than outward act.

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19 individual life, apparently, does not depend simply upon the degree in which any or  
 20 all of these four values are realized in it: their presence in its later stages counts for  
 21 more than their presence in the earlier ones. If a given value is to be more completely  
 22 realized in one part of the life than in another, we regard it as desirable that the fuller  
 23 realization should be in the latter part. Simply to say, however, that the quality of the  
 24 later stages is, somehow, more important than that of the earlier does not characterize  
 25 adequately the peculiar relation that we suppose to exist. For many of our evaluations  
 26 of life apparently imply the belief that the quality of the later stages is not merely  
 27 more important, but of supreme importance, so that the quality of the earlier stages  
 28 seems to have been wiped out by that of subsequent ones. Later happiness atones for  
 29 earlier unhappiness (makes it as if it had not been), later goodness for earlier moral  
 30 defect, later intellectual or aesthetic activity for an earlier want of it. But earlier joy  
 31 does not atone in like manner for the later sorrow, nor earlier goodness for the later  
 32 moral downfall, nor an earlier high level of thought and aesthetic sensibility for the  
 33 later low level. The value of the later stages seems to cancel or destroy that of the  
 34 earlier, but not to be in turn canceled by it. Thus the later stages seem to stand for  
 35 the earlier in a way in which the earlier cannot stand for the later.<sup>2</sup>

36 Now we saw that the extent to which a value is affected by these temporal relations  
 37 appears to depend upon the degree of its fusion with the personality. Truth and  
 38 beauty, considered quite in themselves, are above the vicissitudes of time and change.  
 39 And even as the products of human activity, they are, regarded from one point of  
 40 view, equally secure. The greatness of a scientific or artistic achievement cannot  
 41 be destroyed by any later failure on the part of its author. But our estimate of the  
 42 intellectual or aesthetic worth of the man, as distinguished from that of the particular  
 43 achievement, is more or less affected by his subsequent failure. It is not then value as  
 44 such that is influenced by temporal relations, but value as an integral part of human  
 45 personality. And the reason why our estimate of hedonic and moral value seems to  
 46 be more readily affected by temporal considerations is that these two ordinarily fuse  
 47 with the personality more completely than intellectual and aesthetic value do.

48 The outcome of our first article then may be expressed by saying that human  
 49 beings show a marked tendency to believe that so far as the value of the individual  
 50 life is concerned, its later stages are of supreme importance.<sup>3</sup> Later excellence, men  
 51 seem to think, makes up for earlier defect, makes it as if it had not been; and in  
 52 similar fashion later evil swallows up, destroys, earlier good. The task of the present  
 53 paper is to try to determine the connection between this belief and the problem of the  
 54 relation of the individual life to the time-process. My purpose is primarily neither  
 55 to defend the belief nor to offer arguments in support of any particular theory of the  
 56 time-process, but rather to ask what conception of the relation of the individual life  
 57 to the temporal process is logically implied in the belief.

<sup>2</sup> As a matter of convenience I shall regard the phrase 'supreme importance' as indicating this compensatory function that the later stages seem to have.

<sup>3</sup> In this paper, as in the preceding one, we shall limit our consideration to the life of the human individual. To ask as to the value of the life of the race, taken as a whole, would be to raise questions which are of much interest and importance, but which lie beyond the scope of this discussion.

58 Some might feel inclined to dispose of our task at once by the simple method  
 59 of condemning the belief outright. Men seem, they might tell us, to regard the later  
 60 stages of life as supreme in importance, but this opinion, however cherished, is quite  
 61 mistaken. If pleasure, and goodness, and intellectual and aesthetic activity have any  
 62 value, they have as much at one time as at another. The belief to the contrary is simply  
 63 one of the many errors to which popular opinion is liable. It seems to me, however,  
 64 that we are scarcely justified in throwing aside the belief in this summary fashion.  
 65 And in point of fact I think that few philosophers are willing to reject it altogether.  
 66 Many whose theory of the nature of time seems incompatible with it try, none the  
 67 less, to find some place for it in their account of reality. And since this is the case,  
 68 it may be worth our while to inquire somewhat carefully into the relation between  
 69 the belief and the various ways in which the temporal aspect of human life may be  
 70 conceived. I proceed at once then to ask how we must regard the temporal character  
 71 of the individual human life in order that our conception may be consistent with the  
 72 belief in the supreme importance of the later stages.

73 The first thing to be said is that we must regard the time-process as having at least  
 74 a certain degree of reality. For *if* time is utterly unreal, it cannot matter whether the  
 75 so-called ‘earlier’ or ‘later’ stages of a human life contain more of happiness; and it  
 76 must be equally indifferent which stages reveal the greater moral, intellectual, and  
 77 aesthetic attainment. If our time-consciousness is altogether illusory, the distinction  
 78 of earlier and later is void of real significance. All that we can admit is a whole whose  
 79 parts exhibit various degrees of good and bad.<sup>4</sup> The order in which these degrees  
 80 appear to us to be arranged and the direction of this order—the irreversibility of the  
 81 time-process—have no significance. And thus it must be a matter of indifference  
 82 whether the more complete realization of value is in what we call the earlier or in  
 83 what we call the later part.

84 The acceptance of our belief then would involve the assertion that the order and  
 85 the irreversibility of the time-process are real. But this is not all: it would involve  
 86 also, I maintain, the reality of change, of the time-flow, of the passage of earlier into  
 87 later. For unless change is real, the value of the later stages cannot cancel that of the  
 88 earlier. Our defence of this thesis will occupy the greater part of this paper. As a first  
 89 step we must inquire in what sense we are to conceive change as real. As soon as  
 90 one asserts the reality of change or of the time-process,<sup>5</sup> a question arises as to the  
 91 nature of the past. To some it seems that a consistent believer in the reality of change  
 92 must ruthlessly banish past events from the domain of the real.<sup>6</sup> But if we do this,

<sup>4</sup> I use the terms here in the broader sense in which ‘good’ includes all value, not merely moral value. The same usage appears occasionally in other parts of this paper, but I think that the meaning is clear in all cases.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout the rest of this paper I shall use the terms ‘change’ and ‘time-process’ indifferently to signify the concrete flow of events, the replacing of one (earlier) content by another (later). ‘Time’, if conceived as an empty form in which events are arranged, is at best real only in the degree in which any abstraction is real. Our concern here is simply to defend the reality of that aspect of life that we call change.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Bradley, “How, if we seriously mean to take time as real, can the past be reality?” *Appearance and Reality* (1897), p. 208.

93 have we a conception of the time-process that will justify our belief in the supreme  
 94 importance of the later stages of life? At first glance it might seem that we have.  
 95 As life goes on, one stage after another passes into non-existence. At any moment  
 96 then we can say that the happiness of the past, being dead and gone, can in no way  
 97 compensate me for the fact that I am unhappy now, and similarly that the sorrow of  
 98 the past cannot interfere with my present joy. But though the past has no power to  
 99 alter the value of the present, the present seems in a certain sense able to affect that  
 100 of the past. The present, since it alone is real, is all in all. Hence its happiness sweeps  
 101 triumphantly away the griefs of an earlier time; or its misery settles like a pall over  
 102 the fair face of bygone joys. In the insistent reality of the present it is as if the joy  
 103 or the pain of the past had never been at all. And the same thing, *mutatis mutandis*,  
 104 may be said of moral, intellectual, and aesthetic achievement. I am only that which  
 105 I am now. If I am now sinful or intellectually slothful or insensible to beauty, the  
 106 virtue, the mental activity, the aesthetic sensibility of my earlier life shall avail me  
 107 nothing. But if I am now high-minded, mentally alert, or appreciative of beauty, the  
 108 intellectual stagnation, the aesthetic insensibility, or the moral weakness of my past  
 109 is wiped out by the attainment of this later period.

110 But although it may seem at first thought that this account of the matter makes  
 111 room for the belief in the supreme importance of the later stages of life, a brief  
 112 reflection will convince us that it does not. For what we have been saying goes to  
 113 show merely that present is more important for us than past, not that present and  
 114 future are more important than past, or future than past and present. In fact, the  
 115 inference that this way of thinking most naturally suggests is that the present has  
 116 a value far outweighing that of either past or future. Now it is doubtless true, as  
 117 we pointed out in our first paper, that for the naïve consciousness the present has  
 118 precisely this supreme value. But what we have maintained is that for the higher  
 119 insight of the reflective consciousness the future, if we can in any way overcome the  
 120 disadvantages arising from its uncertainty, has greater value than the present. It does  
 121 not, of course, even to the most highly reflective consciousness, give so keen a sense  
 122 of reality as the present; but it has greater weight in determining the worth of life.  
 123 Or, to put the matter more accurately, in our most serious estimation of this worth  
 124 we make our distinction, not between present on the one hand and past and future  
 125 on the other, but between the earlier and the later stages of a process, each moment  
 126 of which is in turn future, present, and past.

127 It is clear then that we cannot justify the belief in the supreme importance of the  
 128 later stages by appealing to the unique reality that the present moment has for us.  
 129 Nay, more, if this unique reality should beguile us into supposing that only because  
 130 of it has the present more importance than the past, we should be forced in the end to  
 131 admit that the temporal position of the various realizations of value in an individual  
 132 history is of no significance whatever. For we should have to say that any stage of  
 133 the history, when present, is of more consequence than any of the others—past or  
 134 future—but that its peculiar importance vanishes when it becomes part of the past.  
 135 And since each stage in its turn is present, no stage would ultimately have more  
 136 importance than any of the others. Thus, given so much of good in an individual life,  
 137 it must be a matter of indifference in what part of it this good is contained.

138 It seems clear then that if we interpret change as meaning simply the emergence of  
 139 a given content into the status of ‘present’ and its subsequent lapse into the status of  
 140 ‘past,’ and if we suppose further that what is past is completely gone, we cannot justify  
 141 the belief that we are considering: so far as the defence of the belief is concerned,  
 142 we might quite as well declare change to be illusory. But is it not possible to assert  
 143 the reality of change and at the same time to take a different position with regard  
 144 to the past? May we not suppose that although the time-process is real, the earlier  
 145 stages of a human life do not fade into utter non-existence when the later ones come  
 146 into being? That in the history of the individual which *was* real is still real, let us  
 147 say, in a highly significant sense. The life of the human being is a unity, not merely  
 148 when you take it in cross-section, but also when you take it longitudinally. Each of  
 149 its successive stages includes within itself all the preceding ones, and includes them  
 150 in such fashion that they are at once preserved and transformed. Let us ask in what  
 151 the preservation and the transformation must consist.

152 The most obvious sense in which an earlier stage may be said to live on in a later  
 153 one is found in the case of memory. Almost every one would admit that what is  
 154 remembered has not utterly ceased to be, and that thus in a certain sense it may be  
 155 said that the earlier stages, in so far as they are recalled, live on in the later. But the  
 156 appeal to the fact of memory is far from giving us a solution of our problem. For  
 157 in the first place, if no more of my past is preserved for me than my memory can  
 158 illuminate, it is probable that the larger part of it is gone forever. And in the second  
 159 place, quite apart from this consideration, it is obvious that the mere fact of memory  
 160 can furnish no justification of the belief in the supreme importance of the later stages.  
 161 The fact that a man happens to remember his former intellectual or moral deficiencies  
 162 in no way provides a rational basis for our belief that these deficiencies are atoned  
 163 for by his later attainment. Nor are we any better off in the case of past affective  
 164 states. On the contrary, in this case it even seems at first glance as if the assertion that  
 165 memory gives existence to the past might furnish an argument against the belief in  
 166 question rather than for it. The memory of former pain, one might urge, may mar a  
 167 present joy, and the recollection of bygone happiness may soothe a present sorrow;  
 168 but if this is so, the affective value of the earlier seems to cancel that of the later in  
 169 much the same way in which we have said that the value of the later cancels that  
 170 of the earlier. So it might seem at first thought; but second thought shows that this  
 171 is not a true statement of the case. For the affective tone and the affective value of  
 172 any memory belong to the moment of the remembering, not to the moment of the  
 173 experience remembered.<sup>7</sup> It is obvious then that the fact of memory does not indicate  
 174 that the value of the earlier can in any degree cancel that of the later. But it is equally  
 175 obvious that it cannot justify our belief that the value of the later cancels that of the  
 176 earlier.

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<sup>7</sup> This is borne out by the reflection that “a sorrow’s crown of sorrow” may consist in “remembering happier things;” and that similarly the recollection of a past painful experience may serve to enhance a present joy. It is borne out also by the fact that a pseudo-memory—a supposed recollection of a pleasant or painful experience that never actually occurred—would have the same influence upon the affective tone of the present consciousness that a true memory would have.

177 There is, however, another sense in which we may say that an earlier stage lives  
 178 on in later ones; namely, that it has helped to make these what they are, that they  
 179 are bone of its bone and flesh of its flesh. In this second sense we may declare that  
 180 a man's life is a whole in which each moment bodies forth all of it that has gone  
 181 before. Through memory a part of what I have been lives on in me, but in the fact  
 182 of which we are now speaking the past is preserved more completely and in a more  
 183 significant sense. This second fact also would doubtless be admitted by most of those  
 184 who say that the past is non-existent. Few, if any, of those who make this assertion  
 185 mean it in the bald sense in which it is opposed to the recognition of any continuity  
 186 of character and conduct.

187 But when we have said that an earlier stage continues to live in a later one in the  
 188 sense that it has helped to give this later its character, we have not gone very far toward  
 189 explaining the compensatory function of the later stages. For it is comparatively  
 190 seldom that we can say that the later good exists because of the earlier evil or the  
 191 later evil because of the earlier good.<sup>8</sup> In most cases it seems that we must rather  
 192 say that the evil replaces the good and that the good replaces the evil; that the later  
 193 good exists in spite of, not because of, the earlier evil, and similarly the later evil in  
 194 spite of the earlier good. Now in such cases it does not seem possible to explain the  
 195 compensatory function of the later by an appeal to the influence of the earlier. At  
 196 the same time I believe it to be true that the later stage has its compensatory power  
 197 because it is what the earlier has come to be. What I have in mind is not, however,  
 198 the influence of earlier upon later, but a different relation, which we must now try to  
 199 describe.

200 If one were to assert the complete determination of the later by the earlier, this  
 201 would amount to declaring that the earlier contains the later, wrapped up within  
 202 itself. And thus we could say that the very first stage of an individual history is  
 203 virtually the whole life. Everything is there, folded up in that earliest stage; and what  
 204 we call the living is simply the unrolling of a scroll upon which all the characters  
 205 are already inscribed. But instead of saying that the earlier thus contains the later,  
 206 one might reverse the procedure and say that the later contains the earlier. In our  
 207 ordinary conception of the individual human life, we think of its various stages as  
 208 so many different parts of it. The whole life would thus be the sum total of these  
 209 stages. But from the point of view that we wish now to suggest, the life is to be  
 210 regarded as a unity in a sense that makes the whole something other than this. We  
 211 can perhaps best express our meaning by saying that the final stage in the history of

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<sup>8</sup> The instances that are most commonly given in support of the assertion that evil leads to good are the spiritual enrichment that sometimes seems to result from suffering and the strengthening of moral fiber that comes from the conflict with obstacles of various kinds. Much has been said of the ennobling effect of the conflict with pain and difficulty; and I am far from wishing to deny the deep truth involved in the contention, although it seems to me that in our emphasis upon it we sometimes overlook the fact that in a large number of instances the effect is apparently the reverse of ennobling. Be this as it may, the point that I wish to make is that when a man's nature is refined by suffering or strengthened by the struggle against heavy odds it is not quite accurate to say that good has come out of an earlier evil. For the increase in moral strength, *e.g.*, which shows itself at a later period, came not from the obstacle (the evil), but from the heroic battling against it; and this was not an evil, but a good.

212 a human being—assuming for the nonce that there is a final stage—is not a part of  
 213 that history, but the whole; that it gathers up into itself and keeps in existence the  
 214 entire past, which but for its maintaining power would be dead and gone. It is only  
 215 with reference to the future, never with reference to the past, that we could speak of  
 216 the present moment in a life as one of its parts. My present is my whole life, so far  
 217 as that life has yet been lived; it is a part only in the sense that it, in its turn, will  
 218 be taken up and preserved in what we call a later stage. According to this way of  
 219 regarding the matter, the earlier stage is one with the later, not merely in so far as it  
 220 is preserved in memory, not merely by virtue of the subtle influence of past thoughts  
 221 and deeds upon present character and conduct, but also because the later stage *is* the  
 222 earlier, the earlier enlarged, enriched, transformed.

223 This way of looking at the matter emphasizes the unitary character of the individual  
 224 life. But it should not be confused with the doctrine that the human life is essentially  
 225 a timeless unity, which is revealed in varying degrees of completeness in the different  
 226 parts of the temporal process. When I say that each human life is a unitary whole, I  
 227 do not mean to imply that the unity is something that is once for all there and that  
 228 the various stages are so many different manifestations of it. I mean rather that it is  
 229 a unity that has its very being in time. Each stage in its turn is in a sense the whole  
 230 life; but each new stage is more truly, because more fully, the whole life than any of  
 231 the preceding ones were.

232 Now if the life of the human being is a unity of this kind, it is clear that the temporal  
 233 position of the various realizations of value in it is a matter of profound significance.  
 234 A man's life is more nearly identical with certain of its stages than with others: every  
 235 new stage is more truly the life than any of its predecessors have been. And if this is  
 236 so, we can understand, at least in some measure, how it is that the value of the earlier  
 237 may be canceled by that of the later. We said above that the inclusion of the earlier  
 238 stages in the later, implied in our conception, involves not only their preservation  
 239 but also their transformation. The transformation consists in the fact that the earlier  
 240 has come to be the later. Whatever may be true of change in general, the change that  
 241 characterizes the life of a human being is not a replacing of one content by another  
 242 content, but the transformation of the one into the other. Now if the earlier is changed  
 243 into the later, we can see how the value of the later may stand for that of the earlier,  
 244 how later good can atone for an earlier evil and later evil can wipe out an earlier  
 245 good.

246 But at this point we must pause to answer an objection that may arise in the minds  
 247 of some of our readers. Granted that the greater importance of the later stages of life  
 248 could be explained on the assumption that has been made, one may yet ask whether  
 249 it could not be equally well explained by a simpler assumption. May it not be that  
 250 the later stages are more important than the earlier simply because the quality of still  
 251 later stages depends more upon them than upon their predecessors? In the life-series  
 252  $a, b, c, \dots n$ , the stage  $g$  is more important than  $b$  because of the strong probability  
 253 that  $h, i, j, \dots n$  will be like it rather than like  $b$ .

254 To this objection we can make two answers. In the first place, we can reply, men  
 255 apparently feel that the quality of the later stages is more important than that of the  
 256 earlier, even when that of still later ones is not in question. This is shown, I think,

257 when we try to estimate the value of a life taken as a whole. When we survey a  
 258 life that has been ended by death, we believe that the quality of its latter part is of  
 259 the greatest importance. And while in many cases this feeling is probably in some  
 260 measure due to the belief in immortality, I incline to think that it is equally strong  
 261 in those who either reject the doctrine or are in doubt with regard to it. Of course it  
 262 is open to any one to urge that even in these cases the feeling has its origin in the  
 263 belief in a future life, and thus that those who reject the belief are yet unconsciously  
 264 influenced by modes of thought that have their source and their sole justification in  
 265 it. To discuss this assertion would take us too far afield; I can only say that personally  
 266 I doubt its truth. Moreover, even if we should grant it with reference to the other  
 267 values, it seems hardly possible that our estimates of the pleasure-pain value of the  
 268 earthly life are thus influenced by a belief in immortality. The affective quality of a  
 269 particular stage offers no guarantee of the quality of subsequent stages, whether in  
 270 this life or in a life to come. Nevertheless men seem to feel that, judged from the  
 271 point of view of pleasure and pain, a life is more desirable if the fuller realization of  
 272 affective value is in the later rather than in the earlier part.

273 But it matters comparatively little whether or not this first answer to the objection  
 274 that we are considering brings conviction. For the second, to which I now pass, seems  
 275 conclusive. The objection proposes to substitute for our explanation one that has the  
 276 advantage of being simpler. But unfortunately this substitute explains, not the fact  
 277 that we are trying to account for, but a different one. At the very best our opponent  
 278 has explained only the greater importance of the later stages; he has not explained  
 279 their compensatory function, the power that they seem to have to transform the values  
 280 of the earlier stages. Even supposing that he has justified us in regarding the quality  
 281 of the later stages as more important than that of the earlier, he has done nothing to  
 282 validate our belief that later good makes up for earlier evil, and later evil spoils earlier  
 283 good: he has not shown how it is possible that the quality of one stage should fix the  
 284 value of the whole preceding life. For this compensatory function of the later stages  
 285 the only explanation that we have yet found is that furnished by our conception of  
 286 the individual human life as a whole that more and more comes to be.

287 Let us now gather up the threads of our discussion. We began by asking how we  
 288 must conceive the relation of the individual life to the time-process in order to justify  
 289 our belief in the supreme importance of its later stages. We showed in the first place  
 290 that the order and the irreversibility of the time-process must be accepted as real.  
 291 Next we made the assertion—to be defended later—that the reality of change must  
 292 also be affirmed. At this point it seemed necessary to explain what we meant by  
 293 asserting the reality of change, and in particular to define our position with reference  
 294 to the problem of the existence or nonexistence of past events. In considering this  
 295 problem we limited ourselves to the life of the human individual. And the theory  
 296 that we tried to develop is that the past of such a life is not altogether non-existent:  
 297 it lives to some extent in memory; it lives still more completely in the influence of  
 298 the earlier upon the later; it lives most truly of all in the sense that this later is what



299 it has become and that thus it is held in solution, as it were, in this later.<sup>9</sup> And it is  
 300 this third aspect of the continued existence of the past that we must affirm in order  
 301 to justify our belief in the compensatory function of the later stages of life. For only  
 302 the evil that has become good is atoned for; and only the good that has become evil  
 303 is spoiled.<sup>10</sup>

304 Our contention then is that in order to justify the belief in the compensatory  
 305 function of the later stages of human life we must assume the reality of change as  
 306 characterizing that life in the sense that we have just described. We must now ask  
 307 what can be said in support of this contention. A part of our defence has already  
 308 been offered in connection with the discussion of the nature of past events. We have  
 309 shown, I think, that we cannot justify the belief in the supreme importance of the  
 310 later stages if we assert the utter non-existence of the past, nor if we regard the past  
 311 as existing simply through its being remembered and through its influence upon later  
 312 stages. We have shown also that we cannot explain it by appealing to the fact that  
 313 in general the later stage has more influence than its predecessors in determining  
 314 the quality of still later ones. But one more point remains to consider before we can  
 315 regard our defence as complete. It seems fairly evident that *if we assert the reality*  
 316 *of change*, we can justify the belief in the supreme importance of the later stages  
 317 only by supposing that the later include the earlier and thus in a sense keep them in  
 318 existence. But we have not as yet shown that we cannot vindicate it equally well if we  
 319 deny the reality of change altogether. And we can imagine some reader protesting,  
 320 at this juncture, in the following fashion. If the later stage is more important because

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<sup>9</sup> If any one thinks that he finds in this conception some resemblance to a certain view of Bergson's I shall not try to dispute the point. I shall only say that if I have been influenced here by the doctrine of the French philosopher I have been influenced unconsciously, and that I have been led to my opinion by considerations quite other than those that seem to have moved him. Furthermore, the difference between my conception and his seems to me at least as great as the resemblance. I have tried to show that in the life of the human individual the earlier stages must in some way be preserved in the later, and that this preservation is something more than that which is afforded by memory or by the influence of the earlier stages upon those that follow them. Precisely what this 'more' is it is not indeed easy to say, and I must plead guilty to the charge of being rather vague upon this point. But I cannot see that we should gain anything by appealing to the conception of 'unconscious memory.' About all that we can say is that the preservation of the earlier stages is a corollary of the fact that there are beings whose nature is essentially temporal, whose wholeness is something that comes to be.

Aside from the fact that I do not follow Bergson in appealing to the conception of unconscious memory, there is the further difference that my theory involves not only the preservation of the earlier stages by the later, but also the fixing of their value. The conception that I am trying to develop is something other than the mere notion of cumulation. The preservation of the past, whether through unconscious memory or by other means, is only a part of the matter; the transmuting of the value of the past is of equal or greater importance.

<sup>10</sup> It might be urged that our solution of the problem consists simply in an appeal to the conceptions of growth and development. And in the sense in which these terms are ordinarily used they have no doubt much in common with the conception that I am trying to present. I have tried, however, to avoid them because it seems to me that both concepts are sorely in need of a clarifying analysis. As commonly employed they have various biological implications which such analysis should bring out. And though not identical in meaning, they are frequently used as if they had the same significance.

321 it is more nearly the whole life, is it not clear that our interest is not in change, but  
 322 in wholeness? And if so, does it not seem that the way in which men evaluate life  
 323 can be defended equally well upon the assumption that change is a guise that reality  
 324 wears for us, but is not characteristic of its inner nature? What we call a difference  
 325 in temporal position is ultimately only a difference in degree of completeness; and  
 326 the so-called later stage is simply a larger part of the non-temporal whole.

327 To this objection I reply as follows. It is indeed true that our chief interest is not  
 328 in the time-process merely as time-process; one of our main contentions has been  
 329 that the later stages are more important simply because the life that fills them is  
 330 more nearly complete.<sup>11</sup> But this does not require us to admit that change is illusory.  
 331 Moreover, I think it can be shown that if one admits that change is illusory one  
 332 cannot justify the belief in the compensatory function of the later stages, no matter  
 333 how strenuously one may insist that wholeness, rather than change, is the thing of  
 334 chief significance. We shall now try to show this.

335 Let us designate by *a* one of the so-called earlier stages of an individual life, by  
 336 *b*, *c*, etc., somewhat later stages, and by *n* the final stage, assuming for the sake of  
 337 the argument that there is one. Now according to the view that we are criticizing,  
 338 which regards the temporal process as illusory, *n*, which we call the final stage, is,  
 339 properly speaking, simply our view of the whole life, *N*; *A*, the reality corresponding  
 340 to our *a*, is a small part of *N*; *B* is a larger part, which includes *A* within itself; *C* is  
 341 a still larger part, which includes *B*; and so on. The series *A*, *B*, ... *N*, which is the  
 342 real order corresponding to our time-series *a* ... *n*, might thus be symbolized by a  
 343 number of concentric circles, of which *A* is the smallest and *N* the largest.<sup>12</sup> Now  
 344 according to our opponent, man's belief that if *n* be good its character atones for that  
 345 of *a*, which we will suppose to be evil, can be justified without our assuming the  
 346 reality of change. If the whole, *N*,—represented to us in *n*, the final stage,—is good,  
 347 it compensates for the fact that a certain part *A*,—represented to us by *a*, one of the  
 348 early stages—is evil. The excellence of the whole atones for the evil of some of the  
 349 parts. But it is precisely at this point that we must raise an objection. It is only if  
 350 change be real that the excellence of the whole can atone in the slightest degree for  
 351 the evil of the part. If change is real it is possible, we have urged, that the part—one  
 352 of the earlier stages—may be transmuted in the whole, the final stage. But if change  
 353 is unreal, how can this be? If *A* becomes *N*, it is conceivable that *N* might atone for  
 354 *A*. But if change is unreal, *A*, *B*, *C*, *N* are all equally existent, equally eternal. Now  
 355 *N*, which by hypothesis is good, includes *A*, which is evil; but *A* does not in its turn  
 356 include *N*. Hence for *A* there is eternally nothing but *A*. That is, there is no escape  
 357 from misery or sin: a 'temporary' suffering or sin is really eternal. And if it be eternal  
 358 its evil is not transmuted.

<sup>11</sup> In other words, our chief interest is not in change as such, but in change as the form of human life.

<sup>12</sup> The true nature of the relation of *A*, *B*, *C*, etc., to one another and to *N* must be in great part unknown to us, since we view reality, not as it is in truth, but in its illusory temporal aspect. We must therefore emphasize the point that the series of concentric circles is merely a symbol of an order whose true nature we cannot describe. By hypothesis, however, the order *A*, *B*, *C*, etc., is one of increasing completeness.

359 But, one may here interpose, does not our own experience present many cases in  
 360 which the excellence of the whole cancels the evil of the part, and vice versa the evil  
 361 of the whole the excellence of the part? In many a noble deed there is some slight  
 362 admixture of unworthy motive; in many a glorious achievement of art there is some  
 363 minor defect in conception or execution; and it is a commonplace of experience that

364 Our sincerest laughter  
 365 With some pain is fraught.

366 Yet each of these wholes is 'good,' and its excellence seems to atone for the  
 367 deficiency of some of its parts.

368 But, I ask, does it really atone? Is it not rather the case that if there be the least  
 369 taint in the part, the whole falls short of perfection? It is true that we regard a slight  
 370 defect as practically negligible. Because our experience seldom, if ever, shows us  
 371 anything quite free from flaw, we accept with glad thankfulness that in which the  
 372 good seems far to outweigh the evil, feeling that in the face of so much excellence it  
 373 would be carping to allow our thought to dwell upon the defect. None the less, sober  
 374 judgment must admit that the evil of the part is ignored rather than destroyed. Now  
 375 what I am trying to bring out is the difference in this respect between an existing  
 376 whole and a whole that comes to be. An existing whole cannot be completely good  
 377 unless each of its simultaneously existing parts is good. But a whole that comes to  
 378 be, might be completely good in spite of the fact that some of its (serial) parts were  
 379 bad. It will always be true, if you like, that certain of the earlier stages *were* evil. But  
 380 when they have grown into the final stage, they have *become* good.<sup>13</sup>

381 I repeat then that if the temporal process be unreal, I can see no way in which the  
 382 evil of some parts can be in the least degree atoned for by the excellence of the whole.  
 383 There are indeed many who would try to escape from this conclusion by declaring  
 384 that evil is illusory, but this theory offers no safe refuge. The definitive answer to all  
 385 attempts to deny the reality of evil has been made by Dr. McTaggart, for one, in his  
 386 paper on 'The Relation of Time and Eternity'.<sup>14</sup> To the assertion that evil is mere  
 387 illusion we must reply, he says, that in such case the (undeniable) existence of the  
 388 erroneous belief in it would itself be an evil.<sup>15</sup>

389 It is equally futile to try to avoid the difficulty by saying that evil is merely  
 390 incompleteness. Evil is absence of value, lack of that which ought to be. And if it is  
 391 this, it is not mere incompleteness; it is something other than being a part instead of  
 392 a whole.<sup>16</sup> But if by the identification of evil with incompleteness one means rather

<sup>13</sup> Another point that might be urged is that in a whole whose parts are co-existent with it we can ignore the evil of some parts only if this is slight in comparison with the excellence of the whole. But in a human life, taken as what I may call a serial whole, the case seems to be different. A considerable amount of pain or intellectual or moral defect in the earlier stages is atoned for if the later stages are good.

<sup>14</sup> *Mind*, N. S., Vol. XVIII, pp. 343 ff.

<sup>15</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 360.

<sup>16</sup> This conclusion cannot be avoided, I think, unless we are prepared to say that the concept of value is merely a derivative from the concept of completeness. And this is by no means certain. Certainly the burden of proof rests with those who ask us to believe that value is such a derivative,

393 that the sense of evil arises from our taking a part as if it were the whole, from our  
 394 viewing it in isolation from the whole to which it belongs, this is simply going back  
 395 to the doctrine that evil is an illusion. And we can reply to it, after the fashion of Dr.  
 396 McTaggart, by urging that the fact that men view the part in isolation from the whole  
 397 is itself an evil—is something other than incompleteness, is that which ought not to  
 398 be.

399 There is still one more way in which we might try to reconcile the belief in the  
 400 compensatory power of the later stages of life with the doctrine of the unreality of  
 401 change. The character of the human individual, it might be urged, is something fixed  
 402 and definite, which stands as an unchanging reality back of the process of our life  
 403 in time. This changeless character—the true self—is manifested in different degrees  
 404 of adequacy in the various stages of the life, but more fully in the later stages than  
 405 the earlier, while the final stage is virtually a complete manifestation. The quality of  
 406 the later stages is the more important because these reveal more fully what the life  
 407 essentially is. This hypothesis may be regarded as an application to the individual  
 408 life of Dr. McTaggart's attempt to reconcile the two doctrines of the unreality of time  
 409 and the reality of progress.<sup>17</sup> We can refute it by the help of considerations that we  
 410 have already used in attacking a slightly different argument.<sup>18</sup> If the time-process is  
 411 unreal, all the less and more adequate representations of the changeless reality exist  
 412 eternally. And the existence of the more adequate can in no sense do away with that  
 413 of the less adequate. If the time-process is real, such atonement for the earlier by the  
 414 later—for the less adequate representations by the more adequate—is conceivable;  
 415 but if it is unreal, the atonement is not conceivable.<sup>19</sup>

416 We have now considered the various ways known to us in which one might try to  
 417 reconcile man's belief in the compensating power of the later stages of life with the  
 418 doctrine of the unreality of change, and we have shown that each of these attempts  
 419 must end in failure. We cannot as a result of our survey assert outright that the doctrine

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and no satisfactory proof of this thesis, I think, has ever been given. It is one thing to declare that only the whole is altogether good and that thus any part must be in some degree evil—though even this proposition seems to some of us to lack adequate proof—and it is quite another thing to say that excellence is nothing but completeness and evil nothing but incompleteness.

<sup>17</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> See above, p. 31.

<sup>19</sup> The conclusion that is really indicated by Dr. McTaggart's argument is, to my mind, not that change is unreal, but that the universe, at present actually imperfect and in process of change, may eventually reach a state of perfection and that then change will cease. This is the only intelligible interpretation that I can give to the doctrine of the eventual passage of time into eternity. And it is, it seems to me, a theory that one might conceivably adopt, although personally I do not feel sure that perfection and change are incompatible. But although this seems to be the conclusion to which his argument points, it is evident that Dr. McTaggart would not be willing to accept it. For while apparently he would not object to the identification of eternity with changelessness, he is definitely committed to the doctrine of the unreality of change.

Professor Overstreet, in an article entitled 'Change and the Changless' (this journal, Vol. XVIII, pp. I ff.), seeks to show, among other things, that a perfect being may undergo change. While there are some parts of his theory that I am unable to accept, it seems to me that on this particular point he has presented a forceful argument and that he has at least shown that the common belief in the incompatibility of change and perfection is open to question.

420 and the belief are incompatible; for perhaps one might attempt a reconciliation in  
 421 some other way that has not occurred to us.<sup>20</sup> But I think that we are justified in  
 422 saying that so far as we can at present see, man's belief in the supreme importance  
 423 of the later stages can be defended only if we conceive the temporal character of  
 424 human life in the way that we have suggested. As the matter stands at present, we  
 425 must either adopt this conception or condemn as utterly mistaken our belief in the  
 426 transforming power of the later stages. Now there can be little question that we feel  
 427 it to be of vital importance that the fuller realizations of value shall appear in the  
 428 later stages of a man's history. So long as a life falls short of complete attainment,  
 429 we demand that at least it shall show progress—perhaps in happiness, certainly in  
 430 intellectual power, in aesthetic sensibility, in moral attainment. And this conception  
 431 of progress—important for all aspects of our nature—is so fundamental in our idea  
 432 of the moral life that any theory of the time process that robs it of its meaning fails  
 433 to satisfy one of the most insistent demands of our being.

434 And with this I am content to leave the matter. I do not profess to have proved that  
 435 my conception of the relation of the individual life to the time-process is correct. But  
 436 it seems to me that I have shown that so far as we can at present see, we must either  
 437 accept it or repudiate all those evaluations of life that give it its deepest significance  
 438 for us.<sup>21</sup> Some there may be who will still maintain that the belief in the compensatory  
 439 power of the later stages is a mistaken one. But when we consider how intimately it  
 440 is related to our sense of the value of life we may well refuse to condemn it without  
 441 strong reasons. That the majority of thinkers are loath to repudiate it is shown by  
 442 the fact that many who assert the phenomenal character of the time-process still  
 443 try to justify, by some means or other, the conception of progress.<sup>22</sup> With regard  
 444 to this conception there are three questions that should be carefully distinguished. (1) Is  
 445 progress possible? I.e., is reality of such a character that either in the whole or in some  
 446 part the later stages *might* contain fuller realizations of value than the earlier? (2) Is  
 447 progress in this sense actual? (3) If progress is possible, is it significant, desirable,  
 448 valuable? Is it any better than retrogression? Of course if a progressive series, taken as  
 449 a whole, contains more good than a regressive one, we should unhesitatingly declare  
 450 it to be better. But what our third question means to ask is whether, given a certain  
 451 amount of good in the series as a whole, progress is any more to be desired than  
 452 retrogression. It is this question with which I have been concerned in the present  
 453 discussion. For the purposes of this study I do not care to know whether progress is  
 454 actual or not. What I have tried to show is that *as* progress it can have no value unless  
 455 the later stages can compensate for the earlier as the earlier cannot for the later. *I.*  
 456 *e.*, unless there is such one-sided compensation, it can make no difference—given  
 457 a certain amount of value in the whole of a particular life—whether that life in its

<sup>20</sup> It should be remembered also that we did not try to prove that value is something other than completeness but merely declared that the burden of proof rests with any one who may ask us to regard the two as identical.

<sup>21</sup> I should not wish it to be thought that this is the only consideration that leads me to accept the essential reality of the time-process. But my concern in this discussion is not to examine the arguments for and against that doctrine.

<sup>22</sup> *E.g.*, Dr. McTaggart (op. cit.) and Professor Howison (*The Limits of Evolution*, 1904, pp. 373 ff.).

458 course progresses or retrogrades. And thus even if there were progress, it would be,  
459 *qua* progress, of no significance.

460 Now if one declares that change is phenomenal it is not easy to see how one can  
461 assert the possibility of progress at all. But even if we waived this difficulty and  
462 assumed that one might reconcile the two doctrines of the unreality of time and the  
463 possibility of progress, we should still be unable to see how the later stages of a life  
464 could in any way compensate for the earlier. And in this case, though we might be  
465 willing to grant that progress is possible in the life of an individual, we should have no  
466 ground for regarding it as significant, as any better than retrogression. If however we  
467 accept the reality of change and if further we conceive the temporal aspect of human  
468 life in the way that I have proposed, we have a theory that implies the desirability of  
469 progress and thus furnishes an adequate basis for our most fundamental judgments  
470 as to the value of life.