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The Obsolescence of the Eternal

Author(s): Arthur O. Lovejoy

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THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW.

THE OBSOLESCENCE OF THE ETERNAL.¹

NO contingent aspect of reality, doubtless, is likely to seem less deserving of recognition from philosophers than an anniversary. The habit of contemplating the universe under its eternal aspect is scarcely compatible with much respect for the accidents of the Gregorian calendar. Yet, since this discourse is chiefly to argue for the practice of viewing things *sub specie temporis*, some deference to chronological considerations may for the nonce appear not altogether incongruous. Our association, at all events, actuated by human and by pedagogic, if not by philosophic, motives has chosen to devote a large part of the present meeting to commemorating an anniversary and to taking an account of half a century's progress. The association assembles to-day for the first time in the city in which Kant, Fichte, and Hegel were first fully naturalized in America; in which began the movement to which the revivification of philosophical study and teaching in our colleges and universities must in great measure be traced back; in which was published, I suppose, the first American magazine devoted to technical philosophy; where were associated for a time a remarkable group of men, of high gifts and high enthusiasms, who later came to be, in widely scattered places and in very diverse ways, the influential missionaries of views of life and ideals of culture that were all based in common upon an idealistic metaphysics. St. Louis, perhaps, more than Boston or Concord, is the native home of speculative philosophy, in the strict sense, in America; and the history of the movement that began here exhibits a decided tendency of what are called

¹Address of the President at the Ninth Annual Meeting of the Western Philosophical Association, St. Louis, April 9, 1909; printed with some revision and abridgment.

'abstract speculative ideas' to influence life and affairs, to contribute to the moulding of a civilization. The transition from the ideas to their application was often, I cannot but think, an alogical, if not an illogical, one; but it was, at all events, actual:— in one way or another, the abstruse conceptions of the Kantian epistemology and the Hegelian dialectic bore fruit upon American soil and gave evidence of 'pragmatic' vitality. It would be most unfitting that this organization of teachers and students of philosophy should convene in St. Louis without recalling all this, and without commemorating the services of two men, — Henry C. Brockmeyer and William T. Harris, — to whom, first and foremost, the movement owed its beginning, a little more than fifty years ago.

Reminiscence, however, is not the chief use of anniversaries; their more important office is to remind us how far we have come, and to make us examine with a fuller historical self-consciousness whither we are tending. In reflecting with such purposes upon the past half-century's development of neo-Kantian and Hegelian idealism in America, it is impossible to forget that all the world is this year celebrating a still greater anniversary, and engaged in similar reflections upon the present outcome of another notable movement of thought, covering the same half-century. There is, it is true, an illusion of perspective involved in much that is said and written *à propos* of the semi-centenary of the *Origin of Species*. The theory of organic evolution, even as a substantially demonstrated doctrine, is much more than fifty years old; and the evolutionary way of thinking about natural phenomena was no discovery of the biologists. The doctrine of the mutability of species is only one application of a general presupposition in scientific method, and in the conception of the temporal order, which has a range far wider than the natural history sciences. The biologists were, in fact, curiously late in utilizing the notion; it had established itself in geology a good deal earlier, in astronomy and cosmical physics earlier still. It was, perhaps, as Professor Wenley has lately been reminding the non-philosophical public,¹ German philosophical or semi-philosophical writers of 1780—

¹ *Popular Science Monthly*, April, 1909.

1800, and the succession of post-Kantian idealists culminating with Hegel, who did most to elaborate and to diffuse a general evolutionist way of thinking, especially with relation to man and human society. But though this is true, the fact remains that our contemporaries are just now much occupied with discussions about the history, the meaning, and the value, not simply of the hypothesis of natural selection, but of the idea of evolution.

It has seemed worth while to let the conjunction of these two anniversaries dictate the theme of the present discourse. For the evolutionist conception of the world, — usually incongruously joined with a mechanistic conception, — and post-Kantian idealism not only have been the two greatest intellectual forces playing upon the mind of the past fifty years ; they also are forces which, in spite of a superficial harmony, are bound to come into final opposition, — an opposition which may be capable of, but which at least assuredly calls for, rational adjustment. For the evolutionist in natural science, in the social sciences, in ethics, is concerned with the temporal genesis and growth of things, with a process of Becoming by which items of reality emerge into existence and the total content of reality is modified or augmented. But the philosophy of both Kant and Hegel implies that the temporal aspect of things is a superficial and in some sense unreal one, that even moral and intellectual progress belong to the world of appearance rather than that of genuine reality, and that, in spite of the utility of genetic or evolutionary ways of thinking in the abstract realms of the special sciences, they have no pertinency to the ultimate problems, which must be solved by the use of conceptions of quite another type. Hegel's language, for example, — in the words of one of the most authoritative of his English commentators, — “is clearly incompatible with the theory that the dialectic is gradually evolved in time. It is true that, in the *Philosophy of Religion*, the *Philosophy of History*, and the *History of Philosophy*, he explains various successions of events in time as manifestations of the dialectic. But this proves nothing as to the fundamental nature of the connection of time with the universe. The dialectic is the key to all reality, and, therefore, when we do view

reality under the aspect of time, the different categories will appear as manifesting themselves as a process in time. But this has no bearing on the question whether they first came into being in time, or have a timeless and eternally complete existence."¹ And to such a question most of the thinkers of the neo-Kantian and Hegelian succession have returned the same answer,—they have adopted the conclusion at which Mr. McTaggart arrives, "that there is something which renders our conception of time unfit, in metaphysics, for the ultimate explanation of the universe, however suited it may be to the finite thought of everyday life." Against the evolutionary, in short, neo-Kantian idealist metaphysics has usually set the eternal; and it has declared that, although doubtless in some manner both evolution and eternity subsist, the latter is the overriding, ultimate, and truly explanatory notion. Though the masters of idealistic philosophy in the nineteenth century were great promoters of evolutionary ways of thinking, evolution was never the last word with them; and it is a question deserving of consideration whether the sort of evolutionism that they professed could be superimposed upon their more fundamental eternalism without inconsistency.

It is chiefly with this question that the present inquiry is to be concerned. We are to seek to determine whether a belief in the eternal character of 'ultimate' reality, or of any reality at all, is reconcilable with a belief in the actuality of evolution, in the most general sense. Before proceeding to the inquiry, some definitions ought to be given. By evolution, as used here, I mean a process of real temporal Becoming; and by real Becoming I desire to imply not only change, but also the emergence into existence, at diverse moments, of new items of reality which did not previously exist and which, therefore, by their appearance bring an actual augmentation of the total content of the universe. And by eternity, of course, I mean neither everlastingness nor mere permanence through time, but timeless existence,—being that is without change in itself or in any of its relations, and therefore without date,—entity to which the lapse of time cannot lend

¹ McTaggart, *Studies in the Hegelian Dialectic*, 1896, p. 170.

even an increment of age. In a preliminary stage of the argument, I shall have something to say about a sort of temporal shadow or terrestrial counterpart of eternity, namely, the quantitative and qualitative constancy of the universe, which physical science has been supposed to affirm; we shall find it worth while to inquire whether even this be compatible with the ascription of any sort of reality to evolution. But our main business will be with the strictly supra-temporal realities of the eternalistic idealists. These philosophers have, in the nineteenth century, usually not intended to fall back into the Oriental doctrine of illusion, by boldly consigning all Becoming to the realm of simple nonentity; they have, as has been intimated, rather wished to supplement Becoming by one or many eternals, or to include time in eternity. They have, as a rule, supposed it possible to find some, though not a coördinate, place in one universe for each of these modes of being, and even to derive from the alleged existence of the one inferences bearing upon the other, — to find in the consideration of the timeless either theoretical explanations or practical guidance, consolation, or incitement, relevant to the life in time. It is the truth of this supposition that I wish on this occasion to examine. It will be contributory to the purpose to begin with a rough genetic natural history of the conceptions of immutability and eternity.

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Our business in this inquiry, however, is not with the epistemological question about the meaning and the supposed 'eternity' of truth as truth. That issue I hope I may, for the present occasion, be permitted to avoid. Our problem is not that of determining whether 'truth' is a concept which includes eternalness as a part of its connotation. We are only to consider whether real evolution and real eternity can be congruous in the realm of concrete existences. The 'eternity of truth' (if truth be anything *but* the concrete existence of specific entities) would not, of itself, settle the question of the possibility of conceiving any concrete existence, — a state of consciousness, for example, — as eternal.

¹ Several pages of the MS. of the address as delivered have been here omitted through necessary limitations of space.

For, as we have seen, the eternity of the trueness of a proposition nowise implies the eternity of the objects that the proposition is about ; nor does it directly imply the eternity of the mind that affirms the proposition as true. Our concern, moreover, is not even with the criticism of the idealistic inference from eternal truths to an eternal mind or noumenal Ego. It is, however, with one of the results of that inference ; and our hasty sketch of the natural history of ancient and modern, — of realistic and idealistic, — Platonism, has therefore been of use, in that it now enables us to grasp more understandingly the second of our two problems. When, namely, you give up the mere abstraction of eternal truths, and begin to speak of an eternal consciousness which possesses those truths, you are obliged in two ways to define the relation of that consciousness to temporal existences. The eternal consciousness, namely, must, among other things, be *about* temporal, changing, and imperfect objects ; and it must also, according to the view of all modern idealists, include or ground or generate other consciousnesses that are not eternal but successive. And our second main problem arises just at this point. The direct argument for the existence of this idealistic eternal we shall not challenge ; we shall only inquire whether that eternal can conceivably be correlated in any logically consistent or practically pertinent way with the empirically undeniable existence of the temporal and the evolving.

Our two problems are now adequately defined. We may proceed to take them up in turn. The discussion of them will be not quite so voluminous as the length of the preamble might make it natural to fear.

I. THE CONSTANT OF PHYSICAL SCIENCE.

It was the great initiator in whose hands the problems of philosophy took on their typical modern form who first joined the conception of the quantitative and qualitative constancy of the material universe with the conception of that universe as the scene of a progressive evolution. In his suppressed *Traité du Monde*, written about 1632, Descartes, as he tells us in the Fifth Part of the *Discours*, undertook to show how, even though one sup-

posed the world to have once been "a chaos more confused than ever poet feigned," there must gradually have developed out of this chaos, as the simple consequence of the redistribution, through a fixed quantum of matter, of a fixed quantum of motion in accordance with fixed laws, a world in which all "things purely material would in course of time have become such as we observe them at present." From the nature of matter and the principles of mechanics, the necessary evolution of planetary systems, of "mountains, seas, fountains and rivers, the metals produced in the mines, the plants that grow in the fields," and the bodies of animals and men, was to be deduced. The same enterprise has been many times repeated since. Spencer's system is the best-known latter-day manifestation of it. That 'evolution' follows as a natural implication from the mechanistic conception of the physical world, seems to be assumed by many as an obvious common-place. But it is not difficult to show that in reality the notion of evolution and the notion of a closed mechanical system are inherently incompatible; that where there is evolution, there can be no quantitative constancy of the universe, and that where there is quantitative constancy there can be no evolution. This would, indeed, be so nearly self-evident as scarcely to need argument, were it not that many minds have forgotten the meaning of the verb 'to be.' The device of Democritus, renewed and modified by Descartes, whereby, in the interest of the quantitative constancy of the material universe, all qualitative change and diversity are taken away from it, is apparently supposed to have either abolished secondary qualities out of existence altogether, or at any rate, to have made it legitimate to treat the physical correlate of a given quality as if it actually *were* that quality. A wave-motion of a given length in the inherently colorless ether, — or, perhaps, that motion *plus* a vibration of particles which it ultimately sets up in the cortex, — is oddly imagined to *be* that wholly different, qualitative thing, the color red, as presented in sensation; the energy-equivalent of a toothache is identified with toothache as such, though what I have before my mind when I am thinking of the one entirely excludes the predicates which I have before my mind when I am thinking of the other.

The error is, of course, due to the fact that where you have an invariable correlation between a given measure of motion in a part of a qualitatively and quantitatively constant material system on the one hand, and a given kind of quality in sensation, on the other hand, you are, for purposes of the practical manipulation of things, concerned only with the former. The physical correlate is a perfectly adequate substitute for the quality in experience with which it *is* correlated, so long as the production of the one may be confidently expected to be accompanied by the experience of the other. But there are, after all, two items of reality to be counted here, and not one. For, — as all might have learned from another part of the philosophy of Descartes, — to say that A and B are the same thing, when A and B are at the same time conceived by you as having distinct and mutually exclusive attributes, — is to say what is meaningless and absurd. This truism, — which is, none the less, often forgotten, even by subtle metaphysicians, — is all that any one needs to bear in mind, to see the incompatibility between the occurrence of evolution in the universe and the quantitative constancy of the universe.

In order, however, to make the application of this truism clear, let us imagine a definite situation. Suppose that in the course of the redistribution of matter and energy, sentient organisms have already appeared; suppose that in one of these organisms there is about to occur the first rudimentary experience of color-vision; and suppose that there hovers above the scene, at the moment, Laplace's perfect physical calculator, a being fully acquainted with the quantity of matter and energy present in the universal system and with the unchanging laws of their distribution, but destitute of any experience or idea of any of the secondary qualities of matter. Our calculator, at the moment in question, will have before him nothing but a world of energy-possessing particles thus-and-so distributed. He will know that in the moment to ensue that world will continue to contain exactly the same number of particles and the same sum of energy; but that the distribution will be, in a determinate manner, different from the present distribution. He will also know, as a detail of this distribution, that there will occur just that arrangement of

moving parts in the ether and in what we now call the rudimentary eye of the organism, which *we* know to be the invariable correlate of the sensation of red. But *he* will not know anything of the sort, nor have the least ground, in his perfect acquaintance with the laws of his qualitatively uniform system, for suspecting that anything so strange is about to happen as the sudden appearance of sensible redness in the universe. All that he could predict would be that the particles at that next moment were going to be arranged in a certain spatial order, just as at the preceding moment they had been arranged in a certain other spatial order. But that, when the new arrangement eventuates, there will therewith pop into existence something, *other than that arrangement merely defined as such*, which was not in the universe at all at the preceding moment, — this would be a thing not dreamed of in his physical philosophy. And, even if assured that the something more had actually supervened upon his world, he would, of course, be unable to form any representation of *what* it was, unless there came to him, as well as to the developing organism at that moment, a direct experience of color-sensation. Still, even if denied this acquaintance with the concrete *quale* of the new element, he would remain a perfect calculator; and a perfect calculator should be able to add. He would, therefore, certainly conclude that if, upon the occurrence of a given disposition of the units of a qualitatively and quantitatively constant physical order, there emerges a new sensible quality, not identical with the invariable primary qualities of those units, then the total sum of the universe at that instant is greater than at the preceding instant. The constancy of his physical order, within its own limits, need not be affected by the appearance of a new reality lying, by definition, outside those limits. But since the reality is there, it must be counted as one, when you are footing up the account of the entire system of realities; and since, also, the reality is a newly introduced item, the total of your addition must be greater than it was when the sum was last cast up.

Thus if evolution, — in the sense of the emergence, upon the occasion of certain physical combinations, of new and increasingly diverse sensible or other qualities, — if evolution takes place at

all, the sum total of the universe cannot remain constant, but must be subject to augmentation. Constancy can be maintained only in that conceived part of the general system of things from which all the diversity and change of quality characteristic of the concrete world of experience have been artificially abstracted. You may, if you will, — so far as the present argument goes, — suppose the invariable physical order to have existed for ages, all by itself, innocent of sensibility or other mode of consciousness. During all those ages your physical order would have been all the universe there was ; and that universe would truly have been constant in quality and quantity, and in all save the shifting positions and relations of its contained parts. But when the first dim spark of consciousness started up, the days of the invariableness of the cosmic content came to an end, the evolution of qualitative diversity had begun. It will be observed also that rudimentary sentiency or rudimentary color-vision or any other newly-appearing item in the qualitative make-up of the evolving world must have appeared quite literally out of nothing. To the observant Laplacean cosmic calculator, it would have been simply a case of ‘now you don’t see it and now you do.’ Nothing in the antecedents pointed to the result ; that that kind of physical arrangement is a uniform correlate of the given quality, — a kind of being wholly disparate and incommensurable with the first, — could be ascertained only *post factum*. Give a physicist the original cosmic formula, and permit him to assume the conservation of energy and (if he still cares for matter) the indestructibility of matter, and his inferences as to the position of any portions of matter in space, at any given moment, will be purely deductive and necessary. But his knowledge as to the secondary qualities arising in sensible experience at the same moment must be empirical to the end. From the primary qualities (however you may enumerate them) to the secondary there is no argument or any intelligible mediated transition ; nor is there any in the contrary direction. Consequently, physical science, using the Democritic device, may reduce the world of primary and unchanging qualities to never so clear and certain and deductive scientific form, without making the world we really live in much the less

contingent and opaque and baldly factual ; and without making its evolution any the less a process of absolute, unpredictable, inexplicable creation of new realities out of nothing. If the nexus between primary and secondary qualities,—for the sake of simplification I say nothing of the nexus of cortical processes and their sensational correlates,—is incomprehensible, incomprehensibility would seem to lurk at the crucial point in our universe. Something like this was a favorite remark of Locke's ; I scarcely think that it has been sufficiently reflected upon by the mechanistic cosmogonists.

The conclusion reached, upon our first problem, then, is simply this : that a world in which qualitative evolution is supposed to take place is one in which, as a total, quantitative constancy cannot be said to subsist. It may be added that a world in which any kind of qualitative change takes place, even though not evolutionary, is one in which quantitative constancy cannot in any verifiable sense be maintained ; for qualities, though they unquestionably constitute enumerable items in the sum of reality, are not quantitatively commensurable.

II. THE ETERNAL OF NEO-KANTIAN IDEALISM.

We turn from the constant of physical science, at best but a weak imitation of an eternal being, to the strictly supra-temporal realities of most post-Kantian idealism. Upon the conception of an eternal Self, whether in its monistic or its pluralistic form, the criticisms that might reasonably be made are numerous and diverse ; but I am compelled to limit myself to two simple arguments. The first seems to me so simple and of so evident cogency that the general principle of it can be stated in a paragraph.

The eternal, it will scarcely be denied, is a discovery of philosophers who live in time,—of transitory creatures who were born and will die, to whom tomorrow has a far different interest and import from yesterday, in whom the content of the future, by virtue of its futurity no less essentially than by virtue of its character, awakens emotions of hope, or curiosity, or incertitude, or terror, or resolute determination. And it was through time,

and because of exigencies arising in this concrete temporal life of theirs, that the most other-worldly of these philosophers were led to set up their graven image of an eternal. In all cases eternity was designed by them to serve some temporal use, to solve some temporal problem, or to illuminate some temporal situation; even in the most nihilistic of ontologies the eternal is meant to be functional, not to be merely the blank and irrelevant negation of temporality. It is, therefore, a pertinent, and a fatal objection to the doctrine of the eternal nature of ultimate reality, that an eternal being can be shown to be incapable of logical relevancy to any temporal fact. Time and eternity are, indeed, by the very definition of the latter, incommensurable in an absolute sense; *non sunt mensuræ unius generis*, in the words of the Angelic Doctor.¹ For the eternal to enter into relations with aught that becomes or changes is *ipso facto* to lose its eternity. For the change in the temporal term in the relation makes the relation one of change; and, since the proposition that a thing may change its relations while remaining absolutely unaffected by change, is a plain contradiction, the change must necessarily infect the other term of the relation also. If this is not sound logic, certainly none of the dialectic of our absolute idealists can make any pretensions to validity; it is a sort of reasoning that should make a peculiar appeal to that school of dialecticians. And for them, at least, it should suffice to make evident the hopeless sterility of the eternal. Yet, since this way of putting it is abstract and formal, it may be worth while to illustrate the difficulty by recalling specific instances of its occurrence in eternalistic philosophies of the past and present.

The difficulty was, of course, a peculiarly troublesome one for the Christian theology of the Middle Ages. For that system was committed to the affirmation of a causal relation between God and the world in time. The universe was created on a certain morning of a certain year B. C.; but it was created by a Deity *omnino immutabilis*, who was not in time at all. This required that God should do something at a moment in time in which, *as* a moment in time, he, by definition, did not exist.

¹ *Summa*, I, I, q. Xa 4, ad I.

Such a being was, therefore, really useless and unintelligible as a causal explanation of the beginning of the temporal order, or of any subsequent happening in it. Equally useless is the conception of the eternity of the Absolute when considered in relation to final causality,—to the purposes and plans of action of human beings. For the illustration of this we may jump from Aquinas to Hegel. The latter philosopher, as Mr. McTaggart has pointed out, is frequently inclined to infer from the eternity of the scheme of relations constituting the dialectic, that “all dissatisfaction with the existing state of the universe, and all efforts to reform it, are futile and vain,—since reason is already and always the sole reality.” “Das absolute Gute vollbringt sich ewig in der Welt, und das Resultat ist, dass es schon an und für sich vollbracht ist, und nicht erst auf uns zu warten braucht.”¹ As thus interpreted by Hegel, the notion of the eternal perfection or rationality of reality is, in its practical implications, equivalent to fatalism. If you try to bring your confidence in the supra-temporal completeness of the self-fulfilling *Idee* to bear upon your life in time at all, you can only conclude that nothing whatever can be, or need be, done by you in time. Mr. McTaggart has, it is true, acutely argued that Hegel here draws from his own doctrine of eternity an unwarranted inference. If, Mr. McTaggart insists, we are thinking about the world as perfect, we must *then* also think it as timeless and changeless, and so no question of action,—which is a mode of change,—can arise. But if we are, on the other hand, thinking of time and change, then “whatever reality is to be allowed” to them, “imperfection and progress may be allowed to share; and no conclusion can be drawn, such as Hegel seems at times to suggest, against attempting to make the future an improvement on the past. Neither future and past, nor better and worse, can be really adequate judgments of a timeless and perfect universe, but *in the sense in which there is a future* it may be an improvement on the past.”² The logic by which Mr. McTaggart thus defends Hegel against himself may be admitted to be better than Hegel’s own; but its result is not to improve the situation for

¹ McTaggart, *Studies in the Hegelian Dialectic*, pp. 170–171.

² McTaggart, *loc. cit.* Italics are the present writer’s.

the Hegelian eternal. For it saves the conception of that eternal from the fatalistic implications indicated by Hegel, only at the cost of the virtual admission that the conception has no practical implications of any sort. Mr. McTaggart simply tells you that if you wish to plan or to act, to think about past and future, or better and worse, you must, for the time being, shut a door in your mind, and rigorously forget all about the perfect and the eternal.

Similar objections hold against the attempt of many neo-Kantians, both monistic and pluralistic, to represent their 'Eternal Self' as standing behind, possessing, and making possible, man's empirical existence in time. In the metaphysics of T. H. Green, for example, you have the painful spectacle of an earnest and resolute intellect engaged in the manifestly hopeless effort to bestride the great gulf that is fixed between the evolving and the eternal. Green, being fundamentally a moralist, was chiefly interested in the evolving, in the self-development of the individual and the cumulative historic tasks of humanity. It was merely with a view to giving to these interests a higher dignity and a deeper sanction that they were declared to be simply the phenomenal expression of an eternally complete thinking consciousness, a 'spiritual principle' behind all natural Becoming. With this consciousness man's "true being" was declared to be identical. But if the Divine Mind is eternal and complete, how can it be said to 'manifest itself' in what, confessedly, is as different from it in all its predicates as anything can conceivably be? And how can it become any more complete or any more adequately manifested by virtue of any moral endeavor on man's part? Sidgwick seems to me to have concisely but definitively exhibited, not only what he characterizes as "the barrenness of Green's metaphysical convictions for his ethical purposes," but also the internal discrepancies of those convictions.¹ "An eternal intellect out of time," as Sidgwick says, being (even by Green's own reasoning) "equally implied in the conception of *any* succession," does not "carry with it the conception of any progress toward an end in the series of motions or changes of which the process of the world in time consists. The series might be altogether purposeless, — a

¹Sidgwick, *Lectures on the Ethics of Green, Spencer and Martineau*, 1902, Chapter I.

meaningless round of change, — and still the ‘unification’ which appears to be the sole function of Green’s eternal mind would be none the less completely performed.” And, this form of the difficulty aside, the addition to the temporal self of man of an Eternal Self simply ends in an unmediated and unintelligible duality. “What,” Sidgwick asks, “becomes of the unity of the individual’s consciousness when it is thus split up into an eternally complete consciousness out of time, and a function of an animal organism which this eternal mind, somehow limiting itself, makes its vehicle?” To this question no satisfactory answer appears to me to be forthcoming. Green’s, however, was the most determined and impressive effort of the British mind, with its intense ethical seriousness, to extract edification out of the eternal. If, as I believe, the effort was a total failure, — and has been shown to be such by another British moralist of not inferior ethical seriousness but of much greater logical acumen, — the outcome is an historical fact from which some profitable reflections may arise.

In a somewhat different setting the same objection presents itself, when we turn from the neo-Kantianism of the great Oxford teacher to the much more lucidly and vigorously excogitated form of the same philosophy put forward by a great American teacher formerly associated with the St. Louis group, — I mean the pluralistic or ‘personal’ idealism of Professor Howison. This system, to which I owe much instruction, seems to me to be chiefly subject to difficulty at just those points where the working of the old leaven of eternalism and perfectionism becomes noticeable in it. Eternity appears at two points in this doctrine. First, each individual self has two “aspects” ; it is, primarily and essentially, eternal, and, in so far as it is viewed only under this aspect, perfect ; but it “defines itself” as different from other equally eternal selves by virtue of its association with a unique, individuated life in time, which, just because it is in time, involves some measure of imperfection. In the second place, since it is assumed that the total society of selves must contain all possible grades of being from lowest to highest, there is a Supreme Self, which differs from all the others in that it has no temporal side to

it and no imperfection. This supra-temporal *ens perfectissimum* is the final,—not the efficient,—cause of the temporal striving of all the other selves. The ideal of timeless self-sufficiency and of impassible aloofness from sin and struggle and becoming, which is realized in God, is the chosen (but the unattainable) goal of each developing consciousness.

In this scheme of things, it is evident that both my eternity as a noumenal Ego, and the eternity of God, are meant by the philosopher to have some pertinent bearings upon both the intellectual and the moral life in time. But here again it may be shown that neither of these eternals can, without self-contradiction, be said to have any logical relation to, or practical significance for, any piece of temporal business whatever. Consider, for example, the Aristotelian kind of deity which Professor Howison proposes to revive. How can the thought of such a being's perfection serve as an inciting ideal for me, when the mode of existence in which its perfection is realized is generically different from any possible to me,—and by the most radical of all conceivable generic differences? By no imaginable strivings in time can I ever become in the least like such a God in his one truly distinguishing peculiarity,—supra-temporality.¹ Nor can his supposed character

¹ In recent issues of the PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW (XVII, 18 ff.; XVIII, 1 ff.) Professor Overstreet has apparently sought to relieve this and kindred difficulties by proposing some refinements upon the notion of time, and by devising a sort of *tertium quid* combining the charms of both time and eternity. I am unable to see that the relief desired is secured. The 'defect' of time, we are told, is not its successive-ness, but its fragmentariness, its dividedness; it prevents the whole of our life from being present at once, since the past of us is always gone and the future not yet. Yet this defect may belong only to the time of our experience. There might be a succession in which our whole self would "in each phase" be totally present. "With such a wholeness, time, as a past, present, and future, would disappear;" but "pure succession" would not. In this latter sense time may be conceived "as of fundamental reality," and such succession may be predicable even of "perfect being."—On these ingenious distinctions I venture the following comments: (1) "A succession without past, present, or future," is to me a phrase wholly destitute of meaning. (2) If the "pure succession" which it is proposed to ascribe to perfect being contains the past-and-future contrast in any sense whatever, the "whole self" (if that is meant to include all the content of the successive temporal phases of the self) cannot conceivably be present "in each phase" of the succession. (3) Some 'essential' or 'fundamental' (*i. e.*, partial) self might, indeed, persist unchanged through the succession; but precisely in so far as this essential self is declared to be unmodifiable and unaugmentable through change, just so far is it removed from relevancy to temporal experience.

reasonably awaken in me any interest or respect ; my feeling for an entity so otiose, so completely ignorant of, and unaffected by, all the moving turmoil of our world, could resemble only the feeling which Stevenson, in 'Our Lady of the Snows,' expresses for the monks of the Grande Chartreuse. As little, again, shall I be profited, either in speculation or action, by considering the alleged eternity and (in its eternal aspect) perfection of my own private Self. If it is perfect, *it* will not be made any more so by the endeavors of the empirical Ego with which, in some unintelligible manner, it is unequally yoked together. If it requires those endeavors, on the other hand, for its own fulfilment or development, it is not perfect and it is not out of time. How, moreover, can an eternal self be said to "define itself in its eternal difference from all other selves" in terms of a mode of existence which can only be described by attributes which the self in question is in the same breath declared not to possess? Every proposition that is made about my noumenal Ego as related to my empirical life brings the former down into temporal relations. It can retain its proper character only by having nothing whatever to do with the empirical ; it belongs apart, in a completely 'separated,' Platonic sort of world, and it cannot remain what it purports to be save by everlastingly keeping there.

These difficulties are veiled in philosophical systems of this type chiefly by the use of the term 'aspect.' Now this word may, I suppose, mean any of these four things : (*a*) a line of direction in space ; (*b*) the way in which something appears, not in itself, but to an external observer, and as modified by the means of apprehension employed by the observer ; (*c*) a real but temporary quality or relation of a thing ; (*d*) an actual part or element in a complex, conceived as abstracted from the rest of the complex. None of these meanings, however, seems fitted to render intelligible the conjunction of eternity with temporal process in a single human person or a single Absolute Mind. It is apparently in some approximation to the second sense that the term 'aspect' is usually employed. But, in any case, an aspect is either a genuine part of the entity of which it is predicated, or else it is a more or less false appearance. Both alternatives are

unsatisfactory to the eternalist.¹ To say that the temporal and the eternal are two distinct parts or constituents of the self seems to destroy its unity, and to preclude the desired identification of the one with the other. To say that the temporal aspect is a mere appearance means, if it means anything, a resort to the lame artifice of the Oriental metaphysician. That artifice is, in point of fact, the eternalist's only ultimate way of escape from palpable self-contradiction. His doctrine, if stripped of equivocal metaphors, amounts in the last analysis to calling the temporal *Māyā*, — unexplained, meaningless, negligible, absolute illusion. For those who do not wish to go to this length, the sole alternative is the abandonment of the eternal.

The difficulties which I have tried to set forth thus far all illustrate the common principle, that the assertion of a real relation between an eternal and a temporal reduces the eternal to the temporal. There is a second principle, distinct from, though akin to this, which seems to me to have been too little heeded by metaphysicians. It appears to me to be impossible for us to conceive any concrete thing save as either *now* existing or not now existing, — as other than past or present or future. There is, I think, a temporal form of the law of excluded middle. Not only must anything either be or not be, but it also must either be now or not now. It has been commonly assumed by eternalistic ontologists, and too readily admitted by philosophers generally, that you can avoid this alternative by saying that some things are not in time at all, and therefore cannot be said either not to be or to be at any given moment *in* time. But this seems to me to be a mere evasion. I personally find it as easy to conceive that *a* is *non-a* or that twice two is seven, as to conceive (assuming that 'existence' means anything at all) any possibility beyond the present existence and the present non-existence of a given potential entity, — between the assertion that the entity is or isn't contemporaneous with any specified duration in my experience. The time form, with its categories of antecedence and

¹ Since this address was written, substantially the same criticism of the use of the term 'aspect' has appeared, with a far more effective expression, in Professor James's *A Pluralistic Universe*, 201 ff.

simultaneity and futurity, infests, I believe, all the thinking of us temporal creatures, — it conditions not merely possible objects of perception but also possible objects of thought. You may refrain from thinking of ‘now’ or ‘then’ at all; but, as soon as those ideas enter your mind, as soon as you raise this question with respect to any determinate moment or period in time, you find all your universe of discourse falling into two reciprocally exclusive and jointly exhaustive classes. Now an eternal being, of course, cannot be said either now to be, — for then it is brought within the range of application of the calendar and the time-table; nor yet can it be said now not to be, — for an eternal surely cannot at any time be supposed to be non-existent. I conclude, therefore, that the idea of eternity is an idea which cannot be positively thought, under the conditions involved in all our thinking as beings in time. It is a self-contradictory, and therefore wholly empty notion.

For a final exemplification of the truth of the principal thesis of this discourse, I turn to a recent paper of Mr. McTaggart’s on “The Relation of Time to Eternity.”¹ Mr. McTaggart is a Hegelian who has the rare merit of grappling seriously with the difficulties which the time-process offers the Hegelian sort of metaphysics. His solution of those difficulties is that we should agree to speak of eternity in the future tense. “When, taking Time as real, as we must do in every-day life, we are endeavoring to estimate the relation of Time to Eternity, we may legitimately say that Eternity is future.” This is at least, “much truer than to say that it is present or past.” “We must conceive the Eternal as the final stage in the time-process. We must conceive it as being in the future, and as being the end of the future. Time runs up to eternity and ceases in Eternity.” Mr. McTaggart’s reasons for this surprising conclusion proceed from a primary assumption which he asks us to make, but for which he thus far has offered no real argument: namely, that “the states of the time-series” are arranged in such an order that each successive state “is a more adequate representation of the time-

¹ Delivered before the Philosophical Union of the University of California 1907. — Berkeley, The University Press, 1908.

less reality" than its predecessor. Then that timeless reality would be the limit which the temporal states progressively approximate; and a future moment might, as a representation of the eternal reality, "be only infinitesimally inadequate." It would then imply as the next state in the series, "the timeless reality, in its own completeness."

Now the motives which seem to have led Mr. McTaggart to this view admirably illustrate once more our first principle of the irrelevancy of the eternal. They may be described as a dissatisfaction with the eternalistic solution of the problem of evil, and a craving for an evolutionary meliorism as a substitute therefor, — which evolutionary conception, however, Mr. McTaggart, as a Hegelian, finds himself obliged to state in eternalistic terms. Hegel, as Mr. McTaggart says, "reared the most magnificent optimism that philosophy has ever seen." But that optimism rests upon the unreality of time. "Only the Eternal reality exists and the Eternal is perfectly good. All the evil which we suppose to be in existence is part of the time-element which we wrongly suppose to be in existence. And so there is no evil at all." But this sort of optimism Mr. McTaggart finds quite unconsoling; and the reason that it is so, is that it does not deny or diminish the temporal reality of temporal evil. "To tell us that evil is unreal does not make what we think to be evil in the least less unpleasant to suffer or in the least less depressing to expect. And even if it had that effect on the people who know the truth, how about the people who do not know it?" Mr. McTaggart in this matter seems to me to be reasoning more justly than Professor Royce, who has repeatedly put forward the doctrine of the eternal perfection of the Absolute Experience as the ground of a theodicy and a means of religious consolation. That the Absolute somehow finds that experience rational and satisfactory, when viewed from an absolute point of view, which I cannot share, and seen in its eternal completeness and simultaneity, which I cannot see, nowise alters the character of the imperfect fragment of reality which I do see, from the temporal point of view to which I am limited. It is, then, because he feels the force of these considerations that Mr. McTaggart gives up

the attempt to extract comfort and religious profit for beings in the time-process from the notion of the (present) perfection of a being out of the time-process. Such comfort and profit as are to be had he finds only in a faith in the cumulative and ameliorative character of the general evolution of things. But, being under the Hegelian spell, Mr. McTaggart can represent this only as an evolution towards a time when time and evolution shall be no more.

The way in which I have just put the conception at which Mr. McTaggart arrives is not a caricature. It simply brings out sharply that peculiarity of the conception in which the truth of our second principle concerning the relation of eternal and temporal is exemplified. A future eternity would obviously be an eternity in time,—an eternity that could be put down in the calendar, if you were informed in advance of the scheduled running-time of the universe. It would duly arrive and be entered upon just so many million weeks or months or years from April ninth of the year of our Lord 1909. You would, when making temporal distinctions of before and after, be obliged to say of it, 'It is not now, but it is going to be.' Now we have had eternities that have been declared to include time,—which, it is not difficult to show, is an absurd conception; and we have had eternities which have been declared somehow to stand apart from time altogether; which, it is not difficult to show, is a profitless and a logically impossible conception. But a future eternal would neither include time nor stand apart from it; and it would assuredly, therefore, not be open to the complaint of either inconceivability or irrelevancy. But it would escape this only by giving up all pretensions to be eternal, in the ordinary sense of 'supra-temporal.' Mr. McTaggart has brought his eternal into relation with time with a vengeance,—namely, by making it nothing more or less than one among the other moments of the time-series. This is the result of the latest effort, by one of the most learned and accomplished of contemporary Hegelians, to give to the eternal some intelligible meaning and some real use.

It is true that Mr. McTaggart's kind of eternity is defined as the *last* moment in time, and as one of a certain qualitative su-

periority over all others, — as might be some perfected mind's moment of complete, instantaneous insight *into* all the other moments, and into all the content and all the constitutive relations, of the whole system of reality. But the last moment and best moment is just as much a part of time as any other. Moreover, if it *were* the last, — if there were no change, no development, no duration, after it, — then to speak of the arrival of eternity would be a euphemistic way of referring to an absolute end of the world and a general disappearance of reality. For when the moment of "adequate representation," of complete insight came, its 'eternity' would mean merely the instantaneous, the simultaneous, all-inclusiveness of that insight; it would, by definition, have no possibility or need of continuance or augmentation. Thus, the picture which Mr. McTaggart's ingenious metaphysical imagination presents to us, is really a picture of the universe, at some future date, going gloriously to smash. The world, we are assured, will have its great moment before it dies; but it will purchase that moment at the price of total and immediate extinction. Drowning people have been popularly imagined to experience, just before they sink for the last time, an instant of complete remembrance and understanding of all their past lives. It is some such prospect that Mr. McTaggart holds out to the universe; and to this border-land vision of a drowning cosmos he gives the odd name of eternity.

He is not, of course, blind to all this; he realizes that, in order to bring his eternal to terms with our temporal mode of thinking he has really made it an episode in time. But his manner of forestalling this objection is also instructive, and illustrates one of the contentions already made. "The answer," he says, "to these objections, I think, is as follows: Of course, on this view, Eternity is not really future, and does not really begin. For time is unreal, and therefore nothing can be future and nothing can begin." But "Eternity is as future as anything can be. It is as truly future as tomorrow or next year." Now this sort of thing, I submit, is merely playing fast and loose with logic. Time is taken as real so long as the argument serves; and when inevitable self-contradictions arise, the contradictions are

conveniently annulled by the denial of the reality of time and all that it contains. In short, the final refuge of the eternalist is and must be, as I have already maintained, sheer illusionism, the doctrine of *Māyā*,—a doctrine which I take to be but vanity and a striving after wind, a thing to which no sober occidental mind is likely to give heed. But if one is to be an illusionist, it is at least well to know it and be plain about it. And that the Vedāntist is. There are, I incline to think, only two types of philosophy that quite thoroughly know what they are about,—Oriental illusionism and thorough-going temporalism,—Shankara and, if you please, Bergson. And between these alternatives I do not find it possible to hesitate.

The eternal is, then, I think, the characteristic but not necessarily incorrigible distemper of adolescent metaphysics. So long as the belief in it has prevailed, it has produced in philosophy logical irresponsibility, an unwholesome sort of other-worldliness, and an intellectual priggishness based upon the idea that the philosopher was dealing with a finer, higher, more elegant class of realities than those with which the common man or the scientist were concerned. When metaphysicians generally begin to abandon their eternals and immutables, and set themselves whole-heartedly to understand the world temporally and evolutionally,—*sub specie generationis*, in Professor Dewey's phrase,—philosophy may undergo a revolution not less notable than that which took place in 'natural history' when the biologists generally began to abandon their immutable species and set themselves to understand the world of organisms evolutionally. Certainly, philosophy will not have learned the primary lesson of modern reflection until, in all its departments, it begins,—as it has until lately scarcely ever done,—to take the time-process seriously. But the genuine evolutionary view of the world is not to be reached upon the path followed by such transitional system-makers as Spencer, who naïvely conceive it possible to apprehend real Becoming in terms of a change of distribution of parts in a qualitatively and quantitatively constant system. That kind of evolutionism is as impossible as eternalism. A thoroughly temporalistic way of thinking has its

technical categories for the most part still to forge ; it means a profound and difficult reconstruction of our epistemological and ontological presuppositions. There is plenty of hard dialectical work for it to do, though the work is now happily begun in several quarters, — a part of the work being that of setting precise limits to the reach of dialectic. It is a kind of philosophy which is naturally ready to recognize its own results as provisional, and to leave much to the future. But of its main principle I think we have by this time a right to be confident ; if I may conclude with a sentence borrowed from Mr. Schiller, “it is only in the direction of an abandonment of the prejudice against the reality of time that I can descry a future for hope, a future for philosophy, and a philosophy for the future.”

ARTHUR O. LOVEJOY.

THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI.