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. 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

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1 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.

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

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

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

\(^2\) As a matter of convenience I shall regard the phrase ‘supreme importance’ as indicating this
compensatory function that the later stages seem to have.

\(^3\) 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.
Some might feel inclined to dispose of our task at once by the simple method of condemning the belief outright. Men seem, they might tell us, to regard the later stages of life as supreme in importance, but this opinion, however cherished, is quite mistaken. If pleasure, and goodness, and intellectual and aesthetic activity have any value, they have as much at one time as at another. The belief to the contrary is simply one of the many errors to which popular opinion is liable. It seems to me, however, that we are scarcely justified in throwing aside the belief in this summary fashion. And in point of fact I think that few philosophers are willing to reject it altogether. Many whose theory of the nature of time seems incompatible with it try, none the less, to find some place for it in their account of reality. And since this is the case, it may be worth our while to inquire somewhat carefully into the relation between the belief and the various ways in which the temporal aspect of human life may be conceived. I proceed at once then to ask how we must regard the temporal character of the individual human life in order that our conception may be consistent with the belief in the supreme importance of the later stages.

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

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

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4 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.
5 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.
6 Cf. Bradley, “How, if we seriously mean to take time as real, can the past be reality?” Appearance and Reality (1897), p. 208.
have we a conception of the time-process that will justify our belief in the supreme
importance of the later stages of life? At first glance it might seem that we have.
As life goes on, one stage after another passes into non-existence. At any moment
then we can say that the happiness of the past, being dead and gone, can in no way
compensate me for the fact that I am unhappy now, and similarly that the sorrow of
the past cannot interfere with my present joy. But though the past has no power to
alter the value of the present, the present seems in a certain sense able to affect that
of the past. The present, since it alone is real, is all in all. Hence its happiness sweeps
triumphantly away the griefs of an earlier time; or its misery settles like a pall over
the fair face of bygone joys. In the insistent reality of the present it is as if the joy
or the pain of the past had never been at all. And the same thing, *mutatis mutandis,*
may be said of moral, intellectual, and aesthetic achievement. I am only that which
I am now. If I am now sinful or intellectually slothful or insensible to beauty, the
virtue, the mental activity, the aesthetic sensibility of my earlier life shall avail me
nothing. But if I am now high-minded, mentally alert, or appreciative of beauty, the
intellectual stagnation, the aesthetic insensibility, or the moral weakness of my past
is wiped out by the attainment of this later period.

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

It is clear then that we cannot justify the belief in the supreme importance of the
later stages by appealing to the unique reality that the present moment has for us.
Nay, more, if this unique reality should beguile us into supposing that only because
of it has the present more importance than the past, we should be forced in the end to
admit that the temporal position of the various realizations of value in an individual
history is of no significance whatever. For we should have to say that any stage of
the history, when present, is of more consequence than any of the others—past or
future—but that its peculiar importance vanishes when it becomes part of the past.
And since each stage in its turn is present, no stage would ultimately have more
importance than any of the others. Thus, given so much of good in an individual life,
it must be a matter of indifference in what part of it this good is contained.
It seems clear then that if we interpret change as meaning simply the emergence of a given content into the status of ‘present’ and its subsequent lapse into the status of ‘past,’ and if we suppose further that what is past is completely gone, we cannot justify the belief that we are considering: so far as the defence of the belief is concerned, we might quite as well declare change to be illusory. But is it not possible to assert the reality of change and at the same time to take a different position with regard to the past? May we not suppose that although the time-process is real, the earlier stages of a human life do not fade into utter non-existence when the later ones come into being? That in the history of the individual which was real is still real, let us say, in a highly significant sense. The life of the human being is a unity, not merely when you take it in cross-section, but also when you take it longitudinally. Each of its successive stages includes within itself all the preceding ones, and includes them in such fashion that they are at once preserved and transformed. Let us ask in what the preservation and the transformation must consist.

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

7 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.
There is, however, another sense in which we may say that an earlier stage lives on in later ones; namely, that it has helped to make these what they are, that they are bone of its bone and flesh of its flesh. In this second sense we may declare that a man’s life is a whole in which each moment bodies forth all of it that has gone before. Through memory a part of what I have been lives on in me, but in the fact of which we are now speaking the past is preserved more completely and in a more significant sense. This second fact also would doubtless be admitted by most of those who say that the past is non-existent. Few, if any, of those who make this assertion mean it in the bald sense in which it is opposed to the recognition of any continuity of character and conduct.

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

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

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8 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.
a human being—assuming for the nonce that there is a final stage—is not a part of
that history, but the whole; that it gathers up into itself and keeps in existence the
entire past, which but for its maintaining power would be dead and gone. It is only
with reference to the future, never with reference to the past, that we could speak of
the present moment in a life as one of its parts. My present is my whole life, so far
as that life has yet been lived; it is a part only in the sense that it, in its turn, will
be taken up and preserved in what we call a later stage. According to this way of
regarding the matter, the earlier stage is one with the later, not merely in so far as it
is preserved in memory, not merely by virtue of the subtle influence of past thoughts
and deeds upon present character and conduct, but also because the later stage is the
earlier, the earlier enlarged, enriched, transformed.

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

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

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

To this objection we can make two answers. In the first place, we can reply, men
apparently feel that the quality of the later stages is more important than that of the
earlier, even when that of still later ones is not in question. This is shown, I think,
when we try to estimate the value of a life taken as a whole. When we survey a
life that has been ended by death, we believe that the quality of its latter part is of
the greatest importance. And while in many cases this feeling is probably in some
measure due to the belief in immortality, I incline to think that it is equally strong
in those who either reject the doctrine or are in doubt with regard to it. Of course it
is open to any one to urge that even in these cases the feeling has its origin in the
belief in a future life, and thus that those who reject the belief are yet unconsciously
influenced by modes of thought that have their source and their sole justification in
it. To discuss this assertion would take us too far afield; I can only say that personally
I doubt its truth. Moreover, even if we should grant it with reference to the other
values, it seems hardly possible that our estimates of the pleasure-pain value of the
earthly life are thus influenced by a belief in immortality. The affective quality of a
particular stage offers no guarantee of the quality of subsequent stages, whether in
this life or in a life to come. Nevertheless men seem to feel that, judged from the
point of view of pleasure and pain, a life is more desirable if the fuller realization of
affective value is in the later rather than in the earlier part.

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

Let us now gather up the threads of our discussion. We began by asking how we
must conceive the relation of the individual life to the time-process in order to justify
our belief in the supreme importance of its later stages. We showed in the first place
that the order and the irreversibility of the time-process must be accepted as real.
Next we made the assertion—to be defended later—that the reality of change must
also be affirmed. At this point it seemed necessary to explain what we meant by
asserting the reality of change, and in particular to define our position with reference
to the problem of the existence or nonexistence of past events. In considering this
problem we limited ourselves to the life of the human individual. And the theory
that we tried to develop is that the past of such a life is not altogether non-existent:
it lives to some extent in memory; it lives still more completely in the influence of
the earlier upon the later; it lives most truly of all in the sense that this later is what
it has become and that thus it is held in solution, as it were, in this later. And it is this third aspect of the continued existence of the past that we must affirm in order to justify our belief in the compensatory function of the later stages of life. For only the evil that has become good is atoned for; and only the good that has become evil is spoiled.

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

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9 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.

10 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.
it is more nearly the whole life, is it not clear that our interest is not in change, but
in wholeness? And if so, does it not seem that the way in which men evaluate life
can be defended equally well upon the assumption that change is a guise that reality
wears for us, but is not characteristic of its inner nature? What we call a difference
in temporal position is ultimately only a difference in degree of completeness; and
the so-called later stage is simply a larger part of the non-temporal whole.

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

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

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

12 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.
But, one may here interpose, does not our own experience present many cases in which the excellence of the whole cancels the evil of the part, and vice versa the evil of the whole the excellence of the part? In many a noble deed there is some slight admixture of unworthy motive; in many a glorious achievement of art there is some minor defect in conception or execution; and it is a commonplace of experience that

Our sincerest laughter

With some pain is fraught.

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

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

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

It is equally futile to try to avoid the difficulty by saying that evil is merely incompleteness. Evil is absence of value, lack of that which ought to be. And if it is this, it is not mere incompleteness; it is something other than being a part instead of a whole.\(^\text{16}\) But if by the identification of evil with incompleteness one means rather

\(^{13}\) 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.

\(^{14}\) Mind, N. S., Vol. XVIII, pp. 343 ff.


\(^{16}\) 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,
that the sense of evil arises from our taking a part as if it were the whole, from our
viewing it in isolation from the whole to which it belongs, this is simply going back
to the doctrine that evil is an illusion. And we can reply to it, after the fashion of Dr.
McTaggart, by urging that the fact that men view the part in isolation from the whole
is itself an evil—is something other than incompleteness, is that which ought not to
be.

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

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

\(^{17}\) Op. cit.

\(^{18}\) See above, p. 31.

\(^{19}\) 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. 1 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.
and the belief are incompatible; for perhaps one might attempt a reconciliation in some other way that has not occurred to us. But I think that we are justified in saying that so far as we can at present see, man’s belief in the supreme importance of the later stages can be defended only if we conceive the temporal character of human life in the way that we have suggested. As the matter stands at present, we must either adopt this conception or condemn as utterly mistaken our belief in the transforming power of the later stages. Now there can be little question that we feel it to be of vital importance that the fuller realizations of value shall appear in the later stages of a man’s history. So long as a life falls short of complete attainment, we demand that at least it shall show progress—perhaps in happiness, certainly in intellectual power, in aesthetic sensibility, in moral attainment. And this conception of progress—important for all aspects of our nature—is so fundamental in our idea of the moral life that any theory of the time process that robs it of its meaning fails to satisfy one of the most insistent demands of our being.

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

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20 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.

21 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.

22 E.g., Dr. McTaggart (op. cit.) and Professor Howison (The Limits of Evolution, 1904, pp. 373 ff.).
course progresses or retrogrades. And thus even if there were progress, it would be, *qua* progress, of no significance.

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