

CHAPTER V

THE ETHICAL ARGUMENT FOR IMMORTALITY

A THEORETICAL proof of immortality is, we have concluded, not possible. From the data at our disposal we cannot reach the goal by any irrefragable logical process. Our speculative results in this connexion do not amount to more than a probable argument, and the human mind craves for more. After the speculative reason has shown a way or ways in which a life after death may be realised, men naturally desire some definite assurance that these possibilities are actualities. To many it has seemed that the ethical argument supplies such an assurance. The facts of moral experience, when their meaning and bearing are examined, are thought to justify faith in a future life. In other words, they are believed to warrant the faith that man's life on earth is only a stage in the development of his spirit. A higher and a transcendent form of existence appears to be necessary, if man's ex-

perience in this world is to be justified by the moral reason.

At present there are those who regard with hostility any attempt to introduce what they call theological implications into ethics. Ethics, it is said, has its own sphere, which is complete in itself: ethics deals with the values of human experience, and has no need to go beyond them. Our moral judgments are quite independent of any beliefs about the future destiny of the soul.¹ In evidence of this independence it is urged, that man's ethical life is not really influenced by a belief in immortality. As a practical motive the belief does not count.² But I doubt that, if the belief were practically useless, it could have maintained itself as it has done. Beliefs which have been divorced from action wither and die, while beliefs which persist always stand in some vital relation to practice. Nevertheless there is this element of truth in the opinion we are considering: the system of moral values will not be revolutionised by the presence or absence of faith in immortality. A man may retain his faith in duty after he has lost his faith in a future life, as

¹ So Paulsen, *System of Ethics*, Eng. trans., p. 440, "Ethics will not change a single proposition whether there be a life after death or not."

² It is rather curious that Holmes, who accepts immortality, should give exaggerated expression to this view in his book, *Is Death the End?* Vide p. 333.

there are examples to show. Yet to admit this is not to say the conviction, that our existence here is teleologically related to a higher form of existence hereafter, does not exercise a real influence on our valuations. If it does not subvert our moral values, it sets them in a new perspective and lends them a deeper significance. The fact gives a higher importance to our acts of moral choice, that we recognise they go to the making of a character which persists after this earthly form of being has passed away. And if all moral values are doomed in the end to perish, they must lose in meaning and reality, even though good continue to be good for the individual, and evil evil.

I do not think, therefore, that what are called the religious postulates of ethics are practically of no effect. They certainly invest experience with deeper significance. Yet the issue we have in view just at present is not directly concerned with the sphere of ethics or the bearing of immortality on ethical conduct. For quite apart from the opinion we have on this subject, the main question with which we have to deal is the question, whether the data of human experience can be justified and found consistent by the developed moral consciousness. This is not a matter of theory, or hypothesis, but of facts. If, as the result of a dispassionate survey, we find our present experience reveals moral anomalies and

inconsistencies, we shall then be in a position to consider whether the situation is not remedied, if we postulate a life to come and a supramundane order of things. To answer the question in the affirmative is, of course, to recognise that ethics raises issues which transcend the present world-order. This is the general problem with which the ethical argument for immortality deals.

Let us now examine more closely the nature of the so-called moral proof for immortality. It is usual to speak of proof in this reference, but it is well to point out that it is not a proof in the scientific sense of the word. For we do not deduce immortality by the method which shows that, from a certain rational connexion of elements, a further connexion inevitably follows. The moral argument is not a strict deduction from given data, but a demand. It is a claim that man, as an ethical being, makes on the universe in which he lives and acts. In other words, it is a postulate put forward to harmonise the facts of experience, and to make them consistent with the demands of the moral consciousness. To identify this procedure with an argument from human wishes and desires is quite unfair and misleading. Those who persist in doing so easily succeed in showing human desires are variable, often inconsistent, and sometimes such that, in the nature of things, they are doomed to disappointment. A

recent writer remarks that the desire for immortality finds its "main support . . . in the yearnings of the heart for the maintenance of the bonds of love and friendship, and in the desire to think highly of oneself and the universe."¹ And were this all that could be said, it would be fair to point out, as the author in question does, that such desires carry with them no guarantee of their realisation. It is man's fate often to desire in vain. But this line of reasoning does grave injustice to the moral argument, which rests, not on subjective feelings, but on the demand of the practical reason for coherence and harmony in a moral universe. There is nothing arbitrary or casual in making a postulate which is needed for the moral organisation of life. The point is to show that it is needed. Nor is the method of postulation singular. The philosopher and the man of science alike make postulates. The former bases his endeavour to rationalise experience on the postulate that the universe is a rational whole: the latter postulates that the uniformities he discovers in nature will hold good in the future as they have done in the past. These postulates cannot be strictly proved, but they are demands necessary to justify the procedure of the thinker and the scientist. Of course it may be said, even by a sympathetic critic, that the universe would not

¹ J. H. Leuba, *The Belief in God and Immortality*, p. 313.

become 'a sheer irrationality' apart from the postulate of personal immortality.¹ And it is true that man can live an orderly life in the world without accepting the doctrine. But the larger question remains, whether without the postulate of immortality the facts of ethical experience can be conceived as a consistent and harmonious whole. In other words, can we, apart from the acceptance of immortality in some form, justify the world as a moral cosmos? In the following pages I shall try to give some reasons why we cannot do so.

Our duty at this stage will be to consider the nature and meaning of the ethical facts which lead to the postulate of personal immortality. They are fairly familiar to students of the subject. Broadly speaking, I think there are two general lines of evidence which can be distinguished, though they are related to one another. The former rests on the claims of justice, and the second on the incompleteness of the ethical and personal life. I go on to discuss them in order.

I. The argument based on justice asserts the importance and value of justice: it assumes that justice is an essential element in the order and working of the universe, just as it is essential to human society. The argument carries with it

¹ *Vide* Pringle-Pattison, *The Idea of God in Recent Philosophy*, p. 45.

the rejection of a purely naturalistic view of life as well as the purely mechanical conception of the world. If a man is content with a non-moral universe, then the moral argument will leave him cold. The argument turns on the value of justice, and the need that its claims should be met. If justice is to be realised in the system of things and in the experience of individuals, man's life on earth can only be a stage of his development which leads up to and issues in a supramundane form of existence. This line of thought has a prominent place in Plato, and it will be interesting and helpful to look for a little at his treatment of the problem.

In Plato's discussions on immortality the ethical interest, as we have noted, is dominant, and this was the determining factor in forming his faith in a life of the soul after death. He firmly believed that justice, the principle of perfection in society and in the individual, also reigned in the universe. In virtue of this a law of retribution was operative, which was not confined to this life. Here and now justice is the health and injustice the disease of the soul. Justice has its good reward and injustice brings a hard fate; but these goods and ills are only the foretaste of greater things to come.¹ Sin and vice disfigure the soul while it lives on earth, so that it comes to resemble the

¹ *Republic*, 613 E ff.

sea-god Glaucón, who was so crusted over with shells, weeds, and stones that his divine form was hardly recognisable.¹ If death were the end of all, the wicked man would have a good bargain in getting quit of his body and his soul at the same time.² In the *Phædo* and the *Gorgias*, Plato insists on the fact of a future retribution for the deeds done in the body. The *Phædo* and the *Republic* contain, in the garb of myth, symbolic pictures of the punishment of the wicked and the fate of the soul in the after-world. Among wicked persons, Plato distinguishes those who are curable and those who are incurable.³ The latter are cast into Tartarus, while the former must suffer for their sins and go through a course of purification. Only after this discipline can they attain to those fair habitations "which it is not easy to describe."⁴ This discernment of a world to come where Justice accomplishes her mission gives a new incentive and a deep seriousness to human life. When the issues of life are seen to extend beyond the present world, human choice becomes charged with a momentous significance; and this truth is emphasised in a myth of the *Phædrus*. After death there follows, we are told, a period of retribution for the evil the individual has done on earth. Souls sink to the world again when a

¹ *Op. cit.*, 611 C, D.

² *Gorgias*, p. 525; *Phædo*, p. 113.

³ *Phædo*, 107 C.

⁴ *Phædo*, p. 114 C.

thousand years have elapsed, and choose the lives they are to live for another term of existence. The soul which has thrice in succession chosen the best life, passes, freed from the body, to the realm of spiritual bliss.¹ Here we have moral truth 'embodied in a tale.' Without laying stress on the details of Plato's symbolism, we can mark that he is in earnest with the idea that human choice has consequences which reach far beyond the present world. In his view, punishment has a part to play alike in this life and in that to come, whether by way of retribution or as a deterrent. In the case of those whose wickedness is curable there will be a process of purification in which the soul will be gradually liberated from the tyranny of sensuous desire. To the last Plato believed in "a justice of Heaven" in accordance with which the soul, by reason of the character it had formed on earth, passed upward to the heavenly places or downwards to Hades.² For the utterly and incurably bad, he suggests that the state of punishment may be eternal.³

This rapid outline will at least show how Plato anticipated most of the later ideas on the subject. The main thought which governs his view of the soul's fate is the principle that the claims of justice must be fulfilled. A man must reap as he

¹ *Phaedrus*, p. 249; *Republic*, pp. 619-621.

² *Laws*, p. 904.

³ *Phaedo*, p. 113 E.

has sown; and if this does not always hold in this life, there must be a world to come in which justice gets its due. No scheme is complete in which the worst offenders sometimes do not receive their desert. The argument has not wholly lost its force, and a natural instinct prompts us to believe that the notorious evil-doer, who has evaded justice here, will meet it hereafter. At the same time this argument is subject to certain qualifications. Retribution is not an end in itself, and punishment in general must be regarded as a means of improving and educating the individual. An endless punishment, which can have no educational value, is felt to be meaningless. On the other hand, punishment judiciously used as a means to an end has a legitimate function in society, as every one will admit. None the less the plea for a future life in the interests of retaliatory justice has, it must be confessed, lost something of its cogency and value for the modern mind. The appeal to the fear of future punishment as an inducement to virtue and a restraint from vice is not, in the light of experience, quite convincing. In some periods when the belief was universal the effect on conduct appears to have been small; and in any case the man who refrains from wrong-doing for fear of punishment, and practises virtue in the hope of a reward, is governed by lower motives. It is, partly at least,

because the doctrine of external rewards and punishments involves an appeal to motives which are not pure, that this form of argument has lost force in recent times.

In contrast to the notion of an external administration of justice whereby compensation is awarded for wrongs endured and retribution given for sins committed in this world, the modern mind is more inclined to think of justice as a principle immanent in the social and individual life. Here and now there is a law of justice at work in the characters of men, a law silent but continuous in its operation. The man who abandons himself to sin suffers damage to his soul in consequence, while the man who devotes himself to the practice of virtue gains an abiding inward good. The working of this immanent justice is in no way dependent on the will of any individual: the good man cannot help gaining, nor the bad man help losing, what is of most value in life. We do not lay ourselves open to the charge of appealing to impure motives, when we regard this gain and loss, not as an outward retribution imposed on men, but as the reaction of their own deeds upon themselves: it is the inner consequence of what by their deeds they have made themselves to be. In this sense an individual is fully justified in making the foreseen results of his action a motive to virtue rather

than vice. He is blameworthy if he fails to do so, and his motive if he does so is ethically pure.

In regard to the reality of the principle of immanent justice there need be no doubt. The problem remains, however, whether the principle works itself out so adequately in this world, that the claim on the score of justice to a life beyond the present has neither meaning nor point. Is all the justice that is necessary already realised in human characters and their destinies within the historic process? Can we say that every man, when measured by the inward test, gets his due in this life? It is no argument in favour of the affirmative to point out, that the good man who suffers for his integrity finds a truer satisfaction in himself and in his lot than he could have found in any 'happier' state which was gained by yielding to lower motives. Any complete view of human good implies a union of virtue and happiness or well-being. We could not say, for example, that a full good was attained by an individual of high character whose fruitful activity was constantly thwarted by adverse circumstances, or whose life was prematurely cut short by death. A coincidence of virtue and happiness there must be, if goodness is to receive its due; but the facts of experience only warrant us in affirming there is a certain tendency towards this coincidence in

the world.¹ On the other hand, it would be easy to prove that human history shows us very many cases of serious discrepancy between the two. How often does it happen that the keenest suffering and the most acute misery are brought on men and women by the sins of others, and not by any fault of their own! From the days of Job the case of the innocent sufferer has been a problem. The great European War, with its countless tragedies, furnishes a terrible illustration. But the proposition needs no illustration: every honest mind will acknowledge its truth. Indeed I should not care to say that a recent writer has overstated the case when he remarks: "We can hardly help feeling that if what we see of the ways of God with man on this earth is all that there ever will be to see, Justice counts for very little in His dealings."² Even on the most generous view of the facts, we cannot maintain that the theory of an immanent justice fully realised on earth covers, or nearly covers, all the experiences of life. There is so much in human experience which contradicts this idea, that it is not plausible. Nor does it really help us to take refuge in the thought that, though goodness and well-being have been widely separated in the past,

¹ Cp. Rashdall, *Theory of Good and Evil*, vol. ii. p. 217.

² Professor A. E. Taylor in his essay on "Immortality" in the volume entitled *Faith and the War*, p. 146.

still the world is advancing to a condition in which the division will be healed. Experience does not justify this optimism, and the future progress of the race is not an assured truth. Even if it were, the happiness of a section of the race in its later evolution could not undo or neutralise all the unmerited suffering of the past, or heal the wounds of that great company who have passed away "not having received the promise."

We seem then to be confronted with a great alternative. We may say, and say frankly, that justice and the other ethical values do not count in the organisation of the universe, for the universe must be interpreted on purely naturalistic lines. But in this case we have to meet the insuperable difficulties which beset any attempt to find the ultimate explanation of the higher in the lower. If we refuse to accept the conclusion, we are driven to the other alternative. In other words, we endorse the claim of justice as a spiritual value, and declare that its imperfect realisation here calls for its full realisation hereafter. In that case we shall agree with Bishop Butler, that in the end justice will be done: "All shall be set right at the final distribution of things. It is a manifest absurdity to suppose evil prevailing finally over good under the conduct and administration of a perfect mind."¹ This means that we must postu-

¹ Third sermon on *Human Nature*.

late the persistence of the personal life after the death of the body, for it is in living persons that the ethical values are realised. And in this connexion we recall the thought of Plato, that there is a purifying and educating discipline of souls in a world beyond the present. We may even claim that the present order of things can only be regarded as reasonable in the large sense of the term, if it leads up to a higher form of being which corrects and supplements what is imperfect in the present order.

II. The second form of the ethical argument takes its departure from the acknowledged incompleteness of man's moral life, and goes on to postulate the continuance and completion of that life after death. Man as a moral being experiences a discrepancy between his ideal and his achievement: he struggles after a goal, but the goal always lies beyond him; and there is a felt contradiction in the thought that it is the nature of man to develop ideals which, in the nature of things, cannot be realised. Why, it is asked, should there emerge in the evolution of the world a being with this high outlook, if his meaning and destiny lay wholly within the mundane order of things? If man's end is purely earthly, why does he not find a full and final satisfaction in earthly goods? There is a disparity between man's ethical and spiritual equipment and the purely

mundane conception of his vocation. Were man's destiny merely earthly, one would expect in his case something similar to what obtains in the animal kingdom. The animal has no outlook beyond its natural environment, and the impulses, instincts, and arrangements of the animal world refer exclusively to the conservation of the individual and the species. Were this true of the human race, then the evidence would certainly tell against a belief in personal immortality. But man is decisively differentiated from the animals. And if he is condemned to pursue ideals which the scope of his earthly life precludes him from attaining, it is only reasonable to expect that room will somehow be given for their attainment.

I shall begin the discussion of this aspect of the argument by a short statement and examination of the form in which it was presented by Kant. The proof of immortality, like that of freedom and of God, Kant derived from the practical reason. He regards the Moral Law with the implied notion of duty as a pure *a priori* principle of the practical reason or will, and he decisively rejects the theory which bases morality on utilitarian or hedonistic considerations. The moral law takes form as a categorical imperative, a principle of universal obligation, which demands from the individual a reverence and obedience into which neither considerations of expediency

nor desire for happiness dare enter. The moral law must be the sole motive of good action: motives based on sensuous feelings and desires cannot give moral conduct as Kant understood it. On the other hand, when Kant came to determine the nature of the Chief Good, he saw that happiness could not be excluded, if the *Summum Bonum* was to be a *complete* Good. Now "happiness is that state of a rational being in the world in which he finds everything in the whole of his existence ordered in conformity with his wish and will."¹ The question then arises, how the moral reason is to achieve the ideal. For man is a sensuous as well as a rational being, and the will to good in him is constantly hampered and thwarted by feelings and desires which—so Kant believed—must be non-moral in their character. Obviously man is not capable of achieving at any given moment that perfect accordance of the will with the moral law in which holiness consists. But this perfection is practically necessary; if it is to be realised, it can only be realised gradually, and it implies a progress *ad infinitum*. "Now, this endless progress is only possible on the supposition of the *endless* duration of the *existence* and personality of the same rational being. . . . The *summum bonum*, then, practically, is only possible on the supposition of

¹ *Vide* Caird's *Philosophy of Kant*, vol. ii, p. 295.

the immortality of the soul; consequently this immortality, being inseparably connected with the moral law, is a postulate of pure practical reason."¹

Such, in bare outline, is Kant's ethical proof. It has been much criticised, and in various ways it is open to criticism. For instance, an immortality based on endless progress in time assumes the reality of time; and Kant in his epistemology treats time as a form of intuition which is purely phenomenal in its reference: it has no application to the noumenal or real world. Moreover, the extreme antagonism in which he sets the intelligible and the sensuous realms, and his identification of desire with desire for pleasure, import a dualism into human nature. It is hard to see how the moral ideal could be realised in human experience even by the way of a continuous progress in time. But the Kantian argument, despite its inconsistencies, contains true and valuable thoughts; and it is possible to disentangle the questionable elements and to reconstruct it in a form which is less open to criticism. In this connexion we can discard the Kantian view of time as a form of intuition valid only for the phenomenal world, and we may properly reject the idea that feeling and desire must be excluded from the moral consciousness.

¹ Abbot's translation of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, pp. 218-219.

Having set aside these elements of the Kantian theory, we have still to consider the significance of the moral ideal. It is a demand, as Kant saw, for the realisation of the highest Good, and we have to examine this fact in its bearing on human experience. The reality and pressure of the ideal are evident: the ideal is operative in man's knowledge that he is never all that he ought to be. The moral life is a struggle on man's part to be better than he is, and the struggle never closes in the consciousness of a full and final attainment. Though the spirit be willing the flesh is weak, and the upward endeavour of the individual is time and again impeded by the intrusion of selfish feelings and desires. When we 'would do good evil is present with us,' and man never succeeds in giving a full and satisfying expression to what is best in him.

“What hand and brain went ever paired?
What heart alike conceived and dared?
What act proved all its thought had been?
What will but felt the fleshly screen?”

Men who have begun the moral struggle in earnest never, even at the end of the day, win a complete victory over the lower nature; and to the last they are haunted by the feeling of short-coming. We are confronted with a radical incompleteness in the spiritual life of persons. The individual is a centre of value, and it may be

of growing value. But there is no perfection, and the actual does not coalesce with the ideal. Though, like the apostle of old, the human pilgrim press steadily forward, yet he never reaches a point in his journey when he can count himself to have attained. The best men are haunted by the shadow of failure, yet in this very sense of failure the power of the ideal is revealed. To many the thought of another life is welcome just because it seems to offer them an opportunity of gaining the good which they have here failed to gain.

The endeavour after a full and satisfying good must have a significance for human life as a whole. For it is from no arbitrary caprice or casual desire that man sets out on this quest and engages in this endeavour. His inner nature urges him to follow the upward way; and if he turns into the downward path, his conscience rebukes him for being false to his vocation. We have to ask ourselves the question, Is man by the spirit in him led to enter on a quest which is bound to be vain and doomed to end in defeat? Is the vision of the Good only a phantom light which lures the pilgrim into the morass? Is the goal fondly desired only a dream which fades in the sober light of waking reason? No one will come to an affirmative conclusion gladly, and if any one does so conclude, it must be at the expense of

admitting that there is somehow a contradiction at the heart of things. For, consider what the conclusion means. It means that it is involved in the nature of man—and so in the constitution of the universe in which man comes into being—that he should form and strive after an ideal of good, and that it is equally involved in the nature of things that this endeavour is destined to final defeat. The situation would be analogous to that where an individual bestowed a precious gift, and at the same time took measures to render the possession of the gift ineffective. We cannot accept such an inconsistency in the constitution of the world unless we are compelled to do so by a logic which admits of no other alternative. Any reasonable hypothesis which enables us to overcome this inconsistency, and to harmonise our experience, has a serious claim to be considered.

From this point of view we can see that the postulate of personal immortality is no mere expression of subjective feelings. It is not the pure outcome of a personal wish, but issues from the need of harmonising the facts of experience. The postulate is put forward to remove a real difficulty: it is a demand man makes on the universe in order that his moral world may be consistent and harmonious. Apart from this postulate the life of moral endeavour is destined

to remain fragmentary and incomplete—nay more, the value already realised in the ethical life is doomed to be lost. All the good which a man has reaped in his own soul as the harvest of his moral endeavour will be annihilated when he ceases to breathe, and his career will close in darkness and silence. The postulate of immortality conserves the value already gained, and is a guarantee that the endeavour after the good shall come to its goal and fulfilment. These ends are not achieved within the present world-order, where the personal life is fragmentary; hence the postulate of a supramundane or transcendental realm in which the personal life is continued and fulfilled. This postulate is the legitimate claim man makes on the universe, and it is the solution of an urgent problem.

At the stage we have reached we can see that the two forms of the ethical argument tend to meet and coalesce. The notions of justice and of completion come together in the conception of a teleological development of the personal life to its consummation in the transcendent world. For the soul, through this development, comes to its due and reaches its fulfilment. The principle of retribution finds a place, yet in no external or mechanical fashion. For the life to come issues out of the life here, and the soul is what it has made itself to be. The upward struggle which

is broken short on earth is 'completed, not undone.'

The line of thought we have been developing has been criticised on various grounds. It may help to set the principles for which we are contending in a clearer light, if we consider briefly one or two of these objections.

This form of the ethical argument, it is said, implies an exaggerated other-worldliness. It points men away from the domain of common experience, and is touched by the spirit of the Middle Age, when people spoke of time as the 'anteroom of Eternity.' The objection, however, in this case is not really relevant. For the transcendent world is conceived as teleologically related to life in the present world, and man's conduct and character here go to fashion his destiny hereafter. If we regard what takes place in this life, then the future has, and ought to have, an intimate bearing on the present. Purposive endeavour which has reference to the future is bound up with the very structure of life. And more especially so in a being with 'forward looking thoughts,' who is constantly relating what is to what is to be. If we have recourse to analogy, we can see that it is possible to relate the future to the present, so that the present is in no way emptied of its worth and significance. Youth, for instance, has a value and character of

its own, and it has its own peculiar part to play in human experience. The young have their own special interests and ideals, and they make their own contribution to the life of society. Yet, this notwithstanding, youth is charged with a significant reference to the future, and comes to its fulfilment in the mature man and fully equipped citizen. To reach its goal, youth itself has to pass away. This analogy furnishes us with a clue to the mode in which we may conceive the relation of personality in the temporal world to its fruition in the transcendent world. In both cases the goal gives a new depth of meaning to the earlier stage, without at the same time robbing that stage of its own interest and value.

The objection is stated in a more subtle form when it is argued that the other world is just the ideal truth or reality of this world. This theory has been persuasively stated by able thinkers. The other world, they tell us, the world of truth, of good and beauty, is not something beyond this world but immanent in it. "‘This’ world and the ‘other’ world are continuous and inseparable, and all men must live in some degree for both."¹ Or, as another writer has put it, "The temporal life is the phenomenal form of a life which is eternal as such."² Let us begin by acknowledg-

¹ Bosanquet, *Essays and Addresses*, p. 98.

² Paulsen, *System of Ethics*, Eng. trans., p. 440.

ing an element of truth in this view. The conception of the world as an externally related system of elements is a superficial conception: it must be corrected and deepened by showing the presence and activity within experience of self-conscious mind. A silent process of ideal construction goes to the making of the world as it presents itself to us in our daily life. It is a fallacy to suppose the external world as we know it is a complete fact by itself, and the function of mind merely to report on it and try to understand it. In this sense we agree that the ordinary outlook on things is superficial and inadequate, and a deeper analysis shows that spiritual factors co-operate in making our world. On the other hand, we deny that the 'other world' is simply the spiritual world which is immanent and operative in the world of common experience. Were this so, man ought to be able to reach his full and final self-realisation within the present world-order. There could be no enlargement of the scope and character of man's life, for it is entirely bounded by the horizon of this world. No transformation of its material basis would be possible; at most there would be the correction of the superficial view of things by the recognition of those spiritual elements which underlie experience, and lend it its deeper meaning. Not to transcend the world, but to apprehend it more truly, would

be man's goal. But if this were all, the perplexities and anomalies of the present order of the world would still remain, and would be felt with the same force. All those unsatisfied needs in human experience which give point and vigour to the demand for the completion of the personal life in a supramundane sphere would remain unfulfilled. Even if the ideal world is immanent in the actual, the fact remains that the actual world is not a moral cosmos: it is not a world in which moral justice reigns supreme. If you accept the theory under review as adequate, you can do nothing to remove those difficulties which oppress the moral consciousness. For these reasons we cannot think a solution of the moral problem can be given, if we reduce the transcendent world to an immanent aspect of this world.

But, it may be said, are you entitled to lay so much stress on the moral argument? Granted there are anomalies in the moral situation, yet does not life in a transcendent world present difficulties? On reflexion, may we not find that the difficulties we create in this way are as many as those we seek to obviate? This is true in the sense that any attempt to give concrete form and detail to the conception of the future life will call forth more or less relevant objections and criticisms. But such an attempt may well transcend

human powers, and we are under no obligation to make it: we confine ourselves to the postulate that there must somehow be a transcendent completion of this life, and find the postulate a sufficient solution of the problem. If the demand seems a large one, the reasons for making the demand are urgent and weighty. The existence of ethical personality is a fact of paramount importance, and it rightly claims that the laws which are at work in the world should be in harmony with its judgments. The discord would be an unbearable one, if the natural and moral world were at variance. In the circumstances we are entitled to lay stress on the existence of ethical personality as a thing of supreme significance: it cannot be evolved from lower elements. An inner personal life dedicated to the realisation of ethical ends and ideals is a centre of value with which no material object deserves for a moment to be compared. The growth and expanding outlook of this personality which finally, in correspondence with its inner worth, demands a fulfilment in a transcendent sphere, is deeply suggestive. The moral and spiritual demands of the personal life have as great a claim on consideration as those of the theoretical reason, and scepticism in the one case would be as fatal as in the other. To distrust the working of my moral consciousness is as

subversive as to distrust the working of my intellect: in the end it leads to sheer scepticism. Hence the demand that the moral and spiritual values have objective validity, and a place and function in the real universe. In a rational universe the real and the good must be connected and unified, so that they may co-operate harmoniously in the teleological development of personal lives.

Bound up with the claim of the ethical values to enter into the texture of the real world, is the claim that these values should be conserved. They must partake of the enduring nature of reality. One cannot acquiesce in the thought that the good should grow, flourish for a little, and then fade and die. It must have an enduring vitality of which natural organisms are destitute. If value is to be conserved, then the personal beings who are the active centres and supports of value must also be conserved. But if there is no immortality, if the personal life flickers out with the dissolution of the body, the conclusion is inevitable that value is constantly being lost. And this because the value that is in character perishes: the growing good realised in a human life is lost and dissipated when the organic process runs out. If this view be accepted, the melancholy conclusion follows, that all the toil and travail of the human spirit in bringing the spiritual values

to flower and fruit will not avail to save them from annihilation. The end of man and the brute alike is dust and ashes, for "man has no pre-eminence over the brute."

Depressing to most people is the idea that the good enjoys only a brief and uncertain tenure of existence. They feel it contradictory that what is highest and best should be a fugitive appearance. Hence it is sometimes argued the conservation of values is not necessarily bound up with the conservation of personal lives. These values are produced, it is admitted, by individuals, but once they have come into being they are taken up and sustained by the wider life of society, and thus continue to "live and act and serve the future hour." The work of art endures and gives pleasure long after the hands which shaped it have mouldered into dust: "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever." So with great poetry; its creator passes away, but his creation becomes part of the treasure of the race and a joy of many generations. In the same way the value of a human personality is not lost; it continues to be an influence for good when the individual has vanished, for it is taken up into the growing heritage of society. To put it in a word, the good in the individual lives on, for it becomes an element in the growing good of the world. This, no doubt, is an argument which has influenced many, and it appeals

to certain unselfish instincts in human nature. To merge all personal desires in the supreme desire for the well-being of the race seems a noble thing. On the other hand, the argument makes certain assumptions, and these are, to say the least, of doubtful validity.

(a) If the good which the individual himself is, is to be conserved by the race, then that good must receive outward expression in some form in order to enter into the racial inheritance. But the individual never attains a full and perfect expression of himself. A man's acts reveal him, but not completely. He is more than the sum of his acts; and there are depths in his nature which do not find articulate utterance. Hence, even if an immortality of influence were possible, there would still be a loss in value when a pure and good personality passed out of the world. The only assurance against loss is the conservation of the personality itself.

(b) In the second place, if the social system or the race is to be the ultimate repository and conserver of all values, we seem to be driven to postulate its permanence or immortality. A corporate must take the place of an individual immortality. But, as has been pointed out, an immortality of the race, all of whose constituent elements are mortal, is something like a contradiction in terms. Out of a multitude of

impermanencies you cannot evolve a permanency. Though the race has outlasted millions upon millions of individuals, there is no guarantee that it will continue to do so indefinitely. In truth, the probabilities point in the opposite direction. Beyond all question our earth was for ages unfitted for human habitation, and the appearance of man on its surface only dates from a relatively late period in its history. There was a time when mankind did not exist, and there will in all likelihood come a time when it will cease to exist. Even if human history is not cut short by some cosmic catastrophe, physical science tells us that conditions favourable for life on earth will not endure for ever. It is probable that the diminution of the sun's heat will steadily continue, inducing a condition of things on our globe increasingly unfavourable to life. The consequence will be the gradual deterioration and final extinction of human and animal organisms. It may require long ages to bring about the relapse of our world into darkness and silence, but the persistence of the human race would only be possible if the earth always continued a suitable dwelling-place for man. Not only is there no guarantee of this, but it is not intrinsically likely. The hope, therefore, that the values created by mortal individuals will somehow be conserved by the race is futile. The conclusion is inevitable, that if we abandon

faith in personal immortality, we thereby sacrifice any assurance of the final persistence and victory of the good. Man with the good he has won by the travail of his soul becomes only a transient episode in the vast cosmic process. And when this process reaches a point in its downward movement, all life will finally perish.

It will help to confirm the line of thought just developed, if I go on to point out difficulties which are involved in the idea that the goal and end of human endeavour are to be found in society and the race. I shall leave out of account for the moment the objection drawn from the mortality of the race itself, though that objection is, I think, fully justified. What I now wish to show is, that you cannot consistently conceive the race to be the ultimate end of the individual. You can give no satisfying statement of the goal of moral endeavour in terms of an earthly society. The attempt to give such a statement becomes entangled in difficulties. Let us see how this is so.

If society is to be the ethical end of the individual, then the social system must be conceived as a sufficient end or goal. But there is the same discrepancy between the ideal and the actual in the case of society as in that of the individual. All mundane societies are imperfect, and an imperfect system cannot be a perfect

ethical end. Societies like persons are in process of development; and so long as there is development, there is not completeness or perfection. It would seem then that for society as it is we must substitute an *ideal* society, if we are to have an adequate ethical end for the individual. Shall we say then, that the goal and ultimate ideal of personal endeavour is a perfect society on earth, in which development has reached its term? I think not. A state of static perfection, a condition of society which left no room for effort or aspiration, would be totally out of keeping with human nature as we know it. The ethical life as it takes form on earth is essentially a life of purposive endeavour, and a mode of existence which left no place for this would not be the best. Human character and human powers, as they have developed under terrestrial conditions, are such that a life without progress, a life with no goal beyond the present, is a life which has ceased to be desirable. Accordingly a perfect society on earth cannot be the goal and end of human persons. Moreover, this ideal, even were it practicable, could only mark the close of a long development; and this involves the insuperable objection, that generation after generation would be doomed to toil for a good it was never to share. This good would be the monopoly of those who came late in time.

But if a static goal to social development on earth is untenable, the ideal, it may be said, is just progress itself. To go on improving things is an adequate motive for mortals. The individual man has his sufficient ethical end in working for the progress of the society in which he lives. There is no need, so our critic may say, of conceiving the developmental process as reaching its term at any fixed point in time. It goes on indefinitely, and man gains his true self-fulfilment in contributing to the forward movement. At every point in the historic process an individual realises the ideal possible for him, when he strives to leave society better than he found it.

At first blush this might appear a plausible solution of the problem before us. Further reflexion reveals certain flaws in the theory. In the first place, what assurance is there that society will always make progress? It is an utter mistake to suppose that a social system or the race naturally and necessarily develops, so that one can depend on its progress just as you can depend on the growth of a plant or a tree. Society is always changing, or, if you like, evolving; it is not constantly developing. Progress is no movement that proceeds with mechanical regularity: it is born of the inwardness of free personalities, and it stands for a

vocation or ideal which men are called, but not compelled, to fulfil. Looking out on human history we see societies developing, others stagnant, and some in process of decay. And in the lifetime of a social system a period of progress may be followed by one of decline or of arrested development. So at least the empirical evidence leads us to conclude. It may be said that retrogression is only apparent: on a wider view it falls within the movement of progress. This, we reply, may be true in some cases, but there is no proof that it is always so, and much evidence to the contrary. The view appears to rest, not on the data of history, but on the dogmatic opinion that progress is continuous and necessary. "There must be progress; therefore what seems to be a decline is, in the end, an element in progress." The argument is, of course, vitiated by its faulty premises.

If you abandon the notion that progress is universal and necessary, and still define the ideal as progress, you must face the question how you are to determine what is progress. For plainly you will often be called on to distinguish real from apparent progress, and to give reasons for your decision. It frequently happens that a movement which one section of society hails as an advance another regards as a decline. The individual has to be assured where progress lies,

that he may know how to act in given circumstances. Now progress is a value-idea, and presupposes a criterion or standard of value in the light of which given cases are judged. To put it quite simply: if you are to determine whether a certain movement is forward or backward, you can only decide, if you are given a fixed point or goal by reference to which you judge or measure the movement. Otherwise there can be no consistency of judgment: one man will decide in one way, and another in a different way. Accordingly, if you persist in taking progress pure and simple for the ideal, it will be at the expense of abandoning universality and coherency of opinion. General agreement will be impossible, and relativity of judgment will prevail. In this case people will fall back on the method of judging one historic movement with reference to another and declaring that *relatively* it exhibits progress. Evidently sound and valid conclusions cannot be reached by a method like this. Subjective feelings and interests will prevail, and where one man discerns progress another will read the tokens of decay. Where there is no standard there can be no consistency of judgment, for there is no valid way of correcting error.

The endeavour, therefore, to find in society the ultimate ethical end for persons leads to an *impasse*. On the one hand, the conception of a

perfect society under terrestrial conditions would not be the ideal for men as they are at present constituted. And, on the other hand, the goal as social progress is hampered with the difficulty that, apart from a final end or ideal good as standard, it is impossible to define progress, or to say when and where it exists. In a word, a standard is needed, and yet a mundane standard will not work.

The difficulty in giving a final form to the moral ideal has been traced to the fact that morality is not itself an absolute and final form of activity, but has its issue and consummation in religion. This is true so far, though much depends on the meaning we give to religion. But we shall only reach a solution of the moral problem through religion, if it be frankly recognised that the movement of the religious consciousness is directed to a transcendent world, and has its full realisation there. This means that the goal to the ethical progress of mankind cannot be stated in terms of any form of earthly existence at all. Here is the secret of the inconsistencies which beset every attempt to do so. The final end of progress is in the supramundane realm.

When we make a postulate of this kind, we may expect to be asked how the transition from the mundane to the supramundane is achieved.

One cannot suppose that a miraculous transformation of human society is to take place at some point in its temporal evolution. To try to solve the problem thus is to ignore where the real pressure of the difficulty lies. The solution will rather be found in the recognition of the supreme value of human personality. Social good is a legitimate motive of human endeavour, but the well-being of human society is not the ultimate end of personal spirits. Indeed there is a sense in which ethical and spiritual personality is the end of social development. Society is not an end but a means, a means to the unfolding of personal lives; and the measure of the value of a social system will be found in the character of the persons who compose it. Accordingly it is through the nature and meaning of personality that we have to interpret the relation of the temporal to the transcendent world. In a word, the inner worth of the human soul leads to the postulate of immortality; and it is the conception of immortality which enables us to solve the problem of the meaning of progress and the goal of social development. The transition from the lower to the higher order of being is achieved in and through the personal life which survives the crisis of death, and goes on to its completion and fulfilment in the transcendent world. Society, in ministering to personal development, becomes in

development on earth will come to a close is not a question of supreme importance. The temporal process, so far as we can see, will not reach any ideal fulfilment. The historic movement is ever reaching its end in the persons for whom life here is a stage to life hereafter. In the doctrine of immortality the problems of the conservation of values and of the meaning and goal of social development find their solution. There are no doubt many things in human experience which the conception of man's immortality leaves unexplained, and we do not put it forward as a general principle of explanation. But the postulate removes some of the contradictions of experience, softens what is harsh in the human lot, and gives coherency to man's outlook on life.

The claim to an existence after death is a great claim, but human personality is a great and supremely important fact. And this must be our final justification for making the claim. On some of the unique features of personality I have already insisted. Persons are the creators and sustainers of the world of values, and the realms of ethics and spiritual religion are the outcome of personal life. Apart from a society of persons, goodness and value become abstractions: impersonal forces are in the end non-moral forces. The movement of history on a large view is a

movement through individuality to personality, and finally to fully formed ethical and spiritual personality. As man's personality has developed his outlook on the world and life has widened. And, finally, he has laid claim to a destiny beyond this mundane sphere. It is the unique character of the moral and spiritual life of persons, and the paramount importance of the values which are bound up with personalities, that give weight and urgency to the demand for a life after death. The expanding vision of the personal consciousness has finally taken form in the faith that the goal of personal spirits transcends this earthly form of being. This faith reveals the consciousness of the inner worth and riches of the human soul—the soul which finds the world a stage too narrow for the full unfolding of its powers.

The previous discussions have shown us converging lines of thought which lead to the postulate of immortality. The demands of moral justice, as well as the incompleteness of man's moral achievement when contrasted with his ideal, call for a life beyond the present. Moreover, human society is not man's ultimate end, nor can social progress have an earthly consummation. The conclusion to which we come is, that the doctrine of personal immortality is an answer to difficulties and a fulfilment of needs which are

interwoven with the texture of human experience.

The doctrine is, as I have tried to show, an ethical postulate, a postulate which makes the world of our experience a more reasonable world. At the same time, we must bear in mind that a postulate is necessarily limited in its scope. In this instance our postulate of immortality does not give us information about the contents of the idea. Nor does it tell us how the idea is to be realised.¹ The moral consciousness gives us no warrant to speak with certitude on these matters. As we saw in the previous chapter, speculative thought has offered suggestions in this reference, but it is not in a position to make dogmatic statements. Those who venture to speak dogmatically forget the limitations of human knowledge, and they usually entangle themselves in misleading analogies. In this connection it is well to remember the reserve of Christ. He drew no picture of the life to come, but warned men against conceiving the heavenly world in terms of this world. Whatever the future life may be, it cannot be a mere replica of this life. Indeed it is only because immortality implies the transformation of the present material form of existence, that it offers a solution of the problems we have been discussing.

¹Cp. on this point F. C. S. Schiller's *Humanism*, p. 264.

But though we refuse to dogmatise, one or two things most of us will feel are needed, if the life to come is to have value for us. The transcendent state of being cannot be a solitary state; it must be life in a society, in a kingdom of spirits. The fulness of personality can never be realised in isolation; and to many a lonely immortality would be an object of dread. As a matter of feeling, the desire for immortality is hardly ever a selfish desire. Most persons who desire a life beyond the present do so, because they long that those tender ties and affections, which are the core of what is best in man's earthly estate, should not be obliterated by death, but should be renewed in a 'better world.' Many feel strongly that if these were finally destroyed, their personality would lose elements of value that could not be replaced. A life in which love had no part would be poor. Hence the longing that the immortal life should be a social life.

Again, we note the human recoil against the prospect of an eternal fixity of being. Such a condition is destitute of any human interest. A transcendent world which excluded all progress would not be desirable for us as we are now constituted; it would only be acceptable if our nature were transformed into something quite different from what it is at present. In that case there could be little continuity between our present

and our future life. But speculations about the conditions and character of life hereafter are in the main unprofitable. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be," and the world to come has to be experienced to be known. Immortality is the object of faith, not of sight, but it is a faith which can give a reason for itself.