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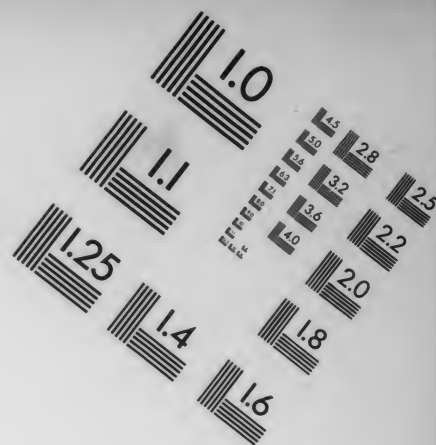
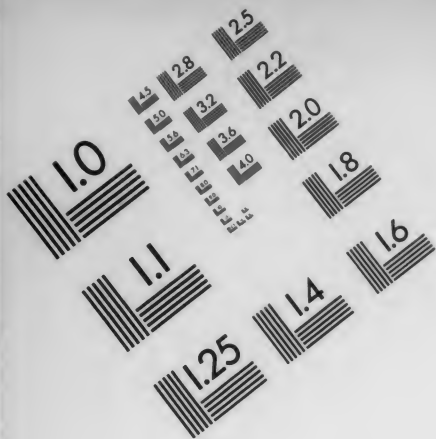


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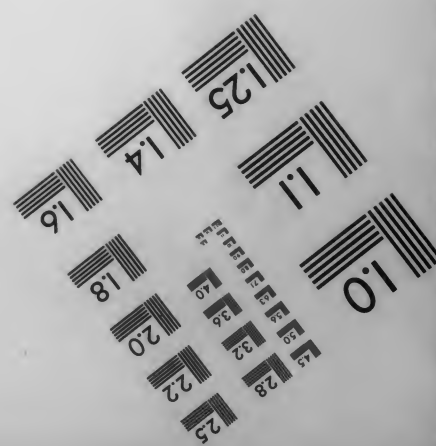
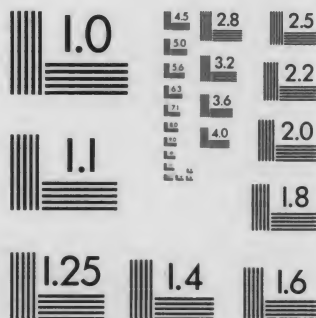
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**THE RELATION OF TIME AND ETERNITY**

**JOHN ELLIS MCTAGGART**

**PHILOSOPHICAL UNION  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA**

1908

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

**THE RELATION OF TIME AND ETERNITY**

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[Reprinted from the UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA CHRONICLE Vol. X, No. 2]

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THE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
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## THE RELATION OF TIME AND ETERNITY.\*

JOHN ELLIS MCTAGGART.

1. The true nature of Time, and especially the question how far it is absolutely real, have been much discussed in philosophy. But there is, I think, no ambiguity in speaking of Time. Everyone means by Time the same characteristic of experience—a characteristic present in the experience of each of us.

Time, however, does not admit of definition. There are, indeed, several general qualities which we can ascribe to it. We can say, for example, that it forms a single series, and an irreversible series. But these predicates, and any others we can add to them, do not form an adequate definition of Time. Something might have all of them, and yet not be Time. And thus we must say that Time does not admit of definition. If a person has not got the idea of Time, no combination of other ideas will give it to him.

2. Eternity is a more ambiguous word. It is used in at least three distinct senses: to denote unending time, to denote the timelessness of truths, and to denote the timelessness of existences.

The first sense need not detain us long. It is admitted to be a rather improper use of the word, and is only important on account of its frequency. The great majority of people, for example, who say that they believe that they will live eternally, do not mean that they believe in a timeless life, but that they believe in a life in time which will

\* Address before the Philosophical Union of the University of California, August 23, 1907.

never end. This is not the only idea in the popular conception of immortality, nor the best, but it is the most common. In this sense the relation of Eternity to Time is, of course, very simple. Time—finite Time—is simply a part of Eternity.

We pass on to the deeper meanings of Eternity. But first I should wish to say that, although it may be a shallow view of Eternity to see nothing in it but unending Time, yet I cannot regard the question of unending existence in time with the contempt with which it is sometimes treated. If, for example, it were proved that the true nature of man was timelessly eternal, yet I cannot see that the question of his future existence in time would be either unmeaning or unimportant. It would, on any theory, have as much meaning as the statement of his present existence in time—which may be partially inadequate, but has certainly some meaning. And it may very well have great importance. This, however, is a digression.

3. The second sense in which Eternity is used is to denote that timelessness which is said to be possessed by all general laws, and, indeed, by all truths, particular as well as general. "The angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles." "The flash of a distant cannon is seen before its report is heard." "The date of the Battle of Waterloo is the 18th of June, 1815." Of these truths the last two have reference to time, and the third is not a general law, but a particular fact. Yet, it is said, all three truths are timeless. Any man's knowledge of them, indeed, is an event in time. It begins at a certain moment, and has a certain duration. And there may well have been times when none of these truths was known to any person. But the truth, it is said, must be distinguished both from our knowledge of it, which is in time, and the subject-matter referred to, which may be in time. And the truth, it is said, is always timeless.

There is much to be said for this view; but also, I think, something to be said against it. I do not propose to discuss

it here. It would take us too far, and is not essential for our purpose. For, if we define Eternity in this manner, the relation of Eternity to Time is very simple. It is simply the relation of a truth to the subject-matter of the truth. About every substance existing in time, and about every event in time, however slight or ephemeral, many propositions—indeed, an infinite number of propositions—will be true. And since, on this view, nothing that exists will be eternal, but only the truths about them, the relation between Eternity and Time will simply be a case of the relation between a truth and the reality of which it is true. What that relation is, constitutes, indeed, a highly interesting question. But the special natures of Eternity and Time will not enter into it.

Nor does the establishment of an Eternity, in this sense, give us any fresh view of the nature of reality, or afford us a glimpse of any greater permanence or stability in the universe than appears on a *prima facie* view of experience. Everything, no doubt, has on this view a certain connection with Eternity. But everything has exactly the same connection, and that without any transformation of its nature, but taking it just as it appears. We can look at ourselves *sub quadam specie aeternitatis*, for each of us exists, and the truth of his existence is eternal. But then—for an hour or two—a bridge-party exists, and it can be looked at *sub quadam specie aeternitatis*, as easily as a human being. And so can the bubbles in a glass of soda-water—I do not mean the substance of the water, but the shape which it assumes for a moment.

And even events have the same timelessness. If I sneezed on last Christmas day, the truth which expresses that event is, in this meaning of Eternity, as eternal as the truth of love, or of man's existence, or of God's existence, if he exist. No person and no thing are eternal on this view. But about everything, permanent, ephemeral, high and low, there are infinite eternal truths. The con-

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clusion may be correct, but it cannot be called very interesting or significant.

The contemplation of eternal truths, indeed, may be in the highest degree interesting and significant, though whether it is—as Spinoza seems to have held—the highest activity of which spirit is capable may be doubted. But then the contemplation of eternal truths is not itself a truth. It is an activity. And it cannot, therefore, be eternal in the sense which we have so far discussed.

4. We pass to the third meaning of Eternity, which will occupy us for the rest of the paper, in which it is used of the timelessness of existences. Existence is, I think, like Time, too ultimate to admit of definition. But it is not difficult to determine the denotation of the word. In so far as substances, or the qualities and relations of substances, are real at all, they exist. In so far as events are real, they exist. On the other hand, if truths, and the ideas which are the constituent parts of truths, have any independent reality, it is not a reality of existence—though of course our *perceptions* of such truths exist, since they are psychical events. Thus the Emperor of China exists. His moral character, and the reciprocal influences between him and his subjects exist. So do the events of his daily life. On the other hand the Law of Excluded Middle, the Law of gravitation, and other true propositions do not exist, although my knowledge of the Law of Excluded Middle exists as an event in my mind.

Whatever is temporal exists. This seems to be generally admitted, for those thinkers who hold that truths and ideas have a reality which is not existence, admit that such reality would be timeless. Whatever is temporal then, and is real at all, exists. But is the converse true? Is all existence temporal?

All existence which presents itself as part of our ordinary world of experience presents itself as temporal. But there may be reality which does not present itself to us in

the ordinary course of things, though search may reveal its presence. And, again, a thing may present itself in a more or less deceptive fashion. And it is frequently maintained that we have reason to believe that some reality which exists, exists timelessly—not merely in the sense that its existence endures through unending time, but in the deeper sense that it is not in time at all.

5. The possibility of timeless existence has been denied. Lotze, for example, makes time an essential characteristic of existence—his terminology is different but it comes to this. But the general opinion of thinkers has been the other way. For most men have believed in the existence of a God, and most of those who have not believed in a God have believed in the existence of some impersonal Absolute. And God or the Absolute has generally been conceived as timeless. This has not been universal. Lotze regards God as existing in time. And among theological writers there have doubtless been some who, when they called God eternal, only meant that he existed through endless time, or that his nature did not change. But as a rule philosophy and theology have held that God exists timelessly.

It seems to me that this opinion—that timeless existence is possible—is correct. To exist and to be in time seem to me two characteristics, each quite distinct from the other. And, while it seems clear that nothing could be in time without existing, I fail to see any corresponding impossibility in something existing without being in time. If so, timeless existence is possible. Whether it is actual—whether we have reason to believe that anything does exist out of time—is a question which I shall not discuss in this paper. My object here is only to discuss the relation of existence in Time to existence in Eternity, should there be any such eternal existence.

6. We, who are endeavoring to estimate the relation, appear to ourselves to exist in time, whether we really do so or not. It is not strange, therefore, that men should have

endeavored to express their relation to the Eternal by terms borrowed from Time, and to say that the Eternal is present, past, or future. We shall consider which of these terms is the most appropriate metaphor, and whether any of them are more than metaphors.

In the first place, we may consider that existence in Time and existence in Eternity are equally real. Then, since the same thing clearly cannot exist both in time and timelessly—if both predicates are taken in the same sense and as equally real—the only possibility would be that some existent being was in time, and some existent being was out of it. (This is exemplified in the very common theological view, according to which God exists timelessly, but everything else exists in time.) What would the relation be, in such a case, between the temporal and the eternal?

The eternal is often spoken of, under these circumstances, as an "eternal present." As a metaphor this has, as we shall see, some appropriateness, but it cannot, I think, be taken as more than a metaphor. "Present" is not like "existence" a predicate which can be applied in the same sense to the temporal and the timeless. On the contrary, its meaning seems to include a distinct reference to time, and a distinct reference to past and future. The Present has been future and will be past. I do not say this is an adequate definition of the present, but it does seem to be an essential characteristic of the present. If so, the timeless cannot be present. The eternal, the timeless, must be distinguished from what exists unchanged in time. The Pyramids exist in time, but they have existed through thousands of years, through all of which they have been present. And supposing that human beings were really in time, but also immortal, we could say of every man, after he had been born, that he would be endlessly present, since in every moment of future time he would exist. But persistence through time is, as we have seen, quite a different thing from timeless existence.

7. There is one reason which has, I think, led to regarding the eternal as an eternal present, which rests on a confusion. Of anything which exists in time, my judgment "It is true that X exists now" is true when X is in the present and not when X is in the future or past. Now supposing that Z exists eternally, my judgment "It is now true that Z exists" will be always true. Hence, I believe, it is sometimes supposed that Z is always present. But this is a confusion. For "It is now true that Z exists," where the "now" refers to the truth of the judgment that Z exists, is by no means the same as "It is true that Z exists now," where the "now" refers to the existence of Z. A judgment is a psychical event in my mind, and is in time, even if I am judging of the timeless, so that "now" is an appropriate word to use about it. But "now" cannot be used about the existence of the timeless itself.

8. As a metaphor, however, there is considerable fitness in calling the eternal a present. In the first place, the future and the past are always changing their positions in regard to us. The future is always coming nearer, while yet remaining future. The past is always going farther away, while yet remaining past. The present, however, while it remains present, does not change in this way. It is continually being born out of what was the future. It is continually changing into the past. But as present it does not change in its relation to us.

This affords a certain analogy to the timeless which, of course, is not capable of change. The timeless does not change, and therefore, nothing in the timeless can bring it nearer to us or farther from us. And the constancy which this involves has an analogy with the constancy of the present while it remains present.

9. In the second place the present is always regarded as having more reality than the past or future. So much is this the case that we feel no inappropriateness in saying of something which is not existing at present that it does not

exist. We should not feel the expression unusual if we said that the Holy Roman Empire does not exist, which is the same expression we should use of More's Utopia. And yet we no more mean to deny the past existence of the Holy Roman Empire than we mean to deny the present existence of the United Kingdom. Now the eternal does not appear with the diminished reality of the past and future. It has all the reality of which its nature admits. And the eternal is generally considered as more real than the temporal, for, when some reality is held to be eternal and some temporal, it is God or the Absolute which is considered eternal, and the created or finite which is considered temporal. It will thus resemble the reality of the present more than the reality of the past or future, and so it will be an appropriate metaphor to regard it as present. This is especially the case when we consider our emotions toward the eternal—a point of great importance since the eternal in this case would be, as we have just said, God or the Absolute. It is clear that the emotions of a man who loved an eternal God would stand much closer to the emotions of a man who loved a being existent in present time than they would the emotions of a man who loved a being who had ceased to exist, or who had not yet come into existence.

10. In the third place it must be remembered that it is only the present, and not the past or future, which we regard as capable of exercising immediate causal influence. The future is not conceived as being a cause at all—since causality always goes towards what comes later, and never back towards what is earlier. The past is certainly regarded as acting as a cause, but not immediately. The past has produced the present, and so is the remote cause of what the present is now occupied in producing. But it is not the immediate cause of what is now being produced. This, I think, is the inevitable way of looking at causality in connection with time. If it leads to contradictions—and I do not say that it does not—they are contradictions which

spring from the nature of time. They may affect our judgment as to whether time is ultimately real, but we cannot get rid of them while we are looking at things in time.

Now the eternal can be looked on as a cause. I do not wish to enquire whether the view is correct, which is often held, that the eternal can be the sole cause of anything. But there is no doubt that, if anything eternal exists, it can be a part-cause of an effect, so that the result would be different from what it would have been except for that eternal being. And the causation of this eternal being must be regarded as immediate, in the same way as the causation of a being present in time. For this reason, also, then, the present is an appropriate metaphor for the eternal. But it cannot be more than a metaphor. Presentness involves time, and cannot be predicated of the timeless.

11. We must now consider another theory on the subject of timeless existence. This holds that all existence is really timeless, and that the *prima facie* appearance of Time which our experience presents is, in reality, only an appearance, which disguises the nature of the timeless reality. In this case we shall not, as in the previous case, divide all existence into two facts, one eternal and one temporal. All existence will be eternal. And though this will exclude the possibility of any of it being really temporal, yet it will leave the possibility open that some, or even all, of it may appear to us as temporal.

The theory of the unreality of Time is doubtless very difficult to grasp fully. And doubtless it presents very many difficulties. I do not intend, in this paper, to advocate it, or even to develop it at length, but merely to consider, as before, what would be the relation of Time to Eternity, should the theory be true. It cannot be doubted that it is worth while to consider the consequences of this theory. For it is one which is very largely held by philosophers. The exact nature of Eternity in Spinoza's philosophy, and its relation to time is a very difficult problem, especially since

it is not improbable that Spinoza himself did not distinguish with sufficient clearness between the timelessness of truths and the timelessness of existence. But the doctrine that all reality is timeless was unquestionably held by Kant—though he would not perhaps have used this expression. It was held by Schopenhauer. It was a fundamental doctrine of Hegel's philosophy, and in this respect Hegelians have followed their master more closely than has been the case with other doctrines. And, at the present day, it is held by the greatest of living philosophers, Mr. Bradley. If we turn from philosophers to theologians we shall find the same doctrine. The view that all reality is timeless is not so general, of course, among theologians, as the view that some reality is timeless. But theology has never in any country or in any age, remained for long together untouched by mysticism. And the unreality of time, although it is not held by all mystics, is one of the most characteristic mystical tenets.

Once more in the Far East, where philosophy and theology do not admit even of that partial distinction which is possible in the West, we find the doctrine of the unreality of time assumes cardinal importance.

A theory which has attracted so much support, and which continues to attract so much at the present day, must, right or wrong, have much to be said in its favor. Teachers so great, and so different, do not adopt such a doctrine without grave reasons. For my part I am convinced that in spite of the very great difficulties which belong to the theory, it must be accepted as true. But at present I am merely concerned to point out that, whether the theory be true or false, it is no waste of time to consider any consequences that would follow from accepting it.

12. What is the precise description which we must give to Time on this theory? We cannot call it a mistake, for to perceive things in time does not necessarily involve an erroneous judgment. If a person who perceives things as in time believes that they really are in time, that would of

course be an erroneous judgment. But if the theory is true, a person who believed the theory would not be making any erroneous judgments on the subject. His judgment would be "I perceive things as in time, and I cannot perceive them any other way, but they are not really in time, but timeless." In this judgment there would be no error. And thus the perception of things in time must not be called a mistake. It hides, more or less, the true nature of things, but it does not involve making any false judgment about their nature.

And since the perception of things in time does not necessarily involve an error, it follows that, when the error has been there, and is removed, it will not alter the perception of things in time. If I begin by holding the view—which may be wrong, but is certainly the most obvious view—that things are really in time, and are then convinced by philosophical arguments that they are really timeless, I shall, none the less, continue to perceive the things in time.

Thus we must conceive our perception of things in time to be an illusion, of the same character as those which make us see the sun at sunset larger than at midday, and make us see a straight stick crooked when it enters the water. I do not, after childhood, suppose the stick to be really crooked. But however clearly I may satisfy myself, either by reasoning or by the sense of touch, that the stick has not changed its shape since it was put in the water, I shall continue to get visual sensations from it resembling those which would be given me by a crooked stick in the air. Of this sort is the illusion of time—though it is far more general, and far more difficult to grasp. It hides part of the truth, it suggests a wrong judgment—for the obvious conclusion from our experience, as I said just now, is to hold that things are really in time. But it does not necessarily involve a wrong judgment, and it is not removed by a right judgment.

13. What relation, then, does Time bear to Eternity on such a theory as this? The answer will, I think, vary.

When we see existence under the form of time, the theory tells us, to see it more or less as it really is not. At the same time, the appearance is not *mere* illusion. We perceive, in spite of this illusive form of time, some of the real nature of the timeless reality. So if we look through a window of red glass we shall see the objects outside correctly as to their form, size, and motion, though not correctly as to their color. The question is, of course, much more complicated here. We cannot get round on the other side of time, as we can on the other side of the glass, and so discover by direct observation what part of our previous experience was due to the form of time. And to reach and justify an idea of what the true timeless nature of existence may be is a very hard task, though I think not an impossible one. We must content ourselves here with the general results that where existence appears to us under the form of time, we see it partly, but not entirely, as it really is.

Thus the way in which, at any moment of time, we regard existence is more or less inadequate. And it seems to me that the relation of time to Eternity depends on the relative inadequacy of our view of reality at different moments of time.

The decisive question—this is the theory I wish to put before you—is whether there is any law according to which states in time, as we pass from earlier states to later, tend to become more adequate or less adequate representations of the timeless reality.

14. Let us first consider what would happen if there were no such law. In that case there would be no tendency for the future, because it was future, to resemble the timeless reality more or less than the present does. There might be oscillations, even then, in the adequacy with which time represented Eternity. At one moment my view of the universe might distort the truth either more or less than my view of the moment before had distorted it. But such oscillations are like the waves of the sea. At a particular

moment the surface at a particular point may be higher than at the moment before. But this does not give us the least reason for concluding that an hour later on it will also be higher than it was at the past moment, or that the average height is rising.

If the adequacy of the time-representations is in this condition, the relation of Time to Eternity will, I think, be expressible in the same way in which we expressed it when Time and Eternity were taken as equally real. That is to say, the most appropriate metaphor for the relation is to consider Eternity as a present, but this is nothing more than a metaphor.

The metaphor is appropriate for the same reasons as it was before. In the first place, the relation of Eternity to time is constant. In some particular moments of time we may, as I have said, get a less adequate representation of Eternity than at others, but if we take time as a whole it neither approximates to Eternity nor diverges from it. And, for the reasons explained above, there is a certain appropriateness in using presentness as a metaphor for this unchanging relation.

In the second place, the metaphor is appropriate here, as it was before, to express the reality of the eternal. The eternal has not that diminished reality which we attribute to the past and the future. Indeed, its reality is relatively greater here than it was on the other theory. In that theory the Eternal was generally the most real, for it generally included God or the Absolute. But here it is an inevitable result of the theory that the Eternal is not only the most real, but the only true reality. It is more important than before, therefore, to express it by a metaphor drawn from the greatest reality in time.

In the third place, the Eternal must certainly, on this theory, be regarded as exercising immediate causal influence, or, rather, as having a quality of which causal influence is an imperfect representation. For everything depends on the nature of the eternal, which is the only true reality.

At the same time, to say that the eternal is eternally present remains a metaphor only. It is not a literally correct description. For the present, as we saw, is essentially a time-determination, and the eternal is not in Time.

15. So far, I think, I have not said much that is controversial, and certainly nothing that I should claim as original. But I have now a thesis to put forward which, whether it is original or not, is certainly controversial. I submit that although to us, who judge from the midst of the time-series, the presentness of the eternal can never be more than a metaphor, yet, under certain conditions, the assertion that the eternal was past or future might be much more than a metaphor. This statement will doubtless seem highly paradoxical. The eternal is the timeless, and how can the timeless have a position in the time-series? Still, I believe this position can be defended, and I will now attempt to sketch my defense of it.

16. So far we have considered what would happen if there were no law according to which states in time, as we pass from earlier states to later, tend to become more adequate or less adequate representations of the timeless reality. But what would happen if there were such a law?

Events in time take place in an order—a fixed and irreversible order. The flash of a distant cannon is perceived before the report. The report is *not* perceived before the flash. The Battle of Waterloo was fought before the Reform Bill was passed. The Reform Bill was not passed before the Battle of Waterloo was fought. Now what determines this order?

The mere form of time does not do so. If things happen in time they must happen in an order, and a fixed and irreversible order. So much the nature of time demands. But it gives us no help as to what the order shall be. If the Battle of Waterloo and the passing of the Reform Bill are to take place in time at all, the nature of time requires *either* that they shall be simultaneous *or* that the Battle shall

precede the Bill, or that the Bill shall precede the Battle. But it gives us no help towards determining which of these three alternatives shall be taken.

What does determine the order of events in time, on the supposition, which we are now discussing, that Time is only an illusory way of regarding a timeless reality? I believe myself that there is good reason to hold that the order is determined by the adequacy with which the states represent the eternal reality, so that those states come next together which only vary infinitesimally in the degree of their adequacy, and that the whole of the time-series shows a steady process of change of adequacy—I do not say yet in which direction.

I think something can be said towards proving this statement, but it would want far more than a single lecture to say it, and I do not propose even to sketch it now. Nor is it necessary for our present purpose, which is only to consider what the relation of Time to Eternity would be under various circumstances. Let us now proceed to consider what that relation would be under these circumstances.

17. Let us suppose, then, that the states of the time-series were such that each state was a more adequate expression of the reality than the state on one side of it, and a less adequate representation of reality than the state on the other side of it, so that they formed a continuous series in respect of the adequacy of their representation. And let us suppose that the most adequate of these representations—which will be, of course, at one end of the series—differs from the reality it represents only by an infinitesimal amount. What is the relation here between Time and Eternity?

This will depend upon the direction in the series in which greater adequacy is to be found. It may be, in the first place, that the later stages of the time-series are more adequate than the earlier stages. In that case the present stage will be more adequate than any of the past, and less adequate than any of the future.

We may go further than this. If time is unreal, as we have supposed, then the illusion that time exists can no more be in time than anything else can. The time-series, though a series which gives us the illusion of Time, is not itself in time. And the series is really therefore just a series of representations, some more adequate and some less adequate, arranged in the order of their adequacy. This—the series of adequacy—is the only serial element which remains as real, if time is to be condemned as unreal.

When, therefore, we say that a certain stage in the time-series is still in the future, the real truth, if the theory we are considering is correct, is that the stage in question is a less inadequate representation of the timeless reality of existence than our present stage.

Now the timeless reality itself contains all its own nature. And therefore it will stand to the least inadequate of the representations of itself as this stands to the next least inadequate, and so on. Since, by our hypothesis, the representations of reality in the time-series approach the reality till the inadequacy finally becomes infinitesimal, the last of the series of time-representations will differ only infinitesimally from the reality itself. And, since time is continuous, the stage before the last will differ from the last in the same way—by being infinitesimally less adequate.

Thus the timeless reality—the Eternal—may itself be considered as the last stage in a series, of which the other stages are those which we perceive as the time-series,—those stages nearest to the timeless reality being those which we perceive as the later stages in time. When, therefore, we are looking at things as in time—as we must look at them—we must conceive the Eternal as the final stage in the time-process. We must conceive it as being in the future, and as being the end of the future. Time runs up to Eternity, and ceases in Eternity.

18. This conclusion will doubtless be rejected by many people without further examination as grossly absurd. How

can the timeless have a position at the end of a time-series? How can Eternity begin when Time ceases? How can Eternity begin at all?

The answer to these objections, I think, is as follows: Of course, on this view, Eternity is not really future, and does not really begin. For Time is unreal, and therefore nothing can be future, and nothing can begin. What, then, is the justification of regarding Eternity as future? It lies, I maintain, in the fact that Eternity is as future as anything can be. It is as truly future as tomorrow or next year. And, therefore, when, taking Time as real, as we must do in everyday life, we are endeavoring to estimate the relation of Time to Eternity, we may legitimately say that Eternity is future. From the point of view of time, the events of to-morrow and next year are future. And if Eternity is as truly future as they are, it is legitimate to say that Eternity is future. It is not absolutely true but it is as true as any other statement about futurity. And it is much truer than to say that Eternity is present or past.

Let us recapitulate. If time is unreal then the time-series is a series of more or less adequate representations of the timeless reality, and this series itself is not really in time. If what determines the position of the stages in the time-series is the different degrees of adequacy with which they represent the timeless reality, then the series which is not really a series in time, is really a series of degrees of adequacy. If the most adequate of these stages has only infinitesimal inadequacy, then the timeless reality, in its own completeness, forms the last stage of the series. And if the distinction between earlier and later stages is that the later are the more adequate, then—since the future is later than the present—we must place the timeless reality in the future, and at the end of the future.

Thus to say that Eternity is future on this theory is far more accurate than it was, in the two previous cases, to say that Eternity was present. For in those cases Eternity,

though it had some analogy to the present, was not as fully present as to-day's sunlight is, which is in the fullest sense present. But in this case Eternity is as really future as tomorrow's sunlight, which is in the fullest sense future. The presentness of Eternity was only a metaphor. Its futurity, in this case, is as true as any futurity.

19. Let us pass to another case. Let us suppose, as before, that the truth of the time-series was a series of representations arranged by their degrees of adequacy, and running on until the extreme term of the series only differed from the timeless reality itself by an infinitesimal amount. But let us suppose that the series runs the other way, so that it is the more adequate members which appear as the earlier stages of the time-series, and the less adequate members which appear as the later stages of the time-series. In this case we should have to regard the timeless reality as the beginning of the past, instead of as the end of the future. We should have to regard ourselves as having started for it, not as destined to reach it. It is obvious that from a practical point of view the difference between these two cases may be very great—I shall return to the practical importance of the relation later on. It seems to me that there are reasons for supposing that the first of the two cases is the one which really exists, and that Eternity is to be regarded as in the future and not as in the past. But our object here is merely to realize that, if the second case is true, and it is the more adequate members which appear as the earlier, then Eternity must be regarded as in the past.

20. For the sake of completeness we may mention a third case, though I think it one which is very improbable. Let us suppose that the stages of the series were arranged, not simply in order of adequacy, but on some principle which placed the least adequate in the middle, and made them more adequate as they diverged from this at either end. And let us suppose, as before, that the more adequate representations only differed from the timeless reality infinitesimally.

Then it is clear that the timeless reality would stand to the earliest member of the series, as that stood to the next earliest. And it is also clear that the timeless reality would stand to the latest member as this stood to the next latest. And therefore the timeless reality would be a term at each end of the series, which would start from it and would return to it. In that case we should have to consider the Eternal both as the beginning of the past, and the end of the future.

21. Thus we see that, under certain suppositions, the Eternal may be said to be past or future, not only as a metaphor, but with as much truth as anything else can be past or future. But this is not the case about the present. On no supposition could we be justified in saying now that the Eternal was present. If it were present, it would bear the relation to our present position in the time-series that the present does—that is, of course, it would have to be identical with it. And the timeless reality is certainly not identical with a position like our present one, which represents it as in time, and, therefore, according to our theory, represents it inadequately. On several suppositions, as we have seen above, the most appropriate *metaphor* for the Eternal is that of an eternal present. But on no supposition can it be more than a metaphor.

22. It remains to say, as to the cases in which the Eternal is regarded as being the end of the future or the beginning of the past, that it is possible that the past or the future in question might be infinite in length. I do not see anything which should exclude this supposition, and enable us to assert that the present has been reached in a finite time from the Eternal, or that the Eternal will be reached in a finite time from the present.

In mathematics that which only happens at an infinite distance is said to be the same as that which never happens at all. Thus two parallel straight lines are said to meet at an infinite distance. Since mathematicians adopt this meth-

od of expression it has probably some real convenience for mathematics. But, apart from the conventions of that special science, it seems to me that there is a very real difference between a series such that it reaches a result after an infinitely long process, and a series such that it never reaches that result at all.

Even, therefore, if the series of stages which intervene between the present and the timeless reality were such as would appear as an infinitely long time, I should see no impropriety in speaking of the timeless reality as the extreme stage of the series, from which it started, or to which it attains. At the same time, I see no more reason to suppose the length infinite than to suppose it finite.

23. I propose to devote the rest of my paper to a consideration of some aspects of the possibility that it may be right to regard Eternity as the end of the future.

It will be seen that this view has a very strong resemblance to a very common Christian view. The Christian heaven is sometimes looked upon as enduring through unending time. But it is also often looked upon as a timeless state. At the same time, it is generally looked on as in the future. We are not in it now. We have not been in it before birth—indeed, most Christians deny that we existed at all before the birth of our present bodies. We are separated from it by death—not, indeed, that death alone would place us in it, but that we shall not reach it till we have passed through death.

This has not been the universal view of Christianity, but I think it cannot be denied that it has generally been held that heaven was in the future. Heaven may be held to be a state of the mind, not a place or an environment. But still it is a state of the mind which is yet for us in the future. "Now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face." (1st Epistle to the Corinthians, XIII, 12.) The beginning may be present here, but not the completion. Moreover, even what is attained of it on earth has to be attained, to

be gained where it was not before, and so was once in the future and is still for many men in the future.

This view of the Christian heaven has been severely criticised lately, both from inside and from outside Christianity. It has been said that heaven, if it is perfect, must be timeless, and that it is generally admitted to be timeless, and that therefore it is absurd to place it in the future, and it should rather be regarded as an eternal present.

The critics have a certain subjective justification. They have investigated the relation of Time to Eternity more deeply than the majority of those who hold the view criticised. They have perceived the difficulties of giving Eternity a place at the end of the time-series, while many of those who held that heaven was future had not perceived those difficulties at all. Yet we must hold, I submit, that the view of heaven as now future might, under certain circumstances, be much truer than the view of heaven as now present could be under any circumstances.

Let us recapitulate once more the conditions. The Eternal can be rightly regarded as future if time is unreal, if the series which appears to us as a time-series is a series of representations arranged according to adequacy, if the highest of the series only differs by an infinitesimal amount from the reality represented, and if it is the more adequate representations which appear as latest in the series.

Now many people who hold heaven to be future would hold that it was attained gradually, by advancing stages which got higher till the last led into the timeless perfection without any breach of continuity, and that the higher of these stages came later. Three of the four conditions are thus complied with. The first—that time is unreal—is, of course, less frequent. But if this is combined with the other three—as it often is, and may very well be—then it seems to me that the idea of a timeless heaven as future is quite justifiable, and that the Christians who held this belief, while not seeing so deeply as such critics as Mr. Bradley

and Mr. Haldane, had in point of fact grasped the truth, though without seeing very clearly why it was true.

24. The practical importance of the question whether the Eternal can be regarded as future appears to me to be enormous. The supreme question, from the point of view of practical importance, is whether good or evil predominates in the universe, and in what proportion. The practical importance of philosophy consists, not in the guidance it gives us in life—it gives us, I think, very little—but in the chance that it may answer this supreme question in a cheerful manner, that it may provide some solution which shall be a consolation and an encouragement.

In what way can we hope to do this? It cannot be done by empirical induction. Even granting that we have evidence for coming to a favorable conclusion about the state of people on this planet at the present time—and this is all we can know empirically—it would be far too small a basis for an induction which would give us even the least probability as to the universe as a whole through the whole of time.

The belief in a God who is on the side of the good has been one of the supports on which men have most often tried to base an optimistic solution of this question. But, even if we accept the existence of such a God, it will not by itself afford sufficient ground for what we seek. We are wrecked against the old difficulty—the difficulty which Augustine stated with perfect clearness, and which theists, in all the centuries that have passed, have never avoided. Either God can do everything he likes, and then evil, since it exists, cannot be repugnant to him, and his existence affords no ground for limiting its extent or duration. Or else God cannot do everything he likes, and then we cannot be certain that evil, in spite of God's efforts, may not predominate over good now, and be destined to increase in the future.

Attempts have been made to prove the predominance

of good from the intrinsic nature of good and evil. But here, as it seems to me, any argument which proves anything proves too much, for they all tend to prove that there is no evil at all. And such an argument may, I fear, be dismissed as a *reductio ad absurdum*.

25. What other course remains—to those of us who are not so happily constituted as to be able to believe a thing because we want to believe it? One attempted solution remains—that on which was reared the most magnificent optimism that philosophy has ever seen, the optimism of Hegel. This solution rests on the unreality of Time. Only the Eternal reality exists, and the Eternal is perfectly good. All the evil which we suppose to be in existence is part of the Time-element which we wrongly suppose to be in existence. And so there is no evil at all.

This solution, however, in the form which it takes with Hegel, will not give us what we seek. In the first place, it has really no optimistic result. To tell us that evil is unreal does not make what we think to be evil in the least less unpleasant to suffer or in the least less depressing to expect. And even if it had that effect on the people who know the truth, how about the people who do not know it? The only ground of optimism would be found in a belief that this illusion of evil was limited in quantity or transitory in apparent duration. And the assertion of its unreality would not permit us to limit the extent or the duration of our illusion of its reality.

In the second place, I do not think that the theory can be accepted as true. It is possible that there is no sin in existence—indeed, if time is unreal, it seems inevitable that there should be no sin. It is even possible that there should be no pain—though that is not so simple. But evil is wider than sin or pain. And it seems, to me at any rate, certain that even the illusion that I am sinful or in pain is evil. I may not be really sinful or really in pain, but in some sense the illusion of the sin or pain exists, and that is

a real evil. If we doubt it, let us ask whether we should not think the universe better if a given illusion of sin or pain was replaced with an experience of virtue or pleasure. Or let us ask whether we should not blame a creator who needlessly inserted such illusions into the universe he created.

26. But if we abandon the attempt to base an optimistic solution on the unreality of time through the unreality of evil, yet there is another way in which the unreality of time may help us.

It is a certain fact—which may some day be accounted for, but which cannot be denied, whether it is accounted for or not—that good and evil in the future affect us quite differently from good and evil in the past. Let us suppose two men, one of whom had been very happy for a million years, and was just about to become very miserable for another million years, while the other had been very miserable for a million years and was now about to be very happy for the same period. If we suppose them to remember the past and to be certain of the future, it is certain that the second would be in a very much more desirable position than the first, although the total amount of life which each would be contemplating shows exactly the same amount of pleasure and pain.

Past evil, as such, does not sadden us like future evil. We may be saddened by the results which it has left behind in the present, or which may be expected to appear in the future—if those results are themselves evil, which of course is not always the case with the present results of past evils. Or the remembrance of past evil may remind us that the universe is not wholly good, and make us fear for evil in the future. And a particular past evil may give us, not merely this general apprehension, but particular reasons to fear some particular future evil. And, once more, if past evil has been caused by the wickedness of any person, the fact that the evil has passed away will not affect the fact that the responsible person is still wicked, unless indeed he has improved and repented.

27. If, therefore, we arrived at a theory of the universe which was unable to deny the existence of evil, or to assert that over the whole of time good predominated over evil, or that it did so at present, there would be still a chance for optimism. If such a theory were able to assert that, whatever the state of the universe now, it would inevitably improve, and the state of each conscious individual in it would inevitably improve, until they reached a final state of perfect goodness, or at least of very great goodness—surely this would be accepted as a cheerful theory. Surely this would give, as much as any belief can give, consolation and encouragement in the evils of the present. Indeed, it is nearly as favorable a theory as could be framed, for if we went much beyond this in the direction of optimism, we should soon reach the denial of evil, and then, as was said above, our theory would break itself against facts which cannot be denied.

28. But how could such a theory be established? No empirical evidence which we could reach would afford even the slightest presumption in favor of such a vast conclusion. And how can we prove *à priori* that good will predominate over evil more in the future than it has in the past, or than it does in the present? What link can *à priori* reasoning find between the later and the better.

I do not see how it can be done if Time is to be taken as real. But if Time is unreal, I do see a possibility—more I do not venture to say at present—of such a demonstration. I do see a possibility of showing that the timeless reality would be, I do not say unmixedly good, but very good, better than anything which we can now experience or even imagine. I do see a possibility of showing that all that hides this goodness from us—in so far as it is hidden—is the illusion of time. And I do see a possibility of showing that the different representations which appear to us as the time-series are in such an order that those which appear as later are the more adequate, and the last only infinitesimally dif-

fers from the timeless reality. In that case we must look on the Eternal as the end of Time; and on Time as essentially the process by which we reach to the Eternal and its perfection.

The reality of the Eternal can only have comfort for us, then, if we conceive it as future, since it is to the future that optimism must look. Nor do I see how we can regard the future optimistically unless we regard it as the progressive manifestation of the Eternal. Whether this can be done, will be for the future to pronounce—the possibilities of which I have spoken may prove to be demonstrations or to be the merest fallacies. Only I do see a chance of a happy solution in the relation of Time to Eternity, and, as philosophy stands at present, I see it nowhere else.

