III.—SOME PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS ON SELF-IDENTITY.

BY HAROLD H. JOACHIM.

§ 1. Of all the strange things, in this most strange and interesting world, perhaps the strangest is our own incuriousness. We walk for the most part stolidly through life, guided by sense and tradition and prejudice, our footing (as we suppose) on the king's highway, "solid facts" to our right hand and our left, ourselves the most indubitable fact of all. And if occasionally, in a momentary flash of thought, our environment, the highway under our feet, our own selves, flicker and rock and crumble, we are not greatly perturbed. The "thought" (we readily persuade ourselves) was but a piece of dialectical fireworks. Brilliant and amusing it may have been, but not a revelation of the truth. How indeed could it be true, if by its illumination the solid facts of our environment lost the firmness of their outlines and wavered into illusions? Thought is well enough if confined within its proper limits; and like our prototype, Thrasymachus,¹ we summon it to our aid, when it suits our purpose. But the thought, which is not idle fancy, must be based upon the "facts". It can "abstract" from them, and "generalise," but it must return to them in the end. They are the sole criterion of truth and reality, to which thought itself must be accommodated. Hence, when our prejudices are threatened, we shall again follow the example of Thrasymachus,² and appeal *against thought* to what we are pleased to call "the concrete facts of actual life". We measure thought by those very "facts," which it has shown to be conglomerates of sense in part illusory and wholly obscure. We will not revise our estimate of the "facts," measuring them by thought. We will not recognise that in thought and reflexion we are for the *first time* beginning to apprehend our selves and our environment as they really are, to understand what precisely it is that we assume so positively as "fact".

Foremost amongst these "unquestionable facts" are our

¹ Plato, *Republic*, 340 C ff.

² *Republic*, 343 A ff.

own Individuality and Self-Identity. It is a fact (or so we believe) that we are "Individuals," distinct from, and even exclusive of, all other things and people, and "the same" as ourselves through all the moments of our life. This exclusive individuality and this self-sameness throughout life seem so indisputable that we do not often stop to inquire what precisely they mean. It is worth discussing (we sometimes suppose) whether "we" have existed before birth, and shall survive after death: but in thus formulating these problems, we have already prescribed the limits within which the discussion is to move. We have already assumed our Individuality and our Self-Sameness during life as certainties neither requiring nor admitting criticism or elucidation—the solid foundation and the indubitable criterion of the whole discussion.

Yet, if there are "facts" which it is absurd for me to question, at least I should be able to state precisely *what* they are. My self-identical individuality may be an unquestionable fact: but clearly, if I am to accept it as such, I must understand what exactly it is that I so obstinately believe. In what precise sense am I undoubtedly an "individual"? And in what precise sense am I *now* "the same" as, *e.g.*, the boy, who, called by my name, went trembling to Elstree School in the autumn of 1879?

§ 2. Both for myself and for others, "I"—in the usual and unsophisticated sense—am an embodied spirit. The unity and individuality of our bodies, and their persistent (though changing) identity, are included in what we ordinarily mean when we refer to ourselves or to one another as self-identical individuals. Our body, we suppose, is one and individual at every moment of our life; and it persists one and the same throughout, although it changes. Disease and insanity, no doubt, raise problems which might lead us to qualify our ordinary attitude: but, normally at any rate, we should not regard ourselves as "one," if our body were two or more in such a way that its unity was destroyed. Nor should I normally recognise as "myself" a spirit which changed from body to body, or a body which embodied, simultaneously or successively, a plurality of disconnected spirits.

Now every body, as extended in three dimensions and as enduring in time, conforms to certain spatial and temporal conditions. Thus, *e.g.*, it 'occupies' a certain place, and the occupation is exclusive. It excludes every other body, and in so doing, is itself excluded by them. Its appropriation of one place is its expropriation from all other places. *Its* place, we may say, is at once its domain and its prison-

house:—the territory, within which it is privileged to be, and to which it is confined by the privileges of other bodies forming its spatial environment. We talk, indeed, of “penetration” and “chemical combination”. But one body does not “penetrate” another. The nail advances only in so far as particles of the wood are displaced or retreat. And though two or more chemical elements are said to ‘combine’ and ‘fuse’ to form a new chemical substance, the ultimate infinitesimal constituents of the combining bodies are supposed (it would seem) to retain their privacy and reciprocal spatial exclusiveness. They are *juxtaposed* in the compound, and not transfused.¹ So, again, every body can change its place, i.e. can pass from place to place, but only by passing continuously through the intermediate positions: and a body can exist at different dates, but only if its being is a continuous duration so that there is no temporal break between its ‘then’ and its ‘now’.

From these considerations, it would seem, we may derive certain *conditiones sine quibus non* of our own individuality and self-identity. For, so far as our body is concerned, we must surely suppose that “we” are subject to the general conditions of unity and persistence which apply to the spatially-extended and temporally-enduring things. And though even our body—*a fortiori* the embodied spirit which we call “ourself”—is *much more* than the solid which moves in space and endures through a period of time, yet, in being more, it can hardly be less. Its individuality and persistent identity must at least conform to the conditions just specified.

The living body then—even the living body of the self-conscious being—must occupy its own exclusive and excluded place at every moment of its life. It must exist somewhere and somewhen. Its changes of position must be connected by its continuous passage through intermediate positions in space; and the different dates, at which it exists, must be the successive phases of a duration which is a continuous passage in time. “I”—as a *bodily* individual—exclude, and am excluded by, all other things and embodied spirits. And if “I”—as an embodied spirit—am self-identical through life, both spatial and temporal continuity must be traceable through all the different positions in which, and all the different dates at which, “I” have existed. Given sufficient information, the successive events, in which “I” figure from my birth to my death, would show themselves, in so far as

¹ Cf. Arist., *De gen. et corr.*, 328 a 14, καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ τῷ μὲν μεμγμένον, ἐὰν μὴ βλάβῃ ὅξυ, τῷ λυγρεῖ δ' οὐθέν μεμγμένον.

they are or involve changes of my body, as phases of its continuous duration. And the different positions, which "I" occupy from my cradle to my death-bed, are all of them continuously connected in the unbroken passage of my body in space.

The observance of these conditions is not indeed enough to constitute the individuality and the identity of an embodied spirit: but the breach of them would suffice to destroy my claim to be a self-identical person. For I should neither be, nor remain, an individual, if my body could fuse with another body. And if, *e.g.*, an embodied spirit, in all other respects indistinguishable from myself, came into existence *here* two hundred years hence, or existed *now* in China—or even contiguous to, but expropriated from, the place now occupied by my body—none of these hypothetical personages would be myself.

§ 3. What we have said might appear plausible, if the living body were a Democritean atom or an aggregate of such atoms. Even then, however, the least reflexion would show us that the unity of the body—its unity as an atom, or as a sum of atoms—has been quietly assumed, and has in no sense been elucidated. Does the unity of an atom define the unity of "its" place, or is an atom one, because "its" place is one? And what do we mean by the unity of a place? Do the many atoms in a chemical compound, and the many compounds which constitute my body, sum themselves together into One, or are they summed together by the pressure of the neighbouring atoms? Or what other meaning can be attached to the Unity of a Many of this kind? These are amongst the questions, which we should be forced to ask, but should not be able to answer.

We have in truth made many impudent assumptions. We assumed that the unity of an atom was the exclusive occupation of a place: but we never inquired what "a place" might be, nor how in the spatial *continuum* a place could be "one" and condition the unity of its occupant. Again, we assumed that the "solid, which moves in space," is either an atom or an aggregate of atoms; and that, if it is an aggregate, its unity is the exclusive occupation of "its" place, *i.e.* of the sum of the places of its constituent atoms. Finally, we assumed that though our body "is much more than the solid, which moves in space and endures through a period of time, yet, in being more, it can hardly be less": and fortified by this specious principle, we applied to the living body what we supposed to hold good of the inanimate solid. Yet, if A is "more

than" B and therefore cannot also be less, it does not follow that A contains B, identical and unaltered, *plus* certain additions. The number 6 is "more than" 3, and friendship is "more than" abstract justice. But 6 does not possess, in addition to certain properties of its own, all the properties which characterise 3;¹ nor should I count you as my friend, if you exacted from me the utmost rigour of the law with the accompaniment of your kind regards and an invitation to dinner.

There was nothing to warrant these assumptions, and they forced us to maintain strange paradoxes. Thus, we were driven to deny all *chemical*, as distinguished from *mechanical*, synthesis. The chemical compound, we were compelled to say, is really a composite of juxtaposed atoms, a shuffling and re-grouping of unalterable infinitesimal solids. But the chemical compound acts and re-acts as one, as if it held together of itself: and it exhibits its own peculiar character and properties, which cannot be regarded as the aggregate—the sum or arithmetical balance—of the properties which its components manifest in isolation. And the single chemical constituents, the chemical atoms, which we regarded as so many inert solids, pushed from position to position in space like draughts on a board, exist only in our imagination. If we must attempt to describe the ultimate components of the compounds which we see, we shall be forced to think of them as centres of force, as "monads" or "entelechies" which *are* in so far as they act and re-act: as entities, whose being is to attract and repel one another, manifesting even a certain elective affinity in their attractions, a certain antipathy in their repulsions: and uniting not by juxtaposition in space but by a conspiracy of co-operation which issues in a unitary system of differentiated movement. A body—a chemical constituent or a chemical compound—is, it would seem, a centre of force or a system of co-operating centres of force: and its place is determined by its action, is the result of its individuality, and not *vice versa*. The action of a body, or what it is, does not depend upon its place. On the contrary, its place is the sphere of its action, the expression of what it is. Its being is its action and reaction, and is thus essentially relative to the being of its fellows. It does not act where it is, but is where it acts.

And when we denied that the living body could be, or remain, an individual, if it fused with another body, the absurdity of our position reached its climax. For the living body

¹ E.g. 6 is not a prime.

is chemical process through and through. The formation, the disintegration and the re-formation of chemical compounds—what we call “assimilation,” “nutrition,” and “growth”—are life, or the inseparable characters of life. And if, in these processes, we will not recognise the fusion of other bodies with the living body, with its cells and tissues, how otherwise can we conceive them? To conceive nutrition and growth as the mechanical apposition of the atoms of the food to the atoms of the cells and tissues is *in principle* hardly less absurd than the view, that my flesh and bone are nourished and augmented by the addition to them of infinitesimal portions of flesh and bone in the bread which I devour.

§ 4. Let us then endeavour to make a fresh start. “All bodies,” Leibniz has said,¹ “are in a perpetual flux like rivers, and parts are entering into them and passing out of them continually.” But as regards the living human body, this is, if anything, an understatement, and a metaphor still too mechanical. For it suggests (what Leibniz himself possibly did not mean) that *only some* parts pass in and out of the whirlpool of life, whilst others persist unaltered: and it implies a channel through which the river flows. But our body is, from what we call its “beginning” to what we call its “end,” a flux, a torrent, a whirlpool, for which it does not seem possible to assign any continent channel, and in which no single material particle appears to persist unaltered. Certain portions of my skeleton, it is true, appear to persist relatively unaltered throughout the greater part of my life, and even after my death. But they were not present at my first inception, and they formed no part of my living body in the first stages of its pre-natal development. And precisely in so far as we suppose them to be out of the whirlpool of chemical process, we regard them as “dead” and as “inorganic,” as not constitutive of the living organism. They are, we may perhaps say, the channel which the river has cut for itself in the course of its flowing: but the river preceded the channel. Or, they are the shell deposited by the living creature:—a shell which emerged after the life was there, and remains as the mummified witness to the life that has gone.

The biologists tell us that we “begin” as a single cell, itself the fusion of two parent cells, which sets up a process of internal fissure and cell-multiplication. As generation of cells succeeds generation, there is a rapid increase in the

¹ *Monadology*, § 71.

number of the cells and a rapid progress in the differentiation of their functions and their structure: so that an animal body like that of a man is, already before its "birth," a federated society of many colonies of cells, and the colonies, and the cells which form them, differ greatly from one another both in visible structure and in their actions and reactions

If now we date our own beginning as a living body from the fusion of the two primitive cells, and identify our own bodily death with the disruption of the federation of their descendants, the change and development of the cell-population between these two dates may be regarded as our "bodily life". And "our body" will signify the cell-population itself with all its vicissitudes during that period. Our "bodily life" will cover the growth and development of a society of living entities, and will cease when the society is disintegrated into groups, or perhaps into single units of its population. It will start, indeed, with a single cell, which is the fusion of two in one; and, for an appreciable period, "we" shall exhibit rather the unity of a family than that of a society. But for the greater part of our life, from a date long before our birth, "we" are a nation or a federated system of nations. Our body is a shifting population of diverse cells, all descended from the same ancestor. This population is differentiated into groups or colonies; and the colonies are united by so intimate a federation that they—and even the unit-cells which compose them—depend reciprocally upon one another for their "being" and their "persistence". For their "being" is their actions and reactions in which they respond to the actions and reactions of their fellows: and their "persistence" is the continuous stream of descendants in which they are reproduced, the reproduction depending upon (and itself being a contributory condition of) the activities of the other units, and groups of units, in the federation.

Thus, if I am asked whether my body, as a living whole, is "the same" as that of the boy who went in my name to Elstree School in 1879, the answer would seem to be "Yes—in a sense analogous to that in which the English nation is 'the same' now as it was in the days of Queen Elizabeth". We must however remember that the cells, which are the people of my body, are all descended from a single ancestor, itself a unit of this shifting population: and in this respect at least the analogy does not hold. If, on the other hand, I am asked whether any of the cells of my present body are "the same" as those of my former body, the answer is

clearly "No—unless you are prepared to identify the child with its parents and remoter ancestors".

§ 5. We have struggled, as it were, half-way up the cliff, and have reached a somewhat precarious foothold. Our safest course will be to proceed. But before we attempt to advance, it will be well—even at the risk of a fall—to examine a little more closely the place in which we stand. While I live, my body (we have maintained) is "one" and "the same," though nothing in it—with the exception of certain dead deposits of its life—no organ, no tissue, and no single cell, persists *numerically* the same from my inception to my death, or endures *unaltered* even for a brief fragment of my duration. The constituents of my body are succeeding generations of cells—an ever-shifting population, the units of which are one by continuity of descent. All the cells, which are at any time in my body, are differentiated reproductions of the "same" cell: and, in each of the lines of direct descent, the children and the grandchildren take up the work of their ancestors and contribute "the same" distinctive actions and re-actions—or rather a developed variation of "the same"—towards that system of conspiring energies which is the life of the whole.

The *unity* of my body—my bodily individuality—at any one moment is thus the co-operation of a conspiring Many:—a co-operation which never fails throughout my life (for failure would be physical death), but which is always changing in its character and in fulness, and in respect to the Many which co-operate. And the *identity* of my body through the different moments of its life is thus a *theme with variations*. But this metaphor must not be pressed. For the different stages and phases of my bodily development, the successive "co-operations" which are its "individuality" at each successive moment, are, *taken in their entirety*, the varied theme. No single one of them is "theme" *par excellence*, upon which the others succeed as "variations". Each is theme and variation in one; or the theme is and lives only in, and as, its variations.

We have, then, here a unity or individuality which is that of a system or cycle of functions: and an identity or permanent, which is the unrolling character, the law or the plan, of a development. The whole is one, not as a spatial continent, which 'embraces' a Many but leaves separate the Many embraced. The "whole" is a unitary cycle of activities: and its "parts" are the contributory activities, which are at once the differentiations of the whole and the complements of its fulness. And the identity is not

a permanent element in the change, not an atom or a monad or a point of sameness round which the differences flow. It is itself differentiated, itself changing and developing: the different stages and the successive states are *its* variations, and the phases of *its* being.

§ 6. How precarious our foothold is, should by this time be more than sufficiently plain. The metaphors, which we have employed, may, indeed, have made it clear that the unity and identity of the body are—like the unity and identity of anything which is not an unreal abstraction—“ideal”; *i.e.* that they are the proper objects of speculative thought and intelligent reflexion upon the perceived, and neither the mere conglomerates presented coincidentally to sense, nor the fictitious ‘ones’ and ‘permanents’—the atoms and the units—which an excessive faith in mathematics might incline us to accept as realities. But in other respects our metaphors have raised more questions than we can pretend to answer. A “theme with variations” implies a composer and executive musicians: the “co-operation of a conspiring Many” demands that the Many should be such as to conspire. A “character unrolling itself in a temporal development” must surely be the character of something or somebody: and a “plan” fulfilled in a development at once suggests a purpose, and a mind or a will which purposes.

Now we might perhaps plead for patience, on the ground that so far we have but considered *the body* of the embodied spirit. We might suggest that the spirit, which is embodied, may prove to be the owner of the “character” and the composer of the “theme”: that *it* is the mind which “purposes,” and whose “purposing” in part finds expression in the “plan” or “law” of the bodily development. The final discussion of some of the difficulties, and perhaps the final crash, would thus be postponed to a later stage of our inquiry. But one difficulty at least can not be postponed or evaded. We set out to investigate our unity and self-identity: and we began with the living body which we, as embodied spirits, involve. And what we have offered as the result of our inquiry is the systematic co-operation of an indefinite multiplicity of living bodies, the shifting population of cells. They are the musicians who execute the varied theme, the conspirators whose co-operation is the unity of the whole. Yet what are they, but simplified miniatures of the whole? Like the whole, each cell is one by unity of action and re-action: and identical, while it lives, by continuity in the variations of the “theme” which is its energy. Like the whole also, each cell is born, is nourished and grows; endures for a time, grows old, and

is reproduced in its descendants. Differences no doubt there are: but, in principle and in the main, the very characters, which perplexed us in the whole, have been transferred to the single cells without hesitation, as if *there* they were transparently obvious.

Yet if we examine the "single" cell, as before we examined the "single" human body, we shall again be confronted with the whirlpool of chemical process. The cell *appears* indeed to the microscope, as the body *appears* to the naked eye and the sense of touch, as a solid thing with fairly definite outlines, as a characteristic substance with a fairly distinguishable structure. But its substance, as chemistry will tell us, is certain complex and highly unstable chemical compounds, continually forming from the matter which flows in from the environment, continually breaking down and restoring to the environment the products of the disintegration, and continually re-forming from fresh incoming materials. There is about as much or as little persistent identity in the stuff of the cell, as in a vortex moving down a stream. And the cell's outlines and inner structure are in constant expansion and contraction, and change. The particles, which constitute them, do not persist numerically the same, but are continually yielding to new-comers which relieve them.

Once more then, in the "single" cell as in the "single" body, we have an "ideal" unity and an "ideal" identity, the same in principle and raising similar problems. But there is this serious difference. We cannot even plausibly imagine the Many which make the unity of the cell (the shifting succession of infinitesimal entities within its unity and identity) as endowed with the properties of the whole. We cannot, without stultifying ourselves, conceive them as a new and still simpler order of living bodies, as an army of still smaller conspirators and executive musicians. The cell was the *least* living body—the indivisible unit of life. And if we ask "What are these infinitesimal constituents of the single cell?", we can only conceal our ignorance and our defeat by semi-mathematical and semi-mythical language, by calling them, *e.g.*, "monads" or "entelechies" or "centres of attractive and repulsive forces".¹

§ 7. One reason of our discomfiture is not hard to discover. We have once more confused an abstraction with a constituent of the concrete from which it was abstracted. We have once more succumbed to the fallacy that if A is more than B, A must be B together with certain additions.²

¹ Cf. above, § 3

² *Ibid.*

The unity and identity of the living body, as we have been conceiving it, are irrelevant to our problem. For though I am an *embodied spirit*, I am not a living body apart from spirit *together with* a spirituality apart from body. Hence I—the concrete embodied spirit—may well be one and self-identical, even though my body, conceived as the chemist and biologist might conceive it, is neither: and if, on the other hand, my living body, considered thus from without, be one and identical, yet *its* unity and identity are not constituents of *mine*.

We have not here to discuss the difficult question whether any living body, any animal or plant, or even any body at all, can *be* and be adequately conceived under the abstraction necessarily and rightly made by the natural sciences. It is certain at least, and it is sufficient for our present purpose, that no human being is, or contains within itself, a "living body" thus conceived. It would be absurd if we based an inquiry into the dramatic unity of Hamlet on a study of the minor characters, without taking any account of the hero. Yet our own procedure has been even more unreasonable. For the "Hamlet," whom we have neglected, is not one personage amongst others, but the only personage. He *is* the play; and what we have taken for "minor characters" must either be viewed as phases of his personality or disappear from the drama altogether.

There would seem in fact to be two positions, which it is not possible to combine in a single *conspectus*. For (1) we may "observe" our own bodies and our own physical processes within certain limits; and, again within certain limits, we may "observe" our own moods and habits of mind, the affections and vicissitudes of our conscious state. So, too, we may "observe" other bodies and their processes: and with some precariousness we may infer, from certain observable changes, moods and habits of mind, desires, volitions and thoughts, which we attribute to self-conscious beings other than ourselves. On the other hand (2) we may plant ourselves, as it were, within the intimacy of our own self-consciousness, and "enjoy"—but not "observe"—our own being-for-ourselves from within the incommunicable and impenetrable privacy of our self-feeling.

Now hitherto we have adopted the first position, and we have attempted by the way of "observation" to elucidate the unity and identity of our body. And this is substantially the position of the chemist, the biologist, and every student of nature. They study, by observation and inference, the vicissitudes and functions of the living thing: and they dis-

tinguish and describe, and attribute to "it," certain actions and re-actions, certain chemical processes, instincts and habitual modes of behaviour, perceptions, memories, desires and thoughts. But what they are thus describing, is the being of the living thing as it appears from without, and not as it is for the inward experience of the thing itself. And any unity and identity, which they may find in the facts thus studied, are relative to the observers, and have not necessarily anything to do with any unity and self-identity which the embodied spirit may "enjoy" in its being-for-itself.

§ 8. Within the big whirlpool of chemical process, the student of nature will observe many minor vortices. Each of these is a short-lived, ever-shifting bubble on the stream of change. Nevertheless, for his observation and inference, it is a "single" bubble, *this* bubble and not *that*. It will at least *appear* to the observer to possess a certain cohesion and continuity in its changes; and he will reckon it as "one thing" relatively self-contained and distinguished from "other things" in the external world. Although the stuff comprised within its shifting outlines is a concentrating and a dispersing, a streaming in and a streaming out, of the stuff of the big whirlpool, yet it will exhibit to the observer a fairly constant chemical character. Within each minor vortex, certain typical chemical compounds are always forming, and—even in disintegrating—re-forming. And this constancy of type in its stuff is reflected in the typical constancy of that cycle of activities by which the vortex responds to activities in its surrounding whirlpool. The cycle of activities, indeed, is always changing in response to the changing provocations of the environment. Yet, even in these changing adjustments, the observer will detect a certain typical constancy or continuity of character, *i.e.* a certain identity in the development of the vortex.

Now this cycle of activities—this cycle of observable changes responding to other observable changes—is only the *outer show*, which an inward and spiritual being presents, in so far as certain phases of its inwardness, of its being-for-self, are *externalised* :—*i.e.*, displayed to an observer as so many facts and events in space and time. "My body," as I myself and others may observe it, as a minor vortex with its typical stuff and its typical activities, is not "myself" nor any part of "myself" as I genuinely and veritably am. For nothing can enter into my veritable being, unless it be or become an appropriated "moment" of my own self-conscious experience, a phase in the enrichment of my "self," a turn or a re-turn in that spiritual movement, which is the maintenance, the expression and the development of my "personality".

§ 9. Let us then endeavour to start each from his own self-consciousness. "I"—let us suppose—am for myself a centre from which radiate, or a focus in which converge, certain rays of immediate consciousness. Of this immediacy, pleasure and pain are typical, but by no means the only, instances. For all my experiences—all my emotions, my desires and volitions, and all my perceptions and thoughts—whatever else may be said about them, are "immediately for me," are "appropriations" of my inward spirituality: and thus considered they are rays streaming from, and converging into, the centre or focus which is myself. "Centre" and "focus," of course, are metaphors, and must not be pressed. If "I" am a centre, my centrality is also its own circumference: and if I am a "focus," the "focus" is one with the rays which it focusses. But the metaphors may serve to convey that my inward unity has a certain range, which is also *eo ipso* a certain limit. "My" feeling extends into, and over, a sphere in which I am "at home," where "I" alone can thus feel, beyond which "I" in this sense am not. This province of my immediate spiritual appropriation, which is the territory of its confinement, includes—along, no doubt, with a great deal more—what the observer would call "my body". And thus "I," the concrete embodied spirit, am in my veritable being an incommunicable and impenetrable individual, an absolute one of feeling. This intimate immediacy, which is "myself," cannot indeed be observed—not even by myself—nor described. But it is "unquestionable fact," the primary self-evident *datum*, the one immediate and absolute certainty for each of us in this world of doubt and possible illusion. Here at last I have found "myself"—the self-identical individual, which excludes all others, and "enjoys" its own privacy of being throughout what people call "my life," and perhaps beyond.

My veritable being, if it is a "fact," is unlike all other facts, since it can neither be observed nor described—not even by myself—but only be "enjoyed". We have, indeed, named and described it, following in the footsteps of Descartes, as the immediate oneness of self-feeling: and we might have borrowed the language of Kant, and have spoken of the "'I think' which accompanies all my ideas," of the "Analytic Unity of Apperception," the "I am I" of Self-Consciousness. Any description is in the nature of the case inadequate. All that we can do is to appeal to each self-consciousness to plant itself within its own privacy, and there to live and enjoy the indescribable which is itself.

§ 10. We have reached a position, which we may be tempted to repudiate as absurd without more ado. The indescribable,

we might be content to say, is—whatever its merits—at least *quid* indescribable nothing for philosophy. It is nothing at least for a philosophical inquiry, which sets out to elucidate and explain. Or we might ridicule this issue of our wild-goose chase, according to which (as it seems) the hunter must become the fowl in order to capture it. But the ridicule will lose its force, if we remember that in *our* goose-chase, admittedly and on any theory, hunter and hunted are *in some sense* one and the same from the start. And a position which has, or appears to have, the support of Descartes and perhaps of Kant, cannot safely be dismissed without a patient consideration.

My veritable being, then, is an immediate unity of feeling. As such—as an immediacy of self-enjoyment—it is the present, and *the present alone* is it. For how can the immediate unity of feeling enwrap within itself what is *no longer* or *not yet*? Now, indeed, in the very raising of this doubt, the experience, which is the doubting, is a self-positing and a self-guaranteeing flash of being, absolutely one with itself and for itself, absolutely impenetrable and incommunicable. And *now* again there is a second flash, a moment's impenetrable and incommunicable self-being or self-feeling, as self-positing and self-guaranteeing as the first. Am "I," then, in my veritable being, a series of moments, each absolutely one and individual, each absolutely impenetrable to all other moments? Or does the impenetrable individuality of my self-feeling cover and embrace within itself all the successive moments of the series which is my self-conscious life?

To accept the first alternative, would be to pulverise "myself" into an indefinite multiplicity of reciprocally exclusive and impenetrable selves. Each moment of my being would be as foreign to every other, as incommunicable and impenetrable a "self," as *I* could be to *you* or to any other person on the extremest theory of the absolute privacy and self-containedness of the human individual. Thus, the very immediacy and incommunicableness, which were to guarantee our own self-identical individuality, have turned against us, and dissolved "ourselves" into a heap and a stream of isolated impenetrable entities.

Nor can we help ourselves by appealing to Descartes. For Descartes had his own way of escape; but a way which makes short work of any "veritable being" of our own. On a first reading, indeed, we may think that Descartes is content to assume an Individual Mind, which the single flashes of self-consciousness presuppose as the Substance of which they are attributes or modal states. And we may

be inclined to put this aside, as an assumption which may perhaps clearly formulate the problem, but certainly does not solve it.

But, if we look more closely, we find the finite "thinking Substance" dissolving into the creative omnipotence of God. I, as a Mind, am indeed a Substance—but a *created* Substance; and "creation," in the theory of Descartes, has an unexpected depth of meaning. For God, who has created me, maintains me in being: and this maintenance is a re-creation from moment to moment—a re-creation, moreover, which achieves the union of the intrinsically isolated. "For the whole time of my life can be divided into innumerable parts: and these parts are such, that none of them taken singly depends in any way upon the rest. Hence the fact that I was a short time ago is no ground from which my present being may reasonably be inferred, unless some cause creates me, as it were afresh, for this very moment, *i.e.* conserves me."¹

The second alternative is an extravagant fancy, a mere effort to find solid ground by plunging more deeply into the swamp. There is no immediate unity of self-feeling, no individual whole of intimate self-enjoyment, comprehending within itself my yesterday, my to-day, and my to-morrow: *à fortiori*, there is none which embraces my boyhood and my old age, my whole self-conscious life. Great stretches of my past, not to mention my future and many features even of my present, are clearly not "for me" as explicit constituents of my immediate sense of myself. And when I sleep—even if I always dream—and when I faint, there are lapses and breaks in my self-consciousness, which *on any interpretation* are fatal to this hypothesis. Moreover, if *per impossibile* this comprehensive individuality of immediate self-feeling were a fact, and were my veritable being, my temporal existence, at least as regards its successiveness, would be an illusion. It would be meaningless to ask whether I am the same person as the boy of 1879, since "I" should be a being whose existence, though limited in time, was inwardly "timeless"—*i.e.* without any distinction of past, present, and future within its total duration.

§ 11. No doubt it will be said that our two alternatives are not exhaustive. We shall be told that we have forgotten to reckon with Memory. For in memory I am immediately aware of what was, aware in the present of my own past. Thus Memory is the thread which binds the successive

¹ Descartes, *Med.* 3 (vii., pp. 48-49): cf. also, *Resp. Sec.*, Ax. 2 (vii., p. 165).

moments of my immediate self-consciousness into an enduring self.

What, then, is it that remembers? And what guarantee is there that the memories are genuine:—real moments of my past self, not creatures of my present imagination? If “I,” the present immediate self-certainty, “remember” (and what other remembering subject can the theory admit?); and if *what is remembered*, as well as the *remembering*, is one for me with my own immediacy:—my past is fused in the intimate self-feeling which is my present. My “then” and my “now,” these two impenetrables and incommunicables, have nevertheless flowed into one; and “I,” in being now, *am* simultaneously, with the same immediate presence, what “I” was then. *Either*, then, my memory has tampered with the facts. I *am* not genuinely remembering, but imagining, and imagining falsely. *Or* the distinction between past and present in my duration is illusory. There seemed to be, but there never were, two impenetrables, two successive moments of my being. There is but one, the immediacy of a present, inclusive of differences, but without inner temporal succession.

Suppose, on the other hand, that I am immediately aware *that* I “remember” or *that* I fancy myself to be remembering, but that *what is remembered* is not included in my immediate self-consciousness. Suppose that “I” remain this impenetrable moment of immediacy, and *am not*, in remembering, *that which I remember*. Then the attachment of the past to my present is (for me) inferential and precarious: it is not invested with that “inwardness” which guarantees my immediate self-feeling. And if thus the past moments of my being belong to my veritable self, only so far as they are recalled and authenticated by my memory in the present, there will be little or nothing, beyond the moment’s self-feeling, which can with any certainty be accepted as “mine” or “me”. It is a commonplace that memory is untrustworthy and capricious. It deceives by omission, even when it does not deceive by invention. We have all been disconcerted by the attempt to recall even those activities and interests, in which (to judge by all the available evidence) “we” must have lived most intensely in the past. Some of them will come to us with so strange a face, that we shall with difficulty believe that there was a time when “we” were identified with them. Many of them will not come back to us at all. Which of us can “remember” the self, whose whole being was concentrated in the triumphant mastery of the arts of standing, walking, and talking? And though we are readily

convinced, as regards some of these "remembered" experiences, *that* once "we" lived intensely in them, we cannot now recall them in their detail, or renew the fulness of the life which once was theirs and ours. I cannot doubt *that* once "I" lived in intimate friendship with A, B and C, and *that* this affection and this intercourse, with all that they involved, constituted the substance of my self-conscious being. But A, B and C have long ceased to be anything but names to me—if indeed I can even recall their names: and all the detail of our intercourse has faded beyond recovery. Nor can I doubt that the greater part and the substance of my self-conscious being was once absorbed in such-and-such a study. Yet, if I now read the book, in which those former moments of my "self" obtained expression and relief, whole paragraphs and pages—and even in some measure the thought which they embody—are as alien to me as the work of a writer long since dead and buried.

§ 12. No resource is open to us, but a candid confession that we have taken an utterly wrong turning. We have looked for spirituality in the inwardness of self-feeling, and we have found what might have been expected. We have found the empty form of immediacy, the shadow which "accompanies" all self-conscious being, and is not the substance of any. For that form of absolute and impenetrable oneness, which seems to shut me in and to shut me out, is attributable equally and alike to every human consciousness, or rather to every moment of self-conscious experience. Such a unity is mine at every moment of my being, and yours at every moment of yours. And if at this moment "I" am—in all the substantial content of myself, in all my interests and purposes, in all my thoughts and emotions—other than "I" was at school, and other than I shall be ten years hence, still *then* and *now*, and at every *then* and every *now*, this trivial abstraction of unity, this indifferent form of immediacy, will "accompany" all my experiences, as it "accompanies" yours. All that I experience is "mine": and into this privacy nothing and no one can intrude, since it contains nothing. Or since this same privacy is yours and everyone's, it contains anything and everything, and intrusion is superfluous.

§ 13. If we continue to believe in our exclusive individuality and our self-sameness through life, we must recognise that these "unquestionable facts" have hitherto frustrated our attempts at elucidation. Our belief is a faith in a something we know not what: and what we seem to know is the reverse of what we profess to believe. At every turn of our investigation there emerged not our self-identity, but our self-dif-

ference ; not our exclusive individuality, but our communion with other beings ; not our impenetrable privacy, but the broad universality of the common environment. We tried to conceive our body as a solid thing, as an atom or a sum of atoms, the proprietor of its own impenetrable place. And we were forced to recognise a universe of actions and reactions, a system which is the interplay and the balance of adjusted forces. We spoke of monadic centres of force, of single entelechies, as the units whose actions and re-actions co-operated to constitute the system. But even if this partitioning of the system is legitimate—even if these “ monadic centres of force ” are real individual entities, and not mere mathematical fictions—the supposed impenetrable unity of our body as a solid thing in space has vanished beyond recovery.

At the next stage, we tried to conceive our living body as a chemical and biological individual, or at least as a self-contained system of chemical or biological individuals. At once we found ourselves confronted with one great whirlpool of chemical change, with one great stream of processes which is the universal life. And such unity and persistence, as we could venture to ascribe to the living things, were relative and derivative. The living body is an individuation of the universal life, a minor vortex within the big whirlpool.

If, in the last stage of our investigation, we were not forced into a corresponding position, it was only because our inquiry here was incomplete. We have gone far enough to recognise that our spiritual individuality is certainly not an incommunicable and impenetrable privacy. We have not gone far enough to see our spiritual selves as the individuations of the universal spirit—as that or nothing. Yet it is not hard to sketch the further stages of our journey ; not hard to trace the path which would lead us to recognise (if we may adapt a phrase from Geulincx¹) that we are but currents or “ rivuli in the one great ocean of divinity ”.

For there are plain and obvious facts, which hitherto we have not noticed. We share in common joys and sorrows, we can be inspired with one hope and one enthusiasm, and we can make our lives the realisation of the same ideals and the instruments for the expression of a common love. To “ forget oneself ” (as the phrase goes) in the reverence and

¹ Geulincx, *Annotata ad Metaphysicam* (Land's ed., ii., p. 269), “ Nos sumus rivuli magni istius oceanus divinitatis,” etc. (cf. also the masterly development of the position, which I am feebly sketching, in Bosanquet's *Value and Destiny of the Individual and Principle of Individuality and Value*).

in the creation of beautiful things, is to become a great artist. The thinker must have "buried himself" in the pursuit of truth, and the prophet and the saint are those who have "lost themselves" in the worship and love of God. Pondering on the significance of such phrases and such experiences, we should begin to see in a new light the birth and development—the self-collecting, the self-winning, and the self-quickeading—of the spiritual individuality of man. For we are no longer blinded to every other feature in our experience but one. We are no longer tempted to insist that, since it was *I not you* who discovered this truth, who painted this picture, who initiated this reform, who made this sacrifice, *here only* or *here primarily*—in this "I not you"—must lie my veritable self, my individuality as a spiritual being. Discarding this shadow, we should concentrate our attention on the substance. We should turn to the worlds of knowledge and art, of morality and religion—to the universal structures or systems in which the lineaments of spirituality are most plainly to be seen. And in these "embodiments" and "creations" of the spirit of truth and beauty and love, we should recognise that universal spiritual substance which is "self-individuated," "self-appropriated" and "self-manifest" as the personality of man.