

Why We May Hope for Immortality.

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Why We May Hope for Immortality. By Prof. Josiah Royce.



MAN is a significant being, not by virtue of his body, or his feelings, or his fortunes, or his social status, but by virtue of his will. A man as an ethical being is what he purposes to be, so far as his will is as yet temporally expressed. So far as his will is not yet expressed his life belongs to the future. All else about him, besides his will, his purpose, his life plan, his ideal, his deed, his volitional expression—all else than this, I say, is mere material for manhood, mere clothing, mere environment, or mere fortune. Ignorantly as he now expresses himself, his worth lies not in the extent of his knowledge, but in the seriousness of his intent to express himself.

But if one who appears in the outer form of man shows no sign as yet of having any personal ideal, or life plan, or purpose, or individual will at all, then in such a case we indeed call the being whom we know in our human relations a person; but he so far appears as a person by courtesy. An explicit personality is one which shows itself through deeds that embody a coherent ideal—an ideal which need not be abstractly formulated, but which must be practically active, recognizably significant, consciously in need of further temporal expression.

The righteous man is dissatisfied with his present opportunity to express his will. He needs yet further future opportunities to do his duty. The conscious sinner is dissatisfied with the will which he is at the moment trying to express. Each as a finite being engaged in a temporal process is a person by virtue of his dissatisfactions. I refer now by the word dissatisfactions not to gloomy feelings so much as eagerness for further deeds. How we feel is a matter of fortune. How active we need to be—that constitutes ourselves as now we are.

A finite personality, I insist, is a will to do something. So far as I have something yet to do, I am, however, dissatisfied with the past as with the present. I demand in just so far a future, a future in which, since I am now a sinner at war with myself, I shall come into unity

with my own will and shall discover what it is I am seeking; a future in which, in so far as even now I know and intend my duty, I shall further express this will of mine in the countless deeds that my personal purpose requires me yet to do.

Does not this follow at once? The finite personality can say: "In me as now I am God is dissatisfied with himself in so far as he is partially expressed in me. I am a form of that divine dissatisfaction which constitutes the entire temporal order. This is my link with God, that now I am discontent with the expression of my personality."

In me, then, God is discontented with his own temporal expression. This discontent I myself am. It constitutes me. This individual thirst for infinity, this personal warfare with my own temporal maladjustment to my own ideal—this is my personality. I am this hatred of my own imperfection, this search for the future deed, this intent to do more than has as yet to be done. All else about me, fortune, feeling, hope, fear, joy, sorrow—these are accidents. These are my clothing, my mere belongings; these constitute the wilderness of finitude in which I wander. But I—I am essentially the wanderer whose home is in eternity. And in me God is discontent—discontent with my waywardness, discontent with the little so far done.

In me the temporal being, in me now, God is in need, is hungry, is thirsty, is in prison. In me, then, God is dissatisfied. But he is God. He is absolute. Eternity is his. He must be satisfied. In eternity in the view of the whole temporal process he is satisfied. In his totality he attains, and he attains what I seek. And this, I take it, is our rational warrant for insisting that every rational person has in the endless temporal order an opportunity for an endless series of deeds. Seen, then, from the eternal point of view, my personal life must be an endless series of deeds. This is a sketch of what I take to be the doctrine of immortality.

