Self, God and Immortality

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CHAPTER 8

Immortality: A Pragmatic-Processive Model

I am the resurrection and the life. If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?

—John 11:25-26

Leap, life
Leap and dance.
Dance out of death.
Leap.
Dance.
Life,
sun-filled, touch
the phoenix self
of death to life.

Death to life:
all death
to life
in flame.

—William Birmingham
“The Phoenix”

Just as it is unacceptable to advance a belief in God without venturing some guess as to the character of the divine, so it would be fruitless to present a belief in immortality that did not—however tentatively and sketchily—suggest what a new life would, or at least ought to, involve. As John Hick has noted: “A doctrine which can mean anything means nothing. So long, then, as we refrain from spelling out our faith it remains empty.”1 In the same vein, H. D. Lewis contends that “no one can expect or believe anything without having some idea of what it is that he expects.”2 The task of this chapter, then, is to suggest a model of the cosmic process that would justify belief in immortality as attractive and as life-enhancing. In keeping with the experiential character and this-worldly focus of the pragmatism I espouse, any acceptable model will have to offer possibilities for the enhancement and enrichment of life. It will be unacceptable to the extent that it is an escape
from life as we here and now experience it. It will be acceptable to the extent that it is an invitation to enter more deeply and fully into such life. Readers might be aided by mentally placing the term “this life” in quotation marks, because the nature and scope of human life is precisely what has been and will likely continue to be a matter of intense dispute among reflective human beings. A crucial aspect of the dispute centers on what ought to be the relationship between the present and future characteristics of this life. Apart from a superficial “eat, drink, and be merry” mode of hedonism, most reflective efforts have involved some vision or philosophy of the future. For example, no thinkers have been more passionately opposed to any philosophical or religious positing of any other world than Marx and Nietzsche. In its eschatological dimensions, Marxism invokes a dedication to the present in virtue of a belief that one is thereby contributing to a future utopian state. Nietzsche, despite his radical individualism and fierce attacks on religion, manifests a profound concern for the future. However variously they may be interpreted, his doctrines of revaluation, the overman, and eternal return are calls to move beyond the present situation and bring forth a mode of life more creative and fulfilling.

There is, I believe, a rather wide consensus among contemporary thinkers to shun both a view of the present devoid of a significant future and a view of the future that reduces the present to a sheer means. Two texts from John Dewey express a mode of this present-future dialectic:

We always live at the time we live and not at some other time, and only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future. This is the only preparation which in the long run amounts to anything.

The ideal of using the present simply to get ready for the future contradicts itself.

Albert Camus expresses a similar sentiment when he notes that “real generosity toward the future lies in giving all to the present.” William Ernest Hocking, who is as sympathetically inclined toward belief in immortality as Dewey and Camus are opposed, asserts: “To be able to give oneself wholeheartedly to the present one must be persistently aware that it is not all. One must rather be able to treat the present moment as if it were engaged in the business allotted to it by that total life which stretches indefinitely beyond” (MI, 155). At the same time he rejects—quite properly, in my view—any notion of the future that would give meaning to a presently meaningless life:

Unless there is an immediately felt meaning there is no meaning at all; no future meaning could compensate for a complete absence of meaning in the present moment; and whatever meaning life may come to possess hereafter must be simply the ampler interpretation of the meaning which it now has. (MI, 159)
Christopher Mooney makes an allied point in somewhat different language: “Christian hope in resurrection will have meaning for us only to the extent that we have some inkling of resurrection now, some experience of fullness of life, of self-discovery, love or creativity.” Finally, H. D. Lewis considers it a great travesty of Christian truth to suppose that we should think of our salvation solely in terms of some destiny to be achieved later. It is a present reality, and the full realization of this is essential to the appreciation of Christian claims and the impact they can have on our present attitudes. But however important this emphasis may be, and however necessary in the commendation of Christianity today, it would be odd, to say the least, if the peculiar relationship established between God and men in the coming of Christ were concerned wholly with the present life. It must surely be understood in the context of an abiding fellowship. (SI, 207-8)

These latter texts suggest that an adequate model of the creative process demands the most intense living in the present, at the same time remaining open to the possibility of participating in transcendent and future modes of existence. To argue in favor of belief in immortality, it is not necessary to claim that such belief is needed to avoid a superficial presentism or hedonism; it is sufficient to show that there is nothing intrinsic to this belief that leads to diverting energies from the tasks at hand. One can readily concede that it is possible for individuals to work in the present to build a future life in which they believe they will have no personal share; it does not follow, however, that a belief that we shall be personal participants in this future life is a deterrent or an obstacle to our living fully at the present moment. After all, few would claim that it is either unreasonable or unworthy of young persons to believe and to be taught that the efforts they are making at the moment will affect the quality of their lives as adults. Indeed, the significance and depth of youth would seem to be immeasurably increased by the belief that young persons are participating in a process in which the future depends upon the present.

PRAGMATIC-PROCESSIVE MODEL

The general features of pragmatism’s model of the cosmic process have already been touched upon in my earlier discussion of metaphysics and the self. Keeping in mind the mode of pragmatic extrapolation employed throughout this essay, it remains now to explore this model with specific reference to immortality or the possibility of new life consequent upon death. Recall that for the pragmatist the world is characterized by processes and relations that can be expressed metaphysically in terms of ever changing “fields within fields.” Thus the world or reality can be described as a processive-relational continuum or field embodying and bringing forth a plurality of subfields, each with a unique focus but dependent upon, overlapping with, and shading into other fields.
From the pragmatic perspective, reality is pluralistic rather than monistic. Hence, it is a bit misleading to speak, as I have spoken, of a or the cosmic or creative process. It is more accurate to speak of a plurality of processes with a variety of relations and interrelations. Though such a perspective does not exclude the possibility that one of these processes is wider and more encompassing than all others, it does exclude the conception of this process as absolute, with the narrower processes absorbed by it. Moreover, to affirm a plurality of processes is not to affirm chaos—nor is it to deny some kind of unity. This unity cannot be an essentially completed or finished unity, however, nor can it be one that excludes plurality or makes plurality peripheral or accidental. Whatever unity belongs to the collectivity of processes must, to be consistent with pragmatism’s pluralistic universe, be constituted by these processes. The contributions these processes make to this unity are not necessarily equal; it is permissible to believe that some make significantly greater contributions than others. Unity so viewed is itself a process: reality is at every moment “one,” and is at every moment “becoming one.” Thus the unity that pragmatism affirms does not exclude disunity. Indeed, if our extrapolation retains experiential rootedness, it must include both unity and disunity as characteristics of reality. None of this, however, excludes a belief in and a working toward increasing the unity and diminishing the disunity, toward a world of ever increasing harmony.

This model allows, then, for the highest and most intense mode of interrelationship and participation without losing the distinctiveness and independence of the participating processes. Since all these processes, according to the specific quality or character of each, are contributing to the development and enhancement of the collective whole, one can speak with reasonable consistency of their living or acting “for their own sakes” while simultaneously contributing to other processes—narrower and wider. Hence, in the language of present and future, we can plausibly live fully for the present while contributing to the emerging life of the future.

This model is quite obviously evolutionary, and in suggesting an evolutionary process in which there emerge individuals capable of sharing in life beyond death, it is hardly unique. Interesting and fruitful comparison could be made with the models described by Henri Bergson, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and Sri Aurobindo. One similarity worth mentioning is that they all in some way affirm a continuity between our experienced life and any wider or future life. This means that our present acts are here and now contributing to a process or processes far more extensive than is evident to our ordinary consciousness. Our actions have present and future consequences for the character and quality of those processes which can at best be only vaguely grasped. “It may be true,” James tells us, “that work is still doing in the world-process, and that we are called to bear our share. The character of the world’s results may in part depend upon our acts” (SPP, 112). Elsewhere, James confesses that he does not see “why the very exis-
tence of an invisible world may not in part depend on the personal response which any one of us may make to the religious appeal. God himself, in short, may draw vital strength and increase of very being from our fidelity. For my own part, I do not know what the sweat and blood and tragedy of this life mean, if they mean anything short of this. If this life be not a real fight, in which something is eternally gained for the universe by success, it is no better than a game of private theatricals from which one may withdraw at will” (WB, 55).

This, of course, is an expression of a hope, but so is the humanist or Marxist claim that our present actions have a bearing, for better and for worse, upon the future condition of humanity. The depth and scope of the process needed for a plausible belief in immortality is admittedly greater, but all such claims share a commitment to the present based at least partly on a belief in consequences, many of which will be realized, if ever, only in a distant future.

Although I am certainly not suggesting that these views are substantially the same, the model I am arguing for is both like and unlike humanistic and traditional “religious” approaches. Later I will maintain that a transformationist character is essential to any new life, and this moves my model in the direction of more traditional beliefs concerning an afterlife. The point here under consideration is closer to the humanistic emphasis upon the significance of present acts. Since “work is still doing in the world-process,” our actions have consequences radiating far beyond the bounds of a narrowly conceived spatio-temporal present. Feeding the poor, caring for a child, tending the sick, creating works of art, solving scientific problems—all these and many other human activities must be seen as in some way advancing and deepening the quality of the world-processes, just as our negative actions must be seen as impeding and diminishing them.

The pragmatic model contrasts sharply with one that would picture this life as a test which, if successfully endured, will deliver us from the temporal process into the eternal world. Pragmatism rejects the classical dualism between the temporal and the eternal. Since pragmatism affirms continuity between the narrower and more immediate fields of our experience with the wider and more encompassing ones, our everyday activities take on greater significance than in traditional religious or humanistic views. Historical and cosmic processes—known and unknown—are not processes from which we are striving to escape, nor are they tales “told by an idiot, signifying nothing.” However mysterious the deeper and more ultimate characteristics of these processes are, a pragmatic perspective allows for a belief and a hope that transcend, without negating or diminishing, the more immediately accessible fruits and consequences of these processes. Time is not something to be gone through or gotten beyond; it is itself reality insofar as it brings forth novelty and growth as well as loss and diminution. Since chance is one characteristic of creative processes, their outcome is nei-
ther preset nor totally determined, even by the divine participant. The char-
acter and quality of the processes that constitute reality, present and future,
will be determined by the free creative acts of all the participants, only a few
of which, perhaps, are actually known to us at the moment.\textsuperscript{10}

Any model of the creative processes that allows for immortality must
account not only for the relation of the present world to some future world
but also to dimensions of the present world to which we do not usually
attend. Further, no model of reality would serve belief in immortality if it
allowed only for the emergence at some future time of persons capable of
participating endlessly in the divine life. This would exclude a possible im-
mortality for all human persons involved in the evolutionary process save
those who had the good fortune to emerge in its final stage.\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{THIS WORLD—OTHER WORLD}

Whatever we may think of those lengthy and at times tortuous theological
speculations concerning immediate judgment and final judgment, the state
of souls prior to the resurrection, and the like, they were concerned with a
question that no immortality extrapolation can avoid: namely, the continu-
ing existence of those persons who die prior to the eschaton. Though the
detailed mode of such existence may be almost completely beyond our
imaginative powers, the belief in such an existence is plausible only if it is
also plausible to extrapolate an other world distinct but not separate from
this one. But will this not be an escape into that otherworldliness that has
been so soundly criticized in the modern era? Perhaps, but there are indica-
tions that this question has not been as decisively settled as many on both
sides imagine.

The difficulty rests in the not-so-evident meaning or meanings attached to
the phrases “this world” and “other world.” The question involved is some-
what analogous to that concerning “natural” and “supernatural.” When
there was a consensus on the nontranscendent meaning of nature, affirma-
tion of transcendence meant that the theist posited some kind of super-
natural, which the secularist denied. But when nature is taken as provision-
al, processive, and open-ended, the question is transformed: we now seek to
understand the various dimensions of nature or reality, and the supernatural
is either relativized (as is nature) or irrelevant. Similarly, when “this world”
was understood in a more restricted materialistic-mechanistic sense, or in
the Greek-Medieval sense of a closed and finished republic of natures, then
affirmation of an “other world” was indispensable to avoid cutting off
important human possibilities. Now that this dialectic appears to have run
its course, a new model is called for, one that will avoid an escapist other-
worldliness and a superficial this-worldliness.

There are, to begin with, good grounds for extrapolating worlds other
than those more commonly recognized. For example, it is quite evident that
any reference to “this world” is relative and perspectival.\textsuperscript{12} Remaining close
to ordinary experience, we can see that at every moment and at different moments we are engaged in a plurality of "worlds." We speak, for example, of the "workaday world," the "world of art," the "scientific world," the "world of common sense." We do not designate one of these the "real world" and call the rest "subjective" or "imaginary." Each is real insofar as it bears upon the concrete presence and continuing development of life. If the mystical world or the divine world meet this criterion of vital presence, and that is the claim and belief of many, then these worlds are no more and no less "other" than, say, the world of art or the world of science. I do not claim for them the same kind or degree of evidence, but I do argue that the reality of an other world cannot be rejected solely because it is not identical with some alleged "this world."

Of course, for the pragmatist, such other worlds are always matters of belief, but at least one pragmatist—William James—maintained that such belief, or overbelief, was neither alien nor opposed to experience. "If needs of ours outrun the visible universe," James argues, "why may not that be a sign that an invisible universe is there?" (WB, 51). Two texts show how seriously James entertained the notion that we participate in worlds of which we are unaware or only vaguely aware.

The whole drift of my education goes to persuade me that the world of our present consciousness is only one out of many worlds of consciousness that exist, and that those other worlds must contain experiences which have a meaning for our life also; and that although in the main their experiences and those of this world keep discrete, yet the two become continuous at certain points, and higher energies filter in. (VRE, 408)

In spite of rationalism's disdain for the particular, the personal, and the unwholesome, the drift of all the evidence we have seems to me to sweep us very strongly towards the belief in some form of superhuman life with which we may, unknown to ourselves, be co-conscious. We may be in the universe as dogs and cats are in our libraries, seeing the books and hearing the conversation, but having no inkling of the meaning of it all. (PU, 140)

I find that last sentence the experiential base for the extrapolation of other worlds. It is important to recall that an extrapolation is not constructed in air but must be an imaginative construct suggested by data given in experience. Moreover, successful acts of imagination enrich and enhance experience and reality, often in ways not immediately evident. We could add to the situation cited by James innumerable instances in which organisms are totally unaware of processes which at every moment contribute to the constitution of their being. Focusing on human experience, we have evidence of what might be called "unaware participation." To what extent are most human beings aware of their involvement in social and historical worlds, processes that have a reality not simply reducible to the consciousnesses of
their constituent members? Nietzsche's genealogical inquiries, Freud's psychoanalytic techniques, Marxist and structuralist analyses all claim to reveal the underlying structures of morality or the psyche or history or language. These are imaginative efforts to bring to light worlds that are operative in human life but not attended to consciously.

Of course, the most significant data pointing toward the reality of a world or worlds other than or beyond the customary one are the claims of those we call mystics. From the pragmatic perspective, these claims do not prove the reality of such worlds but, as James argued in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, they may not be lightly dismissed. The pragmatist would insist that despite the mystic's claim to direct experience of God or the One or the Absolute, there is still a faith or interpretive dimension to these experiences. The issue here, however, is not whether the mystic is correct in describing his or her experience as intuition or higher knowledge or enlightenment. Whatever the description, we have an enormous number of individuals distributed over the length of human history and a variety of cultures who make experiential claims which, to say the least, remain decisively unaccounted for within a narrow space-time framework. Such data, combined with other factors, contribute to the plausibility of extrapolating as real some dimensions that transcend the narrow confines of our conventional world. Such data will, of course, fail to persuade someone who has not had at least an experiential inkling of what the mystic points toward. Unless one has, minimally, a vague sense of something "more" to life than that which constitutes our quotidian experience, the extrapolation I propose will lack meaning and validity.18

**CONTINUITY BETWEEN PRESENT LIFE AND NEW LIFE**

Granting the plausibility of extrapolating the reality of an other world, what characteristics would make a new life in it desirable? Bernard Williams, who rejects the desirability of immortality, nevertheless lists some of those characteristics. The first is "that it should clearly be me who lives forever." I have already stressed at some length that personal survival is crucial to any significant immortality.19 Williams's second condition is "that the state in which I survive should be one which, to me looking forward, will be adequately related, in the life it presents, to those aims which I now have in wanting to survive at all."20

A process model along the lines suggested allows for this effective continuity between our present life and any new life. It does so in its insistence that we act in the belief that we are contributing to a process or processes wider in scope and longer than those of which we are immediately aware. While not limiting any future participation to the exact mode in which we are now participating, we must believe that those aims, goals, and ideals that now energize us will remain in some way operative in any new life.
Any adequate model of the creative process and extrapolated immortality will have to take account of the eternal. Even Nietzsche, though ready to surrender God and immortality, is unwilling to part with "eternity." Zarathustra sings a hymn proclaiming that "all joy wants eternity / Wants deep, wants deep eternity." Nietzsche wants an eternity located neither in some distant future nor in some other world presently inaccessible to human experience. An important element of the Christian tradition also insists, despite differences, on the possibility—indeed the necessity—of here-and-now participation in the eternal. Friedrich Schleiermacher insists that just such participation is the authentic mode of immortality.

The goal and the character of the religious life is not the immortality desired and believed in by many. . . . It is not the immortality that is outside of time, behind it, or rather after it, and which still is in time. It is the immortality which we can now have in this temporal life; it is the problem in the solution of which we are forever to be engaged. In the midst of finitude to be one with the Infinite and in every moment to be eternal is the immortality of religion.

Though with a slightly different emphasis, Soren Kierkegaard makes much the same point: "Immortality cannot be a final alteration that crept in, so to speak, at the moment of death as the final stage. On the contrary, it is a changelessness that is not altered by the passage of the years." Though the pragmatic model of reality would not employ the language of Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard, and in particular would not accept any literal meaning of "changeless," it remains open to the depth of experience they call for. What it would need is an account allowing for, even insisting upon, a relation to God or the divine or the eternal that is everlasting without being everlastingly the same. In such an account, "changeless" might be accepted as a symbol of the constancy or trustworthiness of divine love but would not exclude some kind of change in both the divine and the human relata.

To shift the focus a bit—it is exactly everlastingness that is questioned as to whether it is humanly desirable by many who reject personal immortality. At stake here is whether duration is a value that makes an endlessly enduring life desirable. Williams, who argues against Lucretius that "more days may give us more than one day," nevertheless denies that unending life would give us anything over and above what can be realized in a life that ends: "There is no desirable or significant property which life would have more of, or have more unqualifiedly, if we lasted forever" (PS, 89).

The counterview is expressed by Hocking: "Duration is a dimension of value." George Santayana maintains that "length of things is vanity, only their height is joy." But according to Hocking, "it is the normal destiny of experience to be prolonged in proportion to its height, not inversely"; hence, "life is objectively worth more as a continued than as a closed affair" (MI, 68–69).
NEW LIFE: DURATION AND TRANSFORMATION

The attractiveness or unattractiveness of duration will depend upon how it is to be understood. Bergson, finding it attractive, describes it as "the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances." On the other hand, those who find endless duration unattractive presuppose that it involves an unending continuance of fundamentally the same mode of life. Thus Williams, in citing the Makropulos case as evidence that one would become bored by an immortal life, describes a life that had really not changed for some three hundred years, a life devoid of significant growth and real novelty. This same presupposition, that a life of unending duration would be merely an indefinite extension of human life in the same mode as it now exists, undergirds the views of those who distinguish it from the eternal life of Christian tradition. "Eternal life," we are told by Stewart Sutherland, "is not to be equated with endless life." We are not told, however, just what the difference is between the two, and while conceding that any new life cannot be identical with our present one, I confess that I am completely unable to grasp what an eternal life would be that excluded the characteristic of everlastingness. The distinguished American philosopher John Smith has expressed a view similar to those being challenged; though more understandable, it retains the presupposition of unending sameness. Smith considers "historically inaccurate" the "belief that the Judaeo-Christian tradition espouses a doctrine of 'immortality.' On the contrary, the symbol of 'eternal life' expresses a new dimension or new quality of life and in no sense implies merely the endless continuation of the same." While I question, in part, his interpretation of Judaeo-Christian tradition, I can understand Smith's existential interpretation of eternal life. I have already expressed strong reservations concerning the efficacy of any such interpretation; my concern here, however, is with his assertion that everlastingness is to be understood as "forever more of the same." Much closer to the mark, in my opinion, is John Baillie's view that "the soul's hope has not been for more of the same, but for something altogether higher and better."

What we need is a doctrine of transformation that enables us to acknowledge both continuity and difference between the present life and any new life that might be hoped for. That transformationist views are congenial to those reflecting within a Christian framework is evidenced in the following texts from E. J. Fortmann and William Frost:

Does the end of the world mean its annihilation (and re-creation) or merely its transformation? . . . Today the second view, transformation and not annihilation, seems to be growing stronger and stronger. Those who hold it think that the biblical passages should be construed as "change-passages," not as "annihilation-passages," if they are taken in a fuller biblical context.

This theology of hope places imagination in a Christian context. Christ, the Messiah, is portrayed as one who does not simply take the facts of life for
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granted. In his unique contribution to the human race he encourages us to work and labor for the transformation of things so that the kingdom may become a reality. . . . This emphasis on transformation of reality in the name of life’s promises and expectations culminates in the narratives of Christ’s resurrection. Thus Christians receive the promise of a life beyond the grave. 31

Any process model of reality is and must be transformationist, but whether this is a help or a hindrance to belief in personal immortality is a much more complicated question. Any evolutionary theory that extrapolates some mode of new being or new consciousness must confront a dilemma: if the changes in human nature are such that this nature remains basically as we now know it, then there is no possibility for the kind of divine community projected by the best visionary thinkers; if, on the other hand, such a community is made possible by a total transformation of human nature, then we no longer have human nature as we now know it. Because the available evolutionary data are ambiguous, it is possible to make two very different extrapolations of the future: one in which humanity continues to exist, though in a profoundly transformed manner; another in which humanity disappears and a new species emerges. Initially, this second interpretation would seem to be more consistent with our present knowledge of the evolutionary process. After all, the revolutionary and, for many, threatening aspect of Darwinism was that it posited the “transformation of species.” The crucial consequence of evolution would seem to be that just as the human emerged as a new species from a species no longer in existence, in the distinct future there will be such a transformation of the human species that it will become extinct.

While this is surely a plausible extrapolation, it is not strictly entailed by the evidence. To begin with, we are not compelled to assume that the way in which evolution will continue to take place is identical with the way in which it has taken place. Indeed, such an assumption would seem to be contrary to one of the more exciting features of evolution—the emergence of the radically new. Hence, while up to this point the transformation of species appears to have resulted in a loss of fundamental identity between the old and the new, we cannot definitively rule out a change in the evolutionary process itself whereby future transformation—whether in “this world” or in an “other world”—will result in enrichment without the loss of identity.

I suggest that there are already some grounds for such an extrapolation in both individual and collective development. The transformation of a fertilized egg into a relatively helpless, speechless, instinctive infant and then into an adult capable of wondrous feats of creativity would not seem to be qualitatively less significant than the transformation of a fish into a reptile. Yet there is a mode of identity present in the former transformation that is absent in the latter. Further, we now recognize that the earlier stages of individual human lives have a value and meaning in themselves while simul-
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taneously contributing, positively or negatively, to the transformed later stages in which identity continues, however profoundly transformed.

Shifting our focus to the human collectivity, we are able to detect further grounds for affirming great transformative development without simple loss of identity. Consider the evolution of Homo, which began with *Homo habilis* about two and a half million years ago, was transformed into *Homo erectus* about one and a half million years ago, and became *Homo sapiens* some three hundred thousand years ago. Although anthropologists are not in complete agreement as to how “close” *Homo habilis* was to the present-day *Homo sapiens*, they do seem to be making two judgments. First, they are distinguishing the earliest *Homo* from that species of which it was a transformation. Second, they are affirming a mode of “identity” between that original *Homo* and the present-day one. Since no one would deny the profound changes that have taken place within humanity over those two and a half million years—or even over the three hundred thousand years of *Homo sapiens*—transformation and identity cannot be asserted as mutually exclusive. Some modes of transformation do result in loss of identity, but others result in transformed identity.

Further, it might be suggested, as Teilhard de Chardin apparently has, that a new quality or mode of life has already emerged from the evolutionary process, one that allows for an even greater transformation without loss of identity than in the previous stages of evolution. Hence, one might now extrapolate a new level of human existence that will be inconceivably different from but nevertheless fundamentally continuous with our present mode of life. The alternative extrapolation, which has already been criticized, is to view humanity as a means or preparation for the emergence of a new species (whether in “this world” or in any “other world”) that will retain the human only in the way in which we now retain the subhuman from which we have evolved.

There is a formidable difficulty with the mode of extrapolation I favor, and it must be faced, though I do not know how to resolve it even to my own satisfaction. It can be objected that I am conflating two distinct time-space continua by extrapolating from the evident time-space continuum available to science to the not-so-evident time-space continuum of an other world. Thus, even if one were to concede that there will be a future transformation of the human species along the lines I have suggested, this is radically different from some future or new life entered into by all humans—past and present as well as future—on the occasion of their individual deaths. The most serious threat to the perspective here advanced is that a claim that such a new life is already available to those who die renders the long evolutionary process irrelevant. One way out is to say that the purpose of evolution, or at least a consequence of it, was to bring forth a species whose individuals are so constituted that death henceforth has the possibility of transformation rather than obliteration. While something such as
this must be held if my claims for personal immortality are to stand, it still leaves unsettled the questions of why evolution should be continuing and why we should be working here and now to bring about a future transformation of the human community.

In response, I must revert to the contention that our actions and their consequences are not confined within those processes available to ordinary and scientific consciousness. My entire case depends upon a belief such as that which we have already heard expressed by James:

The world of our present consciousness is only one out of many worlds of consciousness that exist, and . . . those other worlds must contain experiences which have a meaning for our life also; and . . . although in the main their experiences and those of this world keep discrete, yet the two become continuous at certain points, and higher energies filter in. (VRE, 408)

Given such an overlapping and interpenetration of processes and worlds, it makes sense to exert our fullest efforts toward transforming the world or worlds most immediately accessible to us, spurred on by the belief that these efforts bear fruit we are unable to perceive clearly at this moment. The evolutionary process, therefore, is multidimensional, and human participation—past, present, and future—is not restricted to the most immediately conscious dimension. Incidentally, an evolutionary model such as this is congenial, I believe, to a reconstruction of the traditional doctrine of the communion of saints and the practice of praying for and to the dead.

NEW LIFE: POSITIVE CHARACTERISTICS

However radical the transformation that brings about a new life would be, it cannot be such as to obliterate all trace of those characteristics that presently constitute human life. Prominent among the characteristics of human life that seem inseparable from it are creative action, growth, self-development, love, joy, laughter, community, suffering, struggle, and loss. If we are to extrapolate these as also belonging to any new life, it cannot be too strongly stressed that by such extrapolation we are able to know as much and as little about the new life mode of these characteristics as we can about them when they are extrapolated as belonging to God. The same possibilities and limitations that attach to talking about God would attach to talking about any new life. The most obvious limitation attending any “new life” extrapolation concerns the “new” aspect, of which little or nothing can be said positively. That a future life such as the one here suggested and hoped for must be new in an inconceivable and unimaginable way seems both congenial to and mandated by faith and reason. The “newness” characterizing the risen Christ is a belief of long standing. As one commentator succinctly expressed it, “The Resurrection was not merely a coming back to life, but a birth into a new life which Christ did not have in his bodily humanity.”

The evidence from reason for the necessity of newness is quite simply the
dissolution which, in our experience, accompanies all living beings. Unless there is a "new" character realized through death and the saving grace of God, there is no possibility of a life without dissolution—without death.

Let me now briefly discuss the necessity that the positive characteristics of human life continue in some way in any new life. It is quite obvious that since pragmatism's process metaphysics denies any absolute permanency or status, it cannot consistently allow for any new life from which process or change is completely absent. But a central feature of process or change is that at its best it brings about growth. Hence, a pragmatist could not extrapolate any divine or new human life that would exclude the possibility of growth. There is a growing consensus, despite metaphysical and theological differences, that any new life must be a growing or processive one. "A certain growth," Piet Schoonenberg tells us, "also remains possible in the final fulfillment. Otherwise we would perhaps cease to be human." Ignace Lepp maintains that "the idea of progress is in fact so intimately related to that of life that we can only conceive of eternal life as eternal growth." Similarly, John Shea rejects the notion of a static heaven, noting that "many people cannot conceive of human happiness except in terms of growth" (HH, 86).

Growth, whether human, cosmic, or divine, is possible only insofar as the participative realities or beings have the power of creative action. Diverse as the activities may be, all realities—from electrons to God—are real in virtue of and to the extent that they are centers of activity. It follows, then, that our extrapolation of a new life will include the possibility of proportionate creative activity for the participants in such a life. "It is the yearning after continued action," according to Bergson, "that has led to the belief in an after-life." And Goethe in a letter to J. P. Eckermann asserted: "To me the eternal existence of my soul is proved by my idea of activity."

The creative activity performed by those entities designated selves is directly or indirectly bound up with self-development or self-realization. Pragmatism shares the view of those who insist that the self is a project or task, not a fully realized given. It is the task of self-creativity begun in this life that must be extrapolated as continuing in any new life. John Shea makes clear that such a viewpoint is not restricted to a pragmatic extrapolation: "When time and history are not viewed as terrors but as mediums of human development, heaven will not be viewed as external and static perfection. Heaven will be a time for continued growth and moral progress. The project of each man's life which is begun in this world demands more time to develop" (HH, 86). Similarly, Hocking contends that there can be no sense to a continuing life unless "the reflective self is concrete and active, carrying on that questioning which is the identity of its life here" (MI, 66).

In his "justification" of the desire for immortality, Ralph Barton Perry notes that "there is always some unfinished business." Further, "the desire for more life springs from the belief that life on the whole is good, and to
ask for more time is to have some affirmative reason for its use." Perry was in all likelihood influenced in this matter by his mentor, William James. Perry tells us:

As James grew older he came to believe in immortality. In 1904 he had acquired a feeling of its "probability." Although he did not feel a "rational need" of it, he felt a growing "practical need." What was this practical motive? In explaining why he was now, late in life, acquiring the belief for the first time, he said, "Because I am just getting fit to live." With his temperamental love of the living, his affectionate sympathies, and his glowing moral admirations, he had come more and more to feel that death was a wanton and unintelligible negation of goodness. (TC, II:356)

None of this, of course, in any way proves that we are immortal. The most that can be claimed is that it indicates a certain meaning and propriety that would accompany a new life in which the projects and tasks—including the task of self-creation—that have been begun and that death always leaves unfinished, would be continued and brought to fuller realization.

The activity which above all other human activities seems to cry out for a continuance without end is, of course, love. "The surest warrant for immortality," according to James, "is the yearning of our bowels for our dear ones" (PP, II:937). Mooney points out that "human love . . . is quite shameless in hoping for immortality and believes against all evidence that it will not be affected by death" (PAT, II:146). George Maloney suggests that "our love relations here and now determine the true, future direction of our psychic powers and the degree that they will be realized" (PAT, I:147).

Whether or not love is a sign of a continuing life, there seems to be no question that it is the human experience most painfully frustrated by the event of death. The love relation has an enduring character that the present conditions make difficult if not impossible to realize. The love relation is continually strained and ravaged by a multiplicity of factors, but those loves that endure seem to express most adequately the essence of love. One of the painful features of our present mode of existence is that some loves do end, or become incapable of being maintained in their richest mode and greatest intensity. Nevertheless, it appears to be humanly impossible to love and simultaneously accept without pain that love will end absolutely and without remainder, as death seems to indicate. The death of a loved one is almost beyond question the most tragic experience human beings undergo.

This tragic antithesis between love and death is poignantly expressed by Thomas Hardy in his Tess of the D'Urbervilles. As Tess is leaving her husband, Angel Clare, shortly before she is to be hanged, the following exchange takes place:

"Tell me now, Angel, do you think that we shall meet again after we are dead? I want to know."

He kissed her to avoid a reply at such a time.
“Oh, Angel—I fear that means no!” said she with a suppressed sob. “And I wanted so to see you again—so much, so much! What—not even you and I, Angel, who love each other so well?”

Tess does not fear death; what she finds intolerable is that the love between herself and Angel will end with her death—and it will end except as a memory for Angel if she ceases to be. It would seem that if death is the annihilation of the individual, one cannot really be said to love someone who has died. If love involves the touching of two relational centers, the cessation of one of these centers necessitates the cessation of love. It would not seem possible to really love a nonexistent, a nothing. Of course, it might be argued that love is maintained through a memory, but unless the memory involves some kind of “presence” of the other, it is short-lived, as experience repeatedly shows. Gabriel Marcel has sensitively and perceptively explored the role of “presence” in the relationship between love and death. “Fidelity truly exists,” he maintains, “only when it defies absence, when it triumphs over absence, and in particular, over that absence which we hold to be—mistakenly no doubt—absolute, and which we call death.”

Love, then, is the experience that gives the deepest ground for and greatest impetus to extrapolating a life that is not absolutely terminated by death. Further, any desirable new life must be such that the love relations so haltingly and imperfectly begun here, including those interrupted or diverted, will have an opportunity for reconciliation, renewal, and fuller realization.

A central feature of pragmatism, as was seen earlier, is that human individuals are constituted by their social or communal relationships. This view, of course, is not peculiar to pragmatism but is shared by a range of thinkers in the twentieth century. An immediate corollary of the communal nature of humans is the need to construct communities or a community that will enrich and expand the actualities and possibilities of human life. There is a consensus that to this point in history the communities that have emerged are radically deficient in terms of enabling their members to reach the fullness of their potential. There follows, then, if not a consensus, a widely shared notion that human efforts ought to be directed to creating a truly human community free from those features that now limit and destroy so many. Whether in Utopian, Marxian, or Deweyan form, the call for such a community involves an extrapolation from past and present experience to future experience. Any suggestion of a desirable immortality must include an extrapolation similar to though obviously not identical with such future community extrapolations. It will share with these “secularist” extrapolations the notion that we are “here and now” striving to create a better community that will, we hope, be realized in the future. At the same time it will not restrict the parameters of this community, either in its present struggling form or its future realized form, to a narrowly conceived “this world.”
Further, and most important, the kind of extrapolation called for will not restrict membership in the “new community” to those individuals who had the good fortune to come into existence concurrent with the fruitful realization of the often powerful efforts of so many other individuals.\(^{48}\)

**NEW LIFE: NEGATIVE CHARACTERISTICS**

To this point the extrapolation of a desirable immortality has focused on what might be called the positive aspects of any new life that might be forthcoming after death. If we are to avoid a kind of self-deception or “bad faith,” however, we cannot ignore certain negative aspects that properly should be extrapolated as likely to accompany this new life. Let me mention three such aspects—struggle, suffering, and loss—and indicate why and how they should be incorporated into a developed extrapolation of immortality.

The evolutionary process at all levels and stages gives no evidence of taking place without the seemingly essential character of “struggle.”\(^ {49}\) An extrapolated life totally devoid of struggle would seem to involve a discontinuity, which has been previously ruled out, between the present life and the new life. The more encompassing process extrapolated from the more immediate processes of our experience has been described as continuous with these processes. In other terms, that divine life in which any new life would be a participation is already in a real relation to and hence in some way a participation in the world of immediate experience, just as human life is really related to and already participating in the divine life. It follows that God is a participant in the evolutionary struggle.\(^ {50}\) How then could we properly extrapolate a new life that would be transformed participation in the divine life, while excluding from such new life that struggle which even the divine does not escape? No, the struggle that is inseparable from human life appears to be related to one that is cosmic and even in a sense “trans-cosmic.”\(^ {51}\)

This, of course, touches upon that deepest of mysteries, the mystery of evil. With no pretense to resolving the irresolvable, let me simply indicate a response consistent with pragmatism. First, pragmatism, as we saw in the chapter “Self and God,” strongly objects to any view of evil that sees it either as incorporated within the eternal plan of an omniscient, omnipotent God or as preserved but overcome within the Whole or the Absolute. The only philosophical account of evil congenial to pragmatism is one that energizes human beings in their struggle to lessen and overcome it. Hence, any pragmatic immortality belief will be in part motivated by the hope and desire of having new opportunities for continuing the struggle against evil in which humans are presently engaged.

An almost inevitable accompaniment of the evolutionary struggle, particularly as manifest in the human species, is suffering. It is significant, I believe, that more and more efforts have been made to show that a God intimately involved in the creative process must be a “suffering God.”\(^ {52}\) Again,
therefore, any extrapolated new life cannot exclude the possibility of suffering in some form.

There remains the question of “loss” as it might pertain to any new life. Perhaps the most crucial aspect of this question has to do with the loss of everlasting union with the divine. Since I have already extrapolated a continuing struggle after death, it would follow that the achievement of everlasting union with the divine may depend on actions that are not restricted to “this life.” It is because it is increasingly hard to believe that the actions of most human beings in the time allotted them in this life are of such a nature as to merit them either eternal life or eternal damnation that thinkers such as John Hick suggest a succession of lives, whereby a continuing purification will take place such that there will emerge individuals worthy of the most intimate union with God. Elsewhere, I have expressed my reservations about Hick’s successive lives theory—he fails, in my judgment, to safeguard that individuality which I consider essential to significant personal immortality. Here I wish to take issue with another aspect of his philosophical theology: namely, his affirmation of “universal salvation.” Finding the idea of hell or eternal suffering repugnant, Hick argues that the divine love is such that all will eventually be saved, though some may have to undergo a succession of a greater number of lives than others in order to achieve adequate self-purification.

The question that must be raised here is whether the doctrine of universal salvation, highly motivated though it may be, does not diminish the “seriousness” of human experience. While I do not think that hellfire and eternal torment ought to be presented even as a possibility, I am not sure that in order to avoid them we must assert that all human beings will necessarily be united with God in a union of joyful immediacy. At stake here, of course, is the nature and scope of human freedom. Without even touching upon the numerous subtle issues related to this freedom, let me simply suggest that there is a profound difference between a human freedom whose exercise must lead to union with God and one that allows for the possibility of eternal separation from God. This in no way rules out the possibility that all humans will eventually be united with each other within the depths of the divine life—indeed, this should be our hope. It would seem, however, that a world in which there can only be winners is a less serious world than one in which the possibility of the deepest loss is real. From a perspective such as Hick’s, the goal is assured; the only question is how long an individual will take to reach it—as if God has said to us, “You’re going to keep doing it till you get it right.” Hence, while I think that Hick has advanced a very suggestive and supportable hypothesis—namely, that the process of creating ourselves and thereby moving closer to God must continue beyond “this life”—he has unnecessarily weakened and softened it by asserting that the final goal is preset and certain to be reached. Hell—understood as the everlasting separation of the individual from the divine center of love—must remain a live option for radically free human beings.