

= Time and Eternity (philosophy book) =

Time and Eternity - An Essay on the Philosophy of Religion (1st imp . Princeton New Jersey 1952 , Princeton University Press , 169 pp) is a philosophy book written by Walter Terence Stace . At the time of writing , Stace was a professor of philosophy at Princeton University , where he had worked since 1932 after a 22 year career in the Ceylon Civil Service . Time and Eternity was one of his first books about the philosophy of religion and mysticism , after writing throughout most of the 1930s and 1940s that was influenced by phenomenalist philosophy .

In his introduction Stace writes that Time and Eternity is an attempt to set out the fundamental nature of religion , and to deal with the conflict between religion and naturalism . He explains that the basic idea set out in the book is that all religious thought is symbolic , and that his influences include Rudolf Otto , especially his *Mysticism East and West* , and Immanuel Kant . He says he was motivated to write the book in an attempt to add to the " other half of the truth which I now think naturalism [as espoused in his 1947 essay *Man Against Darkness*] misses " .

The book begins by looking at religion , specifically God as non @-@ being and as being , put by Stace as the negative and positive divine . Stace then defines two orders of being - time and eternity , which he says intersect in the moment of mystic illumination . He goes on to say that the nature of God or eternity is such that all religious language is symbolic and that it is necessarily subject to contradictions .

= = Synopsis = =

The first chapter asks what religion is , stating that religious thought is contradictory , is rooted in intuition , and that God is fundamentally a mystery . The second and third chapters look at the negative divine - the characterisation of God as void , silence or non @-@ being - which Stace maintains is an idea found in all religions . He maintains that mystical experience is shared by all mankind , it is only the theories about it that differ . On this point he says he is in agreement with Otto . In this experience the distinction between subject and object is overcome , indeed there is no difference between the experiencer and the experience .

Stace then goes on to explain that all religions say that religious revelation is ineffable , because no words or concepts can be applied to God who is without qualities or predicates . Thus , God cannot be comprehended by the intellect , but is apprehended by intuition . " ... it is of the very nature of intellect to involve the subject @-@ object opposition . But in the mystic experience this opposition is transcended . Therefore the intellect is incapable of understanding it . Therefore it is incomprehensible , ineffable . "

Stace then looks at the positive divine ; he asks how concepts can be applied to that which is above all concepts and finds that all propositions about God are symbolical . He defines religious and non @-@ religious symbolism as differing in two respects . Firstly , religious symbols cannot be translated into logical propositions because they refer to an (ineffable) experience rather than a proposition . Secondly , the relationship between the religious symbol and what is symbolised is one of evocation rather than " meaning " , as meaning refers to a concept , which is absent in the mystical experience . " Yet in some way this symbolic language evokes in us some glimpse , some hint , seen dimly through the mists and fogs which envelop us , of that being who stands above all human thought and conception . " He goes on to write that some of these symbols feel more appropriate than others (e.g. God is love not hate) .

Next Stace explains that there are two orders of being : time (or the world) and eternity (or God) , and these intersect in the moment of mystic illumination . He maintains these orders are distinct , so one order cannot dictate to the other . Here he says that he agrees with Kant , who made a distinction between the world of phenomena and the noumenon , although he is critical of Kant ? s disregard for mystical experience .

Looking at symbolism in religion , Stace states that there are two types of predicates applied to God : first , the ethically @-@ neutral sort , such as God being mind , power or personhood . Secondly , the ethical kind , where he is love , mercy , or righteousness . He explains that the former qualities

are justified by an appeal to a hierarchy of being , and the latter to a hierarchy of value . In both cases the more adequate symbol are those that are higher in each hierarchy . In rooting symbolism in hierarchies , Stace explicitly states he is in opposition to Otto who thought religious symbolism was based on analogy between the numen and qualities found in the natural world .

Stace next looks at religion ? s claims to truth . He draws an analogy between mystical illumination and aesthetic truth , as the truths of both rest on revelation rather than reason . " Either you directly perceive beauty , or you do not . And either you directly perceive God in intuition , or you do not . " Further , he maintains the arguments of both mystics and naturalists in denying each other ? s positions are invalid , as they concern different realities .

These separate spheres lead Stace to reflect on both proofs for God and acosmism . He writes that proofs and disproofs for God are equally false , as God is only accessible by intuition and not logic . " ? the production by philosophers of proofs of the unreality of space , time , and the temporal world generally , is a direct result of their mistaking of their mystical propositions for factual propositions . " Further , proofs of God actually harm religion as they make him a part of the natural order - a point on which he says that he agrees with Kant . Conversely acosmism (the denial of the reality of the world) has its root in the mystical moment , within which there is no other truth , God is the supreme reality and there is no naturalistic world . However this is a symbolic truth , rather than a statement of fact . Its counterpart in naturalism is atheism , which denies the reality of God .

In the final chapter Stace looks at mysticism and logic . He returns to the idea that theology and mystical philosophies (he gives the examples of Vedanta , Spinoza , Hegel , and Bradley) will always contain contradictions . Known as the doctrine of the Mystery of God , he maintains this is because the intellect is inherently incapable of understanding the Ultimate . All attempts to state the nature of the ultimate necessarily produce contradictions .

= = Critical response = =

Virgil C Aldrich reviewed the book alongside *Religion and the Modern Mind* and *The Gate of Silence* , also by Stace and published in 1952 . He points out that all three books mark a new direction for Stace who was previously best known as an empiricist and naturalist . For Aldrich this new intellectual interest results in a sharp dualism in both Stace ? s personality and his thought . However , he writes that fortunately Stace ? s philosophical background prevents him from supposing that scientific empiricism can confirm religious experience , indeed his religious philosophy is the sort ? that a Hume or a Kant can consort with . ? Aldrich argues that Stace ? s intellectual sophistication is most evident in his ideas about the negative divine , but his thought is liable to all the standard objections where he proposes notions of the positive divine and religious intuition . Specifically , the notion that religious language is evocative of the mystical experience is problematic , because it is difficult to determine what language is adequate without resorting to literal or abstract ideas . Rudolf Otto ? s notion of analogy , rejected by Stace , is more robust . Aldrich points out a contradiction in Stace ? s reliance on hierarchies of being and values to more adequately refer to God , as this implies continuity between the world and eternity , which Stace denies .

Julius Seelye Bixler reviewed the book twice , in 1952 and 1953 . In his first review he wrote that he believed Stace was trying to have his cake and eat it with regards to the truth of both naturalism and mysticism . Bixler also wonders whether the revelation of God can really be free of concepts and thus whether time and eternity are utterly unrelated as Stace maintains . He identifies points in Stace ? s thought where there is continuity between these two states and mystical language does appear to refer to concepts . Finally he rejects the book ? s analogy of mystical experience to the evocative power of art , maintaining that art must be somewhat related to logic . Nonetheless , Bixler does concur that the book is a fascinating *confessio fidei* and personal statement . A year later , he reviewed *Time and Eternity* alongside *Religion and the Modern Mind* . As well as reiterating the points he had made earlier , Bixler judges the second book more favourably and recommends reading the two together to better understand the problems they address .

Stace was praised for his clarity and ambitious aims in *Time and Eternity* by Abraham Kaplan who

believed the book was one of the best on the subject for many many years . He pointed out that the book 's distinction between the orders of time and eternity owed much to Kant (which Stace himself acknowledged) . Kaplan reflected that it was the book 's emphasis placed on mysticism and a universal religious intuition that would be of particular interest to students of ' Oriental and comparative philosophy ' . The central idea upon which Stace 's thought stands or falls , for Kaplan , is that religious language is evocative rather than descriptive . In this both religionists and naturalists will find problems . For the former , Stace can only account for the appropriateness of religious language by relying on ' nearness ' to the divine rather than on resemblance , and this relies on ' a vague panpsychism ' and levels of being in the manner of Samuel Alexander . While for the naturalist , Stace 's system of religious symbolism is doomed to remain mysterious , because it does not allow religious metaphors to be translated literally and neither can it be said how they evoke the experience to which they refer .

Also noting the unachievable ambition of solving the conflict between naturalism and religion , Martin A Greenman , remarks that one must come to the book ' with a certain mood ' . Too critical a mood would blind the reader to its religious insights , while the sensitivity and depth of its philosophic insights would be lost if one were to approach it in a too enthusiastically religious mood . Greenman finishes by justifying Stace 's philosophy to logical positivists by quoting from Wittgenstein 's Tractatus : ' My propositions are elucidatory in this way : he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless , when he has climbed out through them , on them , over them ' . He must surmount these propositions : then he sees the world rightly ' (6 . 54 .) Dorothy M Emmet found issue with the notion that the mystical experience is the point of intersection between the temporal and eternal orders . She writes that there are difficulties in Stace defining these orders as two distinct ' orders of being ' , rather than just as a way of speaking , because this then means some statements about the temporal order are relevant to what is said about the eternal order and vice versa . Indeed , the interrelation between these two orders is difficult to maintain . She also questioned Stace 's characterisation of mystical consciousness as being the same everywhere .

More recently , Maurice Friedman writes about the book in the context of the various attempts to find a universal essence - or perennial philosophy - within religion . He finds that Time and Eternity is a more systematic attempt at this than those proposed by Aldous Huxley or Ananda Coomaraswamy , but no more successful . For Friedman , the philosophy that Stace lays out in the book is derived from metaphysical speculation (that , like the ideas of Huxley and Coomaraswamy , is influenced by Vedanta) , rather than mystical experience . Central to Friedman 's critique is the notion that there is a vast gulf between the mystical experience which Stace defines as beyond thought , and his philosophical system built on this . He also mentions that mystics do not always agree on what experiences , symbols and philosophies are the closest to the divine .

The book has received more positive support however . Robert C Neville called Time and Eternity ' the most sophisticated treatment of eternity and time in our century so far ' . In his Thought : A Very Short Introduction , Tim Bayne says the book contains a ' classic ' discussion of ineffability . American writer Arthur Goldwag has said that the phrase " that than which there is no other " that he encountered in Time and Eternity was one of a number of factors that contributed to him giving up praying .