

The Idea Of Eternity

We use the word 'eternity' in three main senses. Most generally the word is taken to mean an unending extent of time. This is probably the use we would meet most often in ordinary conversation, but we can find it also in certain philosophies.

The word is also used to stand for that which is entirely timeless, for a state of being in which no movement is conceived to occur. We hear this use in the expression, "I stood still for what seemed an eternity. "

The third use of 'eternity' refers to that which includes but transcends time. In this use time is conceived to be a process of events occurring in serial order such that each event displaces the one before it and is displaced by the one after it, the whole series of events occurring within some substance itself not determined by such a process.

A good image of this third kind of 'eternity' can be seen in the sea, which is the substantial support of various wave patterns. We may stand on a cliff and watch what we call a 'series' of waves traveling over the sea. We may count the waves and see how many pass a given rock in one minute, or in one hour. If we concentrate very hard on counting the wave crests we may forget the unity of the sea which is the basis of their existence.

In the same way, in our daily lives, we may concentrate so strongly on things that interest us that we may forget that all things are really only modifications of some universal energy which stands as the substance of all reality.

Today we know scientifically that all 'material' things are only patterns of energy. We know that reality itself is like a vast ocean of energy the wave patterns of which constitute all the things we know, the stars, suns, planets, minerals, vegetables, animals and ourselves. All these things rise like waves upon the sea and then fall back into their origin. We know that that into which they fall back endures beneath all its apparent changes.

Just as the sea endures beneath and through all its changing waveforms, all the gentlest movements and most violent storms, so beneath and through all the changing events of the time-play is the enduring ultimate reality we call eternity.

If we accept that we should use the word time for that which presents itself to us as a series of events each of which vanishes as the next appears, then we can use the word 'eternity' for that from which appears each event and into which each event vanishes.

'Eternity' then is seen as the permanently enduring reality underlying the things and events which appear in time. Time is like the waves and the wave-patterns which we observe passing over the surface of the ocean. Eternity is like the ocean itself. Using this image to aid our thinking we can see that time is a process in the eternal, supported by the eternal, but not in itself the eternal. Waves are a process or behaviour of the sea, supported by the sea, made

substantially possible by the sea, but not are themselves as such the sea. None of us has seen a series of waves dashing towards the shore without the sea.

We see then, that eternity is the substantial basis from which the waves of time may rise; and we see no time exists other than that made possible by the eternal reality underlying it. Time depends upon the reality of eternity. Eternity does not depend upon the changes of time.

Whatever rises in time also vanishes in time, "Babylon is fallen." Great empires that arose in the ancient world are no more. Egypt is gone; and Greece and Rome with it. The gorgeous palaces India's past" are overgrown with time's weeds. "All is vanity" in the time process. "Vanity" here simply means 'that which passes', that which vanishes. 'Vane' is an old word for straw.

When the human soul contemplates the tremendous stretches of time behind it, and images the rise and fall of vast civilizations, a strange sadness permeates it. It asks itself, "what is the meaning of these vast undertakings, these enormous projects? If all that arises in time must ultimately vanish from time, why should we strive to establish anything?" "Eat, drink and be merry; for tomorrow we die."

But time is only the patterns on the ocean of eternity. What appears in time is lifted for a period out of eternity, and to eternity must return. To die is only to pass from time back into eternity, only to pass from the realm of the transitory to the realm of the ever-enduring.

What we call 'life' in time is a process, a kind of activity marked by a series of events irreversible in character.

We say 'irreversible' because although the child grows up to become the man, the man does not grow down to become again the child. The seed of the tree grows up to become a tree. When the tree has reached its maximum height and after some years dies, it does not become smaller and smaller and finally return to the original seed. Before its death it makes new seeds, many new seeds, to replace the one from which it started its life.

Every life form coming into existence grows in some unique way predetermined from within itself, and prepares a seed or seeds to leave behind it to take its place after_ its form has served its purpose. The life-forms which appear in time are like the wave-patterns which appear on the sea that are possible only because the sea is there. The life-forms of time are possible only because eternity is there. Time is a process made possible only on the substance of eternity. Life-forms in time are possible only because the eternal substance of life supports them. What we call the "everlasting arms of God" are simply the powers of the eternal substance which bring into being all the things and beings of the time-world.

There is no quarrel between eternity and time, for time is of eternity and eternity supports and develops time. But often there is a quarrel in man's mind about whether to serve the God of eternity or the idols of time.

We may select from the waves upon the ocean a given wave, concentrate our attention upon it, declare it the best wave we have ever seen, feel pleased as it moves with massive dignity over the ocean, and then feel sad when our favorite wave subsides and ceases its movement. And while we are doing these things we may forget the ocean itself, forget that which the wave presupposes.

So with the things of time. We may select from amongst all the things presented to us those the form of which give us the greatest pleasure; the best house, the best man for husband, the best woman for wife, the best car, the best clothes, and so on. And whilst we are admiring the objects of our choice in time, we may forget the eternal real substance.

When we think only of things of time, value only the things of time, worship only the things of time, we are called, and rightly, idolaters, for as the waves on the ocean cannot exist from themselves independently of the ocean, so the things of time cannot exist from themselves independently of the eternal power substance of God.

The things of time are only effects: they are not causes; they are relatively superficial appearances brought into existence by the action of the supreme cause hidden in the infinity of eternity.

If we do not wish to be superficial, if we wish to relate to reality, and to each other, in depth, we must learn to see what lies under the wave-patterns of the human soul. We must learn to feel the movements of the infinite spiritual power which is the substance and sustainer and origin and goal of all things.

We must learn to believe that underneath all the things and purposes of time stands the other purpose, the purpose which comprehends all the purposes of time and gives them whatever significance they have, the purpose of Eternity, the purpose of the infinite hidden God within whose hands we are held, and will be held, forever.

The control of consciousness is the control of being.

The Universe is consciously structured by the will. Every time you define it more energy comes in.

The Absolute can act only through the particular.

An idea is a device to enable the mind to remind itself about its origin and put itself back into that origin.

Everyone is self-imposing - upon themselves and upon everyone else. You like what you are like.

If you do not like the price - then re-define it. Enlightenment is where you are.