



COLLEGE OF POSIDONIUS

Outline of Essential Information from Walter Stace's *Religion and the Modern Mind*

(J. B. Lippincott, 1952) Compiled by
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A Brief Biography of Walter Stace¹

Walter Terence Stace (1886-1967) was a member of the Philosophy Department at Princeton University 1932-1955.

Born in London, Stace's great-grandfather was General William Stace of the Battle of Waterloo; his family was a military family; and it was expected that he, like his father and his brother, would enter upon a military career. In his teens, however, he experienced a religious conversion, and he entered Trinity College, Dublin, with the intention of a career in the Anglican Church....

Upon graduation from Dublin in 1908, and with family pressures upon him, he entered the British Civil Service. For twenty-two years, from 1910 to 1932, he served in various capacities in the government of Ceylon, always with distinction. He was district judge, private secretary to the governor, land settlement officer, member of the legislative council, member of the governors's executive council, Mayor of Colombo, and chairman of the Colombo Municipal Council. "Stace Street" still exists in Colombo.

During these years philosophy was his avocation. His routine was to be awakened at 6:00 a.m. with early tea and to read and write for two hours before breakfast at 8. He produced in this manner three books: "A Critical History of Greek Philosophy", "The Philosophy of Hegel" and "The Meaning of Beauty: A Theory of Aesthetics."

... [Because] President Hibben of Princeton, himself a philosopher, greatly admired Stace's writings, as did the other members of the Department of Philosophy. Stace was appointed visiting lecturer in 1932 and in 1935 was named Stuart Professor of Philosophy, a chair he held for twenty years until his retirement in 1955....

.... [Stace] saw clearly enough that the existence of God is no more susceptible of demonstration than is the existence of a pebble or a rainbow... "Either God is a

1 Due to my great admiration for the works of Walter Stace I am including this brief bio prior to the outline of his book, *Religion and the Modern Mind*. This outline is offered because his works are out of print and can be prohibitively expensive. Excerpt is from Princeton University Department of Philosophy: <https://philosophy.princeton.edu/about/great-and-good/w-t-stace>

mystery or He is nothing at all," he wrote. "To ask for a proof of the existence of God is on a par with asking for a proof of the existence of beauty. If God does not lie at the end of any telescope, neither does He lie at the end of a syllogism."

It seemed to him that the only consistent path for an empiricist in the field of religion is the path of mysticism. The religious claim makes empirical sense if and only if mysticism makes sense. In his final three books he set himself the task of showing that mysticism makes sense. His argument was that the mystical experience is a fact, is unique, and is the same in all cultures; that while interpretations of the mystical experience vary from culture to culture, all interpretations agree that the experience is logically paradoxical when expressed in conceptual terms. On Stace's view, however, this is a challenge to empiricism, not a violation of it.

The Outline

In the medieval world-picture there are 3 main philosophical ideas (p. 15):

1. God
2. World-purpose, and the
3. Moral order of the world

GOD

God was thought of as personal—a conscious mind or spirit that was similar to a human mind with plans and purposes, thoughts and ideas, and perhaps some emotions such as love and anger. But as "pure spirit" God probably has no physical sensations (pp. 15-16).

"Of course God's mind is thought of as much larger, greater, more powerful, wiser than any human mind...but still it must be of the same kind as a human mind (p. 17)... If you think of God as in any sense a person, a mind or a spirit...you cannot help being anthropomorphic...because you have no other materials out of which to form your conception of him. In short, God is incurably and *necessarily* anthropomorphic. (pp. 17-8)."

God in the medieval mind made the world several thousand years ago in the same sense as a man makes a house. But men make houses out of pre-existing materials while god made the world out of nothing. When God said "Let there be light," there was light (pp. 18-9).

WORLD PURPOSE

Teleology: "...the teleological explanation of a phenomenon means the explanation in terms of a purpose. Thus if a man commits a theft, his action is an event in nature just as much as would be a flash of lightening and we ask why such an event occurred (p. 19).

Teleological vs. the mechanical explanation of science is restated as purpose vs. explanation by laws of nature. Example: man climbs a hill. Why? Two explanations: the teleological explanation is because he wants to see the view from the top of the mountain. Mechanical explanation examines the physical aspects of his movements. One answers why; the other answers how (pp. 19-20).

"One of the contrasts between the medieval and the modern mind is...that the former was dominated by religion, while the latter is dominated by science...religion has generally been associated with teleology, science with mechanism (p. 24)." Buddhism exists without teleology, but most religions, including Christianity believe God made the world for a purpose (p. 25).

Medieval example: Teleological explanation of the rainbow is that God gives it as a sign he will never again destroy the world with a flood. Modern explanation is given by the laws of physics. "Socrates, Plato & Aristotle developed teleological systems of metaphysics (p. 26)."

World as a Moral Order

This third philosophical idea "...permeates not only Christianity, but all the great religions (p. 32). "...this idea is a necessary part of *any* sort of religious belief about the world." The subjective view is that without human beings there would be no moral values in it: "Nothing in the universe is, in itself, either good or bad...values are a purely human thing (p. 47)...[But moral values are] an essential part of the religious attitude (p. 48)."

In Hindu and Buddhism this idea is expressed by karma. "...the ultimately moral character of the universe, whether it is personified in the form of a righteous and transcendent God or...immanent in the world-process itself, has been a part of all advanced religious cultures....Until modern times a universal belief...The opposite conception, a blind universe... is the product of the 17th century scientific revolution (p. 49)."

[Heraclitus fragment 60 (Burnet): "To God all things are fair and good and right, but men see some things wrong and some right."]

Age of Science

SHOCKS to Christian religious belief (pp. 53-4):

- Discoveries of geology shattered belief in Earth as 6000 years old
- Darwinian evolution showed humans were related to other animals
- Historical and literary criticism showed that the Bible was not a record of facts dictated by God.

But the real shock that undermined religious belief was "not between particular discoveries of science and particular discoveries of religion" it was that the

general assumptions of the scientific world view conflicted with the basic assumptions of the religious view. All religions believed in:

- the world as a moral order
- world purpose—teleology
- God was necessary for creation

"Newtonian science produced in men's minds an ever-growing sense, or feeling, of the *remoteness of God*." The medieval view of God as being near and miracles showing God's love for those who worshiped him was pushed back to a God of long ago and far away (pp. 86-7).

"A God who 'exists' but does nothing in the world, who in no way affects the outcome of events, is simply a God who does not matter." Newtonian science did not destroy a belief in God but drained the life out of any belief in him (p. 89).

"If one admits the scientific maxim that every event in nature has a natural cause, it is still possible...to bring in God at the beginning as a first cause. But this leads to the conception of a God who, since he does nothing in the world now, is of no practical importance in our lives (pp. 91-2)."

"Much of the darkness, perplexity, and loss of sanity in the modern world...can be traced back ultimately to that loss of faith in the existence of any purpose or plan in the world-process, which has been one of the major results of the work of the mainly devout and pious men who were the founders of modern science (p.102)."

Morals

There is no logical connection between modern science and moral ideas, and yet "*They have brought about the collapse of the belief that the world is a moral order* (p. 103)." Belief that the world is NOT a moral order is the same as believing that moral values are subjective, that they depend on *human* desires, feelings, and opinions (p. 104).

This idea came about because of a lack of purpose (teleology) in the universe. If there is purpose in the world, then there will be values in the world; values will be objective. If values are only in human minds, then they will be subjective. Values of any kind—economic, aesthetic, or moral—are intimately bound up with the concept of purpose (p. 105). Even if a clever philosopher could construct a rational theory separating value from purpose, plain men always connect the two (p. 106).

Outline of the train of thought by which moral objectivism of the medieval mind became moral subjectivism of the modern mind (p. 107):

1. If morality is grounded in divine or cosmic purpose, then it is objective and the world is amoral order.
2. Newtonian science caused a loss of effective belief in divine or cosmic

- purpose.
3. But values have to be connected with, and defined in terms of, some purpose.
 4. If divine or cosmic purposes are eliminated, all that remains is human purpose.
 5. Moral values will then be dependent on human purpose, subjectivism, and the world is not a moral order.

"Science leads to subjectivism.
Subjectivism leads to moral relativism (p. 111)."

The logical positivists of our time are relativists. Only a few idealists deny relativism, and they're out of date (p. 113). Greeks thought slavery was right [\[as did the Stoics\]](#). A moral relativist would say that for ancient Greeks slavery *was* right...which is the same thing as saying because some primitives believed the world was flat, then at that time the world *was* flat (p. 115).

[\[My personal notes: How do we prove slavery is wrong? Other than the Golden Rule how can we prove it is morally objectionable? Why is it possible to own every other kind of animal except humans? If we believe Nature is God, how can we own property, waterways, islands, mountains, et cetera? Can we morally own Nature but not other humans? Again, other than a firm belief in the Golden Rule, how do we believe slavery—or anything—is morally wrong?\]](#)

Naturalism

Descartes represents a complete break with Medievalism even though he retains some of their thought. He believed natural phenomena are ultimately controlled by divine purposes, which are inscrutable and useless for the purposes of science. The special purposes of science were to predict phenomena so we can control the future to our advantage. Founders of science ignored beliefs in the teleological aspects of nature to focus on the mechanical interpretation (pp 150-1).

Descartes' philosophy was dualistic, and he believed the world was made of two radically different things—matter and mind. [\[Is this same or similar to the Stoic Active and Passive principle?\]](#) He thought man has mind and soul (but all other animals do not), and these are not material s they can survive the body. He attempted to construct axioms, self-evident truths, to prove God existed:

1. " I think, therefore I am."
2. God exists
3. Matter exists

Thus the world is composed of 3 things: God, mind, and matter. His complex chain of arguments about these axioms were eventually proven false (pp. 152-5).

Hobbes (1588-1679) was the first pure exponent of the naturalistic or scientific view of the world. He believed everything in the world was mechanical, including minds. All events were nothing but changes in the motions of material particles. He was a hard determinist who said all affects are produced by a necessary cause (p. 155). Hobbes believed the human was also only a machine and that our desires are nothing but motions of particles. He was an early proponent of the subjectivity of moral values. Stace considers Hobbes' theories crude compare to intellectual gifts of Scottish philosopher David Hume (p. 156).

David Hume (1711-1776)

Hume is the father of all positivists down to the present day (p. 156).

(Empiricism: the theory of the origin of our ideas and knowledge. All ideas that can exist in a mind are preceded by, and are derived from impressions presented to the mind.) According to Hume there are two kinds of impressions:

1. by the senses—seeing, smelling, hearing, etc.
2. reflection or introspection—our feelings and thoughts or other operations of the mind

You have no ideas about a sensation unless it's based upon a previous sensation (e.g., the idea of color only exists if you can see; sounds only if you have hearing [p. 159]). All that can ever be observed is a succession or flow of events, one thing following another. You cannot observe the connection to these facts. You can observe that water in a pot over a flame will boil, but you have no sensation of the connection of water boiling when heated by flame. There are no rational grounds for belief that a flame causes water to boil except by experience (pp. 161-2).

Because there are no rational grounds for believing the sun will rise tomorrow, or any other prediction about the future, "There is no reason why anything happens as it does and that the universe is totally irrational and senseless in its proceedings." We can ask what happens, but to ask why it happens is meaningless (p.164).

"Everything is just brute fact. We live in a brute fact universe." Thus science can never do anything except describe what happens. It can never explain why. We can know that water freezes at 32 degrees F.; but, we can never know why the molecules of water slow down when they get colder (p. 165).

This is a world without purpose, sense, or reason—the scientific view of the world, which is nothing but a stream of events. It is the function of science to predict from one set of senseless events what the next set of senseless events will be. Is slavery wrong? Can you see, hear, or smell wrongness? The question cannot be verified either directly or indirectly, and is therefore meaningless (p. 174).

Moral claims express emotion, they do *not* express a fact. It is a subjective emotion, not an objective fact. The world, in this view, is not a moral

order...emotions express a human feeling and have no basis outside of the human mind (pp. 175-6).

"That there is no purpose in anything, the human life like everything else is futile and meaningless, that the world and all that is in it including human beings are governed by blind material forces, that there is no goodness, no beauty, nor any other kind of value in the universe save that only which men themselves have invented, that we are all carried along helplessly on predetermined paths, that we have no choice and no control of our own destinies—this is a dismal set of doctrines. Protest and reactions against it were bound to make their appearance...The human spirit rebels against such conclusions (p.177)."

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

Hume and the German philosopher Immanuel Kant are the two great masters of the Modern period. Kant's philosophy attempted to reconcile the religious view with the scientific view (pp. 188-9). Kant said the scientific view is 100% correct and the religious view is 100% correct—even if they contradicted each other as follows (pp. 190-1):

1. The world is governed by spiritual forces; it is not governed by spiritual forces
2. The world is guided by purpose; it is not guided by purpose
3. The world is a moral order; it is not a moral order

Somehow, both pictures of the world must be true. There must be *two worlds*. For any perception or thought there are two terms involved: subject and object.

SUBJECT: the mind which perceives, knows, or thinks

OBJECT: the thing being perceived, known, or thought about. The object may be a material thing, such as a stone; or it may be the mind of another person or one's own mind

If your mind is thinking about your mind, then it is the subject thinking about the object. In all perceiving, knowing, and thinking there is always the antithesis of subject and object (p. 192)

>Concepts to categories. Concepts are general ideas as distinguished from ideas of particular things. Man is a concept distinguished from Zeno, a particular man. Some concepts are universal. Kant calls them categories and says there are exactly 12 categories, but Stace only gives what he says are the 5 most important ones: Unity (being one), plurality (being many), totality (being a whole), causality (being a cause), action and reaction (acting on and being acted upon by other things). (p. 192)

>Categories apply to all material things, and on all minds and mental things. Every mind is one mind and has many thoughts. Every mind is a whole, and a cause and an effect that can act and react.

>This is the world of things in space and time to which categories apply, the space-time world to which science applies and which is 100% true. God, freedom, and immortality *cannot* be found in the space-time world (p. 193).

The space-time world is not reality; it is only appearance, which Kant attempts to prove with logic (but his proofs are too complicated and ultimately found incorrect). The appearances are not real in themselves but only due to the structure of the perceiving faculty. Our minds are made in such a way to perceive appearances, but reality is unknowable.

>Stace says Kant's proofs were ultimately proven wrong but his intuition is correct and characteristic of his great genius (pp. 194-5).

The real world is outside of space and time and is the religious way of thinking, which is 100% true. But this world can never be proved or disproved by reason. "No conceivable scientific discovery could ever clash with religion, because all scientific discoveries have reference only to appearance. For the same reason in reverse no religious truth could ever conflict with the dicta of science (p. 196)."

Kant's two-world hypothesis shows that the very structure of our mind prevents us from knowing reality, and every attempt to know reality ends in mystery and contradiction (p. 197).

German Idealists, following Kant, accepted our inability to know reality but believed we could penetrate the screen of appearances and that spiritual forces, not material, rule the world. Mind is the ultimate reality (p. 198)

Religious Truth

"It is impossible to prove the nonexistence of God." If the mind of God is anything like the mind of man, then it is a stream of psychological states flowing and changing in a time-series. Consciousness cannot exist any other way. It cannot be unchanging because it depends on contrast (p. 221). But if God's consciousness flows and changes with time, then it contradicts all religious and theological conceptions that God is above time and created it.

>If a mind is a flow of changing conscious states it would imply finitude or finite consciousness, not infinite

>"God's consciousness cannot have changed from a perception of the absence of the world before it was created to the perception of its presence after he created it (pp. 221-2)."

[Heraclitus fragment 20 (Burnet): "This cosmos, which is the same for all, no one of gods or men has made; but it was ever, is now, and ever shall be an ever-living fire, with measures kindling, and measures going out."]

"Religion is not simply ethics. Nor is it just a mixture of ethics and dogma...There is a third something...The essence of religion is not morality but mysticism...My

contention is that all religion is ultimately mystical, or springs from the mystical side of human nature (pp. 228-9)."

"Kant's only mistake was his failure to recognize that man can have direct experience of the eternal order in the mystical vision (p. 244)."

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