

Abridged Chapters from

OF TIME AND ETERNITY

Translator's Foreword

Of Time and Eternity invites comparison with Heidegger's monumental *Being and Time*. Given that for Lavelle eternity is practically another name for being the two titles announce the same general concerns.¹ But apart from agreement on the close relation between being and time and on the pivotal role of the present there is little similarity between the two works.² The former has eternity as its focus and provides a fully-formed theory of time in relation to it, mainly by way of an intuitive approach. The latter has finitude as its focus, deals with it in a meticulous phenomenological fashion and only hints at the possibility of a profound understanding of time—which is never delivered.³ What is important is that Lavelle and Heidegger were among the first thinkers of their era to delve into the question of being and that they independently recognised time as a key factor.

The main topics addressed in *Of Time and Eternity* are:

¹ Heidegger's work is chronologically first, appearing in 1927, whereas Lavelle's appeared in 1945. Yet the selections from *The Total Presence* translated in this collection testify that the essential insights in *Of Time and Eternity* existed as early as 1934. Even earlier indications are contained in *Of Being* (1928) and an unpublished 1912 manuscript entitled *Of Existence*.

² A detailed comparison of the two works would be valuable nonetheless.

³ I see Heidegger's late-life lecture "Time and Being" (in *On Time and Being*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh, Harper & Row, 1972) as an—admittedly provocative—apology for the author's failure to give a full and in-depth account of time. Perhaps the most valuable aspect of this lecture is the linking of Being and time through the notion of "presencing". I feel that Lavelle would have been very comfortable with this expression of being's connection with time.

1. absence as a variety of presence, leading to the conclusion that past and future are in fact present disclosures;
2. the lived experience of time “in the order of existence” as a progression from future to present to past rather than the reverse, which is the usual construction of time;
3. the relation between becoming and duration as parallel to the relation between time and eternity;
4. the difference between the present and the instant, with special emphasis on the latter;
5. the interrelation of time and eternity;
6. their single essence in being.

All these themes are represented in the translated selections.

Owing to the importance of the present in *The Dialectic* Lavelle’s detailed treatment of time in this third volume is crucial to the whole enterprise. In terms of the author’s total vision *Of Time and Eternity* is second only to *Of the Act*. In terms of lucidity it might be considered first. If anything the book is under-represented in this selection of readings but I feel I have accurately laid bare its essential argument in what is offered. Both *Of the Act* and *Of Time and Eternity* deserve to be translated in full at some future date.

The main thesis of the latter is that time and eternity require each other and in fact interpenetrate. On the one hand time gives intimations of eternity—not only in privileged moments but *continually*, in the very character of time itself where the sense of preservation associated with the past, the sense of immediacy associated with the present and the welling sense of newness associated with the future are properly nuances of eternity. On the other hand eternity is not frozen being but a permanent emerging that shares time’s dynamism and liveliness, in part by constantly gathering into itself a multitude of realised possibilities, i.e. the achieved essences of human beings.

As for what awaits mortals after death the author seems to envisage a community of essences united with their source and purified of all worldly or objective particulars. However each being seems confined to the degree of essence it realised during its earthly sojourn—perhaps a harsh judgment on those failing to make the most of their short lives but then there are indications that whatever degree of realisation holds boundless riches in the hereafter.

Special attention should be paid to the circulation of time “in the order of existence”—i.e. from possibility to actuality to memory—for it will be the foundation of Lavelle’s discussion of the soul’s progress and meaning in *Of the Human Soul*.