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0521467624 - Space, Time and Man: A Prehistorian's View - Grahame Clark

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Written by a prehistoric archaeologist, this book describes how man has extended his understanding of time and space far beyond that of his primate forebears through technology, social organization and, above all, his capacity for abstract thought. Prehistorians have shown that even Palaeolithic people had long outstripped their forebears in comprehending time and space; and social anthropologists have documented preindustrial societies in which people were fully aware of these dimensions but were severely restricted by their social and cultural worlds. Evidence for more expanded horizons first appeared with those civilizations which controlled extensive territories and recorded their history to some extent in writing. The transition to modern times was marked above all with the advance of geographical discovery culminating in the circumnavigation of the world and by the beginning of recorded history. Today, people are searching for explanations of what we know in terms of natural science. This involves looking beyond our world to outer space and seeking to understand our place in the cosmos.

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# Preface

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To describe and analyse the specific character which space and time assume in human experience is one of the most appealing and important tasks of an anthropological philosophy.

E. CASSIRER<sup>1</sup>

The famous philosopher Samuel Alexander once wrote<sup>2</sup> that all the vital problems of his subject depended on solving the question of what space and time are and how they are related to one another. The present book is not offered as a contribution to philosophy. It is devoted to reviewing people's perception of these basic dimensions in the course of their social evolution. It is thus primarily anthropological and historical in its concerns. It aims to show how people have achieved their humanity in part by attaining a fuller comprehension of their own place in time and space. In considering how men and women gained this fuller insight we have always to remember that they not only stemmed from but remain part of the animal kingdom. At the same time, in the course of their prehistory they have become a very special kind of animal. Indeed, this is the reason why in my view prehistory is worth intensive study. Since we have only attained a fuller understanding of our place in the universe in the course of the general development of our culture, it will be convenient to treat the matter historically, beginning with the emergence of *Homo sapiens* and culminating in communities cognizant of modern science. As I said at the end of my Hitchcock Lectures at Berkeley in 1969,<sup>3</sup> a more comprehensive grasp of the dimensions in which they lived has been of high adaptive value in the evolution of specifically human communities.

In writing a book of this kind, which I believe to be the first to deal with the topic of space and time over a span extending from animal ethology to modern cosmology, an author has to rely on

work published by authorities in many fields beyond his own. If I have misinterpreted what they say I can only ask their indulgence and accept the blame. By the same token I must seek the indulgence of authors whose works I may to my loss have overlooked. In such a summary work it would be tedious to cite in detail all the sources on which I have in fact drawn. Instead I have merely listed in the notes at the end of the book those on which I have principally relied in the order in which I have used them. Apart from learning from their writings I owe much to the inspiration of having known a number of the authors personally. As an archaeologist with a special interest in economic prehistory I have long been concerned with animals as sources of food. I owe my interest in animal behaviour as such to Professor Thorpe, formerly a close neighbour. Geology, particularly Quaternary geology, is a subject in which I have necessarily been closely involved as a prehistorian, and the same applies to fossil man studied by human palaeontologists. At Cambridge my own subject, archaeology, has always been taught alongside social anthropology and I owe an immense debt to colleagues in that field, notably Meyer Fortes, Edmund Leach and E. Evans-Pritchard, not forgetting Donald Thomson who came to us for a brief period from Australia. From them and their writings I gained an abiding sense of the uses, economic and social, to which peoples living beyond the range of modern civilization have recently put space and time. A book to which I have frequently returned over the years has been *The Discovery of Time* by Stephen Toulmin and June Goodfield,<sup>4</sup> the former of whom visited my first excavation after the war, perhaps to see how an archaeologist went about conducting an experiment in time. Dennis Sciama, while he was a Fellow of Peterhouse, first fascinated me with cosmology and I can only hope he and his former pupils will forgive my very imperfect understanding of their books. Lastly, I have been encouraged to note the attention currently being directed by some of the younger Cambridge faculty, including Geoff Bailey,<sup>5</sup> the prehistorian, to the problems of time and space as these presented themselves to prehistoric man.

I would also like to thank all those who have helped in the production of the book, including my wife, Mollie, who has removed many defects from the text, and my subeditor, Margaret Deith.

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