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Why I am Not A Christian Response Paper

Bertand Russell is highly respected in his field as a prominent mathematician and philosopher and because of his high credentials I was interested in his reasons for why he is not a Christian. Bertrand Russell in this paper made the argument that Christianity is not only delusional, but also evil. He gives a number of arguments to support his claim but the majority of the paper Russell is only making assertions without justifying them with evidence. Let me address a few of these assertions and arguments. I will start by addressing his first argument. Russell's first argument was that when the theist claims that God created the universe, the argument/response that shows that would be impossible is to raise the question "Who created God?" He writes, "If everything must have a cause, then God must have a cause. If there can be anything without a cause, it may just as well be the world as God" ("Why I am Not a Christian" 2).

Now, Russell makes one argument and one claim. The argument being that because God exists, God must have had a cause. He also makes the claim: "There is no reason to suppose that the world had a beginning at all" ("Why I am Not a Christian" 2). I will first address his claim concerning the origin of the universe. Now I do understand that when Russell was writing this paper, the best scientific evidence that the universe had a beginning had not been discovered yet. However, here I will provide just a small sample of the evidence for why it is the dominant view in contemporary cosmology that the universe had a beginning.

In 1929, the American astronomer Edwin Hubble made the discovery that the universe was expanding. He "made measurements of the red-shift in the optical spectra of light from distant galaxies" (The Ultimate Question of Origins: God and the Beginning of the Universe, Hubble 168-173). This discovery did not mean that the universe is expanding into empty space; rather the universe (space itself) is expanding. This means that reversing the process of expansion would result in going back in time to the point where the universe began to exist in the finite past in a dense point of singularity. The English physicist Paul Davies writes:

An initial cosmological singularity therefore forms a past temporal extremity to the universe. We cannot continue physical reasoning, or even the concept of spacetime, through such an extremity. For this reason most cosmologist think of the initial singularity as the beginning of the universe. On the view the big bang represents the creation event; the creation not only of all the matter and energy in the universe, but also of spacetime itself (78-79).

More recently in 2003, three cosmologist: Arvind Bord, Alan Guth, and Alexander Vilenkin were able to prove that if any universe which is in a constant state where it is expanding on, that universe cannot be eternal in the past, meaning that the universe must have an absolute beginning ("Richard Dawkins On Arguments for God" 16, "Inflationary spacetimes are not past-complete"). This theory that the universe clearly has a beginning is so strong that in 2012 at a conference celebrating the 70th birthday of the famous scientist Stephen Hawking, Vilenkin delivered a paper entitled *Did the Universe Have a Beginning* which surveyed current cosmology in regard to this question. Through this paper, he demonstrated why the coming into being of the universe is unavoidable, even with alternative models to the Big Bang. Vilenkin concluded, "All the evidence we have says that the universe had a beginning" (Vilenkin, qtd. in Grossman, "Contemporary Cosmology and the Beginning of the Universe").

Now just scratching the surface of the evidence it is still clear that the universe began to exist. In fact NASA puts the age of the universe at 13.77 billion years (“How Old Is the Universe?”). Russell’s claim that there is no reason to believe that universe had a beginning is an unjustified assumption. The second point that he made was the argument that God cannot be the cause of the universe because question immediately arises: “Who made God?”

This objection that Russell makes can be dealt with by addressing two points. As Peter Bocchino and Dr. Norman Geisler point out, “he [Russell] incorrectly defines the causality principle and committed a logical fallacy called a *category mistake*” (78). Now what is the “causality principle?” This is the first principle of science and it states that, “anything which is finite and limited needs a cause” (Geisler and Bocchino 78). This basically means that if something began to exist, then it requires a cause. Now Russell’s first mistake was that he defined the principle by saying that everything requires a cause (which is not what the causality principle states). Russell also commits a logical fallacy known as a category mistake: “The error of assigning to something a quality or action that can properly be assigned to things only of another category, for example, treating abstract concepts as though they had a physical location.”

In this case Russell is assigning the finite category with the infinite category. God is as the cause of all space, time, and matter (the universe) and would therefore transcend space, time, and matter and therefore exist as timeless, space-less, and immaterial being. If the universe were infinite, then Russell would be correct on inferring that it does not require a cause, but as I have shown previously in this paper, as Dr. Vilenkin says, “All the evidence we have says that the universe had a beginning” (Vilenkin, qtd. in Grossman, “Contemporary Cosmology and the Beginning of the Universe”). The point that Russell’s objection is like asking, “What is the cause of the uncaused first cause?” It is a contradictory/meaningless question.

The next assertion that I want to tackle is the one where Russell makes when he writes, “Historically, it is quite doubtful whether Christ ever existed at all” (6). He makes the assertion with absolutely no justification. Dr. Robert E. Van Voorst, Professor of New Testament Studies at Western Theological Seminary writes, “The theory of Jesus’ nonexistence is now effectively dead as a scholarly question” (14). The late New Testament historian Dr. F.F. Bruce wrote, “Some writers may toy with the fancy of a ‘Christ-myth,’ but they do not do so on the ground of historical evidence. The historicity of Christ is as axiomatic for an unbiased historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar. It is not historians who propagate the ‘Christ-myth’ theories” (123). Dr. Mark Allan Powell, a professor of NT and chairman for Historical Jesus at the Society of Biblical Literature puts it harshly when states: “Anyone who says that today [i.e. that Jesus didn’t exist]—in the academic world at least—gets grouped with the skinheads who say there was no Holocaust and the scientific holdouts who want to believe the world is flat” (168).

The reason why Jesus’ existence is not doubted in scholarship is because as even the skeptical New Testament historian Dr. Bart Ehrman says, “He [Jesus] is abundantly attested in early sources . . . early and independent sources certainly indicate that certainly that Jesus existed.” Historian Dr. Gary Habermas gives a summary of the number of sources that we have for Jesus: “We have examined a total of 45 ancient sources for the life of Jesus, which include 19 early creedal, four archaeological, 17 non-Christian, and five non-New Testament Christian sources” (250). To give a few examples of what these sources are, we have four Greco-Roman biographies written in the first century; we have the letters of Paul (He also knew Peter (Jesus’ disciple) and James (Jesus’ brother)), which were written in mostly in the 50s AD. We also have early extra-biblical sources such as the Jewish historian Josephus, the Roman historian Tacitus, the Roman historian Suetonius, the Talmud, the Greek Satirist Lucian, the Syrian author Mara Bar-Serapion, and the sources go on. Russell’s assertion concerning the existence of Jesus is completely false.

Now I want to focus on another key issue that Russell raises in his essay on how Christianity is evil. He writes at length:

In the so-called Ages of faith, when men really did believe the Christian religion in all its completeness, the Inquisition, with all its tortures; there were millions of unfortunate women burned as witches; and there was every kind of cruelty practiced upon all sorts of people in the name of religion . . . You find as you look around the world that every single bit of progress of humane feeling, every improvement in the criminal law, every step toward the diminution of war, every step toward better treatment of the colored races, or ever mitigation of slavery, every moral progress that there has been in the world, has been consistently opposed by the organized churches of the world. I say quite deliberately that the Christian religion, as organized in its churches, has been and still is the principal enemy of moral progress in the world (“Why I am Not a Christian” 8).

Now he claims that the Christianity is evil that it has opposed “moral progress” he makes all these claims about the morality of Christianity but with absolutely no basis given his own atheistic worldview. Now rather than giving an argument for why on atheism (“the view that there is no God”) (McCormick) evil is illusory, I will quote Bertrand Russell on what he has to say about morality on his own worldview:

“Materialists use the laws of physics to show, or attempt to show, that the movements of human bodies are mechanically determined . . . When a man writes a poem or commits a murder, the bodily movements involved in his act result solely from physical causes. It would seem absurd to put up a statue to him in one case and to hang him in another.” (“Has Religion Made Useful Contributions to Civilization?” 37).

The comments that Russell makes on how “evil” Christianity is, are meaningless statements. They are just words that he was “mechanically determined” by the laws of physics to write. He cannot even define what evil means. To put it simply, laws of nature are merely descriptions about reality. Morality is the way people ought to behave. Russell explains how people ought to behave a certain way but based on his own view that we are merely biological machines that are mechanically determined with now transcendent moral standard, he is guilty of committing the is-ought logical fallacy. As the Encyclopedia of Philosophy states: “The is-ought fallacy occurs when a conclusion expressing what ought to be so is inferred from premises expressing only what is so, in which it is supposed that no implicit or explicit ought-premises are need” (Fallacies).

The actions that people take on his own materialistic worldview are just different and determined. He recognizes that there is no transcendent standard of morality for why we can judge something as moral or immoral (which is evident by what he says on determinism). However he writes, “every moral progress that there has been in the world, has been consistently opposed by the organized churches of the world” (“Has Religion Made Useful Contributions to Civilization?” 37). What is this moral progress that he is speaking of? This is a meaningless statement by his own admission. I think that C.S. Lewis elucidates this point:

If your moral ideas can be truer, and those of the Nazis less true, there must be something - some Real Morality - for them to be true about. . . . If the Rule of Decent Behavior meant simply “whatever each nation happens to approve,” there would be no sense in saying that any one nation had ever been more correct in its approval than any other; no sense in saying that the world could ever grow morally better or morally worse. (25)

Again, what does Russell mean when he uses this phrase “moral progress?” If there is no standard of morality, if we are as Russell says just “mechanically determined” biological machines, then how can we say condemn the Nazis for what they did? How can we say that Christianity is preventing moral progress? How can Russell define “evil?” Again, without a standard of morality, there is no such thing as moral progress; there is only motion.

I think it is clear at this point for why I disagree with Russell’s argument. Now I have not proven that God exists or that Christianity is true, but what I have done is offer the reasons why Russell’s arguments are insufficient scientifically and philosophically to justify his conclusions.

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