

Response to *Why I Am Not A Christian* by Bertrand Russell:

Although I will grant that some of the arguments Russell sets forth in this writing are well-put, they are by no means incontrovertible and are outnumbered by his patently false assumptions and accusations regarding Christianity. The work begins with Russell's definition of a "Christian." It seems at first as though he is choosing the most far-reaching and "fair" definition. However, he says that he "shall not insist that a Christian must believe in hell" (50). I would argue that anyone who does not believe in hell is not a Christian, for at the base of Christian theology is the fall. Thus, some of the arguments Russell sets forth may be refuted by the mere fact that he is assuming orthodox Christianity can exist without the hell and, consequently, without the fall. This is his first problem.

Russell goes on to discuss the classical arguments for God. The first comment in this section that I found interesting was his reference to having to wait "until Kingdom Come" (50) – interesting choice of words for an anti-Christian. Moving on, though, it is important to point out that many Christians have pointed out the exact same difficulties that Russell puts forth. The classical arguments serve a purpose, but whether or not they survive scrutiny does not determine whether God's existence is reasonable. Thus, Russell's arguments may expose true weaknesses in the classical arguments, but they do not really endanger the concept of God's existence.

Nevertheless, these arguments contain certain statements that warrant a response. While Russell makes valid points about the first-cause argument, I do not find his response completely satisfactory. He behaves as though the question "who made God?"

is a total refutation. However, to assume a pre-existent creator makes more sense than to assume a pre-existent creation. Matter, though orderly, is not intelligent. If one assumes that only matter is pre-existent, he must still answer how that matter ordered itself into the clearly designed universe we live in today. To throw billions of years into the equation so it has time to “happen” on its own is much less plausible than to simply say that it was created by a pre-existent, intelligent being.

In the portion on the natural-law argument, Russell says “We now find that a great many things we thought were natural laws are really human conventions” (51). Here he defines natural laws as conventional, and therefore they are always changing and cannot be used to unequivocally prove anything. This is a problem for Russell, however, for later he uses “ordinary laws of science” (53) to make the point that everything tends toward a state of decay (which is strange, for how could the universe evolve in an orderly manner if it tends to decay?). Russell’s main point in this section, however, is similar to his moral argument later. He says “if there were a reason for the laws which God gave, then God himself was subject to law” (52). Just as I will say later in my response to morality, a response to this is that rather than God arbitrarily defining law, God *is* law. God *is* orderliness, and therefore He is neither an arbitrary definer of law, nor defined by a larger concept of law. Rather, law is part of his nature – God is the originator of the concept itself.

Russell’s response to the argument from design has problems as well. He expects an omnipotent and omniscient God to be able to do better than the “Ku Klux Klan or the Fascists.” What he fails to mention is that in Christian theology, God created the universe perfect. There was no death, decay, or any such aspects of “the ordinary laws of

science.” How then did evil and imperfection enter the world? God created man in order to love him and for him to love God back, but of what value is compulsory love? We were created perfect, but we were also given the choice to love God or to reject Him. By having this choice, those who decide to follow God do so out of genuine love, not because they were forced. It seems as though Russell thinks God should have created robots that would be unable to disobey God or to reject Him. And advocate of “freethinking society,” this is an odd position for him to take.

In this same discussion, Russell goes on to directly criticize the Almighty.

“Do you think that, if you were granted omnipotence and omniscience and millions of years in which to perfect your world, you could produce nothing better than the Ku Klux Klan or the Fascists?” (52-53).

First of all, why does he make the argument that God made nothing better than the KKK? Naturally, he chooses an example of man at his worst to point out all the “problems” with God’s creation. But this is really a non-issue. Whether he used the example of genocidal Adolf Hitler or peace-loving Gandhi is really irrelevant. The main idea is that Russell is forgetting the fact that in orthodox Christianity, man fell as a result of choosing to obey Satan. If Russell is going to argue against Christianity, he *cannot* deny the existence of Satan or hell. If there was no hell or Satan, there would be no explanation for the imperfections in the world and Russell would have a point. But the fact is that Christian doctrine holds to the fact that all evil is a result of man’s fall. Thus, if there’s anyone Russell should be blaming for the KKK or Fascism, it is Satan – not God.

Russell also addresses the moral argument for deity.

“If you are quite sure there is a difference between right and wrong, then you are in this situation: Is that difference due to God’s fiat or is it not? If it is due to God’s fiat, then for God himself there

is no difference between right and wrong, and it is no longer a significant statement to say that God is good. If you are going to say, as some theologians do, that God is good, you must then say that right and wrong have some meaning which is independent of God's fiat, because God's fiats are good and not bad independently of the mere fact that he made them." (53).

In other words, if morality is an arbitrary definition made by God, then he is not under that code. But if God is good, then "goodness" must have some meaning independent of God himself (and thus be above Him). My response is that God *is* the definition of goodness and morality. There is no meaning of goodness independent from God, and goodness was not an arbitrary creation of God – it is his very nature and essence. Russell concludes this argument with a hypothetical about the devil making the world "when God was not looking" (54). This is a contradictory statement for Russell to make. Number one, it accepts the existence of the devil (who is synonymous with hell), and therefore he has broken the rule he laid out for himself that he would not bring hell into the equation. And second, he has already accepted the definition of "God" as omniscient (52), so how could God be "not looking" and miss something? He violates his own definition for God.

After attacking the common arguments for God's existence, Russell moves on to the topic of Christ. He begins by listing various statements made by Jesus that he agrees with. He tries to show how these are not even followed by Christians. However, he is judging the efficacy of Christianity itself by the performance of those who follow it. True, it is sad that Christians do not live more like they should, but he is committing a logical fallacy when he takes what is true about the part and applies it to the whole. In other cases, he merely takes the quotes out of context. For example, "Judge not lest ye be judged" is taken by him to mean that courts are unbiblical. He ignores the other verses in the Bible where judgment is validated and even commanded (not to mention a frequent

act of God). Then, of course, he would argue that this is a contradiction, despite the fact that said quote is not coming against the treatment of criminals or sinners, but against a judgmental attitude.

Though C.S. Lewis' "liar, lunatic, or Lord" argument is not inerrant, it may be used against Bertrand Russell. After listing points where he respects Christ, Russell then denies His deity and explains how he believes Christ to be mistaken about the time of the Second Coming, among other things. But how could Christ, who was so vocal about His status as Son of God, be such a blatant liar about that while being a "good teacher?" And on the topic of Christ supposedly being so unsure about the timing of the Second Coming, this is actually biblical: Mark 13:32 says that the time of the Second Coming is known only to the Father. As for Christ supposedly believing that His return would come soon, a millions years is "soon" to an infinite being! The passages where Christ speaks of not thinking about tomorrow merely mean that He could return in the next minute or the next millennium – we must merely be certain to be ready for that time if it should come soon. Our primary concern should be what are we doing *today* for God's Kingdom and that we are ready now if he should return at this time.

Russell then ups the ante as he depicts Christ as some inhuman animal who delights in the suffering of men. To Russell, for God to send people to hell is the sign of immorality. As he seemed to indicate in "The Character of Christ," Russell apparently does not agree with the concept of justice. He is appalled that God would send those who reject him to everlasting punishment. He thinks that hell-fire as a punishment for sin "is a doctrine of cruelty" (56). So God shouldn't have the right to judge his own creation. Additionally, Russell takes these "violent and cruel" quotes about people going to hell to

be threats, when they are actually meant as wake-up calls. I couldn't help but noticing that Russell includes plenty of quotes of Christ acting violent and cruel, but none of his healing the sick, feeding the hungry, or commanding people to love one another. Before speaking of the consequences that will come to those who do not believe in Christ, 2 Peter 3:9 says "The Lord is... not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." Clearly, Russell overlooked these many examples. He then points out some less significant complaints, such as Christ causing the fig tree to wither for not bearing out of season. I'm not sure what translation he used for that quote, but neither the KJV nor the NASB (both highly literal translations) include anything about it not yet being fig season.

Another misconception Russell has about Christianity is that it is based on emotion. He thinks that people accept Christianity (and religion in general) because of the argument that "Christianity makes men virtuous, so if you attack it you must not want virtue to continue!" Despite the fact that this is hardly the typical Christian's method of defending their faith, Russell moves on to give examples of how evil Christianity has made the world – even making the statement that "the Christian religion...has been and still is the principal enemy of moral progress in the world" (57). In an entirely predictable fashion, he mentions the Inquisition and the many witch trials as results of Christianity, and therefore all of Christianity must produce and promote evil. This is patently not the case. Once again, Russell has taken a couple examples and applied it to the rest of the Church. Though Christians have certainly behaved in completely immoral ways in the past (and still do), the actions of those who fail to follow the Bible should not be used to denigrate the value of the teachings contained therein.

To make the claim, as Russell does, that Science and humanism will bring forth moral improvement is historically unproven. The United States, which was founded by predominantly Christian and God-fearing men, has become the most prosperous, advanced, well-run country in history and gives incredible amounts of food and aid to poor countries. Yet Germany, under the secular, humanistic Adolf Hitler, embarked on a mission to kill off the “inferior” Jewish race in order to “make the greater whole of humanity happier.” Great Britain, which has a historically Christian background, has continued to be a prosperous country that also contributes greatly to world prosperity. The Soviet Union, run by Marx-influenced, non-Christian communists, was responsible for countless deaths and suffering. Israel, a nation of God-fearing Jews, is an oasis of freedom and prosperity in the midst of the war-torn Middle East. Palestine, a direct opponent of anything Judeo-Christian, is run by terrorists and suicide bombers. Though evil actions have been done under the name of “Christian,” *practicing* Christians who follow Christ’s instruction have done more good for this country than any other religion. Missionaries help feed and nurture the poor in other countries, while telling them in love the way to salvation. Churches, when they do their job, give to their community, making the world a better place. For every example of evil done by Christians, there are many more of those who have taken on the servant’s heart and shown selfless love to their fellow man. A relativistic, “whatever makes people happy,” approach to morality has not improved the world but instead has produced men like Hitler. The spread of Christianity, however, has arguably done more for mankind than any other philosophical or religious institution in the history of the world.