

A Response to Bertrand Russell’s Lecture: “Why I Am Not A Christian”

(By Don McNeill with citations from Greg Bahnsen, John Frame, Cornelius Van Til, William Lane Craig, and others)

Introductory note: Russell delivered this lecture on March 6, 1927 to the National Secular Society, South London Branch, at Battersea Town Hall. Published in pamphlet form in that same year, the essay subsequently achieved new fame with Paul Edwards' edition of Russell's book, *Why I Am Not a Christian and Other Essays ...* (1957).¹

As your Chairman has told you, the subject about which I am going to speak to you tonight is "Why I Am Not a Christian." Perhaps it would be as well, first of all, to try to make out what one means by the word *Christian*. It is used these days in a very loose sense by a great many people. Some people mean no more by it than a person who attempts to live a good life. In that sense I suppose there would be Christians in all sects and creeds; but I do not think that that is the proper sense of the word, if only because it would imply that all the people who are not Christians—all the Buddhists, Confucians, Mohammedans, and so on—are not trying to live a good life. I do not mean by a Christian any person who tries to live decently according to his lights. I think that you must have a certain amount of definite belief before you have a right to call yourself a Christian. The word does not have quite such a full-blooded meaning now as it had in the times of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. In those days, if a man said that he was a Christian it was known what he meant. You accepted a whole collection of creeds which were set out with great precision, and every single syllable of those creeds you believed with the whole strength of your convictions.

What Is a Christian?

Nowadays it is not quite that. We have to be a little more vague in our meaning of Christianity. I think, however, that there are two different items which are quite essential to anybody calling himself a Christian. The first is one of a dogmatic nature—namely, that you must believe in God and immortality. If you do not believe in those two things, I do not think that you can properly call yourself a Christian. Then, further than that, as the name implies, you must have some kind of belief about Christ. The Mohammedans, for instance, also believe in God and in immortality, and yet they would not call themselves Christians. I think you must have at the very lowest the belief that Christ was, if not divine, at least the best and wisest of men. If you are not going to believe that much about Christ, I do not think you have any right to call yourself a Christian. Of course, there is another sense, which you find in *Whitaker's Almanack* and in geography books, where the population of the world is said to be divided into Christians, Mohammedans, Buddhists, fetish worshipers, and so on; and in that sense we are all Christians. The geography books count us all in, but that is a purely geographical sense, which I suppose we can ignore. Therefore I take it that when I tell you why I am not a Christian I have to tell you two different things: first, why I do not

¹ Electronic colophon: This electronic edition of "Why I Am Not a Christian" was first made available by Bruce MacLeod on his "Watchful Eye Russell Page." It was newly corrected (from Edwards, NY 1957) in July 1996 by John R. Lenz for the Bertrand Russell Society. Bertrand Russell was a noted scholar. He taught at the University of Cambridge in England and received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1950.

believe in God and in immortality; and, secondly, why I do not think that Christ was the best and wisest of men, although I grant him a very high degree of moral goodness.

But for the successful efforts of unbelievers in the past, I could not take so elastic a definition of Christianity as that. As I said before, in olden days it had a much more full-blooded sense. For instance, it included the belief in hell. Belief in eternal hell-fire was an essential item of Christian belief until pretty recent times. In this country, as you know, it ceased to be an essential item because of a decision of the Privy Council, and from that decision the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of York dissented; but in this country our religion is settled by Act of Parliament, and therefore the Privy Council was able to override their Graces and hell was no longer necessary to a Christian. Consequently I shall not insist that a Christian must believe in hell.

The Existence of God

To come to this question of the existence of God: it is a large and serious question, and if I were to attempt to deal with it in any adequate manner I should have to keep you here until Kingdom Come, so that you will have to excuse me if I deal with it in a somewhat summary fashion. You know, of course, that the Catholic Church has laid it down as a dogma that the existence of God can be proved by the unaided reason. That is a somewhat curious dogma, but it is one of their dogmas. They had to introduce it because at one time the freethinkers adopted the habit of saying that there were such and such arguments which mere reason might urge against the existence of God, but of course they knew as a matter of faith that God did exist. The arguments and the reasons were set out at great length, and the Catholic Church felt that they must stop it. Therefore they laid it down that the existence of God can be proved by the unaided reason and they had to set up what they considered were arguments to prove it. There are, of course, a number of them, but I shall take only a few.

[Note to the reader: From this point forward, my comments will be in the Narrow Arial font style; Russell's comments will be in Times New Roman font style; quotations from other authors: Bahnsen, Frame, et al, will be in the Book Antiqua font style.]

Russell is referring to the theology of Thomas Aquinas that has dominated Catholic theology ever since the publication of Thomas' *Summa Theologiae*. Aquinas adopted the philosophy of Aristotle (and his argument of the *prime mover*) with modifications. In this way, Aquinas was doing the same thing that many Christian thinkers did in the early centuries after Christ's death. According to John Frame,

In the early centuries after Jesus' resurrection, biblical thought came to influence the philosophical discussion. The Christian thinkers made use of Greek philosophy, but they modified it considerably by their allegiance to the biblical worldview. They did not however, break away entirely from the Greek conception. The *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) begins with a distinction between two disciplines: philosophy, which operates by “natural reason” alone, and theology, which appeals to divine revelation. In Thomas' thought, these two spheres overlapped in certain ways. But in his work there was always some confusion as to the role of revelation in the sphere assigned to natural reason. He at least suggests that intellectual autonomy is possible and legitimate in some degree and at some areas of thought....

Intellectual autonomy has been the rule in philosophy down to the present, with a few exceptions. Indeed, this principle has deeply infected theology as well....

...In 1670, [Spinoza] published his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, in which he dealt with the nature and interpretation of Scripture and its implications for politics. In this volume, he defends freedom of thought in society by attacking superstition. He contends that the Bible, rightly interpreted, leaves reason absolutely free. Rational knowledge is just as much revelation as anything in Scripture. Prophecy cannot give knowledge of phenomena beyond that available to reason alone. Miraculous events, which contravene the laws apprehended by reason, can never take place. Spinoza denies the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and many other traditional ideas about the origin of Scripture. Essentially he proposes that we read the Bible as any other ancient text, subjecting it to the criteria of human reason. It is God’s Word only in the sense that God endorses all the conclusions of reason. And of course, Spinoza understands reason to be autonomous....²

From Spinoza’s presupposition of autonomous reason follows the succession of the Cambridge Platonists in 17th century England and the enlightenment thinkers of Voltaire and Diderot in the 18th century. The Enlightenment thinking, in turn, produced the critical approach of German theology represented by Julius Wellhausen, Albert Schweitzer, and Rudolf Bultmann. The so-called “Jesus Seminar” in the United States (John Dominic Crossan, et al) is a liberal, critical approach to the gospel accounts determining which part of the life and work of Christ is possible within the constraints of human reason. According to the “Jesus Seminar”, not everything we find in the gospel accounts really happened. Many of the miracles of Jesus were fabricated by his followers to propagate the Christian faith. Frame continues,

...within the liberal movement itself, there was no consideration of the alternative [to autonomous reason]. Intellectual autonomy was accepted as a presupposition as something fundamental, not to be argued about. It was thought that anyone who disagreed was simply not a scholar, not qualified to do serious research.³

There were conservative scholars who served as a fortress against the liberal establishment in American universities and seminaries—men like E. W. Hengstenberg, J.F.K. Keil, Franz Delitzsch, B.B. Warfield, Geerhardus Vos, J. Gresham Machen, George E. Ladd, F.F. Bruce, Edward J. Young, Meredith Kline, et al.⁴

But the major university faculties were nonetheless dominated by those who embraced the principle of intellectual autonomy. It all happened very quickly. There was no academic debate on whether it is right for human beings to exercise reason without the authority of God’s revelation. There was not much argument about whether the universities should change their time-honored commitments to divine revelation. Rather, major figures simply began teaching from the new point of view, and there was no significant resistance. They accepted the assumption of autonomy and say to it that their successors accepted it, too. Campus politics certainly played a major role in this development. The conservatives did not know what hit them.

Soon, because pastors were trained in universities, the liberal view spread to the churches, so that by the late nineteenth century most mainstream denominations in America were tolerating that approach. In 1924, 1274 ministers of the Presbyterian

² John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 18

³ Frame, p. 19

⁴ Frame, p. 19

Church USA⁵ signed a document called the *Auburn Affirmation*, which denied that the inerrancy of Scripture, the virgin birth of Christ, the substitutionary atonement, the resurrection of Christ, and his miracles should be tests of orthodoxy in the denomination. In the 1930s, ministers in the denomination were disciplined for insisting that the church’s missionaries believe in the above-listed doctrines. The liberal commitment to intellectual autonomy had made these doctrines optional, and many church leaders regarded them as literally untrue. Those who objected to these developments (contrary to liberal claims of “tolerance”) were given no respect or power in the councils of the church....

If these doctrines are true, they must be true because of God’s personal testimony. There is no way that they can be validated on the authority of autonomous reason. Indeed, if human reason is autonomous, the God of the Bible does not exist, for his very nature as the Creator excludes the autonomy of his creatures.⁶

The First-cause Argument

Perhaps the simplest and easiest to understand is the argument of the First Cause. (It is maintained that everything we see in this world has a cause, and as you go back in the chain of causes further and further you must come to a First Cause, and to that First Cause you give the name of God.) That argument, I suppose, does not carry very much weight nowadays, because, in the first place, cause is not quite what it used to be.

Russell is alluding to Hume’s skepticism about the validity of causality assumed on the basis of past events. From a purely empirical perspective—one which Russell presupposes—one cannot predict causality. The reason for this is that causality is an abstract non-material concept. It cannot be empirically observed. You can observe that a ball thrown in the air a thousand times always comes down, but there is no empirical proof that the next time you throw a ball into the air that it will come down. The universal law of gravity cannot be empirically observed.⁷

For Hume, causality is the frequent (but coincidental) accompaniment of one event by another. For Kant, it is a structure that the mind imposes upon events.⁸

Even if we say that something has a cause, these causes cannot lead to any conclusions about an event nor can they imply conclusions about what will occur in the future.

As with all unbelieving thought, however, one cannot live practically in this world without acknowledging cause and effect. Life as we know it would be impossible. Even if I have convinced myself philosophically that I cannot get to Kampala by car any quicker than by walking—simply because the past effect of getting to Kampala faster by car is no determiner of the future—I will always take a car. Bahnsen calls the inconsistency of the unbeliever to live up to his professed belief “moral hypocrisy” and “irrationality”.⁹ Of course, in this sense all Christians display irrationality as well—like losing your temper in a traffic jam when

⁵ The PCUS church of the southern United States later broke off from the PCUSA. The PCUS, as well, became liberal, calling for the beginning of the conservative Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) in 1973.

⁶ Frame, pp. 19-20

⁷ See Kenneth Gentry, *Study Guide for Basic Training for Defending the Faith, “The Problem of Universals”*

⁸ Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, p. 112note

⁹ *Always Ready*, Kindle book Location 2575

you believe in God’s sovereign ordination of all events, even traffic jams. Yet, intermittent (irregular) irrationality is one thing, but a whole lifestyle of continuous hypocrisy and irrationality is another.

Continuing with Russell,

The philosophers and the men of science have got going on cause, and it has not anything like the vitality it used to have; but, apart from that, you can see that the argument that there must be a First Cause is one that cannot have any validity. I may say that when I was a young man and was debating these questions very seriously in my mind, I for a long time accepted the argument of the First Cause, until one day, at the age of eighteen, I read John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography*, and I there found this sentence: "My father taught me that the question 'Who made me?' cannot be answered, since it immediately suggests the further question 'Who made god?'" That very simple sentence showed me, as I still think, the fallacy in the argument of the First Cause. 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, so that there cannot be any validity in that argument.

This is essentially the evolutionary argument, but one that dates long before Darwin. Since evolutionists cannot bring themselves to acknowledge the pre-existence of an uncaused God, then they are left with only one other option, the preexistence of matter, energy, motion, and time—none of which have a cause. Today, scientists propose the Big Bang theory which somehow gave rise to matter, energy, and time. But the Big Bang is no answer since there must have been *something* to cause a big bang. There must have been stored matter and energy for the big explosion to give rise to planets, etc. The Big Bang

...represents the instantaneous suspension of physical laws, the sudden, abrupt flash of lawlessness that allowed something to come out of nothing. It represents a true miracle – transcending physical principles.¹⁰

All matter and energy, as well as time, were created in the Big Bang between 10 and 20 billion years ago. In other words, at some point in the distant past, everything in the Universe was concentrated into a point-like region of space called a singularity. For some reason, and astronomers are unsure why, this singularity expanded rapidly in an explosion, releasing all the matter-energy and time—this event is what is termed The Big Bang.¹¹

Russell continues,

It is exactly of the same nature as the Hindu's view, that the world rested upon an elephant and the elephant rested upon a tortoise; and when they said, "How about the tortoise?" the Indian said, "Suppose we change the subject." The argument is really no better than that.

This is what is called a “straw-man” argument. You build a man out of straw which can be easily knocked down. It is a common way of trying to intimidate your opponent into thinking that you really have an argument when you don't. Christians don't think about such absurdities as elephants resting on tortoises. We presuppose the existence of an all-powerful God with infinite wisdom who can create the world out of nothing in six days. There is nothing illogical or irrational about this belief; it is irrational to believe that something came from nothing as the consequence of chance. No matter what culture we visit, we will always

¹⁰ Kenneth Gentry, *Study Guide for Basic Training for Defending the Faith*, Lesson Ten, p. 10, quoting from Paul Davies, *The Edge of Infinity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), p. 161.

¹¹ Gentry, p. 11, quoting from “What is Cosmology?” at the University of Dublin website.

find people of all religious persuasions who presuppose the existence of a Creator, but we would seldom find anyone presupposing absurdities like the one Russell mentions. This is just his way of ridiculing the Christian faith without a substantial argument.

Continuing with Russell,

There is no reason why the world could not have come into being without a cause; nor, on the other hand, is there any reason why it should not have always existed. There is no reason to suppose that the world had a beginning at all. The idea that things must have a beginning is really due to the poverty of our imagination. Therefore, perhaps, I need not waste any more time upon the argument about the First Cause.

Why is it unreasonable to believe that God is without cause or that God should have always existed? Why is Russell’s reasoning superior to the Christian’s reasoning? Moreover, why is Russell’s fruitful “imagination” superior to belief in Genesis 1: 1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”? This is an example of *special pleading* or *double standard*. Russell dismisses the possibility of an uncaused God, but readily allows for the possibility of an uncaused universe—along with Carl Sagan, Paul Davies, and other “imaginative” evolutionists. However, this fails to account for the fact that the world does not exist *necessarily* while it can be argued that God exists *necessarily*.

Leibniz argued for two kinds of things: (1) those which exist necessarily, and (2) those which are produced by an external cause and which do not exist necessarily. God exists by the necessity of His own nature, but the external world does not exist by the necessity of its own nature. We can look at the world and conclude that it was caused by something else, but when we contemplate God, we intuitively understand that God cannot be caused by anything or anyone else.¹² If God were caused by something else, then that something must be a superior God, who must then be caused by another God superior to himself, and so on and so on. Therefore, the very idea of God presupposes that He exists necessarily without being caused.

Craig gives the example of someone walking in the deep woods who stumbles across a translucent (partially clear) ball. He would wonder how a ball came to exist in the deepest part of the woods. Who brought it there? Why did they leave it there? Perhaps an animal brought the ball into the woods; or, perhaps it was dropped from an airplane. Any number of suggestions would be logical. He would never conclude that the ball just existed in the middle of the woods *by necessity*. Such a suggestion would be irrational. As Frame says,

Once that intuition [the intuition that affirms causation] is honored and irrationalism is excluded, the cosmological argument can make some progress.¹³

To continue Craig’s illustration, increasing the size of the ball in the woods does not change the argument. Suppose the ball is the size of a car, or a train, or a jumbo jet? Should we *then* assume that the ball necessarily existed without a cause? What if the ball is the size of a continent, or planet, or even the size of the universe? Does the increased size of the ball give it *necessary* existence without need of any explanation for its existence or cause? The answer is “no”. Thus, when we contemplate the world, we do not naturally assume that it had no cause.

The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.
(Psalm 19:1 NASB)

¹² William Lane Craig, *On Guard*, David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, 2010, pp. 55-56

¹³ Frame, p. 112

Furthermore, the unbeliever cannot claim that *everything in the universe* has an explanation, but that the universe *itself* has no explanation. Leibniz did not even say that God has no explanation for His own existence. He simply said that if God exists, he must exist *necessarily* without the need for a cause.¹⁴ But necessary existence does not apply to the universe if it does not apply to the different parts of the universe itself—the universe is the sum of its parts. On the other hand, the God of the Bible is not the sum of His attributes—love, omnipotence, goodness, omniscience, holiness, etc. Remove any attribute of God from God, and He ceases to be the God of the Bible. How could God still be God if He were not all-powerful, or all-knowing, or holy? Could He still be God without any of these attributes?

Moreover, how can Russell prove that the world did not have a cause? To prove this, he would have to be omniscient and eternal.¹⁵ Who gives Russell the right to make such a dogmatic assumption that the world does not have a cause? Here, one can see that Russell’s final authority is his own autonomous reasoning. He and other skeptics like him have not found a cause for the world; therefore, there can be no cause.¹⁶ But this is only empty dogmatism; it is not an argument.

This leads us to Frame’s conclusion that those who claim the world has no cause are irrationalists. It is irrational to claim that something comes from nothing. The nature of reason is to search out causes. If one fails to find a cause, he does not for that reason conclude that something does not have a cause, but searches further or postpones his search for another time. This is the very reason that current scientists favor the Big Bang theory as the cause of the universe; or even more recently, that life on earth was transported here from another planet or solar system. The human mind cannot live very well with loose ends—like an uncaused universe or a ball in the middle of the woods. Moreover, if one event in the world lacks a cause, it would follow that there are other events in the world which also lack causes, in which case the rational basis for scientific discovery would be undermined.¹⁷ One event may have a cause while another event may not. How does one distinguish between events with causes and those without causes? This would produce disincentive in the search for causes—like looking in a pitch-dark room for a black cat that does not exist.

Frame goes on to say that if there is no first cause or uncaused cause, then there is no complete explanation for anything, “no complete reason why any event takes place”, leading eventually to irrationalism. Causes are reasons and reasons are causes. Irrationalism is the same as saying that something happens without reason or without cause—like saying to your hiking buddy in the woods, “The ball just happened to be here. There is really no cause for it, no explanation.” Your hiking buddy would not accept such irrationality, and neither do most people when it concerns the cause of the universe. “It just happened to be here” is not a rational answer.¹⁸ One is therefore forced to choose between believing in a first cause or irrationalism—there is no first cause or reason for anything.¹⁹

Continuing with Russell,

The Natural-law Argument

¹⁴ Craig, p.56

¹⁵ In the book of Job, God argues that Job was not present when He created the world; therefore, he is not qualified to question the manner in which God governs the world—including Job’s life.

¹⁶ See Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, pp. 111-112.

¹⁷ Frame, p. 111. I think I have correctly interpreted him here, but I can’t be sure.

¹⁸ Craig, p. 55. On the other hand, to say, “God just existed” makes sense to most people who, according to Russell, have no imagination.

¹⁹ Frame, pp. 112-113. Incidentally, irrationalism is precisely where current philosophy has led in the latter part of the 20th century and into the 21st century. But no one can actually live there consistently. By necessity, it is only a theory.

Then there is a very common argument from natural law. That was a favorite argument all through the eighteenth century, especially under the influence of Sir Isaac Newton and his cosmogony. People observed the planets going around the sun according to the law of gravitation, and they thought that God had given a behest to these planets to move in that particular fashion, and that was why they did so. That was, of course, a convenient and simple explanation that saved them the trouble of looking any further for explanations of the law of gravitation. Nowadays we explain the law of gravitation in a somewhat complicated fashion that Einstein has introduced. I do not propose to give you a lecture on the law of gravitation, as interpreted by Einstein, because that again would take some time; at any rate, you no longer have the sort of natural law that you had in the Newtonian system, where, for some reason that nobody could understand, nature behaved in a uniform fashion. We now find that a great many things we thought were natural laws are really human conventions. You know that even in the remotest depths of stellar space there are still three feet to a yard. That is, no doubt, a very remarkable fact, but you would hardly call it a law of nature. And a great many things that have been regarded as laws of nature are of that kind. On the other hand, where you can get down to any knowledge of what atoms actually do, you will find they are much less subject to law than people thought, and that the laws at which you arrive are statistical averages of just the sort that would emerge from chance. There is, as we all know, a law that if you throw dice you will get double sixes only about once in thirty-six times, and we do not regard that as evidence that the fall of the dice is regulated by design; on the contrary, if the double sixes came every time we should think that there was design. The laws of nature are of that sort as regards a great many of them. They are statistical averages such as would emerge from the laws of chance; and that makes this whole business of natural law much less impressive than it formerly was. Quite apart from that, which represents the momentary state of science that may change tomorrow, the whole idea that natural laws imply a lawgiver is due to a confusion between natural and human laws. Human laws are behests commanding you to behave a certain way, in which you may choose to behave, or you may choose not to behave; but natural laws are a description of how things do in fact behave....

On the one hand, Russell insists that laws are only “human conventions” that are nothing more than “statistical averages such as would emerge from the laws of chance”—like throwing dice. He then contrasts natural laws with human laws. Human laws (e.g. laws against stealing) can be broken. You may “choose to behave, or you may choose not to behave.” Natural laws, on the other hand, “are a description of how things do in fact behave...” But Russell cannot have it both ways. If natural laws are only statistical averages similar to throwing dice, then one may very likely get away with breaking natural laws. But no one would seriously believe that there is a similarity between throwing dice and jumping off cliffs. The law of gravity is not a statistical average. If thirty-six people—corresponding to Russell’s thirty-six rolls of the dice—jump off a cliff, apart from some miraculous deliverance, every one of them will die. Moreover, I don’t think Russell would have bet on being the 36th exception to this rule. While speaking of laws as human conventions, he simultaneously speaks of natural laws as “how things do in fact behave”.

What’s more, Russell seems oblivious to the oxymoron (a contradiction in terms), “laws of chance”. What exactly is a “law of chance”? Laws arise from inductive reasoning applied to observation of past events. Things have behaved in certain ways under certain circumstances. Through observation, we make laws based upon the regularity of results assuming the same controlling circumstances. But if something occurs randomly—not based upon regularity but according to chance, as Russell would assert—then it is not based on law.

Of course, the Christian would say that nothing occurs by chance, but according to the foreordination of

God—even the rolling of dice.²⁰ The rolling of the dice *appears* random because there is no possible way for the dice roller to throw the dice in exactly the same way, the same speed, or on exactly the same surface area every time. Thus, the results appear random. Were he able to control these factors, then the dice would come up the same number every time. The same is true with the law of gravity. Given a certain weight and a certain kind of structure, the same results will occur. Feathers float off cliffs; people plunge. Pick a thousand different feathers and a thousand different people, you will still have floating feathers and plunging people—given normal weather conditions.²¹ What Russell calls the “laws of chance” is a nonsense phrase. Chance and law are opposites.

Theologically, there are no laws operating independently outside the sovereign will of God.

And He [Christ] is the radiance of His [God the Father’s] glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. (Hebrews 1:3a NASB)

Greg Bahnsen has argued that what theologians call natural law is “misdirected”.

It is sometimes thought that miracles are super-natural because they amount to divine intrusions into the ordinary and predictable operations of an otherwise “closed” and self-perpetuating domain of “nature.” Mechanical metaphors are often used to give a picture of this natural order, for instance the metaphor of a well-designed clock which God devised, wound up, stood back from, and now runs on its own—except for those rare occasions when the clock-maker steps in to interfere with the way He intended the clock to operate.

The more philosophically sophisticated way to describe this situation is to speak of “natural law.” The events which transpire in the universe, whether monumental or minuscule, are viewed as inevitable and predictable according to causal factors which can, in theory, be described in systematic, law-like principles. Many ancient Greek philosophers (e.g., Heraclitus, the Stoics) conceived of an eternal and impersonal “logos” or “reason” governing or flowing through the realm of matter, thus organizing all motion or activity into a rational order. The religious version of this notion that there are “laws of nature” postulates a personal God as the origin of the material world and of the causal principles by which it operates, but this God (and the free or arbitrary exercise of His almighty will) is nevertheless “separated” from the ordinary and ongoing workings of the world He made. God has chosen not to directly govern every detail in the created world on a moment by moment basis, and thus “nature” has laws inherent in it which determine what things are like and how things happen. Variations on this conception of God’s world as governed by impersonal natural laws are found in a wide range of Christian professions, from Deism to Thomism (Roman Catholicism) to evangelical Arminianism.

²⁰ “The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD” Proverbs 16:33 NASB.

²¹ Given a tornado or hurricane, something strange could happen. I once read about an infant who was picked up by the swirling winds of a tornado (tornadoes can have wind speeds up to 200 miles per hour) and gently laid down in the branch of a tree. Rescuers found him there alive and in good condition. Miracle? Yes, in that most people picked up in tornadoes don’t survive. But such an event took place “naturally” according to wind speeds which tornado experts have measured many times in the eye of a tornado. The baby was in the right place and the right time according to God’s providential will.

Given the above conception, the *super*-naturalness of a “miracle” consists in its “violation” of the laws of nature. God interferes with the machinery of the world in its law-directed actions and procedures. This is a flawed and terribly misleading way of thinking about the cosmos and about God, however. God’s self-revelation in the Scriptures offers no support for the idea that there are impersonal laws of nature which make the world operate mechanically and with an inevitability which is free (ordinarily) from the choices of God’s will. In fact, the Bible offers us a view of the world which is quite contrary to this, one where God and His agents are seen as intimately, continuously, and directly involved in all of the detailed events which transpire in the created order.

God personally created and now *personally directs* all the affairs of the world. Thus sustaining of all animal life and renewing of the plants in this world is the work of God’s Spirit (Isa. 63:14; Ps. 104:29-30); Jehovah’s Spirit is intimately involved with the processes of the created world, from the withering of the flowers to driving the rushing streams (Isa. 40:7; 59:19). God’s decretive will governs all things which happen, from the changing of the seasons (Gen. 8:22) to the hairs on our head (Matt. 10:30). Even the apparently fortuitous events in this life are planned and carried out by His sovereign will (Prov. 16:33; 1 Kings 22:28, 34). Paul declares that God “works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Eph. 1:11). That is, He causes everything to happen which happens. There is no semi-autonomous, self-operating realm of “nature” whose impersonal laws are occasionally “violated” by the God who reveals Himself in the pages of the Bible. Nothing is independent of Him and His sovereign, immanent, personal will.²²

Continuing with Russell’s “*Why I am not a Christian*”,

Human laws are behests commanding you to behave a certain way, in which you may choose to behave, or you may choose not to behave; but natural laws are a description of how things do in fact behave, and being a mere description of what they in fact do, you cannot argue that there must be somebody who told them to do that, because even supposing that there were, you are then faced with the question “Why did God issue just those natural laws and no others?” If you say that he did it simply from his own good pleasure, and without any reason, you then find that there is something which is not subject to law, and so your train of natural law is interrupted. If you say, as more orthodox theologians do, that in all the laws which God issues he had a reason for giving those laws rather than others—the reason, of course, being to create the best universe, although you would never think it to look at it—if there were a reason for the laws which God gave, then God himself was subject to law, and therefore you do not get any advantage by introducing God as an intermediary. You really have a law outside and anterior to the divine edicts, and God does not serve your purpose, because he is not the ultimate lawgiver.

In this example, Russell has appealed to what William Craig calls “The Euthyphro Dilemma”, named after a character in one of Plato’s dialogues. Therefore, the argument is not original with Russell. The basic question is this: Is something good because God wills it, or does God will it because it is good? If something is good because God wills it, then goodness becomes arbitrary. After all, God could have willed something else instead. He could have willed theft rather than the right to private property, adultery rather than fidelity. If, on the other hand, God willed something because of some inherent, independent goodness in something,

²² Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, Kindle Locations 4225-4255.

then God’s freedom is limited. He is constrained to declare something good independent of His will. This would contradict the statement: If God does not exist, then objective moral values and duties do not exist. Well, if moral values exist independently of God, then the existence of God is not necessary to morality—even objective morality. The contradiction would arise from the fact that we must recognize moral values because they are intrinsically, inherently, and independently moral in and of themselves. Any unbeliever holding to moral values independent of personal or societal preference must reason in this way. Something is moral apart from any belief in the existence of God.²³

For the Christian, the “dilemma” (irreconcilable problem) is no dilemma. The answer to the question is that God wills something because this “something” is consistent with His nature. He does not will something because **it** is good; He wills something because **He** is good.²⁴ Goodness does not exist independently of God; it is an expression of His unchangeable nature. God’s nature is the standard of goodness; God is not subject to a “law” or standard of goodness outside of Himself. Thus, faithfulness in marriage is good because God is faithful, and He desires the same faithfulness from His creatures. Likewise, God demands hard work and the consumption of one’s own bread (2 Thess. 3: 12) because He is a hard-working God who not only created the world but sustains the world through His power.

We also note Russell’s presumptuousness of thinking that he knows the reason why God willed certain things and not others—“the reason, of course, being to create the best universe...”

In short, this whole argument about natural law no longer has anything like the strength that it used to have. I am traveling on in time in my review of the arguments. The arguments that are used for the existence of God change their character as time goes on. They were at first hard intellectual arguments embodying certain quite definite fallacies. As we come to modern times they become less respectable intellectually and more and more affected by a kind of moralizing vagueness.

The Argument from Design

The next step in the process brings us to the argument from design. You all know the argument from design: everything in the world is made just so that we can manage to live in the world, and if the world was ever so little different, we could not manage to live in it. That is the argument from design. It sometimes takes a rather curious form; for instance, it is argued that rabbits have white tails in order to be easy to shoot. I do not know how rabbits would view that application. It is an easy argument to parody. You all know Voltaire’s remark, that obviously the nose was designed to be such as to fit spectacles. That sort of parody has turned out to be not nearly so wide of the mark as it might have seemed in the eighteenth century, because since the time of Darwin we understand much better why living creatures are adapted to their environment. It is not that their environment was made to be suitable to them but that they grew to be suitable to it, and that is the basis of adaptation. There is no evidence of design about it.²⁵

When you come to look into this argument from design, it is a most astonishing thing that people can believe that this world, with all the things that are in it, with all its defects, should be the best that omnipotence and omniscience have been able to produce in millions of years. I really cannot believe it. Do you think that, if you were granted omnipotence and omniscience and millions of

²³ William Lane Craig, *On Guard*, p. 135

²⁴ Craig, p. 135

²⁵ On the contrary, the entire created world shows evidence of design while the theory of evolution has no substantial evidence either from the fossil record or from cellular biology. For those readers looking for truth, I would recommend Philip Johnson’s *Darwin on Trial*, Michael Behe’s *Darwin’s Black Box*, (arguing irreducible complexity) and a host of other books challenging the theory of evolution.

years in which to perfect your world, you could produce nothing better than the Ku Klux Klan or the Fascists?

The first thing we notice about this statement is that it is a case of *special pleading and prejudicial arrogance* against the Christian faith. Russell names the things in this world which seem to argue against the idea of God designing the universe. He does not mention spectacular sunsets, rolling ocean waves and beautiful landscapes around the world, millions of varieties of animals and plants, and the intricate design of the human body; nor does he mention compassion to the poor and afflicted shown by millions of Christians throughout history. All he cares to mention are the aberrations of God’s design found in man’s sinfulness—the racism of the Ku Klux Klan²⁶ and Fascism²⁷. Basically, Russell’s argument is not an argument about design, but the argument against the existence of God based upon the existence of evil.

In spite of Russell’s special pleading, we cannot approach this argument statistically, as if the argument is decided in favor of those showing either more evidence of good or more evidence of evil. Weighing the evidence does not answer the problem. Bahnsen quotes the following statements from another evangelical apologist.

For instance, we read a popular apologist say this about the problem of evil: “But in the final analysis, the evidence for the existence of the good (God) is not vitiated [weakened] by the anomaly of evil.” And why not? “Evil remains a perplexing mystery, but the force of the mystery is not enough to demand that we throw out the positive evidence for God, for the reality of good.... While we cannot explain the existence of evil, that is no reason for us to disregard the positive evidence for God.”²⁸

As Bahnsen says,

The problem of evil amounts to the charge that there is *logical incoherence* within the Christian outlook—regardless of how much evil there is in the universe, compared to how much goodness can be found. If Christianity is logically incoherent, *no amount* of positive, factual evidence can save its truth. The internal inconsistency would itself render Christian faith intellectually unacceptable, even *granting* there might be a great deal of indicators or evidence in our experience for the existence of goodness or for God, otherwise considered.²⁹

The 18th century Scottish philosopher, David Hume, expressed the problem of evil in a strong and challenging fashion: “Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?” What Hume was arguing is that the Christian cannot logically accept these three premises: God is all-powerful, God is all-good, and nevertheless evil exists in the world. If God is all-powerful, then He must be able to prevent or remove evil, if He wishes. If God is all-good, then certainly He wishes to prevent or remove evil. Yet it is undeniable that evil exists.

George Smith states the problem this way in his book, *Atheism: The Case Against God*: “Briefly, the problem of evil is this: ...If God knows there is evil but cannot prevent it,

²⁶ A racist group organized after the American Civil War for the subjugation of the black race.

²⁷ The anti-Jewish, political ideology of the Nazi party in WWII Germany

²⁸ *Always Ready*, Kindle Locations 2944-2949, quoting Sproul, R. C. Sproul, *Objections Answered* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, G/L Publications, 1978), pp. 128, 129.

²⁹ *Always Ready*, Kindle Locations 2952-2957

he is not omnipotent. If God knows there is evil and can prevent it but desires not to, he is not omnibenevolent.” Smith thinks that Christians logically cannot have it both ways: God is completely good, as well as completely powerful. Therefore, the charge which unbelievers make is that the Christian worldview is incoherent; it adopts premises which are inconsistent with each other, given the evil in this world. The unbeliever argues that, even if he were to accept the premises of Christian theology (regardless of evidence for or against them individually), those premises do not comport [agree] with each other. The problem with Christianity is an internal one – a logical defect which even the believer must acknowledge, as long as he realistically admits the presence of evil in the world. This evil, it is thought, is incompatible with either God’s goodness or God’s power.³⁰

The answer to the problem of evil is briefly outlined below.³¹

Logically there can be no problem of evil from the following two premises alone:

- a. God is completely good
- b. God is all powerful

These two premises do not present problems. The problem emerges when the third premise is introduced.

- c. Evil exists

The resulting conclusion then becomes:

Therefore, God does not exist.

Yet, the unbeliever has no grounds upon which to judge something as good or evil. In a chance, impersonal universe, there can be no moral absolutes, no standards of good or evil. If he bases his distinction between good and evil upon personal preference, then the distinction becomes purely subjective. What he says is good or evil is no more authoritative than what anyone else says is good or evil. If he bases the distinction upon the public approval theory of good and evil, then he must explain how some cultures condone (approve) practices which he and others in different cultures would condemn as evil—e.g. widow immolation, cannibalism, genocide, polygamy, etc. If he prefers the utilitarian theory of good and evil (the good brings the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people) then he will have to explain how happiness can be rated and compared among vast numbers of people and how one can predict the innumerable consequences of an action among vast numbers, even through the use of advanced computer programming. The task would be impossible. Finally, one would have to prove that what *he prefers* as the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people is really a good thing. But how would he prove this, considering his relativist assumptions? As Bahnsen says,

Philosophically speaking, the problem of evil turns out to be, therefore, a problem for the unbeliever himself. In order to use the argument from evil against the Christian worldview, he must first be able to show that his judgments about the existence of evil are meaningful – which is precisely what his unbelieving worldview is unable to do.³²

When the believer challenges the unbeliever on this point, the unbeliever will likely turn around and try to argue that evil is, in the final analysis, based on human reasoning or choices – thus being relative to the individual or culture. And at that point the believer must press home the logical incoherence within the unbeliever’s set

³⁰ *Always Ready*, Kindle Locations 2946-2973

³¹ *Always Ready*, Kindle Locations 2973

³² *Always Ready*, Kindle Locations 3014-3017

of beliefs. On the one hand, he believes and speaks as though some activity (e.g., child abuse) is wrong in itself, but on the other hand he believes and speaks as though that activity is wrong only if the individual (or culture) chooses some value which is inconsistent with it (e.g., pleasure, the greatest happiness of the greatest number, freedom). When the unbeliever professes that people determine ethical values for themselves, the unbeliever implicitly holds that those who commit evil are not really doing anything evil, given the values which they have chosen for themselves. In this way, the unbeliever who is indignant over wickedness supplies the very premises which philosophically condone and permit such behavior, even though at the same time the unbeliever wishes to insist that such behavior is not permitted – it is “evil.”

What we find, then, is that the unbeliever must secretly rely upon the Christian worldview in order to make sense of his argument from the existence of evil which is urged against the Christian worldview! Antitheism presupposes theism to make its case.³³

Unbelievers would be required to appeal to the very thing against which they argue (a divine, transcendent sense of ethics) in order for their argument to be warranted.³⁴

By saying that the Christian faith is false because of all the evil in the world, Russell has automatically placed himself upon the Christian worldview.³⁵

Nevertheless, it may still be argued by the unbeliever that in spite of his inability to justify his own distinction between good and evil, the Christian has not given him a coherent argument to solve what appears to him as a logical fallacy of the Christian position, based upon three premises:³⁶

1. God is all-good.
2. God is all-powerful.
3. Evil exists

The answer to this objection is the insertion of a fourth premise:

4. God has a morally sufficient reason for the evil which exists.

Accordingly, when the Christian observes evil events or things in the world, he can and should retain consistency with his presupposition about God’s goodness by now inferring that God has a morally good reason for the evil that exists. God certainly must be all-powerful in order to be God; He is not to be thought of as overwhelmed or stymied by evil in the universe. And God is surely good, the Christian will profess – so any evil we find must be compatible with God’s goodness. This is just to say that God has planned evil events for reasons which are morally commendable and good. To put it another way, the apparent paradox created by the above three propositions is readily resolved by adding this fourth premise to them:

4. God has a morally sufficient reason for the evil which exists.

³³ *Always Ready*, Kindle Locations 3036-3048

³⁴ *Always Ready*, Kindle Locations 3054-3055

³⁵ *Study Guide for Basic Training for Defending the Faith*, Lesson 9: “The Problem of Moral Absolutes”

³⁶ *Always Ready*; Kindle Locations 3064-3067

When all four of these premises are maintained, there is no logical contradiction to be found, not even an apparent one. It is precisely part of the Christian’s walk of faith and growth in sanctification to draw proposition 4 as the conclusion of propositions 1-3.

Think of Abraham when God ordered him to sacrifice his only son. Think of Job when he lost everything which gave his life happiness and pleasure. In each case God had a perfectly good reason for the human misery involved. It was a mark or achievement of faith for them not to waver in their conviction of God’s goodness, despite not being able to see or understand why He was doing to them what He did. Indeed, even in the case of the greatest crime in all of history – the crucifixion of the Lord of glory – the Christian professes that God’s goodness was not inconsistent with what the hands of lawless men performed. Was the killing of Christ evil? Surely. Did God have a morally sufficient reason for it? Just as surely. With Abraham we declare, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25). And this goodness of God is beyond challenge: “Let God be true, though all men are liars” (Rom. 3:4).³⁷

Of course, the unbeliever will accuse Bahnsen of circular reasoning. He is using the authority of the Bible to prove that God had a morally sufficient reason for the evil existing in the world. But all explanations about ultimate reality (metaphysics) must use circular reasoning. The rationalist uses reason to prove that ideas exist. The empiricist uses empiricism to prove that reality consists only in material objects. “Skeptics must be skeptical of their own skepticism.”³⁸

Bahnsen goes on to argue that the problem of a good and all-powerful God in the face of an evil world is not so much a *logical* problem as a *psychological* problem. It is difficult to deal with the emotional pain when bad things happen to us, to our loved ones, and to people in general, when there is never any explanation for it. Without being informed about the reasons for our suffering and the suffering of others, Christians are nevertheless told to trust God who is all-wise and all-good—i.e. to trust God implicitly without being given an explanation. The unbeliever finds this situation intolerable to his prideful and independent autonomy. He demands an explanation but does not receive one which agrees with his independent evaluation of good and evil. In his rebellious attitude, he therefore repeats the same sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. When Eve was tempted by the serpent to eat the fruit, she made a decision to question the goodness of God and His benevolent intentions for her well-being. God was holding out on her, withholding something good which would make her life more meaningful and enjoyable. She was the first human to believe that autonomous reasoning was superior to God’s reasoning.

He [the unbeliever] will not believe that God has a morally sufficient reason for the evil which exists, unless the unbeliever is given that reason for his own examination and assessment. To put it briefly, the unbeliever will not trust God unless God subordinates Himself to the intellectual authority and moral evaluation of the unbeliever – unless God consents to trade places with the sinner. The problem of evil comes down to the question of whether a person should have faith in God and His word or rather place faith in his own human thinking and values. It finally becomes a question of ultimate authority within a person’s life. And in that sense, the way in which unbelievers struggle with the problem of evil is but a continuing testimony to the way in which evil entered human history in the first place. The Bible indicates

³⁷ *Always Ready*, Kindle Locations 3071-3090

³⁸ John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, p. 10

that sin and all of its accompanying miseries entered this world through the first transgression of Adam and Eve. And the question with which Adam and Eve were confronted way back then was precisely the question which unbelievers face today: should we have faith in God’s word simply on His say-so, or should we evaluate God and His word on the basis of our own ultimate intellectual and moral authority? ³⁹

When unbelievers refuse to accept the goodness of God on the basis of His own self-revelation, they simply perpetuate the source of all of our human woes. Rather than solving the problem of evil, they are part of the problem. Therefore, it should not be thought that “the problem of evil” is anything like an intellectual basis for a lack of faith in God. It is rather simply the personal expression of such a lack of faith. What we find is that unbelievers who challenge the Christian faith end up reasoning in circles. Because they lack faith in God, they begin by arguing that evil is incompatible with the goodness and power of God. When they are presented with a logically adequate and Biblically supported solution to the problem of evil (viz., God has a morally sufficient but undisclosed reason for the evil that exists), they refuse to accept it, again because of their lack of faith in God. They would rather be left unable to give an account of any moral judgment whatsoever (about things being good or evil) than to submit to the ultimate and unchallengeable moral authority of God. That is too high a price to pay, both philosophically and personally. ⁴⁰

Therefore, Bahnsen’s argument concerning the problem of evil is strictly biblical. We have no explanation other than the Scriptural reason that “God has a morally sufficient reason for the evil which exists.” This reason will not be satisfactory for the unbeliever, as Bahnsen says, because he is committed to autonomous thinking. He demands that God bring himself down to a level playing field and subject Himself to human rationality. God will not do so, for He is God; and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Isa. 55: 9). The unbeliever cannot possibly examine the mind of God and His secret purposes for evil in this world. As the Apostle Paul says to those who are dissatisfied with God’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart,

You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?’ On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it? (Romans 9:19-20 NASB).

To claim that the existence of evil proves the non-existence of God implies that the unbeliever has exhaustively examined every possible explanation in the universe.⁴¹ Perhaps there is additional evidence which would lead him to a contrary opinion, but since he is limited by lack of omniscience, omnipresence, and eternity, he cannot possibly examine all the evidence.

As mentioned earlier, although the unbeliever cannot account for the distinction between good and evil, this does not relieve the believer of doing the best he can in answering the problem. John Frame admits that “this problem is perhaps the most serious objection to Christian theism”.⁴²

Frame shows us how God’s goodness is vindicated through a new look at history. God allows human suffering to be spread out over a long period of time which accounts for much of the mystery of evil in this world. Two thousand years passed between the promise to Abraham and the coming of the Redeemer. Why

³⁹ Always Ready, Kindle Locations 3112-3115

⁴⁰ Always Ready, Kindle Locations 3106-3130

⁴¹ Richard Pratt, *Every Thought Captive*, p. 104

⁴² Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, p. 180

did God wait so long to send the Messiah? Why has He waited so long between the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ?

Certainly a great part of the problem of suffering lies in the fact that our suffering is drawn out in time. We cry out to God, and he does not seem to hear. Or, rather, he in effect tells us to wait and wait and wait.

Scripture tells us a great deal about this waiting process. It shows us how God’s people are tested by the passage of time over and over again. But it also shows us, again and again, how God brings the waiting periods to an end, vindicating himself and ending the sufferings of his people.⁴³

He supplies the following examples: There is no word from God to Israel from the death of Joseph until the exodus event, a period of over 300 years. Moses, hand-selected by God to deliver Israel, must wait 40 years in the wilderness before he is allowed to come back to Egypt. The wilderness journey from Egypt to the Promised Land lasts 40 years because of Israel’s faithlessness and disobedience. Even after Joshua brings the people into the land, they fail to completely conquer it thus exposing themselves to idolatry and earning a vicious cycle of God’s judgment (Judges). God graciously provides the people with judges, concluding with the prophet Samuel and later a king after His own heart, David. Yet, because of the failure of Solomon, who allowed the influence of false gods, and his son Rehoboam who accepted unwise counsel, Israel is divided and suffers under the poor leadership of ungodly kings—with a few notable exceptions in the southern kingdom of Judah.

Even the Promised Land does not completely fulfill God’s promise to Abraham. The unending requirements of animal sacrifice indicate that full atonement for sin has not been achieved. The blood of mere animals cannot take away the guilt and penalty of sin; and thus, the consciences of the people were never fully cleansed and at ease with the holy God who had delivered them (Heb. 10: 1-2).

Throughout the OT period there exists the apparent contradiction between justice and mercy. How can God show mercy to a sinful and rebellious people? To do so would sacrifice His justice. Yet how can God not show mercy if He fulfills His promises to Abraham that through him all the nations will be blessed? How can a “just” God be a “justifier” of sinful people? The resolution comes in the person of Jesus Christ. Through the sacrifice of Christ, God can not only judge sin, but He can show mercy to His people and fulfill His promises to Abraham. He can be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (Rom. 3: 26).

Frame concedes that this historical perspective does not answer all the problems. It does not answer the question of why children suffer malnutrition or die in violent storms. However, it does offer us hope that the same God who resolves the problem of justice and mercy in the past can also resolve the problem of evil in the present day. The apparent contradiction between God’s justice and mercy in the OT seemed to be an impossible problem of good and evil. God took His time in resolving it, although He could have resolved it immediately. And just as this problem is ultimately resolved in Christ after so long a waiting period, we can expect Him to resolve other problems of evil—but not immediately. He will do so in His own good time, and we must wait for the answer even as the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11 had to wait for the fulfillment of the promise in Christ.

From this historical perspective, we have the “lens” through which we can partially understand our present experience of suffering. As God used evil in the past to accomplish the “greater good” of demonstrating the glory of His justice and mercy, He can do the same today. God uses evil for various purposes. He uses it to discipline His children and promote holiness (Heb. 12; Ps. 119: 67, 71; Rom. 8: 28-30), to warn unbelievers

⁴³ Frame, p. 180

of the wrath to come (Lk. 13: 1-5; Jn. 5: 14), to bring sinners to himself through the suffering of His saints (Col. 1:24), etc. To be fair with Adams,⁴⁴ we must acknowledge the merit of his argument which says that many of God’s perfections are demonstrated through the existence of evil. This is the “greater-good” defence which is the only classical defence of a good and all-powerful God which has scriptural support.⁴⁵ Christian churches and relief organizations throughout the world daily demonstrate the love and mercy of God by relieving human suffering. But again, this is not pretended to be a final answer to this problem. The question Frame asks is: Why can’t God demonstrate his eternal attributes without employing evil? This is a mystery, and we must wait for the final answer.

That answer will possibly come at the climax of human history at the return of Christ. At that time the righteous deeds of God will be revealed to everyone’s satisfaction—even if not exhaustively. Frame cites the following passage.⁴⁶

And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations!"⁴ "Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; For ALL THE NATIONS WILL COME AND WORSHIP BEFORE YOU, FOR YOUR RIGHTEOUS ACTS HAVE BEEN REVEALED." (Revelation 15:3-4 NASB)

At this point, there will be no doubt about the “righteous ways” of God in dealing with mankind throughout history. He will be completely justified in everything He has done so that “remaining doubts concerning God’s goodness will be entirely taken away from us.”⁴⁷

Continuing with Russell,

Moreover, if you accept the ordinary laws of science, you have to suppose that human life and life in general on this planet will die out in due course: it is a stage in the decay of the solar system; at a certain stage of decay you get the sort of conditions of temperature and so forth which are suitable to protoplasm, and there is life for a short time in the life of the whole solar system. You see in the moon the sort of thing to which the earth is tending—something dead, cold, and lifeless.

Russell is speaking of the law of entropy or the second law of thermodynamics which states that the available energy in the universe is dissipating (degenerating) as non-reusable energy (heat). Thus, the sun, stars, etc. are being used up as their light is being emitted, and their energy cannot be stored—at least indefinitely. What is interesting here is that Russell is appealing to the “ordinary laws of science” as if he completely agrees with those laws. And in practice, he does agree with them because he must. In other writings, Russell calls into question the scientific assumption of the law of uniformity—namely, that phenomena (events) will occur in the future in the same way they have in the past, given the same or similar conditions.⁴⁸ This law is absolutely essential for all scientific experimentation and progress, but it is not one that Russell, or scientists, can assume strictly on the basis of empiricism. We will let Russell explain why the uniformity of nature is indefensible from an empirical perspective.

It has been argued that we have reason to know that the future will resemble the past, because what was the future has constantly become the past, and has always been found to resemble the past, so that we really have experience of the future, namely of times which

⁴⁴ Jay Adams, *The Grand Demonstration—A Biblical Study of the So-Called Problem of Evil*

⁴⁵ Frame, p. 184

⁴⁶ Frame, p. 188

⁴⁷ Frame, p. 189

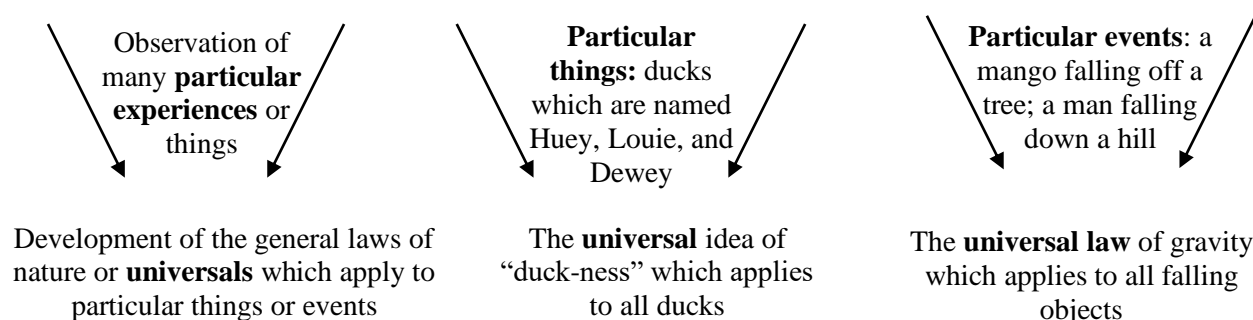
⁴⁸ For example, if we design an airplane that successfully flies, we may build 100 more just like it which will also fly, given the same atmospheric conditions.

were formerly future, which we may call past futures. But such an argument really begs the very question at issue. We have experience of past futures, but not of future futures, and the question is: Will future futures resemble past futures? This question is not to be answered by an argument, which starts from past futures alone. We have therefore still to seek for some principle which shall enable us to know that the future will follow the same laws as the past.

The general principles of science, such as the belief in the reign of law, and the belief that every event must have a cause, are as completely dependent upon the inductive principle as are the beliefs of daily life. All such general principles are believed because mankind has found innumerable instances of their truth and no instances of their falsehood. But this affords no evidence for their truth in the future, unless the inductive principle is assumed.

Thus all knowledge which, on a basis of experience tells us something about what is not experienced, is based upon a belief which experience can neither confirm nor confute, yet which, at least in its more concrete applications, appears to be as firmly rooted in us as many of the facts of experience. The existence and justification of such beliefs—for the inductive principle, as we shall see, is not the only example—raises some of the most difficult and most debated problems of philosophy.⁴⁹

The inductive method of scientific investigation can be illustrated the following way.⁵⁰



Universals are necessary to make sense out of life; otherwise, we would not understand the relationship of particular things to one another. Whenever I am navigating my way through Mbarara, Uganda, I have the general sense of “car-ness” which applies to all automobiles. Therefore, before I walk out onto the street, I look down the road to make sure that no automobile is coming. I don’t have to examine each automobile—which looks different from another—to know that if I step out in front of it I will be killed or injured. Furthermore, the *universal idea* of automobile will not kill me, but a particular automobile *will* kill me if I don’t stay out of its way.

To use the above example, Huey, Louie, and Dewey are individual ducks which I can eat, but “duck-ness” is a universal principle which is non-material, something I cannot eat. I can eat a particular duck, but not duck-ness. In other words, universals are *non-material* concepts that cannot be touched. They are abstract ideas about the material world which everyone assumes without proof. For example, I don’t have to prove that when an object is thrown into the air, it will eventually come down because everyone assumes the universal law of gravity. All objects will conform to this law, and I will not have to convince anyone of this fact. If we had to prove this universal every day with a particular experiment for every particular object we handled, life

⁴⁹ Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, chapter 6, quoted from Kenneth Gentry, *Study Guide for Basic Training for Defending the Faith*, “The Problem of Universals”

⁵⁰ Diagram based on the *Study Guide for Basic Training for Defending the Faith—A Lecture Series* by Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen, Dr. Ken Gentry, Jr., “The Problem of Universals”, Lesson 11, based on Lecture 5 of tape series. See also *Pushing the Antithesis: The Apologetic Methodology of Greg L. Bahnsen*, Gary DeMar, editor, p. 201.

as we know it would cease to exist because everyone would be frozen in uncertainty about how to handle particular objects.

What Russell is saying here is that the *inductive principle* establishing the law of uniformity is unfounded from the philosophical standpoint of *pure empiricism*⁵¹—the very epistemological principle which has been used to establish the law of uniformity. Just because man has found “innumerable instances” of the truth of cause and effect by having observed “past futures”—that is, events which were formerly future but are now past—this is no proof that the inductive principle will be reliable for “future futures” simply because no one has *observed* future futures, nor are future futures (future events) available for observation. Of course, for the Christian, this presents no problem. God has assured us that the world is predictable.⁵² His laws for the universe will operate the same way tomorrow as they did today, barring any supernatural use of the laws of the universe (like a world-wide flood).⁵³

But Russell does not detect his own inconsistency. While on the one hand affirming the scientific method and the law of uniformity, he maintains that it is philosophically indefensible since the method cannot account for what will happen in the future. Moreover, he has earlier spoken of “the laws of chance”. Bahnsen notes the inconsistency,

The nagging problem which Russell simply did not face is that, on the basis of autonomous reasoning, man cannot give an adequate and rational account of the knowledge we gain through science and logic. Scientific procedure assumes that the natural world operates in a uniform fashion, in which case our observational knowledge of past cases provides a basis for predicting what will happen in future cases. However, autonomous reason has no basis whatsoever for believing that the natural world will operate in a uniform fashion. Russell himself (at times) asserted that this is a chance universe. He could never reconcile this view of nature being random with his view that nature is uniform (so that “science” can teach us). So it is with a knowledge and use of the laws of logic (in terms of which Russell definitely insisted that fallacies be avoided). The laws of logic are not physical objects in the natural world; they are not observed by man’s senses. Moreover, the laws of logic are universal and unchanging—or else they reduce to relativistic preferences for thinking, rather than prescriptive requirements. However, Russell’s autonomous reasoning could not explain or justify these characteristics of logical laws. An individual’s unaided reason is limited in the scope of its use and experiences, in which case it cannot pronounce on what is universally true (descriptively). On the other hand, an individual’s unaided reason is in no position to dictate (prescriptively) universal laws of thought or to assure us that these stipulations for the mind will

⁵¹ Empiricism is a method of knowing based purely on observation of phenomena (events like the falling of a mango from a tree).

⁵² “While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, And cold and heat, And summer and winter, And day and night Shall not cease.” (Genesis 8:22 NASB)

⁵³ Bahnsen (*Always Ready*, Kindle Locations 4220-4274) argues that miracles like the flood are not interruptions or “violations” of natural law, as if the “natural laws of nature” are operating independently of God at one moment but are interrupted by such miracles as the world-wide flood. I don’t know what Bahnsen would say about the flood, but it seems from Scripture that God used what we call “natural forces” of underground water as well as torrential rains to flood the earth. “In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the same day all the fountains of the great deep burst open, and the floodgates of the sky were opened.” (Genesis 7:11 NASB) Therefore, there was sufficient water supply under the surface of the earth and in the atmosphere to cause a world-wide flood, given the right conditions. This is not to say that God did not cause the flood, but that He caused it by using what we would call natural causes. However, what we term natural laws never operate independently of God, even when they are operating normally.

somehow prove applicable to the world of thought or matter outside the individual’s mind.⁵⁴

The ethics of knowledge is discussed in Frame.⁵⁵ Given a certain set of premises which are true, we are morally obligated to believe a given conclusion flowing from those premises. If we refuse to believe this conclusion, this is not a morally neutral matter; it is a sin. For example, we are morally obligated to believe that $2 + 2 = 4$ rather than 5, and that $4 - 5 = - 1$ (negative one). We are morally obligated to believe that excessive government spending (deficit spending) does not bring long-term prosperity to a nation. If an individual spends more money than he earns, he goes into debt; and debt is not good. Likewise, a government that spends more money than it takes in as tax revenues goes into debt—also not good. Denial of these truths puts us in an imaginary dream world—the dream world of many politicians in the US—with negative consequences for ourselves and others for years to come. For another example, Adolf Hitler believed he was destined to take over Europe—for its own good, of course—and his delusional thinking cost millions of lives and billions of dollars worth of destroyed property. Believing any lie is never a morally neutral matter.

Bahnsen makes the point that the laws of logic are “universal and unchanging”; otherwise, they are based on the relativistic principle of *personal preference*—like the personal preference theory of ethics. We can no more choose our own personal laws of logic than we can choose our own personal laws of ethics. Any attempt to do so ushers us into an unreal world—the same unreal world that plagued Russell. However, the devastating results of delusional ethics often do not show up as quickly as the devastating results of delusional mathematics or physics. The denial of physical laws will show up immediately—like jumping off a building instead of taking the elevator. The denial of personal economic laws will show up either a month or a few months after our money runs out. We cannot pay our bills, and we lose financed purchases like homes and cars. The results of governmental over-spending may take many generations to show up when our grandchildren are too strapped with taxes and inflated currency to buy food and electricity. The consequences of breaking moral laws may show up in broken marriages and homes, or even imprisonment, or they may become apparent only in the final judgment. Nevertheless, the consequences of breaking any of God’s laws—moral or logical—are inevitable.

Continuing with Russell,

Moreover, if you accept the ordinary laws of science, you have to suppose that human life and life in general on this planet will die out in due course: it is a stage in the decay of the solar system; at a certain stage of decay you get the sort of conditions of temperature and so forth which are suitable to protoplasm, and there is life for a short time in the life of the whole solar system. You see in the moon the sort of thing to which the earth is tending—something dead, cold, and lifeless.

I am told that that sort of view is depressing, and people will sometimes tell you that if they believed that, they would not be able to go on living. Do not believe it; it is all nonsense. Nobody really worries about much about what is going to happen millions of years hence. Even if they think they are worrying much about that, they are really deceiving themselves. They are worried about something much more mundane, or it may merely be a bad digestion; but nobody is really seriously rendered unhappy by the thought of something that is going to happen to this world millions and millions of years hence. Therefore, although it is of course a gloomy view to suppose that life will die out—at least I suppose we may say so, although sometimes when I contemplate the things that people do with their lives I think it is almost a consolation—it is not such as to render life miserable. It merely makes you turn your attention to other things.

⁵⁴ *Always Ready*, Kindle Locations 2803-2815.

⁵⁵ *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, p. 104

The Moral Arguments for Deity

Now we reach one stage further in what I shall call the intellectual descent that the Theists have made in their argumentations, and we come to what are called the moral arguments for the existence of God. You all know, of course, that there used to be in the old days three intellectual arguments for the existence of God, all of which were disposed of by Immanuel Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*; but no sooner had he disposed of those arguments than he invented a new one, a moral argument, and that quite convinced him. He was like many people: in intellectual matters he was skeptical, but in moral matters he believed implicitly in the maxims that he had imbibed at his mother's knee. That illustrates what the psychoanalysts so much emphasize—the immensely stronger hold upon us that our very early associations have than those of later times.

Russell is making a very indirect argument against Christianity upon the basis of childhood conditioning. People believe in God, not because of the evidence for Christianity—which Russell says is insufficient—but because they are conditioned as young children to believe in God. Doubtless, there is enough smattering of truth in Russell's assertion to be credible. There are many so-called Christians today who go to church only because they grew up in so-called (nominal) Christian homes. They have religion, but not Christ, and they have never been truly converted. Yet, the reader can detect Russell's arrogance in assuming that he can read people's minds about why they follow the Christian faith. Can Russell read the minds even of people he knows well, much less the millions of Christians whom he does not know? Again, Russell's argument would have to presume omniscience. Russell knows the minds of all Christians, and he knows that they are Christians only because they were “programmed” by their parents to be Christians!

In his essay, “Why I believe in God”, Cornelius Van Til counters this psychoanalytical argument with one of his own. (The essay is written in the first and second person as if it were an actual apologetical encounter with an unbeliever.)

Though there were no tropical showers of revivals [in Van Til's childhood home], the relative humidity was always very high. At every meal the whole family was present. There was a closing as well as an opening prayer, and a chapter of the Bible was read each time....

I was “conditioned” in the most thorough fashion. I *could not help believing* in God – in the God of Christianity – in the God of the whole Bible!

Your childhood may not have been so restricted. Your parents, I assume, were most enlightened in their religious views. They read to you from some *Bible of the World* instead of from the Bible of Palestine. No, you say, they did no such thing. They did not want to trouble you about religion in your early days. They sought to cultivate an open mind in their children.

Shall we say then that in my early life I was conditioned to believe in God, while you were left free to develop your own judgment as you pleased? But that will hardly do. You know as well as I that every child is conditioned by his environment. It appears that you were as thoroughly conditioned *not* to believe in God as I was to believe in

God. So let us not call each other names. If you want to say that belief was poured down my throat, I can always retort that unbelief was poured down your throat.⁵⁶

Interestingly, at the very beginning of his lecture, Russell cites John Stuart Mill’s autobiography in which he finds this statement,

My father taught me that the question “Who made me?” cannot be answered, since it immediately suggests the further question “Who made god?”

In other words, Mill’s father conditioned him to question the necessary existence of a Creator who has no anterior cause.

Continuing with Russell,

Kant, as I say, invented a new moral argument for the existence of God, and that in varying forms was extremely popular during the nineteenth century. It has all sorts of forms. One form is to say there would be no right or wrong unless God existed.

Without the Bible and the Christian faith as the absolute standard of morality, we are left in an ocean of moral relativism in which one person’s, or one society’s, opinion is pitted against another person’s or society’s opinion. In either situation, personal or societal morality does not really obligate anyone.⁵⁷

I am not for the moment concerned with whether there is a difference between right and wrong, or whether there is not: that is another question. The point I am concerned with is that, 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 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. If you are going to say that, you will then have to say that it is not only through God that right and wrong came into being, but that they are in their essence logically anterior to God. You could, of course, if you liked, say that there was a superior deity who gave orders to the God that made this world, or could take up the line that some of the gnostics took up—a line which I often thought was a very plausible one—that as a matter of fact this world that we know was made by the devil at a moment when God was not looking. There is a good deal to be said for that, and I am not concerned to refute it.

At this point, Russell is simply repeating the Euthyphro dilemma that we have already answered. There is no right or wrong anterior to (or prior to) God to which God must answer. The “good” does not exist independently of God as some kind of platonic “ideal” hovering in the air above God. Moreover, God was not constrained or forced to call something good in consistency with this platonic ideal. Rather, something is eternally good only because it reflects the very goodness of God who is eternal, thus making it dependent upon God.

⁵⁶ Cornelius Van Til, *Why I Believe in God*, p. 4.

⁵⁷ This argument is dealt with in three separate chapters in the following books: (1) *Study Guide for Basic Training for Defending the Faith*, “*The Problem of Moral Absolutes*”, Kenneth Gentry, ed., (2) *Always Ready*, “*The Problem of Evil*”, Greg L. Bahnsen, and (3) *Pushing the Antithesis*, “*The Problem of Moral Absolutes*”, Gary DeMar, ed. It should be noted that both Gentry’s and DeMar’s books are based upon the apologetic method of Greg Bahnsen who was an avid student and interpreter of the presuppositional apologetics of Cornelius Van Til.

The Argument for the Remedy of Injustice

Then there is another very curious form of moral argument, which is this: they say that the existence of God is required in order to bring justice into the world. In the part of this universe that we know there is great injustice, and often the good suffer, and often the wicked prosper, and one hardly knows which of those is the more annoying; but if you are going to have justice in the universe as a whole you have to suppose a future life to redress the balance of life here on earth.

First of all, we can see that Russell assumes the metaphysical ideas of “justice”, “good”, and “wicked”. How does he define these words, and what is his authority for this definition? Second, Russell is addressing a very strong, intuitive argument for the existence of God. It is “intuitive” because it is immediately apprehended and understood by almost everyone without need for proof. Almost everyone either believes, or wishes to believe, that wrong-doing will be punished.⁵⁸ They also know that many wrongdoers are not punished in this life while those who did less harm to others sometimes suffer under such people. Hinduism teaches that the wrong-doer is reincarnated into a lower caste of people or even a lower class of animal life while the good person is reincarnated into a higher caste or higher form of animal life. But most people rightly reject Hinduism, and they need some kind of assurances that evil done to themselves and others will be punished—somehow.

So they say that there must be a God, and there must be Heaven and Hell in order that in the long run there may be justice. That is a very curious argument. If you looked at the matter from a scientific point of view, you would say, "After all, I only know this world. I do not know about the rest of the universe, but so far as one can argue at all on probabilities one would say that probably this world is a fair sample, and if there is injustice here the odds are that there is injustice elsewhere also." Supposing you got a crate of oranges that you opened, and you found all the top layer of oranges bad, you would not argue, "The underneath ones must be good, so as to redress the balance." You would say, "Probably the whole lot is a bad consignment"; and that is really what a scientific person would argue about the universe. He would say, "Here we find in this world a great deal of injustice, and so far as that goes that is a reason for supposing that justice does not rule in the world; and therefore so far as it goes it affords a moral argument against deity and not in favor of one." Of course I know that the sort of intellectual arguments that I have been talking to you about are not what really moves people. What really moves people to believe in God is not any intellectual argument at all. Most people believe in God because they have been taught from early infancy to do it, and that is the main reason.

This argument is repetitious of the earlier argument. Since there is so much evil in the world, and since God is all-powerful and could extinguish evil, then God must not exist. He then returns to the psychoanalytical argument of childhood conditioning. Russell dismisses the idea of “redress[ing] the balance” as wishful thinking. People wish heaven and hell were real so that God could redress (equalize) the balance between the good and the bad done on earth.⁵⁹ In his heart of hearts, Russell knows that there is a heaven and a hell where the good is rewarded and the evil is punished (Rom. 1), and he should not so quickly dismiss an intuition which is so strong in everyone’s mind—even empirical philosophers.

But looking at his argument further, from a “scientific point of view”—which we assume is an empirical point of view—we would ask once more where Russell gets the idea of justice? Can the scientist “see” justice in the laboratory? Can he hear it or feel it? All the scientist can do is observe human behavior in a variety of situations and cultures, but he cannot determine from observation whether that behavior is morally “just” or

⁵⁸ Also immediately apprehended by all people by virtue of their being made in God’s image

⁵⁹ Russell assumes without proof that more bad is done than good, but such knowledge would once again require omniscience.

“unjust”. Anthropologists can observe a young Hindu wife being burned alive on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband (sutee), but can they scientifically determine that this is a horrific cultural practice? Like many in our day, Russell is far too optimistic about the capabilities of science. What man is *capable* of doing from technology and science gives us no hint about what he *should* do. Today, scientists are capable of taking embryonic stem cells from aborted babies to help cure some diseases (although the proof is not fully established); but, assuming for the sake of argument that this can be done with 100% success, does this justify the killing of unborn infants to harvest stem cells? ⁶⁰

Then I think that the next most powerful reason is the wish for safety, a sort of feeling that there is a big brother who will look after you. That plays a very profound part in influencing people's desire for a belief in God.

This is a continuation of the psychological argument of wishful thinking. People are Christians not because of the evidence, but because they wish Christianity were true. We do not doubt that we believe in Christ for the personal benefit of having eternal life. As Paul said,

If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:19 NASB).

Nevertheless, it is not wishful thinking that led the original apostles to sacrifice their lives for the sake of the Christian gospel, and it was not wishful thinking that influenced Polycarp and countless other believers to submit their bodies to be burned at the stake. These Christians did not presume that “big brother” Jesus would save their lives in the brink of time; they believed that Christ would transport their spirits safely into the kingdom of heaven even if their physical life was snuffed out. They believed, further, that their new bodies would rise from the dead at the resurrection. Christians sacrifice their lives—as well as their money—without looking for any return in this life. They are looking for a city whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11: 10).

The Character of Christ

I now want to say a few words upon a topic which I often think is not quite sufficiently dealt with by Rationalists, and that is the question whether Christ was the best and the wisest of men. It is generally taken for granted that we should all agree that that was so. I do not myself. I think that there are a good many points upon which I agree with Christ a great deal more than the professing Christians do. I do not know that I could go with Him all the way, but I could go with Him much further than most professing Christians can. You will remember that He said, "Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." That is not a new precept or a new principle. It was used by Lao-tse and Buddha some 500 or 600 years before Christ, but it is not a principle which as a matter of fact Christians accept. I have no doubt that the present prime minister [Stanley Baldwin], for instance, is a most sincere Christian, but I should not advise any of you to go and smite him on one cheek. I think you might find that he thought this text was intended in a figurative sense.

Buddhists, like Hindus, are monists. This means that they have no basis for distinguishing between good and evil; everything is spiritually one. Buddha's pacifism was part of his general philosophy of the inevitability of suffering. Buddhists cannot give a reason or goal of suffering; they accept it passively as an inevitable part of human existence. Suffering is caused by desire; therefore, ridding the human heart of desire is a major tenet of Buddhism.⁶¹ Based on this presupposition, suffering is punishment for desire; therefore, why

⁶⁰ This is the naturalistic fallacy. “Is” requires “ought”. That is, if a situation exists, then it should or ought to exist. If scientists are capable of curing diseases with the tissue of aborted babies, then this is what they ought to do. But this reasoning is fallacious.

⁶¹ Fritz Ridenour, *So, What's the Difference?*

should we attempt to remove the suffering which is teaching a person to rid himself of desire? Consequently, Buddhism is known as a religion which does not resist external evil of any kind, but only the internal evil of desire. One’s personal journey of suffering is ultimate and must not be interfered with from the outside. When we think about it, where have we ever witnessed international Buddhist agencies for the relief of hunger and displaced people groups? Where do we see teams of Buddhist volunteers (including monks) for relieving the victims of Tsunamis and earthquakes? Where do we find soup kitchens for the hungry and homeless run by Buddhist monks? Such organizations are either Christian agencies like the American Red Cross or The Samaritan Purse, or they are secular western agencies from countries that are still living off the religious capital of Christianity. Christian charity is not a random accident of sociology. We can expect certain actions on the basis of one’s religious orientation.

Further, assuming for the sake of argument that Buddha did teach people to turn the other cheek 500 years before Christ, this should not concern us. He was simply borrowing ethical principles ingrained in him as an image-bearer of God. The Code of Hammurabi also taught many things which predated Moses, proving that the work of God’s law is written on men’s hearts because of their image-bearing capacity.

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves,¹⁵ in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them. (Romans 2:14-15 NASB)

The Bible assumes that even unbelievers will be able to recognize the wisdom of God’s law.

"So keep and do *them*, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'" (Deuteronomy 4:6 NASB)

Continuing with Russell,

Then there is another point which I consider excellent. You will remember that Christ said, "Judge not lest ye be judged." That principle I do not think you would find was popular in the law courts of Christian countries. I have known in my time quite a number of judges who were very earnest Christians, and none of them felt that they were acting contrary to Christian principles in what they did.

This is a classic case of poor exegesis, and we should be able to expect more from a deep thinker like Russell. He was probably presenting it as another one of his “straw-man” arguments. Build a man out of straw, and you can easily push him over. In this article, Russell is not aiming at sophisticated philosophers who could easily shoot holes in his arguments. He is writing for a popular audience whom he assumes cannot discern the difference between a good argument and a fallacious one. When it came to exegesis of the Scriptures, he was probably right that most people were as incapable of the task as he was—considering that most people in his day, and ours, do not even read the Bible much less interpret it correctly. Because Russell was considered an eminent philosopher, he thought this qualified him to be a Biblical exegete. It didn’t, and this is something the biblical apologist must remember. He must not allow himself to be intimidated by the so-called wise men of this world who have little understanding of the content of Scripture and even less ability to interpret it correctly.

Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" (1 Corinthians 1:20 NASB).

I have more insight than all my teachers, For Your testimonies are my meditation. (Psalm 119:99 NASB).

The context of Jesus’ statement, Matthew 7, has nothing whatever to do with civil courts. The context is judging others for the same sins you are presently committing—i.e. judging hypocritically as the Pharisees commonly judged.

"Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?⁴ "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye?⁵ "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye" (Matthew 7:3-5 NASB).

Then Christ says, "Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." That is a very good principle. Your Chairman has reminded you that we are not here to talk politics, but I cannot help observing that the last general election was fought on the question of how desirable it was to turn away from him that would borrow of thee, so that one must assume that the Liberals and Conservatives of this country are composed of people who do not agree with the teaching of Christ, because they certainly did very emphatically turn away on that occasion.

Again, Russell is confusing the context, turning the words of Christ into a maxim (rule) for economic socialism.

Then there is one other maxim of Christ which I think has a great deal in it, but I do not find that it is very popular among some of our Christian friends. He says, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that which thou hast, and give to the poor." That is a very excellent maxim, but, as I say, it is not much practised. All these, I think, are good maxims, although they are a little difficult to live up to. I do not profess to live up to them myself; but then, after all, it is not quite the same thing as for a Christian.

Once more, Russell fails to interpret the context. The rich ruler loved his money so much that he had made a god out of it. Jesus calls the man to a radical faith which forsakes all other gods for the sake of following Him. But Russell is now demonstrating the logical fallacy of the double standard or special pleading. If he agrees with these “good maxims”, then he ought to follow them. But he says that it is one thing for him not to give to the poor, quite another for Christians not to give to the poor. But if it is wrong for Christians not to live up to their ethic, then it is also wrong for unbelievers like Russell to fail to do so. This is not an argument against the Christian faith; it is a prejudicial double standard.

Defects in Christ's Teaching

Having granted the excellence of these maxims, I come to certain points in which I do not believe that one can grant either the superlative wisdom or the superlative goodness of Christ as depicted in the Gospels; and here I may say that one is not concerned with the historical question. Historically it is quite doubtful whether Christ ever existed at all, and if He did we do not know anything about him, so that I am not concerned with the historical question, which is a very difficult one.

This is precisely an example of what Bahnsen calls “prejudicial conjecture.” He explains,

One will often find that unbelievers, both educated [like Russell] and uneducated, take the offensive against Christianity before they have become familiar with what they are talking about. In the place of research and honest assessment of available

evidence concerning some aspect of the Bible, many unbelievers have substituted personal conjecture [guesswork] about what “seems likely” to them.⁶²

Russell takes no consideration of the thousands of extant documents of the NT which speak of the historical existence of Christ, nor does he even take into consideration secular sources which recognize His historical existence. He simply makes a prejudicial conjecture (guess) that Christ probably never existed at all.⁶³ On the other hand, although there is far less documentation of the historical existence of Mohammed, one may seriously doubt that Russell would find Mohammed's existence as offensive as Christ's existence. Why? Because, deep down, Russell knew that his unbelief was a denial of the reality of God and the gospel.

I am concerned with Christ as He appears in the Gospels, taking the Gospel narrative as it stands, and there one does find some things that do not seem to be very wise. For one thing, he certainly thought that His second coming would occur in clouds of glory before the death of all the people who were living at that time. There are a great many texts that prove that. He says, for instance, "Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come." Then he says, "There are some standing here which shall not taste death till the Son of Man comes into His kingdom"; and there are a lot of places where it is quite clear that He believed that His second coming would happen during the lifetime of many then living. That was the belief of His earlier followers, and it was the basis of a good deal of His moral teaching. When He said, "Take no thought for the morrow," and things of that sort, it was very largely because He thought that the second coming was going to be very soon, and that all ordinary mundane affairs did not count. I have, as a matter of fact, known some Christians who did believe that the second coming was imminent. I knew a parson who frightened his congregation terribly by telling them that the second coming was very imminent indeed, but they were much consoled when they found that he was planting trees in his garden. The early Christians did really believe it, and they did abstain from such things as planting trees in their gardens, because they did accept from Christ the belief that the second coming was imminent. In that respect, clearly He was not so wise as some other people have been, and He was certainly not superlatively wise.

I have no idea where Russell got his information about Christians not planting trees in their gardens. I doubt this fact could be substantiated. We will have to excuse him for failing to correctly interpret the text in Matthew 24 which has perplexed interpreters for the whole history of Christianity. It can be argued that some believers, even some apostles, were looking for the imminent (soon) return of Christ, and some modern preterists⁶⁴ believe Christ actually returned in 70 AD at the destruction of Jerusalem in fulfillment of the prophecy of Matthew 24. However, Russell's presuppositions about the non-deity of Christ are evident in his criticisms. If Christ is divine, He could not have been mistaken about His return.⁶⁵ Christians must reject this suggestion, as well as develop biblical evidence for the deity of Christ.

On the other hand, Russell is absolutely sure that his analysis of the text proves that Christ was mistaken. His commitment to epistemological independence, and his over-confidence in his hermeneutical ability, is evident. Has Russell surveyed the history of interpretation of Matthew 24 to be absolutely sure that Jesus was mistaken in His prediction? Could He have intended some other meaning? Could it be that Christ was intertwining the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem so closely with the events of His second

⁶²*Always Ready*, Kindle Locations 2304-2308

⁶³ See Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, Kindle Location 2825.

⁶⁴ The belief that Christ returned in 70 AD at the destruction of Jerusalem summarily defines the preterist interpretation of eschatology—the doctrine of last things.

⁶⁵ Although Christ did say that even the Son did not know the day or the hour of His return (Matt. 24: 36). This is a very difficult verse considering that on many other occasions, Christ knew men's hearts. But for Christ to admit that, humanly speaking, He did not know something, is not the same as saying that Christ was actually mistaken about the timing of such an important event as His second coming.

coming that the two events seem indistinguishable in Matthew 24? And could it be that the return of Christ is foreshadowed in the destruction of Matthew 24, as many interpreters believe?

The Moral Problem

Then you come to moral questions. There is one very serious defect to my mind in Christ's moral character, and that is that He believed in hell. I do not myself feel that any person who is really profoundly humane can believe in everlasting punishment. Christ certainly as depicted in the Gospels did believe in everlasting punishment, and one does find repeatedly a vindictive fury against those people who would not listen to His preaching—an attitude which is not uncommon with preachers, but which does somewhat detract from superlative excellence. You do not, for instance find that attitude in Socrates. You find him quite bland and urbane toward the people who would not listen to him; and it is, to my mind, far more worthy of a sage to take that line than to take the line of indignation. You probably all remember the sorts of things that Socrates was saying when he was dying, and the sort of things that he generally did say to people who did not agree with him.

You will find that in the Gospels Christ said, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of Hell." That was said to people who did not like His preaching. It is not really to my mind quite the best tone, and there are a great many of these things about Hell. There is, of course, the familiar text about the sin against the Holy Ghost: "Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven him neither in this World nor in the world to come." That text has caused an unspeakable amount of misery in the world, for all sorts of people have imagined that they have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, and thought that it would not be forgiven them either in this world or in the world to come. I really do not think that a person with a proper degree of kindness in his nature would have put fears and terrors of that sort into the world.

Russell is quite certain he has properly interpreted Christ's displeasure with others as that of some preachers who get angry when people dislike their preaching. The Christian, on the other hand, understands Christ's displeasure as the anger of God against sinful unbelief in the light of undeniable evidence of Jesus' claim to be the Son of Man (cf. Daniel 7: 13; Matt. 26: 64). Russell, of course, takes no notice of the evidences of Christ's deity in making blind men see, dumb men talk, deaf men hear, and raising the dead. The works of Christ testify to His truth claims to be sent from God the Father and to speak the words of God.

"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. (Matthew 11:21 NASB)

The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." ²⁵ Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. ²⁶ "But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. ²⁷ "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. (John 10:24-28 NASB)

However, most of the Jews would not listen, and for this they were chastised and later condemned. By condemning unbelief, Jesus was doing the very same thing as the OT prophets who foreshadowed Him (Matt. 23: 29-33; Luke 6: 23-26).

Then Christ says, "The Son of Man shall send forth his His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth"; and He goes on about the wailing and gnashing of teeth. It comes in one verse after another, and it is quite manifest to the reader that there is a certain pleasure in contemplating wailing and gnashing of teeth, or else it would not occur so often.

Russell presumes to know Christ's motives in mentioning hell so often. According to Russell, it is not that Christ wishes to warn men of the coming judgment (Luke 13: 3), but that He takes pleasure in sending men to hell, in contradiction of explicit statements of Scripture (Ezek. 33: 11).

Then you all, of course, remember about the sheep and the goats; how at the second coming He is going to divide the sheep from the goats, and He is going to say to the goats, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." He continues, "And these shall go away into everlasting fire." Then He says again, "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into Hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched; where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched." He repeats that again and again also. I must say that I think all this doctrine, that hell-fire is a punishment for sin, is a doctrine of cruelty. It is a doctrine that put cruelty into the world and gave the world generations of cruel torture; and the Christ of the Gospels, if you could take Him as His chroniclers represent Him, would certainly have to be considered partly responsible for that.

Therefore, asserts Russell, the cruelty which exists in this world is not the result of man's unwillingness to submit to God's law and His Lordship over man's life, but rather, it is "partly" the result of Christ's teaching about punishment in hell. The doctrine of hell—a doctrine of God's punishment for sin—produces cruelty. If men did not hear about being punished for their sins, they would be less cruel.

There are other things of less importance. There is the instance of the Gadarene swine, where it certainly was not very kind to the pigs to put the devils into them and make them rush down the hill into the sea. You must remember that He was omnipotent, and He could have made the devils simply go away; but He chose to send them into the pigs. Then there is the curious story of the fig tree, which always rather puzzled me. You remember what happened about the fig tree. "He was hungry; and seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, He came if haply He might find anything thereon; and when He came to it He found nothing but leaves, for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it: 'No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever' . . . and Peter . . . saith unto Him: 'Master, behold the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away.'" This is a very curious story, because it was not the right time of year for figs, and you really could not blame the tree. I cannot myself feel that either in the matter of wisdom or in the matter of virtue Christ stands quite as high as some other people known to history. I think I should put Buddha and Socrates above Him in those respects.

In the interpretation of the curse upon the fig tree, there is some ambiguity (uncertainty) based on a different understanding of Palestinian agriculture. For example, Wessel says that around the Jerusalem area, fig trees leaf out in March or April "but do not produce figs till June"⁶⁶, while Carson maintains, "Fig leaves appear about the same time as the fruit or a little after", but that the figs are not fully ripe or edible until June. If so, when Jesus saw a fig tree covered in leaves, He could *reasonably expect* to find figs on it, even if green and disagreeable to the taste.⁶⁷ According to this interpretation, Mark's comment, "for it was not the

⁶⁶ Walter W. Wessel, *Mark*, p. 726. So also William L. Lane, *Mark*, p. 400

⁶⁷ D.A. Carson, *Matthew*, p. 444. See J. Knox Chamblin, unpublished notes Matthew (pp. 185-186) for further explanation.

season for figs”, does not imply that it was impossible for the tree to have figs at all, but that there would be no *ripe* figs suitable for eating. As it was, Jesus “found nothing but leaves”; that is, no figs of *any* kind, edible or ripe (v. 13c). This would remove any confusion about Jesus cursing a tree that was biologically incapable of producing *any* figs at this time of year, an act which appears to some scholars as a purposeless act unworthy of Jesus’ stature. For example, T.W. Manson says,

It is a tale of miraculous power wasted in the service of ill temper (for the supernatural energy employed to blast the unfortunate tree might have been more usefully expended in forcing a crop of figs out of season); and as it stands it is simply incredible.⁶⁸

On the contrary, what is “simply incredible” is Manson’s blind audacity (boldness) in accusing the sinless Christ of “wasting miraculous power in the service of ill temper”. His attitude is akin to that of Russell who claims to be much wiser and nobler than the God-man.

The lesson is the same regardless of how we interpret the biological data. The tree provided Jesus with a useful *analogy of Israel*—particularly its leaders—giving *false evidence of life* on the outside (many leaves), but bearing no fruit.⁶⁹ As the lush foliage (leaves) of the tree gave one a false hope of something to eat, so also the temple ceremonies—including the Passover feast—gave one the impression of spiritual life within the nation of Israel. Upon further examination, however, the external religious life of Israel proved to be a sham (deceptive counterfeit). *It was a nation flourishing with religious activity but possessing no religious substance* (similar to many churches which have large memberships and budgets but no spiritual weight—Rev. 3: 14-17). By cursing the fig tree, Jesus foreshadows the destruction of Israel in 70 AD. The referenceto Jer. 7: 11, “a robber’s den”, confirms this interpretation since the context of that passage is *Judah’s mistaken confidence* in the presence of the temple as a guarantee against invasion by foreign oppressors. As robbers and bandits found refuge from arrest and prosecution by hiding in caves, Israel thought they could find refuge from judgment by “hiding” (not literally but figuratively) in the temple and its ceremonies.⁷⁰ Jeremiah gives his famous “Temple of the Lord” speech to disprove this theory, and God later confirmed that He was a true prophet by destroying the temple at the hand of Babylon in 587 BC. Thus, in His denunciation of the money changers and merchants, Jesus gives a forewarning of the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

I have provided this explanation to demonstrate Russell’s prejudicial conjecture about Christ’s motive in cursing the fig tree. At the time he wrote, Russell did not have commentaries by Wessel, Carson, Lane, and Chamblin, but there were many other notable commentators (including Calvin, Matthew Henry, J. Gresham Machen, et al) who could have cleared his muddled and prejudicial misinterpretation of the fig tree episode. The truth is, people who hate Christianity—and Russell did not disguise his disdain for Christianity—will produce this kind of argumentation to sway the multitudes who are void of Biblical understanding and too lazy to acquire it.

As far as the swine are concerned (Matt. 8: 28-34), see my notes on *The Synoptic Gospels* for more explanation. I make no attempt to defend Christ’s action of killing the swine; there is no need. They were His pigs to begin with, and he can do with them whatever He wants.

The Emotional Factor

As I said before, I do not think that the real reason why people accept religion has anything to do with argumentation. They accept religion on emotional grounds. One is often told that it is a very

⁶⁸ Wessel, p. 726, citing T.W. Manson, “*The Cleansing of the Temple*”, BJRL 33 [1951]: 259

⁶⁹ Wessel, p. 726

⁷⁰ Chamblin, p. 179

wrong thing to attack religion, because religion makes men virtuous. So I am told; I have not noticed it. You know, of course, the parody of that argument in Samuel Butler's book, *Erewhon Revisited*. You will remember that in *Erewhon* there is a certain Higgs who arrives in a remote country, and after spending some time there he escapes from that country in a balloon. Twenty years later he comes back to that country and finds a new religion in which he is worshiped under the name of the "Sun Child," and it is said that he ascended into heaven. He finds that the Feast of the Ascension is about to be celebrated, and he hears Professors Hanky and Panky say to each other that they never set eyes on the man Higgs, and they hope they never will; but they are the high priests of the religion of the Sun Child. He is very indignant, and he comes up to them, and he says, "I am going to expose all this humbug and tell the people of Erewhon that it was only I, the man Higgs, and I went up in a balloon." He was told, "You must not do that, because all the morals of this country are bound round this myth, and if they once know that you did not ascend into Heaven they will all become wicked"; and so he is persuaded of that and he goes quietly away.

That is the idea—that we should all be wicked if we did not hold to the Christian religion. It seems to me that the people who have held to it have been for the most part extremely wicked. You find this curious fact, that the more intense has been the religion of any period and the more profound has been the dogmatic belief, the greater has been the cruelty and the worse has been the state of affairs. In the so-called ages of faith, when men really did believe the Christian religion in all its completeness, there was 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.

At the beginning of his article, Russell argues against Christian doctrine. At this point, his argument has degenerated into the fallacious *ad hominem* argument.⁷¹ But you cannot prove Christianity to be false by pointing to historical and current aberrations in its practice. There is nothing in the NT that condones holy wars or the execution of heretics. Idolaters were executed in OT Israel as the means of preventing the extinguishing of true religion, and thus, the nation (Deut. 6: 14-15; 4: 23-28). Most likely, Islamic nations instituting Sharia law have the same reason for outlawing any other religion except Islam. But while Christianity has organic continuity with the OT, it has progressed beyond Judaism through the progressive revelation of the NT. It has done so through the fulfillment of the law through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and the application of His atoning work through the indwelling renewal and ongoing ministry of the Holy Spirit. Unlike the Israelite religion, the Christian faith does not belong to a single nation, nor does the Christian faith demand that someone become part of a nation to be in right relationship with God. It is transnational, incorporating all peoples who are one in Christ Jesus. The immaturity of the people of God in the OT dispensation required laws which tangibly and physically isolated them from other people groups in order to preserve them as God's holy people. This situation persisted until the coming of Christ and the Holy Spirit who gave His people the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, "Abba, Father" (Gal. 4: 1-7). It is therefore no longer necessary to follow minute, ceremonial rules; nor is it necessary for God's people to isolate themselves into a distinct land separated from all others.

⁷¹ The *ad hominem* argument does not argue against the position a person holds, but against the person holding the position. It is fallacious since the truth or falsity of the argument has nothing to do with the person's practice of his faith. All Christians are somewhat inconsistent in practice, but this does not disprove Christianity. Thousands have been put to death by others because they held doctrine that was condemned by the church, but the real question is whether the gospel itself calls for the execution of heretics. Many reformers, including Calvin and Zwingli, believed that the civil magistrate should protect the true religion against heretics and thereby defended the execution of heretics (see McNeill, *Religious Persecution During the Sixteenth Century Protestant Reformation*). While regressing doctrinally in many ways since the Protestant Reformation, the church has also matured in other ways. Our understanding of progressive revelation and the distinction between the church and the state helps us understand that religious heresy is punished only by excommunication from the church, not execution by the state in behalf of the church.

Russell also turns to special pleading, focusing only on the atrocities committed by misguided Christians rather than the atrocities by professing Muslims—whose Quran still sanctions slavery and the mistreatment of non-Muslims—and the practice of eastern religions in countries where manifold barbarisms have occurred.

You find as you look around the world that every single bit of progress in 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 every 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.

Once more, the ad hominem argument. And while it is sadly true that the established church in England and the United States sanctioned slavery, true Christians in both countries risked their lives attempting to help the slaves and to end the institution of slavery legally. William Wilberforce, a committed Christian, labored unceasingly for 30 years to end slavery in England while others in the US helped escaped slaves move to safe havens by means of the “Underground railroad”. God has often worked with a few individuals to conquer great evils in society, and it is not irrelevant to the discussion to say that the most free peoples on earth are those who live in nations where the Christian faith has taken root.⁷²

How the Churches Have Retarded Progress

You may think that I am going too far when I say that that is still so. I do not think that I am. Take one fact. You will bear with me if I mention it. It is not a pleasant fact, but the churches compel one to mention facts that are not pleasant. Supposing that in this world that we live in today an inexperienced girl is married to a syphilitic man; in that case the Catholic Church says, “This is an indissoluble sacrament. You must endure celibacy or stay together. And if you stay together, you must not use birth control to prevent the birth of syphilitic children.” Nobody whose natural sympathies have not been warped by dogma, or whose moral nature was not absolutely dead to all sense of suffering, could maintain that it is right and proper that that state of things should continue.

This is more of the same kind of argument, begging the question: Does the Bible really teach these things?

That is only an example. There are a great many ways in which, at the present moment, the church, by its insistence upon what it chooses to call morality, inflicts upon all sorts of people undeserved and unnecessary suffering. And of course, as we know, it is in its major part an opponent still of progress and improvement in all the ways that diminish suffering in the world, because it has chosen to label as morality a certain narrow set of rules of conduct which have nothing to do with human happiness; and when you say that this or that ought to be done because it would make for human happiness, they think that has nothing to do with the matter at all. “What has human happiness to do with morals? The object of morals is not to make people happy.”

It is correct to say that the goal of morality is not to make people happy; otherwise, we are espousing either the personal preference theory of ethics or the social preference theory (or utilitarian ethics which says the “good” is whatever brings the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people—something which is impossible to calculate and which, besides, does not establish what is really “good”. (See discussion above.) Nevertheless, the Christian knows that God did not give us His law for the express purpose of making us

⁷² See D. James Kennedy, *What If Jesus Had Never Lived?*, and Alvin Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World*.

miserable. If we keep the standard of God’s law with the right motive (love for God) and for the right goal (the glory of God), we will be happy. Happiness is not the goal, but an inevitable consequence of obeying God. As an example, if I keep the seventh commandment, “You shall not commit adultery”, along with its NT equivalent, “Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church”, this will increase my happiness (assuming the right motive and the right goal). I do not keep this law to be happy, but keeping it will help deepen my love for God and for my wife, and the deeper relationship with God and my wife will make my life happier. Many believe that the law of God is intended to make us miserable. Adam and Eve made this mistake, and the human race has been making the same mistake ever since.

Fear, the Foundation of Religion

Religion is based, I think, primarily and mainly upon fear. It is partly the terror of the unknown and partly, as I have said, the wish to feel that you have a kind of elder brother who will stand by you in all your troubles and disputes. Fear is the basis of the whole thing—fear of the mysterious, fear of defeat, fear of death. Fear is the parent of cruelty, and therefore it is no wonder if cruelty and religion have gone hand in hand. It is because fear is at the basis of those two things. In this world we can now begin a little to understand things, and a little to master them by help of science, which has forced its way step by step against the Christian religion, against the churches, and against the opposition of all the old precepts. Science can help us to get over this craven fear in which mankind has lived for so many generations. Science can teach us, and I think our own hearts can teach us, no longer to look around for imaginary supports, no longer to invent allies in the sky, but rather to look to our own efforts here below to make this world a better place to live in, instead of the sort of place that the churches in all these centuries have made it.

What We Must Do

We want to stand upon our own feet and look fair and square at the world—its good facts, its bad facts, its beauties, and its ugliness; see the world as it is and be not afraid of it. Conquer the world by intelligence and not merely by being slavishly subdued by the terror that comes from it. The whole conception of God is a conception derived from the ancient Oriental despotisms. It is a conception quite unworthy of free men. When you hear people in church debasing themselves and saying that they are miserable sinners, and all the rest of it, it seems contemptible and not worthy of self-respecting human beings. We ought to stand up and look the world frankly in the face. We ought to make the best we can of the world, and if it is not so good as we wish, after all it will still be better than what these others have made of it in all these ages. A good world needs knowledge, kindness, and courage; it does not need a regretful hankering after the past or a fettering of the free intelligence by the words uttered long ago by ignorant men. It needs a fearless outlook and a free intelligence. It needs hope for the future, not looking back all the time toward a past that is dead, which we trust will be far surpassed by the future that our intelligence can create.

In reply, Bahnsen says,

Russell wished to fault Christians for the emotional factor in their faith-commitment, and yet Russell himself evidenced a similarly emotional factor in his own personal anti-Christian commitment. Indeed, Russell openly appealed to emotional feelings of courage, pride, freedom and self-worth as a basis for his audience to refrain from being Christians!⁷³

⁷³ *Always Ready*, Kindle Locations 2850-2853

We have by no means exhausted all of the logical fallacies included in Russell’s critique of the Christian faith. We will let Bahnsen have the last word,

Russell’s essay “Why I Am Not a Christian” reveals to us that even the intellectually elite of this world are refuted by their own errors in opposing the truth of the Christian faith. There is no credibility to a challenge to Christianity which evidences prejudicial conjecture, logical fallacies, unargued philosophical bias, behavior which betrays professed beliefs, and presuppositions which do not comport with each other. Why wasn’t Russell a Christian? Given his weak effort at criticism, one would have to conclude that it was not for intellectual reasons.⁷⁴

Electronic colophon: This electronic edition of "Why I Am Not a Christian" was first made available by Bruce MacLeod on his "Watchful Eye Russell Page." It was newly corrected (from Edwards, NY 1957) in July 1996 by John R. Lenz for the Bertrand Russell Society.

⁷⁴ *Always Ready*, Kindle Locations 2858-2862