

Chapter 10: Dad! But...Who Made God?!

Bertrand Arthur William Russell; the British philosopher and mathematician of the 20th century (died in 1970) with his emphasis on logical analysis influenced the course of 20th century philosophy.

He is a well known in the West for his anti-religious attempts. His work 'What I believe' which was published in 1925 barred him from teaching at the College of the City of New York, for his attacks on religion.

In his lecture 'Why I Am Not a Christian' delivered at the Battersea Town Hall in London in 1927, he argues the existence of God by refuting the argument of the First Cause as presented by Christian theologians.

This chapter aims at addressing his argument and unveiling the fallacy of it. I will also elaborate on the misleading theological roots to his misconceptions of God.

Part of his lecture on 'Why I Am Not a Christian' reads:

" 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.

The philosophers and the men of science have got going on cause, and it has not anything like the vitality that 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. 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. 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”.

The main elements of Russell's arguments rest under the following questions:

1. If everything has a cause, then why not God?
2. Has the world always existed or not?

My aim in this chapter is to show that it is not true that everything has a cause, and also the timely eternity of the world does not make it needless to God.

Who Has Made God?!

There are three different approaches to this question.

1. Questioning is an innovation (Just have faith)

The first attitude towards such very basic religious questions is to blame, stop, prevent and condemn the questioner. This attitude is observed by mainstream Christians when they are asked about issues such as Trinity, as well as Traditional Muslim scholars.

Malik Ibn Anas one of the four jurisprudential leaders of the Traditional Muslims was asked once about the meaning of the Aya 5 in Chapter 20 of the Holy Quran which says: “ *The Most Gracious (Allah) rose over the Throne .*”

He became so upset that had never been seen like that. The questioner with a face down full of regrets had sweats on his head. Malik then said: “ *All what we know is that He rose over His Throne, but HOW it is unknown and the question is an innovation .*”

I remember when I was eighteen I developed some doubts and questions about the existence of God.

Eventually, I put my questions in writing and send them to one of the Islamic institutions that I was aware of.

Unfortunately, to my extreme surprise the sole answer I received was that apparently I had been captured by Satan and need to seek refuge with God by reciting some of the Chapters of the Quran!

Well, perhaps the only benefit of that style of answer for me was to make me more enthusiastic to discover the Truth by myself and made me determine to begin my spiritual journey.

Needless to say that I found later on that the above attitude has no confirmation in the Quran nor in the lifestyle of the Prophet of Islam and his twelve successors. They have always been addressing all questions in the best manner without condemning or labeling the questioners with heresy or innovation.

2. Denial

The second attitude is to deny the existence of God as Russell and many others perhaps do when they fail to find any answer for the question.

As a matter of fact, the first and the second group have a similar problem in that they have both failed to find any answer for the question. The difference however between them is that the first group have just censored their minds and convinced themselves that they should have just faith in it. You tell them how can you prove it. They tell you we can't for it is beyond logic! And then you are speechless.

3. Answer

I believe the above question is one of the very basic questions about the existence of God and if this does not have any answer, then no religious issue shall be analysed logically.

The Fallacy of the Question

As a matter of fact, there is a fallacy in the question as presented by Russell. It is very disappointing to see a thinker such as Russell misinterpret the argument of the First Cause and assumes that the Creator of the world is part of the world, even though the first part!

I may however justify the fallacy of Russell's argument by the misrepresentation of many Christian theologians from whom Russell is quoting.

The concept of God for a typical Christian from childhood is a humane concept. The Old Testament teaches that God has created man of His own image and the central doctrine of Christianity, which suggest that Jesus Christ is incarnate son of God and is believed to be embodiment of God in human form.

Such wrong concepts of God are, I believe, one of the major reasons for declination of religion in the

West and the prevalence of atheism.

Let us remember that Russell's title of lecture was 'Why I Am Not a Christian', not why he does not believe in God.

Every possible being needs a cause

All what we perceive in this world enjoy inevitably the following characteristics.

1. **Limitation:** all the objects around us from a tiny atom to the giant galaxies have occupied a limited space. They may vary in size and volume but they are all in common is the fact that they all have a limit. In other words they all belong to a specific time and place.

2. **Change:** Einstein's theories implied that the universe was not static, but dynamic. Everything in this world is subject to change and transformation and alteration. No condition is permanent in this world. Nothing in this world remains unchanged.

They are either growing, moving and developing up or declining, perishing and decaying. Once upon a time, you are young, energetic and flourishing and after a while your health declines until you lose your energy and become so weak as your infancy period. *“And he whom We grant long life, we reverse him in creation (with weakness after strength)”*

3. **Dependence:** Another universal characteristic of the living things in this world is that they are all dependant and conditional to others. In other words, everything in this world does exist if and only if one or many other things already exist.

Thus, the existence of things in this world is 'IF existing'. There is nothing in this world that exist unconditional and irrespectively. You only exist if you had parents and if there is oxygen for you to breath and if and if.

4. **Need:** when everything in this world is conditional in their existence, they are also in need of other elements. Every object in this world is needy to numerous other objects to exist. There is nothing in this world that is needless of others. We are all needy and indigent. Our existence is fully covered by the universal cloak of poverty no matter how rich we assume we may be.

5. **Relativity:** All the sensational objects in this world are relative whether in their degrees of existence, their size, ability, power, beauty, age etc. When we say for instance that 'the Sun is large'. This is true only in comparison to planets like earth or mars, not if compared to super giant stars with diameters that are more than 400 times that of the Sun.

The true concept of the argument of the First Cause is that all the living things in this world with their characteristics of being finite and limited in their extent, changeable, dependant, needy and relative need

in their existence something which is unlimited, doesn't change, is independent, needless and absolute.

This Being is not part of this world or else would suffer from the same characteristics. At the same time, objects with the above-named characteristics cannot exist by themselves. As numerous zeros do not make any number.

In conclusion, the fallacy of Russell's argument is what he maintained that '*If everything must have a cause, then God must have a cause.*' The answer is that everything in this material world has a cause. Therefore, his main mistake is that he assumed God exist along with other things in this world, and because of that assumption maintain to refute Him as the First Cause.

Does the World Have any Beginning?!

In spite of different theories about the beginning of the universe, still science has no confirmation about the matter.

On the one hand we read from Albert Einstein in his theory of General Relativity which is considered the most accurately tested theory known to science, that the universe is expanding away from a point and if so then it had a beginning at that point. If the universe had a beginning then it must have a Beginner.

Dr. Wendy L. Freedman in his article '**The Expansion Rate and Size of the Universe**' published in *Scientific American* July 2001 edition :

" At present, several lines of evidence point toward a high expansion rate, implying that the universe is relatively young, perhaps only 10 billion years old. The evidence also suggests that the expansion of the universe may continue indefinitely. Still, many astronomers and cosmologists do not yet consider the evidence definitive. We actively debate the merits of our techniques".

On the other hand, according to Carl Sagan in his introduction to Stephen Hawking's best sell; '*A Brief History of Time*', the book represents an effort to posit '*a universe with no edge in space, no beginning or end in time, and nothing for a Creator to do*'.

One should however, bear in mind that all of these are just proposals.

The number of stars visible to the naked eye from earth has been estimated total 8000; 4000 for each hemisphere. The astronomers have calculated that the stars in the Milky Way number in the hundred of billions. The Milky Way in turn is also one of several hundred million such galaxies. Astronomers estimated that there are about 50 billion galaxies in the universe.

The question of why the universe exists remains the ultimate mystery. Professor Derek Parfit, a contemporary philosopher and a senior lecturer at New York University , declares that "No question is more sublime than why there is a Universe: why there is anything rather than nothing."

Derek Parfit, "Why Anything? Why This?" *London Review of Books* 20/2 (January 22, 1998), p.24.

Does the world need a Creator because it is timely finite?

Russell in his refutation of the first Cause has also assumed that the reason because of which this world needs a Creator is that it is timely finite and a beginning for its existence. Part of his lecture reads:

'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!'

Similarly Hawking also states: "The universe would not be created, not be destroyed; it would simply be. What place, then for a Creator?" (A Brief History of Time)

If the Big Bang theory is such a good theory, why doesn't it explain the origin of life?

Because it isn't designed to do so, nor will it ever be, at least not in the way you want it to. You are asking too much of a single physical theory, and perhaps not realizing that no single theory can ever explain ALL aspects of reality at any arbitrary scale.

Big Bang theory will help us answer the BIG questions of the general conditions of matter, space and time. It will, hopefully, tell us why certain physical constants are as they are, and how galaxies were formed.

It will not be able to tell us how individual stars and planets formed because that is covered by a second rank of physical theories which only depend on very local physics at a scale millions of times smaller than a galaxy in size.

Big Bang will tell us why certain 'life' issues were settled by nature the way they were such as the initial hydrogen to helium abundance ratio, and the age of the universe being comfortably longer than it takes for chemistry to create living systems.

But the details of how these chemistries led to life...and particular sentient life...are not covered by the physics of Big Bang theory because the timescales and length scales that are relevant to life are trillions upon trillions of times smaller than the scales covered by Big Bang theory.

Historical Background

There are so many literature and on going debates amongst Christian theologians tackling such naturalistic assumption that the universe has always existed.

Christian as well as Muslim theologians believed that the world is timely finite and limited and in this way they proved the existence of God. In other words, they assumed the sole reason they can prove the existence of God is if the universe has a beginning and then it needs a Beginner. According to theologians

the reason of being in need of a cause is that something was not and then it is.

Muslim philosophers by contrast, proved that the reason because of which a being needs a cause is not that it is timely limited. According to Muslim philosophers the reason for the Creator is possibility of being and essential need.

This is considered of the causes of the glories of Islamic philosophy. Muslim philosophers believe that the discussion about whether all things must have a beginning or not is an imaginary discussion. The outstanding contemporary Muslim philosopher Professor Al-Tabataba'i in his '***The Fundamentals of Philosophy & the Methods of Realism***' states:

“ Our mind is used to timely events and hence, imagines a hollow space and an unlimited time for the beginning of the world, then imagines a being like an infant in the cradle of space which is handed over to the nurse of the time who was ready in advance to develop it .”

Therefore, Russell is correct in that the idea that things must have a beginning is due to the poverty of our imagination as the late Al-Tabataba'i also stated, but he is wrong in concluding that this would make the world needless to any Creator. For according to Muslim philosopher all beings are divided into two: possible beings and Necessary Being. Possible beings is in need of Necessary being for its being.

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