

# A Cosmological Neuroscientific Examination of Bertrand Russell's Essays on Religion and Related Subjects

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This work examined Bertrand Russell's main arguments against the existence of God and his strongly negative opinion on the historic role of religions. These arguments were: (1) The idea that God is a First Cause is invalid because the cosmos doesn't have to have a beginning; (2) If there were reasons for God to issue the observed natural laws and not others then God Himself was just an intermediary of older laws; (3) Considering all the defects of the world one cannot consider God as an omnipotent designer; (4) If God created both right and wrong then it is no longer a significant statement that God is good; And (5) most people believe in God just because they have been taught from early infancy to do it. The criticisms of cosmological neuroscience were as follows: (1) The particular cosmic wave that carries our Universe could have a beginning; (2) Although there were reasons for the natural laws which God issued, it cannot diminish the divine creativity of this act; (3) Although the world is indeed full of defects, they are as much parts of the cosmic order as its splendors, due to their common roots in the Law of Coexistence in Diversity; (4) Although right and wrong may ultimately be both in God's blueprint, He is still benevolent due to the Law of Divine-Evil Asymmetry permitting wrong only under the dominance of right; And (5) although many believe in God only because they were taught to do so and hope it provides safety, this is an oversimplification unable to explain the genuine Faith of others. The devastating judgement of Russell that religions have been just "a source of untold misery to the human race" was also examined. This brief article could not detail all the positive social changes with which the religions of goodness (e.g., Abrahamic religions) enriched history, such as introducing the respect for human life. But the paper did remind the reader of the God-inspired work of Lao Tzu, Rumi, Michelangelo, the Bach-interpreting Leonard Bernstein, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr., George Harrison and others including the architects of the Borobudur temple and astronauts like Frank Borman who read from the Bible while flying around the Moon. The paper ended with the central thought of Bertrand Russell that "The good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge", to emphasize that if committed to their Conscience atheists like him can live as moral lives as the men and women of Faith—the difference is being nothing else than sensing or not the Soul that permeates the cosmos.

*Keywords:* Soul of Multiverse, God, Christianity, conscience, morals

## Introduction

Bertrand Russell's extraordinary—mathematician, philosopher, writer, politician—intelligence led to a life and post-life reverence that now belongs to humankind's representative sphere. He was able to live that life not

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just because his genes derived from such highly capable ancestors as Lord John Russell, one of the Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom, and Lady Stanley of Alderley, one of the earliest campaigners for the education of women in England, but because as a member of the aristocratic class he was free of the financial and professional pressures that have been hindering the ambitions, possibilities, and careers of humankind's most talents. At the same time his childhood and youth were burdened with tragedies, as his sister, mother, father, and grandfather had all died before his 7th birthday, he then was raised in loneliness and attacked for his deepest philosophical thoughts while going from one failed marriage to another. Depressive episodes and suicidal thoughts were not missing from his life either. Thus, he experienced the pain and conflicts of human fate that so often drive the capable mind to countering them with achievements and understanding them by immersions into life's secrets. His greatest books, *Principia Mathematica* with A. N. Whitehead, *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits*, and *A History of Western Philosophy* appeared among many other influential books and essays by him which earned Russell the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1950. As one who didn't just speak but acted according to his conscience: he chaired the India League from 1932 to 1939 to lobby for Indian independence. "Noblesse oblige"—he embodied this principle.

One of Russell's recognitions accompanied my own 30-year academic life in neuroscience pressured by mastering an isolated subject without the freedom of looking outside for its context or true solutions for its problems. This Russell recognition is this: "The man who has no tincture of philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense, from the habitual beliefs of his age and nation..." (Russell, 1912, chapter XV, paragraph 7). I was well over 60 when letting this "tincture of philosophy" surface in my mind more systematically and ambitiously than in my previous—neither promoted nor advertised—poetic composition (Ludvig, 1986) and science-fiction (Ludvig, 2017). This philosophy was rooted in my neuroscientist background (Ludvig, 1999; Ludvig, Medveczky, Tang, & Baptiste, 2016). I named it as "cosmological neuroscience" and let it address the problem of God along with the pre-physical/pre-chemical laws of Nature and the cosmic Soul that interconnects all.

Specifically, cosmological neuroscience (Ludvig, 2022a; 2022b) views religion as the social expression of the human brain's spiritual function processing: (1) the commands of Soul to choose between right and wrong; (2) the encounters of the mystery of life on Earth; (3) the admiration of the beauty and order of the starry sky; and (4) the sense of the relation of these inputs to the cosmic force historically imagined as God.

According to this discipline (Ludvig, 2023a; 2023b):

God may be a—humanly incomprehensible—eternal cosmic existence, intimately related to the endlessness of space, to the nature of the deepest common substance of matter and energy, to this common substance's unceasing motion responsible for time, and to the basic laws of their allness, letting love transform this allness to an ordered Multiverse with a Soul: the—scientifically approachable—Soul of Multiverse inspired to guard these laws and equip their order with direction and morals while imbuing the cosmos with the potential of lives evolving, at the right spatial and temporal distances, to embrace the sense of the divine, thus justifying the existence of God. (Ludvig, 2023a, p. 420)

Those basic—pre-physical/pre-chemical—hypothesized laws of allness may be the Law of Mystery of Endlessness, Law of Coexistence in Diversity, Law of Truth in Complexity, Law of Divine-Evil Asymmetry, Law of Determination with Uncertainty, and Law of Lives to Transcend (Ludvig, 2022b; 2023b).

Would these thoughts be found wanting if weighed on the scale of Bertrand Russell, who was known for his atheism? I examine this on the following pages.

### Criticism of Russell's Arguments Against the Possible Existence of God

Bertrand Russell didn't mince words about his opinion on religions. In the Preface of his powerful book, *Why I Am Not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects* (Russell, 1957), he let us know:

There has been a rumor in recent years to the effect that I have become less opposed to religious orthodoxy than I formerly was. This rumor is totally without foundation. I think all great religions of the world—Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, and Communism—both untrue and harmful. (Russell, 1957, p. 1)

He then listed some key suggestions by Christianity on the existence of God and marshalled his refutations for all. To present this memorable intellectual effort clearly, I put together Table 1.

Table 1

*The Five Key Suggestions by Christianity on the Existence of God and Bertrand Russell's Arguments Against These Suggestions (Russell, 1957)*

Primary suggestions by Christianity on the existence of God, according to Russell	Russell's arguments against each primary suggestion by Christianity on the existence of God
"... 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."	"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."
Then there is "the Natural-law argument." Since the planets are going around the sun according to the law of gravitation, it means "... that God have given a behest to these planets to move in that particular fashion..."	You face the question "Why did God issue just those natural laws and no others?... if there were 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."
"...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 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."
"Kant... invented a new moral argument for the existence of God... which is to say that ... there would be no right or wrong unless God existed."	Is that "difference between right and wrong... due to God's fiat or 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."
"...the existence of God is required to bring justice to the world. In the part of this universe that we know there is a great injustice, and often the good suffer, and often the wicked prosper... there must be a God... in order that in the long run there may be justice."	"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. Then I think 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."

While cosmological neuroscience admits the weakness of the theological suggestions cited in Table 1 for the existence of God, the discipline cannot find Bertrand Russell's opposing arguments convincing either.

First, just because "there is no reason to suppose that the world had a beginning at all," as Russell argues—with which cosmological neuroscience agrees—it cannot mean necessarily that the particular cosmic wave carrying our Universe within the Multiverse must not have had a beginning. A holy synthesis, birth of a God-like loving and inspiring existence from the Way of the eternal cosmic matter-energy could well be such a beginning, indeed the first cause of the Universe we call ours.

Second, even "if there were reason for the laws which God gave" and thus God acted only "as an intermediary", as Russell argues, it still means that God's creative inspiration lets the machinery of these laws work, without which our Universe couldn't evolve as it did. God's possible use of the cosmos' eternal substances and meaning cannot diminish its creative magnificence—intermediary or not.

Third, though Russell is right when pointing out the contradiction between “this world... with all its defects” and the belief in God’s “omnipotence and omniscience”—what he may miss is that the defects of the world are perhaps as much parts of the cosmic engine as its splendors due to their shared roots in the Law of Coexistence in Diversity. Please recall Lao Tzu’s *Tao Te Ching*, verse 2: “There can be no existence without nonexistence; / No difficult without easy; / No long without short; / No high without low...”

Fourth, Russell’s consideration is understandable, that if the difference between right and wrong “is due to God’s fiat” then “it is no longer a significant statement to say that God is good” and thus Kant’s moral argument for the existence of God cannot be significant either. But what Russell may miss this time is the possibility that God’s goodness may work through the Law of Divine-Evil Asymmetry assuring the slight but significant dominance of Divine over Evil, right over wrong, however Evil and wrong are permitted to exist. This is as much apparent from the renewal of life after all mass extinctions from 444 million years ago to 65 million years ago (Raup & Sepkoski, 1982) as in the renewal of civilization after every natural catastrophe, plague, or World War.

And fifth, Russell’s argument that people only believe in God because “they have been taught from early infancy to do it” or for their “wish for safety” is certainly inconsistent with my own free road to sensing the nature and context of God (Figure 1)—and I am not the only one on such a road.

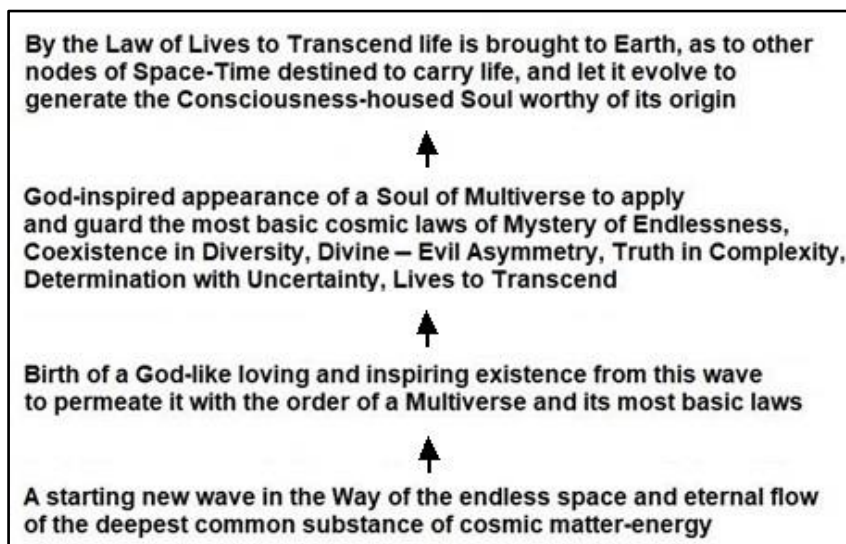


Figure 1. Key elements of the cosmological neuroscientific concept of God and its environment.

### **Criticism of Russell’s One-Sided Negative Judgement on the Role of Religions in History**

This is Russell’s key sentence on religions (Russell, 1957): “I regard it as a disease born of fear and as a source of untold misery to the human race.” (p. 24). He continues by saying that “The three human impulses embodied in religions are fear, conceit and hatred” (p. 44). And his conclusion is:

The knowledge exists by which universal happiness can be secured... The chief obstacle to its utilization for that purpose is the teaching of religions.... It is possible that mankind is on the threshold of a golden age, but if so, it will be necessary first to slay the dragon that guards the door, and this dragon is religion. (Russell, 1957, p. 47)

Ever since these have been published, bestseller atheist authors (Hitchens, 2007; Dawkins, 2008, etc.) have been citing Russell’s system of thoughts as their major influence.

Cosmological neuroscience appreciates this system of thoughts. I highlighted Narendra Jadhav's related warning that "Today there are 165 million Dalits... and they continue to suffer India's 3500-year-old caste system... as Hindus believe that God created the caste system" (Ludvig, 2023a, p. 423) described in the ruthless social commands of the Rig-Veda. I didn't hide my opinion either that European powers robbed and colonized half of the world "in the name of spreading Jesus' words" (Ludvig, 2023a, p. 423) and that although Muhammad taught in his Farewell Sermon that "...Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over and Arab... except in piety and good action" (Ludvig, 2023b, p. 79), his followers killed each other in the field of Karbala and massacred thousands after invading Constantinople.

Yet, these exclusively negative views on religions are as senseless as the closed views of religious fanatics. Figure 2 lets religions be seen from the wider window of the Law of Truth in Complexity:

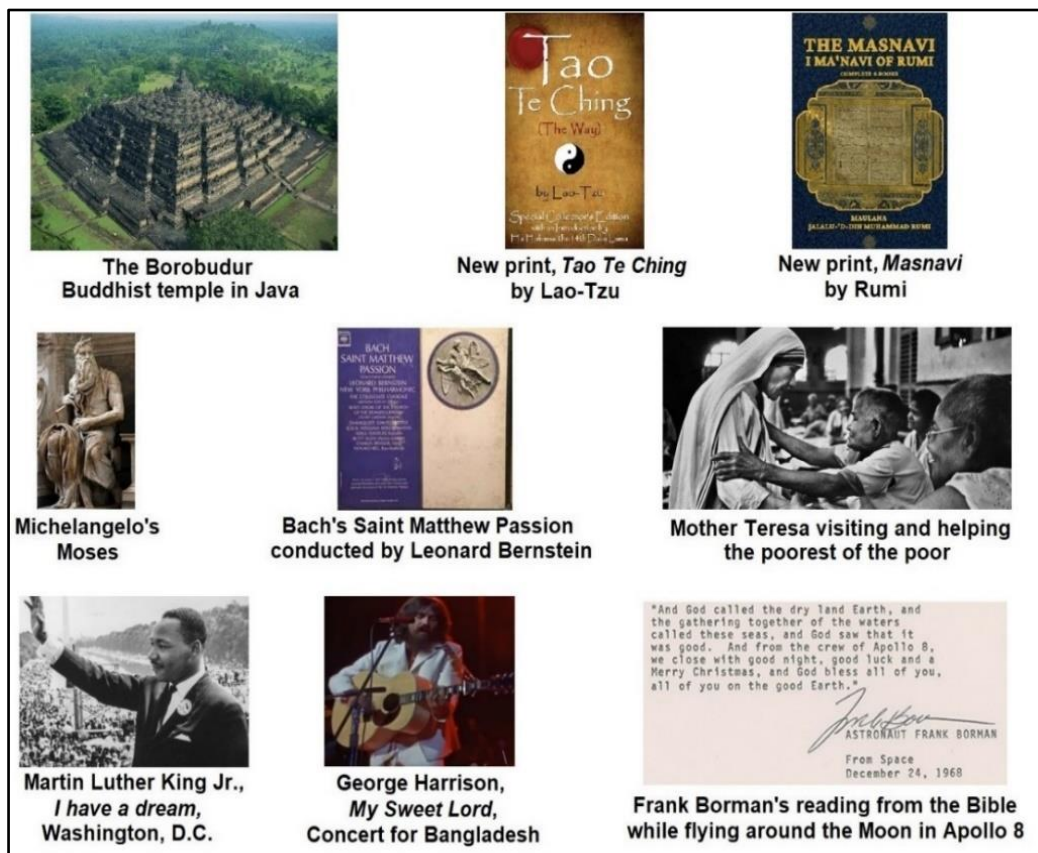


Figure 2. If the reader processes the common message of these nine moments in history, he or she can no longer deny that religions, however diverse they are, not only moved history forward but did it with goodwill and splendid creativity.

Please consider: don't the terraces and dome of the 9th century Borobudur temple translate with still mesmerizing architecture the Buddhist aims to elevate life's decades to divinity? Don't Lao Tzu's 2400 years old *Tao Te Ching* and Rumi's 800 years old *Masnavi* still represent the greatness of Taoism and Islam, respectively, in every bookstore and library of the world? Doesn't the Christian Michelangelo's masterpiece on Moses or the Jewish Leonard Bernstein's unforgettable presentation of the Saint Matthew Passion prove the true harmony between religions, however different they are on their surface? Didn't the spiritual acts of the Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr., or George Harrison better the world while Frank Borman connected the space-age to God?

The contradictory facts of religions (Table 1, Figure 2) can be reconciled with Russell's own thoughts. For he stressed: "... the teaching of Christ, as it appears in the Gospels, has had extraordinarily little to do with the ethics of Christians" (Russell, 1957, p. 25). And his 1957 book also included these relevant words on Buddhism originally published in 1930: "What is true to Christians is equally true to Buddhism. The Buddha was amicable and enlightened ... But the Buddhist priesthood—as it exists, for example, in Tibet—has been obscurantist, tyrannous and cruel in the highest degree." (Russell, 1957, p. 25).

The point is that the superhuman insights of Zarathustra, Moses, Lao Tzu, Siddhartha Gautama, Jesus, or Muhammad into the relationship between human existence and divine realms have been simply impossible to fully comprehend by their worshipping followers whose less capable minds typically brought these insights down to their daily routine of life with all of its competitive, irrational, passion-filled impulses.

The deeply Christian mind of Queen Isabella I of Castile was too occupied with reconquering the Iberian Peninsula from its Muslim occupiers and with making decisions on the fantastic plan of Columbus in the late 15th century while navigating in her family struggles as a mother of five to fully understand the evil of the practice of Inquisition and the barbarity of the expulsion of Jews from Spain which she approved—however both acts were absolutely against everything Jesus taught. Or in our time, the high-minded, 1991 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, deeply committed to the Buddhist Faith that gave her strength to guide Burma's democratic transition, still failed to comprehend the right of her country's minority Muslims to live according to their own conscience and agreed with military actions against them—however none of Siddhartha Gautama's Eightfold Path agrees with such violence against fellow humans.

Then what could be expected from the less intelligent multitude? Did the crusaders know what they were doing when killing the people of Jerusalem in the name of Jesus? Were the hijackers of the planes of September 11, 2001, fully aware of the crime they were about to commit in the name of Muhammad against thousands of innocents? The truth, therefore, is that it is not Moses' *Ten Commandments*, Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount*, Buddha's *Sermon at Benares*, or Muhammad's *Farewell Sermon* that are the dragons guarding the door of the golden age for humanity, even if Bertrand Russell said so, but it is the lack of proper education of the masses and the corruptness of most of their leaders that block that door—in the same way today as throughout history.

### **Reverence for Russell's Disclosure of His Own System of Beliefs**

The courageous, honest, and always helpful life of Bertrand Russell, dedicated to goodness and education, is one proof among many that the moral commands of Conscience can be followed without claiming any divine inspiration or belonging to any religious organization. Thus, the lives of atheists committed to their Conscience can run on as admirable courses as the religious lives of Maimonides, Rumi, Pope John Paul II, or Rabindranath Tagore and their less known but equally pious fellow compatriots. The only difference is that the men and women of Faith are connected, knowingly or unknowingly, to the Cosmic Soul astronaut Edgar Mitchell sensed this way:

What I experienced during the three-day trip home was nothing short of an overwhelming sense of universal connectedness. I actually felt what has been described as an ecstasy of unity. And there was the sense that our presence as space travelers and the existence of this universe itself, was not accidental, but there was an intelligent process at work. (Mitchell, 2022, p. 4)

Yet, it must be admitted, this recognition is not as important for moral behavior as air for life. What is as important for moral behavior as air for life is what the Russell expressed in this sentence: "The good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge." No scripture states this better. But all scriptures want to say the same thing.

### Discussion

This paper examined Bertrand Russell's main arguments (Table 1) against the existence of God and his strongly negative opinion on the role of religions in human affairs. These main arguments were: (1) The idea that God is a First Cause is invalid, because there is no reason to suppose that the world had a beginning at all; (2) If there were reasons for God to issue the observed natural laws and not others then God Himself was subject to law and thus He is just an intermediary; (3) Considering all the defects of the world one cannot consider God as an omnipotent designer; (4) If God created both right and wrong then it is no longer a significant statement that God is good; And (5) most people believe in God just because they have been taught from early infancy to do it and because they hope God provides safety for them.

Based on its key elements (Figure 1), cosmological neuroscience disagrees with these arguments because: (1) Although the world is probably eternal, it cannot mean that the particular cosmic wave that carries our Universe shouldn't have had a beginning; (2) Although there were reasons for the natural laws which God issued, it cannot diminish the creative magnificence of this act, intermediary or not; (3) Although the world is indeed full of defects, they are as much parts of the cosmic order as its splendors, due to their common roots in the Law of Coexistence in Diversity; (4) Although right and wrong may ultimately be both in God's blueprint, He is still benevolent due to the Law of Divine-Evil Asymmetry permitting wrong only under the dominance of right; And (5) although many believe in God only because they were taught to do so and hope it provides safety, this is an oversimplification unable to explain the genuine Faith of those who experienced God with free reason and will—including the author of this article.

The devastating judgement of Russel that religions have been just “a source of untold misery to the human race” was also examined by the cosmological neuroscientific sense of the Law of Truth in Complexity. As a brief article, this paper could not detail all the positive social changes—such as the respect of human life, obligation of helping the poor, duty to improve the status of women, education for peace and divine goals—with which the religions of goodness enriched history. But the paper did remind the reader of the God-inspired work of Lao Tzu, Rumi, Michelangelo, the Bach-interpreting Leonard Bernstein, the nun Mother Teresa, preacher Martin Luther King Jr., spiritual George Harrison and others including the architects of the Borobudur temple and astronauts like Frank Borman who read from the Bible while flying around the Moon (Figure 2).

Yet, the paper ended with the central thought of Bertrand Russell that “The good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge”, to emphasize that if committed to their Conscience atheists like him can live as moral lives as the men and women of Faith—the difference is being nothing else than sensing or not the Soul that permeates the cosmos with love.

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Watching my beloved aunt, Gizella Ludvig, to go to her little church in my childhood's anti-religious Communist world whenever she could, yet never forcing me to share her devotion; absorbing the wonder of Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*; encountering the mystery of the Transformation Music from Wagner's *Parsifal*; realizing that my only real friend in academic life, the Swedish-American Professor of Surgery, John Gunnar Kral, was an atheist; and feeling love from my daughter Krista and sister Agnes though neither of them has ever pretended to be a particularly religious person were all crucial experiences for forming the view of this paper.

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