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Why Doesn't God Need a Creator?

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The problem of “what created God?” is summarized well by Bertrand Russell’s rather dismissive treatment of the First Cause argument:

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 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.^[1]

Serious Metaphysicians Don't Dismiss First Cause

The major thrust of Russell’s argument concerns the universality of the causal principle. Russell believes that “First Cause arguments” are based on the assumption that “everything must have a cause.” If any metaphysician seriously assumed this, then he would be liable to Russell’s judgment that his argument is (stupidly) open to the question, “What caused God?” Fortunately, I can attest that very few metaphysicians in history were stupid enough to argue Russell’s “universality of causation,” making his rendition of “First Cause arguments” a straw man. It should be noted that in the three philosophical proofs given in NPEG (Chapters Three through Five), it was never assumed that “everything has a cause.” Indeed, the assumption was quite the contrary.

In the metaphysical proof (given in Chapter 3 of NPEG), a complete disjunction was given: In all reality there is either only conditioned (caused) realities or there is at least one unconditioned

(uncaused) reality. This proof does not assume that everything has a cause, but rather demonstrates that an unconditioned reality (i.e., an uncaused reality) would have to exist if the hypothesis that “all reality is conditioned” entails that nothing exist. It does entail this. And hence, the proof does not fall prey to the question, “What caused God?” because this question, within the context of the proof, would be “What caused the unconditioned (uncaused) reality?” which is, of course, absurd. The Lonerganian argument rests on grounds similar to the metaphysical one (see Chapter 4, Section II.A of NPG), and so does not fall prey to Russell’s objection for the same reasons.

In the third proof (given in Chapter 5 of NPEG), it was not assumed that everything had to have a cause, and a first uncaused caused was likewise not assumed. Rather, it was shown that a first cause of past time had to exist because the hypothesis of infinite past time contradicted the constitutive nature of time necessary to prevent contradictions in history. Thus, a first uncaused cause was shown to be necessary, and further, to transcend temporality altogether.

In sum, all three proofs never assumed the universality of the causal principle (“everything must have a cause”). Indeed, every proof assumed the hypothetical possibility of the contrary (i.e., that an uncaused reality could exist).

Russell’s statement also includes another objection, namely that proofs of God have inadequate definitions of causation: “The philosophers and the men of science have got going on cause, and it has not anything like the vitality it used to have...”^[2] Since the days of Hume^[3] and Kant,^[4] the objection has been raised that we do not know precisely what a cause is. In recent years in the areas of quantum mechanics and Relativity Theory, the notion of causation has expanded enormously to include information in quantum fields, changes in space-time geometry, non-aggregative motion in plasmas, and a host of other non-linear, non-experienceable, seeming causal relationships. Most philosophers and scientists do not believe they understand one one-hundredth of the possible manifestations of causes. But one does not have to understand or experience the full range of causation in order to use some general principles of causation within the arguments for God’s existence.

Recall for a moment that science is quite different from metaphysics. Science seeks to understand the particulars of data (say, causation within a quantum field), while metaphysics uses completely disjunctive categories with the most general definition possible. Thus, the only definition of causation with which the above three proofs are concerned is what is completely disjunctive to “an unconditioned reality” (first and second proofs), and “a creator of past time outside of this universe” (third proof). These proofs do not require an experience or understanding of every possible manifestation of the above three references to the “caused.” Indeed, they do not have to make recourse to the notion of “causation” (with all of its historical baggage) at all.

Recourse was made to three categories which could adequately cover the entire range of action, interaction, interrelationship, and energy emission in the General Theory of Relativity, Quantum Theory, quantum cosmology, string theory, etc. – namely, “conditioned realities” (realities which depend on the fulfillment of conditions of any kind for their existence) and “conditions” (any reality upon which a conditioned reality depends for its existence) and “unconditioned reality” (a reality which does not depend on conditions of any kind for its existence). Conditioned realities and conditions can include space-time manifolds, electromagnetic fields, quantum fields, plasma fields, positions in the space-time manifold, structures of complexes, magnetic monopoles – literally any reality which is not unconditioned.

Dependence on conditions is all that needs to be known in order for the proof to function. The kind of condition is absolutely irrelevant to the functioning of the proof. No doubt, in the future, the meaning of causation will be enhanced and changed with respect to the kinds of conditions and conditioned realities. But what will remain unchanged is that there will be conditioned realities, and that these realities will not, by themselves, be able to exist without an unconditioned reality. Furthermore, what will remain unchanged is that an unconditioned reality must be absolutely simple (proved in Chapter 3, Section II.B of NPEG) and unrestricted intelligibility (proved in Chapter 4, Section II.B of NPEG); and that absolute simplicity and unrestricted intelligibility must be unique; which means that everything else in reality must be conditioned. This puts to rest Russell’s further criticism that “if there can be anything without a cause, it may just as well be the world as God.”

By now it will be clear that the first two proofs do not assume that realities need a cause. Far from it – they actually demonstrate that all realities which are not absolutely simple and unrestrictedly intelligible must be conditioned (caused) realities. So long as the proofs require nothing more than these most generic, completely disjunctive definitions of “causation,” philosophers and scientists can keep changing and expanding their views of causation without affecting the intelligibility or the validity of the three above-mentioned proofs.

We now proceed to Russell’s third objection, namely, “how do we know that there are not many uncaused realities?” The only reason this question comes up is because Russell has not analyzed any real proofs for God’s existence – but only his strawman argument. If he had read any of the proofs which resemble the two proofs in NPEG Chapters Three and Four, he would have noticed that after proving that there must be at least one uncaused reality, most metaphysicians prove that there can only be one uncaused reality (see NPEG Chapter Three, Section III and Chapter Four, Section II.C). After showing that there can be only one uncaused reality, it is easy to show that everything else in all reality must be caused. This follows by a simple disjunctive deduction (i.e. everything else besides the one uncaused reality must be caused). Thus, these proofs do not assume that there can only be one uncaused reality; they prove it. Russell’s third objection, then, is irrelevant to these proofs, and as we can see, the proofs of God actually help to clarify the caused status of everything else in reality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, if Russell had assessed any rigorous proofs for the existence of God, he would never have asked the question, “what created God?” Rigorous proofs first demonstrate that there must be at least one uncaused cause (They certainly do not assume that everything must be caused as Russell suggests). Rigorous proofs then go on to demonstrate that there can only be one uncaused cause, which leads inevitably to the deduction that everything else besides the one uncaused cause, must be caused.

Footnotes

1. ↑ Russell 1957, pp. 6-7.
2. ↑ Russell 1957, pp. 6-7.
3. ↑ Hume 1969, pp., 58-60.
4. ↑ Kant 1965, pp. 205, 230, and 253. He uses his problematic notion of causality to show “problems” in the First Cause argument. See, for example, pp. 389-390, 409ff, 415ff, 464ff. Notice that Kant defines causality according to the linear dynamics of seventeenth and eighteenth century (Newtonian) physics, limiting its usefulness in contemporary physics and ontology.