



On God and Religion (Great Books in Philosophy)

Bertrand Russell, Al Seckel (Editor)

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Al Seckel has rescued many of Bertrand Russell's best essays on religion, free thought, and nationalism from their resting places in obscure pamphlets, hard-to-find books, and out-of print periodicals to form a superb compilation.

On God and Religion (Great Books in Philosophy) Details

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Jake says

This book is a posthumous collection of religious-themed essays by Bertrand Russell, published 16 years after his death. I came upon this book on the recommendation of a friend, a Psychology professor I know, who mentioned Russell's famous essay *Why I am not a Christian*. I had previously read Russell's *A History of Western Philosophy* and found it absolutely captivating. I picked up this collection with high hopes.

The first essays of the collection are *My Religious Reminiscences* and *First Efforts*. They are primarily autobiographical in nature, and offer an interesting glimpse into the childhood of a man who the editor of this work calls "without question one of the most productive and brilliant thinkers of the 20th century." They speak of his solitary childhood, and his feeling of intellectual entrapment under the guardianship of his grandmother which led him to turn his reflections inward. One gets the sense that this hardship led Russell as a boy to think more deeply on religious subjects than many do in a lifetime.

Why I Am Not A Christian is one of Russell's more famous essays, but I found it less than compelling. He first outlines a few historical proofs of God's existence, dismissing each with relatively simplistic swipes. He then mentions a few Biblical accounts which call into question Christ's character, and ends with his thesis that "Religion is based, I think, primarily and mainly on fear". This essay may be a fair description of why Russell himself is not a Christian, but as a broad-reaching case for atheism it falls short. For this purpose, I found much more compelling another essay which I read nearly concurrently (Ironically written by a Christian!), *Arguments For Atheism* by John O'Leary-Hawthorn, part the collection *Reason for the Hope Within* (ed Michael J. Murray).

Regardless of my disappointment with the essay that led me to this collection of Russell's works, I found the remainder to be very enjoyable. My thoughts could fill pages, but I will focus on what is perhaps the most whimsical and entertaining essay of the collection, *An Outline of Intellectual Rubbish*. In this, Russell surveys many widely held beliefs in the realm of religion, history, and pseudo-science, as well as some more narrowly-held beliefs of individuals he has encountered over the years. The essay is laced with a dry, British wit: one can picture Russell faintly smirking to himself as he writes the words. The tone is haughty: it is of one who is certain of the superiority of his own views; nonetheless the gems of subtle wit dispersed throughout had me rereading it two or three times. One of my favorite examples comes while Russell is poking fun at Christian doctrine: "the whole conception of 'Sin' is one which I find very puzzling, doubtlessly owing to my sinful nature." One gets the sense by the end that Russell viewed the world as his intellectual playground. He walked through life collecting ideas and ideologies as an entomologist might collect beetles, and through doing so came to a rare understanding of the things that make people tick.

Russell was a prolific and compelling writer. In this collection, he espouses on complex philosophical issues with a stunning clarity. This collection of essays is one of those rare books that, having returned it to the library, I am tempted to purchase and have on my shelf, always at hand.

Jerry Pogan says

I enjoy reading Bertrand Russell because his philosophy reinforces my own beliefs. Many of his articulations

help to clarify my own thoughts. He was truly a brilliant man.

Paolo says

"And do you think? That unto such as you,
A maggot-minded, fanatic crew,
God gave the secret, and denied it me?
Well, well, what matters it?
Believe that, too."

- Omar Al Khayam to the Israelites

Great arguments. The burden of proof lies on the believer, on the ones that made the assumption.

Kevin Stephany says

I don't agree with everything Russell wrote on the subject of religion. I do have immense respect for his willingness to express controversial views during an era much less tolerant than our own. For that alone I give the book five stars.

Peter McLoughlin says

I was first introduced to Russell ironically enough at Catholic University. I had taken an Analytic Philosophy course where Russell figured prominently and became interested in his writing. I have read much of Russell's work both popular and technical. As a philosopher like Nietzsche he is a lively and accessible writer and hence a very popular philosopher. He is much easier to digest than a Heidegger or Kant. I had never had much interest in religion and found church as a child boring but I did not have strong opinions on religion either way. Russell like the new atheists of recent years will get one off the fence one way or another when it comes to matters of faith. Reading him you will no longer be "luke warm" to quote Paul but will come to a decision yea or nay about religion. Russell has a lighter touch than the new atheists and although engages in some polemics it is nowhere near as vituperative as todays crusaders against religion. In an essay "an outline of intellectual rubbish" Russell strikes both hilarious notes and quite serious ones in the same essay. The only omission I will not is that the collection does not contain " A free man's worship" one of Russell's most famous essays on religion. If one wants to hear the arguments of the "new" atheists delivered in a gentler and wittier manner this is a good place to start.

Sam "The Record Man" says

I just love Bertrand Russell.

Yohan dhiwa says

Pemikiran yang diilhami dengan hati.

Mark James says

This collection of writings from Russell's long philosophical life is oddly compiled. You'll read one that is clear as day while the other is steeped in historical reference so as to totally obscure the content to a neophyte. That's not to criticize his writing - rather to marvel at the flexibility of his mind and his ability to retain such a diversity of information.

Maurizio Manco says

"Gli uomini tendono a credere a tutto ciò che si confà alle loro passioni. Quelli crudeli credono in un dio crudele, e usano la loro fede per giustificare le loro crudeltà. Solo quelli miti e generosi credono in un dio mite e generoso, ma costoro sarebbero miti e generosi in ogni caso."

(La fede di un razionalista [1947], p. 80)

Mai Radhiallah says

"Karena manusia bergerak ke depan, segala yang baik tidak lagi baik"

Apa yang terjadi pada kau, Mai ? Setelah berhabis masa dengan tulisan-tulisan Russell setahun lama-nya ? Adakah iman kau semakin kuat atau jatuh merudum termakan idea-idea Russell. Soal hati kecil aku. Aku tidak puas lagi dengan sajian-sajian idea buku ini sebenar-benarnya. Bacaan-bacaan begini sering kali buat aku terlelap dealam keadaan buntu.

Lindsey says

Fantastic book from a fantastic free thinker! I also thought it was an easy read for a philosophy text. One of my favorite passages from the book (it is long but well worth it):

"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 the 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 round 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 fit place to live in, instead of the sort of place that the Churches in all these centuries have made it.

Well said Bertrand!

Adi says

Dont judge a book by its title..

tajuk memang gempak tapi buku ni langsung tak menggugah. keseluruhan buku ni cuma menghentam agama kristian dan dalil yg diutarakan penulis ni ternyata basi dan tak mengagumkan langsung.

Kalau aku buat list 100000 manusia paling genius di dunia.. bertrand russell takkan masuk dalam list aku, sebab dia akan aku masukkan ke dalam satu kelompok lagi iaitu '**top 5 list penjaja teori hafalan**' . Russell lebih kepada tukang komen yang berpaut pada fikiran orang lain, dan kalau ada komentar yang benar-benar kritis pun, cumalah yg dipetik dari kata-kata voltaire dan mill.

Tajuk buku juga langsung tak ada kaitan dengan kandungan. Russell tak percaya tuhan tapi dia suka membaca buku tentang agama-agama lain yg ada di dunia. Dari agama pagan sampai agama samawi.

Russell bukanlah agnostik terulung, dia menolak wujudnya tuhan kerana kisah2 dari injil yang tak sesuai dengan logik akalnya.

Dalam melihat situasi ini secara reverse, dia sebenarnya adalah seorang yang mahu hidup di dalam dunia yg disukainya , bukan sebuah dunia yang disediakan untuknya.

Dalam erti kata lainnya, sekiranya buku das kapital tak sesuai logik seorang penguasa kilang, adakah itu bermakna Karl marx tak pernah wujud di dunia ?

Selain itu, russell juga jenis mempercayai sains bulat-bulat. walaupun peringkat sains yang masih bersandar pada teori semata-mata. Dia mempercayai darwin dan komunis yg disifatkannya ilmiah. sedangkan itu bukan tanda intelektual. Kita tahu zaman newton, penganut sains percaya wujudnya tarikan dari dalam bumi yg dipanggil graviti sehingga datang Einstein dengan teori relativitinya memadamkan habis teori newton tersebut. Malah sejak zaman greek lagi, pengetahuan sains sering berubah2. Menyangkal adam dengan teori monyet yang mungkin akan dipadamkan oleh ahli sains akan datang bukanlah sesuatu kongkrit.

Russell bukanlah seorang pemandu bas, tetapi dia cuma salah seorang 'penumpang' yang berkongsi bas dengan ahli teologi dan para athiest. Yang kepercayaan mereka selalunya ditentukan oleh orang2 lain.

Atika says

good books! i like it

Hugh Coverly says

Quite simply, Bertrand Russell makes sense. Not surprisingly, Russell was not mentioned at all in seminary. I only knew of Russell as Alfred North Whitehead's collaborator on Principia Mathematica; he was spoken of in hushed tones as a philosophical gadfly and misfit. This collection of essays ranging from the 1920s to the 1950s is a wonderful introduction to Russell's philosophy. Russell writes in a clear language avoiding unnecessary jargon (with the possible exception of "The Essence of Religion") and he pulls no punches;

nothing and no one escapes his critical eye. Some may find Russell too optimistic and a bit naïve, but then he remained hopeful after two world wars and in the midst of the Cold War. It's time to reevaluate Russell's contributions to philosophy and the resurgence in atheistic discourse.
