



The Free Man's Worship: An Integration into Bertrand Russell's Existentialism

By

Obiagwu Obinna Victor (PhD)¹, Okwara Donatus Uzoma (PhD)², Obasi Samuel Ugochukwu (PhD)³,
Agama Christian Sunday (PhD)⁴, Okorie Nkechi Fidelia⁵

¹²³⁴Directorate of General Studies,
Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Nigeria

⁵Business Administration and Management
Kingsley Ozumba Mbadiwe University

Abstract

The moralization of Nature and religious interpretation of Natural processes coupled with the scientific value laden determination of Nature, create a life of anxiety unto absurdity. To the extent that human consciousness and orientation to oneself is nothing but a dissipated search and process. Confusion reigns. Mother Nature receives obnoxious interpretation and as such the ways of Nature must be rethought if humans must be Natural. Naturality again has to be hominized for it to be acceptable to them. The process towards hominization of Nature or Naturalization of humans yet plunges one into a hydra-headed problem. Religion in all its ramifications is one such process of reconciliation which has left its creators in a serious dilemma, a state which has not only stifled human freedom but threatens to alienate one from self. Bertrand Russell thinks that the solution lies in a human's intrinsic power of creativity and imagination. This has to be employed towards a redefinition of religion and the act of worship, a redefinition of self as oriented towards its own ideals of goodness, freedom and a submissive acceptance of one's helplessness before the powers of Nature. This attitude is regarded as the free [man's] human worship which shall be appreciated to underscore its merits and demerits as an approach towards the redemption of human beings from existential dilemma and chaos.

Keywords: Existentialism, freedom, worship, nature, human life

Introduction

The purposely question of the universe and human existence has been a central issue in learning since the dawn of consciousness. Human beings have always wondered why they are here and how they came to be here and from where they did come. There various answers to the above statement. The most important of all these is the self's response to its "thrown-ness". One response is the invention of religion either as a result of fear of that which it was conscious of but could not really conceptualize or as a means of showing gratitude and reverence to that which spares it and provides for it in the midst of incomprehensible turmoil (Glenn,1941). Since the invention of religion due to whatsoever reason, it has dominated the center of human existence any and every attempt to understand this issue is simply the question of redefining and understanding of the very essence of human nature. As an integral part of human existence, it is viewed as somewhat the only way towards making sense out of the seemingly senseless universe.

The problem now is to determine what this religion consist of, the process of worship, the subject/object of worship, the purpose of worship and even the meaning of worship. This is sequel to the issues of scientific determination of human conditions and trado-mythical assumptions which create a situation of meaninglessness, senselessness, blindness and hopelessness. In this situation, Russell thinks it is better to do away with institutionalized religion and invent a religion anchored on the freewill and indomitable human spirit. Such is the religion and right behavioral principle that can confront the above stated human condition. This he did by quoting Mephistopheles history of creation. By the way, Mephistopheles is a fictional being and according to medieval Demonology is one of the seven Arch-devils to whom Faust in the Faust legend sold his soul (Marlowe, www.britannica.com). This history of creation has been attempted by many fields of life. Here a little review of the scientific account of beginning shall be attempted. The scientific account is to be reviewed because it was well known to Russell and also it was one of the agitations of his mind that prompted the question of the free human worship.

Evolution/Creation of the Universe and Human Life

Since the dawn of the 18/19 century, the term evolution entered prominently into human consciousness and ever since then has remained a household term referring to the account of beginning. It is of various types but the concern here is the scientific perspective. For the scientist, the physical universe started in time and as a process and product of chance. The forces and causes of this process of evolution had no provision of the end they were achieving hence the existence of physical universe and human life thereof was never a premeditated action. It was all a process of accidental collocation of natural forces and atoms that gave rise to what is now known as the physical universe and human life (Monod 1972, 118).

One of the major models of this process is known as the big bang model of Evolution which was a theory propounded by a priest-scientist and Theorist George Lemaitre. According to this model, it started around some 15 billion years ago; some unknown forces formed the primeval egg which got so hot due to some natural forces to the extent that it exploded hence the bang which set so many forces into an irreversible but speedy motion. This irreversibility aspect of evolution has been defended by Darwin and more prominently Jacques Monod, Herbert Spencer and many neo-Darwinian philosophers and scientist. While it is not the wish to rehearse the evolutionary account of the scientist, suffice it to say that Russell saw the story of creation of the bible and the scientific account of evolution together with Mephistopheles' account which is akin to the scientific as that which plunges man into absurdity and into purposelessness. One cannot but agree more with him especially as the scientists are seen laboring frantically to solve the inconsistencies noticeable in the account of beginning. For example, the generally accepted big bang model is posited as the start - in - time of all beginnings that is to say; there was nothing whatsoever before the bang so how did the primordial natural forces/energy come about and from where? Since also the big bang was the statement of the creation of matter, from where did the primeval atom or egg get the refined matter that constituted it? If there was no matter where did the matter of which the universe is made of come from? Hence is it possible for something to be derived from nothing? Perchance it is possible, how life came to be and sustained in the primeval chaotic world where the conditions necessary and sufficient for life were not just possible? For there to be life, there has to be a D.N.A and RNA and each has a repair mechanism, now singly non of them will ever survive, two of them cannot grow simultaneously otherwise one molecule of sugar or protein from either of the two strands will outrightly cancel the process thereby making it impossible unless there was a selector carefully laying them side by side in the appropriate quotient who or what is the selector. Jacques Monod will attribute it to chance, randomness and perturbation that did engender a slight change hence a mutation which once done continues irreversibly while commanding with absolute necessity every other process of development (Monod 1972, 122).

As the foregoing projects, life and human being came as a mistake, there was no end or purpose to the whole process and as it were humanity is doomed unto utmost destruction. Russell (1986,536) accepts this human condition of accidental beginning, purposeless existence, hopeless and catastrophic end as was deducible from the scientific account of the origin of life and the demonic version [Mephistopheles' rendition], thus he would say,

And such a world, if anywhere, our ideals hence forward must find a home... that man [a human being] is a product of causes which had no prediction of the end they were achieving, that his/her origin, his/her growth, his/her hopes, fears, love, belief

are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms, that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system and that the whole temple of human achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins all these things if but quite beyond dispute are so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand.

How can survival in such a strange world be possible, what can humanity do to appreciate its uniqueness? Yes a human being is powerless before the powers of Nature. Nature is simply omnipotent and there is no way around the laws of Nature in their cosmic magnitude. Humanity is but a speck in the immensity of Nature. If humanity is a part of Nature and is in Nature confined, is it not preponderant and preposterous to challenge or rebel against the powers of Nature as Prometheus and medieval fathers philosophy of rebellion would suggest. Russell would adopt humanistic approach which seems to be an appreciation and acceptance of the unfathomable powers of Nature and the fate of humanity thereof, hence suggesting a process of naturalizing oneself by renunciation and proper integration of oneself with Nature by using the very powers of nature within one to create oneself within Nature. He however cautioned against a slavish submission to the powers of Nature. Idolization of Nature and its power without recourse to the freedom of the integral human essence and, sheepish obedience to the laws of Nature without efforts to understand and at least the meaning of the workings of Nature is equivalent to the salvage who invented religion and the concept of God without understanding and due to fear, the salvage had no idea of their essence as free moral agent at least, they were so preoccupied with fear and their impotence before the powers of Nature and as such made terrible mistakes. According to him, it was this slavish attitude that portrayed the then invented God to appear wicked and ruthless but as morality has grown bolder and humanity has reached the dawn of consciousness it behoves them now to know as he would say; "That in spite of death and the seal of the parental control (man) human beings are yet free during their brief years to examine or criticize, to know and in imagination to create to them alone in the world with which they are acquainted this freedom belongs and in this lies their superiority to the resistless forces that control their outward life(Russell 1986, 537).

It is important to note that this freedom that makes the difference is yet a gift of Nature. It is the ability to think that makes a human being free, without this, humanity remains in the primitive stage of existence and can never make out meaning in Nature.

Freedom and the Ideal Free Person

The pessimistic and absurd picture painted by Russell is to make a case for human freedom. Granted that humanity is entrapped and confined by the laws of Nature to their physicality, there is a gift from Nature which makes the difference. This is the ability to go beyond the physical bounds through the mental power of a human being. This gift of Nature to humanity is freedom which simply is, a quality of the human mind to weigh and choose and act in whatsoever manner without constraint or coercion. Russell recognizes physical restraint and confinement of humans but believes that humanity is free like in this context to redefine oneself to reshape and re- appreciate their "given-ness" and make a meaning out of it. Just like in the myth of Sisyphus by Albert Camus, it is the responsibility of humans to chart the way of their existence and destiny. Here Russell makes a case for the indomitability of the human spirit that which does not blame its fate on any external force / cause: to do this, is to worship the crude powers of Nature, it is slavish and sheepish submission. Thus, he would say:

In this lies a human being's freedom: in determination to worship only the God created by our own love of the good, to respect only the heavens which inspire the insight of our best moments. In action, in desire, we must submit perpetually to the tyranny of outside force but in thought, in aspiration we are free, free from our fellow men, free from the petty planet on which our bodies impotently crawl, free even while we live from the tyranny of death (Russell 1986, 539).

From the foregoing, it is evident that the essence of Russell's rendition is to produce a truly dignified moral agent hence the ideal free person. A free person for him is one who has been able to assert this quality of the mind over the thoughtless force of Nature. In that, the person has learnt and been able to develop an unfettered contemplation of life through the process of resignation and renunciation of personal transitory wishes and desires. One who has

been able to freely submit the personal selfish desires through the process of resignation, such a person is the ideal free person, for thought here is no longer beclouded and as such whosoever is free in the mind is free indeed and from such a person the whole word of art, philosophy and perfect vision of beauty becomes realizable.

The Free Person in the Art of Worship

The ideal free person as its deducible from Russell's work is one who has accepted the physical entrapment and decides never to be entrapped in the mind even while the proudest and bravest of all Nature forces[tragedy] come knocking. The ideal free person is the honorable one who has resolved never to pattern one's life according to three major forces of Nature namely time, fate and death. One who has decided to understand, think and demystify these forces and most of all to accept them not with a slavish attitude rather with understanding of them as part of human phenomenon. The free person here learns to emancipate oneself by allowing oneself to be consumed with the fire of enthusiasm and passion for eternal things. This also has to do with the contemplation of fate, owing nobody anything except the light of love. This is the religion of love of a free person in an unfortunate and absurd world. It is a religion of emancipation a religion of commitment to one another in the light of love, a religion of personal resignation and renunciation. It is a Naturalized-human world (Oscar 1990, 33).

Conclusion

The scientific expression of the universe as a purposeless and meaningless tomb of human beings can only evoke in such minds as Russell thoughts it to be the way forward. As a thorough humanist, Russell feels that only humanistic doctrines can grant man hope and meaning. Suffice it to say, there have been efforts in correcting the anomaly in scientific account, while there are aspects of evolution which could be said to be eventual. It is important to note that evolution generally is psychical, it did not start from matter to end in matter rather it started in psycho-spiritual ethereal plain of existence before it was materially visible. Hence physical evidence and account of evolution without this immaterial aspect will always leave human beings in a dilemma. This is what Russell tried to solve only that he too assumed the wrong premise that Nature is imperfect whereas if he had seen it as perfect, meaning and purpose would not have been lost. This is the crime of all institutionalized religion to think of Nature as imperfect with man as the self-appointed 'perfector'. Humanity will do itself better if it stops to moralize the workings of Nature and co-operate with it while trying to understand the inherent cosmic laws of creation in Nature otherwise, Nature will always complete and balance the equation which may not go down well with man.

References

- Glean, J. P. (1941). *Cosmology*, London W.C., B. HerderBook co.
- Marlowe, C.; 'Dr. Faustus' in Online Encyclopaedia Britannica, www.britannica.com/.Mephistophels
- Mondo, J. (1972). *Chance and Necessity*, N.Y, Vintage books, 1972, p.118.
- Oscar, B. (1990). *In the Light of Truth*, vol 3, Cleasen & Bosse Lect press.
- Russell, B. (1986). '*Free man's Worship*' in *world of Ideas*, Jacobus A. Lee NY, Bedford books.

