Analytic Atheism?

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> 'My views on religion remain those that I acquired at the age of 16. I consider all forms of religion not only false but harmful. My published works record my views.' Bertrand Russell, letter to *The Humanist*, October 1968, (Perkins ed. 2002: 410).

> None of us would seriously consider the possibility that all the gods of Homer really exist, and yet if you were to set to work to give a logical demonstration that [they] did not exist you would find it an awful job. You could not get such proof. Therefore, in regard to the Olympic gods, speaking to a purely philosophical audience, I would say that I am an Agnostic. But speaking popularly, I think that all of us would say in regard to those gods that we were Atheists. In regard to the Christian God, I should, I think, take exactly the same line (Russell 1949: 91-92)

1. Introduction

Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) was famous as an atheist and famous as an analytic philosopher, indeed famous as one of the founding fathers of the analytic tradition in philosophy. But did his atheism depend on his analytic philosophy or his analytic philosophy on his atheism? More generally, is there some kind of intellectual link between analytic philosophy and atheism? After all, most analytic philosophers are atheists, and would probably agree with the Cambridge philosopher, F.P. Ramsey (the brother of a future Archbishop of Canterbury) that 'Theology is a famous subject which we have realized to have no real object' (Ramsey 1925/1990: 247). Furthermore, the critique of religion was very much part of the ideological agenda for a number of early analytic philosophers, including Russell himself (who lost at least two jobs and missed out on a chance of getting into Parliament because of his public godlessness), the logical positivists of the Vienna Circle (who regarded organized religion, especially in Austria, as a prop to fascism and a support to racism and reaction)[1] and Anthony Flew (who, at least until his

[1] For the cultural and historical background see Hacohen 2000: chs. 2 and 5.

eighties was equally opposed to the dogmas of religion and the policies of the Labour party). On the other hand, a substantial minority of analytic philosophers, including some very distinguished names (such as Anscombe, Geach, Dummett), are, or have been, religious believers, and 'analytical theism', as represented by the likes of Swinburne, Plantinga and the Adams family[2], is very much a going concern. Thus godlessness and godliness both seem to be compatible with a commitment to analytic philosophy. In this the analytic tradition does not differ that much from some other philosophical schools or movements. There have been Christian existentialists such as Kierkegaard and atheistic existentialists such as Sartre, theistic empiricists such as Berkeley and irreligious empiricists such as Hume. The diversity of religious opinions within a single philosophical tradition is partly due to the fact that philosophers on the whole are not disposed to buy suits of opinions off-the-peg (so to speak) but prefer to mix and match. But with analytic philosophy this is all the more likely because analytic philosophy nowadays is not so much a bundle of doctrines as a *tradition*, bound together by a loose bunch of techniques and preoccupations and some shared value judgments about what good philosophy tends to look like. Thus you can combine a taste for formal methods in philosophy and a lively respect for the achievements the early analytic philosophers (including Russell's activities as one of the co-inventors of modern logic) with a wholesale rejection of Russell's naturalism and atheism. And it is the techniques and the preoccupations that make you an analytic philosopher rather than the specific doctrines, even if (as is *not* the case with Russell's atheism) those doctrines were central to analytic philosophy in the days of the founding giants.

That the techniques of analytic philosophy might be used to defend religion was a worry for the logical positivist Otto Neurath (1882-1945), whose own brand of analytic philosophy was devised on purpose to do down metaphysics and religion in the name of science, modernity and socialism. He thought that an undue obsession with logic and semantics on the part of his philosophical comrades might allow religion and metaphysics to creep in by the back door. In a letter to his buddy, the philosopher Rudolf Carnap (1881-1970), he darkly hints at the religious, and specifically Catholic,

[2] Marylyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams

tendencies lurking in the writings of the great Polish logician, Alfred Tarski (1901-1983):

> I am really depressed to see here all the Aristotelian metaphysics in full glint and glamour, bewitching my dear friend Carnap. As often, a formalistic drapery and hangings seduce logically-minded people as you are very much … It is really stimulating to see how the Roman Catholic Scholasticism finds its way into our logical studies which have been devoted to empiricism … [Brentano and the Polish philosophers] begot now Tarski etc and they are God fathers of OUR Carnap too; in this way Thomas Aquinas enters from another door Chicago [where Carnap was working a the time]. (Neurath to Carnap 15/1/43, quoted in Mancosu 2008: 196)[3].

Neurath's fears have been amply fulfilled[4]. For a start, many analytic philosophers nowadays (myself included) take a keen interest in the scholastic philosophers of the Middle Ages and think that the study of their logic and semantics can pay big philosophical dividends. Analytic metaphysics is a major philosophical industry and it is indeed characterized by a free and easy use of logical tools, including tools derived from Tarski and the other Polish logicians such as mereology (Google it!). As for religion, as I have stated already, analytic theism is a big philosophical business, complete with books, journals, conferences and star professors. Furthermore analytic theism isn't just a ghetto affair, an activity pursued in private between consenting theistic adults. It is rather more mainstream than that. Analytic atheists (or at least analytic philosophers who are atheists) draw on the work of analytic theists and analytic theists draw on the work of analytic atheists.

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[3] The oddities of Neurath's style are due to the fact that he was writing to Carnap in English, which was not his first language. A German missive between these two refugees might have aroused the suspicions of the war-time censor who would probably have been keeping an eye on the trans-Atlantic correspondence of two people with such obviously Teutonic names as Carnap and Neurath.

[4] Though in the case of Tarski, Neurath's fears were somewhat overblown. So far from being a partisan of St Thomas, Tarski was a nominalist and a materialist, an atheistic jew whose juvenile conversion to Catholicism had been a purely political gesture. See Greg-Arnold 2008 Fefferman and Fefferman 2004 for details.

To pick a text from my shelves almost at random, William Hasker, author of *God, Time and Knowledge* (1989), who defends the view that it is impossible to reconcile Human Freedom and full-on Foreknowledge, and argues, in consequence, for 'Open Theism', the idea that God himself is in Time and that although he knows everything that can be known, he does not know future contingent singulars – propositions about what free individuals will do – because if their decisions are genuinely free, there is no fact of the matter about what they will do. (If I am genuinely free with respect to my breakfast, then it may be true that I am *likely* to have mussels rather than eggs for breakfast tomorrow, but it is not yet true that I *will* have mussels rather than eggs. And if it isn't yet true, not even God can know it.) Hasker draws on atheistic philosophers such as David Lewis for his theory of conditionals as well as a logical apparatus developed by mostly godless philosophers such as Tarski and Russell.

Neurath would have been deeply disappointed to discover that seventy-odd years down the track this sort of stuff is not only getting published but is held in high regard, even by philosophers such as myself who think that it is founded on falsehoods. He would have been even more shocked to learn that an atheistic philosopher like me, with a strong attachment to the scientific worldview, not only owns and has read such a book but that I actually think that it is *right,* though in a hypothetical sort of way. (I think Hasker is correct. *If God exists*, the He does not have full-on Foreknowledge and is therefore the God of the open theists rather than the timeless creator favoured by traditional theology.) According to Neurath, I should not even have *opinions* about such topics since there are, in a sense, no genuine opinions to be had. For Neurath believed that talk about God is cognitively or factually *meaningless* and hence incapable of truth or falsity (though it may possess some non-factual kind of meaning). Now this is indeed a brand of atheism that was characteristic of early analytic philosophy. It can be derived from verficationism, an idea that was at least *widespread* amongst analytic philosophers from the twenties through to the fifties and maybe even beyond, namely that *synthetic sentences are only factually meaningful if they can be verified (or perhaps falsified) by experience.* Since theological claims *cannot* be verified or falsified, (so the story goes) it follows

that they are not cognitively or factually meaningful, and hence that they are neither true nor false.

It might at first appear that this is not a form of atheism at all, since traditional atheists think it *false* that God exists and *true* that he does not. Thus traditional atheism presupposes that 'God exists' is factually meaningful and that it has a truth-value (namely *false*), and that 'God does not exist' is *also* factually meaningful and has the *opposite* truth-value (namely *true*). All this is denied by the logical positivists in their critique of theology. Russell makes the point in his review of A.J Ayer's famous book *Language, Truth Logic* (1936/1946), the English manifesto for logical positivism:

> [Ayer's] condemnation of "metaphysics" leads to some very sweeping conclusions. For example, the proposition "God exists" is condemned as meaningless; from this follows not only a rejection of theism, but also of atheism, which maintains the equally meaningless proposition "God does not exist," and of agnosticism, which asserts "whether God exists is doubtful." This view is maintained on the double ground that there can be no empirical evidence either for or against the theistic hypothesis, and that the hypothesis is neither logically necessary nor logically impossible … Mr. Ayer is thus led to a view which is opposed equally to the assertions of the orthodox and to the doubts or denials of the sceptics. (Russell 1936)

But is Mr Ayer's view *equally* opposed to the assertions of the orthodox and to the doubts or denials of the sceptics? Surely not. To the godly, the positivist thesis just looks like a particularly insulting form of atheism ('Your claim that God exists is not just false – it doesn't even make sense!'). And the logical positivists and their allies were at least committed to *one* claim that looks very like atheism:

> *The sentence 'God exists' (as usually understood) cannot be used to express a truth.*

This is atheism transposed from the material mode (where we talk about things) to the formal mode (where we talk about words) but it still looks pretty atheistic to me. You are no less an unbeliever if your unbelief is due to the opinion that the beliefs of the orthodox are devoid of cognitive content (and are therefore untrue) than if it is due to the opinion that they *do* have cognitive content but are nonetheless false.

The point is reinforced if we look at Ayer's intellectual autobiography. As was often the case with the early analytic philosophers, Ayer was a teenage atheist long before he became a professional philosopher, and therefore long before his conversion to logical positivism. At Eton he had to take communion, and, as he explains, after taking the sacrament two or three times, 'I began to ask what the performance implied. It was not long before I decided that not only the theory of the Eucharist, but the doctrine of the Trinity, the assumption that Jesus had been divine, and indeed the hypothesis that the universe had been divinely created were all intellectually untenable. I became a militant atheist and annoyed my school fellows, who took little interest in the subject, by haranguing them about such things as the contradictions in the Book of Genesis and the inconsistencies in the Gospels' (Ayer 1992: 9). G. E. Moore, Russell, Broad and Carnap (big names in the early history of analytic philosophy) all tell much the same tale, except that in their cases the Eucharist wasn't the issue, and that, lacking Ayer's rather flamboyant personality, they apparently managed to become teenage atheists without unduly annoying their schoolfellows. (See Moore, 1942: 11-1, Russell 1944: 7-8, Broad 1959: 43-44 and Carnap 1963: 7-9.) They were not moved by verificationism or by any other tenet peculiar to analytic philosophy (which in the days of their youth was either non-existent or just being invented) but by the kinds of arguments accessible to clever but philosophically untrained adolescents in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thus the clincher for Russell was an argument derived from John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), who, unbeknownst to him had consented to act as his secular godfather just a year before his death (See Reeves 2007: 478): 'I believed in God until I was just eighteen, when I found in Mill's *Autobiography* the sentence: 'My father taught me that the question "Who made me?" cannot be answered, since it immediately suggests the further question "Who made God?" ' In that moment I decided that the First-Cause argument is fallacious' (Russell 1944:

8). In the cases of Russell, Broad and Carnap they were also moved by a keen interest in science and the growing conviction that it is difficult to reconcile Christianity with the scientific outlook. (Moore and Ayer, by contrast, were classicists who knew next to nothing about science.) But of course, Ayer *did* become an analytic philosopher, and a verficationist to boot, which means that according to his *official* view 'the atheist's assertion that there is no god is equally [as] nonsensical' as the theist's view that there is one. (Ayer 1946; 115.) Did this mean that he had ceased to be an atheist? Whatever he may have thought at the time, this is not how he felt about things when looking back in later life. . 'In the sixty years since I first became an atheist, I have never yet discovered any good reason to believe in the existence of a deity' (Ayer 1992: 9) – which rather suggests that in his mature opinion he *remained* an atheist throughout the intervening sixty years, including the period when he was a gung-ho verificationist.

Thus verificationist atheism may be a deviant kind of atheism, but it, it is a variant atheism nonetheless. For the verificationist atheist, it remains the case that the great theistic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – are based on a mistake, though the mistake is *linguistic* rather than factual or metaphysical: it is not (as the old-fashioned atheists supposed) the mistake of believing in a non-existent of God but that of believing a set of claims to be factually meaningful and *true* when in reality they are factually meaningless and *incapable* of truth. Of course the claims in question are not false either, but this not being false is hardly a plus – a false statement loses out in the true/false game but a cognitively meaningless statement has not got what it takes to get into the game in the first place. Priests and rabbis, pastors and mullahs are still profoundly wrong, but what they are wrong about is no longer the existence of a Deity but the content of their own pronouncements. Religious believers fail to understand what they themselves are saying, for if they did, they would see that they are not saying anything that can be genuinely believed. At best, they are expressing an emotion or registering a moral commitment.

It is common to offer a consolation prize. Though they are not very clear about it and tend to wrap it up in a lot of double-talk about language games, Wittgenstein and his disciples sometimes seem to be propounding a sort of hush-voiced version of analytic atheism, which earnestly congratulates

religion on its lack of cognitive content ('It's not that kind of language game. It has a different and more profound kind of significance … yadda, yadda, yadda). But with the exception of a few 'Honest to God' theologians, believers on the whole don't seem to have appreciated the compliment despite the reverential tone in which it is commonly proffered[5]. After all, they are most of them still in error, the error being that of misunderstanding their own beliefs.

Verificationist or falsificationist atheism, it appears, is a brand of atheism that is unique to analytic philosophy. I shall be arguing in the second section that it is false, and indeed absurd. But though it was at one time popular it has now been largely abandoned and was probably never the dominant view even amongst analytic philosophers. It was certainly not the view of Bertrand Russell who rejected verificationism, and as the epigraph reveals, believed all forms of religion to be *false* (and indeed harmful) rather than nonsensical or lacking in cognitive content. Moreover, Russell was an atheist long before he became one of the co-inventors of analytic philosophy, and the analytic philosophy that he invented did not have much impact on his atheism. Though he was a Twentieth Century atheist his atheism was largely a Nineteenth Century affair. From an intellectual point of view there is not much difference between the arguments in 'Why I am Not a Christian' and his other atheistical works and the arguments to be found in Mill, Huxley or Clifford, except that Russell has much more of a sense of humour and a more knock-about polemical style[6]. Thus Russell's atheism was not due to his analytic philosophy.

But was his analytic philosophy due to his atheism? The answer is a qualified 'yes'. Analytic philosophy (at least in Britain) arose as a response to the Absolute Idealism of the British Hegelians, Green, Bradley and McTaggart, to which Russell and Moore were briefly converts, and which was then the house philosophy of the British Empire. But Absolute Idealism was

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[5] For a forthright version of this sort of thing see Braithwaite 1955. For a characteristically unctuous, cagey and obscure formulation, see Phillips 1970.
[6] This is not true of more recent champions of atheism within the analytic tradition, such as Mackie 1981, Gale 1991, Sobel 2004 and Howson 2011, who often deploy a range of technical devices – modal logic, Bayesian probability theory and decision theory - to counter the arguments of such the analytic theists as Swinburne and Plantinga, whose work displays a similar level of technological sophistication. What we have here is an intellectual arms race: fun for analytic philosophers but less so for other folk.

itself a response the Victorian crisis of faith. It functioned as a sort methadone program, helping high-minded Victorian intellectuals to get off the hard staff of official Christianity without the usual withdrawal symptoms of 'Death of God' despair. Its key tenet is that although we may *seem* to be material boys and girls living in a material world, this is an Appearance only. In Reality the universe is a sort of unified spiritual whole of which our separate selves are delusory aspects. Russell abandoned Absolute Idealism (and went on the invent analytic philosophy) in part because he realized that it could not deliver the goods: it could not provide any consolation for life's disasters nor could it show (as Russell had once hoped) that even in a godless world it still is more *rational* to be moral than to be selfish. This is the theme of the final section.

2. Atheism, Verification and Falsifiability.

The argument for verificationist atheism (or the verfcationist argument for atheism) goes something like this.

> 1) Cognitively or factually meaningful propositions are either analytic and true, self-contradictory and false, or synthetic and *verifiable*. (Call this the *verifcationist criterion of meaningfulness* or the VCM for short.)
> 2) Theological propositions such as 'God exists', if they are propositions at all, are (or are supposed to be) synthetic.
> 3) But theological propositions are not verifiable.
> Therefore
> 4) Theological propositions such as 'God exists' are not cognitively or factually meaningful.

Roughly speaking, a proposition is supposed to be verifiable if we can specify possible observations or experiences that would (tend to) confirm it. But though the general idea of the VCM *seems* clear enough, endless difficulties arose in the attempt to make it really precise. (Does 'confirm' mean *prove* or merely *provide evidence for*? Are the 'possible' observations *practically* possible or merely *imaginable*?) Successive formulations either included what its proponents meant to *exclude* – such as metaphysical propositions - or

excluded what they meant to *include* – such as scientific laws and findings. (See Hempel 1950, Soames, 2003: ch. 13.) Worse, the VCM seems to be self-refuting however it is formulated. For it divides significant truths into two classes, the analytic and the empirically verifiable, into neither of which it falls. Thus if it is true it is factually meaningless, which means that it is incapable of truth or falsity, and therefore not true. Finally, even if we can get around these difficulties there is a further problem. Premise 3) appears to be false. If, after my death, I were to find myself restored to life in a new body to witness and participate in a scene similar to the Last Judgment as depicted by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel, then I would be very surprised indeed, but I would certainly take it as a strong confirmation of the doctrines of the Christian religion. Some theological propositions, it appears, are verifiable after all.

But mid-century analytic philosophers had a passion for dismissing their opponents' views as senseless, and in a (then) much-discussed, paper Anthony Flew (1923-2010) decided to give it another go (Flew 1955). The reason that 'God exists' is factually meaningless is not that it cannot be *verified* but that it cannot be *falsified*. The argument for falsificationist atheism (or the falsificationist argument for atheism) goes something like this:

> 1) Cognitively or factually meaningful propositions are either analytic and true, self-contradictory and false, or synthetic and *falsifiable* (Call this the *falsificationist criterion of meaningfulness* or the FCM for short.)
> 2) Theological propositions such as 'God exists', if they are propositions at all, are (or are supposed to be) synthetic.
> 3) But they theological propositions are not falsifiable.
> Therefore
> 4) Theological propositions such as 'God exists' are not cognitively or factually meaningful.

The argument trades on a certain asymmetry between verification and falsification. ''I will be resurrected on Judgment Day' is a thesis that I can, in principle, verify. But it is not a thesis that anyone can directly falsify. For

after the last human being dies there will be nobody around to experience the non-resurrection.

There are several things wrong with Flew's argument. To begin with he borrows the idea of falsification from Popper without due acknowledgement and then misapplies it. For Popper falsifiability provides the demarcation criterion between science and *non*-science not (factual) sense and *non*sense. In his view unfalsifiable claims can be perfectly meaningful and even true – it's just that they can't be scientific. (Popper 1963 and Popper 1992.)

Secondly Flew's key argument for Premise 1) rests on an equivocation. He argues that a synthetic proposition can't be factually meaningful unless it is falsifiable in the sense that there is a specifiable state of affairs that would render it false. Maybe so, but by this criterion 'God exists' is perfectly falsifiable since there *is* a specifiable state of affairs that would render it false, namely a God-empty universe. Flew then goes on to conclude that a synthetic proposition can't be factually meaningful unless there is a *detectable* state of affairs that would render it false. But it is one thing to say that a synthetic proposition must rule some things out, but quite another to say that the things it rules out must be things that we can detect. You can't infer the one from the other.

Thirdly, most interesting propositions are not absolutely falsifiable in the sense that Flew's argument requires. Typically, whether or not a given piece of evidence falsifies a proposition depends on what else we assume. (This point is known as the Quine-Duhem thesis.) The fact that I *seem* to see a dagger before me only falsifies the thesis that *there is no dagger in front of me* on the (plausible) assumption that I would not seem to see a dagger unless there were a dagger to see. But if I know myself to be discombobulated by the thought of murdering Duncan and consequently prone to hallucinations, the fact that I *seem* to see a dagger does not disconfirm the thesis that there is no real dagger in front of me. As Macbeth realizes, it might just be 'a dagger of the mind, a false creation/ Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain'. (Macbeth 2.1). Falsifiability, it seems, is an assumption-relative affair.

This is important in the theological case. For on certain assumptions, evidence in favour of the Special Theory of Relativity can falsify the claim that God exists. Suppose you think that if God is to get off the hook from the

Problem of Evil, then he needs the Free Will Defence, which, in turn presupposes Human Freedom. But suppose you agree with Hasker that Human Freedom is incompatible with full-on Divine Foreknowledge. Then it follows that if God exists, the future must be open. But God, if he exists, is omnipresent. So for the future to be open *for him* then it must be *same past* that is fixed and the *same future* that is open *all over the universe*. This requires absolute simultaneity. But according to Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity, (the STR) there is no such thing as absolute simultaneity (since what is in the present from one point of view can be in the past or in the future from another). So if the Special Theory of Relativity is true God does not exist. Hence evidence that tends to confirm the STR tends to falsify 'God exists'. This means that *on certain assumptions* – assumptions about the need for Human Freedom if the existence of God is to be compatible with the existence of evil and assumptions about the incompatibility Free Will and Foreknowledge – evidence for a physical theory can falsify a theological thesis.

I think the argument I have just sketched is quite a good one. But if it is, it is an argument for old-fashioned atheism - the claim that 'God exists' is factually meaningful but false - not for the new-fangled atheism of Flew which denies that it even makes sense. Indeed we can go further. Even if this argument fails as a disproof of God's existence it succeeds as a disproof of Flew's brand of falsificationist atheism. For what it shows is that 'God exists' is not absolutely unfalsifiable but only unfalsifiable under certain assumptions. And it has to be absolutely unfalsifiable if Flew's argument is to work.

We can put the point like this. Propositions are either factually meaningful or factually meaningless. They are not factually meaningful given one set of assumptions and factually meaningless given another. But they are often falsifiable given one set of assumptions but not falsifiable given another. Hence to be factually meaningful or meaningless is not to be falsifiable or unfalsifiable.

Thus premise 1) is false and Flew's argument a failure[7]. If we are going to be atheists at all we should be old-fashioned atheists rather than new-fangled atheists. We ought to concede that God-talk makes factual sense. We simply deny - as Bertrand Russell did - that it corresponds to anything real. It make sense is one thing, but to have an objective referent is quite another.

3. The Death of God and the Birth of Analytic Philosophy

'We called him "old Sidg" and regarded him as merely out of date' (Russell 1959: 38). So said Russell of his teacher, the great Victorian moral philosopher, Henry Sidgwick (1838-1900). But the young Russell was much exercised by a problem that also bothered Sidgwick: the Dualism of Practical Reason. According to Sidgwick, it is rational to do what is morally right (by maximizing pleasurable consciousness for all sentient beings) and rational to do what is prudentially right (by maximizing pleasurable consciousness for oneself), but, when the two come into conflict, the one does not seem to be any more rational than the other. If God exists, then He can ensure that it will pay in the long term to promote the public interest, by rewarding the righteous in the life to come. But if, as Sidgwick was reluctantly inclined to think, there is no God, what is morally right and what is prudentially right will sometimes come apart, in which case it is not clear that is *more* rational to be good than to be bad, a conclusion that Sidgwick found deeply disturbing (Sidgwick 1982: 496-516). Russell was bothered by the problem too as he did not believe in God either, but as a fashionable young philosopher of the 1890s he thought he had something would do nearly as well, namely, the Absolute. Since we are all aspects of the Absolute, a sort of timeless super-self which is the only thing that is really real, there is essentially the same objection to indulging my desires at your expense as there is to indulging one of my own passions at the expense of others: I am hurting, if not myself, at least a larger whole of which we are both parts. (Russell 1999a: 92-8.) But before long this solution ceased to satisfy. In 'Seems Madam? Nay It Is', a paper read to the Apostles (an elite Cambridge discussion group of which he was a member), Russell argued (as he put it to Moore) that 'for all purposes that are not *purely*

[7] Something that Flew himself seems to have realized. Though he makes a half-hearted allusion to it, the argument is not repeated in in his 1966 book *God and Philosophy*.

intellectual, the world of Appearance is the real world'. In particular, the hypothesis that there is a timeless and harmonious Reality provides no consolation for our present pains since it is a Reality that we never get to experience. If 'the world of daily life remains wholly unaffected by [Reality], and goes on its way just as if there were no world of Reality at all ', and if this world of Reality is a world that we not only *do not* but *cannot* experience (since our experience is necessarily temporal), how can its alleged existence afford us any consolation for what seems to be (and therefore *is*) evil in the world of Appearance? (Russell 1999a: 79-86.) Now this argument has an interesting corollary which Russell does not explicitly draw. It may be that *in Reality* the pains I inflict on you affect me - or at least a larger mind-like thing in which we both participate - but if I never *experience* those pains, how can this give me a motive to do or forbear if my interests conflict with yours? If Absolute Idealism can provide no consolation for life's disasters - which is what Russell is explicitly arguing - then it seems that it cannot supply me with a reason not to visit those disasters on somebody else, if doing so is likely to benefit me. Thus the Dualism of Practical Reason reasserts itself. Sometimes what is morally right is at odds with what is prudentially right and when it is, there seems no reason to prefer the one to the other.

Whether Russell realized this is not entirely clear. But 'Seems, Madam? Nay, It Is' marks the beginning of the end for Russell's Absolute Idealism. Once he realized that 'for all purposes that are not *purely* intellectual [including perhaps the purpose of providing moral uplift] the world of Appearance is the real world', Russell came to feel that the world of Reality was no use for purely intellectual purposes either and soon ceased to believe in it. A big 'R' Reality, that could neither console us for life's troubles nor reconcile duty and self-interest, was a big 'R' Reality that might as well not exist. It was but a short step to the conclusion that it *does not* exist, since the arguments in its favour are not very compelling. The methadone of the Absolute having proved to be ineffective, Russell went on to develop a new kind of philosophy where the object of the exercise was not to reconcile duty and self-interest or to console us for life's tragedies, but to understand the world as it is. Thus the birth of analytic philosophy was not due directly to the Death of God but to the perceived uselessness and ultimate death of a

popular God-*substitute*, namely the Absolute. In its absence, Russell thought, we have to face up to a universe which is fundamentally indifferent to us: 'only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built' (Russell 1999b: 32) though as he later came to realize, it is possible to erect a cheerfully godless habitation on these rather unpromising foundations.

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