

## An Atheist's Values critique of Jesus Christ

Richard Robinson, An Atheist's Values, 1964.

Richard Robinson wrote An Atheist's Values which is a wonderful criticism of many secular and religious myths. Robinson rejected humanism as his label and it seems to be down to its insistence that morality is good while he is clear that morality has a bad side. He rejects the optimism of humanism. He even examines the teaching of Jesus Christ. It is strange that few attack Jesus though he was clearly used by the gospel writers and the Church as a way of shoving faith down people's throats. Jesus largely in the gospels is a threatening figure who wants towns destroyed for not heeding his message. The Church says that sin is just individuals not the Church for the Church in a sense is Jesus. It is the presence of Jesus bringing people together and connecting them. This dreadful doctrine is an excuse for saying, "Catholic x is a heretic and adulterer so she or he does not reflect on the Church." It is the One True Scotsman fallacy where you say that true Scotsmen don't abuse drink but Hamish does and despite being born in Glasgow is not then scottish!

QUOTE: "The gospels emphasize self sacrifice too much. 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends' (John xv. 13) - a person who is always sacrificing himself is destructive of everyone's happiness, except perhaps his own; and he creates no love."

COMMENT: My comment on that is that Jesus' version of love is not about being happy but putting others first. Everybody would however agree with Jesus that it is love in that sense and a duty to die to save your friends when there is no way out. The self sacrifice problem is there though. It is in Jesus's attitude that we must be all for God. That is very destructive and miserable.

Jesus was asked which commandment was the greatest. Was the goal to get him to say that if you kept one commandment you could break the rest? Or was it just to learn which one was the most important? Jesus said the greatest was to give all the love in your heart and soul and mind and body to God. So that was answered. But he gave the next greatest, to love one's neighbour as oneself. Clearly the latter was given just for elaboration and Jesus would have been happy to not give it at all. It is not true that Jesus gave him two equally important commandments. He gave one supremely important commandment. The commandments of love God and love neighbour are shorthand for the ten commandments. They start off with commanding love for God and the rest are about one's neighbour. So the order is there. The message is clear though that love for God comes first. Failing to love God is worse than committing murder or adultery. The commandment to have no other God means that God alone is to be loved and don't share your heart with any other god even non-religious gods like money. This is totally at odds with humanism.

Liberal Christians are not really Christians for they go on about God's unconditional love which for them is not about God working to help you rid yourself of the cancer of sin but God not caring what you do. They do not advocate love for God but sentimentality.

QUOTE ABOUT WHAT LOVE IS NOT: "Nor is love almsgiving, or 'charity' as that is sometimes wrongly called. 'The real love knows her neighbour face to face, and laughs with him and weeps with him, and eats and drinks with him, so that at last, when his black day dawns, she may share with him, not what she can spare, but all that she has.' Those fine words were written by Stella Benson (Living Alone, p. 92)."

QUOTE: "What mostly makes it hard to love living things is not their absence but the hatefulness of their presence. The ways of men and animals often strike us as too hateful to let us love them."

COMMENT: Does God or Jesus feel like that about us? Christians say love is not feeling but action. They seem to care not that God loves them but that he feels love for them. Yet they say God has no feelings as such as he is a being of spirit.

Suppose we all deep down think what Robinson thinks. How do we tell ourselves that we must have some lovability? Is what we want a God for? Is it a crutch so that one can feel loved?

QUOTE: "The only completely improper extension of love is its extension to the love of a god; and the New Testament's putting this first is a great defect in its formulation of the ideal. If there is a god, we should be on man's side against him; and in any case one cannot converse with a god. The doctrine that 'God is love' conflicts violently with other things that are said about him."

QUOTE: A conscientious man is 'one who when he deliberates always has (the idea of rightness) in his mind, and does not act until he believes that his action is right' (G. E. Moore, Principia Ethica, p. 179). Conscientiousness is often considered

the greatest of the virtues. 'It is as certain as anything can be that very harmful actions may be done from conscientious motives' (G. E. Moore, op. cit., p. 180)."

COMMENT: Worse harm comes from not caring enough about what is right. So we should be conscientious. If God hinders that in any way then belief in him should go.

QUOTE: "What Jesus subordinated conscientiousness to, namely the love of god and man, is not identical with what I subordinate it to, namely reason and the love of man - conscientiousness is not the greatest virtue, and that conscience should be criticized by reason and love."

COMMENT: Conscientiousness that is derived from the wrong thing is not conscientiousness at all. The paradox of conscientiousness is that the more it looks like the real deal and is not the more dangerous it is. A truly mangled conscience loses credibility and will wreck itself. A subtly off-centre one is more toxic and dangerous. It is as bad as the reason a good counterfeit banknote is bad.

QUOTE: "The main irrationality of religion is preferring comfort to truth; and it is this that makes religion a very harmful thing on balance, a sort of endemic disease that has so far prevented human life from reaching its full stature... faith is not a virtue but a positive vice. More precisely, there is, indeed, a virtue often called faith but that is not the faith which the Christians make much of. The true virtue of faith is faith as opposed to faithlessness, that is, keeping faith and promises and being loyal."

COMMENT: In examinations of religious faith it is forgotten that faith is not just trust in a God who reveals himself but is also keeping faith. Faith involves a promise to commit to God as he reveals himself. If the person cannot believe but keeps trying to that is still a person of faith in the sense of trying to live out the promises of faith. Catholics who are baptised and confirmed receive these sacraments which involve and are based on a promise to support what God has said about himself according to the Church. Failing to keep faith then as cherry-picking cafeteria Catholics do is totally uncatholic. If they are Catholic then their Catholic nature does not matter. Being Catholic is not enough or not much when you don't live it. The gospels praise the efforts of Jesus's doubters to live out faith. The idea is that if you act as one who trusts what God has said then even if you don't then you have faith deep down. You are being tested.

QUOTE: "Even when a person is aware that faith is belief without regard to evidence, he may be led to hold faith respectable by the consideration that we sometimes think it good for a man to believe in his friend's honesty in spite of strong evidence to the contrary, or for a woman to believe in her son's innocence in spite of strong evidence to the contrary. But, while we admire and love the love that leads the friend or parent to this view, we do not adopt or admire his conclusion unless we believe that he has private evidence of his own, gained by his long and intimate association, to outweigh the public evidence on the other side. Usually we suppose that his love has led him into an error of judgement, which both love and hate are prone to do."

QUOTE: He points out with religion which is based on reports about the gods, "All of these reports have the remarkable feature that they tell us that the gods are experienced and yet not perceived. One may, it is said, sometimes perceive manifestations of the gods, visions, miracles, and, of course, images. One may also perceive a man and infer from the miracles he does that he is also a god. But one cannot perceive the god directly with eyes or ears. And yet one experiences him. Experience without perception is, of course, usually a mark of the subjective; what I experience without the aid of perception is primarily my own inner life, my thoughts and imaginations and moods and so on. But we are told that there is also experience without perception of at least one kind of objective reality, namely god or the gods."

COMMENT: My comment is that it is not experience but your interpretation. It is what you want to think about the experience. You make yourself the real God for you are the one deciding that it is your opinion alone that matters. Who is God if you care about your opinion not his? In practical terms you are God!

QUOTE: He writes, "Another phenomenon from which people infer the existence of an unperceived god is the multitude of convinced and sincere testifiers. 'How could all those intelligent and honest men be mistaken?' This inference is also worthless. If we took the existence of a multitude of convinced and sincere testifiers as good evidence for a belief, we should have to believe not in one religion but in all the conflicting religions that have obtained".

COMMENT: You cannot make a God out of popular opinion for many people say they believe what they do not and most people can be wrong. The number of people holding an idea only popularises the idea but has nothing to do with showing the idea is really credible or true. The argument however that most people believing in God is evidence that there may be a God is probably at the back of everybody's mind and the fundamental reason why the belief seems to be so persistent. You can see the potential for bullying in such an attitude.

"Everybody believes in God so you must be wrong not to believe" is not a logical argument. It does not follow that there is a God just because most believe. Maybe too many of them only think they believe. People can be wrong in what they think

they believe and that they think they believe. But religion turns it into a logical argument: "God inspires all people to look for him so most believing is a sign from him that he exists and loves us." Logic is iron and merciless. Here the problem is that they assume God is inspiring people and then decide then that indicates that there is a God! They are abusing logic. Remember logic is iron and you cannot avoid it and you do violence to yourself and potential violence by trying to defy and corrupt it. So see the aggression in the abuse. Its trying to create a fake reality and that shows no real concern for people. People may be all for themselves and not be letting God in so there is something arrogant about boasting that your faith is an argument for God! The argument that so many good and smart people believe Jesus was good or God is similarly worthless. It usually presupposes that God is prompting you to believe in Jesus.

QUOTE THAT HELPS US THINK ABOUT THE TEACHING THAT THOSE WHO SAY MORALITY IS NOT REAL UNLESS GOD IS REAL FOR GOD COMMANDS IT: "It has been made perfectly clear that there can be no entailing reason for a moral law except another moral law. Probably the first person to point this out unmistakably was H. A. Prichard in his article in *Mind* for 1911, 'Does Moral Philosophy rest on a Mistake?' (reprinted in his *Moral Obligation*). A sentence beginning 'thou shalt' or 'thou shalt not', or containing the words 'ought' or 'ought not' or 'right' or 'wrong', can be entailed only by a sentence also containing one of these expressions. For example, the sentence 'thou shalt not kill' is not entailed by any of the following: 'there is a god who hates killing', 'there is a god who punishes killing with eternal fire', and 'there is a god who is our father and commands us not to kill'. None of these is an entailing reason for the law that 'thou shalt not kill'. The following, however, is an entailing reason for this law: God commands us not to kill and thou shalt do whatever God commands.' This is an entailing reason because it contains a 'thou shalt', and therefore is itself a moral law. A moral law can be entailed by a sentence about a god only if that sentence is itself a moral law. It cannot be entailed by a sentence which merely informs us that there is a god, and what his commands are. The moral laws as a whole are not and never will be entailed by anything. In other words, there is a good sense in which ethics has no basis and cannot have a basis. There is a good sense in which there is no such thing as 'the foundations of morality'. Mr. Hare stated this point very clearly, with special reference to Christian thought, in *Philosophy* for 1950, p. 376.

COMMENT: If morality has no ultimate basis then it should not have. It does not need it. So to try to base it on God is immoral. Saying God commands that you must not commit adultery is saying you must believe in God and that he commands and that he commanded this. So you have several commands in one! It all boils down to people saying they have verified a message from God that they have that you must obey. They are doing the commanding. The command of God comes from and through their authority so if it is really from God that does not really matter. It is them you are depending on.

QUOTE: "One cannot abase oneself before a perfectly moral person, because a perfectly moral person treats one as an equal and as having a right to one's way of life."

COMMENT: God does not make you an equal. Devotion to God is immoral and undignified or believers secretly think they are equal to God!

QUOTE REGARDING THE FOUR GOSPELS: "Each of them is in form a biography rather than a collection of commandments and valuations. In each of them, and especially in Mark, Jesus is primarily not a teacher or moralist but a mysterious and miraculous divine leader."

COMMENT: Mark it is true has very little moral guidance in it. However it contains loads of threats for sinners.

QUOTE: "The teaching is paradoxical and intended to be so. The writers represent Jesus as one who repeatedly uttered statements, valuations, and commands, that seemed to most people odd or shocking. He is given to sayings like 'the last shall be first, and the first last', and 'whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant'. Though in one saying he condemns making a scandal (Matt. xviii. 6 ff.), yet in another he implies that his own preaching makes scandal (Matt. xiii. 21); and Matthew often speaks of people being scandalized by him. Most people are in fact scandalized by the saying that 'whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath'."

COMMENT: The paradoxes and "deepities" are taking advantage of how people think that a person making such statements is full of wisdom. In reality they are given useless teaching. Jesus was out for his own glorification and nothing else. It is a classical trick used by religious charlatans who wish to hide that they don't really know what they are talking about.

QUOTE ABOUT JESUS' TEACHING: "The teaching has a prominent strain of harshness in it. Jesus threatens weeping and gnashing of teeth. He threatens great misery to those who do not receive his missionaries (Mark vi. 11). He threatens damnation to those who do not believe in his gospel (Mark xvi. 16), and to those who blaspheme against the Holy Ghost (Mark iii. 29). He is remarkably abusive (cf. Matt. xi. 20), especially towards the Pharisees, with whom he at least once engages in clever silly argument (Matt. xxii. 15-22). He harshly neglects his family relations for his gospel (Matt. xii. 46 ff.). He expects his gospel to result in parricide and in the betrayal of brothers and children to death (Matt. x, especially

verse 21). He withers a fig tree and destroys a herd of swine. Matthew Arnold seems to me far from the truth when he finds 'sweet reasonableness' in Jesus. There are a few 'sweet and comfortable sayings'; but the prevailing atmosphere is harsh. One of his most judicious twentieth-century followers, Professor T. W. Manson (*The Sayings of Jesus*, p. 75), acknowledges 'the seeming harshness of Jesus and His almost brutal thrusting into the background of natural feelings and obligations', but puts it down to 'the overwhelming urgency of His task'."

COMMENT: The task was hardly urgent for there is no sign that anybody is really delivered and saved from sin by Jesus. Saved Christians are as bad as demon adoring pagans. Jesus cast out demons instantly it is said in the gospels. But he had a get out clause if the person acted possessed again – it's the person letting the demon back in. Anyway a man is not a saviour though it is claimed he could get demons out instantly for the evidence is from Catholicism in particular that exorcism is never that quick! Jesus himself knew that nobody was any better than anybody else so the urgency does not explain his harsh teaching. It is simple, he hated sinners.

In Mark 9 Jesus says,

Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.

And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell.

And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'

For everyone will be salted with fire.

Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.

End of citation from Mark 9.

Jesus is saying that it is better to be murdered for sin than to go to Hell for it.

He suggests you go to Heaven with whatever limbs you have. Life is Heaven. So if you lose a hand you have no hand in Heaven. The reference to losing salt implies that you make yourself beyond redemption. Jesus here gives the same rationale God gave for the stoning of adulterers and idolaters to death in the Old Testament. Its about purging evil which is why you are better murdered than going to Hell and better losing your limbs than going to Hell. You are better hurt in any way than going to your death in unrepentant sin.

If Mark saw the resurrection in very physical terms then that may explain why he has no resurrection of Jesus account. Was it removed for saying Jesus was raised but was sick and bleeding and sore?

QUOTE: "Jesus says nothing on any social question except divorce, and all ascriptions of any political doctrine to him are false. He does not pronounce about war, capital punishment, gambling, justice, the administration of law, the distribution of goods, socialism, equality of income, equality of sex, equality of colour, equality of opportunity, tyranny, freedom, slavery, self determination, or contraception. There is nothing Christian about being for any of these things, nor about being against them, if we mean by 'Christian' what Jesus taught according to the synoptic gospels."

COMMENT: Politicians use Jesus to bolster themselves and their aims. The people are sweetened up by the politician referring positively to Jesus. Jesus should be dropped when he did nothing about war the biggest problem of all and said nothing. He did allow capital punishment though for he told the Jews off for mercy towards lads who cursed their parents. They were not stoned to death as the law commanded and he objected to that disobedience. Jesus did say when a woman was brought to him that adulterous people like her deserved stoning. Indeed it was such a holy deed he said it could not be done by those who held impurity in their hearts. Jesus was hardly going to tolerate any sexuality apart from a married man and his wife when he centred like that on divorce. Jesus seems to have been written about in a way that politicians could use him to consolidate their own support among the people.

FINALLY

We have learned that God and Jesus fail to promote love. Jesus is just weaponised by Christians.