

Friday, August 27, 2010

A Critique of Sye Ten Bruggencate's www.proofthatgodexists.org

A visitor to my website [recently informed me](#) about [a debate](#) he had on [Premier Christian Radio](#) with a presuppositional apologist named Sye Ten Bruggencate.

I've seen Sye's website before (it is located here: <http://www.proofthatgodexists.org/>). On this site, Sye seeks to prove the existence of his god by leading visitors through a series of pages which present various alternatives regarding the laws of logic, mathematics, science and morality. The first four steps ask the visitor to affirm whether or not the laws of logic, mathematics, science and morality even exist. If at any point the visitor disaffirms the existence of one of these features, he is taken to a page which reminds him that he makes use of what he has denied on a daily basis. So the visitor is compelled to affirm the existence of the laws of logic, mathematics, science and morality.

At [Step Five](#) the visitor is asked to decide whether those laws, whose existence he has just affirmed, are "immaterial" or "material." It is at this point that I think Sye's proof begins to suffer its most profound problems. The alternative "immaterial" versus "material" strikes me as a false dichotomy, since "immaterial" only tells us what something is *not*, not what it *is*. This negative term is contrasted with its positive counterpart, namely "material," suggesting that these are the only two options available. The descriptor "immaterial" has no positive meaning of its own and could refer to just about anything one imagines (for according to Christian apologist Peter Pike, imaginary things are "immaterial" - see [here](#)). Sye's case might raise fewer suspicions if his question at [Step Five](#) asked whether the laws of logic, mathematics, science and morality were material or *not material*. This correction would improve things two-fold: first it would undo the mistake of treating "immaterial" as if it had a positive meaning; also, it would generate a question which Sye seems unprepared to ask: If the laws of logic, mathematics, science and morality are not material, then what are they? It would be erroneous to suppose that calling them "immaterial" satisfies this question.

By framing the alternatives in the manner which he chooses, Sye seeks to tip the scales artificially in favor of his desired conclusion. But we will find that, even though he does this to give his position an advantage, it does not work. Let's explore the two alternatives as Sye understands them.

If we click the box in [Step Five](#) which says "Laws of logic, Mathematics, Science, and Absolute Morality are Material," we are scolded with the following statement:

If you believe that laws of logic, mathematics, science, or morality are made of matter, please show me where in nature these laws are. Can you touch them, see them, smell them, hear them, or taste them? Rather than have you produce a material, physical law I will narrow down the field for you... just show me the number '3' somewhere in nature. Not 'three things,' not a written representation of the number 3 but the real physical, material number 3.

Statements like this strongly suggest that Sye has something *conceptual* in mind when he speaks of "the immaterial." This is because his example of something "immaterial" is the number '3', which in fact is a *concept* (Sye disqualifies objects in the quantity of three and symbolic representations). This raises yet a further question about the terms in which Sye chooses to inform his proof:

Why doesn't he frame his question about the ontology of the laws of logic, mathematics, science and absolute morality in terms of conceptual versus material instead of "immaterial" versus material?

The reason why Sye does not cast the alternatives in these terms is most likely because (a) he probably has no conceptual understanding of logic, mathematics, science and morality, and (b) doing so would jeopardize his case for theism. Not only does Christianity not have a theory of concepts (which would explain why Sye does not treat these issues as conceptual phenomena), his god is not supposed to be merely a concept, but an independently existing being.

The problem is even worse for Sye. As noted above, at Step Five Sye contrasts "material" with "immaterial."

Another expression which he uses to designate “the immaterial” is the term “abstract entities.” Does Sye really want to say that his god is “abstract” in nature, like the number 3 or any other abstraction? I wouldn’t think so. Abstractions are not living entities, they have no consciousness of their own, and they are not independently existing entities: they require minds to form and make use of them. But the Christian god is supposed to be an independently existing entity possessing its own consciousness, not needing a mind which forms it (such as in the believer’s imagination).

So just by citing a concept as an example of something “immaterial,” Sye is letting on that “God” refers to something *psychological* rather than existential, to something in his mind rather than an independently existing entity. Concepts are products of a mental process. By characterizing both “God” and concepts as “immaterial,” Sye is saying that his god is analogous to products of a mental process. Only instead of constituting genuine knowledge about the world (as in the case of concepts formed on the basis of perceptual input), Sye’s god-belief finds its residence in his imagination.

If at [Step Five](#) we click the box which says “Laws of Logic, Mathematics, Science and Absolute Morality are Immaterial,” we are taken to [Step Six](#), which has us decide whether these laws “are universal or up to the individual.” Again we seem to have a false dichotomy on our hands. Sye asks: “Does $2 + 2 = 4$ only where you are, and only because you say it does, or is this a universal law?” Sye implies that something must be universal in order to be what it is independent of our personal dictates and circumstances. But I’m sure that Sye would agree that this is not the case. In contrast to universal laws and truths, particular objects exist independent of our conscious intentions, and our actions in regard to them show that we recognize this, albeit perhaps only implicitly.

At any rate, most will likely agree (and rightly so) that the equation $2 + 2 = 4$ (assuming equivalent units) applies everywhere and not just in one specific location and not just because we might happen to say it does. If this is what is meant by universality in this context, then one can agree that the laws of logic, mathematics, science and morality apply everywhere and are thus universal in this sense. (I have presented the proper understanding of universality in my blog [Demystifying Universality](#).)

Before proceeding with Sye’s proof, however, it should be noted that Sye contrasts “universal law” with something being the case because someone says so. This is noteworthy for it is in the theistic worldview where we find the view that a consciousness has the power to speak things into existence and alter them according to its will. Sye keeps this aspect of his theism safely out of view while suggesting that such a position is antithetical to universality as such in the dichotomy he introduces at this point.

If we take the option at [Step Six](#) which affirms that the laws of logic, mathematics, science and morality are indeed universal, we are then asked at [Step Seven](#) to affirm whether or not those same laws unchanging. Sye summarizes how far we’ve come once we’ve made it this far in his proof:

You have acknowledged that laws of logic, mathematics, science, and absolute morality exist, that they are not made of matter, and that they are universal. The next question is whether you believe they are changing or unchanging.

We are asked to decide whether or not, on our own view, the law of identity, for instance, or $2 + 2 = 4$, man’s need for values, etc., can be altered in some way or another, either on its own or by means of some external force. Of course, there’s no good reason to suppose that these laws will do this, we do not experience them changing, and the idea that they could or would change seems entirely self-refuting. Indeed, what would *cause* the laws to change? But causality is one of those laws. To expect a cause to change the laws invokes the laws. But couldn’t they change without a cause? No, because causality is the identity of change; if there’s change, that change - because it exists - would have identity, and thus the law of causality would be in play.

Apologists like Sye, however, think that this state of affairs implies or entails the existence of a god which *makes* this state of affairs - namely the immutability of the laws in question - obtain, or at any rate that this would not be the case unless their god were real. Of course, with reasoning such as this, we are still left with *imagining* the god in question, and projecting it as the solution to what may in fact not be a problem at all in the first place (I say this because we have [The Axioms and the Primacy of Existence](#)). Besides, presuppositionalists do not make a very clear case for why their god is a necessary precondition for the existence, universality and immutability of the laws of logic, mathematics, science and morality. In fact, it seems that these laws imply the very opposite:

that the very notion of a god is completely arbitrary, even antithetical to them.

At this point, we come to the ["preproof" page](#) in Sye's case, where he announces:

To reach this page you had to acknowledge that immaterial, universal, unchanging laws of logic, mathematics, science, and absolute morality exist. Universal, immaterial, unchanging laws are necessary for rational thinking to be possible. Universal, immaterial, unchanging laws cannot be accounted for if the universe was random or only material in nature.

We saw above that characterizing the laws in question as *conceptual* in nature - i.e., as generalized identifications composed of concepts - is vastly preferable to characterizing them as "immaterial," which ignores their conceptual nature and leaves them subject to whatever arbitrary investment one's imagination may ascribe to them. In fact, recognizing that these laws are conceptual in nature explains the remaining two attributes: universal and unchanging. Universality is essentially the open-endedness of conceptual reference. For instance, the concept 'man' includes not just one man or five men, but all men who exist, who have existed and who will ever exist. It is because of this open-endedness that we can speak of men in the past and in the future as well as in the present, and still have the same essential features in mind - i.e., a biological organism possessing the faculty of reason. Concepts owe their open-endedness of reference to the process of measurement-omission which is a key aspect of concept-formation, an action performed by the mind. There's no mystery here, so there's no reason to attribute universality to something beyond man's own mental abilities.

Similarly with the attribute of immutability: conceptual reference rests on the proper orientation of the subject-object relationship and the process by which concepts are formed. The orientation between consciousness (the subject) and its objects does not change; the subject and its objects do not and cannot switch places. Moreover, the truth of the axiomatic concepts 'existence', 'consciousness' and 'identity' do not change. For instance, the fact that there is a reality ("existence exists") does not change. The immutability of conceptual reference is thus grounded in facts, facts which do not conform to conscious intentions, facts which obtain regardless of the actions of any consciousness (whether real or imagined).

So in a sense, just by preferring to characterize these laws as "immaterial" instead of *conceptual*, Sye has stacked the deck against their real nature in order to underwrite them with theistic presuppositions which have no basis in reality whatsoever, and which in fact violate the very axioms which ground those laws in the first place.

Sye says that these laws "cannot be accounted for if the universe was random or only material in nature." But they can be accounted for if the universe exists independent of consciousness (the primacy of existence ensures this), if the axiom of consciousness is true (there are organisms which possess the faculty of consciousness), and if one has a theory of concepts which explains how conceptualization is possible. And we have all three of these in the philosophy of Objectivism.

Meanwhile, Christianity defaults on all three of these points. For one thing, it holds that the universe does not exist independent of consciousness. It holds to the primacy of consciousness, claiming that the universe was created by an act of consciousness, and that its contents conform to the dictates of that consciousness (to its "will"). Moreover, Christianity in essence denies the axiom of consciousness, for it must assume that consciousness can exist without an independent object (see my blog [Before the Beginning: The Problem of Divine Lonesomeness](#)). Lastly, Christianity has no theory of concepts, which means its adherents have no philosophically native means of understanding the nature of concepts or the processes by which the human mind forms them.

It is because of these fundamental problems that I wager that Sye's proof ultimately relies on an *argumentum ad ignorantium* - an argument from ignorance. It is primarily because one lacks knowledge of the axioms, the issue of metaphysical primacy and concept theory that one would seek to exploit the resulting mysteriousness of the nature of the laws of logic, mathematics, science and morality and attribute them to [the "supernatural"](#).

Sye continues, saying:

The Bible teaches us that there are 2 types of people in this world, those who profess the truth of God's existence and those who suppress the truth of God's existence. The options of 'seeking' God, or not believing in God are unavailable. The Bible never attempts to prove the existence of God as it declares that the existence of God is so obvious that we are without excuse for not believing in Him.

Sye must appeal to the contents of [a storybook](#) in order to affirm the antithetical categories into which he wants to fit all men. In doing so, he seeks to wipe out the sheer honesty of many non-believers: those who honestly do not believe any mystical claims, including the claim that a “God” exists. It is honesty which is the casualty of such pronouncements, and this is what we need to understand. If Sye’s proof were built on honesty, why does it seek to exploit ignorance in such a predatory manner? Blank out. Again, he appeals to the storybook, acknowledging that it presents no arguments for the existence of its god, but rather “declares” - i.e., merely *asserts*, without argument - its existence, claiming (with blatant contradiction at Romans 1:20) that its existence is “so obvious that we are without excuse for not believing in Him.”

What the bible offers, and what Sye repeats here, is essentially an accusation against non-believers. This is one of the oldest tricks in the book: if someone doesn’t believe your claims, accuse them of some moral shortcoming. In this case, we’re accused, given our non-belief in Sye’s god, of purposely “suppressing the truth.” The allegation here is that we are willfully and deliberately denying something that we really know to be true. But again, neither Sye nor any other apologist has any rational basis for making such a charge. He cites no facts or evidence to support his claim; rather, he simply repeats what the sacred storybook already says. The passage where he gets this comes from the apostle Paul. Paul wrote this passage some 1900 years ago, long before anyone reading this was even born. In other words, we were accused of this moral breach before we even existed, without trial, without a hearing, without weighing any evidence, without any investigation into any of our souls.

Essentially, we have the theist saying, “Well, if you do not confess that my God exists, then I’m going to accuse of denying what you really know!” This is somehow supposed to compel us. Who would want people to believe his claims on such a basis? Wouldn’t that make one’s own confidence in said belief all the more shaky? It is noteworthy that apologists want to make the issue a moral matter. Are they not tipping their own cards by doing so? Are they not tacitly admitting that their god-belief is ultimately a matter of *choice* by telling us that we’re immoral for essentially *choosing not* to believe? Should we just up and choose to believe that Sye’s god exists, with no reason other than that we do not want to be guilty of his charge of “suppressing the truth”? Should we just retreat into our imaginations on Sye’s say so, on the basis of fear of the imaginary consequences of the alternative, and agree with his claim that his god is needed for any proof in the first place?

I trow not.

So it appears, upon inspection, that what Christians really mean by “believe in Him” is nothing more than “*imagine* Him.” For no matter what the apologist offers in defense of his god-belief, we still have no alternative to *imagining* his god which he insists exists.

This conclusion bears out in the claim which Sye [presents as his “proof”](#):

The Proof that God exists is that without Him you couldn't prove anything.

This hardly constitutes any kind of proof. Indeed, it seems merely to be the opinion of someone who *already believes* the claim that said god exists in the first place. In fact, I see no reason why someone who believes in the Muslim god could not make essentially the same claim about his god:

The Proof that Allah exists is that without Him you couldn't prove anything.

To bring the point home, we could imagine any god in place of Sye’s “God” and wonder why it would not stick for that god for the kinds of reasons Sye supposes it works for his god:

The Proof that Blarko exists is that without Blarko, you couldn't prove anything.

I’m guessing that Sye would not find these latter two variations on his own them very compelling.

Finally, after all the steps in Sye’s presentation are exhausted, we come to the question [what do you believe?](#) We are given only two options at this point:

“I believe that God exists”

and

“I do not believe that God exists”

If we choose the first option, Sye finally rewards us by taking us to his site’s [main page](#), where he asks visitors who have not gone through his eight-step program to go to his proof’s first step. For those who made it here by following the desired alternatives of Sye’s proof and choosing the “I believe that God exists” path, Sye writes:

For those who have gone through the proof to get here, it may have been a huge step to finally admit that God exists. While it may be a relief to finally make such an admission, it is just the first step, not the last.

He apparently thinks it requires a lot of courage to “admit that God exists,” even though after going through Sye’s proof we still have no alternative but to *imagine* the god whose existence he’s been trying to prove. Nothing has changed in this regard: before Sye’s proof, we could only imagine his god, and now that he’s presented his 8-step proof, we can still only imagine it. We cannot perceive this god, we cannot conduct a conversation with it, we cannot verify its existence by asking it to reveal itself in some unmistakable, demonstrative manner (such as levitating a book from the book shelf - something that should be easy for the creator of the universe to do). True to presuppositional form, Sye’s god remains marooned in our imagination, even after all his gyrations about absolute truth, the laws of logic and universality. Indeed, while I went through the steps of Sye’s proof, I never experienced any compulsion to “admit that God exists.” Rather, I sensed only that our leg was being pulled.

But Sye makes it sound like “admit[ting] that God exists” lifts some terrible burden off our shoulders. But there was no burden there in the first place. There is no strain in recognizing the fact that there is a fundamental distinction between what is real and what is merely imaginary. In fact, if there’s any “relief” to be achieved, it is in grasping the nature of this fundamental distinction and “admitting” that the imaginary is not real, even if Sye’s god doesn’t like it. But surely even Sye Ten Bruggencate recognizes the fact that there is a fundamental distinction between what is real and what is imaginary, does he not? If so, why then does his proof show no concern for this fact? Why does Sye not tell us how we can distinguish between his god and what is merely imaginary? Why does he not build any safeguard into his proof which ensures that the god whose existence he wants to prove is not something we set up in our imagination as we go through its several steps? And if he were to build such a safeguard into his proof, how would it integrate with the terms of his proof, and how would it affect its intended conclusion? We may never know.

If we go through Sye’s eight-step proof and choose the latter option, namely “I do not believe that God exists,” Sye will naturally be disappointed. Only stubbornness and hardheartedness could lead one to choosing this option. It is by choosing this option that we are lead to [a new page](#) where Sye scolds us yet again. There he writes:

Denying the existence of God is not unbelief but an exercise in self-deception. You may know things, but you cannot account for anything you know.

Is it truly an instance of “self-deception” when one recognizes the fact that there is a fundamental distinction between what is real and what is imaginary? Indeed, it seems that ignoring this distinction is a telltale indication of self-deception, and I have yet to see how god-belief is possible without downplaying this distinction. If something does not exist, then how can denying its existence when someone insists that it does exist, constitute an instance of self-deception?

Sye betrays the inherent *argumentum ad ignorantium* nature to presuppositionalism when he tells us “you may know things, but you cannot account for anything you know.” He grants that his visitors can know things, but essentially says that they don’t know *how* they know *what* they know. How does he know this about those who visit his website? Is he omniscient? Does he confuse himself with the god he claims he worships? He may have never made their acquaintance before, and yet he professes to know that they can’t know how they know what we know. He apparently takes his website’s visitors for fools.

Perhaps Sye is expressing a hope here, namely the hope that his visitors are unable to “account for anything” they might happen to know. But why would he hope this? Or perhaps he’s projecting his own ignorance here. Either way, he seems to think he’s on safe grounds here, since he provides no support at all for his claim about people who may very well be complete strangers to him. He talks about being able to “account” for one’s knowledge, but presents no basis to “account” for the knowledge he claims for himself about people he’s never met. Sye is telling us that the basis for his visitors’ knowledge is a mystery to them. And yet isn’t this precisely

what Christianity ends up teaching about the “knowledge” believers are supposed to claim for themselves when push comes to shove? Look at what presuppositional apologist John Frame tells us when he wrestles with the question of how the believer can “account for” the “knowledge” he is supposed to claim for himself:

I cannot explain the psychology here to the satisfaction of very many. In this case as in others (for we walk by faith, not by sight!) we may have to accept the fact even without an explanation of the fact. Somehow, God manages to get his Word across to us, despite the logical and psychological barriers. Without explaining how it works, Scripture describes in various ways a “supernatural factor” in divine-human communication. (a) It speaks of the *power* of the Word. The Word created all things (Gen. 1:3, etc.; Ps. 33:3-6; John 1:3) and directs the course of nature and history (Pss. 46:6; 148:5-8). What God says will surely come to pass (Isa. 55:11; Gen. 18:149; Deut. 18:21ff.). The gospel is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16; cf. Isa. 6:9-10; Luke 7:7ff.; Heb. 4:12). (b) Scripture also speaks of the personal power of the *Holy Spirit* operating *with* the Word (John 3:5; 1 Cor. 2:4,12ff.; 2 Cor. 3:15-18; 1 Thess. 1:5)10. Mysterious though the process may be, somehow God illumines the human mind to discern the divine source of the Word. We know without knowing how we know. ([Presuppositional Apologetics: An Introduction - Part 1 of 2: Introduction and Creation](#))

Frame construes the problem as a matter of psychology, but what we’re really after here (and what Sye is presumably interested in) is a matter of *epistemology*, not psychology. For what we’re supposed to be concerned with is giving an “account for” the knowledge we claim to have, right? So this in itself is quite an admission on Frame’s part: it tells us that he has no epistemological “account for” the “knowledge” he claims to have acquired from a supernatural source. And that would be accurate: knowledge that is dispensed from a supernatural source would have *no* epistemological basis, since it would not be knowledge which one *infers* from previously validated knowledge, but which would have been forcibly inserted into his mind by means of irresistible magic.

And this analysis is not at all uncalled for: Frame admits that the bible fails to “explain... how it works,” but mentions that it involves some kind of “*power*,” a power which is powerful enough to “direct... the course of nature and history” (so how could puny little man resist it?). This “power” is something which “operat[es] *with* the Word” which the believer reads in the sacred storybook, so just by reading the storybook the believer is supposedly giving this power access to his mind to do whatever it chooses to do. Frame himself concedes that he does not understand how this all works, calling the “process” by which this power inserts knowledge into the believer’s mind “mysterious,” insisting that “somehow” his god “illumines the human mind to discern the divine source of the Word,” while failing to explain how this supposed illumination is any different from the believer’s own imagination. It is at this point that Frame throws up his arms in utter cognitive resignation to make the damning admission “We know without knowing how we know.”

This is the philosophical heritage of presuppositional apologetics. And yet, given this concession of defeat on a most important epistemological matter (indeed, the most important matter for the believer if there were any!), Sye wants to exploit the non-believer’s supposed inability to “account for” what he knows. Presuppositionalists have always told us that non-believers cannot “account for” their knowledge, so Sye tells us nothing we haven’t already heard. But if accounting for knowledge were in fact so important to Sye, why doesn’t he make up for Frame’s admitted defeat and get down to the business of accounting for his own so-called knowledge, beginning with explaining how we can reliably distinguish between what he calls “God” and what he may merely be imagining?

The silence on these points is indeed deafening!

But if Christians can give themselves a pass when it comes to giving an “account for” their knowledge and ultimately appeal to “mystery,” why is it an issue of the non-believer is unable to articulate the epistemological grounding of his own knowledge?

Perhaps it is because - and this is what we should expect if Christianity were in fact false - Christianity has no genuine epistemology, and non-believers - who claim no supernatural source for the knowledge they have - should have an epistemological basis for the knowledge they have, since they acquire their knowledge through processes governed by the nature of their consciousness and its perceptual contact with reality. In other words, while believers should not be expected to provide any epistemological accounting for the knowledge they claim to have about “the supernatural” (since such “knowledge” is summarily arbitrary in nature), non-believers do not claim to

acquire their knowledge from some “supernatural” source, but instead rely on their own faculties to discover facts, formulate general principles and infer higher-level truths through some understandable process. So the Christian is right on schedule in giving himself a pass, since he has no “account for” the knowledge he claims, and he is clever in challenging non-believers to explain how he acquires the knowledge he has.

But this does not in any way justify the believer’s appeal to “mystery” or some “supernatural power.” By taking this route, the believer announces that his god-belief rests ultimately on his own ignorance: he has no idea how to “account for” knowledge at all, and yet it is on the basis of this ignorance that he hopes to establish the validity of his god-belief. The circular tail-spin of crash-and-burn presuppositionalism leaves its practitioners stranded on a deserted island, unable to fend for themselves, unable to do nothing more than rest on the futile hope that some unsuspecting victim will come along and fall for his pretenses.

That being said, it is true that many non-believers do find it difficult to wrestle with presuppositionalism’s devious and challenges. There are, among others, two fundamental reasons why this may be the case. For one, while individual thinkers do have a great store of knowledge in their minds, they typically do not learn the processes by which they acquire knowledge in an explicit, systematic manner. They started learning knowledge when they were toddlers, and just continued with the processes that they naturally developed over time, never really understanding how their knowledge relates to what they perceive, never exploring how they form a concept, never identifying the process by which they can infer general truths from what they are aware of directly. Since their childhood, the processes by which they acquire their knowledge has been *automatized*, something they do without fully understanding how they do it. In this way, many non-believing thinkers’ orientation to their own knowledge is no different from what Frame indicates about the religious knowledge he claims when he concedes that “we know without knowing how we know.”

The solution to this is not what the presuppositionalist offers, which is to retreat further into the cave of his religion’s darkness, but to recognize the fact that since consciousness and knowledge both have identity, they can both be understood, since knowledge is essentially a process of identifying that which has identity. This is where Objectivist epistemology, the objective theory of concepts, sheds light where presuppositionalism can only prey on ignorance. (For details, see Ayn Rand’s *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*.) I contend that, without a theory of concepts, one will be unable to answer presuppositionalism’s challenges in any definitely resolute manner.

Sye’s next statement is noteworthy:

Arguing against God’s existence would be on par with arguing against the existence of air, breathing it all the while.

It’s curious that Sye would compare “arguing against God’s existence” with “arguing against the existence of air,” for his proof makes it clear that his god is supposed to be immaterial while air is undeniably material in manner. We do in fact breathe air, and can feel it rushing into our lungs and out our noses as we breathe. We can directly sense air, since our air channels are equipped with nerve endings which register the passage of air as it moves across them. But the Christian god is supposed to be immaterial, invisible, and beyond the reach of our senses. It’s said to be “out there” some place, but without any ability on our part to perceive. All we can do is *imagine* it (which we aren’t supposed to talk about). So Sye’s comparison of his god with the air that we breathe, is at the very least highly questionable. If Sye could say this about his god, couldn’t we say this about anything we imagine?

Sye then says:

You use the universal, immaterial, unchanging laws of logic, mathematics, science, and absolute morality in order to come to rational decisions, but you cannot account for them.

How does Sye know that we “cannot account for them”? If we have the objective theory of concepts, we surely can “account for” logic, mathematics, science and morality, since these are conceptual in nature. Indeed, how could these endeavors be possible to any consciousness lacking the ability to form concepts? Blank out! Sye certainly does not explain this. He does not even consider this question. I have already discussed the proper understanding of universality (see [here](#)). Universality is essentially nothing more than the human mind’s ability to form open-ended classifications of reference (namely mental integrations) into which new units can be integrated

when they are discovered or considered. There is nothing mysterious about universality when it is understood as an aspect of conceptual awareness. But notice that presuppositional apologetics does not encourage an *understanding* of universality, but instead seeks to utilize universality as a point of ignorance against the non-believer.

Similarly with the quality of being “immaterial”: since Sye is talking about universality, he’s clearly talking about the mind’s ability to formulate open-ended classifications of reference. But the mind does not experience its own activity in the same manner that it experiences the concrete entities which it perceives in the world. The mind acts according to its own nature, and this activity is certainly different from the nature of the objects of which one is aware by means of sense perception. A tree which one perceives is different from the concept ‘tree’ which one forms in his mind to integrate and identify the many trees he perceives.

Sye continues:

These laws are not the only way God has revealed himself to you, but they are sufficient to show the irrationality of your thinking, and expose your guilt for denying Him.

The “laws” to which Sye refers here, if they have any objective basis, are not the means by which an invisible magic being “reveals” itself to human beings, but in fact the conceptual form in which human minds identify and integrate general truths which they discover about the world in which they exist. There’s nothing otherworldly about these laws. In fact, they pertain in *this* world precisely because they are formed on the basis of what is discovered in *this* world. The reason why religious thinkers treat them as indications of a supernatural dimension is precisely because they do not understand their inherent relation to this world, which again implicates the *argumentum ad ignorantium* nature of presuppositional apologetics: the apologists do not know how the laws of logic, mathematics, science and morality can be derived by the human mind from their awareness of the world around us, therefore they couldn’t possibly be derived from awareness of the world around us. Consequently, they must derive from some awareness alien to this world, they must derive from a supernatural mind. After all, goes the reasoning, this world is nothing but matter in constant flux, particulars that are ever-changing. So how could these laws, which are “immaterial,” unchanging and universal find their basis in this world? If such reasoning were true, how could these laws have any applicability in this world if they didn’t have any basis in it? Again, to address such questions, apologists appeal to the supernatural: because the laws reflect the nature of a supernatural being, and the supernatural being created this world (this world which is a chaos of particulars constantly undergoing change). Still we are left with imagining something beyond what we perceive, beyond what we can infer from an objective basis, beyond what we can reach by means of reason. You just have to have faith in the apologist’s claims that the defense he gives for his god-belief is true, for it will never make sense on the basis of reason.

Sye’s presumptuousness seems to know no bounds when he writes (again, he’s writing this to whoever happens to visit his website and finds his way to this page):

There is a reason that you deny the existence of God and it has nothing to do with proof. I can show this to you. Examine what your initial reaction was to the proof of God's existence offered on this website. Did you think that you could continue to deny God because you are not a scientist, or philosopher but 'Surely somewhere, sometime, a philosopher or scientist will come up with an explanation for universal, immaterial, unchanging laws apart from God? Did you try to come up with an alternate explanation on your own? OR Did you even consider that the proof was valid?

The problem with Sye’s proof is not whether it is valid or invalid. Validity is a formal concern in logic; one can produce a valid argument that the earth rests on the back of a giant tortoise swimming through space. The question is whether or not Sye’s argument is *sound*, and this should be his concern. It should be our concern as well, for even if we object that Sye’s argument is invalid, it would not take a lot of effort to make it valid, and then what? The concern should be whether the premises in Sye’s argument are true as well as whether or not they in fact support his intended conclusion. On this note, Sye’s argument does not make it clear how the conclusion that his god exists follows from the premises that the laws of logic, mathematics, science and morality are “immaterial,” unchanging and universal. He insists that such laws “cannot be accounted for if the universe was random or only material in nature” (Sye makes this claim on the [pre-proof page](#)). But it does not follow from this that his god therefore exists. Nor does Sye’s claiming that these laws “reflect the very nature of God” given their so-called “immaterial,” universal and unchanging nature (as he does [here](#)). It is one thing merely to *claim* that

these laws “reflect the very nature of God,” another thing entirely to prove (a) that said god exists and (b) that the laws in question actually do reflect its nature. Sye has merely presented the claim that they do (thus assuming the existence of his god, which is what he was supposed to prove in the first place); he has not at all come close to accomplishing the latter tasks.

Notice Sye’s glaring presumptuousness in speaking on behalf of his visitors, most of whom he will never personally meet. How does Sye know that any given reader’s reason for rejecting the claim that his god exists has nothing to do with proof? Presuppositionalists are constantly asking non-believers to “account for” their knowledge; why doesn’t Sye “account for” what he claims to know here? It could be that readers find Sye’s “proof” deficient (they’d be right to do so), and this would be sufficient to reject its conclusion. Sye says that he can show that his readers’ rejection of the claim that his god exists by examining their initial reaction to his website. But even Sye does not know what his readers’ initial reaction to his website may be. That he does not know this is given away by the fact that he must ask his readers questions in order to probe for those reasons. Sye notes several possible initial reactions, but hardly provides an exhaustive list. It could be that his readers came to his website with a willingness to let Sye make his case, and upon examining his case found it to be insufficient to the task he put before himself. It may be the case that some readers are simply being honest when they examine Sye’s case and find it surreptitious or deceptive. Would Sye fault any of his site’s visitors for being honest?

Sye clearly wants to forestall any alternative to his god-belief:

Hoping that an alternate explanation for universal, immaterial, unchanging laws can someday be found apart from God, is a blind leap of faith, or wishful thinking. Isn’t it interesting that this is exactly what professed unbelievers accuse Christians of?

In other words, Sye chides putting hope in what merely be imaginary as an alternative to putting hope in what believers can only imagine. A leap of faith in favor of some mystical concoction of human imagination which starkly departs from the realm in which we exist is to be preferred over man’s potential when it comes to what he may produce in the future (human beings have quite a track record, from the Empire State Building to the Declaration of Independence).

But all of this is for naught, for we already have a *rational* explanation for the universal, unchanging and objective laws which Sye has in mind. And that explanation is found in the philosophy of Objectivism. (If what he presents to us on his site is any indication, it appears that Sye has no familiarity with this philosophy; he certainly does not interact with it.) So there is no need to “hope” that “someday” an “alternative explanation” can be “found apart from God” (as if positing “God” explains these things to begin with!). No “leap of faith” is required, either for some imagined future explanation or for some supernatural deity which one can only imagine. No “wishful thinking” is needed.

And yes, hoping, leaps of faith, and wishful thinking, are indeed the kinds of things non-believers observe Christians indulging in when it comes to their god-belief. And no, non-believers are not constrained to doing the same, so long as they choose rational philosophy.

But rational philosophy, the philosophy of Objectivism, is precisely what believers do not want to consider. Indeed, does Sye consider the possibility that there is a rational alternative to his god-belief? Not that I can see.

Does Sye Ten Bruggencate present a genuine proof for the existence of “God”? Not if what is imaginary is distinct from what is real. If his god were real, why would Sye rely on the usual tactics of presuppositionalism to demonstrate its reality? I submit that he relies on these tactics precisely because his god is not real, and yet *wants* it to be real.

by Dawson Bethrick

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