

Friday, June 11, 2010

## Answering Hutchinson's Critique of Objectivism

A Christian named John Hutchinson posted some comments to my blog [Is Atheism Inherently Arrogant](#). In those comments, Hutchinson spelled out his criticisms of Objectivism. In this entry, I will answer those criticisms.

First, Hutchinson began with a compliment:

Dawson:

Despite the great extent to which I disagree with you, I must confess to appreciating the lucidity by which you present your case.

It is good to see these kind remarks. It is interesting to note however that while some acknowledge the lucidity of my writing, others seem to find my writing simply too difficult to engage. David Smart of [Aristophrenium](#), for instance, seems to think that one would have to be a masochist to read my writings (as Smart suggests [here](#)). At any rate, it is good to see that at least some of my critics can allow themselves such dignity.

Hutchinson writes:

First, I suggest that in upholding Objectivism as the criteria by which all things are judged, you are engaging in just another form of Presuppositionalism. I quote from one your blogs:

"The primacy of existence is a fundamental precondition of proof."

Is this any different in kind from those who uphold the primacy of Scriptures as a fundamental precondition of understanding the cosmos?

It is profoundly different in so many ways, but I can see how one might think the two belong to the same species if he focuses only on superficial similarities. Presuppositionalism is an apologetic method which attempts to defeat non-presuppositionalists in debate by claiming that human knowledge, logic, induction, morality, science, etc. presuppose the Christian god. It is a very specific set of claims associating human cognitive faculties with something we can only imagine, namely the Christian god. It does not address the issue of metaphysical primacy directly (it couldn't survive if it did), but instead keeps this concern safely out of view in order to advance a subjective agenda. The goal of presuppositionalism is two-fold: first, to reinforce the believer's commitment to the devotional program of Christianity, and two, to silence Christianity's critics. It has nothing to do with discovering the fundamental roots of knowledge, logic, induction, etc. These are simply opportunities for the inherently religious predation which drives the believer's yearning to achieve these goals. In the case of the first goal, it does little more than tease its own practitioners; that's why they're continually trying to reinvent it. In the case of the latter goal, it's clearly not done very well at all. If anything, quite the opposite is taking place.

By contrast, the primacy of existence describes the proper orientation between consciousness and its objects and consists of the affirmation that the objects of consciousness hold metaphysical primacy over the conscious activity by which one has awareness of those objects. Since knowledge, logic, induction, etc., all involve conscious activity, the question of the proper orientation between consciousness and its objects in these matters is ever-present and inescapable. Any time one formulates a thought about something, makes a statement, constructs an argument, draws a generalization, studies a phenomenon of nature, pursues his values, etc., he is making use of his conscious faculties and thereby engaged in a relationship between himself as a conscious subject and whatever object(s) he perceives and/or considers. There is no agenda here to convince oneself of some religious formulation that has been handed down through the centuries as the tradition of men, nor is its purpose to silence critics. Its purpose is to provide the basis for objective cognition by clearly identifying and understanding the fundamental roles between the two basic components of any cognitive activity, namely the subject of consciousness and its objects. The goal of the primacy of existence is not to bamboozle non-believers, or defend an arbitrary worldview, or encourage belief in what is only imaginary.

Hutchinson continued:

I don't have a problem with Presuppositionalism as A form of proof. My problem is when it is made THE only form of proof. (It is also badly grounded on a theological and Scriptural basis but that is neither here nor there.) As a form of proof, it is useful if it presents an internal coherence and a correspondence to reality. I.E. Does the Christian worldview demonstrate a coherent consistency with objective reality. Do those assertions in Scriptures, which can be measured, be validated? Or in your Objectivist faith, do your axioms stand up to objective reality and logic?

First of all, Objectivism is not a “faith.” It is a philosophy. Its fundamentals are not accepted on faith, and it does not require one to be willing to “die for” it, as a religious faith demands of its adherents. As Kreeft and Tacelli tell us, “Religious faith is something to die for” (*Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, p. 14). Objectivism represents a diametric opposite to this view: where the Christian believes he is obligated to serve his worldview, the Objectivist recognizes that his worldview is supposed to serve him.

Second, in response to the question of whether or not the Objectivist “axioms stand up to objective reality and logic,” I can only ask: how does one conceive of the concept of ‘objective reality’ without the axioms? The very concept ‘objective reality’ (itself a redundancy, albeit a necessary one in certain contexts), denotes the view that reality is what it is independent of conscious activity. The bible never speaks of something called “objective reality”; its authors appear to have been utterly ignorant of the idea, and the worldview which they accepted and endorsed in their writings about a universe-creating conscious being which “controls whatsoever comes to pass” (Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 160) and to whose will everything else in reality supposedly conforms, only confirm their commitment to the primacy of consciousness metaphysics. Objective means in accordance with the primacy of the object in the subject-object relationship. It is the strict and comprehensive adherence to the fundamental, incontrovertible recognition of the fact that a thing is what it is independent of what one may think about it, feel about it, wish about it, etc.

In the case of logic, I have already explored the notion that logic somehow rests on the existence of the Christian god in my five-section study on the issue:

[Does Logic Presuppose the Christian God? Part I: Examining the Presuppositionalist Viewpoint](#) - In this entry, I examine the claim that logic presupposes the Christian god by reviewing the defenses for this view proposed by several presuppositionalist theorists. In that examination, I uncover many deficiencies, confusions and discrepancies in the presuppositionalist “case” for this view.

[Does Logic Presuppose the Christian God? Part II: Reasons Why Logic Cannot Presuppose the Christian God, #1: Christianity's Lack of Objectivity](#) - In the remaining four entries, I identify reasons why logic *cannot* presuppose the Christian god or the Christian worldview. I begin by pointing out the facts that logic rests on the view that reality is objective while Christianity consists of a subjective version of metaphysics, which precludes objectivity both as an orientation grounding one's worldview as well as a principle guiding one's judgments.

[Does Logic Presuppose the Christian God? Part III: Reasons Why Logic Cannot Presuppose the Christian God, #2: Christianity's Lack of Concept Theory](#) - In the second installment identifying reasons why logic cannot presuppose the Christian god or Christian worldview, I develop the case for logic being *conceptual* in nature, then point out the facts that Christianity lacks a theory of concepts and that presuppositionalism seeks to fill this void with what can rightly called a storybook understanding of logic. Without a theory of concepts, the Christian worldview can hardly “account for” logic, since logic is conceptual in nature.

[Does Logic Presuppose the Christian God? Part IV: Reasons Why Logic Cannot Presuppose the Christian God, #3: Contradictions in Christ](#) - In this entry, I point out the fact that the doctrine of the incarnation is inherently self-contradictory, and note the fact that logic (which is “the art of *non-contradictory identification*” - Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*) cannot be premised on a self-contradiction.

[Does Logic Presuppose the Christian God? Part I: Reasons Why Logic Cannot Presuppose the Christian God, #4: The Trinity](#) - In the final installment, I argue that the doctrine of the trinity is incoherent due to its inherently self-contradictory nature, and therefore that logic cannot presuppose the Christian god or the Christian worldview because “the art of *non-contradictory identification*” could not itself have a self-contradictory basis.

I've tried to share these profound deficiencies with the presuppositionalist system with many apologists, but none that

I can find have attempted to deal with them, and yet they still go on to claim that Christianity is the only worldview which can “account for” logic. I can only conclude that they aren’t really concerned about “accounting for” logic and are chiefly concerned with sustaining their faith commitments as an end in itself.

Hutchinson stated:

I have several problems with your viewpoint

And then proceeded to ask the following question:

Are objects necessary for consciousness to exist?

He then quoted Ayn Rand:

“a consciousness with nothing to be conscious of is a contradiction in terms” (*Atlas Shrugged*, Galt’s Speech)

Then he commented:

It makes consciousness not an entity unto itself but both entity and relationship between itself and its object.

It’s not clear what Hutchinson has in mind when he says “*it* makes consciousness... both entity and relationship...” What the “*it*” here is supposed to refer to remains unstated. Is it supposed to refer to the quote from *Atlas Shrugged*? If so, I do not see where this quote “makes consciousness... [an] entity” in the first place. Rand was very clear that consciousness is *part* of an entity - namely the organism which possesses it - not an entity as such. Consciousness is a type of biological activity like other forms of biological activities, such as digestion, respiration, circulation, etc. Yet one would not call any of these “entities,” would they? Why call consciousness an “entity”? What justifies this?

As to Hutchinson’s question, “are objects necessary for consciousness to exist?” I would of course say yes, since consciousness is consciousness *of some thing*. This does not mean that consciousness is “both entity and relationship between itself and its object,” but rather an attribute of a biological organism which is engaged in a relationship between itself and some object. The proper orientation of the relationship between the subject of consciousness and its objects is what the primacy of consciousness denotes.

Hutchinson states:

I would submit that just as existence can exist without consciousness, consciousness can exist with nothing to be conscious of, including itself. Consciousness can be immersed in a void, within and outside of itself. It would not be a contradiction in terms, but rather a living hell. Indeed, in US military experiments, ‘volunteers’ were experimented upon with sensory deprivation. Most exited displaying symptoms of temporary insanity. If that occurs with a mild case of deprivation of objects with which to dwell upon...

Experiments in sensory deprivation do not validate the notion of consciousness without anything to be conscious of. The subjects of such experiments had certainly been conscious of objects prior to those experiments by means of sensory perception, and they went into those experiments with fully developed memories, conceptual inventories and the ability to feel emotion, imagine. Thus even if their sensory faculties are diminished or debilitated, they still had something to be conscious of, namely their memories, thoughts, imaginations, emotions, etc. These are known as secondary objects, since they are consciousness’ way of responding to what has been perceived. So there’s no consciousness without something to be conscious of. If anything, the experiments demonstrate the need of the human mind for mind-independent objects to maintain cognitive stability. So rather than serving as a counter-example to the primacy of existence, or as evidence that consciousness can exist without something to be conscious of, such experiments only underscore what Objectivism has already understood.

Hutchinson raised another objection:

Another point of order is that you suggest that other philosophies / theologies suggest that consciousness creates existence or objective reality. Outside of existentialism, I don’t know of any Western philosophy or Christian orthodoxy that asserts that. I don’t think that Rand accuses those other worldviews of that.

It is not I who says that certain philosophies grant metaphysical primacy to consciousness, as if I were their spokesman. On the contrary, there are philosophies which do in fact affirm the primacy of consciousness, and I simply

point it out. That Christianity numbers among such worldviews is incontestable. The Christian doctrine of creation is an obvious case in point, exhibiting precisely what Hutchinson denies: conscious activity producing existence. The entire universe, we are told, was “created” by the will of a supernatural consciousness. Observe what Cornelius Van Til tells us:

Creation, on Christian principles, must always mean fiat creation... If the creation doctrine is thus taken seriously, it follows that the various aspects of created reality must sustain such relations to one another as have been ordained between them by the Creator, as superiors, inferiors, or equals. (*The Defense of the Faith*, pp. 26-27).

Van Til goes on to explain that the orientation which the subject of consciousness known as “God” is supposed to enjoy between itself and the objects it has created does not end with merely creating them; it also *controls* them, personally directing their every move, and able to revise the particulars of its creation *at will*:

God may at any time take one *fact* and set it into a new relation to created law. That is, there is no inherent reason in the facts or laws themselves why this should not be done. It is this sort of conception of the relation of facts and laws, of the temporal one and many, embedded as it is in that idea of God in which we profess to believe, that we need in order to make room for miracles. And miracles are at the heart of the Christian position. (*The Defense of the Faith*, p. 27)

So unless one does not grasp the basics of the issue of metaphysical primacy, I do not see how one can affirm that the Christian worldview does not assume the primacy of consciousness. If anyone has any trouble understanding it, I suggest they read the following entries on my blog:

[Confessions of a Vantillian Subjectivist](#)

[The Inherent Subjectivism of God-belief](#)

[How Theism Violates the Primacy of Existence](#)

Pay close attention to the Christian reaction in the comments.

As for what Rand said of other worldviews adopting the primacy of consciousness, we need look no further than the essay in which she introduces her theory of metaphysical primacy:

The primacy of existence (of reality) is the axiom that existence exists, i.e., that the universe exists independent of consciousness (of *any* consciousness), that things are what they are, that they possess a specific nature, an *identity*. The epistemological corollary is the axiom that consciousness is the faculty of perceiving that which exists - that man gains knowledge of reality by looking outward. The rejection of these axioms represents a reversal: the primacy of consciousness - the notion that the universe has no independent existence, that it is the product of a consciousness (either human or divine or both). The epistemological corollary is the notion that man gains knowledge of reality by looking inward (either at his own consciousness or at the revelations it receives from another, superior consciousness).

The source of this reversal is the inability or unwillingness fully to grasp the difference between one’s inner state and the outer world, i.e., between the perceiver and the perceived (thus blending consciousness and existence into one indeterminate package deal). This crucial distinction is not given to man automatically; it has to be learned. It is implicit in any awareness, but it has to be grasped conceptually and held as an absolute .... Very few men ever choose to grasp it and fully to accept it. The majority keep swinging from side to side, implicitly recognizing the primacy of existence in some cases and denying it in others, adopting a kind of hit-or-miss, rule-of-thumb epistemological agnosticism, through ignorance and/or by intention - the result of which is the shrinking of their intellectual range, i.e., of their capacity to deal with abstractions. And although few people today believe that the singing of mystic incantations will bring rain, most people still regard as valid an argument such as “If there is no God, who created the universe?” (“The Metaphysical Versus the Man-Made,” *Philosophy: Who Needs It*, pp. 24-25)

So Rand was pretty clear: the primacy of existence is “is implicit in any awareness,” but that “it has to be learned” since it “is not given to man automatically.” Rand explicitly states that it must be “grasped conceptually and held as an absolute,” i.e., it must be identified in conceptual form (not just a “hunch” or some vague belief), and applied without

exception throughout one's cognition.

She also observed that “the majority [of human individuals] keep swinging from side to side,” sometimes acting on the primacy of existence, sometimes retreating to the false security of the primacy of consciousness (e.g., “it makes me feel better to ignore the pain in my chest!”). Finally, she points to theism as the ultimate expression of the primacy of consciousness, and she is right to do so.

Hutchinson continued:

My understanding is that most believe that flawed perception skews the comprehension of 'the object as is'. The person who is colour blind, (cannot see green and red), cannot perceive the object as is.

I have no idea what a “flawed perception” could be. Perception is a causal, non-volitional activity performed by a biological organism. A perception cannot be flawed any more than digestion could be flawed. An organism may suffer from indigestion, but this would not be an example of a “flaw,” as if a mistake were made. If I ingested two pounds of Thai chilies and spent the next day glued to my toilet seat as a result of it, this would not be due to my stomach and intestines making some kind of mistake. They would be reacting to the contents that they need to deal with. Similarly with perception: there's no such thing as a “flawed perception.” We perceive according to the physical particulars of the organs we possess. Our organs do not “make mistakes,” as if I perceived a tomato when in fact I'm looking at a steamship. Mistakes are only possible where there's choice involved, and this means that only in the realm of *identifying* what we perceive can we make mistakes. We can misjudge the height of a curb, for instance, and slip and fall as a result, but this is not because of a mistake made by our perceptual awareness, but rather in how we identified what we perceived.

Similarly in the case of someone who is colorblind. He sees an object precisely as his faculties can, given their nature. Joseph Rowlands speaks directly to this issue:

Imagine you're color blind. So you only see things in black and white. Now, are your senses flawed? Are you seeing the world incorrectly? The answer is no. The causal chain is still there, although it works different for you. You are still connected to reality. You may not have easy access to some data, but that's not a flaw. That's how everything is. Because there's a means of gaining knowledge, it is necessarily limited. There's nothing wrong there. Just as real people don't have x-ray vision but they still view the world fine, a color blind person is fine too. ([Sense Perception](#))

Colorblindness is not a “flaw” in one's perceptual abilities, any more than nearsightedness is. They may not be considered optimal, but it would occasion the fallacy of the stolen concept to argue that these are “flaws.” A colorblind person's faculties are still operating according to their nature; he is still perceiving the object as his faculties allow him to perceive them. The “flaws” only come once we start making judgments about what we perceive, whether implicit (such as judging the height of a stair step) or explicit (such as making a statement about something). For further reading on the nature of perception, I strongly recommend David Kelley's *The Evidence of the Senses*.

Hutchinson writes:

As all persons have internal biases and flawed structures by which they decode the cosmos, these act as similar filters from seeing 'things as are'. (Christianity's version is of the 'plank in the eye')

For one, I don't think the cosmos is a “code” which needs to be “decoded.” The cosmos, or universe, simply exists. It is not a set of symbols referring to something beyond it. The systems of symbols which human create are intended to record their identifications of what exists in the universe. That's the task which language fulfills:

Language is a code of visual-auditory symbols that serves the psycho-epistemological function of converting concepts into the mental equivalent of concretes. Language is the exclusive domain and tool of concepts. Every word we use (with the exception of proper names) is a symbol that denotes a concept, i.e., that stands for an unlimited number of concretes of a certain kind. (Ayn Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, p. 11).

Second, I would be interested in seeing an argument for the claim that “all persons have... flawed structures by which they” perform any cognitive activity (including “decoding” the universe). Such a generality naturally includes the person affirming it, which only implicates the view itself. I'd say this needs to be “rethink” a bit.

As for “Christianity’s ‘plank in the eye’,” I’m supposing this refers to Matthew 7:3, in which the following words are attributed to Jesus:

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?

While Hutchinson may be correct that this refers to “filters” through which one tries to “decode the cosmos,” my understanding of this verse is that it refers to an expression of hypocrisy and a failure to examine oneself sufficiently. I don’t think these are the same thing as what Hutchinson is driving at. Then again, I do not style myself as a spokesman for the supernatural, so maybe I’m completely off here.

Hutchinson writes:

I think Rand rages at this idea that things cannot be perceived as they are. But I have yet to have found where she states that Western thought believes objects are projections of one subjectivity.

Rand understood the distinction between perceiving an object, which is automatic and non-volitional, and identifying it by means of concepts, which is a volitional process. The objects which we perceive “as they are” are perceived by processes which are “as they are.” The objects do not change because of the nature of our perceptual faculties, nor are we necessarily “biased” or “theory-laden” simply because we are colorblind or nearsighted. A good analogy that I once heard from Harry Binswanger involves traveling to New York City. The argument that we do not perceive objects “as they are” is akin to saying that we do not enter New York City “as it really is” if we enter it by Interstate 95 from New Jersey as opposed to the Southern State Parkway from Long Island. Regardless of how you *enter* the metropolis that is New York City, you are still entering New York City *as it really is*. It’s not something other than New York City *as it really is* simply because you entered it by means of a specific route.

Rand pointed out that the mistake which this view commits is essentially what Kant believed. Writes Rand:

[Kant’s] argument, in essence, ran as follows: man is limited to a consciousness of a specific nature, which perceives by specific means and no others, therefore, his consciousness is not valid; man is blind, because he has eyes—deaf, because he has ears—deluded, because he has a mind—and the things he perceives do not exist, because he perceives them. (“For the New Intellectual,” *For the New Intellectual*, p. 30)

Proposing a similar objection, one Objectivist asked the following:

why do you imply that perceptions [sic] have to be the same for all people in order for them to be a base for objective individual knowledge? Each person makes the implicit judgement “this is how this object looks under these circumstances to me.” I may be colorblind or I may be wearing rose colored glasses or be looking at an object passing thru a refractive surface such as a stick passing thru the surface of a lake. That is how those things look *to me under those circumstances*. ([What does it mean to perceive Objectively?](#))

The bottom line is that the senses are causal, and thus so is perception, since perception is an automatic, non-volitional process performed by the nervous system of a biological organism.

Also, as we saw above, she did characterize the primacy of consciousness as “the notion that the universe has no independent existence, that it is the product of a consciousness (either human or divine or both).” Western thought is a mixed bag; we have little if any basis to ascribe any fundamental uniformity to it. If a person has not learned to grasp the primacy of existence explicitly and fully, he is like a ship at sea with no rudder or compass, meandering about in a “hit-or-miss” fashion, as Rand puts it, sometimes acting on the primacy of existence, at other times assuming the primacy of consciousness, and never recognizing the difference between them. If there were ever a contest between worldviews on concealing the distinction between the primacy of existence and the primacy of consciousness from its adherents, Christianity would take the cake.

Hutchinson went on:

But the largest problem I have, is with your Objectivist presumption of the Primacy of Existence. And by that presupposition, you presume to disprove the Christian God because the Scriptures ‘affirms the existence of a consciousness on which existence depends.’

As I pointed out above (see specifically the blogs to which I linked), the fact that Christianity assumes the validity of the primacy of consciousness is incontestable. To deny the fact that Christianity does rest on the primacy of consciousness, is to deny the authoritative sovereignty of the Christian god.

Hutchinson then wrote:

My question to you is that when you write and project a thought, actually codifying this entity with your keyboard upon electronic media somewhere on the Net; at the point at which you create and communicate it, is not the object that you create a projection of your consciousness? If that is true, does that mean that you do not exist?

Hutchinson's question reminds me very much of a claim made by presuppositionalist Paul Manata, who wrote:

There are some respects which reality is the product of human consciousness. For example, Dawson's mind causes blog posts to appear in the world. ([Bethrick Burner](#))

My response to Manata should suffice to answer Hutchinson's question:

My consciousness does not cause blog posts to appear in the world. My physical actions do. Without a functioning computer hooked up to the internet and without my fingers busily typing away and pointing and clicking hyperlinks, etc., I would not be able to post even one word on my blog. My mind does not put the blog on the internet, my actions, along with the electronic mechanics of my computer and [www.blogger.com](#), do.

Just last week I was editing a post on [blogger.com](#) when a storm outside caused the power to fail temporarily. I lost the edits that I had been making. My wishing was not sufficient to prevent this, nor was my wishing able to restore those edits once the power came back on. If my consciousness causes posts to appear in the world, my wishing should have been sufficient to do all this. But reality does not conform to consciousness. On the contrary, to get the job done, I had to start over, physically going through each paragraph again to review what was written and make any edits that needed to be made. ([Theism and Subjective Metaphysics](#))

If my blogs were merely a projection created by my consciousness, why would I need a computer to write and upload my writings? It is precisely because I do *not* have the ability to "project" my thoughts onto the internet that I must work with the hardware and software which allow me to do this. In other words, it is entirely because existence holds metaphysical primacy that I must obey the natures of the entities involved in order to accomplish the tasks I've set before myself, if I want to accomplish them. As Bacon succinctly put it, "Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed." My consciousness does not have the ability to supersede nature. If Hutchinson can unmistakably identify an instance where this really happens, I'd like to see it. Perhaps he could wish a hundred million dollars into the bank account of my choosing, and then I could devote my life full time to writing blog entries, without ever having to work a job again. Hey, Matthew 21:22 says "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." I'm guessing that Hutchinson believes. So why doesn't he ask for such an outcome? If "the Scriptures" in fact hold metaphysical primacy, as he claims, then the next time I check my account, I should see quite a bounty! But something tells me that this won't be happening. That something, is the primacy of existence.

Hutchinson sought to anticipate my counter-objection, writing:

Now, you might argue that a thought is not a real object or entity. But then I would ask, "Why do you engage in imaginary entities when you spurn the theists for engaging in theirs?" Indeed, the materialist would suggest that there are chemical messages that constitute the physiological components of that thought. You might suggest that you are merely manipulating objects by typing them on an electronic page. But the thought itself is independent of the manner by which you codify it and the tableau on which you inscribe it.

For one, Objectivism is not materialism. It is amazing how often theists equate the two. So whatever "the materialist would suggest" should not be taken for granted as representing the Objectivist position on the matter in question.

Also, since Objectivism explicitly affirms the axiom of consciousness, and consciousness has a nature (including the conceptual activity of human consciousness), there is no reason to suppose that thoughts cannot be real objects of awareness. Part of the confusion here may be due to a lack of understanding as to what the concept 'object' means in the present context. An object in the present context is anything which one perceives and/or considers. It can be a primary object, such as something one directly perceives (a tree, a ball, a mountain, a skyscraper, a computer screen,

etc.), or a secondary object - one which is assembled by the mind on the ultimate basis of perceptual input (such as thought, a feeling, a concept, an argument, a thesis, etc.). Thoughts can be objects, just as they are at many points in this paper (such as at the present moment!). But thoughts are not entities in the sense of mind-independent entities, like trees, mountains, automobiles, biological organisms, staplers, and the such. To treat them as entities within the confines of a certain context (namely one defined by the primacy of existence), is harmless. But failure to grasp the distinction between a thought and the things it denotes, can lead to major confusions and unnecessary mistakes in philosophy.

And it may very well be the case that “the thought itself is independent of the manner by which [I] codify it and the tableau on which [I] inscribe it,” but this does not validate the notion that my blog articles are a “projection” of my consciousness on the internet in the sense being debated. Indeed, I had the thought before I went through the physical motions of typing the symbols which record that thought in visual form. That’s not a counter-example to the primacy of existence; indeed, it is due to the fact that existence holds metaphysical primacy.

Hutchinson went on to say:

It could be argued that any creation that a man creates is a projection of their consciousness at the point of your creating it. It would seem that the logic of the Primacy of Existence denies any form of creation, including that belonging to mankind.

The primacy of existence does not “deny any form of creation,” if by creation one means assembling pre-existing materials into a desired formation, such as when construction workers build a house. In such an endeavor, the workers take materials which exist, and put them into new relationships to each other - such as one board nailed to another board, and then to another, and so on, then being anchored to a concrete foundation, then fastening drywall, setting a roof, installing windows and doors, etc. Gee, makes it sound so easy, doesn’t it? Actually it’s not so easy. It’s a very laborious process. Why? Because existence holds metaphysical primacy. Man does not simply think “house” and the house of his dreams appears before him. He does not “create” a house as the god of the Christian religion is said to have created the universe. It is not the case that man can simply “project” his will onto his environment, and his environment snaps into the desired shape. Why? Because consciousness does *not* hold metaphysical primacy.

Finally, Hutchinson closed with the following remark:

If my reasoning is sound, it would seem to destroy your disproof of God and challenge the presumption of the absolutist maxim of the Primacy of Existence. (I am, by no means, suggesting that this proves God's existence.)

It should be clear from the foregoing, that Hutchinson’s objections are far from sound, but in fact suffer from some rudimentary misunderstandings about the issues to which they pertain. Indeed, it seems that with each statement Hutchinson has made, a correction is needed. Thus if Hutchinson has set out to challenge my criticisms of the Christian religion, I submit that he should give the relevant issues some deeper thought.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Metaphysics](#), [Objectivism](#), [Primacy of Existence](#)

*posted by Bahnsen Burner at [11:00 AM](#)*

**7 Comments:**

[Tim](#) said...

Nice post Dawson. I need to get back to reading you stuff. Keep it up.

Primacy of Existence:

- 1: Recognition that Consciousness is metaphysically passive.
- 2: Recognition that Consciousness is Epistemologically active.



[June 13, 2010 7:20 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Tim,

It's good to see you back. It's been a while!

Your points are spot on.

It's always curious to me when theists claim that Christianity does not reject the primacy of existence. I can only surmise that they simply do not know what the primacy of existence means.

Hutchinson left a comment (see [here](#)) saying that my "form of disputation is to blow off [my] interlocutors by ad hominem rather than address the question." Did you get the impression that this is what I was doing in my response to him?

I've asked Hutchinson to cite examples, but he's not done so.

Seriously, I don't know how anyone could try harder than I have to address the issues and not make any of this a personal matter. That being said, the criticisms of Objectivism which I see most often are due to a lack of firsthand understanding of what Objectivism teaches (an example can be found in the comment of Hutchinson's to which I linked above, where he cites Wikipedia as a source on axioms to which Objectivism is supposed to be measured), and are more in need of correction than of refutation per se. Nowhere am I arguing that Hutchinson's points are wrong because of some personal defect of his own.

Just wondered if you saw something different going on here.

Regards,  
Dawson

[June 13, 2010 9:56 AM](#)

[Ydemoc](#) said...

Dawson,

If I may offer my two cents regarding the confusion: When reading the comments section to your post "Is Atheism Inherently Arrogant?" I got the impression that Hutchinson was responding to Secular Walk's comments, mistaking them for yours.

Keep up the good work!

[June 13, 2010 10:50 AM](#)

[Tim](#) said...

I didn't get the feeling that your response was a personal attack but was a serious bit of thinking about questions or responses toward the Objectivist position.

I suspect a theist feels that their position supports the primacy of existence because it tends to reflect and feel like a realist view. In an effort to support the efficacy of existence the ruling consciousness is that force which makes this happen. The problem, as Rand pointed out, was that this leads to idealism - the opposite of the POE.

I read thru the "Atheism is Inherently Arrogant" and I didn't feel that that piece was a blow off.

I think you have correctly identified the problem as that of certainty. I have been listening to and thinking about Ravi's 5 part audio series on "Faith as Delusional." Ravi sets up the dilemma by claiming that in order for certainty to exist one must step outside oneself but since all atheists are determinists how do they come to know anything much less be

certain about it?

I suspect the charge of arrogance comes about because it is assumed by the theist that the atheist assume 1: Atheism is true and 2: Materialism is true. The problem is that not all atheists are materialists and Objectivism is one of them. Rand rejected cosmology as a part of her metaphysics which meant she didn't endorse either atheism OR materialism at the outset. I do, however, think theists are right to point out that any atheist who presupposes her atheism / materialism at the outset is putting constraints on existence that are no different from the theist.

As far as agnosticism, is it really applicable to theism or god-belief? When it comes to particles one is agnostic toward either position or speed - the concept is valid in that instance. When it comes to "god" is the concept applied in a valid way?

I loved the assumption of the theist position because it makes very evident the problem of the POC.

Sorry, this comment is a bit of a blend between articles.

[June 13, 2010 11:02 AM](#)

[Tim](#) said...

From the outside it would seem that one simply accepts or presupposes the Objectivist axioms (or POE) and works from there. This is not the case. The axioms must be arrived at thru the process of identification like all other concepts. Once they are identified, personally, they are then assumed and applied systematically thru the rest of the system.

Yes/No?

[June 13, 2010 11:24 AM](#)

[Cydonia](#) said...

I was thinking of Ethos Pathos and Logos the other day in relationship to this problem. Objectivism and your writing is Logos but has no Pathos and Ethos to it. Jesus(Ethos) and fear of hell/want for heaven(Pathos) have more pull on the average person than anything you say here could ever have. That's why I hate Presuppositionalism so much. It attempts Logos when quite frankly it doesn't need to. It takes a believer to follow and defend Presuppositionalism but, they are already believers, why bother? It's not really going to win you converts because 99% of people are convinced by the Ethos and Pathos arguments. It's better to stand on a street corner and hand out Chick Tracts if your goal is more converts. I think a better strategy for Presuppositionalism would be to feign logos by making up a giant pile of almost plausible sounding statements, call the opposition biased, and never defend yourself. People will think "sounds good enough to me" and you can claim victory all the way to the bank(creation museum comes to mind). When studying mathematics I always knew if the answer was right if the solution was beautiful. If I got an ugly solution it must be wrong(not true for all math but a lot of college math it's true). Existence exists is just such a solution. Its simple, elegant, and depends on no other concepts. It's beautiful. It bothers me on some level that people won't grasp this like I see it. But, to make most people see it I would have to do something ridiculous like make them fear for their lives or love me so much that they agree only because I agree. Its pathetic really.

[July 18, 2010 1:25 PM](#)

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