

Saturday, September 15, 2012

## Answers to “50 Important Philosophical Questions”

I recently saw a blog entry on [Thoughts On The Line](#) (TOTL) titled [50 IMPORTANT PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS](#) (no, that’s not me shouting), and after reading some of the questions I thought I’d take some time and answer all fifty questions. So here they are, in the order in which they appear on the TOTL blog entry:

### 1. Does God exist? (Metaphysics + Philosophy of Religion)

While theists might find this answer emotionally disturbing, if “God” is supposed to denote some kind of “supernatural” consciousness, the answer is no. Since that which is imaginary is not real, that which is imaginary does not exist, for that which is not real does not exist.

Consider: Would it be possible to “believe in” a deity even if it didn’t actually exist? The very insistence that Christianity is the “one true religion” and other religions are false, suggests that this is indeed possible. It is always possible to *imagine* a god, even the Christian god, such as when one is reading a “sacred text.” Just as the characters of “Harry Potter” come alive in one’s imagination when he reads one of J. K. Rowling’s novels, the Christian god and all the other characters of the Christian bible “come alive” in the imagination of the believer who reads it and invests his reading experience with emotional projections. Essentially speaking, there is no fundamental difference between the two cases. Since it is always possible to *imagine* a god, one will always be able to imagine the Christian god. But this alone does not tell the whole story of Christianity’s problems. While the mere ability to imagine the Christian god is in itself sufficiently damning, the fact that believers and non-believers alike have no alternative *but to imagine* the Christian god, even within the variable contexts of contemplating arguments supposedly *proving* its existence, is far more damaging to theism than any refutation of a pro-theistic argument.

Defenses of theism do nothing to eliminate the need to rely on the imagination when contemplating or worshiping the god or gods whose existence they are intended to establish. Moreover, getting behind apologetic sound bite formulae common in some theistic circles - e.g., “the proof that God exists is that without Him you couldn’t prove anything,” “the impossibility of the contrary,” “God has revealed the truth of His Word such that we can be certain of it” - is entirely possible in spite of the fact that the god being so promoted is merely imaginary. On the contrary, given the imaginative nature of religious confessional investment, such slogans are to be expected among the faithful as prompts intended to keep them from straying. For those who may be interested, I have already exposed these points in my blog [The Imaginative Nature of Christian Theism](#) and have presented [A Proof that the Christian God Does Not Exist](#) on my blog.

### 2. How can we know that He exists? (Epistemology + Natural Theology + Philosophy of Religion)

This is a question that theists need to address, but sadly they continually fail to deliver on it. Christian apologist John Frame tells us, “We know without knowing how we know” ([Presuppositional Apologetics: An Introduction \(Part I\)](#)). This comes from the same camp which relies on an apologetic method which consists of continually repeating the question “How do you know?” over and over against non-believers (as is acknowledged [here](#)). So while apologists like to press non-believers to explain how they know what they claim to know, apologists themselves seem entirely unprepared to answer their own question on behalf of their own knowledge claims.

Meanwhile, Christians need to make a choice: either acknowledge that the imaginary is not real and abandon theism altogether, or go on pretending as though something which theists can only imagine is truly real in spite of the fundamental distinction between the real and the imaginary.

Moreover, Christians need to recognize once and for all that the claim to have secured knowledge by means of “revelations” only indicates that they have no epistemology proper to speak of. Claiming to know something “by revelation” means that the person making such a claim cannot identify the steps by which they came to the “knowledge” they claim to possess. Presumably he “receives” knowledge without performing any mental steps which he could identify in the first place. On the theist’s view, knowledge is not a product of mental activity

performed by the knower, but a deliverance from a supernatural realm which he passively receives by some means which the knower himself cannot identify, understand or articulate. The claim “It was revealed to me” really means that the believer wants to ignore penetrating epistemological inquiry and expects his audience to accept his claims without rational basis and without regard for the need to tie knowledge objectively to reality. As such, the retreat to revelation is an outright assault on reason and the abilities of the human mind.

The problem for Christians who claim to know things by means of “revelation” is the impossible tightrope which such a claim forces them to try to walk. On the one hand, when the “it has been revealed to me” card is played, the apologist implies that he has received some kind of direct, private revelation from the god he claims to worship. This is essentially a claim to infallibility on the part of the apologist: he is essentially saying he cannot be wrong about what he claims, since he has “received” it directly from an omniscient and infallible source. Supposedly infallibility is thereby transferred by means of supernatural manipulation of his mind. After all, how could a revelation from an infallible and omniscient supernatural consciousness be wrong? Such a presumption amounts to a denial on the part of the apologist of the very nature of his own mind, which, if he is a human being, is indeed fallible.

It also suggests that the apologist fancies himself as one of his god’s favorites. Why else would the believer be receiving all these revelations from a supernatural source while everyone else is relegated to bystander status? Naturally, the believer will want some kind of psychological compensation for the emotional investment he’s put into his god-belief. So why not do his best to believe that what his theology urges people to believe is “revealed” by a supernatural being? In the believers’ mind, labeling his beliefs as “revealed” makes them unquestionable. Of course, this doesn’t work for everyone else who tries this maneuver.

On the other hand, if by “revelation” the apologist merely means that he read something in some sacred text, such as the Christian bible, then all bets are off: he’s on the same level as everyone else, and thus just as fallible as the next person. The biblical text is available for anyone, believer and non-believer alike, to examine, scrutinize, and judge. What the apologist resents is when non-believers examine and judge the bible. The apologist essentially says that the non-believer has no right to judge the content of the biblical text. And yet, the same apologist insists that non-believers acknowledge its supposed truth. But to say that something is true is to pass judgment on it just as much as saying that it is false is passing judgment. So again, the apologist finds himself in a futile epistemological pickle here, essentially a trap set by his own worldview.

Either way, an appeal to revelation is a declaration that reason is not the only means of knowledge by man, for revelation and reason are certainly not the same. Indeed, they are mutual exclusive. In the case of revelation, the human mind allegedly receives knowledge *passively*, without any epistemological process performed by the knower. It does not rely on awareness of reality by means of perception; it does not rely on the formation of concepts on the basis of perceptual input; it does not rely on any tie to reality external to the human knower which is distinguishable from imagination (such as the objects of perceptual awareness). On the other hand, reason depends entirely on its content *ultimately* from perceptual input. Reason is the faculty which identifies and integrates the material provided by the senses. Without perception and perceptual input, there is no reason. Reason is not a faculty by which man discovers facts about reality by turning the focus of his attention *inward*, such as into the fantasies of his imagination. Revelation is essentially indistinguishable from consulting one’s imagination as the source of his “knowledge,” for it involves the pretense that knowledge of reality can be gained without consulting the facts which one directly perceives in the world around him.

### 3. Does God have a nature? (Phil. of Religion + Metaphysics)

Not according to Christians. Christians say that their god is “infinite.” That which is “infinite” has no specific identity, no nature. To exist is to have attributes which can be measured, even if only by means of rough comparisons to attributes possessed by other entities (indeed, this is how measurement begins for all of us). But to say that something is “infinite” is to say that it is *beyond* any specific measurement, which means it *cannot be measured*, not even roughly. Of course, this amounts to a self-contradiction: they are essentially saying that their god’s nature is that it has no nature. It is extremely important that theists understand that this is *not* the non-believer’s problem.

### 4. Does God have properties? (Phil. of Religion + Metaphysics)

Only those which its beholders imagine it has, for it is the believer’s imagination which ultimately calls all the

shots - even if those shots are inspired by some written text - when it comes to developing an image of one's god.

#### 5. Can we gain knowledge about God's nature or properties? (Epistemology)

Not by rationally investigating reality. Since the notion "God" and religious claims associated with it have no tie to reality, either perceptually or conceptually, it is not something that one can discover by looking outward at reality. One can only gain "knowledge" of a god's "nature or properties" ultimately by turning one's focus *inward*, namely by consulting one's own imagination and calling it "theology."

It is important to keep in mind the fact that reason, man's only means of knowledge, rests squarely and uncompromisingly on the primacy of existence metaphysics. We discover facts about reality by looking *outward*, by observing reality, not by imagining alternatives to what we perceive. To say that a claim is true is to imply that it is true *independent of our wishes, our desires, our preferences, our emotions, our imagination, our fantasies, etc.* In other words, to say that something is true is to imply that it is the case *independent of conscious activity*. That is the primacy of existence.

In contrast to this, religious belief assumes the primacy of consciousness metaphysics. The primacy of consciousness is the fundamental keystone and distinguishing characteristic of religious ontology. In metaphysics, the primacy of consciousness is instanced any time one posits that some form of consciousness - either one's own or someone else's, whether real or imaginary - holds metaphysical primacy over selected objects or reality as such. Staple religious doctrines such as the doctrine of creation, of miracles, of divine foreordination, divine sovereignty, historical providence, faith, prayer, salvation, sin, revelation, atonement, incarnation, resurrection, etc., etc., etc., all presuppose the primacy of consciousness. Since the primacy of consciousness denies the primacy of existence, any view which grants metaphysical primacy to any form of consciousness entails a denial of the very preconditions of truth as such. Consequently, religious belief, including Christianity, performatively contradicts itself any time it affirms its doctrines as truths. So religion is no friend to truth. Indeed, religion is an assault on truth.

#### 6. Is God the source of all reality? (Metaphysics + Phil. of Religion)

No. The very notion that some entity or thing is "the source of all reality" is irreversibly incoherent. If one posits that reality is sourced in something, would this not imply that the source of reality is something other than a part of reality? Why not start with reality, which we know exists, and forget about trying to make sense of the self-refuting notion that reality has its source in something other than itself? Other than what we can *imagine*, there is no alternative to reality. And any alternative we can imagine, is *imaginary*. So such questions as the one posed here are philosophically inert - they have no genuine intellectual value; they rest on anti-intellectual premises.

#### 7. What does it mean to say that God is transcendent over His creation? (Phil. of Religion)

While "sovereignty" denotes the primacy of divine whim over reality, history, and human nature, "transcendent" signifies immunity from the strictures faced in the human condition. According to [Theopedia](#), "transcendence" in this context "means that God is above, other than, and distinct from all he has made - he *transcends* it all." So, to say that a god is "transcendent" means to say that said god enjoys significant freedoms that human beings do not enjoy. Human beings, for instance, face a fundamental alternative, namely life vs. death. A transcendent god, however, faces no such alternative: it cannot die, even if it wanted to. It is supposed to be eternal, unchanging, immortal, never knowing any need. Human beings need values and are susceptible to harm. But a transcendent god knows no threats and needs nothing in order to exist. It has no need for values, and thus no need for morality. Morality simply would not apply to such a being.

In this sense, the notion of "transcendent" is code for the primacy of the believer's own imagination in dictating the fundamentals of his worldview. It is a religious expression of the primacy of consciousness translated into theological terminology. For instance, the believer imagines that his god is a living being, but he also imagines that it has no moral responsibility, somewhat like a dog or an ant. Like dogs and ants, it cannot be held morally responsible for its actions. It is not bound to the same standards as man is. But unlike dogs and ants, it cannot be harmed, it cannot suffer, it cannot die, it cannot be killed.

Ultimately, so far as theology is concerned, “transcendence” signifies nothing more than divine aloofness, and it translates into an excuse from any responsibility on the part of the god which is so characterized. This can easily be massaged into excuse for believers as well, and a god’s excuse from moral responsibility (albeit disguised as “transcendence”) is crucial to the believer’s maintenance of a self-imposed euphoric calm in response to the troubles of this world, which are to be downplayed as ultimately insignificant; he is not to experience or express outrage at mass destruction of human values which, according to his worldview, would be caused or enabled by his god. A “transcendent” god is one which is not held to be morally responsible for its chosen actions by its worshipers. It can do anything it chooses to do, and no matter what it may be that it does, it is not morally liable for its actions and thus not to be judged. A human being performing the same chosen actions would be condemned by the same moral code as that which believers claim is based on their god’s nature, but which believers are reluctant to apply to their god.

#### 8. Is God the source of morality? (Ethics + Phil. of Religion)

No, absolutely not. The source of morality is existence, particularly man’s existence given his nature as a biological organism capable of the conceptual level of consciousness and confronted with the fundamental alternative of life vs. death.

#### 9. What is Morality? (Ethics)

Morality is “a code of values to guide man’s choices and actions—the choices and actions that determine the purpose and the course of his life” (Ayn Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics,” *The Virtue of Selfishness*, p. 13). Man needs morality because a) he faces a fundamental alternative, namely life vs. death, and because of this he needs values in order to live; b) he has no *automatic* means of knowing what is a value and what is a non-value, so he needs a rational system by which he can determine these things; and c) he has no *automatic* means of knowing what action or actions will preserve his life as opposed to actions which will put his life in danger, so he needs a rational system by which he can determine actions proper for his life. Rational morality is essentially the application of reason to the task of living. It has nothing to do with worshiping something we can only imagine; it has nothing to do with serving something that has no needs; it has nothing to do with sacrificing oneself to something that could never use, need or benefit from anything one could sacrifice. The entire project of morality is primarily geared toward preserving and improving one’s own life. As such, morality would not and could not apply to a being which faces no fundamental alternative as man does. A rock does not need morality, for it cannot die. An ant has no use for morality because it does not have the capacity for reason, namely the conceptual level of consciousness.

An immortal, indestructible god which has no needs would clearly have no use for morality. Its existence is inalterable: nothing can harm it, it cannot die, and it can know no deprivation. Moreover, an omniscient and infallible god would have no need for reason, for reason is a means of discovering, identifying and validating knowledge. Such a faculty would not be necessary or even useful to a mind which is said to already know everything. Indeed, [an omniscient mind would not have its knowledge in the form of concepts](#), which is the very ability which makes reason possible to man in the first place.

#### 10. What is Good? (Ethics)

“All that which is proper to the life of a rational being is the good,” (Ayn Rand, *For the New Intellectual*, p. 122).

#### 11. What is Evil? (Ethics)

“...all that which destroys [the life of a rational being] is the evil,” (Ibid.).

The concepts of good and evil can only apply to man in the context of his life and his ability and choice to live it. They cannot rationally apply to ants or rocks any more than they could apply to imaginary beings, such as gods and deities. Nor can their basis or meanings be sourced in ants, rocks or imaginary beings. The good is not something that can be commanded any more than it can be wished into existence. The good is something man must *earn*, and he must earn it by reasoned productive effort.

#### 12. How can we tell what is Good and Evil? (Ethics + Epistemology)

Only by using reason as our only means of knowledge, our only standard of judgment, our only guide to chosen action. To determine whether some thing or action is good or evil, one must use reason to discover the relevant facts of the matter and weigh their impact on one's individual values (assuming those values themselves are *objectively* defined).

### 13. Why should I be moral at all? (Ethics)

You should be moral only if living is your ultimate goal. So to answer this question, you must determine whether or not living is your ultimate goal. No one else can answer this for you. No one can "command" you to want to live. No one should need another person to "command" him to want to live. If a person does not value his life, commands will not change anything. If someone values his life, commands accomplish nothing other than interfering with one's choice to value his life. Moreover, there is no "duty" to live. An individual rationally values life *by choice*, not because he's "obligated" to do so. An obligation implies a broader goal or purpose. But if living is one's ultimate goal or purpose, then there could be no such obligation to live. For the rational human being, life is an end in itself, regardless of who disapproves.

But consider this question from the perspective of religious morality. Religion holds that morality entails obedience to divine commandments. On this view, to be moral means to obey a god's commandments, to do according to a god's will. But if this is the case, why be moral? To outsiders, it seems that theists are essentially saying that religion teaches that one should be moral for fear of the consequences of disobedience: obey god's commandments or you will be punished. While this is clearly modeled in sacred texts like the bible, believers often insist that this is not their view of moral motivation. But it certainly seems to be the case, given what we find modeled in the bible. And if it is an accurate characterization, it is important to note that such a moral view does not offer any goal on behalf of moral action except to avoid a god's displeasure. The motivation here is not to gain and/or secure values, but to avoid wrath. This means that, on the religious view, there is no value to be gained as a result of moral action; moral action is to be performed only to stave off a supernatural consciousness' pointless anger, and this does not yield anything that man can use for living his life. If there were any value to be achieved as a motivating goal for morality, then such action would be selfish, and religious morality is notorious for its condemnation of selfishness. But in spite of its condemnation of selfishness, religious morality cannot escape selfishness in moral motivation completely, for even the goal of avoiding punishment is itself an end in a person's self-interest.

### 14. Are humans just physical entities or do they have an immaterial self? (Metaphysics)

Human beings are integrations of matter and consciousness. They are physical entities, and they possess, among other attributes, the faculty of consciousness. However, consciousness itself is not an entity, nor is it an independently existing concrete. On the contrary, it is a type of *activity* which organisms like human beings *perform*. Consciousness is [biological in nature](#). As a living organism which is an integration of matter and consciousness, man is indivisible. Contrary to what religion has taught for millennia, man is not a ghost inhabiting a corpse.

### 15. Do humans have an essential nature? (Metaphysics)

Yes: rational animality.

### 16. Do humans have free-will? (Philosophy of Mind + Metaphysics)

Yes, in the sense of being able to select between alternatives. Either one chooses to acknowledge this fact, or he chooses to evade it. Conceptual awareness would not be possible without volition.

### 17. Are humans morally responsible for the things they think, do, intend, etc.? (Philosophy of Mind + Metaphysics)

Human individuals are morally responsible for any action they *choose* to perform, since choice is the province governed by morality. One is not morally responsible for having a heart murmur, getting the hiccups, having a fever, etc. Such things lie beyond the reach of one's volition, and morality applies only to action which is *chosen*.

### 18. Does the personal identity of a human persist through change? (Metaphysics)

Yes, so long as the change in question does not result in the destruction of the person, for if a person is destroyed, his identity is extinguished. Man's identity includes all of his attributes, including his capacity to act and change within certain limits.

19. What are the anthropological implications of determinism? (Metaphysics)

Inescapable fatalism, and the anti-philosophical wasteland that this implies.

20. If we can prod the brain and produce a physical or even a mental effect, what implications follow? (Phil. of Mind)

Nothing more than or contrary to the facts that man is a physical being, that he is a biological organism, and that he is an integration of matter and consciousness. If man is a biological organism integrating matter and consciousness, we should expect external manipulation of the brain to have certain effects, up to and including effects on one's conscious experience.

21. How can God know the future? (Philosophical Theology + Phil. of Religion)

Only by means of some believer imagining that his god knows the future. (Roulette, anyone?)

22. Does God know counter-factuals? (Phil. of Religion)

Only if some believer imagines that his god knows such things.

23. Is God within time or outside of time? (Metaphysics, Philosophy of Time/Science)

Time is not a room or box which one is either inside or outside of. The part that the theist needs to come to terms with is the fact that if something *acts*, its actions can be measured in relation to the actions of other entities, including the actions which serve as the standard of temporal measurement, for time is the measure of motion.

24. What is time? (Phil. Of Time/Science)

Time is a means of measuring motion and action. As such, time is epistemological, since measurement is epistemological; what time measures is metaphysical.

25. Is time a physical entity or a metaphysical entity? (Phil. Of Time/Science)

Neither. Time is not an entity; it is not even metaphysical. It is a process. It is a process of measurement. It is an epistemological activity, essentially similar to counting.

26. How can humans have free-will and God be sovereign all at the same time? (Phil. of Religion)

I'm glad this is not my problem. There is no non-contradictory reconciliation or compromise between the volitional nature of man's consciousness and the notion of an all-controlling sovereign god which "controls whatsoever comes to pass" (Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 160).

27. Is science compatible with religious belief / Christianity? (Philosophy of Science)

No, science and religion are not compatible. Science is pro-reason, and religion is anti-reason.

28. What is science? (Phil. of Science)

Science is the systematic application of reason to a specific field of study. Reason rests on the primacy of existence, and religion rests on the primacy of consciousness, which is in direct contradiction to the primacy of existence and which is logically self-refuting.

29. Is there only one scientific method? (Phil. of Science)

Broadly speaking, yes, since the systematic application of reason is the only epistemological methodology available to science. Science is not the application of mysticism or irrationalism to some field of study. Only the application of reason can qualify as a scientific endeavor.

30. Do the findings of science imply naturalism or materialism? (Phil. Of Science)

They imply Objectivism, and necessarily so. There has never been a scientific discovery which undermines or refutes the tenets of Objectivism.

31. Which fields of study count as science? (Phil. of Science)

Only those accessible by the systematic application of reason.

32. What theological implications follow from the findings of Quantum Physics? (Phil. of Science)

Only those which theists imagine as following from the findings of Quantum Physics.

33. Is scientism a rational view? (Epistemology)

As I have seen the term 'scientism' used, it is laden with negative connotations, typically by those who find science as such a threat to their worldview. Personally I have never encountered someone who claims to be an adherent of "scientism," so I do not have much to go on as to what "scientism" as a worldview teaches save for those who have hoisted it up as something to shoot arrows at.

As for determining whether or not a particular viewpoint is rational, it really should not be as difficult as some seem to think. Rationality is uncompromising reliance on reason; it is adherence to reason as one's only means of knowledge, one's only standard of judgment and one's only guide to action. So ask the question: does the view in question adhere uncompromisingly to reason? From there one needs to check the premises of the view in question to determine whether or not this is the case.

34. Isn't Evil incompatible with God's being real? (Phil. of Religion)

According to Christians, their god has sufficiently moral reasons for allowing evil. For example, Greg Bahnsen holds that "God has a morally sufficient reason for the evil which exists" (*Always Ready*, p. 172). Clearly they believe their god is on cozy terms with evil. Of course, this can only mean that such a god is not good. There is no compromise between good and evil, and there is no such thing as "a morally sufficient reason" to commit or allow ("ordain") evil. This is essentially like saying there is a morally sufficient reason to be immoral. What form of morality grants license to violate its own norms? For more on this matter, see my blog entries [Christianity's Sanction of Evil](#) and [Greg Bahnsen on the Problem of Evil](#).

35. Do God's "omni" properties make sense? (Philosophical Theology)

Of course not. It is all part of the believer's irrational worldview. But this does not stop theists from calling their theology "knowledge."

36. Can God do anything? Even something logically incoherent? (Phil. of Religion)

Is anything that takes place in a Bugs Bunny cartoon "logically incoherent"? For more on this matter, see my series of articles on [the Cartoon Universe of Christianity](#).

37. What is Truth? (Epistemology)

Truth is the non-contradictory, objective identification of fact. It is only possible on the unbreached adherence to the primacy of existence.

38. How can only one religion be true? (Phil. of Religion)

Religion is mystical in nature. No form of mysticism is true since mysticism as such rests on metaphysical premises which deny the very basis of truth, namely the primacy of existence metaphysics.

39. How can one effectively compare different religions or views to see which one is true? (Phil. Of Religion + Epistemology)

One can only "effectively compare different religions" by recognizing first that religion is a primitive form of philosophy. Religion is primitive in the sense that it is irrational and pre-scientific, and it lacks the benefits of

an objective understanding of the nature of human mental activity, including concept-formation, reasoning, psychology, etc. Since religions are irrational, it can safely be said that no religion is true or philosophically sound.

40. Is the trinity a coherent concept? (Phil. of Religion)

No, it's not. (Further reading: see [here](#).)

41. How could God become a man? (Phil. of Religion)

How can Wiley E. Coyote crawl out from underneath a 40-ton boulder that dropped on him? Very easy: in a universe that is analogous to a cartoon, anything can happen. E.g., men can walk on unfrozen water, water can suddenly become wine, dead persons can be resurrected. The cartoonist can even pencil himself into his cartoons and perform as one of their characters. Again, see [this series of articles](#).

42. What does it mean to say that Jesus has two natures? (Phil. of Religion + Metaphysics)

It means to contradict oneself. The idea that Jesus is "wholly God, wholly man" simply means that Jesus is a walking contradiction. See [here](#) and [here](#).

43. What are miracles? (Phil. of Religion)

Miracles are a type of fantasy imagined on the part of a believer in which a supernatural consciousness brings about certain outcomes by means of manipulative will. (Further reading: see [Craig Keener on Miracles](#).)

44. Are miracles possible? (Phil. of Religion)

Not if wishing doesn't make it so.

45. Can we examine ancient documents and gain knowledge from them? (Epistemology + Philosophy of History)

Of course. For instance, we can examine ancient documents and learned what at least some people back then may have believed. (Further reading: see [here](#).)

46. Can we know certain truths without evidence? (Epistemology)

If by "truths" we mean non-contradictory, objective identifications of facts (cf. question #37 above), and by "evidence" we mean factual input from reality acquired by rational means which inform what we call "truths," then no, we cannot know any truths without evidence. What we call "truth" depends on facts which we discover in reality by means of an objective process and which we identify and integrate into the sum of our knowledge in a non-contradictory manner. Anything other than this could only be a "truth" falsely so-called, i.e., some ideational content consisting of and/or resting on stolen concepts, ignorance, fantasy, imagination, etc.

47. What role do "supernatural experiences" or "mystical experiences" have to play? (Phil. of Religion)

What role do these things have to play *in what*? What exactly is a "supernatural experience"? What is a "mystical experience"? Human beings have experiences. This is undeniable. But determining their nature and their causes is subject to reason. Since reason inherently presupposes the primacy of existence (e.g., the recognition that "wishing doesn't make it so"), and *rationality* is adherence to reason as one's only means of knowledge, one's only standard of judgment, and one's only guide to action, then any course of inference which concludes that a particular experience is or was caused by something which contradicts the primacy of existence, cannot be rational. Since supernaturalism inherently assumes the primacy of consciousness (which contradicts the primacy of existence), any course of "reasoning" which seeks to establish one's personal experience(s) as supernatural in origin, cannot be rational. Typically the work of one's own imagination is not difficult to spot in such cases. See for instance my blog [Carr vs. Cole](#).

48. Do abstract objects exist (i.e. does the number 2 exist)? (Metaphysics)

Only as the form in which the human mind identifies and integrates the material provided by the senses. Abstractions, or *concepts*, are mental integrations; they are the method by which the mind organizes and



retains what it discovers in the world. As such, abstractions are not independently existing concretes, but rather a process by which the human mind functions. Because of early philosophers' ignorance of the process by which the human mind forms concepts, debate raged for millennia on the proper way to classify abstractions *metaphysically*. While they were distracted with such issues, they lost sight of the *epistemological* status as well as the process by which concepts are formed, and the function they play in cognition, which are the real philosophical issues to which philosophers should be paying attention.

49. If abstract objects exist, what is God's relation to them? (Metaphysics + Phil. of Religion)

There is no objective relationship between properly formed abstractions (i.e., abstractions formed on the basis of objective input) and imaginary beings. The proper relationship entailed by abstractions is the relationship between human consciousness and the objects discovered existing in reality which those abstractions identify and integrate. It is this relationship which has eluded philosophers for over two millennia of philosophical musing, and focusing on theological nonsense (literally, *nonsense*) has prevented thinkers from fully understanding the nature of concepts and their importance to human knowledge. The presence of stolen concepts in mystical thinking is sure evidence of this.

Notice how theists are concerned about how their god is related to "abstract objects." Notice also that they seem completely disinterested in how the human mind, including their own, is related to "abstract objects." They apparently presume that their minds can only be related to "abstract objects" by first having some kind of relationship with their god, a relationship via which they are subsequently able to enjoy a relationship with "abstract objects." Abstractions, then, are known, either through revelation or anamnesis, prayer or faith, or some other alleged mystical medium which makes psychic communion with the otherworldly possible. For such thinkers, abstractions are not the product of human mental activity; perhaps they presume that this would automatically make abstractions subjective. Given theism's departure from the objective orientation between the human mind and reality, it certainly would result in subjectivism. But so does basing abstractions on a being which the human mind can only access by means of imagination. The solution to these anti-conceptual pursuits is grounding conceptual knowledge on the axioms and the primacy of existence and forming them according to the proper method of concept-formation, as laid out by the objective theory of concepts (see Ayn Rand's *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*; see also Allan Gotthelf's [Ayn Rand on Concepts](#)).

50. Do universals exist? (Metaphysics)

That the question is categorized as a metaphysical issue confirms that its author does not understand universality as an *epistemological* concern. And the likely reason why he does not understand universality as an epistemological concern is because he does not understand universality as an aspect of *conceptual* awareness. Universality is not some object existing in some supernatural dimension apart from the objects we perceive in the world. Rather, universality is essentially the open-endedness of conceptual reference. I have posted an entire blog on this issue [here](#).

So there you have it - 50 "important philosophical questions" answered. Will anyone learn from this?

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Epistemology](#), [Objectivism](#), [Philosophy](#)