

The Axioms and the Primacy of Existence

As I mentioned in [my previous post](#), I have much to say in response to many of the points that Paul Manata raised in his 4 Nov. [diatribe against me](#). In this post, I focus on Paul's misunderstanding of the relationship between the axioms and the primacy of existence principle.

A Failure to Integrate

One of Paul's attempts to argue against Objectivism's affirmation of the primacy of existence principle is that the axiom of existence is not sufficient to support it. He presents this argument early on in the second section of his blog (point 5 under the heading "The More Substantive"), and must think it's very effective because he comes back to it over and over throughout the rest of his post.

He writes:

"Things exist" does not tell us that "things exist independent of any consciousness." There's no logical rule by which that inference can be made. Indeed, Piekoff [sic] tells us that "things exist" does not tell us anything about the nature of the things that exist." Therefore, if "things exist" does not tell us ANYTHING about the nature of the things that exist it cannot; therefore, tell us that they are the kind of things that "exist independent of consciousness." Same goes with his claim that these "axioms" tell us that "consciousness did not create reality."

To those who are not very familiar with Objectivism, Paul's inference here may seem pretty devastating in that he seems to have found the exception to Objectivism's absolutism that theism needs to squeeze its gangrenous way into a rational worldview. To the untutored, it very well may appear that Paul has found Objectivism's Achilles' heel.

However, contrary to his apologetic intentions, the argument that Paul offers here does not refute anything that Objectivism teaches, or any criticism that I have raised against theism. As an attempt to criticize Objectivism, it commits the fallacy of context-dropping and serves as a prime example of what happens when one fails to integrate. It must be remembered that the axiom of existence, about which Paul is attempting to make his point, *is only one of several axioms*, and that Objectivism does not affirm the axiom of existence in the contextual vacuum that Paul's concern here assumes. The axioms are our most fundamental recognitions made explicit. However, Objectivism nowhere proposes that the mind *stops* with any one of these recognitions, or that the axioms serve as a substitute for further knowledge that we may acquire about the world. On the contrary, they provide an anchor for knowledge, a foundation upon which to build our knowledge, not an escape from knowledge.

Now it is important to keep in mind that the axiom of existence is not the *only* axiom, that it is not a recognition that remains isolated from other recognitions. The act of recognizing the fact that existence exists *begins* a series of recognitions; it does not bring the mind to a halt. The recognition that "things exist" does not by itself indicate the relationship between what is perceived and the means by which it is perceived, because the mind that is doing the recognizing hasn't gotten there yet; the discovery of consciousness is still to come. Once the mind recognizes both facts - that there are things *and that it is aware of those things* - then there's a relationship to be grasped. This is the point that Paul's argument fails to factor in, namely the axiom of *consciousness*. There is also the axiom of identity, which is implicit in both recognitions, that things exist and that one is aware of things that exist; it tells us that there is a distinction between what we perceive and the means by which we perceive it. Together the axioms of existence, identity and consciousness set the stage that subsequent knowledge requires by identifying the constants which apply throughout all knowledge and providing the mind with an explicit recognition of the fact that there is a fundamental distinction between *what is perceived* and the *action of perceiving it*, between *what is known* and the *process by which it is known*, between the *object of cognition* and the *subject of cognition*. Throughout the history of philosophy, there are many persisting errors which have resulted from a failure to grasp the nature of this distinction and understand its implications for knowledge and epistemology. Many still persist to this day, and the religious view of the world is definitely one of the more obvious ones.

In the above statement, Paul alluded to a statement by Dr. Leonard Peikoff. Let's look at what he writes. He writes:

The axiom [of existence] does not tell us anything about the nature of existents; it merely underscores the fact that they exist. (OPAR, p. 4)

This statement comes at the end of a primary point that Peikoff is establishing early in his discussion of philosophy:

We start with the irreducible fact and concept of existence - that which is. The first thing to say about that which is is simply: it is. As Parmenides in ancient Greece formulated the principle: what is, is. Or, in Ayn Rand's words: *existence exists*. ("Existence" here is a collective noun, denoting the sum of existents.) This axiom does not tell us anything about the nature of existents; it merely underscores the fact that they exist. (Ibid)

Peikoff begins by addressing our need for a cognitive starting point: where do we begin? Objectivism holds that the fact that existence exists - the fact that there are things that exist - is irreducible, both metaphysically and conceptually. Theists who try to square their theism with Objectivist principles by qualifying their creationism with the footnote that their god is not supposed to have created itself, are in effect simply trying to assimilate this fact into their worldview, even though their worldview nowhere comes to grips with the issue of metaphysical primacy. However, they rightly sense that the fact that existence exists is undeniable and absolute. But even if they try to assimilate select Objectivist principles into their mystical concoctions, theists are still typically reluctant to identify the Objectivist axioms as their fundamental starting point. They want to have their cake, and they want to eat it, too. They want the respectability and dignity of affirming absolute reality, but they want the fantasy of their imaginations to be taken seriously as well. This never works because there is a fundamental distinction between reality and fantasy; the two will never be on the same par.

Paul's argument here, however, is part of an effort to defang Objectivism's ability to criticize theism. His concern is not to come to grips with the subject-object relationship and its implications for philosophy and knowledge, but to save an uninhabitable shack that has already burned to the ground (as well as a little face). He argues that, if the axiom of existence does not make any statement about the nature of what exists, then one cannot draw from this one axiom the conclusion that whatever does exist, exists independent of consciousness. But no one is suggesting that such a conclusion follows from this single axiom. (Indeed, where did he get the concept 'consciousness' if this axiom has not been reached yet?) So far as I know, he is not criticizing anything that has actually been endorsed. As I pointed out above, the axiom of existence is only the first of several axioms, it *begins* a series of recognitions, and it does not remain isolated in some contextual vacuum; to grasp the relationship between what exists and the means by which one is aware of it (consciousness), you need both concepts. But Paul's argument ignores this need. No Objectivist has suggested that we affirm the axiom of existence and then halt our knowledge-gathering there and try to wring all kinds of conclusions from this single, isolated recognition.

In fact, Paul is way off when he complains not to have found a "logical rule by which that inference can be made." That is, he wants to see a formal proof of the primacy of existence principle. But if that's what he's looking for, then he obviously hasn't been paying attention. The primacy of existence is a fundamental precondition of proof. Proof is a cognitive exercise, and so involves a subject and an object, and therefore requires both to already be enjoined in the proper relationship with each other. The primacy of existence is the proper relationship between subject and object that rational operations assume and require, and is thus preconditional to logical inference and formal proof.

But in spite of these facts, Paul still misconstrues what Peikoff (and I) have been saying. Observe:

If we don't know ANYTHING (per Peikoff [sic] and Bethrick) about the nature of the existents then we don't know that their nature is such that it is necessarily uncreated.

But we *do* know many things about the nature of the existents we encounter, because we *discover* things about them. Again, the mind does not stop with the axiom of existence, nor does this axiom say that we never learn more about the objects of our awareness than merely *that* they exist. Peikoff is not alleging that "we don't know ANYTHING... about the nature of the existents" we encounter; he's just saying that our initial recognition of their existence does not tell us all the details about the nature of what exists. This discovery is subsequent to the initial recognition. There is nothing inconsistent between the facts that we recognize that there are objects on the one hand, and on the other that we discover data about those objects as we investigate them. Again, Paul fails to integrate the various points belonging to the position he's trying to criticize. But it is interesting to note that Paul's statement here indicates that he realizes that the Christian worldview assumes the primacy of consciousness metaphysics, for he's obviously looking for a way to side-step the primacy of existence. It's true - the primacy of consciousness is the lifeline of Christianity.

The Axioms Work Together

Now consider: if a consciousness's *first* act is to recognize *that* things exist, it makes no more sense to suppose that this initial recognition would provide it with total knowledge of the nature of the things it perceives than it does to suppose that the act of being aware of those things brings them into existence in the first place. That's why Peikoff states what I quoted above. However, a mind does not need to know all the specific details about an object that it perceives in order for it to recognize that it exists *and* that it exists independent of the process by which it is aware of it. On the contrary, it would recognize *that* it exists before continuing on to discover *what* it is, should it choose to investigate further. *Together* the axioms of existence *and identity and consciousness* underscore the independent existence of objects by making the distinction between the objects of cognition and the processes of cognition explicit. Hence there is a distinction, there is a relationship, and since this relationship is involved in *every act* of consciousness (since every act of consciousness involves a consciousness conscious of some object), understanding the nature of that relationship, specifically the orientation between subject and object, is vital to an understanding of knowledge (though many philosophers throughout history have ignored it). Without this understanding, we would have at best a haphazard, unsure footing providing a hit-and-miss epistemology which would be ever prone to confusing fact with sheer imagination. And that is precisely what religion provides; it fails to deliver a rational epistemology because it confuses the relationship between subject and object at the fundamental level of knowledge and elevates imagination above reality, reason and man's epistemological needs.

Now consider: for us to acquire any knowledge about the nature of any thing that exists, that thing would at the very minimum have to exist. And for us to acquire awareness of it, it would *already* have to exist. In other words, its existence would have to precede our awareness of it for awareness to be possible. How can you be aware of something that does not exist? Blank out. Additionally, since cognition is a process by which data is *gathered* from what we perceive (where *what* we perceive is the object), cognition does not add anything to the nature of an object. We can think anything we want about an object, and it will remain what it is. For instance, if I see a bottle that was manufactured in Atlanta, Georgia, my supposing that it was manufactured in Montréal, Canada will not alter the fact that it was actually manufactured in Atlanta, Georgia. Why? Because of the primacy of existence: the task of cognition is to *identify* reality, not to create or alter it. Objectivism recognizes all these facts in one sweeping principle: the primacy of existence - the fact that existence exists independent of consciousness.

The Primacy of Existence as the Foundation to Knowledge

Notice how this principle is integral to the concepts 'true', 'false', 'error', 'correct', 'incorrect', etc. Because cognition requires some object(s), and the data which informs cognition about an object must be gathered from the object by some process performed by the subject, and because it is possible to misidentify the nature of an object, we need a set of principles which guide the mind through the process by which it identifies what exists. The primacy of existence is the front line in the struggle for correct identification of objects, and therefore the fundamental principle of knowledge. Since our efforts to acquire knowledge of the world can result in error, we need a set of principles to guide us toward error-free results. Obviously a principle which states "reality is whatever one wishes it to be" will not suffice, for reality does not conform to wishing. Why? Because existence holds metaphysical primacy over conscious intentions. Should not a theory of knowledge recognize why reality does not conform to wishing? Objectivism holds that a theory of knowledge should do this. Other theories hold what amounts to "Who cares? Such truths are so obvious they do not interest us!" And those who have been paying attention have seen the results.

Above I gave an example of how the primacy of existence principle provides the foundation to truth and knowledge. The bottle in my example was in fact manufactured in Atlanta, Georgia. This is a fact. It does not depend on my knowing it. Nor does it require my consent, my approval, even my discovery. It was a fact before I discovered it. It would be a fact even if I never discovered it. I could even deny it once I did discover it, but it will still be a fact that the bottle was manufactured in Atlanta and not somewhere else. Essentially speaking, the fact obtains independent of my consciousness. My consciousness does not have the power to alter this fact. I cannot, for instance, wish that it were not the case that the bottle was manufactured in Atlanta and revise reality by so wishing. Due to the nature of my consciousness and the orientation between it and its objects, facts do not conform to my consciousness. On the contrary, my consciousness works properly only if it conforms to the facts, specifically by acknowledging them as facts which obtain independent of my conscious functions. Facts are the data we gather from the objects we perceive, and the objects are what they are independent of our perception of them. According to the primacy of existence principle, our perception of them does not alter the objects which we perceive. Nor do other conscious functions.

Since my consciousness cannot alter the objects of my awareness, my consciousness does not originate the data which I gather from those objects. They are, therefore, absolute. And this is where truth gets the surety of its content - from the absolutism of facts, which is a corollary of the primacy of existence.

Christianity vs. the Primacy of Existence

Now, Christians tell me that they have awareness of a being which has a conscious ability not only to alter facts in a way that I cannot, but also create them out of nothing as well. It can do this, they claim, because its consciousness - quite unlike my consciousness - has the power to conform reality to its will. Essentially, they are claiming that this consciousness enjoys the exact opposite relationship that my consciousness has in respect to its objects. Where my consciousness can only perceive and identify the objects which I discover and which exist independent of my consciousness, this being that Christians tell me about essentially has the power to wish its objects into existence from nothing - "ex nihilo" in their words. Their god wished that the universe exists, and POOF! - it exists, just like that. It's a neat trick I'd love to witness sometime.

Paul's concern is to protect his belief in such a being, and thus seems to resist Objectivism precisely for making these distinctions explicit and incorporating them into a system-wide, fundamental principle. Does Paul not realize that there is a distinction between a thing that exists and the cognitive process by which we acquire knowledge of that thing's nature? Does Paul deny that there is such a distinction? Or, does he think it's not philosophically important? In other words, does he think knowledge can still have an objective basis if one ignores any distinction between the object of knowledge and the processes by which that knowledge is obtained? On occasion, he has suggested that such recognitions are not "interesting," as if this were supposed to constitute an argument challenging their truth, importance or fundamentality. But if knowledge is the product of a cognitive process, and there is a fundamental, absolute distinction between the object of knowledge and the cognitive process by which we acquire knowledge of it, then how could this distinction be untrue, unimportant or non-fundamental? Paul does not say. Instead, his protestations suggest that he wants to defy their implications in order to protect something. What does he want to protect? Indeed, he wants to protect the blurring of this distinction which is central to his worldview from being exposed. This is one of the primary reasons why Paul resents Objectivism: it spoils his fantasy.

Validating the Primacy of Existence

So what does tell us that the primacy of existence is true? Objectivism's answer to this is that our conscious interaction with the objects of our awareness tells us this on a constant basis; we merely need to attend to it if we are going to grasp it. A simple experiment is sufficient to settle any disputes on the matter. If the objects of consciousness depended on consciousness, then one should be able to alter the objects of his awareness at will. That is what the primacy of consciousness holds: that the objects of consciousness depend on the functions of consciousness in order to exist, in order to be what they are, in order to be anything at all. It holds that consciousness has the final say on what exists and what is true. (Sound familiar?) The objects of such a consciousness would conform to whatever that consciousness desired, expected, or commanded of them. A simple experiment is sufficient to show whether or not this is the case, and anyone can try it.

In this experiment, just find any object in your immediate awareness and focus your attention on it. Any object will do. Right now I'm looking at an ordinary paperclip that's sitting on my desk. It is a single continuous wire bent round three times into its pristine manufactured shape, about one and a half inches long, steel-colored, and by all accounts a normal paperclip. This is the object that I see. But now I begin to exercise my consciousness in regard to the paperclip, to see what effect it will have on it. First I begin imagining the wire of the paperclip to unfold itself, straightening itself out. In my imagination I can "see" this happening, but the paperclip sitting on my desk remains in the shape it had when I first looked at it. My imagining had no effect on it. Now I make a wish: that the wire of the paperclip straighten itself out. It remains motionless, still folded into its paperclip shape. My wishing had no effect on it. (Perhaps I didn't wish hard enough?) Now I command it: "I command thee to unfold thyself!" I say in a loud booming voice. The paperclip stubbornly defies my command, which has no effect on the paperclip whatsoever. Then I simply deny that the paperclip is not simply a straight piece of wire, without any curves from end to end. This too, has no effect. The paperclip remains just as it was when I first looked at it. I can do this all day long, varying my imagination, wishing, commands and other conscious functions. But what will remain constant throughout? What remains constant is the relationship my consciousness has with the paperclip: the primacy of existence. The object of my

consciousness does not conform to the dictates of my consciousness. This is inescapable, and Objectivism holds that this inescapable, constant fact is philosophically important, since it pertains to all instances of man's consciousness, and therefore also to his knowledge.

Similar experiments can be performed by anyone at any time. But if the primacy of consciousness were true, we would not expect these results in this type of experiment. We would not have found that consciousness is so ineffectual in merely altering its objects. On the contrary, we would have found that the objects would conform to our imagination, wishing, commands and other conscious functions, if consciousness held metaphysical primacy over its objects. But the objects of consciousness are not so easily pushed around after all. Reality has its terms, and it is up to us either to accept them or live in denial, protesting what we cannot change, imagining a fantasy world beyond it and pretending that a super-duper-double-whammy consciousness somewhere out there or nowhere out there can change what we cannot change. Meanwhile, reality remains what it is, independent of our preferences, likes, dislikes, temper tantrums, etc.

Do theists offer any experimental evidence to confirm the opposite of the primacy of existence? If not, what do they offer? "Arguments"? Well, what is their starting point? What orientation between subject and object do their *premises* assume? What orientation between subject and object do their *conclusions* affirm? Do their premises and conclusions assume the same orientation? It would not bode well for theism if their arguments' premises and conclusions pointed to opposite metaphysical orientations between subject and object. It should already be clear that, whatever their premises, their conclusion (to whatever degree they offer arguments for it) that a god exists and created the universe unmistakably points to the primacy of consciousness. But they nowhere validate this assumption, and they nowhere show how it can live side by side the primacy of existence principle, which they use any time they make a truth claim (even if it is false). They don't because they can't.

An Attempt to Evade the Primacy of Existence

The theist, still recognizing the need to salvage the primacy of consciousness in some way, may pull back at this point and suggest that, even though the primacy of existence may be true in the case of *human* consciousness, this is no indication of the relationship enjoyed by a *divine* consciousness with respect to its objects. According to this approach, assuming that the universal, absolute truth of the primacy of existence principle applies to all forms of consciousness, even those which are not human, is simply a grand over-generalization.

What this approach represents is a failure to recognize and integrate the profound implications that the primacy of existence principle has for epistemology. Like any human being, the theist initially formed his concept of consciousness implicitly through his own conscious interaction with the world. As pointed out above, Objectivism holds that our own interaction with the objects of our consciousness constantly confirms the primacy of existence principle. The actions of his own consciousness serve as the units which he isolates and integrates to form the concept. They are the initial inputs which give his understanding of consciousness its content.

So what inputs inform the theist's concept of consciousness beyond his own firsthand experience such that he thinks it is meaningful to suppose that there exists a consciousness possessing the exact opposite relationship that his consciousness has with its own objects? What gives his concept of consciousness such latitude? What units has he discovered and integrated into his concept of consciousness which allows him to affirm two contradictory metaphysics? We know already that the *method* by which he informs his concept of consciousness must be consistent with the *nature* of his consciousness, for he has no alternative to using his own consciousness in developing and securing the knowledge he seeks to hold. So this rules out his own use of the primacy of consciousness as a means of arriving at a point where he can reasonably affirm the primacy of consciousness. For instance, since the primacy of existence applies to his own conscious interaction with the world around him, he cannot reasonably adopt a method of affirming the primacy of consciousness which reduces to the assumption that reality conforms to his conscious operations. Not only would this be fallaciously circular, it would short-circuit the nature of his own consciousness and invalidate any conclusion he wants to draw. He cannot, for instance, rationally say that the primacy of consciousness is valid because he *wants* it to be valid, for his consciousness does not have the power to alter reality; his wants and wishes are ineffectual. We already know from experimental evidence that his consciousness simply does not have such authority over reality. The facts of reality do not conform to his imagination, wishing or commands, so if he wants to claim that the primacy of consciousness orientation obtains in the form of consciousness other than his own, he will need to show how this is the case by means of a methodology that is consistent with his own consciousness' orientation to its objects. In essence, he needs to use a primacy of existence methodology in order to

show that the primacy of consciousness is true. Such a procedure would amount to using a principle (thus affirming its truth by using it) to prove what contradicts it, thereby denying the truth of the principle which he used to arrive at his goal, which is: self-contradiction as such.

Additionally, we have already seen how concepts of truth necessarily assume the primacy of existence metaphysics. It would contradict the nature of our consciousness to say that some state of affairs obtains merely because we *want* it to. The bottle manufactured in Atlanta was not suddenly manufactured in Montréal because we wanted it to be, and the paperclip did not unfold itself because we wanted it to. So already it appears that the theist's project is doomed from the very beginning, precisely because what he wants to defend denies the truth of a principle that he needs to use in defending it. Thus he cannot avoid the fallacy of the stolen concept.

So again we should ask: what inputs does the theist factor into his conception of consciousness that allows him to recognize (if only implicitly) the truth of the primacy of existence on some occasions, and on other occasions affirm the primacy of consciousness? All examples of consciousness that we have found so far in nature are examples of consciousness possessing the same fundamental orientation to the world that our consciousness has - i.e., the primacy of existence. But theists are quick to call the consciousness of their deity "supernatural," and thus caution that we should not expect to find evidence of such a consciousness in nature. In other words, we're looking in the wrong place. So, they tell us where *not* to look for their god. But to give their claims any hope of credibility, they need to tell us where we *should* look. Without this, their god-belief claims dangle helplessly in the chill void of a conceptual vacuum.

Imagination: The Source of Mystical "Knowledge"

Let us try another approach. Let us ask: where do they get this idea of a supernatural consciousness to which reality conforms? Christians make no attempt to hide the source where they get this idea. They get it from a *storybook* - "the Bible" is what they call it. And this storybook provides the inputs which they factor into their understanding of consciousness which allows them to affirm two contradictory metaphysical orientations between subject and object. The storybook was inspired by the imagination of its ancient authors, and today it inspires the imagination of its readers. But as we saw above, there is a fundamental distinction between reality and imagination. We can certainly imagine Jesus feeding the 5,000, or walking on the waters of the sea, or raising Lazarus. And we can also imagine Dorothy in the land of Oz, Alice in Wonderland, Bilbo Baggins hobbling through Middle-earth, etc. Stories like those found in the bible did for the ancients what cartoons do for us today: they put one's imagination into concrete, perceptible and communicable form. They can certainly entertain, but they are not true. The primacy of existence guarantees this.

In a primacy of existence universe, a man will not grow a third arm simply because someone wanted him to. But in a primacy of consciousness universe, whatever consciousness wants dictates whatever happens. Just as in a cartoon, a man could grow a third arm just because the cartoonist wanted it to. And in the cartoon universe of theism, if the ruling deity wants a man to grow a third arm, what would stop this from happening? In such a universe, the ruling consciousness' wants and pleasures are the final court of appeal.

The Primacy of Existence is Important to Knowledge

Now that it is clear that the primacy of existence principle is undeniably true, let us look at a couple reasons why it is important.

One reason why the primacy of existence principle is important, is that it serves as the mind's most basic safeguard against error. It is not sufficient to prevent *all* errors, but it is necessary to avoid *any* error. If it is observed consistently throughout one's reasoning, it will keep him from making the most fundamental error, namely reversing the orientation between himself as subject and the objects of his awareness. The primacy of existence allows a mind to avoid such errors by making the distinction between the an object and the subject with its cognitive operations explicit and by recognizing the proper relationship between them. Errors are misidentifications of something. The very idea of error assumes that a mind is not always right in its identifications. Any act of identifying something requires a standard to give that act an objective basis. And the standard is the object being identified, to which consciousness must conform in order to identify it accurately.

By recognizing that the task of consciousness is to perceive and identify the objects of awareness (rather than create or alter them at will), the primacy of existence principle equips a mind with the fundamental context in which concepts like 'true', 'false', 'right', 'wrong', 'accurate', 'inaccurate', 'correct', 'incorrect', etc., are rationally meaningful. It would not make sense in a cartoon universe, for instance, to say that something is "wrong," for "wrong" presupposes an objective standard to which cognition must conform. A consciousness to which the facts of reality conform could never be either wrong or right. "Right" is when a consciousness accurately identifies an object that exists independent of itself, and "wrong" is when it misidentifies an object that exists independent of itself.

Another way which the primacy of existence is important is related to the one above. This principle is important to man because it teaches him not to confuse what he imagines with what is real. If there is a distinction between the subject of knowledge and the object of knowledge, then there must be a distinction between *what* a subject knows and *the cognitive process by which he knows it*. And if this is the case, then there must be a distinction between what actually exists in reality and what one merely imagines. Mistaking what one imagines for reality would hardly be beneficial to man's life, and it could easily prove fatal if he acts on such confusion. I can imagine, for instance, that a T-shirt will keep me warm in the winter, but if I walk out into a blizzard without appropriate clothing, I may very well be overcome with hypothermia and die. Reality does not conform to my imaginations (my imagining will not make a T-shirt sufficient to protect me from the cold in a wintry blizzard), so I need to conform my choices and actions to this fact if I want to live. So there is a practical as well as rational advantage to recognizing and respecting the distinction between reality and imagination.

Even the theist recognizes the distinction between what he wants to say is real and what he is willing to admit to be imaginary at some point. He will, for instance, object when a rival theist's imagination of deity conflicts with his own. We see this inside Christianity all the time. One group of Christians will develop their imagination of their deity in one direction, while another group of Christians develop their imagination in another direction, each claiming the same source for inspiration and authority. But when the two conflict, each side accuses the other of "vain imaginations" which, if unchecked by the "authorized" imagination, will lead to "heresy," i.e., the *unapproved* imagination. So even theists will sooner or later admit that there is a difference between reality and imagination when it suits their position to do so. Unfortunately for them, it is too late at that point, for they have already sacrificed the concept of objectivity on the altar of faith in invisible magic beings.

Excuses and Ridicule to Be Expected

When I ask for evidence to support their claims, Christians typically give me a string of excuses. If I am to accept excuses as evidence for anything, I can only accept them as evidence for the likely fact that they cannot provide evidential support for their claims about this being they allegedly have awareness of. When I point out the various problems that I see in their claims - for instance, they have no objective starting point (cf. Prov. 1:7), they affirm metaphysical subjectivism, they do not clearly identify the means by which they are allegedly aware of their deity, they confuse the imaginary with the real, they endorse faith over reason, etc. - Christians scramble in a panic to turn the tables, find counter-examples, hoping to trap me in some kind of quandary which usually turns out to be more casuistry on the apologist's part. He is threatened by my certainty, and this is what he wants to undermine more than anything: my confidence in my own mind.

Then come the name-calling, the insults, the condescension. Like the 9 Powell bus, right on schedule. This is typically an indication that the apologist really has no defense for his position at all, and he's trying to cover it up with bluster and loud barking. Apologists get frustrated when people do not accept their religious assertions on their say so, for they know they have nothing else to back them up.

I can certainly imagine some of the things Christians tell me. But what I imagine is not real. When I ask how I can distinguish between what they claim and what they may be merely imagining, I get flack in return. This is another indication of a problem. Why else would this be what they give me when I try to learn more about their position?

I do not indulge in the name-calling and personal insults because I know what I teach is true, and I enjoy teaching what I know. Do they want a dialogue? Then why the attitude, condescension and ridicule? Do they think that they are all-knowing? If so, then why the impatience with those who are so willing to acknowledge that they themselves are not all-knowing? If they don't think they're all-knowing, then perhaps they're willing to admit that there are things they still have to learn. If that's the case, why aren't they more eager to learn and more grateful for the effort others

put into helping them learn? They claim to be thankful to a being which can help them without effort, but unthankful to those who have no choice but to apply effort if they choose to help them. Don't they to learn? don't they want to know? Don't they want to understand?

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Axioms](#), [Knowledge](#), [Metaphysics](#), [Objectivism](#), [Paul Manata](#), [Primacy of Existence](#)

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1 Comments:

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Very Interesting, Thanks.

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