

Confessions of a Vantillian Subjectivist

I. THEORY

We've all heard the expression "wishing doesn't make it so" and its many variations. Christians have told me things like "Just because you don't believe in God doesn't mean he doesn't exist!" and "Saying there's no god doesn't mean that God is not real!" Statements of this nature are, whether their speakers realize it or not, expressions of the primacy of existence principle, which is the philosophical recognition of the fact that reality exists *independent of consciousness*. Wishing, believing, affirming, denying, ignoring, evading, etc., are all acts of consciousness, and the primacy of existence principle holds that these conscious actions will not alter the facts which obtain. For instance, if I choose to ignore the oncoming traffic on a busy street, this will not reduce my risk of getting clobbered by a speeding vehicle if I try to cross it. My act of ignoring the state of affairs will not alter the state of affairs. Nor will my wishing, and this is because the primacy of existence principle is *true*.

It is this principle which is the basis of the concept of *objectivity* - the active commitment to the principle that existence exists independent of consciousness - that the task of consciousness is to perceive and identify objects, not create and revise them according to will. We call this 'objectivity' because it is the recognition that the *objects* of awareness hold metaphysical primacy over the *subject* of awareness, that the subject does not *create* its objects, bring them into existence, or assign them their natures.

The opposite notion, which we call *subjectivism*, constitutes a reversal of the primacy of existence principle, affirming either implicitly or explicitly that the *subject* of awareness holds metaphysical primacy over its *objects*, that the objects find their source in the knowing subject, that the subject *creates* the objects which exist and assigns them their identity. The reversal of the orientation between subject and object which is the defining essence of subjectivism, is the root error behind the belief that wishing does make it so, which most adult thinkers implicitly recognize to be false. When someone tells you that "wishing doesn't make it so," he's essentially saying that subjectivism is not true. This is correct, and this recognition has the backing of the primacy of existence.

It is my conviction that Christianity is lethal to human life because of its commitment to subjectivism at the most fundamental worldview level. And even though expressions of subjectivism can be found throughout Christianity's metaphysical, epistemological and moral doctrines, its defenders stubbornly resist acknowledging this fact in so many words. But soon as they start telling us about what they believe, it's like an 800 lb. gorilla in a dining room: you just can't hide it. Thus when someone treats wishing as if it were the final arbiter of truth, he may very well be borrowing from the Christian worldview.

II. DETECTION

By now my readers know that I have no qualms considering apologetic defenses of Christianity in the words of those who seek to vindicate its teachings. A bountiful source of specifically presuppositionalist discourse, arguments and musings can be found in the [Van Til Discussion Lists](#), which unfortunately are no longer active. I enjoy paging through these archives because not only is there no end to the many ways apologists attempt to hold their god-belief together with their elaborate rationalizations, there are also some very telling confessions to be found as well.

Take for example [this February 26, 2004 posting](#) by apologist [Mike Warren](#) in which we find the following ripe statement regarding the fundamental differences between the orientation between man's consciousness and the objects of his awareness, and that allegedly belonging to the Christian god. Warren writes:

In knowing a flower, for example, God knows everything about the flower. Humans can have that flower as an object of their knowledge as well, so there is a similarity in the knowledge; but a difference is that humans cannot know the flower exhaustively. Not only is there a quantitative difference between divine and human knowledge of the flower, but there are qualitative differences. God knows the flower originally. Everything about the flower originates from His own consciousness. Indeed, God's thinking about the flower makes it so. In contrast, humans know the flower as something originating external to them. Their thinking about the flower does not make it so. Human knowledge claims about the flower can be incorrect, unlike God's perfect knowledge. These are similarities and differences that characterize a biblical view of human knowledge as analogical of God's knowledge.

When I first read this statement two years ago, I was impressed with its open admission of crucial points which many apologists have been reluctant to acknowledge. I was impressed because I found myself, in a sense, agreeing with just about everything Warren was saying here. In light of the clarification I made above regarding the concept of objectivity and the error rooting subjectivism, let's examine Warren's statement bit by bit to see once and for all just how deeply Christianity is committed to subjectivism. As we go through the various points of Warren's confession, observe the contradictory metaphysical orientations between subject and object which the believer accepts and will seek to rationalize in his defensive ploys.

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Actually, given the dogmatic stipulations of Christian god-belief, the two positions that "God knows everything about the flower" and "humans cannot know the flower exhaustively" are outcomes of difference that is even more fundamental than Warren acknowledges which erases any impression of "similarity" the believer wants to claim between his own knowledge and the "knowledge" he attributes to his god. It is an outcome of a *two-fold, internal antithesis within the Christian worldview*:

1) The Christian god's relation to the flower in terms of the subject-object relationship vs. man's relation to the flower in terms of the subject-object relationship: In the case of man, the *object* holds primacy over the *subject* of consciousness (this is the primacy of existence, i.e., *objectivism*); and in the case of the Christian god this orientation is *reversed*: the *subject* holds primacy over any *objects* of which it is allegedly conscious (this is the primacy of consciousness, i.e., *subjectivism*). For the Christian god, the identity of the objects of its awareness *conforms to consciousness*; for man, however, *consciousness conforms to identity of the objects which he perceives*.

2) Man's need for a means of knowledge acquisition and validation (reason) vs. the Christian god's lack of such a need (the Christian god "just knows" and does not need to acquire and validate knowledge): For man, knowledge is only possible by *discovering* facts of reality and *integrating* them by means of *concepts*, which he forms, initially on the basis of perceptual inputs, and subsequently on the basis of concepts so formed. That is, man needs a *process* for acquiring and validating his knowledge, for his knowledge is not *automatic*. This is in keeping with the primacy of existence principle as noted above: *the task of consciousness is to perceive and identify objects, not create and revise them according to will*. The opposite is the case for the Christian god, as Warren points out: it has *no need* to discover and validate its "knowledge," for it "knows" *automatically*, that is, *without* any process of acquisition and validation. The task of its consciousness is to *create* its objects and *assign* them their identity, revising them when it suits its pleasure, all at will. It could not be stated clearer: for man, the primacy of the *objects* of consciousness (cf. the concept of objectivity) characterizes the fundamental orientation which roots his knowledge, and for the Christian god the primacy of the *subject* of consciousness (cf. subjectivism) characterizes its orientation to knowledge. While for man wishing does *not* make it so, for the Christian god wishing *does* make it so.

So when Warren claims, as he does in the opening statement of [his message](#), that "Van Til's philosophy is wholly based on the problem of the one and the many," he is actually *camouflaging* the real problem that lies at the heart of the religious worldview, which is its *contradictory metaphysical orientations*. Man knows, and can only know, that which he discovers and validates *by reason* (that is, *somehow*), and the Christian god "knows" *apart from reason* (that is, *no how*). The only correlativity between man's knowledge and the Christian god's alleged "knowledge," is that, in the case of the believer as it is supposed to be in the case of his god, *the subject holds primacy over the objects of consciousness*: the Christian god *wishes* its objects into existence, and the believer *wishes* his god-belief into "the Truth."

Warren continues:

Not only is there a quantitative difference between divine and human knowledge of the flower, but there are qualitative differences.

Right, according to reasonable inferences from the mythology, the Christian god will always be said to have more "knowledge" than man ever will; specifically, the Christian god will always be said to "know" everything that is *possible* to be known about the flower, while man will know no more than a mere portion of that alleged sum of "knowledge," that portion being whatever he can discover and validate by means of reason. The purpose of claiming such "knowledge" on the part of the Christian god is not to explain some legitimate philosophical quandary, for, unlike man who needs *some* (but by no means *all*) knowledge, the Christian god, which is characterized as an eternally

indestructible entity, would have *no need* for knowledge whatsoever. The real purpose is to equip the priestly class with a ready means of usurping unearned authority over others: if an individual buys the faith-based premise that there's an invisible magic being who "knows and sees all," he will likely make an effort to please it in word and deed, and this ambition typically takes practical expression in accepting the authority of the priestly class, even though its members have already abandoned reason in preference for mysticism.

And yes, there are fundamental qualitative differences between man's knowledge and the Christian god's so-called "knowledge," as I have indicated above. It's not simply a matter of *degrees* of knowledge (one possessing *more* than the other), but the relative subject-object orientations of the two kinds of consciousness involved in Warren's working model: the Christian god's consciousness (the *subject* holds primacy over the *object*) vs. man's consciousness (the *objects* hold primacy over the *subject*). Two wholly contradictory standards are thus endorsed at the heart of Christian theism.

Warren continues:

God knows the flower originally.

Of course, and this is because the flower's identity *came from* and *conforms* to the Christian god's *will*, i.e., a form consciousness.

Warren makes it explicit:

Everything about the flower originates from His own consciousness.

Bingo. That's called *subjectivism*.

Warren makes it even more explicit:

Indeed, God's thinking about the flower makes it so.

Here we have it stated explicitly: the object conforms to the subject in the same sense that "wishing makes it so!" That's subjectivism to a T.

Warren then states:

In contrast, humans know the flower as something originating external to them.

Right. That's the primacy of existence, which affirms the opposite of the primacy of consciousness.

Warren states:

Their thinking about the flower does not make it so.

Right. We must look *outward* (sense perception) in order to *discover* (not "create") and *validate* (not *stipulate*) the identify of the objects which exist. By contrast, the Christian god need not look outward (for before it creates anything "out there," nothing existed "out there"); rather, it looks *inward*, into its *subjective* states where its wishing and imagination provide all the standards.

Warren points out:

Human knowledge claims about the flower can be incorrect,

Right, because human beings start out *tabula rasa*, and must *discover* and *validate* their knowledge by means of a process which they must *learn* before they can master it. (Of course, many theists like to exempt themselves from having to do this.)

Warren states:

unlike God's perfect knowledge.

Exactly: Reason has nothing to do with the Christian god's alleged "knowledge," and could only be characterized as *knowledge from nowhere*. This is the "perfect" ideal for the believer: the claim to knowledge which is to be accepted unquestioningly without validation.

Warren concludes:

These are similarities and differences that characterize a biblical view of human knowledge as analogical of God's knowledge.

Differences? Yes! Off the map, in fact. Similarities? Not at all. Indeed, Warren points to nothing similar between man's knowledge of the objects he perceives and identifies, and the so-called "knowledge" Christians attribute to their god. And he cannot because their basic orientation is, respectively, wholly antithetical to one another. It will not do for the Christian to say that man's knowledge is "analogous" to the Christian god's supposed "knowledge" by pointing to similarities that simply aren't there. Nor will it do to say that "man's knowledge of the facts is then a reinterpretation of God's interpretation" (Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 203f), for the process of discovery and validation is not equivalent to reinterpretation of another mind's wishing. Men do not read minds, nor is wishing - as we have seen - a means of validation.

III. CONCLUSION

As can be seen, however, there is no basis to the claim that man's knowledge is in any way like the knowledge Christianity claims for its god. Man discovers and validates his knowledge, and the Christian god whips its "knowledge" out of nowhere, declaring its self-authored content "truth" by fiat. The fundamental distinctions outlined here can only mean that Christians should probably use a completely different term to refer to whatever it is they think their god has in its consciousness, for it surely could not be knowledge as man has it. Because the content that allegedly resides in the Christian god's "mind" is not put through any validation process, referring to that alleged content as "knowledge" constitutes a stolen concept (hence my use of quotations when using the term in this manner).

In Christianity, we have a worldview which is terminally conflicted with itself given this deep internal antithesis between subject and object. The implication for apologetics is clear: any argument for the existence of god is an argument for the validity subjectivism, essentially the view that wishing makes it so constitutes the final criterion for all knowledge and truth. Because of his worldview's fundamental commitment to subjectivism, the Christian has no uncompromised basis on which to tell non-believers that "wishing doesn't make it so"; he has no choice but to borrow from Objectivism to make such statements. In the final analysis, this is the ultimate reality for the believer: not only does his worldview teach that wishing in fact makes it so, it essentially teaches that *only* wishing makes it so.

by Dawson Bethrick

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [6:00 PM](#)

1 Comments:

[Zachary Moore](#) said...

Great post. Once again, Christianity falls on its own sword.

[March 23, 2006 6:45 PM](#)