

Could the Christian God Be Rational?

In the comments section of my blog [Rival Philosophies of Fact](#), the question of whether or not the Christian god could be *rational* arose in discussion.

I wrote:

I'm in agreement with Justin that, on my understanding of what rationality is, neither concept could apply. I can give some fundamental reasons why this is so if you like.

Vytautas:

Why cannot God be rational?

First, we need a proper understanding of what rationality is. Rationality is not just a synonym for “understandable”; the two concepts have very distinct meanings. In fact, understandability presupposes rationality. Besides, there is no reason to multiply concepts meaning the same thing unnecessarily.

Rationality is the commitment to reason as one's only means of acquiring and validating knowledge, and as his only guide to chosen action. By contrast, irrationality is the reliance on something other than reason (e.g., emotions, astrology, palm-reading, tea leaves, faith in invisible magic beings, etc.) to acquire and/or validate knowledge and guide his choices and actions. In general, rationality is compliance with reason, and irrationality is non-compliance with reason. If you look up '[rational](#)' in the dictionary, even here you will find a close connection with reason.

Now reason is the faculty which identifies and integrates perceptual input. This faculty is made possible by the ability to form concepts from perceptual input (and higher concepts from the initial concepts formed on the basis of perceptual input).

It should not be difficult to recognize from this why man needs rationality. He needs rationality because he needs reason. And he needs reason because he needs knowledge in order to live, and reason is how he gets that knowledge. If he does not get the knowledge he needs to live, man will die. Like any living organism, man faces a fundamental alternative: life or death. So if man wants to live, he has no choice but to employ his faculty of reason.

When it comes to the Christian god, however, we have a much different story. The concept of rationality would not apply since the concept of reason could not apply. Take for example the claim that the Christian god is omniscient. It is all-knowing, possessing all knowledge. There's nothing this god doesn't know, so we are told. Would it make sense to say such a being is “rational”? Well, again, if rationality is a commitment to reason as one's only means of acquiring and validating knowledge and his only guide to chosen actions, then clearly it wouldn't make sense. An omniscient being would have no use for a means of acquiring and validating knowledge, since it is said to already possess all knowledge. There would be no knowledge for it to acquire or validate. Essentially, such a being could not *learn*. So there'd be no need for it to be committed to reason as its only means of acquiring and validating knowledge, for it already knows everything. To call such a being “rational” in this case would be to say it is committed to something it couldn't possibly need. So it would be a [stolen concept](#) at this point.

Also, since the Christian god is said to be non-physical and bodiless, it wouldn't have any sense organs. It wouldn't have eyes, ears, a tongue, a nose, skin. It wouldn't have nerve cells, a spine (yes, the Christian god is spineless), or a brain (yes, it's brainless, too). Because it lacks sense organs, a nervous system and a brain, it would not have awareness via senses. Consequently, it would not have perceptual input from external stimuli, such as when we see an apple, a grove of trees, a baby, a city skyline. Consequently, it would have no perceptual input to identify and integrate. This is yet another reason why the Christian god would have no use for reason, and consequently no need to be committed to reason (i.e., rationality). So again, the theist has another [stolen concept](#) on his hands when he claims that his god is “rational.”

Another point is that, because the Christian god is said to be omniscient, it would not possess its knowledge in the form of concepts. I have already given my argument for this conclusion [here](#). The point here is that, since reason is a conceptual process, a being which would not have its knowledge in the form of concepts would have no use for it. So to call such a being “rational” is, again, to say that it is committed to something it would have no use for and could not need. So here we have a third count of the fallacy of the [stolen concept](#).

A final point is that, because the Christian god is said to be eternal, indestructible, omnipotent, etc., it would have no need or use for a guide for its choices and actions. Unlike man, who faces a fundamental alternative and can die if he acts on bad choices, the Christian god could do anything, and no harm would come to it. In fact, it could sit idle for all eternity, performing utterly no actions whatsoever, and it would still continue on as what it is just fine.

So these are some reasons why I would say that neither the concept 'rational' nor 'irrational' would apply to the Christian god. It would be, like a rock on a hillside or an asteroid in the cold of space, wholly *arational*, and for reasons which are not dissimilar: like the Christian god, rocks and asteroids have neither need nor use for a faculty for acquiring and validating knowledge, nor do they have either need or use for a guide to action. So consequently, they would have no need or use for committing themselves to such a faculty or guide.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [rationality](#), [stolen concepts](#)

posted by [Bahnsen Burner](#) at [12:00 PM](#)

87 Comments:

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Well put! I understand the stolen concept fallacy, however this does not make it rational. Notice the inherent subjectivism here. I understand it so its rational, my thoughts about something make it rational! wow, I did not know I had this power.

[December 07, 2008 5:38 PM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

If reason is in the mind of man, then reason is subjective. Man is subject to his own reason, if reason defines what a man is.

[December 08, 2008 6:48 AM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

err. "reason" should be "reason"

[December 08, 2008 6:53 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas: "If reason is in the mind of man, then reason is subjective. Man is subject to his own reason, if reason defines what a man is."

"Subjective" does not mean "in the mind of man." Subjectivism is essentially the failure to comply with the primacy of existence. As I explain in my blog [Rival Philosophies of Fact](#), subjectivism is dependence on or conformity with the dictates of a subject whose say-so determines the identity and/or actions of its objects. Where objectivity is compliance with the primacy of existence (the *objects* of cognition hold metaphysical primacy over the subject), subjectivism is compliance with the primacy of consciousness (the *subject* holds metaphysical primacy over its objects). Reason does not conform to conscious intentions such that it can be reshaped to suit one's preferences, expectations, imaginations, etc. Reason will not confirm that $2+2=17$, no matter how badly I want it to. It has a specific identity, and that identity is what it is independent of our desires, imaginations, preferences, etc.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 08, 2008 8:39 PM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Bahnsen Burner: Reason does not conform to conscious intentions such that it can be reshaped to suit one's preferences, expectations, imaginations, etc.

Vytautas: So reason only conforms to things that are objective. But why is it the case that it is possible for reason to conform to things that are subjective such as preferences, expectations, and imaginations? If reason can only follow the objective, then where does the subjective come from? If you say from preferences, expectations, and imaginations, then does not the information that supplies the subjective come from the objective?

[December 09, 2008 6:53 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas: "So reason only conforms to things that are objective. But why is it the case that it is possible for reason to conform to things that are subjective such as preferences, expectations, and imaginations? If reason can only follow the objective, then where does the subjective come from? If you say from preferences, expectations, and imaginations, then does not the information that supplies the subjective come from the objective?"

Vytautas, reason does not conform to the subjective. It is the faculty by which we identify and integrate what we perceive. At minimum, rational thoughts are thoughts which conform to their relevant objects. If I perceive a tree, for instance, reason will have me identify it as a tree and integrate this knowledge with knowledge that I have previously validated by reason. It will not allow me to perceive a tree and identify it as a cruise ship because I'd *prefer* it to be a cruise ship instead of a tree. I can *imagine* that it's a cruise ship instead of a tree, but at this point I've already departed from reality and into the irrational, especially if I try to act on this imagination. The primacy of existence shows us that there is a fundamental difference between what is factual and what is imaginary. The primacy of consciousness effectually denies this distinction.

You ask where the subjective comes from. It comes from the denial of the primacy of existence, the erasure of the fundamental distinction between reality and fantasy, fact and imagination. Religion is a perfect example of this on a broad scale. It denies the primacy of existence by affirming the imagined existence of a consciousness which holds metaphysical primacy over reality. On this view, the objects are whatever this alleged consciousness wants them to be, because on this view reality conforms to its wishes, its demands, its commandments - i.e., to the *subject*. The tree would be a cruise ship if and when the ruling consciousness wants it to be a cruise ship. It's like magic: the ruling consciousness wills that the tree is a cruise ship, and poof, it's a cruise ship. The ruling consciousness wills that the water in the water pots to be wine, and poof, it's wine. What card-carrying theist would deny such power to his beloved god? Seated firmly at the center of the believer's imagination, his god can do whatever he imagines it can do. That's why we don't see miracles happening in reality; they only happen in the imagination of the believer.

Ultimately, however, no one can fully escape the primacy of existence, no matter how persistently he seeks to erase the fundamental distinction between the real and the imaginary. The real will always prevail, and in the end the subjectivist only invalidates his own thinking. Even the religionist, even though he resists it at the most fundamental level of his worldview, cannot escape the primacy of existence. He implicitly assumes its truth, even though he doesn't realize it, by using concepts which have referents in reality. The concept 'cruise ship', for instance, has meaning only because it was originally formed on the basis of perceptual input of things which really do exist (objects existing independently of consciousness). And when he says that his god exists, he is implicitly making use of the primacy of existence by claiming it really exists and assuming it is not just his own fantasy; he is saying that it exists independently of his own consciousness as well (like actual trees and actual cruise ships), and that everyone should acknowledge its existence. Unfortunately for the theist, however, making surreptitious use of the primacy of existence will not validate the crass departures from it in the content of what he claims (e.g., "God created the earth and the heaven"). Fantasy remains fantasy, no matter how much one tries to pretend it is true.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 10, 2008 5:34 AM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Bahnsen Burner, I have edited your responses for brevity and have given a response. You type too much.

<http://privyfisherman.blogspot.com/2008/12/bahnsen-burner-revisited.html>

[December 10, 2008 8:51 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas,

Can you clarify something?

When you make statements such as the following, as you do in your [blog](#):

- "integrated knowledge is subjective because the subject did the integrating."
- "everything that exists is real including what is imaginary"

Are you making statements which your worldview affirms? Or are you attributing these positions to Objectivism?

Regards,
Dawson

[December 11, 2008 10:34 AM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

I am answering you on your own grounds. I am not claiming what Objectivism or what my worldview affirms, but rather I seek to show what your ideas lead to.

[December 11, 2008 3:00 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas, or whoever you are, you're way off, like a moon that broke free from its orbit thousands of years ago. I suspect two problems at root: one, you're trying to critique Objectivism without any solid understanding of it, and two, you're trying to trip me up without any genuine bearing of where you're headed. Both are leading you to make some really strange statements which do not follow and do not apply. You're surely not showing where my ideas lead to. Not even close.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 11, 2008 3:22 PM](#)

[Drew Lewis](#) said...

Dawson said:

"Rationality is the commitment to reason as one's only means of acquiring and validating knowledge, and as his only guide to chosen action."

So, you're whole argument depends on this statement, and it's just false. It overreaches. Rationality is really just the commitment to the principle that one's beliefs don't actually contradict each other and experience. Rationality allows for multiple means of acquiring knowledge, and so long as what is acquired does not contradict other knowledge, it is rational for a person to believe it.

To demonstrate why your definition of rationality is false, consider this question: Can you provide a rational argument for your definition of rationality that is not question-begging, while adhering to your own definition of rationality? Note that I will ask how you know each premise is true, and you can only offer logically reasonable steps from universally accepted axioms, since that's where you'd have to start with your definition of rationality.

Following the idea of not multiplying concepts unnecessarily, why should someone accept your more complicated concept of rationality than the correct, simpler version? The only reason I can think of is so that you can define God

out of existence. "Look here! My concept of rationality doesn't allow for the existence of God! So God doesn't exist! What a good argument I just made." Now that's irrationality if I've ever seen it. I can do the same thing. "Look, God is defined as a necessarily existent being (ontological argument), so He exists!" Your argument is no better than this bad ontological argument.

So, could you offer any argument for your definition of rationality over against the simpler, more reasonable one?

[December 13, 2008 4:48 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Drew its really simple. Metaphysically the universe, that is all of existence is either subjective, or objective. This relates to the relationship between subject and object, the mind and what the mind receives of existence apart from itself. The universe is objective, that is nothing is subjective to anyone's mere whims, thoughts or wishes apart from the mind doing the wishing. This is what makes it possible to identify anything at all. Objectivism and subjectivism are mutually exhaustive and mutually exclusive, for if we grant a subjective relationship to just one consciousness, then all bets are off and objectivity is lost. I know the cold cup of coffee in front of me will not change because of some ones thoughts, mine or otherwise, and that it will be the same for everyone within the same respect. So I can make the statement the coffee is cold, its an objective fact. Logic is nothing more then non contradictory identification. Reason is the minds use of logic. Rationality is the commitment to the use of reason. Now here is an example I have to cross the train tracks 10 times a week as I walk to and from work. Sometimes a train will come by. I value my life and I know that existence is objective. If I want to live I must properly identify the train, recognize that it will kill me if I let it strike me and take action to avoid it. What other method do you propose for me to use other then rationality? Shall I ignore the train and trust to something I can not identify nor perceive will protect me? Shall I wish the train away? You may ask what does this have to do with god, well nothing really. But it does have to do with god belief. If I am consistent and honest with myself I will avoid and not embraces contradictory ideas and beliefs. How can I act on a day to day basis that the world is objective and bet my very life on it on one hand and on the other affirm that the whole of existence was created by a god and is subjective to his will. I may fail in life at times and be far from perfect, but I will not knowingly be a hypocrite.

[December 13, 2008 9:01 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

I should also like to point out that the main point here to this posting by Dawson was weather god could be rational or not. In the example I gave earlier with the train, note that god would not even have to wish the train way, he could walk right into its path without a care in the world, no action, in fact no recognition of the train at all would be required for his continual existence. Unlike us, its not so much that god can not be rational or irrational, more that he has no need of it. This becomes more clear when reading the old testament.

[December 13, 2008 9:14 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Drew: "Rationality is really just the commitment to the principle that one's beliefs don't actually contradict each other and experience."

No, that's not what rationality is. This definition makes no reference to reason, and it's a non-negotiable that rationality involves fidelity to reason. Beliefs are not irreducible primaries, nor does the fact that one belief does not contradict another belief make either belief rational or even true. The definition you provide shows no concern for how those beliefs or any ideational content involved in a position or claim were acquired and validated. Indeed, you go on to say:

Drew: "Rationality allows for multiple means of acquiring knowledge, and so long as what is acquired does not contradict other knowledge, it is rational for a person to believe it."

On this view, I could learn by means of reason that the distance between the earth and the moon averages about 384,000 km, by means of reading tea leaves that dogs could find happiness on the moon, by hugging Sequoia trees that dogs can travel to the moon in rocket ships, and by revelation from an invisible magic being that one day a city inhabited by canines will be established there, and since none of this contradicts other knowledge, "it is rational for a person to believe it."

Drew: "To demonstrate why your definition of rationality is false, consider this question: Can you provide a rational argument for your definition of rationality that is not question-begging, while adhering to your own definition of rationality?"

How would this demonstrate whether or not my definition of rationality is false? Should definitions not be formed in accordance with man's means of knowledge? The definition I gave clearly conceives of rationality as a virtue, indeed a primary virtue (since so many other virtues hinge on it). This concept was formed in accordance with the objective theory of concepts, the final step of which is definition. Of rationality as I have defined it, Peikoff writes:

This means the application of reason to every aspect of one's life and concerns. It means choosing and validating one's opinions, one's decisions, one's work, one's love, in accordance with the normal requirements of a cognitive process, the requirements of logic, objectivity, integration. Put negatively, the virtue means never placing any consideration above one's perception of reality. This includes never attempting to get away with a contradiction, a mystic fantasy, or an indulgence in context-dropping. (*Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand*, p. 221)

Since man is neither omniscient nor infallible, he requires a normative cognitive process. This requirement is satisfied by the faculty of reason. It is reason which works in accordance with the nature of man's distinctive consciousness: beginning with perception of objects and allowing him to form concepts on the basis of that perceptual input, and integrating those concepts into a sum of knowledge. Reading tea leaves, consulting astrological ephemerides, praying to invisible magic beings, etc., will not provide man with knowledge of reality. So a primary virtue, one which makes a broad assortment of subsequent virtues possible, needs to take these facts into account, which the virtue of rationality, as I have defined it, does indeed do.

Incidentally, since this is the topic of my blog entry, one of the points I argue is that a god would have no need for reason since it is supposed to be both omniscient and infallible. On this basis, it should be clear that such a being would have no need for a cognitive process by which knowledge is acquired and validated, since it would already possess all knowledge (it's omniscient) and would not need to validate anything (it's infallible).

Drew: "Note that I will ask how you know each premise is true, and you can only offer logically reasonable steps from universally accepted axioms, since that's where you'd have to start with your definition of rationality."

What universally accepted axioms do you have in mind? I've affirmed my axioms, but many (particularly Christian apologists) have denied them. So one could argue that they are not "universally accepted." Besides, why is "universal acceptance" important? Aren't facts more important?

Drew: "Following the idea of not multiplying concepts unnecessarily, why should someone accept your more complicated concept of rationality than the correct, simpler version?"

I'm not sure why you suppose my definition of rationality is "complicated." Also, when a definition makes use of prior concepts in order to isolate the essentials which are integrated by the concept being defined, that is not an instance of multiplying concepts unnecessarily. I had made the point to Vytautas, who defined "rational" as "understandable," that he was simply using two concepts to mean the same thing. There are cases when this is justified, but Vytautas gave no justification for this. Also, as I pointed out, his definition would make Christian theism - with its doctrine of the trinity - irrational, since it is not understandable. John Frame, for instance, makes such a confession when he writes of the members of the trinity:

Somehow they are three, and somehow they are one. The Nicene Creed says that they are one "being" but three "substances," or, differently translated, one "substance" and three "persons." I prefer simply to say "one God, three persons." The technical terms should not be understood in any precise, descriptive sense. The fact is that we do not know precisely how the three are one and the one is three. (*Apologetics to the Glory of God*, p. 46)

Meanwhile, as I also pointed out to Vytautas, his equation of rational with understandable simply means that my non-theistic worldview is rational, since it is entirely understandable. It also means, however, that some things which are understandable - such as Buddhism - are therefore also rational, when in fact they do not cohere with reason.

Drew: "The only reason I can think of is so that you can define God out of existence. 'Look here! My concept of rationality doesn't allow for the existence of God! So God doesn't exist! What a good argument I just made.' Now that's irrationality if I've ever seen it."

On which definition of rationality and irrationality? On the definition that you prefer (“the commitment to the principle that one’s beliefs don’t actually contradict each other and experience”), how would your rendition of my argument be contrary to the norms of rationality? My beliefs about rationality do not contradict each other or my experience, and on the basis of those beliefs I recognize that a being which is said to be omniscient, infallible and indestructible would have no need for rationality as I understand it. How is that “irrational”? It’s internally consistent, at no point does it contradict itself or my experience, and it follows logically. Besides, if you think my argument was intended to conclude that “God doesn’t exist,” you’ve misunderstood it. It simply argued that it would be neither rational nor irrational, for reasons I clearly laid out.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 14, 2008 2:53 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Dawson now that's how I should have responded. You interacted with each point made by Drew, where I just tried to cram as much content as I could into a terse post. I understand the concepts and the argument, however you are a better word smith than I. I am going to sit back and just try to learn

[December 14, 2008 3:38 PM](#)

[Harold](#) said...

I am going to sit back and just try to learn

Lol, that's probably a good idea.

I'm in the same boat. What I don't understand (and I'm currently at the beginning of DB's 2006 posts) is why these mystics aren't bothered by the fact that many of their assertions about a divine entity can be used for any other religion and not just Christianity.

I don't think DB has been anything but clear on these important issues. Why (honestly, I don't know) do people still cling to this even when exposed to these arguments and facts? Are emotional attachments the motivation? Perhaps they've invested too much. Are they right? Based on the comments, sure doesn't seem like it. Maybe I'm missing something. What's going on here? What's this really all about?

[December 14, 2008 7:42 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Justin: “You interacted with each point made by Drew, where I just tried to cram as much content as I could into a terse post.”

You made some important points, Justin. By drawing attention to the contrast between your nature as a living organism who must guide his cognition and actions by some systematic process with an omniscient, omnipotent and indestructible being, you demonstrated why you need reason and why an omniscient, omnipotent and indestructible being would have no need or use for it. In your example of the oncoming train, as you point out, you need to keep out of its way, or you'll be pulverized. Your life depends on your fidelity to reason. By contrast, an omniscient, omnipotent and indestructible being wouldn't need to care at all. For one thing, it is said to be “immaterial,” so the train would just go its way and wouldn't touch the immaterial being. No harm would come to it whatsoever. Secondly, were it so inclined, the omnipotent being could wish the train to stop, divert its course, make it levitate, turn it into a pebble, or anything else it wants, and simply because it wants. For such a being, its wanting is its own standard, the only standard. Its wishes create reality, its desires are law, and nothing can disobey it. Reason and rationality simply would not apply. It all seems quite imaginary to me.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 14, 2008 7:48 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Harold: "I don't think DB has been anything but clear on these important issues. Why (honestly, I don't know) do people still cling to this even when exposed to these arguments and facts? Are emotional attachments the motivation? Perhaps they've invested too much. Are they right? Based on the comments, sure doesn't seem like it. Maybe I'm missing something. What's going on here? What's this really all about?"

Thanks for your comments, Harold. You ask a good question. I think I have been clear in expressing my points; at least, I've tried my best to be clear. But in spite of this, they insist on their mystical premises. I do suspect that protection of a confessional investment is a gripping motivator for many. As you put it, they've invested too much, or implicitly feel that they have too much to lose, without allowing themselves to be fully conscious of this and what it means. Christianity tends to program believers with a reluctance of ever being wrong. Being wrong can have eternal consequences, according to Christianity. I also suspect that it's not so much a belief in the supernatural which underlies this, but the private fear of admitting that one does not really believe and a concurrent fear that maybe it's all really true and one is on the outside, numbering among the damned. This is resisted at all costs, for to admit disbelief to oneself would acknowledge it and broadcast it to any supernatural voyeurs who might be listening in on the believer's thoughts. In supernaturalism, there is no privacy for man whatsoever (a real damper for romantic occasions I'd think). Everything the believer thinks, considers, feels, says, and does is being recorded by a judge, and this judge is to be feared, as all judgment is to be feared. Such anxieties, however, are to be kept under wraps, hidden from others (from actually existing agents, like you and me), so as to keep up appearances. This is integral to the mind-game that is Christianity.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 14, 2008 8:03 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Dawson, Harold thanks for the kind words.

Harold I would like to say that the reason I believe there is such a commonality between various religions is that they all, or nearly all basically attempt to do the same thing, assault man's mind. They attempt to undermine our reason, and it does not matter whether its Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, communism, or whatever. They are based at their root on subjectivism. We often hear that the love of money is the root of all evil. I disagree. I declare that the root of all evil is the belief that wishing can make it so, and that this evil is at the root of nearly if not all religions. I realize this may sound harsh, but like they say, I got to call them like I see them. I would like to construct an ethical argument on this subject sometime, however it would take more time than I can put in to it.

[December 14, 2008 10:57 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Justin: "We often hear that the love of money is the root of all evil. I disagree. I declare that the root of all evil is the belief that wishing can make it so, and that this evil is at the root of nearly if not all religions. I realize this may sound harsh, but like they say, I got to call them like I see them. I would like to construct an ethical argument on this subject sometime, however it would take more time than I can put in to it."

Very interesting comments, Justin. The idea that "the love of money is the root of all evil" comes to us verbatim from 1 Timothy 6:10. I always thought this was an odd thing for a Christian to affirm. The serpent in the garden which tempted Eve is supposed to be evil, but I don't see how love of money was at the root of this, and this is what introduced sin into the human pool in the first place. It just doesn't integrate well at all. I surmise that the slogan "the love of money is the root of all evil" enjoyed a faddish pop appeal among the Christians of the community which produced 1 Timothy (it was not written by Paul), and was inserted into the canon by virtue of its jingle-like catchiness, not because it was true (because it's not).

If "love of money is the root of all evil," why do Christians, who claim to hate evil and want to think of themselves as being on the side of good, spend any time whatsoever laboring for it? Actions tend to speak louder than words, and we labor where our heart is. I know many Christians, and all of them - without exception - spend a lot more effort in producing money than they devote to spreading the "good news" of Christianity. I'm sure they can come up with ways to justify this, but that's just where the rub is: they think they need to justify this, when in fact it's just a

good (i.e., moral) policy: devote your time, effort and energy to producing values. Why does one feel a need to “justify” this? Does he feel guilty for working for money?

I too disagree with the claim that “the love of money is the root of all evil.” Money is what we use to trade with others on a mutually consensual basis (I do it all the time, and so do Christians). And the ability to trade with others on a mutually consensual basis is a precondition for a free society. Of course, in a free society you’re going to get people who do not believe everything someone else claims; people in a free society will have the opportunity to govern their own minds according to their conscience. And that’s a big threat to religion. I think ultimately that this fear - the fear of losing psychological duress over others - is what is behind the bible’s denigration of “the love of money.”

I think that at the root of any act of injustice you will usually find two primary motivating factors: one is the pursuit of the unearned, which motivates an individual to trample another individual’s right to his own property. The other is intellectual default: the willingness of those who know better (including the perpetrator) to stand by and allow the injustice to happen. These two factors, the pursuit of the unearned and intellectual default, are what need to be identified whenever injustice has occurred. Whether it be robbery, murder, fraud, assault, etc., I strongly suspect that you’ll find these two factors involved.

Now notice how Christianity models both vices. First it models pursuit of the unearned in the doctrine of salvation. First it teaches the believer to accept the unearned, in the form of guilt (he’s guilty from birth, even before he knew anything or could have chosen to do anything, thus needing salvation by virtue of his nature as a human being), and it teaches him to desire the unearned in the form of salvation, a so-called “free gift” which he cannot earn and which is supposed to be more valuable than all the world’s wealth combined (“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” - Mt. 16:26). Second it models intellectual default through its emphasis on faith: just believe, just suspend your consciousness, your reasoning faculty, your judgment (which you’re supposed to fear in the first place). Don’t judge, for fear that you might be judged. How often I’ve heard Christians say, “love the sinner, not the sin.” But if someone is a murderer, a thief, a fraud, why love him? Blank out. Is it any surprise, then, that injustice seems always to accompany Christianity whenever it gains a dominant position within a community? From the Dark Ages, to the Inquisition, to Jonestown... There is an undeniable causal mechanism here. We dare not ignore it.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 15, 2008 9:53 AM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Bahnsen Burner: I had made the point to Vytautas, who defined “rational” as “understandable,” that he was simply using two concepts to mean the same thing. There are cases when this is justified, but Vytautas gave no justification for this. Also, as I pointed out, his definition would make Christian theism - with its doctrine of the trinity - irrational, since it is not understandable.

Vytautas: Rationality means to believe only objective reality. Do not believe what the tea leaves or magic books say even though they are contained in objective reality. Thus, you ought to not any time wish it to be any different. Just accept the facts as they are. So from our descriptions of the objective, we form an ethical obligation to ourselves: You will not lie to yourself. Let’s not misrepresent objective reality. After all, she is our mother, and we ought to be nice to her.

[December 15, 2008 4:54 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas: “Vytautas: Rationality means to believe only objective reality.”

It’s good to see that you are now moving away from your earlier equation of rational with “understandable.” Still not quite there, but you’re getting warmer.

Vytautas: “Do not believe what the tea leaves or magic books say even though they are contained in objective reality.”

Tea leaves and books full of magical tales do exist and therefore are contained in objective reality. But they are not a means of acquiring and validating knowledge about reality, nor are they a guide to life-preserving action. Harry Potter, The Wizard of Oz, Stephen King books and the bible are all fantasy.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 15, 2008 8:09 PM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Bahnsen Burner: It's good to see that you are now moving away from your earlier equation of rational with "understandable." Still not quite there, but you're getting warmer.

Vytautas: There is a difference between being rational and an object being rational. Being rational means you could understand your own thoughts, and an object is rational if you understand it.

Bahnsen Burner: Tea leaves and books full of magical tales do exist and therefore are contained in objective reality. But they are not a means of acquiring and validating knowledge about reality, nor are they a guide to life-preserving action. Harry Potter, The Wizard of Oz, Stephen King books and the bible are all fantasy.

Vytautas: So there is at least one object in objective reality that is false. So your standard of knowledge has false things within it. But you use your reason to tell you what you should believe or not to believe. So you put more stock in your own mind rather than in objective reality.

[December 16, 2008 3:54 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Vytautas: you ought to not any time wish it to be any different.

Justin: I never said or meant to imply that I should never wish to be different, only that the mere wishing in and of itself will accomplish nothing. I am currently trying to right a software program that models ballistics. As it stands now, it does not work. I wish for it to work, so I am putting way too much time into making it work, thru action. Namely writing code and seeing how it breaks! arrgh! When all is done I will have greatly increased my knowledge of the C++ programming language, and thus I will be different. Wishing will not help.

well thats a enough chest thumping for now :)

[December 16, 2008 3:54 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas: "There is a difference between being rational and an object being rational."

Can you complete this sentence? Something seems to be missing. You say that "there is a difference between [WHAT] being rational and an object being rational."

Vytautas: "Being rational means you could understand your own thoughts,"

Being able to understand your own thoughts is not what distinguishes rationality. Saddam Hussein most likely understood his own thoughts, but I certainly would not call him rational. But perhaps you would?

I wrote: Tea leaves and books full of magical tales do exist and therefore are contained in objective reality. But they are not a means of acquiring and validating knowledge about reality, nor are they a guide to life-preserving action. Harry Potter, The Wizard of Oz, Stephen King books and the bible are all fantasy.

Vytautas: "So there is at least one object in objective reality that is false. So your standard of knowledge has false things within it. But you use your reason to tell you what you should believe or not to believe. So you put more stock in your own mind rather than in objective reality."

Boy, you sure do try to twist things beyond recognition, but why?

The concepts of truth and falsehood apply to statements about reality. We do not say that a rock is true or that a fence is false. There are statements which are true, and there are statements which are false. False statements are certainly not my standard of knowledge, and it's unclear how you could get this from anything I have stated. My standard is the primacy of existence: that the objects of consciousness exist independent of my awareness of them. There is nothing false in this standard. And yes, I do rely on reason to identify and integrate what I perceive. And yes, I do put a lot of stock in this, because my life depends on it. But to say that I put more stock in reason than in objective reality is to affirm a false dichotomy. Since reason operates in accordance with the primacy of existence, there is no inherent inconsistency between the two.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 16, 2008 4:20 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Vytautas: So there is at least one object in objective reality that is false. So your standard of knowledge has false things within it. But you use your reason to tell you what you should believe or not to believe. So you put more stock in your own mind rather than in objective reality.

Justin: nothing in reality is false. Our understanding of it may be false, but a thing is what a thing is, law of identity. However when we fail at logic, that is fail to properly identify something then we can entertain false beliefs about objective reality. Good example is believing that tea leaves can ever tell you anything about your future. This is a miss identification of tea leaves.

[December 16, 2008 4:26 PM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Bahnsen Burner: Can you complete this sentence? Something seems to be missing. You say that "there is a difference between [WHAT] being rational and an object being rational."

Vytautas: The difference is between:

1. being rational
2. an object being rational

Do you understand?

Bahnsen Burner: Being able to understand your own thoughts is not what distinguishes rationality. Saddam Hussein most likely understood his own thoughts, but I certainly would not call him rational. But perhaps you would?

Vytautas: We cannot know the thoughts within the mind of Saddam Hussein because neither of us is Saddam Hussein. Why bring this example in the comments section?

Bahnsen Burner: Boy, you sure do try to twist things beyond recognition, but why?

Vytautas: If I am wrong, then show it.

Bahnsen Burner: The concepts of truth and falsehood apply to statements about reality. We do not say that a rock is true or that a fence is false. There are statements which are true, and there are statements which are false. False statements are certainly not my standard of knowledge, and it's unclear how you could get this from anything I have stated. My standard is the primacy of existence: that the objects of consciousness exist independent of my awareness of them. There is nothing false in this standard. And yes, I do rely on reason to identify and integrate what I perceive. And yes, I do put a lot of stock in this, because my life depends on it. But to say that I put more stock in reason than in objective reality is to affirm a false dichotomy. Since reason operates in accordance with the primacy of existence, there is no inherent inconsistency between the two.

Vytautas: But truths depend upon the mind that perceives the object.

Where do you get truth from the object itself? You need to perceive the object first to make a judgement about the object, since your mind does not have the object itself.

[December 16, 2008 7:25 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Truths are just statements of fact that actually correspond to reality. The statements of fact do depend on a mind but that dependence is not what makes them true or not. Only whether they correspond to reality or not. It is up to by means of the science of epistemology to figure out whether a statement of fact is true or not and the cornerstone of that science is the objective subject object relationship. Truth is not up to whim or wish, it is not dependent on our minds. The truth is Mount Hood is 47 miles east of here, its true weather I am aware of it or not, it is not dependent on my knowledge of it. Why is it so hard for some to keep conceptually separated in their minds, the imaginary from the reality apart from their minds?

[December 16, 2008 7:48 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Sorry for any grammatical errors, it's late:)

[December 16, 2008 7:50 PM](#)

[Dr Funkenstein](#) said...

Bahnsen Burner: Tea leaves and books full of magical tales do exist and therefore are contained in objective reality. But they are not a means of acquiring and validating knowledge about reality, nor are they a guide to life-preserving action. Harry Potter, The Wizard of Oz, Stephen King books and the bible are all fantasy.

Vytautas: So there is at least one object in objective reality that is false. So your standard of knowledge has false things within it. But you use your reason to tell you what you should believe or not to believe. So you put more stock in your own mind rather than in objective reality.

I think you are missing Dawson's point - it is not that he disputes that false beliefs and claims exist; clearly it would be disingenuous to argue otherwise.

It is that objective reality itself does not conform to how an individual wishes or claims it to be - eg like in the example of the train that Justin gave

While people can *make claims* that reality is otherwise eg Stephen King can claim for the purposes of his stories that ghosts, demons et al are active and causing havoc in the real world, or JRR Tolkien can concoct a region of the world called Middle Earth filled with giants, wizards and hobbits for the purposes of an extended fantasy tale, it does not follow that because they can imagine these things that they are actually true or happening anywhere in reality, because reality doesn't conform to the storyteller's imagination (and I am sure neither King nor Tolkien intended their stories to be considered in any way factual).

In the same regard, while a Christian or the bible itself can make *claims* that Moses parted the seas, that faith in God or prayer can allow the believer to manipulate reality in the sense that the prayers are answered, or that God can alter facts of the world as he sees fit, this doesn't in fact make it so. Objective reality is indifferent to what is being claimed or wished for by any given individual - eg dropped rocks will not start falling up the way rather than down, simply because someone somewhere prayed to a God or wished for it to happen.

[December 16, 2008 8:05 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I wrote: *Being able to understand your own thoughts is not what distinguishes rationality. Saddam Hussein most likely understood his own thoughts, but I certainly would not call him rational. But perhaps you would?*

Vytautas: "We cannot know the thoughts within the mind of Saddam Hussein because neither of us is Saddam

Hussein.”

True, neither of us are Saddam Hussein. But there is plenty of evidence that he understood what he was doing. I take this as sufficient evidence that he understood his own thoughts as well.

Vytautas: “Why bring this example in the comments section?”

Because it quickly illustrates my contention, contra your statement (“Being rational means you could understand your own thoughts”), that simply being able to understand one’s own thoughts does not make one rational.

I wrote: *Boy, you sure do try to twist things beyond recognition, but why?*

Vytautas: “If I am wrong, then show it.”

I did. You even quoted me.

Vytautas: “But truths depend upon the mind that perceives the object. Where do you get truth from the object itself? You need to perceive the object first to make a judgement about the object, since your mind does not have the object itself.”

Both Justin and Dr. F. made some relevant points here for you to consider. Truth is the domain of concepts and propositions, of statements about things which exist. A mind assembles concepts and propositions from what is perceived, and it can achieve truth in this task only if it assembles concepts and propositions in accordance with what is perceived, i.e., by conforming to the objects of consciousness (rather than supposing that the objects conform to the subject of consciousness). The mind is not infallible in the quest for truth, which is why we need a standard method (i.e., reason).

Here’s a question for you, Vytautas: Do you think that wishing ever makes something true? Why or why not?

Regards,
Dawson

[December 16, 2008 10:09 PM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Bahnsen Burner: True, neither of us are Saddam Hussein. But there is plenty of evidence that he understood what he was doing. I take this as sufficient evidence that he understood his own thoughts as well.

Vytautas: So it is not enough to understand your own thoughts to be rational but you also must be moral, since Saddam Hussein lied to himself about objective reality. Rationality means being a good person. So how faithful to objective reality must one be to be moral? Do you have to be perfect?

Bahnsen Burner: I did. You even quoted me.

Vytautas: Yes, but you and I still cannot know his own thoughts as he thinks them in his head. We might have some evidence, but it is not the thoughts themselves.

Bahnsen Burner: Here’s a question for you, Vytautas: Do you think that wishing ever makes something true? Why or why not?

Vytautas: No, because wishing means wanting to do something and not doing it at the same time. So by definition wishing cannot make something true. Truth is a rightness that we understand with our own mind, but you like to trust your senses.

[December 17, 2008 7:02 AM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Justin: nothing in reality is false. Our understanding of it may be false, but a thing is what a thing is, law of identity. However when we fail at logic, that is fail to properly identify something then we can entertain false beliefs about

objective reality. Good example is believing that tea leaves can ever tell you anything about your future. This is a miss identification of tea leaves.

Vytautas: The concept of truth and reality are mutually exclusive, since truth is a property of propositions. We can only have true statements about reality, which requires a mind. We cannot say if an object in reality is true because an object requires a subject. If you as a subject did not perceive an object, then you cannot know statements about an object, unless another subject told you about an object.

[December 17, 2008 7:10 AM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Dr Funkenstein: In the same regard, while a Christian or the bible itself can make claims that Moses parted the seas, that faith in God or prayer can allow the believer to manipulate reality in the sense that the prayers are answered, or that God can alter facts of the world as he sees fit, this doesn't in fact make it so. Objective reality is indifferent to what is being claimed or wished for by any given individual - eg dropped rocks will not start falling up the way rather than down, simply because someone somewhere prayed to a God or wished for it to happen.

Vytautas: The believer does not manipulate reality, and if he did that would be sin against God, since He is the one who conforms reality to His own will.

If objective reality is primary, then it is eternal. But if it is eternal, then we would never be typing comments on Bahnsen Burner's blog, since an infinite amount of time would have to pass before we ever got here.

[December 17, 2008 7:18 AM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Vytautas: The concept of truth and reality are mutually exclusive, since truth is a property of propositions. We can only have true statements about reality, which requires a mind. We cannot say if an object in reality is true because an object requires a subject. If you as a subject did not perceive an object, then you cannot know statements about an object, unless another subject told you about an object.

Justin: this sounds suspiciously like Emanuel Kant's nonsense about the so called analytic synthetic dicotomy which I reject.

If objective reality is primary, then it is eternal. But if it is eternal, then we would never be typing comments on Bahnsen Burner's blog, since an infinite amount of time would have to pass before we ever got here.

Justin: This is no contraction between stating that existence is all that is and that there is a finite past. If the big bang is the very first meaningful moment then to ask what came before would make about as much sense as asking what is 5 miles north of the north pole. If there is no time proceeding the big bang then there is no causation, nothing to make the big bang to occur. Thus we have a universe that is finite in time from any given moment within it, and at the same time all that there ever was. On the other hand the universe / existence could very well be infinitely old, there is no problem with this, it will not take forever to get here, because there never was a starting point to start counting up from to infinity. Each and every moment in the universe would have an infinite past behind it. The problem of counting up only occurs if we have a infinitely old universe that had a beginning.

[December 17, 2008 8:27 AM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Oh, asking what came before the universe is a whopper of a stolen concept fallacy. I will have more to say about Vytautas's comments about the subject object relationship, I am work and cant give it the attention it requires, look of a post later today :)

[December 17, 2008 8:32 AM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Vytautas: We cannot say if an object in reality is true because an object requires a subject.

Justin: So basically we can not have any knowledge because we have minds, got it!

[December 17, 2008 8:40 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas: “So it is not enough to understand your own thoughts to be rational but you also must be moral, since Saddam Hussein lied to himself about objective reality. Rationality means being a good person. So how faithful to objective reality must one be to be moral? Do you have to be perfect?”

I gave my definition of ‘rational’ in my blog. Here it is again:

Rationality is the commitment to reason as one’s only means of acquiring and validating knowledge, and as his only guide to chosen action.

Rationality is a *precondition* for moral action. A person’s consistent immoral behavior is sufficient to demonstrate that he is not rational.

Vytautas: “Yes, but you and I still cannot know [Saddam Hussein’s] own thoughts as he thinks them in his head. We might have some evidence, but it is not the thoughts themselves.”

We do not need to know a person’s own thoughts as he thinks them in his head to judge his choices and actions.

I asked: *Here’s a question for you, Vytautas: Do you think that wishing ever makes something true? Why or why not?*

Vytautas: “No, because wishing means wanting to do something and not doing it at the same time. So by definition wishing cannot make something true.”

Where did you get this definition for ‘to wish’? Here are the definitions [I find](#):

1. to want; desire; long for (usually fol. by an infinitive or a clause): *I wish to travel. I wish that it were morning.*
2. to desire (a person or thing) to be (as specified): *to wish the problem settled.*
3. to entertain wishes, favorably or otherwise, for: *to wish someone well; to wish someone ill.*
4. to bid, as in greeting or leave-taking: *to wish someone a good morning.*
5. to request or charge: *I wish him to come.*

None of these stipulate that the wisher is not doing what he wishes at the same time.

Nevertheless, if you insist on your newfangled definition, let me rephrase my question: Does *wanting* ever make it so? Suppose a person has a glass of water in front of him, and wants the water in the glass to be wine. On your view, Vytautas, will the water change to wine upon that person’s wanting, or will it remain water regardless of what he wants?

Vytautas: “Truth is a rightness that we understand with our own mind, but you like to trust your senses.”

Do you not trust your senses? If not, how can you carry on a conversation? If your senses are not trustworthy, how can you know that you are accurately perceiving the marks on the page you’re reading?

I’m glad these aren’t my problems.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 17, 2008 9:15 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas: “The concept of truth and reality are mutually exclusive, since truth is a property of propositions.”

This does not follow. If concepts are formed on the basis of perceptual input and remain consistent with the primacy of existence, there is no such antithesis between concepts of truth and reality as you suppose here.

Vytautas: "We can only have true statements about reality, which requires a mind."

Statements are formed by minds, even false statements. We do not find statements lying around in the wilderness waiting for us to pick them up.

Vytautas: "We cannot say if an object in reality is true because an object requires a subject."

Two problems here. First, as I had stated earlier, "The concepts of truth and falsehood apply to statements about reality. We do not say that a rock is true or that a fence is false."

Also, you have things reversed: a subject requires an object, an object does not require a subject. As Dr. Kelley puts it:

To be conscious is to be conscious of something. Awareness is inherently relational. Whenever we see, hear, discover, discriminate, prove, grasp, or know, there is some object of the cognitive state. Even the faintest sensation is a sensation of something - a patch of color, a wisp of sound. If we take away all such content, we have taken away consciousness. ("The Primacy of Existence," *The Objectivist Forum*, Oct. 1981, p. 3)

There are things which exist (objects) which no one has seen or touched, such as a stone buried deep under the surface of Mercury. It exists where it is and is what it is, even though no one has ever discovered it.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 17, 2008 9:26 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas: "The believer does not manipulate reality, and if he did that would be sin against God, since He is the one who conforms reality to His own will."

Is this god you speak of real?

Vytautas: "If objective reality is primary, then it is eternal. But if it is eternal, then we would never be typing comments on Bahnsen Burner's blog, since an infinite amount of time would have to pass before we ever got here."

This argument overlooks four important facts:

1. Time presupposes existence, which means: time presupposes the universe, since the universe is the sum total of all that exists.
2. Time is epistemological, not metaphysical. This means that temporal relations are a category of *measurement*, and as such it is a conceptual operation. What this category measures is motion, and motion is restricted only by the natures of the entities involved, not anyone's poor understanding of time. Temporal relations presuppose a fixed standard (such as the earth's revolving around the sun), and measure between points (e.g., between such-and-such date and such-and-such date), which means it is always finite.
3. Since time presupposes existence (and therefore presupposes the universe - see point #1 above), and because time presupposes a fixed standard (such as the revolution of the earth around the sun), time does not apply to the universe as a whole. The universe is literally eternal, i.e., out of time, since there is no fixed standard once we get to the universe as a whole. (E.g., the universe is not revolving around something else.)
4. It is always now. The concepts of 'past' and 'future' only have meaning in relation to the present, which is unceasing.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 17, 2008 9:30 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Justin: "Oh, asking what came before the universe is a whopper of a stolen concept fallacy."

Justin is correct. To understand what the fallacy of the stolen concept is, see here:

[Stolen Concepts and Intellectual Parasitism](#)

To see why the claim that the universe was "created" commits the fallacy of the stolen concept, see here:

[Basic Contra-Theism](#)

Of course, if the theist insists that the universe was created, he's got bad news. See here:

[Before the Beginning: The Problem of Divine Lonesomeness](#)

Regards,
Dawson

[December 17, 2008 9:31 AM](#)

[Brian Guppy](#) said...

Justin: If the big bang is the very first meaningful moment then to ask what came before would make about as much sense as asking what is 5 miles north of the north pole. If there is no time proceeding the big bang then there is no causation, nothing to make the big bang to occur.

Brian: There are stolen concepts here as well. How do "first" or "proceeding" ("preceding"?) mean anything if there's no time. Both concepts presuppose the existence of time, so to talk about the "first meaningful moment" isn't meaningful. I would go so far as to say that it's meaningless to talk about how "old" existence is, since the concept of the "age" of something implies that time exists independently of it. Clearly this isn't the case when it comes to existence.

[December 17, 2008 9:45 AM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Dawson: Time is epistemological, not metaphysical.

Justin: I do not dispute that time is epistemological. However I believe the concept and includes a metaphysical aspect as well. The theories of general and special relativity which have passed every test we can conduct describe time as a fabric of sorts that can be distorted and is inseparable from space. That together space and time are a thing in and of them selves. Of course this could just be a conceptual trick to describe something that otherwise could be not related to anything in our ordinary lives. We do this in programing all the time, abstraction layers on top of abstraction layers. This does not change the fundamentals however, even if time is thing itself, it still existence as what it is and presupposes the concept existence.

Also quantum physics describes space and time as a lattice network and this can be tested as well, but I do not pretend to come close to understanding that theory. Dawson I realize that this is really off topic and and I apologize, however I am really curious as to your thoughts on this.

[December 17, 2008 9:57 AM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Brian Guppy. I agree with you to a point, however even tho the universe is the sum total of existence we can still indentify it and discuss its properties, such as size or age, this is why I doubt its infinity old as that would not be an actual age at all. So if it is infinity old I agree, asking its age is pointless

[December 17, 2008 10:00 AM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Brian, my reply was short and really did not say what I want to, I am at work and can only seek a minute here or there for this, I would like to discuss your post in more detail, but that will have to wait until 4pm PST :)

[December 17, 2008 10:15 AM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

reviewing my post Dawson, I realize my poor grammar may render my post incoherent, I will repost later, sorry guys, I will slow down and reread my posts before posting in the future :)

[December 17, 2008 11:56 AM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Vytautas: "The concept of truth and reality are mutually exclusive, since truth is a property of propositions."

Bahnsen Burner: This does not follow. If concepts are formed on the basis of perceptual input and remain consistent with the primacy of existence, there is no such antithesis between concepts of truth and reality as you suppose here.

Vytautas: But the mind forms a proposition about the perceptual input. The senses take in perceptual input, and then the intellect must somehow transform the input into propositions about reality. However, a mind is necessary to form propositions about reality because propositions are not found in reality itself.

Vytautas: "We cannot say if an object in reality is true because an object requires a subject."

Bahnsen Burner: Two problems here. First, as I had stated earlier, "The concepts of truth and falsehood apply to statements about reality. We do not say that a rock is true or that a fence is false."

Vytautas: Right, but concepts of truth are formed by the subject even though they apply to statements about reality. A mind must work with the input to see if they are true or not. Perceptual input is almost useless to the mind until it beings to make sense of the perceptual input.

Bahnsen Burner: Also, you have things reversed: a subject requires an object, an object does not require a subject. As Dr. Kelley puts it...

Vytautas: Well, a subject could be its own object. Thus a subject does not require an object, if by object you mean something outside the subject. A subject is able to make statements about himself (or herself, if a girl is reading this). How do you explain the fact that a subject could be the object of his own understanding, if perceptual input is how you know everything? How do you know yourself?

[December 17, 2008 2:31 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Vytautas: Well, a subject could be its own object. Thus a subject does not require an object, if by object you mean something outside the subject. A subject is able to make statements about himself (or herself, if a girl is reading this). How do you explain the fact that a subject could be the object of his own understanding, if perceptual input is how you know everything? How do you know yourself?

Justin: to entertain that a conciseness can be conscious of only ones own conciseness is to commit the fallacy of pure self reference. An example is the statement "this statement is true" The statement makes reference to its own reference, in effect it says nothing meaningful at all. In order for a conciseness to be conscious of itself, it must first be conscious of something else to differentiate it's self from. Children are not really self conciseness and aware of them selfs as thinking beings until about age 18 months to 2 years, yet they have already acquired fast knowledge via perception of the world. Further one has to come into a gradual awareness of ones self as a conscious being thinking via the use of concepts, it does not just snap on the minute we are born or at a later date. We do not have direct perceptual awareness of our own conciseness. It is an internal process, you can see it. It is conceptualized

abstractly after a lot of prior input.

Dawson and Brian I will reply to earlier posts and clear somethings up, just a little more time:)

[December 17, 2008 4:14 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

What I did not make clear in the post above, is that we are not directly conscious of our selves, we understand it abstractly and only after a lot of prior input. the fallacy of pure self reference pertains to direct perceptual awareness of our conciseness.

what did I say earlier to myself about proof reading, urrghh.!

[December 17, 2008 4:19 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas: "Well, a subject could be its own object. Thus a subject does not require an object, if by object you mean something outside the subject."

Actually, a subject does require an object other than itself. A subject can introspect, and thereby be its own object. But before it can do this, it must have an object independent of itself, otherwise the subject would have no content to introspect. Otherwise, as Justin pointed out, you'd be committing the fallacy of pure self-reference. I discuss this problem [here](#), a blog of mine to which I had provided a link in one of my earlier comments.

Vytautas: "A subject is able to make statements about himself (or herself, if a girl is reading this)."

Yes, this is true. We all make statements about ourselves. We can do this because we have content to introspect.

Vytautas: "How do you explain the fact that a subject could be the object of his own understanding, if perceptual input is how you know everything? How do you know yourself?"

By means of introspection, which is possible once there is content to introspect (i.e., having awareness of objects independent of ourselves).

So how about my question about a person wanting water to change into wine? Suppose a person has a glass of water in front of him, and wants the water in the glass to be wine. On your view, Vytautas, will the water change to wine upon that person's wanting, or will it remain water regardless of what he wants?

Regards,
Dawson

[December 17, 2008 4:56 PM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Bahnsen Burner: So how about my question about a person wanting water to change into wine? Suppose a person has a glass of water in front of him, and wants the water in the glass to be wine. On your view, Vytautas, will the water change to wine upon that person's wanting, or will it remain water regardless of what he wants?

Vytautas: Jesus turned water into wine, but I am not sure of the process though.

[December 17, 2008 5:03 PM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Vytautas: "A subject is able to make statements about himself (or herself, if a girl is reading this)."

Bahnsen Burner: Yes, this is true. We all make statements about ourselves. We can do this because we have content to introspect.

Vytautas: So we cannot know statements about ourselves, but we can only introspect the content of the objects that we learned from. So another subject must view myself as an object, and then the subject must tell me who I am because I can only know objects.

[December 17, 2008 5:10 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas: "Jesus turned water into wine, but I am not sure of the process though."

Did he do this through a fermentation process?

Regards,
Dawson

[December 17, 2008 5:19 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas: "So we cannot know statements about ourselves,"

Yes, we can know statements about ourselves. For instance, I know the statement "I like Thai food." That is a statement about myself, and I do know it.

Vytautas: "but we can only introspect the content of the objects that we learned from."

The content that we introspect when we introspect our own consciousness, is the content we have acquired from awareness of objects. Once we have such content, we can introspect our conscious functions and discover how they work.

Vytautas: "So another subject must view myself as an object, and then the subject must tell me who I am because I can only know objects."

Why would you suppose this?

Regards,
Dawson

[December 17, 2008 5:20 PM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Bahnsen Burner: Did he do this through a fermentation process?

Vytautas: I am not sure of the process.

[December 17, 2008 6:44 PM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Bahnsen Burner: Yes, we can know statements about ourselves. For instance, I know the statement "I like Thai food." That is a statement about myself, and I do know it.

Vytautas: But "I" is a subject. Knowledge only comes from objective reality, which is outside of yourself. How could you predicate an object to yourself?

Bahnsen Burner: Why would you suppose [that another subject must view myself as an object, and then the subject must tell me who I am because I can only know objects]

Vytautas: Consciousness is consciousness of something. It is only possible to be conscious if the subject is aware of

an object. So another subject would have to be aware of you as an object, and then he can report the perceptual input to you.

[December 17, 2008 6:59 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas: "I am not sure of the process."

Then maybe it wasn't a miracle after all?

Regards,
Dawson

[December 17, 2008 8:07 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas: "But 'I' is a subject. Knowledge only comes from objective reality, which is outside of yourself. How could you predicate an object to yourself?"

Vytautas, since we exist, we are part of reality.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 17, 2008 8:09 PM](#)

[Drew Lewis](#) said...

Dawson said:

"No, that's not what rationality is. This definition makes no reference to reason, and it's a non-negotiable that rationality involves fidelity to reason."

Sorry, I thought that it would be reasonable to assume that you would see that I was offering a description of what is reasonable. Let me put it so that you can understand. Rationality is really just the commitment to the principle that one's beliefs--*in accordance with reason*-- don't actually contradict each other and experience. To me, that seems redundant, but I guess if you can't tell that I was describing an aspect of reason, then you can't tell how I was correctly defining rationality.

Drew said:

"To demonstrate why your definition of rationality is false, consider this question: Can you provide a rational argument for your definition of rationality that is not question-begging, while adhering to your own definition of rationality?"

Dawson replied:

Since man is neither omniscient nor infallible, he requires a normative cognitive process. This requirement is satisfied by the faculty of reason. It is reason which works in accordance with the nature of man's distinctive consciousness: beginning with perception of objects and allowing him to form concepts on the basis of that perceptual input, and integrating those concepts into a sum of knowledge. Reading tea leaves, consulting astrological ephemerides, praying to invisible magic beings, etc., will not provide man with knowledge of reality. So a primary virtue, one which makes a broad assortment of subsequent virtues possible, needs to take these facts into account, which the virtue of rationality, as I have defined it, does indeed do.

Um, I haven't advocated any of these things, so how do you know that I don't have good reason to join you in showing that they're irrational? I take each of those things to be contrary to experience, so I take them to be irrational.

You've forgotten that our little discourse here is a disagreement on the definition of rationality. So far, you've offered no argument to support why someone should reject my definition and accept yours.

All you've done is to reiterate your definition over and over again. When you encounter a person with a very controversial position, which yours is, you'd expect them to offer some sort of argument or evidence for it. Could you do that, or are you going to just restate the definition? That's the worst kind of question-begging. You don't even offer any logical steps between where you assume your conclusion and then conclude your conclusion.

Drew as quoted by Dawson:

"The only reason I can think of is so that you can define God out of existence. 'Look here! My concept of rationality doesn't allow for the existence of God! So God doesn't exist! What a good argument I just made.' Now that's irrationality if I've ever seen it."

Drew continued:

"I can do the same thing. "Look, God is defined as a necessarily existent being (ontological argument), so He exists!" Your argument is no better than this bad ontological argument."

Dawson responded:

On which definition of rationality and irrationality? On the definition that you prefer ("the commitment to the principle that one's beliefs don't actually contradict each other and experience"), how would your rendition of my argument be contrary to the norms of rationality? My beliefs about rationality do not contradict each other or my experience, and on the basis of those beliefs I recognize that a being which is said to be omniscient, infallible and indestructible would have no need for rationality as I understand it. How is that "irrational"? It's internally consistent, at no point does it contradict itself or my experience, and it follows logically. Besides, if you think my argument was intended to conclude that "God doesn't exist," you've misunderstood it. It simply argued that it would be neither rational nor irrational, for reasons I clearly laid out.

First, what's irrational about the argument I laid out is that it does contradict what constitutes a good argument in my experience. Good arguments are more than just rational. They are based on solid evidence, whether logical or experiential. The reason it's irrational to try to play with concept of rationality so as to declare non-contradictory (with experience and reason) beliefs irrational is that our experience teaches us that the world is what it is, regardless of how we try to define it. Whether God exists or not, and whether belief in God is irrational or not cannot be determined by the way we try to define a word. Belief in God does not lead to any contradictory beliefs. Moreover, there are reasons to believe in God. This doesn't make such belief true, but it makes it rational. You may disagree with what theists and Christians take to be good evidence, but you can't just define it as irrational by fiat. That leads to my second point.

Your definition (and I'm sure Peikoff's and Rand's) of rationality is no better than the bad ontological argument I compared it to. You didn't quote that part, and you didn't respond to it by showing how your defining rationality the way you do is better than the above proponent's ontological argument for God's existence.

If you could do that, I'd be surprised. We are dealing with definitions after all. So, since mine is simpler and works in the world, please offer us a reason to reject it in favor of yours other than to say something equivalent to, "But my definition makes certain beliefs I reject irrational!"

Thanks,

Drew

[December 18, 2008 2:50 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Drew: Moreover, there are reasons to believe in God.

Justin: Drew I realize that this is mainly a discussion between dawson and yourself, however I would be interested in hearing from you how one can justify holding beliefs predicated on metaphysical subjectivism, such as god. while at the same time acting as if one's world view was predicated on metaphysical objectivism without contradicting one's self. I for one dont see how.

[December 18, 2008 3:52 PM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Bahnsen Burner: Vytautas, since we exist, we are part of reality.

Vytautas: Yes, but you require another object who has to be a subject at the same time, so that he can tell you that you exist.

[December 18, 2008 4:25 PM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Drew Lewis: "Look, God is defined as a necessarily existent being (ontological argument), so He exists!"

Vytautas: That is not the argument that I gave though. God is a defined as a necessarily existent being. Assume for puposes of contradiction that there is no necessarily existent being. This means that it is possible to have non-existance. Given the Objectivist's axiom that existance exist, we have a contradiction. Thus, God exists.

[December 18, 2008 4:43 PM](#)

[Drew Lewis](#) said...

Justin,

If you mean by subjectivism and objectivism the technical terms defined and used by objectivists, then I don't really have an answer to your questions, because I reject those definitions.

I believe that God exists objectively and based on no subjective cause. He didn't create Himself. I do believe that whatever else exists is created by Him. Thus far, I've seen no evidence put forth by objectivists that isn't either question-begging against the existence of God or woefully ignorant about what Christians believe about God. In other words, objectivists think that believing that reality is objective precludes belief in God. It simply doesn't. Every defense I've seen for the position that it does either supposes God to be something He isn't or defines Him out of existence/rationality. Not very convincing if you ask me.

[December 18, 2008 5:03 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Vytautas, you are equivocating a being (one thing) with existence (the sum total of everything). While it is possible to identify a being and conclude that it is, or it is not a necessary being, existence is a different story. Existence is everything, including us, the beings discussing what may or may not be. It is assumed by even asking the question, "is there a necessary being".

[December 18, 2008 5:04 PM](#)

[Drew Lewis](#) said...

Vytautas,

I wasn't necessarily criticizing every version of the ontological argument. I think that Peter Van InWagen makes a good case that if a necessary being is possible, then a necessary being exists. To be honest, I've been responding to Dawson's original post and haven't really followed you're interaction much.

Sorry for any confusion.

[December 18, 2008 5:06 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Drew, why do you reject the definitions of subjective and objective metaphysics? Also if hypothetically the definitions provided by objectivism are sound then is it the correct conclusion to draw that god belief is irrational? Note, I did not say god, only god belief.

[December 18, 2008 5:09 PM](#)

[Drew Lewis](#) said...

Justin,

I've heard objectivists insist that objectivism makes belief in God irrational. They do this by saying that existence cannot be dependent on consciousness because there must exist something before anything can be conscious. From this idea, they conclude that belief in God is irrational because it puts consciousness before existence. This is just false. Belief in God is a belief that God Himself exists logically prior to any consciousness, including His own. This is in full agreement with what objectivism says. That's why I consider the conclusion that belief in God is irrational to be either question-begging (objectivism defines belief in God as irrational) or making a straw-man argument (objectivism accuses belief in God of putting consciousness before existence.)

I've not spent a great deal of time studying objectivism, so if my characterization is wrong, by all means let me know. I just know that what I've seen so far is not convincing. It makes logical leaps that have no basis in fact or reason.

[December 18, 2008 6:55 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I wrote: *No, that's not what rationality is. This definition makes no reference to reason, and it's a non-negotiable that rationality involves fidelity to reason.*

Drew: "Sorry, I thought that it would be reasonable to assume that you would see that I was offering a description of what is reasonable."

Descriptions are broader than definitions; they are not the same thing. For instance, one could describe a city as a place where people live. That's true, people do live in cities, but that's not an appropriate definition for the concept 'city'. It's a description. What I offered in my blog is a definition of 'rationality', in accordance with the norms of definition formulated by the objective theory of concepts. As Rand puts it, "The rules of correct definition are derived from the process of concept-formation." (*Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, p. 53) You were challenging this definition of 'rationality', apparently on the grounds that a "simpler" definition is to be preferred. Whether your alternative definition is "simpler" is not clear, nor is it clear why a "simpler" definition should be preferred over one which is formulated according to the rules of correct definition. Now you're saying that what you were offering was "a description of what is reasonable." If you're just giving a *description* of rationality, what is your *definition* of rationality, and how did you form it?

Drew: "Let me put it so that you can understand. Rationality is really just the commitment to the principle that one's beliefs--*in accordance with reason*-- don't actually contradict each other and experience."

This is not what you had offered before, but it is a slight improvement since now you are incorporating mention of reason into your new definition. Earlier, however, you had stated explicitly that "rationality allows for multiple means of acquiring knowledge," but now you seem to be moving away from this. It's okay to modify definitions in light of new knowledge or if they've been found to be deficient in some way. But I still don't see how your new version is all that much better. For one thing, it makes the issue hinge on "beliefs," and beliefs are not irreducible primaries. We do not begin with "beliefs" already formulated and pre-populating our minds. Beliefs are contextual, they are formed by some process, and to be rational they must ultimately be formed on the basis of perceptual input. Also, the part about contradicting experience is a bit vague, and that won't do when it comes to definitions. For instance, the notion of a god contradicts my experience, so on your definition of rationality, god-belief is irrational. But a theist would probably not accept this.

Drew: "To me, that seems redundant, but I guess if you can't tell that I was describing an aspect of reason, then you can't tell how I was correctly defining rationality."

I don't see how the phrase "in accordance with reason" makes your new definition redundant, if that's what you're saying. Many people have beliefs that are formed in a manner contrary to reason (such as faith in the supernatural). They could even say that they do not contradict each other or their experience, but on your initial definition this would be considered rational. For example, an astrologer's belief that her son's career in medicine was dictated by his birth sign and the ascendancy of Jupiter on his twelfth birthday may very well not contradict other beliefs she holds or her experience. On your initial conception of rationality, this fits the bill as rational. Now not only did your

initial attempt to define rationality make no mention of reason, you also stated explicitly that it “allows for multiple means of acquiring knowledge.” So how could I suppose that you had reason in mind, especially when you claimed that my definition of rationality, which makes commitment to reason as one’s only means of acquiring and validating knowledge explicit, is “just false” and “overreaches,” and the alternative you provided made explicit allowance for means of acquiring knowledge other than reason (e.g., astrology, tea leaves, faith in the supernatural, etc.)? Perhaps now you may be beginning to see why the definition I had provided is so viable, for it explicitly identifies reason as one’s only means of knowledge and his only guide to action.

I wrote: *Since man is neither omniscient nor infallible, he requires a normative cognitive process. This requirement is satisfied by the faculty of reason. It is reason which works in accordance with the nature of man’s distinctive consciousness: beginning with perception of objects and allowing him to form concepts on the basis of that perceptual input, and integrating those concepts into a sum of knowledge. Reading tea leaves, consulting astrological ephemerides, praying to invisible magic beings, etc., will not provide man with knowledge of reality. So a primary virtue, one which makes a broad assortment of subsequent virtues possible, needs to take these facts into account, which the virtue of rationality, as I have defined it, does indeed do.*

Drew: “Um, I haven’t advocated any of these things, so how do you know that I don’t have good reason to join you in showing that they’re irrational?”

That’s just it: based on your alternative definition of rationality, I couldn’t know that you would reject any of these, or on what basis you could reject any of them. As you had stated, “Rationality allows for multiple means of acquiring knowledge.” Your statement explicitly made allowance for “means of acquiring knowledge” *other* than reason. Now you seem to be backing away from that. That’s good.

Drew: “I take each of those things to be contrary to experience, so I take them to be irrational.”

Perhaps you could elaborate on what you mean by “contrary to experience,” and how one determines this. (My definition already identifies reason as the means by which this would be determined, but you didn’t like my definition so I’m supposing you have some other way of determining it?) As I mentioned above, it’s rather vague, and that’s a big no-no when it comes to definitions. Many people in this world seem to think that alternatives to reason, such as reading tea leaves, consulting ephemerides, and praying to invisible magic beings, are valid means of acquiring knowledge. Since they seem to see nothing “contrary to experience” about these, they probably would not consider them irrational, and going by the definition of rationality that you had given (especially since it “allows for multiple means of acquiring knowledge”), they’d apparently be right. Of course, again as I mentioned above, the notion of a universe-creating deity is wholly contradictory to my experience. So on your definition of rationality, god-belief is irrational.

Drew: “You’ve forgotten that our little discourse here is a disagreement on the definition of rationality.”

No, I’ve not forgotten this. It seems you may have though. Above, in your latest comment, you seem to be saying that what you had provided earlier is a “*description* of what is reasonable,” but description and a definition are not one and the same. Meanwhile, I have stated my definition of rationality, and it’s unclear what exactly you think is wrong with it. Do you think reason is not one’s only means of acquiring and validating knowledge and guiding his actions? If so, what alternatives to reason do you have in mind such that a commitment to them could constitute rationality?

Drew: “So far, you’ve offered no argument to support why someone should reject my definition and accept yours.”

Actually I did, by pointing out (a) that fidelity to reason is a non-negotiable in defining rationality (since reason is man’s only means of acquiring and validating knowledge), (b) that your (original) alternative definition made no mention of reason (even common dictionaries do not fail to relate reason to rationality; see for instance [here](#)); (c) that “beliefs” are not irreducible primaries and should not be treated as such (as your definition does), and (d) that your earlier definition, which “allows for multiple means of acquiring knowledge” reduces to absurdity by inviting any alternative to reason that one can think of (since it provides no guide in what qualifies as a suitable means of acquiring knowledge). I also referenced a source which speaks to this very matter at length for further study if you’re interested.

Drew: “First, what’s irrational about the argument I laid out is that it does contradict what constitutes a good argument in my experience.”

But another individual could come along and say that, in his experience, it is perfectly suitable as a good argument.

Given your view of rationality, the argument would be irrational for you, but rational for the other guy. I recall one guy who thought the following “argument” was super-duper:

Premise 1: Nothing exists or God exists.

Premise 2: Something exists.

Conclusion: Therefore, God exists.

Now it’s amazing to me that anyone would take such an argument seriously. But apparently somebody does. I’m sure he would call it “rational” to believe that there is a god on the basis of this kind of argument.

Drew: “The reason it’s irrational to try to play with concept of rationality so as to declare non-contradictory (with experience and reason) beliefs irrational is that our experience teaches us that the world is what it is, regardless of how we try to define it.”

Here you’re describing, whether you realize it or not, the primacy of existence principle. It is this very principle which god-belief violates by positing a consciousness which enjoys the exact opposite orientation between itself and its objects.

Drew: “Belief in God does not lead to any contradictory beliefs.”

Actually it does, a whole lot of them in fact, but believers typically do not admit it when they do. Belief in a god rests on a whole series of stolen concepts, beginning with the primacy of consciousness. In fact, one must grant metaphysical primacy to consciousness just to suppose that there is a god. See my blog [Theism and Subjective Metaphysics](#) for starters.

Drew: “Moreover, there are reasons to believe in God.”

Unfortunately, there are no *good* reasons to believe in any gods. The primacy of existence assures this.

Drew: “This doesn’t make such belief true, but it makes it rational.”

Are you saying that it can be rational to believe something that is not true? If a claim is not found to be true, how could it be rational to believe it?

Drew: “You may disagree with what theists and Christians take to be good evidence, but you can’t just define it as irrational by fiat.”

I don’t. I show why it’s irrational. At minimum, since rationality entails fidelity to reason and reason necessarily complies with the primacy of existence, rationality must adhere to the primacy of existence. Any idea, belief, argument or position which grants metaphysical primacy to consciousness at any point is thereby irrational by virtue of this default. And god-belief does just that: it grants metaphysical primacy to consciousness in the notion of a god. No defining by fiat here.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 18, 2008 9:00 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas: “Yes, but you require another object who has to be a subject at the same time, so that he can tell you that you exist.”

No, Vytautas, you’re confusing yourself again. Read what I wrote again:

The content that we introspect when we introspect our own consciousness, is the content we have acquired from awareness of objects. Once we have such content, we can introspect our conscious functions and discover how they work.

A subject, once it has awareness of objects other than itself, can turn its awareness inward and introspect. Extrospection (awareness of objects independent of the subject) must precede introspection.

Vytautas: “That is not the argument that I gave though. God is defined as a necessarily existent being. Assume for purposes of contradiction that there is no necessarily existent being. This means that it is possible to have non-existence. Given the Objectivist’s axiom that existence exist, we have a contradiction. Thus, God exists.”

Several points here. For one thing, “God” is supposed to be an independently existing entity as opposed to a concept. Definitions apply to concepts, not independently existing entities. By saying that “God is defined as...”, you’re implying that it is mental, like an imagination. I would agree with this by the way. As I pointed out to you before, Vytautas (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)), people who believe in a god have a very hard time explaining how one can reliably distinguish between what he calls “God” and what he may merely be imagining.

Second, the argument you provide seems to be trying to define your god into existence. Notwithstanding my previous point that definitions apply to concepts rather than to independently existing entities, this move can be replicated for any rival deity. For instance: “Geusha is defined as a necessarily existent being. Assume for purposes of contradiction that there is no necessarily existent being. This means that it is possible to have non-existence. Given the Objectivist’s axiom that existence exists, we have a contradiction. Thus, Geusha exists.” Of course, Geusha is not the Christian god. Geusha for instance did not have a son.

Third, the axiom of existence is inescapable. As Porter correctly points out, “anybody can deny the validity of ‘God’, but nobody can deny the validity of ‘existence’” (*Ayn Rand’s Theory of Knowledge*, p. 176). On the Objectivist view, the universe is necessarily existing in that it is the sum total of all that exists. If anything exists, the universe necessarily exists since the totality is implied by the existence of any thing. Also, we recognize, by means of the primacy of existence, that the universe is not a creation of consciousness, but a collection of independently existing existents.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 18, 2008 9:02 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Drew: “I’ve heard objectivists insist that objectivism makes belief in God irrational. They do this by saying that existence cannot be dependent on consciousness because there must exist something before anything can be conscious. From this idea, they conclude that belief in God is irrational because it puts consciousness before existence. This is just false. Belief in God is a belief that God Himself exists logically prior to any consciousness, including His own. This is in full agreement with what objectivism says. That’s why I consider the conclusion that belief in God is irrational to be either question-begging (objectivism defines belief in God as irrational) or making a straw-man argument (objectivism accuses belief in God of putting consciousness before existence.)”

First of all, it’s important to note that we have no onus to prove that the non-existent does not exist. If the theist wants non-believers to be convinced that a god exists, it is upon the theist to argue for this claim.

Now I don’t know what you’ve been reading, or where you think “objectivism defines belief in God as irrational,” but the points you present here betray a rather poor understanding of the argument from the primacy of existence. The primacy of existence is the recognition that objects of consciousness exist independently of the subject of consciousness, that the task of consciousness is not to create its own objects (e.g., I want something to exist, therefore it exists), or to assign and/or manipulation their identities (e.g., something is what I wish it to be), but to perceive and identify what does exist. This recognition is a corollary of the axiomatic concepts ‘existence’, ‘identity’, and ‘consciousness’, and like the axiomatic concepts one must assume their truth even in the act of denying them. For instance, if someone says that the primacy of existence is false, he would most likely be saying this is the case whether anyone likes it or not. But that’s the primacy of existence: reality is what it is regardless of what anyone thinks, knows, denies, wants, fears, wishes, etc. The primacy of existence, then, is undefeatable. I have yet to see a theistic argument remain consistent with the primacy of existence and still soundly conclude that a god exists. Indeed, I’ve yet to see any theistic argument address the issue of metaphysical primacy to begin with. The idea of a god posits a consciousness which is supposed to enjoy the exact opposite orientation between subject and object that

Consciousness does presuppose existence, and it does so in three fundamental ways. First it presupposes existence in requiring consciousness to have an object distinct from itself. A consciousness conscious of nothing is a contradiction in terms. Also, it presupposes existence in requiring consciousness to have a means of awareness. For

instance, sensory organs, a nervous system, a brain, etc. Lastly, consciousness presupposes existence in that it serves a purpose other than its own. For instance, the survival of the entity which possesses consciousness. If human beings were not conscious, for instance, they would die because they would not be able to locate food, shelter themselves from harm, etc.

Notice how the notion of a god violates each of these three fundamental facts. First, since it is said to have created everything distinct from itself, it begins by having no object distinct from itself to be aware of. I examine this problem in my blog [Before the Beginning: The Problem of Divine Lonesomeness](#). Anton Thorn also has a piece dedicated to this topic called [God and Pure Self-Reference](#). Second, since a god is supposed to incorporeal, i.e., lacking a body, it would be non-biological. Consequently it would have no sensory organs, no nervous system, no brain, etc., which consciousness presupposes. Theists typically deny that consciousness requires these, but what evidence can they produce to support the view that consciousness is possible without sensory organs, a nervous system, a brain, etc.? I've seen no good reason to suppose that consciousness is possible without these things, and no evidence of such a consciousness. By what means would it be aware of anything? Blank out. Third, since a god is supposed not only to be bodiless and non-biological, but also immortal, eternal and indestructible, there'd be no purpose for it to possess consciousness. It doesn't need to find food, it doesn't need to seek shelter, it doesn't need to do anything. It would have no needs whatsoever, and consequently no need for a means of being aware of anything.

Another issue is one of starting points. What is the theist's epistemological starting point when he believes that a god exists? Certainly not the Objectivist axioms. Quite often, if they ever get around to addressing this question, theists will make it clear that their god is already part and parcel with their starting point. For instance, [Dominic Tennant](#) announces his starting point as "the Bible is the Word of God." This would mean he simply starts with the assumption that his god exists from the very beginning. So any argument he presents to prove that his god exists would be question-begging.

Another issue is the fact that anyone can *imagine* a god or other so-called "[supernatural](#)" beings. As Cornelius Van Til put it, "I could believe in nothing else if I did not, as back of everything, believe in this God." ("Toward A Reformed Apologetic," 1972) He didn't *see* this god "back of" everything, he *imagined* it. In his story of his boyhood conversion tells us how as a little child he took imaginary fears very seriously and that's what brought him to the faith. Not "arguments." Of course, the primacy of existence tells us that there's a fundamental distinction between what is real and what is imaginary. Unfortunately, when theists try to tell us about their god and what it's doing in the world, they give us no indication of how we can reliably distinguish between what they call "God" and what they may merely be imagining. And, as philosophical detection shows us, many worldviews fail to grasp the primacy of existence explicitly and often fall prey to blurring the distinction between the real and the imaginary. Religion is a prime example. We can imagine that a god created the earth and the heaven, but the imaginary is not real. So unless there's some way we can rationally apprehend what it is they call "God" (and this entails the ability to reliably distinguish between what they call "God" and what is only imaginary), I see no reason why it is not imaginary.

I could go on, but these are some starters. You may also want to review [these resources](#) to familiarize yourself with some of the issues a little better.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 18, 2008 9:20 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Thank you Dawson, you said it better than I could. I find god belief, and any and all metaphysical subjective propositions to be incompatible with the twin goals of desiring to live and a desire to avoid inconsistencies in my world view. I like everyone else must start his/her conceptualization with a implicit if not explicit acceptance of existence as axiomatic. Once one realizes this, there is nothing more for god to do but head off to the unemployment line.

[December 19, 2008 8:52 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Drew: "I believe that God exists objectively and based on no subjective cause. He didn't create Himself. I do believe that whatever else exists is created by Him. Thus far, I've seen no evidence put forth by objectivists that isn't either

question-begging against the existence of God or woefully ignorant about what Christians believe about God. In other words, objectivists think that believing that reality is objective precludes belief in God. It simply doesn't. Every defense I've seen for the position that it does either supposes God to be something He isn't or defines Him out of existence/rationality. Not very convincing if you ask me."

It's well and good that your god-belief holds that your god did not create itself. However, this does not sanitize god-belief from its inherent subjectivism. The argument is not that god-belief is subjective because its god allegedly created itself. The argument is that god-belief is subjective because it ascribes metaphysical primacy to a conscious will over any and all of its objects. That's where the subjectivism of god-belief lies, in the relationship between the god as a subject and any objects distinct from itself.

To explore this, let's ask some questions. Is this god conscious? Typically theists think of their god as a conscious being. It is supposed to know things, communicate, feel certain emotions (e.g., anger, wrath), desire things, issue commandments, plan things in advance, judge, etc. All of these activities presuppose consciousness because they involve conscious activity, so it would be strange if a theist denied consciousness to his god. Now let us ask: *What is the orientation between the god as a subject of consciousness and the objects of its consciousness?* Is it the same orientation we have? The orientation we have between subject and object is characterized by the primacy of existence: the objects of our consciousness hold metaphysical primacy over the subject of our consciousness. You could call this the primacy of the *object* as well, which is where we get the concept 'objectivity'. Objectivism is the philosophy which is developed consistently on the basis of the primacy of existence (the concept 'objectivity') from its very foundations throughout its farthest reaches. Hence the name, Objectivism. The primacy of existence (i.e., the primacy of the object metaphysics) is the recognition that the objects of consciousness exist and are what they are independent of the subject's awareness of them (e.g., "wishing doesn't make it so"). The subject perceives and identifies its objects, it does not create them or assign them their identity or nature.

For example, suppose I see a stapler on my desk. My seeing the stapler does not bring the stapler into existence. It exists independent of my perception of it, my awareness did not cause it to exist. Now if I *wish* that the stapler be full of staples when in fact it has already run out, my wishing will not automatically reload it so that it is full again. Wishing does not have this power, because the objects of consciousness hold metaphysical primacy over consciousness. If I want the stapler reloaded, I would have to physically reload it, and only if I have a set of staples to put into it. I could wish that the stapler levitate itself to my hand if it is out of my reach, but will the stapler obey my wishing? No, it won't. Again, it exists independent of my conscious activity. I could *imagine* that the stapler is really an Asian elephant, but does my imagination turn the stapler into an elephant? No it does not. It remains a stapler all the same, and that's because existence holds metaphysical primacy over consciousness, the objects are what they are regardless of my conscious activity. I could *forget* that my stapler is on my desk, but when I turn around, it's still there. Why? Because it exists independent even of my forgetfulness, too. I could continue this experiment, but the result will always be the same: existence exists independent of consciousness. The primacy of existence cannot be defeated.

But a god is supposed to have precisely the opposite orientation: creating its own objects ("ex nihilo" even) and giving them their identity, even revising their identity, *at will* - i.e., by conscious intentions. The objects of its consciousness are supposed to conform to its will. That's the primacy of consciousness, or if you will, *the primacy of the subject* in the subject-object relationship - i.e., *subjectivism*. Suddenly wishing does make it so, in the case of a god. All objects will conform to its conscious intentions, no matter what they might be. It may wish that an object exists, and poof, it exists. It may wish that the object which it has thus created be a ball, and poof, it's a ball. It may then wish that the ball become a person, and poof, it becomes a person. Since according to theism everything in the universe is said to have been created by this god and its willful acts of creation ("whatever else exists is created by Him"), theism necessarily ascribes to what I call [the cartoon universe premise](#). The things which theists say their god can do can be illustrated in a cartoon. But oddly we don't see these things happening in the world at all. Instead, one must imagine that there's a god behind the scenes, as it were, populating the world with whatever it wants (like characters in a cartoon) and choreographing the events of history as if it were a pre-determined drama which never seems to end (in spite of promises of a dramatic ending).

Christian apologist Paul Manata confessed that reality is subjective, since it's "based on a divine mind" (see [here](#)). He speaks for the Christian worldview. Mike Warren, another Christian apologist, tells us explicitly why the Christian view of reality is ultimately subjective (see [here](#)). He too speaks for the Christian worldview. So given such confessions, and other points which I have made throughout my blog, Objectivists are correct in recognizing that the objectivity of reality precludes any gods.

So there's no supposing that the theistic god is something it isn't said by theists themselves to be going on here. There is simply no misrepresentation here at all. This is what theists themselves tell us when they describe their

god's activity and relationship to the world. Also, there's no defining of a god out of existence as if we simply stipulate that a god does not exist. We have an inescapable principle, the primacy of existence, which tells us about reality and the proper relationship which consciousness has to reality. To affirm the existence of a god is to tacitly assume the primacy of existence by implying it exists independent of our consciousness (theists typically don't say their god exists because they believe it does, or because they want it to exist, but say that it exists independent of our consciousness). But the content of this claim - a being to whose consciousness all objects conform - explicitly asserts the exact reverse of this principle, the primacy of consciousness. So the theist is making use of a principle and contradicting it in the very same breath at the very foundation of his presuppositions. This is why Anton Thorn is correct to conclude that [the claim that "God exists" performatively contradicts itself](#).

Regards,
Dawson

[December 19, 2008 10:42 AM](#)

[Jason Streitfeld](#) said...

I'm not sure how best to bring this to your attention, but here it is:

[Proof That Presuppositional Apologetics Cannot Produce Valid Arguments](#)

It's short.

[December 19, 2008 2:02 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Jason, In many discussions with Presuppositionalists, they will freely admit that their Transcendental Argument for God commits itself to circular reasoning and they don't appear to be bothered by it one bit. They claim all arguments are ultimately circular. Which I guess also includes any argument in defense of the conclusion that all arguments are circular. Most of the ones I have debated would not word TAG the way it was in the link.

[December 19, 2008 5:10 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

It's interesting how Bahnsen downplays the circular aspects of presuppositionalism, when he writes:

"Circularity" in one's philosophical system is just another name for "consistency" in outlook throughout one's system. That is, one's starting point and final conclusion cohere with each other. (Van Til's Apologetic: Readings & Analysis, p. 170n.42)

Of course, when a non-Christian's position is internally consistent, he's accused of begging the question. But when the presuppositionalist clearly assumes the truth of his conclusion in the presuppositions which inform the premises offered in support of that conclusion, he's just being "consistent."

By the way, Jason, I read your blog [Notes From Triablogue](#). Very interesting thoughts. I have not read any of Triablogue's screeds against you (nor would I have to, I've seen it all before), but I did enjoy reading your thoughts about your encounter with that contemptuous bunch.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 19, 2008 8:13 PM](#)

[Jason Streitfeld](#) said...

Thanks for the feedback, Dawson and Justin.

I suppose if presuppositionalists are content to embrace question begging, then nobody can stop them. But then they would have to either redefine what it means to have a valid argument (perhaps a valid argument is defined

simply as an argument which presupposes their own beliefs), or admit that they can have no valid arguments at all--in which case, why do they bother trying to make them?

Anyway, Dawson, I'm glad my "Notes From Triablogue" post was of interest to you. I haven't been following your own blog enough to know if there is anything you would find of interest in my discussion with the Triabloggers. You might be interested in my approach to epistemology and morality, however. If so, rather than wading through the Triablogue posts, you can wait for my next entry, which I'll hopefully be posting on my blog in the next month or so.

Regards,

Jason

[December 20, 2008 9:26 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Jason: "I suppose if presuppositionalists are content to embrace question begging, then nobody can stop them. But then they would have to either redefine what it means to have a valid argument (perhaps a valid argument is defined simply as an argument which presupposes their own beliefs), or admit that they can have no valid arguments at all--in which case, why do they bother trying to make them?"

You might find some of the following blogs of mine of interest, or at least entertaining if nothing else.

I've asked presuppositionalists to present their TAG, and it seems that they have difficulty assembling this masterly crafted argument which is billed as some knock-out of a proof. Many - and I mean *many* - presuppositionalists like to point to Greg Bahnsen's performance in his debate with atheist Gordon Stein as an exemplary display of presuppositionalist argumentation. But I have strong doubts that there's anything really there. I've published my analysis of Bahnsen's opening statement - the statement for which he would be most prepared to present his argument - and I don't see any argument there at all. See my blog [Bahnsen's Poof](#) for details. (I call it a "poof" because, unlike a *proof*, Bahnsen seems to think that his god's existence can be pulled out of a hat; he gives no indication of how he *concludes* that his god exists from any clear line of *inference*, which an argument is purposed to make explicit.)

In my blog [Will the Real TAG Please Stand Up?](#) I explore the phenomenon of the elusiveness of TAG. Like a kaleidoscope, it seems to change every time you look at it.

Also, in [Presuppositionalism and the Argument from Ignorance](#), I show why an implicit argument from ignorance seems inescapable for the TAGer.

In [Putting Paul's TAG to the Geusha Test](#), I show how one basic formulation of TAG can lend itself to argue for anything's existence. The problem is that there's no clear connection between "God" and what is cited as evidence for "God." It relies on a stipulated association (e.g., "if God does not exist, there would be no laws of logic, no uniformity, and no moral absolutes") with things that have no clear connection to what the theist calls "God."

In [Tape-Loop Apologetics](#), I show how a common presuppositionalist debating tactic is inherently faulty.

Presuppositionalist Michael Butler published his rendition of presuppositionalism in his essay [The Pulling Down of Strongholds: The Power of Presuppositional Apologetics](#), in which he describes the presuppositional argument as a two-step method. The first step involves executing an internal critique of the non-Christian position which is presupposed to be inherently flawed (this is where you need to be on guard for misrepresentations and deliberate caricatures of your position, or ascribing positions to your view which you have not endorsed). The second step consists of "invit[ing] the unbeliever to come inside our worldview in order to show him that Christianity makes sense of our experience. It provides the necessary preconditions for knowledge." In my blog [The Ominous Parallels Between Presuppositionalism and Drug Addiction](#), I remark how this second step is frighteningly similar to a drug addict trying to coax you into trying some narcotic, after which you're supposed to immediately "see the light."

Jason: "Anyway, Dawson, I'm glad my 'Notes From Triablogue' post was of interest to you. I haven't been following your own blog enough to know if there is anything you would find of interest in my discussion with the Triabloggers. You might be interested in my approach to epistemology and morality, however. If so, rather than wading through the Triablogue posts, you can wait for my next entry, which I'll hopefully be posting on my blog in the next month or so."

I thought your "Notes From Triablogue" was very sober and carefully written. I think it expresses a lot of valid points about the kinds of tactics we can expect from that crowd. I've seen enough of their stuff to know what to expect from them. I made the following remarks in [the comments section of an earlier blog](#), and I stand by them:

Triablogue are stuck at Device 2: Discrediting the World. This is their primary mission: to discredit, even vilify, anyone who's not entirely on board with their god-belief program. Their tools are ridicule ("Dawson must either be a precocious four-year old or a retarded adult") and condescension ("you're not smart enough to be devious"). I've found that there is little if anything valuable to learn from Triablogue, which I think is a telling point. To find anything worthy of learning, you have to pick through a lot of ad hominem fluff. Watch how they turn on each other, too, when they step outside their imaginary doctrinal boundaries. It gets very ugly very quickly. I guess it's just the love of Christ in action.

Let me know when your blog is up. I look forward to reading it.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 20, 2008 10:32 AM](#)

[Harold](#) said...

Presuppositionalist Michael Butler published his rendition of presuppositionalism in his essay [The Pulling Down of Strongholds: The Power of Presuppositional Apologetics](#), in which he describes the presuppositional argument as a two-step method. The first step involves executing an internal critique of the non-Christian position which is presupposed to be inherently flawed (this is where you need to be on guard for misrepresentations and deliberate caricatures of your position, or ascribing positions to your view which you have not endorsed). The second step consists of "invit[ing] the unbeliever to come inside our worldview in order to show him that Christianity makes sense of our experience. It provides the necessary preconditions for knowledge."

Yes, yes, yes. This seems to be what happens with the so-called evolution/intelligent design controversy. They will focus on attacking "godless evolution" and won't provide any evidence for their own position.

I'm still going through the earlier posts, but has there been any answer to your Geusha point?

[December 20, 2008 11:51 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Harold: "Yes, yes, yes. This seems to be what happens with the so-called evolution/intelligent design controversy. They will focus on attacking "godless evolution" and won't provide any evidence for their own position."

What's noticeably lacking from Butler's two-step method is any concern for *facts*. But this should not surprise us, because once the debate moves to the arena of facts, the presuppositionalist is DOA (defeated on arrival).

Harold: "I'm still going through the earlier posts, but has there been any answer to your Geusha point?"

Nothing which sustains scrutiny so far as I have seen. Recently I was told that theistic arguments work only for a divine consciousness possessing the attributes which the theistic god possesses, regardless of what name is attached to it. On this view, presumably, an argument for the existence of the Christian god which is revised to argue for the existence of a non-Christian supernatural being, like Geusha, is really arguing for the existence of the Christian god under a different name, since only those attributes belonging to the Christian god fulfill the premises of the argument. Unfortunately, this response is quite unpersuasive. The Christian god, according to Christian mythology, has many attributes which have no logical relevance to the premises of certain arguments offered in support of its existence. Take for example the following argument (from my blog [Putting Paul's TAG to the Geusha Test](#)):

Step 1 Prove A: God exists.

Step 2 Assume ?A: God does not exist.

Step 3 If ?A, then B: there are no laws of logic, uniformity of nature, and moral absolutes.

Step 4 ?B: There are laws of logic, nature is uniform, and there are moral absolutes. Step 5 ??A by Modus Tollens.

Step 6 A by negation.

Q.E.D.

Now this argument nowhere explicitly identifies the attributes which are needed to fulfill its requirements. It surely does not require that the being it seeks to prove created the earth in six days, named the first man "Adam" and put him in a garden, telling him not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, sent a worldwide flood to destroy all the wicked, gave the promised land to a man named Abraham and his offspring, sent his only begotten son to die by means of crucifixion only to be raised three days later and ascended to heaven, etc. At best this argument implicitly calls for some very general attributes, such as sovereignty over the universe, an "absolute" nature, etc. One could ascribe these general attributes to anything one imagines, and there is a whole pantheon of deities throughout the history of mythology which can provide candidates for this slot. The Lahu tribe of northern Thailand, for instance, worship a supreme being they call Geusha, and according to their mythology such an argument most likely serves as a splendid proof of its existence just fine. Hence:

Step 1 Prove A: Geusha exists.

Step 2 Assume ?A: Geusha does not exist.

Step 3 If ?A, then B: there are no laws of logic, uniformity of nature, and moral absolutes.

Step 4 ?B: There are laws of logic, nature is uniform, and there are moral absolutes. Step 5 ??A by Modus Tollens.

Step 6 A by negation.

Q.E.D.

Now unlike the Christian god, Geusha - according to Lahu mythology - did not have a son which was crucified and resurrected three days later. I don't know what Christian would admit that this attribute of the Christian god is dispensable. But the argument model itself nowhere requires that the being it seeks to prove had a son which was crucified and resurrected three days later. It simply has no bearing to the issues it raises as evidences for its existence.

The point is that, given ignorance about the true nature of logic, nature and morality, one could point to any imaginary being as their source, and assemble an argument structure like the above to "prove" its existence. Thus if the Christian version of this argument is taken to be "sound," I see no reason why the Geusha version should not also be taken to be sound. But curiously those who would endorse the Christian version of the argument are typically not Geusha-believers too. So there are other reasons for their faith that the Christian god is real than the arguments they themselves put forward for its existence. Arguments of this nature are really an attempt to keep us distracted from the real reasons why they claim to believe in their god. It's no accident that they keep the real reasons for their god-belief unclear.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 20, 2008 8:47 PM](#)

[Harold](#) said...

*As Cornelius Van Til put it, "I could believe in nothing else if I did not, as back of everything, believe in this God." ("Toward A Reformed Apologetic," 1972) He didn't *see* this god "back of" everything, he imagined it. In his story of his boyhood conversion tells us how as a little child he took imaginary fears very seriously and that's what brought him to the faith. Not "arguments." Of course, the primacy of existence tells us that there's a fundamental distinction between what is real and what is imaginary.*

There's something here worth mentioning. It's interesting to see how religions create in the minds of people, especially the young, an omnipotent, all-knowing, all-loving entity--sort of like a parent figure. This figure, it is alleged, cares about the child and wants the child to be happy and rewards and punishes based on it's own rules and commandments (sort of like parents). The child is then told that if it does not undergo the appropriate sacraments or accept certain metaphysical claims, that this parent will *turn away* from that child *forever*. The nature of this "hell" is in dispute of course, seeing as how there's no evidence. And while I don't have children myself, I know (as I'm sure most here do) that the fear of abandonment is a very real and powerful emotion in children. The way that religions exploit this fact is unconscionable. And yet, they call it morality.

How many lives have been ruined because of this? And for what?

[December 20, 2008 11:18 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Harold, on the other hand maybe the actual abandonment of a child can engender a strong sense of atheism. I have never believed in god, at least not to my memory. I do recall learning of the word atheism and its meaning at age 8 and knew it applied to me. It would be much later at age 30 that I would learn of Ayn Rand, through reading several books by George Smith. Only at this time did I learn of the logical failures of Christianity. My father was gone by age 2, and I was a ward of the state by age 6. I wonder what if anything these early life experiences had toward shaping my world view and my rejection of supernatural claims.

[December 21, 2008 6:01 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Harold: "child is then told that if it does not undergo the appropriate sacraments or accept certain metaphysical claims, that this parent will *turn away* from that child *forever*."

Just look at what this "Father" allowed to happen to its own son! What genuinely loving parent would allow such harm come to his own child? Christians seem to think that Jesus underwent the worst possible suffering imaginable. For example, [one source tells us](#):

His body was beaten from head to foot. The thorns had pierced His brow and the blood was running from His head. His back was lacerated. His face was black and blue from being beaten with the fists and hands of the soldiers. He had been spit on. His face had been in the mud. If that robe was on Him for ten or fifteen minutes, it sealed itself to all those wounds, and just like tearing off a bandage unmercifully, they jerked that robe back off. It opened all the wounds and caused them to bleed more profusely than ever before.

A loving "Father" is said to have stood by and allowed this to happen to its own son, while at the same time it had more power than one could imagine to stop it at any point. And Christians hold as an ideal becoming a child of this Father.

But Christians seem to have a schizophrenic view of suffering. For in some statements, like the above, the suffering of Jesus is essentially glorified, raised on high as something to behold and contemplate and even feel guilty for. But then, [we're told things like this](#):

Suffering in this life is so insignificant in light of eternity that it is not even worthy of a comparison. It may not seem this way when we look at our circumstances, but when we look out to the joy set before us, it is nothing. Suffering is not even a drop in the bucket.

So first we're supposed to take Jesus' suffering exceedingly seriously, but then we're told that suffering really doesn't matter. It matters when it's Jesus' suffering, but it doesn't matter when it's anyone else's suffering.

(Quotes courtesy of [Steven Carr's blog](#).)

Regards,
Dawson

[December 21, 2008 7:54 AM](#)

[TODMAG](#) said...

Dear Dawson,

I stumbled on your blog today and it interests me.

You wrote :

"Rationality is the commitment to reason as one's only means of acquiring and validating knowledge, and as his only guide to chosen action. By contrast, irrationality is the reliance on something other than reason (e.g., emotions, astrology, palm-reading, tea leaves, faith in invisible magic beings, etc.) to acquire and/or validate knowledge and guide his choices and actions. In general, rationality is compliance with reason, and irrationality is non-compliance with reason. If you look up 'rational' in the dictionary, even here you will find a close connection with reason.

Now reason is the faculty which identifies and integrates perceptual input. This faculty is made possible by the ability to form concepts from perceptual input (and higher concepts from the initial concepts formed on the basis of perceptual input)."

To help me understand your view points better, can you please define what you mean by "perceptual input" and "concepts"?

Thank you

Tony

[December 21, 2008 8:50 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hello Tony,

Tony: "To help me understand your view points better, can you please define what you mean by 'perceptual input' and 'concepts'?"

Sure. Perceptual input is perceptual awareness of *objects*, existents (e.g., entities as wholes, their attributes, their actions, etc.) which exist in the world (apart from our awareness of them) and which are accessible to our perceptual awareness. "A 'perception' is a group of sensations automatically retained and integrated by the brain of a living organism, which gives it the ability to be aware, not of single stimuli, but of entities, of things." (Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness*, p. 19) Perception, then, is a non-volitional form of awareness: while we can choose to direct our perception - to look one way as opposed to another, for instance - we cannot choose what perception will give us awareness of when we do look. For instance, if I perceive tracks of mud into my house after I've walked in after a rainstorm, I cannot choose to see a clean floor instead. Perception is objective in this very sense, for its causality is not under our volitional control. For a full-blown objective theory of perception, David Kelley's *The Evidence of the Senses* (1986) is perhaps the best. In it, Kelley describes his two-part thesis as follows:

The burden of Part I... is that perception is a per-conceptual mode of direct awareness of physical objects. My argument in Part II is that perception supplies adequate evidence or justification for our beliefs about such objects, but that the evidence is nonpropositional. That is, I reject the common assumption that a belief can be justified only by another belief, judgment, or other propositional state; and the principles of justification I present are quite different from those usually discussed in the literature (p. 3)

On the other hand, "[a] concept is a mental integration of two or more units possessing the same distinguishing characteristic(s), with their particular measurements omitted." (Ayn Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, p. 15) Unlike perception, which is an automatic (non-volitional) integration of sensory data, the formation of concepts is a volitional (i.e., selective) process. (As a side note, this is an area where David Hume was mistaken, and his mistakes here in part made his skeptical conclusions about induction inevitable.) Our initial concepts are formed on the basis of perceptual input, i.e., on the basis of objects which we perceive. Subsequent or higher concepts are formed by the same process, but integrating previously formed concepts. The result is a sum of knowledge possessing a hierarchical structure. Rand's *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology* is a good source if you're interested in becoming familiar with the objective theory of concepts.

The overall point of the argument which I present in my blog is that, since rationality is fidelity to an objective method of *acquiring* and *validating* knowledge, such a virtue would not apply to a being which is said to possess all possible knowledge already (i.e., "omniscient") and cannot be mistaken in anything it knows (i.e., "infallible"), for a *method* of acquiring and validating knowledge would be of no use for such a being. It would be neither rational nor irrational, but *arational*, since *acquiring* and *validating* knowledge are not steps it would need to take for the knowledge it possesses (since it is said to possess all possible knowledge infallibly). Unlike man's knowledge, an omniscient and infallible being's knowledge would simply not be a product of the application of *any* method.

Hope that helps!

Regards,
Dawson

[December 21, 2008 10:02 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Justin: "I have never believed in god, at least not to my memory. I do recall learning of the word atheism and its meaning at age 8 and knew it applied to me. It would be much later at age 30 that I would learn of Ayn Rand, through reading several books by George Smith. Only at this time did I learn of the logical failures of Christianity. My father was gone by age 2, and I was a ward of the state by age 6. I wonder what if anything these early life experiences had toward shaping my world view and my rejection of supernatural claims."

That's an intriguing question, Justin. I'm not aware of any studies in this regard (though I wouldn't be surprised if any exist). But it would be interesting to see if there are any statistics on this. Then again, at the same time, I don't think we could draw anything but tentative conclusions from such data, since there are just far too many variables which factor into an adult's view of reality. I suppose too that, even if one loses his parents at a young age, he may still be raised in subjection to domineering personalities, ersatz father figures who assume essentially the same role in a child's formative development, and that could include a dose of religious propaganda, such as at a religious orphanage or religious foster parents. Everyone has their own story.

Interesting points to contemplate though!

Regards,
Dawson

[December 21, 2008 10:17 AM](#)

[Robert Morane](#) said...

I think that Peter Van InWagen makes a good case that if a necessary being is possible, then a necessary being exists.

The concept of necessary being is flawed. If a necessary being must exist necessarily (by virtue of being necessary), it is because, at first glance, it is commanded by logic: If a being is necessary, then it follows that it must exist. However, there's a problem.

If the necessary existence of a necessary being follows by logic, then such a being could not exist in an illogical universe, for its existence would be logical.

This is important because it shows that a necessary being's existence is dependent upon logic. If that being's existence is dependent upon logic, then that being is contingent, not necessary. This means that logic must precede the existence of any object or being. This also means that no being can be necessary; the concept is simply self-contradictory.

So if a being is contingent, it need not exist; if it is necessary, it *cannot* exist.

[December 24, 2008 10:25 PM](#)

[Robert Morane](#) said...

And let's not forget the law of identity -- for a necessary being to exist, it would need to be a necessary being (A must be A - A cannot be Not-A). So no being can exist without its existence being made possible by logic. Similarly, an object or being can be made impossible to exist by logic. Eg: a square circle cannot exist. It is not allowed by logic.

Again, logic is a condition necessary for existence, and therefore all things existent are dependent upon it. So all objects and beings are contingent by necessity.

[December 24, 2008 10:40 PM](#)

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