

Sunday, April 04, 2010

If Knowledge Then Non-Theism

Presuppositionalists claim that knowledge has a theistic basis, specifically Christian theism. They typically flesh out their case for this position by first taking the ‘justified true belief’ analysis of knowledge for granted, and then posing the question, ‘How do you account for it?’

I have already pointed out some fundamental deficiencies inherent in the ‘justified true belief’ analysis of knowledge [here](#). Presuppositionalism seems unprepared to overcome these faults. I’ve also pointed out on numerous occasions that Christianity has no native theory of concepts (the building blocks of knowledge), and that believers must consequently seek outside their worldview for an understanding of concepts (thus “borrowing” from a non-Christian worldview). Presuppositionalism seems unequipped to overcome this problem as well.

Here is a simple argument which demonstrates succinctly and directly, contrary to what presuppositionalism claims, the *non-theistic* implications of knowledge. In developing this argument, I set out with a specific goal: Trace knowledge to its philosophical roots, and understand their implications for the question of theism. This argument is thus reductive in nature and consists of the following five steps:

Step 1: If knowledge, then concepts.

Spelled out: Man’s knowledge is conceptual in nature. “A *concept* is a mental integration of two or more units which are isolated by a process of abstraction and united by a specific definition” (Ayn Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto*, p. 17). If man is capable of discovering and validating knowledge of the world, if he has any knowledge at all, then the conceptual level of cognition is an undeniable reality, for he acquires and retains that knowledge in the form of concepts. Man acquires knowledge, and he does so in conceptual form. If knowledge, then concepts.

Retortion: Denial of the conceptual level of cognition constitutes a claim to knowledge, making use of the conceptual level of cognition in order to deny it. This would commit the fallacy of the [stolen concept](#). One would need to make use of concepts in order to deny concepts or the conceptual level of human cognition. This would be analogous to using a mathematical equation to prove that mathematical equations do not exist.

Step 2: If concepts, then the objective theory of concepts.

Spelled out: If man is capable of acquiring and retaining knowledge in the form of concepts, then he does this by applying a method of concept-formation. The objective theory of concepts provides a truthful analysis of this method (see Ayn Rand’s *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*).

Counter-proposal: The only alternative to the objective theory of concepts, is some *non-objective* theory of concepts. Where does one find this non-objective theory of concepts, and what specifically does it teach? What would be its merits, and how could it support an objective understanding of knowledge? These are just some of the questions which would come into play if Step 2 is to be denied.

Step 3: If the objective theory of concepts, then the objective account of metaphysics.

Spelled out: The objective theory of concepts necessarily presupposes the objective account of metaphysics. Only an objective account of metaphysics could support an objective theory of concepts. A non-objective theory of concepts would not arise from the objective account of metaphysics, and a non-objective account of metaphysics could neither give rise to nor support the objective theory of concepts.

Alternative: The only alternative to the objective account of metaphysics, is some *non-objective* account of metaphysics. Thus to deny the objective account of metaphysics is to endorse some non-objective account of metaphysics. But a non-objective account of metaphysics would undercut any claim to objectivity in knowledge. Thus denying the objective account of metaphysics would lead to an epistemological dead-end.

Step 4: If the objective account of metaphysics, then the primacy of existence.

Spelled out: The core of the objective account of metaphysics is the primacy of existence. This is the recognition of the fact that the objects of awareness exist and are what they are independent of the activity by which the subject is aware of those objects. It is the view that the *objects* of consciousness hold metaphysical primacy over the *subject* of consciousness. Hence, *objectivity*.

Alternative: The only alternative to the primacy of existence, is some expression of the primacy of consciousness. Theism numbers among the many expressions of the primacy of consciousness. Any idea or worldview which assumes the primacy of consciousness can only entail a subjective account of metaphysics.

Step 5: *If the primacy of existence, then non-theism.*

Spelled out: Since theism posits the existence of a consciousness to which its objects are said to conform, theism assumes the primacy of consciousness and thus constitutes an example of a worldview whose metaphysics is *non-objective*. Indeed, the metaphysics of theism is *subjective* in nature. Moreover, to deny the subjective nature of theistic metaphysics, is to deny the power, sovereignty and supremacy of theism's god. I have already shown how theism is incompatible with the primacy of existence (see for instance [here](#) and [here](#)). Theists who have attempted to interact with my case have only shown themselves to be at a loss as how to overcome the problems which I have identified.

Challenge: Those who would claim that theism is compatible with the primacy of existence, are welcome to attempt a reconciliation between the two. I submit that any attempt to do so will compromise the one or the other in some fatal manner, such as extinguishing the sovereignty of theism's god, or by outright repudiating the primacy of existence.

So there you have it. If the presuppositionalist claims to have any knowledge at all - even so-called "mundane" knowledge - his claim to knowledge carries with it the epistemological and metaphysical underpinnings which cannot support his theistic beliefs.

The upshot is that any time a theist affirms his god's existence as an item of knowledge, he is performatively contradicting his theism. Additionally, any time he attempts to enlist knowledge in assembling an argument intended to prove the existence of his god, he is implicitly undercutting his own case. By making a knowledge claim, he is making use of concepts; by making use of concepts, he is assuming the objective account of metaphysics; by assuming the objective account of metaphysics, he is implicitly granting the primacy of existence; by implicitly granting the primacy of existence, he is implicitly denying the primacy of consciousness, which is the metaphysics to which theism ultimately reduces.

How can the theist overcome these points? He would ultimately have to show that knowledge reduces to a *subjective* account of metaphysics, to the primacy of consciousness. Thus he could not make use of the objective theory of concepts, and it's questionable even if he could underwrite his conception of knowledge with any theory of concepts. Thus it should not be a surprise when theists characterize knowledge as a phenomenon consisting primarily of *beliefs* rather than concepts.

But I am open to considering theistic reaction to the chain of reasoning which I have presented above. I am especially curious to see how Christians would try to tackle it.

Any takers?

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Concepts](#), [Knowledge](#), [Metaphysics](#), [Primacy of Existence](#), [stolen concepts](#)

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

26 Comments:

[Pranav Bethala](#) said...

This post has been removed by the author.

[April 06, 2010 9:12 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hello,

Thank you for your question.

By 'objective' I mean the proper orientation in the relationship between the subject of consciousness and its objects in epistemology. See my blog [The Inherent Subjectivism of Theism](#) for details.

Regards,
Dawson

[April 06, 2010 4:38 PM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

God is not bound to the primacy of existence, while others are bound by it, since it depends if knowledge is objective relative to the subject. Man is bound by the primacy of existence, while God is not bound by it, since his knowledge is subjective.

[April 07, 2010 1:32 PM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Dawson -

Do you like Iommi as in Tony Iommi from Black Sabbath? Also you can check out my argument for God here if you want: <http://privyfisherman.blogspot.com/2009/12/analogical-knowledge-of-god.html>
It is different than the ontological argument.

[April 07, 2010 1:43 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas: "God is not bound to the primacy of existence"

Of course: in the context of the imagination, imaginary beings are not bound by anything. They can do whatever you imagine.

Vytautas: "while others are bound by it,"

Every example of consciousness which we find in nature (in the reality which we can perceive and scientifically study) is bound by the primacy of existence. Why suppose that there exists some consciousness outside of nature (outside the reality which we can perceive and scientifically study) which enjoys metaphysical primacy over its objects? How do we reliably distinguish this supposed primacy-enjoying consciousness from something we're merely imagining?

Vytautas: "Man is bound by the primacy of existence, while God is not bound by it, since his knowledge is subjective."

So, your god's knowledge is subjective, not objective. That's quite an admission. If what you claim your god "knows" is subjective, how does it qualify as knowledge? This is not explained.

Also, if it is conceded that man is bound by the primacy of existence, and your god's alleged knowledge is admitted to be subjective, then I must be correct in inferring that (man's) knowledge implies non-theism, since man's knowledge (even the very possibility of his knowledge) presupposes the primacy of existence, the principle from which, according to you, your god is exempted.

I did briefly look at your argument. You seem to think that if “the universe as a whole is not self-sufficient,” then your god “must exist.” It is unclear how this would follow without a number of supporting assumptions being brought to the fore and defended. For instance, if it turns out that the universe is not self-sufficient, why couldn’t it be the case that 20,000 gremlins must have created it? Or that a magical obelisk (a la *2001: A Space Odyssey*) must exist? Or perhaps a universe-manufacturing singularity is responsible for its existence? Why suppose that whatever allegedly caused the universe to exist is or was a conscious being?

Your argument for the universe not being self-sufficient is also deficient. It blatantly commits the fallacy of composition, and when attempting to defend it against the charge of composition, you commit the fallacy of division when you say “if the characteristic of the whole is an essential property, then all of the parts must carry that property.” I see no reason why specific entities in the universe may be dependent upon other entities within the universe, but that the universe as a whole does not depend on anything else.

You then say “If it is possible that some of the parts do not carry the essential property, then those parts are not apart of the entity, since the essential property defines it.” For one thing, the universe is not an entity, but the sum total of everything which exists; it is a *collection* of entities. Also, I would not say that self-sufficiency is “the essential property” which “defines” the universe. For one, definitions are characteristics of concepts, not of entities or groups of entities as such. Also, the essential of the universe is *existence*, for it is by virtue of the fact that something exists that it is properly included in the collection which the concept ‘universe’ denotes. The fact that the universe, far from being a product of anything “outside” of it, is self-sufficient (in the sense that it does not “depend on anything else outside of itself to preserve it”), is simply an added bonus, not *the essential* characteristic of the universe. There is no “outside” the universe. There is the universe, and there is what we imagine. By placing your god outside the universe, you put it squarely in the realm of the imaginary.

Regards,
Dawson

[April 07, 2010 5:10 PM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

God knows something because he made it that way. He does not learn about anything in creation because he made it. As you say, “to deny the subjective nature of theistic metaphysics, is to deny the power, sovereignty and supremacy of theism’s god.” I deny the objective account of metaphysics, in which all subjects are bound by the primacy of existence. What is to affirm an objective metaphysics but to deny that the subject can create out of nothing?

As for my argument, God is assumed not to exist, then a contradiction is shown, so that God must exist. 20,000 gremlins or a magical obelisk are not assumed to not exist for purposes of contradiction, while God is assumed not to exist. The wording for the argument could be better, but I still do not see its logical fallacy. A collection of entities is an entity. Instead of saying self-sufficiency defines the universe, the universe has the property of self-sufficiency, and the self-sufficiency of the universe is an essential property, if God does not exist.

The fallacy of division applies to accidental properties of an entity, while my argument deals with an essential one. For example, the outside of the apple is red, so that the entire apple including the inside of it is red. This does not follow because apples do not have to be red. It could be yellow. There are dependent entities in the universe. For example, a book is dependent on its writer, or the watch is dependent on its watchmaker. The universe as a whole does not depend on anything else because if it did then there would be a creator of the universe, but some of the entities of the collection are not self-sufficient.

[April 07, 2010 6:09 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas: “God knows something because he made it that way.”

Of course, one can claim that the god which they imagine created anything. And what you say here simply confirms that Christianity affirms mutually self-contradictory metaphysics (see for instance [here](#)).

But what you say here puts a condition on your god's knowledge that you probably cannot sustain consistently. Does your god know itself as a trinity? If so, did it make itself a trinity? Does your god know what sin is? If so, did it create sin? Did it create the possibility of sin? Does your god know what imperfection is? If so, did it create imperfection? (See [here](#).) Even when it comes to your god, mutually self-contradictory metaphysical implications are unavoidable.

Vytautas: "He does not learn about anything in creation because he made it."

Can your god learn anything at all? If your god is all-knowing, it seems incoherent to say that it could learn anything. And yet man learns. How can your god be omnipotent if your god cannot do something that its creatures do all the time?

Vytautas: "I deny the objective account of metaphysics, in which all subjects are bound by the primacy of existence."

At least you're open about this. Most theists try to conceal their subjective commitments. But apparently you do not see how denying the objective account of metaphysics leads to a self-contradiction: to deny the objective account of metaphysics is essentially to affirm that the subjective account of metaphysics is true. But just by saying that something is true, you're saying that it is the case independent of your own wishes, preferences, feelings, temper tantrums, etc. In other words, you assume the truth of the objective account of metaphysics just in denying it.

Vytautas: "What is to affirm an objective metaphysics but to deny that the subject can create out of nothing?"

Good question: the theist has no choice but to admit the subjective implications of theism. The problem is that claiming that the subjective account of metaphysics is self-contradictory. Of course, the subjective nature of theism necessarily leads to [the problem of divine lonesomeness](#). I have yet to see how a theist can unravel his way out of this conundrum.

Regards,
Dawson

[April 07, 2010 9:25 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

As for [your argument](#)...

Vytautas: "As for my argument, God is assumed not to exist, then a contradiction is shown,"

I did not see how a contradiction results from the assumption that your god does not exist. Can you clarify this?

Even more, I do not see how a contradiction results from starting with the fact that existence exists, and reasoning onwards from there (as we do in Objectivism). Even Christians cannot avoid starting with existence. So if I cannot avoid a contradiction, you cannot either, so there must be something you're not considering very carefully here.

Vytautas: "A collection of entities is an entity."

No, a collection of entities is a collection of entities, not a single entity in its own right. When a group of individuals gather for a meeting, for example, they do shed their individuality and become a single entity. They are still a group of individuals. The unity here is a conceptual device, not a metaphysical outcome. You can, conceptually, treat a collection of entities as an entity (that's what concepts allow us to do), but only in keeping in context the fact that the individual entities constituting the collection are still individual entities. Thus the composition and division fallacies are still hazards which your argument fails to overcome.

Vytautas: "Instead of saying self-sufficiency defines the universe, the universe has the property of self-sufficiency, and the self-sufficiency of the universe is an essential property, if God does not exist."

How can self-sufficiency be the essential property of the universe when everything that is included in the concept 'universe' is included by virtue of the fact that it exists? Existence is the essential, not self-sufficiency. I stated this already, but you ignored it. Why?

Vytautas: "There are dependent entities in the universe. For example, a book is dependent on its writer, or the watch is

dependent on its watchmaker.”

What’s noteworthy about the examples you produce to vouch the claim that “there are dependent entities in the universe,” is the fact that they are all examples of things made from pre-existing materials. Matter is recycled, not created. Can you cite one verifiable instance of matter being “created” ex nihilo by means of conscious intentions? I doubt you can. This can only mean that you fail to produce even one particular entity which is non-self-sufficient in the manner in which your argument needs the universe as a whole to be non-self-sufficient. Consequently, even if you seek to overcome the charges of composition and division, you’re still talking apples and oranges here and thus have a non sequitur on your hands. Either way you slice it, your argument comes up fallacies.

Moreover, you do not explain how it could be even remotely intelligible to suppose that the universe (as the sum total of that which exists) could be dependent upon something allegedly residing “outside” it, or originating from something “outside” it. In order for something to create anything else, it would have to exist; but if it exists, it would be part of the sum total of what exists - i.e., it would be part of the universe. So unless you think something creates itself, the whole idea is incoherent. Moreover, so is the idea of something creating itself. Thus your argument depends on dropping the context of the meaning of the concept ‘universe’. If you had rational grounds for supposing that the universe were created, you wouldn’t need to do this.

But you want us to believe that the entire universe owes its existence to the creative activity of a consciousness. Where’s the evidence? Yes, I’m sure you can imagine that a god did this; so can I. But so long as there is a fundamental distinction between what is real and what is imaginary, what you imagine does not and cannot qualify as supporting evidence.

Regards,
Dawson

[April 07, 2010 9:29 PM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Dawson - Of course, one can claim that the god which they imagine created anything. And what you say here simply confirms that Christianity affirms mutually self-contradictory metaphysics.

Vytautas - There is no contradiction when you affirm that God has a subjective orientation to knowledge, while man has an objective orientation toward knowledge.

Dawson - But what you say here puts a condition on your god’s knowledge that you probably cannot sustain consistently. Does your god know itself as a trinity? If so, did it make itself a trinity? Does your god know what sin is? If so, did it create sin? Did it create the possibility of sin? Does your god know what imperfection is? If so, did it create imperfection? Even when it comes to your god, mutually self-contradictory metaphysical implications are unavoidable.

Vytautas - God’s subjective knowledge is oriented towards the creation, while self-knowledge is not decreed. God made everything good within the space of six days, along with Adam, who had power to fulfill the law of God; and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of his own will, which was subject to change. God knew Adam was going to sin, but Adam was not defective, since it was possible for him to keep the law.

Dawson - Can your god learn anything at all? If your god is all-knowing, it seems incoherent to say that it could learn anything. And yet man learns. How can your god be omnipotent if your god cannot do something that its creatures do all the time?

Vytautas - God cannot learn much like he cannot create a square circle.

Dawson - Good question: the theist has no choice but to admit the subjective implications of theism. The problem is that claiming that the subjective account of metaphysics is self-contradictory. Of course, the subjective nature of theism necessarily leads to the problem of divine lonesomeness. I have yet to see how a theist can unravel his way out of this conundrum.

Vytautas - There be three persons in the Trinity.

[April 08, 2010 11:07 AM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Dawson - I did not see how a contradiction results from the assumption that your god does not exist. Can you clarify this?

Vytautas - The contradiction is between the parts of the universe being self-sufficient, since the universe itself is self-sufficient, and the fact that the parts are not self-sufficient.

Dawson - No, a collection of entities is a collection of entities, not a single entity in its own right. When a group of individuals gather for a meeting, for example, they do shed their individuality and become a single entity. They are still a group of individuals. The unity here is a conceptual device, not a metaphysical outcome. You can, conceptually, treat a collection of entities as an entity (that's what concepts allow us to do), but only in keeping in context the fact that the individual entities constituting the collection are still individual entities. Thus the composition and division fallacies are still hazards which your argument fails to overcome.

Vytautas - Is an apple a collection of bits of apple? Do the individual parts of the apple lose its individuality in the collection of one apple? Are the only real objects atoms or parts of atoms? Or could we speak of entities such as houses and chairs? If so why cannot we speak of the universe as an entity?

Dawson - How can self-sufficiency be the essential property of the universe when everything that is included in the concept 'universe' is included by virtue of the fact that it exists? Existence is the essential, not self-sufficiency. I stated this already, but you ignored it. Why?

Vytautas - You affirmed that the universe is self-sufficient, but that it is only a property and not the property.

Dawson - What's noteworthy about the examples you produce to vouch the claim that "there are dependent entities in the universe," is the fact that they are all examples of things made from pre-existing materials. Matter is recycled, not created. Can you cite one verifiable instance of matter being "created" ex nihilo by means of conscious intentions? I doubt you can. This can only mean that you fail to produce even one particular entity which is non-self-sufficient in the manner in which your argument needs the universe as a whole to be non-self-sufficient. Consequently, even if you seek to overcome the charges of composition and division, you're still talking apples and oranges here and thus have a non sequitur on your hands. Either way you slice it, your argument comes up fallacies.

Vytautas - My argument depends on the fact that the universe is not dependent on anything other than itself, so that all the parts can only depend on themselves. My argument speaks more to the providence of God than to the creative act, since it references present parts, which are not self-sufficient.

Dawson - Moreover, you do not explain how it could be even remotely intelligible to suppose that the universe (as the sum total of that which exists) could be dependent upon something allegedly residing "outside" it, or originating from something "outside" it. In order for something to create anything else, it would have to exist; but if it exists, it would be part of the sum total of what exists - i.e., it would be part of the universe. So unless you think something creates itself, the whole idea is incoherent. Moreover, so is the idea of something creating itself. Thus your argument depends on dropping the context of the meaning of the concept 'universe'. If you had rational grounds for supposing that the universe were created, you wouldn't need to do this.

Vytautas - The definition of God that I gave was the creator of the universe as well as distinct from the universe. I do not need to explain how God exists outside the universe because if your idea of the universe is contradictory, then my idea must be true.

[April 08, 2010 11:43 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

First of all, I want to point out that none of Vytautas' comments have called into question any of the premises in the argument which I have presented in this blog. In fact, it does not even appear that he is attempting to challenge any part of my argument, and certain statements of his actually confirm many of my points. With that, let us now turn to his latest remarks.

Vytautas: “There is no contradiction when you affirm that God has a subjective orientation to knowledge, while man has an objective orientation toward knowledge.”

First it’s important to note that the Christian cannot avoid affirming a duplicitous conception of metaphysics, affirming both the subjective metaphysics native to its mystical worldview and borrowing the objective metaphysics from a non-Christian worldview. You have made it clear that this is the case by your own explicit statements on the matter. Also, by affirming that some knowledge presumes a subjective basis while other knowledge stands on an objective basis, you’re saying that there is no metaphysically consistent basis for knowledge as such. Moreover, if man’s knowledge is ultimately derivative of the Christian god’s knowledge (as presuppositionalists claim), then all knowledge ultimately has a subjective basis, which means that it’s not really knowledge at all, but undefined, elusive fantasy; there would be nothing absolute to it, since everything is revisable according to the ruling subject’s whims. Even worse, there would be no objective basis to anything called “truth,” which can only mean: there’s no such thing as truth at all.

Vytautas: “God’s subjective knowledge is oriented towards the creation, while self-knowledge is not decreed.”

This can only mean (and confirms my analysis above) that the basis of your god’s “knowledge” is metaphysically duplicitous in nature. In some cases, its “knowledge” presupposes the primacy of consciousness, in other cases it presupposes the primacy of existence. But the primacy of existence and the primacy of consciousness contradict each other. This is undeniable. The result is that your god’s “knowledge” cannot integrate into a non-contradictory sum, for two horns of a contradiction cannot be integrated into a consistent unity. The twin bases of your god’s “knowledge” are fundamentally at odds with each other.

[continued]

[April 08, 2010 4:14 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

[continued from above]

Vytautas: “God made everything good within the space of six days, along with Adam, who had power to fulfill the law of God; and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of his own will, which was subject to change.”

This just confirms my analysis that Adam was not created *perfect*. Since according to the creation myth, Adam sinned, this can only mean that he erred in his judgment - i.e., his judgment did not conform to the standard of righteousness according to which he was judged. Thus Adam did not have perfect judgment. This means Adam was not created perfect. A perfect product has imperfections, and a perfect creator creates only perfect products. A creator which creates an imperfect product could not be said to be a perfect creator. If you worship the god of the bible, you do not worship a perfect creator. There is no way out of this tangle.

Vytautas: “God knew Adam was going to sin, but Adam was not defective, since it was possible for him to keep the law.”

One could say that Adam was not defective only if Adam was programmed to sin in the first place. The sin then is traced back to the programmer, namely the Christian god in the context of the creation myth. Consequently, the Christian god could not be holy. A holy person does not use evil as a means to an end.

So either the Christian god is not perfect, or it is not holy. Take your pick.

Vytautas: “God cannot learn much like he cannot create a square circle.”

Learning is not in the same camp as the notion of a square circle. The notion of a square circle is inherently self-contradictory. But learning is not. Man can learn, but he cannot make a square circle either. Again, how can your god be omnipotent when it cannot do something which its creatures do all the time? You don’t answer this.

Vytautas: “There be three persons in the Trinity.”

The idea of the trinity simply multiplies the problem three-fold. It does nothing to solve the problem. With the trinity,

you now have three consciousnesses with nothing to be conscious of but themselves. Thus in Christianity, the problem of divine lonesomeness entails a three-fold contradiction at the most fundamental level. And it is this concocted monstrosity that presuppositionalists say lies at the basis of logic? Mmm, mmm... couldn't fool us.

Regards,
Dawson

[April 08, 2010 4:16 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas: "The contradiction is between the parts of the universe being self-sufficient, since the universe itself is self-sufficient, and the fact that the parts are not self-sufficient."

Where does affirming that universe *as a whole* is self-sufficient also affirm both that the elements of the universe are both self-sufficient and not self-sufficient in the same sense? I don't see it. As I pointed out, you've not been able to produce a single example of an entity in reality which is not self-sufficient in the manner in which your argument needs the universe as a whole to be non-self-sufficient. So again, you're stuck with both composition and division fallacies systemically disabling your argument.

Even the Christian account cannot escape the problem if your composition and division fallacies are maintained. If we enlarge our scope of reference to include everything that the Christian worldview says exists - which would include everything in the natural as well as everything in the supernatural realm, then by your logic, Vytautas, that totality could not be self-sufficient, even though it would in such an experiment also include the Christian god, for parts of that totality are said not to be self-sufficient. You insist that the qualities of the contents of the totality transfer to the totality as an essential quality thereof, which would make the totality non-self-sufficient. This is simply stupid, whether on the Christian view or on the Objectivist view. The fact that you are having such difficulty validating this move only confirms its inherent stupidity.

Vytautas: "Is an apple a collection of bits of apple?"

When the apple is a whole entity, it is a whole entity, not a disintegrated group of parts. It can be sliced and chopped into parts, but at that point the apple no longer exists as a whole entity. An entity is an integrated whole. A thing that has been chopped into dozens of pieces is no longer an integrated whole. This is theory of entities 101 stuff. But then again, you don't learn stuff like this by reading the bible.

Vytautas: "Do the individual parts of the apple lose its individuality in the collection of one apple?"

If they are part of an integrated whole, they are parts of an integrated whole, not entities in their own right. The apple would be the entity, and its parts would be part of the entity.

Vytautas: "Are the only real objects atoms or parts of atoms? Or could we speak of entities such as houses and chairs? If so why cannot we speak of the universe as an entity?"

As I mentioned in my previous message, we can *treat* the universe as an entity, but this is rational only if we keep in mind the context of the meaning of the concept 'universe'. Since the proper definition of the concept 'universe' is the sum total of that which exists, and it is a fact that many distinct entities do actually exist, the universe is comprised of many entities, and is therefore not an entity in its own right. By integrating all the elements of the universe into a single concept (namely the concept 'universe') we are able to treat the universe as if it were an entity in thought. That's what concepts allow us to do - they allow us to treat as a single unit a great amount of data. But this would not at all justify arbitrarily transferring the attributes and qualities of some of its constituents to the whole, as your argument seeks to do. Besides, as I pointed out, you have not been able to produce one example of any entity existing in the universe which is non-self-sufficient in the sense that your argument needs the universe to be in order to argue for the existence of a god.

[continued]

[April 08, 2010 4:18 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

[continued from above]

Vytautas: "You affirmed that the universe is self-sufficient, but that it is only a property and not the property."

The universe is self-sufficient in the sense that you had stated in your blog - namely in the sense that it does not "depend on anything else outside of itself to preserve it." That the universe is self-sufficient is an inference that we can soundly generate from the very meaning of the concept 'universe'. What is the universe? It is the sum total of that which exists. If something exists, it is *part* of the sum total of that which exists. Thus there is nothing that exists or can exist "outside" the universe. The notion of "outside" the universe is totally meaningless. I don't see why you're having such a hard time grasping this.

Vytautas: "My argument depends on the fact that the universe is not dependent on anything other than itself,"

So you grant that it is a fact that the universe "is not dependent on anything other than itself." Good! Welcome to the club. Now you just need to come out of the closet on your atheism.

Vytautas: "My argument speaks more to the providence of God than to the creative act, since it references present parts, which are not self-sufficient."

How do you show that the material make-up of the universe is not self-sufficient? I haven't seen where you validate this assumption, but clearly it plays a role in your argument, no?

Vytautas: "I do not need to explain how God exists outside the universe because if your idea of the universe is contradictory, then my idea must be true."

You have not shown that my idea of the universe is contradictory. Indeed, it seems that you need it explained to you again and again every time you post a comment. I almost get the impression that you do not understand what you're reading. I've had this impression when reading your comments in the past as well.

Regards,
Dawson

[April 08, 2010 4:19 PM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Dawson - First of all, I want to point out that none of Vytautas' comments have called into question any of the premises in the argument which I have presented in this blog. In fact, it does not even appear that he is attempting to challenge any part of my argument, and certain statements of his actually confirm many of my points. With that, let us now turn to his latest remarks.

Vytautas - My first comment addressed your post. "God is not bound to the primacy of existence, while others are bound by it, since it depends if knowledge is objective relative to the subject. Man is bound by the primacy of existence, while God is not bound by it, since his knowledge is subjective." Your argument assumes that every subject is bound by the primacy of existence.

Dawson - Moreover, if man's knowledge is ultimately derivative of the Christian god's knowledge (as presuppositionalists claim), then all knowledge ultimately has a subjective basis, which means that it's not really knowledge at all, but undefined, elusive fantasy; there would be nothing absolute to it, since everything is revisable according to the ruling subject's whims.

Vytautas - Clarkian presuppositionalists do, but Van Tillian presuppositionalists says that our knowledge is analogous to God's knowledge. If you assume an Objectivist epistemology, of course you would say that God cannot have knowledge, but that is not convincing, if you are trying to show that God does not exist.

Dawson - In some cases, its "knowledge" presupposes the primacy of consciousness, in other cases it presupposes the

primacy of existence. But the primacy of existence and the primacy of consciousness contradict each other. This is undeniable.

Vytautas - As if I affirm that either every subject is bound by the primacy of existence, or every subject has primacy over objects. Your “contradictions” are distinctions of how God knows with respect to either himself or his creation.

Dawson - Adam sinned, this can only mean that he erred in his judgment - i.e., his judgment did not conform to the standard of righteousness according to which he was judged. Thus Adam did not have perfect judgment.

Vytautas - There is difference between Adam erring in his judgment and not having perfect judgment. Adam had the possibility of transgressing, so that he was not made perfect in sense that it was possible for him to sin.

Dawson - Learning is not in the same camp as the notion of a square circle. The notion of a square circle is inherently self-contradictory. But learning is not.

Vytautas - Learning as learning is not self-contradictory, but God learning is self-contradictory because he knows all things.

Dawson - With the trinity, you now have three consciousnesses with nothing to be conscious of but themselves. Thus in Christianity, the problem of divine lonesomeness entails a three-fold contradiction at the most fundamental level.

Vytautas - As if another subject cannot be the object of another subject’s consciousness.

[April 09, 2010 9:23 AM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Dawson - Where does affirming that universe *as a whole* is self-sufficient also affirm both that the elements of the universe are both self-sufficient and not self-sufficient in the same sense? I don’t see it.

Vytautas - It is due to the fact that essential properties of entities or collection of entities carry over to all of the parts of the entity or collection.

Dawson - As I pointed out, you’ve not been able to produce a single example of an entity in reality which is not self-sufficient in the manner in which your argument needs the universe as a whole to be non-self-sufficient.

Vytautas - Almost all things in the universe are not self-sufficient. Books don’t write themselves, for example.

Dawson - If we enlarge our scope of reference to include everything that the Christian worldview says exists - which would include everything in the natural as well as everything in the supernatural realm, then by your logic, Vytautas, that totality could not be self-sufficient, even though it would in such an experiment also include the Christian god, for parts of that totality are said not to be self-sufficient. You insist that the qualities of the contents of the totality transfer to the totality as an essential quality thereof, which would make the totality non-self-sufficient.

Vytautas - God is not at the same level of being as the universe. God cannot be considered a part of the totality of everything, since he is present everywhere and doesn’t exist in one particular place, whereas on your conception of the universe, everything is particular and can be divided into parts.

Dawson - If they are part of an integrated whole, they are parts of an integrated whole, not entities in their own right. The apple would be the entity, and its parts would be part of the entity.

Vytautas - If we consider the ‘apple’ to be the sum total of that which exists in the apple, then are all the parts of the apple now distinct entities?

Dawson - Since the proper definition of the concept ‘universe’ is the sum total of that which exists, and it is a fact that many distinct entities do actually exist, the universe is comprised of many entities, and is therefore not an entity in its own right.

Vytautas - If the entities of the universe are part of the integrated whole, are they parts of the integrated whole and not entities in their own right?

Dawson - So you grant that it is a fact that the universe “is not dependent on anything other than itself.” Good! Welcome to the club. Now you just need to come out of the closet on your atheism.

Vytautas- That action would be impious. The fact is drawn from the assumption that God does not exist.

[April 09, 2010 9:53 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas: “My first comment addressed your post. ‘God is not bound to the primacy of existence, while others are bound by it, since it depends if knowledge is objective relative to the subject. Man is bound by the primacy of existence, while God is not bound by it, since his knowledge is subjective.’ Your argument assumes that every subject is bound by the primacy of existence.”

My argument does not explicitly assume that “every subject is bound by the primacy of existence.” Nor does it specifically depend on this fact (which indeed it is a fact). My argument is about man’s knowledge reductively depending ultimately on the primacy of existence, which you have conceded to be the case when you stated in your 07 April comment “Man is bound by the primacy of existence.” The additional fact that you acknowledge that your god as a subject has a subjective orientation to the facts of the universe only seals my case all the more. It would be amazing if you don’t grasp this.

I wrote: “Moreover, if man’s knowledge is ultimately derivative of the Christian god’s knowledge (as presuppositionalists claim), then all knowledge ultimately has a subjective basis, which means that it’s not really knowledge at all, but undefined, elusive fantasy; there would be nothing absolute to it, since everything is revisable according to the ruling subject’s whims.”

Vytautas: “Clarkian presuppositionalists do, but Van Tillian presuppositionalists says that our knowledge is analogous to God’s knowledge.”

Careful here, Vytautas. Van Til wrote: “God is the original knower and man is the derivative re-knower.” (*Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p. 167) But even if you want to say that “our knowledge is analogous to God’s knowledge,” you’re saying that our knowledge is analogous to knowledge which has a subjective basis. So even if you want to say, perhaps in an effort to contain damage already done, that man’s knowledge has an objective basis, this position would inevitably sent to the shredder in preference for a doctrine which treats a subjective account of knowledge as *the standard* - for your god’s “knowledge” is the standard, is it not?

Vytautas: “If you assume an Objectivist epistemology, of course you would say that God cannot have knowledge, but that is not convincing, if you are trying to show that God does not exist.”

For one, no one needs to “show that God does not exist.” One does not need to show that the non-existent does not exist. Also, given the characteristics which Christians attribute to their god, its “knowledge” (if it could be called this) could not be conceptual in nature. See my blog [Would an Omniscient Mind Have Knowledge in Conceptual Form?](#) In a follow-up post, [Pike on Concepts and Omniscience](#), you’ll find a Christian who expresses firm agreement with my conclusion. Christianity is thoroughly *anti-conceptual*, and your open admission of Christianity’s disintegrated view of knowledge eloquently confirms this.

[continued below]

[April 09, 2010 11:41 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

[continued from above]

Vytautas: “Your ‘contradictions’ are distinctions of how God knows with respect to either himself or his creation.”

Actually, they are *your* contradictions (since you affirm the existence of a consciousness which sometimes is bound by the primacy of existence and at other times enjoys the primacy of consciousness), and they result directly from the “distinctions” which your worldview must necessarily affirm about your god’s “knowledge.” There is no consistent metaphysical basis to knowledge on the Christian worldview. Sometimes it’s objective, sometimes it’s subjective. But what’s interesting is that knowledge about the universe on the Christian worldview is subjective, while “knowledge” in the imaginary realm of the supernatural is the only area where objectivity is possible for your god.

Vytautas: “There is difference between Adam erring in his judgment and not having perfect judgment.”

Either Adam had perfect judgment, or he didn’t. If he erred in his judgment, there’s no way you can say he had perfect judgment. Someone possessing perfect faculty of judgment would not err in any of his judgments. You’re stuck here, thanks to the details of the myth of Adam’s fall.

Vytautas: “Adam had the possibility of transgressing, so that he was not made perfect in sense that it was possible for him to sin. “

Typically Christians chalk up the possibility that Adam could transgress to his being given a will of his own. Doesn’t your god have a will of its own? And yet I doubt that you would say that it is possible for your god to transgress. So merely having a will of one’s own is not sufficient to pin the possibility of transgressing on an agent.

But you admit that Adam was not made perfect, which can only mean that his creator was not a perfect creator. A perfect creator by definition creates only perfect creations. Imperfection does not flow from perfection; if there’s any imperfection in a product, this implicates its source as imperfect.

Vytautas: “Learning as learning is not self-contradictory, but God learning is self-contradictory because he knows all things.”

Which just goes back to confirm what I had originally asked: how can your god be omnipotent when it cannot do what its creatures do on a daily basis?

Vytautas: “As if another subject cannot be the object of another subject’s consciousness.”

I’ve never stated that consciousness cannot be its own object. Objectivism acknowledges that this can be the case (just as when we think about consciousness and its activity). The difference is that Objectivism recognizes that consciousness can only be an object in a *secondary* sense: it must first be conscious *of something* distinct from itself before it can identify itself as conscious. So what would the three members of the trinity be conscious of before creating anything distinct from the godhead? If all three members of the trinity are supposed to possess consciousness, what are they conscious of before creating anything else? Of each other? That’s just what I said: it simply multiplies the problem. I know, Vytautas, I’ve thought these things through quite carefully. But go ahead - try to squirm your way out of it. Submit yourself as a lesson for my readers to learn from.

Regards,
Dawson

[April 09, 2010 11:44 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas: “It is due to the fact that essential properties of entities or collection of entities carry over to all of the parts of the entity or collection.”

That’s the composition fallacy, flat and simple. The presence of this fallacy in your argument shows that it seeks to draw its conclusion illicitly. If you had a legitimate case, you wouldn’t need to keep reaffirming its reliance on the composition fallacy every time it’s pointed out. It also, as I had pointed out previously, commits the fallacy of context-dropping, specifically the meaning of the concept ‘universe’. You have yet to explain how something outside the sum totality of existence can be there as something on which the sum totality of existence can depend. I’m waiting for you to address this, but you keep evading it. Why?

Vytautas: “Almost all things in the universe are not self-sufficient. Books don’t write themselves, for example.”

I addressed your book example. Books are manufactured from pre-existing materials. They are not non-self-sufficient in the sense that they needed to be created ex nihilo by means of conscious activity, which is the sense of non-self-sufficiency that your argument needs the universe to be. So even with your insistence on the composition fallacy, your argument still doesn’t fly. Besides, it is not even remotely the case that “almost all things in the universe” are analogous to things like books, which people manufacture. Books are man-made, and they are made from things that are not man-made. Find a rock whose material make-up is non-self-sufficient. You can’t.

Vytautas: “God is not at the same level of being as the universe.”

Either your god exists, or it doesn’t. If it existed, it would be included in the scope of reference denoted by the concept ‘existence’, and thus would be included in the collection described as *the sum total of everything that exists.*

Vytautas: “God cannot be considered a part of the totality of everything, since he is present everywhere and doesn’t exist in one particular place, whereas on your conception of the universe, everything is particular and can be divided into parts.”

See above. The reason why your god “cannot be considered part of the totality of everything” which exists, is not because it “is present everywhere and doesn’t exist in one particular place,” but because it simply doesn’t exist in the first place. Look at how you resist allowing your god to be included in a concept which includes everything else that exists! This screams out loud that you’re hiding something, Vytautas.

I wrote: “So you grant that it is a fact that the universe ‘is not dependent on anything other than itself’. Good! Welcome to the club. Now you just need to come out of the closet on your atheism.”

Vytautas: “That action would be impious.”

It would be honest. If your concern for piety conflicts with the virtue of honesty, I’d say you have a real problem on your hands.

Vytautas: “The fact is drawn from the assumption that God does not exist.”

Actually, as I had stated in my previous comment, the fact that the universe is self-sufficient is a *conclusion* which we infer from the very meaning of the concept ‘universe’, not from the assumption that your god or any other god does not exist. I take the fact that you admit that it’s a fact that the universe “is not dependent on anything other than itself,” as sufficient concession that your argument is full of holes.

Regards,
Dawson

[April 09, 2010 11:51 AM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

You admit that your “argument is about man’s knowledge reductively depending ultimately on the primacy of existence”. When I make distinctions concerning knowledge, you claim that I make contradictions because the primacy of existence applies to every subject and all knowledge. No exceptions.

You object that my argument for God commits the composition fallacy. But the composition fallacy applies to accidental properties but not essential properties. For example, I weigh 135 lbs. Therefore, my heart and liver each weigh 135 lbs. This does not work because weighing a certain amount is an accidental property.

You tell me to “find a rock whose material make-up is non-self-sufficient.” What about metaphoric rocks? They need heat and pressure to be made. But this ignores the fact that at least some of the parts of the universe are not self-sufficient. Whether they were created out of nothing or came from previous material does not matter because presently some parts are dependent on other parts.

My argument for God is relevant in response to your argument against God, but then you say, "For one, no one needs to " show that God does not exist." One does not need to show that the non-existent does not exist." This makes me wonder why you bother with this post, which is to show that God does not exist.

You keep on bringing up objections to 'god-belief' from your other posts. God could only make Adam such that he is incapable of sinning, otherwise God is evil. If you define perfection as incapable of sinning, then Adam was made imperfect. God cannot be charged with imperfection because Adam was created as an agent under the covenant of works. You have to go outside the covenant to charge God with wickedness.

As to the problem of loneliness, you say "If all three members of the trinity are supposed to possess consciousness, what are they conscious of before creating anything else? Of each other? That's just what I said: it simply multiplies the problem." This only multiplies the problem, if God is not an eternal being. As if in time the members of the Trinity have to learn about each other. You can multiply your objections by citing other posts, but I grow weary of them.

[April 09, 2010 1:25 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas: "You admit that your 'argument is about man's knowledge reductively depending ultimately on the primacy of existence'."

"...admit..."? That's too weak a word here. I *intended* it to be just such an argument.

Vytautas: "When I make distinctions concerning knowledge, you claim that I make contradictions because the primacy of existence applies to every subject and all knowledge. No exceptions."

The contradiction that I cited was in the metaphysical duplicity of the "knowledge" you claim on behalf of your god, since it is thought to proceed from the primacy of consciousness in some cases, and is characterized as standing on the primacy of existence in other cases. I think I was pretty clear about this.

Vytautas: "You object that my argument for God commits the composition fallacy. But the composition fallacy applies to accidental properties but not essential properties."

You have not shown that either self-sufficiency or non-self-sufficiency is the "essential property" of the universe, or of any of its constituents. On my view, neither are, and I explained this several times, and gave reasons for doing so, additionally noting that the self-sufficiency of the universe is something that can be inferred from the proper contextual meaning of the concept 'universe'. You have not interacted with any of my points on this, but instead simply insist - without argument - that self-sufficiency must be an essential property of the universe in order to defeat your argument. This is rubbish.

If you want to understand a little more about integrating by means of essentials, start with Rand's *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology* to discover exactly what essentials are, and, if you're still interested, check out Schwartz's [Integration by Essentials](#). Then get back to me on this.

Vytautas: "You tell me to 'find a rock whose material make-up is non-self-sufficient'. What about metaphoric rocks? They need heat and pressure to be made."

The heat and pressure did not create the material make-up of metamorphic rock ex nihilo. Try again.

Vytautas: "But this ignores the fact that at least some of the parts of the universe are not self-sufficient."

Perhaps you need to provide a definition of what you mean by 'self-sufficient'. I don't see how metamorphic rock is non-self-sufficient as an existent. On what does its material make-up depend for its existence? On something you imagine? That won't work.

Vytautas: "Whether they were created out of nothing or came from previous material does not matter because presently some parts are dependent on other parts."

You say they “are dependent on other parts,” but what specifically do you mean by this, how do you show this to be the case, and how does it relate to your overall argument? If I find a piece of metamorphic rock in my backyard, how would I go about determining that it is “dependent on other parts”? I pick it up, hold it in my hands, it continues to be what it is - a rock. Nothing has changed. It does not appear to be “dependent on other parts” at all. As an existent, it is wholly self-sufficient, even considering its geologic history. The material which makes it up existed in some form prior to its current form as a metamorphic rock sitting in my backyard. So in what sense is it “dependent on other parts,” and what are those “other parts” on which it is supposedly dependent?

[continued below]

[April 09, 2010 8:43 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

[continued from above]

Vytautas: “My argument for God is relevant in response to your argument against God,”

Not that I can see. And so far you’ve not explained how it’s relevant. Moreover, given your admissions and disclaimers, your god would be at best completely aloof from the points informing my argument, if it actually existed.

Vytautas: “but then you say, ‘For one, no one needs to “show that God does not exist.” One does not need to show that the non-existent does not exist.’ This makes me wonder why you bother with this post, which is to show that God does not exist. “

Where does my post present an argument which seeks to conclude that your god does not exist? My argument shows that the nature of human knowledge can only imply *non-theism* - i.e., not god-*belief*. You must be misinterpreting this as an argument against the existence of a god. It’s not. Read it again, and this time, read it carefully.

Vytautas: “You keep on bringing up objections to ‘god-belief’ from your other posts.”

Yes, I have this prerogative.

Vytautas: “God could only make Adam such that he is incapable of sinning, otherwise God is evil.”

My argument is actually quite simple, so simple that even a caveman should be able to understand it. If the universe is supposed to be a creation, and it contains any imperfections, then the agent which supposedly created it cannot rightly be called a perfect creator, for a perfect creator does not create creations which have imperfections. If you admit that this universe which you claim a god created contains any imperfections (even spelling errors), then this can only mean that your god - if it did created it - is not a perfect creator. Q.E.D.

Vytautas: “If you define perfection as incapable of sinning, then Adam was made imperfect.”

You have already admitted that Adam erred in his judgment. This can only mean that he did not possess perfect judgment. An agent possessing perfect judgment does not err in his judgments.

Vytautas: “God cannot be charged with imperfection because Adam was created as an agent under the covenant of works. You have to go outside the covenant to charge God with wickedness.”

Here you’re trying to cause a distraction by introducing an irrelevant issue. The issue is simple: either the universe your god created is perfect, or it is not. If it is not perfect, then we must look to the creator of the universe as the responsible agent for the imperfections in its creation. Christianity seeks to blame the creation for its imperfections, which shows just how unjust their thinking really is.

Vytautas: “As to the problem of loneliness, you say ‘If all three members of the trinity are supposed to possess consciousness, what are they conscious of before creating anything else? Of each other? That’s just what I said: it simply multiplies the problem.’ This only multiplies the problem, if God is not an eternal being. As if in time the members of the

Trinity have to learn about each other.”

You clearly do not understand the problem of divine lonesomeness. I suggest you try examining what I have argued.

Vytautas: “You can multiply your objections by citing other posts, but I grow weary of them.”

Where you grow weary is in trying to defend an indefensible argument when its defects are pointed out to you over and over and over again.

Regards,
Dawson

[April 09, 2010 8:47 PM](#)

[NAL](#) said...

What is with these commenters? Only an idiot would click on their links.

[May 02, 2010 6:23 PM](#)

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