

Friday, June 04, 2010

Is Atheism Inherently Arrogant?

Many theists seem to obsess over what they consider to be “atheist arrogance.” The fact that someone dares not to believe in their god apparently really gnaws at them. The very thought that somewhere someone has declared intellectual independence and has cleansed his mind of supernatural superstition, must be very unsettling to those who resent others for having a mind in the first place. The potential that such a thought represents an accurate assessment of reality, vies against the inherently theistic view that man is a mere puppet of some supernatural coordinator.

Many theists charge atheists with arrogance. This is a habit I’ve seen among theists for as long as I can remember. The accusation of arrogance is usually put out there as if it were self-evidently true, and all anyone needs is for someone to point it out, and every by-stander will automatically “see the light” and recognize its unassailable truth.

I must be at a disadvantage, for even though I have been called arrogant many times for simply being an atheist, it was never quite clear to me why someone would sincerely think that I am arrogant simply because I didn’t believe another person’s claims. Indeed, it seems quite the reverse is the case: I’m being told that my non-belief is an offense to something which the believer can only imagine, and that I should “repent” of the “sin of unbelief” and submit myself in fear to what is nothing more than a fantasy, just as the believer has chosen to do. Meanwhile, I’m “arrogant” for simply being honest and recognizing that I don’t believe the theist’s claims because I know that they are not true.

But apparently my grasp of the situation is off a bit. Thanks to David Smart of the [Aristophrenium blog](#), my misunderstandings on this matter have been corrected. ([David Smart](#) posts on his blog under the name “Ryft Braeloch” and elsewhere as “Arcanus” - not to be confused with Arch-Anus I’m sure.) In a [recent post](#) of his, Smart explains the problem once and for all. Apparently it is arrogant for an atheist

to presuppose the truth of his system of thought and expect the Christian to work within the framework of that system.

The alleged arrogance of such a presupposition is

evidenced quite sharply by the response of the Atheist when the Christian opens the Bible to support their claims. Rather immediately the Bible is denounced as any sort of acceptable method of supporting claims, precisely because it fails to satisfy the Atheist’s presupposed criteria.

Smart explains that

This criticism applies only to those Atheist *responses* which deny for the Christian the very principle the Atheist allows for himself. Such a *response* is a one-way street that exhibits an arrogance that cannot be defended except by fallacy.

So apparently this criticism does not apply to Christian responses which do essentially the same thing (such as those which require the atheist to take the bible seriously as intellectual support for the theist’s god-belief claims). It’s not as if Christians presuppose the truth of their system and expect non-Christians to work within the framework of that system (such as when we’re told that we’re “suppressing the truth in unrighteousness” when we question the believer’s god-belief claims). Or do they?

The controversy which concerns Smart involved an exchange between himself and atheist Austin Cline. In that exchange Cline posed the following challenge to Smart:

Why don’t you point to someone actually doing that [shoving their beliefs down my throat] before whining that this is your “true” argument.

In response to this, Smart stated:

When an Atheist presupposes the truth of his system of thought and expects the Christian to work within the

framework of that system, but denies for the Christian the inverse thereof because the only presuppositions the Atheist permits in the field of debate are his own, he is precisely shoving his beliefs down my throat.

One of the fundamental truths of my system of thought is that there is a fundamental distinction between what is real and what is imaginary. And it's true, and I freely admit it: I do expect other adults to grasp this fundamental distinction and apply it in their thinking as well.

Perhaps Smart thinks I would be "shoving" this "belief" down his throat if I expected him to abide by this distinction "in the field of debate." But why? Theists observe the fundamental distinction between what is real and what they imagine in so many areas of their lives, such as when they get out of bed in the morning, consume breakfast cereal, dress themselves, drive their vehicles to work (if they work), tally their monthly bills, balance their bank accounts, walk across their yard, etc.

Why would they object to observing this fundamental distinction "in the field of debate"?

The "inverse" of this principle is that there is *no* fundamental distinction between what is real and what is imaginary. But on this premise, whatever one imagines could be real. So what's behind Smart's gripe? If allowing the distinction between reality and imagination to be blurred is the preferred ideal, the atheist may simply be imagining that the theist's god is not real. In so doing, the atheist is adopting the essentials of the theist's worldview (as we'll see below), but I suspect that the theist will find some way to object to this outcome.

Smart's complaint suggests that the concern underlying his charge of arrogance against the atheist is that reluctance to allow the Christian to "work within the framework of [his] system" impedes debate. But I'm not persuaded that debate is what Christians really want. I know this because of the persistent futility of trying to engage Christians in debate. Where are the disputers of my worldview? The silence is indeed deafening. And it's not because I've been absent from the conversation.

I suspect that the real agenda behind the charge of arrogance is much simpler: it is to smear and discredit non-believers and reinforce believers' commitment to the religious prism through which their worldview requires them to view human nature and interpersonal relationships.

Smart explains his problem with what he considers "arrogance" on the part of atheists in an [earlier post](#):

the Christian is expected to provide arguments in defense of Christian theism which accord with the atheist's epistemology in particular and world view in general.

We should be able to recognize the cause of this resentment, for if the atheist in question has adopted a worldview which coheres with the fact that there is a fundamental distinction between the real and the imaginary, the theist will never be able to keep up with him. As I have already shown (see [here](#)), there are many good reasons to suppose that the god of the theist's worship is in fact imaginary, not real. The fact that the theist cannot produce arguments which both consciously observe the fundamental distinction between the real and the imaginary, and prove the existence of his god at the same time, is not the atheist's problem. Nor is it sufficient grounds for charging the atheist with arrogance.

This analysis is certainly compatible with what Smart states next:

This is implicitly demonstrated in challenges such as, "Provide evidence that God exists." The relevance of evidence, and even what constitutes evidence, are defined by his system of thought.

Again, speaking for myself, any evidence worthy of consideration for any proposition would have to take into account the fact that there is a fundamental distinction between what is real and what is imaginary. Evidence that is merely imaginary in nature is of course worthless, and proposed "evidence" which cannot be reliably distinguished from what is merely imaginary is at the very least subject to question. If the theist objects to such principles, then he's not only telling us about himself, but also about the intellectual solvency of his god-belief.

Smart proposes that

if it is permissible for the atheist to presuppose the truth of his system of thought and expect the Christian to work within the framework of that system, then it is also permissible for the inverse of that situation.

It is clear that the Christian system rejects the primacy of existence. If there's any question on this, notice how Christian apologists continually seek for ways to obviate the primacy of existence and validate the primacy of consciousness (see for instance [here](#) and [here](#)). Christians also openly affirm the primacy of consciousness roots of their worldview (see for instance [here](#)).

So if a non-Christian adopts the underlying metaphysical assumptions of the Christian worldview, as Smart would prefer that he do, then he cannot be faulted for the varieties of conclusions he might draw when applying the primacy of consciousness while trying "to work within the framework of that system." He may, for instance, adopt the view that the universe is the product of conscious activity, and identify the author of that conscious activity as something other than the Christian god. Instead of imagining the conscious agent which created the universe as [trinitarian](#), he may think of it as infinitarian in nature, as some theistic animists have conceived of their own deity. Where the Christian imagines his god as a "father" who chose to give up his son to vicious persecutors, the atheist trying on the theist's shoes may conceive of his ruling consciousness as being eternally sonless. And instead of imagining that human beings are inherently in need of "salvation" because of a botched creation, the atheist who adopts the metaphysical basics of the theist's worldview "for argument's sake," may draw the conclusion that the logical outcome of the creative process of a perfect creator is a perfect creation (see for instance [here](#)), and that human beings are therefore exactly what the creating consciousness had planned them to be, and that the notion of "salvation" misses the point entirely. That's just the problem once one grants validity to the primacy of consciousness: he could imagine any scenario, and on the premise of the primacy of consciousness accept it as "true."

So if Smart had his way, it may not work to his worldview's advantage after all.

Smart insists that if the atheist holds the theist accountable to his own (non-theistic) presuppositions, then

the atheist would shoulder the epistemic responsibility for explaining why the only presuppositions permitted in the field of debate are his own—and I would not anticipate a rational argument for that.

The chiefest of "presuppositions" guiding my principled thought as an atheist is the primacy of existence, the view that

- a) there is a fundamental relationship between consciousness and its objects, and
- b) that the objects of consciousness are what they are independent of the conscious activity by which one perceives and/or considers them.

This two-fold recognition is axiomatic in nature; it is not the conclusion of any proof because any proof presupposes that there is some relationship between consciousness and its objects and that the objects of consciousness do not conform to conscious intentions (e.g., one is not epistemologically permitted to say that something is true simply because he believes it, wants it to be true, would feel better if it were true, dislikes all alternatives if it is false, etc.). Stemming from this two-fold recognition is the immediate understanding that there is a fundamental distinction between reality and imagination.

Smart tells us that

the arrogance of atheism is proven by atheists who "presuppose the truth of their system of belief and then tacitly insist their Christian opponent work within the framework of that system" while prohibiting by fiat any competing epistemic structure in the field of debate.

It seems that Smart requires atheists to adopt "neutrality" toward their own worldview presuppositions, or risk the charge of arrogance if they don't. The atheist is implicitly required to adopt the theist's standards ("presuppositions") when evaluating the latter's "evidences" for his god-belief claims, and if he doesn't do this, he's therefore condemned as "arrogant." As far as curses go, that's not much of a burden to live with.

As for allowing "any competing epistemic structure in the field of debate," the only one I can think of is one which allows a thinker to confuse his imagination with reality, and no theist has persuaded me that this is ever rationally appropriate.

If I may make a few observations, let me state the following. I've often suspected that the real cause behind a theist's choice to accuse an atheist of arrogance stems from a deep-seated resentment of the atheist's *certainty*, whether the atheist really is certain or the theist simply imagines that he is. The atheist should bear in mind the fact that he is essentially a spoilsport for the theist, and that his mere existence as an atheist serves as a constant reminder to believers that not everyone on "God's green earth" has obsequiously surrendered his mind to a frightening concoction of the imagination, and this spawns a sense of private envy in the mind of the believer: he wishes that he had the spiritual courage that it takes to distinguish between the real and the imaginary on a consistent basis and stand up to the arbitrary claims of religion, just as many non-believers do. But he lacks such courage and thus resents those who do.

As confirmation of this analysis, notice how often theists insist that there really are no atheists, that atheism is an impossible alternative to theism, and that, if anything, agnosticism is the rightful category of self-professing atheists. Many have misconstrued agnosticism as essentially equivalent to non-belief. But this is mistaken. Agnosticism is the view that certainty on a given matter is unachievable. It does not have to be in the context of theism, but in the context of theism agnosticism would be the view that no one can be sure whether or not a god exists. An agnostic can be a theist just as he could be an atheist; he could believe that there is a god, or he could disbelieve that there is a god. The agnostic is one who takes issue with a position of certainty on the matter. Such persons tend to be more inclined to succumbing to Pascal's Wager than to acknowledging the imaginative nature of god-belief. Also, theists who have come to realize that their apologetic arguments intending to prove the existence of their god are faulty and consequently unpersuasive, are more inclined to object to an atheist's certainty and insist that he's really an agnostic on the subject.

Note also that the atheist is not someone who claims to have been "chosen" to be included in some group or another by an invisible magic being. A genuine atheist does not presume to be the recipient of favor distributed among men by some supernatural source; he typically understands that he needs to rely on his own wits in life, and seeks to develop them for that very purpose. Thus he values his own wits, and acts to protect them from subterfuge and deceit. Perhaps this is what the theist has in mind when he calls the atheist "arrogant." The atheist is typically not the one who seeks to pass himself off as numbering among "the chosen" and preferring to characterize everyone else as numbering among "the damned." Christianity, for instance, holds that there is no greater prize than "God's grace," and Christian believers style themselves as recipients of this prize and everyone else as lacking it. Given this aspect of god-belief, the charge of arrogance seems entirely misdirected when leveled against the atheist.

Since arrogance is a form of the unearned, the accusation of arrogance is the charge that one is claiming knowledge which he has not earned. But is the atheist really claiming such knowledge? Theists typically like to characterize atheism as the claim that there are no gods at all, a claim to knowledge which no man could, presumably, have "epistemic rights" (while a claim to knowledge of the [supernatural](#) is accepted uncritically and without anything approaching a rigorous epistemological account). Would the theist likewise say that the atheist is being arrogant when he says that there are [no square circles](#)? On the theist's premises, it seems that one is in fact being arrogant when he denies the existence of square circles. For how could he know that there are no square circles residing somewhere in reality? What "epistemic rights" does anyone have to say that there are no square circles? Does the theist hold that there might possibly be square circles in existence somewhere? If not, isn't he guilty of the same "arrogance" that he charges against the atheist?

Let me be very clear here. I for one would not accept the theist's god-belief claims if he could not substantiate them without first demonstrating that the god he claims exists can be reliably distinguished from what may merely be imaginary. It's unclear how someone who is concerned about the preservation of the rationality of one's beliefs could have any objection to such a standard. At the same time, it does not suffice for the theist to simply insist that his god is real and not imaginary, for in doing so he is acknowledging the fact that there is indeed a fundamental distinction between what is real and what is imaginary. But in insisting that his god is real and not imaginary, is the theist *demonstrating* that his god can be reliably distinguished from what he may merely be imagining? Clearly not. I would say that the theist has a very tall order to fill, and I'd also say that I've not encountered one theist who's been able to meet it (and I've encountered *many* theists throughout my lifetime). And if the theist cannot meet this minimal standard, as rationally intact as it is, am I really being "arrogant" for disbelieving his god-belief claims? To borrow an expression attributed to Jesus, "I trow not."

I certainly do not mean to "shove" my beliefs down David Smart's throat. But if Smart is an adult, I would expect that

he at least grasp the distinction between what is real and what he imagines. If he doesn't, then what value could any worldview which he professes possibly have? That is something he must answer, for beyond mere entertainment, I do not see what value the theistic imagination could possibly have.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Christian Psychopathy](#)

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [11:00 AM](#)

18 Comments:

[Naumadd](#) said...

On questions of "what is the fundamental substance and fundamental nature of existence", I usually begin with what tools I have of my own and, when those have been stretched to their potential, ask a physicist.

The last thing I'd do is ask a priest. They seem to reject the efficacy not only of their own tools, but mine and those of others to acquire anything smacking of genuine knowledge.

I'm just not that cynical. I trust my senses, I trust my mind and I trust that a trained and experienced physicist understands the fundamental nature of existence a bit better than I do. In any event, "arrogance" is thinking you or those you admire can't sometimes or even frequently get it all wrong. I don't rest on my own laurels, but I also don't rest on the alleged laurels of others.

I question, I question again and then I question again. If there's still time, well, you know ...

[June 05, 2010 1:26 PM](#)

[The Secular Walk](#) said...

@Dawson Bethrick

Hey Dawson I want to help you out by suggesting a potential topic for you to create content on, since you really don't have a Theistic nemesis/rival anymore since Paul Manata is gone, and Chris Bolt is just not with it or a challenge.

I think you might find it interesting to interact with and provide a refutation of this Deist named stretmediq. He basically claims in this article that he has a scientific model that proves Deism. He asserts what I see to be the Primacy of Consciousness, and claims that based on the evidence, God exists and is an awareness upon which the cosmos is contingent.

Here is the article:

<http://www.positivedeism.com/phpbb2/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=4222>

It's the first entry under scientific deism. I just thought this might be of interest to you considering your track record and stern stance against promoters of the Primacy of Consciousness Metaphysics. It might be hard to read the whole article because it's rather long and boring. I was able to finish it but it took much discipline to force myself to finish it.

Cheers.

[June 06, 2010 1:33 AM](#)

[Jay](#) said...

I just read part of this stretmediq fellow's case for deism. Ignoring some poor use of technical vocabulary, the first major error I found regards the concept 'nothing'.

He reifies the concept. He answers the 'why is there something rather than nothing?' riddle, with the concept of 'something from nothing'. He realises that this is a failure of an answer if we define "nothing" as 'void that is absolutely "without property"'. He says this definition, this 'materialist notion', is the problem, so should be rejected.

Seeing the clear impossibility for "absolute nothingness" to produce the universe, he concludes that the "nothing" from which something emerged must actually be not "absolute", that is: it must be something.

So he redefines a word ('nothing') to make it cohere with a concept ('something from nothing') that constitutes the solution to a problem ('why is there something rather than nothing?') that becomes a non-problem when you substitute in the new definition: 'why is there something rather than something else?' Answer: because stuff changes. No longer a logical or philosophical problem. For more detailed answers, check modern physics.

Back to stretmediq's essay. For no obvious reason, he comes to define this new non-absolute-nothing as a concept. So the universe came from a concept, concepts exist in minds, this first concept must be in God's mind. Yeah, right.

Seems later on he talks about quantum mechanics. But if he's building upon this mistake, I don't see any reason to peruse the rest of the post.

Regards

Jason

[June 06, 2010 7:08 AM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

If he postulates something prior to the universe, than in what meaningful way is he describing the creation or beginning of the universe. He has simply moved the goal post further back and not answered the question. Is not treating nothing as something a logical fallacy, the reflected zero or something?

[June 06, 2010 10:47 AM](#)

[Jay](#) said...

Referring to this, JH?
http://aynrandlexicon.com/lexicon/zero--reification_of.html

[June 06, 2010 11:51 AM](#)

[? ?](#) said...

Time and tide wait for no man. [.....](#)

[June 09, 2010 12:32 AM](#)

[Tavarish](#) said...

Here's a thing that irks me a bit. Your comment has to be moderated and edited on pretty much every Christian site before it's posted. It's a minor gripe, but it doesn't bode well for those who want to engage in a no holds barred approach to the subject. I had a few comments not approved because I told a creationist at Aristophrenium he was severely misinformed, and apparently that's a strawman and Ad Hominem. However, when ryft goes on a tirade about how Atheism is arrogant no less than 3 times, it's absolutely fine.

I'll be publishing something on my blog along the lines of this discussion, but I almost guarantee it will fall on deaf ears, much like all the conversations I've had with the staff on Aristophrenium. One point gets addressed, 10 go unchallenged, and a post gets made on their site claiming superiority within the week.

I guess that's what apologetics is about - ignoring points, then claiming victory.

[June 09, 2010 7:21 AM](#)

[Jay](#) said...

Forget about mutual engagement or convincing the wilfully ignorant.

Just write about whatever needs to be written. Whether it's an original philosophical analysis of some issue or a response to some particularly ignorant or fallacious blog post. You can write clearly and convincingly without worrying about actually convincing anyone in particular. In fact, I'd wager that over-concern about persuading particular misguided people will detract from your writing's potential inherent clarity and rigour! Throwing off that burden will, at least, relieve you of some annoyance.

There's my unsolicited advice. Enjoy!

[June 09, 2010 9:57 AM](#)

[John Hutchinson](#) said...

Dawson:

Despite the great extent to which I disagree with you, I must confess to appreciating the lucidity by which you present your case.

First, I suggest that in upholding Objectivism as the criteria by which all things are judged, you are engaging in just another form of Presuppositionalism. I quote from one your blogs:

"The primacy of existence is a fundamental precondition of proof."

Is this any different in kind from those who uphold the primacy of Scriptures as a fundamental precondition of understanding the cosmos?

I don't have a problem with Presuppositionalism as A form of proof. My problem is when it is made THE only form of proof. (It is also badly grounded on a theological and Scriptural basis but that is neither here nor there.) As a form of proof, it is useful if it presents an internal coherence and a correspondence to reality. I.E. Does the Christian worldview demonstrate a coherent consistency with objective reality. Do those assertions in Scriptures, which can be measured, be validated? Or in your Objectivist faith, do your axioms stand up to objective reality and logic?

I have several problems with your viewpoint. Are objects necessary for consciousness to exist?

"a consciousness with nothing to be conscious of is a contradiction in terms" (Atlas Shrugged, Galt's Speech)

It makes consciousness not an entity unto itself but both entity and relationship between itself and its object.

I would submit that just as existence can exist without consciousness, consciousness can exist with nothing to be conscious of, including itself. Consciousness can be immersed in a void, within and outside of itself. It would not be a contradiction in terms, but rather a living hell. Indeed, in US military experiments, 'volunteers' were experimented upon with sensory deprivation. Most exited displaying symptoms of temporary insanity. If that occurs with a mild case of deprivation of objects with which to dwell upon...

Another point of order is that you suggest that other philosophies / theologies suggest that consciousness creates existence or objective reality. Outside of existentialism, I don't know of any Western philosophy or Christian orthodoxy that asserts that. I don't think that Rand accuses those other worldviews of that. My understanding is that most believe that flawed perception skews the comprehension of 'the object as is'. The person who is colour blind, (cannot see green and red), cannot perceive the object as is. As all persons have internal biases and flawed structures by which they decode the cosmos, these act as similar filters from seeing 'things as are'. (Christianity's version is of the 'plank in the eye') I think Rand rages at this idea that things cannot be perceived as they are. But I have yet to have found where she states that Western thought believes objects are projections of one subjectivity.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

[June 10, 2010 8:03 PM](#)

[John Hutchinson](#) said...

(CONTINUED)

But the largest problem I have, is with your Objectivist presumption of the Primacy of Existence. And by that presupposition, you presume to disprove the Christian God because the Scriptures 'affirms the existence of a consciousness on which existence depends.'

My question to you is that when you write and project a thought, actually codifying this entity with your keyboard upon electronic media somewhere on the Net; at the point at which you create and communicate it, is not the object that you create a projection of your consciousness? If that is true, does that mean that you do not exist?

Now, you might argue that a thought is not a real object or entity. But then I would ask, "Why do you engage in imaginary entities when you spurn the theists for engaging in theirs?" Indeed, the materialist would suggest that there are chemical messages that constitute the physiological components of that thought. You might suggest that you are merely manipulating objects by typing them on an electronic page. But the thought itself is independent of the manner by which you codify it and the tableau on which you inscribe it.

It could be argued that any creation that a man creates is a projection of their consciousness at the point of your creating it. It would seem that the logic of the Primacy of Existence denies any form of creation, including that belonging to mankind.

If my reasoning is sound, it would seem to destroy your disproof of God and challenge the presumption of the absolutist maxim of the Primacy of Existence. (I am, by no means, suggesting that this proves God's existence.)

John

[June 10, 2010 8:04 PM](#)

[The Secular Walk](#) said...

@John Hutchinson

The fact that you think the Primacy of Existence is a presumption or presupposition, shows you haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about in regard to Objectivism and it's Axioms. It would take a man with great patience to refute all your nonsense and confusion.

It absolutely baffles me how or why anyone would try to impugn the Primacy of Existence, or not understand it's meaning. The Primacy of Existence essentially means existence is an irreducible primary upon which everything in reality depends and grounds. Hence, existence has PRIMACY. Why is that so hard for you mystics to understand?

[June 11, 2010 1:11 AM](#)

[John Hutchinson](#) said...

Dawson:

I am not particularly interested in carrying on this discussion as it is self-evident that your form of disputation is to blow off your interlocutors by ad hominem rather than address the question. Thus you are as beyond discourse as a Vatican cardinal. And indeed, you are a partisan. Otherwise, I would ask you to humor me.

However, one of the problems with Rand's axiom of consciousness that you seem to confirm in your sentence "The Primacy of Existence essentially means existence is an irreducible primary upon which everything in reality depends and grounds" may be one of definitions.

A Wikipedia definition of an axiom "is any mathematical statement that serves as a starting point from which other statements are logically derived." If the 'axiom' of consciousness is derived from the axiom of existence, the 'axiom' of consciousness cannot very well be an axiom, can it?

[June 11, 2010 9:43 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hello John,

Thank you for your comments, and for complimenting my writing. I'm supposing you have other objections against Objectivism beyond those which you have elucidated here. But for every point of criticism that you've raised so far, I have addressed them [here](#).

I must admit that I am puzzled by your sudden decision not to continue the discussion which you started with me. You made this decision even before you've had a chance to see my response to your objections. So something must have turned you off.

You say that "it is self-evident that [my] form of disputation is to blow off [my] interlocutors by ad hominem than address the question," but I have no idea what you're talking about. I expend a lot of energy addressing the questions that are posed to me, both those which are posted in the comments sections of my own blogs, as well as those which are published elsewhere. I do not rely on ad hominem, but rather focus on the issues that are raised. I'm surprised that someone as thoughtful as your own initial comment suggested about yourself would come back suddenly and compare me to a Vatican cardinal. You call me "a partisan," but it is unclear what specifically this is supposed to mean (are Christians not "partisan"?), and say "otherwise" that you "would ask [me] to humor [you]." If you deem me "a partisan," what would I have to be for you to carry on the discussion you started with me?

At any rate, I have interacted with your comments, and if you think I sought simply to "blow you off" through the use of ad hominem, please point out the specific instances.

As for the definition of 'axiom', Wikipedia is not Objectivism's source of definitions. Rand provides the following definition of 'axiom' as it is understood within the context of Objectivism:

"An axiom is a statement that identifies the base of knowledge and of any further statement pertaining to that knowledge, a statement necessarily contained in all others, whether any particular speaker chooses to identify it or not. An axiom is a proposition that defeats its opponents by the fact that they have to accept it and use it in the process of any attempt to deny it." (*For the New Intellectual*, p. 155)

So, I hope you've been humored. Even if you aren't, you've surely been answered.

Regards,
Dawson

[June 11, 2010 11:44 AM](#)

[Naumadd](#) said...

John, a "consciousness" with nothing to be conscious of - including itself - isn't consciousness. "Consciousness" is, after a long chain of derivation, a product of existence, not the other way around. As seems reasonably clear, consciousness is derivative of life which is derivative of chemistry which is derivative of physics which is the most basic study and description we have of "exists". On what basis does one make the claim of consciousness without that from which it is derived? Unwarranted posturing?

That you can't dismiss the assertion "primacy of scripture" unless scripture, in fact, exists and someone exists who is aware of it (consciousness) to do the dismissing rather makes the point that existence has primacy and consciousness and scripture do not. Of course, because scripture is a product of consciousness, both existence and consciousness come before scripture. Consciousness is derivative of existence. Scripture is derivative of consciousness.

As many objectivists are aware, Rand called "existence" and "consciousness" self-evident in that for there to be consciousness, there must exist that which is conscious (the one doing the questioning) AND for a thing to be conscious there must be something of which it is conscious. Because consciousness appears only derived from life, that consciousness is at least aware of itself. Of what we know of life, it is derived from other things which means that there is necessarily something for a consciousness to be aware of beyond itself.

Again, if you make the claim of "consciousness" somehow not derived of life which is itself derived of other things, I'd like to know what your support is for such an assertion. If it is not open to observation and question, for all intents and purposes it does not exist except in one's imagination.

Existence does not necessarily mean there is consciousness, however, if there is consciousness, there is necessarily existence. To claim that non-existence has consciousness is a contradiction in terms and, in any case, a claim impossible for any human being to justify making except as a symptom of utter insanity.

[June 11, 2010 1:00 PM](#)

[Naumadd](#) said...

John,

"If the 'axiom' of consciousness is derived from the axiom of existence, the 'axiom' of consciousness cannot very well be an axiom, can it?"

No. I believe what you intend is "irreducible primary". No, consciousness isn't an irreducible primary in that it presupposes existence which, unless you can reasonably demonstrate something even "existence" presupposes, is irreducible. Nevertheless, "consciousness" can be an axiom if further concepts are derived from consciousness as the starting point. "Axiom" as you defined it here is merely a placeholder effectively saying - "All of what I'm about to assert begins from this point." Many things can be an axiom, however, there is really only one irreducible primary - existence - from which even consciousness is derived, but only after a long chain of derivation as physicists, chemists, biologists will attest.

[June 11, 2010 1:09 PM](#)

[Naumadd](#) said...

John,

"I have yet to have found where she states that Western thought believes objects are projections of one subjectivity."

I believe Rand made it quite clear who she was speaking of when she mentions those who assert and attempt to practice "primacy of consciousness". Some of her more notable comments on these concepts are in "The Ayn Rand Lexicon" which is available online here: http://aynrandlexicon.com/lexicon/primacy_of_existence_vs_primacy_of_consciousness.html .

[June 11, 2010 1:18 PM](#)

[John Hutchinson](#) said...

Dawson:

I do apologize for not getting back to you. I can appreciate your justified defensiveness regarding my characterization of a post I received which I presumed was you. The poster of the comment had the air of authority for which I presumed came from the author of the blog, namely yourself. As I received the post in my email, I did not bother to look on your blog, or look closely at identity of the poster and I didn't know the tag line by which you identify yourself.

I do apologize for my comments. I shall take up on the response you provided at a later date as I am a bit swamped with other projects at the current time.

John

[June 17, 2010 12:40 PM](#)

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