

John Robbins and the Foreclosure of His Critique of Objectivism

In a [recent blog entry](#) on [Choosing Hats](#), Christian apologist Chris Bolt quoted from the late John Robbins, the student of “Reformed” theologian Gordon Clark who sought at one time in his life very strenuously to take down Objectivism. Though they have historically called themselves “Scripturalists,” Gordon Clark and his followers have commonly been referred to as “presuppositionalists,” however their apologetic viewpoint differs significantly from that of Cornelius Van Til and his followers. Clark and Van Til, both believers in the Christian god whose followers claimed that they were “led by the Spirit” in their walk and talk, found themselves locked in a bitter, unending dispute over some trifling aspect in their respective theologies (specifically, on the issue of the incomprehensibility of their god).

Robbins vs. the Vantillians

For the benefit of the uninitiated, it should be noted that the rivalry between Van Til and Clark spawned a blood feud which continues to boil to this day among their ideological heirs. Consider for instance the recent controversy brewing between Vantillian [James Anderson](#) and Clarkian [Gary Crampton](#) on the issue of “paradox” or “apparently contradictory” teachings. The constant believer-versus-believer imbroglios which have characterized Christianity since the Pauline epistles summons to mind the old “Spy vs. Spy” cartoons in Mad Magazine: humorous and inconsequential.

John Robbins (1948-2008) was a die-hard Clarkian who eventually died. He is probably best known for his work with the [Trinity Foundation](#) and sundry trouble-making on the internet. Robbins did write a book attempting to refute Objectivism called *Without a Prayer: Ayn Rand and the Close of Her System* (Hobbs, New Mexico: The Trinity Foundation, 1997. 399 pp.). The [cover of Robbins’ book](#) features a photograph of Ayn Rand’s headstone. This book offers a glimpse into the horrific sophistry of the Calvinist mindset, and has been reviewed by several non-Clarkians (see for instance [Bryan Register’s](#) and [Jim Peron’s](#)).

Now when a Vantillian presuppositionalist runs to Robbins as his savior, you can be assured that he’s on the ropes. Vantillians and Clarkians are bitter enemies, but in my experience Vantillians tend to cave into the Clarkian camp before Clarkians ever resort to Van Til. This is because the Clarkian position is more consistently mystical. For instance, it denies empiricism in toto (and just so readers know that I’m not making this up, check out [this monstrosity](#)). As such, it is only logical - on the basis of Christianity’s premises - for believers who are faced with insurmountable difficulties to retreat into the thick forest of an overtly subjective viewpoint, even if it belongs to one of their arch-rivals. So in a sense, Bolt is right on schedule.

Robbins on the Objectivist Conception of Causality

Unfortunately, Robbins makes numerous mistakes in his attempt to challenge the Objectivist position, and scores zero points in discrediting the conception of causality which I have presented [in this blog](#). Some of Robbins’ mistakes are incidental, while others demonstrate a significant failure to grasp the position which he was critiquing.

As an example of a somewhat easily corrected mistake, consider the following. Robbins quotes (purportedly) an Objectivist source (no citation is given in the portion which he quotes from Robbins’ book) stating:

the premise that every action is only a reaction to an antecedent action, rules out, arbitrarily and *a priori*, the existence of self-generated goal-directed action

Robbins mistakenly states that Objectivists “hold that this premise applies to all reality except man.” But this is not the case, and it’s puzzling that Robbins didn’t know any better. As Rand stated:

Only a *living* entity can have goals or can originate them. And it is only a living organism that has the capacity for self-generated, goal-directed action. On the *physical* level, the functions of all living organisms, from the simplest to the most complex—from the nutritive function in the single cell of an amoeba to the blood circulation in the body of a man—are actions generated by the organism itself and directed to a single goal: the

maintenance of the organism's *life*. ("The Objectivist Ethics," *The Virtue of Selfishness*, p. 16)

Clearly Rand held that more than merely man is capable of self-generated, goal-oriented action. Rand identified this as a distinguishing characteristic of life as such, not just human life, but all living organisms. All living organisms is certainly much broader than just human beings. The former category includes single-celled protozoa, plants, tilapia (yum!), kangaroo rats, gorillas, etc. And even when it gets to man, this attribute is not restricted merely to his volition, but also includes autonomic biological functions, such as his heart beat, respiration, nerve activity, etc. The type of actions which these entities and features perform are not of the billiard-ball-acting-on-billiard ball type of causation.

Also, it is arguable that some entities other than biological organisms are capable at least of self-generated action (apart from goal-orientation), such as magnets and celestial bodies exerting gravitational pull on others. At any rate, Robbins is wrong to assume that Objectivists hold that only man is capable of self-generated action.

Robbins then states (in reaction to the quote above purportedly from an Objectivist source):

This is the central problem in their theory of free-will.

At best this is misleading. While man possesses free will (as Objectivism understands it), the theory of causality which Objectivism endorses (namely that the relationship between an entity and its own actions is a *necessary* relationship; see [here](#)) pertains to more than just human beings given the volitional nature of their consciousness. As noted above, other types of biological organisms are capable of self-generated and goal-oriented action, and yet Objectivism does not attribute a volitional form of consciousness to these species.

Robbins continues, saying:

They also reject the modern notion that causality is a relationship between motions, in favor of an older view that it is a relationship between things.

No, not "a relationship between *things*" (where "things" is understood to be different entities), but *between an entity and its own actions*. Either Robbins was not aware of what the Objectivist theory of causality holds, or he was simply a poor reader. Another possibility is that he was so consumed with a lust for smearing Objectivism that he didn't care to factor in such pesky details, since they don't serve his agenda.

Taking such confusions as a point of departure, Robbins presses on only to prove himself to be a rather belligerent thinker. After quoting Nathaniel Branden at length (see [Bolt's post](#) for the entire quote; Bolt states that Robbins is quoting Branden from *The Objectivist*, March 1966, pp. 11-12), Robbins accuses Branden's position of

presuppos[ing] that which an empiricist cannot presuppose: that he somehow 'knows' the nature (or identity) of a thing apart from observation of it.

Unfortunately, Robbins does not pinpoint where Branden's position relies on knowledge of things acquired apart from observation of them (unless of course Robbins is objecting to conceptual integration and application of concepts here, which of course would be glaringly self-defeating). Robbins simply asserts that Branden does this, and probably does so by clinging to the Humean conception of causality without realizing it (and thus failing to perform an internal critique of Objectivism). In the portion which Robbins quotes from Branden, Branden nowhere claims to know something apart from observation. If Robbins thinks that Branden's statement implies such a move, he needs to show us where. But he doesn't.

Robbins goes on to stipulate that

observation, of course, does not mean staring at an immutable object, but manipulation of an object and watching the changes it undergoes or "causes".

These are not jointly exhaustive alternatives, so it is unclear why "observation" must mean either horn of Robbins' dichotomy. We can observe objects which are not immutable without manipulating them, too. I can, for instance, observe a squirrel gathering nuts or the second hand of a clock moving in radial fashion. Neither object here is "immutable," nor am I manipulating them. But I am observing entities in action all the same. Robbins' stipulated meaning of observation arbitrarily rules out such activities. Nor is it clear what Robbins thinks he may be gaining by

doing this.

At this point Robbins says that “this is precisely Hume’s point,” but what specifically does Robbins have in mind here as “Hume’s point”: that we cannot know the identity or nature of something without observing it, or that observation entails manipulating an object and “watching the changes it undergoes or ‘causes’”? I ask, because Robbins’ own statement here suffers from imprecision and clumsiness.

Contrary to what Robbins is saying, Hume’s point was precisely what Branden states, namely that

If all that is involved [in causality] is motion succeeding motion, there is no way to establish necessary relationships between succeeding events: one observes that B follows A, but one has no way to establish that B is the effect or consequence of A.

Unfortunately, Robbins’ muddle gets increasingly thicker after this point. For instance, he writes:

the observation of change (of motion-to-motion causality to use Branden’s term) is the only observation that can be made.

But what is Robbins’ argument for this claim? None that I can see. He has yet to justify the dichotomy into which he tried to shoehorn “observation” in the first place. But even if we do accept Robbins’ preferred notion of observation, why is “observation of change” “the only observation that can be made”? We can observe *entities* as well as what they do (i.e., their actions, movement, change, etc.). Also, we can observe things which are not acting, in motion, or changing, such as a photograph. Indeed, even if one claims that one observes changes within the photograph (such as from one color to another, or one image in the photograph to another), this type of change itself is not a form of motion, but rather a static difference.

Even more to the point, Objectivists would be right to point out to Robbins that when we observe change, we are observing some *thing* that is undergoing the change, not just the change itself as if it could exist independent of the thing which is changing. When I observe the second hand moving in radial fashion around the face of a clock, I’m observing *the second hand* - a *thing*, not merely “change” in and of itself.

So if, contrary to what Robbins asserts (without argument, mind you), we observe not only “change” but also the entities which undergo the changes we observe, and we understand that there is a necessary relationship between an entity and the actions it performs, we observe not only the action (or change) but also the entity which performs it. We are not observing merely a succession of “events,” but rather entities in action. But even here, Robbins seems to think that, neither can we observe entities in action, but to have knowledge of what entities do we need some kind of non-sensory input. Not surprisingly, Robbins never explains how this works.

Robbins then asserts:

In the example Branden uses, no empiricist, including Ayn Rand, can state truthfully that the lighted match caused the wastebasket to burn.

Apparently Rand and other “empiricists” are supposed to know that the lighted match caused the wastebasket to burn through anamnesis or some other non-empirical means (perhaps prayer?), even though this could be observed directly. According to Robbins, observing a lighted match being thrown into a wastebasket supposedly gives no indication of how the wastebasket ignited in flames. But that’s Hume’s view, not the Objectivist’s view. If action is the action of *a thing* (a premise which Robbins & co. never refute), and a thing acts in accordance to its nature (another premise which Robbins & co. never refute), why would not a flammable object burn when it comes into contact with a flame? It is in the nature of a flammable object to burn when it comes into contact with a flame. But Robbins objects to the recognition that we can learn this by perceiving a flammable object catching fire when it comes into contact with a flame. Presumably we are supposed to ignore what we observe and rely on mystical means to learn about reality (though this always leads to conflict among mystics; see for instance [here](#) and [here](#)).

Notice that throughout all this, Robbins gives no indication of any alternative means by which one can know these things, nor does he make any genuine attempt to refute the recognition that action has identity or the view that an entity’s actions depends on the nature of the entity performing that action.

But Robbins has not exhausted his appetite for bald assertions. He continues, saying:

Causality is not observed at all.

Again, Robbins is simply affirming the Humean conception of causality here: we observe “events” in succession, but not the causality which connects them. But this requires that we observe only “change,” arbitrarily implying as we saw above that we do not observe the entities which do the changing. But if causality is the identity of action, and we perceive action (such as when an entity moves) as well as the entity which does the action, why are we not also observing causality? Robbins’ explanation appears to be in the following statement:

What *is* observed is a change in the condition of the wastebasket following the placement of a lighted match in it.

If Objectivism adopted the Humean conception of causality, where all that is observed is a series of events in succession (as Robbins himself believes to be the case), then the charge of fallacy here could be sustained. However, if it is conceded that we are observing “a change,” and change is action, and action is the action *of* some entity which does the acting, then it is conceded that we are in fact observing causality, for Objectivism conceives of causality as the law of identity applied to action. Q.E.D. Thus no such fallacy as Robbins claims has been committed. On the contrary, Objectivism demonstrates its dynamic potential by adhering to reality.

Robbins then seeks to charge “empiricists” with an elementary fallacy:

On empiricist grounds, to say that the latter caused the former is the fallacy *post hoc ergo propter* [SIC] *hoc*.

But this charge cannot apply to Objectivists, for on the Objectivist view we are observing causality (contrary to Robbins’ confused contentions to the opposite), and we also have recourse to concepts - i.e., we can *integrate* what we perceive according to objective principles (including the law of causality) in formulating rational judgments about what we have observed.

Meanwhile, Robbins demonstrates that he can only beg the question against Objectivism by assuming - without argument or any attempt to validate it - the Humean conception of causality while advancing his criticisms of the Objectivist alternative. All that he accomplishes is to deny the Objectivist position while assuming it to be false. He denies that we observe causality, only “change” or “events,” and claims arbitrarily that we cannot know that an action rests on the nature of the entity performing it except through some non-sensory means which he never identifies or explains.

Robbins offers the following highly confused summary of what Objectivism (as he *dis*understands it) to entail:

The Objectivists illegitimately separate knowledge of events (motions) and knowledge of things (identities) and seek to establish causality on the latter, while conveniently ignoring that knowledge of things (identities), insofar as it deserves to be called knowledge at all, on empirical grounds must be identical with knowledge of motions.

Really? Which part of the Objectivist viewpoint does this: the part which recognizes that action has identity (again, if action did not have identity, how could we form concepts denoting actions in common parlance?), or the part which recognizes that the action of an entity depends on the nature of the entity which performs that action? In affirming these positions, are Objectivists really trying to “separate knowledge of events (motions) and [*from?*] knowledge of things (identities)”? On the contrary, Objectivism holds that an entity acts in accordance to its nature; it does not seek to “separate” these as Robbins insinuates. (That is not to say that we cannot *abstract* the actions which an entity performs and apply them in various ways; see below).

Does Objectivism “seek to establish causality on the latter [i.e., on “knowledge of things (identities)”], while conveniently ignoring that knowledge of things (identities)... must be identical with knowledge of motions”? No, it does not. Apparently Robbins (and I suspect other detractors of Objectivism) interpret the Objectivist view of applying the law of identity to action in formulating the law of causality, as affirming that an entity and its actions are one and the same, that they are not distinct. If that is the case, then they have completely misread what Objectivism teaches. Objectivism teaches precisely the twin components which I explicated above, namely that:

(1) action has identity (since action exists, it is something; concepts denoting certain actions confirms this),

and

(2) the actions which an entity performs depends on the nature of the entity which performs it (i.e., an entity acts according to its nature).

That Objectivism does not hold that “knowledge of things (identities)... must be identical with knowledge of motions,” owes to the *conceptual* nature of knowledge. Where Robbins’ critique implicitly depends on a one-to-one relationship between knowledge of entities and the entities one perceives and likewise for actions or “events” (confirming that Robbins himself cannot, ironically, break away from the anti-conceptual, concrete-boundedness of his own presuppositions), the Objectivist theory of concepts accounts for man’s ability to apply concepts of actions to different types of entities. For instance, human beings can swim, and so can fish; waste baskets can burn, and so can houses; index fingers can point, and so can traffic signs; babies can crawl, and so can ants, etc. True to certifiable subjectivist form, Robbins drops the entire context of the conceptual nature of knowledge from his attempt to interact with the Objectivist position. For Robbins, it’s simply embarrassing.

Back to the point, when an individual, operating on the Objectivist view of the world, says that it is the nature of a match to ignite a wastebasket, he is not (as Robbins stipulates) merely saying “no more than ‘I (or others) have seen wastebaskets ignite after lighted matches have been dropped into them’,” but rather applying the law of causality to entity classes, a capacity for which Robbins’ (and Bolt’s) Christian worldview cannot account (since it lacks a theory of concepts as well as a consistent understanding of causality), and which their attempts to exegete and discount are self-undermining.

Tabula Rasa

Robbins, clearly failing to have seen the manifold shortcomings of his own analysis of the Objectivist position, attributes the “problems” he says he’s uncovered to Objectivism’s theory of knowledge, namely

that the mind is a *tabula rasa* at birth and that all its knowledge comes by the senses. By accepting this premise, they must also maintain that the three laws of thought are derived from experience, unless they wish to deny the three laws are knowledge. But the establishment of the law of identity, for instance, as an ontological law on the grounds of experience, cannot be done. It would involve knowing the objects of experience in some non-sensory manner and comparing this knowledge with one’s sensory data.

To buttress this criticism, Robbins quotes from his mentor Gordon Clark, who wrote:

...Aristotle’s claim that the law of contradiction is an ontological law as well as a law of thought involves a *hysteron proteron*. To suppose that logic is adequate to reality requires a knowledge of reality prior to and independent of the law. But the law itself denies that there is any knowledge independent of it. Therefore, concludes Nietzsche, we can never know that the world of things corresponds to our laws of thought.

Robbins then continues:

Just as the three laws as ontological laws cannot be established by an appeal to experience so neither can the knowledge of “identities” be established by experience of events. Events are all that is experienced by man’s senses. To claim that some sort of superior knowledge of “identities” as the Objectivists do, is to claim a means of knowledge other than the senses. Their view of causality is radically at odds with their epistemology.

It is true that Objectivism affirms that man’s mind is *tabula rasa* at birth (cf. Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness*, p. 28; *Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution*, p. 54; et al.), and it is right to do so. This is the view that, at birth, man begins life without content in his consciousness (particularly *conceptual* content, but also perceptual), and implies that man acquires awareness of the world by means of cognitive activity which begins in infancy, that knowledge must be developed by an objective process (beginning with sense perception) which a human subject must perform, that man *learns* his knowledge through effort, etc.

Now it is hard to see how any mature thinker could seriously deny this aspect of man’s nature, and the reasons which Clark-Robbins give are not the primary motivation for rejecting this view. Mystics have historically had problems with the *tabula rasa* model because it threatens their enshrinement of the imaginary. Since imaginary beings cannot be perceived, for instance, mystics find it necessary to oppose any epistemology which endorses an objective process for

discovering and validating knowledge. An objective process for discovering and validating knowledge begins with sense perception and adheres to [the primacy of existence](#). But as we have seen, theists reject (either in full or in part) the fact that human awareness begins with sense perception of objects existing independent of their cognitive activity, and are continually befuddled when [confronted with the primacy of existence](#).

Robbins attempts to find fault with the *tabula rasa* model by insisting that those who accept it

must also maintain that the three laws of thought are derived from experience, unless they wish to deny the three laws are knowledge.

Why must any laws of thought themselves be derived from experience, as opposed to merely one's *knowledge* of those laws being derived from experience? On the latter view, rather than being "derived" from experience, the "laws of thought" are foundational to experience *as such*, regardless of what that experience may be or what one takes away from it, owing to the nature of the faculty which makes experience possible in the first place (namely consciousness) and its interaction with any object. In affirming the *tabula rasa* model and the view that there are "laws of knowledge" (i.e., general principles which objectively guide the mind in discovering and validating knowledge), there is no conflict in supposing that the principles obtain independent of any particular experience, but that one's *knowledge* of those principles must come by means of experience (i.e., through conscious interaction with the realm of independently existing objects). Notice that Robbins does not show any conflict in this proposal; he doesn't even consider it. In fact, in developing his line of criticism, Robbins fails to integrate Rand's understanding of consciousness and the primacy of existence (which Robbins sought to slander by revising it as "the primacy of *unconscious* - a flagrant stolen concept if there ever were one) with the *tabula rasa* position and the Objectivist understanding of logic as a conceptual system based on the axiom of identity. Robbins is implicitly (whether he realized it or not) relying on the *diaphanous model* of consciousness here, which is riddled with irresolvable problems (see Kelley, [The Evidence of the Senses](#) and [The Primacy of Existence](#)). In [his review of Robbins' book](#), Bryan Register points this out about Robbins' presuppositional underlayer. It is evident from Robbins' criticism that he implicitly accepts the premise that, as Register puts it, "if a means of awareness conditions how we are aware of the world then it must distort that awareness." Thus by ignoring (and performatively denying) the fact that consciousness has identity, Robbins fails to consider the possibility that the relationship between a subject and object by itself sets in place the metaphysical fundamentals which are later discovered and understood as principles governing objective thought. This is just one reason why the primacy of existence is so pregnant with valuable philosophical meaning.

It should also be noted that the axiomatic concepts of *existence*, *consciousness* and *identity* put to rest the remainder of Robbins' concerns by tying human knowledge directly to reality at the most fundamental level of cognition. Robbins holds that

the establishment of the law of identity, for instance, as an ontological law on the grounds of experience, cannot be done. It would involve knowing the objects of experience in some non-sensory manner and comparing this knowledge with one's sensory data.

Robbins does not elaborate on what he means by "the *establishment* of the law of identity... as an ontological law," but by using this language and the context of his complaint he suggests that it is a formal process. Nor does Robbins explain why this process requires "knowing the objects of experience in some non-sensory manner and comparing this knowledge with one's sensory data." Just by referencing "sensory data," Robbins is granting the application of the law of identity. "Sensory data" *as opposed to what?* If one *perceives* an object, he perceives *an object*, whether by sight, hearing or touch. This is to say that the law of identity is not a phenomenon which needs to be formally "established," since it is *implicit* in any act of awareness to begin with:

Man grasps [the concept of "existent"] *implicitly* on the perceptual level—i.e., he grasps the constituents of the concept "existent," the data which are later to be integrated by that concept. It is this implicit knowledge that permits his consciousness to develop further. (Ayn Rand, *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, p. 6)

Since the same is the case for the axiomatic concepts of consciousness and identity, I would even say that the law of identity is *inescapable*: it is *implicit* in any awareness, including the perceptual level, and therefore inavertible (as we saw above in the relationship between an entity and its own actions). Why then does the law of identity need to be "established... as an ontological law" rather than simply *recognized* in an *explicit* manner and *integrated* contextually throughout his knowledge, a la Rand's axiomatic concepts? Blank out.

In grasping the axiomatic concepts explicitly, one does not need to acquire non-sensory awareness of objects and then compare it to sensory data. To suggest this is simply ridiculous.

Robbins then states that

Just as the three laws as ontological laws cannot be established by an appeal to experience so neither can the knowledge of “identities” be established by experience of events.

Why can't “knowledge of ‘identities’ be established by experience of events”? Robbins simply asserts this, as if Objectivism taught that we do not also perceive *entities* as well as the actions (“events”) which they perform. He provides no argument, nor does he seem able to interact with Objectivism on its own terms, especially given its explicit affirmation of the view that perception gives us direct awareness of *entities*:

A “perception” is a group of sensations automatically retained and integrated by the brain of a living organism, which gives it the ability to be aware, not of single stimuli, but of *entities*, of things. (Ayn Rand, “The Objectivist Ethics,” *The Virtue of Selfishness*, p. 19)

As man integrates the entities which he perceives into concepts, he also integrates their attributes into abstractions. Some of these abstractions integrate the actions which some entities perform. These actions are included in the concepts subsuming the entities themselves (as units integrated by the conceptual process), but can also be abstracted and re-applied to different entity classes (if this were not possible, there'd be no such thing as metaphors).

Apparently Robbins was eager to make his intellectual belligerence plain for all to see, for he states:

Events are all that is experienced by man's senses.

On Robbins' view, we can experience only “events,” but not the entities which participate in bringing those “events” about. This is like saying that we can only perceive action, not the things which perform the action which we perceive. And yet above Robbins claimed that it was Objectivists who “illegitimately separate knowledge of events (motions) and knowledge of things (identities).” Here Robbins is doing an even graver disservice: he's saying we can experience only events, and not entities. To do this, one would at minimum need to “separate” (and arbitrarily so) actions from the entities which perform them, and then ignore the entities responsible for the actions they perform as if they didn't exist.

If I look at a picture hanging on a wall which stands motionless before me, I'm apparently unable to experience anything, since there's no action here, and therefore no “event” taking place. I'm awake, I'm conscious, but there's no object to my consciousness, because there's no activity, and - according to Robbins - “events are all that is experienced by man's senses.”

Does Robbins provide an argument for this claim? Of course not. Indeed, in order to provide an argument, he would hardly be able to contain its disastrous implications any more than by leaving it as a mere assertion as he does. Sadly, Robbins comes across as someone who embraces the Humean view of causality entirely uncritically, and who has no discriminated awareness of what he himself as a conscious subject perceives.

Epitaph

In all, I cannot find anything that Robbins gets right in his attempt to critique Objectivism. He exhibits in concrete form Rand's dictum (attributed by Barbara Branden) that people who believe in God are either stupid or dishonest. It seems that in Robbins' case, he was both, at least to some degree.

Now we shouldn't want to make the mistake of supposing that the steady stream of mistakes uncovered here is any indication of the validity of any of Robbins' criticisms in the remainder of his book. This could open us up to the charge of hasty generalization, and that wouldn't be very nice. After all, it could be that the section of the book where Robbins interacts with the Objectivist understanding of causality is marked by circular reasoning, context-dropping, baseless assertions, unstated alternatives, false dichotomies, and the like, while the rest of Robbins' book exhibits scholarship of the most exquisite caliber. Indeed, one could adopt the mentality expressed in a now-retired campaign slogan for John Kerry, which stated:

It may be the case that Al Qaeda is in Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Bali, Malaysia, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the Sudan, Somalia, Spain, Germany, Czech Republic, Florida, Oregon and Ohio. But don't expect me to believe that they're in IRAQ! Vote John Kerry for President!

Translation:

It may be the case that virtually every sentence of the quoted section of John Robbins' book is dripping in misstatements and fallacy, but don't expect me to believe that faults such as these will be encountered elsewhere in his writings!

Again, we could adopt this type of mentality. But I wouldn't recommend it.

As a side note, I must say that Robbins, apart from his pervasive confusions, was quite a character. I recall the days in the late 1990s when I encountered him firsthand in a mock e-mail forum which a friend of mine had assembled (he had the e-mail address "jrob1517@aol.com"). Robbins inserted himself into every discussion as if he had some endangered reputation to protect. Truly, he was one of the most presumptuous individuals I had ever encountered in life up to that point. He exhibited no limit to the amount of hot air he was able to produce. His angst against the senses was ever-present in virtually every message that he submitted to that forum, insisting that no knowledge could ever be gained from what we perceived. It seemed difficult for him to hold back his resentment for the human mind, particularly the ability to generate inductive generalizations. After he had made some statement condemning inductive generalizations, one of the participants asked how he could know that his criticism could apply to *all* inductive generalizations without relying on induction. I remember specifically that he avoided answering this question. And yet he continued to participate, railing against the role of sense perception in developing knowledge. When the obvious question was asked how he could acquire knowledge of his god's will from the writing in the biblical storybook, he still insisted that one cannot acquire knowledge from "scribbles inked on a page." When I asked how he knew what he saw on the page were "scribbles inked on a page," he confessed in reply to this, "I don't know the answer to your question," and soon abandoned the discussion entirely. One little pin prick is all it takes to pop an over-inflated balloon.

By the way, now that John Robbins is dead, should Objectivists publish a book with a photograph of Robbins' grave on the cover? The title of the book could be something like, *John Robbins: A Man Who Prayed and Then Died*. Just a thought...

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Induction](#), [scripturalism](#), [tabula rasa](#)

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [8:58 PM](#)

2 Comments:

[C.L. Bolt](#) said...

Thank you for addressing this. Yes, Robbins was, as I understand it, a bit nasty at times. I find Dr. Paul's endorsing his book rather odd too though I know Robbins worked for him for some time.

As usual I will try to give it a better read when I have more time.

[March 11, 2010 9:27 PM](#)

[C.L. Bolt](#) said...

Uh not the book. Your post.

[March 11, 2010 9:28 PM](#)

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