

## My Chat with a Presuppositionalist

One day while on a short flight to Denver, a presuppositionalist apologist was seated next to me. He didn't waste time and started right in with his robotic apologetic babbling. Our conversation went as follows:

**Presuppositionalist:** "God, as absolute personality, is the ultimate category of interpretation for man in every aspect of his being." (Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 52)

**Non-believer:** Are you simply trying to state your beliefs, or do you have a proof of your god's existence?

**Presuppositionalist:** "There is the evidence of the created order itself testifying to the wisdom, power, plan, and glory of God." (Greg Bahnsen, [The Great Debate](#), opening statement)

**Non-believer:** Are you saying that you infer your god's existence from things that you perceive, or are you saying that you perceive your god directly? It sounds like you're saying you infer its existence rather than have direct awareness of it.

**Presuppositionalist:** "God is not found at the end of an argument; He is found in our hearts." (Van Til, [Why I Believe in God](#))

**Non-believer:** So, you don't have an argument for your god's existence. Instead, you look inwardly, consulting the subjective realm of your feelings and emotions?

**Presuppositionalist:** "The argument for the existence of God and for the truth of Christianity is objectively valid. We should not tone down this argument to the probability level. The argument may be poorly stated, and may never be adequately stated. But in itself the argument is absolutely sound. Christianity is the only reasonable position to hold." (Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, p. 62)

**Non-believer:** So you do have an argument? If you infer your god's existence, from what do you infer it, and what is the course of reasoning by which you arrive at the conclusion that your god exists? Or, if you perceive it directly, by what means do you perceive it? And if you do perceive your god directly, why would you need any argument for its existence?

**Presuppositionalist:** "The theistic proofs therefore reduce to one proof, the proof which argues that unless *this* God, the God of the Bible, the ultimate being, the Creator, the controller of the universe, be presupposed as the foundation of human experience, this experience operates in a void. This one proof is absolutely convincing." (*Common Grace and the Gospel*, p. 192, emphasis original)

**Non-believer:** I don't find this convincing at all, let alone "absolutely convincing." And something is still not clear to me. I asked if you infer your god's existence. But here you say you presuppose it. One could say this about any arbitrary belief. So if you claim to have an argument for your god's existence, you're tacitly admitting that you do not perceive its existence directly (for we do not argue for that which we perceive directly). So, what's your argument?

**Presuppositionalist:** "The proof of Christianity is the impossibility of the contrary. That is, the validation of the Christian worldview is that without it you cannot prove anything." (Greg Bahnsen, *Pushing the Antithesis*, p. 148)

**Non-believer:** That is not an argument, it's simply a naked assertion. Similarly, the Lahu tribesman can say "Geusha exists because of the impossibility of the contrary," and I can say "All gods (including yours) are fictitious because of the impossibility of the contrary." So you still need an argument.

**Presuppositionalist:** "The atheistic worldview cannot account for the laws of logic/absolutes, and must borrow from the Christian worldview in order to rationally argue." (Matt Slick, [The Christian Worldview, the Atheist Worldview, and Logic](#))

**Non-believer:** This too is not an argument. Even if it is true that a particular non-believer "cannot account

for the intelligibility of human experience,” etc., this would not prove that no atheist individual or atheist philosophy can do so, or that a god exists or that Christianity is true. All it would prove is that the individual in question is ignorant on these things. Since we’re born ignorant, and the issues being inquired on are very complex and rife with controversy even among those who have devoted their entire academic lives to them, a particular individual’s ignorance in some area of philosophy is wholly understandable. Most people are too busy living their lives to delve into philosophy in the manner that the presuppositional method demands of them. So, do you have anything more than mere assertions?

**Presuppositionalist:** “It is impossible and useless to seek to defend Christianity as an historical religion by a discussion of facts only.” (Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 7)

**Non-believer:** I realize that. Since the basis of your religion is not factual, you have no choice but to retreat into the imaginary. Only you refuse to acknowledge that it is imaginary. But you offer nothing other than one’s imagination as the means by which one can “know” its so-called “truths.” For instance, I can imagine Jesus rising from the dead in the confines of his stone sepulcher, but doing so does not establish what I imagine as actual historical fact. There is a difference between fact and imagination, and your religion trades on blurring this distinction.

**Presuppositionalist:** “To engage in philosophical discussion does not mean that we begin without Scripture. We do not first defend theism philosophically by an appeal to reason and experience in order, after that, to turn to Scripture for our knowledge and defense of Christianity. We get our theism as well as our Christianity from the Bible.” (Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 8)

**Non-believer:** I realize this also. Your imagination of your god is inspired by the content of a storybook. The anecdotes, speeches and episodes that we read about in the bible supply inputs which the believer substitutes for actual facts, and quickened by the imagination they take on what seems to be a larger-than-life quality. The same process happens when we allow ourselves to be absorbed in a Harry Potter novel. We imagine the characters of the story and the events that the story has them go through, and in our imagination they take on their own life. The biblical realm, like the realm of Harry Potter, is a creation of the human mind invested in the imaginative elaborations inspired by what is given in the text.

**Presuppositionalist:** “If Christian theism is not true then nothing is true.” (Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 208)

**Non-believer:** Okay, let’s try this. I have a simple challenge for you. You say your god is real, that it truly exists. Can you explain how I can reliably distinguish between what you call “God” and what you may merely be imagining?

At this point the presuppositionalist turned forward and stared directly ahead. His eyes were wide and bleak, and his mouth pursed shut. Completely mute, he looked like a gambler who was realizing that he had just lost his life’s fortune.

The man didn’t say anything for the rest of the flight, even when the flight attendant asked if he wanted anything. He just sat there in silence, staring off into space, as if pretending no one else existed.

When we finally landed and were preparing to disembark, I said to him, “Thanks for the chat. I hope you enjoy your stay in Denver.” He just nodded slightly and turned his back on me. I guess he couldn’t answer my challenge.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Dialogues](#), [Presuppositional Gimmickry](#)

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

10 Comments:

[Rory](#) said...

can i kiss you? that was gloriously awesome.

keep up the excellent work.

roryhand.com

[December 27, 2007 1:34 PM](#)

[Citrus](#) said...

Good to see an update, nice dialogue. It'd be interesting to read the other side's account of it!

regards

Jason

[December 28, 2007 8:50 AM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Non-believer: Okay, let's try this. I have a simple challenge for you. You say your god is real, that it truly exists. Can you explain how I can reliably distinguish between what you call "God" and what you may merely be imagining?

Vytautas: God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. And an imaginary god does not have these attributes.

[January 03, 2008 4:40 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas: "And an imaginary god does not have these attributes."

Something imaginary would have whatever attributes one imagines it to have. For instance, I imagine Brakko. Brakko is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable.

Anyway, you've missed the challenge, Vytautas. All you've done is assert what's in question. This is unhelpful. The challenge is for you to explain how I can reliably distinguish between what you call "God" and what you may merely be imagining. You've not explained how I can do this. Simply asserting that an imaginary being doesn't have the attributes which you apply to your god does nothing to meet this challenge. One can make any claim he wants about something he has imagined. If your god is imaginary, nothing would stop you from describing it the way you have.

Regards,  
Dawson

[January 03, 2008 6:33 PM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Bahnsen Burner: Something imaginary would have whatever attributes one imagines it to have. For instance, I imagine Brakko. Brakko is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable.

Vytautas: Then Blakko is your word for what I call God since they both have the same properties. Since there is only one God, then whatever is identical to God is God.

Bahnsen Burner: Anyway, you've missed the challenge, Vytautas. All you've done is assert what's in question. This is unhelpful. The challenge is for you to explain how I can reliably distinguish between what you call "God" and what you may merely be imagining. You've not explained how I can do this.

Vytautas: You distinguish two things by the properties that they have. If something lacks the properties that God has, then that thing is not God.

Bahnsen Burner: Simply asserting that an imaginary being doesn't have the attributes which you apply to your god does nothing to meet this challenge. One can make any claim he wants about something he has imagined. If your god is imaginary, nothing would stop you from describing it the way you have.

Vytautas: I thought of something, an imaginary god, and said this was different, since you give me the liberty to give any properties to what one imagines. So this different god is different from the true God which means I distinguished between God and what I imagine.

[January 03, 2008 8:44 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas: "Then Blakko is your word for what I call God since they both have the same properties. Since there is only one God, then whatever is identical to God is God."

If Blakko, which I know is imaginary (since I imagined it), is identical to your god, then your god is also imaginary (by your own admission).

Vytautas: "You distinguish two things by the properties that they have. If something lacks the properties that God has, then that thing is not God."

Differing properties is helpful, but only if we can confirm their existence. What you need to do is identify the means by which we would have awareness of these differing properties if they were real. For instance, if I imagine Blakko, and my friend imagines Bleepo, we can compare properties. Upon comparison we discover that Blakko and Bleepo share many properties (such as the ones you mentioned), but my Blakko had a son (because I imagined it that way), and my friend's Bleepo had no son (because he imagines Bleepo that way), we have a differing property: Blakko is a parent figure, while Bleepo is not a parent figure. Unfortunately, they're both still imaginary. How would my friend be able to confirm for himself, firsthand, that Blakko [a] is real, and [b] had a son? Since Blakko is imaginary, he can't.

Now if my wife comes home from the grocery store and tells me that the car has a flat tire, I can go out to the car and see for myself. If she was imagining, then I'd not find any flat tires. If I find a flat tire, then she wasn't imagining. Similarly with the Christian god: people tell me this being is real, but since they define it out of my means of perception, they are essentially telling me that I have no way of distinguishing it from what they may merely be imagining. They offer no alternative by which I can have awareness of it; all I can do is try to imagine what they claim they have awareness of. But since I'm only imagining their god, I've already departed from what is real and actual. They then say "Here, read this book!" and hand me a bible. Well, this is essentially no different from reading a Harry Potter novel and imagining what it describes. Jesus Christ was for the early Christians what Harry Potter is for millions of children today: a rich, imaginary construct. Luckily, most children realize that Harry Potter is simply a fantasy; but Christians refuse to accept the fact that their Jesus, even though it lives only in their imaginations, is a fantasy.

Vytautas: "So this different god is different from the true God which means I distinguished between God and what I imagine."

How do I know this? And even more, how could I confirm it? You claim it, but you give me no way of confirming it. You could be simply distinguishing between two different imaginary constructs. We know that human beings have the ability to imagine. As I point out in my blog [The Role of Imagination in Christian God-Belief](#), blurring the distinction between reality and imagination was central to Van Til's own decision to embrace his god-belief, as he tells us in one of his own essays, [Why I Believe in God](#). There he writes about an occasion when he was very young and he went to sleep in his parents' haybarn one night. He writes:

**"That night I heard the cows jingle their chains. I knew there were cows and that they did a lot of jingling with their chains, but after a while I was not quite certain that it was only the cows that made all the noises I heard. Wasn't there someone walking down the aisle back of the cows, and wasn't he approaching my bed?"**

He already had awareness of the cause of the sounds he was hearing - the cows which were jingling them. But after a while, he started imagining "someone walking down the aisle back of the cows," and he imagined that this someone was coming for him. Failing to distinguish between what is real and what is imaginary, the young

Van Til grew frightened as he invested in his imagination as if it were real, and prayed to an imaginary being to rescue him from his frightful imagination. And you know what? He felt like he had been rescued from the frightful imagination, for the person he imagined coming after him never got him. Of course not, he was imaginary. The frightful imagination was chased away by the religious imagination. And he used his feelings (as opposed to reason) to confirm everything in his mind. He was never in any danger from the person he imagined, just as he was never saved by the divine being he imagined. Had he succeeded in distinguishing between reality and imagination from the very beginning, never blurring between the cause of the chains' jingling that he knew exists (the cows) and the cause he imagined ("someone walking down the aisle back of the cows"), he would never have felt a need to pray to an imaginary being to rescue him from the frightful imagination.

Keep in mind that the invisible and the non-existent look very much alike, just as the imaginary and the supernatural behave very much alike. Once I fully understood this, the spell which Christianity held over me shattered and dissolved forever.

Regards,  
Dawson

[January 04, 2008 5:19 AM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Bahnsen Burner: If Blakko, which I know is imaginary (since I imagined it), is identical to your god, then your god is also imaginary (by your own admission).

Vytautas: But your imagination which contains Blakko is finite, temporal, and changeable. The finite cannot contain the infinite. God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. So God cannot be imaginary, since your finite imagination cannot contain him, so God exists in reality.

Bahnsen Burner: Differing properties is helpful, but only if we can confirm their existence. What you need to do is identify the means by which we would have awareness of these differing properties if they were real.

Vytautas: The property of the real is existence. I am not claiming that God is only idea I have, but that he is real.

Bahnsen Burner: Similarly with the Christian god: people tell me this being is real, but since they define it out of my means of perception, they are essentially telling me that I have no way of distinguishing it from what they may merely be imagining.

Vytautas: But God is not a material object that can be sensed.

Bahnsen Burner: They offer no alternative by which I can have awareness of it; all I can do is try to imagine what they claim they have awareness of. But since I'm only imagining their god, I've already departed from what is real and actual.

Vytautas: You are not only imagining God, but he is real because the conception that we have of God is of a necessary being. A necessary being must exist in all possible worlds including the actualized world we are apart of. God is necessary because he does not depend on any other being for his existence.

Bahnsen Burner: They then say "Here, read this book!" and hand me a bible. Well, this is essentially no different from reading a Harry Potter novel and imagining what it describes. Jesus Christ was for the early Christians what Harry Potter is for millions of children today: a rich, imaginary construct. Luckily, most children realize that Harry Potter is simply a fantasy; but Christians refuse to accept the fact that their Jesus, even though it lives only in their imaginations, is a fantasy.

Vytautas: The New Testament is not a child's fantasy book, since it is history. We are able to differentiate between what is history and fantasy because of what is claimed in each type of book. Peter and Paul claimed that Jesus has risen from the dead and the types of places they were at are in the real world. Is all of history only imagination because we were not there to see the events? A better explanation is that some real events were recorded long ago and we are reading what people actually sensed in reality.

Bahnsen Burner: How do I know this? And even more, how could I confirm it? You claim it, but you give me no way of confirming it. You could be simply distinguishing between two different imaginary constructs. Keep in mind that the invisible and the non-existent look very much alike, just as the imaginary and the supernatural behave very much alike. Once I fully understood this, the spell which Christianity held over me shattered and dissolved forever.

Vytautas: You say that God only exists in the minds of men. How do you know this? It cannot be because you never sensed God, since God is not a sensed object. If you say that all that is real must be capable of being sensed, then do you know this claim about all of reality? Have you sensed all of reality? You will say no, but that everything that you have experienced is capable of being sensed. But God can be known to be real because by definition he is a necessary being, so God must exist.

[January 04, 2008 3:49 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

**I wrote: If Blakko, which I know is imaginary (since I imagined it), is identical to your god, then your god is also imaginary (by your own admission).**

Vytautas responds: "But your imagination which contains Blakko is finite, temporal, and changeable. The finite cannot contain the infinite. God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. So God cannot be imaginary, since your finite imagination cannot contain him, so God exists in reality."

This is irrelevant. Anyone can make this kind of claim about something that is imaginary. Anyone imagining Blakko can say it cannot be imaginary, since no one's finite imagination can contain it. Would it follow from such claims that Blakko exists in reality? Who would believe this?

**I wrote: Differing properties is helpful, but only if we can confirm their existence. What you need to do is identify the means by which we would have awareness of these differing properties if they were real.**

Vytautas responds: "The property of the real is existence. I am not claiming that God is only idea I have, but that he is real."

I understand this. And I've asked how I can reliably distinguish between what you call "God" and what you may merely be imagining. You've not given me anything which speaks to this point.

**I wrote: Similarly with the Christian god: people tell me this being is real, but since they define it out of my means of perception, they are essentially telling me that I have no way of distinguishing it from what they may merely be imagining.**

Vytautas responds: "But God is not a material object that can be sensed."

Same with anything that is imaginary. You're simply conceding that your god has a lot in common with imaginary things. This is on top of the fact that you've not explained how I can reliably distinguish what you call "God" from what you may simply be imagining. That doesn't bode well for your defense.

**I wrote: They offer no alternative by which I can have awareness of it; all I can do is try to imagine what they claim they have awareness of. But since I'm only imagining their god, I've already departed from what is real and actual.**

Vytautas responds: "You are not only imagining God, but he is real because the conception that we have of God is of a necessary being. A necessary being must exist in all possible worlds including the actualized world we are apart of. God is necessary because he does not depend on any other being for his existence."

This objection is essentially no different from the one you provided above. And it fails for the same reason: anyone can make this kind of claim about something that is imaginary. I can call Blakko "a necessary being." Does that make Blakko real? According to the reasoning you offer here, it does. For you claim that "a necessary being must exist in all possible worlds including the actualized world we are apart of." By this reasoning, Blakko "must exist in all possible worlds including the actualized world we are apart of," for Blakko is "a necessary being." And yet, Blakko is something that I have imagined. See? I can make the kind of claim you make about your god about

anything I imagine.

I wrote: They then say “Here, read this book!” and hand me a bible. Well, this is essentially no different from reading a Harry Potter novel and imagining what it describes. Jesus Christ was for the early Christians what Harry Potter is for millions of children today: a rich, imaginary construct. Luckily, most children realize that Harry Potter is simply a fantasy; but Christians refuse to accept the fact that their Jesus, even though it lives only in their imaginations, is a fantasy.

Vytautas responds: “The New Testament is not a child’s fantasy book, since it is history.”

It’s a storybook. The stories it contains are no more historical than the stories we read in a Harry Potter novel.

Vytautas: “We are able to differentiate between what is history and fantasy because of what is claimed in each type of book.”

Simply “because of what is claimed”? That’s your test for historicity? Anything better than this? What if someone said that a Harry Potter novel is history “because of what is claimed” in it?

Vytautas: “Peter and Paul claimed that Jesus has risen from the dead and the types of places they were at are in the real world.”

So, if the places I write about are in the real world, then anything I claim in writing took place in those places must have really happened, simply because those places are real? My garage is real - it is a real place. I now write a story about my encounter with a magic leprechaun in my garage. In my story about my encounter with the magic leprechaun I describe what he was wearing, how he climbed on top of my washing machine and started talking to me about a pot of gold he hid in my neighborhood. Is my story about the leprechaun true because it takes place in a place that is in the real world? Are you going to start looking for this hidden pot of gold now?

Vytautas: “Is all of history only imagination because we were not there to see the events?”

History is actual. Storybooks containing legends and myths are what’s fantasy.

Vytautas: “A better explanation is that some real events were recorded long ago and we are reading what people actually sensed in reality.”

I’m not sure why you think this is “a better explanation.” In fact, in reviewing all the defenses that believers have put forward in favor of the thesis that the New Testament records actual history, I’ve not found any evidence that legitimately secures that thesis. At the very most, the stories we read record what some people (e.g., their authors) *believed*, not “sensed.” Even the New Testament makes it clear that no one “sensed” Jesus rising from the dead, for according to the stories it took place in a sealed tomb. Are you saying that the author of the gospel according to Matthew “sensed” that Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus? What makes you suppose this? Who “sensed” the saints who according to the gospel according to Matthew (see 27:52-53) rose out of their graves and went walking through the city showing themselves to many? Only Matthew mentions this; no one else in all of history corroborates this story. Was Matthew the only one who “sensed” this? Perhaps he was on drugs, or hallucinating. We know that people take drugs and hallucinate. But you would prefer that we dismiss this possibility and accept, for apparently no good reason whatsoever, that this story is historical. Ain’t happenin’, Vytautas.

I wrote: How do I know this? And even more, how could I confirm it? You claim it, but you give me no way of confirming it. You could be simply distinguishing between two different imaginary constructs. Keep in mind that the invisible and the non-existent look very much alike, just as the imaginary and the supernatural behave very much alike. Once I fully understood this, the spell which Christianity held over me shattered and dissolved forever.

Vytautas responds: “You say that God only exists in the minds of men.”

I simply point out that those who claim that there is a god fail to provide any way by which I can reliably distinguish between what they call “God” and what they may merely be imagining. Your response to my challenge is a prime example of this. I also point out that the traditional notion of “God” is internally incoherent, just as the notion of a square circle is. See my essay [Gods and Square Circles](#) for details.

Vytautas: “How do you know this?”

By means of reason. And I have presented my reasoning for my theses on my blog and on my webpage.

Vytautas: “It cannot be because you never sensed God, since God is not a sensed object.”

I’ve never argued “I do not sense God, therefore God does not exist.” Nor are my criticisms of theism reducible to this. However, I would point out that, by describing their god as something non-sensible, and making the kinds of claims to knowledge that they do, Christians show how *nonsensical* their beliefs are. If you have no means of achieving awareness of your god, then by what means could you know that it exists? If you say that you infer its existence from things that you do perceive, then what is the rationale behind your inference? This is where arguments for theism come into play. I’ve not found one which is sound. If you say that you do possess a faculty by which you can achieve direct awareness of what you call “God,” what is that faculty, how does it work, and how do you distinguish that faculty from your imagination?

Vytautas: “If you say that all that is real must be capable of being sensed, then do you know this claim about all of reality?”

I have not made this claim, so I do not need to defend it. My sensing something is not a prerequisite for it to be real. But if I am going to accept as knowledge the claim that something exists, that claim needs to have some kind of evidence to support it, it must be coherent, and it must be capable of being integrated with the knowledge that I have validated without contradiction. Christianity’s god-belief claims fail on all three points. Christians can’t even show me how I can reliably distinguish their god from what they may merely be imagining! I’m simply being honest to these facts. Would you prefer that I be dishonest and affirm the existence of a god anyway? Well, that would be dishonest. And I made the choice earlier in my life to be honest, and I’m sticking to that choice.

Vytautas: “Have you sensed all of reality?”

No. But do I need to have “sensed all of reality” to know that the unreal is unreal, that the imaginary is imaginary? I don’t think so. Are you trying to find gaps in my knowledge? There are many; I was born ignorant, and I learn at my own, slow pace. Are you suggesting that I’ll discover your god in the gaps of my knowledge? That would constitute a blatant appeal to ignorance. To claim knowledge on the basis of ignorance would be dishonest. Remember my commitment? Ain’t happenin’.

Vytautas: “You will say no, but that everything that you have experienced is capable of being sensed.”

Actually, I didn’t say that. Put it this way. Suppose we had 150 different sense modalities instead of 5 (vision, hearing, taste, touch, smell). With 150 different sense modalities, we’d most likely perceive a lot more about our world than we do with the 5 we have now. But what would prevent someone from coming along and positing the existence of a being which we’d need a 151st sense modality to perceive? Since we don’t have that missing 151st sense modality, we can’t perceive it. So on what basis would we accept the claim that it exists? Simply because someone claims it is there? I’m not that gullible. Do you think I should be?

Vytautas: “But God can be known to be real because by definition he is a necessary being, so God must exist.”

So you’re trying to define your god into existence now. You grant much power to your consciousness, Vytautas. I’m too honest to claim possession of such powers. Besides, your statement here is incoherent. Definition is a property of concepts, not of independently existing entities. Your god, if it were real, would not be a concept, but an independently existing being. Concepts are formed by human minds by integrating inputs perceived by their senses. By saying that your god can be defined, you’re implicitly conceding that it is a construct of your mind, like concepts are. That is understandable if your god is imaginary. But if your god is real, you’ve just sold him out.

Regards,  
Dawson

[January 04, 2008 8:19 PM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Bahnsen Burner: This is irrelevant. Anyone can make this kind of claim about something that is imaginary. Anyone imagining Blakko can say it cannot be imaginary, since no one's finite imagination can contain it. Would it follow from such claims that Blakko exists in reality? Who would believe this?

Vytautas: If God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, then God is necessary because a being that has those properties does not depend on anything else for his existence, so that God is not contingent. A necessary being must exist in reality because a necessary being exists in every possible world including ours. You should believe this, since it is true that the God of the Bible is there.

Bahnsen Burner: And I've asked how I can reliably distinguish between what you call "God" and what you may merely be imagining. You've not given me anything which speaks to this point.

Vytautas: But you don't know what I imagine unless I tell you what it is. I think you are asking how we know that God exists. By knowing what God means we recognize that such a being must exist, since you cannot only imagine a necessary being because a necessary being must exist. God is necessary because he does not depend on any other thing for his existence.

Bahnsen Burner: Same with anything that is imaginary. You're simply conceding that your god has a lot in common with imaginary things. This is on top of the fact that you've not explained how I can reliably distinguish what you call "God" from what you may simply be imagining. That doesn't bode well for your defense.

Vytautas: A material god does not bode well for my defense because a material god would depend on other things for his existence, since matter over time breaks down. God is spirit and does not depend on the material world for his existence. Since you are a materialist, you would have to say that imaginary things are sense objects, since they are the chemical and electrical thoughts in your physical brain, unless you believe you have an immaterial mind.

Bahnsen Burner: This objection is essentially no different from the one you provided above. And it fails for the same reason: anyone can make this kind of claim about something that is imaginary. I can call Blakko "a necessary being." Does that make Blakko real? According to the reasoning you offer here, it does. For you claim that "a necessary being must exist in all possible worlds including the actualized world we are apart of." By this reasoning, Blakko "must exist in all possible worlds including the actualized world we are apart of," for Blakko is "a necessary being." And yet, Blakko is something that I have imagined. See? I can make the kind of claim you make about your god about anything I imagine.

Vytautas: It seems you are giving an argument by contradiction, but you call God by the name Blakko. Since there is only one God any other thing that is equal to God is God. You are just using a different name for God, but both are essentially the same. Now we move to the historicity of the New Testament gospels.

Bahnsen Burner: It's a storybook. The stories it contains are no more historical than the stories we read in a Harry Potter novel.

Vytautas: J. K. Rowling does not claim that Harry Potter is real, but the authors of the gospels claim Jesus is real.

Bahnsen Burner: Simply "because of what is claimed"? That's your test for historicity? Anything better than this? What if someone said that a Harry Potter novel is history "because of what is claimed" in it?

Vytautas: Show where J. K. Rowling claims that Harry Potter is a real character if you really believe that. If Harry Potter is either real or fantasy, then that does not say anything if the New Testament is historical. Also the claim a person makes about an event is not the only criterion for what is historical, but it is one of the criteria for historical events which eliminates Harry Potter.

Bahnsen Burner: So, if the places I write about are in the real world, then anything I claim in writing took place in those places must have really happened, simply because those places are real? My garage is real - it is a real place. I now write a story about my encounter with a magic leprechaun in my garage. In my story about my encounter with the magic leprechaun I describe what he was wearing, how he climbed on top of my washing machine and started talking to me about a pot of gold he hid in my neighborhood. Is my story about the leprechaun true

because it takes place in a place that is in the real world? Are you going to start looking for this hidden pot of gold now?

Vytautas: When I give a single criterion for history, then that does not mean it is the only criterion for history, but all the criteria work together to give a method for history. Another criterion is of many witnesses testifying to an historical event. There are four gospels testifying to the historical events of Jesus, but you only give a short paragraph written only by one person about an event. The more people testifying to the event, then the event has more reason to be believed than just one person.

Bahnsen Burner: I'm not sure why you think this is "a better explanation." In fact, in reviewing all the defenses that believers have put forward in favor of the thesis that the New Testament records actual history, I've not found any evidence that legitimately secures that thesis.

Vytautas: There are prophecies of the Old Testament that confirms the New Testament. Psalm 22 tells that a company of evildoers encircles Jesus; they have pierced his hands and feet-- Jesus can count all his bones-- they stare and gloat over him; they divide his garments among them, and for his clothing they cast lots. Matthew 27 says when the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. And John 19 says when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. So the Old Testament gives evidence for the New Testament.

Bahnsen Burner: At the very most, the stories we read record what some people (e.g., their authors) believed, not "sensed." Even the New Testament makes it clear that no one "sensed" Jesus rising from the dead, for according to the stories it took place in a sealed tomb.

Vytautas: But there are accounts of post-crucifixion accounts of the resurrected Jesus who is alive. They could not be all false, because there could not be mass-hallucinations, since hallucinations are an individual experience and not a group experience. A better explanation is Jesus actually rose from the dead, and other people saw him and wrote about him.

Bahnsen Burner: Are you saying that the author of the gospel according to Matthew "sensed" that Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus? What makes you suppose this?

Vytautas: Matthew did not see directly Mary give birth to Jesus, but he used other testimony to account for this event. He sensed the people who witnessed the event that gave the testimony.

Bahnsen Burner: Who "sensed" the saints who according to the gospel according to Matthew (see 27:52-53) rose out of their graves and went walking through the city showing themselves to many? Only Matthew mentions this; no one else in all of history corroborates this story. Was Matthew the only one who "sensed" this? Perhaps he was on drugs, or hallucinating. We know that people take drugs and hallucinate. But you would prefer that we dismiss this possibility and accept, for apparently no good reason whatsoever, that this story is historical. Ain't happenin', Vytautas.

Vytautas: We know people witness events and record them. But you would prefer that we dismiss this and accept, for apparently no good reason whatsoever, that Matthew took drugs. You have no historical evidence that Matthew took drugs. Matthew might be the only one that recorded the event, but he wrote that the saints went into the holy city and appeared to many. If you can dismiss historical events because there is only one person that wrote about the event, then I can dismiss your stories that you tell me.

Bahnsen Burner: I simply point out that those who claim that there is a god fail to provide any way by which I can reliably distinguish between what they call "God" and what they may merely be imagining. Your response to my challenge is a prime example of this. I also point out that the traditional notion of "God" is internally incoherent, just as the notion of a square circle is. See my essay Gods and Square Circles for details.

Vytautas: You seem to say that one cannot change the world by merely thinking something will change in the world, so that God cannot create the world because a mind cannot manipulate matter. But God is not a creature like you me, but he is the Creator that is able to create matter out of nothing.

Bahnsen Burner: I've never argued "I do not sense God, therefore God does not exist." Nor are my criticisms of theism reducible to this. However, I would point out that, by describing their god as something non-sensible,

and making the kinds of claims to knowledge that they do, Christians show how nonsensical their beliefs are. If you have no means of achieving awareness of your god, then by what means could you know that it exists?

Vytautas: I know God exists by means of the creation he has made and the light of nature in man, since he is created in the image of God. You say that you do not argue that God cannot be sensed, therefore God does not exist. But then you say that we are nonsensical to describe God as non-sensible. You cannot have it both ways, since you are giving the same argument.

Bahnsen Burner: If you say that you infer its existence from things that you do perceive, then what is the rationale behind your inference? This is where arguments for theism come into play. I've not found one which is sound. If you say that you do possess a faculty by which you can achieve direct awareness of what you call "God," what is that faculty, how does it work, and how do you distinguish that faculty from your imagination?

Vytautas: It is necessary for a creation to have a Creator. The Creator gives meaning and purpose for creation which was created by God. If not, then you can have the creation without a Creator. But then you have no explanation for creation, and then say that existence exists. But where does existence come from? If it was always here, then we could not come to this point of time because before this time an infinite amount of time had to pass before we got here. But then we would never get to this point in time because an infinite amount of time had to happen before we got here. But on the Christian position, God created time at the moment of creation and a finite amount of time can happen until this point in time.

Vytautas: "If you say that all that is real must be capable of being sensed, then do you know this claim about all of reality?"

Bahnsen Burner: I have not made this claim, so I do not need to defend it. My sensing something is not a prerequisite for it to be real. But if I am going to accept as knowledge the claim that something exists, that claim needs to have some kind of evidence to support it, it must be coherent, and it must be capable of being integrated with the knowledge that I have validated without contradiction. Christianity's god-belief claims fail on all three points. Christians can't even show me how I can reliably distinguish their god from what they may merely be imagining! I'm simply being honest to these facts. Would you prefer that I be dishonest and affirm the existence of a god anyway? Well, that would be dishonest. And I made the choice earlier in my life to be honest, and I'm sticking to that choice.

Vytautas: I think you do not want to believe in God because if you did then, you have to worship him by the commands that he gives in Scripture. You do not want to have anything to do with God and detest him because you want to live in darkness and not come to the light. You are suppressing the truth in unrighteousness by choosing not to bow yourself to Jesus Christ. You choose to dismiss the New Testament not for intellectual reasons but for moral reasons. It is idolatrous and sinful to deny God exists, so I counsel you to be reconciled to God by Jesus Christ who gave witness to his work that he did for those that believe. It would be most unwise to remain under the wrath of God, by not believing on the Son of God.

Bahnsen Burner: No. But do I need to have "sensed all of reality" to know that the unreal is unreal, that the imaginary is imaginary? I don't think so. Are you trying to find gaps in my knowledge? There are many; I was born ignorant, and I learn at my own, slow pace. Are you suggesting that I'll discover your god in the gaps of my knowledge? That would constitute a blatant appeal to ignorance. To claim knowledge on the basis of ignorance would be dishonest. Remember my commitment? Ain't happenin'.

Vytautas: I gave reasons for God's existence and defended the historicity of the New Testament. You gave Harry Potter, a story of a leprechaun, and Blakko in response, and I have answered these things above. But you do know God exists, since you try to deny him and say that you can imagine Blakko who has all the essential properties of God and say that he is only apart of your imagination. But if you allow for the possibility that God exist, then he exists necessarily, since he does not depend on anything for his existence.

Vytautas: "You will say no, but that everything that you have experienced is capable of being sensed."

Bahnsen Burner: Actually, I didn't say that. Put it this way. Suppose we had 150 different sense modalities instead of 5 (vision, hearing, taste, touch, smell). With 150 different sense modalities, we'd most likely perceive a lot more about our world than we do with the 5 we have now. But what would prevent someone from coming along and positing the existence of a being which we'd need a 151st sense modality to perceive? Since we don't have that missing 151st sense modality, we can't perceive it. So on what basis would we accept the claim that it

exists? Simply because someone claims it is there? I'm not that gullible. Do you think I should be?

Vytautas: It does not matter how many senses you have because God cannot be sensed directly. We can look to creation, the Bible, and the light of nature in man to understand God. We should not deny the revelation that God has given to his creatures, since that would be immoral and against the law of God.

Vytautas: "But God can be known to be real because by definition he is a necessary being, so God must exist."

Bahnsen Burner: So you're trying to define your god into existence now. You grant much power to your consciousness, Vytautas. I'm too honest to claim possession of such powers. Besides, your statement here is incoherent. Definition is a property of concepts, not of independently existing entities. Your god, if it were real, would not be a concept, but an independently existing being. Concepts are formed by human minds by integrating inputs perceived by their senses. By saying that your god can be defined, you're implicitly conceding that it is a construct of your mind, like concepts are. That is understandable if your god is imaginary. But if your god is real, you've just sold him out.

Vytautas: I am not claiming that once I define God, then God exists and comes into a point in time, since God is timeless. My consciousness is just recognizing what has been revealed by God and to think analogically as God would want me to think, since we are made in his image. The concepts that we have are analogies to what actually exists. If you say that a chair can be defined, you are implicitly conceding that it is a construct of your mind, like concepts are. But it does not follow that the chair is only imaginary and not real.

[January 05, 2008 1:57 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas, I have answered you [here](#).

Regards,  
Dawson

[January 06, 2008 4:35 PM](#)