

Paulianna Apologetics

In spite of the fact that such an effort is self-refuting, [Paul again sought](#) to attack the axioms.

Let's review the Objectivist axioms. They are:

- (1) Existence exists
- (2) An entity is itself (A is A)
- (3) Consciousness is consciousness of an object

In response to these axioms, Paul had written:

It's dubious how these are used as an argument against theism, though. For example, how does the fact that "things exist" even remotely count as an argument against theism?

In response to this, I had written:

What about (1), (2) and (3) did Paul not understand? The axiom 'existence exists' is a starting point. If we begin with the fact that existence exists, then there's no need to posit something that created existence.

Paul's reply to this began as follows:

First, as Bethrick says, "things exist" tells us nothing of what kind of thing exists. So, according to Bethrick, (1) cannot mean that what exists is "uncreated."

Paul continues to act as if Objectivism affirmed the axioms in a contextual vacuum, as if cognition came to an abrupt halt with the utterance of "existence exists." I have already pointed out the glaring error in Paul's understanding [here](#). He repeatedly recycled this context-dropping argument throughout [his tirade](#), so I don't mind repeatedly pointing out the error it makes. By trying to make room for his theism, Paul finds it necessary to misrepresent what Objectivism teaches, which should not surprise us. The recognition that things exist is merely an explicit starting point for cognition, but Paul's point here can only be advanced on the supposition that this fundamental recognition is where cognition *stops*. Cognition does not *stop* with the recognition that existence exists, it *begins* with it. The mind needs a starting point, and it starts with the three-fold recognition that things exist, that one has awareness of things that exist, and that the things it is aware of are what they are independent of the process by which it is aware of them. That's why I asked Paul to explain what he does not understand about the axioms. These recognitions are implicit in any act of perceiving or thinking; Objectivism simply makes them explicit and recognizes their fundamentality to all cognitive endeavors. Any attempt to argue against them would have to assume their truth from the beginning, and thus be self-defeating.

Now consider the concept 'creation'. This concept is not axiomatic; it assumes prior concepts, so it could never qualify as an axiomatic concept. So even to consider whether existence is created or not, we need additional knowledge beyond that supplied by the axiom of existence. It should be obvious that existence as such was not created, because creation requires a type of causation, and causality presupposes existence. Objectivism recognizes this because it recognizes that knowledge has a hierarchical structure, and that we are not born with knowledge already implanted in our minds. The axioms provide this structure with its bedrock foundations, identifying the fundamental, general context in which that knowledge is available. Existence is the metaphysical precondition for any creative process.

But consider: if existence exists independent of the process by which we are aware of this fact, as Objectivism holds, then obviously existence was not created by that process. When I find a pebble on a trail, pick it up and look at it, preconditional to my ability to find it, pick it up and examine it is the fact that it exists. It would have to exist before I could pick it up and look at it. Also, my awareness of the pebble does not change the pebble in any way; it still is what it was before I looked at it. Nor did my awareness put the pebble there. The pebble, as an object of my cognition, had to come first, before my cognition could have awareness of it as an object. This is the fact that the axioms are recognizing: that the objects of cognition exist and are what they are independent of the processes of cognition, i.e., independent of consciousness.

Is Paul really willing to defend the view that existence was created by the process by which one is aware of

existence? What would be the starting point to such a defense? Would his starting point be the position that existence does *not* exist? He would have to exist in order to advance such a position, so just by endorsing it he would be presenting himself as a counter-example contradicting his starting assumption. If he has another starting assumption, what would it be? To what would it refer? Again, what is Paul really trying to argue here? What is Paul's position, and why is it so difficult for him to identify it?

Paul tried to find another backdoor around the axioms. He wrote:

God has always existed, so "something exists" could not possibly be used to prove that God doesn't exist. And, given His existence, existence has always existed.

Here Paul provides a "naked assertion" of his own, one which bypasses the conceptual integration it needs to be meaningful. He says that "God has always existed," and yet the existence of his god is precisely what he needs to prove if he's going to be an effective apologist. So citing this faith-based belief-assumption is not helpful to his case, which he seems either reluctant or unable to present. Meanwhile, if what Paul calls "God" is merely a figment of his imagination, then claiming that it exists is a purely arbitrary claim, and thus we have no onus to prove that it does not exist. Indeed, no one needs to accept the burden to prove that the non-existent does not exist.

Moreover, no one is claiming that the axiom of existence disproves theism *singlehandedly* - that is, without the benefit of integrating it with the axioms of identity and consciousness, for instance. The statement "something exists" neither proves nor disproves the existence of Paul's god; it's an affirmation summarizing a basic recognition, not an argument. My point above was that if we *begin* with the fact that existence exists, then we slash off the dubious notion that we need an *explanation* for the fact that existence exists. Paul's response to this point suggests that he no intelligent response to it. Rather, he's slinking about to find ways of making his god-belief rest easy with such facts. But in the process, he shows that he's not willing to recognize fully the distinction and relationship between the object(s) and means of cognition, a relationship which is fundamental to any knowledge claim. Nor does he offer a clear methodology by which we can distinguish between his god and what he may merely be imagining.

Our ability to come into the knowledge of the axioms begins with our most fundamental form of awareness, which is sense perception, the level of consciousness which man shares with the higher animals. Sense perception is an autonomic biological process. So long as we are alive, we cannot turn off all of our senses. (Try telling a burn victim to turn off his pain receptors while he lays in agony in his hospital bed.) So this is the given state of awareness with which we naturally begin, and it gives us direct awareness of objects in our immediate environment. Thus the first objects of which we are aware are going to be physical objects. Our sensory receptors are physical, and they operate on a physical basis. Moreover, they are stimulated by physical objects in their vicinity. When my hand comes into contact with a pebble, I acquire tactile awareness of it. When smoke comes into contact with my olfactory nerves, I smell it. When my tongue comes in contact with the flesh of a lemon, I taste it. When sound waves reach my eardrums, I hear the sound. When light reflected from the lemon reaches my eyes, I see the lemon. Perceptual awareness is the base.

Now consider what Paul is trying to say. He is trying to say that his god's existence, which he alleges to be eternal, gives truth to the recognition that existence exists. Now he seems to be affirming that Objectivism's starting point is in fact true (elsewhere he said that my starting point is "not true"). The problem is that our recognition that existence exists is not based on awareness of the existence of a supernatural being that is beyond the reach of our senses. Since our most basic awareness is sensory in nature, and since our axiomatic concepts are based on direct perceptual input, the axioms could not in any sense be based on the existence of the Christian god. That is, to be objective, our cognitive starting point could not be based on the claim "God exists." Quite the opposite, the claim that "God exists" could only be made after the concept 'exists' has been formed. So again, we find [Christianity piggybacking on Objectivist fundamentals](#).

Paul asked:

What kind of things "didn't need to be created?" Before this silly little post of his, it didn't exist. Therefore, some existents are created!

It is true that man is capable of creating things. But we must be careful here if we are going to have any hope of maintaining philosophical credibility. When man creates things, he does not create them "ex nihilo." For instance, if I am going to create a post, I do not *wish* it into place. Blogger.com does not simply obey my conscious intentions, and I certainly do not possess powers of psychography. On the contrary, I need to *act*, and I need to use *materials* which *already exist* in order to create it, and even then, I can only create by obeying the nature of the materials I

use in my creativity. But in his desperation to protect his god-belief, Paul runs roughshod over such details, even though they are factual and pertinent.

As Porter observes:

Awareness has effects, most human achievements among them, *but only through the actions in reality of the organism possessing it*. Cognition alone has no effect on its objects; it doesn't change existence in any way. (*Ayn Rand's Theory of Knowledge*, p. 18, emphasis added)

Thus, preconditional to any action one can take in order to produce something that did not already exist (such as a bowl of rice, a post on the internet, a skyscraper, etc.) is the prior existence of both the materials which are used in producing the new artifact and the organism possessing the conscious capacity it would need in order to take the actions that result in the production of the new artifact. So again, existence comes first. Thus the question Paul should be asking is not "What kind of things 'didn't need to be created?'" but rather: *What kinds of things do need to be created, how are they to be created, and from what are they to be created?*

Paul then asked:

Who posits the "creation of existence?" Not any Christian I know of. This would imply that God created Himself. So, some thing has always existed, some things exist contingently. Thus your little axiom isn't a threat to theism.

Just as [Anderson suggests](#) that a non-believer's impression that presuppositionalists typically do not offer actual arguments for their position "tells us more about [that person's] diet of reading than about the efforts of presuppositionalists to defend their arguments," Paul's confession that he knows of no Christian "who posits the 'creation of existence'" tells us that he needs to "get out more" and mingle with other believers.

In actuality, the problem that Paul has stumbled upon here is nothing less than a result of Christianity's failure to a) provide an explicit understanding of the relationship between awareness and its objects, and b) provide such understanding in terms of fundamentals. The result is that, when pressed on fundamental matters, one Christian's answers will often conflict with another Christian's answers. They have their bible to blame for this letdown, for it provides no consistent intelligence on these matters. Indeed, many Christians have affirmed that their god created existence. One creationist, Jerry L. Steen, wrote the following statement in an essay titled "God Our Creator" (which to my knowledge is no longer posted on the internet):

The creationist sees God as the source of all existence.

Seth Brotherton, in his essay [God's Existence and Nature](#), writes:

This everyone calls 'God' because it is the source of all existence.

The [Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed](#) begins with this statement of faith:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

The phrase "all things visible and invisible" does not leave room for anything else. Indeed, if this creed is about the Christian god, and this god is said to be "invisible" (cf. I Tim. 1:17), then this statement is essentially saying that this god created itself! Christians will no doubt try to rescue the creed by insisting that their god is not a "thing." That would be tantamount to saying that their god is a non-thing. And at that point, I can say: I rest my case. Now really, what could be more amusing than Christian apologetics?

Many Christian apologists who seek to take down Objectivism will respond to Objectivism's axiom of existence by asking "Where did existence come from?" The obvious implication behind such lines of interrogation is that their god was needed to create existence. Others have tried to hide behind Heidegger's famous question: "Why is there something rather than nothing?" Again, the implication is that we need to posit an invisible magic being in order to "account for" the fact that things do exist. Sound familiar? It should.

Peikoff rightly points out that even the religious thinker

does not contest the need of an irreducible starting point, as long as it is a form of consciousness; what he finds unsatisfactory is the idea of existence as the starting point. Driven by the primacy of consciousness, a person of this mentality refuses to begin with the world, which we *know* to exist; he insists on jumping beyond the world

to the unknowable, even though such a procedure explains nothing. (OPAR, p. 21)

We need a conceptually irreducible starting point, but only Objectivism identifies it explicitly with the axiom of existence. Christians are continually stupefied by this axiom as they seek alternately first to discredit it, and then to cohere their god-belief with it. Right on schedule, Paul has been dancing between both angles of restlessness.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Axioms](#), [Metaphysics](#), [Objectivism](#), [Paul Manata](#), [Primacy of Existence](#)

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