

Sunday, February 03, 2008

Presuppositionalism and the Evasion of the Burden of Proof, Part 2

I continue now with my review of Peter's blog series on the burden of proof, this time looking at his second installment, [Christian vs. atheism and the burden of proof, part 2](#). Now recall how Peter ended his [initial post](#) in his series on the burden of proof with the following promise:

In my next post (or perhaps two or three posts) I'm going to try and clarify the Christian position on the matter of the burden of proof, offer a way to resolve the dispute with the atheist, and finally to actually resolve the matter by demonstrating that the unbeliever's position, if he is consistent with himself, is irrational, and that to the extent the unbeliever does attempt to shift the burden of proof to the Christian that he actually has to rely upon the truth of Christian worldview, thus proving Christianity from the impossibility of the contrary.

In my review of Peter's second post, I will be paying particular attention for wherever he comes through on his above declaration. Will he actually "offer a way to resolve the dispute with the atheist"? Will he in fact "resolve the matter by demonstrating that the unbeliever's position... is irrational"? When I first encountered these declarations in [my review](#) of Peter's [first installment in this series](#), I pointed out that it is troublesomely unclear what a Christian might mean by 'rational'. I will point out that it is also troublesomely unclear what a Christian, given his confession of faith in the bible's teachings, could possibly have against anything that is in fact *irrational*. These terms are foreign to the bible and seem to have been imported into Christian defense systems without good understanding of what they mean. So in my following review I will be on the lookout for the minimum requirement that Peter explain what he means by these terms and what he could possibly have against something that is "irrational." Without an understanding of what Christians might mean by rationality, and what they think distinguishes the rational from the irrational, their use of these terms - especially in the context of affirming stories of invisible magic beings, creation ex nihilo, worldwide floods, prophets conferring with angels of the Lord, virgin births, men walking on unfrozen water, miracle cures, exorcisms, dying and rising saviors, zombies emerging from their graves and walking through populated cities, etc. - is, to put it mildly, toothless.

With that, let's begin.

Peter writes:

In the last post the observation was made that the debate over God's existence is not simply about the one mere claim of God's existence, but rather that the atheist and the Christian reason about that claim in accordance with their worldview, a network of presuppositions about epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, etc. In other words, the debate over God's existence is actually a clash of entire worldviews, not merely over one or a few conflicting claims.

Yes, Peter did mention these points: he wants to drag all kinds of other issues into the debate such that the debate is no longer about the existence of his god, which was the original contention under dispute. In his determination to shift the burden of proof, the apologist wants to put the non-believer on the dock, as it were, for everything he does affirm, since among his inventory of affirmations the stock item that the Christian god exists is not to be found. So the desire is to call everything the non-believer does affirm into question, and now have the non-believer defend it. In other words, on this view the non-believer's acceptance of anything as truth assures him a burden to prove it, even if it is not the initial focus of debate. The non-believer might hold that apples grow on trees, and according to the apologist, this constitutes a positive claim and is thus subject to debate. After all, these are positive claims, and doesn't the non-believer himself hold that the asserter of positive claims has the onus of proof? No, I'm not making this up, this is precisely how the apologist is trying to play it, and the hope is that the non-believer doesn't notice that the apologist never meets his burden of proving the claim that his god is real.

What we have here is a most juvenile formula for digression, a tactic for diverting attention from the believer's claim that his god exists to anything but that claim, for the sake of sheltering it from scrutiny. In other words, it is an overt attempt to evade the burden of proof and shift it onto the shoulders of one's opponents.

Peter then found it necessary to repeat a portion of [the first installment](#) of his series on the burden of proof, so I

will repeat what I had stated in response to these statements in the [first installment](#) of my response to Peter.

Quote:

Peter wrote:

Both the atheist and the Christian theist have assumptions about what is acceptable evidence, how much evidence is needed, what is compelling, what can be known by the evidence, and so on.

An adherent to the rational worldview (i.e., one premised on the primacy of existence, whose epistemology is characterized by an uncompromising commitment to reason as man's only means of knowledge and his only guide to action, etc.) has what he needs to determine and validate the criteriological qualifications of legitimate evidence, namely reason. He does not need to rest his verdicts on faith in invisible magic beings and their supposed "revelations." He recognizes that those who rest their verdicts on faith concede that reason is on the side of their adversaries.

The Christian claims that an non-physical, supernatural, infinite and incorruptible being created the universe. But what evidence does he offer on behalf of this claim? If he points to evidence that is physical, natural, finite and corruptible, then he's asking that we accept as evidence that which contradicts the nature of what he has claimed. (This approach is not uncommon in apologetics - see my blog [Is Human Experience Evidence of the Christian God?](#)) The fact that the Christian worldview assumes a metaphysical basis which in fact contradicts reality (because it grants metaphysical primacy to the subject in the subject-object relationship, a philosophical malady known as subjectivism), is sufficient indication that we should expect further contradictions like this from the believer when he tries to present his case for his god-belief.

Peter wrote:

Thus, when the dispute arises over who has the burden of proof, both the Christian and the unbeliever can be found reasoning about that issue in light of their presuppositions, in accordance with their worldview.

The atheist's position on this matter should not be so difficult for the theist to understand. The theist asserts the existence of an entity which, by the characteristics he attributes to it, the non-believer could not perceive. So its existence is simply not perceptually self-evident. That is why the theist needs to resort to proof in order to validate his claims. There is nothing illicit or fallacious about this. Indeed, the Christian himself would likely take the same approach if a Lahu tribesman comes up to him and says that Geusha is the supreme being of all reality. The Christian could easily say, "Well, where's your proof?" Does the Christian sit down and start developing proofs that Geusha does not exist? Perhaps, but that would be a waste of time (but Christians are known for wasting their time anyway - look how they squander their Sundays).

Moreover, Peter's comments raise the question: who is going to be able to reason consistently with his worldview's most basic "presuppositions"? The Christian will of course say that he does (or that only he does), but does he really? Where does his worldview deal with the issue of metaphysical primacy? Or, does it? This is the most fundamental relationship in all philosophy, and it is an inescapable issue, since philosophy is essentially the software by which we operate our consciousness, and consciousness always involves an object. So the nature of the relationship between a subject and its objects will always be a concern throughout one's philosophy, even if he is ignorant of it, even if he attempts to evade it. And yet, far from presenting any intelligent treatment of this issue, no biblical author even suggests that he is even aware of this relationship, let alone its all-encompassing importance to philosophy.

The adherent to the rational worldview certainly will be able to reason consistently with his worldviews most basic fundamentals, for he alone can remain consistent with the primacy of existence metaphysics. But the Christian, whose worldview assumes the primacy of consciousness metaphysics, will be exposed for borrowing from the rational worldview by his implicit assumption of the primacy of existence metaphysics at key points (such as whenever he claims that something is *true*), even though this foundation is incompatible with the god-belief he wants to defend. The test for this is whether or not the Christian thinks that his position is true because he wishes it to be true. If he is consistent with his worldview's "ultimate presuppositions," he would have to admit that he thinks wishing makes it so. If he acknowledges with the non-believer that wishing is irrelevant to what is true, then he is clearly shirking his professed worldview's fundamentals. At best, the believer will show that his worldview compartmentalizes itself by adopting duplicitous metaphysics, one which obtains in the actual world in which he lives (the primacy of existence, which he borrows from the non-believer), and another which obtains in the [cartoon universe](#) of his theism (the primacy of consciousness,

which is the metaphysical basis of the assumption that wishing makes it so). He does grant that his god's wishes make it so, does he not? Or, does he suppose his god's wishes are impotent?

Peter wrote:

Therefore, if the Christian and the atheist reason about the question of the burden of proof in a way that is consistent with their worldview they will necessarily end up disagreeing on this matter (logically speaking, that is, though not necessarily psychologically, but I won't go down that rabbit trail).

I have no problem disagreeing with Christians on philosophical matters. Indeed, there is no agreement between the primacy of existence and the primacy of consciousness, just as there is no agreement between the position that wishing doesn't make it so and the position that wishing does make it so, and for the same reason. But don't be surprised to find the Christian agreeing - if asked - with the position that wishing doesn't make it so. The problem for him, however, is that his professed worldview fundamentally contradicts that position (for it grants metaphysical primacy to consciousness). To cull this out, ask if his god's wishing can make it so. Then watch him squirm.

Unquote

Peter then writes:

Why do the believer and unbeliever disagree over who has the burden of proof with respect to the debate over God's existence?

They disagree because while the believer wants the non-believer not only to accept his god-belief claims (and to do so on the basis of *faith*), but also to undergo fundamental changes in his life as a result of accepting them (to submit in cowering fear to those who pretend to have some metaphysical upper hand by virtue of their numbering among "the chosen"), he also recognizes deep down that he has no good proofs and is in fact probably embarrassed by the reasons he would give for holding such beliefs. The believer wants the non-believer to accept his god-belief claims on his *say so*, not on the basis of proof. Philosopher Dr. Leonard Peikoff makes this point when he points out:

It has often been noted that a proof of God would be fatal to religion: a God susceptible of proof would have to be finite and limited; He would be one entity among others within the universe, not a mystic omnipotence transcending science and reality. What nourishes the spirit of religion is not proof, but faith, i.e., the undercutting of man's mind. ("Maybe You're Wrong," *The Objectivist Forum*, April 1981, p. 12.)

At the point within the bible where it comes closest to defining its notion of 'faith', the book of Hebrews explicitly aligns it with *hope*. Faith is essentially acting on the *hope* that something is true, even though you do not believe it. If you actually believe something to be the case, you wouldn't need faith to act on it. A sure bet requires no act of faith. The biblical notion of faith has an insuperable share of its own problems; I have catalogued them in the following blogs: [Faith as Belief Without Understanding](#), and [Lord Oda on Faith](#). It is ultimately because god-belief rests on faith instead of proof that believers will resist accepting any burden to prove their god-belief claims and attempt to shift it to the non-believer. To the degree that believers seek to evade the burden of proof, they performatively concede that no proof is up to the job.

It's important at this point to keep in mind the overall context of the discussion. Peter asserts the existence of an invisible supernatural being. This is something I do not believe, but he wants me to accept this claim on his say so. (Otherwise, why does he balk at the burden of proving his claim?) Now I openly acknowledge his burden of proving this claim if he wants to persuade me. Is he saying here that he disagrees with me, that he does not have a burden to prove this claim? Fine. If he doesn't try to prove it, he can't blame me for not budging from my non-belief. But Peter has his own answer to this question.

Peter writes:

Because their understanding of evidence and proof is already determined by their understanding of God. And yet, their understanding of God is itself one of the things in dispute between them!

My understanding of evidence and proof is not determined by the notion of any god. Rather, my understanding of evidence and proof is determined by reason, the nature of human consciousness (the kind I have and whose nature I have to work with if I want to know anything), the nature and process of forming concepts, etc.

Essentially, my understanding of evidence and proof is determined by rational philosophy. I don't know why any adult thinker would have a problem with this, but many who like to claim their position is rational and yet have apparently no legitimate understanding of what rationality is, always seem to be troubled by this. The problem here is not mine: I have a *conceptual* understanding of evidence and proof, while the believer insists on a *storybook* understanding of evidence and proof, i.e., evidence and proof *falsely so-called*.

As for what the notion 'god' means, I understand 'god' to denote something which the believer can only apprehend by *imagining* it, and that this something is in fact *imaginary*. The believer's failure to provide an objective method for reliably distinguishing between what he calls "god" and what he may merely be imagining, is confirming evidence of my understanding. Several believers have attempted to meet [my challenge](#) for them to articulate an objective method by which I can reliably distinguish between what they call "God" and what they may merely be imagining, but their attempts have ended in failure. See for instance [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). I have also pointed out that [imagination is of central importance to god-belief](#).

Peter writes:

They both find themselves reasoning in a circle about who has the burden of proof.

Now Peter seems to be unthinkingly mouthing stock presuppositionalist slogans that he's found in some apologetics book. Unfortunately, his conclusion doesn't follow, at least in the case of the non-believer. The concepts 'evidence' and 'proof' are not primaries, they are not irreducible concepts. They reduce to more primitive fundamentals which do not assume the presuppositions which Peter's allegation here insinuate they do. So there is no "reasoning in a circle" necessary on the non-believer's part here. Also, recognizing that a person is deluded into believing what he imagines is neither an instance nor a result of "reasoning in a circle about who has the burden of proof." Now if Peter is admitting that he's "reasoning in a circle about who has the burden of proof," that's a good start. But this is *his* problem, not the non-believer's.

Peter writes:

In the Christian worldview, everything in this universe, both general revelation (all creation) and special revelation (miracles, theophanies, prophetic word, Scripture), all of reality, all of it is unavoidable, perspicuous, entirely compelling proof for God.

I'm sure that's well and good for anyone who wants to believe that his god exists. The problem here, however, is that one could make this kind of claim about *any* deity he imagines. The Lahu tribesman, for instance, can easily make the claim that everything in the universe, from the orbits of planetary bodies to the dust particles on his shoes, is evidence for the reality of Geusha. And on his question-begging premises, it is.

Unfortunately, Peter needs to do more than simply slap the label "evidence for God's existence" on everything that exists. Everything I find in existence is natural or manmade, finite, material, corruptible, changeable, etc., all the qualities that the Christian god is said not to be. Contrary to what Peter claims here, everything that I encounter in the universe confirms the primacy of existence principle - i.e., the recognition that existence exists *independent of consciousness*. Why would I ignore this prevailing evidence in favor of a view which fundamentally contradicts it by affirming that everything that exists ultimately depends on some consciousness? Blank out. Moreover, since Peter claims that there is evidence for his god's existence, he's admitting that he has *inferred* its existence (as opposed to having *direct awareness* of it, such as when we perceive concretes, as he claims in [his next installment](#) in this series). So he needs to hash this out, step by step, to see how well this inference stands up to scrutiny.

Peter writes:

Therefore, when the unbeliever says that he hasn't yet found any convincing evidence of God's existence he is reasoning in a circle.

How so? And how does this follow from what Peter said above? Above he affirmed what Christianity says on the matter. But that's neither here nor there for the non-believer. But that does not even remotely imply circular reasoning. Indeed, given the fact that anyone could slap the label "unavoidable, perspicuous, entirely compelling proof" for any imaginary being he dreams up, the non-believer is simply being wise as well as consistent to point out to the believer that what he offers as "evidence" is not convincing. Not by a long shot! Simply pointing this out is not an instance of "reasoning in a circle." Would the Christian say that the non-believer is "reasoning in a circle" if he mentions that he "hasn't yet found any convincing evidence" of *Osiris'* existence? Or *Horus'*

existence? How about *Geusha*'s existence? If person A proposes the existence of something, and person B says he "hasn't yet found any convincing evidence" of what person A proposes, how is that "reasoning in a circle"? Peter needs to do more than recite stock apologetic mantras here.

Consider two scholars, the one a scientist, the other a New Age sociologist. The New Age sociologist is trying to validate a sample taken from the field as evidence for his thesis that all human behavior is determined by engrammatic residue allegedly possessed by every human being as a result of being dropped in a vat of fermented six-row barley within his first six months of life. The scientist reviews the sample study and finds no evidence that any of the individuals in that sample were ever dropped into a vat of fermented barley, least of all within their sixth month of life. The New Age sociologist then retorts, "Well, you don't see the evidence that's plainly there because of your understanding of evidence! You're reasoning in a circle!" Now, why take the New Age sociologist seriously on this matter? Peter and other presuppositionalists are offering nothing better than precisely this. What they unpocket is nothing more than a gimmick for discounting rational scrutiny, for dismissing one's exercise of rational judgment as an occasion of fallacy.

Again, the universe is full of finite, material, corruptible and changing entities. How could any of these either individually or collectively serve as evidence of something that is allegedly infinite, immaterial, incorruptible and unchanging? Until the apologist can explain how something can serve as evidence for something that contradicts it on multiple levels, he's just mouthing idle incantations.

Peter writes:

When the atheist says he hasn't come across any compelling proof for God existence he can only do so if he assumes that God doesn't exist.

Again we have another unargued assertion. And it's demonstrably untrue. All the non-believer needs to do is recognize that at the beginning of the inquiry, he has not been convinced so far. Pointing to an apple, for instance, does not demonstrate that it was created by an act of consciousness, or that a conscious being chose for it to exist at this point in time. Recognizing this is not the same thing as actively "assum[ing] that God doesn't exist." We assume in terms of positives, but Peter is claiming that we assume in terms of negations. This constitutes a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of human consciousness.

Moreover, the non-believer may have actually examined the philosophical issues involved and discovered that truth on the one hand presupposes the primacy of existence metaphysics, while god-belief assumes the primacy of consciousness metaphysics, and thus the believer locks himself into an irresolvable self-contradiction whenever he claims that his god-belief is true. This too is not the same thing as "assum[ing] that God doesn't exist." Indeed, the nature of the relationship between a subject of consciousness and any objects in its awareness is of fundamental importance to philosophy (it comes long before one ever gets to the question of whether or not a god exists), and yet it is the one issue which theistic philosophers and apologists routinely avoid addressing. Also, if, after giving the proposed "evidence" a review, the non-believer still remains unconvinced, the Christian is simply going to have to lump it, whether he likes it or not. His charges of fallacy ring hollower with every repetition.

Peter writes:

Yet that's the very thing in dispute!

Ah, now it's back to the existence of the believer's god being "the very thing in dispute," while earlier it was "actually a clash of entire worldviews, not merely over one or a few conflicting claims." The believer wants to retain the liberty of toggling back and forth between the debate on rival worldviews and the debate on whether or not his god exists, essentially to suit his apologetic insecurities. His ultimate interest in confronting non-believers is not to establish rational verdicts or to persuade them to some truth they may be overlooking, but to discredit them simply for not believing in any invisible magic beings.

Peter writes:

The unbeliever rejects the Christian position because he rejects the Christian position.

This is a hasty generalization, one which special pleads the Christian case purely for the sake of the Christian's personal preference. Contrary to what Peter asserts here, I reject Christianity because I reject *all* species of mysticism, and Christianity is *only one* species of mysticism. Since I reject mysticism in general, I consequently

reject any species of it. Mysticism is any worldview that is ultimately premised on the primacy of consciousness view of reality. My rejection of mysticism, then, is a logical outcome of my commitment to reason and rationality. So my atheism is actually a consequence of my devotion to reason. Essentially, I reject Christianity for the same reasons I reject Islam, Hinduism, New Age religion, Bahá'í faith, Zoroastrianism, Greek pagan religions, Geusha-belief, Aztec beliefs, etc., etc., etc. When Christians condemn my atheism, then, they are essentially condemning devotion to reason. So make no mistake about it, Christians who heap their scorn on spoilsport non-believers are simply telling us who they are.

Peter:

The atheist is not at all neutral.

Nor do I claim to be "at all neutral." Devotion to reason certainly does not make one "neutral."

Peter writes:

However, the Christian can also be found reasoning in a circle.

Whereas Peter's charge that non-believers are "found reasoning in a circle" fell on hard times, it is good that he admits that he himself "can... be found reasoning in a circle." He has to assume his god's existence in order to argue for it. In the debate between the believer and the non-believer, the believer is alone in committing this fallacy. He cannot validate his supernaturalism without appealing to the supernatural. So he has an interminable vicious circle on his hands. It's good that Peter acknowledges this. But he errs in supposing everyone else is guilty of the same thing. This is the believer's proclivity for reckless projection at work here.

Peter writes:

When he hears the unbeliever say that the Christian has the burden of proof, the Christian thinks to himself, 'That's ridiculous. Everything in this universe bears the stamp of the Creator' (so to speak).

And when the non-believer hears the believer say that the universe was created by a supernatural form of consciousness, he thinks to himself, "That's ridiculous. Everything in this universe confirms that such fantasies are absurd." He doesn't even have to add the parenthetical precautionary "so to speak."

Peter writes:

Everything proves God's existence. If anything, the burden is proof is on the atheist'.

What exactly is the atheist called to prove? That the non-existent does not exist? Again, the atheist has no burden to prove that the non-existent does not exist. So if it's a fact that the Christian god does not exist, then the atheist would not need to prove this fact. And if the Christian never makes an attempt to prove that his god is real and not merely imaginary, then he forfeits the opportunity to catch another fish. It's his choice. Meanwhile, the non-believer goes his merry non-believing way, and the believer is left fuming in his frustrations.

Peter writes:

And if God exists then that's entirely true. But the unbeliever and the believer dispute God's existence.

So where's the apologist going to start? Is he going to start by presenting a case for his god's existence, or is he going to try to establish the truth of his worldview in toto? Or is he going to launch a series of question-begging assertions, as we have seen so far, assuming the truth of what he is called to prove, and continue in his self-inflicted frustration? A minimally rational approach would be to declare one's starting point. This would help avoid wasting a lot of time. But apologists don't know what their starting point is, particularly in terms of conceptual irreducibles.

Peter writes:

How, then, can this dispute be resolved?

Easy: the believer needs to face the fact that his god is imaginary, that the primacy of existence is the only valid orientation in the subject-object relationship, that mysticism (including Christianity) entails a fundamental contradiction of the primacy of existence, and that truth can only be consistently affirmed on the basis of the primacy of existence. But the believer is not likely to do this. It's possible, but it's not likely. But that is the only

rational way to resolve the dispute.

Peter writes:

If the Christian and the atheist reason about God and proof for His existence in terms of a worldview that is already conditioned by their beliefs about God, how can the two actually debate?

So long as an individual insists on affirming an arbitrary position, debate with that individual is not really possible. They can squabble, but squabbling achieves nothing of value. Since the believer does not produce legitimate evidence for the existence of his god (he simply asserts that everything that exists in the universe is evidence of his god's existence, and yet this is most unhelpful, for reasons given above), he is essentially affirming an arbitrary position, and that is why "debate" with believers is so easily muddled and unproductive.

Now if the believer stops for a moment to consider the issue of metaphysical primacy, recognizes that the primacy of existence is the only answer to this issue, and understands how the religious worldview contradicts it, then he should see that debating about the existence of something he merely imagines is a waste of time. But the believer is anxious to protect a confessional investment, so he's not likely to take this route.

Peter writes:

The answer is that we need to place the unbelieving worldview beside the Christian worldview and reason about each one on its own terms to see which one can provide the preconditions of intelligibility. [sic]

Actually, the preconditions of intelligibility already exist before anyone even begins to develop a worldview. Those preconditions are named by the axioms: existence, identity and consciousness. The axioms are the foundation of a rational worldview. Once a worldview is starting to be assembled, the relationship between consciousness and its objects is of utmost importance, as well as a theory of concepts. But where does Christianity identify the proper relationship between consciousness and its objects? Where does Christianity lay out a theory of concepts? The apostle Paul, for instance, was the most prolific writer of the New Testament. And yet he nowhere addresses the issue of metaphysical primacy. Nor does he spec out a theory of concepts. How can one claim to have a theory of knowledge when he doesn't have a theory of concepts? And how can you claim to have a worldview which "provide[s] the preconditions of [intelligibility]" when you don't have a theory of knowledge? Triple blank out.

Peter writes:

We need, for the sake of argument, to reason about each worldview on its own terms in order to see which one can rationally makes sense of reality, including the very idea of the burden of proof. What you will discover is not only that the atheist worldview doesn't correspond to reality, nor is it coherent, you'll also discover that the degree to which the unbeliever has any successes in his reasoning is attributed to his assuming the truth of the Christian worldview. Christianity is proven from the impossibility of the contrary, and in this particular case as it relates to making sense out of proof and the burden of proof.

Why would we need a worldview which is based on a storybook whose content includes narratives depicting miracles like water being wished into wine, men walking on unfrozen water, dead corpses crawling out of their graves and walking through a city showing themselves to everyone they encounter, etc., when we don't find anything like this in reality? Peter says that "the atheist worldview doesn't correspond to reality," and yet he endorses a worldview whose storybook depictions bear no resemblance whatsoever to the reality in which we find ourselves. We find ourselves in a reality in which the objects of our awareness do not conform to conscious intentions. For instance, I cannot wish water into wine, as we find in the sacred storybook. So why would a worldview that is generated by taking the sacred storybook seriously at all have any relevance to life in the reality in which we find ourselves? Again, blank out.

When Peter says that "the atheist worldview doesn't correspond to reality," which "atheist worldview" does he have in mind? Atheists are not monolithic; it is naïve to suppose that all atheists ascribe to one single worldview simply by their self-identification as atheists. So it may be the case that the particular "atheist worldview" which Peter has in mind "doesn't correspond to reality," but this remains to be seen; we would have to look at the specifics to determine this, and Peter has given no indication of why the worldview he has in mind is faulty. And even if it were faulty (as many philosophies surely are), this would in no way indicate that other non-theistic philosophies are also faulty. That would simply be another hasty generalization.

What is more likely is that Peter feels that a worldview which does not derive from the storybook of the bible and

enshrine belief in invisible magic beings somehow fails to correspond to reality. What, then, could Peter have in mind when he speaks of "reality" if not [the cartoon universe of theism](#)? True, the Objectivist worldview, to which I ascribe, does not correspond to the cartoon universe of theism. But the cartoon universe of theism is a fantasy, not reality. Which means: there's no problem on my part here.

So rather than meeting his burden of proof in the case of his claim that the Christian god exists, Peter throws onto his burden cart a whole host of other claims he needs to prove now. Peter simply succeeds in multiplying his burdens, without meeting any.

Peter writes:

In the next post I'll present the Christian position concerning the burden of proof with respect to God's existence, and if time permits me (though I don't think it will) I'll reduce the competing unbelieving position to absurdity -- both of which in order to demonstrate that making sense of the idea of the burden of proof itself proves God's existence and exposes atheism as irrational.

Again Peter closes his post with the assertion that atheism is "irrational." One wonders what the believer understands by either atheism or rationality for him to make such statements. As I pointed out at the beginning of the present review, Peter closed his last post with the promise that he will "try and clarify the Christian position on the matter of the burden of proof," but now he says that it will be in his next installment that he will "present the Christian position concerning the burden of proof with respect to God's existence." He's already made it pretty clear that he doesn't think he as a Christian has any burden to prove anything. He apparently thinks he can assert anything, and everyone's supposed to "just believe" whatever he says on his say so. No, he doesn't come out and explicitly present his view in so bald a manner, but we shouldn't expect someone who holds such a view to be so open and brazen about it. But he does come as close as he can to this without making it open and brazen.

As I stated at the end of my last post, I intended in my review of Peter's second installment in this series to look especially for where he might explain what he means by "rational," for he had stated in his first post that "the unbeliever's position, if he is consistent with himself, is irrational." Unfortunately, Peter so far has not come through on this point. When Christians make statements like this about "unbelievers," it boggles my mind what they could possibly mean by "rational." If Christianity's doctrines pass as "rational" in the mind of a Christian, I can only suppose it's a good thing if he thinks my position is "irrational." Of course, the Christian, having very little understanding of what constitutes rationality, likes to use words as bludgeons, as if they could force others into submission and compliance by threatening to label them with certain words, regardless of their genetic roots. So what we have here is the Christian threatening to call us "irrational" if we don't believe in his invisible magic being. Is everybody scared now?

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Burden of Proof](#), [Presuppositional Gimmickry](#)

posted by *Bahnsen Burner* at [9:00 AM](#)

4 Comments:

[Mike](#) said...

I'm still laughing over "Bahnsen Burner."

Having come out of those circles and abandoning them to their own devices, your blog is a surprise find for me.

Peace,
Mike

[February 03, 2008 10:09 AM](#)

[kbrown45@hotmail.com](#) said...

Its an honor to read the blog of a person so objective, so reasonable, so rational as Dawson Bethrick. As a newbie to Objectivism, I appreciate the free philosophical education provided by Mr. Bethrick.

As a young person I committed myself to reason, to the Laws of Thought, to Logic, to ferreting out fallacies from my thinking, to evidence based epistemology. Thus I was able to renounce Christianity and god belief, despite being indoctrinated from the beginning, after learning that reality bears no resemblance to the fantasies described in the "Holy Bible". My good fortune was especially serendipitous as while in the US Navy and on liberty in Jerusalem Israel, I was able to actually deconvert from Christianity while standing inside the Empty Tomb at the rear of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Gosh, I'm so happy to be free of the ridiculous superstition of Christianity. At the time of my deconversion, I thought Jesus Christ had been a real person. Now, however, I give the nod to the mythicist case. Earl Doherty's book "The Jesus Puzzle" along with his site of the same name makes compelling reading. Robert M. Price's books complement Doherty's work by showing how all the Gospel narratives are simply rewrites of older stories from the Septuagint or older Homeric corpus. Richard Carrier's recent work in disproving the historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus, found in "The Empty Tomb: Jesus Beyond the Grave", instantiates an overwhelming implication to the utter vacuity of Christianity.

But of the strong atheistic arguments against the alleged existence of the god of classical theism, I find the one from Objectivist Metaphysics the most informing. Primacy of Existence theory clearly holds epistemological priority over the fallacy of asserting primacy of consciousness. To believe that YHWH exists is to hold the proposition that it, a stand alone consciousness devoid of any knowledge or resource, created existence by wishing it so. But existence includes identity and constructs we call concepts. To hold a belief that the consciousness YHWH created existence a person must think that in some incomprehensible manner akin to prior or before (as there was no time prior to existence), the alleged consciousness was alone with no existence at all. Thus the consciousness had no concepts, no symbols, no relations, no desires, no motive, no knowledge yet it somehow caused existence to obtain by wishing. This is preposterous because consciousness is an organism's awareness of existence. If there was no existence to be aware of, then there could have been no consciousness. Belief that the god of classical theism exists is self-contradictory and thus incoherent. For this reason as well as others, the term god is devoid of semantic meaning. This is justification for adopting the a priori propositional stance that existence itself compels the honest reasoning person to reject the notion of gods as self apparently absurd. There is no question then that the burden of proof falls squarely on the theist to not only prove with positive evidence their god exists but more importantly to provide a coherent definition of what their god actually is in an ontological sense. Failing the latter task automatically disqualifies any possibility of accomplishing the former.

I would like to learn more about Objectivism's theory of concepts? Is there a blog post here dealing with this subject?

Best Regards and Wishes

[February 20, 2008 2:41 PM](#)

kbrown45@hotmail.com said...

Further to my comment regarding my deconversion from xianity while inside the alleged holy sepulcher, I recall that for the minute I stood inside and looked about after praying: "Well this is the place where it is all supposed to have happened, so God if your real this is the time to show me." As I looked about, I noticed there was not the least little thing that could identify the tomb as that of anyone in particular or even that it had ever been used as a grave at all. After a minute had passed the priest shooed me out so the next visitor could enter. As I walked out of the tomb, I thought to myself that all the religious experiences of my life were somehow no longer meaningful. The Spirit did not move me a bit while I prayed and waited. I was reminded of this when I watched the scene in "Kingdom Of Heaven" where Balian stands on the Hill of Calvary and prays for God to show him a sign. Like my own experience, Balian got only silence. This happens because the gods are only make believe. I made up my mind then and there as I strolled out of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher to abandon Christianity. Some may think I was hasty to deconvert while exiting the tomb, but since the hole in the wall in question, as it turns out, was arbitrarily selected as a site of veneration by Helen, Emperor Constantine's devote mother, in 325 CE shortly before she commissioned the construction of the Church of the H.S. No one in Jerusalem in 325 could possibly have any factual knowledge regarding the location of the tomb as two major wars and almost three centuries had transpired between the legendary events and Helen's choice.

Richard Carrier in his superb essay , "The Spiritual Body of Christ and the Legend of the Empty Tomb" (The Empty Tomb: Jesus Beyond the Grave, p105-233) demonstrates that it was very probable that earliest Paulian Christians thought of Jesus's resurrection as a spiritual event wherein the rotting corpse remained in the grave. Since "supernatural" is not positively defined with any vivifying potentialities, it is therefore simply the negation of the

natural. To demonstrate a miracle, the theist must prove the absolute impossibility of any natural causation for the event in question to be held as a justified belief. Carrier and many others have demonstrated that there is a very good probability of naturalistic causation for the alleged resurrection. While many other competent researchers have cast far greater than reasonable doubt on the very notion that a historical Jesus existed at all. Dawson has done a swell job of showing the total bankruptcy of theism, intellectually, morally, and philosophically. Consequently, there can be no justification for YHWH belief or in the resurrection or historical existence of Jesus. I am justified for abandoning xianity back in 1981.

Best and Good

[February 20, 2008 8:06 PM](#)

kbrown45@hotmail.com said...

"To demonstrate a miracle, the theist must prove the absolute impossibility of any natural causation"

This means that the theist requires Omniscient knowledge of all natural phenomena possible to be able to rule out any possibility of naturalism. Of course, this is itself impossible.

[February 20, 2008 8:12 PM](#)

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