

Monday, February 04, 2008

### Presuppositionalism and the Evasion of the Burden of Proof, Part 3

We now come to the third and final installment of Peter's series on the burden of proof, [Christianity vs. atheism and the burden of proof, part 3](#). In my previous two examinations of Peter's position ([here](#) and [here](#)), we found that he offers no reason to suppose that atheists have any obligation to prove that the non-existent does not exist. Also, at several points he calls atheism "irrational," but nowhere explains what he means by "irrational," nor does he give much indication why atheism should be considered irrational. In his third installment, Peter repeats earlier mistakes (such as the claim that atheists presume to be "neutral," or that "everything in this universe is proof of God," etc.), offers some fresh errors of his own, and demonstrates just how confused Christianity is in the area of epistemology. Much of what he does say strongly indicates that, were he to attempt a proof of his god, it would seriously beg the question and thus fail because of its internal fallaciousness. Indeed, nothing he does say gives us any confidence that he could do otherwise if given the opportunity. All in all, Peter gives us some good opportunities to make some excellent contrapologetic points against presuppositionalism. So with that, let's jump into Part 3 of my series on Presuppositionalism and the Evasion of the Burden of Proof.

Peter writes:

In this third post on this issue I want to begin by highlighting the fact that the atheist is not at all neutral in the debate over God's existence even though he has deceived himself into thinking he is.

It should be clear now that Peter is simply repeating what he has read without examining whether or not it is true. For I am an atheist, and I make no claim to neutrality whatsoever. I'm wholly partial to truth, objectivity and rationality. So there's no self-deception on my part here. What we have is Peter blindly and naïvely believing what he has read in some apologetics book. That is the essence of a worldview based on *faith*.

Peter writes:

He might even say that he's willing to accept God's existence if you meet the burden of proof.

But since one will never be able to prove that the imaginary is actually real, then whether or not the atheist is so willing is irrelevant. Besides, one does not catch fish with proofs and arguments. The Christian uses traps for this. The New Testament metaphor comparing evangelists as 'fishers of men' is no accident.

Peter writes:

But just consider, as was mentioned in the last post, that according to the Christian position everything in this universe is proof of God (e.g. Psalm 19).

But just consider, as was mentioned in my response to Peter's last post, that according to the Objectivist position everything in the universe is proof that god-belief is irrational. Now what?

Peter writes:

Now, the unbeliever might respond that if God doesn't exist then that's not true, then nothing proves God's existence.

Not only this, but also that one could still imagine a god and make the kinds of claims that presuppositionalists like to repeat. Invisible gods and imaginary gods look and behave very much the same.

Peter writes:

The unbeliever might say that if God exists, only [sic] then can the Christian position be true that everything proves God's existence, so you first have to prove God's existence. Think about that. The demand of the unbeliever is that he'll accept God's existence if you show him proof, but you can't use anything whatsoever as proof because the claim that everything proves God's existence already assumes His existence!

There are two claims here that Peter has confused: one is that his god exists, the other is that "everything proves

God's existence." The latter claim clearly assumes the truth of the former, but instead of proving the former, Peter added the second to see if it would work. When this bluff is not accepted, he gets frustrated. Observe:

Peter writes:

As was said, the atheist is not at all neutral in the debate over God's existence, and that includes, as has been the topic of these posts, the dispute over who has the burden of proof in that debate.

I can't speak for other atheists, but I have already gone on record indicating that I do not claim to be neutral. So why does Peter keep coming back to this issue? That an atheist considers himself neutral on the matter is not germane to Peter's proof, is it? If so, then what does he do now when he encounters an atheist who acknowledges that he is not neutral?

Peter writes:

If everything is proof of God's existence, and this proof is overwhelming, unavoidable, perspicuous and compelling, just as the Christian position states, then the atheist is reasoning in a circle when he says that the believer bears the burden of proof in the debate over God's existence.

This doesn't follow, and contextually speaking it is nonsensical on its own terms. If anything serves as evidence for something else, then clearly there is an inferential connection that has been made. When the believer claims to know of evidence to support his claim that a god exists, the non-believer may choose to have the believer explain this inferential connection. This alone would not at all constitute an instance of "reasoning in a circle." Nor would the non-believer be "reasoning in a circle when he says that the believer bears the burden of proof in the debate over God's existence," especially if the believer claims to have proof. If the believer makes the two claims that a) his god exists and b) everything proves his god's existence, then the believer should be willing to acknowledge that these two claims need to be supported. If he doesn't, he's in la-la land chasing a fantasy. The burden to prove two unsupported claims is not met by making a third unsupported claim. But this is basic procedure that Peter is using here. Meanwhile, the non-believer will simply shake his head and go his merry unbelieving way while the believer stew in his own self-inflicted frustrations.

Peter writes:

According to the Christian worldview, God obligates Himself to make Himself known to everyone which He does on His own terms in a way that is completely clear, unavoidable and compelling.

Anyone who enshrines an imaginary object of worship could make this kind of claim about that imaginary object of worship. That's because the imagination does not need to obey any rules or adhere to any facts. The imaginer can make up things as he goes. He can imagine that there is an invisible conscious being behind everything he perceives in the world, and even imagine that this invisible conscious being "obligates Himself to make Himself known to everyone" in whatever way the imaginer imagines it. Hopefully the believer is not so foolish as to believe that repeating statements like the one Peter recites above is going to be very convincing to non-believers. Essentially, the believer has accepted his god-belief on faith, and imagines that everything he encounters in reality somehow confirms it. Proof is the wrong vehicle to maneuver the human mind into such a perverted relationship with the world.

Observe Peter's imagination at work. He writes:

Notice a couple of things about that statement. First, God is under obligation from no one but Himself to reveal Himself. After all, God is God -- there is no law above or outside Him that obligates Him to do so. There is no created person who can obligate God to do anything. Second, no one has an excuse for rejecting God. As Romans 1 says, 'The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.' No one can reply to God that He offered no evidence. Why do many reject God? Because they 'suppress the truth by their wickedness.' And as v. 28 says, 'Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind...' According to Christianity, everyone already knows God. Although, of course, not all know God in a saving fashion; not all know God in His redemptive mercy in Jesus Christ.

Peter's departure from the original topic at hand takes the form of mock preaching constituted by canned

statements recited in sequence as if he thought they would do any good. (We will see that he never gets back on track, for what follows in his blog has nothing to do with the issue of who really has the burden of proof.) But as I pointed out above, anyone can make up anything about an imaginary object of worship, for he is not bound by any facts. He says “there is no created person who can obligate God to do anything.” But who is trying to obligate the non-existent to do something? That would be utterly nonsensical. The non-believer does not expect the believer’s god to present proofs; the non-believer asks the believer if *he* (the believer himself) can prove his claims. That Peter shifts the matter to whether or not his god has an obligation to prove anything only demonstrates how easy it is for the believer to confuse himself with the deity he claims to worship.

And who is rejecting a non-existent being? There’s no need to. What I reject is the subjective metaphysics which underlies the Christian worldview; along with all other species of mysticism, Christianity is thus slashed off at its very root. Peter shows how uncritical one needs to be when it comes to what the bible says, for he recites Romans 1:20 which includes the contradiction that “invisible qualities... have been clearly seen.” If something has been seen, why call it “invisible”? Indeed, the invisible and the imaginary look very much alike, just as the supernatural and the non-existent behave very much alike. But if you see something, then obviously it’s not “invisible.” I would not say that “God... offered no evidence,” for it would first have to exist in order to offer any evidence to begin with. So again, Peter begs the question by assuming precisely what he needs to prove, namely his god’s existence. But again, Peter manages to multiply his burden of proof yet again: not only does he claim that his god exists and that “everything” is evidence proving its existence, he now says that “everyone already knows God,” which is clearly just another faith claim. He’s doing it again: he’s trying to shirk the burden of proving a set of unsupported claims by making yet another unsupported claim. This is a common gimmick in all religious apologetics, and presuppositionalism is no exception.

For amusement, let’s prod this last claim a little more. How could Peter know what “everyone already knows” unless he were himself omniscient? Again, the believer essentially confuses himself with the omniscient being he imagines, which is easy to do since in the end the being he imagines does and knows whatever the imaginer imagines. In the end, the believer’s imagination is the final arbiter of his god’s identity. I made this point to Paul Manata when [he declared](#) that his god “doesn’t wish” while other believers, such as several of the bible’s authors and the granddaddy of presuppositionalism himself, Cornelius Van Til, in fact affirm that the Christian god can wish. [I pointed out to him that](#)

he can say that his god does not wish, because Paul determines what his god is and is not, what his god can and cannot do. The reason why Christians have so many internal disagreements is because one Christian will imagine his god one way, while another Christian imagines his god another way, and never shall the two meet. Here’s an instance where the way Paul imagines his god is at variance with the way Van Til imagined his god.

How can we test for this? Simple: ask the believer to produce some objective fact which proves his claim. The problem is that there are no facts which will prove that the Christian god either wishes or doesn’t wish. Indeed, there are no facts which will prove that the Christian god is real to begin with. It’s all in the believer’s [imagination](#).

Peter writes:

So how, then, does God make Himself known? Broadly speaking, in two ways: general and special revelation (See [here](#) and [here](#).)

Here Peter tries to make it look like he’s willing to step up to the bar on at least one of the burdens in his growing debt. But he does so by sending the reader to two very large documents, presumably to get lost in reading them so that he forgets why he went there in the first place. One of the links takes us to the Belgic Confession, a very longwinded statement of faith which is supposed to improve upon earlier creedal formulations by touching more bases. It is an understatement to say that the Belgic Confession assumes that the Christian god exists, so as a source of proving its existence, it is worthless. Curiously, when it attempts to explain how men know the god which it describes, the Belgic Confession indicates two means for this knowledge:

First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe, since that universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God: his eternal power and his divinity, as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20. All these things are enough to convict men and to leave them without excuse. Second, he makes himself known to us more openly by his holy and divine Word, as much as we need in this life, for his glory and for the salvation of his own.

Sound familiar? Note the Belgic Confession’s citation of Romans 1:20. I have already pointed out the contradiction within that one verse: something that is “clearly seen” cannot also be “invisible.” Also, by pointing to “the creation, preservation and government of the universe,” the Belgic Confession begs the question on the point it is

attempting to address, for this assumes as knowledge key points which it identifies as the means by which that knowledge is supposedly acquired. Besides, the "creation" of something is not a means by which knowledge is acquired in the first place. The first part of the Belgic Confession's answer to how men can have knowledge of its god fails to address that question completely. This is an epistemological question, but the Confession gives no epistemology here. Indeed, by comparing the universe to a book, the Confession simply confirms the [cartoon universe](#) basis of theistic metaphysics. Many Christian apologists have denied the cartoon universe heritage of their worldview, and yet their confessions wholly and unflinchingly embrace it. The essence of so-called 'general revelation' is that the universe is analogous to a cartoon as such, that the Christian god is a master cartoonist, and that human beings are simply characters in a cartoon. This is the Belgic Confession's first answer to how men know its god.

But what of the second answer to this question? The Belgic Confession appeals directly to the contents of a storybook as the means by which men know its god's intentions and holy "plan." So while, according to the storybook itself, [Saul of Tarsus](#) was blessed with a personal visitation by the post-resurrected Jesus, the rest of us have to pull a book from a shelf and rely on our imaginations. The vicious circularity involved in this approach to adopting and shaping one's view of the world and history gorges itself by swallowing the believer's mind into a cyclone of cognitive destruction.

Now it is important to notice how both of the Belgic Confession's answers to how men know its god assumes the truth of what the believer ends up denying as a consequence of accepting its worldview, namely the Objectivist axioms and the primacy of existence. The believer assumes the truth of the primacy of existence, and with it the truth of the axioms which inform it, when he affirms that the Christian religion is *true*. For he is not supposing that it is true because he *wants* it to be true; he's saying it's true regardless of what he or anyone else might want to be the case. In other words, he assumes that facts obtain independent of conscious intentions. That's the primacy of existence in a nutshell. But now look at the content of what is being claimed: that a conscious being created the universe by an act of will, and by acts of will it preserves the universe and governs what takes place within it. In other words, the content of the Christian view of the world assumes the primacy of consciousness: that actions of consciousness hold metaphysical primacy over all objects, including any fact which might be said to obtain in reality. On the Christian view, whatever is factual in the universe, is factual only because the Christian god *chose* for it to be factual. Facts, on this view, depend on conscious intentions. But this contradicts the assumption made when this view is said to be *true*. So the Christian worldview reduces to an explicitly duplicitous and self-contradicting basis: it requires the believer to both assume and deny the primacy of existence. This fundamental contradiction is camouflaged by an enormous quantity of doctrinal affirmations which are intended to keep the believer's attention occupied so that its faulty basis remains hidden.

The test for this? Ask the believer to explain how Christianity addresses the issue of metaphysical primacy. If he at all tries to address this question, ask for his sources, and see how consistently his worldview adheres to the basic principle he espouses. If my experience is any indication, it is highly unlikely that the believer will even take a shot at it - there's simply too much at stake, for he has a confessional investment to protect.

Now let's see if what Peter says in the following explains how the god of Christianity makes itself known to men.

Peter writes:

God is known immediately, by direct apprehension, in the entire created order, including our own selves. This is called general revelation. From the stars of heavens to the trees of the forest to the genetic make-up of creatures, God's power, sovereignty, and goodness are clearly and unavoidably known. But because sin entered the picture, God also, in His mercy, made and makes Himself redemptively known. Through miracles, theophanies, direct word, the prophets, etc. God revealed Himself, His will for our lives, and His plan of redemption for His people. This was most perfectly revealed in Jesus Christ. Though these events are in the past, many of them have been recorded in Scripture (itself a redemptive event) which, by God's grace, is now readily available.

The only things that I "know... immediately, by direct apprehension," are the things that I perceive with my senses. The Christian god is said to be invisible, so on Christianity's own terms I certainly cannot see it. Is it accessible to my other senses? For instance, can I feel the Christian god brushing up against my skin? What would that feel like? Can I smell the Christian god? What does the Christian god smell like? Can I taste it? What does it taste like? Can I hear its voice? Many people claim to hear voices in their heads. But how would we know that it is the Christian god's voice we're hearing, and not the voice of, say, the god Neptune, or Iletus, or Odin, or Geusha? Or, perhaps we're imagining it? Immediately we see Peter's claim that we have "direct apprehension" of the Christian god start to crumble.

Moreover, the Christian god is said to be supernatural, infinite, immaterial, imperceptible, incorruptible, perfect, immeasurable, and otherworldly. But the things which I directly apprehend are natural (or manmade), finite, material, perceptible, corruptible, imperfect, measurable, this-worldly things that exist independent of consciousness. So what I “know... immediately, by direct apprehension” could not - even on Christianity’s own terms - be the Christian god. Also, the nature of the things that I apprehend directly as natural or manmade, finite, material, perceptible, corruptible, imperfect, measurable and this-worldly things, indicates that it would be quite a stretch, to say the least, to consider them ‘evidence’ of a supernatural, infinite, immaterial, imperceptible, incorruptible, perfect, immeasurable and otherworldly thing. This would require us to accept as evidence of the Christian god things which fundamentally contradict it. Furthermore, the fact that the things that I “know... immediately, by direct apprehension” exist and are what they are independent of consciousness, only confirms that existence does not find its source in a form of consciousness. So on two fundamental counts, we have good reason to suppose that the Christian is either painfully mistaken or simply lying when he claims that his “God is known immediately, by direct apprehension.” Couple this with the fact that the believer proposes no objective method for reliably distinguishing between what he calls “God” and what he may merely be imagining, and we have good reason to suppose that his god-belief is quite simply false.

But should we attempt to entertain this notion of having awareness of a supernatural being even by inference from what we “know... immediately, by direct apprehension,” we encounter other problems. For instance, if we suppose that behind “the stars of heavens to the trees of the forest to the genetic make-up of [biological organisms],” there exists a form of consciousness which is responsible for it all, how could we identify it? It is not until relatively recently in human history that we have been able to discover moons orbiting distant planets, and these exist within our very solar system. But the consciousness allegedly responsible for having created them and everything else in the universe is said to originate from beyond the universe. So how could we know that this consciousness is identical to the god of Reformed Christianity, and not Geusha, Zalbitralca, Avalokitesvara, Hu, Mozga’ebatel’, or some other supernatural candidate? How could we rule these other gods out and not the god of Christianity at the same time, unless it were in the end a matter of preference (as we would expect to be the case if all of them, including the Christian god, were imaginary)? For instance, when I look at the stars and begin to imagine a supernatural consciousness behind their existence (and Christians indicate no alternative to imagining as a way to “apprehend” their god), why would I imagine that this supernatural consciousness had a son? Why not a daughter instead of a son? Why any offspring to begin with? See, that’s the trouble with this course of apologetic rambling: there’s no necessary reason to suppose that any supernatural consciousness inferred from the “evidences” Peter lists would be the Christian god as opposed to some other god. That’s because: god-belief constitutes a complete departure from the principle of objectivity, for it’s not *facts* which drive theism’s conclusions, it’s the imaginative contents of a storybook which does this. Without facts, there is no objective content to inform a logical inference. You’ll notice that, in the bible, it is not facts which we discover in the world which lead up to the incarnation of Jesus, but a series of stories - “events... in the past,” as Peter puts it - essentially no different from any other fictional account. The problem for the Christian is that he can give no objective reasons for supposing that the stories found in the New Testament, for instance, are anything other than fiction.

As for a will for my life, I already have one, thank you. Specifically, it is my own will, and my choice is to live and enjoy my life, regardless of who disapproves (for it is in my *self* that I live, move and have my being). How do I know this? Simple: by reason.

Peter writes:

It’s also necessary to remind ourselves that mankind is created in God’s image. As such, man is created and constituted by God in such a way as to recognize His “signature” and “voice” in all creation and in Scripture.

So, human beings, which are created, material, non-divine, non-supernatural, biological, corporeal, non-invisible, finite, mutable, mortal, non-eternal, non-infallible, non-omniscient, non-omnipotent, non-omnipresent, imperfect, corruptible, prone to sin, and destructible, were created in the image of a being that is uncreated, immaterial, divine, supernatural, non-biological, incorporeal, invisible, infinite, immutable, immortal, eternal, infallible, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, perfect, incorruptible, incapable of sin, and indestructible? How do you figure? On every fundamental point, man is that which the Christian god is said not to be.

According to the bible, the Christian god is said to be “a spirit” (cf. John 4:24) and “a spirit hath not flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39). But human beings have flesh and bones, so they could not be spirits on the bible’s own definitions, and yet we were supposedly created “in the image” of a spirit which “hath not flesh and bones”? Our identities are genetically tied to DNA, but what Christian thinks this is the case for his god? To put it mildly, we

resemble bears, elk and trout for more than the supernatural deity of the bible.

Even epistemologically, there are fundamental differences. Man possesses his knowledge in the form of concepts. But, [as I have already shown](#), the Christian god - on account of its alleged omniscience - would not possess its knowledge in the form of concepts. Man is not omniscient, nor is he infallible. So he needs a guide to acquiring and validating knowledge. That guide is called *reason*, and it is the faculty by which he identifies and integrates what he perceives. An omniscient and infallible being would have no need for reason, for it would already know everything - it wouldn't need to acquire and validate new knowledge, for there could be no new knowledge for it to acquire and validate. This means that there is something man can do that the Christian god could not do: man can learn, while the Christian god cannot. And yet man, who must learn in order to exist, is created in the image of a being that cannot learn?

Moreover, there could be no resemblance between man and the Christian god in terms of morality. Morality is a code of values which guides one's choices and actions. Man needs morality because he faces a fundamental alternative: to live or die. It is because he faces this alternative that he needs values in the first place. Indeed, it is because man is *not* immortal and indestructible, like the Christian god is supposed to be, that values have any relevance to his existence in the first place. Also, since man not only needs to act in order to live, but also does not automatically already know what constitutes a value to his life or the actions by which he will acquire those values which his life needs, he needs a code of values - a hierarchy of value importance - by which his values and the actions required to achieve them can be identified. However, none of this could apply in the case of the Christian god. The Christian god is said to be eternal, immortal and indestructible, needing nothing, absolutely perfectly complete in every sense (to "comprehend" this, just set your imagination to maximum). So unlike man, the Christian god would not need to act in order to exist; its existence would be guaranteed, even if it chose to do nothing but remain idle for all eternity. Indeed, why wouldn't it just remain idle for all eternity, since it would have no needs to satisfy? It certainly would have no objective basis for valuing one thing over another, so consequently it would have no objective basis choose one course of action over another. Any choice it would make, regardless of what that choice might be, would be purely arbitrary in the fullest sense of the term. So far from the Christian god serving as some kind of basis or standard of morality for man (a claim that could only indicate how little Christians understand about morality and why man needs it in the first place), morality would be completely useless and irrelevant to such a being.

On every essential, then, from man's nature, to his epistemology and capacity for morality, man is the diametric opposite of the thing Christians describe as their god. The slogan that man was "created in the image of God" only tells us that those who affirm it as truth have failed to integrate what they should know about man and what they claim in their theistic affirmations on anything approaching a rational level. The more one examines it, the more certain the conclusion that the notion of 'God' as the Christians understand it, was created ultimately in the image of man. As Rand succinctly put it,

It is an isolation of actual characteristics of man [e.g., consciousness capable of thought, judgment, emotions, volition, memory, wishing, etc.] combined with the projection of impossible, irrational characteristics which do not arise from reality - such as omnipotence and omniscience. (ITOE, p. 148)

The evidence, then, points to the opposite conclusion, namely that the Christian worldview has it reversed. The idea of 'god' was created on the basis of certain characteristics belonging to man, amplified beyond their contextual limits (by setting one's imagination on maximum) and "combined with the projection of impossible, irrational characteristics" which find their basis in man's imagination, not in reality. So the claim that "mankind is created in God's image" is a demonstrably false premise. Therefore, anything concluded on the basis of this false premise must also be false.

Peter writes:

In the Christian worldview, man is no 'tabula rasa'. When people look around at the universe or at themselves, or when they are reading Scripture, they know they are beholding their Creator.

The denial of *tabula rasa* as the initial condition of his consciousness, only earmarks one's position as initially out of line with the facts of reality. This does not bode well for any conclusions one seeks to draw from such pronouncements. However, it is not surprising to find Christians denying *tabula rasa*. It is necessary for Christians to deny *tabula rasa* as man's beginning condition, for they want to claim that knowledge of their god is *a priori* or *innate*. They have to do this, because they know that they cannot infer the existence of their god from facts which we find in the world. So instead of ditching the notion of a god, they ditch the nature of man's mind, and with it all legitimate knowledge in sum. Thus they dichotomize at this point, affirming knowledge of an *a priori*

nature as well as knowledge of an *a posteriori* nature, so that they can have access to the legitimate knowledge they need as human beings to live in the non-cartoon universe of atheism. Thus they show how necessary it is to borrow from a worldview which contradicts their own even just to live. For without doing so, they will wind up like Jesus: willingly embracing a premature death.

Notice, too, that, once one accepts as valid the notion of innate knowledge, one could claim any arbitrary notion as truth. The Lahu tribesmen could, like the Christian, claim that their knowledge of Geusha is *a priori*, denying *tabula rasa* and affirming their religious views on the claim to have been 'created' with this 'knowledge' already in their heads. If the Christian can claim this about his knowledge of the Christian god, why can't the Lahu tribesmen make the same kind of claim about their knowledge of Geusha? If the arbitrary is valid for one religion, why would it be invalid for a rival religion?

Peter writes:

Thus, in the Christian worldview, God's meets His own self-obligation to make Himself clearly known to everyone. Not everyone knows God unto salvation, yet no one has an excuse for rejecting God. All men know God but many reject Him because they 'suppress the truth by their wickedness'. According to Christianity, therefore, the burden of proof has been met beyond reproach by God Himself. The demands of the unbeliever for evidence are based upon his suppression of the truth in his wickedness. This does not mean we shouldn't discuss and debate these things with unbelievers, but it does mean that we need to remember that God is God, not us. He validates Himself. Man is not the judge of God to see whether He exists.

Statements like this show the futility of presuppositionalism in producing any proof whatsoever for the existence of the Christian god. Peter makes it clear that a circular (i.e., fallacious) argument is the best we can expect from presuppositionalists when he says "in the Christian worldview, God...meets His own self-obligation to make Himself clearly known to everyone." In other words, if you first accept the Christian worldview, then you'll accept the claim that its god has done what it needed to do "to make Himself clearly known to everyone." But if one had already accepted the Christian worldview, he would already believe that the Christian god exists, and thus would have no further need for proof (unless of course he in fact really didn't believe, but didn't want to admit this to himself or anyone else).

But what about those who are not "in the Christian worldview," who want to know why anyone would accept it as truth to begin with? This is the area where presuppositionalism is weakest as a type of apologetics. It is most likely well suited to those who are eager to convince themselves that they are right when they claim that a god exists, or to temporarily chase off salvation doubt. But as a recruiting device, presuppositionalism is too laden with disclaimers, spring-loaded dichotomies, evasive ploys and dearth of positive arguments for its fundamentals to do much good. At most, apologists who make use of presuppositionalism can only hope that non-believers who encounter it will be overwhelmed with its aggressive offensiveness, predatory bluffing and rhetorical gimmickry, and consequently bamboozled by its piping hot bullshit.

But also note that the apologist gives us what anyone trying to defend belief in an imaginary being could say about the being he imagines. Simple parody is enough to show this. For instance:

*In the Flabbergastian worldview, Flabbergast meets Her own self-obligation to make Herself clearly known to everyone. Not everyone knows Flabbergast unto flabbergation, yet no one has an excuse for rejecting Flabbergast. All men know Flabbergast but many reject Her because they 'suppress the truth by their anti-flabbergastianism'. According to Flabbergastianity, therefore, the burden of proof has been met beyond reproach by Flabbergast Herself. The demands of the unbeliever for evidence are based upon his suppression of the truth in his anti-flabbergastianism. This does not mean we shouldn't discuss and debate these things with uneblievers, but it does mean that we need to remember that Flabbergast is Flabbergast, not us. She validates Herself. Man is not the judge of Flabbergast to see whether She exists.*

How does the Flabbergastian know all this? Well, because Flabbergast has put this knowledge into her head of course! In fact, everyone "just knows" this, just as the Flabbergastian does, only many people reject Flabbergast because of their anti-flabbergastianism.

This is on the same level as the Freudian insinuation that all women suffer from penis envy. How do you prove that they suffer from penis envy? Why, women prove it by virtue of the fact that they're women. Their denial of wanting a penis only confirms that they in fact do suffer from penis envy. It's utterly unprovable, unfalsifiable, easily parodied, completely baseless and could be claimed about any invisible magic being one sets up as an object of worship.

Peter writes:

We should appeal to the unbeliever's suppressed knowledge of God.

Likewise, the Flabbergastian should appeal to the unbeliever's suppressed knowledge of Flabbergast. Why doesn't the believer instead deal with the issue of metaphysical primacy, examine his own interaction with the world to see which version of metaphysical primacy he assumes when affirms a truth, reaches for a glass of water, or balances his checkbook? Does he believe that consciousness holds metaphysical primacy over the objects of his consciousness, or does he recognize that the objects hold metaphysical primacy over his consciousness? I wager that the believer will not investigate this issue because he senses that his professed worldview will not be sustainable once he does.

Peter writes:

I plan to do this in the next post when I reduce atheism to absurdity by showing that the atheist cannot make sense of the very idea of proof itself, and that the idea of proof and the burden of proof only make sense when reasoned about according the Christian worldview. I think I'd like to move on to other topics soon, so I'm going to try and do that in one post.

This is something I would really like to see. But just consider what Peter is saying (or parroting from some apologetics book). He says he's going to "reduce atheism to absurdity." We must ask: what is atheism? Break it down: the root word is 'theos' which means 'god'; -ism signifies belief system; a- means "not" or "without". Thus while 'theism' is *god-belief*, 'atheism' is *absence of god-belief*. So Peter says he's going to "reduce" the absence of god-belief to "absurdity." Now what could possibly be absurd according to someone who believes in the absurdity of invisible magic beings, miracles, divine revelations, etc.? For instance, would Peter consider it "absurd" if someone told him that he witnessed a group of rocks in the desert holding a conversation together? Well, according to the Christian worldview, the Christian god could make talking rocks. Bahnsen himself rhetorically asked of his god, "He could even make the stones cry out, couldn't He?" (*Always Ready*, pp. 109-110). In fact, how would the believer know that his god doesn't have a whole planet full of talking rocks revolving some star in our galaxy or somewhere else in the universe? This just underscores the problem with Christianity and the presuppositionalist ambition of reducing rival worldviews to "absurdity": the concept 'absurdity' would be meaningless in the cartoon universe of theism. So here the presuppositionalist gives us a prime example of conceptually borrowing from the non-cartoon universe of atheism in order to denigrate atheism.

But the presuppositionalist still may wonder how I as an atheist "make sense of the very idea of proof itself." I can assure you, it's not by asserting the existence of an invisible magic being. First, we need to understand what we mean by 'proof'. We won't find this information in the pages of the bible, so I'll give my own rendition: proof is the conceptual process of identifying the logical relationship between that which is *not* perceptually self-evident and that which *is* perceptually self-evident. This is a conceptual process because it makes use of logical principles, and logical principles are conceptual in nature. A principle is a general (i.e., open-ended) truth upon which other truths logically depend. In other words, universality is a property of concepts, and the universality of logic derives from its conceptual nature. Man is born not knowing anything, so he must learn by identifying and integrating what he encounters perceptually by means of a conceptual process. But this is not an infallible process, so he needs a guide which enables him to adhere his knowledge to reality - that is, to preserve the logical integrity of his knowledge which what he perceives. Proof is one way to do this. It is by proof that a thinker can assure that the identifications he makes about what he perceives are in fact hierarchically consistent with what he perceives and with other truths which he has validated. This is all in keeping with the primacy of existence principle, which is the recognition that the objects one perceives are what they are independent of the subject's intensional operations (e.g., awareness of them, wishing, hopes, emotions, cognitive errors, etc.).

Now consider: how can one make sense of proof on the metaphysical basis assumed by Christianity? At minimum, proof requires consistent as well as stable reference to facts; it requires the facts we discover in the world to be *reliable*. A non-theistic worldview is compatible with this requirement if it adheres to the primacy of existence, for upon the primacy of existence facts obtain as they are independent of consciousness - that is, there's no invisible magic being that can mess with the facts. So the facts we discover in the non-cartoon universe of atheism are in fact reliable, since there's no supernatural consciousness which could come along and magically revise them at will. But on the Christian worldview, facts can change for no objective reason whatsoever. Van Til makes this very clear:

God may at any time take one *fact* and set into a new relation to created law. That is, there is no inherent



reason in the facts or laws themselves why this should not be done. It is this sort of conception of the relation of facts and laws, of the temporal one and many, imbedded as it is in that idea of God in which we profess to believe, that we need in order to make room for miracles. And miracles are at the heart of the Christian position. (*The Defense of the Faith*, p. 27)

This can only mean that facts are neither stable nor consistent. Which could only mean: the facts we discover could not be reliable. At one moment, the pots are full of water, but at the next they are full of wine (cf. John 2:1-11). Why? Because on this view there exists a supernatural consciousness which can magically turn the water into wine just like that, completely at will. No fruit and yeast mixture, fermentation and aging are needed. As Van Til says, "there is no inherent reason in the facts or laws themselves why this should not be done." Causality on this view has nothing to do with the natures of the objects involved, but has everything to do with the intentions of the supernatural consciousness which magically directs their movements, as a cartoonist directs the movements of the characters in his cartoons.

So logic is completely unhelpful on Christianity's own premises. You can look into the pots yourself and see that there's water in them. But moments later someone comes up to you and insists that they are now full of wine. You reply saying that you had just verified that they are full of water. No, says the other fellow, they're full of wine. That's not logical, you think, right? Well, you're assuming the non-cartoon universe of atheism at that point. On the Christian worldview, however, facts can change at the whim of the ruling consciousness, so logic will be of no avail in reliably identifying any state of affairs in the universe. To the degree that the believer relies on logic to identify facts, he is in fact borrowing from a worldview which fundamentally contradicts Christianity. At which point we can safely say: the Christian has conceded debate just by raising the issue of logic.

by Dawson Bethrick

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

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

#### 5 Comments:

[M.](#) said...

This entry, like the others before it, are absolutely superior.

This entire blog is a fantastic resource for the Reformed nonsense that I am surrounded with on a daily basis.

You have readers; keep up the good work - please.

[February 04, 2008 9:56 PM](#)

[klas\\_klazon](#) said...

That dude Peter you quoted provided us readers with nothing more than unbacked assertions, clad in pompous language. Pathetic. I see it as an obligation to mock such people.

Oh, and by the way: great post.

[February 09, 2008 3:32 PM](#)

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

Outstanding work Dawson. You are to be congratulated. I especially like the last paragraph.

\*\*\* "On the Christian worldview, however, facts can change at the whim of the ruling consciousness, so logic will be of no avail in reliably identifying any state of affairs in the universe. To the degree that the believer relies on logic to identify facts, he is in fact borrowing from a worldview which fundamentally contradicts Christianity. At which point we can safely say: the Christian has conceded debate just by raising the issue of logic." \*\*\*

This pertinent idea is in my arsenal of argumentation against theism from hence forth. When the poor delusional xiantian invokes miracles as purported evidence, my counter appeal to the xiantian's assumption of a fixed reality

and logic in opposition to the cartoon universe of biblical theism means the xiantian is committing the fallacy of the stolen concept and thus invalidating her argument. She borrows from primacy of existence in order to assert primacy of consciousness.

[February 20, 2008 7:12 PM](#)

[Robert](#) said...

Tap tap tap ... is this thing on?

Is there a Bahnsen Burner in the house?

[February 29, 2008 1:43 PM](#)

[kbrown45@hotmail.com](mailto:kbrown45@hotmail.com) said...

Greetings Dawson

Sir, I respectfully request your directed attention towards the article at the following link.

<http://homepages.cs.ncl.ac.uk/chris.holt/home.informal/bar/philosophy/objectivism/merrill.comments.html>

Further, I also request of you to write a review and rebuttal of Gary Merrill's critique of Rand's ITOE.

Many Thanks and Best Regards

[March 10, 2008 7:29 AM](#)

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