

Probing Mr. Manata's Poor Understanding of the Axioms

In his 29 September comments to [this Christian apologetics blog](#), amateur Christian apologist Paul Manata of [Press the Antithesis](#) has attempted to bring the Objectivist axioms into doubt with a series of questions he prepared. But curiously, even before he presented his questions, he announced his own ignorance on the matter:

First, I don't know what you mean by the axioms.

It is apparently upon this foundation of admitted ignorance that he proceeded to pontificate:

Ultimately, 'existence exists' is broken down to saying that only material particulars exist, this surely isn't a self-evident axiom. So, you can't ask if I agree with them since they are very vague and, once subjected to some kind of Wittgensteinian linguistic analysis, they are shown to not stand.

Notice the stupendous ignorance already in need of correction: a properly conceived axiom by definition does not "break down" into prior statements, for those prior statements would need a firm foundation in order to be meaningful, and the axioms are the only proper foundation for meaningfulness. Since an axiom is a conceptually irreducible primary, it cannot be "broken down" into more fundamental affirmations. Additionally (and it is surprising that this would need to be pointed out), the axiom 'existence exists' and the statement "only material particulars exist" are not identical statements. To say that the axiom 'existence exists' can be "broken down to saying" something that is not identical to it, assumes that axioms are not conceptually irreducible, and if Mr. Manata is attempting to critique the Objectivist axioms, this is something that he would have to prove.

As for exclusivity, the only exclusivity of importance implied by the axiom 'existence exists' is that *only existence exists*. The axiom 'existence exists' does not "break down to saying that only material particulars exist," since the clause "only material particulars exist" is not conceptually irreducible, and pointing out the fact that existence exists leaves open the question of the nature of any particular existent that may be discovered. So we have not only an ill-fated attempt to interpret an axiom which in no way necessitates such interpreting (indeed, one should not interpret on the basis of self-admitted ignorance), we observe the fallacy of the stolen concept in action: Mr. Manata is asserting a multi-concept proposition, which is *not* conceptually irreducible, at the same level of or prior to a foundational axiom, which *is* conceptually irreducible. Indeed, the statement "only material particulars exist" - whether true or not - already assumes the fact that something exists (namely the particulars that are said to be exclusively material in nature as well as both the subject and object of cognition).

Also, Mr. Manata's confusion may in fact be due to an errant understanding of 'self-evident'. Many philosophers have claimed self-evidence for certain of their formulations which in fact are not at all self-evidently true (some have even suggested that invisible things are self-evident - cf. Rom. 1:20), and this trend in philosophy has unfortunately led to pervasive confusion about what it means to say that a truth is self-evident. Unfortunately, Mr. Manata appears to have fallen victim to such confusion.

Another confusion here is the tendency to mistake generality for vagueness. The two are not the same. I can say "all birds are biological organisms"; this statement is a generalization, but it is not in any way vague. The concept 'existence' is the widest of all concepts (it includes reference to anything and everything that exists, whether observed or postulated), but this does not lead to vagueness. To say that the concept 'existence' is vague suggests an inability to discriminate between the real and the unreal. If someone says that birds exist, who would find this vague? Mr. Manata and other theists insist that their god exists, and yet they do not seem to be troubled by any vagueness here. Indeed, the concept 'vague' is an abstraction which assumes the validity of a whole chain of prior concepts which ultimately stand on the truth of the axioms. So again, one must assume the truth of the axiom in order to make such statements, which again is evidence of yet another stolen concept.

Mr. Manata then suggests that axioms, when "subjected to some kind of Wittgensteinian linguistic analysis," can be "shown not to stand." Here Mr. Manata would be wise to check his premises, indeed, his own foundations. For here he is seeking to discredit a conceptually irreducible foundational statement by using a massive abstract system whose own foundations lie in the darkness of obscurity and which ultimately assume the primacy of consciousness (i.e., a view of reality that essentially denies the axioms). This tactic thus amounts to question-begging. All the while, the truth of the axiom 'existence exists' must be the case in order for Mr. Manata to utter any statements to begin with. If there were no existence, there would be no Mr. Manata and no "Wittgensteinian linguistic analysis" to deepen his

confusion. But ironically, Mr. Manata's very own existence and efforts to destroy rival views merely confirm the Objectivist axioms. So again, we have a jumble of stolen concepts choking a confused mind unable to find his way among the concepts he attempts to apply but which turn out to be too big for him to handle effectively.

Then Mr. Manata stated,

Anyway, resprting to axioms is basically foundationalism.

For one who seems to think himself competent in the ways of "some sort of Wittgensteinian linguistic analysis," Mr. Manata could make a better effort to clarify what he is trying to say. The series of letters "resprting" does not show up in my dictionary. Perhaps he meant to write "resorting"? Let's add this correction and see if his statement starts to make any sense:

Anyway, resorting to axioms is basically foundationalism.

Now this is at least a little more coherent, but unfortunately not much more. Mr. Manata does not make himself clear for he does not make his position on the matter explicit, but it appears that he is attempting to use the term 'foundationalism' to connote a derogatory position. Foundationalism in philosophy has been contrasted with such notions as 'contextualism' and relativism. Perhaps there are other positions against which foundationalism is asserted. But until Mr. Manata isolates his view on this matter and explains a) how "[resorting] to axioms is basically foundationalism" and b) what in tarnation might be wrong with foundationalism as he understands it, this statement, if correctly interpreted from his sloppy writing, appears to have been written with the intention to inflame rather than inform.

Mr. Manata then proceeded to itemize his criticisms, which I will address in the order in which they were given. But before proceeding, I want to point out that, as Leonard Peikoff notes in *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (p. 11), "no argument can coerce a person who chooses to evade" the axioms, and even if I thought this were possible, I would not seek to coerce anyone, even Mr. Manata himself. He is free to evade all he wishes. With that said, I will now go on to interact with his questions and criticisms.

i. If only beliefs that are perceptually self-evident serve as appropriate axioms, then what is the epistemic staus of this belief itself: that only beliefs which are perceptually self-evident can serve as axioms (or, basic beliefs)? Is this belief itself perceptually self-evident. No. So Burner's criteria runs afpul of its own standards. [sic]

This argument, to the extent that it can be taken as an argument, simply misconstrues the position it is attempting to critique. A worldview founded on objective axioms has no need to make the claim that *all statements* (even those pertaining to the nature of axioms) are axiomatic. The epistemic status of higher level statements is certainly not axiomatic (for they are not conceptually irreducible), and affirming that certain fundamental truths are axiomatic in no way commits one to the claim that higher abstractions and inferences must also be axiomatic. The essence of the issue should be quite easy to understand: we would need to have already formulated the axioms in order to discover their unique nature and understand their special relationship to the rest of one's knowledge. Statements summarizing the nature of axioms do not themselves have to be perceptually self-evident, and identifying the axioms as such in no way stipulates that statements summarizing what can be discovered about the axioms must also be perceptually self-evident. So there is no internal inconsistency here, no breach of one's own standards, just a lack of understanding on the part of the critic.

ii. The myth of the given: Sellers argues that this myth consists in thinking that perceptual states such as "this is red," and our powers of sensory discrimination in general, are pure an incorrigible, completely independant of any theoretical contribution or, background beliefs. So, perceptually self-evident claims cannot be foundational since it depends on prior assumptions for its intelligibility. Sellers writes: "For the point is specifically that observational knowledge of any particular fact, e.g., that this is green, presupposes that one knows general facts of the form X is a reliable symptom of Y. And to admit this requires an abandonment of traditional empiricist idea that observational knowledge 'stands on its own feet.'"

Again Mr. Manata's sloppiness needs to be corrected here. The name is *Sellars*, not "Sellers," and the ideas which Mr. Manata is repeating here belong specifically to one Wilfrid S. Sellars. There are several problems with Sellars' argument (or at least with Mr. Manata's attempt to present it - though it's not at all clear what the phrase "pure an incorrigible" [sic] is supposed to mean). But nonetheless the error here presents a good opportunity for clarifying an important point about the Objectivist axioms which is often missed by critics. Specifically, the issue here has to do with reducibility as well as the overlooked distinction between perception and conceptualization. The statement "this is red" is not a perceptual state, but a conceptualized identification *based* on a perceptual state. According to Objectivism, conceptualization must reduce to the perceptual level if it is to be objective and meaningful (since

conceptualization is the result of abstracting ultimately from what is perceived). Also, statements like “this is red” and “that is green” are *not* conceptually irreducible. To be sure, the statement which Sellars proposes as a template for predication - “X is a reliable symptom of Y” - is certainly not conceptually irreducible. Such statements do stand on prior assumptions, but acknowledging this does not in any way imply that perception is not the pre-conceptual foundation to cognition. Objectivism simply makes those fundamental assumptions explicit by rightly identifying them as axiomatic truths - that is, as truths that would have to be true even for one to deny them. Now, the quote that Mr. Manata cites does not indicate what Sellars would propose in place of the “traditional empiricist idea” in question (let alone what he would propose in place of the Objectivist axioms), but this would be interesting to see. If it is thought that conceptual thought does not reduce to the perceptual level, then to what does it reduce (if to anything), and to what is that thought supposed to pertain (if not to things that we perceive)? Since Mr. Manata does not elaborate on these topics, it’s hard to rule out the possibility that they matter not to him.

To be sure, before Rand, there were many misunderstandings that persisted in the realm of philosophy about the nature of perception and its role in the cognitive process. Now, however, we have sound theories of perception and concept-formation which integrate to form an objective basis for rational thought. The axioms are crucial to this objective basis, for they identify what makes it possible. Since consciousness is *consciousness of something*, statements are *statements about something*. Similarly, attribution of a property to a thing or a class of things is possible because properties are *properties of things*, of *entities*. So statements such as “this is red” and “that is green” do in fact require the axioms; if the axioms were not true, there would be nothing either green or red, and there would be no one around to call them such. To suppose that something other than perception must provide the basis of our knowledge is to say that something other than awareness is the faculty which makes knowledge possible. Thus the absurdity of those who contend against the primacy of perception in cognition is exposed.

iii. The regress is not halted: you must justifiedly believe yourself competent to judge whether a belief possesses those features which make it axiomatic. So accepting a certain claim B as basic requires that he also accept another claim K as basic: that B has whatever features needed to make it axiomatic, and not some alternative, as the proper foundation for knowledge. Thus the regress is not halted.

This statement completely misses the point. In order for a person to judge anything, whether it’s his own competence or a job offer, the Objectivist axioms would have to be true: the person doing the judging would have to exist (there’s one axiom), and he would have to be conscious in order to judge (there’s another axiom). Furthermore, to judge anything presupposes differences which can be discriminated, and there wouldn’t be any differences to discriminate if the axiom of identity were not true (so there’s a third axiom). Quite simply, judging oneself competent to do anything is not a precondition for the general truths identified by the axioms: the axioms are true whether one judges himself competent or incompetent. That’s because truth is objective - that is, truth is the identification of any actual state of affairs that obtains independent of our wishing, ignorance or denial.

Now we must ask: What is metaphysically more basic to any cognitive process than the subject-object relationship which makes cognition possible? A cognitive process is a process by which a conscious subject perceives, identifies *and* considers any object. The theist of course will want to posit that a deity is responsible for this. But is not the deity itself supposed to be conscious? Of what is it conscious? So the theist is right back to square one again, while Objectivism secures its position with an objective starting point which theism wants to second-guess as it tries to get away with denying it. What theists overlook is the fact that the Objectivist position would have to be true in order for the theist even to question or dispute that position.

iv. How do axiomatic beliefs support non-axiomatic beliefs?

It’s good that Mr. Manata chooses to bring such questions to non-Christians, *for his bible nowhere addresses them*. So how do the axioms support non-axiomatic knowledge? The axioms provide higher knowledge with the solid conceptual basis needed for building the entire sum of one’s knowledge in hierarchical structure. The axioms identify in the broadest possible terms the context which makes knowledge possible and important to human life and as such they directly identify the very preconditions of intelligibility.

The issue of the hierarchical structure of knowledge is of key importance to understanding the nature of the relationship between the axioms and the higher abstractions of a worldview. Peikoff makes the following point in this regard:

Human knowledge is not like a village of squat bungalows, with every room huddling down against the earth’s surface. Rather, it is like a city of towering skyscrapers, with the uppermost story of each building resting on the lower ones, and they on still lower, until one reaches the foundation, where the builder started. The foundation supports the whole structure by virtue of being in contact with solid ground. (*Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn*

Objectivism can claim certainty for its foundations because those foundations are grounded in the invulnerability of the axioms. To deny the axioms is to deny the reality that gives authority to any truth. In this way such denial is self-refuting. Denial is an action undertaken by a consciousness, and a denial that consists essentially of saying that there is no consciousness is a denial that rules itself out. Similarly, a denial that says there is no existence is a denial that consists essentially of saying the one who's doing the denying does not exist. So denying the axioms does not get someone very far. Indeed, what is he trying to accomplish? Will his denying get him where he wants to go?

v. How does one know what he perceives is the way the world really is? Is there a difference between appearance and reality? Maybe your axioms tell us how we should think in order to be rational, but how do you know your axioms, which are based on perception, marry the world outside you? How does you escape the ego-centric predicament?

It's unclear what these questions are expected to achieve, if not simply to antagonize. Consider the first question: "How does one know what he perceives is the way the world really is?" Does Mr. Manata truly think it's possible to perceive things as they are not? Typical examples of what some might call "misperceptions" might include things like so-called 'optical illusions', such as a pencil sticking in a glass of water. "The pencil is straight, but look at it when it's dunked in the glass of water! It looks bent! See! The senses can't be accurate!" Well, how did he know that the pencil is straight in the first place? Silly religious fool! He's so quick to discount his own means of knowledge that he doesn't realize that he's discounting his own means of knowledge!

The issue here is not an *error in perception*. Rather, it is a *misidentification of what one perceives*. There's a fundamental difference here, since perception is not the same as conceptualization. Of course, we should not expect those who have no native theory of concepts to grasp such distinctions. Rather, it may be the case that such persons are grasping for anything that will open the door to doubts that feed theistic craving.

Perception is not a volitional process. We can focus our perception, and such directing is volitional, but we do not choose to perceive something in place of something that's really there. We also don't choose how our senses integrate sensory input into perceptions; this is a metaphysical feature of our nature as biological organisms. Mr. Manata seems to be concerned that the axioms might not "marry the outside world." It's not clear what this is meant to say, but apparently the concern is that the axioms have nothing to do with what they're naming. But what is driving this concern? If the axioms are formed on the basis of what we perceive, why wouldn't they have anything to do with what we perceive? Is this a genuine concern on the part of Mr. Manata, or is it just more smoke and mirrors? It's clear that he perceives Objectivism and its axioms to be a threat. And as an apologist for the religious view of the world, he should. What he misses is the fact that his faith-based worldview is no match for a worldview founded on reality and reason.

vi. People disagree about what is perceptually self-evident.

Peikoff deals with this kind of tired, go-nowhere statement very effectively in his book *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* (pp. 9-10):

"People disagree about axioms," we hear. "What is self-evident to one may not be self-evident to another. How then can a man know that his axioms are objectively true? How can he ever be sure he is right?"

This argument starts by accepting the concept of "disagreement," which it uses to challenge the objectivity of any axioms, including existence, consciousness, and identity. The following condensed dialogue suggests one strategy by which to reveal the argument's contradictions. The strategy begins with A, the defender of axioms, purporting to reject outright the concept "disagreement."

A.. "Your objection to the self-evident has no validity. There is no such thing as disagreement. People agree about everything."

B. "That's absurd. People disagree constantly, about all kinds of things."

A. "How can they? There's nothing to disagree about, no subject matter. After all, nothing exists."

B. "Nonsense. All kinds of things exist. You know that as well as I do."

A. "That's one. You must accept the existence axiom even to utter the term 'disagreement'. But, to continue, I still claim that disagreement is unreal. How can people disagree, since they are unconscious beings who are unable to hold ideas at all?"

B. "Of course people hold ideas. They are conscious beings - you know that."

A. "There's another axiom. But even so, why is disagreement about ideas a problem? Why should it suggest that

one or more of the parties is mistaken? Perhaps all of the people who disagree about the very same point are equally, objectively right.”

B. “That’s impossible. If two ideas contradict each other, they can’t both be right. Contradictions can’t exist in reality. After all, things are what they are. A is A.”

Existence, consciousness, identity are presupposed by every statement and by very concept, including that of “disagreement.” (They are presupposed even by invalid concepts, such as “ghost” or “analytic” truth.) In the act of voicing his objection, therefore, the objector has conceded the case. In any act of challenging or denying the three axioms, a man reaffirms them, no matter what the particular content of his challenge. The axioms are invulnerable.

Mr. Manata’s goal in vi. was to bring the axioms into dispute by declaring that people disagree about axioms. But, as Peikoff points out, just by acknowledging that there are people who can disagree about anything, Mr. Manata only succeeds in affirming the truth of the axioms while seeking to deny them. As Peikoff succinctly puts it, “The axioms are invulnerable.”

vii. Why trust your axioms? Maybe it’s just perceptually self-evident to you.

Having run out of objections which can be groomed to appear substantial, Mr. Manata is now obviously grasping for anything that can be turned into a weapon against the axioms. But as before, he seems oblivious to the fact that he must assume their truth even to dispute them. To say “maybe it’s just perceptually self-evident to you” concedes the truth of the axioms: something would have to exist for the terms in such a statement to be meaningful, and someone would have to be conscious in order to utter them. Man has no choice about what is fundamentally true; this much is for certain. Wishing does not make something true (unless of course you’re Geusha ;). The most fundamental choice we have is to think, or to evade thinking. If we choose to think, then we are already affirming the truth of the axioms implicitly, whether we consciously realize it or not. In order to think, we must first exist (there’s the first axiom), we also must be conscious (there’s the second axiom), and our consciousness must have the kind of nature that enables cognitive processing (there’s the third axiom). In fact, in order for thinking even to be an option, the axioms must be true, since thinking, even as a potential, is a conscious activity. And if there were no consciousness (a supposition entailed by any rejection of the axioms), then thinking could not be considered an option (since there would be no consciousness to do the thinking and since consideration of options is a conscious activity as well).

To assert this all a matter of “trust” is to commit the fallacy of the stolen concept: these facts must be true long before we even get to the question of trusting someone or something. Since trust is a conscious activity, the axioms would have to already be true in order for us even to form the concept, let alone probe questions concerning what should or should not be trusted. In sum, the truth of the axioms does not depend on anyone’s trust in them. They are true whether we trust them or not, which simply means that trust is irrelevant to their truth. They don’t stop being true simply because someone chooses to distrust them.

viii. (If you says you knows that his perception is true for everone) How do you know this, then how do you know what you just said, ad infinitum. That is, how do you escape infintie regress? [sic]

Questions about truth only become an issue when considering statements about things, and even then only if we do so honestly. We do not say that a rock is either true or false, but we can say that a statement about the rock is either true or false. We can say, for instance, that the rock sitting in the garden came from a nearby construction site. This may or may not be true, and such claims are open to investigation. But the rock itself is neither true nor untrue, it simply is.

Now, the concept ‘perception’ refers to an autonomic physical activity of a biological organism. Perception can no more be “wrong” or “untrue” than a heartbeat or digestion. We would not say that hair growth is untrue, would we? Why then would we say that perceiving an object is untrue? Where did the critic of the primacy of perception get the concepts ‘true’ and ‘untrue’? To what do they refer? Indeed, if one is not perceiving something, he’s not conscious, for perception is the means by which biological organisms are conscious. To be conscious is to be *conscious of something*. If someone says that he is aware of an object but that the body’s perceptual faculty is not involved in making that awareness possible, can he identify the means by which he has this awareness? Perhaps he just has “faith” - that is, he feels it in some *non-sensory* manner. In other words, he appeals to nonsense.

ix. Just assert me that your view is axiomatic (dogmatism).

To recognize that one’s view is founded on the basis of undeniable axioms is not to declare his view in toto is summarily axiomatic. Axioms provide objective grounding to an entire conceptual hierarchy: while the total

architecture of the context of knowledge is supported on the firm basis of axioms, we do not claim that all the concepts and affirmations that inform the entire structure of that hierarchy are axiomatic. Properly formed non-axiomatic abstractions are formed on the basis of the axioms, and ultimately reduce to the axioms as well. For instance, I hold to the view that man has the right to exist for his own sake, i.e., that he does not need to seek permission *from anyone*, either real or imagined, to live. But I do not declare this view as an axiom. Indeed, Objectivism is extremely careful about what it calls an axiom. An axiom has the following qualities:

- It names a perceptually self-evident fact
- Its truth not inferred from prior truths
- Its truth conceptually irreducible
- Its truth is implicit in all perception
- Its truth is implicit in all knowledge and any statement
- Its truth must be assumed even in denying it

Consider the axiom of existence: the concept ‘existence’ refers generally to anything and everything that exists. We know that things exist because we have awareness of them, and that awareness is possible by means of perceptual integration of sensory input. By saying ‘existence exists’, the Objectivist is simply affirming that there is a reality, for reality is the realm of existence. He does not infer this truth from prior truths, for there could be no truths prior to the fact that there is a reality. To what would those allegedly “prior truths” refer? To something *other than* reality? To *non*-reality? The unreal is unreal, so originating claims on the basis of something other than reality could not lead to truth. Thus beginning with non-reality (or non-existence, as religionists do) is futile. Also, the concept ‘existence’ is conceptually irreducible; it is not defined in terms of prior concepts (again, to what would those prior concepts refer if not to things that exist?), but is defined *ostensively*, that is, by pointing to reality. Moreover, the concept ‘existence’ is implicit in all perception, since perception is *perception of something* (i.e., of something that *exists*) by someone (i.e., by a conscious subject which also exists). Likewise, since objective knowledge is grounded ultimately on what is perceived, the concept ‘existence’ is implicit in any knowledge claim, any inference, any generalization, any conclusion, since knowledge is knowledge of something. And lastly, as we saw above, the truth of the existence axiom must be assumed even in an attempt to deny its truth.

x. Or, repeat what you've already said, i.e., that it's perceptually self-evident (circularism).

Repeating a truth does not make that truth “circular,” if by this one means the fallacy of circular reasoning. They are true whether one repeats them or not. Furthermore, as pointed out above, the axioms are not inferred from prior truths; on the contrary, they are the truths on which all other truths stand. The axioms would have to be true for anything else to be true, since the concept ‘truth’ refers to statements which accurately identify some actual state of affairs. That is, statements that are true are statements that accurately identify reality (the realm of existence). So there's no instance of fallacious reasoning undergirding the axioms since they do not derive their truth from prior argument. Indeed, if the axioms were not true, there would be nothing to argue about and no one to assemble any arguments.

xi. How do we learn of these axioms?

By discovering them. As adults this requires the process of conceptual reduction, which involves systematically breaking our concepts down to their most fundamental assumptions, and checking to see if we've hit bottom, so to speak. The truth of the axioms is already implicit in our first perceptual experiences, since the axioms identify what we directly perceive. So long as we are conscious of anything, the axioms are present. In fact, the axioms are implicit in all perception, since perception is the fundamental, pre-conceptual awareness of some object by some conscious subject. Perception is *perception of something*, so the only validation that the axioms require is the relationship between a knowing subject and the objects it perceives.

But *identifying* these truths as axioms does require a hierarchy of knowledge which is consistent with those truths and which enables a serious thinker to consider the question: What is fundamental to the knowledge I know? Unless one introspects honestly on the nature and source of his knowledge, however, it's probable that he will misconstrue the nature of his own mind as he misconstrues the nature and source of knowledge. The result of such misconstrual is religion.

To conclude, we should not miss the fact that the problem for Mr. Manata on this topic is that he does not understand how the human mind forms concepts from perceptions. And he doesn't understand this because his worldview does not explain how the mind forms concepts to begin with. Essentially, he does not understand the relationship between the conceptual and the perceptual, and how the perceptual holds epistemological primacy over the conceptual. This is going to be extremely difficult for Mr. Manata to grasp because he has chosen to commit

himself to a worldview which holds that the subject of consciousness holds metaphysical primacy over its objects rather than the other way around, even though he must assume the very opposite in order to think and act. It is here where the ultimate problem lies: the willful devotion to a position which is ultimately *subjective* in nature - that is, a view of the world which grants metaphysical primacy to the subject of consciousness over its objects. So long as a mind remains committed to such a distorted and distorting view of the world, he will not be able to deal with these issues honestly.

by Dawson Bethrick

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [6:30 AM](#)

18 Comments:

[Francois Tremblay](#) said...

I already posted a full account of my philosophy on my own blog, starting with the axioms. Of course Manata will not answer it, because that would require him to address actual philosophical issues.

[October 04, 2005 1:58 PM](#)

[Christian Theist](#) said...

This post has been removed by the author.

[October 04, 2005 8:18 PM](#)

[Christian Theist](#) said...

My goodness, Dawson, you went and wrote a whole book! Am I supposed to read this whole thing? AAARRGGGHH!!! I guess I will. As much as I disagree with you, your posts are always interesting to read. Well, maybe Paul will respond and I can leave all the work to him.

Cheers!

- Christian Theist.

[October 04, 2005 8:22 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

CT: "My goodness, Dawson, you went and wrote a whole book!"

Was this your reaction when Bahnsen's *Van Til's Analysis* was published?

CT: "Am I supposed to read this whole thing? AAARRGGGHH!!!"

It's your choice, CT. You don't have to do anything you don't want to do. But if you want to learn something, you might want to read my blogs.

CT: "As much as I disagree with you,"

What specifically do you disagree with? See specifically my interaction with point vi. in my blog. If the axioms of my worldview are not true, then there's nothing to disagree about and no one to do any disagreeing.

CT: "your posts are always interesting to read."

Why, thank you, CT. They're also very interesting to write.

CT: "Well, maybe Paul will respond and I can leave all the work to him."

I wouldn't count on it. Paul has demonstrated over and over that all he can do is catcall from the sidelines. He never

interacted with my blog [Paul's Argument from Desperation](#). I recommend you read that one, too. It's a real slam-dunk.

Regards,
Dawson

[October 05, 2005 3:57 AM](#)

[Paul Manata](#) said...

Why doesn't Dawson write blogs on refuting the tooth fairy, the jaguar religion, santa clause, and ghosts? Oh, that's right, because even Dawson doesn't think he needs to waste his time refuting stupid arguments.

Dawson, writing a lot and misrepresenting others does not automatically mean you've done stellar work.

One example is when you look like a hack when you declare your ignorance regarding the philosophical problem of appearance vs reality. You can find this discussed, for example, in Russell's *The Problems of Philosophy* (you can find this on the internet for free). It is not what you're talking about (e.g., perspectival variation with the pencil)!!!

However, since you mentioned perspectival variation (which didn't even address *my* point and is an example of how your entire blog was sloppy and a waste of my time), I'll deal with what you said:

Consider the first question: "How does one know what he perceives is the way the world really is?" Does Mr. Manata truly think it's possible to perceive things as they are not?

Bethrick just asked if I think it is possible to "perceive things as they are not?" Got that? Then, Bethrick admits:

"The pencil is straight, but look at it when it's dunked in the glass of water! It looks bent!"

So! Bethrick just admits that one "can perceive things they way they are not!!" Or, does Bethrick really think that the pencil is really bent! This is unclear.

Bethrick's fantasy of a refutation proceeds by immaturity spouting:

See! The senses can't be accurate!" Well, how did he know that the pencil is straight in the first place? Silly religious fool! He's so quick to discount his own means of knowledge that he doesn't realize that he's discounting his own means of knowledge!

But the appearance vs reality question is not meant to attack the senses! Bahnsen just carelessly carves a path through unknown territories that no man (read, my argument) has ever been! Does Dawson seriously think that refuting non-existent arguments, and then trying to pin them on me, counts as a refutation of my argument??? As a side note wonders if Bethrick is a direct realist (snicker).

Anyway, Dawson's entire post was of this caliber. Why he thinks I need to waste my time refuting pathetic arguments is beyond me. Does Bethrick refute every single one of my blogs? Well then! they must be devastating arguments for theism! I recall Dawson saying that he hardly frequents my blog and finds most of what I write, boring. Well, could that not be the same here? Honestly, Dawson, and I'm sure you're a cool guy when you get a few beers in ya, but your stuff is purile and sophomoric. You can think you've touched what I wrote but you haven't, you didn't even get 3/4 of what I wrote and just showed your ignorance. I must say, in all honesty, that I really do feel bad that you publicly posted this and showed those who have even a smattering of understanding of these issues your complete and utter ignorance on that which you write on.

[October 05, 2005 9:24 AM](#)

[groundfighter76](#) said...

Check out "A Note on Rand's Misunderstanding of Kant" at <http://maverickphilosopher.powerblogs.com/>.

Looks like Dawson is just following his leader.

[October 05, 2005 2:27 PM](#)

[Paul Manata](#) said...

watch out GF, Dawson may Randroid rage on you.

I like this part of the above link: "So I persist in my view that Rand is a hack, and that this is part of the explanation of why many professional philosophers accord her little respect."

Dawson follows his cult leader, how cute. Rand misrepresents (and misunderstands) Kant and Dawson misrepresents (and misunderstands) me! Hey, I have something in common with Immanuel Kant and Dawson has something in common with an ugly Russian whore (you know, all those stories with Brandon, 'n all).

Look at all the design and order in this universe.

[October 05, 2005 2:56 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Paul Manata wrote: "Bahnsen just carelessly carves a path through unknown territories that no man (read, my argument) has ever been!"

Paul, you're leaking hot air again. But I think you're right: ol' Greg Bahnsen made a lot of mistakes, that's true. But I don't know that he blazed any trails in unknown territories.

At any rate, Paul, when you can show that the Objectivist axioms are untrue, please present your case. Oh, but wait, the axioms would have to be true in order for you to do that. Perhaps you've not grasped this yet.

[October 05, 2005 4:39 PM](#)

[Christian Theist](#) said...

BB: "At any rate, Paul, when you can show that the Objectivist axioms are untrue, please present your case. Oh, but wait, the axioms would have to be true in order for you to do that."

The argument is not over whether there is such a thing as existence, identity, and causality. After all, God is their author. The question is whether you, as an atheist, can prove that they are constant and that they ought to be assumed by everyone. Because you're a finite, limited person, you don't know that the "axioms" are assumed in everyone's thinking.

I know objectivists talk about the stolen concept fallacy. But if this proves anything, it only proves the "axioms" at the time they're proved and for the person who proves them. You don't know that the axioms are universal and invariant and that they "ought" to be assumed in everyone's thinking. Objectivists can't avoid egocentrism.

[October 07, 2005 8:56 AM](#)

[Jerry](#) said...

Because you're a finite, limited person, you don't know that the "axioms" are assumed in everyone's thinking.

Strange how the theist has to retreat into ignorance to defend their magic man. They are conceding that there is no rational argument or refutation to the atheist argument when they do so.

[October 07, 2005 6:10 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I wrote: "At any rate, Paul, when you can show that the Objectivist axioms are untrue, please present your case. Oh, but wait, the axioms would have to be true in order for you to do that."

CT: "The argument is not over whether there is such a thing as existence, identity, and causality. After all, God is their author."

CT, with all due respect (I'm allowing that there is some), when I see people make statements like this, I can only suspect that they haven't thought these things out very carefully, or that they're simply being dishonest so that they can protect a confessional investment. Your statement amounts to saying that existence, identity and causality had to be created. But what created them? Something that did not exist, has no identity and can cause nothing? If

you say that what created existence, identity and consciousness is something that exists, has identity and is conscious, then you're admitting that they did not need to be created, unless you think something created your god. But then you'd have an infinite regress here. Again, we have more nonsense coming from the Christian side of the fence. Meanwhile, you have to assume the truth of the axioms even to say what you are saying here. And what's more, you offer no argument to substantiate your position. I suspect that's because you don't have one.

CT: "The question is whether you, as an atheist, can prove that they are constant and that they ought to be assumed by everyone."

Wrong, CT. Stop trying to shift the issue. There is no onus on the atheist here. He has a firm foundation in the axioms if he adopts Objectivism. That's all he needs. He owes no one anything. If the axioms were not constant, that would mean that existence would stop existing. And if existence stopped existing, there would be no one around to ask anyone to prove anything. So again, we come back to the truth of the axioms, as Objectivism has identified them. They are, as Peikoff notes, invulnerable. Meanwhile, you're invited to explain where you got the concept 'proof'. I'd like to see this.

Now, if you want to disprove the axioms, then you're free to try this. But just by trying to disprove them, you will negate yourself, as I explained in my posting (which you've not interacted with, by the way). Do you not see this? In actuality, the dispute has to do with what holds metaphysical primacy: the objects of consciousness (Objectivism), or the subject of consciousness (metaphysical subjectivism). This is bringing the debate to its most fundamental level, one which theists typically try to avoid (they'd prefer to characterize the debate in terms of an antithesis between belief and non-belief; I already dealt with this misunderstanding in my post [Only Two Worldviews?](#) which I encourage you to read.) To make any meaningful statement about anything, one assumes implicitly that the object(s) he is talking about exist and have their identity independent of consciousness. Otherwise, you essentially end up affirming that wishing makes it so, which is the true essence of theism.

CT: "Because you're a finite, limited person, you don't know that the 'axioms' are assumed in everyone's thinking."

I have no idea what could be an alternative to "a finite, limited person." By identifying something as a person, you're already delimiting it. On a rational worldview, the concept 'infinite' can refer only to a potential, not to an actual. The actual is always finite. And here you speak of it as if it were some kind of deficiency. Aren't you finite also? Or are you beyond anything specific?

As for the point in question, whether or not I "know that the 'axioms' are assumed in everyone's thinking," again, I don't think you've thought very carefully about this, CT. The very fact that someone exists and is even capable of thinking affirms the axioms. It would strike me as bizarre if someone really didn't understand this. As for whether or not a thinker assumes the axioms, this is demonstrated by the fact that the thinker in question assumes that his thoughts and statements have reference to reality.

CT: "I know objectivists talk about the stolen concept fallacy."

And they should: there are so many worldviews that are premised on stolen concepts (Christianity is only one of many).

CT: "But if this proves anything, it only proves the 'axioms' at the time they're proved and for the person who proves them."

It's not clear to me what you're trying to say here, CT. The axioms do not need proving. One would have to assume their truth in order even to dispute or deny them, as my posting explains. Proof presupposes the truth of the axioms, since proof is a mental process. A mental process requires consciousness, and consciousness requires an object, and herein are distinctions which could not obtain if there were no identity. Again, you seem to be speaking without understanding.

CT: "You don't know that the axioms are universal and invariant and that they 'ought' to be assumed in everyone's thinking."

CT, seriously now, how do you know what I know or don't know? You're just asserting these things, but we've never even discussed these issues together. Your presumptuousness is all too typical, I'm sorry to report. But let's consider: are the axioms universal? Well, did I claim they are? In the space of my blog on axioms, I don't believe I did make this claim, so I'm not sure what generated your statement here unless you're just reaching for ways to discredit

the axioms somehow. But to do that, they would have to be true, this much is sure. If they weren't true, there would be no discussion of axioms since there would be no participants to the discussion. But let's consider: what is 'universe'? According to Christians, [the universe is analogous to a cartoon, as I have shown to be the case](#) in prior blogs. No Christian has given any good reason to suspect otherwise. But according to Objectivism, the universe is the sum total of all that exists. Thus [all that exists] = [universe]. Herein the axiom 'existence exists' is literally universal, since it applies to everything that exists, i.e., it applies universally. The test for this? Posit something that exists, and then exclude it from the sum total that exists. But that's a contradiction. So my position stands.

CT: "Objectivists can't avoid egocentrism."

It's not a question of an inability to "avoid egocentrism." Rather, it's a fully volitional, fully rational embrace of egocentrism, as Objectivism understands it. You might want to read *The Virtue of Selfishness* sometime.

Also, let's see if you can avoid hypocrisy here, CT. Why else be a Christian unless you took it's teachings seriously? And if you take it's teachings seriously, then you take the teaching that you will go to hell if you don't obey and do what Jesus wants to you to, right? So you do what is demanded of you, not because you love Jesus, but because you want to save your skin. I remember sitting in Sunday school on many occasions, and hearing the pastor say "If my wife doesn't want to go to heaven, that's her choice. I'm goin' to heaven. That's the most important thing to me." At least he was candid about it.

Also, CT, above you had stated that you disagreed with me. I asked you to specify what you disagreed with in my blog, but you've not come back on this. Can you state what you disagree with, if in fact you find something objectionable in my blog? Did you read it?

Regards,
Dawson

[October 07, 2005 8:04 PM](#)

[Christian Theist](#) said...

BB, I'll post a response, but I'm going to bed now and I have to work tomorrow so it may not come until Sat. evening or Sunday after church.

[October 07, 2005 9:03 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

CT, that's fine, you can comment all you like - in fact, I'm glad you do. But let's cut to the chase here. What is it that you disagree with? Can you at least focus on that first?

Thanks,
Dawson

[October 08, 2005 8:27 AM](#)

[Aaron Kinney](#) said...

Wow Dawson, this is a hell of a post! I gotta stop by your blog more frequently. For now I must read read read!

[October 12, 2005 12:28 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hi Aaron, thanks for your comment. I know sometimes my blogs are a little lengthy, but I intend to have my say on my blog. Everyone is invited to comment, but if I've said all there is to be said on a topic, what more is there to say? Curiously, CT from over at [Atheism Presupposes Theism](#) said that he would be posting a response to my blog on the axioms. That was back on the 7th. Not sure what happened. His blog seems to have no activity this week. I would enjoy a good exchange on the axioms, but no Christians are coming forward to interact with what I have presented. The most that they've been able to come up with by way of response is to malign Rand for comments she made about Kant. But that's completely irrelevant. Even if it were true that Rand misrepresented or misunderstood Kant, this has no bearing on the truth of the axioms (indeed, they would have to be true for anyone to misrepresent anyone else to begin with, let alone file the charge). Besides, no one has claimed that she was infallible, so it's likely that they're

just trying to inflame - i.e., generate heat rather than light, which is unproductive.

Anyway, stay tuned for more. I have lots on the way, just little time to work on it.

Regards,
Dawson

[October 13, 2005 6:04 AM](#)

[Francois Tremblay](#) said...

Rand is so maligned. I think she's the Nietzsche of Objectivism : not a great technician, but eminently inspirational and quotable.

[October 21, 2005 2:01 AM](#)

[Bones of Time](#) said...

Speaking of existence... there is a limitation. In finding this limitation a person finds that the foundation of evolution is on unsure grounds. Consider the following:

THE FOLLOWING WORK CONTAINS A MASS/FREQUENCY CHANGE CONCEPT THAT SOLVES THE QUESTION AS TO WHY MASS MOVES AT ALL. IT ALSO CLARIFIES WHY OUR WORLD IS ONE OF PRESENT TIME ONLY, WITH THERE BEING NO POSSIBILITY OF TIME TRAVEL TO EITHER THE PAST OR FUTURE.

THE PROBLEM AND REPAIR OF RELATIVITY

(C) 2004, Duane Ertle

In order to introduce the problem, I am going to quote a few sentences from a book "The Universe and Dr. Einstein," by Lincoln Barnett, published in 1960 by Mentor Books. The quotes are from pages 61 and 63 respectively.

The first concept involves that of mass.

"In its popular sense, mass is just another word for weight. But used by the physicist, it denotes a rather different and more fundamental property of matter: namely, resistance to a change of motion. A greater force is necessary to move or stop a freight car than a velocipede; the freight car resists a change in its motion more stubbornly than the velocipede because it has greater mass. ... But Relativity asserts that the mass of a moving body is by no means constant, but increases with its velocity relative to an observer. In short, energy has mass!"

Next, we need to look at the reason for this belief.

"By further deduction from his principle of Relativity of mass, Einstein arrived at a conclusion of incalculable importance to the world. His train of reasoning ran somewhat as follows: since the mass of a moving body increases as its motion increases, and since motion is a form of energy (kinetic energy), then the increased mass of a moving body comes from its increased energy. ..."

Now I am going to quote a paragraph from "The Bones of Time," copyrighted in 1978 by Duane Ertle, it is from the chapter "Flexible Time."

"The reason a fast moving mass is so difficult to stop, or have a direction change in, is due to its becoming frozen in a linear manner so energy cannot pass through its total volume as happens when it is at rest. When a mass moves at one-hundred thousand miles a second, the energy existent and having potential movement at right angles to its direction of travel could be at most a distance of eighty-six thousand miles a second. When moving at the speed of light minus two feet per second, the potential energy existent at right angles to its forward motion would only be two feet in one second. At the speed of light the mass would convert from being a three-dimensional object and would become a single beam of high energy photons streaking through space, all existing in only one dimension. Obviously there would be zero energy potential at right angles to the direction of travel."

Moving mass does not acquire additional mass as it moves. Atomic matter is composed of waveform. As

electromagnetic energy (a wave) has differing energy values so, also, does mass at different speeds have an overall differing waveform. The waveform is derived from the moving mass itself, as energy at right angles to direction of travel decreases in line density with movement, and transfers a proportional amount of that frequency toward the direction of travel. In this sense greater mass is being added to the forward motion of the mass at the expense of the energy/mass at right angles to it.

There is an expression that deals with frequency density and an increase of energy as the lines of frequency increase. The expression in question says that $E=hf$. The energy of an electromagnetic wave is equal to that of a very small numerical constant times the frequency of the wave. The greater the frequency of the wave, the more energy the electromagnetic wave would have. Radio waves may have very long peak-to-peak distances of thousands of meters, while cosmic radiation is able to have its frequency so compressed that it acts as dimensional mass, and there may be trillions of frequencies, or waves within a single meter. Now consider how the frequency at right angles to direction of movement changes from having great potential in those directions, toward having less, thus giving up mass/energy potential. Energy, in form of greater frequency, converts to an overall change of mass, or as some would say, "... resistance to a change of motion."

The concept of $E=hf$ is an equation that works for three different elements of nature:

1. $E=hf$, is an equation that describes why electromagnetic energy has greater and lesser energy values. Radio waves have very little energy value, while gamma and cosmic radiation have a great deal. And it all is dependent upon wave frequency and the density of that wave in a particular space.

2. $mk=hf$, (mass kinetic energy, equals hf) describes why mass shrinks to an observer as it moves. Because mass is composed of electromagnetic energy, it has the same wave values as electromagnetic energy, but in a very condensed manner. Electromagnetic energy remains in three-dimensional space in form of standing waves, yet having the same linear value of 186,000 mps all the while. Like a runner on a racetrack traveling all the while at that great speed. The same distance is traveled, just not in a straight line. As long as the velocity value within mass maintains the value of "c" it does not matter how small the "race track" becomes.

The, $mk=hf$, value demonstrates that the shrinkage of a moving mass is constant with frequency change. There are no sudden changes in mass/energy values. It also explains why the energy transfer takes place as frequency converts at right angles to that of forward motion. Just as sound waves have greater frequency with greater mass speed (thus the lines of frequency shrink, or become compressed) so, also, mass in the direction of travel shrinks in proportion to a greater or lesser internal frequency or energy values.

3. $c=hf$, is that for the relationship of a gravitational field and its frequency. It is possible that a "graviton," a single gravitational wave, has the same frequency as all other gravitational waves, no matter where they form; and what we consider as field of gravity has to do with quantity and not quality. Even though it might be either way, at present it appears that a gravitational field is formed of a quantity of waves (a greater multitude of waves all exactly the same no matter where in earth they formed) and not their frequency; although the $c=hf$ concept would be valid in either sense.

Dr. Einstein understood moving mass from the perspective of how it related directly to that of energy - and it worked for him. He arrived at $E=mc^2$! But the same result is able to be found by understanding that mass is composed of waves, and the moving mass undergoes a change from being greater in mass in three dimensions toward that of becoming greater in waveform in one direction and less in the other two dimensions.

In order that the reader may understand the thinking of today concerning the potential ramification of compounding mass, I am going to quote a paragraph found in a book entitled "Asimov's Guide to Science," (c) 1972; published by Basic Books Inc..

"... When Oppenheimer worked out the properties of the neutron star in 1939, he predicted also that it was possible for a star that was massive enough and cool enough, to collapse altogether to nothingness. When such collapse proceeded past the neutron star stage, the gravitational field would become so intense that no matter what, no light could escape from it. Nothing could be seen of it; it would simply be a "black hole" in space."

To which concept I would say; Oppenheimer did not realize that the force of gravity is a field of energy, $c^2=E/m$, initiated by the heat energy within a solar mass. No heat - no energy.

Black holes today are an attempt to explain why so much mass is missing from creation - 90%. The galaxies have been stretched out, and there is not enough mass in empty space to account for distances outward and their being so far apart from each other. But, that condition is not really new news. In the book of Isaiah 45:12 God said 2700 years ago

that the heavens had been stretched out. "I have made the earth, and created man upon it, I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded." So, then, it is not 'black holes' that mankind needs to find, but God.

The conclusion is this. Because moving mass has increased frequency change in direction of movement until it reaches the speed of light, it then converts into radiation; there is no manner by which a black hole is able to form under any condition. There is no manner whereby the mass in question may be anything other than the original mass converted into what it already, intrinsically, was. This means, if it is impossible for a black hole to form, then it is just as impossible for the "big bang" to have happened. Neither of these events ever did exist nor shall they. They both soon shall disappear with a "little poof" into an obscure page somewhere in antiquity.

[November 03, 2005 9:07 AM](#)

[Brother Danny](#) said...

Hahahahaha,

Duane Ertle! Still pushing that silly old pseudoscience as hard as ever, I see.

Dawson, if you don't know, Duane goes about from Creation-evolution forum to forum attempting to overturn Einstein. Does Duane have a degree in physics? Nope. He's just "inspired of the Lord," it appears.

Your [cartoon universe](#) was quite on target. I have repeated the same lines of reasoning to many friends in explaining the sanity (versus insanity) of the materialist (versus theist) worldview.

They do not seem to grasp the fact that their worldview erases rational boundaries, and fear logically follows. If *anything* can happen (God is totally sovereign), even the "covenant" God made with people could be "modified" (as it apparently was once from the OT to the NT) -- and Xians could all burn in hell for rejecting "Testament 3"!

I commented more on the post above on the [Debunking Xianity](#) blog. Have you thought more about joining? As I said, you can always cross-post to your own site. We are [averaging 300 hits a day](#), so think about it ;)

[April 15, 2006 4:57 AM](#)