

Tuesday, April 07, 2009

Q and A on Atheism

I had seen [these questions for atheists](#) some time ago, and had even written up a set of responses to them. However, I must have forgotten about them because I never did post them. While I was rummaging through some files recently, I came across these and decided to finally put them on my blog. Enjoy!

1. **Question:** “Why do you not believe in God?”

Answer: Because I’m honest.

2. **Question:** “Where do your morals come from?”

Answer: From existence.

3. **Question:** “What is the meaning of life?”

Answer: Meaning is a property of concepts and symbols. Perhaps the questioner meant to ask, “What is the *purpose* of life?” In that case, broadly speaking, the purpose of man’s life is to live and enjoy it.

4. **Question:** “Is atheism a religion?”

Answer: No. Atheism is an individual’s absence of god-belief.

5. **Question:** “If you don’t pray, what do you do during troubling times?”

Answer: I use my mind and deal with the situation. Those who choose to pray to an invisible magic being are simply announcing with this action the fact that they have given up on their own minds and are seeking a substitute to do their thinking for them.

6. **Question:** “Should atheists be trying to convince others to stop believing in God?”

Answer: Not necessarily, and here’s why. That one is an atheist does not mean that he ascribes to or promotes a *rational* worldview. Many atheists hold to a worldview which is little more than a secularized form of religion, a worldview which is built on subjectivism (the primacy of consciousness), mysticism (anti-reason), self-sacrifice, “duty,” the primacy of the state, etc. Such individuals are in no position to provide a suitable alternative to the irrationalism of religion. Now if the atheist happens to ascribe to a *rational* worldview, he will likely have an interest not only in educating others about this prize possession of his, but also be eager to model it to others in his own choices and actions. Such an individual recognizes the facts that every individual has the right to govern his own mind according to his own conscience, and that no individual can be forced to believe or disbelieve anything. He also does not give primary importance to what others believe or not believe. His own life is more important to him.

7. **Question:** “Weren’t some of the worst atrocities in the 20th century committed by atheists?”

Answer: I don’t have a list of 20th century atrocities by rankings. But again, atheism is neither a religion, nor a worldview. That one is an atheist only tells us what he does not believe. It does not tell us what he thinks is true. The atrocities of the 20th and other centuries were committed by individuals whose worldview sanctioned the initiation of the use of force against other individuals. I know of no religion which can consistently prohibit this, and many secular worldviews, themselves influenced by

religion, likewise fail to prohibit the initiation of the use of force.

8. Question: “How could billions of people be wrong when it comes to belief in God?”

Answer: Quite easily, in fact. The billions of people who have subscribed to one form of god-belief or another have been let down by the philosophers, who should have recognized and understood the fundamental distinction between consciousness and its objects, and consequently the distinctions between the real and the imaginary, the factual and the fictitious. Without understanding of these fundamental distinctions, expect a lot of errors in one's philosophy.

9. Question: “Why does the universe exist?”

Answer: This question commits the fallacy of the [stolen concept](#).

10. Question: “How did life originate?”

Answer: By a causal process.

11. Question: “Is *all* religion harmful?”

Answer: Yes, very much, particularly if one attempts to practice it consistently. Fortunately few in the west try to do this. But this does not lessen its threat to man.

12. Question: “What's so bad about religious moderates?”

Answer: That depends on the individual case. But a so-called “religious moderate” is likely to stand for very little, and when more serious religionists assert their numbers, moderates are usually the first ones to yield. They are less likely to be philosophically consistent in their views, and thus more likely willing to strike a compromise on serious issues. It is also important to keep in mind that every dictator is a mystic, and every mystic is a potential dictator.

13. Question: “Is there *anything* redeeming about religion?”

Answer: Not that I have found.

14. Question: “What if you're wrong about God (and He does exist)?”

Answer: I'm not wrong.

15. Question: “Shouldn't all religious beliefs be respected?”

Answer: This is like asking, “Shouldn't all lies be respected?” The answer is a most resolute no.

16. Question: “Are atheists smarter than theists?”

Answer: I don't see it as an issue of intelligence so much as it is a matter of choosing to be honest to reality.

17. Question: “How do you deal with the historical Jesus if you don't believe in his divinity?”

Answer: The stories of Jesus that we find in the bible are [legends](#).

18. **Question:** "Would the world be better off without any religion?"

Answer: Simply ridding the world of religion would not be enough. Human beings still need a philosophy suitable to their life on earth (and anywhere else in the universe for that matter). That is why I promote and defend Objectivism. The alternative to Objectivism is some form of subjectivism, of which religion is the chief model.

19. **Question:** "What happens when we die?"

Answer: Typically someone buries us.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Atheism](#)

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

18 Comments:

[madmax](#) said...

"Not necessarily, and here's why. That one is an atheist does not mean that he ascribes to or promotes a rational worldview. Many atheists hold to a worldview which is little more than a secularized form of religion, a worldview which is built on subjectivism (the primacy of consciousness), mysticism (anti-reason), self-sacrifice, "duty," the primacy of the state, etc. Such individuals are in no position to provide a suitable alternative to the irrationalism of religion."

This is an awesome description of the "Four Horseman"; ie Harris, Dennet, Dawkins and Hitchens. Merely being against religion is not enough. Those four (and many other atheists including secular humanists) are not for a rational philosophy and only offer a secularized version of religion and sacrifice.

Great set of answers Dawson.

[April 07, 2009 3:45 PM](#)

[Darrin](#) said...

"Existence" is too broad an answer for the grounding of morals IMO, as the theist can claim his morals come from God, who is part of existence (not to mention moral Platonists, but let's not dally on that silliness).

I think the best response here would be "from the identity of man in general and particular men in specific moral contexts."

Love these answers - although we may disagree on the historicity of Jesus and on atheism versus agnosticism, your thoughts are as close to mine as I've found on the Blogosphere.

[April 07, 2009 4:58 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

This post has been removed by the author.

[April 07, 2009 8:15 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Darrin, Dawson, Robert and everyone else

In discussions I have had with theists, they conceive of morals as a set of arbitrary commandments and often either can not or are unwilling to think about alternative moral systems. Thus any answer that stems from an objectively based system of ethics is likely to confuse them. In my experience they will claim that what we are espousing is moral relativism. They hear "mans identity" or "mans nature as man" and interpret that as meaning thou shawl do what thou wants. Frankly I just don't know how to distill down Rand's theory of ethics in a few concise sound bites that might get the idea across. I agree that existence is too broad and likely to confuse them, or more likely convince them that we don't have any ethics at all.

[April 07, 2009 8:19 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hi everyone,

Thanks for your comments. I see that my response to the Question No. 2 has raised some questions. That's great actually. I was hoping someone would call me on this.

Okay, here's the deal.

I think the question "Where do morals come from?" is stupid. It treats "morals" as if they were some kind of concrete object that is foreign to reality and mysterious in nature. It implies that "morals" had to be delivered from someplace else, someplace other than the here and now, the real, the actual, that maybe they are otherworldly. Such premises, although not explicitly stated in the question, seem to be expected given the way the question is phrased.

My pithy response "from existence" is intended to bring the questioner back to reality. Regardless of whether or not it's "too broad," I happen to think it's true, granting the question its most charitable interpretation (e.g., "What is the basis of moral principles?"). "Morals" don't come from the non-existent, and they don't come from something that is merely imaginary. They come from what is real, from existence. At best, the question is essentially asking us to point to the source from which we get our moral principles. That source is existence.

Also, keep in mind the fact that the question itself is very broad, so I don't think one can be faulted for offering a broadly-termed response to it. In fact, I don't think a theist who asks such a question in the first place is going to be very willing to sit down and consider the various points involved in developing the objective theory of values. He thinks an objective theory of values needs to be "grounded" in his god's nature, which only tells me how little he understands about what morality is and why man needs it. He's not interested in learning what you have to say. He's only interested in discrediting what you believe or think is true. A theist asking a question like "Where do your morals come from?" certainly is not expecting the kind of answer I've provided it, so it would be interesting to see how he might try to interact with it. Will he dispute it? Will he say "No, morals don't come from existence!"? Fine. Let him. Keep in mind that the theist is predisposed to disputing pretty much any positional affirmation you make, given your non-belief in theism. He has *presupposed* that whatever you say needs to be debunked.

Of course, it would be helpful to make clear with the theist what exactly morality is. I think confusion on this point in part generates questions like "Where do morals come from?" That the theist is confused on what morality is, is confirmed beyond all doubt when he claims that his god is the "ground" of objective morality. Morality is a code of values which guides an individual's choices and actions. What would an immortal, indestructible, omniscient and omnipotent being have to do with such a code? It would have no need for values in the first place, since it does not face a fundamental alternative like man does (i.e., life vs. death). Nothing can harm it, nothing can deprive it, nothing could possibly serve as an objective guide for its choices. It could sit on its hands for all eternity and do absolutely nothing, and it would still be what it is. But man needs to act if he is going to live. He cannot sit on his hands all eternity and continue living. He needs to acquire values in order to live. And since he is not omniscient, man does not automatically know what is a value and what is a threat, and he does not automatically know which actions will help him obtain values and avoid threats. He needs a code of values to teach him these things, and that code of values is not grounded in an immortal, indestructible, omniscient being which could have no use for values in the first place, but in reason and the facts of reality, i.e., existence.

Darrin suggested that morals come "from the identity of man in general and particular men in specific moral contexts." One could say that "identity of man" is also too broad. Some men are businessmen, some men are drunken bums.

Which man's identity is going to serve as the source of morals? Of course, I understand what I think Darrin means by "the identity of man" (i.e., his biological nature, including the fact that he faces a fundamental alternative between life and death, that he must choose to live if he is going to live, that given his nature as a biological organism capable of the conceptual level of cognition he needs a code of values to guide his choices and actions, etc.), and that's all true. But the theist isn't interested in hearing all this. I know, I've tried my best to try to explain it, and when I do they simply remove themselves from the conversation, showing no willingness to learn something from what I have to say on the matter. I have several blogs on this, and Christians don't interact with them. His prime directive is to twist the things you say, including the response Darrin proposes, into smitherneens by distorting them beyond recognition.

Justin is correct in pointing out that theists "conceive of morals as a set of arbitrary commandments." Their underlying premise when it comes to morality is that man needs to be controlled and told what to do and what not to do. Who better to take care of this than an omniscient law-giver? It is extremely simplistic, but that's part of the "beauty" of religion: it appeals to the lowest common denominator in terms of simplemindedness. "God good, man bad." It basically reduces morality to series of grunts from the beyond. Even the most simpleminded will respond to threats, and the priests understood this. Justin also stated that theists are typically "unwilling to think about alternative moral systems." He's right - they usually aren't willing to take the time to learn about these things. Deep down theists probably realize that their claim to morality is bogus, but instead of questioning it, they choose to endorse it more vociferously, and stand on discrediting rival positions as their own position's validation rather than actually producing something worthwhile in terms of a code of values which man actually needs.

Justin stated: "In my experience they will claim that what we are espousing is moral relativism. They hear 'mans identity' or 'mans nature as man' and interpret that as meaning thou [shalt] do what thou wants."

Right. As if their minds were on auto-repeat, they're just going to say your position is subjective. But that's when you ask, "what can someone whose worldview is based on the primacy of consciousness possibly have against subjective morality?" We do not need to concede that morality is in fact subjective, since we have the facts which inform our code of values. But the theist cannot claim this on behalf of his position. Now he has two burdens, not only to demonstrate that his position is in fact objective (and he would have to clarify what he means by this - let him try!), but also to explain why something subjective is "bad."

Justin wrote: "Frankly I just don't know how to distill down Rand's theory of ethics in a few concise sound bites that might get the idea across."

You said the magic word: "sound bites." This is the level to which the theist wants us to play. That is why I think my response is suitable. It will disarm the theist every time. Try it the next time a theist asks you "Where do your morals come from?" If it sparks further dialogue, great; explain what it means, and be careful to define your terms (something he's probably not very prepared to do himself). If it silences him, then he has made his choice. If he wants to walk away convinced "that we don't have any ethics at all," that's fine; he was already told to believe this long before he encountered you. His thoughts do not reality make.

Regards,
Dawson

[April 08, 2009 6:27 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

By the way, Darrin, what happened to Truthseeker over at your blog? I was so looking forward to more interction with him on David Hume and induction, seeing that he was pumping Hume so much earlier in that vast sea of comments. It's another case in point: the theist doesn't really want to debate these issues. He just wants to discredit non-believers. Hume is useful only so long as no one can respond to him. But as soon as someone comes along with an answer to Hume, the theist disappears. It's an unmistakable pattern.

Regards,
Dawson

[April 08, 2009 6:30 AM](#)

[openlyatheist](#) said...

Dawson/Darrin,

Do you have a link the aforementioned exchange w/ truthseeker? I can't seem to find it on Darrin's blog. Did I miss something? Thx.

[April 13, 2009 2:34 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hey OA,

How's everything been for you?

Here's the link:

<http://skepticalstudies.blogspot.com/2009/02/tag-peanut-gallery-comment-here.html> It's got to be one of the longest com-boxes I've ever run across.

Jump in, the water's fine!

Regards,
Dawson

[April 13, 2009 7:55 PM](#)

[openlyatheist](#) said...

Aha. I was searching that thread for the word 'dawson,' your signature, which is not there. Yes, that must be a record for replies. Thx.

[April 13, 2009 11:39 PM](#) [madmax](#) said...

Dawson,

Could I make a request. If you have time, could you read this short attempt to answer the problem of evil by a Christian apologist. I'm going to make it a broken link because he and his followers are crazy and they swarm like bees to their opponents. So I have placed a few breaks in the link.

http
://www.amnation.com/
vfr/archives/012529.html

He is relying heavily on Eric Voegelin (have you ever heard of him?) and the so-called "transcendent/imminent" distinction. Have you seen this type of argument before? It relies on a Platonic conception of "order" and truth. The question I would have for such an apologist is why did god not build order into the world? Why would he create a disorderly world when he himself is the essence of order? It seems a non-answer to me.

Anyway, I hope this is not an imposition.

BTW, this guy is a really ugly Paleo-Conservative but occasionally he gets metaphysical. So if you start reading his archives make sure you don't do it on a full stomach. He makes Pat Buchanan look sane and benevolent.

[April 21, 2009 1:24 PM](#)

[madmax](#) said...

Dawson, two more quickies:

1) Wow, I did not know you dealt with Bill Vallicella's criticism of Rand and Peikoff. I just discovered the post on Katholon. I have some reading to do. I'm psyched.

2) I have searched your site for this but I can't find it. I believe that you wrote a blog post that dealt exclusively with the claim that "man was made in god's image." Could you direct me to it? My searches haven't returned what I am looking for. Maybe it wasn't its own blog. I'm not sure.

[April 21, 2009 3:06 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hi Madmax,

Thanks for your messages. It's been exceptionally busy for me at work lately, and home life is no different. So I've not been able to spend much time on my blog in recent weeks. I have lots in the mill, but nothing quite ready to roll out yet.

I took a look at the article you linked to, and will assemble some thoughts in response to it when I get some time (maybe this weekend, but no promises). One thing that's interesting to contemplate is the variety of ways in which Christians attempt to resolve the problem of evil. Can't they all be with one accord on something like this? Or is the bible really not so clear on the matter? Anyway, more thoughts later...

As for Vallicella's anti-Rand rants, let me know what you think. Did I miss anything? I wrote my responses back in January as I was prepping for my trip overseas (e.g., brushing up on my Thai, etc.), and was in quite a hurry. I made some edits later, after I got back, and posted the edited version on my website. It should serve as a handy reference any time someone points to Vallicella as some kind of authority on Objectivism. He simply isn't.

Oh, and my post on man having been created "image of God"? That was in Year One: [Is Man "Created in the Image of God"?](#) I was actually working on another piece on this matter, last year or perhaps earlier, but never finished. Perhaps one of these days, if I get time, I'll see if I can finish it.

Regards,
Dawson

[April 23, 2009 6:00 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hi Madmax,

I finally took a few moments to review the article you linked to and assemble some of my thoughts in response to all this. Let me know what you think.

Much of Auster's theodicy is vague and hard to understand explicitly. But I would say that, if the point of the "transcendent/immanent" distinction as Auster applies it is not to render the Christian god irrelevant to the happenings on earth (as reason for why one should not expect the world to be free of evil), I don't know what his purpose is in raising the matter to begin with. Perhaps he thinks that the one sure-fire theodicy would be one which makes the Christian god completely irrelevant to what takes place on earth. If so, then he has applied the "transcendent/immanent" distinction well. Certain key statements in his theodicy confirm this.

For instance, Auster says:

"God's order is not an immanent order of the world that is simply given and that exists by itself; God's order is a transcendent order toward which we try to orient ourselves and in which we participate in the act of trying to orient ourselves to it."

This tells me that the "order" which characterizes or distinguishes Auster's god is not something one experiences in the world. Of course, this crucially depends on what is meant by the terms "immanent" and "transcendent," and from

what I can see Auster does not define these terms in his article.

Bahnsen explains the “transcendent/immanent” distinction as follows:

“Something is ‘immanent’ if it is near at hand or inherent in human experience (as opposed to being ‘transcendent’ - originating beyond or exceeding human experience).” (*Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings & Analysis*, p. 109n.61).

Given Bahnsen’s rendering of these terms, I think my point above sticks: if “God’s order is not an immanent order of the world,” but is “transcendent” - “originating beyond or exceeding human experience,” then it seems that Auster’s theism borders on deism: belief in a god which created the world and has abandoned it to its own mechanisms. Beyond that, the believer is supposed to seek after his god, on his own effort, striving to catch a ride on some “transcendent” order which is beyond his experience.

I would say, in response to Bahnsen’s definition of “transcendent,” that it, too, is rather vague. For something can originate beyond human experience, but still be accessible to it. A lake, for instance, on whose shores one vacations, would fit this category. The lake may have formed 10,000 years ago (and is thus “originating beyond... human experience”), but yet is not “exceeding human experience” (for one can see it, travel around it, jump into it, fish in it, etc.).

But other statements from Auster’s piece suggests that his solution to the problem of evil involves the implication that his god is irrelevant to the happenings on earth.

For instance, Auster writes:

“God is transcendent and can only be known through the life of the soul that turns toward him.”

This too is vague. Taken literally (and how else do you take a statement which is not accompanied by explanation?), this statement suggests that, if one wants to know “God,” he has to find a “soul” which has turned towards it, and that somehow “through” this soul which has turned toward “God,” one can himself “know” it. Assuming “soul” refers to a human being, the seeker of “God” would presumably have to search the world for someone who has turned toward “God” already. But then how does one know whether someone who claims to have found “God” has actually “turned toward” it? Auster does not explain this. Then, assuming one has found someone who has “turned toward God,” how does this help him know “God”? Again, Auster does not explain. Of course, these are not sayings which are meant to be understood; rather, they are meant to put the unstable mind at ease (in particular, Auster himself).

Then Auster comes out with the biggie:

“With God or without God, towers will continue to fall, cars and planes will continue to crash, accident, disorder, and evil will continue to be active in the world.”

If this statement is not a grand tip-off that, deep down, Auster really believes that his god is ultimately irrelevant to what takes place on earth, what else could be? It tells us that, in Auster’s view, evil is inevitable and unstoppable; it is destined to prevail on earth, in spite of the existence of his god. Auster’s god won’t lift a finger to combat evil on anyone’s behalf. Properly parsed, Auster’s view is really nothing more than that evil reigns in the actual world (the “immanent” realm), and good only obtains in a place which men can access only by means of imagination (the “transcendent” realm). Each of these points - that evil is unstoppable, that the Christian god will do nothing to put a stop to evil, that the good is something that obtains in some otherworldly realm - are consistent with the descriptions theists give of their god, namely that it has no needs, that it faces no fundamental alternative (e.g., life vs. death), that it is unchangeable, that essentially it could sit on its hands for all eternity, doing nothing, and still be everything that it is.

But a theodicy is typically not intended to confirm such points. Rather, it is usually intended to protect belief in an omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent deity given the fact that evil exists or takes place in what is supposed to be its creation. For Auster, it seems his god couldn’t care less about evil having a field day in its creation, which would defeat its claim to omnibenevolence. Or, maybe it does care, but the divide between “transcendence” and “immanence” viz. the Christian god’s “order” somehow prevents it from eradicating evil. It’s not clear either way in Auster’s case, because it’s not clear whence comes the “transcendent/immanent” distinction which radically divides the

supernaturalism of the Christian god from the nature of the world - the "immanent world," which Auster claims "remains disorderly." Can the Christian god do anything about bridging this alleged divide? If it can but chooses not to, then how could he maintain that his god is omnibenevolent? An omnibenevolent deity would be actively opposed to any and all manifestations of evil. If it wants to but cannot bridge this alleged divide, then it's simply not omnipotent: something prevents it from acting on its choices. Then again, I don't think the problem of evil is answerable on Christianity's grounds in the first place. Some vital ground needs to be surrendered in one way or another. Auster's answer to the problem of evil is to make his god effectually indifferent to evil. That hardly constitutes an omnibenevolent god.

It is interesting to note, however, the wide variety of responses Christians concoct to answer the problem of evil. But of the three characteristics which a theodicy seeks to preserve - namely omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence - it is this last characteristic which Christians seem most willing to compromise. For instance, where Auster exploits the "transcendental/immanent" distinction (and again, it's unclear if evil prevails because his god is not omnipotent or not omnibenevolent), Greg Bahnsen's answer to the problem of evil is different from Auster's. Bahnsen solves the problem of evil as follows:

[quote]

1. GOD IS ALL-GOOD.
2. GOD IS ALL-POWERFUL.
3. EVIL EXISTS.
4. GOD HAS A MORALLY SUFFICIENT REASON FOR THE EVIL WHICH EXISTS.

[unquote]

(Source: *Always Ready*, pp. 171-172)

Of course, Bahnsen does not identify what this "morally sufficient reason for the evil which exists" is exactly. Nor does he explain how a "reason for the evil which exists" could at all be moral in any way. More than anything else, this "solution" to the problem of evil tells us about Bahnsen's conception of morality; it tells us that, on his view, there is such a thing as a morally justifiable reason for standing by and watching evil take its course, *even when one has the power to stop it or prevent it in the first place*. How such indiscretion can be "moral" is beyond me. It can only mean that evil is suitable as a virtue in that it is allowable in the pursuit of some interest. On this view, it's just more "the end justifies the means," where the "end" in this case is the Christian god's glorification, and the means to achieving it involves evil activity. If morality is about duties and obligations (as Christians continually make it out to be), it is certainly not about being obligated to the good. Keep in mind that, since the Christian god is supposed to be omnipotent, it would be effortless for it to vanquish any existing evil (supposing it existed without its involvement in the first place), or to prevent it in the first place. (And as I pointed out in my blog [Was Adam Created Perfect?](#) it is futile to blame human beings for the existence of evil.) Bahnsen's theology heavily emphasizes the sovereignty of his god over its creation, so it's not likely that Bahnsen would conceive of a theodicy which concedes his god's claim to omnipotence.

Where Auster's god seems to be constrained from eradicating evil in the world due to some metaphysical condition apparently beyond its control (the "transcendent" nature of its order is somehow prevented from manifesting itself experientially in the world, thus compromising the claim that the Christian god is omnipotent), Bahnsen's god is apparently not so constrained, but makes the choice to allow evil to take its course wherever it does. And on Bahnsen's understanding of morality, there are supposedly "morally sufficient reasons" for his god to make this kind of choice. Tellingly, Bahnsen remarks that "any evil we find must be compatible with God's goodness. This is just to say that God has planned evil events for reasons which are morally commendable and good" (Op. cit., p. 172). He also has an excuse for not being able to identify what those reasons, "which" he says "are morally commendable and good," may be: "God does not always (indeed, rarely) provide an explanation to human beings for the evil which they experience or observe... We might not be able to understand God's wise and mysterious ways, even if He told us (cf. Isa. 55:9). Nevertheless, the fact remains that He has not told us why misery and suffering and injustice are part of His plan for history and for our individual lives" (Ibid., p. 173). Thus Bahnsen admits that he has no *informed basis* for calling his god's "reasons" for allowing evil "morally sufficient." How can you call a reason one has for the choices he makes "morally sufficient" when you do not know what that reason is? This is a complete misuse of the concept of morality, essentially making it meaningless: it is applied to purposes which are in fact opposed or destructive to values (which is

what evil is), which is simply not moral (since the moral is always pro-values).

So while Auster's god is ultimately irrelevant to what takes place on earth, Bahnsen's god actively sees to it that evil runs its course, since it deliberately chooses to use evil as a means in pursuit of some interest. Given this, it can reasonably be argued that Bahnsen's god has a favorable disposition towards evil. It certainly is not opposed to it. Auster's god may be opposed to evil, but due to the "transcendent/immanent" divide which separates his god's "order" from the world whose nature "remains disorderly," appears to be powerless to do anything about it.

Anyway, that's my take on all this. It is interesting to compare to various attempts to address the problem of evil. What is striking is the fact that there is no single answer which Christianity uniformly endorses. It's a case of theological groping if there ever were one.

Regards,
Dawson

[April 26, 2009 6:44 AM](#)

[Harold](#) said...

Brilliant analysis. This is the type of rationalizing I heard from Prager back when I used to listen to talk radio. With regard to the Holocaust and comments made by John Hagee, he said the [following](#):
"But the notion that God willed the Holocaust is neither anti-Jewish nor even un-Jewish. There are, after all, only two possible explanations regarding God and the Holocaust:

1. *God allowed it but did not will it.*
2. *God willed it.*

This is simple logic."

Sure. Of course, no serious person would find either choice satisfying and he concedes that...

"Why God allowed the Holocaust and other evils is a mystery."

In other words, we don't know why and probably can't know why but we still know, y'know?

You would think that one might, if committed to truth and confronted with these type of epistemological dead-ends, reconsider their assumptions and start over from the [beginning](#).

Oh, and if the formatting appears screwed up, well...It looked fine in the preview :O

[April 26, 2009 1:40 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Prager: "Why God allowed the Holocaust and other evils is a mystery."

Well, if one believes there is a god in the first place, and insists that it is an all-good god, yes, it would be a mystery. What's truly mysterious is why anyone would call such a being "good." This only denigrates the concept of good. How is allowing evil "good"? The appeal to mystery here is essentially another way of saying "Duh, I donno!" But my point is that, if one does not know the reasons why someone would knowingly allow evil, he has no legitimate basis to call those reasons "moral," "morally sufficient" or "morally justified." Of course, I think the notion that the Christian god, as it is described, could have a purpose to begin with, is a stolen concept.

Harold: "In other words, we don't know why and probably can't know why but we still know, y'know?"

I'm reminded of John Frame's [telling admission](#): "We know without knowing how we know."

Christians simply don't want to think their god is evil. But their theology clearly demonstrates that what they worship is evil. What they deny is the fact that chosen actions are subject to moral judgment, no matter who does the choosing.

If an individual is aware of evil taking place, has the power to stop it, but chooses to allow it to take its course, that is a choice, and it is subject to moral judgment. Proper moral judgment requires impartiality. But the Christian clearly wants to exclude his god, which is supposed to be all-wise, all-knowing, infallible, etc., from moral judgment. He would not seek to protect his god in this manner if it were truly a morally impeccable agent.

Regards,
Dawson

[April 26, 2009 3:45 PM](#)

[madmax](#) said...

Dawson,

Wow! I didn't expect such an awesome response. You nailed everything. I reached some of the same conclusions but with nowhere near the same comprehensiveness. Damn impressive.

Regarding Auster, you are so right. His god is indifferent to human suffering. Auster is an extreme PaleoCon who hates liberals, all liberals both Classical and Leftist. He thinks that liberalism is at root an attempt to remake the earth into the Kingdom of Heaven which means to try to make everyone equal. This leads "liberals" to socialism, feminism, the welfare state, open immigration (he is a real natavist), etc. So it is crucially important for him to explain that not everyone should be equal on earth. Therefore his god can't and won't intervene to help man and end evil (although he wouldn't say it like that). But this gets me too another point...

You again are so right that each Christian has their *own version* of god in which they stress different divine attributes and, as I now see, for the reasons of advancing their own agenda, personal or political. I have now come to believe that when a Christian is telling you about god what he is really telling you is about himself. You made that point brilliantly using Bahnsen as an example.

Regarding Valicella,

I thought you exposed that he did not understand Rand well enough to be critiquing her. He grossly misrepresented her. You showed that. He clearly opposes Objectivist epistemology (or what he thinks it is) and you showed in what crucial ways that was the case. Your essay was very helpful for me. BTW, why does he think he is a maverick? He seems like another religious apologist to me.

Oh and thanks for link to the image of god post. For some reason I just could not find that using the search feature.

Thanks again Dawson

[April 28, 2009 12:43 PM](#)

[openlyatheist](#) said...

Hey Dawson,

I'm afraid I have to ask for another link. I went over to katholon and tried searching for "Vallicella" without success. Can you let me in on the discussion?

Thanks again!

[May 07, 2009 1:21 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hi OA,

The link is there, it just doesn't reference "Vallicella" - it refers to "Maverick Philosopher." If I get a chance I'll revise the description on my Writings page to include his real name.

Here's the link:

[The "Maverick Philosopher" on Objectivism](#)

Above Madmax wondered why Vallicella apparently thinks of himself as a maverick. That's a good question. There doesn't seem to be anything "maverick" about the content of his thinking. If anything, he's double-dosed on Anal Phil, which is all too common among "philosophers" today, as well as among Christian apologists. It's as common as discarded cigarette butts on the sidewalk... Hardly something I'd call "maverick". Any time you see them talking about "possible worlds" and treating logic as a primary (without the need to ground it in perceptually accessible facts), you're probably dealing with an advocate of Anal Phil. Curiously, I typically do not find a defense for Anal Phil itself; it's simply taken for granted that it's the greatest thing since sliced bread. Personally speaking, it makes my skin crawl, as does anything which implicitly grants metaphysical primacy to consciousness.

There were other comments made above that I had thoughts on, however I've been busy traveling on business and repairing some computer issues... And my wife has already seen to it that we have a packed weekend coming up... So bear with me as I'm running behind (again!).

Regards,
Dawson