

Sunday, July 30, 2006

Responding to Chris

Christian commenter Chris posted some comments to my blog [Theism and Its Piggyback Starting Point](#). He wrote:

Oh Dawson, you've incinerated me. I admit that I cannot keep up with you. Your verbal gymnastics are extraordinary.

Thank you, Chris. I am to incinerate.

Chris writes:

I suppose I should be flattered that you felt the need to devote an entire post to little ole me. My wife will be jealous. Better cut it out. Of course your brilliance is only surpassed and mightily dimmed by your arrogance. Perhaps you can put down your verbal sword and have a civil discussion?

I run a blog, and I reserve the right to post anything on my blog that I see fit. I had not posted anything since July 12, and, given the little time I have to devote to blogging, a response to Chris was also an opportunity to post a new blog. If Chris opened up his own blog, he could do the same.

I had hoped that Chris would consider the points that I posted in response to him. But given what he wrote back to me in the comments section of [Theism and Its Piggyback Starting Point](#), it does not appear that he has pondered on my points very deeply. He does not demonstrate that he has grasped what I have presented, nor does he interact with what I have stated. Instead, he accuses me of arrogance and complains over the prospect that I might think that I "have it all figured out." I don't claim to "have it all figured out," but so what if I did? I know that I don't believe in any gods. And I know why. Chris has not shown that my reasons for disbelieving theistic claims are flawed or insufficient. His reaction to what I have provided suggests that he is in fact frustrated. But this can hardly be due to incivility on my part, even though he wonders if we could "have a civil discussion." I come prepared for a civil discussion. I have defined my terms and have traced the course of reasoning supporting my conclusions and verdicts. I am patient and willing to teach. I am willing to consider what Chris presents. When I think Chris is wrong, I point it out. Am I being uncivil? How so? Does Chris want me to go along with where I think he's mistaken, just to be chummy? I won't. Friends don't let friends drink and drive. Friends don't let friends mismanage their premises, either.

Chris writes:

If theism is not useful in man's natural desire to know why he exists, what is? Do you not seek greater understanding of life's many mysteries? Are science and philosophy your religion? Are you confident that in time you will be able to figure it all out? Or perhaps you already have? Yes, I think that must be it, because your steadfast foreclosure of all things theistic is a clear indication that you have it all figured out.

Falsehood and arbitrariness are not useful to any legitimate need that man has. "Mysteries" is just another term for the gaps in our knowledge where mystics want to say their preferred source of mystical knowledge exists. These persisting "mysteries" are nothing more than shadows where the cockroaches of the intellect hide. Shine the light of reason, and they scurry to find another shadow to hide in as they scamper to find another gap in man's knowledge which can be claimed to be inhabited by their god. Chris' response to my post is a superb example of this. I'm interested in *knowledge*, not in "mysteries." And what's more, I'm interested in leading an honest life, not in pretending to have a knowledge from beyond that I don't really have.

Chris writes:

You must know something that I don't know (other than all those neat words and verbal deconstructions), otherwise you wouldn't spend so much time telling me I'm wrong for believing as I do.

There are many things I know, and there are many things that Chris knows. Some of what he knows I know, some I don't know. And vice versa. I use my blog as an opportunity to tell my readers what I know. Chris is welcome to take a look and examine it, or to spout off in unintelligent reaction to it. The choice is his. One thing that I do know is that he has not refuted anything I have presented. In fact, it does not even appear that he has tried to do so. Rather, he seems to be upset that I have confidence in my verdicts. But calling me "arrogant" does not refute my verdicts.

Chris writes:

The universe existing is not in question. The questions are why it exists and how did it come to exist? I believe you made the claim, perhaps it was someone else, that the universe is eternal. It doesn't have a starting point. That claim can be nothing more than a statement of faith, since no evidence is offered to back it up.

So that my readers can understand where I'm coming from, let's consider Chris' questions one by one:

1. Why does the universe exist?

This kind of question is invalid because it commits the fallacy of the stolen concept. The fallacy of the stolen concept occurs when a thinker makes use of a concept while denying or ignoring concepts or conditions on which that concept depends. As such, it constitutes a breach of the knowledge hierarchy. For example, suppose someone told you that geometry is a valid science, but basic arithmetic is always wrong. The problem here is that geometry builds on the truths of basic arithmetic. So if arithmetic is always wrong, how can geometry, which makes use of arithmetic principles, be valid? Suppose someone makes the claim "There is no such thing as consciousness." Would you accept this claim? Does not the individual making that claim need to be conscious in order to make that claim? Do his hearers not have to be conscious in order to hear and consider his claim? In fact, he is performatively affirming the concept 'consciousness' by forming and making a statement, but his statement is denying the existence of the faculty which makes this possible.

Now consider the question "Why does the universe exist?" Let's focus first on the nature of questions which ask "why" something happened or is the case. Typically these are purposive inquiries: those who ask them are seeking to discover the purpose or motivation of an action or decision. We can ask, for instance, why did Billy stay home from school today? Naturally we suppose there is some rationale behind Billy's decision to stay home from school, but not knowing what it is, we ask the question. There's purpose here: Billy tells us that he was sick, and he stayed home to recuperate. We can accept this because Billy is a human being, and human beings possess the faculty of consciousness capable of conceptual thought, and are thus capable of making purposive decisions like this. What's clear here is that Billy has to exist in order to make any decisions, and he exists in the context of other things existing around him in making decisions. So existence is obviously a precondition to purposive action, and therefore also of questions inquiring about purposive action.

But when we get to the universe, are such questions valid? Well, what is the universe? I have already stated what I mean by this term. The universe is the sum total of all that exists. If something exists, it is by virtue of its existence a member of this sum totality called the universe. To ask *why* the universe exists is to ask why the sum totality of everything that exists, exists. But since questions of purpose can only be meaningful in the context of what exists, such questions can only apply *within the universe*, not to the universe itself. The universe exists by itself; it does not exist within something greater than itself. This follows from its definition as *the sum totality of what exists*. Since the question applies purposive inquiry to the universe as a whole, it ignores the fact that the universe is all there is, thus committing the fallacy of the stolen concept. If the universe is everything that exists, there's nothing outside the universe to satisfy the question on its own terms.

Also, the question "why does the universe exist?" begs the question against the position affirming the eternal universe by assuming what the advocate of the non-eternal (or "created") universe is called to prove, namely that the universe is here to satisfy or fulfill some extra-universal purpose. Where does the theist validate this assumption? Indeed, he seems unaware that this assumption is built into his question, and yet it is plainly there.

2. How did the universe come to exist?

I think questions like this are also clearly invalid. Since the universe is everything that exists, the question ignores that the only alternative to the universe is non-existence as such, which is nothing. Such questions ignore the fact that no matter what exists, if it exists, it exists within the totality of all that exists. So, the question requires that we start with *non-existence* - i.e., with *nothing*, since it does not allow anything to already be existing. At this point we have an unsolvable problem: if nothing exists, what can happen? Action requires something that exists to do the acting, so postulating any action necessarily assumes that something exists to do the acting so postulated. Theists are always telling us that the universe could not have created itself. I agree with this, but for slightly different reasons. I don't think that the totality of all that exists could have brought itself into existence, for an act of bringing anything about requires that something exist to do the bringing about in the first place. But since I start with existence, not with non-existence, I do not partake in the theist's unsolvable conundrum.

The theist does not have a problem with something existing eternally, *so long as it is a form of consciousness*, namely his deity. But if a deity exists, it would merely be a part of the totality of what exists, by virtue of its existence, whether hypothetical or actual. That is, it would be a part of the universe, since the universe is the totality of what exists. But the theist finds this unsatisfying, not for intellectual reasons (for we will see that an eternal universe is intellectually valid), but for emotional reasons. The alternatives to his god-belief are considered depressing, therefore he will deny all reasoning which

conflicts with his god-belief claims.

And yes, I do affirm that the universe is eternal. My reasons for supposing this are already suggested in the foregoing. But an additional point which even many atheists overlook or misunderstand is the fact that time is not metaphysical, it is epistemological. I do not accept the idea that the universe is "a space-time continuum." Time is not a thing existing out in the world that we find and pick up and hold in our hands; figurative expressions such as "I have a lot of time on my hands" notwithstanding. On the contrary, time is a measurement of motion, and requires a fixed standard, such as the earth's revolution around the sun. One revolution around the sun we call a year, and this standard is taken as a unit and broken into various subdivisions to give us the calendar and the clock. When we get to the universe as a whole, however, it's clear that there can be no relationship which can be taken as a standard. The universe is not revolving around some other object to provide a basis for temporal measurement. Time simply does not apply to the universe itself, it only applies within the universe. The universe thus exists outside of time, i.e., eternal.

That's my position, and Chris is free to dismiss it or make fun of it or anything else he likes. I don't really care.

Chris wrote:

I understand that you don't buy the theistic reasons for creation, because your mind requires evidence and a logical progression of cause and effect. You cannot contemplate a Divine hand in creation because it is not tidy, it is not mathematical, and it is not sensory based. You require facts, evidence, and logic. Nothing short of God revealing himself to you personally will do. So you retreat to the discernable universe and instead of asking the questions of why and how, you make yourself comfortable with the notion that it just is.

I have not given as reasons against god-belief that "it is not tidy" or that "it is not mathematical." Tidiness is not a condition that I put on claims, and I do not tend to measure claims for their mathematical accuracy unless of course they involve mathematical calculations (such as reconciling an inventory turn-over report or validating my mobile phone bill).

However, I have no choice about my reliance on sense perception, because this is part of my nature. My awareness of the world is made possible by sense perception. Everything I know about the world finds its ultimate basis in sense perception. Theists want to play a little game at this point, asking something like "Did you perceive with your senses the fact that everything you know about the world finds its ultimate basis in sense perception?" But if they practice a little more care in grasping what my statement says, they should see that I did not claim that every truth I know is a truth that I perceive directly. The ultimate basis of knowledge is sense perception, but through the formation of concepts I can build a body of knowledge upon that basis. Because I am able to form concepts, I am not bound to the perceptual level of awareness; I am able to develop broad abstractions which take the perceptual awareness of the world as their basis. I need this perceptual basis in order to build a body of knowledge in the first place. Knowledge of what? Knowledge of the world, of reality, of things that exists. Knowledge requires reason, which is the faculty which integrates and identifies what we perceive. It is not bound exclusively to the empirical level, for concepts are not empirical.

Yes, I do require facts, evidence and logic, because knowledge of the world is based on facts, evidence and logic. I want knowledge, so I go by the facts, the evidence and the logic that connects them together. I have found no gods there. Theists tell me that I need something in addition to these, namely something they call 'faith', which they treat as a kind of faculty like reason, but which operates completely mysteriously, even to the user. What's noteworthy is that the products of faith contradict the products of reason, so there's no valid way to integrate the two. Also, different people claim to know different things by means of faith, so those who claim to know things by faith quite often tend to disagree with each other, unless of course they're reciting from the same playbook. Since it remains completely unclear what faith's 'processes' are (supposing it has any processes to begin with), there's no way to determine whether a mistake has been made, or whether its basis is true, or whether its conclusions (if they can be called that) in fact rest on their stated basis in a rightful manner (we can't say "validly" here because validity is a property of rational thought, not of faith-mongering). So appeals to faith only complicate things, and bring us no closer to actual knowledge of the world. Besides, if one is honest, he has no need to resort to faith to substantiate his position. Either he knows on the basis of reason, or he simply doesn't know - he merely "believes," and even this is questionable.

As for the Christian god revealing itself to me... Well, it allegedly did this for Saul of Tarsus, did it not? The Christian god doesn't play favorites, does it? It seems that, if the Christian god exists and wants me to believe it exists and become a devoted follower and witness, it is free to do for me what it did for Saul of Tarsus. In fact, according to the legends we find in the New Testament, Saul was a violent persecutor of Christians. I'm quite the opposite: I'm trying to help Christians. Perhaps if I become a persecutor like Saul of Tarsus, the Christian god will pay me a visit?

Chris writes:

To answer your challenge of how I am aware of my God (to spare my jugular), my spirit attests to his spirit. My heart knows God, even as my mind struggles to keep up. I have felt God's spirit in my life. I have felt his directing hand. I have felt his assurances. When I become agitated, my appeals to him for relief are answered. This of course, is unsatisfactory to those whose requirements for belief are completely captive to the "sense modalities".

All of this suggests that Chris is "aware" of his god by directing his attention inwardly, by consulting some internal impulse or set of feelings which are in fact not a means of acquiring and validating knowledge of the world. By saying "my spirit attests to his spirit," Chris gives us nothing that we can examine and understand, unlike what we can know of the process of reason. He does not identify what he means by "my spirit," or "his spirit," or the process by which the one "attests to" the other. He says that his "heart knows God." But this gives us no further understanding of *how* he could know what he claims to know. What does he mean by "heart" in this context, and what is the means by which it "knows God"? Without an understanding of the process by which this alleged knowledge is to be acquired and secured, how does Chris know that he hasn't made an error? Or, is "error" simply not possible in such a case, because there is no actual process here? John Frame says "We know without knowing how we know." ([Presuppositional Apologetics: An Introduction \(Part I\)](#)) Now, that's not very helpful, nor does it give me any confidence that John Frame really knows what he claims to know. He knows *no how*, that is, without method, process, understanding or assuredness. This is by definition what we mean by a baseless claim.

What's noteworthy is that adherents to different religions claim their truths on a similar non-basis, saying that they "know" by some internal testimony which we're expected to accept on their say so. And when we don't, they get upset at us, sometimes calling us names, condemning us to imaginary realms of eternal punishment, sometimes even taking up arms against us for the threat of doubt and non-belief that we represent. If what they claim is all so true, why do we get such attitude when we express doubts or question their claims?

Also noteworthy is the fact that Chris does not enlighten us on how we can distinguish what he calls "God" from something he is merely imagining. This was my other question to him. To make matters worse for him, he appeals directly to his feelings when he says "I have felt God's spirit in my life. I have felt his directing hand. I have felt his assurances." Basing one's knowledge on his emotions is called subjectivism. Essentially it is the claim that something is true because we want it to be true. Typically subjectivists are not so openly brazen about their reliance on emotions as their epistemological rudder, seeking instead to camouflage their noetic vice.

But I do thank Chris for his comments here, for they strongly confirm the conclusion I came to in my blog [Carr vs. Cole](#), namely that *Jesus is a mood*, not an actual *person*. His god-belief is merely a set of feelings, not a set of truths.

Chris concluded his comments, writing:

You say that the universe is neither a cause nor an effect. Again, I say that a statement like that requires faith, because you cannot present evidence supporting it. I say that God is the cause and the universe is the effect. Evidence? Plenty, but none to your satisfaction. Again, I assert impasse.

Yes, I say that the universe is neither a cause nor an effect, and I have given substantial reasoning to say this. This has to do with what we mean by 'universe'. I have given my definition for this term; Chris has yet to give his. By universe I mean the sum totality of all that exists. Since the concepts 'cause' and 'effect' both presuppose existence as a necessary condition, they can only have meaning within the universe. They cannot refer to the universe as a whole. My reasoning is my evidence, and crucial to understanding my reasoning is an understanding of my definitions. If the universe is everything that exists, how can one say that it is an effect of something beyond it? The sum totality of what exists is the sum totality of what exists, i.e., nothing exists outside that sum totality.

Chris says he has "plenty" of evidence to support his claim, whose "truth" he apparently "knows" by means of consulting his internal feelings, that "God is the cause and the universe is the effect." From what I have seen, he has not presented his evidence for this claim, and what he has stated gives me no confidence to suppose that he has any objective evidence to present in support of it, and what he has left unstated (namely how we as his hearers can confirm that he is not mistaken or how we can distinguish between what he calls "God" and what he may merely be imagining) gives little confidence that even he truly believes these claims deep down.

by Dawson Bethrick

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [2:00 PM](#)

14 Comments:

[Francois Tremblay](#) said...

Hey Dawson. I have made a link back to you from my new blog, Check Your Premises (<http://francoistremblay.wordpress.com/>). Keep up the good work!

[July 31, 2006 7:50 PM](#)

[Chris](#) said...

Dawson- I too am very busy and have little time for blogging or commenting, but I do sometimes enjoy the back and forth interaction with non-believers. But I did want to respond to your post. There are a few items I would like to address and then we can let the vultures devour my lifeless carcass.

You will notice all of your quotes in italics.

First off:

He does not demonstrate that he has grasped what I have presented, nor does he interact with what I have stated. Instead, he accuses me of arrogance and complains over the prospect that I might think that I “have it all figured out.” I don’t claim to “have it all figured out,” but so what if I did? I know that I don’t believe in any gods. And I know why.

Dawson, the accusation of arrogance goes directly to your “tone” and the abundance of words and sentence constructions that are meant to confuse meaning rather than convey it. Atheists are nothing if not completely infatuated with the sound of their own voice and the self professed brilliance of their arguments. It is clear from talking to many atheists of the highly educated variety that what is really at issue here is worship. Atheists want what we Christians or Theists give God; worship.

This response will have little in the way of “if A is this and B is thus, then C must be that or you have a fallacy of something or other”. I took one semester of logic in college and found it to be dreadfully boring. If it weren’t for the blonde in the pink sweater, I would have dropped it.

The whole post boils down to this: Dawson - “I don’t believe in any gods”
Chris - “ I believe in God”

Falsehood and arbitrariness are not useful to any legitimate need that man has.

This is naïve and frankly coming from a worldly wise individual, disingenuous.

I’m interested in knowledge, not in “mysteries.” And what’s more, I’m interested in leading an honest life, not in pretending to have a knowledge from beyond that I don’t really have.

Admirable, but not realistic. You don’t fancy yourself much of a gambler I take it? How about the stock market? Or Real Estate speculation? In fact, much of life involves weighing facts, suppositions, beliefs, making decisions and then acting on those decisions. You watch a stock move over time. You think based on your analysis that its PE ratio demonstrates an undervaluation. You call your broker and you take a position based on the best information you had up to that moment. The next day the SEC announces that the company is involved in a stock manipulation scheme and indictments are imminent. You lose it all because you can’t unload the stock fast enough. The minute you picked up the phone to buy that stock you were engaged in an act of faith. Your knowledge only took you so far, then you had to act.

Take horse racing. You can know how each horse runs on each surface and for what distance. You can handicap them until the cows come home, but eventually you need to place a bet.

Jumping out of airplanes is fun. I’ve made over 500 jumps in my life. You practice, you drill, you train, you buy the best equipment, you pack your own equipment and you do everything by the book. At the end of the day, you are very nearly 100% equipment dependent and actually taking that step out of the aircraft is an act of faith. You have knowledge, but its worthless without action.

You don’t “pretend to have a knowledge” from beyond that you don’t really have. Neither do I. I have knowledge, objective truths, subjective truths and beliefs, as do you. One of my beliefs is that God created us and the Universe. It’s akin to jumping out of the airplane, or placing your bet, or executing the buy order. The knowledge I have is creation itself, a book

of prophecy and fulfillment, and a happy life in service to God, who has bestowed upon me many blessings. These things I know.

One thing that I do know is that he has not refuted anything I have presented. In fact, it does not even appear that he has tried to do so. Rather, he seems to be upset that I have confidence in my verdicts. But calling me "arrogant" does not refute my verdicts.

The arrogance is just the envelope in which you deliver your message. But this is not an uncommon trait among atheists, or theists for that matter. I just find that it engenders ill will and makes communication difficult. Its not practical.

The substance of my disagreement with you is plainly elucidated. I believe that you have arbitrarily assigned a value to creation that is not in evidence. You say that it is eternal. The only knowledge that you have is that creation exists because you experience it with your sense modalities. You cannot from there state with any degree of certainty that it always existed.

I asked the question, "Why does the universe exist?"

To which you responded:

This kind of question is invalid because it commits the fallacy of the stolen concept...

And on and on...

Also, the question "why does the universe exist?" begs the question against the position affirming the eternal universe by assuming what the advocate of the non-eternal (or "created") universe is called to prove, namely that the universe is here to satisfy or fulfill some extra-universal purpose. Where does the theist validate this assumption? Indeed, he seems unaware that this assumption is built into his question, and yet it is plainly there.

I ask what people have been asking forever and you respond with verbal mathematics. All of this is quite impressive but you've completely evaded my question, claiming it to be invalid. The "why" questions lie at the root of all scientific inquiries and leaps in understanding. What if Newton never pondered the "why" of gravity? Discoveries of any kind, monumental or mundane require first that questions like this be asked. I could go on and on with this. It's such a basic question but within the context of our discussion it's "invalid" because it commits the fallacy of x not wanting y to impart b to the second power! Please. You are not communicating to anyone here but yourself.

2. How did the universe come to exist?

I think questions like this are also clearly invalid....

And on and on and on.

It's another great question and the simple fact is, that you do ponder it and you can't reconcile it so you retreat to your syllogisms and your logical fallacies instead of saying, "I don't know and I'm unwilling to guess."

Since the universe is everything that exists, the question ignores that the only alternative to the universe is non-existence as such, which is nothing. Such questions ignore the fact that no matter what exists, if it exists, it exists within the totality of all that exists. So, the question requires that we start with non-existence - i.e., with nothing, since it does not allow anything to already be existing. At this point we have an unsolvable problem: if nothing exists, what can happen? Action requires something that exists to do the acting, so postulating any action necessarily assumes that something exists to do the acting so postulated. Theists are always telling us that the universe could not have created itself. I agree with this, but for slightly different reasons. I don't think that the totality of all that exists could have brought itself into existence, for an act of bringing anything about requires that something exist to do the bringing about in the first place. But since I start with existence, not with non-existence, I do not partake in the theist's unsolvable conundrum.

"I start with existence" is an arbitrary starting point as I said previously. You don't have an unsolvable conundrum because you have not dared to put yourself in a position to have to solve it. You have placed your parachute on your back and have boarded the airplane but have refused to jump. This is weak and intellectually dishonest. Everything you see around you, the

sum total of your life experiences has starting points. The natural world is comprised of things individually, each with a starting point. Astrophysicists and Geologists have dated the earth. They give a range of dates, but dating something clearly points to a beginning point. Trees grow from seedlings, birds hatch from eggs, there is a cycle of life and everything has a starting point. And I know at this point your saying "Well, now you are committing the fallacy of assumption" or some such nonsense. Whatever. Astrophysicists have also concluded that observable celestial matter is moving out from a center point at a defined rate of speed. This indicates that all of this matter started somewhere else, likely the same place and was forced out in a tremendous explosion. What we see around us now, has not always been as we see it. The conclusion that I draw from this is that given that the universe is made up of things, all with starting points, it makes sense to me that it too had a starting point.

I don't think that the totality of all that exists could have brought itself into existence, for an act of bringing anything about requires that something exist to do the bringing about in the first place.

Precisely! What are we arguing for? I believe what you say here. It makes perfect sense. You see it's just as much a leap for me to believe that the universe always existed as it is for you to believe that something (God) that brings about the universe always existed.

And yes, I do affirm that the universe is eternal. My reasons for supposing this are already suggested in the foregoing. But an additional point which even many atheists overlook or misunderstand is the fact that time is not metaphysical, it is epistemological. I do not accept the idea that the universe is "a space-time continuum." Time is not a thing existing out in the world that we find and pick up and hold in our hands; figurative expressions such as "I have a lot of time on my hands" notwithstanding. On the contrary, time is a measurement of motion, and requires a fixed standard, such as the earth's revolution around the sun. One revolution around the sun we call a year, and this standard is taken as a unit and broken into various subdivisions to give us the calendar and the clock. When we get to the universe as a whole, however, it's clear that there can be no relationship which can be taken as a standard. The universe is not revolving around some other object to provide a basis for temporal measurement. Time simply does not apply to the universe itself, it only applies within the universe. The universe thus exists outside of time, i.e., eternal.

I agree with your assessment of time. This is what confuses people about the Creation account in the bible. A day to God cannot mean the same thing as a day to man. A literal interpretation of these passages must be framed within the context of time that you suggest above. Where you go off the tracks is to assume that because time is reconciled differently within the context of the universe, that the universe doesn't have a starting point. That isn't a factual statement. You don't have knowledge of this. I'm sure this is a fallacy of something or other, pick one.

That's my position, and Chris is free to dismiss it or make fun of it or anything else he likes. I don't really care.

I have not given as reasons against god-belief that "it is not tidy" or that "it is not mathematical." Tidiness is not a condition that I put on claims, and I do not tend to measure claims for their mathematical accuracy unless of course they involve mathematical calculations (such as reconciling an inventory turn-over report or validating my mobile phone bill).

However, I have no choice about my reliance on sense perception, because this is part of my nature...

My awareness of the world is made possible by sense perception. Everything I know about the world finds its ultimate basis in sense perception.

How do you explain or reconcile the concepts of consciousness, self awareness, and intuition? These are not neat, quantifiable topics. They don't fit tidily into your requirements for facts, evidence, and logic. You have a brain, but what gives rise to your mind?

Also, different people claim to know different things by means of faith, so those who claim to know things by faith quite often tend to disagree with each other, ..., Since it remains completely unclear what faith's 'processes' are (supposing it has any processes to begin with), there's no way to determine whether a mistake has been made, or whether its basis is true, or whether its conclusions (if they can be called that) in fact rest on their stated basis in a rightful manner (we can't say "validly" here because validity is a property of rational thought, not of faith-mongering).

This is true. But put 25 atheists in front of a Shakespeare play and you will get 25 different versions of what the master himself was saying. This is not a criticism. This is humanity. There are in fact, unifying principles and beliefs in Christianity. The books of the bible are many. There are 66 books written by 41 different people over a period of 1600 years. There are bound to be some differences of opinions. There are bound to be differing subjective truths, as many as there are believers. There is however, only one objective truth and we are all searching for it. Tell me, what are the unifying principles of

Atheism? What is your unified world view? Perhaps the only one I can see is that you all hate or have contempt for Christians/Theists?

Also noteworthy is the fact that Chris does not enlighten us on how we can distinguish what he calls "God" from something he is merely imagining.

Call it a gut feeling, an intuition, or a higher consciousness. Let's just say that when I jump out of the airplane, I'm convinced my chute will open. Call it God's spirit working for me in my life. Call it a happiness that you can't possibly imagine.

Dawson, I suspect that nothing short of a miraculous event in your life or God revealing himself personally to you as he did Saul of Tarsus, will make you see the wisdom of God. Until then, until all the facts have been presented, and I believe that they will, keep an open mind. All good scientists keep an open mind.

Regards,
Chris

[August 01, 2006 7:40 PM](#)

[Chris](#) said...

The transition from Word to your blog comments has eliminated the italics. My apologies.

Chris

[August 01, 2006 7:41 PM](#)

[Frank Walton](#) said...

Dawson, you couldn't incinerate ice if you ate it.

[August 04, 2006 7:41 PM](#)

[Beast_of_Burden](#) said...

Chris:

Your examples of examining facts, reaching conclusions and acting on them are not examples of faith. It seems that you don't understand the meaning of the word, so I will define it for you, straight from the dictionary.

1. Belief that does not rest on logical proof or material evidence. See Synonyms at belief. See Synonyms at trust.
2. Loyalty to a person or thing; allegiance: keeping faith with one's supporters.
3. (often) Faith Christianity. The theological virtue defined as secure belief in God and a trusting acceptance of God's will.
4. The body of dogma of a religion: the Muslim faith.
5. A set of principles or beliefs.

1. Obviously this is not the definition you were using as you are talking about the analysis of facts to decide a course of action. This is the definition that you seemed to be using originally as you were describing a personal sensation, not material evidence.
2. This is not an accurate description; you are not being loyal to those ideas, you are merely looking at facts and thinking logically.
3. This type of faith would obviously be of no use in making bets based on logic.
4. This is also not related to facts or analytical decision-making.
5. This could be the one you were using above, but only in the very broad sense that you believe that facts and logic will lead you to the best outcome. EX. I have faith that the way I was taught to pack my parachute is effective.

Now, you don't seem to grasp his argument for the eternal existence of the universe at all. First, keep in mind that if the universe includes everything that exists, it would include god. Second, keep in mind that this theory does not explain the big bang, as that is not the question you asked. This simply says that the matter that caused the big bang, if that is what you believe, was already part of the universe. (It did not come from nowhere)

Now, there are two possibilities, either the universe can exist or it could not exist in "the beginning."

Universe does NOT exist: There is no god, and there is no matter, therefore nothing could come into being from nothing.
Universe does exist: There is either a god, or matter, or both in the universe, therefore things can exist.

Since things obviously exist now, the universe did exist in "the beginning," or in other words it always existed.

Finally, his point that different people receive different personal experiences of faith "from their gods" was not referring to Christians disagreeing on the message. It was referring to the fact that Christians, Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Jews, and every other religious group all have equally powerful experiences that "prove" their faith is correct. Therefore, the best alternative is that most of these experiences are wrong. This means that these personal experiences of feeling god are undeniably unreliable, and if your personal experiences are most likely incorrect grounds on which to base your faith, and you don't have any facts to base your faith on, your faith is rather irrational.

[August 05, 2006 8:20 PM](#)

[Daniel Morgan](#) said...

Walton,

You are such a goddamned twit. Incineration means to burn something to ashes. Eating ice would melt it, as well as vaporize some fraction of it inside your stomach. Not only could Dawson not incinerate ice, moron, no one could...but they could vaporize it.

You raise an interesting point, though, in your choice of ice over, say, wood. Perhaps what you meant was "vaporize"?

If you'd taken an introductory chemistry course, you'd've learned that the specific heat for water is quite high -- it takes quite a bit of heat energy, q (Joules), to vaporize ice, where $q = C \cdot m \cdot dT$, and C = specific heat (J/[g*K]), m = mass (g), and dT = temperature change (K).

The specific heat capacity of water is approximately ten times that of iron, for example, approximately forty times that of gold...and approximately three times that of wood. So if Dawson were completely stupid, as, say, you appear to be, he would choose to try to put his energy into vaporizing water rather than incinerating wood. If you aren't aware, Frankie, all it takes to incinerate wood is a very small amount of focused heat energy -- the energy of activation, in order to start the combustion of cellulose. Once some of the cellulose combusts, it releases a huge amount of energy (exothermic process) which in turn autocatalyzes the process (spontaneously spreads the fire).

Perhaps you should stick to hurling insults at atheists and not try so hard to be funny/thoughtful/quasi-witty. It just makes you look ever more the twit we already love you for being.

Now, hurry along and write a post on this on your blog which no one will read, and link to it as many times as possible, on as many forums and blogs and comboxes as possible, hoping you'll finally get a few hits. [maybe even your first returning visitor!]

[August 11, 2006 12:18 PM](#)

[Aaron Kinney](#) said...

Oh my God Daniel that was absolutely priceless. Fuck an ayyyyy!

Okay now seriously, Dawson, I made a post about your recent comment at my blog. I hope you dont mind. In fact I think youll like it. I am on a spiritual quest you obtain 20/20 vision for you!!!

[Click here!!!!](#)

Hope you enjoy it. Lets get you some free (not to mention divinely inspired) 20/20 vision ;-)

[August 11, 2006 4:03 PM J](#)

[ohn Flavin](#) said...

First, a small response to Chris:

The "why" questions lie at the root of all scientific inquiries and leaps in understanding. What if Newton never pondered the "why" of gravity?

This shows an *extremely* misguided notion of what science is. Science never asks "why" things are, merely "how" they happen. In fact, Newton specifically avoided the "why" of gravity, saying, *I have not been able to discover the cause of those properties of gravity from phenomena, and I frame no hypotheses; for whatever is not deduced from the phenomena is to be called a hypothesis, and hypotheses, whether metaphysical or physical, whether of occult qualities or mechanical, have no place in experimental philosophy [science].* Questions of causality have their place in philosophy and theology, not science.

Now to Dawson:

I do not accept the idea that the universe is "a space-time continuum."

Why not? The concept of a spacetime continuum really only means that in order to exist, something has to exist not only in space but also in time. Just as no object we know of can be only two-dimensional, as everything has *some* extension in all three spacial dimensions, so too no object can have no extension in the time dimension. Everything that exists, in order to exist, has no exist *somewhere* and *somewhen*. The spacetime continuum is verifiable in reletavistic effects, and I'll provide examples if you'd like.

Dawson:

Time simply does not apply to the universe itself, it only applies within the universe.

My problem with this comment may lie in confusion over how you defined "universe." Your definition for universe is, *the sum total of all that exists*. My question is: is the universe actually an extant "thing" and thus a member of its own set, or, being the sum of other extant things, does it not actually exist as a thing in its own right? I can see either being true, but I'm not sure which you mean.

I think I may also take issue with the sentence *The universe thus exists outside of time, i.e., eternal*. As soon as anything exists then the universe, as the sum of all things that exist, also exists. But that thing cannot exist without existing somewhere and somewhen. Really, spacetime and the universe as you've defined it are the same thing. Time is a relationship between things that exist, and so is the universe. The universe doesn't exist "outside" of time because the universe, as a sum, only exists when things exist, and when things exist so does time.

That being said, I want to tell you that I like your blog. I've only started reading it today, and already I'm a big fan. Thanks for taking your time out to write for all of us.

[August 11, 2006 4:30 PM](#)

[Lui](#) said...

What I find most difficult to comprehend is: why should there be matter instead of none-matter? (when I say "why", it's because of my lack of sophistication in being knowledgeable or imaginative enough when it comes to asking these types of deep questions. I'm trying to avoid introducing motive into the equation. Perhaps I should say "How is it that there is") This is screwing with my mind. What is matter at the most fundamental level? What is matter made of? "Why" does it exist at all instead of an empty void? "Why" should there even be a universe? Why not just an eternal "lights out", and nothing to call a universe, period? The more I think about it, the more it makes me suspect that the universe is absurd. I don't know if anyone really understands what I mean here, but it's starting to piss me off, and frankly, it's quite depressing, God or no God.

[August 19, 2006 6:59 AM](#)

[Aaron Kinney](#) said...

Lui,

The Hartle Hawking Wave Function of the Universe theory has some of the answers that you are looking for.

Dawson,

My blogs "Hit List" has been updated due to recent changes in the blogosphere. Check it out when you get a chance!

[August 21, 2006 4:36 PM](#)

[Lui](#) said...

This "Wave Function"; would it be possible for someone to translate it for me in a way that's at least a little intuitional? I'm not a physicist at all and I have major problem even grasping what these concepts entail. If not, could someone refer me to someplace where such an explanation might be available?

[August 22, 2006 2:08 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Wow, Aaron, that's pretty interesting. I wonder what prompted that. Isn't PM still active over on Triablogue? It's been hard for me to keep up on things as I'm preparing for a move. We're buying a house and I'm boxing everything up in anticipation of moving day, and it's sucking up all my available time. A while back I had worked up some responses to Chris above, but I think Beast of Burden pretty much answered him, and I don't see that Chris ever came back. If I had some time right now I would like to give both Lui and John Flavin some of my thoughts in response to their interesting comments, but even just writing this comment is about all I have time for now (I got DMV and title people to deal with today... egads!). I'm hoping to be all settled in within a month or so, but I'm not sure how much time I'll be able to devote to blogging. I have lots of material in the works, but little time to edit and complete it.

As for the wave function theory, I'm not very confident that Lui will find it very satisfying. The kinds of questions that Lui is asking are not intended to be satisfied. That is why he is frustrated with them. But I'll let you and Lui work this out, as I could be wrong on this.

Regards,
Dawson

[August 22, 2006 6:54 AM](#)

[beepbeepitsme](#) said...

I am compiling a blogroll of atheists and agnostics. Do you consider yourself to be in either of these categories? And if so, would you like to be added to the blogroll?

[August 27, 2006 6:45 PM](#)

[beepbeepitsme](#) said...

Welcome to the new blogroll :)

[August 28, 2006 4:11 PM](#)