

Monday, August 31, 2009

Response to MadMax

Hi Madmax,

Thanks for your comments to my blog. As always, they were very thoughtful.

I am responding via a new blog post because Blogger is not allowing me to post comments at the moment. Some error code: "bX-y8qp7n". I've reported it to Blogger, but I have no idea what they'll do about it, or when. So I'm not waiting for them.

MM wrote:

you've pumped out a tremendous amount of content recently.

Yes, it's been quite a run the last couple months. However, it still does not compare to Schönberg's "Verklarkte Nacht." 30 minutes of densely textured counterpoint for string sextet written in the space of 21 days. When did he take a breath? I've at least taken the time to have a beer.

RK used the term "noetic" at least once. I've encountered this before from theists. Noetic consciousness is supposed to have some non-rational access to knowledge, ie a form of intuition.

Presuppers occasionally invoke the term "noetic," and though they typically do not define it (one gets the impression that i) readers are supposed to already know what it means, and ii) they're simultaneously supposed to be impressed, even intimidated, by its use), it seems to have a rather general meaning, given the contexts in which I've seen it used. It seems to be another word for "cognitive." The dictionary defines it as follows: "of or pertaining to the mind," "originating in or apprehended by the reason," both of which are highly generalized. But perhaps you're right - perhaps it is supposed to denote some non-rational access to knowledge, or intuition as such.

As for what "intuition" denotes, this is a good question, but ultimately it rests on those who affirm it as part of their system to give it a concise definition. The dictionary is only somewhat useful, as it provides a number of different definitions. For instance:

- direct perception of a truth, fact, etc., independent of any reasoning process; immediate apprehension.
- a fact, truth, etc., perceived in this way.
- a keen and quick insight.
- the quality or ability of having such direct perception or quick insight.
- *Philosophy.*
 - a. an immediate cognition of an object not inferred or determined by a previous cognition of the same object.
 - b. any object or truth so discerned.
 - c. pure, untaught, noninferential knowledge.

Of course, the context in which the term is used is important in knowing more specifically what it is supposed to mean. Generally speaking, however, from what I've gathered, I think you're right to point to subconscious influences on one's conscious mental activity. It seems to denote a combination of association and automatized mental habit taking place on the subconscious level and expressing itself in the form of quasi-conclusions on the conscious level. Well, that's not intended to be a technical definition. Perhaps it's just my own intuition of what intuition is? Regardless, I would say it is not wise to rest one's verdicts on an appeal to intuition without a good understanding of what exactly it is supposed to denote and how it supposedly operates, so that its products can be understood in terms

of which inputs (if any) actually support it. Then again, if one can claim to "intuit" the Christian god, for instance, why can't another "intuit" Brahma or Xipe Totec? Of course, Objectivism does not participate in such arbitrary contests, since it is emphatic in making its premises and inferences explicit and tying them to what we perceive (as opposed to what we imagine). I don't think that's what the notion of intuition is typically intended to have in mind.

I must say, MM, I read [the Bernstein article](#) you linked me to the other day, and I really, really enjoyed it and have put a link to it on my sidebar. Bernstein covers so much territory in such a succinct and penetrating manner while thoroughly obliterating the thesis of Rodney Stark's book *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success*. Bernstein must have really poured a lot of effort into it, as it is very well written. I know Bernstein mostly from his recorded lectures, so it was refreshing to see him in print. It is an excellent article, and if I were teaching a class on the history of western civilization, Bernstein's article would be on the list of required readings. I think he goes a bit far in one sentence when he states that "a heretic is nothing more than an independent mind whose freethinking leads him into conflict with the prevailing religious text," but perhaps I'm just being trivial. However, it seems to me that a heretic could very well be someone who still endorses dogmatic commitments which he would question were he truly independent in his thinking (I'm thinking of Arius, for instance, whom Bernstein discusses). He may dispute the doctrine of the trinity, for instance, but still affirm equally arbitrary notions, such as creation ex nihilo, the virgin birth, salvation through Jesus' atoning works, miracles, raising the dead, etc. But this in no way detracts from the point Bernstein is trying to make at this point in his essay, and surely not from any of the larger points he is trying to make.

I went through with my highlighter and noted a number of Bernstein's statements for future reference. I was delighted to see that he made the distinction between rationality and rationalism, as this is a key issue for the discussion. Christian apologists tend to suppose that apply norms of logic guarantees a position's rationality. But this merely emphasizes form over content, giving the the latter short-shrift. As "deduction without reference to reality," rationalism applies logic to arbitrary content, to essentially a fantasy, as Bernstein rightly notes.

I have plenty more works in the mill. But in the meantime, you might want to take a look at [Chris Bolt's latest reply to me](#). He did a video where he takes [my recent blog](#) on divine deception to task. In it, he calls my blog entries "lengthy, arrogant posts." I thought that was rather flattering.

Regards,
Dawson

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [5:00 PM](#)

3 Comments:

[madmax](#) said...

Dawson,

I'm so glad that you liked the Bernstein article. Bernstein is my favorite Objectivist writer. His writing has great precision. He wrote an essay on heroism which was awesome. He carefully defines the word breaking it into 4 subparts and then explains every one. It was the best thing on heroism that I ever read. In the essay I linked to, he totally destroyed Stark's thesis. It was a joy to read.

Regarding Noetic, I too have seen it referred to as a stand in for all things cognitive. But a few Christians I have encountered use it to give consciousness a supernatural aura as they describe it as an intuitive conduit to a "higher reality" which the "materialist" secularists, of course, can't disprove.

And thanks for the link to Chris Bolt's video. I didn't listen to the whole thing but it sounds like he is doing what theists always do - give their god inherent properties so as to avoid contradictions; i.e. "god can't lie", "god can't violate the laws of logic", "god can't square circles", "god can't declare eating small children as the moral good", etc..

Regards,

MM

[September 01, 2009 10:35 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

The very notion that "God cannot lie" seems to contradict what the [Westminster Confession of Faith affirms](#), which is that the Christian god is "most free". It references Psalms 115:3 to support this: "But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased." If it is the case that "God cannot lie," then how can one say it is "most free"? It is not free, it is constrained in a way that even man is not. Moreover, since "God cannot lie," its truth-telling is amoral - it has no choice in the matter. Where there is no choice, there is no morality. So the Christian god certainly could not itself be moral for this reason, and thus it is incoherent to point to it as a model or standard of morality.

Also, Bolt did not deal with my point about lying by omission. Since the Christian god selects what it will reveal to human beings, this means that it chooses not to reveal certain things. Since there is such a thing as lying by omission, how does the Christian escape this problem? I suppose that if Bolt had a good response to it, he would have shared it.

Regards,
Dawson

[September 01, 2009 4:18 PM](#)

[karim](#) said...

A valuable post on Intuition

Thanks,
Karim - [Mind Power](#)

[September 30, 2009 2:15 AM](#)

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