

Sunday, July 13, 2008

[SIC]

I recently found the following unsolicited e-mail from a Christian in my inbox:

*Your talk is nonsense*

*Instead of using your time for this nonsense. Why don't you just repent of your ignorance And start asking God to forgive you. Oh but I remember you said you don't believe in God. So, then tell me who do you believe in? In your self, stone, wood, air, moon, sun or what. You think you're good enough to be god. Give a Good reason that I would believe. Yea. Cause you Don't have one.*

*I'll give a good reason to believe in God. Remember this for the rest of your life and you can share it As well. Jesus is the Only Lord and Savior. If you believe You will be saved from going into the lake of fire.*

*Remember this very specific thing that I'm going to say. God is God and not your puppet. He will do as He will. If you can make God do what you want then He is not God anymore.*

*Mr. Dawson you can keep on waiting for that demonstration of power But you are never going to get it. For the intention of your heart is not good. Your discussion is evil nonsense talk which have no meaning.*

*I just want to ask you something. Do you know who Lucifer is? Mr. Dawson have you had a bad life? What pushes you to believe what you believe? What proofs do you have for what you believe? We live in a world that has laws. We are obligated to follows these laws. If we break any one of these laws we have face a judge and he will judge us According to the offense committed. That's a proof that bad and good exists. Just like there is rules and regulations to follow here on the world there is devine rules and regulations. You will have to face the heavenly Judge for not believing in His Son Jesus Christ. What excuse are going to tell him? That you didn't know that he exist because He didn't demonstrated his power of moving a mountain. That you spent your*

*Time arguing against him and wasn't evidence to believe in him. I'm sorry If I didn't use the correct words but I feel disappointed and sad at same time when I See what they write about God. All God wants to do is love us.*

ALL,

If you can't see it, this has [SIC] written all over it. That is, its author suffers from acute *Self-Inflicted Christianity*. I found it so entertaining, that I didn't want to pass up the opportunity to examine it. So let's do some lighthearted atheology, shall we?

Clearly this guy (I'll assume it is a man, but this may be wrong for all I know) is really out there. As a pastor I once knew would say, he's "sold out for Jesus." I suppose so. It's interesting to note that he asks why I don't "just repent of [my] ignorance," while Christians are always telling us that Romans 1 indicates that we do not have this "excuse" (see vs. 20). He asks why I don't "start asking God to forgive [me]," only then to acknowledge the fact that I have no god-belief to begin with. I don't ask things that do not exist to "forgive" me of things I haven't done wrong to them. Indeed, how do you wrong something that doesn't exist?

He then asks "who do you believe in?" What part of the concepts "atheist" and "non-believer" does this person not understand? If he is interested in knowing what I affirm to be true, he is welcome to start reading [my blog](#). He could start with [A Succinct Summary of My Worldview](#). He can also familiarize with what I hold to be true by examining some of the many articles I have published on my website [Katholon](#).

As possible answers to his own question, he suggests my "self, stone, wood, air, moon, sun or what." Notice that, with the possible exception of the unspecified and open-ended "what" at the tail end of his list, each of the things he mentions actually exists. I exist (which means: my self exists), stones exist (there are some in my backyard right now), wood exists (there's wood all over in my house, both in the frame and in most of the furniture), air exists (I breathe it all day long), the moon exists (I've always loved looking up at it), and the sun

exists (it helps my basil plants grow). So why wouldn't I recognize that these things exist? Is this Christian upset because I acknowledge things that do exist, and don't put faith in things that do not exist? Is his complaint really an expression of some kind of worldview jealousy?

He says that he will "give a good reason to believe in God," and proceeds to tell me that "If [I] believe, [I] will be saved from going into the lake of fire." I guess this fellow doesn't see that he simply multiplies his own burdens here, for at this point, not only does he need to demonstrate that his god exists, he also needs to demonstrate that a "lake of fire" also exists. His "just believe" rendition of Christian apologetics is remarkably indistinguishable from the "just pretend" indulgences of a child. That itself is not remarkable, though; it is all too commonplace among adherents of Christianity, from the occasional pew-warmer to the most dedicated church pastor, to the studious apologete who's gung ho for his god. Believers are so absorbed in the fake environment of their shared fiction, that they suppose everyone else is just as prone as they are to believing in analogous fantasies. Their approach is to substantiate one bit of fiction by appealing to another bit of fiction. The more sophisticated apologists at least make some attempt to conceal this, but it's there all the same.

He goes on to admonish me with severe words:

Remember this very specific thing that I'm going to say.  
God is God and not your puppet. He will do as He will.  
If you can make God do what you want then He is not God anymore.

I see. Well, I guess I won't try to make the Christian god do what I want it to do anymore. The Christian god is not my puppet (glad that's settled!). But according to Christianity, I'm its puppet, since "the potter is sovereign over the clay in both control and authority" (John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, p. 178; cf. Romans 9:20-21). After all, on the Christian view, I'm nothing more than a lump of clay in its god's hands (even though it doesn't have any hands - it has no body!), and what I am and what I do have already been pre-determined since before the foundations of the world (cf. Rev. 17:8).

But don't be surprised to find below that there's apparently something I can do to keep the Christian god from doing something it might otherwise want to do.

He then writes, referring to the "power" of his god:

Mr. Dawson you can keep on waiting for that demonstration of power But you are never going to get it.

And this is supposed to be news? Of course there won't be a demonstration of his god's power. If his god is merely imaginary, it doesn't have any power to demonstrate in the first place. I already know this won't happen, that's why I'm not "waiting" for it to happen.

What's interesting is his reasoning for why his god won't demonstrate its power. He writes:

For the intention of your heart is not good.

So where above he exclaimed that his god is not my puppet, that "He will do as He will," now he's saying that there's something that I'm doing that prevents his god from demonstrating the power it allegedly possesses. My intentions are sufficient to determine what his god will or will not do. The Christian god spooks easily, you see, and runs off to hide in the shadows at the first hint of non-belief. Non-belief is like a light switch: just turn it on, and watch the cockroaches scurry away.

Clearly theists need to make up their mind. If their god exists and does what it chooses to do, then don't blame non-believers when its chronic absenteeism becomes more and more conspicuous with each passing moment. So often with religious apologetics, we find that action figures are always sold separately. A demonstration of the supernatural is always confined to the pages of some storybook, and take place only in the imagination of the reader.

Then my Christian correspondent blurts out:

Your discussion is evil nonsense talk which have no meaning. [SIC]

My "discussion is evil nonsense talk"? How is it "evil"? What harm have I caused? How has anything I've written caused the destruction of values? Or, is it simply because I challenge the alleged truth of religious claims, and for this reason he condemns it as "evil"? Notice that he nowhere interacts with any of my arguments. He just

dismisses them flippantly, as I would expect.

Then I was subjected to a most grueling interrogation:

I just want to ask you something. Do you know who Lucifer is?

Yes. Lucifer is the name of a character in the [cartoon universe of Christianity](#). Lucifer is supposed to be the embodiment of evil itself, according to the Christian worldview, though I don't think it is as evil as the god that Christians worship. After all, that god is said to have created Lucifer in the first place, and could have acted against Lucifer long ago if it wanted to. In fact, were I a believer (and I can attest to this, because I've been there before), how would I be able to determine whether things like the tsunami in the Indian Ocean of 2004 were caused by the god of the bible, or by Lucifer? Not that it would make much difference to the victims of such tragedies, but as a believer it would be difficult to know which invisible magic being is responsible for which calamity. This is the domain of faith: imagine one way or another, and hope for the best.

Mr. Dawson have you had a bad life?

Actually no, I can't say I have. I've had a very good life, save for a brief portion when I wandered far too deeply into mysticism than I should have. And even then, I still made the best of it. (Look what I've learned!) But I finally made the decision to be honest, and I cured myself of Self-Inflicted Christianity. Any believer can do this. But other than that, my life has been wonderful, and it gets better everyday. Would believers prefer that I be miserable? Probably. It's stubbornly difficult to convert an atheist who's happy. And encountering such a person, stable as he is in his ways, causes ample resentment in believers.

What pushes you to believe what you believe?

"Pushes"? I don't think anything "pushes" me to do anything. I choose to think and to be honest, and my devotion to rational philosophy naturally follows. Nothing forces me to be who I have chosen to become. I wouldn't want to be anyone else than who I am, quite frankly.

What proofs do you have for what you believe?

Proofs which solidly support what I believe, of course.

We live in a world that has laws. We are obligated to follow these laws. If we break any one of these laws we have face a judge and he will judge us According to the offense committed.

I'm ready to face any judge. So long as he is a rational judge, I have nothing to worry about. Where Christianity teaches "judge not, lest ye be judged" (Mt. 7:1), I go by a radically different dictum: Judge, and be prepared to be judged. That's one reason why I realized that I never needed Christianity. Christianity is for those who are afraid of judges and justice. I don't fit that category. Not by a long shot.

That's a proof that bad and good exists.

Oh, there are better proofs than this. Have you ever stubbed your toe, cut your finger, or broken a bone? A rational understanding of good and bad has its ultimate basis in our nature as biological organisms. Christianity attempts to use this truth in its tactics to get people to fear hellfire, but philosophically it misses the point completely. It is because we face the fundamental alternative of life versus death that we need values, and a means of identifying them and the courses of action proper to achieving them. Good and bad have nothing to do with the whims of an invisible magic being that does not face such an alternative. An immortal, indestructible and eternal being would at best be indifferent to whatever may be happening around it. It surely would have no vested interest in exercising control over things.

Just like there is rules and regulations to follow here on the world there is devine [sic] rules and regulations.

I think he means *biblical* "rules and regulations," such as "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk" (Ex. 34:26), or "Masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Don't threaten them; remember, you both have the same Master in heaven, and he has no favorites." (Eph. 6:9).

Don't worry, I can assure you that I haven't transgressed any of these. I've never seethed a kid in his mother's milk, and I've never owned a slave to begin with, let alone mistreat him/her in some way.

You will have to face the heavenly Judge for not believing in His Son Jesus Christ.

It seems that believers are the ones who are judging - and condemning - others for not believing in the Jesus of the gospels. Regardless, that's fine with me - they can condemn me all they want. In reality, they're condemning me for being a spoilsport in regard to their fantasy. And if the Christian god is so warped as to consider it "evil" that one does not "believe in" one individual who may or may not have actually lived in first century Palestine, it is one small-minded god indeed! I could not, in good conscience, worship such a brutish thug anyway.

What excuse are going to tell him?

Excuse? No, I'm not the one who needs any excuse. The proper question is: what excuse is your god going to give me? His apologists are always trying to come up with an excuse for their god. That's why they spend so much time developing their *theodicies* - a "justification" of their god. They wouldn't devote so much energy to this task if they didn't think their god needed an excuse for the choices and actions they attribute to it. What is its excuse for allowing the Hitlers, Stalins, Mao Tse Tungs, Pol Pots, Saddam Husseins, the Jim Joneses, the Marshall Applewhites, the terrorists of 9/11, the Harrises and Klebolds, the Cho Seung Huis, and the Jeffrey Dahmers of human history to execute their murderous rampages? This is an issue of moral character. If you had the choice to allow or prevent Adolf Hitler coming to power in Germany in 1933, or Jeffrey Dahmer killing his first victim, what would you do?

Now I don't have the power to prevent the Adolf Hitlers, the Saddam Husseins, the Jim Joneses, etc. from acting on their destructive choices. But if I did have such power, do you think I'd just stand idly by and watch them wage their massacres? I'm not the one with the power to intervene on these things, so I'm not the one who needs to find some excuse for failing to do so. But if I did have that kind of power, do you think I'd allow these injustices to take place, at the expense of the lives of people just trying to live and enjoy their lives, raise their families, and chase their dreams, and then try to pass those injustices off as serving some "higher purpose" ? If you do think this, you've got me confused with the god you worship.

The problem of evil is ultimately a character test for the individual attempting to engage it. Christians routinely fail this test, and they do so openly, so that we know what kind of people they are. Greg Bahnsen, for instance, shows us his true colors when he offers as a Christian solution to the problem of evil the premise that his god "has a morally sufficient reason for the evil which exists" (*Always Ready*, p. 172). This tells us about Greg Bahnsen more than anything else. It tells us what he thinks about morality. On this view, evil is morally justifiable. His proposed solution to the problem of evil brings this out explicitly: *Greg Bahnsen's view of morality sanctions evil means in the pursuit of desired ends*. So thought Josef Stalin, Mao Tse Tung, Saddam Hussein, Tim McVeigh, and a whole list of humanity's villains. What else do we need to know about Greg Bahnsen at this point? Here we have the mystic of spirit enabling the mystic of muscle, just as Ayn Rand described in her novel *Atlas Shrugged*.

Now many human beings have taken and will continue to take action against the Adolf Hitlers and Jeffrey Dahmers, and in so doing they often put everything they have, including their very lives, at dire risk. They stand to lose it all. The Christian god, being immortal, indestructible and eternal, has nothing to risk, nothing to lose, and yet even its own self-appointed spokespersons acknowledge that it "allows" these tyrants to carry out their intentions, and they try to come up with ways of excusing this moral default. In fact, since they claim to worship this being, and call it perfectly righteous, they must be proud of its choice to sanction evil and allow it to reign over the world. That's what they think, isn't it, that evil reigns over the world their god created? Now of course, their god would stand to lose nothing if it had decided to put a capper on evil men long ago; then again, it stands to gain nothing by doing so, too. Values have nothing to do with its choices and actions. Indeed, its spokesmen would not even allow that its permissiveness of evil be characterized as moral default, even though they would hasten to condemn any human being, who hasn't anything analogous to the power religionists claim on behalf of their god, for failing to act against evil when he has the opportunity to do so. And yet, on the Christian view, such passivity would simply be an expression of obedience to the will of the ruling consciousness, for we read in Mt. 5:39 that Jesus said "I say unto you, That ye resist not evil." According to "the good book," Jesus doesn't want people resisting evil. Jesus must prefer that evil steamroll its way through our lives without impediment.

My Christian correspondent then tried to answer for me as he guessed what kind of "excuse" (for precisely what, is unclear) I might try to come up with:

That you didn't know that he exist [SIC] because He didn't demonstrated [SIC] his power of moving a mountain.

Well, if this were my reason (or "excuse" [sic]) for not buying Christian BS, what is so wrong about it? According to the New Testament, Jesus went around 1st century Palestine demonstrating his power to its inhabitants all over the place. Are stories of these performances, indistinguishable as they are from modern-day fictions in their

essence and content, intended as substitutes for similar demonstrations before us today? If so, then I've got a bridge for sell.

He makes another guess:

That you spent your Time arguing against him and wasn't [SIC] evidence to believe in him.

I'm not arguing against "God." Rather, I simply put the claims and defenses that theists give for their faith-based worldview under the magnifying glass, to see what I might find. If theists really believed that their apologetic cases were as airtight as they posture them to be, this shouldn't bother them. But it really seems to get their gaggles up, doesn't it? What's noteworthy is how deafening Christian silence in response to my arguments really is. As I pointed out above, this Christian nowhere attempts to challenge any of the arguments I've posted on my blog or my website.

I'm sorry If I didn't use the correct words but I feel disappointed and sad at same time when I See [SIC] what they write about God.

With this statement, he makes it sound like his objections essentially stem from the fact that his feelings have been hurt. Well, I have no intention of hurting people's feelings. There there now.

All God wants to do is love us.

We've seen how much the Christian god loved its own son. Look what your god allowed to happen to its own son. I can't put it better than one Christian did:

He allowed His own Son to be tortured, mocked, spit upon and beaten beyond recognition, then crucified on the cross to die for your sin, my sin and the sins of all mankind.

So the Christian god loved people like Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Jim Jones, and Jeffrey Dahmer, so much that it allowed its own beloved son to be slaughtered by a bunch of primitives who, like clay in a potter's hands, were just doing what they were predestined to do all along. If that's how it treats its beloved, I wouldn't want to become one. On this note, if you read between the lines of the benign, attractive persona that the bible puts forward as its face to the world, John 3:16 really reads like this:

For God so loved Tim McVeigh, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.

After all, according to the gospels, Jesus allegedly said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mk. 2:17; cf. Mt. 9:13, Lk. 5:32). So the Christian god's deliberate allowance of its son's destruction at the hands of the Romans was for people like Tim McVeigh, so that they could have the opportunity to "repent" and be reconciled to that same god. You see, this god wants a relationship with people like Tim McVeigh; it wants Tim McVeigh's adoration, devotion, worship. It wants to call Tim McVeigh "son." It manifests its glory by suspending justice in order to justify the unjust.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Christian Psychopathy](#), [problem of evil](#)

*posted by Bahnsen Burner at [9:00 AM](#)*

**14 Comments:**

[Chad](#) said...

This post has been removed by the author.

[July 15, 2008 7:47 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Before he deleted his own comment, Chad wrote:

"I have been reading portions of your blog with some interest over the past couple of days."

I'm glad my blog is keeping your interest. I hope you read more, and that you ask more questions.

"I would like to ask a question, if I may, as I am curious to know your response."

Sure.

"The question came to me as I was reading the following paragraph of your most recent post:"

**Excuse? No, I'm not the one who needs any excuse. The proper question is: what excuse is your god going to give me? His apologists are always trying to come up with an excuse for their god. That's why they spend so much time developing their theodicies - a "justification" of their god. They wouldn't devote so much energy to this task if they didn't think their god needed an excuse for the choices and actions they attribute to it. What is its excuse for allowing the Hitlers, Stalins, Mao Tse Tungs, Pol Pots, Saddam Husseins, the Jim Joneses, the Marshall Applewhites, the terrorists of 9/11, the Harrises and Klebolds, the Cho Seung Huis, and the Jeffrey Dahmers of human history to execute their murderous rampages? This is an issue of moral character. If you had the choice to allow or prevent Adolf Hitler coming to power in Germany in 1933, or Jeffrey Dahmer killing his first victim, what would you do?**

Chad then asked:

"In your view, would it be wrong for a rational being to permit a Hitler or Dahmer or Stalin to be tortured or killed?"

This is a loaded question. The first question to ask is not whether or not it would be wrong for a rational being (and by "rational being" I assume Chad means man, for those are the only beings capable of rationality which exist; if he holds otherwise, he'll have to argue for his position) to permit a Hitler or Dahmer or Stalin to be tortured or killed, but whether or not that person has the ability or power and opportunity to permit or prevent such action. Take me for instance. I was not even alive when Hitler and Stalin were alive, so there's no question that I was in any position to permit or prevent their deaths in whatever manner they occurred. I was, however, alive when Dahmer was killed by a fellow inmate in November 1994. However, even then, I was in no position either to permit or to prevent Dahmer's assailant from attacking and murdering him. So first we would have to establish whether or not the rational being in question is in any position to permit or prevent the action in question. And the only way I suppose I would be in any position to permit or prevent a Hitler or Dahmer or Stalin to be tortured or killed would be if I were present before the action occurred, knew that it was about to occur, and could exercise any influence on it occurring or not occurring. If I were in such a position, I would say it would be wrong if I *didn't* permit one of these villains from being killed, especially if it posed little or no risk to myself.

The Christian god, however, is said to be everpresent, all-knowing, and omnipotent, so it cannot claim *not* to have the opportunity, the knowledge, and the means to act against evil individuals. And even though there is no objective evidence for the existence of such a being, we're expected not only to believe that it exists, but also that it is all-good and all-moral. So an all-good, all-moral being with the opportunity, knowledge and means necessary to act against evil beings like Hitler, Stalin and Dahmer, stands by and allows those evil beings to carry out their destruction on other beings. How do we integrate the concept of moral good with the kinds of choices Christians have their god making? The only way to do so is to deny those concepts any objective meaning, which is precisely what biblical Christianity does, particularly in device 3: Logocide.

Chad then wrote:

"I am not asking with the hope that you will acknowledge an objective morality so that I can ask you what is the basis of that morality with a view to proving that there is no objective morality without God."

Good. Such an argument would be futile. A person who think that "there is no objective morality without God" has a very poor understanding of what morality is and why man needs it. This always comes out for all to see in his attempts to defend such a grotesquely distorted view of morality.

Chad continued:

"Though I think such a line of questioning is relevant and important (and perhaps we'll take it up some other

time), I suspect you have heard it many times before and have a ready answer.”

Yes, I’ve seen it before, and I do have a ready answer. In a nutshell, my answer is that for morality to be objective, it must be developed in accordance with the primacy of existence principle, and this rules out Christianity from being a contender as a philosophy whose moral doctrines are objective precisely because it finds its basis in the primacy of consciousness. I have seen no good or informed response to this, and still I see Christians assuming that they know what objective morality is when they attribute it to their religious worldview.

I’ve already written on the topic to some extent. See for example the following entries on my blog:

[Christianity vs. Objective Morality](#)

[Do I Borrow My Morality from the Christian Worldview?](#)

[Rational Morality vs. Presuppositional Apologetics](#)

[CalvinDude's Defense of Christianity's Moral Bankruptcy](#)

[Hitler vs. Mother Theresa: Antithesis or Symbiosis?](#)

[Answering Ecualegacy, Pt. 4](#)

See also Anton Thorn’s essay [Is Christian Morality Objective?](#) to acquire some familiarity with the issues.

Chad announced:

”I am asking for other reasons.”

I see - for reasons that you do not identify. Why the caginess?

Chad then wrote:

“Also, only God knows why you spent any time at all replying to a poster that is probably not even capable of understanding what you writing here.”

You must be calling me “God” then, for I certainly know why I spent my time replying to the comments that were e-mailed to me.

Chad finished with the following statement:

“But to call any post on a public blog with an open comment section “unsolicited” is bullshit.”

Read the opening statement of my blog again, Chad. It states:

**I recently found the following unsolicited *e-mail* from a Christian in my inbox:**

The message to which I responded to in my blog was not left as a comment on my blog. It was sent directly to my e-mail by a party with whom I have no prior history of correspondence. One might call it a piece of Christian spam, save for the fact that its content addresses me by name. And if I did not post it on my blog (which I did in its entirety), no one else would get to enjoy it.

Regards,  
Dawson

[July 16, 2008 6:00 AM](#)

[madmax](#) said...

This question is off topic to this post but it is relevant to Christian Apology in general. How are the “Divine Watchmaker” or Intelligent Design arguments to be classified? Are they more along the lines of Evidentialist (sp?)

apologetics or do Presuppositionalists use them too?

For example, one Christian blogger I follow (who identifies himself as a traditionalist Conservative) constantly argues that the "order" found in life suggests that an intelligent creator must have created the universe and everything in it. He is militantly anti-evolution and blames Darwin for everything from Nazism to Communism to the common cold (just kidding about the last but you get the point). He seems to suggest that a rational study of the universe (nature) leads to the belief in god. So he seems to have nature as his starting point which would place him outside the Presuppositionalist school, I think.

How do you classify such arguments and those who make them? Also, in your many writings have you dealt with the anti-evolution crowd in any significant way? It would be great to see an Objectivist take on these creationists with a combination of philosophy and science. (The main argument that IDers make is that "micro" evolution might be possible, meaning that there could be variation within a species. But "macro" evolution is impossible because random variations could never result in new species. Only a divine creator with a plan could do that.)

BTW, I recently discovered your blog and am thrilled that there is Objectivist atheist site dedicated to challenging religious apologists. Most Objectivists don't really spend time refuting religious claims. They are generally more interested in refuting the Kantian/Humean skeptics which in many ways are far more dominant in today's academic world.

[July 16, 2008 4:09 PM](#)

[chadzwo](#) said...

Dawson - I was not going in the direction you assumed, though I cannot blame you since I gave no indication as to what direction I was going. I was not intending to be cagey, I was intending to get an answer to the question. Of course I realized the apparent caginess, but it was hard to avoid with the limited amount of time in my possession. As you astutely noted, I did delete the post rather than leave my questions/comments incomplete.

I will try to take this up when I have time but as my time is very limited I cannot guess when that will be. In the meantime, to clarify, given the qualifications you stated in your initial reply to my deleted post, are you saying that it would morally acceptable to kill or torture a Hitler/Stalin type? You said, "I would say it would be wrong if I didn't permit one of these villains from being killed, especially if it posed little or no risk to myself."

I am confused because you said "...it would be wrong if I didn't permit one of these villains \*from\* being killed..." I believe you are saying it would be wrong not to kill/torture such, but then I would have expected you to say "...it would be wrong if I didn't permit one of these villains \*to\* be killed..."

Please clarify as able and I will do my best to let you know in what direction I am heading.

[July 18, 2008 6:08 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Madmax wrote: "This question is off topic to this post but it is relevant to Christian Apology in general. How are the "Divine Watchmaker" or Intelligent Design arguments to be classified? Are they more along the lines of Evidentialist (sp?) apologetics or do Presuppositionalists use them too?"

Theistic arguments such as the design argument and the cosmological argument, are often referred to as belonging to the evidential, classical or traditional school of apologetics. These three terms seem to be used interchangeably by many apologists. Many presuppositional apologists look upon so-called "evidentialist" arguments with disdain, and apparently consider their use as a marker identifying their users as representatives of some heretical strain of Christianity. Lorenzini, for instance, tells us that "[t]here are two basic apologetic methods: evidentialism and presuppositionalism. Evidentialism (also called Classical apologetics) is the method of Catholics, Arminians, and many inconsistent Calvinists." (Defending the Faith: An Introduction to the Presuppositional Method) The association of "evidential" apologetics with the proclivity of "selling out" the faith is strong (though not universal) among presuppositionalists, and this has to do with the suspicion that "evidentialist" arguments grant the non-believer's assumption of "autonomy," which is a very involved topic unto itself. Lorenzini continues:



"Evidentialists hold that man's mind is neutral and is capable of judging the credibility of truth claims... The main problem with evidentialism is that it grants the unbeliever too much. The evidentialist grants the unbeliever the right to think autonomously (independently) while at the same time asking him to give up his autonomy through conversion. This is theologically impossible. The unbeliever will always employ his tools of reason to dismiss the arguments for Christianity."

From my non-believing point of view, the standard presuppositionalist criticism of this kind of argument is that they grant that the non-believer can come to Christian conclusions without revelatory coaching, i.e., revelation (and along with it the preferred interpretation of it) is not being honored as a guiding or "ultimate truth." The presuppositionalist rejects the evidentialist approach to apologetics essentially because it grants that man's mind is competent, and the presuppositionalist resents individuals who have competent minds and know it. And this is to be expected in an apologetics program which seeks to be as consistent as possible with biblical teachings. The idea that man's mind is competent must be combated at all costs, and presuppositionalism relies on an inventory of borrowed gimmicks and booby-traps to net unwitting fish.

And while many presuppositionalists claim that presuppositionalism is the only qualifying apologetic method of the so-called "Reformed" faith (typical is Neal Baird's view that "the Reformed position cannot employ the classical or evidential methods of apologetics and still survive intact" - [The inseparable link between Reformed Theology and Presuppositional Apologetics](#)), John Frame, who was one of Van Til's own pupils, does not insist on such a hardline approach to the presuppositional-evidentialist antithesis. In contrasting his own views with those of Van Til, John Frame writes:

"I do not agree that the traditional arguments necessarily conclude with something less than the biblical God. Take the teleological argument, that the purposefulness of the natural world implies a designer. Well, certainly the God of Scripture is more than a mere designer. But the argument doesn't say that he is merely a designer, only that he is a designer, which he certainly is. Similar things can be said about the other traditional theistic proofs. It would be wrong to think of God merely as a first cause, but the cosmological argument does not entail such a conclusion... It should also be remembered that the traditional arguments often work. They work because (whether the apologist recognizes this or not) they presuppose a Christian [p. 72] worldview. For example, the causal argument assumes that everything in creation has a cause. That premise is true according to a Christian worldview, but it is not true (at least in the traditional sense) in a worldview like that of Hume or Kant. So understood, the proof is part of an overall Christian understanding of things, and there can be no legitimate objection to it. However, once one defines 'cause' as Hume or Kant does, the argument goes nowhere. Now many people can be led to accept the existence of God through the traditional argument because they agree to a Christian concept of cause. This is part of God's revelation that they have not repressed - what Van Til calls 'borrowed capital'. But once they become more sophisticated and philosophical (i.e., more self-conscious about suppressing the truth) they are likely to raise objections to such proofs on the basis of a more consistently non-Christian frame of reference. At that point, the apologist must be more explicit about differences of presupposition, differences of worldview, differences in concepts like that of causality. Then the argument becomes more explicitly transcendental." (*Apologetics to the Glory of God*, pp. 71-72)

However, in their book *Five Views on Apologetics* (2000), editors Steven B. Cowan and Stanly N. Gundry have assembled pieces from representatives of five different schools of apologetics. They are: the "Classical Method" (represented by William Lane Craig), the "Evidential Method" (represented by Gary Habermas), the "Cumulative Case Method" (represented by Paul Feinberg), the "Presuppositional Method" (represented by John Frame), and the "Reformed Epistemological Method" (represented by Kelly James Clark). I recommend this book if for nothing else than for the entertainment value it offers in watching these folks squabble amongst themselves on what's the best way to validate their god-belief.

"For example, one Christian blogger I follow (who identifies himself as a traditionalist Conservative) constantly argues that the "order" found in life suggests that an intelligent creator must have created the universe and everything in it."

This apologetic, which is quite common these days, is a variation on the "how do you account for" approach that has been popularized by presuppositional apologists. But I see no reason why non-presuppositionalists could not adopt it into their own arsenal. But this kind of argument - that the "order" in life suggests an intelligent creator - strikes me as silly and obtuse. It is an example of what I have come to call [Tape-Loop Apologetics](#), which consists of identifying some attribute of the world or universe which can allegedly only be explained by pointing to the Christian god, while ignoring that the Christian god is described in such a way that it itself possesses that same attribute, which is left explained once the theist points to his god. The Christian blogger's premise is that

life possesses an element of “order,” and this can only suggest an intelligent creator of life. But at the same time, that intelligent creator is itself said to be a living being, and as such - according to the apologist’s own premise - it must that same element “order,” which could only mean - again on the apologist’s own premises - that an intelligent creator is needed to explain it. The apologist is thus inconsistent with his own premises, which demand either an infinite regress (a “tape-loop”), or a fundamental starting point which does not possess the attribute which, according to those premises, requires the type of explanation which the argument proposes. As I wrote in my above-linked blog:

“...if he appeals to the very thing that’s being called to be explained, then he simply makes no progress in providing an explanation, for in the end he simply winds up with what he’s called to explain.”

If you’re trying to explain life, for instance, how does pointing to something that is alive going to provide an explanation of life? At that point you’re just pushing the demand for explanation back a step without coming any closer to satisfying it. It’s an obvious blunder, once you see it, but I still see this kind of nonsense all the time.

“He is militantly anti-evolution and blames Darwin for everything from Nazism to Communism to the common cold (just kidding about the last but you get the point).”

When I see Christians blame the theory of evolution for the rise of Nazism, Communism and the like, they’re just telling me that they do not understand what the theory of evolution is, that they understand what Nazism and Communism are, or how they arose. For a good understanding of how Nazism arose in 1920’s and 1930’s Germany, see Leonard Peikoff’s *The Ominous Parallels*. In the meantime, Christians would be wise to start observing the dramatic collectivistic implications of their own worldview.

“He seems to suggest that a rational study of the universe (nature) leads to the belief in god. So he seems to have nature as his starting point which would place him outside the Presuppositionalist school, I think.”

I would tend to agree, but then there are those like Frame who attempt to reconcile these two apparently opposed camps, or perhaps assimilate the evidentialist approach into a more broadly contrived presuppositionalism.

“How do you classify such arguments and those who make them?”

I tend not to get too caught up in the battle for internal divisions like this, as I have no dog in the race as they say. Whether their defenders call them presuppositionalist, transcendental, classical, evidentialist, etc., I classify theistic arguments as irrational and ultimately premised in metaphysical subjectivism. Thus I classify them in terms of broader essentials than apologists themselves are prone to thinking.

”Also, in your many writings have you dealt with the anti-evolution crowd in any significant way?”

No, I haven’t. I tend to leave this issue to thinkers who are more familiar with the scientific background of the issues involved. I don’t see it as a philosophical debate, but rather as a debate between science and storybook-inspired fantasy, and that loses my interest rather quickly.

“It would be great to see an Objectivist take on these creationists with a combination of philosophy and science.”

I agree, it would be great to see. Few Objectivists seem to be very interested in the matter, however, and I can’t say I blame them. Most Objectivists seem more interested in social issues, though I suspect we’re going to see more and more Objectivists branching out. Some will inevitably swerve more head-on into the clash with religion. I’ll be waiting to show them the crime scene.

“(The main argument that IDers make is that “micro” evolution might be possible, meaning that there could be variation within a species. But “macro” evolution is impossible because random variations could never result in new species. Only a divine creator with a plan could do that.)”

I suspect that the IDers pack the bulk of their argumentative burden into highly connotative words like “random” in order to force their conclusions beyond their logical worth. With stop-watch predictability, they assume that “random” means “acausal,” when in fact no good scientist is going to say that genetic mutations do not have a cause. This is why a good understanding of concepts is so badly needed in science as well as in any other

intellectual field. The Objectivist view of evolution, given most succinctly by Binswanger in one of his discussions of science, is that natural selection is the law of causality applied to life. Mutations are not an exception to causation, but a product thereof. If that's the case, then the IDers sails have no wind behind them: if they grant "micro-evolution" within the species, whose variations are causal, then why deny the causality of variations on a larger, cumulative scale? It's a matter of personal preference for the IDers at this point, which means: in spite of all their protestations against non-believers for their alleged "anti-supernatural bias" (which is supposed to be some illicit, unjustifiable prejudice on the non-believer's part), here we see their own *pro*-supernatural bias in action. If the IDers and other theistic defenders protest at this point, I would refer them to my [discussion of supernaturalism](#) and let them choke on that.

"BTW, I recently discovered your blog and am thrilled that there is Objectivist atheist site dedicated to challenging religious apologists. Most Objectivists don't really spend time refuting religious claims. They are generally more interested in refuting the Kantian/Humean skeptics which in many ways are far more dominant in today's academic world."

Yes, that's true - a lot of Objectivists tend to lose patience quickly and walk away from debate with theists. I don't think that's necessarily wrong; no rational individual has an obligation to engage in discussion with irrational individuals. But notice how my blog is not simply a forum for debating believers. Rather, I try to employ Objectivist principles in the development of a teaching tool, a reference source for thinkers on both sides of the issues to consult either for their own learning, or for purposes of entertainment if nothing else. I'm glad you found it and hope you enjoy it.

Regards,  
Dawson

[July 18, 2008 6:12 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Chad asked:

*I am confused because you said "...it would be wrong if I didn't permit one of these villians \*from\* being killed..." I believe you are saying it would be wrong not to kill/torture such, but then I would have expected you to say "...it would be wrong if I didn't permit one of these villians \*to\* be killed..."*

Yes, I see what you're saying. The word "from" is adding to your confusion and should not be there. My apologies for the wandering word; like you, I have little time, and it probably crept in as a result of my haste to move onto other tasks in my day.

Let me restate this way:

It would be morally wrong if I acted to prevent Hitler or Stalin (at least, once they had proven themselves to be murderous tyrants - I'm not talking about when they were innocent little children, even though it may be difficult to imagine either one as an innocent little child) from being killed or destroyed. And I say this because, on my view, morality is about values - namely about achieving and/or protecting them - and consequently it would be contrary to the interests of such values-based morality to act in pursuit of protecting a destroyer of values from being destroyed.

Now notice I did not say "tortured" - I'm not into torture, as I'm not convinced that it has any genuine retributive value. Though there may be good arguments out there to the contrary that I simply haven't examined. But that's another issue.

Anyway, I hope that serves to clarify my point.

In the meantime, I asked several questions in my blog. Have you considered what your answer to them would be?

Regards,  
Dawson

[July 18, 2008 6:26 AM](#)

[chadzwo](#) said...

"...my answer is that for morality to be objective, it must be developed in accordance with the primacy of existence principle, and this rules out Christianity from being a contender as a philosophy whose moral doctrines are objective precisely because it finds its basis in the primacy of consciousness."

While I have a degree in Philosophy I have forgotten more than I have retained in the past 12 years.

Please explain the "primacy of existence principle" v "primacy of consciousness." I am not sure I understand either term, much less the conflict or why you attribute the latter to the Christian worldview.

More later.

Chad

[July 18, 2008 9:05 AM](#)

[chadzwo](#) said...

"In the meantime, I asked several questions in my blog. Have you considered what your answer to them would be?"

My apologies. To which questions are you referring? You have written quite a bit, I have only browsed the blog. At this point it seems you are rebutting ideas from a popular form of Christianity which has its roots in ancient mystery religion rather than a Biblical Christianity. It is like calling Britney Spears records music and then concluding music is terrible. It is music, but not a very good representation of it. FWIW, this is the direction I was/am going with my initial question. I will try to be more precise as able.

[July 18, 2008 9:08 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I wrote: "...my answer is that for morality to be objective, it must be developed in accordance with the primacy of existence principle, and this rules out Christianity from being a contender as a philosophy whose moral doctrines are objective precisely because it finds its basis in the primacy of consciousness."

Chad responded: "While I have a degree in Philosophy I have forgotten more than I have retained in the past 12 years. Please explain the "primacy of existence principle" v "primacy of consciousness." I am not sure I understand either term, much less the conflict or why you attribute the latter to the Christian worldview."

In my experience, it's not at all uncommon for academics in philosophy, whether Christian or otherwise, to be unfamiliar with the issue of metaphysical primacy. This is the most fundamental issue in philosophy, as it has to do with the relationship between the subject of consciousness and its objects. There's plenty of material on my blog regarding this issue. But for starters, you might want to consult the discussion in my article [Gods and Square Circles](#).

Regards,  
Dawson

[July 18, 2008 11:12 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I asked: "In the meantime, I asked several questions in my blog. Have you considered what your answer to them would be?"

Chad responded: "My apologies. To which questions are you referring?"

To the questions that I asked in my blog entry. For instance, the questions that I asked in the section of my blog which you had quoted in your initial comment (which you subsequently deleted).

Chad: "At this point it seems you are rebutting ideas from a popular form of Christianity which has its roots in

ancient mystery religion rather than a Biblical Christianity."

This is a common tactic that I've found with many Christian apologists. It's the "That may be true for some variations of Christianity, but it's not true in the case of mine" response that anyone could employ, whether it's valid or not. Christians like to think of themselves as monolithic until the raw nerves become exposed, and we have their bible as a proof-text for the beliefs they espouse. Which ideas specifically do you think I'm getting wrong? And why are you taking a cat and mouse approach in our discussion rather than simply trying to correct the record as you see it?

But you raise my curiosity. If you're a Christian (and it appears more and more that you are), don't you believe that your god is all-knowing, all-good, and all-powerful? Is it or is it not able to act against evil? Is it or is it not able to choose to act against evil? Does it or does it not possess sovereign authority over its creation? Is it able to act against the Hitlers, Stalins, Mao Tse Tungs, Pol Pots, Saddam Husseins, the Jim Joneses, or is it powerless against them? Or, like Greg Bahnsen, do you think your god has some "morally sufficient reason" to "allow" evil people to do their evil things?

I'm guessing you won't spend much time elaborating your answers to these questions, but it's pretty hard to see how someone defending a biblical form of Christianity would deny these qualities to his god. Then again, I do know that many Christians, when pressed on matters, have a tendency to start jettisoning items of faith that earlier they had embraced wholeheartedly.

At any rate, I would agree with many thinkers today who recognize that the New Testament shows significant signs of being influenced by ancient mystery religions, so I don't think I would put much stock in the dichotomy you're trying to pass off here.

Chad: "It is like calling Britney Spears records music and then concluding music is terrible. It is music, but not a very good representation of it."

This seems to be a rather weak analogy for the charge you've levelled here, for it makes it appear that the differences between various strains within Christianity are merely differences of taste. I doubt that's what you're intending to convey, but that's where your analogy ultimately seems to lead.

Chad: "FWIW, this is the direction I was/am going with my initial question. I will try to be more precise as able."

I'm not sure if it's precision that needs improvement, or if you could simply be more direct and cut to the chase. That might serve to save some of our precious time. ;)

Regards,  
Dawson

[July 18, 2008 11:22 AM](#)

[madmax](#) said...

Dawson,

Thank you so much for a very informative response. I have bookmarked your blog as one of my favorites.

[July 18, 2008 4:35 PM](#)

[chadzwo](#) said...

Dawson,

It should be noted that in the interest of time this post has not been edited prior to submission.

A couple of comments which I hope will be brief:

1. Yes, I am a Christian. Was this not obvious from the content of the deleted post?
2. You have a tendency to assume too much about what I will or will not do and you use semi-inflammatory

language to do so. As examples:

-"This is a common tactic that I've found with many Christian apologists. It's the "That may be true for some variations of Christianity, but it's not true in the case of mine" response that anyone could employ, whether it's valid or not. Christians like to think of themselves as monolithic until the raw nerves become exposed, and we have their bible as a proof-text for the beliefs they espouse."

-"I'm guessing you won't spend much time elaborating your answers to these questions, but it's pretty hard to see how someone defending a biblical form of Christianity would deny these qualities to his god. Then again, I do know that many Christians, when pressed on matters, have a tendency to start jettisoning items of faith that earlier they had embraced wholeheartedly."

-"At any rate, I would agree with many thinkers today who recognize that the New Testament shows significant signs of being influenced by ancient mystery religions, so I don't think I would put much stock in the dichotomy you're trying to pass off here."

-The frequent use of "it" to refer to God, the lower case "g", and of course the repetitive "your God". It is commonly accepted to refer to God as "he" and to use a capital G. Also, I don't think anyone is going to make the mistake of concluding that the God under discussion is yours.

If you can agree to dispense with this non-sense and simply comment on what I say and do rather than supposing what I might say and do, then I will agree to either state a position and/or ask questions about objectivism. I may just ask questions because I haven't spent a lot of time thinking about objectivism and therefore do not have much to say against it. Do we have a deal?

Regardless, I came across your blog while looking for information regarding the presupposition position - I know a little bit about it but not enough to have an opinion. I decided to stick around because a good argument against a position is usually as useful as a good argument for it (and certainly of more value than a bad argument for it). However, at this point I am more interested in learning about objectivism.

3. The problem of evil. I think it is important to define what we mean by evil (which we have done partly). Before going further, a quick clarification. Previously we discussed whether it would be morally wrong for someone to permit a Hitler or Stalin to be \*tortured\* or killed. The discussion should have been about whether or not it would be morally wrong for someone to permit a Hitler or Stalin to suffer or be killed. I haven't got a clue as to why I said "tortured" - perhaps it was due to all of the talk in recent months of the policies of the Bush administration. Anyway, let this paragraph stand to amend the previous discussion - my intention was to discuss suffering and death, not torture and death.

I would answer each of your questions in the affirmative. Yes, God is able to act against evil, he is able to choose to act against evil, and he does possess sovereign authority over his creation. As well, he has the power to successfully act against evil and the opportunity. I have never read Bahnsen so I cannot be sure whether or not my position mirrors his. I suppose you have a point that you will bring up in your next post. In the meantime, have I sufficiently answered your questions?

4. You stated the following:

>>>>

At any rate, I would agree with many thinkers today who recognize that the New Testament shows significant signs of being influenced by ancient mystery religions, so I don't think I would put much stock in the dichotomy you're trying to pass off here.

>>>>

Actually, the popular \*interpretation\* of the New Testament is extremely (and increasingly) influenced by the ancient mystery religions. For this we can thank Constantine and his deliberate admixture of Christianity and paganism around the year 325 AD. However, what the New Testament actually \*says\* is in stark contrast to the ancient mysteries. It is their acceptance of this admixture that puts me at odds with most of professing Christendom. No doubt there are some surface similarities between the mysteries and the Bible, but it is the differences between the two that are most striking.

Finally, assuming the dialogue continues, please be aware of the following:

a. I don't think you are anymore convertible to Christianity than I am to objectivism, so please don't harbor the mistaken notion that I am trying to convert you. It makes no difference to me whether or not you convert to Christianity.

b. I only accept one English Bible as acceptable, the King James Bible. Any argument from any other translation is therefore unacceptable to me.

From your email:

>>>>

Chad: "It is like calling Britney Spears records music and then concluding music is terrible. It is music, but not a very good representation of it."

This seems to be a rather weak analogy for the charge you've levelled here, for it makes it appear that the differences between various strains within Christianity are merely differences of taste. I doubt that's what you're intending to convey, but that's where your analogy ultimately seems to lead.

>>>>

Though this one may have been particularly bad, I believe that ultimately all analogies fail. In this case, I was only trying to show that the popular version of a thing is not necessarily the best representation of a thing. In that I think I succeeded.

Let me know what you think about continuing this dialogue. I realize I still have not given you much to go on, but at this point I don't have confidence that you want to have an informative discussion. I am more persuaded that you are looking for someone to lambaste.

Chad

[July 20, 2008 8:41 PM](#)

[chadzwo](#) said...

Dawson,

My apologies. Under 3, the following sentence was not supposed to be part of this post:

"The problem of evil. I think it is important to define what we mean by evil (which we have done partly)."

As you will notice, I never return to the thought. Depending upon your reply I will continue the thought next time.

Also - it is clear that in regards to philosophy you are more knowledgeable than I. I would like to know what formal training you have, if you don't mind telling.

Chad

Chad

[July 20, 2008 8:45 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hello Chad,

Again you come back to me.

You wrote: "1. Yes, I am a Christian. Was this not obvious from the content of the deleted post?"

Thank you for making this explicit. It's interesting that you ask whether or not your Christian confession were obvious to me from the content of your initial comment, which you deleted (btw, for the record, I have never

deleted a comment submitted to my blog), and then complain in your second point that I “have a tendency to assume too much...” Since you did not come out and identify yourself as a Christian in your initial comment, I deliberately chose not to assume that you are a Christian, even though I suppose the indicators were plain enough. There’s a reason why I am hesitant to assume that someone is a Christian without more solid input on the matter. I’ve done this before and have been wrong, so I learned to hang back a bit as it were. Also, there is the occasional non-Christians who likes to play devil's advocate, for argument's sake.

You wrote: “2. You have a tendency to assume too much about what I will or will not do...”

I prefer to let people speak for themselves, Chad. However, I reserve the right to pass judgments on the individuals I encounter in life, both in person and online. When an individual’s actions or statements are persistently cryptic, as yours have been, then his actions are sometimes all I have to go by. Cryptic behavior naturally breeds suspicion. In your initial comment, you had quoted an entire paragraph from my blog. In that paragraph, I had asked several questions in regard to the problem of evil. I asked other questions in other portions of my blog as well. However, instead of addressing any of those questions, you chose to pose some of your own questions to me. There’s nothing wrong with this; I’m happy to entertain questions from my readers. By this point, however, you seem to be avoiding my questions, and your comments to date suggest a baiting tactic in your intent. I’ve seen this many, many times before with Christians, and your comments do not strike me as at all unique. And now you complain about what you consider to be “semi-inflammatory language.” I suppose I need to kick it up a notch to get rid of that annoying “semi” in there... ;)

You did cite some examples of what you consider instances of “semi-inflammatory language” on my part. The first example was the following:

**-"This is a common tactic that I've found with many Christian apologists. It's the "That may be true for some variations of Christianity, but it's not true in the case of mine" response that anyone could employ, whether it's valid or not. Christians like to think of themselves as monolithic until the raw nerves become exposed, and we have their bible as a proof-text for the beliefs they espouse."**

What you are calling “semi-inflammatory language” here may actually be nothing more than the fact that the recognition I make explicit here is frequently true about Christians. I’ve interacted with hundreds of Christians directly over the years, and have watched even more interact amongst themselves and with other non-believers as well. Certain general traits and habits become difficult to miss when they appear with such constancy as I have found in my examinations. One common habit is the tactic I pointed out here. It is frequently encountered when a non-Christian raises a strong criticism against the Christian worldview. Sometimes the attending Christian attempts to answer it; but quite frequently she chooses to disown the position in question, even though it is taught in the New Testament. For instance, I recently interacted with a Christian on the topic of faith. He claimed that faith and reason are compatible, at times making it sound like faith is just another word for reason (I have seen other Christians make claims very similar to this). When I pointed out that Hebrews 11:1, the closest that the NT ever comes to putting an explicit definition to the notion of faith, links faith with hoping, he did everything he could to distance himself from the obvious connotations of such an association, since that association undermines the supposition that faith and reason are so closely related. What he gave me was an example of “That’s what it says, but that’s not what it means,” which is extremely common among defenders of Christianity. The related tactic represented by the statement “That may be true for some variations of Christianity, but it’s not true in the case of mine” is also very common. A Calvinist, for instance, would be quick to point out that a criticism of Arminianism has no teeth against the Calvinist position. Frequently Christians like to use their numbers (2 billion strong worldwide today) as a kind of premise for the conclusion that Christianity is therefore true (I never did understand the “logic” to such arguments, but they are not uncommon), only to turn around and hide in the splinters, as it were, pointing out that the criticisms offered only apply to some heretical strain of Christianity which enjoys widespread popularity.

Another example of “semi-inflammatory language” that you cited was the following:

**-"I'm guessing you won't spend much time elaborating your answers to these questions, but it's pretty hard to see how someone defending a biblical form of Christianity would deny these qualities to his god. Then again, I do know that many Christians, when pressed on matters, have a tendency to start jettisoning items of faith that earlier they had embraced wholeheartedly."**

Yes, I can see how you might find this inflammatory. In fact, I’m gently trying to provoke you into a more directly engaging and lively dialogue, hoping that you’ll eventually cut to the chase. So far, however, you have done



pretty much what I guessed: you have not spent much time elaborating on the questions I've posed.

Now I will point out that you have the advantage in the sense that my position is laid out in the open: I have over three years of blogging available for your perusal as well as a website showcasing some of my writings. But you seem anxious to discover my position by posing numerous questions to me. You may find that some of your questions for me have already been addressed (I provided links to several of my earlier blog entries for your reference). Naturally, if you're a Christian, I would assume that you endorse what Christianity teaches, right? Ah, but there's that point that there are so many different variations of Christianity in the marketplace.

And another:

**-“At any rate, I would agree with many thinkers today who recognize that the New Testament shows significant signs of being influenced by ancient mystery religions, so I don't think I would put much stock in the dichotomy you're trying to pass off here.”**

I'm not sure why you consider this statement to be using “semi-inflammatory language.” If you recall, I had stated this in response to your following statement:

“At this point it seems you are rebutting ideas from a popular form of Christianity which has its roots in ancient mystery religion rather than a Biblical Christianity.”

Since you had raised the issue, I took the opportunity to make my position on that issue clear for the record. Your reference to “a Biblical Christianity” would naturally imply a Christianity informed by the bible, including the New Testament. But if the New Testament itself shows significant signs of being influenced by ancient mystery religions, then obviously I would reject the implied dichotomy which you seem to be assuming. The influence of pagan mystery cults is a key element in the New Testament. Naturally I don't expect Christians themselves to admit to this, but many thinkers have documented this, and I find myself strongly persuaded by more than one of them. Again, what you're calling “semi-inflammatory language” may be something closer to home: the truth sometimes hurts.

**-The frequent use of "it" to refer to God, the lower case "g", and of course the repetitive "your God". It is commonly accepted to refer to God as "he" and to use a capital G. Also, I don't think anyone is going to make the mistake of concluding that the God under discussion is yours.**

I understand that this annoys many Christians (they want everyone else to take their imaginary deity seriously, like they do), but that is not why I do it. Rather, I have philosophical reasons for this choice. I use the minuscule 'g' because the use an abstraction is most appropriate in the contexts with which I deal. Since an abstraction is by nature open-ended (whereas a proper name is restricted to referring to a specific individual), the small 'g' "god" lends itself to wider application. It can refer not only to your god, but also to anyone else's god, Christian or otherwise, so long as the context allows for it. (For instance, it can just as validly refer to any version of the Christian deity, garden variety or otherwise, as well as to deities of theistic non-Christian religions.) Proper names (e.g., "God") are used to identify particular entities, and would not be appropriate for the pantheon of deities to which my points apply. Also, proper names rightly belong to actually existing, animate beings (like human beings or pets), or to characters of fiction (such as Harry Potter, Jesus Christ or John Galt). There of course is room for play in this as well; for instance, my wife refers to our automobile affectionately as "Duncan," which is intended tongue-in-cheek. Likewise, personal pronouns denoting living third persons - e.g., 'he' and 'she' - are properly reserved, in English anyway, for living organisms (like human beings and other animals), whether real or fictitious. The Christian god in no way is a living organism; in fact, the qualities which Christians attribute to their god render it as lifeless as a rock. At best, it could only be an it.

There is also a moral reason why I use the minuscule 'g' here. And that is because I refuse to sanction the irrational. Since god-belief is irrational, it would be wrong to dignify it by pandering to its terms. You see, Chad, I am a non-Christian, a non-believer, an atheist. I don't believe in this thing you call “God.” You do, and you want to give it all the allegiance you can muster. I accept no obligation to do likewise, Chad, and I am not going to change because it hurts people's feelings.

You wrote: “If you can agree to dispense with this non-sense and simply comment on what I say and do rather than supposing what I might say and do, then I will agree to either state a position and/or ask questions about objectivism.”

Well, if you would identify your position, I wouldn't have to guess what it is. So it's your call, Chad. As for asking questions about Objectivism, I welcome them.

You wrote: "I may just ask questions because I haven't spent a lot of time thinking about objectivism and therefore do not have much to say against it. Do we have a deal?"

I'm not going to change my ways for you, Chad, if that's what you're asking. This is my blog, you are welcome to comment here all you like, but you engage me on my terms, or not at all.

You wrote: "Regardless, I came across your blog while looking for information regarding the presupposition - I know a little bit about it but not enough to have an opinion. I decided to stick around because a good argument against a position is usually as useful as a good argument for it (and certainly of more value than a bad argument for it). However, at this point I am more interested in learning about objectivism."

That's good news. A good starter book would be Leonard Peikoff's *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand*. If it's not available at your local bookshop, you can easily purchase it on the web from retailers like Amazon or [www.aynrandbookstore.com](http://www.aynrandbookstore.com). If you're shy about making the investment at this time, you might also enjoy reviewing some of the articles on [www.aynrandlexicon.com](http://www.aynrandlexicon.com) - excerpts from many of Rand's (and Peikoff's) writings.

You wrote: "3. The problem of evil. I think it is important to define what we mean by evil (which we have done partly)."

I agree. As Rand stated, "Definitions are the guardians of rationality, the first line of defense against the chaos of mental disintegration" ("Art and Cognition," *The Romantic Manifesto*, p. 77). As for the concept of evil, Rand stated:

"The standard of value of the Objectivist ethics—the standard by which one judges what is good or evil—is man's life, or: that which is required for man's survival qua man. Since reason is man's basic means of survival, that which is proper to the life of a rational being is the good; that which negates, opposes or destroys it is the evil." ("The Objectivist Ethics," *The Virtue of Selfishness*, p. 23)

Now I'm curious what the bible's definition of evil is. Chad, can you produce this for me?

You wrote: "Before going further, a quick clarification. Previously we discussed whether it would be morally wrong for someone to permit a Hitler or Stalin to be \*tortured\* or killed. The discussion should have been about whether or not it would be morally wrong for someone to permit a Hitler or Stalin to suffer or be killed. I haven't got a clue as to why I said "tortured" - perhaps it was due to all of the talk in recent months of the policies of the Bush administration. Anyway, let this paragraph stand to amend the previous discussion - my intention was to discuss suffering and death, not torture and death."

Okay.

You wrote: "I would answer each of your questions in the affirmative. Yes, God is able to act against evil, he is able to choose to act against evil, and he does possess sovereign authority over his creation. As well, he has the power to successfully act against evil and the opportunity."

Good. I would say, then, that I'm not, as you seem to have charged, rebutting ideas that belong to something other than orthodox Christianity, at least on the issue of problem of evil, for you are affirming the very points that my treatment of the problem of evil takes into account. Perhaps you had something else in mind when you made this charge?

You wrote: "I have never read Bahnsen so I cannot be sure whether or not my position mirrors his."

Well, here's your chance. As I noted in my blog, Bahnsen claims that his god has "has a morally sufficient reason for the evil which exists" (*Always Ready*, p. 172). This is his answer to the problem of evil. Curiously, he never identifies the reason which he evaluates as "morally sufficient."

Would you say that your god "has a morally sufficient reason for the evil which exists"? Or would you, like me,

recognize that there is no such thing as "a morally sufficient reason" for evil?

If you're interested in learning more about Bahnsen's defense against the problem of evil, it is available online here: [The Problem of Evil](#).

I wrote: "At any rate, I would agree with many thinkers today who recognize that the New Testament shows significant signs of being influenced by ancient mystery religions, so I don't think I would put much stock in the dichotomy you're trying to pass off here."

You responded: "Actually, the popular \*interpretation\* of the New Testament is extremely (and increasingly) influenced by the ancient mystery religions."

I'm not talking about \*interpretations\* of the New Testament, but telltale indicators in the New Testament itself which show that its authors, to varying degrees, had absorbed and assimilated numerous elements from pre-existing pagan models that were very much alive during the times of the early Christians.

You wrote: "For this we can thank Constantine and his deliberate ad-mixture of Christianity and paganism around the year 325 AD."

Constantine was not around when Paul was writing his letters and the evangelists were developing their gospel depictions of Jesus' ministry. So we can't credit Constantine for the presence of these elements in the NT.

You wrote: "However, what the New Testament actually \*says\* is in stark contrast to the ancient mysteries."

I have no doubt that it makes statements that contrast with what some ancient mystery cults taught. But it would not follow from the presence of these that the overall gospel story or Paul's teachings lacked any influence from the religions enjoying currency in the surrounding culture.

You wrote: "It is their acceptance of this ad-mixture that puts me at odds with most of professing Christendom."

Can you cite some specifics?

You wrote: "No doubt there are some surface similarities between the mysteries and the Bible, but it is the differences between the two that are most striking."

So in a sense, it sounds like we agree to some degree: Christianity has its share of peculiarities as well as commonalities with other religions that were around at the time of its inception. Of course, the same could be said about each of the mystery cults as well: they shared some features with other religions, but also had unique differences which distinguished them.

You wrote: "Finally, assuming the dialogue continues, please be aware of the following: a. I don't think you are anymore convertible to Christianity than I am to objectivism, so please don't harbor the mistaken notion that I am trying to convert you. It makes no difference to me whether or not you convert to Christianity. b. I only accept one English Bible as acceptable, the King James Bible. Any argument from any other translation is therefore unacceptable to me."

Noted.

You had written: "It is like calling Britney Spears records music and then concluding music is terrible. It is music, but not a very good representation of it."

I responded: "This seems to be a rather weak analogy for the charge you've levelled here, for it makes it appear that the differences between various strains within Christianity are merely differences of taste. I doubt that's what you're intending to convey, but that's where your analogy ultimately seems to lead."

You wrote: "Though this one may have been particularly bad, I believe that ultimately all analogies fail."

This seems a bit extreme. Many of the teachings which the gospels attribute to Jesus are given in the form of a parable, which in essence is an illustration by way of analogy. The view you express here seems to have negative implications for those teachings because of this. However, unless you don't ascribe to the view that Jesus taught

in parables, I doubt you mean to imply this, do you?

You wrote: "In this case, I was only trying to show that the popular version of a thing is not necessarily the best representation of a thing. In that I think I succeeded."

I see. All analogies fail, but the one you gave (in spite of the point I raised against it) succeeded. Okay.

Regards,  
Dawson

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