

Sunday, April 06, 2008

The Double Whammy

A visitor to my blog, apparently a Christian, recently left [an excited comment](#) under the moniker “TruthTRUTH” attempting to defend the claim that his god exists with a very common approach. (It’s always curious to me why God’s self-appointed representatives conceal their identities with monikers like this one.)

TruthTRUTH’s approach has two distinct steps. First he proves that his god exists by arguing that the universe needed a creator, and quite coincidentally his god happens to be its creator. “Stuff doesn’t pop out of thin air,” he writes. The second step is that one cannot disprove the existence of his god simply because we don’t “perfectly understand its nature,” and “because it isn’t tangible or even explainable.” Significantly, he puts love, thoughts and emotions into this same category, suggesting that “just because you can’t show someone else your thoughts, or explain exactly what a thought even is, doesn’t mean thoughts don’t exist.”

We can call this an example of the “double whammy” approach to apologetics: it seeks to produce a proof as well as preempt certain avenues of disproof. Seems simple enough, doesn’t it? The first step establishes that the desired deity must exist, and the second step establishes that one cannot disprove its existence. But how well do these arguments fare? In the course of my interaction with TruthTRUTH’s comments, I will show that both steps are riddled with insuperable problems, problems that are easily avoided by adopting a position which, to the disappointment of theists, is incompatible with theism.

So without any further ado, let’s jump in and take a look at TruthTRUTH’s apology.

TruthTRUTH wrote:

Dawson, you make some very compelling arguments. But who created humans? The universe? Who created that very first particle that ever came into existence?

I would recommend some serious premise-checking here. Why suppose that the universe was “created”? Why suppose that “the very first particle that ever came into existence” was “created”? Why even suppose that there was a “very first particle that ever came into existence” in the first place? And why think a person (implied by the use of the interrogative pronoun ‘who’) “created” these things? What does “create” mean anyway? Why suppose that there was a time when the universe or particles or anything that exists did not exist? If we suppose that there was a “very first particle that ever came into existence” (a supposition that I would like to see argued for), why suppose there was some pre-existing person “who created” it? Your questions make assumptions which need support, but here you ask these questions apparently unaware of this fact.

The issue that is being raised here is one of starting point. I see two options here: either we start with existence, or we start with non-existence. If we start with existence (as my worldview does), then there’s no puzzle to sort out here - no need to come up with an explanation for existence. It’s only if we start with non-existence (as TruthTRUTH apparently thinks we need to do) that we need to come up with an explanation for the obvious fact that things do in fact exist.

TruthTRUTH writes:

You speak of reason. Here’s my reasoning.

Okay, let’s take a look at it.

TruthTRUTH writes:

A. Stuff doesn’t pop out of thin air.

I agree. That’s one reason why I don’t accept the “creation ex nihilo” idea. It’s a fantasy that is based on a

falsehood. Besides, if we start with existence rather than non-existence, then there's no need to suppose that anything had to "pop out of thin air" - existence already exists.

TruthTRUTH writes:

It comes from a source. Babies come from their mommies, Plants grow out of the ground, factories must be built by hands.

But even in each of the examples given here, we have things coming from other things that *already exist*. The material that a mommy's body uses to manufacture a baby already exist. Similarly with plants: seedlings use water and nutrients to grow into plants. Again with factories, men build factories from materials they gather from the earth. There's no example here of anything coming into existence from non-existence; we never observe things coming into existence from nothing. The source of the specific objects mentioned in the example here is: existence, not non-existence.

TruthTRUTH writes:

B. Thus we can trace back all of creation, if we must.

On the contrary, everything traces back to existence, not "creation." You yourself admitted that "stuff doesn't pop out of thin air." Every "new" thing (be it babies, plants, factories, or what have you) are in fact re-arrangements of pre-existing materials. Find one example of something that "pops" into existence. You won't find one. To say that the universe is an example of such a thing begs the question, and is thus invalid. Also, since 'creation' assumes the fact of existence (especially in that it requires a creator to do the creating in question), it assumes what it is trying to explain, namely existence. Thus it commits the fallacy of the stolen concept: it asserts a concept (namely 'creation') while ignoring its genetic roots (in this case the fact of existence).

Futher reading:

[Basic Contra-Theism](#)

[Theism and Its Piggyback Starting Point](#)

[Responding to Pavielle](#)

[Responding to Chris](#)

TruthTRUTH writes:

Suppose the following, which many believe to be true. We evolved from primates, who evolved from ... etc. etc. all the way back to microscopic bacteria in the ocean. Who created that bacteria? Where did it come from?

In the case of the ancestry of organisms, we see that each species evolved from some previously existing species. In other words, nothing is "popping" into existence from nothing in such a case. In fact, I see no reason why we should not suppose that the first or original species did not come from something that already existed as well. After all, the elements which we find in living organisms are also found naturally occurring in non-living things - such as carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, iron, and other elements. So it seems a tall order, one that exceeds the bounds of credibility, to suggest that the first species (assuming there was a "first species") came into existence from nothing. As I pointed out above, we never observe something coming into existence from nothing, so why postulate such a phenomenon when, granted certain illicit premises, we seem to have been backed up against a wall? Moreover, why suppose there was a person "who created" the original bacteria that you propose here? In other words, why suppose that some act of consciousness was necessary to bring these things into existence, even if we grant the untenable premise that they did come into existence?

You ask where that original bacteria came from. That's easy: they came from existence. However, the creationist finds this answer unsatisfying. The creationist posits a creation of these things because he doesn't want to begin with existence; this would annul his religious beliefs. Instead, he assumes that we need to begin with non-existence. But since deep down he recognizes that beginning with non-existence is utterly nonsensical, he posits a supernatural consciousness which "creates" these things. But this presupposes precisely what he didn't want to grant in the first place, which is: existence, my very starting point. Otherwise he posits not only a consciousness which has nothing but itself to be conscious of (a clear contradiction in terms), but also a consciousness which doesn't exist (given his presumed starting point of

non-existence). Yes, the more we explore TruthTRUTH's reasoning, the more unpluggable holes we find in it.

TruthTRUTH writes:

Or take the Earth. Our solar system came from a giant explosion called the big bang. But the big bang assumes particles already existed. Who created these particles?

Again, why suppose anything was created in the first place? The assumption that they were created could only be reasonable if first we assume that nothing existed at some point in the past. But why suppose this? Again, why begin with non-existence, when we know for a fact that existence exists? And supposing we accept non-existence as our starting point, why suppose that a person was need to "create" these particles? If non-existence is our starting point, how can we posit the existence of a creator who creates these things? You want to ask where these particles come from? My answer is: they came from existence. The only alternative to my answer is to say they came from non-existence, but you yourself have already gone on record affirming that "stuff doesn't pop out of thin air." The alternative you want to go with - "creation" - really isn't an alternative to existence; it's a way to try to have your cake (deny existence - hence the need to explain existence) and eat it, too (affirm existence - by imagining a person "who created" it all). But this is internally incoherent due to the self-contradiction which this assumption attempts to smuggle into the argument.

TruthTRUTH writes:

C. Thus it is impossible to escape the reality that at some point, way back along the line of creation, there is an "Un-caused cause".

If there is such a thing as an "un-caused cause," it would be existence. This is not only metaphysically necessary, it is also conceptually sound, for the concept 'cause' presupposes existence. We can know this because causality is the necessary relationship between an entity and its own actions: in order for there to be any action, there must be some entity which does the acting, and for any entity to act, it must first exist. In other words, there could be no causality apart from or outside of existence. So my position, as atheistic as it is, is secure with the notion of an 'uncaused cause' so long as it recognizes these fundamental, undeniable truths.

But somehow your "reasoning" took you elsewhere, to something we can only imagine. For you stated:

This uncaused cause is GOD.

Now, the word "god" is typically supposed to refer to some supernatural, conscious being. And yet, where is the reasoning to support the premise that the things you've been asking about find their source in a form of consciousness? What supports the assumption that they were "willed" into existence? What supports the assumption that there exists a consciousness with the power you attribute to this being whose existence you affirm? We do not find any example of a consciousness possessing such power in nature, this much is certain. So what inputs give content to the concept 'consciousness' such that we can validly suppose that such power exists? As I have pointed out before, I can imagine such a consciousness, and I suspect that this is what theists are doing. But this means that their god is imaginary. If you protest at this point and declare that your god is not imaginary, that you do not apprehend it by means of imagining it, then by what means do you discern it? Do you perceive it? If so, what does it look like? Do you conceive of it? If so, what facts does it integrate? Does it name something that you have awareness of directly, or does it name something whose existence can only be inferred? If the former, then what is this mode of awareness that gives you direct apprehension of what you call "god"? If the latter, I hope you have something better than the "uncaused cause" argument you've put forth, because I've obliterated that one already. In the final analysis, we only learn of this god's alleged existence from those who believe that it exists (or who want it to exist), not from the being itself (which, according to the legends we read in the NT, is able to make itself known to human beings). None of this bodes well for the theist.

TruthTRUTH writes:

Whether you call this being, Blakko or Jehovah, or whatever, THERE IS A CREATOR, since there is a creation. How can there not be a creator? What is the alternative?

These things you name, Blakko and Jehovah, are imaginary. The imaginary is not real. You point to

existence, and then affirm that it was created (without arguing for this premise), and then conclude that there must have been a creator (which you can only apprehend by means of imagination). And if you affirm that anything that exists needed a creator, who created the creator? Why arbitrarily stop with one creator? You may say that there can be no infinite regress. Fine. That still doesn't explain why you stop with the first creator. How would you know when it's time to stop? It could be the second, tenth, 82nd or 5,291st iteration of a prior creator which is the original "uncaused cause." How would you know when you've finally reached the "uncaused cause"?

You ask what the alternative to a creator is? Easy: Existence. Begin with existence, and there's no need to posit a creator before it. Indeed, if you attempt to posit a creator before existence, you're still positing existence, the thing you say that needs a creator. Thus your reasoning shipwrecks on the rocky shore of stolen concepts. Not a very good way to conduct your reasoning.

TruthTRUTH writes:

Our universe is so vast its size [it] is incomprehensible.

It's pretty big, yes. As for comprehending it, we begin by identifying it with generalities. The concept 'universe' itself is a case in point: it is a concept that is so wide in its scope of reference that it includes everything that exists. In fact, even if one could prove that "God" exists, it would exist as just one more entity in the universe, subject to scientific examination just as everything else that exists in it is. To exclude "God" from the access of scientific examination would be to say that it has no objective identity, which would put us right back into the realm of the imagination.

TruthTRUTH writes:

Similarly it is difficult to understand the nature of God.

Well, that's certainly the case, especially when "the nature of God" seems to vary from believer to believer. Even within Christianity, there are so many different views of what its god is, what it does, what it doesn't do, why it does what it does, why it doesn't do what it never does, etc. Incidentally, that is exactly what we would expect to be the case if in fact "God" is simply imaginary. And no believer has ever given me any good reason to suppose it is not imaginary.

TruthTRUTH writes:

But you cannot deny the existence of some power, some force, SOMETHING that created all of this around us.

Why can't I deny such claims? If I don't think they're true, you bet I'm going to deny them. And if their defenders can't avoid conceptual errors (such as the stolen concept I exposed above) when they display the "reasoning" they use to conclude that such a "power" exists, then all the more reason to deny their claim. As [I have pointed out before](#), I don't have faith in "God" for the same reason I don't have faith in square circles.

TruthTRUTH writes:

Or are you supposing that we all popped out of thin air, Dawson?

I have never affirmed anything even remotely approaching the view that "we all popped out of thin air." As I have always maintained, I begin with existence, not with non-existence. Therefore, your god is out of a job, flat and simple.

TruthTRUTH writes:

That's not a very compelling "reason".

Tell you what, since you're so interested in dealing with compelling reasons, what is your compelling reason to suppose that the universe needed to be created by an act of consciousness? This is something theists typically like to gloss over.

TruthTRUTH writes:

And if we didn't pop out of thin air, where did the universe come from?

First, let's clarify what we're talking about. As with most theists who argue for a beginning of the universe, you offer no definition for 'universe', even though you've used the term several times now. Because of this, it remains unclear what exactly we're talking about. So

I'll offer my own: universe is the sum total of everything that exists. Given this definition, it is both nonsensical and self-contradictory to assert the existence of something outside the universe. Why? Because if something exists, it is part of the sum total of everything that exists by virtue of its existence. So, where did the universe "come from"? The word "where" would point us to a place. But every place that exists, exists in the universe (for reasons stated). The question performatively contradicts itself by asking us to accept the hidden premise that a place exists outside of the sum total of everything that exists. So the question is invalid. What's the alternative? As I've stated already: Begin with existence, and there's no problem. The universe didn't come from anywhere, because it didn't "come" to begin with. There has always been existence, which means: there has always been a universe.

TruthTRUTH writes:

Furthermore your most popular argument seems to be this: "How can you separate God from your imagination?"

That is a question, not an argument. And since theists seem very hard-pressed to answer it, it's all I need. Vytautas could not answer it. At this point, I need no argument; if a simple question like this is enough to bring theism to a shattering crumble, why would I need to argue anything? I ask the question, and sit back and watch the entertainment.

TruthTRUTH writes:

I would pose this question to you, my friend: Do you believe in love? Rage? Envy? Of course you do. But please, distinguish to me where the love ends and your imagination begins.

Okay, I'll explain it to you. Both the emotions which you list and imagination are faculties of consciousness, and thus have some commonality as such. But emotions and imagination are distinct from each other. First let's look at emotions. Emotions are non-volitional reactions to new information that we learn as we understand that information relates to our values. If new information promotes my values (e.g., my wife bought me a new pair of pants, I'm getting a big tax refund this year, my daughter said her first words, etc.), my emotions respond positively: e.g., gratitude, relief, excitement, joy, etc. If the new information reveals a threat against my values (e.g., my wife got into an auto accident, I have to pay big time in my tax return, my daughter hurt her finger), my emotions respond negatively: concern, worry, anxiety, panic, frustration, etc. The new information is something I *discover* (rather than imagine), and the values they impact are *actual* (not imaginary).

Now let's look at imagination: Imagination is the volitional process of selectively rearranging inputs we have discovered in ways that we do not perceive. Let's look at an example. I imagine a skyscraper that is 400 stories tall. Although I have seen skyscrapers, there is no such thing as a 400-storey skyscraper in existence, but I can imagine one nonetheless. My imagining it is a volitional process: I can choose to vary the inputs at this point, since I own the imagination, since it is a function of my consciousness. I can imagine the skyscraper being 410 stories, or 267 stories, or anything else I wish. I can imagine it has panorama elevator banks, that it has bay windows, that it is glass and steel, that it has gargoyles mounted on the corners, that it is square, or domed, or a jumble of different shapes. I can imagine it existing in a big city such as New York or Singapore, or in the middle of a barren desert, or even on the moon. Since I am in control of what I imagine, I can vary its attributes as I please.

Emotions do not respond to our volition in this manner. If I get a bill from my doctor for \$100,000.00 for a routine check-up, I can't help but feel at the very least baffled by this. I certainly wouldn't experience joy, nor could I choose to be happy about this. I may initially suppose it's a mistake and experience amusement, but if I initially thought it was legitimate I couldn't choose to feel joy; joy is not an emotion one experiences when he learns that something is threatening his values. Emotions are non-volitional in this sense, unlike imagination. It is because of this fact - that emotions are involuntary - that certain commands contained in the bible indicate to me that its authors did not have a very good understanding of the human mind. The commandment that we "love our neighbor as ourselves" is a case in point. Love is not subject to

commands. I cannot choose to love my neighbor when I know that he abuses his children, can't hold a job, beats his wife, lets his dogs poop on my lawn, etc. I can *say* I love him, but this would be a pretense, a lie, and I'm simply too honest for that. If I don't love someone, I'm not going to say I do love him. And someone like I just described, I would not love, even if an invisible magic being demanded that I love him.

So there is a significant distinction here between the emotions one feels and the things he imagines. However, in both cases, we have awareness of these things directly and immediately, and understand them through introspection. They are not entities that exist apart from us; they are an integral part of our experience. You won't learn about these things from the teachings in the bible. For more information on this, see my blog [Lord Oda's Problem With Pain](#).

TruthTRUTH writes:

This line of reasoning is a simple cop out.

It is? How so? Consider: if someone comes to me and says that some invisible magic being created the universe, and he goes on to say that this being is imperceptible, beyond any capacity of mine to perceive, that I must have "faith" to believe in its existence, and that "everything in this universe is proof of God" (such as [Peter claimed](#)), how is my question about how I can distinguish between what he's claiming and what he's merely imagining a "cop out"? What exactly am I copping out of by asking this kind of question? And why is there so much difficulty in answering it?

TruthTRUTH writes:

You can't disprove something just because you can't perfectly understand its nature.

I'm under no obligation to disprove any claim, especially if the person issuing the claim can't prove it in the first place. Moreover, if he claims that something exists but fails to identify a clear and reliable method by which one can distinguish between the thing he claims exists and what he may merely be imagining, then I reserve the liberty to take solace in the fact that he may very well be delusional. Besides, it's not a matter of understanding the nature of what is claimed; theists use concepts to describe their god, concepts whose basis could only be the real world in which we live to the extent that those concepts are legitimate. So as long as those concepts have objective meaning, I have no problem understanding what is being claimed. The problem arises in that they use these concepts, concepts which originate in the finite, corporeal, natural and corruptible realm to describe something that is supposed to be infinite, incorporeal, [supernatural](#) and incorruptible. Legitimate concepts find their legitimacy ultimately in what we perceive and the process by which we formed those concepts. Concepts whose basis is the natural world and the natural process we use to form them could have no reference to something that allegedly exists in some alleged realm contradicting the natural world.

TruthTRUTH writes:

Nor can you disprove something because it isn't tangible or even explainable.

See above. Again, there's no need for me to disprove something that is real: if it's real, it's real. Also, there's no need to prove that the non-existent doesn't exist: if it doesn't exist, it doesn't exist, no matter who believes it exists. If theists have a hard time proving that their god exists (which has historically been the case, hands down), and there are good reasons to suppose that theism is invalid (as has been shown in both my writings and in the writings of other contrapologists; ask if you want references), then my task on the matter is done. It's at this point that theists start berating me personally for "arrogance" and other "sins," or - as TruthTRUTH himself will do below - issue pious threats of doom and gloom.

TruthTRUTH writes:

Try explaining to someone how anguish feels after a loved one passes away. Its very difficult to do, yet we all recognize the existence of anguish in our world today.

This is a learning experience which most individuals have faced to one degree or another by their early adulthood. Anyone who has lost anything - especially if it is a prized possession - understands firsthand the kind of emotion that accompanies such loss. But I want to make an important point here: our emotions are integrally bound to our values, and values are *selfish* in nature (see [here](#); Christians are notoriously reluctant to admit this fact). If you lose something that you value, your emotions consequently respond

accordingly: you feel grief, sadness, disappointment, etc., to one degree or another. Our emotions respond according to how our circumstances affects us personally. That's because we are not indifferent about our values. If values were selfless, as many Christians have insisted to me, then I wouldn't care what happened to them, I'd be indifferent about them. It's because values are selfish that what happens to our values effects our emotions the way it does.

Now back to the topically relevant point at hand: Isn't it curious how Christian apologists treat emotions as if they were analogous to their god? This is the card that TruthTRUTH plays while objecting to the challenge that he as a theist demonstrate that his god is distinguishable from something he is only imagining. Clearly he thinks there is some commonality between his god as an object of knowledge and his cognitive functions as an object of knowledge. What exactly makes them so similar? Theists tend to think of them as similar because our thoughts and other mental functions are said to be "immaterial," and coincidentally so is "God." In his [debate with Gordon Stein](#), Greg Bahnsen similarly groups his god and what he called "abstract entities" into the the same general category, the common denominator being that both "abstract entities" and "God" are "immaterial entities." To say that something is "immaterial," however, is unhelpful in informing us of its identity, for it only tells us what something is *not*, not what it *is*. So again, if the Christian god is comparable to "mental entities," how is it distinguishable from something that the mind fabricates? The "immaterial" label also emphatically raises the question: How do we have knowledge of something that is "immaterial"? An even more primitive consideration would be: By what means do we have awareness of something that is "immaterial"? This question is topically relevant because we are constantly being told by Christians that we should not expect to perceive their god by means of our senses, and the reason for this is that it is "immaterial" and thus not subject to sense perception. These questions have been stubbornly difficult for theists to address in any clear manner, and I suspect there are good reasons why it's been so difficult.

By objecting to the challenge that I have raised against theism, theists are essentially saying that their god is not merely a thought or fantasy of theirs. And yet, their first line of defense is to compare the nature of their god to the nature of thoughts and other mental phenomena (such as emotions). Both are said to have the same characteristic - "immateriality." But what distinguishes them? This is the question I have posed. They treat their god as if it were an entity which exists independent of human cognition. But that's just the point in question here, so asserting this to be the case would simply beg the question and fail to move the theist closer to addressing the challenge that's been put before him.

TruthTRUTH writes:

When you're at a McDonald's thinking to yourself, "Hmmm, do I want a Big Mac or just a Coke?" are you simply "imagining" these thoughts, or are they real?

The thoughts are real - they are a function of one's consciousness, and consciousness is real. But the Big Mac and Coke that I'm think about in my mind are imaginary. My hope is that, whatever I do end up getting in the order I place is significantly like what I imagined. They are distinguishable though: actual burgers and fries will fill my stomach, but imaginary ones will not. But I've learned to be careful here at fast food joints. For instance, I don't like pickles and I don't like whipped cream. When I imagine a burger, I don't imagine any pickles in it. But many places add pickles as a standard part of the burger's build. Just because the burger I imagine has no pickles, does not mean that the burger I'm served will have no pickles. Again, existence holds primacy over consciousness. So I have to remember this in my orders. Also, I love milkshakes, but while the milkshake I imagine has no whipped cream, many places as a matter of routine top their milkshakes off with whipped cream, which I find annoying. So I have to keep this in mind when ordering.

TruthTRUTH writes:

Just because you can't show someone else your thoughts, or explain exactly what a thought even is, doesn't mean thoughts don't exist.

Since this defense is continually being raised, we must ask: What does this have to do with the topic at hand? To the extent that this is relevant, it confirms the essence of my critique. Thoughts are a function of one's consciousness, and consciousness is an attribute of human beings. I do not deny that human beings exist, or that they are conscious, so I certainly don't dispute that human beings can think. But this is not analogous to the theistic claim. Theists are not saying that their god is merely a thought (if so, they would be openly conceding my criticisms of theism). Rather, they claim that their god is an independently

existing entity, a being which is "extra-mental" as one might say. So apparently it is supposed to be like other entities (such as rocks, flowers, automobiles, etc.) in that it exists independent of human consciousness, but it is also supposed to be like thoughts and emotions in that it is "immaterial" or "non-physical" or "incorporeal." Many theists suggest that we can "know" this god by consulting some kind of "internal witness" provided by the presence of a "Spirit" which presumably infallibly testifies of its existence and will for one's life in his "heart."

Unfortunately, one could make this kind of claim about anything he imagines. For instance, I can imagine that an invisible magic being - call it Bathuko - resides in my "heart" and guides my steps in life. I can easily interpret everything in my experience to conform with this imagination. If the phone rings, for instance, my choice to answer it and say hello are in accordance with Bathuko's will. If my boss invites me to a meeting, my choice to accept the invitation and attend the meeting is in keeping with Bathuko's will. After all, if Bathuko created my "heart" in the first place (I'm free to imagine this as well), then why wouldn't I suppose that what my "heart" decides to do is in keeping with Bathuko's will? I can also imagine that things that happen outside my control are actually being controlled by this same invisible magic being. If I get a raise in my salary, it's Bathuko's way of rewarding me and encouraging me to continue following his will. If I am struck with cancer, it must be Bathuko's will that I learn certain lessons in this life. If I am cured, it was Bathuko's will, not the chemotherapy I underwent, which effected the cure. Etc.

But the problem with all this is that the Christian god is supposed to be independent of any human mind, such that it would still exist even if there were no human beings to know of its existence. So using thoughts as an example case, as many theists commonly do, in fact only confirms that my criticisms are well placed. And since the Christian god does whatever the believer says it does (notice [how quick believers are to explain why their god won't heal amputees](#), for instance), the likelihood that his god is simply a figment of his imagination is simply too compelling to ignore.

TruthTRUTH writes:

Thus it is with God.

There you go, then! All the more reason to suppose that my challenge for theists to distinguish between what they call "God" and what they are merely imagining is right on target. I know of no good reason to suppose that independently existing entities enjoy the same kind of epistemological privacy that our cognitive functions do. And even then, one's own cognitive functions are not hidden to oneself. Consciousness can be its own object, but only secondarily so - that is, only if one is first conscious of something else to begin with.

TruthTRUTH writes:

Simply because the nature of his being is indiscernible does not thereby disprove his existence.

I have already pointed out in three blog posts (see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) why I as an atheist do not have any burden to disprove your god's alleged existence. If you want to call your god "indiscernible," that's fine; one can make this kind of claim about anything he imagines. The problem is that theists fail to explain how we can distinguish between what they call "God" and what they may merely be imagining. I'm of the opinion that they fail at this challenge because there really is no distinction to begin with.

TruthTRUTH writes:

If that were the case, love and every other emotion, every thought, everything that makes us human would be a figment of our imagination.

This doesn't follow. For one, emotions and thoughts are not mind-independent entities. But what theist would allow that his god's existence depends on his mind, like emotions and thoughts do? In fact, it is precisely because believers use psychological phenomena like thoughts and emotions as the case in point for their theistic defenses, that the suspicion that their god is merely imaginary is raised and confirmed. Besides, your point here hazards yet another stolen concept by proposing that thoughts and emotions are "a figment of our imagination." Imagination makes use of our faculty of thought, so it would both assume and deny its own genetic roots to say that thought is a figment of our imagination. My position avoids such pitfalls precisely because it maintains fidelity with the proper orientation between a subject and its objects.

TruthTRUTH writes:

We haven't begun to understand the world around us.

Indeed, with the worldview theists assume, they are simply not equipped to understand the world around us.

TruthTRUTH writes:

Just 500 years ago science and reason said the world was flat!

Supposing that were the case (and many would contest this), how would we know that this assumption (that the world is flat) is wrong? Because "we haven't begun to understand the world around us"? That dog don't hunt.

TruthTRUTH writes:

From the tiniest of particles, which we have base elementary theories to explain, to the vastest reaches of deep space, which we know almost nothing about, mankind is far from an "expert" regarding the universe.

I see. So, in other words, "mankind" is ignorant, and therefore we should posit a god to fill this void in our knowledge? Appeals of this nature only confirm that the god of the gaps argument hasn't quite gone out of style with theists in today's world.

TruthTRUTH writes:

So if the Christian God is omnipotent, infinitely larger, and more powerful than our universe (which we do not understand), how could you possibly expect believers to fully explain to you the mysteries of God?

I don't expect Christians to explain "the mysteries of God" to me. Nothing would bore me more. I simply ask how I can distinguish between what they call "God" and what they may merely be imagining. This is far more entertaining. Anyone can imagine an invisible being that is "omnipotent." So how do I know you're not simply imagining something and claiming it's real, when in fact it simply isn't?

TruthTRUTH writes:

Although the analogy isn't perfect, it gets my point across: love is like God. You can't really explain it, but you know it's there. [sic]

This only means that theists cannot answer my challenge. Here TruthTRUTH explicitly puts his god in the same camp as psychological manifestations like love. The problem with this move is that love is not an independently existing entity, while the Christian god is supposed to be extra-mental, extra-psychological, existing independent of human cognition. When I die, for instance, my loving will stop, and so will my other psychological experiences. But what Christian is going to say that his god stops existing when he does? Again, as I've stated, just by pointing to psychological phenomena as analogous to their god, theists essentially give away the game. They're basically telling us that their god is imaginary without coming out and openly admitting this to be the case.

TruthTRUTH writes:

And you know he's there too, Dawson. Look inside you, look at what makes you human. Therein lies the truth.

Statements like this only confirm my case. If I introspect (i.e., "look inside" myself) I can examine the functions of my own consciousness. But if I ignore the fact that what I'm examining at this point is my own consciousness, and allow myself to blur the distinction between the actual and the imaginary, then I can go along with such pretenses as this. But as I've pointed out, I'm simply too honest to say that something is real that I know is not real. Inside me is just parts of *me*, not a universe-creating, reality-controlling deity.

TruthTRUTH writes:

You may choose to denounce Christian theology (although I wouldn't recommend it, for your sake), but to deny any higher power, any supreme being, any constructor or creator, is not only foolish. Its unreasonable. [sic]

Here we have a most predictable resort to threats. Since TruthTRUTH senses deep down that his apologetic is dimly weak, he chooses to end his plea with a pronouncement of impending doom if his faith assertions are questioned instead of uncritically accepted. But is it truly unreasonable to deny claims like those that Christians have been making for the better of 2,000 years? Obviously I don't think it is unreasonable. In fact, as I see it, any concern for preserving a commitment to reason would compel us to reject what Christianity teaches, precisely because what it teaches is contrary to reason. TruthTRUTH calls this "foolish," and yet what is "foolish" according to a worldview which teaches that the universe was created by the will of an invisible supernatural being who "took on flesh" and sojourned the earth in 1st century Palestine? We would do well to keep matters in perspective when we start entertaining accusations of unreasonableness and foolishness.

Conclusion: TruthTRUTH's double whammy apologetic fails. His argument to the conclusion that the universe had a beginning or needed to be created, which constitutes the first step in his defense of god-belief, ignores the fact that our only alternative to existence as our starting point would be non-existence as our starting point. This is relevant because the existence of the universe (which is the sum total of that which exists) is alleged to having been created. If we begin with the universe, then there's no reason to posit a creator of the universe. Similarly, if we begin with existence (as Objectivism holds we should), then there's no good reason to posit a god which is responsible for creating existence. The tacit premise in the first horn of the double whammy is that we must begin with non-existence, and it is upon this premise that the theist feels compelled to find an explanation for the obvious fact that existence does in fact exist. The presence of this premise is evident in the dichotomy, central to TruthTRUTH's reasoning, that either "stuff... pop[s] out of thin air" (i.e., spontaneously "comes into" existence), or it was "created" by a conscious being (i.e., the Christian god or what have you). Beginning with existence as our starting point does away with such false dichotomies before they're even proposed.

In the second step of TruthTRUTH's double whammy apologetic, he in fact confirms the relevance of my challenge that theists should explain how we can distinguish between what they call "God" and what they may merely be imagining, by putting his god on the same level as human psychological phenomena, which he accomplishes by resorting to a category of defenses which assert that his god's existence cannot be disproved just as we cannot disprove emotions, thoughts, and similar aptitudes of human consciousness. So if the theist can liken his god to psychological phenomena (such as emotions like love) in an attempt to insulate his claim that it exists from disproof, why can't we ask him to identify some process by which we can distinguish his god from those very mental phenomena to which his defenses compare it?

Sadly, we have another example of a theist objecting to skeptical inquiry while undermining his own objections.

By Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [imagination](#), [The Universe](#)

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

9 Comments:

[Robert](#) said...

In response to TruthTruth, Dawson wrote: "...either we start with existence, or we start with non-existence..."

Dawson nails it yet again. This fine dichotomy confirms the law of the excluded middle, (P or not-P). Also known as "Tertium non datur: "there is no third (possibility)" this fundamental law exists independently of any form of consciousness. We know this is true because logic arises as a brute fact of material existence, and in turn the uniformity of nature verifies integration of logic and existence. If on the other hand the primacy of non-existence and consciousness were true, then reality would not be fixed. Under such a

scenario, we could not obtain predictive power via mathematical models constructed in accordance with the laws of physics. The absolute nature of logic, the uniformity of nature, and the efficacy of science are proof positive that the reality we humans perceive is independent of any consciousness.

[April 08, 2008 11:45 AM](#)

[Robert](#) said...

TruthTRUTH writes:

>Furthermore you're most popular argument seems to be this: "How can you separate God from your imagination?" <

Dawson replied:

>That is a question, not an argument. And since theists seem very hard-pressed to answer it, it's all I need. Vytautas could not answer it. At this point, I need no argument; if a simple question like this is enough to bring theism to a shattering crumble, why would I need to argue anything? I ask the question, and sit back and watch the entertainment.<

I've asked three different Christian theists to provide me a method whereby I or anybody else may reliably distinguish any difference between what they think or believe god to be and what they imagine god to be. In response, they all got this confused look on their faces. Two blew it off and continued with their silly diatribes; the other admitted he could not provide a method but that he was going to believe anyway.

Asking how to distinguish their god belief from their imagination is a fruitful technique. If properly nuanced, this is a killer argument. I've learned from Dawson to keep hammering a single argument to pin down the rascally theist. When I let the delusional god believer control the conversation, I am unable to convince the believer to second guess themselves.

[April 08, 2008 2:25 PM](#)

[Robert](#) said...

Whoops: I wrote "If properly nuanced, this is a killer argument."

Sorry, it should be phrased as "...a killer question." instead.

[April 08, 2008 2:27 PM](#)

[Kevin Brown](#) said...

Dawson wrote: "Again, why suppose anything was created in the first place? The assumption that they were created could only be reasonable if first we assume that nothing existed at some point in the past. But why suppose this? Again, why begin with non-existence, when we know for a fact that existence exists?"

Your questions prompted me to reason. Since, no Homo Sapien has ever, by any sensory perception or use of instrumentation or any other means, detected non-existence, we as a species are unwarranted in postulating the negation of existence. Even the void of deep space between the galaxies is something. Only something can be spatial, and space itself is undergoing accelerating expansion. There is no such thing as nothingness. The theist is deceived into imagining nothingness by childhood brainwashing or from sheer ignorance of the facts of reality.

[April 08, 2008 5:03 PM](#)

[Robert](#) said...

"To challenge the basic premise of any discipline, one must begin at the beginning. In ethics, one must begin by asking: What are values? Why does man need them?", Ayn Rand wrote in *The Virtue of Selfishness*, p.15. She continued thusly: ""Value" is that which one acts to gain and/or keep. The concept "value" is not a primary; it presupposes an answer to the question: of value to whom and for what? It presupposes an entity capable of acting to achieve a goal in the face of an alternative. Where no alternative exists, no goals and no values are possible.

I quote from Galt's speech: "There is only one fundamental alternative in the universe: existence or nonexistence—and it pertains to a single class of entities: to living organisms. The existence of inanimate matter is unconditional, the existence of life is not: it depends on a specific course of action. Matter is indestructible, it changes its forms, but it cannot cease to exist. It is only a living organism that faces a constant alternative: the issue of life or death. Life is a process of self-sustaining and self-generated action. If an organism fails in that action, it dies; its chemical elements remain, but its life goes out of existence. It is only the concept of 'Life' that makes the concept of 'Value' possible. It is only to a living entity that things can be good or evil."

To make this point fully clear, try to imagine an immortal, indestructible robot, an entity which moves and acts, but which cannot be affected by anything, which cannot be changed in any respect, which cannot be damaged, injured or destroyed. Such an entity would not be able to have any values; it would have nothing to gain or to lose; it could not regard anything as for or against it, as serving or threatening its welfare, as fulfilling or frustrating its interests. It could have no interests and no goals."

It seems to me that YHWH is very much like Rand's indestructible robot. But more importantly, absolute value and the morality derived therefrom arising from the brute fact of living in actual reality disproves the existence of the YHWH. For if YHWH were to be, then there would be no fixed reality. Instead, we would be at the mercy of a cartoon universe.

http://www.strongatheism.net/library/atheology/cartoon_universe_of_theism/

[April 08, 2008 5:27 PM](#)

[Robert](#) said...

"So again, if the Christian god is comparable to "mental entities," how is it distinguishable from something that the mind fabricates?" Questioned Dawson.

Thinking back to the time 30 years past when I was deluded by Christian Mythology, as sincere as I then thought I was, as thoroughly born again as I deceived myself into believing, as zealous, as positive, as upbeat as I imagined myself to be, as much as I thought I loved Jesus, there was no way I could distinguish any difference between what I thought God was and what I imagined God to be. My Christian faith was a fantasy, albeit a complex one. Yet, a crazed loon would have described me well. I now feel so very fortunate to have been exposed to sufficient science education in college to recognize that the Christian worldview does not comport favorably with reality. No matter how unpleasant reality may become, its better than living a comforting lie.

[April 08, 2008 8:05 PM](#)

[Robert](#) said...

Dawson wrote: "But the problem with all this is that the Christian god is supposed to be independent of any human mind..."

The Christian God is said to be both immanent and ineffable. This is a contradiction of incompatible properties. Immanent means: 1. Existing or remaining within; inherent: believed in a God immanent in humans. 2. Restricted entirely to the mind; subjective.

Ineffable means: Incapable of being expressed in words; unspeakable; unutterable; indescribable

If something cannot be expressed symbolically or conceptually, it is incomprehensible to the mind. Yet the Christian God is said to be entirely and subjectively indwelling the mind. To be immanent, YHWH must be comprehensible, but to be ineffable, YHWH cannot be comprehensible. Such a contradiction, while rendering the concept of YHWH incoherent, does explain the Christian's inability to distinguish their God from their imagination and their acknowledged reluctance to admit to that inability. The Christian cannot integrate results of their introspections with their conscious waking minds, but by sub-conscious mental operations they intuit that something is very wrong with the God thing. Too bad they misidentify the source of their cognitive dissonance, for if they could realize the pernicious nature of the hoax they've swallowed there would be a chance for them to restore their mental health.

[April 08, 2008 8:54 PM](#)

[Robert](#) said...

TruthTruth asserted: "Just 500 years ago science and reason said the world was flat!"

500 years ago any person with the desire to avoid being burned at the stake by the Christian Church's Holy Office of the Inquisition simply parroted the Church's dogma. As the Age of Reason unfolded after the 30 Years War, Men fought for freedom of thought against the superstition of Christianity.

Yet click the link to see the Cosmology the Bible teaches.

<http://www.lhup.edu/~dsimanek/febible.htm>

This is what the Catholic Church asserted as dogma much to Galileo's chagrin. I mean how dare Galileo defend Copernicus when Christianity was sure its sacred fairy tales were more than any man needed to know.

[April 08, 2008 9:19 PM](#)

[Robert](#) said...

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Dawson replied:

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TT makey boo-boo. YHWH is not like love as 1 John 4:8 relates "...God is Love." But what is this love like? Turn in your Bibles to 1 Samuel 15:2-3 where we read "15:2 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. 15:3 Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass."

So YHWH(Jesus) orders Saul to kill all of the Amalekites: men, women, infants, sucklings, ox, sheep, camels, and asses. Why? Because He remembers what Amalek did hundreds of years ago. Those depicted as being attacked had nothing to do with any alleged wrong doing hundreds of years earlier. A normal Homo Sapien will recoil in horror from such injustice and display of genocide. Yet exactly such injustice and genocide are depicted as flowing from the nature of YHWH(Jesus). The fact that natural human objective morality intuitively knows that genocide is wrong and the fact that such genocide flows from the nature of YHWH(Jesus) as depicted in the Bible indicates that YHWH(Jesus) is simply a fantasy in the minds of the believers. Furthermore, 1 John 4:8 discloses taht "God is love" and since love is a human emotion, then God is a human emotion. This would confirm the observation that YHWH(Jesus) is a fantasy as indicated by human objective morality recoiling in horror from the genocides ordered by YHWH(Jesus).

The reason Christians squirm and wriggle to evade Dawson's question is that in their hearts they know that God is only a feeling and that a feelings as emotions can do nothing to or in reality.

[April 09, 2008 11:50 AM](#)

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