

## The Imaginative Basis of Vytautas' God-Belief, Part 4

Continued from [Part 3](#).

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I wrote: Also, notice that “by means of the creation he has made” fails to address my question because it does not identify an alternative to sensation and perception as a means of knowledge. By pointing to “creation” you’re suggesting that you had to infer your god’s existence, that you do not have direct, firsthand awareness of it. Did you mean to say this? If you infer its existence, what is your starting point, and how did you end up with the conclusion that the Christian god is real? Assuming “creation” only begs the question, as I mentioned above. So hopefully you have something better than this? Now, if you claim to have direct, firsthand awareness of this thing you call “God,” then by what means do you possess awareness of this object? You’ve identified how you do not have awareness of it when you say that your god cannot be sensed or perceived. So, how can one have awareness of it? Or, does no one have awareness of it? If no one has awareness of it, why believe it’s real? Again, try to answer these questions with the distinction between the real and the imaginary in mind. So far, you’ve performed miserably in this respect.

Vytautas: "When I point to creation, I mean that which God created such as the earth, man, and animals."

We can imagine that the earth, man, and animals were created by an invisible magic being. But why suppose that such imagination is true? Pointing to the earth, man, and animals does not validate the claim that said invisible magic being exists, or that they were created by it. Again, we have more primacy of consciousness metaphysics in play here: existence cannot be self-sufficient on this view, it had to be created by an act of consciousness. But why suppose this, especially when all we can do is imagine it, and nothing in reality that we discover by rational means suggests that any consciousness has the power to create its own objects? Blank out.

Vytautas: "If you say that we were not created, then development of language is impossible because if a man made up a language, then it could not be communicated to another person because the other person does not know the language."

So, human beings cannot learn or acquire a language? That's interesting. I suppose my ability to speak three other languages is a delusion? Next you'll be saying that human beings could not learn to walk.

Vytautas: "It would seem then that man for all eternity had the ability to learn language, since starting with words would not know their meaning, and if a meaning is known, then a right word cannot be found that would signify that same meaning to another person. For a language to work you need meanings and words that signify the meaning for the word."

So, are you supposing that human beings are incapable of assigning meanings to words?

Vytautas: "Another problem is the fact that life cannot come from non-life because the amino acids that can be constructed in the lab are all left-handed, but we need right-handed amino acids for life, unless life always existed."

If tests in the laboratory are the final arbiter in deciding questions like this, where are the lab results which suggest that an act of consciousness can create matter?

Vytautas: "Since God created life and gave man language that he can understand and communicate with, then this gives an explanation for the origin of life and of human language."

Don't you see how all this reads as an argument from ignorance? Since you don't understand how man develops meaning and language, it must have been "God" who did this. Since you don't know how life could have come from "non-life," "God" must have created it. Your entire rationale for your god's existence is an expression of "[Duh, I donno! Must be God did it!](#)"

Vytautas: "If men have always existed, it would seem the world would be overpopulated by now, unless they

traveled out to other planets. I am not sure what you would say about these issues if existence always existed."

To say that existence exists, and that existence is eternal, is not to say that men have always existed on earth.

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I wrote: Read it again: I wrote: "by describing their god as something non-sensible, and making the kinds of claims to knowledge that they do, Christians show how nonsensical their beliefs are." The stipulation that your god is non-sensible, coupled with other things Christians say about why they believe their god exists (such as the question-begging appeal to "creation" that we saw in your own statement above), indicate how nonsensical Christianity is.

Vytautas: "If every claim to knowledge has to be validated by a sense experience, then what sense experience justifies or warrants the claim that all claims to knowledge has to be validated by a sense experience."

Every claim to knowledge does not need to be validated directly to sense experience. We are not concrete-bound in our thinking. But all legitimate concepts do ultimately reduce to the perceptual level of cognition. Knowledge has a hierarchical structure. Just as a skyscraper needs a foundation, so does knowledge. The foundation of knowledge is perception. It is on the basis of perceptual input that we form our initial concepts, including the axioms (the widest of all concepts), as well as concepts of entities. These first-level concepts can in turn be integrated into higher abstractions, and those into yet higher abstractions. We can also abstract from what we discover in entities and form concepts integrating their attributes. This is how we get concepts like 'length', 'weight', 'angle', etc.

Do the concepts 'liberty', 'orchestration', 'purview' and 'transformation' refer directly to entities? What does "liberty" look like? What does "purview" look like? You see, these are higher abstractions; they do not refer directly to entities. As higher abstractions, these concepts reside on the higher rungs of the knowledge hierarchy, not at the foundation, not at the level of the perceptually self-evident. In fact, the concept 'knowledge' itself does not refer to an entity; we don't perceive knowledge, we develop it by means of discovery, identification and integration. These are cognitive actions; we don't "see" them. Such actions are one of the benefits of a volitional consciousness. It is because of this nature of man's mind that the so-called "analogical reasoning" endorsed by the Vantillian goon squad is so fallacious and unfit for man's mind.

Besides, "God" is supposed to refer to an entity, not an abstraction. How do we have awareness of entities if not by means of perception? Theists are at a loss as to answer this question. They give no straightforward and unambiguous indication of the means by which they allegedly have awareness of this entity they call "God," assuming they think they have awareness of it in the first place. Does [Canon Michael Cole](#) indicate the means by which he supposedly had awareness of Jesus standing next to him?

Vytautas: "You would say that all of your claims to knowledge are based on sense experience, since revelation from God and reasoning from concepts are out."

Knowledge of reality is *ultimately* based on sense perception, since it is by means of sense perception that we have direct awareness of reality. This does not mean that "reasoning from concepts [is] out." Since we can and do form concepts, we have mental content from which to reason and draw conclusions.

If you say you have knowledge from some supernatural source, I simply ask for you to explain the means by which you acquired this knowledge. Believers are typically unclear on whether they claim to have direct awareness of their god or not, but this is a key epistemological issue if believers want their claims to be taken seriously.

Take a look at the arguments theists have over the centuries offered for the existence of their god. Are they simply "reasoning from concepts"? No, they're reasoning from various premises, that is, from statements they have made about the world or the state of affairs or some aspect of our existence. It is here where you will find exploitation of ambiguities (e.g., arguments from "the meaning of life"), false inferences based on unstated, illicit definitions (e.g., the universe had a beginning), reliance on imagination (e.g., "God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived..."), and stolen concepts (all the above plus many others). There is no evidence in this world for something that is "supernatural." Why? Everything in this world is natural (or man-made), finite, destructible, corporeal, etc. How does that which is natural, finite, destructible, corporeal, etc., serve as evidence of something that is supernatural, infinite, indestructible, incorporeal, etc.? In other words, how does A serve as

evidence of something that contradicts it on every parameter? Blank out. I've asked this kind of question in my blog [Is Human Experience Evidence of the Christian God?](#), but to date no one has provided a substantial answer to this question. This pushes theists into the mental realm, hoping to find some way to construe mental properties as evidence for their god. Hence you get assertions such as "Christianity is the only world which provides the preconditions necessary for experience" or something along these lines, a la presuppositionalism. But examination of this kind of assertion and the defenses that presuppositionalists supply on behalf of it reveal a conspicuous ignorance of conceptual theory, which is where these matters are rightfully addressed. Issues such as the basis of the laws of logic, the justification of induction and the source of objective morality are not going to be rationally settled by pointing to a supernatural entity which we can only access by means of our imagination. Indeed, I cannot think of a more unserious way to address such topics. It is as anti-philosophical an approach as one could come up with, and that is why it is no surprise to me why so many Christians are flocking to presuppositionalism in droves: because Christianity itself is so philosophically challenged. Like cockroaches fearing the light, the Christian thinkers scurry when a rational philosophy comes on the scene. Add to this the fact that Christianity is constituted by the worship of contradiction (see [here](#) and [here](#), for instance), and you'll see understand why this will always be the case.

Vytautas: "You start with raw sensation and consciousness converts the impressions into intelligible language."

Actually, we start with perception, not "raw sensation." There is a profound difference. But I'll keep you in suspense for a while.

Vytautas: "But where did the mind get language but from other minds that communicate the language, so that you must affirm people knowing language from eternity?"

Here's another "[Duh, I donno! Must be God did it!](#)" On what basis other than ignorance would I affirm that any god has anything to do with how people know language?

Vytautas: "But we have written records only going back thousands of years. So did people know language for all this time and did not write down their thoughts?"

Possession of a writing system is a precondition for written records, and knowledge of a corresponding language is a precondition for a writing system. So if we have written records going back to a certain point, we can be certain that languages were known and used at that point. Prior to that point, there's no reason to suppose that there was no language, for the ability to speak and comprehend language generally precedes written literacy. This is the case with children today in fact. So there's no problem here.

Vytautas: "Also existence exists is a claim about all things, but it cannot be reduced to sense experience because we have not experienced all of existence, unless you say existence is an idea we have before experience."

Why would existence have to be "an idea we have before experience" in order for it to effectively apply to all existing things? Concepts are open-ended. The concept 'man', for instance, includes every man who exists today, who has existed in the past, and who will ever exist. Since anything I perceive qualifies as something that exists (I couldn't perceive it if it didn't exist), the concept 'existence' applies to it. It also applies to anything else that exists, even if I have not perceived it, or ever will perceive it. 'Existence' is the widest of all concepts, for it includes everything and anything that exists. I do not need to have sensed or perceived everything that it includes in order to have formed it (I formed it from just the few things that I have perceived), nor do I need to have sensed or perceived everything that exists for everything that exists to be subsumed by the concept 'existence'. That's how concepts work: they are open-ended, all-inclusive, and unrestricted by temporal limitations. In fact, many of the issues which theists think indicate the existence of their god are actually aspects of concepts which are not understood as having anything to do with concepts. And what's interesting is that the Christian god, supposing it were real, would not have its knowledge in conceptual form, since conceptualization would only get in its way. Concepts are a mental shorthand that are useful to use *because we are not* omniscient. See my blog [Would an Omniscient Mind Have Its Knowledge in Conceptual Form?](#) for a detailed treatment of this matter.

Consider the concept 'man' again. It refers to a specific class of entities, namely biological organisms which possess the conceptual level of consciousness. As Aristotle observed, man is the rational animal. Did we form our concept of 'man' in the absence of perceptual input? If so, on what basis did we form it? What objective basis supplies this concept with content and meaning? It is true that the concept 'man' refers to individuals whom we have not seen and will never see. But it does not follow from this fact that we formed the concept in the absence of perceptual inputs. The individuals to whom the concept 'man' refers whom we have not seen and never will see are

epistemologically secondary. Why? Because we had to have the concept 'man' before we could apply it to things that we have not experienced firsthand. So, how did we form the concept? We formed it initially on the basis of actual individuals whom we have actually perceived. The actual men whom we have perceived firsthand are epistemologically primary insofar as our concept 'man' is concerned. It is on the basis of our firsthand, direct contact with these few individuals that we initially formed the concept 'man', and due to its open-endedness (made possible by a task in the process of abstraction which Rand calls measurement-omission), we are able to include individuals whom we have not perceived and will never perceive.

Similarly with the concept 'existence'. We began our journey into conscious experience by perceiving things existing independently of us. This was our initial conscious experience, and it happened in our first days and months of life as infants. This primitive experience preceded our ability to form concepts, and therefore preceded any concepts we eventually did form. We had to have perceptual input of some kind to form our first concepts of existents. The axioms, being the widest of all concepts, were implicit in the first actions of our conscious experience. Later we formally grasped them when we started to make specific recognitions like "John is funny" or "the chair is here." Basic predications of this sort fundamentally include even more basic recognitions, such as "this exists" and "that exists," which are wider affirmations than "John exists" or "the chair exists," for these latter recognitions relate to specific entities rather than to an indefinite array of possible entities as in the former cases. What's common to them all? The axioms are. Did we have these axioms before we perceived? This would be like asking if we had knowledge of concepts before we were aware. That would constitute another instance of the fallacy of the stolen concept, for knowledge presupposes awareness, and similarly, for the same reason, conceptualization presupposes perception.

Vytautas: "Why object to me showing God's existence from the concept of God, if you infer all of existence from your concept?"

Existence is not *inferred*. We perceive existence *directly*. Look at anything you perceive. Say, the computer monitor, or a telephone, a table, a sandwich, a tree, your friend, a mountain, a gas station, etc. Do these things exist? If they do, then you're saying that the concept 'existence' applies to things that you directly perceive. It would be silly to say we don't perceive existence. If you don't perceive existence when you perceive, what are you perceiving? Non-existence? We don't start with the concept of something, and then from that basis show that what the concept denotes must exist. We don't do that with anything. Why suppose this is valid in the case of your god? Perhaps you are confusing your imagination for a valid concept, which confusion my challenge is intended to bring out.

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I wrote: I take it by this response that you are affirming that you infer your god's existence rather than have awareness of it directly. So unlike many Christians, you do not claim to have direct, firsthand awareness of your god. Otherwise I would expect to see you identify the means by which you have such awareness (such as when I point to my senses to identify the means by which I have direct awareness of my computer screen, the shirt I'm wearing, the amount I need to pay on a bill I receive in the mail, etc.). You say that creation needs a creator. Okay, fine. Now you need to prove that what you call a "creation" was in fact created, that it is in fact a "creation." Let's see how effectively you can do this.

Vytautas: "By asking for proof you assume the laws of logic which are immaterial and invariant laws of reasoning."

Logic and reasoning are *conceptual*, not "immaterial." "Immaterial" only says what something is not. By classing logic and reason as "immaterial," you're essentially saying you don't know what they are. How does your ignorance supposed to get you anywhere?

Vytautas: "The reason we have the same logic, such as we both agree contractions cannot be true, is because we both made in the image of God, since we have descended from Adam the first man."

This is more appeal to the sacred storybook. It indicates that you have no conceptual understanding of logic and reason, and thus adopt a storybook understanding as if it were somehow true. The reason why logic is universal is two-fold: one, it is conceptual. Universality is a property of concepts (remember the part I said above about concepts being open-ended? That's the universal aspect of concepts. The concept 'man' includes all men, those living today, those of the past, and those of the future. This is why we need to use modifiers when we speak of a specific man or group of men). The other reason is because of the proper orientation between subject and object.

The relationship between a subject (a knower) and any object (what it knows, perceives, holds in awareness, etc.) is not a relationship of equals. Have you ever heard the statement “Wishing doesn’t make it so”? Ever wonder why it’s true? The reason why this statement is true is the primacy of existence metaphysics: the objects of consciousness are what they are independent of the act of consciousness by which we are aware of them. Theism directly contradicts this fundamental principle by positing a form of consciousness which has direct, immediate and total control over everything in its awareness. So there’s a fundamental dichotomy that results in theistic worldviews: for man, here on earth, wishing does not make it so, but for the deity in its fake environment (i.e., the imaginative realm of the believer), its wishing makes everything so. To see how theism explicitly endorses this most fundamental reversal between subject and object, see my blog [Confessions of a Vantillian Subjectivist](#).

Vytautas: “But on your assumption that knowledge is obtained from experience, since you were born ignorant, you obtained the laws of logic from the objective world. How did you get immaterial and unchanging laws from the material and changing world?”

You mean, how did I “get” logic and reason from what I perceive? We start with perception, and from perceptual inputs we form concepts, as I mentioned above. Once we have developed a body of concepts, we have something to work with. What kind of work do we do? We use that basis of knowledge to continue adding to it, identifying new units and integrating them into the growing sum of our knowledge by means of logic. There’s no “mystery” here. But yet that is precisely what you’re seeking to exploit - a mystery, a gap, a gap so big that only your void-god can fit into it. This shows that the rationale for your god-belief rests on assertion from ignorance.

Vytautas: “If you say that logic is obtained from examining the definition of the concept, then some knowledge comes from reason and not just experience.”

I didn’t say that “logic is obtained from examining the definition of the concept.” Rather, it is the application of the law of identity to the knowing process.

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I wrote: Existence exists, and only existence exists. Existence is an irreducible primary. It is not the result of something “prior” to existence; there is no “prior” to existence. Either you start with existence, or you start with non-existence. Implicitly this is what the theist does; he finds beginning with the irreducible fact that existence exists unsatisfying, typically for reasons that are unclear to himself, and that is why he wants to posit a form of consciousness which is responsible for bringing existence into existence. My analysis of the theist’s dilemmas is not inaccurate. Observe:

Vytautas asked: “But where does existence come from?”

I responded: I love this question - it confirms that my antiapologetic approach has been right on all along. Let’s consider it: “Where does existence come from?” Well, what is the alternative to existence, if not non-existence? If we accept the premise buried in your question, the only answer that would satisfy it would be: from non-existence. But you want to say that existence comes from your god (it created existence, right?), but also that your god exists. So your question leads you to a self-contradiction. You demand an explanation for existence, suggesting that existence “came from” something other than existence (i.e., non-existence), and yet say that it came from something that exists. In rational philosophy, your question commits what is known as the fallacy of the stolen concept. Incidentally, this fallacy is inescapable in the religious view of the world.

Vytautas: “When I say where existence came from, I am asking where all the finite, temporal, and changing things come from.”

If you ask where some particular concrete came from, I would answer that it ultimately came from existence. But when you get to existence as such, then you run the risk of committing the fallacies I enumerated above, just as you have.

Vytautas: “God is not finite, temporal, and changing, so that there is no contradiction, since God created everything from nothing, and the universe is not the same being as God.”

Again, one could say this about anything he imagines. But notice that he’s not starting with existence. If we begin with the fact that existence exists, then there’s no need to take your concept-stealing question “where does

existence come from?" seriously.

Also, since the universe is the sum total of all that exists, if you say your god does not exist in the universe, then you concede that your god does not exist. For any entity which exists, exists as a part of the universe.

Vytautas: "So it seems you do not know how things came to be, since they were always here."

You're dropping context here. If existence has always existed, then the question "where does existence come from?" is nonsensical. Moreover, as I have already pointed out, we can question the origin of specific entities all we want, and we can come up with knowledgeable answers, but only by looking at the specifics involved and using reason to guide our judgments and conclusions. But was there ever a time when nothing existed? Why believe this? If things have always existed, then why assert that they were created? If they have always existed, they didn't need to be created. The notion of a creator of existence will not only always be superfluous, it will always commit the fallacy of the stolen concept. But even though this has been explained to you repeatedly now, you will nevertheless ignore this instruction and kick against the pricks. The more you do this, the less credible your position becomes.

Vytautas: "By existence you mean all that exists, so that everything was always here but just in a different form. Did conscious always exist or is it another form of matter?"

I have no idea whether or not consciousness has always existed. Indeed, for this question to be sensible, we would have to ask: have conscious organisms always existed? Well, where? On earth? I doubt it. Have there always been conscious organisms elsewhere in the universe? I have no idea. How would I know? For the purposes of our discussion, why would that even matter? Whether conscious organisms have always existed in the universe or not, the truth is still the truth. Is consciousness "another form of matter"? I'd say this is a scientific question. Indeed, how could I prove that consciousness is not made from a type of matter which we do not understand yet? Thanks to Christianity's anti-rational, anti-scientific view of the world, science is still in its infancy. There's lots yet to discover. It is counter to the endeavor of scientific discovery to affirm that we know everything already, when in fact we do not.

Vytautas: "If consciousness came from matter, then consciousness can be thought of as a mechanical machine, such as a bicycle can be explained by the motion of the parts, so that a mind would be explained by the motion of the parts. But you say, or suggest that you have an immaterial mind, which is made of something that is not matter."

I nowhere said that I "have an immaterial mind." I have a *conscious* mind. Consciousness is its own kind of existence. The notion "immaterial" only says what something is not; it is not another word for consciousness. It never has been, it never will be.

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Vytautas had written: "If it was always here, then we could not come to this point of time because before this time an infinite amount of time had to pass before we got here. But then we would never get to this point in time because an infinite amount of time had to happen before we got here."

I responded: **This line of argument not only ignores the fact that time presupposes existence, it also ignores the fact that it is always now - i.e., the present is eternally continuous. We could not conceive of past or future times if the present did not exist. Challenges to this point will inevitably involve a false conception of time. A rational understanding of time does not lead to the conundrum you try to raise because time is conceptual, not metaphysical. This is a common mistake among thinkers, but it is a mistake nonetheless.**

Vytautas: "When I said that it was always here, I mean that existence is always here, so that I did not ignore existence. If it is always now, then there is no past or future. So when I eat pizza last week, then I am actually eating a pizza right now even though I am not eating pizza right now. Therefore, it is not always now, since now signifies the present moment that is not eternal but it is an infinitesimal duration of time. You must mean that the present is always present to you, but you were not always here."

You've misinterpreted what I have stated. It is always the present. Think about it: when is it not the present? That is the meaning of the present tense of the verb 'to be' - i.e., "is." It applies to the present tense. The word 'now' always has its reference to present action. Recognizing this fact does not at all indicate that you are actually eating

the pizza you ate last week. What an absurd interpretation! "Last week" ultimately only has meaning in contradistinction to the present. If it were not now, you could not say "last week," for present tense action takes place in the present tense.

Vytautas: "And if time is conceptual, then what sense object did you sense to give you time?"

The concept 'time' does not refer directly to any particular object; hence my statement "time is conceptual." It is an abstraction from prior abstractions. This is why it is so often misunderstood, as many thinkers expect it must refer directly to some entity or concrete. It doesn't. It is a form of measurement. What it measures is movement and action.

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Vytautas had written: "But on the Christian position, God created time at the moment of creation and a finite amount of time can happen until this point in time."

I responded: **It is true that I can imagine this happening. But again, the imaginary is not real. You can claim that "God created time," but simply claiming this to be the case does not make it true. And notice that it is posited in answer to a fallaciously conceived problem. "God" is asserted as the solution to a problem that simply does not exist. If this is how you infer your god's existence, no wonder so many people reject it.**

Vytautas: "If the imaginary is not real, then when I see an apple, then my mind recognizes this object and puts an image in my mind, since I see an image of an apple because it is impressed on my mind, and then the apple is not real, since I have an image of the apple."

Wrong. When you perceive the apple, you are aware of it directly. When you perceive an apple, you are not aware of an "image" of the apple that your mind "created." This error is known as representationalism. It has been refuted. See David Kelley's book *The Evidence of the Senses* for a proper understanding of the nature of perception.

Vytautas: "But the apple is real, so some of our images are real."

Doesn't follow. For one, you've misconstrued the way perception works. Also, if I imagine an apple, what I imagine is not real, even if the way I imagine it is as faithful to the apple that I have perceived as I can possibly make it. There is still a fundamental distinction. I think what you meant to say is that when someone perceives an apple, his awareness of that apple is real. But Objectivism agrees with this, since consciousness is affirmed as one of its founding axioms. The religious worldview's failure to distinguish between the real and the imaginary is a consequence of its baseline failure to distinguish between the subject of consciousness and its objects. I have explained this in numerous posts on my blog.

Vytautas: "It is unintelligible to say that the present is eternal, since there is the past and future which are distinguishable from the present."

Eternal means that temporal concepts do not apply. Eternity is not in the past or in the future. It is simply the absence of the applicability of temporal measurement. Since time presupposes existence, existence is eternal. That does not mean that the current state of affairs is eternal, since causality does in fact exist.

Vytautas: "It would seem time would require a consciousness, since the material world does not contain time."

Time requires consciousness, but not for the reason you propose. It is because (a) time is a form of measurement, and (b) measurement is a mental activity, that it requires consciousness. But what it measures - movement and action - does not require consciousness. The standard of our time-keeping is the movement of the earth around the sun. It happens whether anyone is aware of it or not. And yes, the "material world" does contain time. We know this because temporal concepts apply in the material world.

Vytautas: "So if existence is eternal, since everything was always here, then there is an eternal consciousness, since time is a concept and not something sensed in the world."

You're missing two facts: first, that time presupposes existence, and second that eternality is the absence of the applicability of temporal concepts. Because your argument fails to take these two relevant facts into context, its

conclusion is unsound. It also ignores the fact that consciousness presupposes existence as well, specifically the existence of any objects of which it is conscious.

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Vytautas asked: "If you say that all that is real must be capable of being sensed, then do you know this claim about all of reality?"

I responded: **Careful not to make a category mistake here. My knowledge is not an object that exists independent of me, so it is not bound to conditions that attend objects which exist independent of me. I know what I know by a means of knowledge. It's called reason. It is the faculty which identifies what I perceive and integrates what I perceive into the sum of my knowledge. You want me to accept as knowledge something which I cannot perceive and integrate into the sum of my knowledge without contradicting it. Why should I do this? You offer no good reasons for this.**

Vytautas: "If you cannot see time, then time does not exist."

As I pointed out, time is *conceptual*. Since you operate on a false understanding of concepts, this point is most likely lost on you. But keep in mind: time does measure things that I can see, such as a relay race.

Vytautas: "But we do experience duration of time, so knowledge is not just by perception."

Knowledge is conceptual. Perception is the basis of knowledge, since the most fundamental concepts are formed on the basis of perceptual input. Those initial concepts themselves can be integrated into higher abstractions, building a hierarchical sum. Now if you propose something other than perception by which you have awareness of objects, please tell us what it is, and explain how we can reliably distinguish between it and your imagination.

Vytautas: "We are able to distinguish between the present moment and things that have happened and what will happen."

Here is one area where imagination has a legitimate use in our knowledge. Since the future has not happened yet, we must rely on our imagination to estimate what will happen in the future. But here's the tricky part: what serves as our standard for the future estimations that we imagine? Does our imagination serve as that standard, or do objective inputs, ultimately grounded in what we perceive firsthand, serve as that standard? If I take the biblically inspired imagination as my standard, I would probably imagine that the graves at a nearby cemetery will open up and the corpses which lie in them will crawl out, walk among the people of the city I live in, showing themselves unto many. If I take the inputs I gather from reality and validate by means of an objective process as my standard, I would not suppose that the corpses in the nearby cemetery will crawl out of their graves. See the difference?

Vytautas: "If the present is eternal which means that at all times it is present, then we should only use verbs in the present tense and never in the past or future tense."

You're treating time as if it were metaphysical rather than epistemological. The fact that it is always now does not mean that all temporal concepts refer to the present. To correct your error here, you should try to understand that it is what time measures that is metaphysical.

Vytautas: "If knowledge is identification of objective reality and compilations of these identifications into your mind, then can you make claims about what your mind has stored as knowledge? If yes, then this would not empirical claims to knowledge, but these would be non-empirical, since you did not sense your mind."

This is a non-problem. Self-consciousness is also an axiom. So I do not need to use my senses to explore my own consciousness. My consciousness is aware of itself as a secondary object. We first learned how to do this by identifying our senses, and then following the hierarchy on up from there.

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Vytautas wrote: "I think you do not want to believe in God because if you did then, you have to worship him by the commands that he gives in Scripture."

I responded: **You ignore the fact that at one time I was a Christian and in fact wanted Christianity to be true. I**



demonstrated with my whole life at that time that when I thought it was true, I devoted my life according to Christianity's dictates. There were many problems, but they all reduced ultimately to the fact that I was being dishonest to myself. When Christians urge me to return to Christianity, they are in effect urging me to be dishonest to myself. I won't do that. When I was young, impressionable and philosophically defenseless, I was conned into such self-dishonesty. But now I know better. So it ain't gonna happen, regardless of who disapproves.

Vytautas: (silence)

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Vytautas wrote: "You do not want to have anything to do with God and detest him because you want to live in darkness and not come to the light."

I responded: I've matured in many ways since my sojourn into Christianity. One way in which I have matured is morally. Today, if I thought the god of the bible were real, I would certainly not worship it. It is most worthy of contempt. But I realize that it is a fiction, that it does not really exist, that it is an imagination which has captured the fixation of millions of people. I've observed how this fixation on such a detestable construct degrades individuals to defending the most abhorrent evils imaginable.

Vytautas: "You are an egoist which means that your own interests are the most important. So you would say worshipping God is evil since it is not in your own best interest."

Not only would serving an eternal, infinite, perfect, indestructible and perfect being fail to accomplish anything for that being, it would not meet my own ends which I must satisfy if I am going to exist. Praying to an invisible magic being does not put food in the belly, money into bank accounts, or roofs over one's head. Believing the bible to be true and/or imagining that there is a god controlling the universe, [like a cartoonist who makes cartoons](#), will not produce the values that I need in order to live. Nor is the dishonesty that such belief demands of the believer conducive to a happy life. Moreover, I have, for instance, already shown that [the 10 commandments are morally useless](#).

Vytautas: "But everything someone does is for their own best interests at the time, since no man has hated his own flesh."

How do we know that "no man has hated his own flesh"? I have known people who mutilated themselves, were diagnosed with anorexia nervosa, committed suicide, etc. Their actions told me that they had contempt for themselves.

Vytautas: "So everyone does what seems good to him all the time."

And look at what the Christian worldview tells us is "good." It gives no clear and consistent definition to the words 'good' and 'evil', and seats their meaning in the whims of an invisible magic being which doesn't exist in the first place, which is only accessible by means of imagination inspired by a storybook held as sacred (i.e., as infallible and unquestionable and holy) and is thus expected to be accepted as truth even if its reader does not understand it. Moreover, by removing man's nature as a biological organism and his needs as a living being from any consideration in the standard of good and evil, these notions - in the religionist's hands - are completely divorced from man's life and are irrelevant to his needs.

Vytautas: "You are just saying relative to me worshipping God is not good because I should follow my own rational self-interest."

It doesn't matter to me if you follow your own rational self-interest or not. I suspect you do in much of your life (such as when you take effort to meet your life needs), but your religious beliefs will only conflict with this to the degree that you take them seriously and attempt to practice them consistently.

Vytautas: "The point is not that we should follow our own rational self-interest, but that we should ask what should be our rational self-interest."

I'm happy to discuss this. On my view, the answer to the question "what is my rational self-interest?" is: objective values. The religious view of the world does not have an answer for this other than to undermine the very concepts

of rationality and self-interest, and to destroy an individual's capacity for both through its mystical teachings.

Vytautas: "Since God knows everything, he would know what is best for us."

This is just another appeal to an invisible magic being which is imagined to "know all." It's a most unoriginal attempt to foist authority over others. Under examination, it proves to be as shallow as it is imitable. If the Christian god "know[s] what is best for us," what does it say about our need for moral values? I've checked the bible, and it does not speak of moral values. In fact, you can search high and low, but you won't find the word "morality" in it to begin with. The bible's failure to include even a passing discussion of the nature of values (as opposed to a serious treatment of the matter) cannot simply be chalked up to an oversight. If that were the case, this would discredit the bible as a source on morality. Nor can the apologist say that this is something that everyone "just knows" already to begin with. If that were the case, then where's the need for the bible as a source of moral instruction? There's no two ways about it: the bible is simply and quite utterly a completely deficient as an intelligible resource on the topic of morality.

Vytautas: "He gave us the law in order us to know that we should love God and our neighbor as ourselves."

The "law" to which you refer here is informed by commandments issued by an invisible magic being. The source in which these commandments are found was written, redacted and compiled by individuals who obviously did not understand that love is not subject to commands. And look what it calls for: indiscriminate love for (a) something that would not deserve love even if it existed (that is, the Christian god, which arbitrarily withholds justice from some [the elect] and arbitrarily condemns the rest to eternal damnation [the damned]) and (b) anonymous "neighbors" who, by mere virtue of their proximity, are to be valued as much as one values himself. Why? "...just because..." the invisible magic being wishes it. This is the epitome of whim-based morality. And what is a whim-based morality if not a subjective morality? Again, I have already explained how "laws" of this type are [morally useless](#).

Vytautas: "But we do not keep the law and have broken his covenant."

A "covenant" is "an agreement, usually formal, between two or more persons to do or not do something specified." Such agreement is enjoined voluntarily by participants who are knowledgeable about the agreement's terms and the responsibilities it carries. Now I am not a party to any agreement with an invisible magic being. Indeed, I see no good reason to enter into an agreement with someone who refuses to show himself to me. So I am certainly not guilty of "breaking" some "covenant" with your god, Vytautas. To call this a "covenant" while those who you include in it have not agreed to its terms, commits the fallacy of the stolen concept. It does so because it ignores the genetic roots subsumed by the concept, in this case, namely, informed agreement.

Vytautas: "But Jesus came and fulfilled the law and died on the cross to expiate the sins of his people. He kept the moral, ceremonial, and judicial law perfectly, so that we might have life."

So in other words, the ideal (Jesus) was sacrificed for the sake of the non-ideal (us) in which the demands of justice are ignored for an arbitrarily selected group who arbitrarily believe all this happened in the first place, and this constitutes a moral transaction? How?

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I wrote: You accuse me of "suppressing" something that you've not been able to show is even true. So you affirm two falsehoods here in one breath: 1) that I am suppressing some truth, and 2) that your Jesus Christ is real. If you're god-belief had something more substantial than baseless accusations, why do you resort to them when the going gets rough?

Vytautas: "It seems that in order for something to be true, I must empirically observe the truth for myself."

Either we use rational judgment in determining what we accept as true, or we don't. I advocate that we use rational judgment in determining what we accept as true. I don't see where Jesus or any other biblical character advocates this.

Vytautas: "But how does this one fact relate to everything else as a whole? If you start with yourself, you will not come up with the answer, since all of your experiences are particular."

I start with existence. Existence is universal, and literally so: everything that exists in the universe, exists. So not only do I start with a universal, I also start with every particular. I don't "start with [myself]" - that is a straw man, and only exposes your unfamiliarity with my position. My position is invincible, Vytautas.

Vytautas: "I think I have shown that God exists by looking at the concept of God,"

I've already pointed out that "God" could not be a concept. Even on the Christian's understanding of what his god is, it is not a concept. Concepts are mental integrations of two or more units. For instance, the concept 'man' integrates all men who exist, who have existed and who will ever exist. But "God" is supposed to be *sui generis*, a unique being. Also, I have already explained why looking at the concept of a thing to "show" that it exists is backwards. We don't do this with any other entity; why would we use such a method in the case of your god? Again, if your god is imaginary, then I can see why we would need to first "look at the concept of God" and then determine whether or not it exists.

Vytautas: "and then you counter by saying God could have a different name than the one I give."

No, I said you provide no indication of how I can reliably distinguish between what you call "God" and what you may merely be imagining. How many times do I need to point this out?

Vytautas: "However, the substance still remains the same when I say God exists."

What substance? Where is it? By what means can one have awareness of it? You say we cannot perceive it. Okay. So by what means can one have awareness of it? If you aren't aware of it, then why say it exists? What leads you to believe it exists? From what you've indicated so far, from stolen concepts to epistemological reversals, you have no sound inference for its existence. In fact, you cannot explain how I can reliably distinguish between what you call "God" and what you may merely be imagining. So now you speak of some unspecified "substance." How do you measure it? Can it be combined with other substances? What is its freezing point? What is its melting point? What is its flash point? Is it water soluble, fat soluble? What are its applications? What's its market value? Does it float on water, or is it denser than water, so that it sinks? You see, if you're going to apply a legitimate concept to your god, I'm going to ask you to defend this application by showing how it qualifies as a unit that can properly be subsumed under the reference of that concept.

Vytautas: "When you say Jesus is not real because the 500 witnesses and the saints that came out of the tombs during the resurrection could be called into question, then that does not deal with the gospels as a whole and focuses on information that we don't know too much about."

I did not present as an argument to the effect that "Jesus is not real because the 500 witnesses and the saints that came out of the tombs during the resurrection could be called into question." But it is good that at least you admit that the "information" given in the New Testament regarding these things is scant. To call it "thin" would be an understatement. It would be nice, however, if you would at least concede that, given what Paul says about the 500 brethren in I Cor. 15, there'd be no way for the Corinthians to "follow up" on Paul's passing mention of them.

Vytautas: "You say that hearsay evidence cannot be used for history, but I don't see the reason why since testimony is a good source of knowledge which you seem to reject."

There are times when hearsay evidence is all we have to go on. Similarly with firsthand testimony, of which we have very little in the New Testament, and of that it is quite ambiguous at best. In the case of either types, however, it is important to bear in mind that they constitute claims which do not serve as their own validation. "My cousin Joe is 15 feet tall" is a claim that cannot be taken as truth on its own affirmation. Who witnessed Jesus turning water into wine in John chapter 2? No one in the NT claims to have witnessed this. Who made sure that there really was no wine in the water pots to begin with? If my friend, whom I know is real, claimed that he turned water into wine by wishing it, I would not believe it. Why believe it simply because it's written in some storybook? If your friend claimed to have turned water into wine just by wishing it, would you believe it? Wouldn't you ask to see a demonstration of this ability if he expected you to take his claim seriously? Or, do you just believe everything people claim? I doubt you do. You don't want to accept what I claim. But have I claimed anything at all as bizarre as what we read in the pages of the sacred storybook? Have I claimed that my cow jumped over the moon, or that a wooden puppet's nose grew because he told a lie, or that a bunch of zombies crawled out of their graves and walked through the city???

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Vytautas wrote: “You choose to dismiss the New Testament not for intellectual reasons but for moral reasons.”

I responded: **I do not accept the dichotomy here that the moral is non-intellectual. In fact, I would say that moral reasons (assuming the morality of rational philosophy) are intellectual.**

Vytautas: “Your reasons to reject the New Testament is not based on historical evidence,”

First and foremost, my rejection of any religious view of the world is a consequence of my commitment to reason and rational judgment. I would have to renounce reason in order to accept the religious explanation of the world. I know this, for that is what I had to do in my walk as a Christian almost 20 years ago. I remember it all very well. As for historical evidence, I await any confirming historical evidence for any of the claims we find in the bible. What historical evidence (not simply claims, mind you) confirm the existence of the Jesus of the gospels? The Shroud of Turin perhaps? I’m happy to discuss it.

Vytautas: “but you imagine that the events recorded did not happen, and then say people were hallucinating or they lied about what they reported.”

I’ve already pointed out that I don’t think hallucination is the best explanation for the allegations we find in the New Testament. In the case of the 500 brethren which Paul mentions in I Cor. 15, for instance, I’m not convinced that there were any such 500 brethren, since Paul gives no details whatsoever about who they were, where they were, when they were, and what they supposedly experienced. It’s just a passing reference. It does not serve as “historical evidence” by any reasonable standard. But even if we do accept the claim that there were some actual 500 brethren gathered at some place (where?) at some time (when?) experiencing something (what?), Paul gives us no reason to suppose they were experiencing anything more than a waking fantasy, like [Canon Michael Cole](#) describes.

As for “imagin[ing] that the events recorded did not happen,” that is not how imagination works. Imagination is a positive projection, not a negation as your statement here suggests. I don’t have to imagine that something which did not happen, did not happen. If it did not happen, it simply did not happen. I can imagine it happened, even if it did not. But again, that would be imagination, not reality, not “history.” Vytautas: “By intellectual reasons, I meant constructing an interpretation of the events during the earthly life of Jesus.”

My interpretation of the Jesus story is that it is clearly a series of concoctions which grew in legend with each retelling. It’s the stuff of fiction, much like Harry Potter.

Vytautas: “You make the comparison of people reporting the saw Elvis when they died, but anyone can go to the grave and see that Elvis is dead.”

I’m not sure you’re talking about by people who supposedly “saw Elvis when they died.” If they saw something when they died, how would we know this? They’re dead. If you mean people who claim to have seen Elvis after \*he\* died, why not believe their testimony? Yes, anyone can go to Elvis’ grave, but what would this prove? I’ve not been to his grave, but how do I know that there is a body in it? Was Elvis buried in a glass coffin above ground? Or, was he buried in a wooden coffin which was placed underground? And maybe the body in the grave isn’t really Elvis’. Or, it’s just a shell of a body, and Elvis’ “spiritual body” (in which, incidentally, Paul promises the faithful to be resurrected) is what these people are seeing. After all, Elvis is the King, isn’t he? He could have been “sown a natural body,” but “raised a spiritual body” (I Cor. 15:44). Indeed, if I were a Christian, I don’t think I could justifiably (on Christianity’s premises, that is) dispute claims about Elvis’ post-resurrection appearances. Indeed, if we believe Jesus was resurrected on the frail “evidence” we find in the New Testament, why not believe that Elvis was resurrected on the documented reports of thousands of contemporary witnesses?

Vytautas: “Why did not the first century enemies of the Christians point to the tomb of the dead Jesus, if the New Testament is a legend?”

If the New Testament is legend, then there was no Jesus to begin with, let alone a tomb in which Jesus’ lifeless body was placed. Besides, how do we know what “the first century enemies of the Christians” do or say, or didn’t do or didn’t say? They could have said all kinds of things (such as there was no dead Jesus placed in any tomb), and their testimony may not have survived, or was destroyed by Christians seeking to censure their opponents. Indeed, what contemporary of Jesus records Jesus’ being placed in any tomb? Paul is the earliest writer in the New

Testament, coming well before even the earliest gospels, and he nowhere mentions any tomb. Not a peep from Paul about a tomb. Of course, the theist could always say that Paul had no intention of repeating what the gospels say about Jesus' tomb. But this would be silly: the gospels weren't around yet when Paul was writing his letters, so he would not have been "repeating" anything written in them.

Coming up next: Part 5 and the Conclusion to all this.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [imagination](#), [Invisible Magic Being](#), [the bible](#)

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

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