

The Inherent Subjectivism of God-belief

Recent discussions with Christian visitors to my blog in the comments sections of [Could the Christian God be Rational?](#) and [Another Response to David: The Anatomy of Legend and the Ruse of Revelation](#), confirm that ignorance and misunderstanding of the Objectivist rationale for rejecting theism is widespread. In this post I hope to shed some light on common errors Christian apologists might make in responding to Objectivist atheology. In future posts, I plan to interact directly with some more sophisticated efforts to answer Objectivist challenges to theism. In the present post I will focus on the comments which have been made on my blog, specifically to the effect that Christian god-belief avoids the charge of subjectivism.

In [a comment dated 14 December 2008](#), David Parker asked:

You charge theists with metaphysical subjectivism based on the notion that existence should depend on some consciousness (human or divine). Now from reading some previous posts, I see that existence is defined as the sum of existents, which I agree with. **But wait**, if God exists then He does so necessarily and without dependence on any consciousness. So my question: How does that violate the primacy of existence if an existent, specifically God, is not the result of consciousness?

Similarly, [Drew Lewis](#) stated:

I believe that God exists objectively and based on no subjective cause. He didn't create Himself. I do believe that whatever else exists is created by Him.

In both cases, the objection here is that Christian god-belief is not subjective because it holds that the Christian god did not create itself. Now it's well and good that a system of god-belief holds that its god did not create itself. Unfortunately, this does not sanitize god-belief from its inherent subjectivism. The Objectivist argument which I defend is *not* that god-belief is subjective because its god allegedly created itself. Rather, the argument is that god-belief is subjective because it ascribes metaphysical primacy to a subject (e.g., "God's will") over any and all of its objects, regardless of whether or not that subject is said to have created itself. That is where the root of subjectivism lies in the Christian worldview: in the relationship between its god as a subject and any objects distinct from itself.

To probe this matter, let's ask some questions.

1. *Is this god conscious?*

Typically theists think of their god as a conscious being. It is supposed to know things, communicate, feel certain emotions (e.g., anger, wrath), desire things, issue commandments, plan things in advance, judge, etc. All of these activities presuppose consciousness because they involve conscious activity, so it would be strange if a theist denied consciousness to his god. The [Westminster Confession of Faith](#) says of the Christian god, among other things, that it is "most wise," "most loving," and "work[s] all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will." So while Christianity's formal declarations about the nature of its god may not explicitly state that it is supposed to be a *conscious* being, the fact that the faculty of consciousness is ubiquitously implied by many of the attributes ascribed to its god is unmistakable and undeniable. So in assembling an argument which addresses the claim that the Christian god is supposed to be a Christian god, the Objectivist is in no way mischaracterizing Christian theology. One only needs to go by what Christians themselves claim about their god.

Now let us ask:

2. *What is the orientation between the Christian god as a subject of consciousness and the objects of its consciousness?*

Since, as we saw above, the Christian god is supposed to possess consciousness, the question as to the orientation between the Christian god as a subject of consciousness, and its objects, is a fair question. In fact, it is one which theists should be prepared to address explicitly. To understand what this question is asking, let us identify the proper orientation in the relationship between man's consciousness and the objects of which he is aware. The orientation which we have between subject and object is characterized by the primacy of existence: *the objects of our consciousness hold metaphysical primacy over the subject of our consciousness*. This means

that the objects of our consciousness do not conform to our conscious intentions, but rather that the proper function of our consciousness is to conform to its objects. The primacy of existence means primacy of the object in the subject-object relationship. It is from this principle that we get our concept of *objectivity*.

Tom Porter clarifies the meaning of the primacy of existence principle when he writes:

The primacy of existence means both the absolute metaphysical *independence* of existence from cognition, and the absolute metaphysical *priority* of existence over cognition. It means the abject subordination of cognition to existence, the utter dependence of knowledge on its objects. (*Ayn Rand's Theory of Knowledge*, p. 197)

According to this principle, then, an object is what it is, independent of what we know about it, or even if we don't know anything about it. It is what it is, even if we are mistaken about it. An object will not alter or rearrange itself in order to conform to our errors or deficiencies in knowledge. To know an object, our cognition must conform to the object, both in our rudimentary awareness of it (e.g., I must turn my head to see the clock on the wall behind me) and in our identification of it (e.g., if both hands are pointed to 12:00, I would not insist that it indicates that it's 4:30). In other words, to know an object, we need to gather information from the object itself. But the implications of the primacy of existence do not stop there. It tells us that objects do not conform to our conscious activity.

For example, suppose I see a stapler on my desk. My *seeing* the stapler does not bring the stapler into existence. It exists independent of my perception of it, my awareness did not cause it to exist. Now if I wish that the stapler be full of staples when in fact it has already run out, my *wishing* will not automatically reload it so that it is full again. Wishing does not have this power, and that is because the objects of consciousness hold metaphysical primacy over consciousness. If I want the stapler reloaded, I would have to physically reload it, and I could do this only if I have a set of staples to put into it. I could *command* that the stapler levitate itself to my hand if it is out of my reach, but will the stapler obey my command? No, it won't. Again, it exists independent of my conscious activity. I could *imagine* that the stapler is really an Asian elephant, but does my imagination turn the stapler into an elephant? No it does not: it remains a stapler all the same, and that's because existence holds metaphysical primacy over consciousness, the objects of consciousness are what they are regardless of conscious activity. I could *forget* that my stapler is on my desk. But when I turn around, it's still there. Why? Because it exists independent even of my forgetfulness, too. I could continue this experiment and test other conscious functions, but the result will always be the same: existence exists independent of consciousness. The primacy of existence cannot be defeated.

Now does this principle, the primacy of existence, characterize the orientation which the Christian god is supposed to enjoy between itself as a conscious subject and any objects in its awareness? It's hard to see how a theistic believer would think so. A brief look at the Christian god's career, as described in the bible, is sufficient to settle this question definitively. One need look no further than the opening verses of the book of Genesis, where we read that the god it describes "created the earth and the heaven." Christians typically take this act of creation by their god to be comprehensive. For instance, Cornelius Van Til gives us the following statement:

Christianity holds that God is the creator of every fact... *God's thought is placed back of every fact.* (*Christian Theistic-Evidences*, p. 88; quoted in Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings & Analysis*, p. 378)

Christians usually describe their god's creation of the universe as an *act of will*. Again we have Van Til, who wrote:

God wills, that is, creates the universe. God wills, that is, by his providence controls the course of development of the created universe and brings it to its climax. ("Apologetics," 1959)

Elsewhere Van Til wrote:

We now know that the world exists simply because God wills it. ("The Election of All Men in Christ," *The Great Debate Today*, 1970)

Or, as [one source](#) puts it:

Fact: God willed the universe into being. Fact: He willed the universe into being by simply speaking it into existence instantaneously. References: Psalm 33:6,9 Psalm 148:5 Hebrews 11:3 Thought: He did not have to speak in order to create, but He did. God could have just thought the universe into being. Instead, He spoke it into being. He used His word to create.

Similarly, apologist Douglas Wilson, in his article [The Metaphorical Word](#), writes:

God spoke the created universe into being. God the Father "God-the-Son-ed" light, and there was light. God the Speaker Worded the heavens and the earth, and so they came to be.

In addressing the question [What Do Christians Believe? Answering Islam](#)'s Terrell Smith states:

God is Creator of everything, this vast universe. All was created by His Word. He spoke it into being. It is written: (Genesis 1:3) And God said... and it was so. His Word is powerful... God's Word spoke the universe into being. His Word is powerful beyond our comprehension.

Likewise, in answer to the question [Can you explain why God created the universe?](#) Christian author Mike Scott writes:

All things came into being through the will of God. It was God's pleasure that the universe and everything in it be created.

And lastly, Jack Cottrell, in his [Sovereignty and Free Will](#), explains:

God's will is the final and exclusively determinative power of whatsoever comes to pass. The nature of any created thing is what it is because of an act of determination in relation to it on the part of God.

In terms of essentials, all these sources are in agreement: a conscious subject holds metaphysical primacy over its objects. Here we can see this clearly when the Christian god is said to create the objects of its own consciousness by an act of consciousness, either by simply willing them into existence, speaking them into existence, commanding them into existence, etc. It not only *creates* its own objects, it assigns them their *identity* as well: things are what the Christian god *chooses* them to be.

Additionally, it can *alter the identity* of anything it created at will as well. For instance, in the second chapter of the gospel of John, we read about Jesus' first miracle at the wedding in Cana. Here Jesus, as the incarnated god of Christianity, turns water into wine by an act of will. The water, as the object of the Christian god's consciousness, obeys the intensions of the knowing subject. Every object obeys its commands. The waters of the Red Sea part upon its command; a few fishes and loaves of bread are multiplied to feed thousands upon its command; the earth quakes upon its command; dead people rise upon its command, etc.

This is certainly not the orientation between subject and object which man's consciousness has. Where man's experience, characterized by the metaphysical primacy of existence, is that the objects remain what they are regardless of what he knows, thinks, wishes, desires, commands or insists on, the Christian god is said to be able control its objects by its own conscious activity. Thus in the case of man the objects of consciousness hold metaphysical primacy over the subject of consciousness (i.e., objectivism), in the case of the Christian god the subject of consciousness is described as holding metaphysical primacy over its objects (i.e., subjectivism). It's completely irrelevant that Christians claim their god did not create itself. The subjectivism of their god-belief is inherent in the orientation it is said to have between itself and everything distinct from it. As Drew Lewis reminds us, "whatever else exists is created by Him."

In conclusion, we see that the primacy of existence (objectivism) applies in the case of man, but in the case of the Christian god we have the primacy of consciousness (subjectivism). This is what Christians are asking us to believe: that on the one hand, objects *do not* conform to consciousness (e.g., wishing doesn't make it so), while on the other hand objects *do* conform to consciousness (e.g., wishing does make it so). While the primacy of consciousness is unavoidable for us human beings (e.g., reality will not conform to any human being's wishes), the Christian wants us to believe that there exists a consciousness which does hold metaphysical primacy over its objects (e.g., reality will conform to wishes). Reality has its constraints, constraints which conscious activity will not be able to alter or overcome. However, in the fake environment of the [imagination](#), an individual can project a consciousness which does overcome these constraints. We can imagine a consciousness which even put those constraints in place to start with, "in the beginning," and thus has the power to defy them or withdraw them altogether. In its essence, religion is the glorification of an imaginary consciousness possessing precisely this power.

The problem for Christians is simply that they do not want to admit that their god is imaginary. When you point out the fact that their god is only imaginary, they tend to retreat in silence. And there's a good reason why.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Christian god](#), [Metaphysics](#), [Primacy of Existence](#), [wishing](#)

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [12:00 PM](#)

18 Comments:

[Harold](#) said...

Another good one. I was asking myself that same question with regard to the alleged primacy of a consciousness over objects. Wouldn't the theist just say that their god figure is above such constraints by "definition"? And then couldn't they say such subjectivism is objective with regard to finite humans? Are we told to accept this on their say-so? Hmm.

The problem for Christians is simply that they do not want to admit that their god is imaginary. When you point out the fact that their god is only imaginary, they tend to retreat in silence. And there's a good reason why.

Which is? I've heard things like "Well, that's why it's called faith". It's kind of sad, y'know?

Do you think then, that people would attempt some strategy of even having to acknowledge that there's imagination involved by alleging that imagination and human consciousness and logic and everything else can come only after "realizing" that their god exists? Is this what presup is largely about? Seems like an elaborate dodge to me.

[December 26, 2008 9:42 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Very interesting comments, Harold.

Harold: "Wouldn't the theist just say that their god figure is above such constraints by 'definition'?"

He certainly could. Unfortunately, definitions apply to concepts, not to independently existing entities. This kind of error is inevitable if one does not have a good grounding in concept theory, which is a common symptom among theists. When the theist makes statements like "God is [fill in the blank] *by definition*," he's really saying "by stipulation," by mere assertion. Sure he can cite sources which agree with him, but definition per se is not the guide here, as if "God" were a concept and it were formed by an objective process. By treating their god as something that is definable in terms of prior concepts or propositions, theists are tacitly admitting that their god is psychological rather than existential. It's a clue that, deep down, even the theist cannot escape the fact that his god is merely imaginary. That's why theists so routinely assign themselves as spokesmen for what their god will or will not do: an imaginary being does whatever its imaginer imagines it will do.

Harold: "And then couldn't they say such subjectivism is objective with regard to finite humans?"

This has been attempted. See for instance [here](#). Here you'll see internet apologist Paul Manata make the following statement:

But in theism, there's a sense in which reality is subjective - based on the divine mind, but it's still objective for us humans.

This only tells us that the theist has an internally fractured metaphysics: there are cases when the objects of consciousness hold metaphysical primacy over the subject, and other cases where the subject holds metaphysical primacy over its objects. Which case holds primacy over the other? Well, according to theism, human beings are mere creations of a supernatural conscious creator. This could only mean that the objective orientation between subject and object is not the original model. Rather, the *subjective* orientation is the original model. So cautionary disclaimers of this nature (e.g., "it's still objective for us humans") have no prevailing value. In fact, it's an example of the theist borrowing from a non-theistic worldview, something presuppositionalists like to charge atheists of doing all the time. And here they're doing it themselves. Find one place in the bible which explicitly states that reality is objective for human beings (or anyone/anything else for that matter). Its authors show no informed awareness of the issue to begin with. Indeed, it's too late for them, for their stories document how far

along they have journeyed into confusing the orientation between subject and object.

Harold: "Are we told to accept this on their say-so? Hmm."

Good question. What do they offer as the basis for accepting their claims other than their say-so? A review of [Bahnsen's opening statement](#) in his debate with Gordon Stein shows no inferential chain from undeniable facts to the conclusion that the Christian god exists. He seems to just pull "God" out of the air. I can find no course of reasoning in his opening argument which leads to the conclusion "Therefore, the Christian god exists" or something similar to this. He gives us a "poof," not a *proof*. If it's not Bahnsen's say-so as the basis he gives for believing his claims, what is it? [Ignorance](#) perhaps?

I wrote: *The problem for Christians is simply that they do not want to admit that their god is imaginary. When you point out the fact that their god is only imaginary, they tend to retreat in silence. And there's a good reason why.*

Harold: "Which is? I've heard things like "Well, that's why it's called faith". It's kind of sad, y'know?"

There's a point beyond which the theist implicitly recognizes that, if he says anything more, he's liable to give away the game. This is why it's so important for him to keep some things obscure, in the dark. Remember that Christianity originally began as a kind of mystery religion. But the real secret they're guarding is not what they think it is.

Harold: "Do you think then, that people would attempt some strategy of even having to acknowledge that there's imagination involved by alleging that imagination and human consciousness and logic and everything else can come only after 'realizing' that their god exists? Is this what presup is largely about? Seems like an elaborate dodge to me."

In my experience, theists resist anything remotely approaching an open admission that their god is imaginary. But they do admit this tacitly, though they are unaware of it. Such as when they treat their god as something that is definable (see above). With presuppositionalism, you will find a habitual confusing between preconditions (metaphysical conditions which may be in operation even if we do not know about them) and presuppositions (ideational content assumed in one's thoughts, statements, considerations, judgments, etc.). The two are not the same, and confusing the two is a by-product of getting the subject-object relationship wrong. An example of a precondition would be the autonomic activity of our nerve cells in the faculty of perception. We aren't aware of this activity when we're perceiving an object, but if it did not take place there'd be no perceiving going on at all. But this activity is surely not a "presupposition," for knowledge was possible long before nerve cell activity was understood.

Presuppositionalism wants to make the existence of the Christian god a vital "presupposition" to all cognition, whether it be predication, induction, deduction, any kind of inference, judgment, or simply identifying things we perceive. Presuppositionalism would make more sense if it could draw a clearer distinction between preconditions and presuppositions. I know for certain that my knowledge does not presuppose the truth of Christian theism. I've established this beyond any possible or hypothetical doubt in my writings. If presuppositionalists were smarter, I'd expect them to come back with, "Yeah, maybe your knowledge of the world does not presuppose our god's existence, but our god is still a precondition for you to think." Sometimes you may see them almost doing this. But that would all the more yield the debate to my position (since now we'd have an important distinction in play - namely between subject and object), though I don't expect apologists to see that far ahead.

Now with the rise of presuppositional apologetics, it's become popular, if not fashionable, to charge criticisms of Christian theism with begging the question, often without any attempt to substantiate this charge at all. If you go back to [Drew Lewis' Dec. 18 comment](#), you will see that he wrote:

Thus far, I've seen no evidence put forth by objectivists that isn't either question-begging against the existence of God or woefully ignorant about what Christians believe about God.

Since he qualifies his point here with the words "thus far, I've seen no evidence...", I take this to be autobiographical. Drew does not tell us what he's seen so far, nor does he give any examples of Objectivist evidences or arguments which he considers question-begging. (And my points in the present blog should make it clear that there's no ignorance or misrepresentation of "what Christians believe about God" involved here.) Presuppositionalists make it clear that the assumption of their god's existence is requisite for wholly sound

thinking, and even tell us that their god's existence is integral to their epistemic starting point (see for example [here](#)). Any argument for their god's existence which they produce, then, since its ultimate epistemic starting point includes the assumption that their god does indeed exist, will itself be question-begging, for the truth of such argument's conclusion is already assumed in the contextual underlay of its premises. One might even say (since the Christian god is said to be necessary for logical relations) that its existence is assumed in the very structure of argument to begin with. So it's unclear what objection the presuppositionalist would have against question-begging arguments, since their own stated methodology has them painted into a corner here. I can only suppose that their objection ultimately amounts to: "your arguments are question-begging because they're not question-begging," i.e., because they don't assume the truth of their worldview. By their own apologetic stipulations regarding methodology and content of "ultimate presuppositions," they give themselves no alternative here. Nevertheless, I've seen no informed understanding of my argument given to substantiate the charge that it is viciously circular.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 27, 2008 10:16 AM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Bahnsen Burner: ...[D]efinitions apply to concepts, not to independently existing entities. This kind of error is inevitable if one does not have a good grounding in concept theory, which is a common symptom among theists. When the theist makes statements like "God is [fill in the blank] *by definition*," he's really saying "by stipulation," by mere assertion. Sure he can cite sources which agree with him, but definition per se is not the guide here, as if "God" were a concept and it were formed by an objective process. By treating their god as something that is definable in terms of prior concepts or propositions, theists are tacitly admitting that their god is psychological rather than existential...

Vytautas: When you use the term God, you understand what the term God means. If you did not know, then you would ask for a definition. If I give you a definition, then I would be giving a concept, since definitions apply to concepts. So when a theist gives a definition of God, he is not giving an assertion, but rather he is giving you conceptual information. God is not formed by an objective process because he is a subject who tells us who he is. We can understand what God means, so that some knowledge is not formed by means of identifying an object. If God is just an idea inside our heads, then we could not know this because he cannot be identified by sense perception. So how come you understand what God means?

[December 27, 2008 1:00 PM](#)

[Harold](#) said...

Thanks for taking the time to respond to my questions.

This kind of error is inevitable if one does not have a good grounding in concept theory, which is a common symptom among theists.

I'm not either. What books or reading would you recommend on this?

Thinking back on what I used to believe was right, I'm almost embarrassed. I don't want to make the same mistake again and don't want to accept these ideas just because they sound good. I want to make sure I understand what's really going on, so I appreciate your help.

[December 27, 2008 1:07 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Vytautas: "When you use the term God, you understand what the term God means."

Actually, I imagine it, based on *descriptions* which various believers have produced to express what they have imagined. It's not really knowledge. I know the descriptions, but the object so described is a construct of the imagination.

Vytautas: "If you did not know, then you would ask for a definition."

Again, definitions apply to concepts, not to specific entities. What the theist should offer is not a *definition* of "God," but a *description*. The two are not the same.

Vytautas: "If I give you a definition, then I would be giving a concept, since definitions apply to concepts."

If you give me a definition for "god," then you would be treating "god" as a concept, which could only be valid if there were more than one god. But Christians are monotheists; even in the case of the trinity, it's still supposed to be only one god, not three gods. And if it is a concept, how was it formed? Theists need to answer this, not I. What's interesting is that the "definition" of "God" seems to vary from believer to believer, which I would find puzzling if in fact their god-belief were true. Regardless, what you would probably be giving is a description, and you would be using concepts to inform that description. But some of the "concepts" you would use to describe your god would have no objective meaning (such as "omniscient," "omnipotent," etc.).

Vytautas: "So when a theist gives a definition of God, he is not giving an assertion, but rather he is giving you conceptual information."

It would not be wholly conceptual. The significant portion of that description would be anti-conceptual (i.e., consisting of words which attempt to integrate errors, contradictions, stolen concepts, etc.). Even the concept 'consciousness', when applied to "God," has been distorted beyond recognition since its metaphysical roots, such as its biological preconditions, have been denied. How does something without eyes see? Blank out.

Vytautas: "God is not formed by an objective process because he is a subject who tells us who he is."

This is how the Christian tries to settle the matter in his mind. He wants to say that what he has learned about his god came from his god. In fact, however, he reads what other human beings have said about their god in stories which are said to be "inspired" by that god. It is fiction mistaken for fact. Such could be claimed about any stories about an imaginary being.

Vytautas: "We can understand what God means, so that some knowledge is not formed by means of identifying an object."

Oh, certainly. The notion "God" was not formed by an objective process of identifying things we have perceived.

Vytautas: "If God is just an idea inside our heads, then we could not know this because he cannot be identified by sense perception."

We can know this, if (a) we make the choice to be honest, and (b) recognize that we do have the ability to imagine things that we will never perceive (such as werewolves, Superman, headless horsemen, etc.).

Vytautas: "So how come you understand what God means?"

By going by what theists and theistic sources say in describing their god. Essentially, by imagining with them, without making the confessional investment they urge others to replicate.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 27, 2008 2:39 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Harold: "I'm not either. What books or reading would you recommend on this?"

I would recommend starting with Ayn Rand's *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, which outlines her theory of concepts, the objective theory of concepts. In it she explains what concepts are, how categories of measurement relate to conceptual knowledge, how we form concepts of both things which we perceive and of actions of consciousness, how proper definitions are formulated, how axiomatic concepts are distinct from non-axiomatic concepts, as well as the role which concepts play in cognition. This book also contains Leonard

Peikoff's essay "The Analytic-Synthetic Dichotomy" which not only shows why this commonly encountered dichotomy is false, but how it rests on a false theory of concepts. Peikoff's own book, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand* has a good section on concept theory.

I personally have found great value in Tom Porter's *Ayn Rand's Theory of Knowledge*, which is a thorough analysis of Rand's *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*. Porter expounds on every paragraph in Rand's book, and even numbers them so that his reader can cross-reference his remarks with Rand's original statements. Though there are a few points here and there that I would question in Porter's treatment, the good by far outweighs the questionable as he makes some fascinating points on virtually everything he touches.

Harold: "Thinking back on what I used to believe was right, I'm almost embarrassed."

I know what you mean, Harold. I too find my past embarrassing. But I've come to understand it more than I could have had I never explored a genuinely rational philosophy. I know now that I'll never make those mistakes again.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 27, 2008 2:40 PM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Bahnsen Burner -

Here is a response to an above comment:

<http://privyfisherman.blogspot.com/2008/12/concept-without-description.html>

[December 27, 2008 5:49 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Okay, let's take a look at what Vytautas had to say [in his latest blog entry](#).

Vytautas: "God is the only concept without a description."

That's quite a claim. Why do you think this? The bible itself gives plenty of descriptions of its god. Why is your god different?

Vytautas: "A description is formed by sense perception,"

How does sense perception form descriptions?

Vytautas: "but he is a Spirit, so that he is known without using an objective referent."

You tell us essentially how your god is *not* known (it's not known by "using an objective referent"), but can you explain how it *is* known (if you think you know your god)? Below you say that "God is known by examining what the term means," but who decides what it means? Your "God"? If so, how did you discover it? By reading a storybook perhaps (written by human beings)?

Vytautas: "A necessary being must exist in all possible worlds. If this is the only possible world with no god, then all things happen necessarily because all events could not have been otherwise. Our wills would be bound to nature because we could not break the bond of nature's laws. But you accept free will. How do you resolve this tension?"

There is no tension between free will and non-volitional causality, since volition ("free will") is a type of causation.

I wrote: *If it is a concept, how was it formed? Theists need to answer this, not [me]...Regardless, what you would probably be giving is a description, and you would be using concepts to inform that description. But some of the "concepts" you would use to describe your god would have no objective meaning (such as "omniscient," "omnipotent," etc.).*

Vytautas: "The concept was not formed by a process,"

So "God" is a concept, but it was formed by no specific process. Or, you just don't know how it was formed. Got it.

Vytautas: "but it is known innately"

Here we have an appeal to so-called "innate knowledge," i.e., automatic knowledge. This concept "God" was not learned, it was already in your mind when you were born. How do you know that you had knowledge already in your mind when you were born? Of course, anyone could claim (and many do) that their religious proclamations are known via "innate knowledge." It is an admission that the individual claiming such knowledge does not know how he acquired it (or does not want to admit how he acquired it) and consequently could not know whether or not it's true.

Vytautas: "because if it was not known at birth, then it would be known objectively,"

And we already know that god-belief is inherently subjective.

Vytautas: "but God is not something that is known by sense perception."

Right. It is something one imagines "back of" (to use Van Til's favorite expression) everything we perceive.

Vytautas: "God is known by examining what the term means,"

So to know your god, you need to look inward, into the contents of your own imagination and feelings, not outward at the world, at reality.

Vytautas: "but that is not the only way."

Do tell.

I wrote: *The significant portion of that description would be anti-conceptual (i.e., consisting of words which attempt to integrate errors, contradictions, stolen concepts, etc.). Even the concept 'consciousness', when applied to "God," has been distorted beyond recognition since its metaphysical roots, such as its biological preconditions, have been denied. How does something without eyes see? Blank out.*

Vytautas: "If the concept of consciousness depends on physical life, then when physical life did not exist, there was no consciousness."

Man, you're good!

Vytautas: "So the concept of consciousness needs a physical consciousness to exist."

Actually, the concept 'consciousness' needs an organism which possesses a consciousness capable of forming concepts to form it. That organism is man, an integration of both matter and consciousness.

Vytautas: "So something physical gave birth to the non-physical. How could a physical brain think of the concept of consciousness?"

It is the nature of the human brain to think. How could it avoid forming the concept 'consciousness', if only implicitly?

Vytautas: "How could the mechanical produce the mental? It seems impossible."

Perhaps on your level of familiarity with the issues involved here, "it seems impossible." However, the fact that something "seems impossible" to you, is no argument for one position or another. It's simply an autobiographical statement.

I wrote: *We can know [that "God" is just an idea inside the theist's mind], if (a) we make the choice to be honest, and (b) recognize that we do have the ability to imagine things that we will never perceive (such as werewolves, Superman, headless horsemen, etc.*

Vytautas: "God cannot be imagined, since he is a Spirit. One cannot picture something that cannot be sensed, since one can only imagine what is sensed."

To the extent that the points you raise here constitute a hurdle for the imagination, the bible and other storybooks overcome it a thousand times over. In hundreds of places the OT, for instance, depicts its god speaking and interacting with human beings. In Genesis, it "spoke" and the earth and the heaven, even light, all came into existence. It spoke to Abraham, commanding him to prepare his son as a sacrifice. Speaking of course requires a body, including lungs, a larynx, a tongue, a palate, teeth, etc. It speaks with Moses "mouth to mouth" (Numbers 12:8). It also walks (Gen. 3:8) and has feet (Ex. 24:10). It has a hand (Josh. 4:24). It is characterized in a variety of ways which presuppose a body; e.g., it rests (Gen. 2:2), it has a heart (Gen. 6:6, Hos. 11:8), it has emotions (Ex. 20:5, et al.). The purpose of these references is to give the believer's imagination something to work with. Otherwise, it is a blank, and a blank can only invite an individual to fill it in with his own content. The priests certainly saw to it that they control what the believer imagines and feels.

When we get to the New Testament, the floodgates are opened. For now we have this same god incarnated ("the word made flesh"), and now the imagination has a lot to work with. Vivid stories of the Christian god in human form abound in the New Testament. And when it's all said and done, it ascends to heaven to be seated "on the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19). It sits in a throne (Rev. 3:21). All of this is vivid imagery, content for the believer's imagination. There's no question that imagination is hard at work in the believer's life when he contemplates his deity.

But notice this unintended irony in Christianity: it teaches that human beings were made in the image of this "Spirit," and yet when it depicts that same "Spirit" in action, it uses anthropomorphic descriptions, depicting it in the human image.

Vytautas: "Werewolves, Superman, and headless horsemen have objective referents and can be imagined, but they do not exist."

How do you know that werewolves, Superman and headless horsemen do not exist, Vytautas? Please, if nothing else, speak to this.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 27, 2008 9:43 PM](#)

[Vytautas](#) said...

Bahnsen Burner: How do you know that werewolves, Superman and headless horsemen do not exist, Vytautas? Please, if nothing else, speak to this.

Vytautas: Either way, I don't care.

[December 28, 2008 12:52 PM](#)

[Drew Lewis](#) said...

Dawson,

Thanks for the comprehensive explanation of the primacy of existence. Allow my to answer the questions you asked and point out some of the fallacious reasoning you're using.

Dawson asked:

1. *Is this god conscious?*

Yes, God is an objectively existent conscious thing.

Dawson asked:

2. *What is the orientation between the Christian god as a subject of consciousness and the objects of its consciousness?*

God is conscious of Himself and the things He has created. His consciousness of Himself follows His own existence. His consciousness of those things He has created depends on how you characterize it. He was conscious of them before He created them in a similar way to how a baker is conscious of the cookies he plans to make before he makes them. God's prior consciousness is obviously more in depth and accurate, but it is still within Himself, just like the baker. When He has created, He is then conscious of those things in a new way.

Now, for the fallacies.

Dawson:

Rather, the argument is that god-belief is subjective because it ascribes metaphysical primacy to a subject (e.g., "God's will") over any and all of its objects, regardless of whether or not that subject is said to have created itself. That is where the root of subjectivism lies in the Christian worldview: in the relationship between its god as a subject and any objects distinct from itself.

Fallacy: Straw Man or non-Sequitur

First, which statement do you mean to make? "any and all of its objects", or "any objects distinct from itself"? This determines which fallacy you've committed. It is definitely one or the other.

If it's the first, then you've constructed a straw man. Whatever someone may say about God creating "existence" or "reality", no orthodox Christian holds that "God's will" has primacy over "any and all" of its objects, because one of the objects that it is conscious of is itself. Any quote you may find, if you asked, no one would espouse the belief that you're arguing against. This is why it doesn't matter if you said it created itself. In order for Christian belief to be accurately characterized as you do, God would have to be conscious before He existed. That is obviously preposterous and that's why your argument is a straw man against some other belief besides Christianity or any other theistic belief I'm aware of.

That may not be the case, though, so what if you mean "any objects distinct from itself"? If that's the case, then your argument is simply invalid.

This could be your argument by this quote:

For example, suppose I see a stapler on my desk. My seeing the stapler does not bring the stapler into existence. It exists independent of my perception of it, my awareness did not cause it to exist. Now if I wish that the stapler be full of staples when in fact it has already run out, my wishing will not automatically reload it so that it is full again. Wishing does not have this power, and that is because the objects of consciousness hold metaphysical primacy over consciousness. If I want the stapler reloaded, I would have to physically reload it, and I could do this only if I have a set of staples to put into it. I could command that the stapler levitate itself to my hand if it is out of my reach, but will the stapler obey my command? No, it won't. Again, it exists independent of my conscious activity....

And so on.

Well, this argument is just a non-sequitur. It doesn't follow that just because one being lacks an ability, that all beings lack an ability. My question is, what is the logical connection between our inability to affect reality by mere will and God's? There is none, so the argument doesn't follow. It's literally just as good as saying that just because a picture of a car can't get you anywhere, this shows that a car can't get you anywhere. You can try to bring some other argument in if you want to argue that there's no God, but this argument just doesn't follow.

Dawson:

Reality has its constraints, constraints which conscious activity will not be able to alter or overcome. However, in the fake environment of the imagination, an individual can project a consciousness which does overcome these constraints. We can imagine a consciousness which even put those constraints in place to start with, "in the beginning," and thus has the power to defy them or withdraw them altogether. In its essence, religion is the glorification of an imaginary consciousness possessing precisely this power.

Fallacy: non-sequitur

Again, this argument doesn't follow. The ability to imagine a world that has an all-powerful creator is not evidence that such a world must be imaginary. I can imagine a world in which Dawson Bethrick has a blog. Oh, look! That world must be imaginary! Do you really think this is a good argument?

Dawson concluded:

The problem for Christians is simply that they do not want to admit that their god is imaginary. When you point out the fact that their god is only imaginary, they tend to retreat in silence. And there's a good reason why.

Fallacy: either non-sequitur or begging the question (circular reasoning)

If you're just restating the assertion above that the Christian God is imaginary as your conclusion, then it's just a reiteration of the same bad argument.

However, when people start a sentence with "the problem is", they are generally stating a premise to support their conclusion. If that is the case, then it is question-begging to use "god is imaginary" to conclude that Christianity is false or that belief in God is irrational or whatever. I can do the same thing by saying that atheists just don't want to admit that their naturalistic universe is imaginary. Hey, I can imagine such a universe right? It was good enough for you before.

[December 28, 2008 1:28 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Drew: Fallacy: Straw Man or non-Sequitur

drew it is not a non sequitur to assert that if god created everything apart from himself then metaphysical subjectivity follows. Its clear as day to me that if god can determine and create the objects of he perception then there identity is subject to him, thats subjectivity in a nutshell

Drew: Well, this argument is just a non-sequitur. It doesn't follow that just because one being lacks an ability, that all beings lack an ability. My question is, what is the logical connection between our inability to affect reality by mere will and God's? There is none, so the argument doesn't follow. It's literally just as good as saying that just because a picture of a car can't get you anywhere, this shows that a car can't get you anywhere. You can try to bring some other argument in if you want to argue that there's no God, but this argument just doesn't follow.

Justin: The only conceptualization of conciseness is our own, by definition it has properties x, y, and z as determined by our identity. We can image any type of conciseness we want, but how do we separate it from what we may just be imagining. You cant define something into existence Drew.

Last point. A lot of people think its OK for god to have a subjective relationship with existence and we have a objective one and don't see the contradiction. Its simple, one drop of metaphysical subjectivity into the well of objectivity poisons the whole thing. If even one consciousness has a subjective relationship then all bets are off. Who's to say I can not make a stapler in front of me turn into coffee, the other consciousness can maybe hear my wish and fulfill it, or grant me the powers to do so my self. If we grant this power to just one being even in the a limited fashion then the very metaphysical basis on which logic works, the law of identity is dead.

[December 28, 2008 2:42 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hello Drew,

Thanks for your responses. Unfortunately, it seems that you're having a hard time understanding significant portions of my argument. Keep in mind that my argument is intended to establish the conclusion that god-belief (particularly Christian god-belief) is inherently subjective. It is not intended to conclude that your god does not exist. It seems I need to make this clear, even though my argument nowhere seeks to establish a conclusion which

reads, "Therefore, the Christian god does not exist." Please make a note of this distinction in considering my following points.

I asked: *1. Is this god conscious?*

Drew: "Yes, God is an objectively existent conscious thing."

Okay, so according to your god-belief, your god is conscious. Good! You had no difficulty with the first portion of my argument. The problems arise in your response to the second portion. Observe:

I asked: *2. What is the orientation between the Christian god as a subject of consciousness and the objects of its consciousness?*

Drew: "God is conscious of Himself and the things He has created. His consciousness of Himself follows His own existence."

Neither of these statements addresses the question I have asked.

Drew: "His consciousness of those things He has created depends on how you characterize it."

This statement doesn't address my question either, but how it is phrased is curious. Why would your god's consciousness of those things it has allegedly created depend on how I characterize it? Is it really in my control?

Drew: "He was conscious of them before He created them in a similar way to how a baker is conscious of the cookies he plans to make before he makes them."

This too does not address my question. And I should point out that statements like this can be made about anything we imagine. But in the case of an original creator, this statement is problematic. A baker who plans to bake cookies has seen cookies before, and the cookies he intends to bake are significantly like those he's seen in the past. He probably saw cookies well before he became a baker to begin with (for example, when he was a child). He is drawing from memory of things which have already existed and which he has perceived before. Moreover, the baker does not create cookies "ex nihilo." He takes pre-existing materials and blends them according to his chosen recipe and bakes them accordingly.

Even more important, the orientation between a baker and the cookies he bakes is characterized by the primacy of existence. The cookies which he bakes (which actually exist) are what they are independent of the baker's conscious activity. He could put a batch of cookies in the oven and forget to pull them out in time, consequently burning them. The baker would have to scrap them. He would not be able to wish them back to their desired state. But an all-sovereign and omnipotent deity could. Why? Because the objects of its conscious intensions conform to those intensions. Again, it's a question of the *orientation* presumed between the subject in question and its objects.

Drew: "God's prior consciousness is obviously more in depth and accurate, but it is still within Himself, just like the baker. When He has created, He is then conscious of those things in a new way."

Again, this just skirts around the question which I have posed. You have already affirmed that your god is conscious. But the question now becomes: *What is the orientation between the Christian god as a subject of consciousness and the objects of its consciousness?* Is it the same orientation which we have with the objects of our consciousness? That is not what statements made by theists about their god indicate. Quite the opposite in fact. Their statements (and I quoted a number of them to confirm that my point is not misrepresentative of theism) clearly indicate that the orientation between their god as a subject and its objects is characterized by the primacy of consciousness - i.e., the primacy of the *subject*. Hence, *subjectivism*. But your statements, Drew, suggest that you do not fully understand this point.

I wrote: *Rather, the argument is that god-belief is subjective because it ascribes metaphysical primacy to a subject (e.g., "God's will") over any and all of its objects, regardless of whether or not that subject is said to have created itself. That is where the root of subjectivism lies in the Christian worldview: in the relationship between its god as a subject and any objects distinct from itself.*

Drew: "Fallacy: Straw Man or non-Sequitur. First, which statement do you mean to make? 'any and all of its objects

, or 'any objects distinct from itself'? This determines which fallacy you've committed. It is definitely one or the other."

It is as you yourself had stated in your original comment, Drew: "I do believe that whatever else exists is created by Him." This would presumably include stars, planets, dirt, flowers, oxygen molecules, riverbeds, starfish, raindrops, dust particles, etc. Even light itself is said to have been created by this supernatural being (indicating that it "created the earth and the heaven" in the dark). All these things and more would be objects of its consciousness, if it is aware of them. So there's definitely no straw man argument on my part here. I'm simply going by what theists themselves say. I gave a number of quotes from numerous Christian sources to demonstrate that the position in question is not something I've concocted.

Incidentally, your statement logically leads to [the problem of divine lonesomeness](#), to which I've yet to see a credible response by theists.

Drew: "If it's the first, then you've constructed a straw man. Whatever someone may say about God creating 'existence' or 'reality', no orthodox Christian holds that 'God's will' has primacy over 'any and all' of its objects, because one of the objects that it is conscious of is itself."

You may want to re-read what I had stated in my blog:

Now it's well and good that a system of god-belief holds that its god did not create itself. Unfortunately, this does not sanitize god-belief from its inherent subjectivism. The Objectivist argument which I defend is *not* that god-belief is subjective because its god allegedly created itself. Rather, the argument is that god-belief is subjective because it ascribes metaphysical primacy to a subject (e.g., "God's will") over any and all of its objects, regardless of whether or not that subject is said to have created itself. That is where the root of subjectivism lies in the Christian worldview: in the relationship between its god as a subject and any objects distinct from itself.

I don't know how I could be more clear in stating that my argument is *not* that god-belief is subjective because it supposes that a consciousness created itself. But here it crops up in your response, as if you did not recognize this point. Please take note of it.

Drew: "Any quote you may find, if you asked, no one would espouse the belief that you're arguing against."

So, it's not your belief that your god created things like include stars, planets, dirt, flowers, oxygen molecules, riverbeds, starfish, raindrops, dust particles, etc.?

Drew: "This is why it doesn't matter if you said it created itself. In order for Christian belief to be accurately characterized as you do, God would have to be conscious before He existed."

How so? I'm wondering if you've understood my argument at all, Drew. My argument is wholly compatible with the position that your god is eternal, uncreated, and existing independent of its own creative activity.

Drew: "so what if you mean 'any objects distinct from itself'? If that's the case, then your argument is simply invalid."

How so? Again, did you understand my argument and what it seeks to conclude? It simply seeks to conclude that theism (god-belief) is inherently subjective. Your own efforts to interact with my argument seem to proceed from a fundamental misunderstanding of what my argument seeks to establish.

I wrote: For example, suppose I see a stapler on my desk. My seeing the stapler does not bring the stapler into existence. It exists independent of my perception of it, my awareness did not cause it to exist. Now if I wish that the stapler be full of staples when in fact it has already run out, my wishing will not automatically reload it so that it is full again. Wishing does not have this power, and that is because the objects of consciousness hold metaphysical primacy over consciousness. If I want the stapler reloaded, I would have to physically reload it, and I could do this only if I have a set of staples to put into it. I could command that the stapler levitate itself to my hand if it is out of my reach, but will the stapler obey my command? No, it won't. Again, it exists independent of my conscious activity....

Drew: "Well, this argument is just a non-sequitur. It doesn't follow that just because one being lacks an ability,

that all beings lack an ability.”

Here you are straw-manning my argument, for the issue is not a difference in mere “ability,” but in *orientation* between subject and object. Two different individuals can vary in ability (e.g., my ability to throw a football and an NFL professional’s ability to do the same), but still have the *same* orientation between subject and object.

Drew: “My question is, what is the logical connection between our inability to affect reality by mere will and God’s? There is none, so the argument doesn’t follow. It’s literally just as good as saying that just because a picture of a car can’t get you anywhere, this shows that a car can’t get you anywhere. You can try to bring some other argument in if you want to argue that there’s no God, but this argument just doesn’t follow.”

Again, I wonder if you have adequately understood my argument. You say that “the argument doesn’t follow,” but what exactly do you understand my argument to be? My argument is intended to establish the conclusion that subjectivism is inherent in theism. Unless you believe your god has the same orientation between itself as a subject and any objects of its awareness *as human beings have*, then you’re missing the point. Notice the methodology of my exploration of this issue: first I asked if your god is supposed to be conscious. You affirmed that it is. So far no mischaracterization. Then I asked what orientation it has between itself as a conscious subject and its objects. Above you do not answer this question directly. But it is clear that you believe your god created the kinds of objects I listed. After all, you yourself stated: “I do believe that whatever else exists is created by Him.” That’s all my argument needs to work with, and I gave a whole slew of quotes which second the motion. It should be clear that the orientation between your god as a subject and its objects is not the same orientation that we have between ourselves as subjects and any objects of our awareness. The orientation which we have between ourselves as subjects is characterized by the primacy of existence: the *objects* of consciousness hold metaphysical primacy over us as subjects (this is the *objective* orientation between subject and object). But this principle does not apply in the case of your god: in the case of your god, the *subject* of consciousness is supposed to hold metaphysical primacy over its objects (this is the *subjective* orientation between subject and object). It is said to have created all objects distinct from itself by an act of will (i.e., by *conscious* activity); it is said to have assigned them their natures by an act of will; it is said to revise their natures by an act of will, etc. There is nothing apart from the god of theism, according to the theistic worldview, which can escape its sovereign control. This is the primacy of the subject metaphysics, i.e., *subjectivism* Q.E.D. No straw man here. No non sequitur, either. Not in the argument which I have presented. Sorry.

I wrote: *Reality has its constraints, constraints which conscious activity will not be able to alter or overcome. However, in the fake environment of the imagination, an individual can project a consciousness which does overcome these constraints. We can imagine a consciousness which even put those constraints in place to start with, “in the beginning,” and thus has the power to defy them or withdraw them altogether. In its essence, religion is the glorification of an imaginary consciousness possessing precisely this power.*

Drew: “Fallacy: non-sequitur. Again, this argument doesn’t follow. The ability to imagine a world that has an all-powerful creator is not evidence that such a world must be imaginary.”

Here’s another mischaracterization of my argument. The object being imagined is not the *world* (it exists, and we perceive it; we don’t have to imagine it), but the invisible supernatural being which is alleged to have created it. Apparently you agree that people *can* imagine this. You do well. But here’s the question: how can we reliably distinguish between what theists call “God” and what those same theists may merely be *imagining*? As I have pointed out, it was the runaway imagination of a little boy scared out of his wits one night which led young Cornelius Van Til to a lifetime of devotion to mysticism. Here it is in his own words:

I can recall playing as a child in a sandbox built into a corner of the hay-barn. From the hay-barn I would go through the cow-barn to the house. Built into the hay-barn too, but with doors opening into the cow-barn, was a bed for the working-man. How badly I wanted permission to sleep in that bed for a night! Permission was finally given. Freud was still utterly unknown to me, but I had heard about ghosts and “forerunners of death.” That night I heard the cows jingle their chains. I knew there were cows and that they did a lot of jingling with their chains, but after a while I was not quite certain that it was only the cows that made all the noises I heard. Wasn’t there someone walking down the aisle back of the cows, and wasn’t he approaching my bed? Already I had been taught to say my evening prayers. Some of the words of that prayer were to this effect: “Lord, convert me, that I may be converted.” Unmindful of the paradox, I prayed that prayer that night as I had never prayed before. ([Why I Believe in God](#))

You can deny the role of imagination in your god-belief all you want, Drew. That will not make it go away. And no,

it's not question-begging to point out that belief in imaginary beings such as god-belief enshrines is irrational. To insist that it is question-begging only indicates that you are not familiar with the issues raised in my arguments (as your current objections indicate).

Drew: "I can do the same thing by saying that atheists just don't want to admit that their naturalistic universe is imaginary. Hey, I can imagine such a universe right? It was good enough for you before."

I don't see how this move would at all be analogous. Existence exists. There's no non-contradictory way to deny this. The universe is merely the sum total of what exists. The objects which I perceive are not created by anyone's imagination. If I steer my car towards a telephone pole going 80 mph, my imagination will not make the telephone pole stop existing or move out of the way. As I've stated before, the primacy of existence is undefeatable.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 28, 2008 3:41 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Justin: "Its clear as day to me that if god can determine and create the objects of he perception then there identity is subject to him, thats subjectivity in a nutshell."

Exactly. Christianity essentially claims that the universe is a creation of consciousness... you can't get much more subjective than this.

Justin: "A lot of people think its OK for god to have a subjective relationship with existence and we have a objective one and don't see the contradiction. Its simple, one drop of metaphysical subjectivity into the well of objectivity poisons the whole thing. If even one consciousness has a subjective relationship then all bets are off."

Right. As Rand once put it, there is no compromise between food and poison. Season your food (objectivity) with a little poison (subjectivism), and you've destroyed the nutritional value of your food.

Justin: "Who's to say I can not make a stapler in front of me turn into coffee, the other consciousness can maybe hear my wish and fulfill it, or grant me the powers to do so my self. If we grant this power to just one being even in the a limited fashion then the very metaphysical basis on which logic works, the law of identity is dead."

I agree entirely here. Unfortunately, it's going to take the rest of the world a very long time to catch up.

Regards,
Dawson

[December 28, 2008 3:51 PM](#)

[Harold](#) said...

I agree entirely here. Unfortunately, it's going to take the rest of the world a very long time to catch up.

You're more right about that than you can imagine. It's something I find myself thinking about as I go about my day. It seems the more one *understands* and adopts such a worldview based on reason, the more they are psychologically removed from others. I know how that sounds, but what else can one say? It doesn't bother me so much--I'm used to it I guess, but it's interesting to note.

[December 28, 2008 4:50 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

I really don't have a problem saying that if the Christian God exists, He does so with a subjective relationship to all of the objects He created. My problem is when Objectivists insist that what is true of human consciousness must necessarily be true of divine consciousness.

As I've cited before:

"... the basic metaphysical issue that lies at the root of any system of philosophy [is] the primacy of existence or the primacy of consciousness... The primacy of existence (of reality) is the axiom that existence exists, i.e., that the universe exists independent of consciousness (of any consciousness), that things are what they are, that they possess a specific nature, an identity. The epistemological corollary is the axiom that consciousness is the faculty of perceiving that which exists - and that man gains knowledge of reality by looking outward. The rejection of these axioms represents a reversal: the primacy of consciousness - the notion that the universe has no independent existence, that it is the product of a consciousness (either human or divine or both). The epistemological corollary is the notion that man gains knowledge of reality by looking inward (either at his own consciousness or at the revelations it [allegedly] receives from another, superior consciousness)."

Philosophy: Who Needs It, (New York: Signet, 1984), pp. 23-34.

Or as Eric Johnson said in his review of Peikoff's book:

"Since the nature (identity) of consciousness is to be aware of reality, existence is prior to, necessary for, and not subject to the control of, consciousness. As a rephrasing of more basic axioms, the principle could be said as "It is...whether you want it to be or not.". In essence, the point is that consciousness, in and of itself (barring physical action) does not change existence."

Now we can both agree that with respect to humans, there is strong evidence that our consciousness cannot alter the identify of any of its objects without physical action. But what evidence is there that this applies with respect to a divine consciousness?

Do Objectivists just assume this and move on? If so, then this still looks like defining God out of existence to me. Especially when one argues that God's existence is metaphysically impossible precisely because of violating said axiom.

[January 01, 2009 1:44 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

I can not speak for all that claim to be objectivists, however I can say this for myself. The real issue here is two fold. The first is this. You can image any kind of consciousness you like to, but how do we tell if it is real or not. We have here two types of consciousnesses, one our own is the objective type that has no power over the identities of what it perceives. On the other hand is the subjective kind that does have such a power. We know for a fact that the former exists, but what of the second. We only have the imaginings of mystics. How do we know they are real? Talk of defining god out of existence, this is a case of defining god into existence. This is a case of I can imagine it so it just be possible. The second problem is this. I do not have a problem with the existence of god one way or the other, what I am calling exception to is god belief. For if we grant a subjective consciousness does exist, then the law of identity is null and void. If the law of identity is gone then so to is logic, for logic is when you get down to it, just none contradictory identification. As a result a subjective consciousness is incompatible with logic and there can not be a logical argument for one. So yes a subjective consciousness could exist but you can never successfully argue that it is nothing more then what you imagine. It is relegated to the arbitrary and thus can be ignored. This is why I am an atheist. This is why I can say that I have without any doubt I have no god belief. Can god exist? Well yes, so can big flying green dragons, but does anyone have reason to accept this? No one is under any onus to believe an arbitrary claim.

[January 01, 2009 7:42 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

with regard to my earlier post, I said a subjective consciousness could exist. On further reflection I realize this was an error. The concept "could" presupposed the primacy of existence, so no I cant say a consciousness that has a subjective relationship to existence could exist. All I could say about god is nothing meaningful can be said about it apart from stating that discussing of it is meaningless. This is the consequence of accepting subjectivist, the price is the lose of logic and thus meaning. On a further note, one could argue that god can not exist based on that logical fact that nothing can exist that contradicts itself. God is said to be all powerful and all knowing, but in that case it would know everything it was ever going to do in advance of doing it, including changing it's mind, and thus powerless to do anything about it. A all powerful being can not at the same time be an all knowing being, its a contradiction. However the primary argument of existence is not supposed to show god

does not exist, only that god belief is irrational.

[January 01, 2009 11:40 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Happy New Year, everyone!

David, I enjoyed your comments so much that I decided to post my first blog of the new year in response to them. You can read it here:

[Do Objectivists Try to "Define God out of Existence"?](#)

I had a lot to say - more than I included in my blog. I tried to keep it short. Really, I did!

Oh, and Justin, I even quoted you at one point!

Regards,
Dawson

[January 01, 2009 11:48 PM](#)

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