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Theistic Misuse of the Concepts of Meaning, Value and Purpose

A common ad hominem tactic used by Christian apologists against non-Christians (and particularly against non-theists) is the claim, made one way or another, that life without the Christian god has no meaning. In this blog I will examine this claim and several interpretations of it, to determine whether or not such claims have any merit to recommend them. If such claims are determined to have various integral problems, as I argue that they do, then non-believers are wholly justified in rejecting them.

The Concept of Meaning

Famed Christian apologist Cornelius Van Til wrote the following:

Our existence and our meaning, our denotation and our connotation are derived from God. We are already fully interpreted before we come into existence. God knows us before and behind; he knows the thoughts of our hearts. We could not have existence and meaning apart from the existence and meaning of God. All this is the road from God to us. (*The Defense of the Faith*, p. 40)

Now it's not exactly clear to me what statements like this are supposed to mean. The term 'meaning' here is being used in a most idiosyncratic manner so far as I can tell, one which apologists routinely take for granted and tend not to explain. Regardless, it is apparent that this pronouncement - that "we [Van Til presumably has all human beings in mind here] could not have... meaning apart from... God" - is not intended to be complimentary to non-Christians and the philosophical positions open to them given their non-belief in the Christian god.

What is noteworthy about such pronouncements is that, as Van Til's quote exemplifies, they are typically made without any argument whatsoever. Apologists seem to believe that it is sufficient for them to simply assert that "meaning" depends on their god, and apparently this alleged truth is supposed to be self-evident once it's been pointed out. But Van Til did claim that he could demonstrate this. In his pamphlet *Particularism and Common Grace*, Van Til writes:

Yet we can show negatively that unless the objector will drop his objections and stand with us upon the Scriptures of God and hold with us to the God of the Scriptures there is no meaning to his experience.

Unfortunately, in spite of this chest-pounding, I have been unable to find where Van Til in fact shows that disbelieving the claims of Christianity and being convinced of certain objections against it result in one's experience having no "meaning." Again, it seems that we are left with mere assertions at this point.

Van Til does not seem to be saying that, without belief in the Christian god the non-believer has no experience at all. Rather, he seems to be allowing that non-believers do in fact have experience in spite of their non-belief, but that this experience has no meaning, that his experience is real, but nonetheless meaningless. But this is a strange statement to make. In fact, it seems that "meaning" is simply the wrong term to be used here. If it is allowed that the non-believer has experience, then it would have to be admitted that the non-believer's experience at least has identity; otherwise, this allowance would seem to be self-contradictory: how could something be said to exist and included in the denotation of a category ('experience') and yet that thing admitted to exist is also said to have no identity? What, then, would justify including it in the denotation of the concept 'experience'? And if it is admitted that the non-believer's experience has identity (which the apologist would be forced to admit, if he admits that the non-believer does in fact experience things), then what is to prevent the non-believer from identifying his experience, especially if he is conscious and possesses the faculty needed to identify things? Only at this point, once the non-believer has begun to identify his experience in conceptual form, would concern over "meaning" seem to be appropriate. But at this point it's too late for the apologist, for he has already conceded the fundamentals which the non-believer needs to meaningfully identify and understand his experience.

This is because, technically speaking, meaning is a property of concepts and symbols. That is, meaning is

epistemological, not metaphysical. But Van Til is clearly using the concept 'meaning' as if it applied directly to metaphysical phenomena. Typically one does not pick up a rock from the ground and say "what does this rock mean?" The rock simply exists, and is not a symbol for something else. Only with the addition of an enormous context of prior mental integrations can an informed individual (such as a geologist) take his discovery of the rock and its location to make inferences about, for example, what its composition is, where it came from, how it got there, etc.

So I question the conceptual validity of what Van Til is saying to begin with. It seems, rather, that Van Til and others who make the charge that non-believer's experience is meaningless would be better off saying something like, "without God one's experience has no purpose," or "without God one's experience has no value" or "without God one's experience has no importance." Either of these alternatives would make the charge clearer, and thus give all parties something more substantial to consider. The charge that "without God one's experience has no meaning" is simply too vague for its own good, and suggests that the apologist is simply confused on what he is trying to say.

So let's consider these other alternatives, assuming that they are more accurate in interpreting the apologists' accusation.

The latter two variants - "without God one's experience has no value" and "without God one's experience has no importance" - are easily dispatched.

The Concept of Value

Consider the first claim: "Without God one's experience has no value." Whenever the concept 'value' is invoked like this, it is needful to ask: "of value *to whom*?" For the concept 'value' presupposes someone capable of valuing whatever object is in question (in this case, a human being's experience). This claim ultimately assumes that the only one who can value a human being's experience is not the human being who has the experience, but a deity which vicariously observes a human being's experiences. Van Til's claim seems to be that, if this deity does not exist, then there's no one to value the experiences which the non-believer has in his life. But why should anyone accept such a claim? I have found no argument in the apologetic literature which defends this assumption (which is not surprising), but I think there are good reasons to reject it. For one, there are good reasons to suppose that a human being who experiences things in life is fully capable of valuing his own experiences. If this is the case, then clearly it would be wrong to say that his experiences have no value. If a human being values his own experience, what would be the basis for someone else to say that experience has no value at all? It may be the case that those making such claims do not have a very good understanding of what values are in the first place. So again, it is important to define our terms.

Value is that which one acts to gain and/or keep. It should be easy to understand why human beings are capable of valuing things (including their own experiences in life). Human beings are biological organisms, and as such they face a fundamental alternative: to live or die. The life of any biological organism (including human beings) is conditional: they are not immortal, indestructible, eternally existing phenomena. In order to live, for instance, a man must act in order to acquire those values which his life, by virtue of its delicate conditionality, requires. His values are not automatically given to him. He needs to act in order to acquire things like food, water, shelter, happiness (which, as an incentive to continue living, is a most profound value), etc. If he does not act, he will not have food to eat, water to drink, shelter to protect him from the elements, etc., and he will die. I've never met a living Christian who does not act in order to procure those values which make his life possible. So even Christians should recognize this basic nature of the concept 'value'. The point here is that we are capable of valuing things *because we consciously face a fundamental alternative*. If we did not face this fundamental alternative, we would be like rocks in the earth: having no need to act in order to achieve values.

So if it is granted that the non-believer is in fact a human being, then it is granted that he is a biological organism consciously facing a fundamental alternative, namely life vs. death. And if this is granted, then it is also granted that, if the non-believer wants to live (a choice he alone can make for himself), then he has no choice about the facts that he needs certain values in order to live, and that he must take those actions necessary to achieve those values. This all means, and incontestably so, that the non-believer is capable of valuing his own experience in life, for it is through his experience in life that he learns how to hone his abilities to achieve those values which his life requires, given its conditional nature.

Moreover, it is questionable at best to suppose that the Christian god could value anything at all, let alone someone else's experiences. Unlike biological organisms (such as human beings), the Christian god is said to be immortal, indestructible, eternally existing, impervious to harm. The Christian god has no physical body whose skin can be lacerated or whose bones can be broken, whose organs can become diseased or whose heart can stop. It does not need food, it does not need water, it does not need to shelter itself from the elements, it does not need any incentive to continue existing, because it cannot die and does not need motivation to take actions necessary to allow it to continue existing. The Christian god, given what Christianity claims about its nature, could simply sit on its hands for all eternity in unending idleness, and still be what it is. It would have no reason to be anything but utterly indifferent to anything else that exists. In short, it would have no metaphysical basis for valuing anything at all, which can only mean that the theist has no objective basis for assuming that it does value anything at all. And Christian soteriology implicitly concedes this point: the Christian god has no onus to save anyone, but does so out of purely arbitrary choice (cf. Psalms 115:3). So when the theist assumes that his god values anything, that his god is the basis of values, or that his god's existence is a precondition for anyone else valuing anything, he is committing the [fallacy of the stolen concept](#), which invalidates such pronouncements. (For more in depth argument on behalf of these points, see Anton Thorn's article [Why an Immortal Being Cannot Value](#).)

Therefore, it is indefensible to assert that the non-believer's experience in life, given his non-belief in the Christian god, has no value. The non-believer can certainly value his own experience, and it is nonsensical to suppose that the Christian god is needed for the non-believer's experience to have value, given the inherent fallaciousness of such suppositions.

The Concept of Importance

Essentially the same point can be made against the claim that the non-believer's experience, given his non-belief in the Christian god, has no importance. Again we must ask the question: importance *to whom*? The above points about the non-believer's nature as a biological organism conscious of his own fundamental choice between life and death, make it clear that he is capable of considering his own experiences important (they're certainly important to himself), for the very reason he considers it valuable: it is from his experience that he can develop his skills at values-achievement and life-preservation. Additionally, we can ask: why would the Christian god be needed to give the non-believer's experience importance? The Christian god certainly would not find the non-believer's experience important for any reason. Indeed, according to the Christian storybook, the bible, the Christian god need not hesitate in annihilating any human life it wants to destroy, regardless of whether he believes or not. According to the sacred writings of Christianity, the Christian god "destroyeth the perfect and the wicked" (Job 9:22), and "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt. 5:45). Why would the Christian god hesitate to carry out its destructive wrath on anyone? It has nothing to lose by destroying human beings, and has nothing to gain by protecting their lives. So on what basis would the Christian god place any importance on any human being's experience? Blank out.

Now the Christian apologist could respond to all this and say that, when the non-believer values his own experience or considers his experience important to his life, this simply does not count. In other words, he can simply deny that this has any relevance or significance in the context of what he charges against the non-believer. But this would constitute an autobiographical statement: not only does he find it necessary to deny relevant facts, his denial indicates his own lack of value for other human beings - i.e., for things which actually do exist - in preference of something which he can only [imagine](#). If the Christian finds it so easy to dismiss the non-believer's ability to value and the relevance this ability has in consideration of his apologetic accusations, then the non-believer should find it just as easy to dismiss the apologist's baseless charges and [stolen concepts](#). Indeed, the non-believer would have full justification for doing so, given the fallacies identified above.

The Concept of Purpose

Now Van Til or his followers could of course rephrase his charge to say that the non-believer's experience, given his non-belief in the Christian god, serves no *purpose*. This is in line with the assumption commonly made by defenders of Christianity, that without the existence of the Christian god, nothing could have any purpose at all. On this view, the Christian god's existence is a precondition for any purpose whatsoever. Such a view seems to stem from the supposition that there must be an "ultimate" or "absolute" purpose to everything *comprehensively* (i.e., to the

entire universe) in order for any *particular* activity or thing to have a purpose. Along these lines, Van Til tells us that

there must be a comprehensive purpose with history if there is purpose anywhere in history. Without a comprehensive purpose, every act of purpose on the part of man would be set in a void. And if there must be absolute purpose, it goes without saying that all the evil must one day be abolished. All unrighteousness will one day have to be punished. God will accomplish his purpose with the universe, or he would not be God. (*Introduction to Systematic Theology*, chapter 9, section B)

What Van Til gives us here is, *at best*, an argument from (presumably) undesirable consequences. Who wants to suppose that any purposeful act he engages is “set in a void”? Well, according to Van Til’s claim here, if you want to suppose that your choices and actions have any grander purpose than the immediate moment, then you need to frame your purposes within the context of “a comprehensive purpose,” and this can only be achieved by considering the individual’s activity in the larger context of “history” (i.e., something for which no single individual is exclusively responsible), which relegates any individual’s actions to a mere passing ingredient in a conglomerate of historical events. To have any purpose at all, one’s choices and actions need to be in line with something that transcends any individual’s experience. According to such a view, every individual must see himself as a servant to a summary whole which by definition is beyond his own life, something he can never see but can only imagine, something that can at best one day be recorded in history books, written well after the fact by persons who ostensibly would not be participants in said history. Such criteria can only be achieved on the basis of Christian theism, since allegedly only on the basis of Christian theism can such overarching intensions be possible.

There is a hint of truth hidden behind all this, but it is not what Van Til would have us believe. Van Til would have us believe that human activity could only be purposive if it is set within the context of the “comprehensive purpose” which the Christian god allegedly has for all of human history as a whole. The hint of truth here is that one’s particular actions do need a context broader than each individual action to roll them up into a systematic whole. But this context is already provided by man’s nature as a biological organism. What Van Til is denying here is man’s inherent individualism; man’s life cannot have any purpose unless he is part of a collective effort whose significance extends well beyond his individual contributions to that effort. This is how the Christian conception of purpose is inherently collective in nature: it views the human individual as simply a cog in a wheel vastly larger than any individual’s own life, a wheel to whose purposeless turning he must devote his existence.

Notice how the hysteria of such prescriptions is so easy to repudiate: Since purpose is properly understood as goal-oriented endeavor, the metaphysical basis for man’s purpose is the conditionality of his life qua biological organism. Specifically, then, purpose *for man* is inherently related to his need for values. Since values are those things which one acts to gain and/or keep, purpose is the “conscious goal-orientedness in every aspect of one’s existence where choice applies” (Leonard Peikoff, *Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand*, p. 298). Thus the concept of ‘value’ is integral to the concept of ‘purpose’. It is here, in the concept of ‘value’, that we must look for the “comprehensive purpose” which gives an individual’s specific choices and actions the systematic relevance which Van Til mistakenly attributes to his theistic paradigm.

As we learned above, the bases of man’s values are the facts that he, as a biological organism, faces a fundamental alternative: to live or die, and that living his life depends on his achievement of certain values which make his life possible. This summary goal - to live - is the comprehensive purpose which provides an individual with the necessary context for the specific choices and actions which he makes. Balancing my checkbook, for instance, is not an end in itself; it serves a larger purpose, namely to keep me abreast of those transferable values which I do possess and have at my disposal. Transferable values of course are of value because I can exchange them for other values which my life requires, such as to purchase food, to pay my mortgage, to keep current with my electric bill, etc. So the mere act of balancing my checkbook, far from being “set in a void” (i.e., performed apart from some larger context which provides its results with value), does in fact serve a larger purpose, a purpose outlined by my need for values, a need which I have given my nature as a biological being. Purpose, then, contrary to what religion teaches, is in fact *concurrent with biology*: the actions of a biological organism are, generally speaking, summarily organized by its inherent need for values. (There are, of course, exceptions to this, in the case of irrational human beings; however, these are not counterexamples which disprove the rule, but rather exceptions which in fact prove the rule: if a human being does not govern his actions rationally, he is apt to destroy those values which his life requires.)

But clearly a god possessing the characteristics ascribed to it by Christian theism, could have no use for balancing a checkbook. Given the points which I have secured above about the Christian god not needing any values to begin with, whether or not any and every checkbook which has ever existed were balanced, the Christian god - given its

attributes of immortality, indestructibility, eternity, imperviousness to harm, etc. - would not be affected by it in the slightest. The theist may or may not grant this, but surely he would need an argument for denying this. Would his god, in the end case, need *any* checkbook to be balanced? If so, why? I thought the Christian god had *no* needs. Why all of a sudden would it have a need for someone's checkbook to be balanced? What purpose would it serve, and why would that purpose need to be met?

I raised similar questions in my debate with a presuppositionalist who (ironically) calls himself "Truthseeker," in the [comments section](#) of [this blog](#). In our exchange, Truthseeker asserted (without argument) that "Ayn Rand and her disciples have a faulty understanding of concepts." When I inquired about this, I had asked Truthseeker what he understands a concept to be, and what he thinks its purpose is. There's that ugly word: "purpose." Supposedly non-Christians are not supposed to invoke it for fear of conceding the whole farm to the Christian theist. Truthseeker did not give an answer to this question, but instead sought to redirect our discussion, asking "When you ask what its purpose is, do you believe it has purpose?" Truthseeker would have to be stupid to suppose that I didn't think concepts served a purpose, and I don't think he's stupid. So this question seemed rather baiting to me. And of course I think concepts serve a purpose, specifically a purpose suited to man's consciousness - i.e., a consciousness which is neither omniscient nor infallible, as I explain in my blog [Would an Omniscient Mind Have Knowledge in Conceptual Form?](#).

Now Truthseeker had stated that, "For my worldview looking into yours I really can't see purpose." Of course, Truthseeker does not explain what exactly he's looking for in order to find purpose in my worldview. So I explained that purpose, as my worldview understands it, has to do with *goal-orientation*. In response to this, Truthseeker interviewed me on the topic with a series of questions, which I answered, and which I quote here:

Truthseeker: "Who organized these goals?"

In the case of autonomic biological functions (such as the digestive processes of an ameba, the beating of a heart, etc.), no one did. The goal-directedness of biological functions is inherent in biology as such. Life is conditional, and the goal of these functions is to preserve an organism's life. They were not put in place by some magic worker. Contrast biological functions to a rock rolling down a hill. The rock has no goals; its existence does not require goal-directed activity. It just rolls until it comes to a stop. It can sit in one place for years and years and still be what it is, a rock. But when it comes to biological organisms, we're dealing with entities which face a fundamental alternative: life vs. death. This fundamental alternative is the ultimate goal-setter for living organisms. Goal-directedness, or purpose in the broader sense, is concurrent with biology. An entity which faces no fundamental alternative of life vs. death would have no basis for one goal as opposed to any other goal. (Incidentally, this is why ascribing "purpose" to the Christian god commits the [fallacy of the stolen concept](#).)

Truthseeker: "Who gives things purpose?"

Notice that your first two questions about "purpose" presuppose that [it is] assigned by an entity possessing consciousness (a "who"). The answer to your present question depends on what things we are talking about. I don't think rocks exist for a purpose; they simply exist. They are part of the metaphysical given. As for biological organisms, as I pointed out above, purpose (or goal-directedness of self-initiated actions, including autonomic functions) is concurrent with biology, given the fundamental alternative (life vs. death, existence vs. non-existence) which they face. In the case of man-made objects, like paper, scissors, stereos, computers, skyscrapers, etc., their creators and users give them their purpose. Typically human beings give these things the purpose of helping them live and enjoy their lives. Again, no need to point to some invisible magic being to understand purpose.

Truthseeker: "How do you account for purpose and goal-orientation in your worldview?"

It's not always clear what a Christian means by "account for" in such interrogations (since appealing to an invisible magic being settles the question in his mind). But I think the points I gave above will give you some indication of what I mean by purpose and its metaphysical basis. For more insight, I would suggest Dr. Harry Binswanger's book, *The Biological Basis of Teleological Concepts*. By "teleological concepts" Binswanger has in mind things like goal, purpose, end, etc., and he argues in this book quite clearly how these concepts have (as the title suggests) a *biological* basis (as opposed to a storybook basis, for instance).

Truthseeker: “Again I don’t see any purpose or goals standing from your worldview shoes just things that happen with no intelligence behind them.”

I don’t think you’re “standing from [in?] [my] worldview shoes” to begin with, if all this needs to be explained to you, as these points are pretty basic in Objectivism. I suspect you’re standing in your worldview’s shoes looking for what your worldview conceives “purpose” to be, which you have not stated for the record. It’s clear that your concept of purpose is underwritten by the primacy of consciousness, which is why you probably think there’s no conceptual problem in ascribing purpose to your god. But as I indicated above, the presence of a stolen concept at the root of one’s view of something invalidates that view in toto.

If purpose is generally conceived as the goal-oriented action of biological organisms (especially in the case of consciously chosen actions which man initiates), then clearly we have an *objective* basis for this concept, namely the facts relevant to meeting the conditions of life set by the nature of the specific organism in question (such as man’s need for values). According to Objectivism, man does in fact have an ultimate purpose, and that purpose is to live and to enjoy his life. It is this ultimate purpose which provide an objective summary context for all his choices and actions. Apologists who say that they cannot “see” purpose in the Objectivist worldview may be suffering from self-inflicted blindness.

The Christian may not *like* Objectivism’s conception of man’s purpose, but his dislikes do not constitute a refutation. Nor can he deny the fact that this is a goal for which any normal human individual may strive. While Christians can be expected to malign this conception of man’s purpose as providing justification for vicious social behavior such as rape or murder (activities which have not been identified as condoned), they in fact actually reject this proposal, not because it will lead to unethical behavior, but because it is too obviously selfish, allowing an individual to make himself the primary beneficiary of his own actions instead of the Christian god. Underlying the Christians’ objections is a false dichotomy: either man surrenders his life and mind to the Christian god, or he rapes and murders others. It never seems to cross their mind that men are fully capable of governing themselves in a manner which allows them to achieve and preserve their values without infringing anyone else’s right to do the same, even though the vast majority of individuals do just this. Ultimately, Christians want men to treat their god as the primary beneficiary of their actions, even though it is incoherent to suppose that the deity which they describe could benefit from anything in the first place. They would prefer that men hold as their supreme purpose their own sacrifice to the Christian god, which demands man’s sacrifice but would have no need for it in the first place. At any rate, to live and enjoy one’s life is undeniably a lifelong goal-oriented project, and thus satisfies man’s requirement for a comprehensive purpose. If the Christian objects to this by saying one’s life is unimportant and therefore unworthy of life-long effort to preserve and adore, he is telling us about his own values hierarchy, specifically that he sees other individuals as ultimately worthless and consequently as merely disposable lumps of flesh. The Christian’s objections to man considering his own life as an end in itself also seems to conflict with the broader motivations which any believer would naturally have for putting his hopes in the notion of eternal salvation. Would he be so eager to defend his god-beliefs if he believed that he would spend the afterlife broiling lake of fire, in spite of his devotion to his god? Believers often carry on as if service to their god were their ultimate goal, but it seems that eternal security from death is really what it’s all about. Isn’t this just as selfish (albeit irrationally so) as enjoying one’s life on earth as an end in itself?

Furthermore, as I pointed out to Truthseeker, to attribute purpose to the Christian god and its actions is, because of the characteristics which Christianity ascribes to its god, a fine example of the fallacy of the stolen concept on display. Since purpose presupposes the conditionality of biological life, a non-biological entity would have no objective basis for governing its actions purposefully. This would be all the more true in the case of the Christian god, for reasons identified above: since it does not face the fundamental alternative of life vs. death, its continued existence would not depend on achieving certain values, and thus it would have no basis for goal-oriented action. For instance, while man must procure for himself food and refrain from stepping into the path of oncoming locomotives, the Christian god does not need food to begin with, and cannot be harmed by collisions with speeding vehicles. This can only mean that it is conceptually incoherent for Christians to point to their god as the standard of purpose, or to claim that their god’s existence is the precondition of purpose. The precondition of purposeful action is in fact the conditional nature of biological existence. Without the fundamental conditions of biological existence, there would be no basis or need for goal-oriented action.

As for what Christians say about the purpose of man's life, any brief examination of their position will reveal it to be an unending wild goose chase, taking the form of a series of arbitrary goals and unproductive duties which keep the believer psychologically distracted. When asked, for instance, what the purpose of concepts are according to his Christian worldview's theory of concepts (a theory which he never laid out), Truthseeker answered:

The purpose would be to function and interact with God's creation.

When asked what would be the purpose of "functioning and interacting with God's creation," Truthseeker answered:

To be created beings made in Gods [sic] image and likeness.

But what would be the purpose of being "created beings made in Gods image and likeness"? Truthseeker's answer:

If we were not functional we would not be made in the image and likeness of God and we would not be able to rule over the earth.

But again, this too does not identify an end in itself: What would be the purpose of ruling over the earth? And round and round we go. Given such answers (and these are not atypical by any means), one gets the impression that "purpose" for the Christian consists in performing ancillary chores for an invisible magic being which, given its alleged omnipotence, could accomplish whatever goals they supposedly satisfy by simply commanding that it be done. I suspect that Truthseeker and any other Christian would continue this charade indefinitely without ever identifying an ultimate purpose, an end in itself, which would provide all these incidental tasks they point to with a comprehensive context in which they would "make sense." Unless they can do this, their claim that purpose "makes sense" in their worldview rings ever hollow. In my interview with Truthseeker, he provided nothing which would qualify as an end in itself (such as man's enjoyment of life is in the Objectivist worldview). In fact, it seems that such an idea couldn't be further from their worldview's teachings. According to the New Testament, "the first and great commandment" for men to obey is "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Mt. 22:37-38). But why would one need to do this? Blank out. The second commandment is: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Mt. 22:39). Again, why would one need to do this? Blank out again. Is the concern to please the Christian god? Again we must ask: why do this? What end would this serve? Is the Christian god unhappy? If so, it is said to be an eternally unchanging being, so if it is unhappy, it is eternally unhappy, for it cannot change. Does the believer think that his obedience to such purposeless commandments is going to have an impact on the mood of an eternally unchanging, transcendent, omnipotent, omniscient and infinite being? And non-believers are called "arrogant"?

In all honesty, I do not think I am in any way misrepresenting Christianity here by probing its conception of purpose for man's life. Again, I see nothing which comes close to an ultimate purpose for man, unless of course the his ultimate purpose is to play the role of a pawn and eventually sacrifice himself. But as I indicated above, this does not cohere with Christianity's promise of the *reward* of salvation (cf. Mt. 5:12: "for great is your reward in heaven"), which is dangled before the believer as the final prize for his devotion (cf. Mt. 16:27: "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works").

Now if the Christian responds to all this and says, "Well, it's ultimately for your own good that you do what God has commanded," then we're getting somewhere. In fact, whether he realizes it or not, the Christian admitting this is tacitly validating the very selfishness of Objectivism's conception of man's purpose which Christians typically (and are confessionally expected to) resent. But then it's a matter of rational consistency: man's life is conditional in nature; if he does not take the actions necessary to achieve those values which his life requires, he will die. The inherent selfishness of one's attendance to this fact is imperative. By contrast, the Christian god is said to be eternal, immortal, indestructible, impervious to harm, completely free from any needs whatsoever such that it does not face the fundamental alternative of life vs. death that man faces. So why would anyone need to do anything on behalf of such a deity, and why would anyone need to abandon his own need for values in order to please it? The Christian worldview fails to answer these fundamental questions, and in fact plays a shell game with the concept of purpose such that the believer is left groping for answers when he is asked to provide a reason for the hope he claims to have (so much for I Peter 3:15!). For Christians to turn around and claim that non-Christian worldviews are incapable of providing man with "meaning" in life is the epitome of hypocrisy and absurdity.

by Dawson Bethrick

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