

## "Ultimate Questions"

Back in March, I saw a post by Chris Bolt on a blog called [Choosing Hats](#), a blog dedicated to the presuppositional method of defending the Christian faith. The post was titled [Your Thoughts Welcome....](#) In this blog Chris posted [an illustration](#) of the antithesis between Christianity and "Non-Christianity" as Christians are supposedly expected to understand it.

Given the title of this post, I thought I'd submit my comments in response to this. In my comments, I had raised the criticism that, according to the illustration which Bolt published, non-Christian philosophies were being grouped together by a trivial, non-essential characteristic, namely "ultimate commitment to human [independence] from God." In fact, I dispute the claim that non-Christian worldviews could reasonably be characterized as founded upon or motivated by an "ultimate commitment to human [independence] from God." I gave my reasons for this in my exchange with Chris Bolt, which spilled into subsequent blogs which he posted in response to my comments (see [here](#) and [here](#)). Chris of course sought to defend the division which his illustration portrays, but seems to have had difficulty answering the points I raised against it.

In his post [Bahnsen Burner's Presuppositional Apologetic for Objectivism, Part 1](#), Chris made the following comment:

There are only so many ultimate questions available to any worldview with a finite number of "possible" answers.

While I am happy to entertain this proposal, I was looking forward to seeing the questions which Chris thinks are "ultimate" and for any reasons why he would characterize them as such. Unfortunately, Chris has not identified those questions which he considers "ultimate."

So to encourage further interaction between ourselves, I proposed a few of my own "ultimate questions" for Chris to consider in [a comment](#) which I posted on April 1. The first two questions are:

- 1) What is your starting point? and
- 2) What is the proper orientation between the subject of consciousness and its objects?

Now my first question - What is your starting point? - should be easy to understand for anyone who has given his worldview a significant amount of thought. If he does not know what his starting point is, I'd say he has some unfinished business and is defending his position prematurely.

With respect to my second question, many thinkers (perhaps most?) do not seem to understand what it is asking right off the bat. My question is intended to allow a thinker to reveal his position with regards to metaphysical primacy, i.e., the relationship between consciousness and its objects. In fact, however, this is such a fundamental concern that most thinkers do not even recognize it as an issue, let alone explore it, and pass it over in their haste to pontificate on higher-level matters. So I proposed three additional questions to help Chris and anyone else who might want to consider them:

- 3) Are you conscious? (yes or no)
- 4) If you are conscious, are you conscious of any objects? (yes or no)
- 5) If you are conscious of any objects, what is the relationship between yourself as a subject of consciousness, and any object(s) of which you are conscious?

Questions 3) and 4) should not need any explanation. They are quite basic, they use common terms, and they seek simple yes-no answers. The answer to question 3) of course should be yes. If one were not conscious, he could not consider the question in the first place, since consciousness of the question is a precondition to considering it. The answer to question 4) should also be yes: in considering a question, one is obviously conscious of that question. A question can be an object of one's consciousness. He is likely conscious of many other things as well, such as the computer monitor on which he's pulled up the page bearing the question, things on the desk around him, the seat he is

sitting in, noises that may be sounding during the time he's considering the question, such as the whirring of his computer hard drive, a ticking clock on the wall, a car passing by on the street in front of his house, birds chirping in trees outside his window, etc. All of these things would be objects of his consciousness if in fact he is aware of such things.

Now with respect to question 5), I can understand that this may be new territory for many thinkers. But it focuses on the most fundamental issue in all philosophy. The answer which a worldview gives to this question determines whether it is objective or subjective, rational or irrational, suitable for man's life on earth, or unsuitable. Of course, once one does answer this question when he finally does consider it, it remains to be seen whether or not the views he endorses are consistent with the answer that he gives.

Perhaps I'm just naïve, but I was really hoping that Chris would take a few moments and consider these questions, and post his answers to them. After all, as he himself points out, there are only so many ultimate questions one can ask, and only a finite number of possible answers. My questions are intended to penetrate to the very core of one's worldview, to the most fundamental level of one's "presuppositions." I would think that presuppositionalist apologists would relish questions of this nature. It's been nearly a month now since I posed my questions to Chris. Perhaps he's still thinking about them.

by Dawson Bethrick

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

#### 6 Comments:

[Justin Hall](#) said...

umm... Ultimate questions

1. Where did everything come from? (stolen concept)
2. What is "our" purpose here? (more stolen concepts)
3. Who determines what's right and wrong and has the force to back it up? (subjective morality)
4. Where do we go when we die? (question begging)

Did I forget anything?

ask a stupid question, odds are you will get a stupid answer. Sorry for the terse comment, however in the real world and not the fantasy realm of mystics, I have just learned I will need to seek new employment in our wonderful economy. the so called ultimate questions seem to often devolve down to, where did we come from, what do we do while we are here, and finally where do we go after this.

[April 28, 2009 6:37 PM](#)

[danielj](#) said...

What is the answer to question 5?

[May 08, 2009 3:00 AM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

By even asking the question we can infer how you would have to answer the question implicitly. If the answer was subjective, then there is no metaphysical basis to allow for an epistemology in which any question would be meaningful in the first place. So to even ask what is the answer to question 5 affirms on the part of any one asking that the answer is objective.

[May 11, 2009 8:15 PM](#)

[madmax](#) said...

Dawson,

Your method of challenging theistic apologetics is to expose the theist's commitment to metaphysical subjectivism. This is a powerful approach because it shows the theist's contradictions for what they are. But I wonder if Rand's argument that 'God' isn't even a valid concept isn't a more devastating approach.

Rand's argument was, in essence, her own version of the argument on non-cognitivism (or the meaningless of religious discourse) based on her theory of concept formation. Francois Tremblay has summarized the argument of non-cognitivism at his site [strongatheism.net](#)\*. Do you think it is better to show that the god-concept is a meaningless term that literally refers to nothing (as no positive attributes can \*ever\* be attached to it) first and then get into the argument from the primacy of existence? Or do you think that the fundamental argument against theism is to establish the primacy of existence first?

I ask because it seems to me that the epistemological argument against the god-concept itself might be a better place to start before getting to the metaphysical arguments that deal with the subject-object relationship. Lastly, have you ever heard of any "good" objections to the non-cognitivism argument? I know that any answer must be wrong but do theists have any sophisticated responses to the fact that no positive attributes of their god can ever be established?

\* While I find value to [strongatheism.net](#) I should point out that Francois Tremblay has abandoned Objectivism and is now a repulsive anarcho-socialist (that's even worse than the anarcho-captialists!). He even embraces the nihilistic environmentalist "voluntary human extinction movement." He has become the embodiment of the radical subjectivist, nihilistic secularist that theists claim that all atheists are out of necessity. Its a shame.

[May 13, 2009 1:49 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Madmax: I have tried that very approach with a theist. His tactic was to describe god by what he does as if job description equates to metaphysical identity. Its a frustrating line of argumentation to fallow. Further altho the concept maybe flawed and self constricting, we get a scene of the idea, a disembodied conciseness that creates all of existence apart from himself. So altho the idea is nonsense, I cant honestly say I don't know what he theist is talking about.

[May 14, 2009 6:58 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hi Madmax,

I really enjoyed your questions, so much that I devoted a separate post to them. See here:

[Non-Cognitivism or Metaphysical Primacy: What's the Better Strategy?](#) I would love to discuss this further if you have any additional thoughts.

As for your comments about Francois Tremblay, I agree, and yes it is a shame. He seems to have been plunging from heights I know he's capable of for quite a while now. That said, there's still some good stuff on his [his site](#), though I've not visited it in a long time now.

Regards,  
Dawson

[May 15, 2009 4:44 PM](#)

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