

Sunday, April 08, 2012

Answering Dustin Segers' Presuppositionalism, Part II: The Nature of Logic

In this second installment of my series answering [Dustin Segers' apologetic questions for atheists](#), I focus on Segers' question about logic. (My initial blog entry responding to Segers can be found [here](#)).

This one's a biggie, so buckle up and hold on tight. You're in for a wild ride! Let's begin by looking at Segers' second question:

2. Logic - I asked, "If you believe that only matter exists, (a) how do you account for the immaterial, universal, propositional, immaterial [sic] laws of logic given your philosophical materialism apart from an appeal to God and (b) how do you make sense out of our obligation to be rational?"

Segers' question raises numerous red lights which need to be addressed before the essence of his question can be understood rationally. So let's address these problems first.

1. The Presumption of Materialism

First of all, in response to the question's lead-in: according to my worldview, existence exists, and *only* existence exists. I have never affirmed the view that "only matter exists," nor would I, for I do not think this is the case. For example, I recognize that consciousness exists, but so far as I understand what matter is, I don't think consciousness is a material substance. It is indisputable, however, that consciousness is *biological* in nature (as I have argued [here](#)).

But let's be clear on fundamentals here: If something exists, it exists; if it happens to be composed of "matter," it still exists, flat and simple. If something is known to exist, there's no rational justification for denying its existence. And if its nature is causally relevant to an area of inquiry, it won't do for purposes of rationality to deny or ignore its existence or relevance.

Clearly Segers assumes that his interlocutor will be a materialist. The assumption that atheism automatically entails materialism is routinely taught to Sunday school students as part of their standard indoctrination curriculum. It does not matter to Christians that it is false; if you point out the falsity of this assumption to a Christian, nine times out of ten he'll continue repeating it as though it were as vital to his apologetic as breathable air is to the human organism.

The primary distinguishing feature of materialism is the denial of the axiom of consciousness, whether implicit or explicit, in particular *volitional* consciousness. Philosophical materialism constitutes a rejection of the faculty of volition, not merely in the sense of the ability to select between alternatives, but as cognitive self-regulation. Given the facts that (a) Objectivism is atheistic and (b) explicitly affirms the axiom of consciousness, it should be clear to any sensible person that atheism does not automatically entail materialism. For in Objectivism we have an atheistic worldview which is not materialistic in nature. This throws a massive wrench into the presuppositionalist machine, and apologists are never prepared to deal with it. Since Objectivism explicitly affirms the axiom of consciousness as one of its founding pillars and is developmentally consistent with this axiom throughout its entire system, it would simply be a mark of brute obstinacy to insist that Objectivism is materialistic in nature. Unfortunately, however, Christian apologists are more interested in easy kills than in facts (as we saw in [the previous entry in this series](#), their worldview treats facts as subjective, ultimately depending on supernatural whim).

Since Christians are constantly vilifying materialism, can they identify what the root of the problem with materialism must be? If the denial of the axiom of consciousness is not the essential flaw afflicting materialism, what is? My experience is that Christian apologists have a very hard time answering this question.

2. Characterizing Logic as “Immaterial” (x2 even!)

Now, as for how I “account for the immaterial, universal, propositional, immaterial [again?] laws of logic” on the basis of my worldview, apart from any appeal to some invisible magic being, I must first correct Segers’ characterization of logic as “immaterial.” The term ‘immaterial’ does not denote any positive characteristics, while logic has many positive characteristics. Thus even if ‘immaterial’ is a legitimate concept (Segers is welcome to argue for this if he likes), it is ill-suited as a useful descriptor of logic. If logic has positive characteristics, why describe it by saying what it is not rather than identifying what it is?

Segers might respond to this by saying that he’s included other descriptors which are positive. And that is true; we will get those in turn. The problem which he would be overlooking at this point is the fact that the term ‘immaterial’ - to the degree that it is conceptually legitimate - is too broad to be useful as a distinguishing characteristic. The term ‘immaterial’ presumably applies to a wide assortment of phenomena which are quite different from logic. After all, theists think that “spiritual entities” which have personality (i.e., which possess some faculty of consciousness) are “immaterial” in nature, while logic is certainly not such an animal. Segers has characterized logic as both universal and propositional as well. But personal beings are specific concretes, and propositions do not have minds of their own.

Moreover, theists need to consider, given their devotion to things immaterial, whether something a person *imagines* is material or immaterial. It’s hard to see how something one imagines would be material in nature. If I imagine a ball, what I imagine does not have mass or physical dimension; no one else can see it; it is not a concrete existing independently of my imagination. So it couldn’t be material. And if it’s not material, what is the alternative if not “immaterial”?

If theists reject such questions due to implications which they find objectionable, there still remains the perplexing problem of how we are to distinguish what they call “immaterial” from something that is merely imaginary. There may be no one-size-fits-all answer to this question; it may have to be answered on a case-by-case basis, given the wide assortment of phenomena to which theists apply the term. Indeed, I’ve asked numerous theists to explain to me how I can reliably distinguish what they call “God” - which they characterize as “immaterial” - from something they might merely be imagining, and have gotten no good answers on this at all. This is a serious problem for the theist, and any reluctance on the part of apologists to address it in a clear and definitive manner is itself indicative of its scope as an epistemological stumblingblock.

I suggest that instead of “immaterial,” that Segers consider whether or not logic is *conceptual* in nature. He has already characterized logic as “propositional.” Since propositions consist of concepts, he should not object to this. After all, how could there be propositions without the concepts which inform them?

My suspicion is that Segers would be reluctant to jettison his use of the term ‘immaterial’ in characterizing logic, just as he would likely be unwilling to refrain from assuming that atheism entails materialism, and essentially for the same reason: his apologetic program would suffocate without these questionable assumptions. Indeed, Segers is so horny for logic being “immaterial” that he apparently doesn’t realize that he’s included this term *twice* in his list of descriptors characterizing logic. In case you didn’t notice the first few times, here’s Segers again (underlines added):

2. Logic - I asked, "If you believe that only matter exists, (a) how do you account for the immaterial, universal, propositional, immaterial laws of logic given your philosophical materialism apart from an appeal to God and (b) how to you make sense out of our obligation to be rational?"

That he uses the term ‘immaterial’ twice in such close succession like this, suggests that Segers regards it as having paramount importance. In fact, logic is a cognitive system, and as such an investigation into its nature properly belongs to the branch of philosophy known as epistemology. But presuppositionalists want to treat logic as a metaphysical phenomenon. This is their motivation for using descriptors which would contrast logic from matter. That they may be ignoring (or at any rate, downplaying) the epistemological nature of logic, does not seem to concern the apologists.

If we are to avoid misleading ourselves on the nature of logic, we need to refrain from using misleading

descriptors when discussing it. Removing “immaterial” from the list of characteristics describing logic will not in any way lessen its distinction. We won’t miss it. Furthermore, if we emphasize logic’s nature as a cognitive system by correctly characterizing it as a *conceptual* method, our attempts to distinguish logic from other cognitive aptitudes (e.g., perception, emotion, imagination, etc.) will be improved (I hope to make this clear in what follows).

Of course, by pointing out that logic is *conceptual* in nature rather than “immaterial,” I am alluding to our philosophical need for a theory of concepts. And our need for this is critical. I have searched the Christian bible for anything remotely approaching a theory of concepts, and have found that it is completely silent on the matter. There seems to be no such thing as a distinctively *Christian* theory of concepts. By contrast, the philosophy of Objectivism offers the objective theory of concepts, as laid out in Ayn Rand’s *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*. Readers who do not have access to Rand’s book may find Allan Gotthelf’s paper [Ayn Rand on Concepts](#) helpful.

Pointing out the error of characterizing logic as “immaterial” is a real stumper for presuppositionalism; Segers is so horny for logic being “immaterial” that he includes this quality twice in his list of descriptors. However, the presuppositionalist’s bewildering preoccupation with “the immaterial” is neither unexpected nor unprecedented. In regard to this correction, see my [refutation of Sye Ten Bruggencate’s “proof that god exists” website](#). In this critique of Bruggencate’s case for the existence of his god, I demonstrate just how insufficient and wrongheaded it is to go down the presuppositionalist path.

3. The Presumption of a “Duty” to be Rational

Lastly, there is no such thing as an “obligation to be rational.” First, what does it mean to be rational? What is rationality? Sadly, I cannot find any discussion of the nature of rationality in the Christian bible, so I hope that Segers will permit me to defer to non-biblical sources for intelligence on this crucial issue. Ayn Rand provides the following conception of what distinguishes rationality:

The virtue of *Rationality* means the recognition and acceptance of reason as one’s only source of knowledge, one’s only judge of values and one’s only guide to action. (“The Objectivist Ethics,” *The Virtue of Selfishness*, p. 25).

So if rationality “means the recognition and acceptance of reason as one’s only source of knowledge,” etc., what is reason? Again, I cannot find any discussion of the nature of reason as an epistemological standard in the pages of the Christian bible, so again I will defer to extra-biblical resources:

Reason is the faculty that identifies and integrates the material provided by man’s senses. (Ibid., p. 20)

Rand goes on to note that reason

is a faculty that man has to exercise by choice. Thinking is not an automatic function. In any hour and issue of his life, man is free to think or to evade that effort. (Ibid.)

Thinking rationally is an effort which an individual must choose to undertake on his own. Nothing in reality will *force* him to do this; nothing in reality is *commanding* him to do this on pain of punishment. As Peikoff puts it, an individual “must initiate step-by-step cognitive functioning; he must be willing to expend the effort required by each step; he must choose the steps carefully” (*Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand*, p. 116). Man is rational *by choice*, not by compulsion. He *chooses* to be rational because it is in his own best interest to be rational. There is no gun to man’s head forcing him to be rational, and there’s no stick scaring him into being rational when he really wants to be irrational. He has no “duty” or “obligation” to be rational; he chooses to be rational and enjoys its fruits, or to evade rationality and live with the consequences of that choice. Rational philosophy is not religious in nature; it does not require men to sacrifice themselves for some “higher cause” beyond his interests, control or understanding. Man is not rational to suit someone else’s purposes, but rather to identify and pursue his own purposes. Thus the choice to be rational is by its very nature anti-religious. Rationality and religion are inherently incompatible.

Again, is this really where Segers wants to take his apologetic?

Let's turn back to Segers' question now that these erroneous assumptions lurking in it have been corrected. Let us remove its offending premises and try to reconstruct his question in a way that makes at least a little more sense. Let us try the following:

If you don't believe in the Christian god, (a) how do you account for universal, propositional, conceptual and invariant laws of logic given the atheism of your worldview apart from an appeal to the Christian god, and (b) why would you choose to be rational?

Readers should notice that I have removed the following from Segers' question:

- (1) the erroneous assumption that the atheist must be a materialist
- (2) the deeply problematic descriptor of 'immaterial' in characterizing logic (I've replaced it with the descriptor *conceptual*, and have added *invariant* just to raise the stakes on the atheist responder), and
- (3) the philosophically untenable presumption that one has an "obligation" or "duty" to be rational (which I have replaced with an acknowledgement of the fact that an individual must *choose* between being rational and evading rationality).

The next hurdle in understanding this improved version of Segers' question is determining the meaning of "account for" as it is used in this question. Presuppositionalists use this term as a matter of habit in the deployment of their apologetic program, and figuring out what exactly it is supposed to mean is complicated by the fact that the "accounts" with which presuppositionalists themselves are apparently satisfied (e.g., pointing to some invisible magic being which we can only *imagine* as the factor responsible for or guaranteeing some aspect of cognition) are astoundingly uninformative and strikingly irrelevant to the matters they are intended to explain. Indeed, when apologists claim that they "account for" the universal, propositional, conceptual and invariant laws of logic by pointing to a god which we can only apprehend by imagining it, how does this explain anything about the nature of logic, why it is useful to man's cognition (given his non-omniscience, his fallibility, and his need to ground what he knows in what he perceives), and its relationship to knowledge of reality? Blank out. Indeed, it seems that presuppositionalists are interested only in the most superficial treatment of the topics they raise for debate, and only so long as that treatment can be used for apologetic advantage. Increasing our knowledge about logic, truth, knowledge, induction, reason, or what have you, does not seem to be an interest of theirs.

Certainly "account for" cannot mean a logical proof in the context of the present question, for logic is precisely what is under the microscope at this point. So Segers' challenge to "account for" logic cannot be asking how one *proves* logic, for this would be both redundant and circular: it would assume the validity of logic (which would make the whole enterprise redundant) while using logic to prove itself (which would make the effort a circular exercise).

Perhaps the best way to understand this challenge, then, is as a call for some kind of *explanation* for the features which we know logic to have (as corrected in my analysis above). An explanation need not be an argument per se, but rather a systematic identification of the fundamental factors which are responsible for logic's universality, propositionality, conceptuality and invariance. In other words, what makes logic universal, propositional and invariant?

To explore this, we need at least a general understanding of what logic is. Again, I'm sorry to say, I cannot find a definition of logic in the Christian bible. The Christian holy text appears to have nothing to say about the nature of logic or its epistemological composition. These matters seem not to have been a concern at all for the early Christians or their Hebrew forebears. So again, I hope Segers will pardon me for seeking elsewhere for some intelligence on what logic is, for I have no alternative. Rand describes logic as follows:

Logic is the art or skill of non-contradictory identification. Logic has a single law, the Law of Identity, and its various corollaries. ("Philosophical Detection," *Philosophy: Who Needs It*, p. 15)

Some critics of Objectivism have apparently been uncomfortable with Rand's categorizing logic as an *art*. But clearly Rand did not think logic was the same thing as painting a picture. Betsy Speicher, who was a student of

Ayn Rand's, once asked Rand about her definition of 'logic' and her use of 'art' to inform it. Speicher writes:

I once asked Ayn Rand why she used the word 'art' in the definition of logic and she said she was using the word to mean a skill based on specialized knowledge. ([source](#))

So logic, then, is the skill based on specialized knowledge of non-contradictory identification. Identification is a task of consciousness. We perceive things around us, and we identify at least some of those things. We identify them by means of concepts, and integrate those concepts into a larger sum of knowledge. Because we identify and integrate the objects of our awareness by means of concepts, and because logic is the specialized skill of identifying the objects of our awareness in a non-contradictory manner, logic is essentially a *conceptual* method.

As the quote above makes clear, Rand noted the fact that the fundamental principle of logic is the law of identity. Of course, the law of identity as a formal recognition about nature presumes the *axiom* of identity: to exist is to be something specific. In other words, A is A. If A exists, it must be A. The axiom of identity is one of the fundamentals of Objectivism. According to Objectivism, given [the primacy of existence](#), the axiom of identity is the recognition that the objects of consciousness exist and are what they are independent of the activity by which the subject of consciousness has awareness of them.

Given the conceptual nature of logic, we can now begin to see why logic has the characteristics we are indicated in the corrected version of Segers' question above. Indeed, that logic is in fact conceptual in nature, explains or "accounts for" each of the qualities about which the question inquires. Let's look at them one by one.

The Universality of Logic

The question presumes that logic is *universal*. At the very least, this means that logic applies to *general classes of objects* which we find in existence. If something exists, then *in principle* it can be identified and integrated into the sum of our sum of knowledge *without contradiction*. This principle applies *universally*, i.e., to *all things which exist*. But we do not *perceive* all things which exist. Rather, we perceive only a tiny portion of everything that exists. If our cognition were bound only to what we perceive, this would of course be a problem. But in fact, our cognition is not bound only to what we perceive. We have the ability to form *concepts* on the basis of what we perceive. Concepts are open-ended integrations of two or more units which we do perceive, but unlimited by the specific measurements of what we actually perceive. This is because concepts are formed by a process of abstraction, and part of that process involves an operation which the objective theory of concepts calls "measurement-omission." Measurement-omission is a key factor in understanding why the range of a concept's meaning, denotation or reference, is *open-ended*.

In the case of forming the concept 'man', for instance, none of us have personally seen *every* man who has existed in the world. And yet, by means of the concept 'man' we have a cognitive tool which allows us to treat all men who have existed, who do exist, and who will exist, as a single class of entities. We only need to have personally encountered two or more specific men to start the process of forming the concept 'man', which both identifies these individuals (and others) and integrates them into the broader sum of our knowledge. By means of abstraction, we retain the characteristics of each of these individuals without specifying the measure or quantity in which they exist. One individual may be 44 years old, 5'7" tall, dark-haired, portly, unkempt, working as an accountant, married, living in a detached house, etc., while another may be 37 years old, 6'2" tall, blonde, slim, well-groomed, working as a high school gym teacher, single, living in a high-rise condo, etc. These specific attributes are integrated into the concept 'man', but due to the abstraction process, the details of these attributes are not specified. As Rand explains:

Bear firmly in mind that the term "measurements omitted" does not mean, in this context, that measurements are regarded as non-existent; it means that *measurements exist, but are not specified*. That measurements must exist is an essential part of the process. The principle is: the relevant measurements must exist in some quantity, but may exist in any quantity. ("Concept-Formation," *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, p. 12)

That "measurements must exist in some quantity, but may exist in any quantity," is the perhaps the most effective guiding principle underlying abstraction that can be formulated. A man who actually exist must have

some (specific) height; he must have *some* (specific) age, etc.

Porter offers the following points to help clarify Rand's overall view on this matter:

To regard as non-existent is to ignore. To omit without ignoring... is to include... The variation omitted (included) must exist somewhere in that range or category... but may exist anywhere within it... [E.g., a man may be 22 years old or 72 years old; he may be 5'4" tall or 6'6" tall; but he must have *some* age and *some* height] This compensates for spreading our net wider than the known variation, by ensuring that our quarry remains inside it... Distinguishing an attribute from its variation in degree, and omitting its [specific] measurements, means selectively de-specifying specific details of the objects known [e.g., those objects we've personally *perceived*]. Only cognition de-specifies; everything that isn't produced by cognition is fully specific. But how do we know this? Is this a fortunate fact we've discovered, about the whole universe? No, this is our knowledge that de-specifying is a process of cognitive selection. (*Ayn Rand's Theory of Knowledge*, p. 34)

Because of this process of cognitive selection, then, the product of the process - a *concept* - is *open-ended*. In other words, because the concept is formed on the principle (implicitly recognized and applied from our earliest efforts to conceptualize the world around us) that "measurements must exist in some quantity, but may exist in any quantity," its scope of reference is not limited to a specific number of units, but indeed has no quantitative limit at all. The concept 'man' for example, does not cease to be applicable after the 50th, 500th or 150,000th individual denoted by it. Nor does it apply only to those individuals who are presently living. Indeed (and this is most crucial), one of the measurements which a concept omits (or "de-specifies" as Porter puts it) is *time*. The concept 'man' is not restricted to individuals existing at any specific time or during any specific period of time. The concept 'man' includes men who live today, who lived 2,000 years ago, and who will live 2,000 years from now. The *open-endedness* of the concept 'man' is in essence the *universality* of its range of meaning, denotation or reference.

Universality, then, is a by-product of concept-formation. And a very important one. Perception gives us awareness of a very limited quantity of specific individuals. By contrast, the process of concept-formation expands man's awareness beyond the limit of his perceptual awareness by providing him with the cognitive means of treating entire open-ended classes of entities as units of thought. As Rand puts it:

Conceptualization is a method of expanding man's consciousness by reducing the number of its content's units—a systematic means to an unlimited integration of cognitive data. (*Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, p. 64)

So in essence, universality is essentially the *open-endedness* of conceptual integration, as explained here. Consequently, since logic is in fact *conceptual* in nature, it stands to reason that logic should also be universal in its applicability as an organizing structure to man's knowledge, ensuring not only hierarchical integrity, but also non-contradiction. But without a solid understanding of the nature of concepts, one will be without the tools he needs to present a proper philosophical analysis of these relationships, and will consequently be found floating adrift far from the shores of reason as he gropes his way further and further into the depths of unprincipled speculation on these affairs.

For additional insights on the open-ended nature of conceptual integration, see my blog [Demystifying Universality](#).

For insights on how the structure of logical inference owes its universalizing applicability to the open-endedness of conceptual integration, see my blog [Does Logic Presuppose the Christian God? Part II: Reasons Why Logic Cannot Presuppose the Christian God, #2: Christianity's Lack of Concept Theory](#).

The Invariance of Logic

Logic is commonly presumed to be *invariant*, meaning: its principles do not change over time, according to personal preferences, or due to particular circumstances which might happen to obtain (e.g., "situational logic"). Logic's normative principles are thought to be *absolute*, *unchanging*, *invariant*. This presumption about the nature of logic is one of the leading reasons why thinkers reject the view that logic is "conventional" in nature -

i.e., subject to mass agreement, dependent on communal consensus which somehow has authority over the content of logical principles.

But what “accounts for” this unchanging absoluteness of logic? The Objectivist answer to this begins with the axiomatic concept of ‘identity’, the fundamental recognition which formalizes the elementary principle of thought known as the Law of Identity.

It should be noted that the truth of the Objectivist axioms *does not change*. The axioms identify general, fundamental facts about reality which are constant. The axiom of existence is the formal recognition that *existence exists*, that there is a reality, that things do in fact exist. This is a general recognition whose truth obtains literally universally (since it applies to *everything* which exists - i.e., to the whole *universe*) and whose truth *does not change*. The same is the case for the axiom of identity. The axiom of identity is the formal recognition that *to exist is to be something specific*. If something exists, it must be something specific; it must be *itself*. In other words, it must have specific attributes which distinguish it from other things (which are also specific) which exist.

Invariance, then, is already an implicit feature of the most fundamental principles of thought, namely the axioms which serve as the conceptually irreducible anchor of all integrated cognition. As an attribute of rational thinking, invariance, constancy, absoluteness - call it what you like - is present in our cognition from our first efforts to identify what we perceive. For any act of identifying what is perceived - even if that effort has errors in it - always involves a subject interacting with some object of its awareness. This constancy is necessarily concurrent with any action of awareness, since awareness is always the awareness of a subject with some object it perceives and/or considers. If this invariance is already present at the perceptual level of cognition, how much more is it involved at the conceptual level of cognition? Even more, I would say.

At the perceptual level, the invariance of *awareness always having some object* is counterbalanced by the ubiquitous variation in measurements of the specific objects one happens to perceive. This variation in measurements of specific objects is what causes confusion for presuppositionalists. They like to characterize the universe as a realm of constant “flux” or “change,” ignoring the unchanging fact that these concepts invariably presuppose some object which does the “fluxing” and “changing” they have in mind. The invariance that they’re pretending not to see is right under their very noses; their very complaint couldn’t make sense to anyone else without it. And yet, because of their worldview’s systematic decapitation of the mind’s ability to focus on essentials, theistic apologists habitually assume that non-believers also cannot isolate the constants which undergird human cognition which they themselves, out of apologetic expedience and worldview default, fail to recognize. Because of the anti-conceptual nature of their underlying worldview, the presuppositionalist suffers from a system-wide debilitating myopia which pervades his epistemology, and subsequently projects his resulting shortsightedness onto everyone else.

For example, [one apologetic resource hosts an article](#) which asks:

How can the atheist, consistent with his worldview, account for unchanging laws in a constantly changing universe? He can’t. His worldview undermines what is he doing! Admission of objectivity in the laws of logic or the external world is an admission that the atheist is secretly reliant on the Christian Deity in order to argue against the Christian Deity.

The answer to the opening question here, contrary to the authors own opinion that the atheist “can’t,” is that the atheist has the ability to focus on certain constants which are in fact inescapable in any action of consciousness, in any mode of awareness, such as the facts that there is a reality; that every instance of awareness involves *an object*; that the objects of awareness hold metaphysical primacy over the subject of consciousness; that both the objects of awareness and the subject of that awareness have identity (i.e., that they are distinct from each other and from everything else that exists); that the actions performed by consciousness in perceiving its objects have identity and operate according to a specific course of causality, etc. Since these constants are real, present in man’s experience and available to his awareness, and because man has the ability to recognize and identify them in conceptual form (as I just have done here), the alleged inability of non-believers to acquire awareness of those constants and identify them as such due specifically to their rejection of the Christian worldview, simply does not exist. To insist that the non-believer does not have the ability to have the capacity to be aware of the constants which underwrite the laws of logic, is nothing more than

a blatant denial of man's consciousness as such, which is self-defeating (since one would need to be conscious in order to affirm such a denial in the first place). Moreover, since the constants which underwrite logic are not creations of consciousness (i.e., they are *objective*, not *subjective*), the task of his worldview in grounding logic in unchanging facts is not to "provide" these preconditions (as if a worldview had the power to supply something which is already present in reality; see [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)), but to discover, identify and integrate them in a hierarchical manner such that they can in fact serve as the basis of man's epistemology. The constants exist and obtain independent of anyone's wishing, imagining or commanding, and we can discover and identify their relationship to our knowledge. That secures the point, and it's far more than anything Christianity will ever dare to do.

Or, as Greg Bahnsen asks:

since the laws of logic are universal, invariant, abstract, eternal truths, how do they continually apply in our changing world of experience? How do we get those laws from "above" down into the historical process? (*Pushing the Antithesis*, p. 205)

The answer to Bahnsen's question (again, notice he's asking questions here, not offering arguments) is to stop expecting the solutions to such problems to come "from 'above'," but instead to recognize that they're right here on earth underlying every aspect of cognition, and have always been right here.

Since, as I have already pointed out in response to [Segers' first question for non-believers](#), truth is the *non-contradictory, objective identification of fact*, it would be indeed shortsighted to expect that the "universal, invariant, abstract, eternal truths" which inform the laws of logic are brought "down" to human cognition without any reference or relation to the general facts underwriting man's experience. So-called 'truths' without factual basis are not truths at all. And facts are what we discover throughout the universe. They are discovered by looking outward at the world, beginning with perception, and identified and integrated by an objective, *conceptual* process. The facts which inform what Bahnsen calls "universal, invariant, abstract, eternal truths" are here, in the universe, as integral aspects of the universe, beginning with the universal, invariant, abstract and eternal fact that the universe exists. There is no need to look beyond the universe, or to expect that these truths have some basis in some supernatural realm which must be *imagined* in order to apprehend it. Nor is the basis of these truths discoverable by ignoring the fundamental facts of the universe and the preconditions of man's experience and looking inward and allegedly consulting otherworldly transmissions from an invisible magic being which zaps them into being by an act of will.

Sadly, Bahnsen only sees a "changing world" in man's experience. But what is experience, and what are the preconditions of experience? Experience is essentially the conscious interaction between the subject of awareness and its objects, and its preconditions are not otherworldly revelations which are undiscoverable in experience. On the contrary, the preconditions of experience are right here, in the universe, residing along with us, in fact making our life here possible in the first place. The preconditions of experience are the facts that there is a reality (the axiom of existence), that man has a means of awareness (the axiom of consciousness), and that the objects of man's consciousness - like his consciousness itself - have specific natures (the axiom of identity). Rand is entirely accurate when she writes:

It is axiomatic concepts [i.e., 'existence', 'consciousness', and 'identity'] that identify the preconditions of knowledge: the distinction between existence and consciousness, between reality and the awareness of reality, between the object and subject of cognition. Axiomatic concepts are the foundation of *objectivity*. (*Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, p. 57)

Commenting on this, Porter adds:

Axiomatic concepts distinguish the objects known from the function, means and experience of knowing them... Explicitly conceptualizing axiomatic facts... recognizes and reminds us that their constraint is immutable... That's the primacy of existence. Philosophers who deny axiomatic facts *do* mean to deny the primacy of existence. Those who deny existence don't mean nothing exists. They only mean to reject the absolutism of existence; when it's important [to them], consciousness can be unconstrained. (*Ayn Rand's Theory of Knowledge*, p. 215)

Objectivism links the invariance of the principles which inform logic is directly to the axiomatic facts which it

explicitly identifies at the foundation of the cognitive hierarchy of man's knowledge. These facts are perceptually self-evident, irreducible to any more fundamental facts (since there are no facts which are more fundamental than axiomatic facts), implicit in all cognition (since cognition always involves a subject interacting with some object(s)), and inescapable (since wherever you go, existence still exists).

Closely related to the invariance of logical principles is the notion that they constitute what Bahnsen above called "eternal truths." He holds that

According to cosmic evolutionary theory all is ultimately subject to random change and is in a constant state of flux. But our very rationality requires laws so that things may be distinguished, classified, organized, and explained. Rational comprehension and explanation demand principles of order and unity in order to relate truths and events to one another. Consequently, on the basis of the non-believer's worldview rationality itself has no foundation. (*Pushing the Antithesis*, p. 152)

Christian apologists are profoundly threatened by the theory of evolution, and their fear of its implications for theism are sensed in every direction. They scurry like rabbits afraid of a hungry pterodactyl gliding overhead looking for a snack. Their fear of evolutionary theory motivates in them a desire to find opportunities to shoot holes in it every chance they get. And the easiest way to do this (again, going for easy kills is their guiding directive) is to pillory the theory of evolution where it does not apply. The theory of evolution pertains to the development of biological organisms, to the appearance of species throughout geological epochs here on earth. It does not make a statement about the universe as a whole. The theory of evolution does not apply to rocks; rocks do not evolve over successive generations. Indeed, rocks don't procreate in the first place!

But many thinkers, including perhaps some scientists themselves, have used evolutionary concepts to describe features of the universe. This is where Bahnsen likely gets the idea of a "cosmic evolutionary theory" which characterizes everything in the universe as "ultimately subject to random change" and the universe itself as "a constant state of flux." These characterizations of the universe and the entities within it are very common among Christian apologists. Bahnsen's statement here demonstrates how apologists exploit these characterizations for apologetic purposes. And one can sympathize with the essence of his concern here: if everything in the universe is "subject to random change" and "in a constant state of flux," where in the universe would we find factual basis for the unchanging, eternal laws which rationality requires?

We have already seen that the constant facts which underwrite logic and provide human cognition with objective stability are present in the universe and available to man's awareness. (If they weren't, how could we have identified them?) Bahnsen's concern is that, since everything is "subject to random change," the particular facts of the universe are unreliable because they could change at any moment. While it is true that many particular facts do in fact change (e.g., the number of cars on any particular road at any moment, the time of day, the direction and intensity of a wind, etc.), the axiomatic facts discussed above denote *general* facts which in fact *do not* change. Indeed, the facts that there is a universe and that the entities which make up the universe have specific identities are themselves *preconditions for change*. There could be no change without the existence of things which have identity to begin with, and there could be no talk of change without individuals possessing the conceptual level of consciousness and thereby capable of forming the concept 'change'. If the "non-believer's worldview" identifies these general facts and recognizes systematically their underlying, fundamental relevance to human cognition, then Bahnsen's concerns have been assuaged and his claim that "the non-believer's worldview... has no foundation" for rationality, is false.

But what about the *eternality* of these general facts? Doesn't logic need "eternal truths" to vouchsafe its reliability for human cognition? And doesn't basing the laws of logic on facts inherent in a universe where particular facts change on a constant basis threaten to destabilize logic?

What is change? Change is essentially the identity of action. Yes, actions happen, thus they exist, and since they exist, they have identity. We even identify actions. Ever heard of verbs? A man walks, a fish swims, a bug crawls, a rabbit runs, a presuppositionalist scurries. All of these are actions, and if action did not have identity, statements like these would be impossible, for there would be nothing to identify. But already we have an unchanging fact: namely the fact that change has identity. This fact itself does not change. There can be no such thing as a change which has no identity. If something has no identity, what justifies calling it a change? Blank out. The point is that general, unchanging "eternal" facts are all around us. We just have to identify them.

What is eternity? The literal sense of eternity means non-temporal, outside of time, exempt from the measure of time. What is time? Time is the measurement of motion. What is motion? Motion is action of some thing which acts. Therefore, time presupposes the existence of things that can and do act and move. In other words, existence is a necessary precondition for time. Existence, then, is eternal. Existence is also one of the axiomatic facts which Objectivism explicitly identifies at the base of human cognition. So already we have an “eternal truth” to ground logic and rationality: the fact that *existence exists*.

Are there more “eternal truths”? Sure, a whole bunch of them. Some have already been pointed out. For example, the fact that entities which exist have specific identities. That’s an unchanging fact, and the proposition explicitly denoting this fact is eternally true. How about the fact that change has identity? That’s an eternal fact. How about the fact that the existence of things which act is a necessary precondition for change? That’s another one. How about the fact that consciousness always involves an object? There’s another.

The point is, we can go on and on identifying facts inherent in the universe right here in reality which are relevant to the epistemological basis of knowledge and which in fact serve to ground our knowledge in fact.

We should also make note of another fact, inherent in the nature of concepts (and therefore in the nature of logic), namely the fact mentioned earlier that concepts are formed by omitting measurements, and one of the measurements which are omitted in forming general concepts of entities, is the measurement of *time*. As I explained above, the concept ‘man’ for example includes *all* men, including those who exist now, who have existed in the past, and who will exist in the future. So eternity is already implicit in conceptual integration. So it is the very conceptual nature of logic, along with the general facts which lie at its foundation, is what lends logic its eternal applicability. Since time is one of the measurements which most concepts omit (including not only concepts of entities, but also the axiomatic concepts), the concepts informing logical principles are themselves not time-bound. The syllogism “All men are mortal/Socrates is a man/Therefore Socrates is mortal” represents a structure which, being conceptual in nature, produces a truth that is eternally reliable. Indeed, Socrates died over two thousand years ago, but thanks to the conceptual nature of logic, we can discover truths about him.

So contrary to what the presuppositionalists are telling us, we don’t have to give up searching for “eternal truths” in a universe which is “subject to random change” and existing “in a constant state of flux,” and fantasize some alternative in the form of an invisible magic being to whose whims everything obediently conforms. Since the facts which satisfy Bahnsen’s concerns are right here in reality, there is no justification for abandoning it and retreating into the imaginary.

So we have accounted for the universality and invariance of logic, and we have done so by pointing to facts residing right here in reality, apart from any appeal to a god, and by examining the conceptual nature of logic itself. One other attribute which Segers listed in his description of the laws of logic is *propositional*. Logic, says Segers, is propositional, and he wonders how an atheistic worldview would account for this fact.

Let’s begin by asking: what is a proposition?

In [his blog entry](#), Segers cites Anderson and Welty’s paper [The Lord of Non-Contradiction: An Argument for God from Logic](#), and states that in his dealings with the atheists he encountered at the “Reason Rally,” he “essentially simplified and used” the argument presented in this paper. In that paper, the authors make the following statement about propositions:

Philosophers typically use the term ‘propositions’ to refer to the *primary bearers of truth-value*. So propositions are *by definition* those things that can be true or false, and by virtue of which other things can be true or false. (p. 3)

I have already presented several points of criticism in response to Anderson and Welty’s argument (see [here](#) and [here](#)), and in my criticism of their argument I disputed precisely this conception of propositions. In a comment dated 1 January of this year to [this blog entry](#), I offered the following counterpoints to what Anderson and Welty say here:

The authors tell us that “propositions are regarded as primary truth-bearers because while sentences

(i.e., linguistic tokens) can have truth-values by virtue of expressing propositions, propositions do not have truth-values by virtue of anything else." Really? How do they establish this? Perhaps they think it's self-evident, but it isn't to me. Rather, propositions are composed of concepts, and are thus not conceptually irreducible. Without concepts, how could one formulate or "know" any propositions in the first place? I would argue, then, that concepts are in fact the primary bearers of truth, and that truth is an aspect of identification. Since we identify objects by means of concepts, their objectivity is crucial in accurately identifying what we are identifying. If a faulty concept finds its way into a proposition, that proposition's truth-value is severely affected. So the truth of a proposition really does depend on the truth of our concepts as identificatory integrations.

In [my follow-up blog entry](#) on Anderson and Welty's argument, I elaborated on this problem:

My critique of Anderson and Welty's argument can be strengthened even further by pursuing the implications of [this point] - namely that propositions are not the primary bearers of truth, but are in fact composed of concepts, which can only mean that it is not true that "propositions do not have truth-values by virtue of anything else," as Anderson and Welty have asserted. Since concepts are more fundamental than propositions, a proposition can only have truth-value by virtue of the truth-value of the concepts which happen to inform it.

But if propositions are in fact composed of concepts, then we're ready to seal the coffin on Anderson and Welty's argument for good. I have already argued that [an omniscient mind would not have its knowledge in conceptual form](#). And although he found the relevance of my argument puzzling, Christian apologist Peter Pike attempted to interact with this argument, but endorsed its conclusion, [affirming outright that](#) "God's knowledge... is not conceptual." If propositions are composed of concepts, while the Christian god's own knowledge is not conceptual in nature, it's hard to see how any knowledge characterized as "propositional" in nature could imply the Christian god.

By pointing to the objective theory of concepts, we kill two birds with one stone. First, we answer Segers' concern for how we can "account for" the propositional nature of logic. Since propositions are composed of concepts, and since the universality, invariance and eternality of logical principles is accounted for by the fact that logic is conceptual in nature, the propositionality of logic is also accounted for by reference to its conceptual structure. Logic is propositional *only because* it is *first* conceptual.

Second, pointing to the objective theory of concepts destroys the variety of argument which Segers has used to link logic to the alleged existence of his god. Since the objective theory of concepts addresses the issues which this line of argument utilizes in establishing its theistic conclusion, that argument is effectively removed from the table.

So Segers' question about logic has been answered, and it has been answered chiefly by pointing to the objective theory of concepts. This is doubly damning for Segers and other presuppositionalists. Not only does the objective theory answer their questions from the viewpoint of a worldview which is atheistic in nature, it also underscores a fatal shortcoming of the Christian worldview, namely the fact that the Christian worldview has no account for concepts. Since Christianity has no theory of concepts, it leaves its adherents groping in the dark for answers to questions like those which Segers, Bahnsen and other apologist raise. These are real questions, to be sure, and they persist to be merely questions for apologists, precisely because they have no conceptual understanding of the issues to which those questions pertain. This profound deficiency in the Christian worldview leaves it smoldering in its own ashes.

by Dawson Bethrick