

Bolt's Pile of Knapp, Pt. 1

In my blog [The Uniformity of Nature](#), I addressed questions which presuppositional apologists often raise in their debates with non-Christians. The overall purpose of pressing the questions which presuppositionalists pose to non-Christians is to put non-Christians on the defensive, thus keeping the spotlight of attention off their own religious worldview. When their questions are answered, apologists typically insist that the answers given to their questions by non-Christians are inadequate for some reason. The purpose here is to *keep* the spotlight trained on the non-Christian position, thus allowing their religious position to continue hiding in a fog.

There is another purpose behind pressing questions against non-Christians. That purpose is to get the non-Christian either to produce some kind of answer, or to confess ignorance on the matter altogether and do as the theist has done, namely to throw up his hands and blurt "[Duh, I donno, must be God did it!](#)" If the non-Christian produces an answer, expect it to be dismissed as insufficient. If you're lucky, the presuppositionalist may give some indication why the non-Christian's answer should be dismissed as insufficient, but it is often the case that little or no counter-argument is given. The crucial task of the apologist at this point is not to enlighten his "opponent," but to disqualify the non-Christian's position as a viable solution to the matter in contention and to discredit the non-Christian personally as a thinker. The aim in doing this is to maneuver the non-Christian in the direction of confessing ignorance on the matter. The Christian delights in human ignorance, and seeks to uncover it everywhere he imagines it resides in other minds. Human ignorance is the darkness where the Christian seeks to locate his god. Whenever a non-Christian replies "I don't know" to a question which the apologist treats as all-important, you can rest assured that the apologist is there, waiting like a spider, ever-eager to announce "Gotcha!" and thus claim a victory on behalf of his god-belief. The believer needs this, as he is ever seeking to validate his own god-beliefs within the confines of his own imagination.

The types of questions which I addressed in my blog [The Uniformity of Nature](#) have to do with, you guessed it, the uniformity of nature. This is a topic which presuppositionalists treat as a central point of contention between their worldview and whatever worldview a particular non-Christian might represent, particularly on the topic of justifying induction.

Apologist Chris Bolt recently [offered a reaction](#) to select portions of my blog, insisting throughout that I have not adequately addressed the issue and thus have failed to answer presuppositionalism's challenge. Unfortunately, Bolt's response to me is remarkably weak on substance, fails to address important challenges which I have raised in my piece, and gives the impression that he did not give my post a very careful reading before publishing a response to it.

An example of weakness on substance is Bolt's objection to what he interprets my response to be in answer to the question "Why is nature uniform?" Now this was not one of the questions which I had set out specifically to address, but Bolt apparently decided that what did write was sufficient to guess at my response to this question would be, and that is, "It just is [uniform]," which he apparently takes to be a non-answer. What is weak about his discussion on this point is that he offers no reason to suppose that it is not true, even though he clearly rejects this view.

An example of failing to address important challenges which I raise in my blog would be Bolt's decision to ignore totally a series of questions which I highlighted expressly in order to preempt the standard presuppositionalist obfuscations from clouding the issue. Since it just may be the case that Bolt did not see the questions on his first reading (which would be an example of not giving my blog a very careful reading of my blog), I will restate those questions here:

1. Is nature uniform? (Yes or no)
2. If no, we would likely have an instance of the fallacy of the [stolen concept](#), for a denial of the uniformity of nature would have to assume that nature is uniform in order for that denial to make sense.
3. If yes, is nature uniform independent of consciousness, or is nature's uniformity a product of conscious activity?

4. If nature is uniform *independent of consciousness*, the uniformity of nature cannot imply theism.

5. If it is thought that nature's uniformity is a product of conscious activity, why suppose that such an overt appeal to subjectivism is at all philosophically impressive?

These questions cut to the heart of the matter as I see it, and thus I would be very interested in seeing how a presuppositionalist would respond to them. I would think that Bolt would want to preclude any confusion from obscuring what the Christian position affirms on the issue of the uniformity of nature, which is why I would think that he would welcome the opportunity to take a stand on the issues underscored by these questions. If he did in fact read my blog, I don't know how he could have missed these questions, for the issues which they raise occupy a significant portion of the text. Perhaps he just thinks it is unimportant to clarify whether or not his worldview affirms that nature is uniform independent of consciousness. Or, he realizes that Christianity makes the uniformity of nature dependent upon consciousness, and he didn't think it would be apologetically expedient to admit this. Either way, his choice to react to my blog and yet completely ignore these questions, speaks volumes.

In his reaction to my blog, Bolt sought to focus the discussion on a different set of questions. They are:

1. "Why is nature uniform?"
2. "How do we know that nature is uniform?"

In this post I will be examining the first of Bolt's questions, leaving no doubt that it has been addressed, regardless of how "satisfying" Bolt finds my answer.

Considering the Question "Why is nature uniform?"

Bolt quoted [me](#):

[N]ature is uniform on its own, independent of anyone's conscious activity. A person can deny the uniformity of nature, but nature remains uniform all the same, in spite of such denials. This means that if no consciousness exists, the entities which do exist still act according to their natures.

And his response to this goes as follows:

Why is nature uniform? *It just is.*

Again, considering the question "Why is nature uniform?" was not the specific purpose of my post. But in spite of this, the position which I affirmed in my post did in effect answer this question definitively. I had stated at least twice that, on my view, nature is *inherently* uniform independent of conscious activity by virtue of the fact that it exists. Bolt interprets this to mean simply that nature "just is" uniform. While this overlooks many of the surrounding points which I made in my blog (for instance, it ignores my points about the concurrence of existence and identity and the objectivity of the uniformity of nature - that's the part about nature being uniform *independent of consciousness*), let's suppose that all I did say was "*it just is*": "Nature is uniform because... *it just is*, like it or not, so get used to it." This would be an answer to the question, so even though I did not set out to address it specifically, there's no question that an answer to this question, which Bolt thinks is so important, can be obtained from what I did write, even if it has been under-appreciated by careless handling or deliberately de-valued for apologetic expedience.

Apparently Bolt does not find such a response acceptable. But why not? Why can it not be the case that nature "just is" uniform? Why can't nature be *inherently* uniform independent of conscious activity by virtue of the fact that it exists? Bolt never explains why this cannot be the case. Nor does he raise any intelligent objections against the rationale which I had put forward on behalf of this view, namely that "existence exists, to exist is to be something, and nature, since it exists, is therefore itself." To deny this, it seems that one would have to do at least one of the following:

1. Deny the premise that existence exists (but this would be self-defeating - the axiom being denied would have to be true in order for anyone to deny it);

2. Deny the premise that to exist is to be something (which amounts to a denial of the law of identity, which again is self-defeating - specifically *what* is being denied?);
3. Deny that nature exists (in which case one can only wonder why Bolt thinks his questions are so important); or
4. Acknowledge that nature exists but deny that the law of identity applies to nature (which too would be self-defeating, for it would be affirming the existence of something which is not something - a patent self-contradiction).

None of these options is very promising, to say the least.

Now if Bolt has any *good* reasons for supposing that nature is not or cannot be inherently uniform, he did not present them in his reaction to my post, and I for one would be curious to see them. But since I affirmed the position that nature is inherently uniform in my post, and he has published his reaction to it, I'd think that he would have taken the opportunity to educate me on the matter if in fact he knew any better. He did not. I am thus open to the possibility that he may in fact have no good reason against supposing that nature is inherently uniform. At any rate, my position thus far remains intact.

Bolt did follow up his own rendering of my position with this parenthetical statement:

(Stating that the contingent entities in question act according to their natures is another way of stating that nature is uniform but not an explanation for why it is uniform.)

First, Objectivism does not subscribe to the necessary-contingent dichotomy. In [my examination of the law of causality](#), I nowhere characterized the entities which exist as "contingent." Objectivism is well known, even among its more informed detractors, for its rejection of the analytic-synthetic dichotomy along with all its variants (see for instance Leonard Peikoff, "The Analytic-Synthetic Dichotomy" in Rand's *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, pp. 88-121). By interpreting my position as affirming "contingent entities" Bolt indicates either that he is not very familiar with Objectivist epistemology, or that he has an unconscious habit of putting words into his opponents' mouth. I suspect it's a bit of both.

Second, if it is truly the case that stating that entities act according to their natures "is another way of stating that nature is uniform," then denying the view that entities act according to their natures also denies the uniformity of nature. If Bolt holds that nature is indeed uniform and believes that the view that entities act according to their nature is just another way of affirming the uniformity of nature, why did he enlist the likes of John Robbins to argue against the Objectivist conception of causality (see [here](#))?

Third, pointing out the fact that entities act according to their natures is not intended (nor did I offer it) specifically as "an explanation for *why* [nature] is uniform."

Fourth, I don't think the question "Why is nature uniform?" is entirely valid philosophically. In fact, this is not the question which I set out to answer in my post. This is because the question "Why is nature uniform?" strikes me as fallaciously complex. I think it is fallaciously complex because it requires thinkers who attempt to answer it on its own terms to accept hidden illicit premises which have no objective basis.

When the presuppositionalist asks the question, "Why is nature uniform?" is he asking what *causes* nature to be uniform? If so, then the question is indeed fallaciously complex, for it assumes that the uniformity of nature is the result of some prior cause and in so doing it invokes a natural law (the law of causality) prior to the uniformity of nature. But this is conceptually absurd for it blatantly commits the fallacy of the stolen concept: it makes use of a concept (namely causality) while ignoring the metaphysical context in which that concept can only make sense (i.e., a nature uniform with itself). Christians confirm this analysis whenever they name the actions by which their god supposedly causes nature to be what it is, such as when their god "creates" and "sustains" nature according to its will. By naming these actions ("creating" and "sustaining"), the Christian confesses that he assumes that these actions do in fact have identity - i.e., that the law of identity does after all apply to action as well as to the entities which perform them. The laws of identity and causality are natural laws: they are formal recognitions that whatever exists has a nature. Thus the question "Why is nature uniform?" - if it is asking us to identify what "causes" nature to be uniform - is bankrolled on a stolen concept just as the question "Why does existence exist?" does.

Now it is important to note that Bolt nowhere attempts to validate the question “Why is nature uniform?” He just assumes that it is valid, perhaps never having paused to consider whether it is valid or not. Nor does he address the questions which I posed regarding the uniformity of nature, namely those having to do with whether or not nature is uniform independent of consciousness. For instance, in addition to those which I quoted above, I stated:

This is the central question to be considered before all others: is consciousness involved in “making” nature uniform, or is nature uniform *on its own*, regardless of what consciousness does?

Bolt does not address my questions because he knows that the Christian view characterizes the uniformity of nature as a result of prior conscious activity (thus tacitly employing a stolen concept). On such a view, this can only mean that nature is not inherently uniform, and that any uniformity which is said to obtain in nature can be turned on and off at will, depending on what the ruling consciousness wishes. I explained all this and the attendant problems which such a view entails, but Bolt ignores all of this completely in his reaction. Why?

There is another point that I would like to make, similar to the one which Jeffrey J. Lowder made in one of his debates. In his debate with Christian philosopher Dr. Phil Fernandes, Lowder, past president of [Internet Infidels, Inc.](#), made the following statement:

I want to make one point about the big bang model and the beginning of the universe. I'm going to paraphrase [Dr. Phil Fernandes]. He says, "But naturalism or atheism mystifies the beginning of the universe. It says it's just a brute fact, it offers no explanation. Whereas theism explains it." Notice there's going to be brute facts no matter what you believe. In every metaphysical theory there's going to be brute facts. It is impossible for a theory to explain absolutely everything, even its own basic assumptions. Even theism has a brute fact, namely why God exists instead of absolutely nothing. But what about Naturalism's brute fact that the universe exists instead of just nothing? I guess I just don't see the problem here. [[The Lowder-Fernandes Debate - Naturalism vs. Theism: Where Does the Evidence Point?](#) This debate took place September 26, 1999 at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.]

The essence of Lowder's point here is that in any viable philosophical system (particularly if it is a form of foundationalism), there must be a starting point beyond which explanation is impossible (otherwise it ceases to serve as a starting point). We need to start somewhere.

Objectivism recognizes the fact that knowledge has a hierarchical structure to it. This hierarchical structure of knowledge should be apparent every time we develop new knowledge on the basis of already existing knowledge, such as when we integrate newly learned facts about someone with what we already know about him. For instance, just recently my boss, whom I've known for a while now, revealed to me that one of his uncles was involved in [the raid at Los Baños, Philippines](#). This new information has now been integrated with the rest of what I know about my boss. Also, concepts can be formed by integrating previously formed concepts, which is how we have higher abstractions (see for instance chapter three of Rand's *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, “Abstraction from Abstractions,” pp. 19-28). The formalization of any inference is likewise a means of making the hierarchical structure of a conclusion vis-à-vis its premises explicit. As Peikoff rightly explains:

Human knowledge is not like a village of squat bungalows, with every room huddling down against the earth's surface. Rather, it is like a city of towering skyscrapers, with the uppermost story of each building resting on the lower ones, and they on the still lower, until one reaches the foundation where the builder started. The foundation supports the whole structure by virtue of being in contact with solid ground. (*Objectivism: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand*, p. 130)

If you continue to reduce your knowledge to its fundamental bases, you will eventually come to what is irreducible, the bedrock on which it all stands. The Objectivist axioms identify the conceptually irreducible foundations of knowledge (see [here](#)). That which is irreducibly primary cannot be “explained” in terms of anything prior, for there is *nothing* prior which can be referenced in explaining that which is irreducibly primary.

So, on my view, just as nature is uniform independent of consciousness (and is thus an *objective* fact about reality), and since nature is existence as it exists apart from conscious manipulation (cf. Rand's concept of the *man-made* in her essay “The Metaphysical Versus the Man-Made,” in *Philosophy: Who Needs It*, pp. 23-34), if existence is irreducibly primary, there is nothing “prior” to nature to “explain” or “cause” its uniformity. Thus it is *inherently*

uniform. The question “Why is nature uniform?” as Bolt has posed it tends to ignore all these facts, and thus can be dismissed as fallaciously complex.

Now Lowder refers to this type of bedrock as a “brute fact.” And by this he clearly means a baseline fact for which there can be no prior explanation. Now it may be the case that presuppositionalists like Chris Bolt will seize on Lowder’s use of this term to dispute what he says, but I don’t think even they can outrun his point. Presuppositionalists of course insist that there is no such thing as “brute facts” (numerous references to 'brute facts' and presuppositionalism’s rejection of them can be found in Bahnsen's *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings & Analysis*, cf. pp. 38, 78, 268, 279-280, 310, 316, 355-57, 376-79, 570, 673). What they seem to be saying is that "It's a brute fact that there are no brute facts." This is the kind of absurdity that we can expect to find in presuppositionalism once we scratch the very top surface of its systemic gimmickry.

To be continued.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Christian Psychopathy](#), [Induction](#), [Presuppositional Gimmickry](#)

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [5:37 AM](#)

2 Comments:

[NAL](#) said...

I would like to see a definition of the Uniformity of Nature. Is it nothing more than the property of nature that allows induction?

[March 19, 2010 3:08 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hello Nal,

Thanks for your question. I do not equate the uniformity of nature with "the property of nature that allows induction," but rather conceive of it as "the applicability of the axiom of existence to all of reality *and* the absolute (i.e., exceptionless) concurrence of identity with existence" (as I stated in my post [The Uniformity of Nature](#)).

Regards,
Dawson

[March 19, 2010 3:21 PM](#)

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