

Saturday, March 20, 2010

Bolt's Pile of Knapp, Pt. 2

In this post, I continue my examination of [Chris Bolt's reaction](#) to my post [The Uniformity of Nature](#).

How Do We Know that Nature is Uniform?

According to Bolt, even more important than the question “Why is nature uniform?” (which I considered in the [previous installment of this series](#)), is the question “How do we know that nature is uniform?” He asks:

More importantly how do we know that nature is uniform?

In spite of the fact that I devoted a portion of my post to explaining what I understand “uniformity of nature” to mean and to showing its direct relationship to the Objectivist axioms, Bolt insists that I did not address this question. But in fact I did address it. I had quoted Rand's dictum from *Atlas Shrugged* that “Existence is Identity” ([Galt's Speech](#)) and noted that

Nature is uniform with itself, *since to exist is for something to be itself*. If A exists, it must be A. (emphasis added)

The axioms of existence and identity tells us that, if a thing exists, it is itself (which is to say, a thing that exists is *uniform* to itself). Thus, if nature exists, it is itself, which means: nature is uniform with itself. I spelled this out in greater detail in [my post when I stated](#):

The uniformity of nature, then, is essentially the applicability of the axiom of existence to all of reality and the absolute (i.e., exceptionless) concurrence of identity with existence. Both of these aspects of the uniformity of nature are undeniable - that is, they cannot be denied without self-contradiction. Since reality is the realm of existence, the axiom of existence necessarily applies to *all* of reality. Since reality is the realm of *existence*, existence and reality are concurrent *absolutely* - i.e., without exception.

In this way we can confidently say that nature is *inherently* uniform (since existence exists, to exist is to be something, and nature, since it exists, is therefore itself), and that it is such *independent of consciousness*.

Bolt did not interact with any of the above statement in his reaction, missing it entirely (and therefore failing to recognize its relevance to the question he emphasizes) and marching on to insist that I have not successfully addressed his precious question. Of course, it may be the case that Bolt, given his lack of understanding of the Objectivist axioms, simply does not recognize the fact that my statements above address the question he considers so vastly important. Bolt is at least aware of the fact that the answer which I have presented refers to the Objectivist axioms, for he quoted a statement of mine which does in fact mention them:

This is the view consistent with the axioms “existence exists,” “to exist is to be something” (i.e., to have *identity*), and “entities act according to their natures” *independent of consciousness*.

But he doesn't see their relevance. He responded to this, saying:

Conveniently Mr. Bethrick merely asserts what he has already written (“entities act according to their natures” = nature is uniform) and labels it axiomatic or at least derivative of a tautological axiom.

Perhaps I'm supposed to inconvenience myself for Bolt's sake and suppose that there is no relationship between what an entity is and the actions it performs, in spite of its factuality and relevance to the foundations of knowledge. Bolt's ideal must be a *disintegrated* mind - a mind which is lost in a never-ending tangle and constantly groping for anything which will enable its evasion from the distinction between reality and fantasy. I'm reminded of a point which Porter eloquently makes:

Cognition must obey the primacy of existence. That's a severe constraint on knowledge, on all awareness of every kind, and it's the cause of many other distinctive characteristics. It hasn't been explicitly articulated so

philosophers feel no discomfort in straddling it. But, like Ayn Rand's axiomatic concepts they have to assume it in every assertion. Even when denying it as well. (*Ayn Rand's Theory of Knowledge*, pp. 198-199)

Of course, when the axioms and the primacy of existence are identified explicitly, expect those who have been trying to get away with evading them to buck hard, or to roll over and take a Knapp.

As I noted in my [previous post](#), Bolt completely ignores my points about nature being uniform independent of consciousness, perhaps out of reluctance to take a stand either way (for neither alternative bodes well for his theism). Also, he resists interacting with the view that nature is self-regulating (e.g., he gives no reasons to suppose that it is not self-regulating), even though this view is anathema to the presuppositionalist "account for" the uniformity of nature which insists that a supernatural being caused it to be so. Bolt fails to interact with any of this. He doesn't even quote it for his own readers to examine, and, having provided no link to my post from his own, he apparently intends to convey the impression to his readers that his reaction accurately characterizes my position and interacts with it on its own terms. Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the case.

Bolt apparently thinks it is wrong to relate the very concept of the uniformity of nature to the axioms. He writes:

Unfortunately this appeal to alleged axioms is irrelevant to the problem.

If the "problem" which Bolt has in mind here is the *question* "how do we know that nature is uniform?" then certainly the role of the axioms in anchoring our knowledge to reality, informing its fundamental content, and guiding us to distinguish between what is real and what is imaginary, is wholly relevant. The axioms would only be irrelevant to Bolt's "problem" if he thinks anchoring our knowledge to reality, informing the fundamental content of our knowledge, and/or distinguishing what is real from the imaginary is of no concern to addressing the question "how do we know that nature is uniform?" So by insisting that the axioms have nothing to do with answering such questions, Bolt tells us about his own priorities here. They certainly do not include anchoring our knowledge to reality, informing the fundamental content of our knowledge, or distinguishing the real from the imaginary. Nowhere does Bolt make any of these points a concern in his reaction to my post.

But the point is worth pressing further. Since the truth of the axioms is a constant throughout all knowledge, they are always going to be relevant, at least if one seeks to ground his knowledge in what is *real*. Bolt is anxious to discount their relevance because if he were to admit the fact that the axioms actually do bear on the question, then he would have no choice but to admit that my position does in fact have a reliable answer to provide. And he will resist this precisely because it would defeat his apologetic pre-commitments. There is, of course, the additional fact that Bolt's preferred "explanation" of the uniformity of nature involves an appeal to something which we can only *imagine* (for even on the Christian view of the world, human beings do not perceive the Christian god, angels, demons, devils, heaven, hell, etc.; we "learn" about these things by reading about them in storybooks written by ancient primitives who themselves lacked any explicit means by which to distinguish the real from the imaginary), and any acknowledgement of the truth and fundamentality of the axioms would directly threaten the Christian "explanation" of the uniformity of nature. So his reaction is predictable in this sense.

In addition to his ignorance of the relevance of the axioms, Bolt shows throughout his paper that he is unable to grasp Objectivism without importing his theistic presuppositions into the mix, which can only ensure that his defense does not take the form of an internal critique. For instance, he makes unargued and unexplained statements such as "Reality involves much more than matter in motion," "God is *transcendent and real*," "Nature is uniform because God created and controls it," he asserts that appealing to "supernatural causation" as an explanation of the uniformity of nature "is an answer with no apparent problems," and speaks of "'inside the natural order' versus 'outside the natural order'," again without explanation of what any of this means or a defense of the assumed validity of such notions. He does not show that *on Objectivism's premises*, the "account for" the uniformity of nature is self-contradictory, inadequate, reliant on non-Objectivist principles, etc.

Notice also that, for presuppositionalists, questions are "problems" for their opponents, not for themselves. When questions are posed to them (such as the five that I restated from my blog in the preceding section of this post), they can ignore them and pretend they were never asked (as Bolt does).

But Bolt does seem to sense a threat when it comes to the Objectivist conception causality, and rightly so. He writes:

The claim that "entities act according to their natures" does not follow from the claim that "to exist is to be

something” or “to exist is to have identity”.

It doesn't? Why not? Apparently because Bolt declares that it does not. Bolt does not think that action has identity to begin with. He has already made this opinion of his clear when he denied the Objectivist principle that the law of identity applies to action. For Bolt, action has no identity, which can only mean that, on his view, there is no way to distinguish one action from another, since the ability to distinguish things requires that the things being distinguished be distinguishable - and in order for things to be distinguishable from each other, they must have identity. But action is, on Bolt's view, apparently exempt from having identity.

Curiously, Bolt has provided no argument for the view that action has no identity, and this viewpoint is in direct conflict with Bolt's own action of identifying actions in his writings: every time he writes a sentence containing a verbal or noun construction which refers to action, he is performatively contradicting his own denial of the applicability of the law of identity to action by assuming that the actions he so names do in fact have an identity to be identified. By using concepts to identify actions such as “does not follow” (which he uses in the above quote) and distinguish these actions from other actions (such as “does follow” or “swim” or “races about”), Bolt is telling us through his own actions that actions do in fact have identity, that the law of identity does in fact apply to actions, in spite of his denial. Bolt's actions speak louder than his protests.

Moreover, there is the inconvenient fact that action does not take place unless there is some entity which exists and performs that action. Action in this sense is not a metaphysical primary - the entity which does the action is. Action does not exist by itself, apart from the entities which perform it. And because of this, action depends on the entities which perform it. I have elaborated on and defended this conception of causality in my blog [Causality as a Necessary Relationship](#). Thus, contrary to what Bolt asserts, it does indeed follow from the fact that “to exist is to be something” that “entities act according to their natures,” the intervening recognition that actions cannot exist apart from the entities which perform them being key to connecting these two intimately related recognitions.

Bolt made another statement which reveals how careless he's been up to this point:

Apparently thinking that he has solved the Problem of Induction per Objectivist axioms...

Clearly Bolt has been Knapping throughout the discussion. I have nowhere indicated that Hume's problem of induction is solved exclusively by reference to the Objectivist axioms. I have stated explicitly on numerous occasions throughout our exchanges on the topic that the proper solution involves examining the premises of Hume's skeptical argument (which I have done [here](#)) as well as showing how the Objectivist conception of causality (which I have defended [here](#)) and the objective theory of concepts (see [here](#)) work together in providing man with the cognitive ability to move from knowledge of particulars to knowledge of general classes. All of this is geared toward moving us in the direction of a *conceptual* understanding of induction as opposed to the *storybook* understanding preferred by presuppositionalists.

Meanwhile, while I have challenged Bolt to take a stand on whether or not Hume's argument for inductive skepticism is, on his view, sound, and even to reproduce Hume's argument since he seems to think it's so important, Bolt remains silent on these points, showing essentially no appreciation for questioning the soundness of an argument whose conclusion is supposed to be so secure. If Bolt believes that Hume's conclusion is sound, and his “problem of induction” needs to be addressed on Hume's terms, why does he make no effort to defend it?

As for the Objectivist axioms, my purpose in referencing them in my post on the uniformity of nature is to show that the uniformity of nature has a specific meaning within the context of rational philosophy and that this meaning is closely tied to the fundamental recognitions which the axioms make explicit at the base of our knowledge. It's clear from the foregoing that Bolt's attempts to critique all of this have fallen flat.

Stay tuned, there's more to come.

by Dawson Bethrick

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

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