

Wednesday, September 09, 2009

Can the Water in My Drinking Glass Turn into Merlot?

Chris Bolt is apparently unsatisfied with my response (which can be found [in this blog](#)) to his question on how I can be certain that the water in my drinking glass will not turn into merlot (a type of wine), given my own worldview's "presuppositions."

Bolt's dissatisfaction for my response was expressed in his reply to Dr. Funkenstein's own resounding indictment of presuppositionalism, both of which can be found in the comments section of Bolt's blog [Dawson Bethrick, The Man Who Builds His House Upon The Sand](#).

In response to his expressed dissatisfaction with my initial response to his question, I posted the following [comment to his blog](#):

Chris,

You apparently do not accept the answer I gave to your question about knowing whether or not water will turn into merlot the next time I drink it. My short answer to this was: by a means of knowledge, specifically by reason (since reason is my only means of knowledge).

I gather that my answer was insufficient for you, possibly because the concept of reason is foreign to your understanding of human conscious activity. Fair enough. Please allow me to provide a little more detail (without writing 20 pages on the matter).

First, it is important to understand what reason is. Reason is "the faculty that identifies and integrates the material provided by man's senses." Its method is logic, "the art or skill of non-contradictory identification." (These definitions come from Rand's essays "The Objectivist Ethics," in her book *The Virtue of Selfishness*, p. 20, and "Philosophical Detection," in her book *Philosophy: Who Needs It*, p. 15, respectively.) Objectivism is correct to take the "testimony" of the senses as metaphysically given, precisely because they are metaphysically given (they are part of our identity as biological organisms). I suspect that you'll have a problem with this, but I'll leave it up to you to raise your own objections here.

Now, on an objective understanding of reality, which Objectivism provides, there would need to be something which causes the water in a drinking glass to turn into merlot. In other words, since we reject the notion of "causeless action" as self-contradictory, the conditions which could cause water to turn into merlot would have to exist in order for the water in a drinking glass to turn into merlot.

Since the objective view of reality is firmly premised on the primacy of existence, this securely eliminates any form of wishing or commanding as a potential cause for water in any drinking glass to turn into any type of wine. Given the primacy of existence (a principle which would have to be true for someone even to deny it), then, the idea of an invisible magic being willing water into wine must be rejected as contrary to reality. The actions of consciousness cannot alter the identity of objects. Why? Because existence holds metaphysical primacy, i.e., the objects of consciousness hold metaphysical primacy over the subject of consciousness. Hence Objectivism. The negation of this principle, that a subject holds metaphysical primacy over its objects, is known as metaphysical subjectivism. On a worldview premised in metaphysical subjectivism, one cannot in principle raise any objection to the idea that a consciousness can alter the objects of its awareness, such as by an act of will. When a theist affirms that wishing doesn't make it so, or that atheism is not true simply because the atheist does not believe in a god, he is in effect borrowing from worldview which fundamentally unlike his professed theistic worldview (though he probably does not realize this, since he is not accustomed to examining worldview questions in terms of the subject-object relationship).

So this means that, if one wants to entertain the notion that water could turn into merlot, he would have to identify a cause for such transformation which squares with the primacy of existence. We know that merlot wine is produced by a process which involves the fermentation of a specific kind of grape in large quantities.

This process requires a sufficient amount of time for the fermentation of the grapes to take place. Without the grapes, the fermentation, and the time it requires for the grapes to ferment, merlot is not going to be produced. (Ask any viniculturalist if you're unsure on this.) Since a glass of water has no grapes to ferment (we can know this by inspecting the glass of water), we know that the causal conditions for producing wine in the glass of water do not exist. Given this fact, one can be wholly certain that the water in his glass is not going to turn into any type of wine, including merlot. You can even let the glass of water stand for several days, but since the causal conditions for the production of merlot are not present, the water in the glass is not going to turn into merlot.

Now, I highly doubt that any of this is going to satisfy your inquisitiveness, since you're probably eager to find some way to discredit it, and - [as we have seen so far](#) - you tend to critique rival positions according to your own worldview's premises. But how are you going to do this without tacitly employing the very principles which Objectivism affirms? And what would motivate such eagerness, if not religiously-motivated resentment for the fact that people who disbelieve in your god have solid grounds for certainty? Meanwhile, I have yet to see how someone who affirms the existence of a universe-creating, reality-ruling consciousness which is known for turning water into wine (cf. John chap. 2), could know that the water in his water glass will not turn into merlot, without of course borrowing from a worldview which diametrically conflicts with his own theistic premises.

Regards,
Dawson

Now, my answer to Chris Bolt's question is strictly in keeping with Objectivism's premises, in particular the primacy of existence and its understanding of the law of causality, which is that the actions of an entity necessarily depend on the nature of that entity. Certainly my response to Chris Bolt is not a form of raising my hands in utter bewilderment and exclaiming [Duh, I donno! Must be God did it!](#) Though more and more I am sensing that this kind of response, a response of desperation, resignation and contentment to rest on ignorance, is the only one which would satisfy Bolt. Is that the case? Well this depends on him. There is nothing I can do to change the mind of someone who holds to a worldview which rests on the primacy of consciousness.

I welcome all comments on the reply I have given to Chris Bolt above. If you as my reader suspect that there is a weakness in the content of my response, that its wording could be improved, or that I am simply off my rocker, please feel free to comment. I want to hear from you. As my readers should know, I do not moderate the comments that are posted in response to my blogs. I don't even delete so-called "drive-by comments," regardless of how annoying they can be. So don't be shy.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Certainty](#), [Knowledge](#), [Miracles](#), [Objectivism](#), [Water into Wine](#)

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [9:09 AM](#)

16 Comments:

[Chris](#) said...

Your reply, to me, seemed very articulate and as clear as could be. To me, it explains very thoroughly and unambiguously your position. I don't believe he has argued his position so much as that he has continued to assert it.

He continues to ask, "How do you KNOW _____ (insert impossible event here) isn't going to happen?", without bothering to show even a single verifiable example of where anything of the sort has EVER happened. Honestly, I have never succeeded in getting through to this kind of thinking either.

When people begin arguing this way, and claiming that I can't know anything and that nothing can be relied upon to continue working as it has in the past, despite the fact that examination of the physical universe shows every sign

of regularity and predictable behavior, I can only conclude that they are out of touch with reality and have no interest in being introduced to reality.

[September 09, 2009 3:14 PM](#)

[NAL](#) said...

Although the glass of water does not contain the specific type of grape, it does contain energy via the mass of the water. A sufficiently advanced technology could convert the water to energy, and then convert that energy into the atoms and molecules that constitute merlot. The probability of such a technology would be infinitesimal but not zero. Therefore, the certainty, that the glass of water could not turn into merlot, could not be 100%.

[September 09, 2009 5:50 PM](#)

[C.L. Bolt](#) said...

"He continues to ask, "How do you KNOW _____ (insert impossible event here) isn't going to happen?"

Chris,

You beg the question when you label event x as "impossible". There is no contradiction implied by stating, for example, that the sun will not rise tomorrow.

"without bothering to show even a single verifiable example of where anything of the sort has EVER happened."

This also begs the question, as there is just as much evidence in favor of the event coming about in a "regular" fashion as there is that it will not.

"Honestly, I have never succeeded in getting through to this kind of thinking either."

It may help if you read the relevant literature, because you do not understand the argument. I recommend Hume and Russell for an introduction.

"claiming that I can't know anything and that nothing can be relied upon to continue working as it has in the past despite the fact that examination of the physical universe shows every sign of regularity and predictable behavior"

What evidence do you have that the universe will continue to operate in such a fashion in future experience? The original argument as set forth by Hume takes this specific "answer" that you have set forth and refutes it. This is why you should really read the piece before attempting to argue against it.

"I can only conclude that they are out of touch with reality and have no interest in being introduced to reality."

Again this begs the question. You are assuming that in reality nature will remain regular, but that is the very thing you need to prove.

Thankfully the main post here is, as you have said, quite clear and I look forward to reading over it more closely and responding.

[September 09, 2009 8:25 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Thanks for everyone's comments. Some very interesting points.

NAL, are you aware of such advanced technology that actually exists? For your objection to have any weight, it seems that such technology would at the very least have to exist. If it does not actually exist, I fail to see why it should constitute a factor.

Chris Bolt, again you are interpreting what has been presented through premises foreign to Objectivism, as is

apparent in your use of the concept 'impossible'. I already explained in an earlier post why this doesn't work. Also, as for Hume, aren't you aware that he's been refuted? Hume made some fundamental mistakes in his philosophy, particularly in the area of epistemology relevant to his famed 'problem of induction'. I highlighted one of them in my post [Bolt's Loose Screws](#), namely his faulty conception of causation. Also, your conception of the regularity of nature is tacitly underwritten by expectations which can only be held on the primacy of consciousness, which Objectivism rejects. We have to take reality as it exists, and assemble our assumptions on the basis of what we discover. We do not hold that reality must conform to our assumptions, but precisely the reverse - that our assumptions must conform to what we discover in the universe. Again, omniscience is not the proper standard for knowledge. Moreover, the primacy of existence supplies the answer to these trumped-up problems.

Anyway, as I predicted, you're not going to be satisfied by what I have to say, but it is evident that this is due to your inability to step outside your own worldview's faulty presuppositions. But resting on Hume makes you look rather outdated. Also, I look forward to how the mere fact that you "believe in an all-knowing God who has revealed Himself to us and cannot lie" provides certainty on such concerns.

Regards,
Dawson

[September 09, 2009 10:13 PM](#)

[C.L. Bolt](#) said...

So far as I know, we can both only imagine water and merlot in future experience, but as you have written, imagination is not reality. You wrote, "To affirm a possibility, one needs at least some evidence to support it, and no evidence against it." I am interested in the evidence you would produce concerning water and merlot in future experience. Must I conclude by way of your standard that not only is water turning into wine in future experience not possible, but likewise water remaining water in future experience is not possible?

If it is true that we have not, so far as I know, ever found merlot being produced without grapes, fermentation, and time present as described, then it is apparently only known to be true with respect to those instances we have in fact examined. I do not see how we know that this is the case with respect to future experience of the production of merlot.

You need to show how the idea of a causeless action is self-contradictory and why the conditions necessary for water to turn into merlot would have to exist in order for the water to turn into merlot in future experience. I understand you are stating that this is true with respect to past experience, but you have not explained how one is to know that this is true with respect to future experience. For example:

"We know that merlot wine is produced by a process which involves the fermentation of a specific kind of grape in large quantities."

Perhaps this is true with respect to past experience, but how do we know that this is the case with respect to future experience?

"This process requires a sufficient amount of time for the fermentation of the grapes to take place."

Perhaps this is true with respect to past experience, but how do we know that this is the case with respect to future experience?

"Without the grapes, the fermentation, and the time it requires for the grapes to ferment, merlot is not going to be produced."

Perhaps this is true with respect to past experience, but how do we know that this is the case with respect to future experience?

"Since a glass of water has no grapes to ferment (we can know this by inspecting the glass of water), we know that the causal conditions for producing wine in the glass of water do not exist."

Perhaps this is true with respect to past experience, but how do we know that this is the case with respect to future experience?

How do we know that the conditions have not changed?

“You can even let the glass of water stand for several days, but since the causal conditions for the production of merlot are not present, the water in the glass is not going to turn into merlot.”

Perhaps this is true with respect to past experience, but how do we know that this is the case with respect to future experience?

How do we know that the conditions have not changed?

“law of causality, which is that the actions of an entity necessarily depend on the nature of that entity”

Perhaps this is true with respect to past experience, but how do we know that this is the case with respect to future experience?

How do we know that the natures of entities will not change in future experience?

That water was once turned into wine is no argument against the view that nature exhibits regularities and thus water much more often than not remains water, the concept of miracle itself assuming this to be the case.

I do not find your answer satisfactory with respect to my inquisitiveness, but I do not think it is necessarily due to any eagerness to discredit the answer. What you present is a common response to the Problem of Induction that has already been both set forth and refuted in basic literature concerning the subject, the only exception to this being your understanding of possibility, but again this understanding would apparently result in stating that water remaining water in future experience is not possible since you have not presented any evidence to support that it will.

[September 09, 2009 10:41 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Chris: “So far as I know, we can both only imagine water and merlot in future experience, but as you have written, imagination is not reality.”

That is correct: imagination is not reality. But we can conform our imaginative projections to the facts which we do know. This is how imagination best serves man’s needs. For instance, I know from experience that touching a hot stove will result in painful injury. Similarly, I can imagine, based on similar facts, that touching a hot grill will result in the same. If I had any doubt, I could test this to erase any doubt. But I don’t doubt it.

I wrote: “To affirm a possibility, one needs at least some evidence to support it, and no evidence against it.”

Chris: “I am interested in the evidence you would produce concerning water and merlot in future experience.”

What statement have I made about future experience that needs me to produce evidence?

Chris: “Must I conclude by way of your standard that not only is water turning into wine in future experience not possible, but likewise water remaining water in future experience is not possible?”

I certainly don’t think so. In fact, there may be cases where water remains water, and other cases where its elements are separated. Conditions vary from circumstance to circumstance. But what does not vary is the law of identity.

Chris: “If it is true that we have not, so far as I know, ever found merlot being produced without grapes, fermentation, and time present as described, then it is apparently only known to be true with respect to those instances we have in fact examined. I do not see how we know that this is the case with respect to future

experience of the production of merlot.”

Since we know the causal conditions necessary for producing merlot, what exactly is your difficulty here? Are you supposing that it’s still possible for merlot to be produced without the necessary causal conditions being in place? If so, why? If not, what are you asking?

Chris: “You need to show how the idea of a causeless action is self-contradictory”

Causation is the law of identity applied to action. Specifically, it is the recognition that the relationship between an entity and its own actions is a necessary relationship. The cause of action is the entity which does the acting. The idea of “causeless action” essentially affirms action without something which performs the action, which is self-contradictory. As Kelley puts it, “you can’t have a dance without a dancer.”

Chris: “and why the conditions necessary for water to turn into merlot would have to exist in order for the water to turn into merlot in future experience.”

Well, that’s pretty much the way reality is, Chris. Something “turning into” something else is an action, and actions depend on conditions which make them possible.

(continued...)

[September 09, 2009 11:59 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Part II

Chris: “I understand you are stating that this is true with respect to past experience, but you have not explained how one is to know that this is true with respect to future experience.”

As I stated earlier, “one is to know” anything he knows by a means of knowledge, and the means of knowledge proper to man’s consciousness is reason. Reason rests on the axioms, including the law of identity. The law of identity transcends temporal measurement. Identity does not presuppose time, nor does it depend on time; on the contrary, time presupposes identity. Just by invoking the concept “future” you are granting certain constants right there. The concept ‘future’ rests on more fundamental concepts, including the axioms.

Chris: “How do we know that the natures of entities will not change in future experience?”

Some entities do change. For instance, human beings change as they grow older. But even here, there is a cause behind this change, such as metabolism and other physiological functions. What does not change is the truth of the axioms. Since we have these constants, new discoveries can be identified and integrated without contradiction into the sum of our knowledge.

Chris: “That water was once turned into wine is no argument against the view that nature exhibits regularities and thus water much more often than not remains water, the concept of miracle itself assuming this to be the case.”

The argument is not “water was once turned into wine, so therefore you cannot be certain that it won’t happen again.” But rather: Your worldview posits the existence of a supernatural being whose will holds metaphysical primacy over everything within the universe and can do whatever it pleases (in accordance with Psalms 115:3), including - if it chooses - turning water into wine. Since you are not identical to this being, and are yourself neither omniscient nor infallible, you have no objective basis to know anything, since the things you presume to know are subject to revision by an omnipotent supernatural being.

Meanwhile, I have a factual basis, one which is founded on the primacy of existence, for the knowledge that I have.

Chris: “What you present is a common response to the Problem of Induction that has already been both set forth and refuted in basic literature concerning the subject, the only exception to this being your understanding of possibility,”

Oh, there's much more to it I'm afraid, Chris. Most responses to the problem of induction that I have seen do not address the matter from a very good understanding of concepts. I've just given a few hints here rather than a full blown answer (I'm sure you can appreciate this). On the Objectivist view, in addition to the objective theory of causation (which is conceived of in terms of the relationship between an entity and its own actions, as opposed to the Humean view, which conceives of causation as a relationship between "events"), we also have the objective theory of concepts, which provides a working model for inductive inference. But I don't expect you to understand any of this at this time.

Regards,
Dawson

[September 10, 2009 12:06 AM](#)

[C.L. Bolt](#) said...

Chris: "I am interested in the evidence you would produce concerning water and merlot in future experience."

Dawson: "What statement have I made about future experience that needs me to produce evidence?"

You have made many statements concerning water and merlot in future experience. You wrote, "We know that merlot wine is produced by a process which involves the fermentation of a specific kind of grape in large quantities... This process requires a sufficient amount of time for the fermentation of the grapes to take place...Without the grapes, the fermentation, and the time it requires for the grapes to ferment, merlot is not going to be produced...we know that the causal conditions for producing wine in the glass of water do not exist...You can even let the glass of water stand for several days, but since the causal conditions for the production of merlot are not present, the water in the glass is not going to turn into merlot...the actions of an entity necessarily depend on the nature of that entity."

Each of these may be taken as a separate statement regarding water and merlot in future experience. I need to know what evidence you have that these things will be such in future experience. I understand that you claim they are such in the past, but what about in the future?

Chris: "Must I conclude by way of your standard that not only is water turning into wine in future experience not possible, but likewise water remaining water in future experience is not possible?"

Dawson: I certainly don't think so. In fact, there may be cases where water remains water, and other cases where its elements are separated. Conditions vary from circumstance to circumstance. But what does not vary is the law of identity.

If, for something to be considered possible, there must be no evidence against and evidence in favor of; then it must be concluded that it is not possible that water will remain such in the future, since you have not produced any evidence to support this possibility. You wrote, "To affirm a possibility, one needs at least some evidence to support it, and no evidence against it." Remember, you claim that you "work from evidence, not hypothetical 'possibilities' which are essentially no different from fantasies posing as considerations which need to be taken seriously". Where is your evidence that water will remain water in future experience? Where is your evidence that the elements of the water might separate in future experience? Where is your evidence that the conditions may vary in future experience?

Let us press this a bit further. Could a man living long ago observing the flatness of Earth about him and no evidence against the position that Earth is not flat affirm the possibility that Earth is not flat?

[September 16, 2009 11:20 PM](#)

[C.L. Bolt](#) said...

Chris: "If it is true that we have not, so far as I know, ever found merlot being produced without grapes, fermentation, and time present as described, then it is apparently only known to be true with respect to those instances we have in fact examined. I do not see how we know that this is the case with respect to future

experience of the production of merlot.”

Dawson: Since we know the causal conditions necessary for producing merlot, what exactly is your difficulty here? Are you supposing that it’s still possible for merlot to be produced without the necessary causal conditions being in place? If so, why? If not, what are you asking?

My difficulty is with your lack of an explanation of how you know the causal conditions necessary for producing merlot in future experience coupled with your claims that you do know them. Your question, “Are you supposing that it’s still possible for merlot to be produced without the necessary causal conditions being in place?” begs the question due to the use of the word “necessary”. You have not shown that the causal conditions you refer to are necessary with respect to future experience.

Chris: “You need to show how the idea of a causeless action is self-contradictory”

Dawson: Causation is the law of identity applied to action. Specifically, it is the recognition that the relationship between an entity and its own actions is a necessary relationship. The cause of action is the entity which does the acting. The idea of “causeless action” essentially affirms action without something which performs the action, which is self-contradictory. As Kelley puts it, “you can’t have a dance without a dancer.”

How do you know that the relationship between an entity and its own actions is a necessary relationship? If the law of identity functioned as you assume it does (applied to action) then I am not sure that there can be change.

You have a much bigger problem though. How do you know what actions an entity is capable of? How do you know that the entity of water is not in a necessary relationship with the action of producing merlot all by its lonesome?

Chris: “and why the conditions necessary for water to turn into merlot would have to exist in order for the water to turn into merlot in future experience.”

Dawson: Well, that’s pretty much the way reality is, Chris.

And that’s begging the question, Dawson. ;)

Chris: “How do we know that the natures of entities will not change in future experience?”

Dawson: Some entities do change.

Hence their actions as well?

Dawson: “What does not change is the truth of the axioms.”

Great, but the axiom of $A=A$ applied to action does not provide me with answers to what I have been asking of you.

Dawson: Your worldview posits the existence of a supernatural being whose will holds metaphysical primacy over everything within the universe and can do whatever it pleases (in accordance with Psalms 115:3), including - if it chooses - turning water into wine. Since you are not identical to this being, and are yourself neither omniscient nor infallible, you have no objective basis to know anything, since the things you presume to know are subject to revision by an omnipotent supernatural being.

Since it does not follow that He ever does revise them, and since His will is always in accordance with His nature, this argument fails. Why would an all powerful, all knowing God have to “revise” anything anyway? I am sorry, you continue to set up a picture of a God that is inconsistent with my theology.

“In vain do you pretend to have learnt the nature of bodies from your past experience. Their secret nature, and consequently all their effects and influence, may change without any change in their sensible qualities. This happens sometimes, and with regard to some objects. Why may it not happen always, and with regard to all objects? What logic, what process of argument, secures you against this supposition?” - David Hume

[September 16, 2009 11:20 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Chris,

Thank you so much for these comments. I have read through what you have stated, and your questions bring up many topics. So many, in fact, that a full response is not possible at this time (I will be very busy the next few weeks with other matters). But I'll see if I can get snag some moments here and there to compile a response.

In the meantime, I wanted to ask you if you dispute the truth of the Objectivist axioms. They are the following:

1. The axiom of existence: This is the axiom which states "existence exists." It is the explicit recognition that something exists, that there is a reality.
2. The axiom of consciousness: This is the axiom which states "consciousness is conscious of something." It is the recognition that, to be conscious of the fact that things exist (the axiom of existence), one must be conscious.
3. The axiom of identity: This is the axiom which states "to exist is to be something" (as opposed to "nothing"). This is the recognition that a thing which exists is itself, that to exist is to have a nature, an identity, that $A = A$.
4. The primacy of existence: This is the recognition that "existence exists independent of consciousness," i.e., that the nature of an entity is what it is independent of the activity of consciousness.

If you dispute the truth of any of these axioms, it is important for your understanding that you make your contentions known before going any further. If your own understanding of the Objectivist position is not important to you, then I would ask that you make this clear.

Also, in response to my clarification of my argument against theism providing a rational basis for induction, you wrote the following:

<< Since it does not follow that He ever does revise them, and since His will is always in accordance with His nature, this argument fails. Why would an all powerful, all knowing God have to "revise" anything anyway? I am sorry, you continue to set up a picture of a God that is inconsistent with my theology. >>

Your response is disappointingly weak. You say that "it does not follow that [your god] does revise [the things you presume to know]," which itself is a claim to knowledge. How do you know that your god does not revise them? How do you know that it does not follow from the supposition (inherent in your worldview) that it *can* revise them, that it does not revise them? If your god does revise the things that you presume to know, how would you know? If for instance you suppose that rocks are not consciousness, how would you know this? How would you know that your god has not made any rocks which are conscious? How would you know that it has not given consciousness to some rock in a Mexican desert, for instance? Really, how would you know? Bahnsen asks regarding the Christian god, "He could even make the stones cry out, couldn't He?" (*Always Ready*, pp. 109-110). Certainly you do not deny your god's ability to give stones consciousness and make them cry out, do you? If not, how would you know that right now your god has not assembled a chorus of pebbles on the side of some hill in the Andes, causing them to sing songs of praise to its eternal glory?

You ask: "Why would an all powerful, all knowing God have to 'revise' anything anyway?" That's a good question. Why would it do this? But you don't know that it wouldn't have a reason to do this, unless it told you specifically that it has no reason not to do this, since your epistemology is entirely dependent on its self-revelation. You certainly don't think it would need to consult with you first before revising anything it has created, do you?

How is any of this "inconsistent with [your] theology"? You yourself call your god "all powerful." Do you deny Van Til's claim that "God may at any time take one *fact* and set it into a new relation to created law" (*The Defense of the Faith*, p. 27)?

If not, then I'm afraid you need to do some more 'splainin'.

Regards,

Dawson

[September 17, 2009 10:41 AM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Unfortunately it is beginning to appear that Chris will not answer you Dawson. So in the interest of keeping this wonderful discussion going allow me to ask you this. How Mr Bethrick do you know that these core principles of objectivism that you have stated will not change in the future??? mmmm..... Ok, no I could not write that with a straight face.

The skeptic keeps asking how do you know things wont change? It seems to me what they really mean is how do you know they wont change in a completely arbitrary way. This seems well.... arbitrary, an expression of unwarranted extreme skepticism. A things identity in totality really does not change, for that very identity includes all the ways in which it can change, and if it changes in a way not included in our identity of it, well we expand and improve of conceptualization of its identity. Is Chris asking how do we know the universe wont just start acting in a totally chaotic way, the very next second? I guess we don't, but no one has given a reason why I should take that threat seriously, thus there seems no "reason" to do so.

[September 29, 2009 7:41 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hi Justin,

Good to hear from you again.

I am not surprised that Chris has not answered my question regarding the Objectivist axioms. Either he admits that the axioms are true, or he disputes their truth. But neither option is good for his position.

As for your question ("how do you know that these core principles of objectivism... will not change in the future?"), it's really quite simple. First, let us ask: what is meant by the concept 'future'? In my view, the concept 'future' denotes a continuation *from the present*. The standard understanding of the problem of induction, adored by presuppositionalists, implies that it is somehow fallacious to make projections of future happenings based on knowledge known in the present. This "makes sense" given their acceptance of the Humean conception of causation. I have discussed the problems with this conception of causation [here](#). Typically they believe that in order to use knowledge of the present to inform our projections of the future, we have to prove that nature is uniform. But this ignores several key facts, such as: (i) proof presupposes the uniformity of nature, and (ii) the uniformity of nature is essentially the consistent application of the axioms - which means: since the axioms do not need to be proven (they are presupposed in any proof), neither does their consistent application (e.g., the uniformity of nature). One cannot "account for" the uniformity of nature *without* the axioms. Hence my question to Chris.

For skeptics, "the future" is merely a stand-in for "the unknowable." In spite of its posturing, skepticism is actually opposed to knowledge. So it relishes any version of "the unknowable" because it seeks to call any claim to knowledge into dispute, an exercise which is ultimately self-defeating.

But for rational individuals, the concepts 'past', 'present' and 'future' are merely temporal designations. As such, their meaning entails certain preconditions which are implicitly affirmed whenever one speaks of things taking place in either the past, the present, or the future. Those preconditions are identified by the axioms. Thus we can ask the question: "the future *of what*?" Well, presumably the future of the reality which exists. "The future," then, refers to a continuation of the reality which exists from the present. It does not, therefore, refer to some alien universe whose physics constitute a reversal of those which apply in the reality which exists. We can imagine such a universe (think of [cartoons](#), for example), but only by dropping the context of what we do know.

Hume made a lot of mistakes in his epistemology, some very profound mistakes. Many of those mistakes influenced his understanding of induction and the skeptical conclusions which he drew regarding induction. So why should we accept his conclusions? Presuppositionalists point to Hume as if his conclusion regarding induction were sound. But they never show that it is sound. They simply assume that it is, and with this assumption they endorse all of Hume's relevant mistakes.

Regards,
Dawson

[September 29, 2009 10:13 AM](#)

[C.L. Bolt](#) said...

Dawson writes, "...your questions bring up many topics. So many, in fact, that a full response is not possible at this time...I'll see if I can get snag some moments here and there to compile a response...In the meantime, I wanted to ask you if you dispute the truth of the Objectivist axioms...make your contentions known before going any further."

Justin writes, "Unfortunately it is beginning to appear that Chris will not answer you Dawson."

Dawson writes, "I am not surprised that Chris has not answered my question regarding the Objectivist axioms." One would presumably think that if Hume is outdated and his problem easily dealt with it would not require so much writing to provide an answer to my questions. Recall from what Dawson has written that I am still awaiting a response from him. What he has provided thus far does not suffice. His comments indicate that he has more to say in order to try and answer my questions.

"My difficulty is with your lack of an explanation of how you know the causal conditions necessary for producing merlot in future experience coupled with your claims that you do know them. Your question, 'Are you supposing that it's still possible for merlot to be produced without the necessary causal conditions being in place?' begs the question due to the use of the word 'necessary'. You have not shown that the causal conditions you refer to are necessary with respect to future experience."

"How do you know that the relationship between an entity and its own actions is a necessary relationship?"

"If the law of identity functioned as you assume it does (applied to action) then I am not sure that there can be change. You have a much bigger problem though. How do you know what actions an entity is capable of?"

"How do you know that the entity of water is not in a necessary relationship with the action of producing merlot all by its lonesome?"

Why would the conditions necessary for water to turn into merlot have to exist in order for the water to turn into merlot in future experience? Dawson answered, "Well, that's pretty much the way reality is, Chris" which is begging the question.

In response to my question, "How do we know that the natures of entities will not change in future experience?" Dawson wrote that "Some entities do change". Might their actions then change as well?

So again, I am (and have been) awaiting a sufficient response to these types of questions that pertain to induction. As for the so called "Objectivist axioms"; it is necessary for Dawson to show in a much more specific manner how they are at all relevant to the discussion. So far he has been unable to do so.

I find the axioms to be incoherent. It may be that I just do not know enough about them. In either case I rightfully have difficulty accepting them.

For example if "existence exists" is "something exists; there is a reality" then I do not understand why the tenet would be expressed in such vague language. Do I believe that something exists? Yes, God exists, for example. Do I believe that there is a reality? I suppose that would depend upon how one defines "reality". I believe that sin is real, for example. If "existence exists" is the same thing as "something exists" then "existence" must be "something", but what is it and how is it known? Such vague language being utilized in the expression of an axiom makes me wary and raises suspicion that much more may be smuggled in somewhere down the line.

[October 06, 2009 11:17 AM](#)

[C.L. Bolt](#) said...

"The skeptic keeps asking how do you know things wont change?"

How do you know things will not change Justin, or more to the point, how do you know that they would need to change in order to fail to fulfill your expectations regarding them anyway? I keep asking these types of questions to show that there is no answer coming from within the non-Christian worldview.

"It seems to me what they really mean is how do you know they wont change in a completely arbitrary way. This

seems well.... arbitrary, an expression of unwarranted extreme skepticism.”

This has not been shown. Why is it unwarranted?

“A things identity in totality really does not change, for that very identity includes all the ways in which it can change ...”

Your statement is contradictory in that it posits that a thing’s identity in totality does not change and at the same time and in the same respect “that very” identity (in totality, of a thing) can change. Which is it? Are things capable of change or not? Are identities capable of change or not? What is the difference in an “identity in totality” and an identity not in totality? Is a thing different from its identity?

“...if it changes in a way not included in our identity of it, well we expand and improve of conceptualization of its identity.”

This does not answer Hume though, even if we can assert this after the horribly contradictory presentation you provide.

“Is Chris asking how do we know the universe wont just start acting in a totally chaotic way, the very next second?”

Sure, this is one thing I might ask. What is your answer?

“I guess we don’t”

Thank you for the concession that you are an irrationalist given that you do not expect the universe to act this way in the very next second.

“...but no one has given a reason why I should take that threat seriously, thus there seems no ‘reason’ to do so.”

Likewise and by your own concession no reason has been given for supposing that it will not be the case that the universe will start acting in a totally chaotic way the very next second, thus there seems no ‘reason’ not to take the “threat” seriously. You are just now starting to see the problem. :)

Your contradictory discussion of identity in an effort to solve the problem is inconsistent with your statement that we do not know that the universe will not just start acting in a totally chaotic way the very next second.

[October 06, 2009 11:19 AM](#)

[C.L. Bolt](#) said...

“This ‘makes sense’ given their acceptance of the Humean conception of causation. I have discussed the problems with this conception of causation here.”

Have you actually read Hume? He offers something quite like what you are presenting here. I am afraid that the solution is not as easy as saying that causation in Objectivism is drastically different so as to avoid Hume’s concerns. :) I have already addressed this attempt at a way out in my questions and plan to write more on it.

“Typically they believe that in order to use knowledge of the present to inform our projections of the future, we have to prove that nature is uniform. But this ignores several key facts, such as: (i) proof presupposes the uniformity of nature, and (ii) the uniformity of nature is essentially the consistent application of the axioms”

Ignores? I do not think it ignores these things at all. What difference does it make that the uniformity of nature must be presupposed? The skeptic is essentially asking, “Why presuppose it?” I do not know how someone could read Hume’s presuppositional response to his own problem that he subsequently refutes and not see this. It has not been shown how “consistent application of the axioms” solves the problem either, regardless of how many times Dawson repeats the “Objectivist axioms” as though they are philosophically insightful. Justin has done a wonderful job of showing at least one place trying to apply identity to induction leads us.

“For skeptics, ‘the future’ is merely a stand-in for ‘the unknowable’...But for rational individuals, the concepts ‘past’, ‘present’ and ‘future’ are merely temporal designations.”

The term future is not synonymous with the term unknowable and there is no need for a skeptic to assume that it is. Of course “past”, “present”, and “future” are temporal designations. So what? You have not provided anything that would lead one to believe that “preconditions” must therefore be “affirmed” at these different “times”. By the way, the skeptic is not just saying that we cannot know the future. Yes skepticism is ultimately self-defeating, but this realization in and of itself does not help the person who is forced into skepticism by consistently adhering to his or her worldview. Statements like, “the reality which exists” are, again, vague and do not solve the problem before us but may beg the question depending on their use.

“‘The future,’ then, refers to a continuation of the reality which exists from the present.”

No Dawson. How do you know that reality will continue from the present? How do you know that it will be the same? Are you saying that reality never changes, that specifics of reality never change, or what? Be careful lest you head down the same road as Justin! :)

“It does not, therefore, refer to some alien universe whose physics constitute a reversal of those which apply in the reality which exists.”

Why not? “That is just the way reality is.” Yeah, that begs the question. Is this the best Objectivism has to offer?

“Presuppositionalists point to Hume as if his conclusion regarding induction were sound. But they never show that it is sound. They simply assume that it is, and with this assumption they endorse all of Hume’s relevant mistakes.”

You can hand waive all day but it will not make the arguments and questions go away.

[October 06, 2009 11:50 AM](#)

[C.L. Bolt](#) said...

How do you know that your god does not revise [the things you presume to know]?

Revision is inconsistent with the character of the God of the Bible and His desire for His creatures to know.

How do you know that it does not follow from the supposition (inherent in your worldview) that it *can* revise them, that it does not revise them?

Since when does “can” imply “does”? I am not sure why this is a point of contention. The claim that “can” necessarily entails “does” is in need of supporting argument.

If your god does revise the things that you presume to know, how would you know?

God does not revise them so the question is invalid.

If for instance you suppose that rocks are not consciousness, how would you know this?

Rocks and consciousness are two different things.

How would you know that your god has not made any rocks which are conscious?

Of all of the rocks which have ever been discovered none have been conscious. Future experience will resemble past experience, thus it is unlikely that God has made any rocks which are conscious.

Certainly you do not deny your god’s ability to give stones consciousness and make them cry out, do you?

Nope.

But you don't know that it wouldn't have a reason to do this [revision], unless it told you specifically that it has no reason not to do this, since your epistemology is entirely dependent on its self-revelation.

What is the problem?

You certainly don't think it would need to consult with you first before revising anything it has created, do you?

Nope.

How is any of this "inconsistent with [your] theology"?

God is not in the business of the kind of radical revision you propose.

You yourself call your god "all powerful." Do you deny Van Til's claim that "God may at any time take one fact and set it into a new relation to created law" (The Defense of the Faith, p. 27)?

If I understand him correctly, no.

[October 06, 2009 12:24 PM](#)

[Post a Comment](#)