

Wednesday, October 07, 2009

Chris Bolt on Hume and Induction

Presuppositionalist Chris Bolt has raised some more questions about induction in his recent comments to [this blog](#) of mine.

Chris Bolt writes:

One would presumably think that if Hume is outdated and his problem easily dealt with it would not require so much writing to provide an answer to my questions.

Actually, what takes a lot of time and energy, two commodities which are in short supply for me presently, is undoing Hume's many errors. Or, does Bolt think that Hume made no errors? Does Bolt believe that Hume's analysis of induction is free of any error? Does Bolt think that Hume's argument about induction is *sound*? If Bolt thinks this, then he would require much schooling to understand where Hume went wrong than I have time for. Then again, why would this be my responsibility?

But I'm hoping to provide some pointers here for Bolt, though I'm supposing much of it will go over his head given his unfamiliarity with Objectivism.

Bolt writes:

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.

Yes, I have oodles to say about induction. But much of it has already been stated in other sources. I have already referred my readers to David Kelley's treatment of the topic (for instance, see [here](#)). Kelley addresses the matter directly, and points out several of Hume's errors in framing the matter. I would also recommend Ayn Rand's *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, which develops her theory of concepts. The importance of a good understanding of concepts cannot be over-emphasized, since induction is a *conceptual* process. You won't learn this fact from the bible, though. Nor will you learn it from Greg Bahnsen.

Unfortunately, the lack of a conceptual understanding of induction does not stop presuppositionalists from promoting Hume's problem of induction as a topic of debate with non-Christians. They apparently think not only that Hume's conception of the problem needs to be addressed on Hume's terms (which assumes that Hume's analysis of induction is faultless), but also that belief in the Christian god somehow overcomes the problem. The operative implication of the inductive version of TAG (the "transcendental argument for the existence of 'God'") goes essentially as follows: if non-Christians can produce no satisfactory answer to Hume (again, taking the validity of Hume's analysis of induction for granted), then Christianity is vindicated. Why? Because only a supernatural being such as the Christian god can guarantee the uniformity of nature.

As Brian Knapp writes:

In the nature of the case, the answer to the question of why it is reasonable to assume nature is and will continue to be uniform must originate from *outside* nature itself; that is, outside of man and his experiences. Any answer that originates from within nature will always ultimately be justified through the use of induction, as for any solution to apply to the unexperienced realm requires applying a conclusion drawn *from experience* to that which has not yet been experienced. ("Induction and the Unbeliever," *The Portable Presuppositionalist*, p. 131)

The first thing I notice about this analysis of induction and its justification, is that it does not benefit from an informed understanding of the *conceptual* nature of induction itself. One of the points which Kelley makes in his interaction with Hume is that "inductive generalization is not the only way to extract information from the senses" (

[Universals and Induction](#)). In fact, inductive generalization is not even *the primary* means by which we gather information of reality through the senses. On the contrary, we form our initial concepts on the basis of immediate perceptual input. The profound implications which this process has for expanding our knowledge beyond that which we perceive in the immediate moment is completely overlooked by the type of analysis which Knapp presents in his paper. Indeed, we would not even be able to perform inductive inferences without first having formed concepts in the manner which the objective theory of concepts explicates.

My view is not only that thinkers need to make a more critical examination of Hume's conception of induction, but also that we should recognize the inductive implications which concept-formation provides even before our very first inductive inference. I don't know why this should be so controversial, unless someone is trying to hide something.

This approach seems completely foreign to the presuppositionalist mindset, as if it had never been considered. Apologist James Anderson, for instance, has written an essay titled [Secular Responses to the Problem of Induction](#). In this essay, Anderson reviews several of the more popular attempts to address the problem of induction, including those endorsed by Frederick Will, Max Black, Karl Popper, Hans Reichenbach, et al. Curiously, Anderson does not consider Kelley's response to Hume. Indeed, I don't think it would serve Anderson's ends very well if he had. What is common to all the attempted answers to the problem of induction which Anderson does survey, is the fact that none of them points out that Hume's analysis of induction is faulty. Additionally, none of those attempted solutions addresses induction's nature as a *conceptual* process. When I pointed out to Anderson that

I'm always surprised, when reading a paper that attempts to deal with induction, that there is no discussion of concepts, the nature of their forming, or their relationship to inductive generalization, as if these issues did not matter

Anderson's telling response was:

Well, it's not immediately obvious to me how the nature of concept formation bears either on the description of the problem of induction or on the development of cogent solutions.

I call this admission "telling" because it really tells us all we need to know. The problem here is not that Hume's analysis of induction is faultless, but that many thinkers (perhaps most?) fail to understand induction as an extension of the process of abstraction, i.e., of concept-formation. Anderson's own conclusion, based on his survey of a select sampling of attempts to solve the problem of induction, is that

it is evident that there presently exists no satisfactory solution to the problem of induction from a secular perspective. ([Secular Responses to the Problem of Induction](#))

I find this deliciously ironic, for it is itself an example of a hasty generalization, i.e., a faulty inductive conclusion.

In short, the solution to the problem of induction involves two fundamental tasks: first, correcting the errors in Hume's understanding of induction (Hume did not understand induction as a *conceptual* process; neither do presuppositionalists); and second, recognizing how Rand's theory of concept-formation provides the working model of inductive generalization (as well as answers many of the misconceptions which attend the conventional understanding of the problem of induction, such as when Hume's analysis of inductive reasoning is taken for granted).

But in my opinion, Bolt is not anywhere near ready for any of this, as his own worldview has burdened his mind with much unnecessary baggage. For instance, he seems not to have understood one of the points which Justin Hall proffered in his own 29 Sept. comment:

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.

Now, I understand what Hall is trying to say here. But I don't expect Bolt to get it. Not now anyway. Bolt's own reaction to Hall's statement confirms that he does not understand how this factors into a proper understanding of induction.

But when it comes to a proper understanding of induction, where would Bolt go to find this? To the bible?

Please, this is a serious matter.

It would seem that a presuppositionalist - i.e., someone who feigns to be concerned about “presuppositions” - would have more appreciation for the foundations of inductive reasoning than Bolt displays. That is why I asked him to make it clear whether or not he disputes the truth of the Objectivist axioms.

Specifically, this is what I asked Bolt in my 17 Sept. comment:

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.

In response to this, Bolt writes (6 Oct.):

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.

Notice that, on the one hand, Bolt says that he “find[s] the axioms to be incoherent” (though he does not say why), but on the other hand says that I am “unable” to show how they relate to the topic under consideration. This latter judgment is quite hasty. As I indicated in my 17 Sept. comment, I have been quite busy over the past few weeks. That Bolt does not practice even a little charity here suggests that pursuing the matter with him will probably be fruitless for both of us.

The reason why I asked Bolt whether or not he disputes the truth of the Objectivist axioms, was not specifically to draw out their implications for inductive reasoning per se, but to make it clear where he stands. If he denies the truth of the Objectivist axioms outright, then I want to know this before wasting any more time trying to educate him on the topic of induction. As for their relevance to induction, this should not be difficult to see. Induction is a mental process about objects of one’s awareness. As such, induction presupposes the truth of the axioms; it presupposes the fact that there is a reality (the axiom of existence), that the one performing inductive inferences is in fact *aware* of objects (the axiom of consciousness), and that the objects of one’s awareness have a specific nature (the axiom of identity). Induction also presupposes a *relationship* between consciousness and its objects, which is identified by the primacy of existence. If Bolt thinks that these axioms are not true, and/or fails to recognize their fundamental importance to inductive reasoning, then I would wager that he is in sore need of substantial remedial tutoring before he would be in any position to understand, let alone appreciate, the Objectivist analysis of induction and its answer to Hume. Indeed, that Bolt needs all this spelled out to him explicitly, only proves my suspicion that he is simply not ready for a crash course on the Objectivist analysis of induction, that in fact he should start with the basics, beginning with a primer in the axioms.

In the same breath, Bolt acknowledges that he may simply not understand the axioms and their relation to induction sufficiently. If that's the case, then indeed he requires much schooling on the matter, and I do not know why this is my responsibility, especially if he insists on being unteachable on the matter. For all I know, it may be the case that he does not even recognize the fact that he assumes the truth of the Objectivist axioms every time he thinks, speaks and acts. Helping him understand this would be first-order business, long before we ever get to the conceptual mechanics of induction.

Bolt continues:

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.

Right after I have explained what "existence exists" means (see above), Bolt announces that he thinks its language is vague. How is the explicit recognition that existence exists, that there is a reality, *vague*? Bolt tells us about himself here, and says nothing about the axiom itself. Does the concept 'existence' have meaning in Bolt's view? Either it does, or it does not. To what does the concept 'existence' refer in Bolt's view? What does he think it denotes? Does it refer to something that exists, or to something that does not exist?

The language here is not vague. The axiom 'existence exists' identifies a fundamental truth using a single concept. If the axiom used more than one concept, we would be left asking: which is more fundamental? Rand avoided this by stating her irreducible primary as a single-concept axiom. In Objectivism, the concept 'existence' is a collective noun denoting everything that exists, which has existed, and which will exist.

It is wholly important that we not miss out on the purpose which the Objectivist axioms fulfill. They explicitly identify a relationship which is fundamental to *all* knowledge, as Porter explains:

Axiomatic concepts ['existence', 'consciousness', 'identity'] are metaphysical concepts, identifying the fundamental distinction and relation between consciousness and existence, between the knower and the known, between epistemology and ontology. (*Ayn Rand's Theory of Knowledge*, p. 223)

Those who do not want these relationships explicitly identified and understood, would do well to avoid Objectivism at all costs. But why would anyone not want to identify and understand these relationships? What is it that they want to protect? What are they trying to hide? Philosophies other than Objectivism have succeeded very well in keeping the nature of the relationship between consciousness and its objects out of mind and out of sight.

It hasn't been explicitly articulated, so philosophers feel no discomfort in straddling it. (Porter, *Ayn Rand's Theory of Knowledge*, p. 199)

I wholly agree with Porter, especially when he states:

I think the primacy of existence is the most important issue in philosophy. I think it's the real axiom of Objectivism. (*Ibid.*, p. 198)

What is Bolt's position on the primacy of existence? I asked, but he resists stating it for the record. Apparently Bolt has adopted the policy of "don't ask, don't tell." If so, why?

In mulling over the meaning of the axiom of existence, Bolt himself acknowledges its truth:

Do I believe that something exists? Yes

Was that so hard?

Then he hastens to state:

God exists, for example.

Already Bolt has derailed himself by confusing what is merely imaginary with what actually exists. Indeed, just by saying "God exists," Bolt performatively contradicts himself. He makes use of the primacy of existence while affirming a claim which denies the primacy of existence.

Bolt continues:

Do I believe that there is a reality? I suppose that would depend upon how one defines “reality”.

Conspicuously, Bolt does not tell us how he defines the concept ‘reality’. In Objectivism, reality is the realm of existence. In Christianity, however, reality is a combination of that which exists with that which the believer imagines. The earth exists, for instance, but so do supernatural beings which the believer enshrines in his imagination. Should we be surprised why Bolt does not divulge his definitions? I don’t think so.

Bolt goes on:

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.

If Bolt were truly concerned about illicit assumptions being “smuggled in somewhere down the line,” he should see the value which Objectivism provides. As the quote from Porter above rightly indicates, keeping the proper relationship between consciousness and its objects hidden from view, is key to smuggling illicit assumptions into one’s worldview. Objectivism deters this by making the proper relationship between the known and the process of knowing, by “identifying the fundamental distinction and relation between consciousness and existence, between the knower and the known, between epistemology and ontology,” *explicit*. You can’t hide from it once it’s been made explicit at the foundation of one’s worldview. Indeed, why would one want to?

Hopefully my points above will put Bolt’s fears to rest.

But what about the other axioms? Bolt only kicks around on the axiom of existence. He does not indicate whether or not he disputes the truth of the axioms of consciousness, identity and the primacy of existence. Instead, he wants to discuss higher-level issues pertaining to induction. But if Bolt disputes the truth of the Objectivist axioms, it’s unlikely that he’ll understand (let alone accept) anything I have to say on induction, since the Objectivist theory of induction which I hold presupposes the truth of the Objectivist axioms. As Brian Knapp puts it:

The issue at hand is truly presuppositional in nature. (“Induction and the Unbeliever,” *The Portable Presuppositionalist*, p. 121)

Just what are the presuppositions which Bolt holds in regard to the relationship between consciousness and its objects? Indeed, before Bolt can understand the Objectivist theory of induction, he would not only need to recognize the truth of the Objectivist axioms, but he would also need a good understanding of the Objectivist theory of concepts. But from what I can tell, Bolt is nowhere ready for this.

In my [29 Sept. comment](#) responding to Justin Hall, I wrote:

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

In response to this, Bolt writes:

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.

Notice that Bolt does not quote Hume to show that what he offered is “something quite like” what I have presented. He simply asserts that what Hume offers is similar to what I have presented, as if it were common knowledge. It’s not. Yes, I have read Hume, many times in fact. And contrary to what Bolt says here, Hume does not offer the conception of causation which Objectivism endorses. As I have already explained, Hume’s analysis of induction assumes the “event-based” model of causation, which conceives of causation as a relationship between events which happen to follow in succession. Hume writes:

All events seem entirely loose and separate. One event follows another; but we never can observe any tie

between them. They seem conjoined, but never connected. ([An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding](#))

Interestingly, it is clear from statements Bahnsen makes in his publications that he assumed the event-based theory of causation which underwrites Hume's understanding of induction. For instance, in his book *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings & Analysis*, Bahnsen writes:

If the mind of God does not sovereignly determine the relationship of every event to every other event according to His wise plan, then the way things are in the world and what happens there are random and indeterminate. In that case, there is no intelligible basis for holding that any experience is like any other experience, there is nothing objectively common to the two of them, and there is no causal connection between any two events - and thus they are meaningless and undecipherable. (P. 110n.64)

The Objectivist conception of causation is radically different from the Humean view in that it (Objectivism) views causation as a relationship between an *entity and its own actions* rather than merely a relationship between "events" (however the term may be defined). The Objectivist view of causation is essentially the application of the law of identity to action (since actions exist, they have identity), and constitutes the recognition that an entity's actions depend on its nature (hence it is a *necessary* relationship). This is axiomatic. It is also significant to a proper understanding of induction. And no, I never suggested that this is all there is to it, as Bolt seems to think. Objectivism does *not* say: "our conception of causation is different from Hume's, and that alone solves the problem of induction." The proper conception of causality is indeed very important to the matter, but it is not the *only* factor. There is also the theory of concepts. As Rand pointed out:

The process of observing the facts of reality and of integrating them into concepts is, in essence, a process of induction. (*Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, p. 28)

This is why, more and more, I have come to view concept-formation as providing the working model for inductive reasoning.

While presuppositionalists try to solve the problem of induction by (a) accepting Hume's analysis of induction and (b) pointing to an imaginary creator which somehow guarantees the uniformity of nature (which is stipulated in that imagination), Objectivism takes a radically different approach, including (a) correcting Hume's faulty analysis of induction and (b) understanding the conceptual nature of inductive reasoning explicitly.

Hume made numerous mistakes in his epistemology. But nowhere do I see Van Til or Bahnsen pointing this out when they deploy the inductive version of TAG. On the contrary, they seem to be counting on the potential that both apologists who wield TAG and those whom such apologists seek to engage, are simply unaware of Hume's mistakes. For instance, in his essay "Induction and the Unbeliever" (*The Portable Presuppositionalist*, pp. 118-142), presuppositionalist Brian Knapp makes no effort to point out Hume's mistakes. Indeed, doing so would be counter-productive to the intended outcome of TAG, which is essentially to elicit the response: "[Duh, I donno! Must be God did it!](#)"

I wrote:

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

Bolt responds:

Ignores? I do not think it ignores these things at all.

If the challenge is that one *prove* that nature is uniform (as my comment noted), then the challenge does in fact ignore the fact that proof presupposes the uniformity of nature. The uniformity of nature is not established by proof. To require a proof is to commit the fallacy of the stolen concept. But in his essay, Knapp doesn't seem to recognize this either.

Bolt goes on to ask:

What difference does it make that the uniformity of nature must be presupposed?

The difference which this makes is the difference between knowledge and fallacy. Axiomatic truths are not truths which must be established by means of proof. It is not the case that the uniformity must *merely* be presupposed - certainly not for its own sake. It is a precondition of meaning. But since this is ultimately axiomatic, that is not a problem for those who are willing to govern their cognition according to the constraints delineated by the axioms.

Bolt says:

The skeptic is essentially asking, "Why presuppose it?"

The very question "Why presuppose it?" itself presupposes it. The question would not be meaningful without it. That's all we need to point out to the skeptic. If he doesn't like it, he can pound sand. His likes and dislikes do not alter reality. Nor do they constitute a lien on man's cognition.

Bolt states:

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.

Nowhere did I say that the consistent application of the axioms "solves the problem [of induction]," but rather that "*the uniformity of nature is essentially the consistent application of the axioms*". Take a look at the axiom of identity. It is the recognition that to exist is to be something, to have a nature. If something exists, it is itself. As Rand rightly put it, "Existence is Identity" (*Atlas Shrugged*). How one could deny this truth and yet affirm the uniformity of nature is beyond me. One would need (very) good reason not to integrate new units into his knowledge according to this recognition once it's been made explicit. The skeptic is cognitively impotent at this point, since any attempt he makes to validate the move to jettison this recognition will itself assume the truth of this recognition. So he can only commit the fallacy of the stolen concept in asking us to pursue with him his skeptical course.

I wrote:

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.

Bolt responds:

The term future is not synonymous with the term unknowable

Of course it's not. But the skeptic's tactic is to pretend that it is, to treat it as if it were synonymous. Pointing out that it is not so synonymous effectively defuses his intended gambit.

Bolt continues:

and there is no need for a skeptic to assume that it is.

Of course he doesn't need to. But he often does nonetheless, not because he feels a *need* to do so, but because he's afraid of the consequences of not doing so. Just like presuppositionalists.

Bolt writes:

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".

The concepts 'past', 'present' and 'future' do all the providing themselves, since they have *meaning*. These are not first-level concepts. On the contrary, they are complex abstractions which rest on knowledge residing on the lower tiers of the knowledge hierarchy. This is why I raised the question, "the future *of what?*" The intention here is to remind us that the concept "future" does in fact have meaning, and that its meaning cannot obtain unless certain preconditions are understood to be in place. Those preconditions include, but are not limited to, the truths denoted

by the axioms.

Another, very crucial point about temporal designations (as which Bolt agrees the concepts 'past', 'present' and 'future' qualify), a point which most treatments of induction tend to miss, is the fact that in forming concepts of entities (and keep in mind that entities are what *act*), *time* is an *omitted measurement*. Moreover, *so is location*. This is significant.

In his essay "Induction and the Unbeliever" (in *The Portable Presuppositionalist*), Brian Knapp suggests that

an appeal to past experience in drawing conclusions about the future is the very definition of inductive reasoning (p. 126)

while earlier in his paper he states:

Although induction is primarily thought of in the relation of past events to future events, it is also relevant to the way in which a given event will occur in a different location. ...induction has both spatial as well as temporal applicability. (p. 122n.5)

How one conceives of induction in the first place has great significance on what problems it may pose for human cognition and how it is justified. Where for presuppositionalists like Knapp "induction is primarily thought of in the relation of past events to future events" (notice the primacy which is put on "events" here; compare with [Anderson's](#) definition of the "inductive principle" as "the principle that future unobserved instances will resemble past observed instances"), I tend to think of induction as a process of *reasoning from sample to population* (which is entity-based *and* conceptual in nature).

While Knapp is correct to say that we make inferences about future happenings as well as about happenings in different locations, what he fails to grasp *explicitly* is the fact that *time and place are omitted measurements*. This has profound implications for induction. In fact, this is what makes such inferences possible in the first place. Specifically, the fact that a concept integrating like entities into a single unit omits (i.e., de-specifies) temporal and spatial measurements, is what makes them available to our inferences about an entity's actions regardless of time and place. But the knowledge necessary for such inferences, i.e., the information which we need to inform such estimations, is already available to us in our formation of concepts of entities. Gotthelf summarizes as follows:

The integration distinctive of concept-formation begins with multiple perceptual grasps of a small number of individuals (for example, a child's noticing of some tables similar to each other and different from some nearby chairs), and moves to an *open-end* grasp of all relevantly similar individuals, past, present and future (for example, a grasp of *all* tables, past, present, and future). ([Ayn Rand on Concepts](#))

For instance, the concept 'man' includes *every* man who exists now, who has existed and who will exist, regardless of *how many* this might potentially be (after all, *who's* keeping count?), regardless of *when* any of them might live, and regardless of *where* they might exist. The concept 'man' includes men who are six feet tall as well as those who are four feet tall, those who are lean and muscular as well as those who are fat and slovenly, those who are young as well as those who are old, those who are clean-shaven as well as those wearing full beard, living in this century or in the sixth century BCE, in North America or New Zealand, etc. Since we ourselves are capable of forming concepts (which are open-ended in the manner described here), we are in effect able to have at least some knowledge, however abstract, of men whom we will never personally encounter in life. For instance, we can know, just by the concept which we have formed on the basis of a relatively very small sample of men, that the men living in other parts of the earth in previous centuries were, like the ones we do know, biological organisms, that they breathe air, that they have bones, skin, organs, needs, etc. We can know these things about men whose existence we hypothesize in our projections of the future. Why? Because time is an omitted measurement. Any units not possessing these attributes could not justifiably be integrated into the concept 'man'. In the case of such projections, induction uses the concepts which have been formed by an objective process (which Rand articulates in her *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*), and essentially employs it according to its *meaning*. Since measurement-omission is a key aspect of the abstraction process, variations within certain ranges - ranges are defined by the units which we do encounter, but which we expand on the basis of integrating new units which we encounter after originally forming the concept - are not disallowed in our inductive projections. What is disallowed, since the process of forming concepts is *objective*, is *context-dropping*. For instance, a man which is not biological, which lives by breathing sulfuric acid, which has ten legs, an exoskeleton, etc. We can *imagine* such things, but such

imaginings drop the context of what we learn about men in reality.

So not only do temporal designations themselves presuppose certain fundamental preconditions in order for them to have any meaning (let the skeptic affirm their meaning while denying their genetic roots), the fact that time is an omitted measurement in the formation of concepts of entities eliminates the skeptical hurdles which the Humean conception of induction arbitrarily imposes on human cognition (let the skeptic affirm that the formation of concepts does not omit measurements). The skeptic's angle simply implodes on itself. Meanwhile, the concept 'future', properly understood, simply does not have the adverse significance for inductive reasoning that the skeptic assumes it has.

I wrote:

"The future," then, refers to a continuation of the reality which exists from the present.

Bolt protests:

No Dawson. How do you know that reality will continue from the present?

I know this by my recognition of the fact that existence exists. This is absolute context, and is undefeatable. It is power.

Bolt then asks:

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! :)

Regardless of what I do and do not know, some things will change, while other things will not change. The population of Tokyo will change. The height of the tree I planted in my backyard will change. The truths denoted by the axioms will not change. Whether I know this or not is no impediment to existence. Existence exists. I merely observe, identify, wonder, and enjoy. And I enjoy it all, regardless of who disapproves.

I wrote:

[The concept 'future'] does not, therefore, refer to some alien universe whose physics constitute a reversal of those which apply in the reality which exists.

Bolt asks:

Why not?

Because its meaning has an objective basis. Let him who disputes, take up his dispute, and announce his view that concepts have no meaning. Otherwise, he would be wise to hold his tongue, and take a vow of silence. Or, he can join the Objectivists, and recognize that concepts do have meaning, and that their meaning has an objective basis. We all have this choice. What's your choice, Bolt?

I wrote:

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.

Bolt responded:

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

This statement very strongly suggests that Bolt does in fact think Hume's conclusion about induction is soundly established. It is hard to make sense of his statement otherwise.

At any rate, observing that an argument is faulty, is all one needs to do to "make it go away." If an argument is unsound, why should anyone need to pay it any mind? Unfortunately, Bolt has not shown that Hume's argument is

error-free. He can wave his hand all day, but that will not make the errors which an argument commits go away.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Induction](#)

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [12:00 PM](#)

31 Comments:

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

Apparently there are some “problems” with me stating that God exists:

“Already Bolt has derailed himself by confusing what is merely imaginary with what actually exists.”

The assertion that God is merely imaginary requires proof that was not offered with the assertion. This is begging the question with respect to the truth of the Christian worldview.

“Indeed, just by saying ‘God exists,’ Bolt performatively contradicts himself. He makes use of the primacy of existence while affirming a claim which denies the primacy of existence.”

This is begging the question with respect to the truth of the Objectivist worldview. It takes the “primacy of existence” and attempts to apply it to a foreign worldview. Perhaps more importantly, there is no explanation here of how affirming that God exists denies the primacy of existence.

“The axiom of existence: This is the axiom which states ‘existence exists’...In Objectivism, the concept ‘existence’ is a collective noun denoting everything that exists, which has existed, and which will exist.”

Ergo, everything that exists, has existed, and will exist exists.

It turns out that the oft repeated “axiom” is a tautology which is not at all the exclusive property of Objectivism.

[October 08, 2009 9:32 AM](#)

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

“As I indicated in my 17 Sept. comment, I have been quite busy over the past few weeks. That Bolt does not practice even a little charity here suggests that pursuing the matter with him will probably be fruitless for both of us.”

My comment pertaining to your inability to show how the axioms specifically relate to the topic refers to what you wrote prior to your absence. It has nothing to do with the period of silence during your absence which I am completely fine with and understand. During that time I did not post at all concerning anything you have written either here or elsewhere and due to this it was implied upon your return that I was apparently not going to continue the discussion.

Showing that Hume is wrong is your responsibility if you are attempting to offer the claim as part of your response to the concern over induction. While I appreciate references to books which lead to further learning about a topic such references do not constitute valid response in the context of even informal debate concerning that topic.

“Well, it’s not immediately obvious to me how the nature of concept formation bears either on the description of the problem of induction or on the development of cogent solutions.” - Anderson

I can certainly relate to Anderson as you do not make this connection explicit. You yourself do not even appear to “understand” it:

"...inductive generalization is not the only way to extract information from the senses" (Universals and Induction)." - Kelley

"In fact, inductive generalization is not even the primary means by which we gather information of reality through the senses." - Bethrick

vs

"The process of observing the facts of reality and of integrating them into concepts is, in essence, a process of induction. (Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology, p. 28)" - Rand

[October 08, 2009 9:33 AM](#)

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

"Notice that Bolt does not quote Hume to show that what he offered is 'something quite like' what I have presented."

Yes, I did.

"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

"The Objectivist view of causation is essentially the application of the law of identity to action (since actions exist, they have identity), and constitutes the recognition that an entity's actions depend on its nature (hence it is a necessary relationship)."

That you still do not see the problems with this is alarming. Trying to apply identity to the problem leads to the conclusion that there is no change. Your assertion that there is a necessary relationship between entities and their actions begs the question. There are a plethora of questions I have posed regarding this that you have refused to answer. You choose rather to reassert what you have already stated prior to the challenges set forth in the questions.

The supposedly "crucial" points about time and location are really not so crucial as you imagine them to be. I have already asked questions that go to the heart of your argument there. In lieu of answers to those questions you simply explained in greater detail the same view again.

"The very question 'Why presuppose it?' itself presupposes it. The question would not be meaningful without it. That's all we need to point out to the skeptic."

Now this is rather funny. The skeptic already sees that the question would not be meaningful without it. So what? That is an argument from consequences. The skeptic can concede that the question is meaningless and induction is irrational. That is skepticism! You, as a dogmatist, must answer the question.

[October 08, 2009 9:34 AM](#)

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

"...many thinkers (perhaps most?) fail to understand induction as an extension of the process of abstraction, i.e., of concept-formation..."

"... I'm supposing much of it will go over his head..."

"... Bolt is not anywhere near ready for any of this, as his own worldview has burdened his mind with much unnecessary baggage."

"Indeed, that Bolt needs all this spelled out to him explicitly, only proves my suspicion that he is simply not ready for a crash course on the Objectivist analysis of induction, that in fact he should start with the basics, beginning with a primer in the axioms."

“...indeed he requires much schooling on the matter, and I do not know why this is my responsibility...”

“Helping him understand this would be first-order business, long before we ever get to the conceptual mechanics of induction.”

“...if Bolt disputes the truth of the Objectivist axioms, it’s unlikely that he’ll understand (let alone accept) anything I have to say on induction...”

“Bolt is nowhere ready for this.”

“...he seems not to have understood one of the points which Justin Hall proffered...”

“Now, I understand what Hall is trying to say here. But I don’t expect Bolt to get it.”

“Bolt’s own reaction to Hall’s statement confirms that he does not understand how this factors into a proper understanding of induction.”

I “understand” Justin Hall’s statement just fine by the way, and have pointed out that it is blatantly contradictory.

You have consistently failed to answer my questions though you have written a substantial amount in your responses to me. I accept your concession that you are unable to provide an explanation of your worldview such that I might understand it and have the Problem of Induction resolved. Thanks for the discussion.

[October 08, 2009 9:35 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Bolt: “The assertion that God is merely imaginary requires proof that was not offered with the assertion.”

I’ve written much on the imaginary nature of theism on my blog. I see no need to repeat myself. Where have you interacted with it? Nowhere that I can see.

Bolt: “This is begging the question with respect to the truth of the Christian worldview.”

The very notion of “the truth of the Christian worldview” itself begs the question, Chris. How can you not see that you’re begging the question here?

I wrote: “Indeed, just by saying ‘God exists,’ Bolt performatively contradicts himself. He makes use of the primacy of existence while affirming a claim which denies the primacy of existence.”

Bolt responded: “This is begging the question with respect to the truth of the Objectivist worldview.”

Not at all. I’m simply being consistent with the Objectivist worldview. See Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings & Analysis*, p. 170n.42. Meanwhile, it is important to note that the only alternative to Objectivism, is some sort of *subjectivism*.

Bolt: “It takes the ‘primacy of existence’ and attempts to apply it to a foreign worldview.”

The primacy of existence identifies the proper relationship between consciousness and its objects. The fact that there is a relationship between consciousness and its objects is inescapable. The notion of a “foreign worldview” is insufficient to justify avoiding the issue of metaphysical primacy. Your book *The Portable Presuppositionalist* provides a number of definitions of the concept ‘worldview’ on pages 320-322. All of them presuppose the consciousness of the one holding a worldview, and in so doing they imply a relationship between consciousness and its objects.

Bolt: “Perhaps more importantly, there is no explanation here of how affirming that God exists denies the primacy of existence.”

This is a fact which I have already established elsewhere. For instance, see here:

[The Inherent Subjectivism of Theism](#)

If you think that the notion of a god is compatible with the primacy of existence, by all means, please lay out your

case.

I wrote: "The axiom of existence: This is the axiom which states 'existence exists'...In Objectivism, the concept 'existence' is a collective noun denoting everything that exists, which has existed, and which will exist."

Bolt: "Ergo, everything that exists, has existed, and will exist exists."

The axiom of existence does not argue for this conclusion. Nor does it necessarily imply it. Whenever you use the concept 'man', you are not implying that every unit which it subsumes presently exists. You use modifiers - such as "this man" or "the man *standing over there*" to narrow your reference specifically. Axiomatic concepts identify basic truths. At this level, such modifiers are not yet available; they are higher-level concepts. This is simply in keeping with the hierarchical structure of concepts. But if one has little understanding of the nature of concepts, such errors as the one you make here are not unexpected. This is why it takes so much to undo errors like those which Hume makes.

Bolt: "It turns out that the oft repeated "axiom" is a tautology which is not at all the exclusive property of Objectivism."

The axiom of existence is a tautology. No Objectivist would deny this. And no Objectivist would deny the fact that everyone presupposes its truth. It's not a matter of "exclusive property," but a matter of explicit identification and consistency. Where does Christianity explicitly identify the axioms which Objectivism identifies? Blank out.

Regards,
Dawson

[October 08, 2009 11:35 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Bolt: "Showing that Hume is wrong is your responsibility if you are attempting to offer the claim as part of your response to the concern over induction."

I've already point out Hume's mistakes on the concept of causation. Hume sees causation as a relationship between "events" rather than a relationship between an entity and its own actions. If entities exist and act, then this is the relationship which requires our attention in developing an *objective* concept of causation. Hume's concept of causation was not objective. Indeed, Hume did not think that concepts could be objective (another error of his). His epistemology assumes that concepts are put together *arbitrarily* rather than *objectively*. Do you agree with Hume here? He thought we started with sensations, when in fact we begin with perceptions. Do you agree with Hume here? Hume believed that perceptions were assembled volitionally, when in fact they are physiological and pre-volitional. Do you agree with Hume here?

On the contrary, Chris, if you think Hume's argument is sound, you need to argue for this view. As for pointing out Hume's errors, I have already directed you to Kelley's interaction with Hume, in which Kelley points out several key errors of the "Scottish master." One error is enough to call his position into question. Kelley cites several errors. Meanwhile, where is your argument that Hume's analysis of induction is faultless? I've not seen it.

Bolt quoted Kelley: "...inductive generalization is not the only way to extract information from the senses" (Universals and Induction)."

Then he quoted me: "In fact, inductive generalization is not even the primary means by which we gather information of reality through the senses."

Then he quoted Rand: "The process of observing the facts of reality and of integrating them into concepts is, in essence, a process of induction. (Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology, p. 28)"

Bolt supposedly thinks there's a conflict between the first two quotes (Kelley's and mine) and Rand's. Bolt ignores the fact that we *perceive* and make identifications directly on what we perceive, even before we form any concepts. If you've ever raised a child, you should be able to recognize this fact. A child can observe and identify specific

entities - such as her mother, her father, this toy vs. that toy - on the basis of perception. These are perceptual identifications; they are not concepts; they are *pre-conceptual*. They come before concept-formation, and must do so, for it is on the basis of such perceptions that the child will eventually form concepts. Even Rand was explicit in pointing out that perception comes before conceptualization (cf. ITOE, ch. 1).

Again, I was correct: Bolt is in sore need of comprehensive schooling on these matters. They are so foreign to his understanding that his entire worldview is in need of revision. Again, why is this my responsibility?

Regards,
Dawson

[October 08, 2009 12:02 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I wrote: "Notice that Bolt does not quote Hume to show that what he offered is 'something quite like' what I have presented."

Bolt responded: "Yes, I did."

He then quotes Hume: "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?"

This is not at all like what Objectivism endorses. It is simply Hume's ill-informed opinion. Where, for instance, does Objectivism affirm that the entities which we observe have a "secret nature"? Where does Objectivism hold that the "effects and influence" of the entities which we have observed "may change without any change in their sensible qualities"? Hume says "This happens sometimes, and with regard to some objects." But how does he know this? Then he simply asks: "Why may it not happen always, and with regard to all objects?" which indicates his own ignorance, not knowledge. A question is not an argument. Essentially, like all skeptics, Hume uses concepts to deny the conceptual level of cognition. This does not in any way resemble the Objectivist position. That Bolt supposes that it does, only indicates his ignorance of the Objectivist position, and underscores my earlier point that he is in sore need of comprehensive schooling on these and related topics before he'll ever be in a position to understand what the Objectivist position teaches.

The rest of Bolt's comments fare him no better. So I rest my case.

Regards,
Dawson

[October 08, 2009 12:13 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Taken from wikipedia
Formulation of the problem

In inductive reasoning, one makes a series of observations and infers a new claim based on them. For instance, from a series of observations that at sea-level (approximately 14.7 psi, or 101 kPa) samples of water freeze at 0°C (32°F), it seems valid to infer that the next sample of water will do the same, or that, in general, at sea-level water freezes at 0°C. That the next sample of water freezes under those conditions merely adds to the series of observations. First, it is not certain, regardless of the number of observations, that water always freezes at 0°C at sea-level. To be certain, it must be known that the law of nature is immutable. Second, the observations themselves do not establish the validity of inductive reasoning, except inductively. In other words, observations that inductive reasoning has worked in the past do not ensure that it will always work. This second problem is the problem of induction.

Oh dear... Mr Bethrick I seem to have a problem then. If I follow the second problem stated above to its logical conclusion, this problem of induction. Then I am begging the question in even reading your post and concluding it is in fact your post. Oh wait, thats right ,I don't demand nor require a formal proof from my senses that what I sense is in fact what I sense. The perceptually self evident comes before argumentation by induction. If however induction is only validated by earlier induction, thus begging the question, well to be honest I will have to ignore Chris and everything else too, so as not to commit a formal fallacy. For it is only through the senses that I know of him. Let me know if there is some other method for acquiring knowledge other then through the senses, and make sure to convey it to me by this other means.

As for the first problem, uh law of identity anyone? Oh yeah that goes out the window in a metaphysically subjective universe. Please someone remind me how god helps this in any way?

Man, does Hume actually expect me to insist on a formal proof of induction before I can jump out of the way of a speeding car that I sensed with my eyes and ears?

[October 08, 2009 9:35 PM](#)

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

Justin,

Your comments and source make it plain that you do not have a grasp of the problem.

Dawson has conceded that he cannot provide an understandable response to the problem, and you have conceded that you have no answer to the problem. May I remind you what you wrote:

"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"

Plug this into Hume's argument and the conclusion is that you are irrational.

"Oh wait, thats right ,I don't demand nor require a formal proof from my senses that what I sense is in fact what I sense."

This has nothing to do with the Problem of Induction.

"As for the first problem, uh law of identity anyone?"

I already showed the problems with this after your previous comment on this blog.

"Man, does Hume actually expect me to insist on a formal proof of induction before I can jump out of the way of a speeding car that I sensed with my eyes and ears?"

No, but you are irrational in doing so. See above.

[October 09, 2009 9:10 AM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

"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"

Chris what I meant by this was I have no obligation to defend myself against arbitrary claims. There is absolutely no evidence that he universe will start acting chaotic the next second, thus the claim that it will is groundless and I don't have to prove it wont. It is up the one claiming it will or might to prove his case. So when I said I don't know, I meant that literally, I have no knowledge of anyway in which the universe can go chaotic, thus I wont claim any, I don't know. Epistemology is supposed to be about knowledge not ignorance.

Plug this into Hume's argument and the conclusion is that you are irrational.

Hume seems to be saying that all forms of knowledge are inductive in nature. This ignores the fact that some facts are right there in front of our faces. Hume says that observations do not by themselves establish the soundness of inductive reasoning. Observations are themselves explicit recognition of A is A. From these we induct about entities, in the here and now, the past and the future as well as across space. In a simple case, I learn what a circle is, I now know that there are no square circles, not in New Zealand which I have never gone too, Not 65 million years ago which I can not go to, nor ever in the future. Hume appears to be saying I cant claim this because I cant go to any of these places or times. That I can be surprised some day by a circle with right angles. Basically saying I can be surprised so I cant have knowledge. Never mind the claim is its self is a claim to knowledge. Further in the end what is the real problem here, induction is a form or reasoning, do you want a logical proof for logic? Valid sense perceptions and the law of identity are pre conditions for logic

Also I noticed you did not interact at all with this

Oh yeah that goes out the window in a metaphysically subjective universe. Please someone remind me how god helps this in any way?

This is important for me Chris. I fully recognize that I am a fallible and a limited being, I am not all knowing or perfect. You may be right and might be able to argue successfully for your position, in which case I win, for I have come away with a new and profound understanding. So I think I have a grasp on the problem of induction, tho feel free to point me in the direction of source material if you want. However I fail to see how believing in a god that created the universe solves the problem of induction. Moreover it appears to add catastrophic problems such as metaphysical subjectivism which nullifies the law of identity. If you thought knowledge was hard or impossible without a proof of induction, try it without A is A!

Chris, I may not have grasped the problem correctly. However, how is it irrational to act on the perceptually self event knowledge and save my life from being run down by a car?

[October 09, 2009 9:57 AM](#)

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

Justin,

You have clearly stated that we cannot know whether or not the universe will start acting in a totally chaotic way in the very next second. The statement is not even close to what you are now saying it meant. You attempt to get around your statement by trying to import a meaning into what you wrote that is completely foreign to your text and is in no way contained in your text.

“There is absolutely no evidence that he universe will start acting chaotic the next second...”

This is irrelevant to the problem, though I think Dawson would disagree with me in this. There is likewise no evidence that the universe will continue as it has. You have already conceded that we cannot know what it will do.

“Hume seems to be saying that all forms of knowledge are inductive in nature.”

Perhaps according to Wikipedia, but Hume does not say this at all.

“In a simple case, I learn what a circle is, I now know that there are no square circles, not in New Zealand which I have never gone too, Not 65 million years ago which I can not go to, nor ever in the future. Hume appears to be saying I cant claim this because I cant go to any of these places or times.”

Hume does not say this either. Your illustration would fit under Hume's category of Relations of Ideas, and hence is completely irrelevant to the problem.

“Also I noticed you did not interact at all with this. Oh yeah that goes out the window in a metaphysically subjective

universe. Please someone remind me how god helps this in any way?"

You were referring to the Law of Identity; $A=A$. This law is affirmed in Scripture, so I have no idea what you mean when you state that it "goes out the window". I would, however, like to know what the Law of Identity looks like. Perhaps you are smelling it or feeling it...where might I go to experience the Law of Identity in this manner?

I appreciate the humility expressed in the end of your comment. Hume on the problem may be found here - <http://18th.eserver.org/hume-enquiry.html#4> If you look through the back and forth between Dawson and I you will see that he has recommended a number of books from the Objectivist position pertaining to the problem as well.

[October 09, 2009 12:40 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Chris, I am not trying to back port meaning into what I said earlier. The worst I can be accused of is sloppy verbage, which I concede. $A=A$ maybe affirmed in the bible, however this means nothing if everything is subject to the whims of a ruling conciseness. As for not understanding Hume's argument, well frankly I'll take what you say at face value and bow out for a while to educate myself on this philosopher. I have access to a large library of unread books on the subject. Oh so little time for the things id like to do!

One question for you tho, if god is the sustainer of the law of identity, if things are what they are because he wills it, how do you know he is not lying to you. This is the problem of a metaphysically subjective universe. And saying he said he wont lie wont cut it, he is after all in complete control of the very standard we would use to gauge the truth of his word.

oh and thanks for the recourse.

[October 09, 2009 2:20 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

oh one more thing, yeah I should not have used wikipedia as a source, I know better:)

[October 09, 2009 2:22 PM](#)

[Bill Snedden](#) said...

"One question for you [Bolt] tho, if god is the sustainer of the law of identity, if things are what they are because he wills it, how do you know he is not lying to you."

This seems odd. What does it mean to say that god "sustains" the law of identity? Or that "things are what they are because he wills it"? This view would seem to be internally self-contradictory.

If the Lol were NOT to be true unless God "willed it to be so", then God would not have to be anything in particular prior to so willing (because the Lol wouldn't yet exist). But if there aren't any particular objects, then "god" as a particular object wouldn't exist and thus couldn't create any such law. So the idea of god as "creator" of the Lol (or any logical law, for that matter) is simply nonsense.

So what would it mean to say that god "sustains" the Lol? That unless god constantly holds the Lol in his mind it will cease to be true? But this would imply that it's possible for it NOT to be true (i.e., that it's possible for god not to be god) and that seems equally nonsensical.

It seems clear that a state of affairs such that the Lol (and Law of Non-Contradiction and other such logical laws) is true is absolutely foundational (i.e., cannot fail to be the case) and that we can recognize this fact by the impossibility of the contrary (i.e., any attempt to argue against it necessarily involves its being true). So if this is the case, whither the claim that we need god to either instantiate or sustain such a reality?

[October 09, 2009 4:25 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

excellent point Bill, and it is not my position that god is required for law of identity, only that if god has complete control of the reality we are in, then we have not absolute objective reference. What is A can change from moment to moment without rhyme or reason. I however affirm the objectivist axioms, existence, identity and consciousness, so no need for god.

[October 09, 2009 6:47 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Bill wrote: "the idea of god as 'creator' of the Lol (or any logical law, for that matter) is simply nonsense."

You are correct, Bill. What the Christian offers is in fact the *subjective* view of the laws of logic, and it is affirmed explicitly by presuppositionalists. For instance, in a [debate with non-Christian Mitch LeBlanc](#), Christian apologist Joshua Whipps (aka "RazorsKiss" 0 a blogger buddy of Chris Bolt's) made the following statement:

<< I am going to argue that God is not only the ordainer, but creator of the logical laws we use - and that He transcends them, as we mentioned earlier, in Isaiah. >>

In terms of essentials, the Christian view is that the laws of logic find their source in an act of consciousness - which means: on the Christian view, the laws of logic are underwritten by the primacy of consciousness. This is subjectivism in its most overt form.

When Chris Bolt states that the law of identity is "affirmed in Scripture," he is probably referring to the statement put into the Judeo-Christian god's mouth by the author(s) of Exodus. At Ex. 3:14 we read the statement "I AM WHO I AM," which many apologists take to be an affirmation of the law of identity. I have already critiqued this claim [here](#).

As for the claim that the Christian god is presupposed by logic, I have dealt with this view in depth here:

[Does Logic Presuppose the Christian God?](#)

Now they want to tell us that induction presupposes an invisible magic being as well. And they call Objectivists irrational? They are one very confused bunch of dudes.

Regards,
Dawson

[October 09, 2009 9:07 PM](#)

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

I must hand it to you Dawson, you are very thorough. :) I do plan to continue to read your work as time allows.

The problem brought up here is a restatement of the Euthyphro Dilemma (See Plato's "Euthyphro"). It may apply to RK's position. I have not been able to speak with him much about it. So far as I understand him I do not hold the same position.

[October 09, 2009 10:55 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Chris wrote: "So far as I understand him I do not hold the same position."

Chris, I presume that you are speaking about Whipps' (RK's) position that the Christian god is "the creator of the laws of logic" here, and are announcing here that you do not share his view on this. If I presume correctly, how can this be the case? How can you and Whipps disagree on something so fundamental?

Both you and Whipps have appealed to what you call the "sensus divinitatus" as an epistemological resource - an important one at that. In the comments section of [this blog](#), for instance, you pointed to the "sensus divinitatus" as the a priori means by which you allegedly acquire awareness of your stated starting point (which you identified as "

the revelation of God”).

Joshua Whipps also appeals to the “sensus divinitatus” in [his debate with LeBlanc](#), where he refers to this mystical faculty as “the internal ‘sense’,” and claims that “the Christian” has this “in operation due to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer.” He goes on to say that “it’s the equivalent of having the author of the book standing over your shoulder, and correcting your faulty understandings, and continually adjusting your noetic “issues” as He also works to sanctify you in obedience to that revealed Word.”

If Whipps is truly benefiting from such a divinely guided faculty of knowledge as he claims, how could he be wrong when he identifies the Christian god as “the creator of the laws of logic”? If you’re god truly is communicating with believers directly in such a manner as Whipps describes, how can any two believers hold conflicting views on matters of such importance? Or, can it be the case that the your god communicates with believers through the “sensus divinitatus,” and believers still get it wrong?

Meanwhile, in *The Portable Presuppositionalist*, you yourself write (in “Redemption in Apologetics,” p. 162) that “Every fact is what it is because God has said it is what it is” (which confirms what I have written [here](#)). Presumably you hold that the laws of logic are factual, do you not? If so, how do you square your disagreement with Whipps’ view with your own claim here?

This book also contains a series of sections of quotes. In the section called “Logic and Reasoning” (p. 211), we find the following quote: “Logic is not independent of God” (quoting Notaro, *Revelation and Reason*, p. 156).

On page 214 of the same book, there is a quote from Van Til: “God is the one and only ultimate fact” (*Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p. 30).

On the very next page, there’s a quote from apologist James White: “Any fact, that is a fact, is a fact because God made it that way” (*The Dividing Line Broadcast*).

If your god is a “fact,” as Van Til holds, and “every fact is what it is because God has said it is what it is,” and “any fact... is a fact because God made it that way,” it seems that we would have to hold the view that the Christian god created itself as a fact, along with everything else (such as the laws of logic).

Very strange stuff here, and seems very confused.

Regards,
Dawson

[October 10, 2009 5:57 AM](#)

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

"Or, can it be the case that the your god communicates with believers through the 'sensus divinitatus,' and believers still get it wrong?"

Yes, this is the case.

"If your god is a 'fact,' as Van Til holds, and 'every fact is what it is because God has said it is what it is,' and 'any fact... is a fact because God made it that way,' it seems that we would have to hold the view that the Christian god created itself as a fact, along with everything else (such as the laws of logic)."

This is true if the authors quoted all mean the same thing when they use the term "fact", which I do not believe they do. Van Til elsewhere mentions that God is not a fact just like any other fact. Confusing? Yes. I do not think it is fatal though, he was not the best with the language he used.

In the quote from me the word "fact" refers to created facts which would not include the laws of logic.

[October 10, 2009 8:50 AM](#)

[NAL](#) said...

C.L. Bolt:

There is likewise no evidence that the universe will continue as it has.

I disagree. The universe is, for the most part, a deterministic system. What has happened in the past is evidence that allows for the reliable prediction of the future state of the universe. One can, with a high degree of certainty, induce the future state of the deterministic part of the universe and bound the random part.

[October 10, 2009 11:39 AM](#)

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

"What has happened in the past is evidence that allows for the reliable prediction of the future state of the universe."

This is only true if the future will resemble the past. How do you know that the future will resemble the past?

By the way, I like your blog.

[October 10, 2009 5:51 PM](#)

[NAL](#) said...

C.L. Bolt:

How do you know that the future will resemble the past?

I can know to a reasonable confidence because the universe is primarily a deterministic, and hence, predictable system. The deterministic nature of the universe has been established through scientific observations.

[October 10, 2009 9:48 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

I asked: "can it be the case that the your god communicates with believers through the 'sensus divinitatus,' and believers still get it wrong?"

Chris responded: "Yes, this is the case."

So are you suggesting that the "sensus divinitatus" communicated the same thing to both you and Whipps about the nature of logic (that it is not created by the Christian god), and somehow you got it right, and Whipps has gotten it wrong? How do you know it is not the other way around - that Whipps got it right and that you got it wrong?

On a broader level, how does the believer distinguish what he considers communications or guidance from the "sensus divinitatus" and his own imagination? Or emotion for that matter? Keep in mind that, while you have stated that "the revelation of God" is your starting point, the bible itself indicates that a type of emotion is the starting point of knowledge (namely *fear* - cf. Prov. 1:7). Emotion is the foundation of the believer's "knowledge," and his imagination is the backdrop of every fact. Van Til himself tells us how central a role imagination played in his choice to embrace Christianity. And like other Christians, his writings make it very clear that his god-belief is imaginative in nature. I've pointed this out numerous times on my blog.

Chris: "This is true if the authors quoted all mean the same thing when they use the term 'fact', which I do not believe they do. Van Til elsewhere mentions that God is not a fact just like any other fact."

The problem is not isolated to Van Til, as the quotes I listed came from other authors as well. None of the statements quoted make the distinction you're claiming here. That Van Til mentions something else in some other writing of his, is unimpressive. All men, including Van Til, have the ability to contradict themselves and each other,

especially when working from a subjective worldview like Christianity. For instance, Bahnsen holds that “miracles and resurrection do not in themselves imply deity” while Van Til says that “We say that Christ rose from the grave. We say further that this resurrection proves his divinity.” Similarly, you say logic is not created, while Whipps says it is. How can anyone reliably confirm which view is correct?

Chris: “Confusing? Yes. I do not think it is fatal though, he was not the best with the language he used.”

It’s incoherent, Chris. Moreover, it has no objective basis. You can only “defend” it by appealing to the storybook, which itself is simply a compilation of fantasies which grant metaphysical primacy to consciousness.

Chris: “In the quote from me the word ‘fact’ refers to created facts which would not include the laws of logic.”

I quickly scanned your essay again, but I could not find where you make this distinction. Can you point it out for me?

James White’s quote strongly suggests that the laws of logic are included in what he considers to be a creation of his god. Here’s the full quote (from *The Portable Presuppositionalist*, p. 215):

“I don’t believe there is such a thing as ‘neutral ground.’ Any fact, that is a fact, is a fact because God made it that way. *Any scientific truth, historical truth, philosophical truth* - all those things are that way because God made them that way and I would argue that you can’t know the facts without the Christian God in the first place.” (emphasis added)

Logic is part of epistemology, and epistemology is a branch of philosophy. How does White’s statement exclude the laws of logic as a divine creation? It seems specifically to disallow this. Did he misunderstand the “sensus divinitatus” as well?

Regards,
Dawson

[October 11, 2009 5:49 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Justin stated: “There is absolutely no evidence that the universe will start acting chaotic the next second...”

Chris: “This is irrelevant to the problem, though I think Dawson would disagree with me in this.”

Yes, I do disagree. Knowledge (objective knowledge, that is) is built on factual evidence, not on hypotheses which are arbitrary in nature (rightly understood - see OPAR pp. 163-171). If there is no evidence for a proposition, there is no need to take it seriously. If someone tells you that he has a dragon living in his garage but can produce no evidence for it, there’s no need to take that claim seriously. Feel free to disagree, Chris.

Chris: “There is likewise no evidence that the universe will continue as it has.”

There is: everything in the universe is evidence of itself, and coupled with the axioms (including the axiom of causality and the primacy of existence), everything in the universe is in fact evidence of its nature throughout its continuance. This applies to the universe as a whole. The universe would need to exist first in order to continue. So to speak of the continuation of the universe is to grant that its nature is what makes its continuation possible. That’s the axiom of identity at work.

Chris: “This is only true if the future will resemble the past.”

The statement “the future will resemble the past” is ambiguous and can be interpreted in a variety of ways. What does it mean to say that “the future will resemble the past”? It may mean something different to you than it does to me. Some facts obtain eternally, such as the fact that existence exists, the law of identity, the law of causality, etc. This is because time (on an objective understanding of time) presupposes these facts. To speak of “the future” is to grant, however implicitly, that these constants obtain in the projective estimates we make about future

happenings (since those estimates themselves are conceptual, and therefore require the constants in order to be meaningful). To question them is to assume them (cf. OPAR pp. 9-10). To deny them is to commit the fallacy of the stolen concept (cf. ITOE, pp. 59-61).

Chris: "How do you know that the future will resemble the past?"

This of course depends not only on what is meant by "the future will resemble the past," but on what is meant by "know" here. Typically in inductive predictions we are not speaking of a matter of certainty, but rather an estimate informed by facts presently known which implicitly includes the qualification that no unknown factor will contravene. Since we are neither omniscient nor infallible (and thus do not have a crystal ball awareness of what will happen), we need induction - which is *primarily* conceived, not as "an appeal to past experience in drawing conclusions about the future" (*The Portable Presuppositionalist*, p. 126), but as reasoning from sample to population within an entity class (which is a conceptual operation). On my view, induction is basically the application of the law of causality to entity classes, and is in fact an extension of the abstraction process. This is why I have stressed the importance of the proper understanding of causality and the need for an objective theory of concepts, neither of which informed Hume's understanding of the issue.

Since the law of causality is axiomatic, it is not and need not be justified by means of induction itself (Kelley demonstrates this). And since induction is essentially a conceptual process, the justification of concept-formation (which is provided by the objective theory of concepts) *is* the justification of induction. We have this (see ITOE, chapters 1-8).

As I have asked Chris before: Where would a Christian go for his theory of concepts? I've seen no answer to this.

Also, I've asked Chris to make his position clear on whether or not he thinks Hume's analysis of induction is error-free. He has resisted saying so.

Regards,
Dawson

[October 11, 2009 6:27 AM](#)

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

"How do you know that the future will resemble the past?"

"I can know to a reasonable confidence because the universe is primarily a deterministic, and hence, predictable system. The deterministic nature of the universe has been established through scientific observations."

You have stated that you can know that the future will resemble the past due to the nature of the universe. You appeal to the way that the universe *has been*. Your argument is thus that the future will resemble the past because in the past the future has resembled the past. This tells us nothing about the future, however. Sorry!

[October 11, 2009 7:58 PM](#)

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

"So are you suggesting that the "sensus divinitatus" communicated the same thing to both you and Whipps about the nature of logic (that it is not created by the Christian god), and somehow you got it right, and Whipps has gotten it wrong?"

No. The sensus divinitatus is the awareness of God. God has communicated to us, even you, in such a way that we know He exists. (I am imagining your reaction to this as I write it.) So far as I know it has little to do with this particular disagreement concerning logic, if it even is one.

"How do you know it is not the other way around - that Whipps got it right and that you got it wrong?"

We set the two views against one another (if they are not the same) and see which one holds up.

“None of the statements quoted make the distinction you’re claiming here.”

Correct, but they also do not disallow such a distinction. The definition of ambiguous terms is carried out through looking at the context. It is sometimes the case that there is an irreconcilable contradiction. This is certainly not beyond Van Til or any other human writer. The canon of Van Til’s work leads me to believe he was using “fact” in a different way. A look at the contexts might reveal even more to support this conclusion.

“For instance, Bahnsen holds that ‘miracles and resurrection do not in themselves imply deity’ while Van Til says that ‘We say that Christ rose from the grave. We say further that this resurrection proves his divinity.’”

“...in themselves...” Recall Bahnsen’s words concerning evidences and the worldview wherein they make sense during the Bahnsen Stein debate.

“I quickly scanned your essay again, but I could not find where you make this distinction. Can you point it out for me?”

I made it for you in the other comment. If there is a second edition I will try to add a footnote. Perhaps I will give you credit. :)

“How does White’s statement exclude the laws of logic as a divine creation?”

It may be that it does not. I do not know his view on this for certain.

You took note of RK’s disagreement with other presuppers in his position on logic and I think you would agree that, if we are understanding him correctly, he does not hold the majority position amongst presuppers. There are disagreements among those in this camp just as there are disagreements between those in your camp. We have to look no further than the comments on your recent posts to verify this. I am nowhere near as well read on presuppositionalism as many others you have likely already interacted with in the past and hence am not the best suited for dealing with exegetical issues from texts on the subject. If I were there in person I would shrug. Sorry.

“If there is no evidence for a proposition, there is no need to take it seriously. If someone tells you that he has a dragon living in his garage but can produce no evidence for it, there’s no need to take that claim seriously. Feel free to disagree, Chris.”

Certainly. :) Only I need to set this aside and the remainder of what you wrote for a few days. I also need to find a library around this place. Are you in agreement with David Kelley’s (and others; iirc George Smith for example) view on the openness of the Objectivist position?

[October 11, 2009 9:13 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

“So are you suggesting that the “sensus divinitatus” communicated the same thing to both you and Whipps about the nature of logic (that it is not created by the Christian god), and somehow you got it right, and Whipps has gotten it wrong?”

Chris: “No. The sensus divinitatus is the awareness of God.”

To be clear, what you mean here is that the “sensus divinitatus” is the *believer’s* awareness of the Christian god, right? Or, perhaps not just the believer’s, but every human being’s?

Chris: “God has communicated to us, even you, in such a way that we know He exists. (I am imagining your reaction to this as I write it.)”

I’ll eliminate your need to imagine here by giving you my reaction. When I look “inside” to view this “internal ‘sense’” by which I allegedly acquire awareness of the Christian god, I find that I am imagining the Christian god. When I read about Jesus in the gospel of Matthew, for instance, I’m imagining Jesus as I read the story. When I

pray, I'm imagining that an invisible magic being is out there listening to my prayer. When I look at the world around myself and see all the facts, I can, along with Van Til, imagine that the facts were put there by an invisible magic being which lurks "back of" everything I perceive. But I am honest enough to recognize that I am indeed only imagining these things, and my worldview - given its explicit identification of the primacy of existence - teaches me to distinguish between what is real and what is imaginary. Given my understanding and my choice to be honest, I have rejected god-belief.

Chris: "So far as I know it has little to do with this particular disagreement concerning logic, if it even is one."

Whipps tells us that his god, through the "sensus divinitatus," is standing behind him as he reads the bible, correcting his faulty understandings and continually adjusting his noetic "issues." He claims that this is part of the "operation due to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit" in him as a believer. Are you not benefiting from this?

I asked: "How do you know it is not the other way around - that Whipps got it right and that you got it wrong?"

Chris: "We set the two views against one another (if they are not the same) and see which one holds up."

"See"? Or do you really mean *speculate* here? In his debate, Joshua indicated that the "sensus divinitatus" will correct the believer's "faulty understandings" while "continually adjusting [his] noetic "issues" as He also works to sanctify you in obedience to that revealed Word." Do you agree that this is something that the "sensus divinitatus" does? If so, it's hard to see how you can both come to such wildly different views on the origin of logic. And how you propose that the conflict be resolved smacks of reliance on "autonomous reasoning."

[continued]

[October 12, 2009 5:59 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

[part II]

I wrote: "None of the statements quoted make the distinction you're claiming here."

Chris: "Correct, but they also do not disallow such a distinction."

On their plain reading, they do disallow the distinction you've inserted in there, after the fact. They are blanket generalizations allowing no exceptions. If the laws of logic are an exception, it seems that tutored apologists like yourself and James White would be sure to mention it. It seems that, what has happened, is that we have theological speculation presented here as fact, and when it is pointed out that the speculation conflicts with another speculation, the apologists double-back and try to make it seem that the earlier speculation wasn't quite as definitive as originally cast. If this were in the context of a fallible human endeavor, I could understand this. But Christians say their worldview comes from an infallible source, that there is a supernatural faculty in their minds which certifies their proclamations as incontestable truths from the beyond, which the rest of us are expected to take on faith. So when a defect is detected, especially of such proportions as the one under consideration here, the credibility of the whole shebang is called seriously into question. I'd think you of all people would appreciate this. After all, that's the kind of standard you hold non-Christian worldviews to.

Chris: "The definition of ambiguous terms is carried out through looking at the context."

"...carried out..."? I'm not sure what you mean here. Often the ambiguity of key terms, if not given clear definitions, can muddy the entire context. In such cases, the context may not be of any help in clearing up the confusion, but rather allow various interpretations with little resource to determine which is the best or which was the intended interpretation.

Chris: "The canon of Van Til's work leads me to believe he was using "fact" in a different way. A look at the contexts might reveal even more to support this conclusion."

I don't recall whether or where Van Til offers a definition of 'fact' (even when he did offer definitions, they were

typically not beyond criticism), but one thing is clear from Van Til's writings: he thinks facts are the product of an act of consciousness, that some consciousness holds metaphysical primacy over them, deciding whether or not they exist, determining what their nature is at whatever time they may exist, and reserving the "right" to change their natures at will. This is the subjective view of facts to a T.

[continued]

[October 12, 2009 6:01 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

[part III]

I wrote: "For instance, Bahnsen holds that 'miracles and resurrection do not in themselves imply deity' while Van Til says that 'We say that Christ rose from the grave. We say further that this resurrection proves his divinity.'"

Chris: "...in themselves..." Recall Bahnsen's words concerning evidences and the worldview wherein they make sense during the Bahnsen Stein debate."

Yes, I recall this. But I don't think it smoothes out the conflict here. Bahnsen says that "miracles and the resurrection do not in themselves *imply* deity." Van Til holds that the "resurrection *proves* his divinity." These are two very different views.

I asked: "How does White's statement exclude the laws of logic as a divine creation?"

Chris: "It may be that it does not. I do not know his view on this for certain."

So, the "sensus divinitatus" may have told White something different?

Chris: "You took note of RK's disagreement with other presuppers in his position on logic and I think you would agree that, if we are understanding him correctly, he does not hold the majority position amongst presuppers."

I've not conducted any surveys on this. Have you? I've encountered many presuppers over the past 10 or so years. Many have indicated what Whipps says in his debate. When I point out that this makes logic subjective, they try to double-back on what they had said, indicating that they really don't have a solid position on this, and are illicitly trying to use logic as a debating point. That seems to be the majority position among presuppers in my experience.

Chris: "There are disagreements among those in this camp just as there are disagreements between those in your camp."

There are disagreements among Objectivists on certain tangential issues, often in the application of some principle or another. But not on fundamentals. Objectivists don't find themselves in conflict over the axioms, the fact that man has reached the conceptual level of cognition, that morality is based on values rather than on duty, etc.

Meanwhile, Objectivists are not claiming a supernatural, omniscient and infallible source for their knowledge, while presuppers do. So while disagreements among Objectivists can reasonably be expected, they should be absent among presuppers if what they claim were true. Of course, I don't think it's true, so I'm not surprised when presuppers conflict (and they conflict probably more than presuppers themselves realize).

Chris: "Are you in agreement with David Kelley's (and others; iirc George Smith for example) view on the openness of the Objectivist position?"

Not entirely, but I tend to be very live and let live anyway. I don't find this to be a very important issue. By the way, I do not believe George Smith considers himself an Objectivist. I know I do not. When I last met with him (probably 1999?) he acknowledged admiration for Rand, but resisted calling himself an Objectivist.

Regards,
Dawson

[October 12, 2009 6:01 AM](#)

[NAL](#) said...

C.L. Bolt:

This tells us nothing about the future, however. Sorry!

If the state of the universe in the future was randomly determined, then this would be true. If one of the states of the universe, say the orbit of Mars, could not be predicted, then it would be impossible to land the rover spacecrafts on Mars. I'm sure you can think of other aspects of the universe that can be reliably predicted.

[October 13, 2009 6:49 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

It's true that we can reliably predict many aspects of the universe, especially those which are not under the direction of volition (such as the orbit of a planet). But presuppositionalists like Chris think that their god's existence and character are a necessary precondition for our ability to do this. In other words, on the Christian view, induction requires a basis in the primacy of consciousness. This is the storybook understanding of induction which Christianity promotes. In reality, induction actually presupposes the primacy of existence, since it is a conceptual operation, and concepts depend on the primacy of existence. This is the conceptual understanding of induction. Christians lack a conceptual understanding of induction because they lack an understanding of concepts to begin with. I have asked Chris several times where he as a Christian would get a theory of concepts. I don't think it would be the Sermon on the Mount. But who knows? He won't say.

Regards,
Dawson

[October 13, 2009 7:59 PM](#)

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