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Does Logic Presuppose the Christian God? Part II: Reasons Why Logic Cannot Presuppose the Christian God, #2: Christianity's Lack of Concept Theory

The lack of a good understanding of what concepts are, how they are formed, and how they relate to reality, is one of the chief reasons why someone might be seduced into supposing that logic can be "accounted for" by appealing to a "supernatural mind." When apologists affirm that there is some fundamental connection between logic and the nature of their god, they are in effect announcing that they do not have a *conceptual* understanding of logic by treating it as something other than the function of a human mind. As pointed out above, logic is the method of acquiring knowledge suited to a mind which is neither omniscient nor infallible; an omniscient and infallible mind would have no use for logical inference, because it wouldn't need to infer its knowledge in the first place. Essentially, logic is required for learning and confirming what one has learned, and an omniscient and infallible being cannot learn in the first place (for learning presupposes prior ignorance of what has been learned). Because the presuppositionalist case for logic presupposing the Christian god fails to take these points into account, it is evident that lurking behind the presuppositionalist defense is a fundamental disregard for the general nature of the human mind as the proper precondition for the laws of logic.

Logic's Conceptual Nature

Since man's sum of knowledge is something he develops throughout the course of his life as he learns about reality and confirms or disconfirms things which he has learned, his knowledge has a hierarchical structure. Since his knowledge takes the form of conceptual integration, the general nature of this structure has certain requisite features, such as its base in perceptual awareness. Our initial concepts (including of course axiomatic concepts) are formed on the basis of perceptual input. Concepts so formed can of course be integrated into higher abstractions, but only subsequently, after these initial, "lower-level" concepts have been formed, for they would first need to exist in order to serve as units for further integration. Man's higher-level knowledge, then, rests on the validity of his lower-level knowledge, which in turn stands on the perceptual level of his awareness. Peikoff's own illustrative description of the hierarchical nature of knowledge is worth noting:

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

The nature of logic is intimately bound to the hierarchical structure of man's knowledge, in that it has a two-fold purpose: integration and reduction. Logic provides the mechanics, as it were, for developing knowledge, for building the "city of towering skyscrapers" which characterizes the sum of his knowledge. It does this by guiding inferences from previously validated knowledge, by teaching man to draw conclusions from data he has gathered from reality. Logic also works in the reverse, allowing a thinker to retrace his integrations back down to their fundamentals, to discover the premises which lead to the conclusions he holds, to reduce what he has learned to its basis in perceptual awareness. All of this indicates how inherently suited logic is for the non-omniscient, fallible mind which man possesses.

But not only is logic's purpose bound to developing man's conceptual hierarchy, its very principles are conceptual in nature and so is the suitability of their application to this task. The law of identity, for instance, would not be available to man for this purpose if he could not first form the concept 'identity'. The concept 'identity' is an axiomatic concept. And as a concept, it is *open-ended*, which means it can apply to anything which exists. The standard equational formulation of the law of identity, i.e., *A is A*, is so useful because the term *A* can represent anything which exists. For example, a rock is a rock, a river is a river, goats are goats, financial institutions are financial institutions. This *open-endedness* of the concept 'identity' and all other concepts (including those which inform logical principles) is its *universality*, which is a product of the abstraction process known as *measurement-omission*. Briefly, this is the process by which the specifics of the objects which we perceive are treated

as variables which must exist, but can exist in any quantity, thus allowing those objects to be integrated with other objects which are similar in some relevant way to form a concept. The concept 'man', for instance, includes men who are 5'2" tall as well as those who are 6'4" tall, those who weigh 120 lbs as well as those who weigh 320 lbs, those with light skin as well as those who have dark skin, those who are twenty-two years old as well as those who are sixty-two years old, those who live today as well as those who lived two millennia ago, etc. The open-endedness or *universality* of conceptual knowledge is specific to man's consciousness *because* he is neither omniscient nor infallible. It is this understanding of universality which lead Ayn Rand to discover the mathematical nature of conceptual knowledge:

The basic principle of concept-formation (which states that omitted measurements must exist in *some* quantity, but may exist in *any* quantity) is the equivalent of the basic principle of algebra, which states that algebraic symbols must be given *some* value, but may be given *any* value. In this sense and respect, perceptual awareness is arithmetic, but *conceptual awareness is the algebra of cognition...* The relationship of concepts to their constituent particulars is the same as the relationship of algebraic symbols to numbers. In the equation $2a = a + a$, any number may be substituted for the symbol "a" without affecting the truth of the equation. For instance: $2 \times 5 = 5 + 5$, or $2 \times 5,000,000 = 5,000,000 + 5,000,000$. In the same manner, by the same psychoepistemological method, a concept is used as an algebraic symbol that stands for *any* of the arithmetical sequence of units it subsumes. (*Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, p. 18)

Given this *algebraic* understanding of a concept's universality, it does not take a great leap to understand how this applies to logical form. Since the terms in an argument can themselves be concepts, an argument can be made for any conclusion one seeks to establish (even conclusions which are not true). This is easiest to see in the case of a simple syllogism. Take for instance the standard Socrates syllogism:

Premise: All men are mortal.
Premise: Socrates is a man.
Conclusion: Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

The argument here begins with a general statement about an entire class of units, namely "all men." Notice the use of concepts here, the key concepts being 'men' and 'mortal'. In the second premise a specific unit's inclusion in the concept 'men' is affirmed, which allows the inference stated in the conclusion that, because an attribute applies to all units in the concept 'men', it therefore applies to a specified unit which is a member of that class. All this is made possible by man's ability to conceptualize.

But the conceptual aspects of logical syllogism do not stop there. Notice that the very *form* of the argument can be used to argue other conclusions by replacing its terms with other terms. For instance:

Premise: All cats are mammals.
Premise: Morris is a cat.
Conclusion: Therefore, Morris is a mammal.

Here we have the same argument *form* being used to argue for a different conclusion. This is possible because the form of the argument itself has a conceptual aspect to it. To use Rand's language above: an argument *must* have some terms, but it can have *any* terms. The argument can be about men, cats, mammals, paper clips, moral injunctions, planetary movement, or logical form itself. An argument can even be made for conclusions which are not true. For instance:

Premise: All accounts of UFO sightings are true.
Premise: Marshall Applewhite's account is an account of a UFO sighting.
Conclusion: Therefore, Marshall Applewhite's account is true.

Or, consider the following:

Premise: All theistic arguments are sound.
Premise: TAG is a theistic argument.
Conclusion: Therefore, TAG is sound.

Naturally, we could expect even presuppositionalists to reject this argument, since it is unlikely that they themselves would assent to the first premise.

There are, then, various key aspects of logic, including its universality, its two-fold purpose and its suitability to the non-omniscient, fallible nature of man's mind, which are directly related to its conceptual nature. A good understanding of concepts will bring these points out so that we can recognize them explicitly and understand how they apply to man's mind in general and logic's applicability in man's quest for knowledge. And it is precisely this understanding which seems completely absent from presuppositionalism's case for associating logic with the Christian god.

Bahnsen's Mishandling of Universality in Logic

Very often, the "case" for logic having its foundations in the Christian deity takes the form of a false dichotomy, where the pro-Christian side is affirmed with little explanation and the contra-Christian side is denigrated to such a degree that no one would want to affirm it. Greg Bahnsen's views on the topic are not atypical in this regard:

If the laws of science, the laws of logic, and the laws of morality are not seen as expressions of the unchanging mind of God, then the notion of universal and absolute "laws" or the concept of order in the contingent, changing world of matter makes no sense whatsoever. In what way could anything truly be universal and law-abiding when every event is isolated and random? If universality is supposed to be objective, then there is no justification for holding to it on the basis of man's limited experience, whereas if universality is subjective (internal to man's thinking), then it is arbitrarily imposed by man's mind on his experience without warrant. (*Van Til's Apologetic: Readings & Analysis*, p. 110n.65.)

Clearly what Bahnsen was missing here was a good understanding of universality, which is an aspect of concepts given their *open-endedness*, as I explain in my blog [Demystifying Universality](#).

It is important to note that Bahnsen is simply wrong to imply that *all* facts in the universe are "changing." There is no reason why a non-Christian philosophy cannot identify certain fundamental facts which in fact do not change. For instance, the fact that the universe exists does not change; if it changed, none of us would be able to worry about these matters in the first place. But other facts in the universe do not change. For instance, the fact that the objects of consciousness exist independent of consciousness does not change. The fact that man needs to breathe in order to live does not change. The fact that an appropriate amount of heat will cause water to boil does not change. The fact that cows have eyes does not change. The fact that paper is made of some substance found in the universe does not change. There are many constants available to us right here in the realm in which we live, since there are so many facts which do not change.

Also, observe how Bahnsen fails to support his initial statement here, namely his claim that "if the laws of science [etc.] are not seen as expressions of the unchanging mind of God, then the notion of universal and absolute 'laws'... make no sense whatsoever." Instead of offering an argument to support this claim, he follows it first with a question, and then a universally negative assertion which again is not supported with an argument. Let's examine these in turn.

Bahnsen asks the question: "In what way could anything truly be universal and law-abiding when every event is isolated and random?" The question is phrased in a manner such that it seems to answer itself. Presumably if "every event is isolated and random," then nothing could "truly be universal and law-abiding" (save perhaps the supposition that "every event is isolated and random"?). Again, notice how Bahnsen's point here assumes an either-or scenario: either the Christian god exists, or we're faced with a "changing world of matter" where "every event is isolated and random." And even though this dichotomy is not defended by Bahnsen (he simply assumes it), his statements and questions make no sense without it. But as I pointed out above, I see no reason why non-believers would be forced into supposing that the world is ever-changing, and that "every event is isolated and random." In fact, just to categorize something as an event means that whatever it is that one is so categorizing satisfies certain criteria, such as the fact that it has happened, that it has a causal basis, that it is an event as opposed to something else (like a hairball or chocolate bar, etc.). So the "random" part here (if it is supposed to mean "occurring without cause") can be rejected here (while the apologist's insistence on it amounts to deliberate misrepresentation of a rival position). And why suppose that "every event is isolated"? Again, Bahnsen does not say why non-theism necessarily leads to such a view. I certainly don't think it does. We can recognize connections between events, such as the sun shining on the earth and the temperature rising, a car running out of gas and the need to push it to the nearest gas station, or the rise of the Third Reich and World War II.

But perhaps Bahnsen is trying to say that without the existence of his god, such conceptualized connections could not be made. In such a case, we can rightly ask: What does the “God” part have to do with it? If his response is that his god is needed for universality in cognition, then we can safely put this mistaken notion to rest. This brings us to Bahnsen’s universally negative statement:

If universality is supposed to be objective, then there is no justification for holding to it on the basis of man’s limited experience...

Statements like this (which, given its universally negative nature, are quite difficult to defend) indicate to me that Bahnsen did not have a *conceptual* understanding of universality. A key give-away here is the implication that “man’s limited experience” would keep him from cognition on a universal scale. But what is the alternative to “limited experience” if not “unlimited experience”? I don’t think there is such a thing, even on theism’s premises. Even if one affirms the existence of an omniscient god, it too would only have “limited experience.” A god’s omniscience wouldn’t change this. Suppose this god is aware of every thing that exists. That might be an enormous number of things, but it would still only be a *finite* number of things (the redundant expression “finite number” being necessary for purposes of clarification and emphasis). As Luke 12:7 says, “even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” If a god experiences things, it experiences only those things which it experiences, which means: its experience is limited to itself. Since to exist is to be something specific, since A is A, experience is experience, and one’s experience is itself and nothing more than this.

But suppose that the theist explains this to mean that his god is aware of every member belonging to every category, that its direct awareness of things is literally universal. Say for instance that when the history of the earth is all said and done, there will have been exactly one trillion human beings which have lived. The theist of course would claim that his god would have direct awareness of all these individuals (let’s call this “comprehensive awareness”) and that this is most likely what Bahnsen would have had in mind as the alternative to “man’s limited experience.” Fine, let’s say that this is what Bahnsen may have had in mind. But even here it’s clear that it’s alleged experience would still be limited, specifically to those (hypothetical) one trillion human beings, and not “unlimited.”

The presuppositionalist may concede this point but say it gains no significant ground for the non-theist. He may point out that Bahnsen believed that universality presupposed such comprehensive awareness of individuals. But does it? Is it really the case that universality is possible only so long as there’s a mind which does have such comprehensive awareness? If that were the case, and the Christian god is that mind which enjoys such maximal awareness, how does that give man universal categories? It seems that this is where presuppositionalism is destined to fall apart, for it fails to offer a clear account of how man forms universal categories in the first place.

One of the more impressive features of Ayn Rand’s theory of concepts is its illustration of how the human mind can form concepts on the scant basis of only *two* units. Far from needing the kind of comprehensive awareness mentioned above, the objective theory of defines a concept as “a mental integration of *two* or more units which are isolated according to a specific characteristic(s) and united by a specific definition” (*Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, p. 10, emphasis added). Take the concept ‘ball’ for example. On the Objectivist account, a child needs to have awareness of only two specific balls to form a concept integrating them into a mental unit. Say one is a basketball, and the other a ping pong ball. Both have similarity in the fact that they both exist, they are both round, they both roll on the floor, they both bounce, etc. They are also dissimilar in certain ways: the basketball is much larger than the ping pong ball, he can carry the ping pong ball in one hand, but needs two to carry the basketball, the ping pong ball is white and has very little mass while the basketball is orange with black stripes and heavy, etc. The child forms the concept ‘ball’ by integrating these two units by reference to a specific characteristic which they share and omitting specific measurements which distinguish them from one another. This allows him to integrate new units which he’ll discover later, such as tennis balls, baseballs, billiard balls, etc., into the same concept. Because the concept does not specify the quantities in which the omitted measurements must exist, the concept is *open-ended* such that later-discovered units can be integrated along with these previously observed units without contradiction. It is, roughly, in this way that even a child is capable of forming universal categories. He did not need “comprehensive awareness” of each and every ball in existence in order to do this. In fact, it is because man’s experience *is* limited, because man is *not* omniscient, because he does not have “comprehensive awareness,” that universality is both possible and important to him. Universality treats a potential infinity of units as a single whole. It is because man’s awareness is limited that he requires a mode of cognition which allows him to treat a potential infinity as a single unit. Man’s mind can hold only so much in his immediate awareness at any given time, and concepts allow him to economize his cognition. No one knows how many balls exist, have existed and will exist, but this knowledge is not

required to form the concept 'ball'. And if someone did have such knowledge, concepts would be useless to him, since he'd have "comprehensive awareness" of every unit, making the economizing virtues of conceptualized awareness of no value whatsoever. Man's justification for universality, then, is not Christian god-belief, but the objective theory of concepts. Bahnsen's notion that a supernatural, omniscient mind is needed to explain or "account for" universality, is a case of missing the point in the grandest scale imaginable.

As for Bahnsen's understanding of what universality is as it pertains to human knowledge, all that seems important to him is that it's only available if his god exists. Beyond this it is unclear, especially when he entertains the proposal that "if universality is subjective..., then it is arbitrarily imposed by man's mind on his experience without warrant." His parenthetical "(internal to man's thinking)" is of little help here. Is he denying that universality is an aspect of the conceptual level of cognition? But again, the charge of subjectivism can be answered here by the objective theory of concepts: If universality is the result of an objective process of abstraction on the basis of perceptual input (as the objective theory of concepts teaches), then as an aspect of concepts it is *object-bound*, i.e., objective rather than subjective. In such a case, universality is not "arbitrarily imposed by man's mind on his experience," but an important component of a method of cognition which is consistent with the primacy of existence metaphysics.

The chief point here is that logic is *conceptual* in nature, which in turn leads to three relevant truths. Because logic is conceptual in nature:

- (i) the basis of logic is the facts of the universe as they are grasped by a consciousness which possesses its knowledge in conceptual form (as opposed to something which is only [imaginary](#));
- (ii) it is not the case that logic could find its basis in a mind which would not possess its knowledge in conceptual form. (See my blog [Would an Omniscient Mind Have Knowledge in Conceptual Form?](#))
- (iii) a good theory of concepts is crucial to a good understanding of the meta-nature of logic.

In regard to this last point, I don't think you will find any theory of concepts in the bible (let alone a *good* one), and I would not recommend searching for one in the presuppositionalist literature, either. For this, I refer readers to Ayn Rand's *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, which presents the Objectivist theory of abstraction.

Impact on Theistic Arguments

It is important to understand how a lack of a good understanding of the nature of concepts can enable bad theistic arguments. The presuppositionalist argument that logic presupposes the Christian god is a case in point. Below we will observe how such an argument might proceed in action.

As we have seen in the foregoing and in my [examination of presuppositionalist statements about logic](#), the overall scheme of arguments for logic presupposing the Christian god generally takes a two-part format: first it is stated that logic poses insurmountable philosophical tangles for the non-believer due to certain positions (usually inserted by apologists into the non-believer's mouth) which allegedly follow as a necessary result from non-belief; then it is stated that logic finds its basis in the nature of the Christian god given various attributes which it is said to possess, such as its eternity, its immutability, its inability to lie, its absoluteness, etc.

In developing their case, apologists often treat logical principles as mental laws which hold by some mysterious force called "necessity." The implication here, it is said, is that these "mental laws" (because they are "necessary") would obtain even if no human beings were around to mentally grasp them. People come and go, live and die, but these "mental laws" continue indefinitely. They're "eternal" (e.g., they won't "die" with us) as well as "universal" (they're true for everyone, everywhere), and thus they are "necessary" (magically binding?). Dominic Tennant, who defends [such an argument](#), takes it up as follows:

...mental laws do imply a mind. By definition, the mental entails a mind; and so universal, necessary mental laws therefore must imply a universal, necessary mental mind. We could otherwise phrase this by saying that such laws must imply an aseitic God. A necessarily existent, noncontingent, underived, and immaterial Mind exists.

At first blush, the argument presented here seems as poignant as it is simple: mental laws require a mind, and since

those mental laws are universal and necessary, it follows that they entail the existence of a universal and necessary mind. This universal and necessary mind is “an aseitic God” - i.e., an eternally and necessarily existing supernatural mind.

To be sure, this ointment catches many flies.

The problem is that its seeming poignancy and simplicity are merely a disguise for its disastrous superficiality. Aside from the fact that this argument commits the fallacy of non sequitur (it does not follow that because mental laws are universal and necessary, they “therefore must imply a universal, necessary mental mind”), what’s lacking is a good theory of concepts as well an understanding of objectivity in terms of the subject-object relationship. In fact, it is in both these areas which certain key confusions are exploited by such arguments in order to make their theistic conclusions seem cogent. In regard to objectivity here, briefly, I will point out that the objective theory of truth assumes the metaphysical primacy of existence, for this is the metaphysical position which recognizes that the objects of consciousness exist independent of the intentions of the knowing subject. It is this fundamental truth - that the objects of consciousness exist independent of the subject of consciousness - which underlies statements like “wishing doesn’t make it so.” But already theism is at a grave disadvantage here, since theism and the primacy of existence (i.e., the principle of objectivity) are in fundamental conflict. (In regard to this latter topic, see [my several blogs on the topic.](#))

But the problems for such arguments do not stop there. We have yet to see how a poor understanding of concepts can make arguments such as Tennant’s seem so compelling. To expose this, let’s explore his reasoning a little deeper.

The example of “mental laws” which Tennant cites is the old Socrates syllogism which we saw above:

Premise 1: All men are mortal.

Premise 2: Socrates is a man.

Conclusion: Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

According to Tennant, “We believe that we apprehend this conclusion in view of the two premises, and the relationship we perceive between them.” He insists that the “relationship” which “we perceive” here “is not a physical one.” And even though perception is strictly a *physical* process (involving external stimuli on the sensory nerves of biological organisms; scientists have been studying perceptual systems for decades), Tennant assures us that the relationship which the premises of the Socrates syllogism have between themselves, is “not a physical one.” Unfortunately, by describing this relationship as “not a physical one,” Tennant fails to identify the nature of this relationship in *positive* terms. He tells us what it is *not*, not what it *is*. And it is here, in the reluctance or inability to identify the nature of such relationships in *positive* terms, where such arguments find much of their traction among the converted. Simply saying that relationship in question here is “not a physical” one, allows the apologist to characterize it as an “immaterial” relationship (again, note the preference for negative identification here). Apologists typically leave it at that and subsequently insist that “immaterial” anything poses insurmountable problems for non-believers because that the “immaterial” nature of mental relationships cannot be accounted for without pointing to an immaterial and eternally existing being, which just so happens to be the Christian god.

But to his credit, Tennant does at least attempt to develop the matter a little further. He continues, saying that we are “immediately aware” of the relationship between the argument’s premises “through introspection,” and thus “we believe Socrates is mortal *because of* the premises.” The words “because of” here indicate “a causal relationship between the premises and the conclusion.” So we have here, according to Tennant, a causal relationship between different mental phenomena, which he characterizes as “a real, non-physical relationship between these premises and the conclusion.”

It is at this point that Tennant invokes a composition fallacy to fend off the anticipated objection of the facts that human brains are physical and a necessary precondition for any human mental activity:

None of this denies that our mental states may *correlate* to physical states in our brains. But we cannot reduce the mental states *to* these physical states, because we would then remove truth and intentionality completely, since they are non-physical things. Similarly, we cannot say that the mental states are *caused* by physical states, because then the only real causation would be physical causation while the mental states are just along for the ride, having no actual influence on what happens. But we have just established that mental states do really have causal influence on other mental states. If they don’t, then logical inference does not

actually take place, and the relationship between premises and conclusions does not really exist.

Tennant allows that “our mental states may *correlate* to physical states in our brains,” but he apparently finds the implication that this means “physical states in our brains” are causally preconditional to the mental activity involved in grasping the inference of such arguments objectionable. He explains that the inclination to “reduce the mental states to these physical states” will “remove truth and intentionality completely, since they are non-physical things.” But it’s not clear why this would happen. If the mental activity of our minds does in fact depend on the physical activity of our brains (a proposal which Tennant does not in fact disprove directly), why would certain conceptual properties (e.g., truth) and mental capacities (e.g., intentionality) would be “remove[d]”? The argument here seems to be: since truth and intentionality are “non-physical things” (which, again, only identifies what they are *not*, not what they *are*), the “states in our brains” would also have to be “non-physical things” in order to constitute a causal precondition for them. But since the “states in our brains” are physical, the “states in our brains” cannot constitute a causal precondition for our “mental states,” because among these are things like truth and intentionality, which are “non-physical things.” The argument clearly assumes that “physical states” can cause only more “physical states,” and since “mental states” are “non-physical,” they cannot be caused by the “physical states” in our brains. This strikes me as fallacious as saying that metal machinery can produce only metal products, and since paper is not a metal product, metal machinery cannot be used in manufacturing paper products. I see no reason to accept this argument, which seems sufficiently analogous to Tennant’s course of inference here, just as I see no reason to suppose that the human brain does not constitute a causal precondition for human cognition (or “mental states”), and consequently for mental capacities (e.g., intentionality) and conceptual properties (e.g., truth). Indeed, the very fact that our first mode of awareness - namely *perception* - is a *physical* activity of biological organisms, suggests that such arguments are mistaken. That our initial means of awareness of objects is a physical activity (involving an organism’s sensory organs and nervous system), indicates that *at least some* animal consciousness is directly dependent on “physical states” (to use Tennant’s term). And since human cognition is cognition about some object (ultimately involving the objects of one’s perception), the theist defending an argument such as Tennant’s will need to identify the point at which human cognition ceases to depend on the “physical states” of the brain. But it seems that too much vital ground would be conceded at this point, since cognition (“mental states”) is about objects, and we do perceive objects through physical systems. And if we have a theory of abstraction by which we can understand how the human mind forms concepts from its awareness of individual objects which it perceives, then it seems that we have all we need to tackle the theist’s challenges. All of this simply pushes the theist back into a very tight corner.

Tennant says something else which seems incorrect:

we agree that this relationship does exist. What is interesting about it, however, is that, although it *entails* a mind (because it is a mental relationship), it does not entail *our* minds. We could none of us exist, and yet we must acknowledge that this mental relationship would still hold.

By “we could none of us exist,” I understand Tennant to mean *all* human beings, such that: if no human beings ever existed, “this mental relationship would still hold.” If I am correct here, then Tennant has lost sight of the very argument which he himself raised as an example, namely the Socrates syllogism. This argument affirms that “all men are mortal” and requires that Socrates was a man. But if no men ever existed, then how could one claim that there is some binding relationship between the premises of this argument? The bond connecting the argument’s premises is their truth and their distributed terms. But if their terms have no objective reference (which would be the case if men never existed), then there would be no basis for calling them true. Thus there would be no “necessary” relationship between these premises to speak of.

All this is not to say that the existence of human beings is necessary for any *facts* to obtain, where facts are essentially understood as mind-independent data existing in reality and available for us to discover. But even here, there is a context to keep in mind. What I understand Tennant to be essentially saying is that at least some truths, such as the laws of logic, are timeless, and that they are objective. Since these truths apply for everyone, they do not entail or presuppose any specific human mind’s existence, but since they are “mental” they necessarily presuppose the existence of *some* mind. Why it cannot be the human mind as such (an abstraction which includes *every* human mind which exists, has existed and will exist) is not explained. But it seems to me that the laws of logic do necessarily presuppose the human mind, for reasons which I presented in my [previous blog](#), specifically that logic as a method which guides cognition is suited to minds which are neither omniscient nor infallible, which possess knowledge in conceptual form, and whose process of acquiring and validating knowledge is not automatic. These conditions certainly do not suggest the Christian god.

We can say that the laws of logic are timeless because they are abstract. Remember that concepts are formed by a process of abstraction which allows measurements to exist in any quantity. (This is what Rand essentially meant by “measurement-omission.”) One of the measurements omitted in forming them is temporal measurement. The concept ‘man’ for instance does not stipulate that its units have to exist during some specific date range. On the contrary, it includes *all* men regardless of when they might exist. Thus the timelessness of the laws of logic is concurrent with their conceptual nature: they apply regardless of when the units informing an argument’s terms might exist.

The objectivity of the laws of logic is a corollary of their dependence on the primacy of existence metaphysics, i.e., the recognition that the objects of consciousness exist independent of consciousness. An apple is what it is, for instance, regardless of whether or not we like how they taste or believe they grow only in Antarctica or are ripe only on Tuesdays, etc. Similarly for the laws of logic: the law of identity is explicitly partnered with the primacy of existence because it states that a thing is itself independent of consciousness. This is the first law of logic, and its objectivity is explicitly involved in what it affirms.

But the problem with supposing that the laws of logic, given their timelessness (or eternity) and their objectivity, entails the existence of a “universal, necessary mental mind,” is that the issue of metaphysical primacy has been overlooked and the distinction between subject and object effectively blurred. This “universal, necessary mental mind” (e.g., the Christian god) is also said to be supernatural, omnipotent, omniscient, infallible, and able to create the objects of its own awareness. Such descriptions reverse the proper relationship between a consciousness and its objects, thus affirming the opposite of the primacy of existence, and in the case of logic essentially announces that it would be a mind which could have no use for logic (given its omniscience and infallibility). Where the original point was purportedly to account for the objectivity of the laws of logic, the apologist was lead by his faulty premises to a conclusion which denies any objectivity whatsoever.

Consider the role of objectivity when it is applied to human cognition. When we make statements (a conscious action), we make statements about things (i.e., objects of consciousness). Now it should be easy to see that in order to make statements about objects, those objects would have to exist already, before we could make those statements. (The same principle applies in the case of statements about things we imagine, without implying that the imaginary is real, for even in such cases we would have to imagine the things we make statements about before we could make any statements about them.) So on an objective account, the objects would have to exist *independent* of any statements made about them. So why wouldn’t we apply this principle consistently, and recognize that the objects of our consciousness would have to exist *independent* of our consciousness of them in order to make statements about them? We see this in the case of the Socrates syllogism: Socrates and the class of men to which the argument says he belongs, exist independent of the individual apprehending the truth of the argument’s premises and conclusion. If the truth of such premises derive their truth from the objects which their terms subsume (which is a conceptual operation), then a conclusion wholly opposite to the one which Tennant sought to draw is consistently implied: no eternal, universal mind is needed for these truths to obtain, since it is not any specific mind which gives them their truth status, but the objects which are subsumed by their terms and the process by which those terms are formed. This is consistent with the primacy of existence metaphysics - i.e., the primacy of the object in the subject-object relationship, and it is wholly suited to man’s specific type of consciousness, a consciousness capable of the conceptual level of cognition.

In sum, the laws of logic are conceptual in nature, and this very fact, for the many reasons which I have presented here, indicates on several levels that their basis could not be the god which Christians describe in their religious beliefs.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Concepts](#), [Logic](#), [Presuppositional Gimmickry](#), [Universality](#)

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [8:00 AM](#)

2 Comments:

[Justin Hall](#) said...

Dawson i have read a lot of Pikes blogs. He feels that the fact that the universe is what it is requires an explanation. That the objects of existence are stable enough to permit human life. His answer is god forces it to be this way. I dont think he will ever accept the answer that this is the way it is because that is the way it is. Oh and did you get my email?

[July 04, 2009 10:47 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hi Justin,

Yes, I received two e-mails from you. Sorry I've not gotten back to you yet. Lots of family stuff going on this weekend, plus we've all got pretty bad headcolds going on. It's July. What's with these headcolds????

As for Pike, essentially you've got his view down. And it's not just his, it's a whole lot of people. These folks claim that the universe needs an explanation, which allows them to imagine something beyond it. And of course, the cause of the universe must be "personal," which essentially means that the primacy of consciousness is inescapable given their stipulations.

But if the objects of our consciousness exist independent of our conscious activity, why suppose they depend on something else's conscious activity? The issue is that they do not explore the matter in terms of such essentials, such as the subject-object relationship. Only after they've accepted a whole hodgepodge of illicit premises do they ever dare to venture into a discussion of the matter (cf. Van Til's *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 43). And by this time it's simply too late, as evidenced by the views which they affirm at that point.

It's because of such monstrosities that I think it's important for non-believers who encounter aggressive Christian apologists to challenge them to identify their starting point. If they say it's "God," then any argument which they would feign to produce in the interest of proving their god's existence would beg the question (since the conclusion is assumed at the outset). If it's not "God," what is their starting point, and how do they arrive at the conclusion that their god exists?

The presuppositionalists tend only to assert that their god exists, and when this is questioned, they assert other "truths" which are similarly unsupported. There's no *inference* going on here in the so-called "transcendental argument." Check out Michael Butler's formulation of TAG in my [initial installment](#) of the logic presupposes god series. It's amazing that anyone would think non-believers would be impressed by such artifices. But I suspect the real goal of such formulations is to insulate believers from their own doubts.

Regards,
Dawson

[July 04, 2009 8:27 PM](#)