

Wednesday, May 19, 2010

My Suppressed Comment Regarding TAG on Choosing Hats

In the wee hours of 18 May, I submitted a comment to [one of Chris Bolt's blogs](#) over on [Choosing Hats](#). The comment which I submitted was the last in a series of entries I had made in a discussion I was having with Chris Bolt over how to untangle his confusion about two common objections against TAG. My comment was relevant to the post's topic, cordial, free of abusive and offensive language, well within standard commenting protocols, and yet Chris Bolt has so far not approved it. It remains in a never-ending orbit of "awaiting moderation," which has to date taken the form of complete suppression.

Meanwhile, Bolt is continuing the discussion with another commenter who has not been allowed to see my comment.

I have not been given any explanation why my comment has not earned Chris Bolt's approval, or why he has not allowed it to post publicly like all my previous comments. At any rate, since I still have my comment in my files, I will post it here for my readers to enjoy. In it I spell out a few of my reasons why I reject TAG - the "transcendental argument for the existence of God." So without further ado, here is my comment as it was originally submitted:

* * *

Chris wrote: "I've seen a significant number of people state TAG and do not know that they have a hard time stating it."

That's good. Perhaps you could introduce me. I've not found very many who have a) stated TAG in its fullness and b) have been willing to discuss my concerns with it. I have, however, run into a huge number of internet apologists who have no problem stating the conclusion of TAG, but have a very difficult time explaining how it is supposed to follow from any premises which are offered in support of it. Quite frankly, I often get the impression that apologists think I'm dysfunctional in some sense for not simply accepting the conclusion on their say so.

Certainly you know that a sound argument is a valid argument with true premises. The models you cited are clearly valid, but to be accepted as sound arguments, one would need to establish the truth of their premises. Of course, the controversial premise in the argument "If knowledge, then God/Knowledge/Therefore God" is the first premise. To show that the argument is sound, you would have to produce an argument defending the first premise, for its truth is certainly not self-evident, and an inability to defend it would render the whole argument dismissable.

So what would be the argument for the first premise? Or should I ask: is there one? And here's the clincher: would any argument proposed in support of the premise "if knowledge, therefore God," presuppose the truth of the conclusion of the argument which this premise is used in the argument to support?

One reason why I would reject TAG right off the bat is the fact that it takes the notion of "a priori knowledge" seriously (see for instance Butler, "The Transcendental Argument for God," *The Standard Bearer*, p. 91). I'm persuaded that there is no such thing.

Also, the point which Collett brings to light about the basic model of TAG is that the conclusion seems to have no clear inferential relationship to the premises, since it is said to follow whether or not the minor premise is affirmed or denied. Given this, it appears to be an assertion that there exists some fundamental relationship between some principle or idea and the Christian god, dressed up in the form of an argument without any actual inferential connection between the two. Collett says as much when he write:

the truth value of the conclusion is not a function of the truth value of the antecedent minor premise (i.e., premise 2), since the conclusion remains true whether C or -C obtains... In the nature of the case, the truth of a 'transcendental conclusion' does not depend upon the truth value of its antecedent premise, regardless of whether this premise affirms causality or any other principle. ("Van Til and Transcendental Argument," *Reason*

Collett says this is the case because “a transcendental conclusion constitutes the very ground for the proof of that premise” (ibid.).

Thus if the “transcendental conclusion” is something akin to “therefore God exists,” it is claimed via “transcendental argument” that this conclusion “constitutes the very ground for the proof” of the premises which are given in the argument to support that premise. (And round and round we go.) What justifies the supposition, affirmed in the initial premise, that there’s any relationship at all between knowledge and the Christian god in the first place? What justifies the assumption, inherent in the transcendental methodology which Collett elucidates, that the existence of the Christian god “constitutes the very ground” of the argument’s minor premise?

It seems to me that TAG starts midstream, without presenting any real reason for supposing that there is any such relationship between knowledge and the Christian god. It seems to be nothing more than an assertion of such a relationship camouflaged in the form of an argument which has no genuine substance to begin with at all.

So it isn’t any wonder to me that Collett does not deny the circular nature of this type of argument. Again, I’ve written about this at length on my blog here: <http://bahnsenburner.blogspot.com/2009/12/argument-from-predication.html>

To be sure, there are other very good reasons to reject claims like “if knowledge, then God,” such as those which I have raised on my blog. I don’t find that presuppositionalists are able to raise any satisfactory responses to the counterpoints which I have articulated against such claims. In fact, I’ve presented my own argument - If knowledge, then non-theism - see here: <http://bahnsenburner.blogspot.com/2010/04/if-knowledge-then-non-theism.html>

So far, I’ve seen only a very weak attempt to interact with this.

As for the version of TAG which seeks to prove the Christian god’s existence by way of citing logic, I’ve yet to see any attempts to defend this version from the many issues which I have raised against it (see here: <http://www.katholon.com/Logic.htm>). Because of their failure to examine the kinds of issues that I raise, I often get the impression that presuppositionalists are bluffing. But I don’t expect them to admit this.

Regards,
Dawson

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I've suspected for quite a while now that Chris Bolt and the rest of the Choosing Hats gang are at a loss as how to respond or interact with my criticisms of presuppositionalism. In the past, Chris has left comments to the effect that he will read what I've written and thus be in a better position to discuss my objections and counter-arguments, but that never happens.

For instance, when I posted a link to [my response](#) to Chris Bolt's post [Knapp's "Induction and the Unbeliever,"](#) Bolt replied in a comment of his own, "Thanks. Will take a look at it when I can." (See his comment dated 24 March 2010 at 8:46 am.)

Or, consider his February 11 comment to my blog [How Theism Violates the Primacy of Existence](#) wherein, after several exchanges between Chris and myself in which I answered a series of questions he raised, I suggested that Chris read an exchange between myself and Christian apologist Drew Lewis in order to broaden his understanding of my argument. In that comment, Chris stated "I will have to read the exchange between you and Drew Lewis."

One would think that Chris would follow through with his announced intentions, and if he had any more questions, or perhaps objections against what I have written on the topics which he and I have discussed, he would have posted them on his own blog. But this has not happened. This is both a disappointment as well as confirmation of my own prediction: presuppositional apologists typically posture themselves as having this devastating argument for their worldview and against all alternatives, but any critical examination of their claims and what they propose as their "argument" beyond the superficial level, tends to send them running. I would prefer that they stand and fight, which is what they scold non-believers for failing to do as they pound their chests in feigned victory. But if you examine the

battlefield, you just might find that their victories are usually had over one-liners and in the form of one-liners, and thus nothing to write home about. When it gets to the real meat and potatoes of philosophy, they show up empty-handed and without a defense. Meanwhile, they continue claiming things like logic presupposes their god (which I have answered [here](#)), that their god is needed for man to have knowledge (which I have answered [here](#)), that Christianity is the only worldview to "account for" the uniformity of nature (which I have answered [here](#)), that Greg Bahnsen was a thorough and reliable scholar (a myth which I've put to rest [here](#)), etc. Just as they pretend their god exists, they pretend that their claims are beyond criticism. It's all part of an elaborate fantasy which turns out to be a most delicate construct of human imagination.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Presuppositional Gimmickry](#), [TAG](#), [Theistic Arguments](#)

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [6:00 AM](#)

1 Comments:

[Luiz Claudio](#) said...

Can God make an invalid argument a valid one? Maybe if you wish hard...you can make it so, through God. God is a tool people use to believe that thought can alter reality. If there is a God, then there is a chance that reality can be changed through his will and they can "use" him to alter hard reality, like a magic stick. It makes them feel good and you, Dawson, is spoiling the party. That's what we atheist do. Their level of hostility is a thermometer to measure how effectively we're doing this.

[May 20, 2010 4:00 PM](#)

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