

Presuppositionalism and the Argument from Ignorance

On whether or not the presuppositionalist "transcendental argument for the existence of God" (TAG) [qualifies as a variation of the argument from design](#), Zachary Moore made the following comment:

I always thought it was just an argument from ignorance.

After examining numerous apologetic sources pontificating on TAG and presuppositionalism, I am inclined to agree fully with Zachary's statement here. Of course, presuppositionalists will resist and protest this recognition, but the evidence to support it is wide-ranging and substantial, and it's quite easy to spot in the presuppositional strategy integral to deploying TAG.

First, let's get a good understanding of what the fallacy known as argument from ignorance really is. In support of his assessment, Zachary offered the following description of what constitutes an argument from ignorance:

The argument from ignorance, also known as *argumentum ad ignorantiam* or argument by lack of imagination, is a logical fallacy asserting that if something is currently unexplained then it did not (or could not) happen, or that if evidence of something has not been proven to their satisfaction, then it cannot exist. (1)

Technically known as *argumentum ad ignorantiam*, an argument from ignorance essentially consists of resting a conclusion on the arguer's own lack of knowledge of or familiarity with some key point of central concern to the topic under consideration. The argument from ignorance can thus be reduced to the following formula:

I don't know how X could be the case, therefore it follows that X cannot be the case.

As such, the argument from ignorance can be considered to be a form of non sequitur, i.e., an argument in which the conclusion does not follow from the premises offered in support of it. Of course, in actual conversation or debate, instances of this fallacy are typically not so bald-faced. In fact, the arguer himself may not even be aware that he is resting his conclusion on gaping holes in his summary knowledge. On the contrary, arguments resting their conclusion on the arguer's own ignorance of relevant matters usually tend to bury the arguer's ignorance under a mass of verbiage which conveniently disguises the fallacy such that the arguer himself may not readily detect his own error. Discovering and recognizing the error becomes all the more unlikely if the arguer is emotionally committed to the conclusion which his ignorance is supposed to validate.

It is clear to me that TAG and its customary defense strategy make use of an argument from ignorance in the hopes of securing the claim that Christianity is true. And this is not at all difficult to spot. Generally speaking, whenever the presuppositionalist says something along the lines of "you cannot account for [fill in the blank]," he's essentially just telling us that he simply *does not know* how the person addressed in such charges might "account for" such phenomena. And despite his announcement of his own ignorance of such matters in such an explicit manner, presuppositional apologists routinely regurgitate the same pattern throughout their defense of god-belief. Christian apologist Greg Bahnsen, who can be credited with popularizing this very approach to apologetics, used precisely this very tactic in his opening statement when he debated atheist Dr. Gordon Stein. Bahnsen simply asserted that

The atheist world-view cannot allow for laws of logic, the uniformity of nature, the ability for the mind to understand the world, and moral absolutes. In that sense, the atheist world-view cannot account for our debate tonight. (2)

An [examination of Bahnsen's opening statement](#) does not prove fruitful in discovering just how the apologist might go about *proving* this negative claim, and yet presuppositionalists typically mimic Bahnsen's approach as if it had actual substance (often referred to as "thrust"). If the apologist has an actual proof that "the atheist world-view cannot account for" said phenomena, why doesn't he offer it? Such questions are frequently asked, but they remain unanswered. In spite of this, apologists persist in using this very same tactic, even though it only serves in telling the world that they are simply *unfamiliar with what any particular atheist's views are on the topic at hand*.

That the assertion of inability on the part of atheists to "account for" various aspects of cognition and experience is integral to TAG, is clear from statements such as the following:

TAG says that the atheist can't account for logic. (3)

Another apologist followed up this remark, saying:

I don't just think you can't 'account' for just logic and a some other things. The claim of TAG is that you cannot explain or account for ANYTHING. (4)

The apologists' dependence on their own ignorance here is not only uncontained, but brazen and belligerent. And this much is clear: Since TAG is supposed to be an argument *proving the existence of the Christian god*, and *central to this argument* is the charge that non-Christians (perhaps atheists especially) are *unable* to provide an "account for" various things (or "ANYTHING"), one can certainly be forgiven for supposing that TAG is supposed to derive the Christian god's existence from the non-Christian's alleged inability to satisfy such challenges. For it appears that the apologist is essentially arguing as follows:

Premise 1: If the non-Christian cannot "account for" the "laws of logic, the uniformity of nature, the ability for the mind to understand the world, and moral absolutes," then the Christian god exists (or: the Christian worldview is true).

Premise 2: The non-Christian cannot "account for" the "laws of logic, the uniformity of nature, the ability for the mind to understand the world, and moral absolutes."

Conclusion: Therefore, the Christian god exists (or: the Christian worldview is true).

And while this appears to be the basic procedure in defending TAG, the apologist tends not to approach the matter as a topic of inquiry in which a comprehensive survey is conducted to review proposed "accounts" for the various phenomena in question in order to assure us that those proposed accounts are in fact flawed or somehow insufficient to the task. On the contrary, the apologetic method consists of simply *stipulating* this to be the case, as if the apologist's own *say so* were sufficient to seal the case. But in spite of the obvious reliance on his own sustained and indulged ignorance, the apologist fails to show exactly how the existence of an invisible magic being follows from someone's inability to develop a thesis on induction or some other mental process. So the non sequitur at the core of the apologist's argument from ignorance is clearly observed.

Presuppositionalists themselves demonstrate that they need to rely on argument from ignorance (or, should we say, *assertion* from ignorance) when critiquing rival religious beliefs. For instance, [when certain "truths" were asserted](#) on the basis of what were called "the messages of phil," one presuppositionalist attempted to criticize this position with the following:

We could do a transcendental analysis of the "messages of phil." But all you have done is make a blanket statement that the messages of phil are divine. Nothing has not been stated or worked out as a worldview.

Aside from the hapless use of a double negative, the apologist, who is clearly speaking out of ignorance, nowhere shows that the worldview associated with "the message of phil" has not been "worked out." For all he knows, there could be a 30-volume codex that defines and develops such a worldview from its fundamentals on up.

Now, after examining my reasons for agreeing with Zachary on this point, I asked myself the following question:

Is my conclusion that presuppositional apologetics bases its conclusions on the arguer's own ignorance of rival positions, itself based on my own ignorance of the presuppositionalist method and the evidences it recruits in deploying its defensive strategy?

I don't think it is. And here's why: As I mentioned above, I have examined numerous defenses presented by presuppositionalists, both in published works either in print or posted on the internet (cf. Van Til, Bahnsen, Frame, Pratt, Butler, Jones, Wilson, et al.), as well as in firsthand encounters with scores of apologists attempting to use this method of defense. In virtually all cases, the approaches employed share a similar basic strategy: the non-believer cannot "account for" some aspect or feature of cognition or experience, presumably because only an appeal to the believer's god can satisfactorily accomplish such a task and the non-believer by definition rejects or disavows the existence of the believer's god. But in each case, the feature or aspect of cognition or experience which the non-believer is said to be unable to "account for," can in fact only be addressed and understood if one has a good understanding of how the mind forms concepts and integrates them into larger conceptual structures. But this element is completely lacking from every deployment of presuppositional apologetics that I have examined, many of which I learned about because Christian debaters cited them as a supporting resource. (5) Not only do presuppositional apologists seem utterly ignorant of the importance of a good theory of concepts to such considerations, the worldview which they seek to defend - Christian theism - does not seem to have a native theory of concepts. (Apologists have been unable to show where in the bible one might find any information about

concepts.)

Take for instance James Anderson's [Secular Responses to the Problem of Induction](#), a paper intended to support the presuppositionalist position that non-Christian philosophy must confess defeat when it comes to providing a rational justification for induction. I give Anderson credit for at least trying to support this charge without simply stipulating it to be the case, for he does survey at least a few secular treatments of the supposed problem. But absent from his survey is any consideration of the Objectivist response to Hume's problem of induction. Granted, it may not be well known in some academic circles, but it does in fact exist (David Kelley summarizes his response to Hume in "Universals and Induction"). This can only indicate that Anderson's survey is incomplete and that the conclusion that "there presently exists no satisfactory solution to the problem of induction from a secular perspective" (6) is premature, in fact unwarranted. Indeed, his conclusion in fact rests on a gap in his knowledge of available treatments of induction. And I know that he was not familiar with the distinctive approach to induction that Objectivism provides when he wrote his paper based on his reaction to a statement I had made in our correspondence.

Specifically, I had written:

I must say, however, 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.

In response to this, Anderson replied:

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. Perhaps you can elaborate.

This statement, especially coming from an apologist who has emphasized the "atheists can't account for induction" version of TAG so heavily, simply suggests to me that presuppositionalists do not approach induction as a conceptual matter. This tells me that they're ignorant of how induction is an extension of conceptual integration, which can only lead me to the conclusion that their apologetic ploy concerning this issue is based ultimately on their own ignorance of at least some opposing positions.

So unless presuppositionalists can do better than what they have done to date, the charge that TAG relies - at least in part - on an argument from ignorance, appears to be amply justified.

by Dawson Bethrick

Notes:

(1) Quoting [this online source](#).

(2) [The Great Debate](#)

(3) [TAG as Teleological Argument](#)

(4) Ibid.

(5) For instance, section 7.4 "The Transcendental Nature of Presuppositional Argument," in Bahnsen's *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings & Analysis*, pp. 496-529.

(6) [Secular Responses to the Problem of Induction](#)

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [6:30 AM](#)

23 Comments:

[Zachary Moore](#) said...

Great work, Dawson. Much more complete and coherent than what I was able to get across in the comment section.

And I agree- I'm very much looking forward to seeing an actual argument for immateriality.

[February 03, 2006 6:36 PM](#)

[Aaron Kinney](#) said...

Nicely done!

[February 06, 2006 1:32 PM](#)

[Not Reformed](#) said...

Looks good, Dawson.

How long will we have to wait for the devastating refutation? ;)

[February 06, 2006 6:03 PM](#)

[Jerry](#) said...

Isn't it something how the god hypothesis can only exist within the confines of ignorance?

"We don't know such and such therefore god."

or

"We can't explain such and such therefore god."

[February 07, 2006 7:49 PM](#)

[adam](#) said...

Objectivist Epistemology is a joke...I'm sorry you haven't figured that out yet. Perhaps, someday, you'll catch up with everyone else and realize that your version of foundationalism has no answer for the problem of induction. (No answer for any of the foundational problems in philosophy for that matter)

You (or a remnant of objectivists) saying it's so, does not make it so.

Thanks for the link, I am proud to be associated with Van Til, Bahnsen, Frame, and whoever else it is that you think you've one-upped

<http://adamnaranjo.com/blog>

[February 08, 2006 7:53 AM](#)

[adam](#) said...

PS...I took Bahnsen's graduate Apologetics Class and he deals with this. For some reason TAG often gets lumped in with various others forms of arguments - but who's right? Is it a design argument, an argument from causality, etc? I've heard it all. The reason, one attempts to lump TAG in with other arguments that once you've convinced yourself (and others) that it's merely a form of this, or that, argument, it's easier to deal with. The problem is that transcendental arguments are NOT arguments from design - to say so merely shows ones own misunderstanding of transcendental arguments in general.

That you've said as much is evidence of your misunderstanding of transcendental arguments.

Furthermore, TAG does not suffer from the argumentum ad ignorantiam fallacy, because TAG does not claim to KNOW anything based on not knowing something else, but on it's impossibility with the assumption that one want's to remain rational (utlizing the inductive/causal principle, laws of logic, etc).

For to claim X, or not X, one must engage in rational discourse (laws of logic, use of induction), but the unbelieving worldview cannot justify, or make rational, it's 'rationality' ACCORDING TO ITS OWN RULES. Thus, it is not that the presuppositionalist is ignorant - it is that the unbeliever is ignorant, and irrational. At this point the

presuppositionalist sits back and says, OK. You have your ignorance in terms of epistemology, ethics, metaphysics, etc. And I have my worldview which allows me to make good sense of all of this. **This alone does not PROVE anything - unless you want to be rational.** TAG allows unbelieving worldviews to be reduced to absurdity according to their own rules, and leaves it at that. You have to understand that what gives TAG its strength is the need for rationality. TAG doesn't prove anything in itself, yet it settles the whole matter if one must be rational, and not ignorant.

But, as we all know, there are many out there who either:

1) Claim to have solved the problems in terms of epistemology. (Induction, etc)

or

2) Deny rationality and the validity of logic, etc. (Various eastern religions)

You claim to have solved the problems (even though most philosophers would disagree with you strongly). PS. Induction is only the tip of the iceberg.

Obviously this is merely a sketch, I have to get to work

[February 08, 2006 8:34 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Adam: "Objectivist Epistemology is a joke...I'm sorry you haven't figured that out yet. Perhaps, someday, you'll catch up with everyone else and realize that your version of foundationalism has no answer for the problem of induction. (No answer for any of the foundational problems in philosophy for that matter)"

Well, thank you for that devastating refutation, Adam.

Adam: "You (or a remnant of objectivists) saying it's so, does not make it so."

Actually, this kind of recognition only validates my worldview, since my worldview is premised on the primacy of existence principle. I.e., existence exists independent of consciousness. Here you are borrowing from my worldview to defend your worldview, which explicitly affirms the opposite view, namely the primacy of consciousness view of reality. You wouldn't deny the power your religion claims for its god, would you?

Adam: "Thanks for the link, I am proud to be associated with Van Til, Bahnsen, Frame, and whoever else it is that you think you've one-upped"

You're welcome, Adam. Feel free to be a good chap and reciprocate.

Adam: "PS...I took Bahnsen's graduate Apologetics Class and he deals with this."

Great! Perhaps you can show us how to argue like a pro. Maybe the first thing you can do is explain exactly what Bahnsen's argument is in his opening statement in the Bahnsen-Stein debate. What are the premises, and what is the conclusion they're supposed to support?

Adam: "For some reason TAG often gets lumped in with various other forms of arguments"

That's not a surprise to me.

Adam: "but who's right?"

I think the one who points out that TAG is not really an argument after all, is the one who is right. There's no inferring going on. You start with the assumption that your god exists, then assert that its existence is required to "account for" logic, induction, uniformity of nature, etc., that this god "provides the preconditions of intelligibility." It's just more god of the gaps nonsense.

Adam: "Is it a design argument, an argument from causality, etc? I've heard it all. The reason, one attempts to lump TAG in with other arguments that once you've convinced yourself (and others) that it's merely a form of this, or that, argument, it's easier to deal with."

TNAG (the transcendental non-argument for the existence of god) is easy enough to deal with, regardless of whether one thinks of it as a variant on design or other traditional arguments. For TAG, the devil is in its intended murkiness. The strategy is to keep the actual content of the supposed "argument" as indefinite as possible (by use of negative definitions, stubbornly vague expressions, assumptions packed with dubious premises, etc.) to bamboozle the unsuspecting. Even Van Til's analogies tend to backfire on him (e.g., the floorboard analogy, the water man analogy, etc.). And for what? For a worldview that has no epistemology whatsoever. Telling people "believe X or go to hell!" is no formula for epistemology.

Adam: "The problem is that transcendental arguments are NOT arguments from design - to say so merely shows ones own misunderstanding of transcendental arguments in general. That you've said as much is evidence of your misunderstanding of transcendental arguments."

Actually, as I make clear on my blog, I agreed with Dr. Moore's assessment that TAG is just another appeal to ignorance. I showed why I agree with this on my blog. I see you haven't interacted with it.

Adam: "Furthermore, TAG does not suffer from the argumentum ad ignorantiam fallacy, because TAG does not claim to KNOW anything based on not knowing something else,"

It is not necessary that the one who rests his position on ignorance announce his position as having such a foundation. Indeed, as I pointed out in my blog, it may very well be the case that the arguer himself does not realize he's basing his position on ignorance. All we need to do in that case is point this out, as I have done. But I would not expect someone who is confessionally invested in pre-conceived outcomes to admit his error.

Adam: "but on it's impossibility with the assumption that one want's to remain rational (utlizing the inductive/causal principle, laws of logic, etc)."

As I've pointed out before, I have no idea what a Christian might mean by 'rational'. I certainly do not find this term in the bible. As for the "impossibility of the contrary" sloganeering, I already dealt with that one [here](#).

Adam: "For to claim X, or not X, one must engage in rational discourse (laws of logic, use of induction),"

And in order for this to be the case, my worldview's axioms would have to be true.

Adam: "but the unbelieving worldview cannot justify, or make rational, it's 'rationality' ACCORDING TO IT'S OWN RULES."

Here's where your appeal to ignorance comes in. Also, note that you did not supply an argument, you simply announced your assertion as if it were a verdict derived from prior sound reasoning. But you offer no prior reasoning. It's just an assertion. Meanwhile, it's obvious to me that such an assertion is made out of ignorance of the rival worldviews on which it pretends to speak.

Adam: "Thus, it is not that the presuppositionalist is ignorant - it is that the unbeliever is ignorant, and irrational."

Specifically, of what is "the unbeliever" (I suppose this means every non-Christian?) ignorant? Also, what does a Christian mean by "irrational"? If belief in invisible magic beings which can wish objects into existence and command them to be what they are at will is "rational," then what on earth could possibly constitute irrationality? Again, blank out.

Adam: "At this point the presuppositionalist sits back and says, OK. You have your ignorance in terms of epistemology, ethics, metaphysics, etc."

Can you show us where Jesus spoke on universals, induction, the laws of logic, the foundations of science, etc.? I'd really like to see what Christians take as model "solutions" on these matters.

Adam: "And I have my worldview which allows me to make good sense of all of this."

If all that is needed is a "worldview which allows me to make good sense of all this," then your TAG is sunk. There's no need to assert a dying and rising man-god in order to "make sense" of the world in which I live. If anything, such contrivances simply turn the world on its head and make a mockery of reality. A false worldview like Christianity

would need something like TAG to sustain its adherents' delusions.

Adam: "This alone does not PROVE anything - unless you want to be rational."

TAG only proves the desperation of those who put their faith in it.

Adam: "TAG allows unbelieving worldviews to be reduced to absurdity according to their own rules, and leaves it at that."

There is nothing more absurd than [the cartoon universe premise of theism](#). As for TAG reducing "unbelieving worldviews... to absurdity according to their own rules," I have no idea what a Christian, assuming Christianity's cartoon universe, could consider absurd. To be consistent with your worldview, you would have to invest this term with specifically Christian content, which means that you simply end up begging the question (while assuming the truth of my worldview's fundamentals in the meantime). Begging the question is utterly unavoidable for the Christian since his key terms have no reference to reality. His ultimate standard is imaginary, not objective.

Adam: "You have to understand that what gives TAG its strength is the need for rationality."

In the cartoon universe of theism, what need is there for rationality? Here's where Christians blank out.

Adam: "TAG doesn't prove anything in itself,"

Of course. To prove something, you need an argument. Since TAG is just assertions based on ignorance, it cannot prove anything.

Thanks,
Dawson

[February 08, 2006 1:57 PM](#)

[Mark Plus](#) said...

Presuppositionalists seem hung up on the claim that purely physical processes ("matter in motion") can't perform logic. How do they explain computation, performed by electrons in motion?

And if they want to play the "Can't explain" game, can the christian world view account for the expansion of the universe, time dilation, quantum entanglement and all the other deeply counterintuitive things discovered by 20th Century physics? Indeed, Einstein himself denied the cosmological implications of his own theory of General Relativity because he had absorbed the Judeo-Christian presupposition that we live in a static universe.

[February 09, 2006 11:20 AM](#)

[VanTilsGhost](#) said...

Where has the mighty Adam fled to? Why does it seem that presuppers love to pop in...claim victory...and then disappear into the mist?

Things that make you go 'hhhhmmmm....'

[February 09, 2006 2:22 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

You're right, VTG, the presuppers certainly do seem to have this futile habit in common with each other. Perhaps that's their "common ground." The pattern appears to include some or all of the following elements:

Post a comment that has little or nothing to do with the title blog, interact with nothing stated in the title blog, ridicule or malign the author of the blog and/or his point of view without argument or rigor, assert the truth of Christianity without providing any reasons to suppose anything Christianity teaches is even remotely or possibly true, and pretend to have scored points in a game he really doesn't want to take place. Then, when his points have been answered and questions have been posed to him, he never follows up.

And I thought these guys had enough fire power to refute everything and anything brought against their worldview. Presuppositionalism must be just more puffery and chestpounding, nothing more.

[February 10, 2006 6:30 AM](#)

[Apologia4JC19](#) said...

Hello.

If I have understood it correctly (and if I haven't I am certainly open to your correction), objectivism claims to solve the riddle of induction by attempting to reduce the uniformity of nature to the law of causality, which reduces to the "law of identity applied to action" (at least this is how George Smith put it).

In other words, things have specific natures that place limits on the actions they are able to perform, from which some kind of uniformity has to follow necessarily.

Is this the correct way of understanding the approach? If so, it succumbs to the fact that what can be discerned through observation is merely what is within a given being's nature at a given time, and not the whole lot of actions that such a nature might give rise to. In other words, while it might be in the nature of a cat to give birth to cats at certain times (as has been observed), it might also be within the cat's nature to give birth to elephants, whales, etc. Appealing to past experience, as you know, will be of no help. Thus, the only way to justify induction is to have in place within one's system something that *guarantees* the kind of uniformity that we want to be able to invoke in our reasoning processes. Thus, it will have to be something that is personal, completely reliable, and completely rational. Sounds rather like God to me. :)

[February 12, 2006 5:22 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Apologia4JC19: "If I have understood it correctly (and if I haven't I am certainly open to your correction), objectivism claims to solve the riddle of induction by attempting to reduce the uniformity of nature to the law of causality, which reduces to the 'law of identity applied to action' (at least this is how George Smith put it)."

Although the proper conception of causality is crucial to a proper understanding of induction, it does not tell the whole story, for the proper conception of causality is not the only thing that Hume got wrong when he drew his skeptical conclusion about inductive generalization. The other issue of crucial importance here involves the theory of concepts one holds. So if someone told you that the only thing at stake is how to conceive of causality, he was either misleading you, or you misunderstood him (i.e., he might not have intended to say that a proper understanding of causality is the only issue that is important here).

Also, your characterization that the law of causality "reduces to" the law of identity applied to action calls into question what it is supposedly reducing *from*. If the law of causality *is* the law of identity applied to action, then it's misleading to say we need to "reduce" it to such from something else; indeed, it would not need to be reduced to what it already is. So I suspect you're importing unstated, foreign assumptions into your examination of the Objectivist position on these matters, and doing so can only taint your understanding of what Objectivism teaches and the judgments you hope to draw about it.

Apologia4JC19: "In other words, things have specific natures that place limits on the actions they are able to perform, from which some kind of uniformity has to follow necessarily."

Essentially, the law of causality is our formalized and explicit recognition that an entity's actions are dependent on its nature. Notice how radical this departure is from Hume's conception of causality: Hume held to the event-based view of causality, which is commonly held to this day. This view holds that causality is a relationship between "events" - a vague term which defies the specifics that a solid understanding of causality requires, thus forming a conception of causality which allows for no necessary connection between one element and any other involved in any causal interaction. The consequence is that there is, epistemologically speaking, no guide to causal outcomes because, metaphysically, causality is ultimately arbitrary and based on nothing specific and consisting of nothing specific. It's no wonder that skeptical arguments want to trade the assumption that causality is ultimately unpredictable. Contrast this view with Objectivism, which conceives of causality as a relationship between an entity and its own actions. Since an entity's actions are dependent on its nature, this is a necessary relationship, one which cannot be altered by someone's wishing. Thus, given sufficient knowledge of the nature of any entity

involved in a given causal interaction, it is possible to predict outcomes, at least with varying degrees of probability, in some cases (as on the general level) certainty or near certainty.

Apologia4JC19: "Is this the correct way of understanding the approach?"

As you can see, there's a lot more involved that you do not seem to have taken into account.

Apologia4JC19: "If so, it succumbs to the fact that what can be discerned through observation is merely what is within a given being's nature at a given time, and not the whole lot of actions that such a nature might give rise to. In other words, while it might be in the nature of a cat to give birth to cats at certain times (as has been observed), it might also be within the cat's nature to give birth to elephants, whales, etc."

Observation does offer us occasion to identify an entity's nature as a given time, but recourse to observation is not the only cognitive operation at our disposal. We also have our memory, our ability to form concepts, our ability to integrate those concepts, etc., all of which allow us to retain what we have observed and assemble those observations into larger units. As we observe an entity and its actions over time, we are able to integrate what we observe into the concept which classes that entity with others like it in one way or another. This brings up another important contribution of Objectivism: the scope of reference subsumed by a concept is not limited to only that which is specified in the concept's definition. Thus Objectivism's theory of concepts is crucial here, since it allows us to include in the range of a concept's meaning everything we learn about the entities which we observe. (If you believe there is way to learn about entities other than by observing them, I invite you to identify those means and explain how they work.)

For instance, if in the course of my observation of a family of cats I witness them playing, sleeping, hunting, eating, purring, mating, fighting, relaxing, cleaning themselves, nursing kittens, climbing fences, affectionately rubbing up against a human being's leg, etc., the Objectivist theory of concepts allows me to include these actions into the concept 'cat' which groups them into a single class. I have never observed a cat giving birth to either elephants or whales, so I have no evidential basis on which to suppose it's possible that a cat can give birth to either elephants or whales. In spite of this, you suggest that "it might also be within the cat's nature to give birth to elephants, whales, etc." For me to accept such a possibility, you would have to offer more than merely your suggestion that it is possible; rather, you would have to supply evidence which can be observed firsthand. Until you've done so, you give me no reason to include such actions into my concept of 'cat'.

So notice two crucial points in response to your statement here: First, observation occurs over time, and is not our only means of cognition. Second, concepts, if they are formed correctly, are formed by objective inputs, not wild imaginations posing as legitimate possibilities.

Apologia4JC19: "Appealing to past experience, as you know, will be of no help."

We have more at our disposal than only past experiences. We also have our present experience as well, as well as a whole sum of knowledge which has been validated (if in fact it has been validated) and a set of rational principles which guides our integration and application of that sum of knowledge (if we're adhering to a rational view of reality). Couple all this with a firm foundation, offered by the axioms, and an understanding of the proper relationship between the subject of consciousness and its objects, a thinker has the fundamentals that he needs to set out on his inductive study of the world of which he is a part. An important component of the subject-object relationship that constitutes the preconditions of intelligibility of man's experience is the feedback it provides against his inductive projections, which allows him to correct and refine the process as he goes through life. As he becomes more successful at inductively gauging the objects in his environment, his ability to self-regulate will grow into more and more facets of his life, such that he will be able to take care of himself, identifying those values he needs to live and recognizing dangers that he needs to avoid. It is for these tasks that he needs induction in the first place.

Apologia4JC19: "Thus, the only way to justify induction is to have in place within one's system something that *guarantees* the kind of uniformity that we want to be able to invoke in our reasoning processes. Thus, it will have to be something that is personal, completely reliable, and completely rational. Sounds rather like God to me. :)"

This is simply a veiled appeal to the cartoon universe of theism, which is a telltale sign of presuppositional apologetics. And as such, it is a splendid example of the appeal to ignorance that presuppositional apologetics attempts to formalize.

Best regards,
Dawson

[February 12, 2006 11:44 PM](#)

[Apologia4JC19](#) said...

Hello again.

I appreciate your attempt to interact with what I said. Let me first say that the approach I outlined before (as the objectivist approach) was something that came from George H. Smith, a self-proclaimed objectivist, in his radio discussion with Greg Bahnsen. I want to be clear that I have no intention of misrepresenting your views.

From what I am able to gather from your response (and again, if I have misunderstood you feel free to correct me), you would say that entities have specific natures, and that these natures act as the “controls” in terms of which they are able to perform the various actions that they do in fact perform. This is suggested by your statement that “given sufficient knowledge of the nature of any entity involved in a given causal interaction, it is possible to predict outcomes, at least with varying degrees of probability, in some cases (as on the general level) certainty or near certainty.”

This, however, is precisely the issue. How is it that we gain sufficient knowledge of an entity’s nature? Since you do not believe in infallible revelation, you are forced to say that, for example, since we have observed cats giving birth to cats in the past and this occurs in the present as well (and there exists nothing in the “sum total of validated knowledge” that contradicts this), then we can generalize and say that it is in the nature of the cat to give birth to other cats. And, since we’ve never observed instances of a cat giving birth to an elephant, we can generalize and say that it is not in the cat’s nature to do so. But, one is permitted to generalize from observed cases to unobserved cases only when the inductive principle is already assumed (since the cases so far observed can only serve as a reliable guide for interpreting future unobserved cases if it is assumed that the future will resemble the past). So you see, objectivism doesn’t *justify* belief in the uniformity of nature at all. It simply *assumes* this to be the case. But, perhaps I have missed something. I look forward to your reply.

[February 13, 2006 12:50 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Apologia4JC19: “I appreciate your attempt to interact with what I said. Let me first say that the approach I outlined before (as the objectivist approach) was something that came from George H. Smith, a self-proclaimed objectivist, in his radio discussion with Greg Bahnsen. I want to be clear that I have no intention of misrepresenting your views.”

I do not know that Smith is an Objectivist. In fact, when I had a discussion with Smith myself back in 1999, I got the strong impression that he did not consider himself an Objectivist. I know that he has been influenced by Rand and perhaps other Objectivists, and that’s well and good. But that does not make him a spokesman for the Objectivist position. The same is the case with myself. As for his exchange with Bahnsen, there was very little time for Smith to propound a full theory of induction, and Bahnsen had so many philosophical hang-ups (specifically, taking Hume seriously on induction) that it just would not be the occasion to present a formal exposition on the matter. So if you’re taking Smith’s statements in that exchange as authoritative Objectivist position on the matter, you may want to rethink this. If you’re truly interested in induction, I recommend a good understanding of the nature of concepts (I don’t think you’ll find this knowledge by reading the bible) and then you’ll be in a better position to recognize some of Hume’s fundamental errors, which still seem to persist in your thinking, errors which pointed him in the direction of his skeptical conclusions. I’d also recommend David Kelley’s “Universals and Induction,” which is seminal in presenting a rational understanding of induction. You may also want to consult H.W.B. Joseph’s “The Presuppositions of Inductive Reasoning” in his introductory text on logic. I don’t think you’re going to get a better understanding of induction by reading the gospels, or Bahnsen for that matter.

Apologia4JC19: “From what I am able to gather from your response (and again, if I have misunderstood you feel free to correct me), you would say that entities have specific natures, and that these natures act as the “controls” in terms of which they are able to perform the various actions that they do in fact perform. This is suggested by your statement that “given sufficient knowledge of the nature of any entity involved in a given causal interaction, it is possible to predict outcomes, at least with varying degrees of probability, in some cases (as on the general level) certainty or near certainty.”

I think you're mixing issues here. Predictability is an epistemological concern: it is the degree of confidence with which we can make estimations about outcomes of scenarios we deem possible. Causality, however, is a metaphysical fact, regardless of our degree of knowledge of its participating elements (cf. the primacy of existence principle). As to entities having specific natures, this recognition is already implicit in the axioms: to exist is to be something specific. If you think this recognition is in error, it is upon you to present for examination an entity which has no specific nature. Moreover, since causality is the relationship between an entity and its actions, the fact that entities act according to their nature is also implicit in the axioms, since action must have identity (since it exists). But we did not need induction to recognize this, since this recognition is implicit in any firsthand awareness of any object which acts. I suspect that this is a crucial point which you've missed or failed to integrate. You've introduced the term 'controls' and I'm not sure that's an appropriate term due to the variety of subjective implications that accompany its many connotations. Regardless, I've been able to explain my position without employing this term, so it's not clear to me why this term needs to be introduced at this point. I question whether this term is really suggested by the statement I made which you quoted, since that statement was regarding epistemological implications, not the specific relationship an entity has to its actions.

Apologia4JC19: "This, however, is precisely the issue."

To be specific, the issue has two stages: 1) the formation of entity classes (concepts), and 2) the application of the law of causality to those entity classes (induction). Induction is simply an extension of the integrating process which takes place in concept-formation. There's really no mystery here.

Apologia4JC19: "How is it that we gain sufficient knowledge of an entity's nature?"

By a means of knowledge. I.e., by reason.

Apologia4JC19: "Since you do not believe in infallible revelation,"

Why would I believe in a silly thing like that? How does "infallible revelation" explain how the mind forms concepts?

Apologia4JC19: "you are forced to say that, for example, since we have observed cats giving birth to cats in the past and this occurs in the present as well (and there exists nothing in the "sum total of validated knowledge" that contradicts this), then we can generalize and say that it is in the nature of the cat to give birth to other cats. And, since we've never observed instances of a cat giving birth to an elephant, we can generalize and say that it is not in the cat's nature to do so. But, one is permitted to generalize from observed cases to unobserved cases only when the inductive principle is already assumed"

You seem to have missed everything I said about concepts. We only need to observe two cats to form our initial concept 'cat', and this gives the mind enough to work with. So we are not, as you say, "forced" into the position you say we are, for we can form the concept on the basis of present observations; we do not need induction in order to form our concepts of concretes. Abstraction precedes induction. Once the concept is formed, we retain it in memory. What can contradict the facts that we included in our initial formation of the concept 'cat'? If, for instance, I observed a cat giving birth to kittens, what in reality would contradict this? Also, given what we have learned from science about genetics and other forms of biological causality, what error has been made in recognizing that the offspring of cats is not elephantine, but feline? You apparently want to deny the way the human mind works in order to make room for a need for an invisible magic being which does nothing specific here (cf. appeal to ignorance). Meanwhile, you seem to ignore, perhaps for purposes of expedience, the fact that, if we allow for an invisible magic being which controls all things, and this invisible magic being is known for its ability to conform reality to its whims and wishes (cf. Christian doctrine), then there would be no way whatsoever to rule out the notion that a cat might give birth (or has given birth) to an elephant. In [the cartoon universe of theism](#), anything can happen. Mt. 19:26 says "with God all things are possible." You wouldn't deny your god's ability to create a cat which gives birth to elephants, would you? In order for you to say that cats cannot give birth to elephants, you are actually denying your own worldview's legacy of destroying the mind, and then borrowing from my this-worldly worldview to boot. When you're serious about how the mind works, be willing to drop the fantasy of your god-beliefs and come back with an intent to learn on the basis of objective inputs rather than to stipulate on the basis of faith-based dogma.

Apologia4JC19: "(since the cases so far observed can only serve as a reliable guide for interpreting future unobserved cases if it is assumed that the future will resemble the past)."

Just by making the distinction between past and future, you have already granted what is necessary for generally

reliable projections. If your concern here is to press the charge of circular reasoning, then you have, on your own conception of the problem, committed this very error yourself in the way that you have framed it. Concepts of time assume the truth of the axioms, and it is the truth of the axioms which gives our concepts the basis they need for identifying the world around us. And since the truth of the axioms is implicit in any instance of perception (since perception is the action of a subject which exists in distinction to an object which also exists), their truth does not depend on inductive generalization. Objective inputs provide a reliable guide to projecting possible outcomes. To deny this is to deny objectivity. They are all we have and they are all we need. Appealing to an invisible magic being does not solve anything, for it does not seriously address the issues involved. Pointing to a god, for instance, does not bring us any further understanding of how the process of abstraction works. Nor does it give us a genuine understanding of nature; pointing to something that contradicts nature in no way brings us more knowledge of nature. Mysticism can only keep men in the dark on these and other matters.

Apologia4JC19: "So you see, objectivism doesn't *justify* belief in the uniformity of nature at all. It simply *assumes* this to be the case. But, perhaps I have missed something. I look forward to your reply."

See above. Another point that skeptics tend to miss about induction is its implicitly hypothetical nature. Those who want to press skeptical conclusions against induction seem to think that, if induction does not provide 100% reliable results, then it is a faulty tool. Those same persons also tend to disregard the fact that we are born ignorant and need to learn about the world by interacting with it. We do not begin with the assumption that nature is uniform; no one does. We begin by perceiving. But already implicit in our perception are certain key constants which will later serve as the units which are integrated by the concept 'uniformity', such as the constancy of the subject-object relationship, whose orientation obtains without change throughout one's experience. So we can see that the concept 'uniformity' does have objective inputs, and we do not need to secure these inputs via induction; they are already implicit in any firsthand perceptual experience. Couple this with the primacy of existence principle (entities exist independent of consciousness), and the metaphysical basis for the concept 'uniformity' is identifiable. All that's needed now is the ability to form concepts and, later, the ability to understand the process by which they are formed, for induction is an extension of the process of conceptual integration.

These are just some of the basic points that skeptics tend to miss, largely probably because they accept Hume's understanding of the issues involved uncritically. I see Bahnsen do this repeatedly throughout his writings, and if I were a Christian it would really make me cringe. But I also recognize that if Bahnsen himself had a better understanding of induction, he would not be able to bluff his pupils with his so-called transcendental argument, which is really nothing more than the snow-job of an appeal to ignorance.

Hope that helps.
Dawson

[February 15, 2006 4:18 AM](#)

[Apologia4JC19](#) said...

Hello again.

Perhaps Smith isn't an objectivist, though he appears to give an explicit endorsement of Rand's approach to epistemology on p. 137 of his book *Atheism: The Case Against God* (Prometheus: 1989)

It seems that what you want to do is say that we see a cat (for example) and then the observations we make of the particular cat become integrated into our concept of 'cat', such that the actions observed of the particular cat are predicated onto other particular cats, since the actions of particular cats arise in virtue of their participation in the universal "catness." Is this what you are saying? Apart from falling prey to a kind of fatalism (since it would follow that any act can be explained solely by reference to that particular thing's essence, thus allowing for no contingency in the world), this fails to solve the epistemological problem: given that each event in the world can be accounted for in terms of the nature of things, the most we are able to say is that a particular occurrence A is within the nature of a given object B. But, in order to say that any particular occurrence C is not within the nature of object B, we have to say that things are likely to occur in the future as they have in the past. However, the notion of likelihood already assumes the uniformity of nature (without justifying it). Thus, we can either say that every conceivable event is equally likely to occur in the future, or we can beg the question with regard to the uniformity that we expect in the future. Both views are destructive of human knowledge.

You mentioned that given the sovereignty and omnipotence of God, it is possible that He could suspend the uniformity that we have found in experience thus far. The problem of course is that according to Christianity, God is

a being who never lies and is never mistaken. He is also a being who has promised to keep nature uniform. Thus, according to Christianity, uniformity follows necessarily. I look forward to your interaction.

[February 15, 2006 6:28 PM](#)

[VanTilsGhost](#) said...

Christians (especially presuppers) use Genesis 8:22 to 'justify' the uniformity of nature:

"While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, Cold and heat, Winter and summer, And day and night Shall not cease."

Why is this considered an awesome argument for uniformity? A verse in the Bible? Why should a person take that verse as encompassing ALL of the material world....it seems that whoever "wrote" that particular verse was simply observing things around him, and making a comment about what his 'god' would say. How does this reconcile with these verses from the following chapter:

Genesis 9:13-15

13 I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. 14 It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; 15 and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

The writer of these verses obviously did not understand what a rainbow is, or why we perceive them. A rainbow isn't a 'thing' hanging in the clouds. (Let alone, why does God need a 'reminder' to not destroy all of his creation again...kind of a forgetful dude apparently)

With all of the ridiculous crap in the Old Testament, why is a verse about 'heat and cold' and 'winter and summer' a good justification for the uniformity of nature?

[February 16, 2006 7:11 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Apologia4JC19: "Perhaps Smith isn't an objectivist, though he appears to give an explicit endorsement of Rand's approach to epistemology on p. 137 of his book *Atheism: The Case Against God* (Prometheus: 1989)"

So George H. Smith plugs Ayn Rand in one of his books. That's great! But so what? What exactly are you trying to infer from this? Are you trying to say that what Smith said in response to Bahnsen in their radio exchange is definitive Objectivist "scripture"? If you're not trying to say this, what specifically are you trying to say?

Apologia4JC19: "It seems that what you want to do is say that we see a cat (for example) and then the observations we make of the particular cat become integrated into our concept of 'cat', such that the actions observed of the particular cat are predicated onto other particular cats, since the actions of particular cats arise in virtue of their participation in the universal 'catness.' Is this what you are saying?"

No, that's not what I'm saying. The way you recast it here is quite muddled. By the end of your statement you've got things turned completely backwards, though to be fair you probably don't recognize this error yourself. You might want to go back and read what I said, or better yet go learn about the Objectivist theory of concept-formation for without this, you won't have a very good understanding of induction. Try to resist the temptation to translate what you read into terms of a worldview which Objectivism does not assume. I know this might be difficult for you to do, but it is possible if your interest is honest. If you're approaching this as a threat that you think needs to be debunked rather than a position that might offer some genuine understanding that you've not considered before, you will only end up clouding your judgment and remaining in the dark.

Note some very basic points here. We do perceive entities in our environment, such as cats, and this activity is not inductive in nature. Also, we form our concepts of entities on the basis of what we perceive. This process too is not induction. The concepts we form of the concretes we observe include everything we observe in the particular entities which those concepts subsume. They include their attributes as well as their actions. My position does not teach that the actions of particulars "arise in virtue of their participation in the universal '[A]ness.'" On my

worldview's approach, this characterization constitutes a blatant reversal for it implies that concepts precede the concretes which they name. I think the notion that entities "participate in the universal" is highly misleading, for it blurs the subject-object relationship. Concepts are open-ended such that they include all units of a particular kind. Rand used the concept 'man' to make this point: "the concept 'man' does not (and need not) specify what number of men will ultimately have existed-it specifies only the characteristics of man, and means that any number of entities possessing these characteristics is to be identified as 'men'." (ITOE) When we qualify concepts with adjectives or modifying phrases, we do this in order to narrow the scope of reference so as to exclude units which don't apply. For instance, "bearded men" or "men who wear beards" excludes those who are clean-shaven. Similarly, "men with a four-year degree" excludes those who do not have four-year degrees, and so on. Without such qualification, the concept retains its widest scope of reference. Notice how radically different this view of concepts is from the one endorsed by some Christian apologists; they think that a mind needs to be omniscient in order to have concepts that "extend to all particulars" (Warren, [Christian Civilization is the Only Civilization](#)). Such thinkers apparently don't recognize that concept-formation, by virtue of the nature of abstraction, eliminates any supposed need for omniscience in the first place! Beyond that, I would ask where Christians get their understanding of concepts, for it's not explained in the bible. It appears that apologists have taken upon themselves the task of construing concept theory deliberately to fit their god-beliefs in such a way that their god-beliefs are necessary to their view of concepts, even though the result is torturously muddled.

Also, we do not need to "predicate" the actions of one particular cat to another particular cat. Since the concept is a mental integration which includes all the units it names, we are dealing with generalities pertaining to the class. If we see Max the cat (a particular entity) give birth to three kittens, we are not, by virtue of including Max in the concept 'cat', attributing this specific action to Sparks, another cat. The concept allows us to integrate the facts we perceive generally, e.g., (some) cats have the ability to give birth to kittens. The inductive *implications* of conceptualizing from perceived concretes should be pretty clear. This is possible at the level of concept-formation by virtue of the process known as abstraction: characteristics of entities are retained in the content of the concept, but their particular measurements are omitted.

Apologia4JC19: "Apart from falling prey to a kind of fatalism (since it would follow that any act can be explained solely by reference to that particular thing's essence, thus allowing for no contingency in the world),"

Pardon me? Where did I make "reference to that particular thing's essence"? You are trying to interact with my worldview on the basis of deeply insufficient knowledge of it. On my worldview, essence is not metaphysical (and thus is not a property belonging to any specific particular), yet your characterization here assumes that it is. And this characterization is fundamental to your charge of "fatalism" against my position. Doesn't fly, for you speak beyond your knowledge. Your criticism depends on a reversal, and thus invalidates itself. But there's more. Observe:

Apologia4JC19: "this fails to solve the epistemological problem: given that each event in the world can be accounted for in terms of the nature of things, the most we are able to say is that a particular occurrence A is within the nature of a given object B. But, in order to say that any particular occurrence C is not within the nature of object B, we have to say that things are likely to occur in the future as they have in the past."

Your whole approach here is laden with the assumption of an event-based understanding of causality, and since Objectivism does not adopt this assumption, your criticism is already off target. Take a look at what you just wrote above, and now ask: what does your statement take to be primary? Also, as I pointed out to you earlier, concepts of time (e.g., "past," "future," etc.) assume the truth of the axioms. So just by making the distinction between past, present and future, you've already granted the basic foundations validating concept-formation and providing a firm basis for conceptual integration. If there is such a thing as a past (as opposed to a present and a future), would it make sense to suppose that the entities that existed in that time reference did not have specific natures? Would it make sense to suppose that their actions had no relation to their natures? Should we discard the observations we made in the past and the knowledge we validated on the basis of firsthand perception of entities when we estimate the range of possibilities of the same or similar entities? Who does this, and why would he do that? Our knowledge is an increasingly large contextual sum constantly building upon itself. We add data to the content of our concepts as we discover it, if we are attentive learners. We already saw above that concepts of concretes have ample implications for induction (by virtue of the process of abstraction), such that the application of the law of causality (as Objectivism understands it) to entity classes enables us to bring these implications to fruition in the form of broader generalizations about the units subsumed by the concept. The product of this procedure need not be inerrant, especially at the level of any specific particular, for the goal of the process is to reach a general truth which may or may not be applicable to any particular unit included in that general truth's scope of reference. Not all men are bearded, and not all beardless men have to shave everyday. I have to shave everyday or I get a nasty 5 o'clock shadow by 10am. But my friend Akira needs to shave perhaps once a week to remain beardless. Variations

occur, but this does not invalidate the general truths we derive about entity classes by observing their units. Feedback on actual states of affairs (what actually happens) will tell us whether our application of general truths is accurate in case by case basis. Before discovering the specifics of the case, I might suppose that Akira needs to shave just as I do in order to remain whiskerless. Note the hypothetical nature involved in applying general truths to particular units; there's nothing wrong with saying something like "If Akira is like me, he probably needs to shave everyday just as I do in order to fight off his beard." Then, as I discover more data about Akira, I learn that this is not the case. So the abstraction process allows for self-correction.

Apologia4JC19: "However, the notion of likelihood already assumes the uniformity of nature (without justifying it)."

It is not the task of the notion of likelihood to justify the uniformity of nature. The uniformity of nature is already implicit in perception, since perception is a conscious process by a subject of an object or group of objects, and the orientation between a subject and the objects of its awareness does not change. We can attend to this firsthand, in any instance of perceiving an object over any period of time. The recognition of the uniformity of nature is more pronounced in the axiomatic concepts 'existence', 'identity' and 'consciousness', concepts which have to be true even if one wants to deny them. So the recognition of uniformity is already available at the level of the axioms; it only needs to be explicitly identified as it already has an objective basis. Consequently, since this recognition is already implicit in the axioms, we do not need to prove that nature is uniform. The process of proving anything would be of no effect if nature were not uniform. So if the presuppositionalist's concern for how a thinker might "account for" the uniformity of nature constitutes a call for such a proof, he is misguided on the topic and needs to trace his steps in forming the concept in the first place. If he's not asking for a proof of uniformity, then what is he asking for? Of course, if the apologist is satisfied by positing an invisible magic being whose alleged promises will guarantee that the uniformity of nature obtains, he's already premised his worldview on metaphysical subjectivism, for he wants to point to a ruling consciousness whose dictates hold metaphysical primacy over its objects. Thus he commits the fallacy of the stolen concept by placing intentional operations prior to their genetic preconditions.

Apologia4JC19: "Thus, we can either say that every conceivable event is equally likely to occur in the future, or we can beg the question with regard to the uniformity that we expect in the future. Both views are destructive of human knowledge."

There are many dubious assumptions lurking in your statement here, and to tease them out I would ask some questions. For instance, where did you get the concept 'event'? How did you form this concept? What definition are you assuming? Or, do you not know what it means? What exactly is an event, and what distinguishes one event from another? Present your definition of the term 'event' and then let's take a look at its constituent concepts, the ones which you use to inform it, and see if they are reducible.

Meanwhile, you've not been able to pin me with a circular argument, for I did not present an argument. Rather, I merely pointed to those factors and elements which make induction useful and intelligible, and it's clear to me that you're unable to bring a worthy criticism to my position. You can keep trying, or, you might do like other Christians and head for the high grass never to be heard from again. But it's unlikely that you'll come around and say "Hey, you know, I never thought of it quite the way you presented it. It actually sounds plausible..." Indeed, your confessional investment holds you very tight, too tight for you to concede, even when it's obvious that you're in over your head.

Furthermore, on what objective basis would one say that "every conceivable event is equally likely to occur in the future"? I asked above, and ask again: should we jettison the knowledge we've acquired and validated already when it comes to estimations of future outcomes? Or, should we allow ourselves to factor that knowledge into our analyses according to their relevance as we judge each case to generate object-based estimations of future outcomes? Do you think there are other viable options? Perhaps you might suggest that thinkers resort to prayer?

Apologia4JC19: "You mentioned that given the sovereignty and omnipotence of God, it is possible that He could suspend the uniformity that we have found in experience thus far. The problem of course is that according to Christianity, God is a being who never lies and is never mistaken. He is also a being who has promised to keep nature uniform. Thus, according to Christianity, uniformity follows necessarily. I look forward to your interaction."

Lots of words here, but your dodge doesn't work. Since the concept 'uniformity' in Christian hands, like any other concept in Christian hands, has no objective basis, it has no firm meaning and thus can be applied to anything by expedience. The problem is that it proves to be unreliable as a concept for its only purpose is to rationalize an irrational position, which is a hopeless endeavor. Was Jesus' transformation of water into wine at the wedding of Cana a "suspension" of the uniformity of nature? That depends on which Christian you ask, and what apologetic outcomes he projects given how he might answer. Indeed, we should not expect a clear and resolute answer from

the apologist. The bible nowhere takes a firm stand one way or another, for such issues were not a concern for its authors; belief in invisible magic beings was, for their superficial outlook on the world, perfectly acceptable and it suited their social ambitions, which outweighed any concern for philosophical coherence. Indeed, to say that “according to Christianity, uniformity follows necessarily” itself begs the question: “follows necessarily” assumes uniformity already, so to identify this as the mechanism by which it is secured is fallaciously circular.

Furthermore, unless the miracle stories we find in the biblical record are thought to constitute “lies” or “mistakes,” then saying that “God is a being who never lies and is never mistaken” does nothing to address the criticism brought against the Christian worldview given its teachings’ implications with respect to induction. Was the Christian god “lying” when it assumed the form of a burning bush before Moses? Was Jesus “lying” when he fed the 5,000, calmed the storm, walked on the waters of the lake or transformed water into wine at the wedding at Cana? I don’t know any Christians who would say that these are instances of lying, nor have I ever witnessed a Christian say that these are “mistakes,” either. In the Christian’s mind, all these miracle events - which stand as radical deviations from what we perceive in reality (that’s the point of a miracle story to begin with!) are perfectly compatible with all the other claims he wants to make about his god: his god does not lie, but causing miracles to happen is surely not an instance of his god lying; his god does not make mistakes, but causing miracles to happen is surely not an instance of his god making a mistake. So again, the Christian has a real problem with induction given that his worldview asserts the existence of invisible magic beings which can manipulate reality without having to obey the laws of nature. Unless the believer is omniscient, knowing the fullness of what his god allegedly “plans” to do, the believer has no way of knowing whether objects will fall to the earth according to its gravitational pull, or suddenly float up into the sky. Certainly he would not dispute the supposition that his god can do these things; and to say that his god will not do these things amounts to speaking on behalf of his god where he could have no knowledge. Indeed, does the Christian ever explain how he might know what his god might plan to do? In the end, the Christian has an inert and impotent god, completely ineffectual, afraid to come out of hiding and brought to its knees by the unbelieving world.

To say that your god “is also a being who has promised to keep nature uniform” again begs the question, for you’re assuming that the concept ‘promise’ has an objective reference, one that is unchanging over time, and yet the only inputs you’ll be able to supply to support this assumption of yours will necessarily affirm the foundations of my worldview, particularly the Objectivist axioms, which would have to be true for you to assert your worldview’s fundamentals (whatever they might be). Indeed, key metaphysical constants (such as my worldview’s axioms) would already have to be in place for any conscious being to be able to make any promises in the first place. So you commit the fallacy of the stolen concept just by asserting your ‘promise’ as such. Meanwhile, you offer no explanation of how you arrived at the concept ‘uniformity’. Apparently you just pulled this out of thin air.

Also, you overlook Christianity’s own teachings, which tell us that there are other invisible magic beings besides the Christian god which can meddle with nature. There are demons and devils, for instance, as well as fallen angels. In Genesis, we read the tale of Satan assuming the form of a snake. In the gospels, demons and devils are cited as agents responsible for diseases and mental problems. Any of these supposedly malevolent and mischievous beings could, according to what we read in the bible, come along and cause havoc on our environment. As unseen beings, we’d have no ability to detect them or anticipate their next move. The fact is that most believers really don’t believe after all, or else they’d readily admit that they can do nothing but put their faith in the unknown and admit that their lives are ruled according to the unknown. Knowledge is death to Christianity.

Consider: If I believed that an invisible magic being exists, and attempt to govern my estimations of “future, unobserved events” on the basis that such beings exist (given the gospel stories, for instance, as precedent), on what basis would I be able to rule out the possibility that the water I am about to drink out of the glass I am holding to my mouth will turn into wine? Picture this: I am holding a glass of water to my mouth, readying myself to take a sip to quench my thirst. Suppose that I am a teetotaler, intending not to introduce any alcohol into my body. How would I know whether or not the water will change into wine? On my worldview’s premises, I know that reality does not conform to consciousness. But on your worldview’s dogmatic commitment to mysticism, what’s your answer?

I look forward to your interaction.

Regards,
Dawson

[February 16, 2006 1:50 PM](#)

[Apologia4JC19](#) said...

Hello again.

After attempting to decipher your comments, all I can see is that apparently you think that some kind of discernible uniformity in nature follows from the axioms, and that this provides the basis for our use of induction. How is it that you suppose this to be the case? After I get a firm handle on what it is that you are saying (since apparently my attempts at summarizing it have been off the mark), then I will be able to better interact with your perspective (and then I will gladly answer your questions).

[February 16, 2006 6:47 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Apologia4JC19: "After attempting to decipher your comments, all I can see is that apparently you think that some kind of discernible uniformity in nature follows from the axioms, and that this provides the basis for our use of induction. How is it that you suppose this to be the case?"

I explained this above. Go back and re-read it if you did not catch it the first time.

Apologia4JC19: "After I get a firm handle on what it is that you are saying (since apparently my attempts at summarizing it have been off the mark), then I will be able to better interact with your perspective"

I suspect that your primary concern is to debunk my position, for even before you take the time you need to understand it, it's clear that your intention is to discredit it for any reason that might seem expedient. Am I wrong?

Apologia4JC19: "and then I will gladly answer your questions"

Yes, I did ask you a number of questions. What is keeping you from answering them now?

Regards,
Dawson

[February 16, 2006 7:28 PM](#)

[Paul Manata](#) said...

oh Dawson, you're a hoot, you left out how I refuted Moore and thus your post.

[February 20, 2006 9:27 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Paul, it's not clear what you're trying to say. As I recall, your interaction with Zach Moore (for instance [here](#)) concerned his charge that TAG commits the fallacy known as affirming the consequent. By contrast, my post elaborates shows how presuppositionalism depends at least in part on an appeal to ignorance. (To be sure, there are other errors as well, as would be expected in any defense of an explicitly subjectivist worldview.) So "refuting" Zach's charge of fallacy does nothing to overcome the criticism I have presented and supported in my post. To overcome my criticism, you would have to completely revise the whole presuppositionalist method, for Bahnsen makes crystal clear, in section 7.4 of his book *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings & Analysis*, that ignorance of non-believing systems is license to affirm belief in invisible magic beings and the cartoon universe premise. The whole program of presuppositionalism models this reliance on ignorance, specifically the apologist's own ignorance. Ignorance is a gap to be filled by pointing to mysticism. This is why questions about how a specific non-believer might "account for" some feature of cognition, for instance, figure so prominently in the presuppositionalist repertoire: it is as though the apologist is expecting the non-believer to throw up his arms and say "Duh, I donno! Must be god did it!" For that's precisely what's implied by the whole scheme. Beyond that, if the apologist truly believes in Christianity's invisible magic beings, he believes for no clear reason whatsoever. When apologists do attempt to assemble some vague form of reasoning which kinda-sorta seems to suggest the existence of their god (so long as we allow certain dubious assumptions to go unchecked), their own methodology can easily be slightly modified (primarily by swapping out key inputs) to "prove" the existence of a rival god - one which the apologist himself rejects. When this is pointed out, apologists tend to abandon the discussion for they realize their bluff has been called.

Regards,
Dawson

[February 20, 2006 11:21 AM](#)

[Paul Manata](#) said...

Dawson,

i covered this in the post you took Zach's claim from.

[February 22, 2006 11:42 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

So, when an apologist draws the conclusion that "there presently exists no satisfactory solution to the problem of induction from a secular perspective" only later to admit that "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," he's speaking out of knowledge, not ignorance? Oh, Paul, you are a funny one!

Regards,

Dawson

[February 22, 2006 4:53 PM](#)