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Presuppositionalism vs. Causality

Presuppositional apologists like to use words like "random" and "chance" as little barbs suited for maligning rival positions. Just as they are prone to overstating their case (atheist philosophers, we are told, are constantly "failing miserably" in their efforts to formulate a rational view on things), they also assign a heavy workload (primarily for offensive emotional effect) to single words (such as "chance" and "random" in metaphysics, or "relative" in morality, etc.) which are intended to discredit the non-believer's point of view while alleviating the theist from the need to produce an argument. The following captures the essence of their thinking, as I have seen it displayed:

If mutations are "random," then evolution is "chance driven" and it's "just by chance" that man evolved the way he did. Therefore the "Naturalistic" philosopher presupposes a universe built on the slipping sands of chance.

That's basically how the standard refrain goes, but it has numerous variants. Essentially what is being said in such charges is that the apologist disparages any view which does not adopt his frozen abstraction, namely substituting volition, which is a type of causation, for causality as such. If any given action is not an action that was intended by some consciousness (ultimately they have their god in mind here), then it has no causal basis at all - it's "chance" implying a "chaotic" universe. This is standard thinking in the religious mind which wants to credit all the workings of the universe to his imaginary being. Without his god, everything would fall apart.

Of course, this reflects a very poor understanding of causality as well as a commitment to the primacy of consciousness. Causality is the law of identity applied to action, which means: the actions of an entity depend on its nature (contrast this view with the Humean conception which views causality as a relationship between events instead of a relation between an entity and its own actions). This is a general, absolute fact that even the theist must obey in order to achieve any end he chooses to pursue, whether it's tying his shoe, pouring a glass of milk or getting his butt to church on time. Wishing is not a means of causality. But if theism were an accurate description of the universe, wishing would be the only type of causation, and this would render induction completely impossible as a means of acquiring and validating knowledge of the universe. As an acquaintance of mine once put it, **induction is valid because there are no magic beings that can mess with the universe** (paraphrase).

As for natural selection, you're completely right that its processes are not "random" and that its outcomes are not "chance-driven." Binsinger makes this point in one of his lectures:

Natural selection is really the law of causality applied to life. It says (1) the survival of an organism depends on its actions... That's the conditional nature of life on which the Objectivist ethics is built... And (2) the actions of an organism depend on its nature - that's the law of causality. Therefore its survival depends on its nature. Thus every variation in the nature of an organism has a survival significance... It promotes survival, or it hurts survival... Nothing is neutral to life; everything is pro-life or anti-life. The pro-life variations survive better on average than the anti-life variations - that's natural selection.

One of the many assumptions driving the theist's slander of evolution is related to those framing his moral views, namely that life on earth doesn't matter (in fact, the theist wants to believe that he's got another life waiting for him on layaway beyond the grave - believing such nonsense can only lessen one's value of his life on earth; cf. Muslim suicide bombers). Because of the theist's irrational orientation to life on earth, man's nature as a biological organism has no relevance to the theist's conception of science, and it has no relevance to his morality or to what the theist would identify as a value. "God" is the number one value, any theist will likely say, for "God" is the standard of all values (though he won't be able to cite a bible passage that affirms this - the bible is deafeningly silent when it comes to values - at best, they're just taken for granted). The claim that "God" is the standard of value ignores the fact that the being they describe and call "God" could, on the basis of their descriptions (e.g., "immortal," "indestructible," "perfect," "lacking nothing," etc.), have no capacity for values, since its existence would be completely unconditional. It is because man's life is conditional (i.e., he faces the alternative between life and death) that values are both possible and necessary. The facts of reality don't factor into anything since they don't count: they're "contingent" and are not "necessary" in "all possible universes." And notice the duplicity of mind that this massive disconnect spurs on in religious teachings: on the one hand, "God" loves all human beings (enough to kill his son), but on the other, "God" is willing to throw the statistically vast majority of human beings into the garbage can for what amounts to nothing more than simply using their own minds (cf. the presuppositionalists' hatred for what they call "autonomous reasoning" - i.e., thinking with your own mind). That is not the disposition of a being who clearly understands the nature of his values, and it's clear what generates this kind of thinking: the religionist's notion of "love" has nothing to do with values to begin with, for his conception of morality has nothing

to do with the facts of reality.

If anything is "random," it is the Christian's view of things. After all, it's "just by chance" that their god exists. They will say he is a "necessary existence," but what's to keep us from pointing out that it's "just by chance" that "God" is a "necessary existence"? And, since this god's nature is eternal and unchanging, it's "just by chance" that it happened to be a "good god" instead of an "evil god" (again, keep in mind these terms 'good' and 'evil' have no basis in objective values); god didn't choose to be good (that would imply that he's not "necessarily good," and Christians won't stand for that), he "just is" good (i.e., by chance, in the theist's own locution). For Calvinism it's even worse. It's "just by chance" that the Calvinist was picked by god for divine bestowments (regeneration, salvation, rebirth, or whatever they call it), for he did nothing to merit this. It's just the luck of the dice from the believer's perspective (which means thanking god for being numbered among "the chosen" is incoherent - this was "pre-ordained" from all eternity, not chosen). So not only does the Calvinist affirm what amounts to be a worldview based on chance (as apologists conceive of it), he has also completely negated volition - even god's! - since god's actions are "necessary" and "immutable."

Since the theist wants to reject natural causality, appeals to "intelligent design" reduce to an affirmation of the metaphysics of chance: it's "just by chance" that god "designed" man with two arms instead of 14; it's "just by chance" that god "designed" the earth and other planets with gravity instead of without gravity; it's "just by chance" that god "designed" the sun radiates light and energy and plants turn them into energy they can use; it's "just by chance" that bees don't spin webs and spiders don't produce honey; it's "just by chance" that god chose to create us in this "possible universe" and not in some other "possible universe."

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