

Thursday, August 20, 2009

RazorsKiss on the Christian God as the Basis of Knowledge - Part 4: RK on Man's "Warrant" for Using Logic

In his [Rebuttal to Mitch LeBlanc](#), RK raised some issues regarding logic. Presuppositionalists commonly assert that the Christian god is the foundation of logic, and I have devoted a series of blogs investigating this claim already (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)).

Man's "Warrant" for Using Logic

Instead of arguing outright that logic presupposes the Christian god, RK attempted to take LeBlanc to task on the question of having "warrant" for using logic. In this section I will answer RK's questions and objections from my own position.

RK writes:

Having success in using the laws of logic is not the same as saying that you have a warrant to be using it.

A man's "warrant" for using logic is his ability to think, specifically his ability to identify and integrate what he perceives *in conceptual form*. Essentially, man's nature as a rational animal is all the warrant he needs for using logic. He does not need to seek approval from anyone, either real or imaginary, before using his mind and governing his thoughts by means of logical principles.

The question is about whether we have warrant for considering logic as axiomatic.

Logic itself is not axiomatic. Logic is a set of principles which guides an individual's reasoning about the facts he discovers in reality, and is composed of a wide assortment of concepts. So as a method of knowledge it is not conceptually irreducible (which is one of the criteria qualifying a position as axiomatic; see [here](#)). Moreover, logic is only applicable once one has formed a number of concepts, both from perceptual inputs as well as on the basis of concepts so formed (cf. abstraction from abstractions), which are formed in essentially the same manner as concepts formed directly from perceptual inputs. Even if one wants to say that logic is implicit in the formation of these baseline concepts in that some of its principles guide the process of forming concepts, it would not be something that could be identified until those concepts have been formed and thus be something which could be identified. Now this does not erase the fact that the foundations of logic are axiomatic concepts. As an objective method which teaches man to think rationally, logic presupposes the truth of the axioms which I discussed in [my previous blog](#). If RK thinks that logic is axiomatic, he needs to explain this. But I do not see where he attempted to do so in his debate with LeBlanc. Quite the opposite, RK says very little about logic in his opening statement. In fact, his only statement about logic worth noting is his assertion that "an unbelieving man... has no basis for his use of logical laws," a statement for which he provides no informed defense.

It seems apparent to me that Mitch is not providing a justification for using the law that he is using - nor did I see a case that did anything to disprove mine.

Keep in mind that LeBlanc had only presented his opening statement by this point in the debate. Contrary to what he apparently believes, RK is not reacting to LeBlanc's rebuttal to RK's opening statement. Moreover, had the topic of the debate been specifically about "providing a justification for using" logic, then RK could fault LeBlanc for failing to address this, if in fact he did fail to address it. Then again, I did not see where RK had provided a justification for using logic. In his opening statement, all RK essentially did was describe his position, affirm its exclusivity and assert that any other basis is insufficient. With regards to logic specifically, recall that RK had stated:

That any worldview asserting some sort of "objective" basis for the laws of logic specifically, but for nature and morality as well - is pure subjectivism wrapped up in an objective shell consisting of concepts stolen from their Creator.

Why does RK suppose that a worldview which affirms an objective basis for the laws of logic "is pure subjective wrapped up in an objective shell consisting of concepts stolen from their Creator"? Does RK think that Christianity

affirms an objective basis for the laws of logic? If so, does he think he's affirming "pure subjectivism wrapped up in an objective shell consisting of concepts stolen from their Creator"? If the "Creator" which RK has in mind here is the Christian god, he's in for a surprise. RK claims that his god is "omniscient." I have already made the case that an omniscient mind would not have its knowledge in conceptual form (see [here](#)), and a presuppositional apologist has expressed agreement with this conclusion (see [here](#)).

Moving on:

He is simply saying that it is usable - the same problem Martin falls into, in his TANG

Why is saying that logic is usable is a problem? Does RK not think it is usable?

That is not the question. On what grounds can it be considered warranted to be using abstract universals which apply to all (created) thinking beings? I have a proper ground to be doing so.

The use of "abstract universals" is "warranted" on the grounds of the primacy of existence and the objective theory of concepts, two vital philosophical components which are antithetical to the Christian worldview. The Christian worldview assumes the primacy of consciousness, and has no theory of concepts. So RK is deluding himself if he thinks Christianity provides "warrant" for "using abstract universals which apply" to anything at all. By endorsing the Christian worldview, he has rejected the two very things which make "abstract universals" possible and applicable in the first place.

Obviously, an atheist is able to /operate/ with success using the logical laws which his brain operates according to. In fact, they MUST do so.

An individual applies logic in his thinking *volitionally*, because he *chooses* to, not because he's been forced or compelled to. This is the moral element to rational thinking which many thinkers (including presuppositionalists, who prefer to see morality as a matter of obeying the [commands](#) of an invisible magic being) tend to miss. Morality is involved where there is a choice to be made, and applicable only when there is a choice to be made.

As for the mechanics of the laws of logic, however, one will eventually encounter insurmountable difficulty when trying to understand and explain how logic works if his worldview does not equip him with an objective theory of concepts. It is because many individuals lack a worldview with an objective understanding of the nature of concepts that they give up on trying to understand logic and point to something which they can only imagine as the "basis" of logic, as we see in the case of presuppositionalists like RK. Since they have virtually no understanding of concepts, and have no idea how volition can be reconciled with objectivity, they give up and surrender their minds to mysticism. And this very act of giving up is understood, "interpreted," as giving oneself over to the supernatural, as *sacrificing* oneself to his god, following the Christian model, as a devotional act garnering the approval of a divine being, as "pleasing" one's god. The believer here imagines that he hears a voice from heaven, saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." This auto-suggestive con which the believer invokes upon himself, can be powerful in its persuasion, where persuasion at this point is merely a form of positive reinforcement of a vicious psychological habit.

It is no surprise, then, that RK presents no *conceptual* understanding of logic, and in place of such informed understanding seeks to associate logic with his storybook-based worldview.

Now it should be pointed out that, even if one does not understand concept theory, it would not follow from this that his use of logic is "unwarranted." I may not understand how my microwave oven heats food, but this does not mean that my use of microwave ovens to heat food is unwarranted. The microwave heats food, whether I understand its behind-the-scenes functionality or not, so long as I can get it to run. One's use of logic is analogous to this situation. In fact, one would need to use logic in order to understand both how a microwave oven works as well as how logic allows a thinker to scale the hierarchical structure of his knowledge. On the other hand, claiming that a worldview can "account for" the preconditions of knowledge, when in fact that worldview lacks a theory of concepts in the first place, simply undermines the credibility of those who champion such a position. This is the position in which we find presuppositionalists like RK, who claims that the Christian god is the basis of knowledge. Since Christianity does not have a theory of concepts, how could defenders of the view which RK seeks to defend going to produce an intelligible case for such a position?

Continuing, RK states:

The question at hand is not whether - but /why/ he is using them.

A thinker uses the laws of logic *because his consciousness operates on the conceptual level of cognition*. RK thinks that an appeal to a supernatural creator of logic is needed to justify man's use of logic, but this does not address the issue informatively. It does not tell us why logic applies to man's thinking, fails to take into account the nature of man's consciousness, and is preoccupied with validating the contents of an ancient storybook which are irrelevant to logic and man's need for it. RK's view of logic teaches us nothing about the nature of logic or the nature of its relevance to human thought. It only seeks to wedge his god-belief into any conversation about logic, as if it had any relevance in the first place, a relevance which RK has not succeeded in establishing.

Are the Laws of Logic "created" by the Christian god?

Beyond these points, which have been answered, RK said very little about logic. But there was one other claim which RK made about logic which I found noteworthy due to the tension it generates in relation to claims about logic made by other presuppositionalists. RK made the following statement:

I am going to argue that God is not only the ordainer, but creator of the logical laws we use.

I really wish presuppositionalists would get on the same page. In *Pushing the Antithesis: The Apologetic Methodology of Greg L. Bahnsen*, it is stated:

We are not saying God created the laws of logic by His volitional self-determination. Were this so, then He could alter or discard them as well... (p. 210)

Bahnsen says that his god did *not* create the laws of logic, while RK says that his god *is* their "creator." The two are in direct conflict. Which is it? Are we to understand the presuppositionalist position as advocating the view that the Christian god did create the laws of logic, or that it did not create the laws of logic? Is the presuppositionalist's view of logic so radically different from an objective understanding of logic, that the law of contradiction either does not apply, or its violations can still be called "logical"? Or, if one or the other position were true, how could two Christian apologists differ so dramatically on this point?

The real story behind this kind of disagreement between two presuppositionalists who want to claim some kind of fundamental relationship between their god and the laws of logic, is that there really is no fundamental relationship between the Christian god and the laws of logic at all, and defenders of Christianity are attempting to shoplift logic as if its principles were underwritten by the Christian god's alleged nature. This is why RK, Bahnsen and other apologists really don't provide an actual argument to support their claim that the laws of logic "reflect" their god's nature, rather they simply assert it and call their assertion an argument, which is what we see in RK's case (it's definitely what we find in Bahnsen). If there were genuinely an objective rationale for associating logic with the Christian god, I strongly doubt that we would find this kind of disagreement between Christian apologists essentially cut from the same cloth.

On the other hand, if presuppositionalists do have an argument for there being a fundamental association between the Christian god and the laws of logic, it seems that the first order of business would be to agree on whether that association is creative in nature (as RK affirms), or merely "reflective" (as Bahnsen affirms elsewhere). Of course, we would want to know what the premises of such an argument might be, but we can reasonably expect the argument's premises to vary fundamentally on which of these two disparate positions is being defended. An argument for the view that the Christian god is the *creator* of logical laws would presumably look quite different from an argument which merely seeks to establish that the laws of logic "reflect" the Christian god's nature.

Then again, an even more fundamental order of business would be to establish the existence of said god in the first place, for without this it would be nonsensical to claim a relationship between the two. Once this has been achieved (and so far as I've seen - and I've seen a lot - it has not been achieved), presuppositionalists would be advised to get their playbook in order. Did their god create the laws of logic, or not? There are certain risks with either position which could understandably make presuppositionalists uncomfortable.

If, on the one hand, it is held that the Christian god created the laws of logic, as RK wants us to believe, then - as Bahnsen warns - that god "could alter or discard them as well." I'm confident that the religious mind could find a way to live with this, but it would be sufficient to repudiate the claim that said god is "rational," a claim which can be found

throughout the presuppositionalist literature.

Do the Laws of Logic “Reflect” the Character of the Christian god?

On the other hand, if the laws of logic merely “reflect” the character of the Christian god, it could be inferred from this that the laws of logic essentially exist independent of the Christian god, in spite of its alleged “reflection” of the Christian god’s character. The claim that the laws of logic “reflect” the character of the Christian god seems to have been devised specifically to avoid the pitfall of portraying logic as merely another the Christian god’s creations, which it can alter and discard at will, while still maintaining a sense of dependence of logic on the Christian god. So, given the above noted tension, presuppositionalists need to decide that whether or not their created the laws of logic. If it did create the laws of logic, then I see no reason why the warning which Bahnsen gives - that the Christian god “could alter or discard them” at will - would not apply. If the Christian god did not create the laws of logic, and yet it is acknowledged that the laws of logic do in fact exist, then it must be admitted that the laws of logic exist independent of the Christian god’s creative activity. In this case, the laws of logic are *not* created. Whether or not they “reflect” the Christian god’s character is a side issue which I will address below. For the present case, the question is whether or not the laws of logic exist as a result of its creative activity, or independent of its creative will. Given RK’s affirmation above, presuppositionalists seem torn on this matter, and I wager that this is due to the fact that there is no objective support for any relationship between the laws of logic and the Christian god.

As for the claim that the laws of logic “reflect” the character of the Christian god, such a view can only be endorsed if one fails to recognize the profound differences between the nature of logic on the one hand, and the characteristics which Christianity ascribes to its god on the other. Specifically, logic is conceptual in nature. Not only does logic as a method which guides rational thinking consist of principles which take conceptual form, but its very application as a method of non-contradictory identification is inherently tied to the universality (i.e., the [open-endedness](#)) of conceptualization. Specifically, it is because logical principles are *conceptual* in nature, and therefore *open-ended*, that they are available to any individual to apply to any object or set of objects he perceives or considers, whether it be location of a house, the rate of flow of a river, a bank account balance, cooking an omelet, or deciding which political candidate to vote for. Thus, if the laws of logic reflect anything, they reflect the conceptual nature of human thought, where the objective theory of concepts identifies the proper norms implied by the conceptual nature of human thought.

Moreover, the laws of logic presume the primacy of existence, i.e., the recognition that the objects of consciousness are what they are independent of conscious activity. It would make no sense to attempt to apply logic to objects which can vary according to a thinkers will. If one sought to balance his bank account, for instance, and could alter the amount stated on his payment receipts according to his wishes (for instance, instead of having paid \$2800.00 for transmission work, he decided that it cost him only \$4.00), why would he need logic for such a task? If the nature of the objects of one’s awareness conformed to one’s conscious activity, he wouldn’t need to draw inferences about the way things are; rather, he could just reset everything according to his [wishes](#), according to “His good pleasure,” as RK puts it. Psalms 115:3 makes this point explicitly clear: “our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.”

Unfortunately for the presuppositionalist, however, this disqualifies the Christian god as the object which the laws of logic reflect. For, as I have argued [here](#) (and with agreement from a presuppositionalist [here](#)), the Christian god would not have its knowledge in conceptual form. In other words, its knowledge would not be *conceptual in nature*. So if logic is in fact conceptual in nature, and man’s knowledge is also conceptual in nature, there is no reason to suppose that logic “reflects” the character of the Christian god, when in fact logic reflects the conceptual nature of human thought. Also, since logic presupposes the primacy of existence, and the very notion of the Christian god [entails the contradiction of this principle](#), namely the primacy of consciousness, then we have all the more reason to reject the view that the laws of logic “reflect” the character of the Christian god. Presuppositionalists who make such a claim are in fact exposing their hapless ignorance of the conceptual nature of logic, as well as their failure to integrate the attributes which their worldview ascribes to their god into such claims.

by Dawson Bethrick

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

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [10:00 AM](#)

2 Comments:

[Robert Morane](#) said...

Bahnsen Burner:

If I were you, I'd ask your opponent the following questions:

How do you know that God can create logic?

Him: because he's omnipotent!

I don't see the relevancy...

Him: Well, if God is omnipotent, he can create anything, therefore he can create logic! Duh!

But that's a logical conclusion. How can it be logical that a being can create logic because he's omnipotent if logic does not already exist?

Him: (Blank out)

Another problem:

Before the creation of logic, did God have a beginning?

Him: Of course not.

Why not?

Him: Because he's eternal, and an eternal being cannot logically have a beginning...

Yeah, but I asked you if God had a beginning BEFORE the creation of logic. For without logic, it does NOT follow that an eternal being cannot have a beginning.

Him: (Blank out)

[August 21, 2009 9:59 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hello Robert,

Thank you for your comment. All good points. They are most effective against the view that God "created" logic. But this view seems to be a minority position among presuppositionalists. In the published literature, this position is denied and an alternative view is presented (that logic "reflects" the character of the Christian god).

I am not in dialogue with RazorsKiss at the moment, so I cannot personally raise these objections to him. If my experience with presuppositionalists is any indication, RK will probably not dialogue with me, at least not for long. That's too bad, I'm always eager to be entertained.

Regards,
Dawson

[August 21, 2009 10:41 AM](#)

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