

Friday, August 21, 2009

## RazorsKiss on the Christian God as the Basis of Knowledge - Part 5: Exodus 3:14

In his [interrogation of Mitch LeBlanc](#), presuppositional apologist RazorsKiss (“RK” hereafter) immediately drew attention to a statement found in Exodus 3:14:

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’.”

It is not clear from his own statements why RK deemed it important to bicker with LeBlanc over the significance of this passage, unless it was to demonstrate LeBlanc’s own supposed ignorance of the historical meaning of the “I AM” clause, which by itself would have no relevance to the thesis which RK has elected to defend.

Now some Christian apologists claim that this passage contains biblical affirmation of the law of identity, a fundamental law of logic, in the clause “I AM WHO I AM.” Gary Crampton, for instance, makes the following statement:

Also fixed in Scripture are the two other principle laws of logic: the law of identity (A is A) and the law of the excluded middle (A is either B or non-B). The former is taught in Exodus 3:14, in the name of God itself: “I AM WHO I AM.” And the latter is found, for example, in the words of Christ: “He who is not with Me is against Me” (Luke 11:23). [SIC] ([The Westminster Confession of Faith and Logic](#))

I do not know whether or not RK holds the view which Crampton expresses here regarding Exodus 3:14, but there are some points to be made against it.

First of all, the passage in which the “I AM” clause is found does not identify what it states as a fundamental law of logic. (I’m assuming that Crampton means the law of *identity*, for I have never heard of a logical law known as “identity” - perhaps this is a principle which copyists used in reproducing ancient manuscripts.) For that matter, the bible nowhere speaks intelligibly of logic as an epistemological method. The claim that this passage conveys a divinely inspired statement of a fundamental principle of logic, is a blatant case of trying to assimilate legitimate philosophical principles into a Christian context and back-fill them with Christian presuppositions. The law of identity is axiomatic, so it’s not as if we need an invisible magic being to communicate it to us, or to “make it true” (which would simply abrogate the objectivity of the law in the first place).

Moreover, logic as a method of inferring and validating new knowledge is anathema to what the bible does promote as the believer’s source of knowledge. RK himself pointed to what he calls [the “sensus divinitatus”](#) as the faculty by which the believer presumably acquires knowledge. Transmission of “knowledge” from the beyond into one’s mind by supernatural means is not a function of logic; reception of “knowledge” via the “sensus divinitatus” is characterized as a passive process, while scrutinizing the logical integrity of knowledge claims is an active process. Also, to suppose that one must submit the deliverances of the “sensus divinitatus” to the tribunal of logical evaluation in order to determine their validity or truth value, would only suggest that logic is higher than the source of such deliverances. This would be an expression of “autonomous reasoning,” i.e., taking something other than the revelation of the Christian god as “the ultimate reference point” in one’s development of his knowledge, and presuppositionalism scorns “autonomous reasoning” as the fount of all sin. As presuppositionalist Richard Pratt puts it:

This, then, is the essence of sin: man’s rebellion against recognizing his dependence on God in everything and the assumption of his ability to be *independent* of God. (*Every Thought Captive*, p. 29)

Logic, of course, requires intellectual liberty. It requires that the mind be free to follow logic wherever it leads him, regardless of who disapproves. This means that logic is not possible apart from the precondition of independence, the very value which the presuppositionalist notion of “autonomous reasoning” is intended to vilify. Ayn Rand put this principle succinctly when she wrote:

These two—reason and freedom—are corollaries, and their relationship is reciprocal: when men are rational, freedom wins; when men are free, reason wins. (“Faith and Force: The Destroyers of the Modern World,” *Philosophy: Who Needs It*, p. 66)

Those who scorn the value of independence, scorn reason, scorn logic, and scorn man as a rational animal. This attitude is not difficult to find in the Christian worldview by any means. In Christianity, the disposition desired of the believer is that he take whatever his god tells him *unquestioningly*. The believer is not to *question* what he believes his god has told him, regardless of how his god has presumably communicated to him. Greg Bahnsen himself makes point this clear when he tells us that his god's "word and character are not questionable" ([Van Til's "Presuppositionalism"](#)).

Submitting statements which are said to have proceeded from the mouth of one's god to tests intended to determine whether or not they are logical, is not an action indicative of the position which rejects independent thought. So if the believer gets his knowledge of the truth from an allegedly divine source, such as the so-called "sensus divinitatus," then on what basis can he affirm logic as an arbiter of true knowledge, except he compartmentalize his god-beliefs and borrows from an epistemology which assumes the independence, or "autonomy," of the human mind as the proper standard for man?

But some will nonetheless insist that this is the bible teaching a fundamental law of logic, in spite of the obvious conflict between logic as a means of testing knowledge claims and presuppositionalism's overt rejection of "autonomous reasoning," i.e., the position which does not accept assertions attributed by Christianity to the Christian god unquestioningly. The problem with this, however, is that the statement "I AM WHO I AM" could, at best, be an *application* of the law of identity, not an explicit statement of the law of identity as such. Certainly the statement *assumes* the law of identity, but all intelligible statements in fact do this, not just the clause found in Exodus 3:14. Exodus 3:14 is nothing unique.

Even worse for Crampton, the statement "I AM WHO I AM" could not be a statement isolating the law of identity, for it is restricted to a *specific unit* (one which is specified by the personal pronoun "I"), while the law of identity is *open-ended* (i.e., [universal](#)), and thus *not* restricted to a specific unit, but applicable to *any and all units*, whether persons, places, or things. The clause "I AM WHAT I AM" is, to put it mildly, far too narrow in its scope of reference to constitute a statement of the law of identity as such. It is because the law of identity is *universal* in its scope of reference that it is customarily stated in the form of an equation using an open-ended term, e.g., *A is A*. For this reason, the clause in Exodus 3:14 cannot legitimately be taken an explicit statement of the law of identity as such, for the universality of the law is not entailed by "I AM WHO I AM." And while the statement "I AM WHO I AM" can by rightly and logically uttered by *anyone* who can speak, such as actually existing persons (such as human beings), the law of identity applies not only to animate objects, but also to inanimate objects.

Lastly, in the case of the biblical passage, the statement "I AM WHO I AM" has simply been inserted by an author into the mouth of a storybook character, so ascribing the origin of the law of identity to a person who proclaims it a law (as if the law of identity could be legislated by an act of will) simply reduces to subjectivism.

by Dawson Bethrick

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