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The Uniformity of Nature

In their deployment of the “transcendental argument for the existence of God,” presuppositionalists often raise the problem of induction as a debating point and demand that non-Christian opponents provide an “account for” the uniformity of nature. The presumption of this strategy is that induction presupposes the uniformity of nature, and its intent is to expose a non-Christian’s failure to provide an “account for” this vital presupposition necessary for inductive reasoning.

The Meaning of “Account For”

Now it is not always clear what exactly the presuppositionalist is looking for when he requires that a non-believer provide an “account for” the uniformity of nature. Some presuppositionalists have indicated that in this context an “account” for something is a *logical proof*. But in the case of the uniformity of nature, this seems quite an odd thing to expect from anyone, since it can be reasonably held that proof as such presupposes the uniformity of nature. To categorize a line of inference as a “proof” suggests that it is a proof on every day of the week, not just on Tuesdays which happen to fall on a holiday in Laos. Any proof given to satisfy the apologist’s line of inquiry could feasibly be rejected for assuming what is supposed to be proved.

It may be that the apologist is asking the non-believer to identify the *cause* of nature’s uniformity. But here again, pointing to any specific cause which makes nature uniform would be vulnerable to the charge of circularity, since it could reasonably be postulated that causation as such presupposes the uniformity of nature. If the non-believer were to attempt an answer to the presuppositionalist’s inquiry by pointing to something which *causes* nature to be uniform, he could again be charged with circular reasoning for appealing to a law whose persistence itself requires the very thing he’s been called to provide an “account for.” If an “account” is understood in this way, it seems unreasonable to require it from anyone, regardless of his stance on theism.

Alternatively, presuppositionalists may characterize the challenge to “account for” the uniformity of nature as a request to present a “logical warrant” or “rational justification” for assuming that nature is uniform, thus presumably broadening the challenge beyond the need to present a formal proof or identify the cause of nature’s uniformity. Of course, this would in turn broaden the range of viable candidates which can satisfy the challenge, which may in turn pose certain subsequent challenges for the apologist. By expanding the latitude of the meaning of “account” in such a manner, the apologist widens the possibilities of acceptable contenders. But with this broadening may also come ambiguity which, it seems, needs some tightening down in order to clarify what exactly is being requested of the non-Christian, and to make clear at the outset what validly constitutes an “account for” the uniformity of nature, and what could not. After all, it is clear from the context of the controversy which the presuppositionalist intends to stoke, that appeals to an invisible magic being constitute, in his mind, a valid approach to settling the matter.

Then again, as we venture into this matter, it may be wise to bear in mind the possibility that presuppositionalism is essentially geared toward entrapping non-Christians, perhaps in the hopes of scoring a debating point rather than clarifying some genuinely mysterious philosophical issue. It should be no secret that presuppositionalism has a predatory agenda. It may seem to be the case, and possibly for good reason, that the apologist is deliberately seeking to corner the non-Christian into producing a question-begging “account” so that the apologist can say “Ah ha! Gotcha!” The situation grows even more suspect when we remember that presuppositionalists themselves “prefer to reason in a circle to not reasoning at all” (Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, p. 12), suggesting that there really is no alternative to tail-chasing pettios. Apologists of this school seem, however, to reserve this excuse exclusively for themselves, while citing circularity as a fatal error for their opponents’ position if and when they are charged with this.

Uniformity and Metaphysical Primacy

Because the issue of metaphysical primacy is the most fundamental concern in all philosophy, the first item to address in considering the question of how one “accounts for” the uniformity of nature is not whether or not nature’s uniformity entails theism or atheism per se, nor would I say that trifling over what exactly the presuppositionalist means by “account for” will be very productive (good luck getting him to commit to a clear meaning here). Rather, the controversy here first needs to be understood in terms of *metaphysical primacy*. Specifically, if it is agreed that nature *is* in fact uniform, does the uniformity of nature presuppose the primacy of existence, or does it presuppose the primacy of consciousness? Is nature uniform independent of anyone’s thoughts, feelings, wishes, commands or temper tantrums? Or, does the fact that nature is uniform depend on some form of conscious activity?

This is the central question to be considered before all others: is consciousness involved in “making” nature uniform, or is nature uniform *on its own*, regardless of what consciousness does?

As an Objectivist, my answer to this question is that nature is uniform on its own, independent of anyone’s conscious activity. A person can deny the uniformity of nature, but nature remains uniform all the same, in spite of such denials. This means that if no consciousness exists, the entities which do exist still act according to their natures. This is the view consistent with the axioms “existence exists,” “to exist is to be something” (i.e., to have *identity*), and “entities act according to their natures” *independent of consciousness*.

In his discussion on the problem of induction, presuppositionalist Brian Knapp speaks of the need to have a “*logical justification for doing something*” (“Induction and the Unbeliever,” *The Portable Presuppositionalist*, p. 124), including presumably assuming that nature is uniform, and asks “*Why do you believe nature is uniform, and how is that belief rationally justified?*” (Ibid.). But to speak of *rationally* justifying a position, what can one mean other than justifying that position *in accordance to reason*? Reason is the faculty by which an individual identifies and integrates the objects of his perception. This faculty presupposes the metaphysical primacy of existence - i.e., the view that the objects of one’s consciousness exist and are what they are independent of the conscious activity by which he is aware of them.

But this does not seem at all consistent with what presuppositionalism affirms.

The Presuppositionalist Approach

The standard presuppositionalist “justification” for the premise that nature is uniform is quite different from the Objectivist view that nature is inherently uniform independent of conscious activity. While presuppositional apologists often make a big deal about “accounting for” the uniformity of nature, they exhibit no concern for the issue of metaphysical primacy. On the contrary, presuppositionalism is exclusively concerned with advancing the view that the uniformity of nature is *theistically caused*. Specifically, it affirms the existence of a supernatural conscious being

who has created the universe in which we live (Gen. 1:1, Col. 1:16), and who sovereignly maintains it as we find it to be (Heb. 1:3)... This God has a plan for his creation (Eph. 1:11), not the least part of which is revealing himself to it (Rom. 1:19-20). Part of this revelation involves creating and sustaining the universe in such a way that his creatures are able to learn about it and function within it (Gen. 8:22). (Brian Knapp, “Induction and the Unbeliever,” *The Portable Presuppositionalist*, p. 132)

Although presuppositionalists can be expected to insist that this “account for” the uniformity of nature has not “simply ‘moved the problem’ by introducing God into the equation” (Ibid., p. 135), it seems that this is precisely all that such appeals ultimately accomplish. The claim that a being “has created the universe in which we live... and... sovereignly maintains it as we find it to be,” amounts to the view that the uniformity of nature is a *product* of some prior *cause*. This assumes the continuity of any causal process by which said being allegedly accomplishes these tasks. In other words, the “justification” for the premise that nature is uniform proposed by presuppositionalism *assumes* the uniformity of nature from the get go.

It is unhelpful to the presuppositionalist case for apologists to seek exemption from the applicability of a law of nature - and therefore, by implication, the uniformity of nature - in their proposed solution by pointing to their god’s “supernatural” character, for however they wish to conceive of their god, they are unable to escape the causal implications embedded in their proposed justification. Essentially they are saying that their god *causes* nature to be uniform, and are thus invoking a natural law - namely *the law of causality* - even if they wish to refer to it by some

other name. The presuppositionalist appeal to theism, then, to “account for” the uniformity of nature, assumes the very thing that this appeal is supposed to explain, and is thus an instance of reasoning in a circle. As Brian Knapp himself explains:

To reason in a circle is to assume the very thing you are attempting to demonstrate. (Ibid., p. 126)

Knapp holds that circular reasoning “is just as devastating as the arbitrariness of one who has no answer at all” (Ibid., p. 125), and thus any explanation of the uniformity of nature which incorporates such fallacy is to be rejected.

In order to maintain a theistic “account for” the uniformity of nature here, the only alternative to circular reasoning would be to commit [the fallacy of the stolen concept](#). This would be the case if the presuppositionalist denies that his proposed explanation of the uniformity of nature is circular on the grounds that his god’s creation of the universe and maintenance of its consistent functioning is in effect *causeless*, in an attempt to avoid invoking a law of nature - namely *causality* - as the mechanism by which his god allegedly accomplishes its feat of sovereignty over the universe. But this too is a dead end for the presuppositionalist, for he is still affirming that the uniformity of nature throughout the universe is the result of some *action* taken on the part of his god, and causality is essentially the *identity* of action. The dead give-away here is that the presuppositionalist is in fact *naming* the actions of his god - specifically “creating” and “maintaining” its creation - which result in nature being uniform. This would-be rebuttal, then, would in effect affirm acts of creation and maintenance (i.e., actions which have identity) while denying their genetic root, namely *causality*, of which the actions which presuppositionalists attribute to their god are merely species. Causality, it should be noted, is essentially “the law of identity applied to action” (Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, [Galt’s Speech](#)). To name an action (as the presuppositionalist does in his “account”) is to acknowledge that the action in question does in fact have identity.

Now the presuppositionalist may object to any of this by insisting that the causality by which his god affects uniformity in nature is not *natural* causality, but rather “supernatural causality,” and therefore that appeals to “supernatural causality” do not presuppose or depend on the uniformity of nature as necessary precondition. This maneuver assumes that there is, between causality as we know it (that is, causality as a natural law - as “the law of identity applied to action”) and so-called “supernatural causality,” some distinction which relevantly bears on the issue at hand in a manner that is sufficient to alleviate the tensions exposed above. It is thus incumbent upon the apologist who invokes this disclaimer to explain this supposed distinction and make the case for immunity to the charges of circular reasoning and/or the stolen concept fallacy. Indeed, what exactly is “supernatural causality,” and how is it different from *natural* causality? If causality is essentially the law of identity applied to action, and the presuppositionalist implicitly acknowledges that the actions he attributes to his god (“creates” and “maintains”) in fact have identity (which he does simply *by naming them*), how are these actions beyond the scope of natural law if by natural law we ultimately mean that the law of identity applies? Blank out.

As suspected above, the solution which presuppositionalism proposes does in fact seem to accomplish nothing more than to move the problem back a step rather than actually addressing it (insofar as it can be said that there is a problem here in the first place). By referencing “supernatural causality” as opposed to “natural causality” as the means by which his god allegedly created and maintains the order of the universe in a uniform manner, the presuppositionalist is implying a uniformity of “super-nature,” especially in the claim that his god “maintains” (or “sustains”) the order of the universe, as this action would be *continuous* (even if not eternal), rather than merely a single gesture. The apologist is essentially saying that “supernatural causality” is today as it has been in the past and will be in the future, thus presupposing a principle of uniformity prior to nature. But what accounts for this uniformity of “super-nature” which underlies the presuppositionalist’s appeal to a god in order to “account for” the uniformity of nature? Where is the presuppositionalist’s “justification” for this principle of uniformity on which his justification for order in the universe relies and without which his “account” could have no philosophical substance?

Of course, since the presuppositionalist appeals to a god as both the creator of the universe and as the sustainer of uniformity in nature, he likely means by “supernatural causality” (or whatever motor he has in mind behind the creating and sustaining his god is allegedly responsible for) some form of *conscious* activity to make these things happen, as if by [wishing](#). At the very least, the presuppositionalist should make it explicitly clear whether or not he thinks that his god creates and sustains by means of an act of consciousness, and if so, how we can distinguish this act of consciousness from something akin to mere wishing. In other words, the presuppositionalist needs to come clean about his position’s commitment to the primacy of consciousness in his “account for” the uniformity of nature. Since an appeal to theism in order to account for the uniformity of nature essentially signifies the view that the uniformity of

nature rests on the primacy of consciousness, it is this presupposition which the presuppositionalist needs to justify. But this would entail arguing for the view that the uniformity of nature finds its basis in subjectivism: the uniformity of nature is the result of some conscious action (see [here](#) and [here](#)).

Some direct questions may help eliminate some of the presuppositionalist's standard obfuscations:

1. Is nature uniform? (Yes or no)
2. If no, we would likely have an instance of the fallacy of the [stolen concept](#), for a denial of the uniformity of nature would have to assume that nature is uniform in order for that denial to make sense.
3. If yes, is nature uniform independent of consciousness, or is nature's uniformity a product of conscious activity?
4. If nature is uniform *independent of consciousness*, the uniformity of nature cannot imply theism.
5. If it is thought that nature's uniformity is a product of conscious activity, why suppose that such an overt appeal to subjectivism is at all philosophically impressive?

Involved with the presuppositionalist strategy is the tacit assumption that the principle of the uniformity of nature is the end-all and be-all of induction, that the uniformity of nature is equivalent to the so-called "inductive principle." (This habit is common outside of presuppositionalist circles as well, which is probably where presuppositionalists get it in the first place.) If it can be proven that nature is uniform, so the implicit reasoning goes, then induction is justified. Of course, this approach takes for granted - and leaves completely uninvestigated - all the activity which the human mind performs in the activity we call inductive reasoning. It rests all of induction's validity on whether or not nature is uniform and how one "accounts for" this. This tendency fails to recognize that while the uniformity of nature is a metaphysical concern, the justification of induction is an *epistemological* issue. Sadly, those who take the presuppositionalist approach are missing much of the story.

Often coupled with this gaff is the inclination to think of natural laws as phenomena that are in some way independent of the universe and to which the universe must somehow adhere or conform in order for those laws to apply within the universe and thereby serve as reliable principles upon which our reasoning rests. This understanding itself has no objective basis, and in fact invites the fallacies which typically accompany the primacy of consciousness. Implicit in this view may be, for instance, the notion that the laws existed first, then the contents of the universe, and then the contents of the universe (which on their own would be utterly mired in chaos) are compelled by some external force to comply with those laws. Presuppositional apologetics seeks to exploit such assumptions by making the laws of nature extra-universal, otherworldly, indeed "supernatural." For instance, observe the following statement by Brian Knapp:

In the Christian's worldview, at least from the Reformed perspective, laws are not so much "natural" as they are "supernatural". They are an expression of the way in which God providentially orders his creation, rather than something that is "built-in" which operate on their own and independent from God. [sic] ("Induction and the Unbeliever," *The Portable Presuppositionalist*, p. 121n.4)

On Knapp's view, the natural laws describe "the way in which God providentially orders his creation." But how would anyone be able to acquire knowledge of "the way in which God providentially orders his creation," if said "God" is a mind *distinct from the believer's own mind*? As the believer imagines his god, his mind departs from reality in radical fashion. When he ascribes the course of nature to the handling of a being which he can only imagine, the believer ignores the constraints of rational epistemology (which addresses the *how* of his knowledge), because he is no longer speaking from knowledge, but from imagination. This is why the believer can speak of "the way in which God providentially orders his creation" as if he were intimately familiar with the universe of details which such cosmic handling of the contents of the universe would entail. It essentially represents the believer attributing what he takes completely for granted (and does not understand philosophically) to the activity of a being which resides only in his own imagination.

Objectivism does not share the view expressed by Knapp as it (Objectivism) does not grant the assumption that the laws of nature are somehow independent of the universe. I have already discussed at length the Objectivist axioms and their role in anchoring human cognition to reality (see for instance my essay [The Axioms and the Primacy of Existence](#)). But it may still be unclear how they relate to the laws of nature.

Nor does Objectivism grant objective validity to the notion of the “supernatural” (see [here](#)). The laws of nature are not divine commands on the contents of the universe, nor are they rules which the objects literally obey in an effort to remain in good standing with “the Lord.” On the contrary, the *laws* of nature are conceptual integrations, and as such they are general identifications based on perceptual input (as all concepts are ultimately). They represent discoveries of facts which are integrated into open-ended principles which can be applied to all particulars of a certain class. They do not originate from outside the universe, for they are based on facts which obtain within the universe and which are discovered and integrated by minds which also exist in the universe. There is no “outside the universe” to begin with. There is the universe (the sum total of all that exists), and there is what we *imagine*.

The Meaning of “the Uniformity of Nature”

But what specifically do we mean by the term “uniformity of nature”? Not all conceptions of the uniformity of nature are created equal. Presuppositional apologist Greg Bahnsen tends to conceive of the uniformity of nature as “the resemblance between events that we have experienced and events that we have not experience” (*Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings & Analysis*, p. 342n.167), thus holding to an “event-based” model in which “resemblance” (presumably, how something *appears* to an observer) conjoins that which has been experienced with that which has not been experienced.

On the one hand, Bahnsen’s conception of the uniformity of nature, given the central role he gives to “resemblance” and “experience,” does not lend itself very well to the supposition that nature is uniform independent of conscious activity. The viewpoint of the observer seems to have a lot of sway in the matter, and it needs to be clarified whether uniformity in nature obtains independent of consciousness, or if conscious activity is a preconditional consideration. Of course, this does not concern Bahnsen, and making such clarifications would likely be counterproductive to his apologetic ambitions.

On the other hand, Bahnsen’s view seems conspicuously well geared toward positioning apologists in the vantage of criticizing opponents. For how can two things be said to share a “resemblance” unless (and until) they can be compared side by side? And how can two “events” be compared side by side unless they have both already occurred? But isn’t that the whole point behind the principle of the uniformity of nature - namely to provide an objective basis for *expecting* that things which are not available to be compared to what has already been experienced, will operate in a manner similar to what has been experienced?

Brian Knapp presents a somewhat different rendering:

Nature must proceed to operate according to the same laws it has operated according to in the past - laws which determine the effects which arise from a given cause or set of causes. (Op. cit., p. 121)

Here we see the implicit notion that the contents of the universe “obey” (either volitionally or by some means of compulsion) the laws of nature, since it is “laws which determine the effects which arise from a given cause or set of causes.” If this is stated *metaphorically*, then it may not be problematic. But if it is understood *literally*, it invites the primacy of consciousness. Again, it is unclear on this conception whether or not the uniformity of nature is understood to obtain independently of consciousness, or if it is supposed to be something which is put into place by means of conscious activity.

What’s also noticeable in Knapp’s statement here is that it seems *absolute*: “Nature *must* proceed to operate according to the same laws it has operated to in the past...” The way that it is stated here does not seem to allow for exceptions. This, we will find, is not what Christianity really teaches when it comes to the uniformity of nature.

Both Bahnsen and Knapp ultimately agree, however, that the Christian god is the proper (or “only”) answer to the question “How do you account for the uniformity of nature?” But in pointing to the Christian god, believers are, in terms of essentials, claiming that the uniformity of nature is a product of conscious activity. It seems, however, that by supposing there is a consciousness which has the power to cause nature to be uniform, they are also granting that said consciousness also has the power to cause (or “allow”) nature to be chaotic. Since “God controls whatsoever comes to pass” (Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 160), Christianity puts everything which takes place within nature entirely in the hands of a supernatural mind which is imagined to be completely free from the constraints of nature. Indeed, as the Christian worldview itself explicitly teaches, miracles can and sometimes do happen. The water in your drinking

glass can be water one moment, and then magically transformed into merlot the next (cf. John 2:1-11). In the final analysis, since everything that happens is up to the *will* of an invisible magic being, predictable outcomes are as much a crap shoot as are miracles. As Knapp puts it, “In a very real sense, all events in the universe are ultimately supernatural events as God is personally behind each and every one of them” (Op. cit., p. 139). The believer, then, is to *imagine* that his god is “personally behind each and every” event which occurs in the universe, which can only mean - in the context of a worldview which takes such imaginations seriously - that the uniformity of nature (to the extent that nature is at all uniform in the first place) is the result of conscious activity. In other words, the uniformity of nature, on the Christian view, presupposes the primacy of consciousness.

Knapp’s response to the objection that on the Christian view nature could be chaotic as much as it is uniform, is that such objection could be “sound only if [Christian theism] assumes that nature is absolutely uniform, which it does not” (*The Portable Presuppositionalist*, p. 140). Indeed, by conceding that, on the Christian view, nature is not absolutely uniform, then nature might as well not be supposed to be uniform at all (since exceptions to uniformity are granted as legitimate possibilities), and consequently all bets are off: there is no reliable basis for expecting future events to “resemble” those of the past (which is the presuppositionalist’s own measure for understanding whether or not nature is uniform). The ruling consciousness can make it such that glass shatters into dozens of broken shards when struck with a hammer one moment, and that it turns into a flock of geese under the same conditions the next. What Christian would deny its god the power to bring about such outcomes? Indeed, they claim that their god is omnipotent and can bring about any imaginable outcome. But how does this “account for” the uniformity in nature which we observe on a constant basis? Blank out.

Once nature’s “behavior” is placed in the hands of a consciousness which is supposed to possess the power to “control whatsoever comes to pass,” anything can happen. Uniformity is a once-in-a-million chance. The fact that nature *is* uniform, only demonstrates that there is no rational basis to put any stock in the presuppositionalist’s “account for” the uniformity of nature which is clearly observed.

As one non-Christian succinctly put it:

I believe that there is consistency in the universe because there is no god that has the power to mess with it.
(See [The Contra-Pike Files](#), May 10, 2003)

Indeed, if there is no invisible magic being which has the ability to manipulate the objects populating the universe according to its will, the objects in the universe can be reasonably expected to behave in a manner consistent with their own natures. In this way, the uniformity of nature logically implies an alternative which is not theistic in nature.

The *Objective* Alternative

On the Objectivist view, the notion of the *uniformity* of nature seems to be unnecessarily redundant.

Peikoff explains what is meant by the concept ‘nature’ as follows:

What is nature? Nature is existence—the sum of that which is. It is usually called “nature” when we think of it as a system of interconnected, interacting entities governed by law. So “nature” really means the universe of entities acting and interacting in accordance with their identities. ([The Philosophy of Objectivism, \(1976\) Lecture 2](#))

“Nature is existence,” says Peikoff. And he is right to say this. The *uniformity* of nature, then, is existence being itself. As Rand succinctly put it, “Existence is Identity” (*Atlas Shrugged*, [Galt’s Speech](#)). Nature is uniform with itself, since to exist is for something to be itself. If A exists, it must be A.

The uniformity of nature, then, is essentially the applicability of the axiom of existence to all of reality *and* the absolute (i.e., exceptionless) concurrence of identity with existence. Both of these aspects of the uniformity of nature are undeniable - that is, they cannot be denied without self-contradiction. Since reality *is* the realm of existence, the axiom of existence necessarily applies to *all* of reality. Since reality is the realm of *existence*, existence and reality are concurrent *absolutely* - i.e., without exception.

In this way we can confidently say that nature is *inherently* uniform (since existence exists, to exist is to be something, and nature, since it exists, is therefore itself), and that it is such *independent of consciousness*. Uniformity is not a property which consciousness injects into nature, nor is it the manner in which consciousness regulates nature since:

- a) consciousness does not regulate nature (the primacy of existence is true), and
- b) nature is self-regulating (per the law of identity).

Since nature is uniform independent of consciousness (the primacy of existence tells us this), nature is uniform independent of any particular being's consciousness. This means that, if consciousness is to know that nature is uniform, it must *discover* this fact, not "create" or "cause" it. Uniformity is *not* a property which consciousness gives to nature, nor is it something consciousness *causes* in nature.

Moreover, since discovery is a process which begins with perception (i.e., with direct awareness of objects which exist), one must discover the fact that nature is uniform *through experience*. Man discovered, at least on an implicit level, that nature is uniform long before he wrote any storybooks or mused about what lies beyond the universe. Such activities presuppose the uniformity of nature. So we need not consult some *storybook* to learn, even on the level of implicit knowledge, that nature is uniform. This knowledge would be accessible to us, even if we had no access to any storybooks. Reading the bible, then, is no precondition for recognizing that nature is uniform with itself.

Notice that this conception of the uniformity of nature is immune to the charge of circular reasoning. For one, it is not an attempt to *prove* that nature is uniform as the conclusion to an argument. Also, this conception of the uniformity of nature does not make it dependent upon experience. Rather, it's the other way around: experience depends on the uniformity of nature (since experience, as the actual relation between a subject and the objects of its awareness, exists and is therefore a part of nature, and thus has identity), since experience is processional over time. It is not an appeal to experience, but rather to the *preconditions* of experience as such.

Moreover, this conception of the uniformity of nature is impervious to the standard attacks, common among presuppositional apologists, which seek to defuse attempted justification of induction by assuming that future experience will be like (or will "resemble") past experience by appealing to past experiences. For one, it is forthrightly acknowledged that this conception of the uniformity of nature does not tell the whole story behind induction. The uniformity of nature is merely one of several factors involved in induction. Also, the uniformity of nature is a precondition not only of experience (as we saw above) but also of concepts designating temporal categories (such as 'past' vs. 'future'). The fact of existence is timeless, and consequently, so is identity.

Note that the Objectivist conception of the uniformity of nature is not an appeal to "experience," but rather to the *preconditions* of any experience, namely those facts named explicitly by the axioms, facts without which no experience could be possible. Even to dispute the premise that nature is uniform, itself requires the uniformity of nature in order to make sense of the dispute in the first place.

Is the Uniformity of Nature a Matter of *Faith*?

As mentioned in the beginning of this blog, the uniformity of nature is not itself subject to proof, for proof presupposes the uniformity of nature. Attempts to prove the uniformity of nature would commit either the fallacy of begging the question (by assuming the truth of what is to be proven) or the fallacy of the stolen concept (by placing proof prior to its genetic roots). This of course does not mean that one must accept the uniformity of nature *on faith*. To suppose as much is to accept as false dichotomy: a claim can only be accepted on the basis of proof, or on the basis of faith. This is not the first time I've seen this bifurcation. In his [review of John Robbins' critique of Objectivism](#), philosopher Bryan Register encounters this same mistake and offers an eloquent correction:

Robbins asserts that reason always relies on faith: "Reason can never cease to be the handmaid of faith: All thought must start somewhere, and that initial postulate is unproved, by definition... . The only question that remains is, Which faith-which axiom-shall reason serve?" Since Objectivism is grounded on a set of axioms, which are by definition unprovable, Robbins concludes that Objectivism rests on an act of faith in those axioms. But this assumes that there are only two kinds of claims: those one proves and those which one takes on faith. In fact, as the Objectivist literature makes clear, there is a third type of claim: one which is valid because it

formulates a fact that is directly perceived. Such are the most fundamental perceptual judgments and such are the axioms.

Uniformity, then, is not something we merely *expect*, as if we had no rational basis, but something we actually *observe*. However, it is typically when our expectations of certain outcomes are thwarted that we question the validity of those expectations. But the cause for questioning our expectations turns out not to be a cause for questioning the uniformity of nature, not simply because investigating why our expectations were thwarted uncovers factors which we were not aware of (and thus could not factor into our expectations), but also (and primarily) because existence holds metaphysical primacy. The recognition that factors which we did not know had an influence on what actually happened, only confirms the more fundamental recognition that nature is uniform *independent of consciousness*: those factors exist and had their influence on the given state of affairs, even though we were not aware of them. They had a causal impact on what occurred, and the very concept ‘cause’ presupposes the law of identity (since, as pointed out above, causality is the law of identity applied to action). So merely because our expectations did not pan out, is not an indictment on the uniformity of nature, nor on the objective understanding of the uniformity of nature.

Confusion in Presuppositionalism

Presuppositionalism essentially tells us that we cannot know that nature is uniform (even though we observe a uniform nature directly whenever we perceive it), but that we do and cannot fail to know a god which allegedly lies behind the question mark which our worldview allegedly produces when it comes to “accounting for” the uniformity of nature. On this view, I can observe the uniformity of nature firsthand, and cannot know that nature is uniform, while I cannot observe a supernatural deity, but allegedly cannot escape the knowledge that it surely exists. This reversal of reality creates a most hideous carnival out of man’s epistemology.

But the confusion does not stop there.

Upon examination, it is difficult to see how Knapp’s proposed solution to the problem of induction actually solves it. In fact, it is unclear exactly how appealing to the Christian god can serve as a serious proposal in the interest of “accounting for” or providing a “logical justification” of the uniformity of nature.

Knapp claims that the universe in which we live was created by a supernatural conscious being, and that this supernatural conscious being “maintains it as we find it to be” (*The Portable Presuppositionalist*, p. 132). Even if one believes this, it in no way indicates that the universe is being maintained in a *uniform* manner. It would only tell us that, however the universe behaves, it is controlled by a supernatural conscious being. When it is admitted that this same supernatural conscious being is capable of, and known for, performing *miracles* - events which often (and overtly) go against the standard understanding of uniformity in nature - it can only undermine this approach as a means of “accounting for” uniformity: it guarantees no uniformity whatsoever! On this view, any uniformity which happens to obtain, is a fluke. Indeed, it is for this very reason that, after all his promoting of Christian theism as the solution to the problem of induction, Knapp concedes that Christian theism does not hold that nature is “absolutely uniform” (p. 140).

To make matters even worse, the individual who “finds” the universe to be a certain way when he observes and interacts with it, is dealing with only a minuscule portion of the universe. On the Christian view, inferring that all of the universe is “maintained” in a uniform manner is a wild overgeneralization, an extravagant leap of faith which Christian theism itself does not afford any believer. If, for instance, the believer happens to find that the tiny part of the universe with which he is familiar behaves in a uniform manner, this in no way tells him that his god is maintaining the rest of the universe in a uniform manner, or that any hypothetical uniformity in other parts of the universe are uniform with the uniformity with which he is familiar in his particular location. Given the premise that everything is controlled by a supernatural being, it may be the case that in the believer’s part of the universe, balls uniformly roll over plane surfaces, while in another part of the universe balls uniformly turn into marching bands upon impact with plane surfaces. How would the believer in such a being know? Knapp gives no indication of how the epistemological feats needed here might proceed.

But in spite of the self-undermining factors inherent in Christian doctrine, as well as Knapp’s own damning admission, he still thinks that the Christian metaphysics of a universe-creating, reality-ruling consciousness address’s Hume’s philosophical conundrum, even though he points to additional weaknesses native to his worldview which undermine

inductive reasoning even further. He writes:

As simple as this solution seems, it contains all the necessary elements to solve the problem. The areas in which mankind fall short are all “made up for” in God. Man does not have exhaustive knowledge of how the universe operates; God does. Man does not know whether the features of the universe will continue to be as they are at present; God does. Man can be mistaken in what he experiences and how he reasons from those experiences; God is never wrong. (“Induction and the Unbeliever,” *The Portable Presuppositionalist*, p. 134)

Contrary to what he intends, Knapp is simply giving us reasons why Christianity *cannot* give us any confidence in the presupposition that nature is uniform throughout the universe. He has in effect abandoned the problem of induction, which is ostensibly the topic of his essay, and moved on to a new problem, namely that of how one can know what a supernatural conscious being knows. It is of no epistemological value for man to list things that he does not know, and then point to a supernatural being which does have knowledge on these things. This does not tell man how *he* can know what he needs to know in order to live. It is epistemological self-deception to concede, on the one hand, that one does not know something, only to claim, on the other, that this ignorance is “made up for” by an [imaginary friend](#) which is said to know everything. When it comes to the uniformity of nature, Knapp demonstrates only that, on the Christian worldview, one could have no confidence that nature is uniform. Everything is “whatever God wills,” and unless the believer is identical to his god, he would have no way of knowing what his god wills from moment to moment.

Moreover, on the points which he mentions, Knapp does not even tell us *what* specifically his god supposedly knows about these matters. When Knapp states that “Man does not know whether the features of the universe will continue to be as they are in the present,” but figures that the assertion “God does” somehow makes up for this shortcoming, what exactly does his god know, and what good does that do for man in his inductive investigation of the universe if he cannot know it? Blank out. For all Knapp knows, his god could know that the universe will turn inside out in the next second. But since Knapp’s mind is not identical to his god’s mind, simply saying that his god knows something that he does not know, is of no use to him or to anyone else, particularly when it comes to answering Hume. On the contrary, Knapp’s attempted “solution” fully concedes that Christianity has no genuine solution, not only because he fails to question Hume’s own premises, but also because he fails, due to his allegiance to a subjective worldview, to adopt an *objective* approach to the matter in the first place. If Knapp proves anything, he proves that Christianity can only intensify the epistemological darkness which Hume’s skepticism brought to the world.

Conclusion

The presuppositionalist “account for” the uniformity of nature is a consummate dead end. It seeks to premise the uniformity of nature on the primacy of consciousness, which is a false metaphysics. Given this, it is incompatible with the *objective* account of the uniformity of nature, which recognizes that nature is uniform independent of conscious activity. Furthermore, the presuppositionalist analysis is insufficient to overcome the destructive implications which Christianity, with its doctrine of a supernatural being controlling the events of the universe, the doctrine of miracles, its blinding absence of a serious epistemology, etc., poses for the recognition that nature is uniform. By aligning the uniformity of nature with the Christian worldview, presuppositionalism essentially signs its own death warrant as a viable contender in providing an “account for” the one of the fundamental pillars of a scientific understanding of the universe.

by Dawson Bethrick

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