

Will the Real TAG Please Stand Up?

[Paul Manata](#), favorite son of amateur presuppositionalist tiddlywinks, [tells me](#) that I am wrong for concluding that TAG relies at least in part on an appeal to ignorance, even though I cited actual examples which strongly support this appraisal. To the contrary, Paul told me that he had already dealt with this contention in [his exchanges with Dr. Zachary Moore](#), who independently drew the same conclusion that TAG may in fact rely on a veiled argument from ignorance. I reviewed Paul's messages in that exchange, hoping to find the argument that he says is innocent of relying on ignorance in some way so that I could review it and thus confirm his contention that it is in fact innocent of this error. Unfortunately, I was not able to determine exactly what argument Paul had in mind, for he can't seem to make up his mind on what exactly TAG is saying.

I went through his responses to Dr. Moore in search of any statements which Paul might have intended to encapsulate TAG, and in my estimation the following seem to come closest to what he believes TAG is trying to argue:

1. "we are saying something more like, because you ARE NOT ignorant of X, that shows you presuppose that God exists."
2. "The argument is that if your worldview were true, [logic] would not exist."
3. "The argument is that laws of logic are inconsistent with your worldview."
4. "E' is only possible in the a Christian worldview, CW, therefore, using E' is to assume the truth of CW."
5. "The claim of TAG is that you cannot explain or account for ANYTHING."
6. "My argument is that the Christian worldview is true because it is transcendentally necessary for the possibility of knowledge."
7. "I argue that the character of logic is incompatible with the character of matter, therefore the cannot exist because immaterial entities do not exist, and never will, given *what you say*."
8. "I'm saying, for the umpteenth time, that the *reason* you can't account for logic is because it wouldn't exist given your worldview."
9. "I'm saying something about the character of matter and the character of LoL. If matter is all there is, then logic does not exist (except as convention, or linguistic constructs, but then you have the conventionalists problems)."

I suppose that Paul's few typos are the result of lapses from "thinking God's thoughts after Him" indicating that salvation is a work in progress, while the rest of his statements is to be accepted as "next to gospel." But clearing past these mistakes, it's not clear from Paul's statements what he considers to be TAG, for he presents several different statements which can be taken as conclusions. And with the exception of perhaps two of them (namely 4 and 7), it's not clear what their premises or the structure of their inference might be. Without seeing exactly what TAG looks like according to Paul's view, it cannot be confirmed that TAG does not rely at least in part on an appeal to ignorance.

For the most part, however, Paul's arguments seem to be concerned with materialism in particular; specifically he seems concerned to prove that materialism and logic are incompatible. And while this ambition has its own share of problems, even if it were successful, it would not prove the reality of the Christian god, which is what I understand to be the goal of TAG. After all, the acronym TAG is short for "transcendental argument *for the existence of God*," is it not? However, the supposition that logic and materialism are incompatible with one another in no way necessitates the existence of any invisible magic beings, unless of course that supposition is inserted by theistic prejudices. But if that is the case, then the supposed tension between logic and materialism could not itself be used to validate those theistic prejudices as this would beg the question.

So already it seems that Paul has introduced some confusion into the fray, for the argument that he wants to say is innocent of the charge of reliance on ignorance does not appear to be TAG proper. And this is what he seems to overlook throughout his messages to Dr. Moore: that while TAG is concerned (or at least supposed to be concerned) with proving the existence of the Christian god, atheism is not incompatible with the view that logic is not material. Occasionally one finds an astute Christian believer who is willing to concede this, such as when Greg Welty admits that

materialism is not 'the consistent testimony of the modern atheist.' Many atheists believe that something more than concrete, material objects exist, and present plenty of arguments for that view. Acting as if they're all materialists makes us look, well, a bit outdated. Sort of like never progressing beyond Hume in our understanding

of 'the inductive problem'. ([Re: On b\) and possibly not-a\)](#))

In trying to defend the thesis that TAG is innocent of appealing to ignorance, Paul was concerned to present a conception of TAG which goes out of its way to avoid the argumentum ad ignorantiam fallacy. Consider the first condensation that Paul offers of his version of TAG:

we are saying something like, because you ARE NOT ignorant of X, that shows you presuppose that God exists.

And at first blush, if we take this as a summary of TAG, it in fact appears to avoid any appeal to ignorance. But of course, we should not expect a celebrated apologetic method to openly declare its conclusions on the basis of stark naked ignorance. If apologists are to be credited for anything, they are to be credited for their ingenuity in camouflaging their devices such that their questionable nature is not readily detected. Indeed, as I indicated in [my prior blog on this topic](#), an arguer may in fact not realize that he is actually drawing his conclusion on the basis of his own ignorance of some relevant point or fact. We are all capable of this, whether theist or non, since we all start out ignorant in the first place. Here Paul is deliberately going out of his way to portray TAG (his conception of it, that is) as though it can expressly escape the charge of argumentum ad ignorantiam. But if we drill down into the premises and their supporting arguments that would be offered in support of this conclusion, what guarantee does Paul provide that his argument will not at some point be found resting on the mere lack of firsthand familiarity with contrary positions? Perhaps a look at other statements of his will enlighten us.

Again trying to summarize his conception of TAG, Paul wrote:

The argument is that if your worldview is true, [logic] would not exist.

Closely related to this was the next statement:

The argument is that the laws of logic are inconsistent with your worldview.

Naturally, neither of these "arguments" conclude that any god (let alone specifically the Christian god) exists, and simply seems to be a repetition of his case against materialism as such. Of course, the conclusion that a god exists does not follow as a result of proving that materialism is an invalid worldview. In regard to Paul's argument against materialism, however, it is unclear how he proves that logic is not composed of some material which lacks many of the perceptible characteristics of other things that are composed of matter. I do not state this as an advocate of such a view, but simply as a query on the security of his case since he seems to think whether or not logic is material or otherwise is important and his argument's ambition is apparently to rule out the view that logic is material in any way. For instance, he may say that it is self-evident that logic is not material in the way that rocks, fruit trees, dollar bills and stapling guns are material, but this would not rule out the view that logic is material in the sense of sound wave, magnetic field or electrical current. Indeed, it seems that the concern to conclude that the laws of logic are "immaterial entities" is already off track since this assumes that logic is composed of entities, and this would need to be argued for.

The fourth key statement from Paul actually takes the form of an argument. He wrote:

E' is only possible in the Christian worldview, CW, therefore, using E' is to assume the truth of CW.

This apparently is the structure of Paul's conception of TAG (I note that it is quite different from Butler's formalized version of TAG), but was proffered not in the interest of defending TAG per se. Paul emphasized this in a string of statements typed out in all caps. "The point of the above," writes Paul, "was to show that TAG is not an argument from ignorance." Of course, without seeing how the conclusion is supported by its premises, and, more importantly, what can be offered in the interest of justifying those premises, we have an incomplete picture of just how the inference represented in such an argument is thought to be supported. If, for instance, at any point in the substantiation of such arguments we find premises like "the atheist cannot account for" some function of cognition, a course of interrogation which is distinctively characteristic of presuppositional apologetics, such affirmations may in fact represent an open invitation to argue from ignorance, specifically the apologist's ignorance of how an individual atheist may in fact answer such challenges. Presuppositional apologists exhibit the tendency to take the wide-sweeping generalizations of their theorists - like Van Til, Bahnsen and Frame - at their word, particularly those generalizations which supposedly put a caper on the potency of non-believing philosophies. Apparently apologists are supposed to rest their faith on the assumption that Bahnsen et al. have "done their homework" so comprehensively that they can vicariously conclude what they have claimed, thus effectively enabling defenders of Christianity to "think Bahnsen's thoughts after Him."

In the case of this version of TAG, E' is presumably supposed to represent some non-material something, with the

name 'logic' slapped on it, and because it is said to be other than material, it "is only possible in the a Christian worldview." [sic] This is the same tired, outworn assertion that logic can only make sense on specifically Christian presuppositions - as if logic required a basis in [metaphysical subjectivism](#) and a [universe analogous to a cartoon](#), as if logic were only possible in a reality in which the objects of consciousness conform to the intentions of consciousness. At least for the sake of entertainment, it is assertions such as this that achingly beg for support, and only then - once the apologist presents what he takes to be sufficient justification of such assertions - will we have something to examine for the purpose of determining whether or not presuppositionalists can make their case without relying at some point on their own ignorance of rival positions. As Paul has set up his conception of TAG, its whole strategy seems to assume that there are only two contenders to be considered: materialism (conceived as necessarily cancelling out logic) and Reformed Christianity (asserted to be the only worldview that can "account for" logic). Thus the deck is stacked, but not very cleverly. In fact, it is hard to see how one could assert such a dichotomy on any basis other than ignorance to begin with, and at this point we might question whether the apologist is truly concerned for the stability of logic, or for the welfare of his mystical precommitments.

Furthermore, by saying that logic "is only possible in the a Christian worldview" [sic], Paul is saying that logic is *not* possible in any worldview other than the Christian worldview (specifically, as he conceives of it, since there is such a wide assortment of Christian worldviews). In order to substantiate such a claim, the apologist seems to have three alternatives at his disposal:

1. Prove a negative (how and where does he do this, and what basis does he assume?)
2. Argue from ignorance (which proves only delusion or desperation, not intended conclusions)
3. Deliberately build the notion of the Christian god into one's conception of logic (which would strap the apologist into the ready room of circular argument).

Perhaps Paul has a different option in mind, though it is unclear what that might be.

Moving along, Paul attempted to summarize his conception of TAG again:

The claim of TAG is that you cannot explain or account for ANYTHING.

Well, if TAG's claim is that I "cannot explain or account for ANYTHING," then clearly TAG is false. There are many things I can explain, such as how to decline adjectives and conjugate verbs in Russian, resolve French sixth chords by primary function, market heavy and intermediate marine fuel oils in domestic and international ports, import foodstuffs into the US from Asian nations, add new print-on-demand items to online ordering inventories, etc. I can also explain why the versions of TAG that I have examined tend to rely at least in part on argumentum ad ignorantiam. There was a time in my life when I could not explain any of these things, but as I learned these processes firsthand (i.e., by thinking with my own mind, not by pretending to think someone else's thoughts), I can now teach others to do the same. I had thought that TAG claimed that the Christian god would need to exist in order for me to do these things, but now Paul has corrected me: TAG argues that I cannot do these things at all (apparently he thinks that the Christian god creates incompetent beings in its own image).

As Paul's TAG continues to change shape, he offers yet another version of it:

My argument is that the Christian worldview is true because it is transcendentally necessary for the possibility of knowledge. [sic]

Now, this is quite different from the argument that I "cannot explain or account for ANYTHING." It must be evolving as he tries to address new criticisms. Of course, what Paul presents here is not an argument, but an assertion - "that the Christian worldview is true because it is transcendentally necessary for the possibility of knowledge." To make this case, the apologist would at the very minimum need to show that knowledge can be possible on the subjective basis and in the cartoon universe of Christian theism. But we already know that knowledge requires an objective basis in a universe which is not analogous to a cartoon, both of which are incompatible with and disaffirmed by Christianity's metaphysics. Furthermore, one wonders how apologists could claim authority for Christianity in particular in the area of knowledge when their bible has no native theory of concepts. This is crucial since concepts are the building block of knowledge, and our conclusions and evaluations are no more valid than our concepts. Presuppositionalists seem frightfully unaware of this.

Paul's argument changes yet again. His argument now proceeds as follows:

I argue that the character of logic is incompatible with the character of matter, therefore the cannot exist because immaterialk entities do not exist, and never will, given *what you say*. [sic]

It is completely unclear what Paul might mean by his statement that "the character of logic is incompatible with the character of matter." Similar could be said about oil and water as well as heat and plastics. But these things exist nonetheless, and I see no reason why a materialist would not agree. Is Paul saying that logical principles do not apply when matter is involved? Well, when is matter not involved when we usefully apply logical principles? For instance, I would say it is logical to open the car door if you want to get out of the car (notice the application of logic to goal-oriented action). Certainly the car is made of matter. Is Paul saying that this would be a misapplication of logic? How then does he get out of a car? So, at best, Paul needs to make his argument clearer than it is so far, in spite of the constant revision to which he subjects it. While he's at it, it would be beneficial if he could tell us why he might think the laws of logic are "entities."

Paul's next two attempts to clarify his argument reiterate his contention that logic is incompatible with materialism and thus I will consider them together:

I'm saying, for the umpteenth time, that the *reason* you can't account for logic is because it wouldn't exist given your worldview... I'm saying something about the character of matter and the character of LoL. If matter is all there is, then logic does not exist (except as convention, or linguistic constructs, but then you have the conventionalists problems).

Notice how presuppositionalism has taught Paul to presume for himself the ability to speak on behalf of his opponent. He says that "logic... wouldn't exist given your worldview." It may be the case, however, that Dr. Moore's understanding of logic differs from Paul's understanding of logic in some relevantly significant way such that the incompatibility that concerns Paul does not really exist in Dr. Moore's worldview. What is ironic is that, in spite of the standard presuppositionalist worries about being able to provide an "account," Paul does not seem to have taken this possibility into account. Again, he seems to be merely regurgitating Bahnsen's thoughts after him.

Furthermore, it seems that Paul has assumed a false dichotomy, namely that either a) logic is set of divine or supernatural "entities" (in the sense that they "reflect" his god's nature and/or thoughts and thus necessarily imply the existence of his god), or b) logic is conventional, relative, non-absolute, non-existent or ultimately meaningless. Such bifurcation itself is something we would expect to see if someone did not have a conceptual understanding of logical principles, and thus seems to be borne on the clipped wings of ignorance. It is not unlike what some primitive human beings might have thought in regard to thunderstorms, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and other momentous natural threats which they did not understand. The god of lightning bolts has apparently given up its throne in deference to the god of the law of identity. And yet, when we investigate both the cause of lightning and the axiomatic basis of the law of identity, we find no gods whatsoever.

In conclusion, we have seen many broad generalizations, resolute assertions and shuffling of conclusions, but we have seen no guarantee that TAG is not a veiled argument from ignorance.

by Dawson Bethrick

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [8:00 AM](#)

7 Comments:

[Zachary Moore](#) said...

Dawson-

What an exciting and twisted ride through Paul's "arguments." Is that motion sickness or cognitive dissonance causing my nausea?

The assertion of the TAG is pretty well known to me by now, almost to the point that I just take it for granted that it's an argument, without looking closely to see where it's laid out.

Do you think that a possible solution for the problem of the TAG would be to simply equate logic with God? It would not do much for the coherency of the argument, but it would at least put to rest the nature of the relationship between the two (i.e., logic "reflecting" God's nature).

Aside from Paul, are there any other presuppositional apologists that you know of that have tried to formally

establish an orthodox TAG?

[March 01, 2006 12:56 PM](#)

[exbeliever](#) said...

It seems that some of the current presuppositionalists have changed what, I think, Bahnsen meant by it.

As I understand it, the new way TAG is formulated is:

P presupposes Q

P

/Q

"Logic presupposes God; Logic exists; therefore, God exists"

It also works:

P presupposes Q

-P

/Q

"Logic presupposes God; logic does not exist; therefore, God exists [because one is using logic to formulate this argument]"

By itself, this transcendental argument doesn't rely on an argument from ignorance. It is straight-forward and valid.

I think you state it well, though, when you describe how Christian theists attempt to prove the first premise (i.e. that logic presupposes the Christian God).

When defending that first premise you nail it when you write:

"In order to substantiate such a claim, the apologist seems to have three alternatives at his disposal:

1. Prove a negative (how and where does he do this, and what basis does he assume?)
2. Argue from ignorance (which proves only delusion or desperation, not intended conclusions)
3. Deliberately build the notion of the Christian god into one's conception of logic (which would strap the apologist into the ready room of circular argument)."

Instead of saying that TAG relies on an argument from ignorance, perhaps you can say that the defense of TAG relies on an argument from ignorance or some other fallacy.

I wonder how Paul would react to that statement?

[March 02, 2006 8:35 AM](#)

[Clarence the Theologian](#) said...

Greetings again gentlemen:

This entire ideological war is quite proof in itself that we are a divided people. Naturalists working hard to say that Christians are wrong about their belief system. Before I ramble, I want to say, in a world that presupposes mankind to simply be the stuff at the end of the food chain, this whole argument is arbitrary. None of you thinking anti-theists believe in epistemic certainty--right? If that's the case, why are you spending so much energy trying to prove with certainty that the theist is wrong? How can you validate or verify his wrongness? If there is no objective

epistemic referential, my square is your circle. You use that argument in morality, why not in metaphysics? I don't understand why you can't let the Christian have his opinion? But alas, you are certain that he is wrong--how is this?? On what epistemic grounds can you say this? Oh, it breaks the laws of logic?? What are those? Which Laws--western? eastern? A buddhist world-view says all is maya and illusory even my typing presently is illusory. Is the buddhist right? Of course. Are you right? Of course. We are all right. Now, I really don't believe this. I do think its funny that you will believe in a non-material universal law like gravity or the law of identity and not a non-material universal diety. Why not? Again, all I see is arbitrariness. But the point I wanted to make is the same one that Bahnsen offered Stein: on the charge of circular reasoning, you seem not to understand that all of us use circular reasoning. The Trinitarian theist says, without God (the infallible), I cannot know anything. The anti-theist says, with my mind (infallible) whatever I believe is true is true (for me and everyone apparently--how dogmatic). All I see again is arbitrariness. We all assume something to be infallible--it is inescapable. Christians rely on God's infallibility and his consequent revealing of knowledge to whomever he chooses. As Jesus says, "All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matthew 11:27). I don't expect you to understand that. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church ca. 55 AD in these words: "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). David was precisely correct (even if I choose not to believe it) when he said, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Psalm 14:1). I assume the Bible to be right; you dismiss it outright because it doesn't make sense to your mind and consequent world-view, which you assume to be infallible. You would have to, because if you didn't you would have to acknowledge that there is a potential fact in the universe that is infallibly persuasive proving God's existence. You must say that or claim omniscience, which is existential suicide. Perhaps instead of presuppositional, the argument is a type of a priori (to borrow Kant, the grand-daddy of transcendental argument). I believe, therefore I understand (so said St. Anselm). The only difference between us is that Jesus has convinced me infallibly and revealed His Father to me; His existence is existentially undeniable. I cannot prove that to you, but again, you cannot prove any non-arbitrary "Q" at the end of the syllogism.

[March 02, 2006 9:45 PM](#)

[Clarence the Theologian](#) said...

And while I'm thinking about all this, when Stein did ask Bahnsen for infallible proof, Bahnsen's reply is simpler than mine above. He said, "He saved me." Stein retorted, "Well, I have not had that experience, so I can't [I don't remember the word]." That is the a priori for the Christian: it is God's metaphysical sovereign and totally unprovable act in which he convinced me--a former atheist-- of his existence. He saved me. If he would do that for you, all this would make sense. But alas, as long as he has not, your opinions are all arbitrary opinions, unverifiable and self-refuting. Why because I said so. See, I used your presuppositions to make that point. Hey--that reminds me of Stein's fatal move at the end of the debate when he balked and said that logic was the product of social conventions, well, if you've heard the argument, then you know where this is going . . . Bahnsen replied, "If there are no universal norms that are right or wrong, then I win. Stein responded, "How?" Bahnsen said, "I shoot you and I win. I make up my own rules and I win, since there are no absolutes to define logic, morality or anything else" (something to that affect).

[March 02, 2006 9:54 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Clarence,

Thank you for sharing your opinions. Here are some points for you to consider.

Clarence: "This entire ideological war is quite proof in itself that we are a divided people."

And we don't have to be so divided, Clarence. But I find myself living in a world populated with people who think of humanity as divided into two opposing groups, the chosen versus the damned, and I happen to number among the damned in their faith-based worldview which essentially teaches "believe, or go to hell."

Clarence: "Naturalists working hard to say that Christians are wrong about their belief system."

Let's not forget the endless files of mystics working hard to build ministries for the purpose of indoctrinating vulnerable minds and chastising those who confess that they do not believe in invisible magic beings.

Clarence: "Before I ramble, I want to say, in a world that presupposes mankind to simply be the stuff at the end of the food chain, this whole argument is arbitrary."

Specifically, who "presupposes" this? That man may be at the top of the food chain is not a primary, nor is it an automatic guarantee.

Clarence: "None of you thinking anti-theists believe in epistemic certainty--right?"

I suppose that depends on what you mean by "believe in" and "epistemic certainty." However, I am wholly certain about many things. I am certain that there is a reality, that I exist, that I am conscious, that I face a fundamental alternative - to live or die, that I must act in order to live, that the actions that will enable me to live are actions that I must choose to make, etc. I am also certain that mysticism is irrational and opposed to human life.

Clarence: "If that's the case, why are you spending so much energy trying to prove with certainty that the theist is wrong?"

Essentially, you're asking why I write the kinds of things I write. My answer is pretty simple: I enjoy it. Also, I know others enjoy it. In addition to this, I am contributing to a larger effort - namely to pull off religion's mask and expose its hideous, anti-rational and anti-human nature. It gives me profound pleasure to labor fruitfully on the verdicts of my judgment.

Clarence: "How can you validate or verify his wrongness?"

By rational reference to reality, specifically to facts that have to be true even for the theist to concoct his god-belief in his imagination which are incompatible with that god-belief.

Clarence: "If there is no objective epistemic referential, my square is your circle."

But there is an objective epistemic reference - they are named by the axioms: fundamental truths which theists have to assume even to deny them.

Clarence: "You use that argument in morality, why not in metaphysics?"

Are you speaking about something I have written regarding morality? Perhaps you assume I share the views of other non-Christians, but this would be a hasty generalization on your part. In expounding and defending my views on morality, I certainly do not use an argument which claims that "there is no objective epistemic referential," because there are numerous relevant facts which obtain independent of subjective intentions that bear on the matter. You may want to read my blog [Do I Borrow My Morality from the Christian Worldview](#) to get started.

Clarence: "I don't understand why you can't let the Christian have his opinion?"

There's nothing I can do to prevent another human being from having his opinions, Clarence. Writing a blog which exposes the falsehoods of Christianity and its defense strategies does not in any way disallow adherents of Christianity to enjoy their own opinions. On the contrary, I am pleased when Christians read and react to my writings; I am interested in their opinions.

Clarence: "But alas, you are certain that he is wrong--how is this??"

Read my blog. If you don't understand something, ask.

Clarence: "On what epistemic grounds can you say this?"

On the only epistemic grounds possible to man: Reason.

Clarence: "Oh, it breaks the laws of logic?? What are those? Which Laws--western? eastern?"

I am not an advocate of polylogism. The law of identity permits no contradictions, and the law of causality permits no miracles. You're free to pretend otherwise.

Clarence: "A buddhist world-view says all is maya and illusory even my typing presently is illusory. Is the buddhist

right? Of course. Are you right? Of course."

The Buddhist is wrong to believe this just as the Christian is wrong to believe that a supernatural consciousness wished the universe into being: both commit the fallacy of the stolen concept.

Clarence: "We are all right. Now, I really don't believe this."

The issue is not about belief, but about knowledge, for our beliefs depend on our knowledge. In fact, I question whether most Christians truly believe what they profess. I've known many who ended up admitting that they really did not believe, even though they spent years insisting that they did.

Clarence: "I do think its funny that you will believe in a non-material universal law like gravity or the law of identity and not a non-material universal diety. Why not?"

There is an enormous fundamental difference between principles summarizing what we perceive and the notion of an invisible magic being to whose consciousness reality somehow conforms. The two are irreconcilable.

Clarence: "Again, all I see is arbitrariness."

That is because your worldview is arbitrary, Clarence.

Clarence: "But the point I wanted to make is the same one that Bahnsen offered Stein: on the charge of circular reasoning, you seem not to understand that all of us use circular reasoning."

I understand that Bahnsen, as he tried to think Van Til's thoughts after him, repeated this claim on numerous occasions. I also understand why his worldview, which has no objective starting point, would promote such an opinion. Bahnsen thought he could prove his starting point. Consequently he had no choice but to embrace circular reasoning openly. His only way to justify this was to resort to tu quoque: "everybody else does it, too!" Such affirmations are made in ignorance of an objective worldview.

Clarence: "The Trinitarian theist says, without God (the infallible), I cannot know anything."

The Lahu tribesmen say "without Geusha, I cannot know anything." The assertion of an invisible magic being does not enable man to know. On the contrary, it cripples his mind and reduces him to the level a suggestible child. The Trinitarian theist blanks out on the fact that knowledge, like other values, must be earned, not acquired by "revelation" from mystical sources that he cannot understand: "the alleged short-cut to knowledge, which is faith, is only a short-circuit destroying the mind." (Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*)

Clarence: "The anti-theist says, with my mind (infallible) whatever I believe is true is true (for me and everyone apparently--how dogmatic)."

Who specifically says this, Clarence? I think you've confused non-believers with believers. Believers tend not to think that something is true because they believe it; rather, they tend to believe something because they think it is true. You also suggest that non-believers cannot be honest about their fallibility and errors. On the contrary, I know many who are more than happy to admit when they are wrong. Just yesterday my co-worker had to correct me on an issue which I had mistaken; I believed that she was going to take care of a responsibility which, it turns out, is not hers to perform. Did I resist this? Of course not. So, I'm not sure what you're point is, unless you're trying to find some way to make yourself feel good in your religious delusion.

Clarence: "All I see agian is arbitrariness."

Perhaps it's time for you to shrug the arbitrary worldview that you've invested yourself in. But that would require you to be honest about your mistakes. Perhaps that is hard for you to do.

Clarence: "We all assume something to be infallible--it is inescapable."

I'm curious how you know so much about what everyone else assumes. I do, however, think that the senses are infallible. To say otherwise would be to commit the fallacy of the stolen concept. But this is not an assumption I have made without consideration, so it's not something I simply take for granted. It is a recognition based on understanding, while the theist's fantasy of an infallible supernatural consciousness which whispers to his soul is

based on faith.

Clarence: "Christians rely on God's infallibility and his consequent revealing of knowledge to whomever he chooses."

Can this be tested? Or, is this simply a claim to knowledge that has no collateral backing whatsoever? If you can tap into an omniscient and infallible source, tell me the date and place of my birth. Then show that you got this information from a supernatural source. If you come back with "Well, God doesn't give out information like this," then what use is this claim to "revelation"? At that point, you'll be invited to explain what distinguishes "revelation" from simply taking for granted what you've read in some sacred text, which anyone can do (if he's dishonest enough).

Clarence: "As Jesus says, 'All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him' (Matthew 11:27)."

It appears that you're trying to rationalize my non-belief in a way that reinforces your belief. According to this ploy, the matter is not in my hands, for the ploy removes it from me and places the matter in the hands of an invisible magic being. I look at it much simpler than this: I don't believe because I'm too honest to say I believe something I know is not true. Do you think I should be dishonest and say I believe when I don't? Indeed, what reasons do you give for me to change my mind? Oh, that's right, it's not about reason, it's about an invisible magic being taking control of a person's mind and installing that belief without his prior consent. These are the seeds of force; as Rand poignantly observed, faith and force are corollaries. And the result is always destruction. A Muslim suicide bomber and Jesus Christ have a lot in common: both willingly embrace a premature death.

Clarence: "I don't expect you to understand that."

I do understand it, Clarence. But you wish I didn't.

Clarence: "Paul wrote to the Corinthian church ca. 55 AD in these words: 'The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned' (1 Cor. 2:14)."

And in the same passage, the author makes it clear that the "wisdom" he attributes to his god is diametrically opposed to the wisdom men need in order to live in the world. And yet, you borrow this wisdom of the world every time you put forth effort to achieve any goal in this world, such as logging onto your computer so you can go team up with other self-deluded minds who resent their limitations.

Clarence: "David was precisely correct (even if I choose not to believe it) when he said, 'The fool says in his heart, "There is no God"' (Psalm 14:1)."

On the same reasoning, one would be considered a fool for pointing out that there are no square circles. If name-calling is the best you have at your disposal, then your worldview has really let you down, hasn't it?

Clarence: "I assume the Bible to be right;"

Yes, you *assume* it to be right, which means you can't know whether or not it is true. You've decided even before investigating the relevant facts that whatever it says must be accepted as truth on faith. That is not knowledge, Clarence. That is not epistemology. That is not a standard for governing your choices and actions. It is only a formula for evasion.

Clarence: "you dismiss it outright because it doesn't make sense to your mind and consequent world-view, which you assume to be infallible."

I wonder if making these erroneous assertions really makes you feel better about yourself. I doubt it. But many points here are false. For one, I nowhere assume that my mind is infallible. It is because it is not infallible that I need an epistemology in the first place. If I were omniscient and infallible, I would not need a method of cognition comprised of a set of rational principles to guide my mind between truth and untruth. The ideal knowledge for the theist is the unearned: automatic knowledge and automatic authority. He resents other minds because he resents his own first, and the only way to appease that resentment is to assert authority over those rival minds. And the only way he can do this is by hoodwinking them with "mysteries" that only he knows but everyone else better believe or else! Sorry, couldn't fool me. Also wrong here is your assumption that I simply "dismiss [the bible]

outright," which I have not done. On the contrary, I let the bible speak for itself, and I recognize its many falsehoods. I know this bothers many people, but it remains a fact nonetheless. Furthermore, I do not "dismiss" anything "outright" simply because "it doesn't make sense" to me. I recognize that my understanding is not a precondition for factuality. But, my understanding is a precondition for me to confidently and honestly say that I think something is true. So, if I don't understand something, I have no business saying I think it's true. And if I don't think something is true, why would I say I believe it? Blank out.

Clarence: "You would have to, because if you didn't you would have to acknowledge that there is a potential fact in the universe that is infallibly persuasive proving God's existence."

Clarence, if you think there is some fact in the universe discoverable by the human mind that serves as "infallibly persuasive [proof]" of your god's existence, please don't hold back. Let's examine it. But prior to doing so, I ask that you read my blog [Is Human Experience Evidence of the Christian God?](#)

Clarence: "You must say that or claim omniscience, which is existential suicide."

You should be able to see now how misguided this assumption of yours is. I am just as certain that your god is unreal as I am that square circles are not real, and for essentially the same reasons.

Clarence: "Perhaps instead of presuppositional, the argument is a type of a priori (to borrow Kant, the grand-daddy of transcendental argument)."

In fact, that is the case with presuppositionalism, and Bahnsen makes this clear by quoting Kant's understanding of 'transcendental' in his book *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings & Analysis*, p. 499. By resting on so-called "a priori knowledge," the apologist admits that he has no rational proof for his god-belief. On the contrary, it is said to be an item of automatic knowledge, which is simply an open admission of dishonesty since, as the Rand quote above points out, he short-circuits his own mind. Indeed, even if it were true that he had this so-called "a priori knowledge," he would still have the task of proving that this knowledge that he was born with (or which was inserted into his mind by an invisible magic being) is true. He has no rational case for this. If in fact he had a rational case to support his views, he would not have to resort to the claim that it is "a priori," as if he could have knowledge without the processes which make knowledge possible. Again, such claims as you proffer here, Clarence, only serve as evidence that Christians really have no epistemology. It's just fantasy that has been front-loaded as if it were a fundamental, mind-shaping truth.

Clarence: "I believe, therefore I understand (so said St. Anselm)."

Exactly, Clarence. Which means: You "believe" (i.e., accept as truth) BEFORE you understand (i.e., before you have done your homework). Clarence, you're making my case for me!

Clarence: "The only difference between us is that Jesus has convinced me infallibly and revealed His Father to me; His existence is existentially undeniable."

No, Clarence, our difference is even more fundamental than this, namely that I have chosen to adopt an honest worldview, while you have chosen a dishonest worldview.

Clarence: "I cannot prove that to you,"

If it were true, you would be able to prove it. But since it is not true, you will seek to put the blame for your inability to prove it on me as the non-believer, the ultimate spoil-sport.

Clarence: "but again, you cannot prove any non-arbitrary 'Q' at the end of the syllogism."

Well, I hope you feel better about yourself, Clarence. You won't feel better by gloating over imagined inabilities of others.

Regards,
Dawson

[March 03, 2006 7:30 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Clarence,

Before responding to your second comment, I want to say that I have really enjoyed interacting with your statements. Thank you for providing an opportunity to demonstrate the power of my worldview and the impotence of Christianity. I invite you to continue posting your comments, for I will have answers to them.

Clarence: "And while I'm thinking about all this, when Stein did ask Bahnsen for infallible proof, Bahnsen's reply is simpler than mine above. He said, 'He saved me'. Stein retorted, 'Well, I have not had that experience, so I can't [I don't remember the word]'."

Do you think Bahnsen's answer was at all persuasive, let alone rationally conclusive? Think about it, Clarence: What would keep a deluded man from making a statement that Bahnsen made?

Clarence: "That is the a priori for the Christian: it is God's metaphysical sovereign and totally unprovable act in which he convinced me--a former atheist-- of his existence."

Can you explain to me how I would be able to distinguish what you call "God's metaphysical sovereign and totally unprovable act" from a concoction in your imagination? I ask this because I have no idea how I can distinguish what you claim from mere fantasy. It sure looks like fantasy to me, and if it takes some kind of internal experience like the one you claim to have had to believe these things, then I am right not to believe, for I have not had such an experience. As I read the debate, Stein, in pointing out the same, was simply being honest. Now, Clarence, what's so unreasonable about being honest?

Clarence: "He saved me."

The Lahu tribesmen make claims essentially similar to this (they do not refer to it as salvation; from what I can tell, their term for it has no adequate translation in English), and yet they cannot have the Christian god in mind for their deity, Geusha, did not have a son. So if you think I am to believe you, why should I not believe the Lahu tribesmen? You offer nothing *objective*, Clarence. And when we get into the teachings of your worldview, we find that they completely thwart the principle of objectivity, having totally reversed the relationship between subject and object such that the objects conform to the subject rather than the other way around. Tell me how you govern your choices and actions in life - on the assumption that the objects you perceive conform to your wishing, or on the recognition that the objects you perceive remain what they are no matter what you might wish?

Clarence: "If he would do that for you, all this would make sense."

In other words, I would have to become a puppet in order to "understand," right? A worldview which requires its adherents to be puppets is unfit for human life, Clarence.

Clarence: "But alas, as long as he has not, your opinions are all arbitrary opinions, unverifiable and self-refuting."

I know you want me to be punished for not believing in your mystical fantasies, Clarence, but your actions speak louder than your words. If I affirmed your god-belief, suddenly my opinions would go from "all arbitrary" to "all truth," just like that. In fact, however, to claim that a god exists is to contradict oneself. And here's why: to assert any claim as a truth, one assumes the primacy of existence principle (for he is not supposing that his claim is true on the basis of his or anyone else's wishing); but the content of god-belief claims reduces to the primacy of consciousness view of reality - the view that reality conforms to a form of consciousness (e.g., "God created the universe by an act of will"). These two perspectives - the primacy of existence and the primacy of consciousness - are fundamental opposites, contradictory at the most basic point of human cognition. It is with this contradiction that Christianity begins, and it is this contradiction that its apologists are attempting to defend. It is because of this contradiction that their worldview is destructive to human life.

Clarence: "Why because I said so. See, I used your presuppositions to make that point."

You are unfamiliar with my worldview. It is not my worldview which premises its "truths" on someone's say so. This is Christianity's presupposition. It is most interesting that you need a non-believer to point this out to you.

Clarence: "Hey--that reminds me of Stein's fatal move at the end of the debate when he balked and said that logic was the product of social conventions, well, if you've heard the argument, then you know where this is going . . ."

Stein's errors are not important to me, nor are the relevant to the dispute between my worldview and your pretenses.

Clarence: "Bahnsen replied, 'If there are no universal norms that are right or wrong, then I win'. Stein responded, 'How?' Bahnsen said, 'I shoot you and I win. I make up my own rules and I win, since there are no absolutes to define logic, morality or anything else' (something to that affect)."

Bahnsen's error is that he thinks there needs to be an invisible magic being to "account for" facts which serve as the proper guide to man's choices and actions. This is simply a consequence of his profound confusion on matters of philosophy.

Regards,
Dawson

[March 03, 2006 8:03 AM](#)

[VanTilsGhost](#) said...

At the risk of sounding juvenile....

Clarence = PWNED!!!

(excellent responses Dawson!)

[March 03, 2006 1:25 PM](#)