

Friday, May 21, 2010

TAG: Precariously Straddling the Horns of a Nasty Dilemma

Cross-posted at [Choosing Hats](#) with some minor edits:

The two examples of TAG which Chris Bolt has presented (see Bolt's 17 May comment to [this blog](#)) are the following:

Argument A:

Premise 1A: "If knowledge then God"

Premise 2A: "knowledge"

Conclusion A: "therefore God"

Argument B:

Premise 1B: "Logic"

Premise 2B: "If not-Christianity then not-Logic"

Conclusion B: "therefore Christianity"

Chris stated that neither of these arguments appears to be circular, so far as he can see.

In my 18 May comment to [this blog](#) of Bolt's (see also [here](#)), I gave reasons - reasons gleaned from relevant literature sympathetic to presuppositionalism - for suspecting that the circularity of the TAG argument is hidden from view, particularly when the focus is trained exclusively on the bare models which Chris has presented. The models which Chris has presented are carefully constructed to keep their inherent circularity (and other problems) safely out of view.

That is why I raised the issue of soundness versus validity of an argument as well as questions about how Premise 1A and Premise 2B are supported. To accept the conclusion of either argument, both premises of either argument must be demonstrably true.

So far as I have seen throughout this discussion, Chris has made no attempt to demonstrate the truth of his argument's premises.

I suspect, strongly I might add, that as we examine the individual cases for the controversial premises of these arguments (namely Premise 1A and Premise 2B above), that circular logic will be uncovered. It is for this reason that I think Chris resists presenting support for the premises of his two argument models. I suspect this is the reason why he also resists interacting with my comments. If I'm wrong on this, it's up to Chris to show us that I'm wrong and where I'm wrong.

It is in the interest of settling once and for all the question of whether or not TAG is *ultimately* circular that I asked Chris to state for the record whether or not he thinks knowledge and logic presuppose the existence of the Christian god.

It seems that the only alternatives here are

- i) yes, knowledge and logic do presuppose the existence of the Christian god, and
- ii) no, knowledge and logic do not presuppose the existence of the Christian god.

Since Chris is a student of Van Til and Bahnsen, I would think that he would insist that both knowledge and logic are not presuppositionally neutral phenomena, that they are underwritten by certain presuppositions, and that those presuppositions honor the grace and sovereignty which Christianity attributes to its god.

Neither alternative seems to bode well for the presuppositionalist position. Consider:

If on the one hand knowledge and logic presuppose the existence of the Christian god, then Premise 1A and Premise 2B contain elements which assume the truth of their respective Conclusions A and B (the existence of the Christian god, or the truth of Christian theism, which assumes the existence of the Christian god), and thus the two models of TAG which Chris has presented are by definition circular.

If on the other hand knowledge and logic turn out not to presuppose the existence of the Christian god, then knowledge and logic are *at best* presuppositionally neutral, perhaps even anti-theistic (as I have argued on my website - see for example [here](#) and [here](#)). Since presuppositionalism insists that neutrality is a form of self-deception, I'm guessing that Chris would not affirm this horn of the dilemma. But then he's faced with affirming the ultimate circularity of TAG.

It is because of this dilemma, and Van Til's adamant rejection of presuppositional neutrality, that the apologetic master rejected the latter alternative and stated explicitly that he would "prefer to reason in a circle to not reasoning at all" (*A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, p. 12).

So, Chris, how do you untangle this mess?

I'm glad these aren't my problems.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [TAG](#), [Theistic Arguments](#)

posted by [Bahnsen Burner](#) at [10:45 AM](#)

25 Comments:

[Justin Hall](#) said...

You said it a long time ago, it is a poof, not a proof. Now I get why Rand called it evasion. At what point does it cease being a case of being mistaken and become dishonesty?

[May 21, 2010 11:43 AM](#)

[C.L. Bolt](#) said...

Why not come over to the site and interact with what is actually being discussed Justin? Dawson is complaining that, "Chris has made no attempt to demonstrate the truth of his argument's premises." Yeah, Chris does not need to, because that is not the topic of discussion in the post Dawson is responding to!

[May 21, 2010 12:32 PM](#)

[NAL](#) said...

This post has been removed by the author.

[May 21, 2010 8:27 PM](#)

[NAL](#) said...

This post has been removed by the author.

[May 21, 2010 8:30 PM](#)

[NAL](#) said...

I now think my previous comment is incorrect, so I'm deleting it.

[May 22, 2010 9:33 PM](#)

[Martin](#) said...

Premise 1A: "If knowledge then Gus the Magic Cosmic Hippo"

Premise 2A: "knowledge"

Conclusion A: "therefore Gus the Magic Cosmic Hippo"

Wow! This religion stuff is easy.

[May 24, 2010 3:55 AM](#)

[Dr Funkenstein](#) said...

As you point out, Dawson, quite a large number of prominent presuppositionalists seem to have no problem conceding TAG (or at least presuppositionalism) relies on circularity - eg John Frame has a section in this article where he claims it is a necessity in all worldviews

http://www.thirdmill.org/newfiles/joh_frame/PT.Frame.Presupp.Apol.1.html

He begins section 3, which addresses circularity, by saying in the 1st paragraph:

Rather, the argument is circular in that it appeals to criteria of truth and rationality which are themselves Christian in that they accord with Christian presuppositions. But if that is true, then we are presenting an argument that assumes from the outset that Christianity is true; it assumes, in other words, the conclusion it attempts to prove.

Now normally "circular argument" is considered a fallacy. This particular type of circularity, however, I believe, is not a fallacy, but a necessity of human thought.

and finishes it by saying:

It seems to me, therefore, that far from being a fallacy, this sort of circular argument is necessary for anyone who seeks to argue on behalf of a broad world view, particularly one which includes distinctive criteria of rationality and truth.

I'm curious to know if they extend this leeway to non-Christians as well, or just to views they happen to favour?

On a slightly tangential note, you mention the fact that presuppositionalism as a method states that neutrality is a pretense - interesting that adherents of this particular system of apologetics also state worldviews can be evaluated by appeal to internal coherence. While I don't disagree that internal coherence is important, it is also a principle that doesn't favour one worldview over another in principle i.e. it is a neutral means of evaluation. Furthermore, the demand that certain things be "accounted for" is also an external critique, not an internal one (someone who adopts a non-Christian worldview may feel that e.g. the law of non-contradiction needs no further justification or explanation and provides part of the foundation that their system rests on, and sees no reason why they should have to cater to the presuppositionalist's demands as to what does and does not need to be "accounted for" within their own worldview).

[May 24, 2010 12:18 PM](#)

[C.L. Bolt](#) said...

"You said it a long time ago, it is a poof, not a proof."

And now he's saying that it's circular. But how can something be a "poof" as opposed to a "proof" and still be correctly labeled "circular"?

"Premise 1A: "If knowledge then Gus the Magic Cosmic Hippo"

Premise 2A: "knowledge"

Conclusion A: "therefore Gus the Magic Cosmic Hippo"

Wow! This religion stuff is easy."

You did not demonstrate how TAG is both circular and unstated by giving your example of a different argument which is in fact neither circular nor unstated.

Are there any thinkers around here or just mockers?

[May 27, 2010 10:21 AM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

This post has been removed by the author.

[May 27, 2010 11:34 AM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

TAG is wrong on so many levels it is breath taking. Really the only thing you need to know is the whole thing is based on metaphysical subjectivism. It is an open and shut case of performative inconsistency. As for mocking, when full grown adults continue to carry on about their imaginary invisible friends as if they were real, and further take offence when they are not taken seriously, well what do you expect? Sorry for the run on sentence:)

[May 27, 2010 11:36 AM](#)

[HockeyDad](#) said...

Do you believe Jesus Christ was "real"?

[May 27, 2010 7:11 PM](#)

[C.L. Bolt](#) said...

"TAG is wrong on so many levels it is breath taking."

Your statement above is wrong on so many levels it is breath taking.

"Really the only thing you need to know is the whole thing is based on metaphysical subjectivism."

Really the only thing one needs to know is that your whole worldview is based on metaphysical subjectivism.

"It is an open and shut case of performative inconsistency."

Your comments are open and shut cases of performative inconsistency.

"As for mocking, when full grown adults continue to carry on about their imaginary invisible friends as if they were real, and further take offence when they are not taken seriously, well what do you expect?"

When young people on the Internet continue to carry on without any argument whatsoever about how the vast majority of all people who have ever lived have supposedly believed in imaginary invisible friends as if they were real and imagine that others are taking offense at it when they're actually just disappointed in how fundy atheists preach but don't argue what else should they expect but to be called out on it?

See? I can do it too. One should be concerned when one is afraid to think.

[May 27, 2010 10:04 PM](#)

[openlyatheist](#) said...

Some intensely interesting discussion going on in that thread.

Dawson asked: "Do you think TAG's conclusion should be accepted on someone's say so? Yes or no?"

Bolt responded: "If that someone is God, yes."

If only God had a blog!

Bolt further stated: "If that someone is not God and presents TAG as a sound argument, yes."

So God is exempt from the requirement of sound argumentation that we mortals bear? Telling.

[May 27, 2010 11:31 PM](#)

[Justin Hall](#) said...

@HockeyDad

I don't think the question as to whether I believe Jesus was real or not is important. The important question is whether I believe he was the son of god or not. As an atheist of course I do not. This does not preclude there having once been a man called Jesus who was murdered by the Romans for his trouble.

@Chris Bolt

Hey there Chris, got a question for you, in the parlance of the primary argument from existence, or Rand's terminology, do you know what metaphysical subjectivism and metaphysical objectivism mean?

[May 28, 2010 12:24 AM](#)

[The Secular Walk](#) said...

@ Mr. Bolt

I'm extremely baffled at how you can NOT see how your articulation of TAG is circular.

The middle premise does not substantiate in any way, the initial claim in {P1}. That makes the argument a failure, being a fallacy of Begging the Question and a Non-Sequitur.

[May 28, 2010 2:04 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Yes, it's quite baffling, especially when Chris has gone on the record to affirm that both knowledge and logic *presuppose* the existence of the Christian god, and then presents an argument which seeks to draw the conclusion that the Christian god exists from a premise which contains an element which he says *presupposes* the existence of the Christian god.

That's faith for you. It's very effective when it comes to blinding a person to the facts.

I've posted another comment responding to Chris Bolt [here](#) (comment #56).

Regards,
Dawson

[May 28, 2010 10:57 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

HockeyDad asked:

"Do you believe Jesus Christ was 'real'?"

No, HockeyDad, I don't believe that Jesus Chris was real. My view is that the the Jesus of the gospel stories is a concoction of early legends, a position which I've defended on my blog - see my label [Christian legends](#). Here you'll find a wide assortment of reasons and arguments for my position on the matter, if you're interested in pursuing the question.

Regards,
Dawson

[May 28, 2010 11:35 AM](#)

[The Secular Walk](#) said...

@Dawson Bethrick

What is the name of the online paper where you articulate why you hold the position that Jesus Christ was not real? Is it called ("A Response to Josh Ratliff on the "Creed" in I Corinthians 15").

I'd like to read it to see if you are right. Christians generally consider Jesus Mythicists to be quacks, which is why I accept that Jesus was a real person, just not Divine or supernatural. If I read your reasons, perhaps I'll change my position.

[May 28, 2010 4:21 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

The Secular Walk: "What is the name of the online paper where you articulate why you hold the position that Jesus Christ was not real?"

I've got a number of blogs dedicated to this, which is why I provided a link to a label rather than to a specific blog entry. Many of my blogs on this matter were posted in 2008. The best way to find them is to go to my [Year Four archives](#) and look for blogs #151 through #163, all of which address various aspects of the legend theory as I have come to adopt it. There's a lot of debate in the comments sections of these blogs between myself and a Christian named David Parker, who tried to challenge my position. You may find these debates interesting. They are also in my [blog archives](#) if you'd prefer to read them in PDF format (look for the same entry numbers).

The Secular Walk: "Christians generally consider Jesus Mythicists to be quacks, which is why I accept that Jesus was a real person, just not Divine or supernatural."

That's a terrible reason to "accept that Jesus was a real person." Are you afraid of what Christians will say about you?

Also, keep in mind that HockeyDad was asking about "Jesus Christ," not simply "Jesus." The two are not exactly the same. By "Jesus Christ" I take HockeyDad to be referring to the character portrayed in the gospel narratives, which I consider legendary. There may have been a *man* named Jesus living around the time, but this is compatible with the legend theory that I have defended.

Hope that helps!

Regards,
Dawson

[May 28, 2010 4:58 PM](#)

[HockeyDad](#) said...

Dawson & Justin:

Thank you for the additional information...I will read it. And yes, I was referring to Jesus Christ and not simply "Jesus".

Regards,

HockeyDad

[May 28, 2010 7:38 PM](#)

[The Secular Walk](#) said...

Thanks for the response Dawson. I appreciate your time. I will try to read those entries.

[May 29, 2010 4:46 PM](#)

[The Secular Walk](#) said...

@Dawson Bethrick

Amazing Intellectual cowardice on the part of Mr. Bolt. I directly asked him and Nick to give a logical account of why logic/knowledge necessitates God. Mr. Bolt disappears soon after (presumably because of Memorial holiday...conveniently), and Nick decides to wallow in irrelevant nonsense rather than answer the challenge. When Mr. Bolt comes back, does he take the time to substantiate his claims and position? Of course not. He decides to close the thread totally.

Disgusting. And this is after Mr. Bolt decided to give me a backhanded insult by telling me to go read introduction to logic by Copi.

[June 01, 2010 12:04 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Yes, you're right, Secular. Chris loves to repeat the slogans which spill out of the presuppositional playbook. But when it comes to defending them and answering criticisms of presuppositionalism, he tends to find better things to do (such as trifle over petty issues or simply dispatch himself into the tall grass). It seems that if there were good reasons to suppose that knowledge and logic presuppose the Christian god, we'd have seen some genuine substance on the point by now.

I've already addressed these matters in great detail on my blog and on my website. For instance, in the case of the claim that logic presupposes the Christian god, see my multi-pronged exposition [Does Logic Presuppose the Christian God?](#) In this paper, which was assembled from several blog entries that I posted in the summer of 2009, I critically examine the presuppositionalist viewpoint, exposing numerous confusions and conflicts in the treatment of logic which various presuppositionalist sources offer. Then I develop four significant reasons why logic cannot presuppose the Christian god (each of which alone I think is more than sufficient to put the whole matter to rest). I've not seen any responses to this, and yet we keep hearing presuppositionalists claim that there couldn't be any logic unless their god exists.

Similarly for the claim that knowledge presupposes the Christian god. See my examination of Joshua Whipps' "case" for "the Triune God of the Scriptures" as the "basis" for knowledge [here](#).

I've also raked Bolt over the coals on induction. See for instance my five-parter [Bolt's Pile of Knapp](#).

Presuppositionalists typically like to pretend that their objections against non-Christian worldviews are unanswerable, all the while ignoring responses like mine and hoping they'll just disappear.

So, it's nothing new.

Regards,
Dawson

[June 01, 2010 2:38 PM](#)

[Tim](#) said...

"TAG is wrong on so many levels it is breath taking."

Your statement above is wrong on so many levels it is breath taking.

"Really the only thing you need to know is the whole thing is based on metaphysical subjectivism."

Really the only thing one needs to know is that your whole worldview is based on metaphysical subjectivism.

"It is an open and shut case of performative inconsistency."

Your comments are open and shut cases of performative inconsistency.

"As for mocking, when full grown adults continue to carry on about their imaginary invisible friends as if they were real, and further take offence when they are not taken seriously, well what do you expect?"

When young people on the Internet continue to carry on without any argument whatsoever about how the vast majority of all people who have ever lived have supposedly believed in imaginary invisible friends as if they were real and imagine that others are taking offense at it when they're actually just disappointed in how fundy atheists preach but don't argue what else should they expect but to be called out on it?

See? I can do it too. One should be concerned when one is afraid to think.

The above is one reason why I quit reading and paying attention to these things. This is just so childish. I am glad there are some who can deal with these kinds of issues and put up with this crap because I can not do it.

Thanks Dawson.

[June 15, 2010 7:39 AM](#)

[Post a Comment](#)