

UseOfReason

The Matt Slick Fallacy

1. **0. Introduction.** Matt Slick; evangelical Calvinist, radio presenter, apologist. He has made something of a name for himself by promoting a version of the ‘transcendental argument for the existence of God’. His version is one of the easiest to refute that I have come across. However, in all the debates and online discussions I’ve seen Slick engage in, and to be sure he engages in a lot, I have never seen anyone offer what I consider to be the correct refutation. So I will present it here.

His argument was given on his radio-show/podcast, on 17th December, 2015, in an episode entitled ‘A Proof of God’. In fact only the last 14 mins of the show are dedicated to this topic, when Slick is prompted by a caller – ‘Hollywood dude’. I will use that version as a foil. Here is the link it on his official ‘CARM’ podcast site:

<http://carmpodcasting.blogspot.co.uk/2015/12/carm-podcast-1214.html>

Admittedly, the argument was given in a rather off-the-cuff manner by Slick in that show, and he could be forgiven for not being clear and careful with his words. On the other hand, his presentation on the show was very similar to many other times he has given the argument in the past, in situations where he had the opportunity to prepare and refer to notes as he spoke, such as:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPi073maMRw> – In debate with Dan Barker in April 2014. Slick makes his case at about 4:40 into the video.
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dpsz4v_Z8JY – In debate with Matt Dillahunty on the Atheist Experience in 2009. Slick makes the argument at 43:03 in the video.

The argument is also given in written form on his website, here: <https://carm.org/transcendental-argument>. The version of the argument I am looking at here is found at the end of the written version (section 9).

1. Disjunctive syllogism and true dichotomy

At 44:15 into our show, Slick explains his argument. He says that he will use the argument form known as ‘disjunctive syllogism’, which is the following inference rule:

Either p or q

Not- p

Therefore q .

It says that if either p or q is true, and if it is also true that one of them is not the case (say, p), then the remaining one (q) is true. Disjunctive syllogism is valid in propositional logic, and its validity will not be challenged by me here.

Slick also uses the notion of a ‘true dichotomy’, by which he means a strong type of ‘or’-statement. In propositional logic, ‘or’ is a connective that takes two propositions, e.g. p or q . Its behavior is entirely logical. ‘ p or q ’ is true when p is true and q isn’t, when q is true and p isn’t, and when they are both true. It is false when they are both false. That is a disjunction.

Slick’s ‘true dichotomies’ are a strong version of a disjunction; true dichotomies are always true, as by definition one of the options is true in exclusion of the other. The way this is achieved is purely logical; the propositional form of ‘true dichotomies’ is a disjunction between a proposition and its direct negation; ‘ p or not- p ’.

So here is a normal disjunction:

Either Sam or Alex will come to the party.

If it is true, then one of them will be at the party; but it might be false because perhaps neither Sam nor Alex will come to the party. Consider, in contrast, the following:

Either Sam will come to the party, or she won't.

In this case it has to be true, because there are no other possible options than Sam being at the party, or her not being at the party. A 'true dichotomy' for Slick is like this; it has to be true because it covers all possible options.

2. Slick's argument

At 44:15, Slick gives the following monologue:

“If you only have two possibilities to account for something ... if one of them is negated the other is necessarily validated as being true ... So we have ‘God and not-God’, so that’s called a true dichotomy, God either exists, or it is not the case that God exists, we have the thing and the negation of the thing. So now we have a true disjunctive syllogism ... We have, for example, the transcendental laws of logic ... Can the no-God position account for the transcendental laws of logic? And the ultimate answer is no it cannot. So therefore because it cannot, the other position is automati-

cally necessarily validated as being true. Because, you cannot negate both options out of the only two possibilities; that's logically impossible."

The argument structure being used is as follows:

- 1) *Either God, or not-God.*
- 2) *Not-God cannot account for the laws of logic.*
- 3) *Therefore God can account for the laws of logic.*

He then proceeds to examine objections to premise 2, such as some of the main ways an atheist (a representative of the not-God camp?) might try to account for the transcendental laws of logic. Are they discovered, measurable features of empirical reality? Slicks says they cannot be. Are they 'linguistic constructs'? Again, no. Do we vote on them? (Sigh) No. Could they be constructs of human minds? No, no, no. No.

At the end of it, Slick summaries how he speaks to his imaginary interlocutor, the poor atheist, who has had his every attempt at accounting for logic rebutted (this is at 48:22):

"When we go through this with them, I'll say: 'See, you can't account for it. Therefore, the other position is valid'. And then I say: 'Next!'"

3. Refutation

So, what is my refutation of this argument? Well, it does not involve giving a better account for the transcendental laws of logic than our poor imaginary atheist. Nor does it require pinning Slick down on precisely what it means to have an account of something. Neither does it involve pointing out to Slick that the premise ‘God or not-God’ is not an instance of a true dichotomy because, strictly speaking, it is not a properly formed sentence at all^[1]. Anyway, nothing as fancy as the metaphysics of logic is needed here. And we can forgive a badly formed sentence here and there. We can afford to be so magnanimous because there is a logical problem with the argument, and it is very simple. It is a slight of hand, which can go un-noticed, but is easy to spot when spelled out. It is an instance of the fallacy of ‘false dichotomy’.

A **true dichotomy**, such as:

1. a) *‘Either God exists, or it is not the case that God exists’*,

is substituted for the **false dichotomy** of:

1. b) *‘Either God accounts for the transcendental laws of logic or not-God accounts for the transcendental laws of logic’*.

The second is not a genuine dichotomy, because it is quite possible that neither God nor his negation has anything to do with the laws of logic. Here is an example, meant as a reductio of Slick’s argument:

1) *Either toast, or not-toast.*

2) *The absence of toast cannot account for the laws of logic.*

3) *Therefore, toast can account for laws of logic.*

Obviously, the absence of toast cannot ‘account’ for anything, especially the notoriously murky metaphysics of logic. Does this mean though that toast itself can? It seems equally obvious that it cannot. Taking one out of the running is not all that is needed to show that the other is the winner by default. Neither toast nor ‘non-toast’ can account for the laws of logic. The unsoundness of the argument is painfully obvious when ‘toast’ is used in place of ‘God’.

To make Slick’s fallacy apparent, let’s spell out the argument a bit more clearly:

4. Reconstruction 1:

- 1) *Either God can account for the laws of logic, or not-God can account for the laws of logic.*
- 2) *Not-God cannot account for the laws of logic.*
- 3) *Therefore, God can.*

As we have seen, the problem with this is that the first premise isn’t a true dichotomy. Slick’s premise says:

Either [x can do y], or [not-x can do y]

This leaves the logical space available, where neither x nor not-x can do y, which stops the argument being sound. Maybe it is the case that nothing can play the role of x; i.e. maybe nothing can account for logic. If this were the case, then we could not prove one of these two options by eliminating the other (which is the whole point of

using disjunctive syllogism). So if the first premise is as I have indicated, then we can rule out disjunctive syllogism as a useful argument form; that is, unless some independent reason can be produced for thinking that this form of the premise is true.

The point about the first premise, when spelled out like this, is that it is in need of justification. Slick dangles the true dichotomy of ‘God or not-God’ in order to gain assent (as nobody can deny a tautology), but then switches focus to the false dichotomy above without conceding that he now needs to justify the new premise. This is the heart of the Matt Slick Fallacy; it is a bait and switch from a true dichotomy to a false one.

It is clear that that [not-x can do y] is not the direct negation of [x can do y]. The direct negation of [x can do y] is:

not-[x can do y].

This would make the actual true dichotomy:

Either [x can do y] or not-[x can do y]

To get a feel of the distinction, consider the following:

Either God can account for logic, or not-God can account for logic

Either God can account for logic, or it is not the case that God can account for logic.

It is a subtle enough point, but makes all the difference. It is a scope distinction about whether the negation should be thought of as ranging over the entire proposition (as in the true dichotomy), or just one element of the proposition (as in Slick's false dichotomy). Slick's mistake is rather like supposing that either the present king of France is bald, or the present king of France has hair. In reality, neither is true.

5. Reconstruction 2:

We could get around this problem by making the first premise a true dichotomy:

1) Either God can account for the laws of logic, or it is not the case that God can account for the laws of logic.

2) It is not the case that (it is not the case that God can account for the laws of logic).

3) Therefore, God can account for the laws of logic.

Now the first premise is a true dichotomy (and so definitely true). Also, the form of the argument is definitely that of disjunctive syllogism, so therefore definitely valid.

This is where the good features of this argument end though. All disjunctive syllogisms with true dichotomies as the first premise are doomed to triviality, as is easy to show. This problem is due to the second premise of disjunctive syllogism. In this premise, either of the two options in the first premise (either p or $\text{not-}p$) is negated (it doesn't matter which one is used). In the example above, the second premise uses $\text{not-}p$ rather than p . So it is the *negation of not- p* , i.e. $\text{not-not-}p$. But this just means we already have our conclusion in our second premise. p is equivalent to $\text{not-not-}p$; the

two 'nots' cancel each other out. This makes it a case of 'begging the question', where the conclusion of the argument is smuggled in as one of the premises.

To make it crystal clear, here is the form of disjunctive syllogism with a true dichotomy as first premise:

p or not-p

not-not-p

Therefore, p

If we substitute 'p' for 'not-not-p' in the second premise (as they mean the same thing), the argument becomes:

p or not-p

p

Therefore, p

The first premise is now clearly redundant. We could drop it and the argument would simply be:

p

Therefore, p

Thus, the argument just boils down to the derivation of p from p. If the argument is formed this way, it becomes entirely trivial. We are left with no reason to think that p is true, other than the simple assertion that p is true in the first place.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion then, Slick has presented an argument which commits the fallacy of false dichotomy, and if repaired so as to avoid that ends up committing the fallacy of begging the question instead. Thus, the argument is either unsound or trivial.

[1] The sentence has no verb in it. Also, it is dubious that the negation of a noun, such as ‘not-God’, has any meaning whatsoever. In logic, it is propositions that get negated, not names.

Advertisement

📅 December 24, 2015 👤 apmalpass 🔗 Apologetics, Logic, Matt Slick, Philosophy, philosophy of religion, Transcendental Argument

112 thoughts on “The Matt Slick Fallacy”



Paul Higgins

January 11, 2016 at 10:10 pm

Posted this in the wrong place before...

Just throwing your own analysis back at you in my own layman’s words, please correct me if I’m missing something:

Brilliant thanks. A lot of the commentators here don’t seem to get it either.
Correct me if I’m wrong.

It is always fallacious to use a dichotomy as the first premise of a disjunctive syllogism.

Slick's argument is a disjunctive syllogism and it uses a dichotomy as it's first premise.

Therefore Slick's argument is fallacious.

Here is how we prove that a disjunctive syllogism with a dichotomy as the first premise is fallacious:

(using the symbol "!" to denote negation)

- a) p or !p
- b) !p (negate the first option)
- c) therefore !p (the second option)

So, we have forced ourselves into the corner of saying "not p, therefore not p" which is clearly absurd. The confusion comes only when we decide to negate the second option instead in step b. It is a little more complicated but means exactly the same thing:

- a) p or !p
- b) !(!p) (negate the second option)
- c) therefore p (the first option)

BUT in step b !(!p) is the same as p (saying "not not p", is the same as "p"). So again it becomes "p therefore p."

Finally, substituting "god" for illustration:

- a) god or not god (accounts for the logical absolutes)
- b) not (not god) <- this is the same as saying "god" because of the double negative
- c) therefore god

Again, we are left saying "god, therefore god."

The only way for the argument to be valid, is if the first premise is NOT a dichotomy, but then you gain the burden of having to demonstrate the premise, since it is no longer a tautology.

Eg.

- a) christianity or atheism accounts for the laws of logic
- b) atheism does not account for the laws of logic
- c) therefore christianity accounts for the laws of logic.

This is perfectly valid, but with the qualifier IF step a is true. You either have to agree, or have it demonstrated to you that a) is true. Slick knows he can not demonstrate this, so he changed it to a dichotomy (thinking he was being clever) so that everyone HAS to agree with a).

Again, just a layman talking himself through it, correct me if I'm wrong!

★ Liked by [2 people](#)



apmalpass 🧑

September 16, 2016 at 1:51 pm

That's basically right!

★ Liked by [1 person](#)



NoGodsExist (@proofofnogods)

January 20, 2016 at 2:17 am

I enjoyed your side of the conversation with Matt Slick very much and this post does a great job of explaining the issue with his argument. It was hard to sit through some of it especially when he got confused about what a hyphen means. Your patience is much greater than most. I highly doubt Mr. Slick will ditch his argument even after clearly being shown its unsoundness. Keep pressing him on it and keep up the good work. Cheers

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Steve

April 3, 2016 at 5:33 pm

I personally don't think that Matt Slick even begins to be convincing. It seems like he spends most of his time trying to "stack the deck" in his favor, and then miring the opposition with purposeful obfuscation and tedious argument over minutiae that seems specious or flawed.

Matt Slick seems like a pseudo-intellectual (less intelligent than he believes himself to be), out for his own smug self-gratification as a verbal mastur(de)bator.

★ Liked by [1 person](#)

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Brian Keaton

August 16, 2016 at 2:08 pm

Sorry I'm a little late to this discussion, but I have a question related to your takedown of Matt Slick's argument. You've indicated that when we correct Matt's wording, we end up with a trivial argument. Can you explain what a trivial argument is, and why exactly a trivial argument is bad? Thank you, and great job!

★ Like



apmalpass 🧑

September 16, 2016 at 1:50 pm

By trivial, I just mean that the argument becomes equivalent to the derivation of a proposition from itself; p , therefore p . It basically means that the argument has the same rhetorical force as an assertion. Hope that helps.

★ Like



Brian Keaton

September 16, 2016 at 2:48 pm

Thank you, and I understand it perfectly. The frustration comes when I now hear Matt still defending his argument, even when it was explained to him that the argument is dead. He still asserts, “we’ll it’s still true.”

★ Like



Brian Keaton

September 16, 2016 at 2:49 pm

*well

★ Like

Pingback: [Waxing philosophical | Southern Prose](#)



Chris

September 16, 2016 at 12:29 pm

Can someone help me ? I do get that if not p is negated then it becomes not not p therefore p

But what if p is negated it's then simply not p ?

★ Liked by [1 person](#)



apmalpass 🧑

September 16, 2016 at 1:57 pm

So the argument has the following form:

Either option 1 or option 2

not-(One of those options)

Therefore, the remaining option.

So in the case where the second premise is the negation of p the argument is as follows:

p or not-p

not-p (not the first option)

therefore, not-p (the second option)

Hope that helps.

★ Like



chris hoole

September 16, 2016 at 3:46 pm

Thanks for swift response I've got a blind spot here I'm afraid as isn't it the case

P or not p if not p then not p which is correct

If not p then not p which is also correct ??

Thanks. Chris

Sent from my iPhone

>

★ Like



Eskil Simon Kanne Wadsholt

September 22, 2016 at 9:53 pm

You can negate either one of the options of the dichotomy, so there are two ways this can go:

CASE 1

premise 1: p or q (dichotomy)

premise 2: not q (negate one)

conclusion: therefore p (conclude the other)

or

CASE 2

premise 1: p or q (dichotomy)

premise 2: not p (negate one)

conclusion: therefore q (conclude the other)

Now replace “q” by “not p” throughout. It seems that you already understood CASE 1 and asked about CASE 2. So yes: when p is negated, we conclude $q = \text{not } p$, indeed!

Let me know if this helped :o)

★ Like

**Chad Star**

October 6, 2016 at 9:28 pm

Alex – I watched this debate and was really impressed with your composure...and thanks for posting this breakdown of the argument which really helped a layman philosopher from Canada ;0
Chad

★ Like

**Eric**

November 6, 2016 at 4:08 am

Thank you Alex! Great fun! 😊

★ Like

**Tom Reeves**

December 2, 2016 at 3:58 pm

You had me at toast!

★ Like

**jtveg**

December 15, 2016 at 5:57 pm

I think Matt Slick is just engaging in an argument from ignorance. He finds something that science or philosophy has yet to explain (according to him) and merely states that God can explain it.

“Since atheism can’t account for the laws of logic”.....etc

This is why he also uses the “chemical reactions cannot produce logical inference” argument. The fact that science hasn’t yet fully explained how consciousness emerges from a brain means to Slick that there must be something supernatural going on. Obviously God explains it because it is a panacea. God can do anything. Right?

Problem is saying God did it tells us nothing at all. You may as well say black box is responsible.

★ Like



Joe

December 24, 2016 at 2:24 pm

Hi Alex, loved the debates with Matt Slick and the clear written breakdown of the Slick fallacy (or Slick Slip). I think I have my head round what you are saying is wrong with the TAG argument and it's great that someone with expertise in this subject was able to show Slick the problems. I have always seen Slicks TAG argument like a dodgy street performers act. We have a guy with a locked safe, who says there is £10 000 in the safe. The guy states he has 2 keys in a bag (one that will open the safe and one that will not) and for £100 you get to pick a key and try the lock. The problem is we are never shown that any of the two keys can actually unlock the safe. The street performer just asserts they can (it could need a completely different key). In fact we don't even know if there is any money inside the safe (this is just asserted) or that it even is a safe (again asserted with no demonstration). It could just be a solid box with a hole for a key. I wonder if Slick would play this game if he came across it. I mean if one of the two keys do open the box , the odds are he will open the safe long before it has cost him the winning prize money. Maybe this is a way to make money from people who think TAG is a reliable argument .

★ Like



edingess

December 29, 2016 at 11:45 am

The substitution is all wrong. I am not sure Matt framed the argument this way but if he did he made a mistake. Where P is the Christian worldview is true and ~P is the non-Christian worldview (operating on the belief that there are only two possibilities), the form is perfectly fine.

$P \vee \sim P$

$\sim \sim P$

$/P$

The professor has committed an error in his conclusion. Usually one presents the disjunct, and in the second premise selects the denial and the affirmation, and then in the conclusion one selects the other alternative. So you would not do this:

$$P \vee \sim P$$

$$P$$

$$/P$$

You would do this:

$$P \vee \sim P$$

$$P$$

$$/\sim\sim P$$

Or you would follow my first example.

I have not listened to the Slick debate so I cannot comment on his fallacy. I can only comment on how presuppositional apologetics argues, having been trained by the very school founded by Greg Bahnsen himself.

Once the above syllogism is established, one would move to the next one and do the following:

$$\text{Intelligibility} > \text{God}$$

$$\text{Intelligibility}$$

$$/\text{God}$$

or

$$\text{Intelligibility} > \text{God}$$

$$\sim \text{God}$$

$$/\sim \text{Intelligibility}$$

The presuppositional method steps into the shoes of the unbeliever and asks him to account for the intelligibility of human experience upon the presuppositions of their worldview. What has to be true in order for logic to be the case? Or morality? Or love? Et cetera. These symbolic constructions are simply ways of expression those arguments.

The key to understanding the difference between transcendental arguments and rational or empirical arguments is understanding the distinctiveness of the logical character

of (that is, the truth-functional relation of their conclusions to their premises) transcendental arguments.

Human reason has demonstrated for thousands of years now that it cannot demonstrate a coherent philosophy of reality, of knowledge, and of value. On the face of it, this is impossible as the utter lack of consensus in philosophers and their speculations prove with impressive consistency.

That is the thrust of presuppositional apologetics. It is a beautiful method defending an unspeakably beautiful worldview.

★ Like



apmalpass 🧑

December 30, 2016 at 5:47 pm

Hi. I think you have missed the point of this a bit. You say:

“Where P is the Christian worldview is true and ~P is the non-Christian worldview (operating on the belief that there are only two possibilities), the form is perfectly fine.

$P \vee \sim P$

$\sim \sim P$

/P”

Firstly, if we treated P as the proposition

‘the Christian worldview is correct’,

then ~P would be

‘it is not the case that the Christian worldview is correct’,

not

‘the non-Christian worldview is correct’.

The phrase ‘the non-Christian worldview’ is nonsense. It’s like saying ‘the non English country’. You say that you are ‘operating on the belief that there are only two possibil-

ities', but why on earth would you do that? There are way more than two worldviews, unless you mean something odd by 'worldview'. Are the Islamic and the Hindu worldview the same? They are both non-Christian, but clearly not the same. The truth is that, on any reasonable definition of 'worldview', there are an uncountable multitude of them.

Secondly, the form $P \vee \sim P, \sim\sim P / P$ is 'fine', in that it is valid, but it is 'trivial' in that the conclusion is derivable from the second premise alone. It isn't really a version of disjunctive syllogism at all. It is just double negation elimination, with an irrelevant tautology at the start. It may as well be: $A \vee \sim A, \sim\sim P / P$. That is my criticism.

You say:

"So you would not do this:

$P \vee \sim P$
 P
 $/P$ "

Well, you would if you eliminated the double negation. Doing so highlights the redundancy of the first premise, and the triviality of the argument. That's why I only put it like that after explaining the steps first.

You say:

"You would do this:

$P \vee \sim P$
 P
 $/\sim\sim P$ "

Well, that's logically equivalent to the thing you said you would not do, but with the two negations still there. They cancel out, right?

Look, the point is that a disjunctive syllogism with " $P \vee \sim P$ " as the first premise reduces to a trivial form; it becomes a convoluted version of double negation elimination. And it is trivial because the whole thing rests on establishing $\sim\sim P$. Obviously, if you could show that this were true, then you could derive P (big surprise), but it is supposed to be an argument which proves P . Any argument which is supposed to prove P , but which has $\sim\sim P$ as one of its premises is begging the question (or circular).

Please read my other articles, especially ‘The problem with TAG’ (which is my first post) and ‘Transcendental arguments and the logic of presupposition’.

I would be interested in talking more with someone who went to Westminster (that’s where you were referring to, right?).

★ Liked by [2 people](#)



jtveg

December 30, 2016 at 5:48 pm

When the syllogism is put in the form:

$P \vee \sim P$

$\sim \sim P$

$/P$

Then as the professor pointed out, it becomes a tautology, is trivial, is always true and is uninformative.

The problem I have with presuppositional apologetics, aside from its arrogance that it has solved all of humanity’s philosophical problems; The problem of induction, the uniformity of nature, the axioms of logic, consciousness, human emotions and morality. Is its appeal to the supernatural. It presupposes the very thing it sets out to prove. Furthermore it can’t account for God other than asserting that it is a necessary being.

Appealing to the supernatural can account for anything because it has been defined as a panacea.

Also there is nothing stopping any other religion claiming that their God is necessary for the intelligently of reason with the exact same argument and Christians are just denying him in their unrighteousness.

You should watch a debate between a Christian and a Muslim presuppositionalist. They just go around in circles. Each claiming to have knowledge revealed to them in such a way that they are certain.

The difference between secular philosophers and presuppositional apologists is intellectual honesty and humility.

**Edward Dingess**

December 30, 2016 at 7:43 pm

The exclusive disjunctive is a true dichotomy and it neither a tautology nor is it trivial. Nevertheless, to avoid confusion we will change the symbol of the argument and leave the substance of it in place.

I disagree with your characterization of presuppositional apologetics. It is not arrogant. In fact, just the opposite is true: it claims that all human knowledge is utterly dependent on God. Contract that with the claim of the autonomy of human reason made by nearly all of its detractors.

If Christianity is true, an appeal to the supernatural is perfectly reasonable given the criteria of Christian reasoning. It is only if one imposes non-Christian criteria upon the Christian worldview that it becomes as you describe.

It is very annoying to think that a method called presuppositional apologetics would be guilty of presuppositions. The presupposition approach uses TAs rather than a deductive or inductive method. Not that these are excluded from employment anywhere. Just saying that due to the reformed theology behind presuppositional apologetics, it avoids the strong version of natural theology found in Aquinas and the other methods, most notably the classical approach. The basic question is the necessary precondition of the intelligibility of things like you mentioned above.

The problem with any other religion making this claim is that every other religion reduces to the same irrationalism that other non-Christian worldview(s) reduce to. There is no religion like Christianity. The superficial similarities are far outweighed by the substantial differences. It is indeed a unique religion.

It is probably best if I keep my opinion about secular philosophers to myself.

**Edward Dingess**

December 30, 2016 at 7:45 pm

It is probably better to say that this form of argument is an Exclusive as opposed to an Inclusive Disjunctive Syllogism of a contradiction. “True Dichotomy” is not the technical term for this unless something has change recently in the literature.

★ Like



apmalpass 🧑

December 30, 2016 at 8:51 pm

“The exclusive disjunctive is a true dichotomy and it neither a tautology nor is it trivial.” An exclusive disjunction is not necessarily a dichotomy. An exclusive disjunction is just a disjunction which is true only when one of the disjuncts are true, but when not when both are (as opposed to an inclusive disjunction which is true also when both disjuncts are true). It is a definition thing. A dichotomy, on the other hand, can be expressed with either an exclusive or an inclusive disjunction, and is characterised simply by the fact that the disjuncts are the negations of one another, like $P \vee \sim P$. So if it were a dichotomy (like $P \vee \sim P$) then it would be a tautology, though not ‘trivial’ (assuming that trivial has its usual meaning associated with inference). There is a lot of sloppy logic terminology going around here.

“The presupposition approach uses TAs rather than a deductive or inductive method.” Well, I hate to break this to you, but your argument (“Intelligibility > God, Intelligibility /God”) is just modus ponens, which is the archetypical deductive argument. If it counts as a transcendental argument, then it is not at the exclusion of being deductive. Either that, or you have expressed the argument wrong. It is certainly not the case that your argument is both transcendental and non-deductive. If there is another argument, please make it.

“...every other religion reduces to the same irrationalism that other non-Christian worldview(s) reduce to.” It would be SO great if you had an argument for this claim. But you don’t. The modus ponens you provided isn’t an argument for this claim. It’s an argument which presupposes that this claim is true. No presuppositionalist has ever given an argument for this claim. Not Van Til, not Bahnsen, Clark, Frame, Oliphint, Anderson, nor Poythress.

I’m still open to the idea that there is a super subtle line to be drawn here, and I’ve spent a long time reading through the literature and thinking about it, but you, sir, have not provided it here.

★ Liked by 1 person



Edward Dingess

December 30, 2016 at 10:19 pm

A couple of points of clarification: an inclusive disjunctive requires that at least one of the disjuncts be true. But the exclusive disjunction requires that one be true and one be false. Unless that obtains, it is not an exclusive disjunction.

It is true that the argument can take on those forms. But the thrust of presuppositional apologetics, especially as it relates to TAG is transcendental, not deductive. The aim is to ask what else has to be true in order of x to be the case. If x is the case, then y must be the case since y is the necessary precondition for x. I spend most of my time talking about how non-Christians attempt to account for things like morality, knowledge, logic, purpose, etc.

The problem with the disagreement is I think a misunderstanding of what a TA is attempting to do. A TA does NOT attempt to refute every possible alternative conceptual scheme. Rather, it aims to simply refute one; the negation of the conceptual scheme being defended. That is why the $A \wedge \sim A$ in the form of an exclusive disjunction of a contradiction. (see Forster – How Are Transcendental Arguments Possible?) It moves to establish the condition of knowledge or experience, considers an alternative, that is, the NEGATION of the condition, and subsequently demonstrates its internal incoherence.

The idea of morality is a perfect example. I realize that some people argue against it, but their life always betrays them, revealing their true beliefs about right and wrong. Atheistic naturalism simply cannot account for an absolute morality. In the end when the proposition it is the case that there is an absolute morality is placed alongside the proposition it is the case that life evolved from non-life spontaneously by way of random processes, morality becomes intelligible. No answer can be found that rationally account for morality that is consistent with an impersonal origin of life.

The TA then says that in order for morality to be the case, God must be the case because God is the necessary condition for morality, not just a sufficient precondition for it. That is not the same as saying if morality, then God; morality; therefore God. The issue is that all non-Christian systems presuppose that human experience can be accounted for along autonomous lines. They share in the common feature of knowledge independent from God. TAG conducts an internal critique of any non-Christian worldview in an attempt to show that, on its own terms, it is either contra-

dictory, arbitrary, or simply cannot provide sufficient preconditions for human experience. You see, this is what the non-Christian or non-theist will have to do to Christianity. It will have to demonstrate that, upon its own terms, Christianity fails to provide the necessary precondition for the intelligibility of human experience.

★ Like



Joe

October 26, 2023 at 2:48 pm

I just read back through this today, how time has passed. Alex did you ever debate Edward? I was really enjoying my interactions with Edward (although they were a little frustrating at times). What absolutely shocked me was when Edward revealed that he does not believe in evolution and believes in the Adam and Eve account. All through the discussions I had with Edward he talked about the ‘true’ account of Christianity and yet his version is probably one of the easiest to refute. Faith can certainly have a significant impact on how a person rationalises their beliefs.

★ Like



apmalpass 🧑

December 30, 2016 at 8:53 pm

““True Dichotomy” is not the technical term for this unless something has change recently in the literature.” Yes, that’s completely right. ‘True dichotomy’ is a term Matt Slick made up, and I am only using it to follow suit. In the usual usage, there is such a thing as a dichotomy, and there is an informal fallacy called ‘false dichotomy’. Slick has no training in logic, and made up his own terminology.

★ Like



Edward Dingess

December 30, 2016 at 10:21 pm

I should have said *morality becomes unintelligible*

★ Like

**jtveg**

December 30, 2016 at 11:29 pm

Absolutism is an unnecessary red herring.

Whenever Matt Slick is asked about absolute morality and what it means all he can do is come up with an example that he thinks no one will disagree with. Namely “child molestation for fun” This can hardly count as an explanation. Just because you can't find a situation that this would be the moral thing to do doesn't necessarily place it in the “absolute” category. It is also consistent with a naturalistic worldview that bases its standard on human flourishing, reduction of harm, social contract and consequentialism (amongst other things).

Claiming this standard is arbitrary won't help because the Christian arbitrarily “chooses” God to be his standard. All standards are necessarily arbitrary. If you claim God has written his standard upon our heart the naturalist can counter this rationally and with evidence that what the Christian and by extension all social animals feel, is an innate sense of altruism and empathy produced by evolution and natural selection as an aid to survival.

Furthermore there are no moral “oughts” only rational oughts. Even the Christian uses rationality if the hypothesis “If want to go to heaven, I must follow the bible” is true. They are merely applying rational oughts to serve their own interests. If you didn't care about going to heaven or the hypothesis is false then you ought not follow the bible.

Also claiming that Christianity is a “unique” religion is vapid. Since most if not all religions claim this.

So it is not unique in that or any other regard.

Answer me this: If God is used to account for knowledge love logic etc... How do you account for God.

The naturalist can argue that nature accounts for these things. Replace the word God with nature.

Fallible superstitious humans need an agent that does things intentionally (like we do) because they don't understand that mere forces can produce life and complexity out of mere simple matter.

★ Like

**Edward Dingess**

December 31, 2016 at 2:19 pm

It is a mistake to equate the particular content of morality with the universal principle of morality. The latter is the necessary precondition for the former. Cultural particulars should only serve as an example for the necessity of the universal principle itself. Moral behavior is an undeniable fact the absolute universal nature of morality even if the particular interpretations of that morality vary from culture to culture. Christianity would blame poor interpretations of morality on the sinful condition of man.

The naturalistic worldview has a problem supporting the claim that human beings “ought to flourish, avoid harm, go along with society, etc.” One, it begs the question. Two, it is arbitrary. Three, many see it as pragmatic; little more than a rescuing device.

It is a mistake to equate the particular content of morality with the universal principle of morality. The latter is the necessary precondition for the former. Cultural particulars should only serve as an example for the necessity of the universal principle itself. Moral behavior is an undeniable fact the absolute universal nature of morality even if the particular interpretations of that morality vary from culture to culture. Christianity would blame poor interpretations of morality on the sinful condition of man.

The naturalistic worldview has a problem supporting the claim that human beings “ought to flourish, avoid harm, go along with society, etc.” One, it begs the question. Two, it is arbitrary. Three, many see it as pragmatic; little more than a rescuing device.

I think you have that exactly backwards. All rational norms are clearly ethical as well. Human beings can hardly escape ethics in all that they do because as a creature, we are obligated to a set of norms that transcend us, having their source in the self-contained, absolute Triune God of Christian Scripture. The Christian ethic is simply this: I was created by God for God’s glory. Therefore, my summum bonum is to glorify God in every circumstance. Actually, Christianity is not unique because it “claims” to be a revealed religion. It is the content and nature of its revelation that sets it apart as unique. It is true while all other religions are false. Only Christianity can provide the necessary preconditions for the intelligibility of human experience. If you study world religions, you realize just how different they are from Christianity. But, it

should come as no surprise that other religions share some common features with the Christian religion. After all, Christianity claims that one God created all men in his image. It seems reasonable that even men who are cut off from God would still be inclined to worship at a minimum a god of their own imagination.

How one accounts for God is a very good question. It is one of the best that I have encountered. If TAG achieves its objective, God is accounted for in that the impossibility of the contradiction of the Christian worldview has proven successful. But that is not how human beings know that God exists nor is it how human beings actually know God. Christianity teaches that there is a sense of the divine in all men. We call this the *sensus divinitatis*. Due to sin, man is now cut off from his original knowledge of God but not entirely. He still knows but, according to the Christian Scriptures, man engages in the psychological phenomenon known as self-deception. Man actually convinces himself to varying degrees depending on the man, that he does not know that God is there. However, this behavior, according to the Christian Scripture, is not enough to get man off the hook. He is culpable for this knowledge regardless of what he does with it. (much more could be said on accounting for God)

Second, man can only come to a true and accurate knowledge of God and of Christianity through God's work on man's cognitive faculties and nature. God opens the eyes, regenerates the heart, gives man a new mind and heart, and gifts him with faith so that he may see, understand, and be convinced of the truth of Christianity. It is this belief that the project "faith seeking understanding" aims to articulate and publish. Faith and reason, upon Christian principles are not antagonistic. They are companions.

It is not really the case that God can be replaced with nature. We aren't talking about signs and symbols on a piece of paper. Naturalism involves inherent contradictions that reduce its system to irrationalism in the end. One will either have to redefine a bunch of terms or give up naturalism altogether and look for answers elsewhere.

The final claim is a claim that remains unproven, a weak hypothesis at best. And the insult would have been better left out.

★ Like



jtveg

December 31, 2016 at 3:38 pm

Your copy pasta [sic] seems to have failed you, since you repeated a paragraph. Lol. That's how I know you are working from a script. You either don't carefully read what I write or don't care.

I already addressed the fact that "all" standards are arbitrary. Even the Christian arbitrarily chooses the bible as his own standard for morality. How does following the bible not beg the question? The only reason a Christian "ought" to use the bible as their moral standard is "if" the bible is true and the Christian "wants" to get into heaven. So it becomes a rational ought.

At least under naturalism we have good reasons to accept human flourishing and the reduction of harm as a moral standard. This is because we are biological creatures that want to live a comfortable happy healthy long life. I'm sure you don't disagree with that. FYI. I never claimed that "go along with society was a moral ought" you did.

I expressed that I don't believe in universal or absolute morals. The reasons are thus. Under naturalism we are an evolving animal. What may be good for our health or well being today may not be in 1000 years or even the near future. Once it was acceptable to throw rubbish in the streets, now the moral thing to do is to recycle. So it would be impractical and useless to have absolute morals today that would be irrelevant in the future. For example. In the future all or most children may become intolerant to peanuts. It would therefore be "immoral" to give children peanuts. Whereas it is not today.

Thousands of years ago all humans were lactose intolerant. So it would've been immoral to give children cows milk, but not today.

Your claim that Christianity is unique in revelation is not true at all. Islam is based on the very "speech" of God revealed to Muhammad.

Hindu scriptures predate Christianity and make all the same claims.

The rest of your arguments are just assertions with nothing to back them up.

"Christianity is true while all others are false" lol. Nice try. I can do that too. Watch.

"ALL RELIGIONS ARE MYTHS"

Now where does that get us?

"we are obligated to a set of norms that transcend us, having their source in the self-contained, absolute Triune God of Christian Scripture"

Another blatant assertion with nothing to back it up. Cultural norms neither transcend us nor are we obligated to follow them. Unless you mean something else by “norms”

Unless you explain how the Christian standard for morality ie the bible is not arbitrary and why it doesn't beg the question then I will not be replying to you any further.

Happy New Year. 🍷🍎🎉

PS. I see you can't account for God.
Occam's razor strikes again. 🔪

★ Like



Edward Dingess

December 31, 2016 at 4:17 pm

For some reason, my Mac gets a little uncooperative on my copy/paste functions. I often have to do it two to three times. I usually will copy comments into Word, insert my comments as I go along and then copy and paste back into the comm box. And yes, I can be a little sloppy or completely fail to proof read. It is only a problem when I discover after the fact there is no edit button. So its not really my fault for being a lazy... its the website's fault for not having an edit feature. LOL. I am a bit more casual in these conversations and my fingers just cannot keep up with my thoughts.

So you said:

“Unless you explain how the Christian standard for morality ie the bible is not arbitrary and why it doesn't beg the question then I will not be replying to you any further.”

I honestly thought I did this somewhat above but I suppose it doesn't hurt to give it another go.

First, in order for something to be arbitrary, it must be depend on individual preference. Something that is arbitrary would have a set of equally acceptable choices.

Now, Christian ethics is based on the standard of morality contained in the Christian Scripture. Christian Scripture itself is the revelation of God, containing propositions about God that are given to us by God himself through human instruments. In other

words, Christian Scripture is the absolute infallible revelation of God. What the Scripture says about God can be trusted without reservation. Scripture tells us that God is absolute, independent, self-contained, unchanging, all-powerful, and infinitely perfectly good.

Since Christian morality is the expression of the divine nature, by necessity it cannot be arbitrary. Morality, on Christian principles, is logically necessary, having its source in the only logically necessary being, the God of Christianity.

Christians do not select their morality any more than they select their holy book or their God. The reverse is what Christian belief affirms. God selects us.

I will leave the rest of your comments go and focus on this one since it seems to be the one you have hung your hat on.

★ Like



jtveg

December 31, 2016 at 5:39 pm

Ok, so you say that: “First, in order for something to be arbitrary, it must be depend on individual preference.”

I put it to you that when a person either converts to or was raised in Christianity they still make a conscious “personal preference” decision to use the bible as their moral standard. Therefore it is still arbitrary.

My contention is that there is nothing wrong with a standard being arbitrary because once a standard is chosen it may be possible to discover or describe “objective moral facts” from this standard. These facts have nothing to do with anyone’s personal opinion. For example under secularism it would be an objective fact that stealing someone’s clothes is immoral because it deprives them of the necessary warmth that clothing provides (amongst other seasons) You would then need to buy more clothes etc... Ultimately it harms the person that was stolen from. This is not an opinion.

Now you may claim that your scripture teaches that God chooses believers. “The elect” are pre destined for salvation or that everyone already believes in God. Unfortunately for your argument these are just assertions and I know for a fact that everyone does not already believe in God. I don’t. So that part of the bible is false.

It does your argument no good to simply assert or presuppose that God chooses those that believe or experience the holy spirit. It is not backed up by any evidence and is also circular reasoning.

The fact is: people “choose” the bible to be their moral standard. So it is therefore arbitrary.

The important distinction for morality I think theists are really making is “internal vs external” not the arbitrary vs absolute. It is the fact that the standard is external rather than arbitrary that seems to make Christians speak in terms of objective morals.

Since Secular morality is necessarily “internal” Christians think this means morals are simply subjective. This is false.

External: The entity making the morals is themselves not subject to them. ie a dictator, a king, or a God.

Internal: The lawmakers / prescribes of morals are themselves subject to the very same morals.

Once a moral standard is chosen (arbitrarily) you can then have “objective” facts based on that standard.

The standard for human rights, health, reduction of harm to sentient beings (animals included) and increase human flourishing seems far better than the standard “to glorify God” You may agree that my standard achieves the same ends as the Christian one but with only less harm to gays, slaves etc. That is because you are borrowing from my worldview. Morality existed a lot long before Christianity, or any religion for that fact. Anthropologists are unanimous on this point.

If you want to see where I’m really coming from you may want to watch this.

Matt Dillahunty: The Superiority of Secular Morality



★ Like



apmalpass 👤

December 31, 2016 at 12:53 am

“A TA does NOT attempt to refute every possible alternative conceptual scheme. Rather, it aims to simply refute one; the negation of the conceptual scheme being defended.”

The negation of Christianity (if that phrase even makes sense) isn't itself a conceptual scheme. One can negate a proposition, such as the proposition 'the Christian God exists', resulting in 'it is not the case that the Christian God exists'. But you can't negate a conceptual scheme. That doesn't make sense. It's literally nonsense.

What are the tenets of 'non-Christianity'?

Firstly, people can believe in lots of different things. People can be platonists, and believe in the existence of non-natural entities, yet not a god. There is nothing stopping an atheist being a realist about morality, nothing stopping him be a non-naturalist. Nothing is off limits for the 'non-Christian', except the precise combination of things you believe in.

What you want to do, as a disciple of Bahnsen, is straw-man your opponent into being a reductive naturalist. You believe in the supernatural, so the non-Christian must believe in the natural. You believe in moral realism, so the non-Christian must believe in moral relativism. “Atheistic naturalism simply cannot account for an absolute morality.” The word ‘naturalism’ is you strawmanning your opponent. The negation of Christianity isn’t naturalism. That’s idiotic.

The reason you try to make out that there is only one position to be refuted is that there is no way to counter all the genuine combinations of different things people could believe. All you can do is pop a straight jacket on the opponent so that they are easier to knock over. I think it is actually a tactic designed to stop people from leaving the faith (by making out that all the ‘other side’ have to offer is a single weak position) rather than for converting people.

“God is the necessary condition for morality, not just a sufficient precondition for it. That is not the same as saying if morality, then God” Yes it is. It literally is what that means. In a conditional, the consequent is the necessary condition for the antecedent (the antecedent being the sufficient condition for the consequent). That is literally the meaning of the term ‘necessary condition’. Google it.

“The issue is that all non-Christian systems presuppose that human experience can be accounted for along autonomous lines. They share in the common feature of knowledge independent from God.” It’s not clear what you (or any presuppositionalist) means by ‘autonomy’, so you will have to spell that out much more. It could simply be taken as an ontological claim, such that your existence depends on God. If so, then obviously, you wouldn’t be able to reason at all if God didn’t exist. But I think you mean something else here. I mean, that sort of dependency holds between me and my parents too.

What you want to say is that Eve’s sin in the garden was to think for herself and decide to eat the apple. The sin wasn’t so much the eating, but the choice to do so. She was disobeying God and thinking for herself. Autonomy is supposed to be something like this. It is the act of trying to make sense of the world without listening to God’s instructions. Am I close?

I find that absurd for several reasons. Firstly, obeying and disobeying are equally acts of autonomous choice, in the final analysis. I can always choose to follow or go against any order I’m given. Following is an act of will, just as much as disobeying. So if Eve had decided not to eat the apple, and do what God told her to do, she would have made just as much of an act of volition as otherwise. The only way to not reason autonomously is to not reason. Sure, you could be a robot who always does what he is

programmed to do, but if you want to reason then you have to make your own mind up. The message is just a call not to think. Could there be anything more cult-like than this?

And this is where the punchline kicks in. You think that whatever my outlook is, just because it isn't (your version of) Christianity, then it is bound to be incoherent in some way:

“TAG conducts an internal critique of any non-Christian worldview in an attempt to show that, on its own terms, it is either contradictory, arbitrary, or simply cannot provide sufficient preconditions for human experience. You see, this is what the non-Christian or non-theist will have to do to Christianity. It will have to demonstrate that, upon its own terms, Christianity fails to provide the necessary precondition for the intelligibility of human experience.”

Well, seeing as you asked for it, here it is. You came to the conclusion that you don't reason autonomously. You did that yourself. It was an assessment you made. It seems to you, based on the bible and Greg Bahnsen's lectures, or whatever, that you are not (and could not be) autonomous. You reasoned autonomously that you can't reason autonomously. That's the fundamental contradiction in your worldview. It's like saying 'I'm not talking'. There is no such thing as not reasoning autonomously. Yet you claim that you do it all the time. The position doesn't make sense.

You say: “I spend most of my time talking about how non-Christians attempt to account for things like morality, knowledge, logic, purpose, etc.” Would you like to talk in person about this? Perhaps I can get you to do a hangout with me sometime?

★ Like



Edward Dingess

December 31, 2016 at 2:53 pm

It would take a conceptual scheme to negate Christianity. But there is a difference between what a TA is doing in the literature and how presuppositional apologetics uses TAG to defend Christianity. Second, you can negate a conceptual scheme from a logical standpoint. All you have to do is negate its basic belief. Do that, and something like Logical Positivism comes crashing down on its head. Moreover, if Christianity is proven true, every conceptual scheme, or paradigm or worldview that opposes it is proven false.

The basic tenet of non-Christianity is that Jesus Christ is not Lord over everything, the source of all created things.

So if Jesus is Lord over everything, all your other ideas must be submitted to him. Reality, all of it, must be interpreted according to his prior interpretation of it before he willed it into existence.

The reason naturalism must position a non-realist view of morality is because a realist view of morality contradicts the basic tenet of naturalism: Jesus Christ is not Lord.

It is not the product of genius thought that puts forth the variety of theories that philosophers do without a hint of consensus coming any time soon. That is philosophical chaos, not rationality. It is intellectual schizophrenia, not genius.

There is a difference between deductive arguments and transcendental arguments. If you do not understand that, then you should spend more time in the literature.

Autonomy means that human beings contend that human reason stands above all else. God is not needed to explain the world. A set of molecules in motion that is the product of pure naturalistic processes randomly coming together is fully capable to encapsulating and articulating the meaning of it all. Poppycock is my “laughing out loud” response.

My arguments are based off Christian principles, Christian beliefs. I fully expect that to tell you that you are not the master of your own ship would be upsetting and offensive to you. The Christian Scriptures inform Christians that people like you will find the Christian message foolish. And so you do. Looks like the Bible is right about people like you. And I was once a person just like you, thinking the same things. I was not raised in Church.

Well...if you believe that your worldview is coherent, there is a perfectly good way to find out if it is. Let's subject it to an internal critique and see if, on your own principles, it can avoid being reduced to irrationalism. That is what presuppositional apologetics does. And it does it better than any method out there.

Actually, it is not like that at all. To reason in a certain way and to speak are not analogous human behaviors. I can decide to adopt someone else's weightlifting routine, acknowledge that I am following their pattern or I can stick with my own. I can decide to adopt someone else's Jiu Jitsu counter or I can stick with my own. When a Christian comes to know God through regeneration, the Holy Spirit enables them to die to self,

to submit to God, to submit to God's word. Even though it is NOT always easy, and arrogance often gets in our way, we are now enabled to how our worldview informed by Scripture. So, I can say how to I think about say, gay marriage for example? Or at will divorce for example? Or greed? I can adopt the cultures view and try to make the Bible support that view by way of all sorts of creative hermeneutics. OR, I can simply ask what the Bible teaches and accept that view and interpret everything else in reality on the basis that whatever the Bible teaches is true. True Christianity is not the product of rational arguments and evidence, evaluations and justification, therefore I join up. The nature of true Christianity is not rationalistic even though it is rational. It is supernatural top to bottom.

I would be open to a hangout so long as we could agree on a set of ground rules. I love good conversation.

★ Like



apmalpass 🧑

January 1, 2017 at 11:59 am

What sort of ground rules were you thinking of? I was just thinking about an informal conversation on a Google hangout. I'm happy to hear suggestions.

★ Like



jtveg

December 31, 2016 at 5:45 pm

Reblogged this on [jtveg's Blog](#) and commented:
Slick's TAG Totally Debunked.

★ Like



Edward Dingess

December 31, 2016 at 7:25 pm

"I put it to you that when a person either converts to or was raised in Christianity they still make a conscious "personal preference" decision to use the bible as their moral standard. Therefore it is still arbitrary."

With all due respect, I will not attempt to defend your false version of Christianity. The decision is not a “personal preference” and this is not at all what Christianity teaches. If you are going to accuse Christian morality of being arbitrary, it will have to be on Christian principles, not those you force on Christianity or perhaps your own misunderstanding of Christianity.

Your secularism argument for morality is truly begging the question. It kicks the can down the road. After all, why should I care about the comfort or discomfort, pain or happiness of others? Just because a society might do so does not mean it “ought” to do so.

There is a difference in believing in God and knowing that God is there. Moreover, the Bible says that you surely know that is there and that you engage in self-deception when you convince yourself that you do not know that God is there. That is the Christian principle. And it is that principle that I am interested in defending. I fully expect you NOT to agree with it.

The evidence for God’s role in election and then regeneration is first, Scripture. It is what Scripture teaches. Second, it is the experience of Christians. In other words, we experience conversion exactly the way the Bible says it happens. Now, I don’t expect you to just accept this evidence. In fact, I expect you to repudiate it top to bottom. But you can only do so if you presuppose the truthfulness of your own worldview and its principles. You cannot show by way of an internal critique that Christianity involves a contradiction in this area. I contend that your view of morality does not experience the same outcome.

The problem with your internal/external dichotomy is that it seems to ignore the metaphysical necessity of the nature of morality. Morality is not the invention of the great king who is himself subject to the moral code he has put together. That is not the Christian view of morality. It is another misunderstanding of Christian belief.

Respectfully, Matt Dillahunty is a man whose behavior should remove him from any serious consideration whatsoever. His behavior is rude, disrespectful, and at times, despicable. My personal opinion is that no Christian should debate a man with his track record and reputation. I am only interested in intellectually stimulating conversations with people who insist on dignity and courtesy at all times.

There are highly intelligent people who are atheists and who are Christians. No one should ever say that atheists or Christians are just intellectually lacking. It is simply not true and anyone who studies philosophy as a matter of habit knows this to be ab-

olutely true. There is hardly any possible ground of speculation that finds itself unoccupied.

I have probably seen Dillahunty's presentation. I find the man unimpressive and enjoyed what Sye did to Matt in their debate. It was truly embarrassing. I almost felt bad for Matt, but watching him humiliate people the way he does, I just couldn't find it in me.

★ Like



Joe

January 1, 2017 at 11:01 pm

I'm not sure Edward (even though you were referring to a specific area) how you can say the following "With all due respect, I will not attempt to defend your false version of Christianity"

How does one decide what a "false version of Christianity" is? It might be easy to identify very clear "false versions of Christianity" (such as a version that has 5 Gods). But what about the thousands of different versions of Christianity? Who gets to decide about them? (I mean they are different versions) Or about the different views/versions that someone might have who sits at the front of church "X" compared to someone who sits on the fourth row of church "X"? Is it decided by you? You may struggle to understand this but it's very unlikely that anyone person (who is living now or has ever lived) has the exact same views as you on Christianity. In fact it's very likely that as you have grown and studied different areas, your views have probably changed (resulting in a change of your version of Christianity) People who have come into your life may have shaped your views. How big this change is, is irrelevant . It is still a different view/version than you may have had previously. There is that great saying "if you want to find out what is wrong with the first baptist church of (insert name) ask the second baptist church. News flash *there is no one true version of Christianity that has been agreed on , yet alone proven*. Because of the small/medium/big (pick which one you want) differences that every person has, no one "true version of Christianity" will be agreed on . making it impossible to rule out all "false versions of Christianity". What this means that as hard as this may be for you to accept, apart from you no one else agrees with "YOUR version of Christianity" . To them it is a false version. What's worse is that if you try and use the bible to try and reduce some of the differences it causes more problems. Which version of the bible do you use? The other option would be to pray to your God for the answers , but once again we same to end up with everyone having different

views (no one view I have ever heard is the same). Therefore if you can't use the bible and can't pray to God for answers, how else do you find the one true version of Christianity? I'm yet to hear a sound and logical way which can be demonstrated (otherwise I'm sure everyone would have the same views) I mean who would want to not follow the one true version? Most of the time I get the following reply " the small differences in versions do not matter " (well switch churches /denomination /bible tomorrow if that's the case). Occasionally people are honest enough to admit that there is no way around this problem.

★ Like



Edward Dingess

January 1, 2017 at 11:24 pm

Joe

We could engage in yet another protracted discussion about who decides which version of Christianity is true and how all that might work. (I realize that I have an itty bitty IQ and that I am not as sharp as you atheist boys, but I think I get what you're saying – that is so incredibly annoying.)

From a practical standpoint, I can only speak about the Christianity that I think is revealed in Scripture. It is unfair for anyone to make a statement about what Christianity teaches when I don't think it teaches that, and then expect me to defend it or for them to think they have exposed a flaw in the system or a crack in the foundation.

Now, Christianity has a rich history of confessions about what it believes. Those confessions are easily accessible. The closer someone stays to those confessions, the closer they are on what Christianity believes. There are faulty defenses for Christianity and many of them are terrible for the very reason that they involve theology that is terribly flawed due to inconsistency in human reason leading to poor interpretations of a text here or there.

Your idea that the slightest change to Christianity produces an entirely new version is a gross exaggeration. What is one man believes that Moses only wrote part of the Pentateuch while another believes he wrote the entire thing? How would such a difference truly change the essence of the Christian gospel? Not an iota.

There are clear things in Scripture that are the fundamental tenets of the faith. These things, captured by many of the confessions, reflect the necessary affirma-

tions of any Christian. For example, one could not deny a literal, physical resurrection of Christ or the virgin birth and still be talking about the same Christianity.

Your last statement reflects the kind of back-handed condescension that makes me want to adopt the policy of only talking to atheists in person rather than on the internet. For some strange reason, atheists are always much more respectful to me face to face.

★ Like



Jonathan Simmons

November 17, 2017 at 2:42 pm

You say you “know” god is real. No you don’t. You have no means at all of knowing it.

★ Like



edingess

March 21, 2018 at 7:28 pm

How do you know that I do not know that God exists? How do you know that there is no means available to anyone by which they could know that God exists?

★ Like



Jonathan Simmons

March 21, 2018 at 7:31 pm

Then explain the methodology of knowing that a god exists

★ Like



edingess

March 21, 2018 at 8:18 pm

Actually, your the one who said such knowledge was impossible. I would like to hear why you think it is impossible. Then I will be happy to give you a glimpse of a dis-

tinctly Christian epistemology.

★ Like



Joe

January 2, 2017 at 8:05 am

Hi Edward, I'm not sure why you think that my reply is in anyway disrespectful! I haven't attacked you in anyway, I just don't agree with your statement and have asked you some questions. Also I think you have misunderstood my point with your reply "The idea that the slightest change to Christianity produces an entirely new version is a gross exaggeration" I never said it produces an entirely new version, I just said it produces a new version (you added/misquoted me with the word entirely). I purposely didn't use the word "entirely" due to its definition. If you take a song with 100 hundred words and change just one, is it not still a different version of the same song? I think clearly yes!

With regard to the Slicks TAG argument what do you think of this statement that he makes " If we have only two possible options by which we can explain something and one of those options is removed, by default the other option is verified since it is impossible to negate both of the only two existing options."

I have a big problem with it as what if none of the only two options we currently have are valid. An example of this would be if you were in a sealed , locked room with only two possible options to explain how the door opens (key 1 and key 2). If you tried key 1 and it did not work (so you removed it form the options) by default have you verified the other option? Do you know that because you have tried key 1 and it did not work, that key 2 will work?

I would say of course not. All you have done is demonstrate that key 1 does not work. Likewise if key 1 does open the door, it does not mean that key 2 cannot also open the door. There may be no key that opens the door or there could be any number of keys that will open the door. It's no good having only two options unless one of them is a valid and verifiable option. Only then would it be worthwhile negating the other option.

I think Slicks statement needs rewording to cover this issue, but I think any rewording causes further problems. If for instance it read as "If we have only two possible options by which we can explain something and [one and only one of those options is a viable and verifiable option] if the other is removed, by default the remaining option is verified since it is impossible to negate both of the only two existing options.

However, how do we show one of the options is viable and verifiable. And what would then be the purpose of negating the non viable option? By showing this is the only viable and verifiable option, there is no purpose in comparing it with a non viable option.

Slick claiming there is only two possible options is a claim he cannot prove. He may only be able to come up with two possible explanations (2 keys) but that doesn't mean that no one else in the world can come up with another explanation. It's no different than saying no other key in existence can open the door other than one of the two keys I have in my hand. In order to prove this claim you would have to try every other key in existence. Slick has basically set himself up to fail by making a claim (there are only 2 explanations for the laws of logic) that he is unable to prove.

★ Like



Edward Dingess

January 2, 2017 at 10:45 am

I think Slick is probably assuming that the disjunctive is true. And if that assumption holds, then he is right. I also think he is using an exclusive disjunction which requires one of the disjuncts to be true and the other to be false. That said, the way the argument should flow is that each premise should be supported by proofs of some sort. Here is a quick example:

If I say that Christianity is the necessary precondition for the intelligibility of morality, then I must offer a case for why it is not just a sufficient condition but actually the necessary condition without which morality would not be possible. That is a unique proof for truth of Christianity so long as we agree that morality is uncontroversial. I usually focus on how something like Moral Realism or whatever non-theistic moral theory put forward cannot actually deliver on its promise. We know what morality is. It is forced upon us. Whatever theory is created it must be able to truly reflect the power of morality that we actually experience. If it cannot, then it fails. This is where showing that the systems claims about the experience of something like morality contradict its other more basic claims, like naturalism for example. Give what must be true in order for naturalism to be true, morality cannot be true because naturally does provide the necessary preconditions for morality as it is universally experienced by us all. That is an example.

I started to watch the debate again but got distracted by something else.

The argument has to have good representatives that people can relate to. Logic for example requires a mind. TAG is basically showing that the negation of the claim that the necessary precondition for logic has to be the mind of God and that the negation of that proposition is false. On Christian principles, and that should be reiterated over and over, on Christian principles, only God can be the necessary precondition for logic. Again, TAG is seeking to show what else has to be the case if logic is in fact the case. If you can show that the mind of God is the necessary precondition for logic, and that the negation of that statement is false, the argument stands. In order to do that, you show that only Christian theism does NOT involve contradiction where the experience of logic is concerned. You may claim that logic is necessary rather than contingent. If that is the case, it makes it very difficult for competitors to overcome. Given their other basic claims about reality and how we know, contradictions begin to emerge.

This is why Van Til says these things prove Christianity because of the impossibility of the contrary. The contrary is impossible because it involves contradiction in every case. (It being the negation of Christianity.)

But I am more cautious these days in holding that anyone anywhere can prove these things to others with the kind of optimism or certainty that it sometimes feels like we claim. The arguments are good tools and great fodder for conversation so long as they remain cordial. And they can allow Christians like me to talk about what Christianity actually does teach at its more rudimentary level which is more important I think.

★ Like



Joe

January 2, 2017 at 12:32 pm

I think that you are right that Slick is assuming that his first premise is correct, but assumption or assertion are where the problems are. The other big issue I have with these types of arguments is how they are tied to subject "X". The fact is with one or two words changed (the name of the faith/the name of the God) the exact same style and format of argument can be used. This is simply because of the characteristics applied to the God figure. If we are trying to find out the necessary precondition for intelligibility for morality and we are using either a red box or a blue box, the characteristics WE apply to these boxes will determine which one is more likely to fit into the requirements. If you have stated that the red box is all powerful, all knowing and has created everything that has and will exist, then err yes you can explain anything and everything with this red box. But what does that tell us? I would argue

very little until these characteristics are proven. It's almost an argument based on the fallacy of ignorance (the blue box doesn't yet have an explanation).

The second thing I wanted to raise is your reply about the fundamental tenets of Christianity. (the one in which you misquoted me) You could have the same fundamental tenets but still have a very different outcome (I have lots of examples of this). Let's say you and another Christian have and almost identical understanding of what Christianity is. The only thing you disagree on is [Mark 3:28-30: "Truly I tell you, all sins and blasphemes will be forgiven for the sons of men. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven, but is guilty of an eternal sin"]. It could be that you believe that even though you have committed this one unforgivable sin, you can still enter heaven as a sinner. However, the other Christian believes that as you have committed the unforgivable sin, you are guilty of an eternal sin and can never enter heaven. Obviously the outcome is very different even though you have the same tenets of Christianity. A third Christian may believe that just thinking about blasphemes of the Holy Spirit is enough to result in eternal damnation (thinking about adultery is a sin, so this also applies to thinking about sins against the Holy Spirit). Each of the 3 different versions would have very different results. Even if it was true that this unforgivable sin is just that, I doubt it would be seen as this. I mean who would want to believe that they have (maybe without realising/thought crime) sent themselves to hell? And I doubt prominent teachers would push these teachings as if you have committed this sin, your fate would be sealed so why would you need Christianity. My opinion is that in this case most people choose what they think is morally fair. Even though it says quite clearly it is an unforgivable sin that is eternal, who would want to believe it is true? One person could argue it is morally fair to punish a person for all eternity for this crime because it was clearly explained by Gods word. Another may argue that the law in the first place is immoral. Who is right! The one who is following the word of God from the bible or the other?

★ Like



Edward Dingess

January 2, 2017 at 5:51 pm

I suppose in answer to your first paragraph I would be satisfied to do two things 1) Christianity is shown to be successful where the opposing view has not. 2) The opponent could always plead that all the facts are not in quite yet. My response is that he has had 2500 years of philosophy to figure it out. At this point, my opponent is going

to have to give a different reason for not accepting Christianity than that it is not reasonable.

I would say that there is a significant difference between what is necessary for Christianity and what is sufficient. That said, the difference between the two is not material. Both have rightly accepted the belief that there is a Holy Spirit, he can be slandered, and to slander him leads to eternal judgment. That they differ slightly in their application would not be considered a different sort of Christianity. In addition, I see no principles that would lead me to believe there is something more seriously wrong with either man's thinking.

In brief, just thinking about adultery is not really adultery. It is the thought of desire for a woman, a fantasy that is adultery. Thinking slanderous thoughts about the Holy Spirit is a bit more involved and wherever one lands they should do so gently. In one case we have the clear words of Jesus and in the other, only an analogy and an inference.

To the last point concerning eternal judgment. In this case, if someone begins to doubt the severity of divine judgment, this indicates that their understanding of God is off to some degree. It is here that we enter into a dangerous area. For example, Rob Bell once claimed that eternal punishment was unjust for a 16 year old because he had only 4-5 years or so of culpable sinful living. A good God would never sentence someone to eternal judgment for so few sins. Such thinking is simply unbiblical on the face of it. It is because God is infinitely good and perfectly righteous that any sin against Him must receive severe punishment. Additionally, the epistemic authority for what is justifiable and what is not, for the Christian is the divine revelation, Christian Scripture. At the end of the day that Christian submits to the fact that God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts. It may seem one way to us but when God has spoken in his word, we must humbly submit even if we cannot rationalize it. Mystery is not ipso facto a death blow to the reasonableness of the Christian worldview. I hope that all makes sense. If there is a deficiency in the answers, it is mine, not the Christian worldview.

★ Like



Joe

January 6, 2017 at 10:55 pm

Hi Edward.

In your reply you posted this comment "This is why Van Til says these things prove

Christianity because of the impossibility of the contrary. The contrary is impossible because it involves contradiction in every case. (It being the negation of Christianity.) But I am more cautious these days in holding that anyone anywhere can prove these things to others with the kind of optimism or certainty that it sometimes feels like we claim.”

I kind of agree with part of the statement, the second part about proof and certainty (and being cautious) This made me wonder what your views are on areas that Christians defend as true, when the evidence against this is overwhelming? You could say with the example I will give, “that the contrary is impossible because it involves contradiction in every case “(just pinching part of your statement, no plagiarism meant).

The biggest example I would give for this would be Christians who choose to accept the Adam and Eve account in the bible to explain the creation of man/woman and therefore deny evolution. I understand the huge majority of Christians do accept that evolution is a fact and that the Adam and Eve story is not meant to be taken literally, it's not these I'm referring to).

I live in the UK and I do interact with a lot of Christians (from lots of different parts of Europe and America) I have to say It's only very (very very) rare I meet Christians who still believe the Adam and Eve story to be an actual true account, but it still shocks me when I do (mainly when I'm in the USA) Obviously to anyone who has looked at and understood the colossal amount of evidence for evolution, it's no longer a debate. Yet some people still deny it. What are your views on this issue? I really can't figure it. Of those who I have interacted with (Adam and Eve believers) I have found the majority of them to be decent people who seem to have a good understanding of evidence and logic. And yet for this particular subject they seem to just disregard and ignore the evidence.

The best example I can give for this was when I was debating with a Christian about the historical evidence for Jesus. The debate was looking only at Jesus as a historical person and not for any supernatural claims. The arguments and logic he gave were excellent and the sources were mainly credible and very main stream. I felt he followed the evidence well and understood the views of the experts and delivered a very strong argument based on the views of experts in the field and well sourced evidence. Just for your information I think it's most likely that a historical figure (Jesus) did exist. The available evidence does seem to stand more in the court that a historical Jesus existed , than did not. But due to the limitations on the historical methods I don't think it's been conclusively proved, but that is not the fault of histo-

rians, it's just a limitation of this field. One can only use the evidence available so we can't expect or compare this field against other fields where there can much more evidence available (evolution for example) In a later chat we had I discovered he did not believe in evolution, I was very surprised (it floored me). Here we had a person who respected and understood the the evidence and expert views for one subject (and argued it well) but then totally ignored absolutely overwhelming evidence and the views of the huge majority of experts from all the other fields involved confirming evolution. Why do you think this may happen?

Thanks Joe

★ Like



edingess

January 6, 2017 at 11:50 pm

I should be clear that my view that a Christian cannot prove these things with absolute certainty to others is couched in the basic presupposition that our criteria for what counts as proof at its basic level is radically different. My goal would not be to PROVE to someone that Christianity is true. The Christian view is that only God can bring about that kind of knowledge. I am more concerned with a proper attitude and method on the part of Christians where apologetics is concerned. On the other hand, I reject outright the conclusion that some apologists reach: it is very probably the case that Christianity is true. I believe it is absolutely certainly the case that Christianity is true. But there is a difference in my knowing with certainty that Christianity is true and my being able to PROVE that to you with certainty. I have a wife. I know that proposition is true with absolute certainty. But can I prove it to you with absolute certainty? Unlikely.

Second, if we should hold that we have to reach certainty before we know something, then skepticism ensues and right behind it, irrationalism for skepticism falls on its own sword.

I could not disagree with you more on a historical Adam and Eve and the so-called “fact” of evolution and the view that it is no longer even a “debate.” Sorry. Evolution even as a theory is seriously flawed. What people must understand is that science itself cannot even get started if it is based solely on the scientific method. Science is conducted upon philosophical foundations, not scientific ones. And if the philosophy of science cannot stand up to scrutiny, then science must seek a better foundation. I believe that Christian philosophy provides a superior foundation for the right operation of science.

I believe that to deny a literal Adam and Eve is to deny historic Christianity. At the same time, I rarely debate the details of matters like evolutionary theory. My focus is more at the level of world views. And, there are enough Christian scientists, quality men, who fight that fight for me. I call on them when I need assistance in that field. My epistemic authority for what is true and what is not is Scripture. As a theologian I am trained in the languages and allow that text, in its proper setting to inform my beliefs, not philosophies based on scientific theories which are themselves the product of philosophies of one sort or another.

Concerning the historical Jesus, again, I argue that it is unreasonable to toss out Scripture when investigating the proposition: Jesus Christ was a historical figure. I can find no good argument to dismiss the biblical evidence and it seem imprudent to do so out of hand. I need no more than that. In addition, the extra-biblical evidence is such that if one dismisses a historical Jesus, they will dismiss a TON of ancient history along with him. But most people who argue against the historical Jesus seem unwilling to carry their method through to other figures from antiquity. So there seems to me to be a glaring lack of consistency there.

★ Like



Edward Dingess

January 2, 2017 at 11:03 am

atmalpass,

If we were just going to talk about these things casually, I would be fine setting up a google hangout. But if were going to discuss something more specific or get into the details of an issue, we would need to talk about that in advance. Otherwise the conversation could be unproductive. I wouldn't want to come to a google hangout thinking that a casual conversation was the goal only to have the question of David being mentioned in the Armana letters or whether or not the text that supposedly claims that Jesus had a wife is a forgery or not. Does that make sense? I don't want to come to a conversation only to find out after the fact that it is a full on debate.

★ Like



apmalpass 🧑

January 3, 2017 at 9:04 am

I meant that we would continue the discussion we were having on here, which is the basic presuppositional apologetical methodology. I'm not going to bring up anything like the examples you gave, don't worry.

★ Like



Edward Dingess

January 3, 2017 at 10:33 am

That sounds fine to my. How soon were you looking to schedule this? This week is probably not good seeing that the new year is here and things are sure to be busy.

★ Like



apmalpass 🧑

January 3, 2017 at 12:02 pm

Sure. There is no rush. I am on UK time. Weekends may be easiest to schedule, so I don't have to stay up late. Possibly next weekend?

★ Like



Edward Dingess

January 3, 2017 at 10:48 pm

The 14th looks like a good date. I am on EST in the US.

★ Like



Joe

January 7, 2017 at 10:36 am

Hi Edward,

You have a right to believe anything you want but I can't see any point in us debating this subject anymore. Unless you have some overwhelming evidence to demonstrate why evolution is false, I certainly will not change my views on this subject (and will stick with what the evidence says) If you do, please write a paper on this and submit it for peer review, because science wants models that best explain events. But just for the

record you are not disagreeing with “me” over your views on evolution. You are disagreeing with the huge majority of experts in multiple fields such as Palaeontology, Biogeography, Embryology and Comparative Anatomy and Molecular Biology. As well as a huge amount of evidence collected by hundreds of thousands of experts from multiple fields from well over a century. I don’t confess to know why people think the way they do, but I can only conclude that you had a previous byass before you looked at the evidence for evolution. It’s no disrespect to you but anytime I have tried to debate this type of subject with anyone who does not accept the evidence, I find that it does not involve a study of the evidence and a sound conclusion is reached. Therefore I wish you goodbye and good health.

★ Like



Edward Dingess

January 7, 2017 at 11:08 am

You see Joe, when you say that science wants models that “best explains events” you introduce what is called the problem of the criterion. The entire premise that we need to be able to provide evidence that best explains a phenomenon requires that we already have an idea in our mind of how we think things work. But how could such a criterion exist prior to the experiment if the criterion is supposed to be the outworking of science. The hypothesis is put forward but it is done so in the context of a paradigm, or, a worldview. I think it is interesting that science is thought to be this purely objective discipline untouched by the contaminants of philosophical prejudice. It is not.

The appeal to the majority is, as you know, as logical misstep. And that there are scientists with the very same credentials, experts, with the same access to the same data who arrive at different conclusions about evolutionary theory is more than I need to hold to a belief that evolutionary theory is not established fact.

I understand that you think I am biased against evolutionary theory. I agree with you. I am. I openly admit that I am biased against it before the conversation even begins because I am completely committed to the historical record of the Christian Scriptures. And I think if you are honest, you are biased against any ANE documents that are especially religious in nature because you see those beliefs as products of ancient, unsophisticated men who were just trying to explain things with the limited amount of information they had in this time, instead of these documents being the actual product of a deity. Our basic commitments are radically opposed to one another. This is why I say that I am more humble about claiming that I can provide you with

certain proof that Christianity is true. If my beliefs about Christianity is true, then I don't think I can do that. I think Christianity describes non-Christians and the Christian message itself in a way that impedes any project based primarily on rational argumentation and evidence from imparting true knowledge to you resulting in genuine belief. There is no historical evidence clear enough, no syllogism forceful enough to bring you to the conclusion that Christianity is true. The Christian belief about how people become Christians is that God works in their mind to overcome an otherwise unsurmountable obstacle and brings the individual to a true knowledge of Himself. If that is true, then my defense of Christian belief, my apologetic should honor what Christianity teaches in this respect and it should reflect that in its method and approach.

★ Like



Edward Dingess

January 7, 2017 at 11:11 am

I really should prove things before I post them...to make sure my brain and my fingers are on the same page.

★ Like



cnobrnn

February 19, 2017 at 2:40 pm

I don't understand why there is such a focus on the argument being 'trivial'? The fact that it reduces to $\sim\sim P \rightarrow P$ doesn't affect the validity of the argument; the argument is sound so long as the premise can be justified. So I think the real sticking point is that Slick doesn't do this, or that he attempts to justify the non-dichotomous version instead.

Let me know if I'm making any sense here.

★ Like



edingess

June 27, 2018 at 9:34 am

The problem with the claim that all claims require justification is that this claim also requires justification. And if we are going to insist on evidence for its justification, since it is the strongest kind of claim, it will have to be accompanied by the strongest kind of evidence. I would be interested in seeing what kind of evidence could be offered to support it. Second, another looming problem for this claim is the infinite regress. What I would find interesting is whether or not an atheist could provide justification for the claim of justification itself while avoiding an infinite regress.

All the Christian needs to do to show that there is no sustainable de jure objection to Christianity that does not reduce to a de facto objection is to provide warrant for his belief. From what I know about atheism, the epistemic concepts of justification and warrant are what is termed by some as performative self-contradictories.

The real problem that Malpass is ignoring is the fact that the criteria for justification and for warrant are different for the Christian than they are for the atheist. What the atheist wants the Christian to do is to provide justification using atheism's criteria. But the debate includes the possibility of such criteria existing within an atheistic worldview. I think this is where atheism reduces to irrationalism.

TAG remains a significant problem for atheism.

★ Like



Jonathan Simmons

May 30, 2017 at 4:58 pm

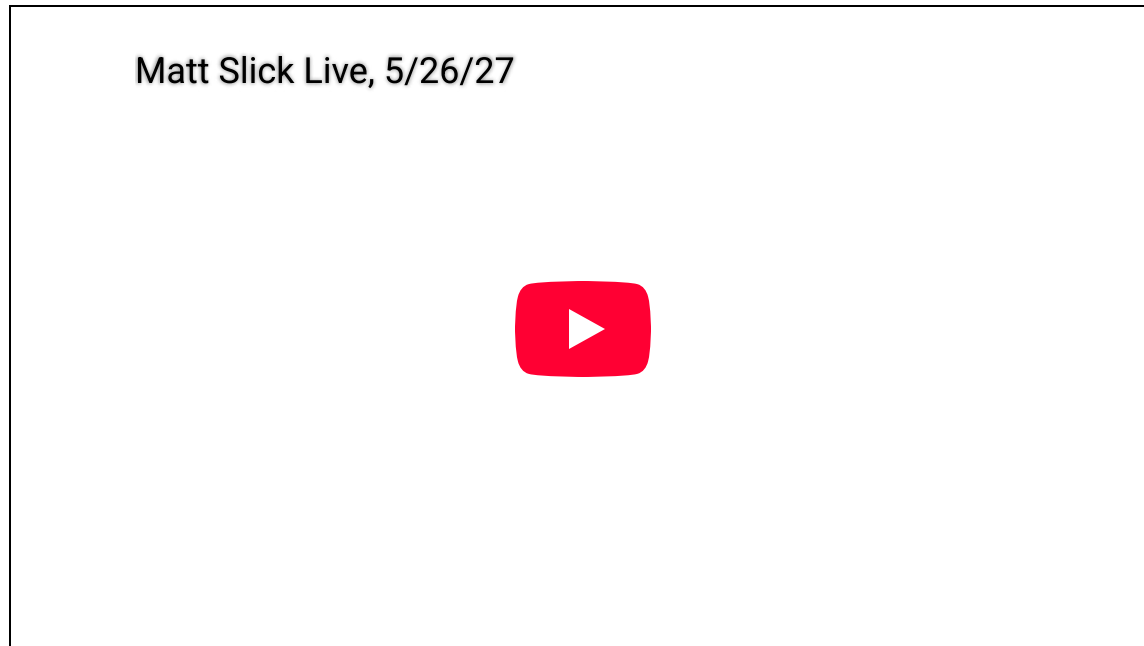
Dr Malpass, Slick is still, as of today's date claiming that you have not refuted TAG. Here is one of his replies to me from his youtube channel:-

"If you think Dr. Malpass is the final authority on TAG, you're mistaken. The argument is not invalidated. I know that you atheists desperately need to have something to validate your faith. But, you won't find it with me. I will continue to use TAG since it has not been refuted. Just because an atheist "says" it refuted doesn't make it so.

Brameleyhill, it is always the atheists who resort to character assassination and now you are saying that I will "continue to lie." At this point, I'm going to offer you a polite warning. Do not attack my character. Attack issues, not my character. If you continue to do that then I will remove you from this thread.

Again, TAG is not refuted. Just having an atheist say it is, doesn't make it so."

You can read the arguments here:- (I am posting under the name BramleyHill on Slick's page, having already been banned under my real name.



It would be wonderful to have you refute the arguments again on Slick's own page, especially when he says you haven't refuted them.

Cheers,
Jonathan Simmons

★ Like



Apetivist The Atheist

November 17, 2017 at 1:00 pm

Reblogged this on Site Title.

★ Like



Phil

February 1, 2018 at 2:48 am

Hi Alex,

Can't the argument be reformulated as follows?

1. Either God accounts for the laws of logic, or something else accounts for the laws of logic.
2. it is not true that something else accounts for the laws of logic.
3. God accounts for the laws of logic.

Or, how about:

1. If God does not exist, the laws of logic could not exist.
2. The laws of logic exist.
3. God exists.

I feel like Slick's formulation is bad, but there's nothing preventing it from being formulated as a non-trivial argument.

★ Like



apmalpass 🧑

February 1, 2018 at 7:00 am

Hi Phil. Yes, your first formulation is valid. The only issue with that is that Slick provides no reason for thinking that the first premise is true. His supporting reasons are for the first premise being a logical dichotomy, but your first premise clearly isn't (because maybe nothing accounts for logic). See my post called 'logic 101'. Anyway, him pretending that the first premise is a dichotomy, while he covertly intends it to be a non-logical disjunction (as in your formulation) is why it is an instance of false dichotomy fallacy.

As for the second argument, again why think that the first premise is true? In addition, it is an instance of modus ponens, whereas Slick is explicit about his argument being a disjunctive syllogism. So while your second argument matches more closely a standard transcendental argument, it doesn't seem faithful to what Slick intends.

★ Like



Phil

February 1, 2018 at 4:39 pm

Hi Alex,

Thanks for the reply. Please forgive me if my vocab or english is slightly hard to understand.

Of course, in both cases, there would need to be further argumentation to support the first premises, since they aren't necessarily true. But when I listen to Slick talk about it, he normally tries to give arguments for the first premise. For instance, he is quoted as saying:

“But they [logical truths] can be accounted for in a theistic one [worldview]. The Absolute God with an absolute mind has conceived of the logical absolutes. They are a reflection of His mind. At least I can offer an explanation for their existence where the atheist cannot.”

(source: <https://carm.org/discussion-logical-absolutes-proof-gods-existence>)

Now, you and I might disagree with Slick that theism can account for laws of logic, but Slick does try to offer an explanation for how they could exist on a theistic worldview. He actually seems to internalize the concept that he needs to give an explanation for how they could exist on a theistic worldview, even if he doesn't recognize formally why he needs to.

So, it seems to me that Slick makes a mistake in the argument formulation, but he instinctively recognizes that he DOES need to offer a way that God could account for the laws of logic as a supporting argument. It's almost like he formulates the argument as a logical dichotomy, but then he doesn't treat it as one!

So, at first glance, it feels like arguing that Slick has set up a false dichotomy is sort of trivial. Sure, he set up a false dichotomy, but he does recognize that he needs to provide supporting arguments for thinking that theism can account for laws of logic, at which point he could easily reformulate the argument.

Am I missing something? I suppose, looking back, you might say this: Let's suppose that we agree with Slick that theism CAN account for laws of logic. Showing that theism can account for laws of logic still is not an argument for premise 1, since “theism can account for” is not the same as “theism DOES account for”. Would you contend with that? If this is true, Slick would need to add a premise that basically says “logical absolutes cannot be accounted for by nothing”, which he would justify with metaphysical intuition (which, as a side note, I actually don't think is the worst argument).

Thoughts? Thanks!

 Like**Jonathan Simmons**

February 1, 2018 at 4:57 pm

What reason do you have to agree with the statement “Theism can account for the laws of logic”? In order to believe that a god has accounted for anything, you first have to show that it exists. Slick had not done this.

 Like**edingess**

February 1, 2018 at 7:21 pm

If the laws of logic are necessary, then how could they, as necessary laws, exist apart from God.

 Like**Jonathan Simmons**

February 1, 2018 at 8:26 pm

Who says they are necessary? They are descriptions of a reality. Logic is a tool we use. Why should a god be a requirement of anything necessary let alone mere tools we us. How do you know any gods exist?

 Like**Phil**

February 2, 2018 at 12:28 am

They might exist uncaused, necessarily, outside of time and space. Much in the way that a theist believes that God exists (uncaused, necessarily, etc.). Where is the difficulty in thinking that?

 Like

**apmalpass** 👤

February 2, 2018 at 9:04 am

Phil:

“Of course, in both cases, there would need to be further argumentation to support the first premises, since they aren’t necessarily true. But when I listen to Slick talk about it, he normally tries to give arguments for the first premise.”

Slick regularly, and explicitly, says things like “God or not-God, there is no third option”, as part of his support for the first premise of his argument. That is him blatantly trying to spin it as a logical dichotomy. He spews a lot of stuff out, of course, but to the extent that he is making this move it is an instance of a false dichotomy fallacy.

You quote him saying:

“But they [logical truths] can be accounted for in a theistic one [worldview]. The Absolute God with an absolute mind has conceived of the logical absolutes. They are a reflection of His mind. At least I can offer an explanation for their existence where the atheist cannot.”

It seems to me that this is a slightly different point. If this is what he is using to support his argument, it renders the second premise clearly false. Here’s why.

The issue is about what it means to ‘account for’ something. in this case for logical principles like non-contradiction. Slick seems to think that it means providing a wider metaphysical setting for them. Fine. Saying that logical principles are thoughts in the mind of God is one way philosophers have thought about the metaphysics of logic. Its a position referred to as ‘divine conceptualism’. It was popular in the medieval period, and it is still defended by various philosophers today (see Greg Welty). Slick doesn’t actually know this though, because he is spectacularly poorly informed about philosophical literature. Anyway, there is an ‘account’ of logic which involves it being part of the mind of god. So, in a very weak sense, Slick can ‘account for logic’.

But notice that your second premise is “it is not true that something else accounts for the laws of logic.” Now, this is clearly false. If all it means is to give an account is that we give a broader metaphysical picture that situates logical principles somehow, then there are loads of other options, ones which make no mention of a god. Platonism, according to which logical principles are abstract objects, for example is the most obvious. In one form or another, it is the main way that philosophers of mathematics

think about mathematical objects (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/philosophy-mathematics/#Pla>).

But, aren't there objections to platonism? Well, yes, of course. But the standard was not that we can situate logical principles in some broader metaphysical picture that doesn't have any objections that could be raised against it. I mean, if that is the standard, then premise 2 is true, but Slick stops having an account of logic as well. Divine conceptualism faces (in my view crippling) objections to it as well. I wrote a blog post about that, called 'A new problem for divine conceptualism?' for example. No position on this area has zero objections to it. If that were the standard for having an account, then nobody has an account. If it means something weaker, then Slick can have an account, but so can people who reject divine conceptualism.

Either way, his argument doesn't work. He needs it to be that the only way to explain logic is if god exists, but that's just massively implausible.

Here is what is going on in his head. He thinks that if you are an atheist, then you must be a reductive physicalist who thinks that everything is the product of atoms in motion. Such a naive physicalist view would find it hard to explain logic, or abstract objects in general. He thinks that the only way to upgrade that view is to believe in a supernatural agent who grounds logic. But that is just the product of a strawman. You can be an atheist and a platonist at the same time. This simple point completely undermines Slick's real motivation. This is more important than the details of his argument's logical form (which is just fun to pick apart). Really, he is labouring under a misconception about how sparse his apologetical opponent's theoretical resources are. In actual fact, if he bothered to do the hard work and read the philosophical literature on this, there is a broad range of options on the table, and sweeping generalisations like his ("only the christian worldview accounts for logic", etc) are just sophomoric and naive.

★ Like



apmalpass 🧑

February 2, 2018 at 9:16 am

In addition to this, there is always going to be the option that when it comes to certain extremely foundational concepts, such as the principles of logic, nothing can be said to support them. I don't buy this myself, but it has a venerable heritage, going back to Aristotle in the Metaphysics (book 4, part 4: <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.4.iv.html>). There the idea is that to ex-

plain the principle of non-contradiction somehow, something more fundamental and more certain would be needed; but nothing is or could be more fundamental than this “most indisputable of all principles”. Explanation has to come to an end somewhere, and this is where Aristotle situates the end of explanation. If he is right about that, then it is an error to even try to ‘account for’ logic in the way Slick does. So long as this option is on the table, Slick’s argument doesn’t get off the ground. As I said, I don’t think Aristotle is right, but I’m nowhere near certain about that. His position is certainly on the table. Dogmatism on the metaphysics of logic is just to approach the subject in a clumsy and childlike manner.

See my post ‘Logic 101’ where I discuss this a bit more.

★ Like



phil

February 5, 2018 at 5:57 am

Hi Alex,

I agree with this completely. I only initially posted because I thought that Slick actually recognizes that he needs to show that god can “account for”, and non-theistic views cannot “account for” laws of logic. As you say, there are, of course, non-theistic ways to account for logical absolutes. While I would disagree with Slick on this, I sort of suspect that he would say that non-theistic views can’t ground laws of logic, but as you said (and I agree), this is largely due to his lack of knowledge of the resources available to a non-theist. I guess my point was that he seems confused and unaware of views like Platonism, but he doesn’t necessarily seem disingenuous to me. I think he is not putting forth intentionally bad arguments, but rather is just ill-informed.

Thanks for the replies!

★ Like



edingess

February 2, 2018 at 11:14 am

That they describe reality does not say much about their necessity. Something is necessary if it is true in all possible worlds. Logic seems to fit that definition. If the laws

of logic are cognitive in nature, and they are necessary, then it seems to me that cognition is necessary. And if cognition is necessary, then it must be true in all possible worlds. I don't see how you can retain a right understanding of logic without also accepting the existence of a necessary mind. Humans are not necessary beings. But some religions, Christianity being one of them, asserts that God is.

★ Like



apmalpass 🧑

February 2, 2018 at 11:23 am

Saying that logic is true in all possible worlds is circular, as the broadest notion of possibility used is logical possibility. If you pick up a modal logic textbook, you will find that a logically possible world is defined as a maximal and consistent set of propositions. Maximality gives you the law of excluded middle, and consistency gives you non-contradiction. In intuitionistic logic, there are incomplete worlds (or 'constructions'), and in paraconsistent logic there are inconsistent worlds, sometimes called 'impossible worlds'. The lesson is that if you have a different logic in mind, you have a different idea of what a possible world is. Which one is the cart, and which one is the horse, isn't clear here.

★ Like



edingess

February 2, 2018 at 11:40 am

How does one get an inconsistent world without the laws of logic? Does not inconsistency require consistency? Of course, it's circular. I don't see a problem with circularity given my metaphysics.

★ Like



apmalpass 🧑

February 2, 2018 at 11:49 am

Also, this idea that logic 'describes reality' seems rather presumptuous to me. Physical principles, like gravity, certainly do describe reality (as far as we can tell), but it is not at all clear whether principles like non-contradiction play a similar role. They could be

tracing contours of the external world, like physical equations do, but they could also be tracing contours of our conceptual apparatus, or of our linguistic abilities.

For example, it may be that consciousness cannot form in inconsistent situations, and wouldn't be able to register it if we found one. In the Everett interpretation of quantum mechanics, the world is constantly branching into various incompatible classical states. A conscious experience is limited to being located in one branch at a time, but reality itself is not so limited. If that were the case, then the appearance of non-contradiction as a 'law' is really not describing reality itself, but just is really saying something about how consciousness is generated.

Alternatively, it may be that something fundamental about communication requires consistency. It might be that expressing propositional content requires a principle of ruling certain things in and certain things out, as various philosophers have proposed (notably the early Wittgenstein). Any attempt to express an inconsistent circumstance violates this principle, and renders the result literally meaningless. If so, then we would be bound by the limits of communication to be unable to express inconsistencies, but reality itself may be inconsistent nonetheless.

It seems to me that if these two options are even remotely plausible then the simple 'logic describes reality' maxim cannot be fully endorsed. We are probably always going to be in a position where any of those three possibilities is always potentially the case, and we will probably never know one way or the other.

★ Like



apmalpass 🧑

February 2, 2018 at 11:58 am

edingess:

“How does one get an inconsistent world without the laws of logic?”

I don't know what you mean by 'get' in this situation. The question is just too vague to know exactly what you are asking.

The point is that various 'laws' of logic correlate with properties of 'worlds'. If non-contradiction is true, then there are no inconsistent worlds. If there are such worlds, then it is not true.

“Of course, it’s circular. I don’t see a problem with circularity given my metaphysics.”

Well, I don’t know what your metaphysics is. My point is just that saying

“Something is necessary if it is true in all possible worlds. Logic seems to fit that definition”

might sound like a substantive point, but given that it is circular it is trivial. It’s like saying ‘all bachelors are unmarried’. That doesn’t tell us anything interesting about the world. It’s just a product of definitions. If I said ‘everyone in this room is a bachelor’, that would be substantive. But because of the way logic is used in defining possible worlds, your statement can never be substantive in that way. It’s not about what is acceptable on a worldview or not, its just that it is a kind of uninteresting definitional point. I don’t think you intended it to be like that though; it seemed to me you were trying to make a substantive point.

★ Like



edingess

March 21, 2018 at 7:59 pm

It seems to me that a world without logic is impossible. The logic is a necessary condition for inconsistency. You could never experience inconsistency in a world where logic is not.

I don’t think logic describes reality as much as it is actually is reality.

If logic is necessary, and I can’t see how it isn’t, then logic exists in all possible worlds.

★ Like

Pingback: [Transcendental Argument for God \(TAG\) – UnGodly Atheism](#)



Chuckk

March 8, 2018 at 2:04 am

Thank you, this is wonderfully clear. I also realize now that I have encountered this a lot, in a sloppy, abbreviated form:

Can you explain how this works without God?

No.

Therefore, God.

I cannot explain how quarks, alcohol, bats, dentistry, or Putin work. Many really do treat this as proof that God exists. My cat also cannot explain how laser pointers work. Therefore, God.

★ Like



sko0l

April 3, 2018 at 2:37 am

Great article. I'm new to many of these presup games, but I've seen a number of your (and others') youtube videos, and find the presup arguments pretty interesting, if entirely unconvincing. After reading this, I'm left wondering though, beyond the formal problems with this argument, why it would be convincing even if it were valid/sound. My reason for this applies more broadly than TAG, I think, being related to any claim that God or some other thing must account for the laws or logic/regularity of the universe/reliability of inference/etc.

Let's say that we grant the argument. God is the necessary and sufficient explanation for the laws of logic/regularity of the universe/reliability of inference/etc. Why does that entail ANYTHING about God's current nature/existence? Let's say that God created the laws of logic/laws of physics/etc as normative laws for the universe, in force for all time. Alternatively, we could say that God created the universe in such a way that the laws of logic/laws of physics/etc function always as true. But then, after doing it, God said "screw it, I'm done" and killed himself. He doesn't exist anymore. It seems like that state of affairs would comport entirely as well with the presup worldview/presuppositions as would the state of affairs in which God still exists.

So then, even if TAG/whatever presup argument is true, so what? It could still be the case that atheism is true (which is pretty damn funny to me). It could still be the case that God does not, now, exist. He did once. And, when he did exist, he did everything necessary to ensure that the universe was regular and that rationality was possible. And then he blinked himself out of existence. Now there is no god. No one to worship.

This could become thornier if the claim is not just that the Christian God is the foundation of rationality, but that the Bible is true and that he produced it. But TAG doesn't

seem to require that. And most presup arguments don't seem to require it. They tend to assert it, after the fact. But nothing in the actual arguments they make seems to require it/they don't argue, so far as i know, that Biblical inerrancy is a presupposition of rationality. They only argue that a certain type of God is necessary. And then, after the fact, they assert that only the Christian God is this type of God.

★ Like



Jonathan Simmons

April 3, 2018 at 8:09 am

Nice argument. But I think the Christians would claim that their bible states that their god is eternal, which precludes him/her/it snuffing itself after the creation was completed

★ Like



edingess

April 3, 2018 at 10:00 am

That isn't at all reflective of TAG. TAG presupposes a very specific God, not just any god. It is not a theistic argument in general, but a Christian theistic argument to be specific. A necessary being cannot not exist in any possible world, let alone the actual one. Since the God that TAG presupposes is the one defined by the revelation of Scripture, TAG does presuppose the truthfulness of the Bible as its final epistemic authority.

Defending the inerrancy of the Bible is not an argument that is made using TAG. It is a different argument altogether. As Ronney Mourad points out, TAG meets four criteria: 1. It should be theologically relevant. 2. It should be the strongest possible type. 3. It should be compatible with a distinctly Christian epistemology. 4. It should account for any formally and functionally distinctive characteristics of transcendental arguments.

As you can see, what you are describing is nothing like TAG.

★ Like



sko0l

April 3, 2018 at 1:46 pm

1. As for “inerrancy”, this is my fault. I immediately regretted using that word, and tried to edit the comment, but could not find a way to do so while it was pending moderation. I meant “accuracy” or “truth”.

2. The rest of what you’re saying just seems to be false. TAG is a very simple argument, with two premises and a conclusion. Nothing in any of those premises requires the kind of God you describe. I can plug in the God I’ve described and the argument still runs (absent the problems described in the article). You may WANT to run it only with the God of Christian Theology, but nothing in the argument itself makes that necessary.

I looked briefly on Slick’s website, at the expanded form of this argument. No version of the word “Christian” or of the word “Jesus” appears. No version of the word “necessary” appears as a predicate for the God of this argument; Slick provides a bunch of predicates for God, but this is not one of them. Because necessary-being is not a quality that would be required to create the logical absolutes. Which was exactly my point to begin with.

You can’t just say that the God of Christian Theology is required by the argument. Show me, if I’ve missed, where there is ANY portion of the argument that says or even implies this. Specifically, any portion that says, or even implies, that this God is a necessarily existent being. And why it would not be sufficient, instead, for this God to create necessary laws, and then disappear from existence.

3. You can’t just say “we don’t use the argument that way” or “we don’t mean it that way” or “we use the argument in this way ...”. You’re essentially imposing a bunch of unstated, and completely unsupported premises. If it’s not part of the argument, then it’s not part of the argument.

★ Like



edingess

April 3, 2018 at 2:20 pm

1. Understood and no problem.

2. This is simply not true. TAG is demonstrating that God is the necessary condition for the intelligence of human experience. God is the necessary condition, say, for the intelligibility of the laws of logic. You can’t just plug in any old god and have the argument still work. What I am saying about TAG is that if it is used as an argument

for God, it must meet minimal criteria. It has to be employed in a manner that is consistent with Christianity as expressed in the Bible. It won't work on just any version because of inconsistencies that are introduced.

3. Any argument can be misused. TAG is an argument. Therefore, TAG can be misused. There are certain characteristics that must be present in a transcendental argument. For example, its conditional premise, if it has only one, asserts a logical implication between the categorical premise and the conclusion, which is based on the claim that the truth of the former is inconceivable without the truth of the latter.

For example, if the laws of logic, then God. The laws of logic. Therefore God. The claim is that the laws of logic are inconceivable apart from God. Such laws are necessary by definition, and they are properties of the mind. The only necessary mind is the mind of God. Something like that. Or, if consciousness then God.

Consciousness. Therefore, God. I don't have to say "Christian God." He is the only candidate for the term "God" in such an argument. Of course you could make some god up, but then you have the problem of having no historical grounding for your claim. Christianity is not "made up." There is an "in your face" historical reality that must be dealt with.

★ Like



edingess

June 27, 2018 at 10:07 am

Actually, when TAG is employed correctly, the term "God" refers to a very specific being. It does not refer to just any idea or concept of God. It refers to the God that Christians believe revealed himself in Scripture. That God is the sort of being that cannot kill himself or cease to exist or cease to be God or cease to be anything that he absolutely is, eternally.

What TAG does is make the claim that its conditional premise entails a necessary relationship. The denial of the relationship in that premise is said to commit a performative self-contradiction. It's like saying "If intelligibility, then knowledge." Rational knowledge is the necessary condition for intelligibility. You cannot deny this conditional premise without contradicting your denial. And you cannot deny intelligibility without affirming it. The challenge for the TAG proponent is to provide warrant for the relationship that is claimed in the conditional premise. That relationship is said to be a logically necessary relationship.

For example, using intelligence as my example. I might say if knowledge, then God. I would then want to show that knowledge cannot obtain, as we understand knowledge, apart from God. That is, God is the necessary condition for knowledge. Now, TAG does not set out to refute all competitors that might attempt to account for knowledge. All TAG needs to do is demonstrate that the negation of its conditional is false. That is the beauty of transcendental arguments of this type. Knowledge is the sort of thing that requires itself. It cannot emerge from non-knowledge. Non-knowledge is incapable of producing knowledge. If this is the case, then one would have to say that knowledge is eternal. This would be the same sort of argument given for the laws of logic, language, morality, etc. That these concepts are intelligibility is undeniable. How they have become so is a problem that no atheist I have ever read has been able to even come close to providing an answer that does not reduce to irrationalism sooner or later.

This article, at best, points out that Slick's formulation of TAG is weak and in need of refinement. It does nothing to demonstrate that TAG itself is weak or logically unsound. Not even close.

★ Like



apmalpass 🧑

June 27, 2018 at 10:32 am

“I would then want to show that knowledge cannot obtain, as we understand knowledge, apart from God. ... Now, TAG does not set out to refute all competitors that might attempt to account for knowledge.”

You want to show that knowledge cannot obtain without God, but you also think that you do not have to ‘refute all competitors that might attempt to account for knowledge’. But those are exactly the same things. If I say that you cannot have X without Y, then I am saying that all the ways you might think you can have X without Y are false. They are literally the same thing.

“All TAG needs to do is demonstrate that the negation of its conditional is false.”

Showing that a conditional is true, and showing that the negation of a conditional is false IS LITERALLY THE SAME THING.

There are some plausible cases of where X is a necessary precondition for Y. Existing, for example, is a plausible precondition for thinking (i.e. Descartes). But

saying that God is a necessary precondition for logic (or whatever) doesn't seem plausible to atheists. If you want to make it seem plausible, you have to do something to show that it is plausible. What you want to do is say something like "Well, how do you account for logic?" and when you don't get a good answer you claim victory. But that is shifting the burden of explanation here. If you are saying that God is a precondition for X, and you are trying to explain it to me who doesn't find it plausible *prima facie*, then you have to do more than just point out that I don't have a completely watertight understanding of X myself. That isn't enough to establish the case you are making. It's like if I said that Jones was at the murder scene at the time of the murder, but all I could offer in support of that was that you don't know where Jones was at the time of the murder. Your inability to account for his whereabouts doesn't mean he was where I claimed he was. I still need to do something else to actually support my claim somehow.

I don't know why this needs to be endlessly explained. It's not hard.

★ Like



edingess

June 27, 2018 at 1:05 pm

The problem, Dr. Malpass is that the criteria of plausibility employed by the atheist and that employed by the theist are different. Plausibility depends heavily on the presuppositions underpinning the claim. I don't know why you can't understand this. It really is quite simple.

What TAG claims is that the negation of the claim, "If logic, then God," involves a contradiction. Now, it is up to the proponent of TAG to show that it involves a contradiction. I usually do that by showing that logic is necessary and that the necessary precondition for logic is a rational mind. To claim that logic emerged from non-logic is a logical contradiction. Why? The claim logic exists is a necessary truth, meaning true in all possible worlds, but you know this already. To deny it is self-refuting.

I think it is important to point out that Slick's framing of TAG may not be the best representative of it. If you want to see an accurate representation of TAG, go to Bahnsen, Van Til, Oliphint, James Anderson, and Michael Butler. I studied under Butler. Ronney Mourad authored an excellent work on this called "Transcendental Arguments and Justified Christian Belief. Mourad builds off Plantinga's notion of warrant.

 Like**Jonathan Simmons**

June 27, 2018 at 1:35 pm

Asserting that logic presupposes a god is not the same as proving it. You can not define a god into existence. You need evidence. Your concept of god no more accounts for logic than does Dr Malpass' toast.

 Like**apmalpass** 

June 27, 2018 at 2:03 pm

“The problem, Dr. Malpass is that the criteria of plausibility employed by the atheist and that employed by the theist are different. Plausibility depends heavily on the presuppositions underpinning the claim. I don't know why you can't understand this. It really is quite simple.”

What counts as being plausible, or implausible, depends on who it is that is judging the plausibility. I agree with that. I didn't say anything to the contrary of that. Your comment doesn't engage with any of the things I said. It's just a little island of smugness unto itself.

It might be a subjective assessment to some extent, but it isn't utterly relative. We both agree that if someone makes a claim, then they should have something they can use to back up, or explain, or justify that if they were challenged on it. If I claimed that Jesus didn't exist, you would probably (at a minimum) ask me why I thought that, or (more likely) tell me that the historical evidence doesn't support that claim. This sort of giving of arguments and evidence in support of claims is common ground between us. We also agree broadly on things like correct reasoning. We both think it is a problem if a claim results in a contradiction. You and I might agree with each other against the dialetheist on that one. So while we agree on many things, we agree broadly on various issues. If either of us says something and then immediately relies on the negation of that thing, we would call the other out on it. And that is where we get to the issue you are addressing (even though it wasn't anything contained in my previous comment), which is about whether the conditional premise of TAG is justified or not. I think we both agree that the person

making the claim shoulders the burden of justification for it, not the other guy. You seem to be in agreement when you say:

“What TAG claims is that the negation of the claim, “If logic, then God,” involves a contradiction. Now, it is up to the proponent of TAG to show that it involves a contradiction.”

Great. We agree so far. You go on to explain how you usually discharge your justificatory obligation as follows:

“I usually do that by showing that logic is necessary and that the necessary precondition for logic is a rational mind.”

So now I need you to explain to me how the necessary precondition for logic is a rational mind. That doesn't seem right to me at all. For one thing, it seems to beg the question against the realist about logic, for whom logic exists independently from any mind. But you don't seem to be going there, because the next thing you say is:

“To claim that logic emerged from non-logic is a logical contradiction.”

The realist doesn't make any such claim. So even if it were a contradiction (which I'm not convinced of either) it isn't an argument against the realist.

“The claim logic exists is a necessary truth, meaning true in all possible worlds”

Another claim that a realist could happily agree to. Where is the reason to think that a mind is the necessary precondition for logic?

And yes, Slick's version of TAG is terrible. He doesn't have a clue. But I've also read a fair amount of those other authors you cite, and written plenty more on many of them:

This engages with Butler: <https://useofreason.wordpress.com/2015/11/07/the-problem-with-tag/>

This engages with Van Til:

<https://useofreason.wordpress.com/2016/11/04/transcendental-arguments-and-the-logic-of-presupposition/>

This engages with Poytress (a prof at Westminster):

<https://useofreason.wordpress.com/2017/04/28/logic-and-gods-character/>

This engages with Anderson & Welty:

<https://useofreason.wordpress.com/2016/11/12/problems-with-the-lord-of-non-contradiction/>

This engages with Welty: <https://useofreason.wordpress.com/2017/02/07/a-new-problem-for-divine-conceptualism/>

I'm not seeing you engaging with the argument I give against divine conceptualism in the last two, for example. You are just asserting it here in a comment and insinuating that I don't bother to engage with the better apologists from your camp. How about you look at the final post in that list and explain to me how divine conceptualism is supposed to work?

★ Like



edingess

June 27, 2018 at 10:12 am

One final thing: TAG shows that the denial of its conditional premise is false by demonstrating that the denial involves a performative self-contradiction. In other words, when employed correctly a transcendental argument is proved true because its denial is a logical impossibility due to the presence of a logical contradiction in its denial. Van Til would say that the proof of Christianity is demonstrated in the impossibility of the contrary because the contrary claim to Christianity is true entails a logical contradiction. This is the goal of TAG.

★ Like



edingess

June 27, 2018 at 1:54 pm

TAG is claiming that there is a logically necessary relationship between logic and God. This means that the attempt to negate that claim is self-contradictory. Presuppositional apologetics takes a two-step approach: first, it asks you to show how logic could exist given your beliefs about the world. Then it asks you to be open-minded to how Christianity tackles the same question about logic and provides an answer that, unlike its denial, does not reduce to irrationalism. The claims that logic exists and atheism is true cannot both be true. If logic is intelligible, atheism cannot be true. So, the claim that logic exists and atheism is true actually entails a logical contradiction that should lead any rational person to abandon atheism.

That is the thrust of the refutation of atheism from a presuppositional point of view that employs TAG along the way.

★ Like



edingess

June 27, 2018 at 3:14 pm

I think that is a fair request. I will take a look at the final post in your list and engage your argument on how divine conceptualism is supposed to work. Probably a few days before I can respond. Wife just had surgery and my plate is a little full on top of it. Appreciate the exchange.

★ Like



Jonathan Simmons

April 3, 2018 at 10:31 am

Surely any creator god would do for TAG. Why does it need to be the Christian version? What evidence do you have that it can only be the Christian one?

★ Like



edingess

April 3, 2018 at 10:39 am

TAG in our context is the argument type employed by presuppositionalists, beginning with Van Til, popularized by Bahnsen and Frame, and employed by Matt Slick. I am not saying that others could not attempt to use this argument type in some form or fashion. My point is that Christian theism is very narrow, very specific, and this argument is only used properly when it is internally consistent with reformed theology, which is, in my view and the view of those who embrace this method of apologetics, the true expression of biblical Christianity.

My experience has been that most atheists do not understand Christianity, true biblical Christianity. I personally think it is impossible to effectively debunk and criticize a view that you do not truly understand. This leads me to the conclusion that no atheist has the ability to truly and effectively offer a sound refutation of biblical Christianity.

**sko0l**

April 3, 2018 at 1:47 pm

“this argument is only used properly when it is internally consistent with reformed theology”

Why? What, in the argument, requires it?

**edingess**

April 3, 2018 at 2:26 pm

If it is true that God is the necessary condition for the intelligibility of human experience, then that requires the sort of God that reformed theology asserts. And it requires that human beings are what that God says they are. This is why you typically see presuppositionalism in the reformed camp. There is a lot you are missing where TAG is concerned.

**Jonathan Simmons**

April 3, 2018 at 10:45 am

Except that you try to intellectualise your god into existence. Where is your evidence that Christianity is true? Where is any credible evidence that a god exists?

**edingess**

April 3, 2018 at 10:57 am

That is a straw man. The idea that Christians “intellectualise” God into existence presupposes atheism. Your requirement for evidence reduces to an infinite regress. Why “ought” humans possess evidence for beliefs if atheism’s take on the material world is actually true? How do you justify the idea that something like the human brain

“ought” to function in just a certain way given your metaphysics? That is a problem you cannot solve.

Christians do possess evidence. In fact, you possess evidence. The problem isn't a lack of evidence or the absence of evidence. The real problem is your interpretation of the evidence. There are no brute facts just waiting to be discovered. There is data that is subject to interpretation and those interpretations always rest upon some philosophical assumption(s).

Christianity is grounded in historical reality. The history of the Bible has been verified repeatedly. It isn't like other myths and legends that like to compete with it, not even a little. Christian theology teaches clearly that men must be regenerated by the work of the Holy Spirit in order to understand the Scriptures. Is this a problem? Well, it is for someone like you who thinks that knowledge can come into existence from no knowledge or that consciousness can arise from non-consciousness. Christians locate logic, knowledge, and consciousness in the absolutely ontological Triune God of Scripture. He is the source of all knowledge. Because he knows everything, humans can genuinely know some things.

If logic, then God. Logic. Therefore God.

★ Like



Jonathan Simmons

April 3, 2018 at 3:09 pm

“Christianity is grounded in historical reality. The history of the Bible has been verified repeatedly. It isn't like other myths and legends that like to compete with it, not even a little.”

The above is only true in your mind. One only need do a little reading to learn that the Bible is no basis for truth.

How is asking for evidence of the truth of your assertion a straw man?

Once again, you assert your faith. Assertions without evidence are meaningless. Faith is a very poor basis for discovering truth. On faith alone one can be led to believe anything

As Sko01 has said, any god can be inserted into the TAG. And, I believe, so can toast

 Like**edingess**

April 3, 2018 at 3:44 pm

Asking for evidence is not the straw man. Defining evidence upon the assumption of your own presuppositions is the straw man.

What evidence can you offer that “assertions without evidence” are meaningless?

Please don't bother me with your juvenile stupidity Johnny. I haven't the time for people like you and based on your closing insult, I will ignore your idiotic comments henceforth.

 Like**Jonathan Simmons**

April 3, 2018 at 3:51 pm

Assertions without evidence are meaningless because one can assert opposing hypotheses with equal value, rendering them meaningless. The pen in my hand is red. The pen in my hand is blue. Without the evidence of the pen to support one of those assertions, they are both equally meaningless.

Without the evidence for a god, you cannot attribute any characteristics to it and expect to be taken seriously.

And had you bothered to watch Dr Malpass' demolition of TAG in the BTWS, you would have understood my joke about toast. It's a pity that you have resorted to insults, but not unexpected.

 Like**edingess**

April 3, 2018 at 4:22 pm

See previous comment.

 Like

**Jonathan Simmons**

April 3, 2018 at 4:27 pm

Epic fail of Christianity. All mouth and no trousers.

★ Like

**Jonathan Simmons**

April 5, 2018 at 7:43 am

A perfect example of why believers try to philosophise their god into existence because they know they cannot win any evidence based argument. Game, set and match, I believe.

★ Like

**apmalpass** 👤

April 5, 2018 at 8:39 am

The idea that ‘assertions without evidence are meaningless’ is not a good maxim. It depends on precisely what you mean by ‘evidence’, but there are some pretty obvious counter examples.

For instance, mathematical and purely logical truths don’t have evidence as such. What is the evidence that $1+1=2$? There is a very good reason for thinking that it is true, but that is to do with purely abstract reasoning about numbers. At no point does the mathematician survey the evidence for that claim. That doesn’t make mathematical claims meaningless though.

It’s also true that bachelors are unmarried men, but there is no evidence for that. Nothing counts as evidence for that. It’s true by definition, not because of evidence. That doesn’t make us meaningless though.

I can claim that I have internal mental experiences, rather than being just a p-zombie, but for you there could be nothing that counts as evidence that I’m not a p-zombie. After all, p-zombies also report having internal experiences. So there couldn’t be any

evidence (for you) that I have experience, yet it isn't a meaningless claim for me to make (or for you).

Maybe the world was created just 30 seconds ago with all the appearance of age. If so then all the evidence would equally support that hypothesis as the hypothesis that it is actually old. Yet the claim that it is actually old, and wasn't just created 30 seconds ago, isn't meaningless.

Lastly, the claim that 'assertions without evidence are meaningless' doesn't have any evidence for it. You didn't find that out one day through observation. It's a theoretical principle you think is true. But because it doesn't have any evidence for it, then it would be meaningless if it were true. So it's false.

★ Like



Jonathan Simmons

April 5, 2018 at 9:16 am

Ouch! But I accept your lesson in clear, precise expression. I have had no training whatsoever in philosophy so it probably shows.

Nevertheless, in the context of this debate about the existence, attributes, engaged-ness or creativity of a god, surely assertions of its existence sans any credible evidence of its existence are meaningless.

Lawrence Krauss said "the ultimate test of reality is experiment" and in the context of the existence or non existence of a god, I think this is a valid view.

So perhaps I should have inserted in to "assertions without evidence are meaningless" the phrase "about the existence of a god"

★ Like



apmalpass 🧑

April 5, 2018 at 10:30 am

Hey, no problem. I'm only trying to help, so I'm glad you took it that way.

I think all you need to do is modify the maxim like this:

‘Assertions without justifications can be ignored’

Justifications is a broader term than evidence. It covers evidence, experience, reasons, arguments, etc. It just means anything that could make a belief more likely to be true. So if someone makes a claim, whether it is about god or not, then they need to provide a justification if they want you to think that they are rational for believing the claim.

The type of justification they need for the claim should be proportional to how strongly they believe the claim. You can make a claim you believe without being able to prove it, just so long as you have a fairly good reason for believing it. I took my car to the garage and they told me that it needed new tires. I don’t know anything about cars, but I still think that it is true that it needs new tires. I wouldn’t bet my house on it (because maybe they are just trying to juice me for a few quid), but I am reasonably confident about it. The justification for my belief is that the mechanic who looked at my car told me. That doesn’t prove it, but it makes my belief at least rational. I didn’t just flip a coin and believe that I need new tires because it landed heads, etc. Is the mechanic’s testimony about my car ‘evidence’? Maybe, depending on what you mean by evidence. His claim is what justifies my (reasonably confident) belief though. It is the reason I believe I need new tires.

If someone makes a claim about god, they need to provide a justification that is proportionate to their confidence that the claim is true. This is what we should be asking for. Is it something with direct observational evidence, like we use in physics? Is it something that has good abstract reasoning supporting it, like in mathematics or logic? Is it merely a definitional claim, like with bachelors? Is it something that they are saying about their own perceptual experience, like if I tell you I am in pain right now? What sort of claim is it supposed to be? That is how we figure out what sort of reasons we would expect to find for it.

Then we need to see if whatever the justification provided matches their degree of confidence. If they claim to be ‘absolutely certain’ or whatever, then they need an absolutely amazing justification. That makes it easier to object to, because they are so much harder to find. If someone just says they have a moderate degree of confidence in the claim, then a weaker justification will still make the claim rational.

Another issue is that being rational for them to claim is just the lowest bar that justification can clear. Persuading someone who has a different opinion requires more than this. Maybe you know all about car tires and don’t think that I need new tires because they look fine to you. If so, then even though my belief is rational (based on

the mechanic's claim), I'm not going to change your mind simply by telling you that. I would need to ask the mechanic why he thought I needed new tires, and then tell you that. To change someone's mind we often have a much harder job. This is why apologists have such a hard time. They need to do more than just explain why what they are saying is rational from their point of view, but also to persuade us to change our minds as well. It's a much higher bar to clear. This presup rubbish doesn't get close to either bar, in my opinion.

★ Like



Jonathan Simmons

April 5, 2018 at 11:10 am

Alex, thanks very much for taking the time to explain – you should be a philosophy teacher 😊

You have the advantage of having been trained so that you can dissect the drivel of presuppositionalism with precision. For the rest of us, we have to muddle along with “that just doesn't feel right, there must be a fallacy somewhere” and then hope that someone like you comes along.

I was so happy when you destroyed Slick. I know him from another context and he really is the most horrible man.

★ Liked by 1 person



lukekrell

November 21, 2019 at 9:35 pm

Thank you. As a Christian I can say that TAG, as you have represented it, is not a good argument; and the way you have represented the argument is consistent with my own personal experience.

That beings said, there are many slightly different versions of these arguments, because the terminology is not standardized among us amateurs.

I thought the discussion was good as well.

In my experience, the best Presuppers, when their backs are up against the wall, morph their TAG argument into the Moral Argument for the existence of God. Myself being a believer in the Moral Argument, I just wish they started there in the first place.

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