

The Contingency of Knowledge and Revelatory Theism

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Introduction

There are two fundamentally different ways to understand the world, intentional and accidental. An intentional world is one that comes about on purpose and for a purpose. It is a world that is what it is, because someone intended for it to be that way. In contrast, an accidental world is one that comes about by pure chance, for no purpose and for no reason. It is a world that is what it is by accident. All worldviews are, at bottom, either intentional or accidental.

These two kinds of worldviews describe very different worlds. They tell different stories about how the world came to be, about the nature of the world and about the nature of man. They give different accounts regarding man's relationship to the world and how the world can be known by man. These two accounts of man's knowledge present us with two very different epistemological stories.

The first story is of an epistemology in which man is aided. It is an epistemology that is grounded, not by man, but by someone who is in a position to know. It is grounded by God. It is a theonomous epistemology.

The second story is of an epistemology in which man is not aided. It is an epistemology that is grounded in man and by man. It is an autonomous epistemology.

As we look at these two stories, we will make a disquieting discovery. We will find that the second story is not true. For, the history of epistemology demonstrates that man, unaided, has not, and cannot, attain a foundation on which to base a theory of knowledge. We will see that any theory of knowledge that originates solely from man must be characterized as arbitrary, ambiguous, and incoherent. But, if man has no coherent theory of knowledge, then his beliefs are without warrant, and if his beliefs are without warrant, then he can make no claim to be in possession of knowledge.

If, however, the story of autonomous epistemology is not true, we will have to make a choice. We will either have to accept the lesson of history and resign ourselves to utter skepticism and ignorance, or, we will have to accept our first story and seek aid as to the foundations of epistemology. But, we will need to seek aid from someone who does not share our limitations. We will need aid from someone who does not share our struggle to understand what the world is, what he himself is, and how he and the world are epistemically related. We will need aid from someone who is not also entangled with the paradox of providing a justification criterion for his justification criterion. We will need aid from someone who is in a position to know. He is in a position to know because he does not stand on our side of the world, but stands in back of it. We will need aid from God.

Theonomous Epistemology

Our first story goes like this: Once upon a time there were those who believed that fundamental reality was One. This One, they believed, was personal, all-powerful, all-rational, and exceedingly creative. But, they did not think this belief to be an arbitrary metaphysical speculation. Rather, it is their testimony that the One had revealed this to them. They believed this revelation was true because it explained a great many things.

It explained the problem of the one and the many. Because everything in the universe is what the One intended it to be, nothing is what it is by chance. Consequently, every object in the universe is united, not

by an infinitely improbable accident, but necessarily. Because the many particulars of man's experience all originate from the One, they are by definition related to one another. Consequently, man's philosophical and scientific descriptions of those relationships are not mere fictions, but are real and meaningful.

Because the One is rational, logic has an absolute referent. And because rationality extends to everything the One has done, it is universal. Mind and matter are appropriate to one another. The categories of thought correspond to the categories of reality. Man's mental processes correspond to physical processes. Survival, science, and philosophy are possible. A thing in itself can be known.[1]

Because the One created man in His own image, man 'transcends' the deterministic nexus of the material world. The human mind is not a mere physical object locked into the great machine of the universe, where thoughts are nothing more than brain states, the mere products of antecedent causes, neither true nor false. Man 'transcends' nature and is related to it as subject to object.

Because the One regulates and orders His creation, nature is uniform and causality exists. Since the same causes bring about the same effects, induction is possible and universal propositions can be formulated. And since universal propositions are a precondition to logical deduction, logical deductions can be made.[2]

Because the One first conceived the patterns or kinds after which all particular instantiations are created, universals have a referent and are real. Consequently, the classification and categorizing of man's experience is meaningful. Language and thought are therefore possible.[3]

Because the One's character constitutes an absolute criteria which is obligatory on all creatures, and for which there are absolute consequences, morality has a referent.

You will recognize this as the revelation and cosmology of the three great monotheistic religions. But, we are not here concerned with whether or not one of these three is the true heir of that revelation. For that question is an in-house inquiry, which becomes relevant only after we have established the pre-conditional necessity of that revelation.

But this story is not generally accepted today. It is rejected as a wild guess and a vain imagining. Knowledge cannot be gotten from God whether He exists or not. Man himself must be the determiner of truth. "Man is the measure of all things" as Protagoras said. Even if the above story is true, every part of it must be certified by passing the cannons of man's autonomous epistemology.

And so, we must turn to the antithesis of this story. We must turn to the story of autonomous Epistemology. This story starts, as do most philosophy texts, not with Adam, Abraham, or Moses, but with Thales.

Autonomous Epistemology

The story of autonomous epistemology begins on May 28, 585 BC at six-thirteen in the evening. At least this is when Dr. Gordon Clark humorously suggests that philosophy began. It was then that the man who is generally recognized as the first philosopher, Thales, made the first prediction of a solar eclipse.

Though men had recorded the movements of heavenly bodies for eons, Thales was the first to see in these movements a pattern, a common denominator by which all heavenly bodies moved. He was the first to find a general law. He found unity in diversity. He reduced the many to one.

But, there are more things to unify in the universe, than the motion of heavenly bodies. Thales proposed that the one element that makes up and unites every object in the universe is water. Water is the primordial stuff of which all reality is made.

Now, what is important here, is not Thales answer, but the question he raised, "What, ultimately, is every thing?" This started the great debate.

Anaximenes said ultimate reality is air. Heraclitus said on the other hand, ultimate reality is fire. Parmenides said they were both wrong, it is "being."

This debate over the nature of ultimate reality was the beginning of metaphysics. And arguments over metaphysics lead to arguments about arguments. And the debate over what constituted a good argument was the beginning of epistemology. What was needed was a theory of knowledge by which one could know that a given proposition was true.

Now the pre-Socratics, have exemplified a few epistemological propensities that have continued throughout history. Some, such as Parmenides, felt that the best arguments are obtained through reason. For example, if all men are mortal and if Socrates is a man, then one can reason that Socrates is mortal, and necessarily so. The appeal to these thinkers is certainty. If reason clearly dictates something, and experience suggests something else, then there is a problem with experience. Reason, is believing.

On the other hand, some, such as Democritus, felt the best arguments are obtained through experience. Seeing, is believing. The appeal to these thinkers is the concreteness of their experience. If reason indicates something other than the dictates of observation, then you know something is wrong with your reasoning.

In time these propensities, and this debate, resolved itself into two primary rival theories of knowledge that are still with us today, rationalism and empiricism. Rationalism was developed by Plato and hit its high water mark with the father of modern philosophy Rene Descartes. Empiricism was developed by Plato's student Aristotle and reached its modern expression in John Lock.

Rationalism

The rationalist takes his model of truth from mathematics. The certainty of its axioms and conclusions appeal to him. Reason is primary and regulates his interpretation of experience. For the rationalist, at least some ideas such as the universality of logic and the fact that the sum of the angles in a triangle is exactly 180 degrees have never been experienced and must be gotten independently of and prior to experience. These ideas are known a priori. They are said to be innate and self-evidently true. Descartes says they are clear and distinct.

Unfortunately, these truths weren't self evident to the empiricists. They were quick to point out that not even the rationalists agree on what is clear and distinct. Plato, Descartes, and Teilhard de Chardin all conceived very different rationalist systems. Aristotle and Lock both expressed concern that such unjustified starting points would color one's observations and destroy objectivity. They felt that if one allows himself to begin with some absolute starting point, that is justified only by his own internal criterion and sense of rational necessity, then he has made himself the absolute determiner of truth and has abandoned any hope of objectivity.

For example, Euclidean Geometry has been the paradigm case of a priori formal systems for over two millennium. Its axioms are self evident, clear, and distinct. Let's take Euclid's Axiom of parallels:

"Given a straight line and a point not on that line, one and only one line can be drawn through that point parallel to the given line."

This axiom appears to most people to be self-evident and true beyond a rational doubt. With this, and Euclid's other axioms, a fully coherent system can be produced. The assumption behind rationalism is, that if a proposition is self evident, then it describes the world in which we live. Therefore, it has been believed for the last few millennium that Euclid's Geometry describes the world in which we live.

But, there are reasons for thinking that this self-evidentness has more to do with the structure of our language and our assumptions about reality, than with reality itself. Currently, there seems to be a consensus in cosmology that the universe is finite and unbounded. But, this means our universe is non-Euclidean. Thus, there can be no infinite straight lines in our universe and Euclid's fifth axiom is false. In

fact, fully coherent non-Euclidean geometry's have been developed that reject this axiom. Consequently, if we accept the current cosmological model, we have here a proposition that is both self-evident and false. If Euclid's axiom of parallels is necessary, then the current state of cosmology is false. But, if the current state of cosmology is even possible, then the traditional understanding of self-evidence is false.

Now, there is no problem with revising empirical a posteriori postulates, but a priori self-evident truths are supposed to be absolute and invariant. This and other such problems have prompted some philosophers to suggest that these self-evident notions simply express the limits of our perceptions and conceptual models. Our limited experience of space, until recently, was very Euclidean. This in turn defined the language by which we express these experiences and think. Propositions that appear self-evidently certain may do so because the rules of our language won't allow us to think otherwise.

Empiricism

In contrast, the empiricists proposed that all knowledge must be founded not on a priori assumptions, but on experience, a posteriori. All ideas represent some object in the world and must be traceable back to some concrete experience. Truth may not be certain, but it is concrete and objective. If you don't agree with someone's observation, you can see for your self.

But, as we said before, the empiricists had their problems too. First they had the obvious ones. On the one hand, the empiricist cannot see universal propositions and perfect triangles. On the other hand, he does see mirages and sticks that appear to bend when stuck in the water. Yet, in both these cases they make judgments contrary to these experiences. Furthermore, empiricists have never successfully accounted for how they could have any experience without first bringing concepts such as causality, space, time, quantity, etc. to the experience.

But, bigger problems start to develop when you take empiricism seriously. George Berkeley acknowledged Lock's realization that though our ideas come from our perceptions, the only objects of our minds are those ideas. Our minds never make direct contact with the external material world. Consequently, we can never set our ideas over against the material world and corroborate the integrity of those ideas. In fact, Berkeley observed, that since the mind never makes contact with the material world, there is no empirical reason to think that it is the source of our perceptions. In fact, there is no reason to think that the material world exists at all.

Let's assume we see a desk in front of us. What we are tempted to say is, "I have a perception of a desk in front of me, therefore, there is a desk in front of me." The first assertion, "I have a perception of a desk in front of me" is empirical and not controversial. But, the second assertion, "There is a desk in front of me" does not follow from the first. It has no logical connection. It is not empirical. It is a bold metaphysical assertion. The idea of material substances was a completely unnecessary and unjustified metaphysical entity that Berkeley dispensed of with a flick of Occam's Razor.

This kind of rigorous empiricism would know no bounds in the hands of David Hume. Hume revived Leibniz's analytic/synthetic distinction and decided he would allow as rational only those beliefs that are either analytically true or empirically verifiable. Thus all ideas are either analytic, synthetic, or nonsense. However, Hume's analytic truths, though known a priori, should not be taken as a concession to the rationalists. Hume's analytic truths are mere tautologies. For example, take the phrase "All sisters are women." Propositions like this may tell us something about how we use language, but they give us no new information about the world. They are trivial.

Hume took Berkeley's rigorous empiricism a step further and demonstrated that just as there is no empirical basis for belief in an external material world as the cause of our perceptions, there is no empirical basis for belief in an internal mental world either. He pointed out that since our experience is limited to our perceptions, there is nothing in our experience to indicate that the origin of our perceptions is either a material substance or a mental substance. Therefore, any substantive affirmation beyond perception is empirically unjustified. The external world, whether mental or material, is empirically un-demonstrable and analytically unnecessary. It is a mere metaphysical speculation. As a matter of habit we may continue to

believe in it, but it is nothing more than an unjustified dogma. He destroys here all naturalistic justification for belief in an external world.

He then turns his empirical gun on the internal world. He points out that our notion of our selves as a substance that continues to receive perceptions is yet another unsubstantiated postulation. Among our perceptions we never perceive the self as the perceiver of our perceptions. He destroys here all autonomous rational justification for the notion of the self as an entity independent of a collection of perceptions.

Our concepts of an external material world and of an internal mental or spiritual world are neither analytic nor are they perceived, therefore they are, on the canons of empiricism, nonsense.

But, what other concepts are neither analytically true nor perceived? Hume examined the philosophical concept of identity. Identity is the concept that there is some continuity in the nature of an object over time. In other words, is the person reading this paragraph the same entity that read the last paragraph? Hume observed that all we perceive, strictly speaking, is a series of sensations, but we have no sensation that corresponds to the idea that a given object in one sensation is the same object in another sensation. We have no sensation of identity. This concept is supplied by the perceiver, yet, it is not analytically necessary nor is it perceived. You may recognize this as the same point made by Heraclitus when he said, "you can never step into the same river twice."

What Hume is most famous for, however, is a critique that fundamentally upset the foundations of both science and common sense, his critique of causality. He noted that when he looked at two events, say one billiard ball striking another, that he could perceive one ball moving prior to the movement of the other ball. He could perceive the one ball touching (continuity) the other ball. He could perceive one ball moving after being touched by the other ball. But, he could not perceive a necessary connection between the two balls. He could never see the cause between the two events.

Causality, like identity, and external and internal substance, are properties of our minds, not of the world. They are the products of our imagination. The reason we believe in the external world, the self, and identity is not for logical or empirical reasons, for there are none. It is psychological; it is a habit of the mind.

But, not even Hume went far enough. First, we must ask if Hume's analytic \ synthetic criteria for truth known analytically or synthetically? It is not true by definition and it is certainly not a perception. Therefore, on Hume's own criterion, it is nonsense. This is a problem that will later plague the logical positivists.

Secondly, if there is no identity between one event and another, each and every perception is new and distinct. Hume should not have been able to say there is a similarity or likeness between any two perceptions at all. Similarity is not perceived, and to suggest a similarity between perceptions at any level is to make an "identity," something that Hume already demonstrated could not be done empirically. Consequently, Hume should not have been able to speak of prior billiard ball events and later billiard ball events, for to do so is to make an identity between the two event perceptions. In fact, Hume shouldn't have identified a single event as a billiard ball, for to do so, is to identify that perception as a member of the category "balls." But, there can be no categories if there is no similarity between perceptions. And, if there are no categories, no given perception can be identified as an instance of a category. But if no given perception can be identified as an instance of a category, then perceptions cannot be identified at all. If perceptions cannot be identified then they cannot be spoken of and nothing can be known. In fact, propositions cannot even be identified as analytic or synthetic.

As Dr. Bauhnsen points out, a rigorous commitment to admitting only propositions that are certified by either reason or direct perception is not only inadequate as an epistemology, it is completely destructive to the entire enterprise. But, having rejected Revelatory Theism, what alternative does the autonomous philosopher have?

Some have suggested that after Hume, philosophy should have been over. David Hume didn't just attack particular problems associated with particular theories of knowledge, he attacked the very foundational dogmas that under-gird all autonomous theories of knowledge. He demonstrated just how cut off the knower is from the objects of knowledge and from himself. For a theory of knowledge to proceed, man will have to already know a priori what the world is, what he is, and how the two are and could be related. But, this is a principled problem and cannot be solved by mere creativity and ingenuity.

Some future philosophers will ignore these critical problems and continue to offer naïve descriptions of the world they believe to be true, and others will simply abandon truth as the objective of epistemology and propose other programs. We will look now at an example of a philosopher who upon realizing our natural limitations, begins to redefine the job description of epistemologists.

Hume shook the foundations of epistemology so strongly that he awakened a professor in Königsberg Prussia by the name of Immanuel Kant. Kant saw that by demonstrating that certain concepts such as causality, substance, identity, etc. were indeterminable as realities in the world, Hume had destroyed epistemology. He then announced that he could save epistemology by shifting the location of these realities from the world to the mind. He said, they are the categories of thought. They are the way we must think about the world.

Because the categories of thought exist in the mind prior to experience they are a priori. Because they refer to reality, they are synthetic. Hence they are called synthetic a priori's. Our experience of the world is a compound of sense data and these categories of thought. They are the way we perceive the world, what he called phenomena, whether it is the way the world, what he called noumena, is or not. Hence, Kant points out, we cannot know the noumenal world itself. We can only know the world as the mind presents it to us.

But, did Kant actually save epistemology? Well, his synthetic a priori's, by his own admission, describe no properties in the noumenal world. They are the mind's contribution to the phenomenal world. So, what exactly does it mean to say they are synthetic? Prior to Kant the task of epistemology was to justify our synthetic judgments, but these were judgments regarding the noumenal world, and, Hume demonstrated that this could not be done. Kant proved that his synthetic a priori's are necessary to experience, but he does not mean by synthetic what Hume and others meant by synthetic. He has not proven what Hume said could not be proven. He has not answered Hume at all. Kant has changed the subject. Kant did not tell us about the world, he told us about our minds and about how we think and called it synthetic. Furthermore, Hume already told us that the mind habitually thinks of the world in terms of causality, substance, identity, etc. and since these are descriptions of our psychology and not of the world, the world cannot be known and science is not possible. Kant's categories of thought, however, are also a description of the way the mind thinks of the world and not descriptions of the world itself, yet, Kant thinks this saves epistemology.

Foundationalism

Those who followed Kant's lead gave up trying to describe the world as it actually is. Because they realized that all the traditional rational and empirical epistemologies and conceptions of science have a similar underlying structure. They are all foundationalistic. They realized that all beliefs could be divided into two categories. Beliefs that are justified by referring to other beliefs and beliefs that are not subject to justification, but are the foundation for all other beliefs. The challenge here, of course, are these foundational beliefs. Rationalists thought their innate self-evident a priori beliefs were the best candidates, and empiricists thought their sense impressions were the best candidates. But, this discussion has never advanced beyond Hume. We should, in fact, recognized that this is a problem beyond resolution if the object of knowledge is to be the world.

Aristotle had already pointed out long ago that our options regarding first truths, that is foundations, are limited. Asked to justify why we ultimately believe something, we will either give an answer or we will not. If we do not give an answer, our belief is arbitrary and fideistic. If we give an answer, then our answer will make reference to some other belief or beliefs. Then we will be asked to justify those beliefs and so on. If in the course of justifying our beliefs we refer back to some belief we have already been

asked to justify, then we will be involved in circular reasoning. If, however, we never refer back to a belief we have already been asked to justify, then we will be involved in an infinite regress.

None of these are satisfactory. A fideistic belief is, by definition, unjustified and does not differ epistemologically from its antithesis. If we think it does have an epistemic advantage over its antithesis then that advantage could be offered as a justification. But, at that point we are on our way to circularity or an infinite regress.

An infinite regress is not satisfactory. To say that the justification for a given belief finally comes at the end of an unending series of beliefs, is simply to obfuscate the fact that the belief in question is never justified. Consequently, an infinite regress is just another fideistic belief and suffers its same fate.

Circularity is also not satisfactory, but it is much more interesting. Advocates of a philosophical position called coherentism think they have beaten the foundation dilemma. They point out that beliefs do not neatly divide into the categories of foundational beliefs and justified beliefs. All our beliefs are related to one another in the form of a coherent web. Some subset of our beliefs may be more important and juridical than other beliefs, but all beliefs hang on all other beliefs, and nothing is foundational.

But, as Michael Depaul in his article "Coherentism" points out, coherentism really doesn't escape the foundational problem at all. It is simply another "version of foundationalism that holds all beliefs to be foundational." He says regarding the coherentist's solution to the problem of circularity, "But coherentism seems to be a nonstarter, for if no belief in the chain is justified to begin with, there is nothing to pass along. Altering the metaphor, we might say that coherentism seems about as likely to succeed as a bucket brigade that does not end at a well, but simply moves around in a circle." [4]

The bottom line is this; we must determine our criterion of justification, prior to determining our criterion of justification, so that we can use it to determine our criterion of justification. If we recognize this as a problem that is in principle unsolvable, we will save ourselves considerable time and headache by not chasing solutions that appear to work, only because they have first obfuscated the problem.

Nicholas Everitt in his book "Modern Epistemology" says of the current state of analysis that, "... this search for foundations has been unsuccessful." It has failed in mathematics and it has failed in science. All particular proposals have failed, and it fails in principle. [5] Everitt concludes with the question, "Given this inevitable failure, what if anything is left for the epistemologist to do?" [6]

Skepticism

As we have already seen, the foundationalist can provide no justification for his belief in causality, identity, externality, and self. But, the skeptic would give these problems a little more emphasis and draw our attention to a few more problems.

External World. We have already seen from Berkeley and Hume that man cannot justify belief in the external world. Immanuel Kant said it was one of the greatest scandals of science and philosophy that there was no proof of the existence of the external world. Because we can make no distinction between our internal world of thought and the external world, we can not know that what we call the external world is not just a form of our internal world. Therefore, we cannot know that the external world even exists.

Willard Van Orman Quine admits, "Physical objects are conceptually imported ... as convenient intermediaries ... comparable epistemologically to the gods of Homer. For my part, I do ... believe in physical objects and not in Homer's gods ... But in point of epistemological footing the physical objects and the gods differ only in degree and not in kind ..." [7]

The Self. We should also make a few more observations about our notion of the self, because this has been the autonomous man's most confident assertion. Ever since Rene Descartes said "Cogito Ergo Sum," "I think, therefore I am," Man has at least been confident of his own existence. But what precisely does the term "self" refer to? What are you? Are you simply a dream, an idea in the mind of a god or demon? Are

you a program on magnetic tape as an old Moody Blues song suggests? Are you simply the nexus of ideas as David Hume suggests. Are you material, spiritual, abstract, or concrete? Whenever autonomous man says his self exists, he has some metaphysical notion behind the term that he cannot justify. But if no given notion of the self can be justified, then no content can be attributed to the notion of the self.

We are confident in the assertion “I exist,” only to the extent that it is completely without content and meaning. This is why Cornelius Van Til refers to the Cogito as “a rock in a bottomless sea.” Yes, it is a rock, but it rests nowhere, can do nothing, and means nothing.

Reliability of the Senses. Autonomous man also cannot justify the belief that there is a sufficient correspondence between the way the world appears to him and the way the world really is. In fact, the world can appear to us only as the senses present it to us. But, we already know that our eyes do not see the full spectrum of light. Nor do we know if objects in the world have properties, maybe essential properties, for which we have no corresponding sense. Why should we think our five senses detect even a small percentage of the range of properties that exist in the world? We do know, that the sonar of bats, the stereoscopic eyes of man, and the compound eyes of flies all project very different images. Each gives sufficient information for survival, but ‘which’ should be taken as normative? How do we know any of them are sufficient to enable us to even engage in an analysis of the possibility of empirical justification?

But, even if our senses were reliable, after the work of Hume, Kant, Wittgenstein, Quine, and all the coherentists, we know that all experience is sufficiently theory laden that it is not rational to simply assume a close identity between reality and our perceptions of it. Even if it is a fact that all minds impose the same structures on the world, causing all our experiences to be uniform, that does not, as some have suggested, give us objectivity, rather, it precludes our ability to contrast our experiences and get behind our mental structures to the real world.

As Richard Rorty aptly puts it, “Since truth is a property of sentences, since sentences are dependent for their existence upon vocabularies, and since vocabularies are made by human beings, so are truths.” If at bottom, vocabularies really are made by human beings, then Rorty is right.[8]

The Inductive Problem. The autonomous man cannot justify his habit of making inductive generalizations. Hume argued that inductive generalizations are not even probable. No number of particular instantiations of an event can justify a universal description of that event in all places and all time. Hume points out that for one to argue that induction is even probable they would also have to make the case for causality and the uniformity of nature.

Bertrand Russell expresses the problem well, he says, “What these arguments prove – and I do not think the proof can be controverted – is that induction is an independent logical principle, incapable of being inferred either from experience or from other logical principles, and that without this principle science is impossible.”[9]

Imre Lakatos says, “One can today easily demonstrate that there can be no valid derivation of a law of nature from any finite number of facts; but we still keep reading about scientific theories being proved from facts. Why this stubborn resistance to elementary logic?”[10]

Now, Karl Popper also thought that Hume’s arguments against induction were insurmountable. So he advocated the abandonment of induction and proposed his theory of falsification as an alternative. But this doesn’t solve the problem of justification at all. First, it abandons the possibility of finding a proposition that is positively indicated and justified, for the exceedingly weak possibility of a mere guess being corroborated by our failure to falsify it. Secondly, given our ability to manufacture secondary hypothesis to protect a beloved hypothesis from falsification, no proposition can ever be clearly falsified. Thirdly, even if some counter example to one’s favorite theory could be produced, since one’s theory exists as part of a larger web of beliefs, one may give up some other belief in the web rather than the theory that might have been falsified. For example, let’s take the old story of the man who thought he was dead, but agreed that dead men don’t bleed. I could prick his finger, cause it to bleed, and then offer that fact as proof that he is

still alive. However, he could logically respond that I did nothing more than refute the notion that dead men don't bleed.

Lakatos explains the problem with "falsification." He says "Scientists have thick skins. They do not abandon a theory merely because facts contradict it. They normally either invent some rescue hypothesis to explain what they then call a mere anomaly or, if they cannot explain the anomaly, they ignore it, and direct their attention to other problems."

"Newton's science, for instance, is not simply a set of four conjectures – the three laws of mechanics and the law of gravitation. These four laws constitute only the "hard core" or the Newtonian program. But this hard core is tenaciously protected from refutation by a vast "protective belt" of auxiliary hypotheses."

"Now, Newton's theory of gravitation, Einstein's relativity theory, quantum mechanics, Marxism, Freudianism, are all research programs, each with a characteristic hard core stubbornly defended, each with its more flexible protective belt and each with its elaborate problem-solving machinery. Each of them, at any stage of its development, has unsolved problems and undigested anomalies. All theories, in this sense, are born refuted and die refuted." [11]

Without justifying inductive generalizations, scientific conclusions cannot be reached, and universal propositions cannot be made.

The Uniformity of Nature. Now, universal propositions also make claims about all future instantiations of the subject. But, this is only so if nature is uniform. And autonomous man cannot demonstrate the uniformity of nature. He can argue that the future will be like the past, only if he already knows that the future will be like the past.

Bertrand Russell explains it well, "It has been argued that we have reason to know that the future will resemble the past, because what was the future has constantly become the past, and has always been found to resemble the past, so that we really have experience of the future, namely of times which were formerly future, which we may call past futures. But such an argument really begs the very question at issue. We have experience of past futures, but not of future futures, and the question is: Will future futures resemble past futures? This question is not to be answered by an argument, which starts from past futures alone. We have therefore still to seek for some principle which shall enable us to know that the future will follow the same laws as the past." [12]

Again, without a justification for the Uniformity of Nature, no scientific generalizations can ever be justified.

The Deductive Problem. Without justification for induction and for the uniformity of nature, no universal propositions can be justified. Without universal propositions, man cannot make use of deductive reasoning.

Logic. Autonomous man can make no direct case for the validity of logic. He can not even say what logic is. Is logic a substance? Is it a property? Is it concrete and particular, or is it abstract and universal? What is it and where is it? This problem is particularly difficult for materialists. Not having a category for non-material universal entities, they often suggest that logic is merely a convention. This of course makes it arbitrary and destroys its universality.

Metaphysics and logic are very closely related. Do we know a priori that Eastern Monism is false? If not, then possibly all is "A" and there is no "non-A." But if there is no non-A, then are the laws of Excluded Middle and Non-contradiction meaningful? How do we know a priori that the monists are wrong?

How, exactly, do we know that all reality must conform to these principles we call logic? How do we know that there exists in the world some universal principle that says, "If all men are mortal, and Socrates is a man, that he absolutely must be mortal?"

Can inductive or deductive inferences be marshaled on behalf of logic? We have already seen that the case for these principles themselves cannot be made. More to the point, induction and deduction are methods that presuppose logic, and therefore any direct case for logic is necessarily involved in circular reasoning.

One may be tempted here to respond that, because no counter example can be imagined, the universality of logic is undeniable. But, does the mere fact that we are psychologically so disposed that we cannot think of the world in other than logical categories, justify us in concluding that the world is bound by those categories? Why should we think our psychological limitations are descriptive of the entire universe? A psychological inability to modify the way we think about the universality of logic does not prove it is in fact universal. It merely means we cannot modify the way we think about it.

If we cannot answer these questions, what are we reduced to? Many of us consider logic to be the bedrock of our world-view and our theory of knowledge. But what kind of a foundation is this? Do I say, "I don't know what it is, I don't know why I believe it, and I don't know if it always applies, but it is the solid foundation on which everything else is built?"

We are not trying to refute logic. We are merely pointing out the inability of man, unaided, to account for something so central and basic to the knowing process. You see, none of these foundational notions are meaningful or are justified individually. Rather, they all find their meaning in a worldview that is itself justified.

These problems and others are what I refer to as the jump-start problem. How do we jump-start the foundations of our epistemology? At this point it becomes clear that autonomous philosophers have been reduced to wild guesses as to their foundations. Most people hold to all the above listed beliefs, but they do so as articles of faith, not justified beliefs.

Given the problems discussed thus far, many contemporary philosophers such as Nietzsche, Quine, Rorty, Unger, Harmon, Lehrer and others have become skeptics as to the possibility of objective truth. According to Richard Boyd the consensus among philosophers of science is that, "Foundationalist conceptions of knowledge in general, and of scientific knowledge in particular, are untenable..."[13] Rather, they have given up on the possibility of truth in any traditional sense.

Pragmatism

Because of the failure of foundationalism, and because of the success of science, science has become the contemporary paradigm for epistemology. Utility has become the modern-day criterion for truth. If it works, it is true. This pragmatic theory of truth first advocated by Pierce, James, and Dewey looks to a proposition for its cash value. This theory has been advocated most effectively in our time by some of the most important philosophers of our day such as Sellars, Popper, Rorty and Quine.

Rorty says, "For the pragmatist, true sentences are not true because they correspond to reality, and so there is no need to worry what sort of reality, if any, a given sentence corresponds to – no need to worry about what "makes" it true. ... He drops the notion of truth as correspondence with reality altogether, and says that modern science does not enable us to cope because it corresponds, it just plain enables us to cope."[14]

This approach to truth should hardly need a rebuttal. The pragmatic project is to identify what language games and forms of life will best enable a given agent to achieve his desired goal. This might be an interesting project in itself, but its pursuit demonstrates the complete failure of autonomous man to make any objective sense out of life, reason, and experience in any type of a normative descriptive sense. Man has not won the game of knowledge, he finally realized he could not win and found a new game to play.

But, man cannot win the game of pragmatism either. For even though he is not playing the game of knowledge, he will still need to provide an unattainable criterion for determining who are the proper agents and what is the proper goal. Only when these choices have been made can man invoke his science and ingenuity to decide what is the most efficient means for the chosen agent to achieve his chosen goal. As Dr. Bauhnsen summarizes,

“We must press on and ask critically about the rationality or the arbitrariness of our choice of goals. We can grant the superiority of sciences problem solving tools only after we are convinced science is dealing with the right problems in the first place. So then, why should our goal be that of coping with the environment instead of the alternative, perhaps more weighty, aims of mystical union with nature, inner personal rapport, appreciation of beauty, and on and on . . . What justifies the particular goal chosen by the empirical scientist? Perhaps that goal is simply arbitrary, consequently reintroducing relativism and skepticism into science.

Now, to avoid arbitrariness and question begging an external justification of the chosen goal becomes necessary, forcing the pragmatist to go outside his epistemology and to naturalize his procedures. This justification will be descriptive in nature claiming that a given agent, the scientist, succeeds in getting to his given goal if he adheres to a given method. Now, when the agent is an individual and the goal is dictated by self interest, epistemology is naturalized or reduced to psychology, which is what you find in Quine’s article “Epistemology Naturalized” (and) in Piaget’s “Genetic Epistemology.” If the agent is the specie and the goal of science is the survival of the specie, epistemology is naturalized into biology, which is what you find in Popper’s “Objective Knowledge” and Steven Toulmin’s “Human Understanding.” If you take the agent as a social class, the goal as its domination over other classes, epistemology reduces to sociology or history, as in Marxist epistemology, as you also find in the sociology of knowledge. When the agent is seen as a culture with the goal of serving its conventional aims, epistemology is reduced to anthropology, which is what you find in Winche’s book “The Idea of a Social Science.” The trouble with all of these naturalizing epistemologies, which reduce to one branch of descriptive science or another, is that they answer the request for a justification of science by simply skirting it.”[15]

Science gives neither a rational nor pragmatic justification for its practice.

In fact, Everitt points out in his analysis of Quines “Epistemology Naturalized” that since Quine is not concerned about the existence of the external world, but only about the psychological processes that exist between the data a person receives, the input, and their view of the world, the output, that is produced as a result of that data, Naturalized Epistemology is not dealing with the same question as Traditional Epistemology and therefore may not really be epistemology at all.[16]

Conclusion

This epistemological dead end view of history is not just the speculations of a committed Christian. Richard Rorty similarly summarizes history. He says that, “. . . once upon a time we felt a need to worship something which lay beyond the visible world. Beginning in the seventeenth century we tried to substitute a love of truth for a love of God, treating the world described by science as a quasi divinity. Beginning at the end of the eighteenth century we tried to substitute a love of ourselves for a love of scientific truth. . .”

He goes on to suggest that we, “. . .try to get to the point where we no longer worship anything, where we treat nothing as a quasi divinity, where we treat everything – our language, our conscience, our community – as a product of time and chance.”[17]

Cornelius Van Till points out that this world of chance, that Rorty endorses, is at the heart of the non-Theistic world-view. This world of chance is in stark antithetical contrast to the intentional world-view of Christianity. It is in this intentional world alone, that the world, man, and reason are connected. It is in this intentional world alone, that truth can exist and in which any theory of knowledge must take place. The very notion of philosophy and science, as descriptive endeavors, presupposes that man and the various objects of the world are all united in a relationship essentially as outlined in our first story. It presupposes that behind everything is a unifying entity. Thus, traditional philosophy and science are theistic concepts.

Rorty himself acknowledges this point. He says, “The very idea that the world or the self has an intrinsic nature – one which the physicist or the poet may have glimpsed – is a remnant of the idea that the world is a divine creation, the work of someone who had something in mind, who Himself spoke some language in

which He described His own project. Only if we have some such picture in mind, some picture of the universe as either itself a person or as created by a person can we make sense of the idea that the world has an “intrinsic nature.”[18]

What is Rorty saying here? He is saying that the idea of truth as a description of the nature of the world is meaningful only if the world has an intrinsic nature. But the world does not have an intrinsic nature if everything is what it is by chance. In a chance world the properties of a thing are not connected or united to one another. It is infinitely improbable that any two entities will share the same property, or any two properties share the same entity, purely by chance. Only if an entity has in back of it, something by which its possible states of existence are limited, is there a limit to its possible states of existence. Our unifying descriptions of a chance world are fictions. It is only if everything is what it is, not by chance, but by intention that our unifying descriptions of the world can be true and meaningful. Rorty correctly sees that such an intentional world is the world that belongs to our first story. It is a world that came forth from the mind of a divine creator. This theistic story is the precondition not just for truth, knowledge, and the intelligibility of experience, but for metaphysics as well. Rorty has inadvertently given us here the transcendental argument for the existence of God and the truth of His revelation.

Karl Popper gives a good explanation of the Transcendental Argument. He says, “An argument which appeals to the fact that we possess knowledge or that we can learn from experience, and which concludes from this fact that knowledge or learning from experience must be possible, and further, that every theory which entails the impossibility of knowledge, or of learning from experience, must be false, may be called a ‘transcendental argument’.”[19]

For example, we saw earlier that no direct argument can be given for logic. Yet, even if we cannot say what logic is, we are not willing to give it up. For to do so, is to unravel the entire fabric of epistemology. And this is exactly why we believe in it. Not because it is the conclusion of some inductive or deductive argument, but because it is foundational to inductive and deductive arguments. This is the strongest inference one can have. This is a transcendental inference. It is in this way, we argue for God.

What the history of epistemology teaches us is that man, without an epistemological jump-start from God, without the revelation of God and the theistic world view expounded in it, cannot know the nature of himself, logic, the world, universals, or how they all are, or could be, related. In short he cannot attain a coherent theory of knowledge. Consequently, no beliefs can be justified, and no beliefs can attain to the level of knowledge. Therefore, because Theistic Revelation alone is the basis upon which knowledge is possible, it is the precondition for knowledge and is transcendently and necessarily true.

Autonomous man can use reason and his senses while denying belief in God, and can thereby do math, science, and manipulate the world around him. But, he can give no account of reason and senses apart from God. Therefore, just as reason presupposes the actuality of logic whether or not one believes in it, so, reason presupposes the actuality of God and the truth of our first story whether or not one believes in it.

This being the case, all arguments are arguments for the existence of God and no argument against the existence of God can be made. For in the final analysis, an argument against the existence of God is like an argument against arguments.

It is when one realizes that it is not possible to give an autonomous account of knowledge at all, he comes to a crossroads. He must, either maintain his epistemological autonomy and surrender to the most radical skepticism, or, he must surrender his autonomy to the revelation of God, not as a conclusion that has met the standards of his epistemological criterion, but as the foundation and precondition of the epistemological criterion itself. Without a revelation from God, we cannot know that all the objects of the world are rationally related and that our attributes are appropriate to know it.

You may recognize this as a simple disjunctive syllogism. Given that knowledge is possible at all, Theonomous Epistemology and Autonomous Epistemology are antithetical systems. One must be true and one must be false. If one is false, then the other is true. We have seen that, in principle, Autonomous Epistemology is not possible. On this premise all facts and all experience are unintelligible. Therefore, we

must conclude that the precondition to knowledge, to science, and to philosophy is the existence of God and the veracity of his revelation.

One's web of beliefs, his world-view, determines the meaning that he applies to an experience. It is the foundation and the criterion by which he determines truth. But, only if man's mind and senses are appropriate for discovering the world, and only if his interpretive scheme, his world-view, is correct can he attain to truth. But, this is possible only if he is intended for this world, and only if his world-view comes from someone who is in a position to know. All other world-views amount to nothing more than wild guesses and vain imaginings.

God is proven, not as the conclusion of rational or empirical theistic arguments, but as the very ground of argument itself. It is with the surrender to God's view of Himself, the world, and ourselves that one can articulate a coherent theory of knowledge. God's revelation is not validated by some autonomous epistemology. Rather, our epistemology is validated by the revelation of God and the story contained in that revelation. God's revelation is self-authenticating, because, by it, everything else is authenticated.

[1] Isaiah 45:18

[2] Gen. 1:5; Lev. 26:4; Jer 33:25

[3] Gen. 1:25

[4] "Coherentism" in "The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy" edited by Robert Audi p134

[5] Modern Epistemology: A New Introduction. P180-181

[6] Modern Epistemology: A New Introduction. P181

[7] "From a Logical Point Of View" p44

[8] Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity p 21

[9] "A History of Western Philosophy" p674

[10] "The Methodology of Scientific Research" in Philosophy: An Introduction to the Labor of Reason" p263

[11] The Methodology of Scientific Research

[12] "The Problems of Philosophy" p64-65

[13] "The Philosophy of Science" p.xii

[14] "Consequences of Pragmatism" p.xvi-xvii

[15] Contemporary Problems in Philosophy – Tape

[16] Modern Epistemology: A New Introduction

[17] "Contingency, irony, and solidarity" p22

[18] "Contingency, irony, and solidarity" p21

[19] "The Logic of Scientific Discovery" p368 footnote