



Circular Reasoning

A Christian reacted to one of my FB posts in which I asserted that humans can intuitively distinguish between good and evil and verify truth without the aid of religious dogma. He goes on to defend circular reasoning on a philosophical basis:

“First, it seems that your presuppositions dictate that we somehow establish truth by evidences (which is a fallacy. Absolutes are not established by evidences or appeal to them), but you have to answer this question: By what standard to you believe that evidences are able to arrive at truth claims? How can particulars establish generals, or is this not an inductive fallacy? You may accuse Gil of circular reasoning, but in doing so you accuse yourself, since epistemic circularity is a necessity for properly basic beliefs. You must select a first principle, and I think you did – intuition. But this leads to a circularity. You believe it because you believe it. If you try to look at evidences, you must then test the evidences and then the evidences of the evidences ad infinitum. You must ask yourself epistemological questions, but let’s cover that for a bit. You state that consciousness and intuition make us feel (this is an appeal to sensory experience) that something is wrong. But how? Appeals to intuition and sensation have caused tyrants to believe other than what you seem to believe – then what is the standard? Subjectivism utterly fails in this regard, so there is no use in making any truth claims at all since Gil can just counter your claim and no standard is established, and nobody can truly make any statements concerning the Bible if morality is subjective or emanates from consciousness or intuition, which is something that the history of philosophy has demonstrated to be excessively problematic, and as of right now, Postmodernism is experiencing an overhaul due to its failure to account for moral absolutes.

Ethics never begins with a social opinion or a categorical imperative (intuition) as you seem to be suggesting. I order for you to call something evil, you have to make sure it is evil – yet you have not supplied a transcendent standard or a law that transcends mere consciousness (I believe your worldview is unable to supply such an all-encompassing standard of ethics). You have accused the “biblical God” of brutality and other scruples, but you have not told us why? What makes something wrong? There must be a standard, and it is not inside humans – it does not proceed from humans, otherwise tomorrow, what is wrong can become right, and this has occurred before in human history. There is no consensus of right and wrong, that proceeds from humans, because we have still not answered the question “why is something wrong?” What if your views, Lynn, are actually evil, and what you believe is evil is actually good? Intuition would not be able to help you there. So by charging God and / or the Bible with wrongdoing, you are shooting yourself in the foot, essentially, since you have not answered by what conditions can something be right or wrong.

You mention genocide, yet you do not remember that God is the giver of life, and therefore he can take it. Humans commit genocide, not God, since they are commanded to not illegitimately take life. You should have known this when "you were a Christian." God's moral law is for humans (you) to follow, not God. God is law, holy, and perfect. He does not need to love His neighbor because he does not have one, and He cannot commit adultery because he does not have a wife. All ethics and morals proceed from the Being of God. He dictates what is right and wrong, and He never sins or commits wrong. Have you not been yet able to analyze that the reason you feel that Yahweh (God) is somehow wrong is because you yourself hate him? You have not been able to point out why something is wrong, and it seems that you misunderstand what Christianity teaches about the Person of God. Sin is something humans (you) do, not God, and God the Creator gets to tell his creatures (you) what is good and evil, and the source is not humans. When humans desire to disobey God, they sin, and this is why they need redemption from God's wrath which condemns justly.

So the following things need to make sense in your worldview: How does what we think in the mind comport with external reality? How are you able to postulate a real truth claim that does not constitute a silly opinion that possesses no ontological weight? And can your worldview stand against the scrutiny of the ages?

All philosophies, at their foundations, including revelatory philosophies, empiricism, rationalism, irrationalism, and subjectivism, are circular. They are axiomatic in nature. First principles are chosen, not proven - and this is something that you will quickly begin to realize.

To aid in our discussion, I recommend the following words from the Stanford Encyclopedia of philosophy regarding 'Epistemic Circularity.' The Bible presents a system of epistemology and ontology, and ethics, that offers an all-encompassing worldview." -Felipe

My response: How is truth established?

I often accuse defenders of Christian doctrine as engaging in circular reasoning. Felipe's argument is that circular reasoning is common to all belief systems, which it is. I have no problem with that.

As I have stated that evidence is important to me in validating belief, Felipe then questions by what standard is evidence validated. Intuition, insofar as I used intuition as part of my argument for an archetypal knowing of good vs. evil, then becomes fair game.

Is intuition to be accepted as an infallible source of truth? Of course not, at least not on any specific area of interest. Even messages arriving from the spirit realm must be dealt with some caution, not due to a suspected intent to deceive, but because simply being a discarnate spirit does not guarantee infallible knowledge.

I only invoked the intuition argument in the general sense that incarnated souls have at least a dim memory of being one with God (Source), and therefore know intuitively how to recognize God's love and light as opposed to fear and hatred. On this level, I would maintain that intuition is infallible. Of course, many choose to follow fear and hatred and probably lose their moral compass, but the memory of being one with Source is still buried somewhere within.

Regarding evidence, this too can be a slippery slope if the rules of evidence can't be agreed upon, or the corresponding worldviews are too far apart. My use of evidence in this case can best be explained by recapping the overall argument:

The Christian believer takes the "leap of faith" and becomes "saved". In doing so, the believer adopts a number of beliefs common to Christian teaching.

One of these beliefs is that a theistic God exists that created humans for a single life on earth, during which time salvation will be either accepted or rejected. Depending on the choice, either eternal reward or punishment will be meted out.

Note that the solitary evidence in support of these beliefs come from the Bible. Acceptance of the Bible as the reliable and authorized “Word of God” is also a required presupposition, but on what evidential grounds does that rest?

Apologists point to the number of correlating manuscripts etc. While the manuscripts may be accurate and the translations accurate, what does this tell us about the source? Nothing. Only through a “leap of faith” can anyone assert that God speaks authoritatively through the Bible.

In contrast, a large collection of evidence has surfaced that most of us have incarnated into dozens or hundreds of lives. This evidence can be separated from circular reasoning, for it arrives through the research of many, with a variety of belief systems and worldviews represented.

One Example:

Dr. Brian Weiss, a highly respected and prestigious psychiatrist, uncovered a case of reincarnation quite by accident. As he recounts in his book “Many Lives, Many Masters”, he was a classically trained physician who believed that life did not extend beyond the physical.

A patient came to him with severe anxiety and phobias. She was deathly afraid of water and often feared she would suffocate. Dr. Weiss tried all conventional treatments with no avail. He finally turned to hypnosis, assuming there must have been a traumatic event in childhood or infancy that caused the symptoms. He tried regressing the patient back through childhood, back to the moment of birth, even within the womb. No trauma was uncovered. In a moment of frustration, he told her to “go back to where the symptoms originated”. She immediately began to recount a life in the Middle East perhaps 2000-3000 years ago. A flood of water had engulfed her village, and she drowned as she desperately tried to hold on to her baby.

Dr. Weiss was astounded, because his belief system didn’t support the concept of past lives. Nevertheless, the reality of his patient’s past life was staring at him. He tried to discount it from many angles, but finally realized that his patient did not possess the ability to fabricate the

details that she gave. She didn't even remember much about the session when she came out of the trance.

Dr. Weiss went on to explore many other lives of this patient, uncovering information that explained much about her present relationships. Her boyfriend in this life turned up as her father in another life, her niece had been her daughter, etc. The web of karmic issues between several souls that shared many lifetimes helped explain the tensions between them in this life.

Application:

The reality is that past life therapy has helped many overcome problems and better understand their present life. This technique is not based on any particular belief system. It is a tool that can help explore the uncharted reality within our minds.

However, this tool and others like it are precluded from Christian practice. Orthodox Christian doctrine states that we only have one life, and it began when we were conceived or born.

Herein is the problem posed by circular reasoning: If rigid enough, there is no way of introducing new information that might come to light.

Let's suppose that I used to avoid eating radishes. I believed that they tasted bad, so my worldview precluded radishes. If someone urged me to try one, my circular reasoning might prevent me. However, if one day I decided to try a radish anyway and found it tasted good, then my circular reasoning would adjust. I would have successfully accepted and incorporated new information.

Christian circular reasoning tends to be quite rigid, because questioning one assumption could threaten to collapse the entire system. The Bible is either God's Word or else it reflects the egos of various disparate authors over the centuries, who had differing beliefs and agendas. It's hard to imagine something in between.

Beyond reincarnation, there are other Christian assumptions that could stand challenge, based on emerging evidence.

Regarding epistemological methods, that is a complex philosophical topic. Some have wrestled with simply defining existence. The universe appears to consist of multiple layers or dimensions. Multiple timelines appear to exist even within our physical dimension. Truth is relative to the context of the reality being experienced at the moment.

This can be quite confusing. Accepting a closed-loop system of belief does make existence easier, because discerning truth within fluctuating realities is hard work. I believe there is a way in which it can be done, by utilizing our God-given abilities of critical reasoning. That is another topic unto itself.

In my own case, my questions regarding the paradoxes within the Christian worldview finally grew to the point where I was willing to look at new information. Breaking out of the mold of circular reasoning was a profound experience; the landscape immediately began to look different.

For those who are satisfied with remaining inside the circle of reasoning, so be it. Perhaps the incongruities that I point out can be safely dismissed. For those who are a bit more curious, perhaps looking at new information might be rewarding.

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