

THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

The Newsletter of the Philosophical Discussion Group

Please join us for our discussion on Metaphysics (or anything else for that matter). We will meet in Gamble Hall, room 213 on Friday, March 26th at 2:00 pm

Can Metaphysical Concepts be Concrete? Support for the Certainty of Select Fundamental Metaphysical Concepts

By Jesse Perry

According to a poll conducted by the Barna Research Group, 95% of Americans state that they believe God exists.¹ However, there is much subjectivity today regarding metaphysical concepts and the role of metaphysics in defining one's worldview. Metaphysics is commonly associated with the mysterious - pyramids, ancient alien runways, and the like. Discomfort with metaphysics tends to manifest itself in attempts to seek empirical explanations for supernatural phenomena. By trying to answer metaphysical questions empirically, much of metaphysics can easily be

relegated to subjectivity. *Must* metaphysical assertions be nebulous and subjective? I don't think so. In the following I will present three a-priori (self-evident) metaphysical concepts that are far from subjective. In fact, if we are willing to consider them without dismissing them on the basis of their rational nature or the conclusions that they indicate, we will realize that they are indeed quite concrete, and lend credibility to Biblical metaphysical assertions. The problem that many people tend to express with describing metaphysical concepts as "concrete" tends to be presuppositional. That is, metaphysical concepts are often dismissed before being thoroughly considered because their implications tend to threaten secularism - a predominant element in our culture (Secularism is the ideology that religious ideas are unimportant and/or irrelevant because they can't be considered factual or universal). Blaise Pascal sums up secularism well in *The Art*

of Persuasion, "People almost invariably arrive at their beliefs not on the basis of proof but on the basis of what they find attractive." Metaphysical considerations tend to be an automatic turn-off for thinkers in our culture, who tend to be secular, but are worthy of honest consideration, nevertheless. Before beginning, I must acknowledge that the extent of this essay is broad, to say the least. My defense of the overarching format is that, separately, these concepts are not clear in their support of the Biblical description of God as the source of all being. However, when logical connections between the three are identified, one realizes the collective evidence they present. The first metaphysical concept is causality. Although some notable philosophers have attempted to deny the existence of cause, preferring instead to attribute the appearance of cause to the brain's need for order, cause is apparent. The complaint that cause is all in the mind is

tenuous, and at some point requires us to question assertions that are *appropriately grounded in our experience (i.e. are apparent or axiomatic)*. Ultimately, absolute skepticism is self-defeating because it doubts itself. At some point, one must acknowledge that axioms do exist, and can be known. Without this acknowledgement, a worldview dissolves into meaninglessness. Cause is appropriately grounded in our experience. Existence demands a beginning - because we are finite beings, and the universe itself (by the estimations of modern science) is a finite universe, both had to be caused to come into existence at some point. For this reason, to argue that an infinite regress of causes is a logically superior alternative to an uncaused first cause is untenable. An uncaused first cause is not only logically possible, but is also apparent. An uncaused first cause must also by definition be self-existent, eternal (separate and distinct from the universe), and omnipotent. Self-existence, eternity, and omnipotence are all qualities that, admittedly, don't differentiate a theological explanation from any number of current theories being proposed by quantum

physicists today involving multiple dimensions and their fluctuations. However, the second concept, complexity, indicates that the cause of the universe must also be intelligent. As we observe nature, we see not only order in its structure, but specified complexity. There is a distinct difference between order and complexity. Order can be described as a repeating pattern in nature such as the symmetrical structure of mineral crystals. To use language as an illustration, order is displayed in a repeating series of letters (such as: wsd wsd wsd wsd wsd wsd). Complexity, however, is an arrangement of ordered sets that contains information, such as a DNA molecule. A linguistic illustration would be an encyclopedia. Richard Dawkins, in his book *The Blind Watchmaker* states, "There is enough information capacity in a single human cell to store the Encyclopedia Britannica, all 30 volumes of it, three or four times over...The amount of information that could be stored in a pinhead's volume of DNA is equivalent to a pile of paperback books 500 times as tall as the distance from Earth to the moon, each with a different, yet specific content."² We can observe nature becoming ordered by

natural processes, but complexity only occurs by design. DNA contains information; therefore it had to be designed because information demands a mind, an intelligent communicator, organizer, and creator. The universe's structure contains information, and in all known cases, information requires an intelligent message sender. The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) operates according to this principle. SETI involves the attempt to detect a radio signal that contains specified complexity - information, which would be regarded as proof of an intelligent message sender. Biological information is stored in patterns of DNA nucleotides, which encode the instructions to make proteins, the building blocks of life. The same pinhead amount of DNA contains "...a billion times more information capacity than a 4 gigabyte hard drive."³ It can be concluded that since information indicates a mind, vast amounts of information indicates a vast mind. Not only does the complex information content of the universe indicate the existence of a vast and potentially infinite intelligence, but the complex processes that we observe in the universe also indicate specific purpose. An

illustration of this is the practice of examining and dissecting a piece of technological hardware or software, known as “reverse engineering”. Reverse engineering is built on the principle that purpose is apparent in complex function. A system’s purpose can be extrapolated by studying its function. The system’s components can then be utilized according to their individual purposes. When added to self-existence, eternity, and omnipotence, intelligence, personality and omniscience describe a creative, purposeful origin of the universe, and helps to explain the presence of the final a priori concept – chaos. Despite the incredible level of complexity in the structure and function of the universe, we also see that it doesn’t function perfectly. The universe is semi-chaotic, and this chaos is manifested in disease, mutation (defects), and hostile environmental conditions. Pain and suffering indicate conditions that are not optimal – that there’s something wrong with the universe. Why do we observe both chaos and complexity in reality? There are two possible explanations. Either the universe once functioned in complete harmony with its form, and it is now suffering from some sort of damage, or the universe began chaotically

and is organizing itself gradually. We are faced with either a self-existent universe or a self-existent God. The self-existent universe would have to display intelligence to account for the complexity evident in itself. It seems that the alternative to a self-existent creator is not such a distinct alternative after all. In addition, there is no observable or comprehensible mechanism for universal self-organization. If the universe is self-organizing, the means by which it is accomplishing this feat continues to elude logical explanation and the grasp of modern science. It is more logical that the form of the universe, coupled with the natural processes and functions that we observe, indicates that the universe was indeed made the way it is to operate in a specific way – *form itself delineates functional parameters*. When a decision is made to utilize something contrary to its form, damage results. An example of this is the use of a wrench for a hammer. A wrench’s form differs from that of a hammer. A hammer is intended to be beat upon metal while a wrench is not. If a wrench is beat upon metal, destruction will result. As cause and complexity indicate, when the decision is made to utilize existence contradictory to its intended purpose, the universe itself

will undergo damage resulting in a semi-chaotic state. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the universe is not self-sustaining. The law of entropy that we observe in nature plainly indicates that the universe itself will eventually arrive at a state of complete thermal equilibrium, and will cease to function. The universe was apparently intended to require sustenance external to itself in order to maintain its existence.

The creative personal intelligence that originated the universe must also be its source of sustenance, and therefore be omnipresent in relation to it. If the creator of the universe intended to sustain the universe, one might claim that it doesn’t seem as if the sustainer is doing his job. For the answer to that problem, we need only look to ourselves. We were apparently created for the purpose of existing in relation to our creator, therefore our decision to acknowledge him or not would determine his involvement in sustaining the universe. If we refuse his involvement as creator, we preclude his sustenance. If we violate functional parameters, we damage the form. Biblical Christianity asserts that although we have rejected his sustenance by rejecting his role as creator, we can restore the relationship of creator to

created, of sustainer to sustained, and experience reality as it was intended to be experienced by acknowledging his provision for our restoration through his decision to assume the consequences of chaos for us. Jesus Christ (whom the Bible asserts is himself the creator) assumed the chaotic consequences resulting from the violation of purpose. These three self-evident metaphysical concepts - cause, complexity, and chaos – support the Bible’s description of the creator, and even affirm the Bible’s central theme – that we have brought the effects of chaos into our existence by denying God his role as our creator (including his authority to delineate the operational parameters, i.e. absolute moral standards, of our existence). These concepts, considered collectively, support the assertion that Biblical Christianity possesses intellectual credibility and coherence. Biblical Christianity should not be denied philosophical consideration simply because it is rooted in metaphysics or has implications that some consider to be unattractive. Again, I ask your forgiveness for the broadness of this essay and the fact that several key assumptions that I have made are by no means universally accepted. Both were

absolutely necessary, however, and I remain, unapologetically, a Christian Apologist.

Footnotes

1. <http://www.barna.org/cgi-bin/PageCategory.asp?CategoryID=2>
2. Dawkins, Richard The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe without Design, New York, 1986
3. *ibid.*

Karl Marx once said, “Religion is the opiate of the masses, the sign of the oppressed, the only illusory sun that revolves around man, so long as man doesn’t revolve around himself.”

In contrast, a man of little renown once said, “Atheism is the opiate of the self-proclaimed intellectuals, the deterrent for responsibility of one’s actions and the guilt that follows accordingly, while God is the only entity that makes the differentiation between reality and illusion meaningful. Man is nothing so long as he attempts the impossible task of denying God and revolving around himself.”

If you have any questions, criticisms, or comments, please contact either Chris Dunn or Dr. Nordenhaug. Anyone interested in writing a brief article for *The Philosopher’s Stone*, please contact either of us (it doesn’t have to be good, however it does have to be thoughtful).

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