TANG Defended

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In a recent paper in this journal I sketched an argument I called the Transcendental Argument for the Non Existence of God (TANG). I used TANG to argue indirectly against the Transcendental Argument for the Existence of God (TAG) — the argument that logic, science and objective ethics presuppose the existence of God. I argued that if TANG is sound, TAG is refuted. However, I also pointed out that if TANG is refuted, TAG is not established since both arguments could be unsound. In this paper I will show that David John Hillary's rebuttal of TANG is inadequate.

In my original essay I maintained that if logic is dependent on God, logic is contingent rather than necessary since God would create logic. I went on to argue that since logical principles are necessary, God does not exist. Hillary counters this by saying that logic is an intrinsic part of God's being and thus logic is necessary since God does not change. But how is one to understand this suggestion? It seems to imply that if God did not exist, there would be no logic. This, in turn, means that if God did not exist, the law of contradiction would not hold. Not only is there no reason to believe this, there seems to be good reason to reject it. Unless the ontological argument that God exists by definition is valid — and I know of no good reason to accept any version of the ontological argument — there is nothing incoherent about denying the existence of God! But it is incoherent to deny the law of contradiction?

Hillary uses this same sort of consideration to rebut my thesis concerning morality. I argued that if morality is dependent on God, then morality is not objective since

God creates it and God could arbitrarily create morality so that cruelty was good. Hillary replies that objective morality is a necessary part of God's perfect nature and therefore is unchangeable. The only way I can understand this suggestion is that if God did not exist, objective morality would be impossible. Now, if Hillary's idea were true, it would be incoherent to deny the existence of God and affirm objective morality. But, as far as I can see, there is nothing whatsoever incoherent about this.

I also maintained that a miracle is a violation of a law of nature and that, therefore, the only way to explain miracles is to suppose God's intervention. Since science presumes that any event that has an explanation at all has an explanation in terms of natural causes, it rules out miracles. And since Christianity assumes miracle, Christianity is therefore ruled out by science. Hillary argues, however, that a miracle is not a violation of a law of nature but rather is an event not governed by natural laws. According to Hillary the universe is governed by natural laws under normal circumstances. But accepting Hillary's account of miracles does not affect my argument for science does not accept the view, presupposed by Hillary, that events are governed by natural causes under normal conditions and by supernatural causes under abnormal conditions. Consider the implications of this theory. Suppose science allowed that under abnormal conditions God intervened in the natural course of events and caused some event to occur, for example, the cure of apparently terminal cancer. This would presuppose that science knows all the natural causes and cures of cancer. However, given the fallibility of science this is precisely what it cannot assume. To follow Hillary's suggestion would be to stop scientific examination of those events in which miracles are postulated. For example, to assume that Jones' cure was a miracle would prevent science from ever discovering whether his cure was the result of natural causes.

Perhaps Hillary means only to point out that not all scientists have forsaken miracle explanations. This is true but irrelevant. Scientists qua religious believers might believe in all manner of things. The question is, however, how a scientist should operate qua scientist, that is, when his or her behaviour is governed the methodological rules that define scientific practice. Hillary also says that some Christians believe that there are no more miracles. Perhaps. But what is the relevance of this? The vast majority of Christians believe that there have been miracles and many believe that there still could be.

Notes
1 See my Atheism: A Philosophical Justification, Chapter 3.
2 Hillary also argues that my example fails because if the law of contradiction is changed by God, then I cannot use the law of contradiction to show that such changes are absurd. But this misses my point which is that it makes no sense to suppose that such a change could occur.
3 Hillary neglects two other aspects of my argument. I argued that there are conflicting alleged revealed sources of what God wills and that even with respect to a particular revealed source there are conflicting interpretations of what this revelation is, and I also maintained that there is no rational way to reconcile these conflicts.

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