

Logic and Christianity

The relationship of authority between logic and Christian thought

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Why logic is an absolute, how it differs from reason and why it is the only criteria for the validation of any truth, including Christianity.

The following are some general thoughts on the nature and extent of logic, along with its relevance to Christian thought and practice.

Definitions:

- Logic is the manipulation by the mind of propositions corresponding to reality.
- Reason is the relative ability to manipulate the propositions of logic accurately.
- The term *truth* means “that which exists.”
- *Absolute*, in philosophical terms, means “a proposition cannot fail to correspond to reality and cannot be otherwise than what it is.”

Logic is an absolute

The most fundamental proposition that can be formed is the statement, “a thing is what it is and is not what it is not.” It doesn’t get simpler than that. A tree is a tree and not a non-tree.

Aristotle, the fourth century BC Greek philosopher, was the first to describe this most fundamental proposition as, “A is not non-A at the same time and in the same respect.” Historically, this proposition is called “the law of non-contradictions.”

This law does not take its authority from Aristotle or anyone else. It takes its authority from the fact of existence itself. Here’s how:

Anything that exists, does so versus not existing. If nothing existed, there would be nothing to compare with non-existence and therefore no law of non-contradictions would exist either. So in this sense, the mere fact of existence itself *creates logic*.

All the other laws of logic are really elaborations of the law of non-contradictions.

Of course, without a mind to observe existence, a proposition cannot be formed with regard to it. But this is irrelevant, for if a thing exists, it does so relative to not existing, whether a mind perceives it or not. It requires a mind to formulate that as a proposition.

In this sense also, logic must be an absolute, for existence cannot be what it is and not be what it is. It is obvious therefore that truth and logic are inseparable. If truth is simply that which exists and logic is a proposition about it, then it follows the two are virtually synonymous, with truth referring to something that exists and logic a proposition that expresses that.

If the fact of existence is an absolute, then logic must be an absolute also. If an absolute, then it must be the way truth is validated. Not only the way it is validated, but the only way. To avoid the idea that logic is the only way truth can be validated, one would need to invent a criteria other than existence itself, which would then be something non-existent. That is simply gibberish. Therefore, logic is the only possible criteria for the validation of truth.

Logic versus reason

The difference between logic and reason is the same as between mathematics and a mathematician. A simple arithmetic formula, such as $4 \times 4 = 16$, is a mathematical fact, regardless of how many third-graders get it wrong in learning their multiplication tables.

The logic of the arithmetic corresponds to the real world. If four rabbits multiply four times, we have sixteen rabbits regardless of whether anyone in the forest knows about it. Math makes no mistakes. Mathematicians do.

So reason is the relative ability to manipulate the laws of logic. This varies from person to person. Some are more “logical” than others, meaning they have more ability than others to apply logic without error. Likewise, there can be so such thing as “too logical.” That would be tantamount to asserting there could be such a thing as too precise in one’s multiplication tables. It is either correct or it not.

It is impossible, therefore, for logic to err, since it is an absolute as we said before. However, we commit errors in reasoning. Logic cannot commit errors any more than numbers can. Third-graders commit math errors because of a relative ability in themselves, not in the numbers.

In this sense, no such thing as a logic error exists. From a cultural and linguistic viewpoint, we speak of logic fallacies as a communication convenience by custom, when we really mean that a person has erred in his ability to manipulate accurately the laws of logic. That is a reasoning error.

When people commit logic fallacies, it is for one of two reasons or both. Either they have insufficient data or have manipulated erroneously the law of non-contradictions. This has nothing to do with the value of logic itself, nor does it mitigate it is the means for the validation of truth. What may be invalidated is the skill of the reasoner, not the nature of logic.

Is there more than one kind of logic?

It would seem only one kind of logic could exist. There cannot exist more than one existence, as a concept. By this we mean the proposition that if anything exists it does so versus not existing. How then could there be, in this sense, more than one “existence?”

Therefore the law of non-contradictions, “A is not non-A in the same respect and at the same time,” is the only logic that could exist. Anything other than that is not logic at all, but illogic.

Does divine logic differ from human logic?

It would seem that divine logic does not differ from human in any regard whatsoever. What differs is the respective ability to reason. God has all the data and makes no mistakes. This has nothing to do with the nature of logic itself, for the question has to do with existence itself. God himself knows he could not exist and fail to exist at the same time and in the same respect.

Though the difference between God and us in quality of being is infinite, this does not mean divine logic and human logic differ in their fundamental nature, for as we have shown above, there is only one logic.

It has been said that we think the way we do because we are made in the image of God and this is the way God thinks. Is this correct?

It would seem it is not correct. Logic would be an absolute whether God existed or not. As sentient beings, we employ logic for the simple reason there is nothing else for a sentient mind to employ because anything that exists, does so versus not existing and this is the law of non-contradictions. Therefore God’s logic cannot differ from ours.

Logic is self-validating

The law of non-contradictions, logic itself, requires no other defense than itself. It validates itself in this respect:

Throughout this discussion, we have been using the law of non-contradictions and could not have had a discussion without it. We cannot even think about the law of non-contradictions without using it.

As we apply it to reality, we see that a tree really is a tree and not a dog or a cloud. We see that a cloud is really a cloud and not a non-cloud such as a tree or a dog. Thus logic validates itself by reality and by the impossibility to think at all without it.

Therefore, logic is self-validating. After all, logic is not non-logic in the same respect, at the same time. No other purported form of logic can validate itself like this, including the so-called dialectic. All other forms are counterfeits and are illogic.

Therefore, only one form of logic exists.

Logic is the only criteria for validation of truth

To validate the length of a baseball bat, a measuring device is necessary, such as a yardstick. What is the yardstick to validate truth as a concept?

Logic is the only means to validate the truth of anything for the simplest of reasons: Any measuring device itself must correspond to the real world to be valid for measuring; otherwise it is measuring nothing at all. This can only be establishing by reality itself, which is another way of saying “logic.”

This does not preclude the validity of secondary measurements, such as yardsticks or established authority. It is perfectly logical to accept the testimony of an expert witness such as a scholar in a domain of study. This is perfectly logical, even though expert witnesses may err. Again, this would be an error in the person, not in logic itself.

The Bible and logic

How does the Bible relate to logic in priority? Which takes precedence over which? The Bible over logic; logic over Bible or both equivalently?

To answer this question, we must first distinguish two possible meanings in the word “priority.” This word can mean chronological precedence or it can also mean precedence in authority.

Once we establish that a person, a thing or in this case a book, has authority and to what degree that authority extends, we can put the authority of that above reason. Note I did not say *logic*. I said *reason*.

Again the distinction between logic and reason is valuable here. We may not be able to understand the logic of a doctor’s medical procedure but we accept his authority because reason tells us it is logical to do so because logic has previously established his authority.

The same is true with the Bible in its domain as authority in all matters relating to doctrine and practice. Once logic, grounded in adequate evidence, leads us to accept the Bible as authority, we can trust it although we may not understand the reasons for its instructions. This is eminently logical for the same reason it is logical to accept the authority of a doctor in the medical practice.

The question then about the precedence of logic versus the Bible has two simultaneous answers. Logic is essential to establish its authority. At that point, logic must yield to it authority for the simple reason we lack the data necessary to evaluate everything that has to do with doctrine and practice. This is not a failure of logic *per se*, but a lack of data along with our own lack of ability to assimilate it all.

So the answer is, logic comes first chronologically and second authoritatively.

From this we have learned...

- Logic means a proposition that corresponds to what actually exists. This differs from reason, which is a relative ability to manipulate propositions correctly. In this sense, reason is not an absolute.
- Logic however, is an absolute. Assuming the reasoning is done correctly and with sufficient data, it cannot fail to correspond to reality.
- No more than one kind of logic can exist. The proposition “A is not non-A at the same time and in the same respect” is the only logic that exists or could exist in God or man.
- Logic is self-validating. It requires no other validation than itself.
- Logic is the only criteria for the validation of truth, for the reason stated above.
- The nature of God’s logic does not differ from that of man’s in any respect. What differs between man and God is reasoning ability and access to all the data, due to God’s infinite knowledge and inability to err.
- Logic takes chronological priority over the Bible in the establishment of its authority. After this, the Bible has priority over logic simply because of human limitations in knowledge and ability to reason correctly about doctrine and practice without the Bible.