“THE LORD OF NONCONTRADICTION”

A Book Review

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by

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*I affirm the honor code.

"THE LORD OF NONCONTRADICTION"

James N. Anderson and Greg Welty wrote a philosophically relevant and insightful paper on the relationship between logic and God. Although they label their argument as ontological rather than epistemological, the telos of their research is undeniably the latter. Their ontological argument of the necessity of God based on the necessity of the laws of logic carries a presuppositional undertone. Theologians have often argued for God's existence by presupposing his existence, at least at some level. I believe their argument aims to be a kind of justification for presuppositionalism, as it were. This is evident in their seemingly "off-topic" insertion of the skeptical claim that God is immoral, followed by an outline of two different kinds of responses. Instead of the "typical" argument for the coherence of theism, which they define as an argument that the "concept of God conforms to the laws of logic," they would argue that there is an equal, and perhaps even better response, which is to "argue that the very idea of logical laws presupposes the existence of God as the only viable metaphysical basis for such laws."[1] Hence, presuppositionalism. If the argument from logic succeeds, the unbeliever faces a defeater for their own arguments, since their use of logic implies God's existence, which would then require a defeater defeater. It is important to recognize not only Welty and Anderson's ontological claims, but also the epistemological "fruits" of their argument, if sound. In this review, I will summarize the flow of their argument and insights and offer some of my own thoughts on their discussion.

What is the metaphysical substance of the laws of logic? What are they? Do they even exist, and if so, how? According to Welty and Anderson, laws of logic exist as real, nonphysical entities; they are necessary propositions that exist as *thoughts*. Laws of logic are therefore thoughts of God and depend on him for existence. "The laws of logic imply the existence of God" because, as follows: "The laws of logic are … necessarily true propositions. Propositions are real entities but cannot be physical; they are essentially thoughts. So the laws of logic are

[1] James N. Anderson and Greg Welty, "The Lord of Noncontradiction: An Argument for God from Logic," *Philosophia Christi* 13, no. 2 (2011): 338.

necessarily true thoughts… [which means] there must be a necessarily existent mind; … [which means] there must be a necessarily existent person… Thus, if there are laws of logic, there must also be a necessarily existent, personal, spiritual being."[2] In terms of its logical structure, Welty and Anderson move from the laws of logic as truths to the nature of propositions, then to necessary truths, to real existence, and finally to propositions as thoughts, culminating in divine thoughts.

Welty and Anderson give a clear description of the nature of propositions. As truth-bearers, "propositions are *by definition* those things that can be true or false," unlike mere statements, which may express propositions.[3] Propositions are language-independent. The laws of logic bear truth value, making them propositions, but they are also propositions about other propositions, since they bear the truth value of other propositions in themselves.[4] They argue that the notion of a possible world without the laws of logic is incoherent; in fact, the laws of logic cohere with whether a world is a possible world. If they are correct, then a world that contradicts the laws of logic is by definition impossible.[5] Thus far, they have not shown that the laws of logic exist or how they exist. They offer four arguments to demonstrate this, including those from ordinary language, ontological intuitions, the existential presuppositions of verbs, and the ontological preconditions of property attribution.[6] Moreover, they anticipated objections, such as deflationary theories and the fallacy of reification, and dealt with them accordingly before proceeding. They extend the first and fourth arguments to demonstrate the necessary existence of the laws of logic, which they then use to prove their nonphysical existence. Moving forward, they point to several criteria for showing that the laws of logic exhibit features of *thought*. In my view, this is the most objectionable part of their argument. Barring any unsoundness, the

[2] Anderson and Welty, "The Lord of Noncontradiction," 336-337.
[3] Anderson and Welty, "The Lord of Noncontradiction," 323.
[4] Anderson and Welty, "The Lord of Noncontradiction," 324-325.
[5] Anderson and Welty, "The Lord of Noncontradiction," 326.
[6] Anderson and Welty, "The Lord of Noncontradiction," 327-328.

conclusion logically follows that there must be some divine mind to instantiate the laws of logic. Their conclusion logically follows from the premises.

Although I am not a presuppositionalist myself, I agree that their argument holds significance for the enterprise of Christian apologetics. My slight critique targets their attempt to explain why the laws of logic are thoughts. I question their explanation for two reasons. First, even if I agree with their definition of "intentionality"—"to be directed toward some goal or thing"—and that propositions do express this sort of "aboutness," it seems to me to be a leap to conclude that propositions are "mental entities" and are therefore to be considered as "thoughts."[7] Thoughts could contain other criteria that make them "thoughts." So the criteria given are not exhaustive. They reject a separate ontological category that could be *intentional-but-nonmental* on the grounds that one would need good reason. Since they assume there are none, they conclude that propositions are mental entities. I had hoped they would have explored and refuted this potential alternative. I remain unconvinced that propositions are mental entities because they express intentionality, without identifying other characteristics of mental entities or mentioning alternative categories. Secondly, I fail to see how this coheres with all propositions. If sound, they show why propositions can contain intentionality. I anticipate potential philosophical challenges. For instance, what is the relationship between the mental entity of this proposition and the referent of the proposition, "propositions are mental entities"? According to Welty and Anderson, this proposition is a mental entity about another mental entity, namely itself. Or take the proposition, "God's thoughts." This must itself be a mental entity about all of God's thoughts or mental entities. Perhaps Welty and Anderson could expand on the coherence of applying to *all* types of propositions.

[7] Anderson and Welty, "The Lord of Noncontradiction," 333.

Conclusion

The argument presented in this paper is persuasive and intriguing, though it is not unobjectionable. The laws of logic require an explanation for their existence. Welty and Anderson have done so. Christian apologetics can greatly benefit from an argument for God's existence grounded in the reality of the laws of logic.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson, James N. and Greg Welty. “The Lord of Noncontradiction: An Argument for God from Logic.” Philosophia Christi 13, no. 2 (2011): 321-338.