

Bahnsen on "Knowing the Supernatural" Part 4: "Fundamental Distinctions"

Continued from [Part 3](#).

"Fundamental Distinctions"

In the following paragraph, Bahnsen identifies the fundamental tokens of Christianity's metaphysical commitments:

The Scripture teaches us that "there is one God, the Father, by whom are all things...and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things" (I Cor. 8:6). All things, of all sorts, were created by Him (John 1:3; Col. 1:16). But He is before all things, and by means of Him all things hold together or cohere (John 1:1; Col. 1:17). He carries along or upholds all things by the word of His power (Heb. 1:3). Therefore, to exist is to be divine or created. In God we live and move and have our being (Act 17:28). He, however, has life in Himself (John 5:26; Ex. 3:14). The living and true God gives the distinguishable unity or common natures to things (Gen. 2:19), categorizing things by placing His interpretation on them (e.g., Gen. 1:5, 8, 10, 17; 2:9). It is He who also makes things to differ from each other (I Cor. 4:7; Ex. 11:7; Rom. 9:21; I Cor. 12:4-6; 15:38-41). Similarity and distinction, then, result from His creative and providential work. Both the existence and nature of things find their explanation in Him - whether casual (Eph. 1:11) or teleological (Eph. 1:11). (*Always Ready*, p. 179)

Consider what Bahnsen affirms here in light of the questions I posed in [Part 3](#). Does the view that Bahnsen outlines here entail subjectivism, or does it entail objectivism? If you answered subjectivism, you'd be correct. As is always the case with subjectivism, reality is split into two mutually exclusive categories. As Bahnsen puts it, "to exist is to be divine or created." There is the supernatural realm of the divine creator, and under its control is the created natural realm. The divine creator creates and controls the natural realm "by the word of His power," that is, by means of its conscious will. The things that exist in the natural realm are assigned their identity by the [wishing](#) of the Christian god.

The creator "categorize[es] things by placing His interpretation on them." In other words, the identity of the things that exist in the natural realm derive from the content of the divine creator's consciousness, which means its consciousness holds metaphysical primacy over those things which exist in the natural realm. There is in what Bahnsen describes no instance of an object of cognition holding metaphysical primacy over the subject of cognition when the consciousness of the divine creator is concerned. The starting point is an omnipotent consciousness, the divine creator, and the natural realm is an object it creates by a sheer act of will. The divine creator wishes, and POOF! - whatever it wishes becomes reality. "Creation, on Christian principles, must always mean *fiat* creation." (Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 26; italics added) You couldn't get more subjective than this if you wanted to. It should not surprise us then, when believers in this stuff turn around and launch arguments purporting to conclude that the intelligibility of man's experience depends on the reality of this same divine creator which voluntarily incarnated itself in human flesh, [becoming "fully God fully man,"](#) and allowed itself to be executed for a creation gone totally wrong.

The idea that "the existence and nature of things find their explanation in [the Christian god]" is the purported capital that the presuppositionalist apologist is hoping to cash in when he challenges non-believers to "account for" some aspect of experience or cognition, such as the assumption that nature is uniform, inductive generalization, laws of logic, science, morality, etc. The apologist poses as having a "ready explanation" at hand, a woolen blanket that covers his own eyes and which he hopes to pull over everyone else's. It's the old "God did it!" formula that seems to have a validity all its own once we grant its fundamental premise, namely the primacy of consciousness metaphysics. Once we grant that the universe and all its contents, events, possibilities and relationships were created by and continue to conform to a conscious will, then all that is needed at that point is a name for that conscious will to give it some semblance of identity in the [imagination](#) of the believer. For the Christian, "Yahweh" (or "Elohim," or "Jehovah," or "Jesus") "accounts for" all these things; for the Muslim, "Allah" "accounts for" all these things; for the Lahu tribesmen, "Geusha" "accounts for" all these things, etc. It's nothing more than the wave-of-the-wand metaphysics that informs the myths of old and the storybooks of today's popular literature. Each shares the same fundamental common denominator: the primacy of the subject over the object at the most crucial point.

But Bahnsen isn't finished yet. He continues, stating:

God is the source of all possibility (Isa. 43:10; 44:6; 65:11) and thus sets the limits of possible reality by His own will and decree. (*Always Ready*, p. 179)

What Bahnsen describes in this unargued assertion is nothing short of [the cartoon universe premise of theism](#). All facts, objects and events found in the universe conform to the ruling consciousness' wishes and decrees. Its wishes and decrees not only determine what is actual and what actually happens, but also what is possible to begin with. The entities, persons and happenings of the universe are analogous to features in a [cartoon](#), while all of history itself is analogous to the cartoon itself and the Christian god is analogous to a master cartoonist who has created a cartoon that begins with the creation of the earth and ends with its destruction. In terms of fundamentals, this view of reality grants metaphysical primacy to a form of consciousness: it is the view that the subject of awareness holds primacy over the objects of awareness. This view is known as metaphysical subjectivism. It characterizes Christianity from its foundations to its outermost dogmas.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Always Ready](#), [Knowledge](#), [Presuppositional Gimmickry](#)

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