

## Christianity's Sanction of Evil

### Prologue

Over the past two weeks or so, while I've been living temporarily in the seaside resort town of [Cha'am, Thailand](#) (since the part of Bangkok where I live has been flooded and unreachable), I've been party to several discussions with presuppositional apologist Sye Ten Bruggencate. Readers of my blog will remember my [critique](#) of [Sye's website](#) where he's published his version of a presuppositional argument for the existence of his version of the Christian god.

Well, we've butted heads again, and the results have been, shall I say, historic.

My conversations with Sye can be found in the comments sections of these blog entries on Alex Botten's blog [An Atheist Viewpoint](#):

[Why I'll Not Be Bothering With Bahnsen](#)

[I've Heard Some Bullshit...](#)

[We're Still Waiting for Sye to Answer](#)

Some heated controversy erupted throughout my conversation with Sye as I presented a number of questions for Sye to answer on behalf of his worldview. (My questions are quoted in the main body of the last of the three blog entries listed above). I think my questions are entirely appropriate given what is claimed about Christianity by its defenders. After all, Sye runs around the internet doing podcasts and YouTube videos telling the world that Christianity is true, that Christianity alone accounts for knowledge, logic, reason, science, morality and all the rest, and that people are fools for not swallowing this nonsense hook, line and sinker, just as he's done. So if the Christian worldview really is so pregnant with unmatched philosophical authority in all these areas of consideration, questions from a puny little mortal like me should be a cinch to answer persuasively.

Unfortunately, however, instead of answering my questions when I posed them, Sye sought tirelessly to redirect the conversation to the topic of whether or not I would engage him live on some recorded Skype broadcast, where he promised he would answer my questions. It was clear to the rest of those who were participating in these conversations that Sye was simply trying to distract attention away from my questions and any way he might be able answer them from the perspective of the Christian worldview which he defends so vociferously in other venues. If he were really willing to address my questions, why not address them where the conversation was currently taking place, where the questions were posed to him in the first place? Certainly Sye's continued participation in the discussion on a blog (in *writing* even!) demonstrated that he could present answers to my questions right there where the conversation was taking place if he had answers he could put forward with any confidence.

Eventually, after much pressing by not only myself, but by others who also participated in the conversation, Sye Ten Bruggencate finally solicited some brief answers to my questions. His answers can be found in the initial comment of [this blog](#) which Alex Botten had posted in order to document the outstanding status of Sye's reluctance to address my questions. Since the issue I raise in my question is so important to the investigation of comparative worldviews, I decided to devote a separate blog entry to considering the implications of Sye's response to it.

### STB on the Justifiability of Evil

Among the several questions that I posed to presuppositional apologist Sye Ten Bruggencate, I asked:

According to your worldview, is evil ever morally justifiable?

Sye's eventual answer to this question was conspicuously terse. He wrote:

“Commission of it, no, ordination of it by God, yes.”

In other words, *committing* evil is not morally justifiable, but “ordaining” evil is morally justifiable, so long as the one doing the “ordaining” here is “God.” So we have a *yes and no* answer to a *yes or no* question. But given the wording of my question - is evil *ever* morally justifiable? - Sye's answer can only be understood to come out as a *yes*. So just to be clear, Sye gives us a *yes* in response to my question *as it is stated*, so as to say: “Yes, evil *is* morally justifiable.”

Answering *yes* to my question is perfectly compatible with the “solution” which Greg Bahnsen offers to settle the problem of evil in his book *Always Ready*. In his “solution” to the problem of evil, Bahnsen holds that the Christian god is “all-good” and “all-powerful,” but also acknowledges the existence of evil in the world. How can this be when the world is said to be sourced in an all-good, all-power, indeed *perfect* creator? How does Bahnsen get out of this jam? Simple. He writes:

God has a morally sufficient reason for the evil which exists. (p. 172)

Clearly one would have to suppose that evil is in essence morally justifiable in order to propose the idea that a person “has a morally sufficient reason” for evil in the first place. And here we have presuppositional apologist Sye Ten Bruggencate explicitly affirming as much.

Of course, Sye hopes to camouflage an affirmative response to my question by introducing a distinction within the rubric of evil: on the one hand, there's the “commission” of evil; on the other, there's the “ordination” of it “by God” (as though Christians supposed anyone else could “ordain” evil). By including the qualifier “by God,” Sye implies that it would *not* be morally justifiable for *anyone other than the Christian god* to “ordain” evil, supposing such action were possible. But this makes the apologist appear to be special pleading the case. If it's morally justifiable for one person to “ordain” evil, why wouldn't it be morally justifiable for another person to do the same? Apparently for the Christian it depends on *who* is doing the “ordaining” here. This strikes me as similar to saying it's morally justifiable for one person to lie, cheat and steal, but not for anyone else. What justifies such exceptions, especially if morality is supposed to be objective and absolute? Of course, Sye's answer nowhere indicates that he has ready answers to such problems. And if standard presuppositional procedure can serve as an indication of the quality of any would-be answer to such objections, we might expect similarly terse and uninformative clichés which are intended to stop further questioning rather than provide legitimate solutions to such conundrums.

What's noteworthy about Sye's response to my question is that, on the Calvinist interpretation of Christianity (which is typically associated with presuppositionalism from a theological standpoint), a human being could not “commit” evil *unless* “God” *ordained* that he commit it in the first place. In other words, the “ordaining” of evil would have to come *before* any “commission” of evil could take place. Nothing in the “created realm” takes place without the sanctioning incorporation of it within the scheme of “God's plan.” And because no one does anything outside of “God's plan,” any action one performs must conform entirely *to* that “plan.” The “plan” is the preconditional template for any event *actually taking place* in the “created realm” according to deterministic Christianity (which presuppositionalism positively affirms). This would include any action which is *evil* in nature, whether it's a child telling a lie to his mother (e.g., “No, I didn't chop down the cherry tree! Honest, Mom!”) to the mass slaughter of millions of Jews (cf. “I vaz only following orders!”) to the destruction of the Twin Towers (i.e., “Glory to God!”).

Indeed, if the Christian god “ordains” evil to take place in the “created realm,” what could stop that evil from taking place? What can stand against the omnipotent will of the Christian god? In a contest of wills between the god of Christianity and puny mortals like myself, the Christian god's will is always going to prevail over mine. So on the Christian view of the world, even if I would wish Hurricane Katrina to fizzle out before hitting New Orleans, if the Christian god wills that it destroy the city, it will. The destructive force (in this case a natural evil) has been “ordained” by the Christian god to deliver is decimating blow to human civilization, and nothing in “creation” can stop it. The “ordaining” of evil cannot be successfully opposed by anything in the Christian god's “created realm,” and no evil could occur without first being “ordained” by the Christian god. So the “commission” of evil is always an *effect* that follows the “ordaining” of evil “by God.” The Christian god, then, by *choosing* to “ordain” evil (it could have chosen *not* to “ordain” evil) is the *cause*

of evil, for in Christianity, there is no resisting of the Christian god's will. Evil therefore finds its source in the Christian god. Given the view that evil is morally justifiable on Christianity's premises, this conclusion is unavoidable. Perhaps this is why Sye was reluctant to face my questions for over a week.

So why would an all-good, all-holy, all-perfect and all-loving deity *choose* to "ordain" evil in the first place? What would *motivate* such a being to "ordain" evil? Evil results in the destruction of values. Why would an all-good, all-holy, all-perfect and all-loving deity *choose* to have values destroyed? What value is gained by destroying values? And if it's "morally justifiable" to destroy values, isn't any supposed "value" that is said to be gained by destroying values also justifiably subject to destruction as well?

The upshot is that Sye cannot give an unqualified "no" in response to this question. According to his worldview, there is a sense in which evil *is* morally justifiable. This is the *Christian worldview* we're talking about. According to one of its spokesmen, the Christian worldview allows for cases in which evil *is* morally justifiable. In other words, as a worldview, it does not take a firm, absolute and uncompromising stand against evil, but in fact allows it under certain circumstances. In fact, the Christian worldview allows for evil in achieving some "holy purpose." According to Christianity, then, evil is ultimately moral!

Sye does not explain how the "ordination" of evil "by God" can be morally justifiable, even though it is preconditional to any *commission* of evil as we have seen. It strains credibility to suppose that *committing* evil is not morally justifiable while the *ordination* of evil, which is the precondition to any commission of evil, *is* morally justifiable. Sye leaves these matters completely untouched, as though they couldn't possibly be an issue to be concerned about, or as though he preferred to keep them undisclosed.

In his brief answer to my question, Sye leaves all these issues completely untouched. But it's clear that if the Christian god "ordains" evil - which is really just another way of saying it compels lesser beings which cannot resist its will to perform evil actions by some divine injunction - then clearly it is essentially *forcing* other beings to do what Sye says is *not* morally justifiable. Thus on the Christian worldview, doing something that one cannot resist doing is *not* morally justifiable, while

choosing to compel lesser beings to do something that is not morally justifiable, *is* morally justifiable. Go figure.

But these objections are indeed perfectly valid considering what Christianity teaches. The Christian worldview teaches that its god is in control of everything that happens within the "created realm," which of course includes human activity. This view is affirmed repeatedly in the presuppositionalist literature. For example:

God controls whatsoever comes to pass. (Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, p. 160)

God's thoughts make the world what it is and determine what happens - which is why all facts are revelatory of God... (Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings & Analysis*, p. 243)

God controls all events and outcomes (even those that come about by human choice and activity) and is far more capable and powerful than modern machines. (Greg Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, p. 489n.43)

Also, the Christian god is said to have a *will*: it does what it *chooses* to do. It is not restricted by something outside its control, since there is nothing outside its control. There is nothing metaphysical which constrains the Christian god's choices or limits the range of its will. And nothing external to the Christian god compels it to make one set of choices as opposed to another. It sets the rules everywhere and always. It is "free" to do what it chooses, and has the power to do whatever it wants to do. If it wants X done, nothing can stand in its way of making X happen.

So any lesser being which is "ordained" by the Christian god to "commit" evil, will "commit" evil by virtue of divine ordination.

So this raises a number of questions, such as:

*Why isn't "ordaining" evil, itself evil?*

Or:

*How could "ordaining" evil be legitimately construed as a good?*

Or:

*How could "ordaining" evil be morally justifiable?*

Or:

*How is being the ordainer of evil not also being the author of evil?*

Or:

*How is being the one who "ordains" evil not also the one who authors evil?*

Or:

*By saying that "God ordains evil," how is this not ultimately saying that evil originates with said god?*

Or:

*How is ordaining evil not a species of committing evil?*

There seems to be no answer to any of these questions which would positively recommend Christianity as a moral worldview, let alone preserve its self-bestowed title as the *only* worldview which can offer an objective standard for morality.

It seems that if a *truly* good person has a choice between "ordaining" evil and *not* "ordaining" evil, he would - being a *truly* good person - choose *not* to "ordain" evil by virtue of his goodness. A *truly* good person would *not* choose to "ordain" evil, since a *truly good* person will stand against evil every opportunity he has. Which means: to any extent he has any influence over a situation, he will not allow evil to happen.

But according to Christian mythology, the Christian god has a long and detailed history of allowing evil to happen. From allowing Adam and Eve to fall to allowing vicious persons torture and execute its own son, the Christian god is characterized throughout the bible as having the power to stop evil in its tracks - even before it has a chance to get rolling - but standing idly by in spite of its alleged goodness and allowing evil to take its course on human values. According to Christianity's own narratives, evil could find no better friend than the Christian god.

Something else that's curious is the fact that [thesaurus.com](http://thesaurus.com) suggests "commission" as a synonym for "ordain." But clearly Sye's answer assumes a significant difference between these two concepts. Unfortunately he does not explain what that assumed difference may be and how it is relevant to his duplicitous answer. At any rate, it would be interesting to examine the apologists' explanations for how the "ordination" of evil is not itself an act of evil. Don't be surprised to find different explanations in conflict with one another, even though Christians are all supposed to be "of one accord."

## **In Conclusion...**

The foregoing is not some petty gripe against the Christian god (for it is [merely imaginary](#) in the first place), *but a powerful and damning indictment against the Christianity as a viable worldview and the claim that it provides the necessary foundations for morality.* Flat and simple, Christianity holds that evil is morally justifiable. Without this underlying premise, Christianity has no "solution" to the problem of evil; and by incorporating claims which assume this premise, apologists give away the fact that it really has no solution to the problem of evil to begin with. For by offering the view that "God has a morally sufficient reason for the

evil that exists” (Bahnsen), or the view that the “ordination” of evil by the Christian god *is* morally justifiable (Sye Ten Bruggencate), presuppositionalists inadvertently acknowledge that evil is sourced in their god and that without the choices and actions their god has, according to Christian narratives, made, evil would never have existed in the first place. The logic is impeccable: given the premises of presuppositionalism, any act of evil can ultimately be “justified.”

Like Bahnsen’s treatment of the problem of evil in his book *Always Ready*, Sye’s efforts to defend his belief in an all-good god amount to nothing more than a clumsy attempt to disguise the contradictions lurking in his position with mere word play. Not only because of the nature which Christians attribute to their god and the cozy relationship their response to the problem evil necessitates, but also because of the cognitive dissonance, compartmentalization and downright dishonesty that belief in such a fantasy requires of Christian beliefs, the conclusion is inescapable: *Christians worship a god that would be evil if it truly existed.*

Of course, we will see the presuppositionalist respond to this conclusion by declaring that we have no ultimate objective standard to “ground” our moral judgments in the first place. This ignores several facts, including:

- a) the objections raised herein afford an *internal critique* which uncovers problems that lurk within Christianity regardless of what other individuals may believe;
- b) the declaration that those pointing out these objections have no objective standard to “ground” their moral judgments in fact accurately characterizes the Christian’s predicament (for by granting metaphysical primacy to a form of consciousness, Christianity has only a *subjective* basis for anything it affirms, and look what it affirms!); and
- c) in Objectivism we in fact *do* have an ultimate objective standard which “grounds” our moral judgments, namely the primacy of existence.

But even if it were the case that we had no ultimate objective standard to “ground” our moral judgments, it would not follow from this that the Christian view is therefore logically consistent, for the problem still remains: Christianity affirms that an all-good and all-powerful consciousness *chooses* to “ordain” evil, and cannot erase the contradictions contained within this affirmation.

So the next time you encounter a Christian apologist claiming that the Christian worldview is the *only worldview* which can “account for” objective moral absolutes, be sure to direct them to this blog entry: he has a huge mess on his hands, and I don’t think he’ll be able to untangle it if he holds, along with Sye Ten Bruggencate, Greg Bahnsen, and other presuppositionalists, that evil can be morally justifiable.

I’m sure glad these aren’t my problems.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Christian Psychopathy](#), [Presuppositional Gimmickry](#), [problem of evil](#)

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [6:00 AM](#)