

Monday, June 06, 2005

Is Human Experience Evidence of the Christian God?

Christian apologists seem eager to take anything as evidence for their god's alleged existence. When asked if he could prove that his god exists on the All-Bahnsen list, for example, Christian apologist [Chris Kersey pointed](#) to Greg Bahnsen's performance in his debate with scientist Dr. Gordon Stein. I have already presented an analysis of Bahnsen's opening statement in my blog [Bahnsen's Poof](#), which shows that the over-hyped apologist gives no identifiable argument whatsoever for the existence of any god, Christian or otherwise. I have yet to see any response to my analysis which salvages Bahnsen's opening statement to show that an actual argument establishing the conclusion that the Christian god exists can in fact be found in it.

Kersey also pointed generally to a number of unspecified papers by Bahnsen that are available [here](#). I've examined a number of Bahnsen's papers available at this site, and I have yet to find one which gives good solid reasons to suppose his god exists. If he or other apologists have a particular article in mind, I'd be happy to take a look at it.

Then Kersey made the following statement:

In terms of evidence for God's existence, the answer inevitably is everything in human experience as well as experience itself.

Let's examine what Kersey is essentially saying here. Basically, he's saying that human "experience" is "evidence for God's existence." The term 'experience' is probably preferred by apologists who want to rest their position on this case because it tends to be philosophically imprecise and approximate, thus allowing them to invest it with all kinds of questionable notions. Apologetics glossaries such as Frame's [A Van Til Glossary](#), [Apologetics.org](#), [Haus-von-Nomos](#), and the one in Bahnsen's [By This Standard](#), do not give entries defining this term. And why should they? After all, doesn't everyone "just know" the definition of 'experience'? Maybe, but in matters of philosophy where imprecision and approximation do more to obscure our ideas than enlighten them, care should be taken to qualify them with more precise terms. Thus it should raise our suspicions if apologists who want to use this term in key premises of their argument for the existence of the Christian god are reluctant to state their definitions for the record. How much confidence do such thinkers have in their argument? Are not Christians always telling us that there would be no "meaning" if their god did not exist?

Since consulting these apologetic sources themselves offered no intelligence on what they might mean by 'experience', I turned to [Webster's online dictionary](#), a non-biblical source, and found the following:

- 1 a : direct observation of or participation in events as a basis of knowledge b : the fact or state of having been affected by or gained knowledge through direct observation or participation
- 2 a : practical knowledge, skill, or practice derived from direct observation of or participation in events or in a particular activity b : the length of such participation
- 3 a : the conscious events that make up an individual life b : the events that make up the conscious past of a community or nation or mankind generally
- 4 : something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through
- 5 : the act or process of directly perceiving events or reality

The first two definitions both specify "direct observation" by a subject of an object ("events") in the process of acquiring knowledge or in participating in personally attended activity. And the final three similarly include some kind of conscious attendance or process of interaction with one's surroundings. So it should be clear that the essential which is common throughout these definitions is *consciousness* as such.

Now, it's been my position all along that religious philosophies ultimately stem from a grotesque misunderstanding of the nature of human consciousness, a perversion which the ancients themselves never identified even though the view opposite to the one they verbally endorsed is inescapable. Central to that misunderstanding is the invalid view that consciousness has the power to create its own objects, which constitutes a complete reversal of the objective orientation of the subject-object relationship. This reversal can be observed throughout a religion's metaphysical, epistemological, moral and social doctrines when one examines them with an explicit understanding of the proper relationship between consciousness and its objects in mind. Furthermore, the bible, which is the source of

Christianity's many doctrines, presents no serious discussion of the fundamental nature of consciousness (I am not the first to question whether any of its authors had ever explicitly formed the concept to begin with; indeed, none of my bibles uses the term), and seemed to associate certain mental states (particularly the emotions or "passions") with the body's abdominal organs, not the brain and the nervous system which it regulates (the inclinations behind such associations no doubt arose due to the fact of mind-body integration, whereas their explicit religious views reduce to a division or dichotomy between mind and body). Also, the overt implications that the bible's teachings have regarding the nature of consciousness, only show that its authors had uncritically adopted the primacy of consciousness model of metaphysics from their intellectual forebears, and this metaphysical view invalidates itself.

Because of such reversals and misunderstandings, Christians typically view consciousness as if it were somehow mysterious, unnatural, even "otherworldly." But it's hard to see how one could maintain such a view given certain discoveries about consciousness that have become common knowledge due to a major shift away from the religious conception of the world to the scientific, thanks in large part to the achievements of the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution. We know, for instance, that human beings are *biological organisms*, and that there are definite physical organs in the human body which make consciousness possible, such as the brain, the nervous system, and those associated specifically with the senses, such as the eyes, olfactory nerves, taste buds, ears and skin. We also know that human beings are not the only biological organisms capable of consciousness, that other animals are conscious, and that the consciousness of non-human animals is also the product of similar organs in their bodies. All these facts, which are undeniable on a rational worldview, point incontestably to the view that consciousness is a *natural*, indeed *biological* phenomenon.

The Christian god, however, is said to be something *other than natural*. Christians prefer the dubious term "supernatural," a notion which seems to be invoked only when one has no legitimate explanation for some position he wants to maintain, thus making it an anti-concept which, according to Christian apologist Greg Bahnsen, means "whatever surpasses the limits of nature." (*Always Ready*, p. 178.) It's not clear that *anything* "surpasses the limits of nature," for it's not clear how one could determine just what the limits of nature may be. Indeed, in rational philosophy, to say that something has a nature basically means that something is itself, that to exist is to be something specific and therefore finite. In rational philosophy, the concept 'natural' is contrasted with 'man-made', that is, something taken from nature and altered in some way by man. But even shoes, watches and jumbo jets have their own specific nature, even though they are not naturally occurring, that is, occurring without the intervention of men.

And yet, believers continue to tell us that there are so-called "supernatural" beings, beings which are invisible and inaccessible to any of man's senses. This poses many obvious (and even not so obvious) epistemological problems for those who want to try to justify such beliefs, but this doesn't stop those who want to believe that their "supernatural" being exists from insisting that they do. The issue that I want to focus on here, however, is the fact that theists characterize that which is allegedly "supernatural" as something that is *other than natural*, and yet *not man-made*. So the theist introduces a *third* category which he calls "the supernatural," something which by definition is not observable in nature (for there is no reason to suppose that what we observe in nature "surpasses the limits of nature"), and, according to the theists' own vehement protestation, also not man-made (for believers would not want to allow that their deity is a human invention). So on the one hand we have that which *is* natural, and on the other hand that which is allegedly *not* natural ("supernatural"). In other words, A (natural) and *non-A* ("supernatural").

Given these points, then, let us return to Kersey's statement, that man's experience somehow qualifies as "evidence" for the existence of the Christian god. As described in their literature, the Christians' god is said to be "supernatural," immaterial, infinite and incorruptible. Man's experience, however, is neither of these; it is natural, material, finite and in fact corruptible (for man can and sometimes does misidentify what he perceives). So the question logically arises:

How does that which is natural, material, finite and corruptible serve as evidence of that which is supernatural, immaterial, infinite and incorruptible? In other words, how does A serve as evidence of non-A?

Or,

How does something serve as evidence of that which completely contradicts it?

Questions such as this seem to have slipped by apologists, for they continue to equate man's experience with evidence for the "supernatural" without bothering to attend to such questions. Recall, however, that the definitions of 'experience' given above specify *direct observation*. But the Christian god is said to be *invisible* (I Tim. 1:17), and thus at best *not* directly observable. And since man's experience entails his nature as a biological organism, it is by necessity also *natural*, just as are other bodily functions, such as respiration, circulation, digestion, etc.

But consider: suppose I perceive an object, such as the apple tree in my backyard. Christians like Kersey are in effect saying that this tree, or at least my consciousness of the tree, is somehow evidence of his god's existence. But what is it that I see? I see a tree, not a supernatural, invisible, magic being. The tree itself is not in any way like the Christian god is supposed to be; the tree that I perceive is

a biological organism (and therefore *natural*) composed of atoms and molecules (and therefore *material*) which has a specific nature (and therefore *finite*), and which dies if denied the nutrients it requires (and therefore *corruptible*).

If I accept the tree as *evidence of anything*, I must accept it as evidence only of *itself*, of its *own* existence. To suppose that it is evidence of something *other than* itself - indeed, as evidence of something which fundamentally *contradicts* it (e.g., "supernatural," immaterial, infinite and incorruptible), I would at the very least have to infer this somehow from what I do perceive. But why would I interpret something I directly observe as evidence of something that *contradicts* what I directly observe? Such a process of inferring could not rest on what I perceive alone; it would in fact require certain assumptions imported expressly to bridge the *gap* between what I really perceive (i.e., what is real, natural, material, finite and corruptible) and what I can *only imagine* (since I can only *imagine* something that "surpasses the limits of nature"). Where would I get such assumptions, and what would their basis be, if not just the arbitrary imaginings that religion supplies?

Here is where the apologist simply blanks out, giving us absolutely nothing to go on, apparently expecting us to accept what they claim about "the supernatural" on their say so, i.e., *on faith*.

So unless the apologist can shore up his claim and give a plausible explanation as to how man's conscious experience can somehow serve as evidence of that which completely contradicts it on every essential, it is safe to assume that he has no case whatsoever to support his god-belief.

by Dawson Bethrick

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [6:45 PM](#)

11 Comments:

[groundfighter76](#) said...

dawson or should i say 'bob',

you are quite pathetic. what is this - two times now you have booted?

[June 07, 2005 7:11 AM](#)

[Aaron Kinney](#) said...

groundfighter76, what are you talking about?

Dawson, another good entry. You illustrated the difference between natural and supernatural and its problems in relation to apologetics vs. philosophy. Then you pointed out the ridiculousness of the apologists claim that everthing one experiences is evidence of God. Then you tied it in to the necessity of faith.

Another thing you could have mentioned is that when the apologist claims that all we experience is evidence for God, he apologist makes an unfalsifiable claim. Ask the apologist to provide an example of an experience that would NOT serve as evidence for God. The apologist has no criteria to distinguish godly experience from non godly experience, if everything he ever experiences is supposed to be evidence for a God.

But then again, you did refute/falsify it with your tree example. Or at least you pointed out that there IS no evidence of the supernatural in the course of ones natural experience.

A real important thing to do in debate is to prove that the Christian has nothing to go on other than FAITH, and faith can be dealt with easily enough when you think about it. I already ripped faith apart a few entries ago over at Goose The Antithesis.

:)

[June 07, 2005 9:25 AM](#)

[groundfighter76](#) said...

This post has been removed by the author.

[June 07, 2005 2:52 PM](#)

[groundfighter76](#) said...

aaron,

bob knows what i'm talking about. He got booted from the bahnsen group a while back for being an ass and now he has to sneak on and ask newbie questions in the hopes of getting some kind of response. it was nice of chris to even respond (i was about to ask him to use the 'search' button)... and now he has been kicked off again.

pathetic...

[June 07, 2005 2:52 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

GF76: "He got booted from the bahnsen group a while back for being an ass and now he has to sneak on and ask newbie questions in the hopes of getting some kind of response."

That was not me, Paul. I was booted from the list in May of 2004.

Now, if you have anything serious to add regarding my present blog, please do.

[June 07, 2005 3:35 PM](#)

[Aaron Kinney](#) said...

Hey BB!

I just added your blog to my links list over at kill the afterlife. I dont know why I didnt do it before, but now its there. Would you mind adding my Kill the Afterlife blog to your links list as well?

Also, I really like the style of writing you got. I think others will too. I recently submitted my blog for the [Carnival of the Godless](#), a rotating carnival/expose of atheist-related blogs. I wasnt sure if youve heard of this before, but if not, you might want to submit an article of yours to it. The more exposure, the better! :)

[June 07, 2005 4:04 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hi Aaron,

Thanks for adding a link to my blog from yours! Per your suggestion, I've added a link from mine to yours as well.

I also got a little "inspired" tonight and created a new blog post. Another lighthearted romp that cuts to the bone.

"Big D"

[June 07, 2005 7:01 PM](#)

[groundfighter76](#) said...

Dawson, i give myself an actual identity and you still think i am paul. wrong again...

[June 07, 2005 8:27 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

GF76: "Dawson, i give myself an actual identity and you still think i am paul. wrong again..."

Oh, you're so right! Above you had signed one of your comments "pathetic..." That must be the identity you gave yourself. Pardon me, Mr. Pathetic. I got you mixed up with Paul. Either way, I've now come to know both of you as Big P. Thanks for stopping by my blog.

"Big D"

[June 08, 2005 4:08 AM](#)

[groundfighter76](#) said...

Dawson,

You are an immature little punk. I did not sign my name as pathetic. It was a statement. Your very statement is contradicted by my screen name...

[June 08, 2005 3:22 PM](#)

[groundfighter76](#) said...

oh and thanks for misrepresenting everything people say....

[June 08, 2005 3:23 PM](#)