

Tuesday, February 06, 2007

The Ominous Parallels Between Presuppositionalism and Drug Addiction

In his essay [The Pulling Down of Strongholds: The Power of Presuppositional Apologetics](#), Christian apologist Michael Butler writes:

Refuting a non-Christian worldview does not establish the Christian worldview, though. It may be that both his worldview and ours is false. So to prove the Christian worldview, we demonstrate that it and it alone can account for human experience. This leads to the second step. In this step we do not answer the fool according to his folly. Rather we invite the unbeliever to come inside our worldview in order to show him that Christianity makes sense of our experience. It provides the necessary preconditions for knowledge.

It is true that proving one position wrong does not necessarily establish the truth of a rival position. As Butler acknowledges, both may be false. But Butler insists that the Christian worldview is true, and declares that he can “demonstrate that it and it alone can account for human experience,” and this would supposedly serve to prove that Christianity is true. And although the claim to be able to “account for human experience” is rather ambiguous, presuppositionalists are in the habit of making it with gusto, apparently putting a lot of stock in this professed ability of theirs. Demonstrating this alleged ability of Christianity to “account for human experience” constitutes “the second step” of the presuppositionalist program. How does the presuppositionalist do this? Butler describes the procedure as follows:

we invite the unbeliever to come inside our worldview in order to show him that Christianity makes perfect sense of our experience. It provides the necessary preconditions for knowledge.

Readers of this can be forgiven for having the impression we're being invited to take on what sounds like a drug addiction. To outsiders, taking the drug is foolish and self-destructive; but to the addicts themselves, the drug is a doorway to a wondrous, mind-altering experience, as precious if not more so than food and water. And this drug is available for “free”; it is not illegal, and it won't cost you a penny to get a hold of some on the street. And its power to alter the mind is tremendous. Many addicts love the drug so much that they will kill for it, and most addicts confess that they are willing to die for it. And while they are under the influence of the drug, everything seems to “make sense” finally and once and for all, as it offers a completely different way of looking at the world and at oneself.

Surely, if one becomes a drug addict, he will see the world through the eyes of a drug addict, and drug addicts are well known for their ability to rationalize their self-destructive habit. They may even claim that only while they are on the drug will their experience “make sense,” for certainly their addiction can “account for” their altered experience.

However, it would not follow from this drug-induced delusion that the drug and/or their addiction to it “provides the necessary preconditions for knowledge.” It is still a drug, and this drug has potentially lethal side effects. Thus we would be wise to politely decline Butler's invitation to sip from the trough of mystical Kool-Aid that he so eagerly wants to serve.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Michael Butler](#), [Presuppositional Gimmickry](#)

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [5:00 AM](#)

9 Comments:

[Francois Tremblay](#) said...

An interesting analogy. I never thought about it that way before.

[February 06, 2007 5:28 PM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

In the 1980's, I remember seeing religious tracts with the slogan "Get high on Jesus." Even Christians themselves sensed the parallels between their god-belief and chemical intoxication. They even used the similarity between the two as a luring device. So in a way, a Christian who condemns drug use is just another hypocrite. Go figure.

Regards,
Dawson

[February 06, 2007 6:06 PM](#)

[beepbeepitsme](#) said...

Nice analogy. I have also seen religious beliefs represented viually as "bubbles." A christian bubble a muslim bubble etc etc. Those within their respective bubbles filter all information recived through the "collective membrane of faith", so they are not able to receive information as it may have been intended.

One could make the case that we all do this to varying extents. But the examples seem more obvious when the filter is one of religious faith.

[February 08, 2007 3:27 PM](#)

[beepbeepitsme](#) said...

Sheesh, I gotta learn to spell check. I hope the previous post is decipherable.

[February 08, 2007 3:28 PM](#)

[openlyatheist](#) said...

It is a parallel I have made many times before. The brain is a chemical machine. When a dog is trained to obey a command for the sake of a treat, then becomes well trained enough to obey in the absence of a treat, it is because the 'treat' is actually the feeling of satisfaction produced by it's brain. In philosophical terms, I often see apologetics as a sort of addiction to concept-stealing; like kleptomania, if you will.

Any more commentary on the rest of Butler's writing?

[February 08, 2007 5:53 PM](#)

[beepbeepitsme](#) said...

I have often thought also that religious meetings resenble in form, nature and effect, those of a rock concert or a nuremberg rally.

People elicit strong chemical responses in some of these situations. The experiences is so enjoyable that they wish to repeat it, kind of like the high an athelete gets from running.

So, they all work themselves up into a lather of emotional responsiveness; the "feel good chemicals" in the brain are going apeshit - and so are they.

Believers claim, of course, that they are "high on god" and that it is god which is touching their lives in wonderful and miraculous ways. Whereas, I think they are just getting off on the idea of a god, and their brain chemistry is responding accordingly.

[February 09, 2007 12:06 AM](#)

[breakerslion](#) said...

Misdirected sexuality. That's why the dogma is so prudish. First, create sexual frustration, then give it an alternate outlet. Hallelujah! Poor, crazy fucks.

[February 20, 2007 5:46 PM](#)

[beepbeepitsme](#) said...

This is to calvindude at <http://calvindude.com/dude/blog/2007/02/drugs-n-religion-man/>

- where he not only copied and pasted my replies here without my permission, but then goes on to claim that I get off on the idea of no god.

Firstly, calvindude, I consider it bad form to write an article that I can not respond via a comment on the article.

And secondly, how do you know I get off on the idea of no god?

Have you got a test for that? Or will we just take that on faith? You know I won't.

Actually, it is more likely to be slightly depressing with the realization that religions are basically fairytales for adults.

But then, I am adult enough to realize that the truth, even if it may be unpleasant, is better than living a lie.

Theists, on the other hand, I suspect, would prefer a lie if it made them feel good, over what may be the truth, anyway.

And we could always conduct a little experiment to see who "gets off more". We could test whether you produce more serotonin when you think about god, than I do when I don't think about god.

Judging by the looks of orgasmic pleasure on the faces of believers at their Nuremberg Rallies, (I mean churches), your serotonin levels will be shooting through the roof.

[February 21, 2007 4:08 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hey Beep,

Thanks for the link. I did not see Calvindude's post until you showed up. Very entertaining stuff, this Calvindude. He accuses me of trying to poison the well. On the contrary, I'm looking to decontaminate it!

He says that my noting a similarity between the invitation to alter one's mind by taking drugs and the invitation to alter one's mind by "trying Jesus," is "an attempt... to employ guilt by association." While I nowhere mention anything about guilt (I simply note the similarity between the two), Calvindude tells us about his own guilt (does he deny any guilt?).

It is a fact that many drugs can alter one's consciousness. Does Calvindude deny this? He does not say one way or another. It is also a fact that step two of the presuppositional apologetic as Butler presents it seeks to persuade the non-believer by having him adopt a worldview which alters his mentality. It's essentially saying "try this, and once you do, you'll see what you've been missing!" just like a junky would say to potential co-users. Just as it seems to be with a drug, presuppositionalism will "open" one's eyes, and suddenly he'll be able to "make sense" of his experience while under its influence.

Calvindude asserts (without argument) that my "post is long on analogy, short on argument." The analogy should be self-evident to most adults, and should not require much if any argument or explanation (look how easy it was for me to explain it!). Perhaps Calvindude needs more handholding here. But the observation should be clear enough, and his associating it with guilt suggests that he gets it.

Calvindude wants to believe that a better analogy would incorporate food instead of drugs. Here Calvindude himself gives us an example of something that is "short on argument" and lacks any analogy whatsoever. It's like comparing food with poison. He provides no argument to indicate that food is a more preferable analogue to Butler's step two than drug use. But there are good reasons to suppose this wouldn't work. First of all, as an already well-fed non-believer, food is not going to alter my consciousness. For example, I just had a plate of pasta for my breakfast, and I still hold the same fundamental worldview (for instance, I can still recognize why Christianity is irrational). Also, I can point to reasons other than altering my worldview for my motivation to eat food. For instance, without it, I will die. This is disanalogous to what happens when someone stops believing in Christianity's invisible magic beings. I stopped being a Christian some 15 years ago, but I did not die. In fact, I finally began to live. Here the analogy to drug use is further secured: when I departed the [childishness of](#)

[Christianity](#), I matured in ways that I could never mature while under the influence of Christianity. Indeed, why be born again when you can simply grow up? Like a drug, Christianity was toxic to my mental health. Calvindude is still under the influence of Christianity's toxins, so his opinion on the matter is about as good as a drug addict's on the "benefits" of drug use. The embarrassing weakness of his response to my blog is simply confirming evidence of this.

And while it is true that "we cannot go without [food]," as Calvindude rightly points out, we can certainly do without presuppositionalism and Jesus. For instance, I am not a worshipper of Jesus, but I certainly do make sense of the world. I do this by using reason, not "Jesus" or pretending that an invisible magic being "controls whatsoever comes to pass" (VT). So Calvindude has some his work cut out for him if he wants to undo the similarities between presuppositionalism's step two as Butler presents it, and drug use.

Regards,
Dawson

[February 21, 2007 5:20 AM](#)