

Monday, August 24, 2009

## RazorsKiss on the Christian God as the Basis of Knowledge - Part 6: RK on the Christian's "Certainty"

In the opening statement of his [debate with Mitch LeBlanc](#), Christian apologist "RazorsKiss" ("RK" hereafter) claimed that

Christians have the privilege of certainty

which implies that no one else does.

But privileges can be taken away.

Consequently, Christians cannot know with certainty when they can enjoy this "privilege of certainty," and when they cannot. And given their worldview's premises, the recognition of the Christian's inherent uncertainty on this matter is accurate.

This is because Christians affirm the existence of a supernatural consciousness which can alter the nature of any thing which exists in the universe at any time, without seeking the prior approval of believers before doing so. (What believer would say that his god needs his approval to do anything?)

In essence, what RK calls "certainty" is based on proclamations inserted into the mouth of a storybook character. But this can only undermine his profession of certainty, not only psychologically, but also philosophically, since its basis (even on Christianity's own premises) is beyond the reach of the believer's epistemological grasp.

That the nature of this "certainty" is at best utterly fleeting and elusive for the believer, is especially true given the context in which RK informs his claim to certainty, namely that this is

a certainty based on the most fundamental guarantor of truth.

That "fundamental guarantor of truth," which, on RK's worldview, can only mean the Christian god, is no "guarantor" of certainty *for the believer* at all.

The granddaddy of presuppositionalism, Cornelius Van Til himself, makes this clear when he writes:

God may at any time take one *fact* and set it into new relation to created law. That is, there is no inherent reason in the facts or laws themselves why this should not be done. It is this sort of conception of the relation of facts and laws, of the temporal one and many, imbedded as it is in the idea of God in which we profess to believe, that we need in order to make room for miracles. And miracles are at the heart of the Christian position. (*The Defense of the Faith*, p. 27)

Because Christians affirm belief in an omnipotent supernatural being which can do what Van Til claims here, they cannot bank on *any* fact with *any* certainty, for unless they are themselves omniscient (which would make them "God," and there can be only one "God"), they cannot know *if or when* their god might take any fact and "set it into new relation to created law." The believer's god is supposed to have a will of its own, independent of the believer's own will. So how can the believer know if or when his god is going to cause another miracle to take place, especially if he relies on "divine revelation" (i.e., information which his god chooses to distribute to the believer) for all his knowledge?

For instance, a believer cannot be certain that the water he is drinking won't suddenly be turned into wine the instant he puts a glass of water to his lips.

Then again, on Van Til's view, he might not even notice that what he thought was water was turned into wine, because the facts pertaining to his perception of such things have been "set into new relation to created law." He may be drinking wine and not know it!

The believer cannot assume that this is a matter of deception, since according to Van Til it would merely be a matter of individual facts being "set into new relation to created law."

Since the Christian god is under no obligation to its creatures, it has no obligation to give believers *advance notice* that any facts are about to be “set into new relation to created law.”

So the Christian’s protestation that his god would not deliberately “deceive” him in such a manner, would be misdirected.

Moreover, protests from apologists that their god is “rational” and therefore will not change things willy-nilly, miss the point of Christianity’s own theological teachings.

If one affirms the existence of such a being, why suppose that it would be irrational for it to change water into wine? Blank out.

Was it irrational for Jesus to turn water into wine at the wedding at Cana (cf. John 2:2-11)?

If the Christian affirms that it was not rational for Jesus to change water into wine, then he’s already admitting that he worships an irrational deity anyway.

On the other hand, if the Christian affirms that it was in fact “rational” for Jesus to turn water into wine, then such protests are inapplicable. Whatever Jesus does, is “rational” because Jesus does it. If Jesus decides that a [car should blow up](#) and destroy human lives, it is “rational” simply because Jesus decides this. If instead of turning water into wine, Jesus decides that [a hurricane](#) should blow into town and take 1836 or more lives, would the believer call Jesus’ decision “irrational”?

I trow not.

Similarly, if the believer affirms that Jesus’ miraculous transformation of water into wine was rational at the wedding at Cana, then why suppose it would be *irrational* for Jesus to do this *or anything else* on other occasions?

Believers are caught in a pickle of their own doing here, and so long as they remain committed to Christianity’s teachings, they’re simply stuck on this one.

So while RK may think that “Christians have the privilege of certainty,” it’s clear that their worldview does not grant them any epistemic *right* to certainty whatsoever (they get only “privilege”). They affirm “certainty” in word only, with no objective support for their claim to certainty at all.

Is this a reliable basis for epistemology?

If course it isn’t.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Certainty](#), [Facts](#), [Knowledge](#), [Miracles](#)

posted by Bahnsen Burner at [11:00 AM](#)

### 3 Comments:

[rhiggs](#) said...

Just thought I'd add this...

Believers assert that they receive certainty through revelation. When asked how God does this, they tend to ignore the question or admit that they do not know. One even admitted to me that if God explained it, he would not understand the explanation. The problem is, if a believer does not know precisely how God delivers certainty, then they are simply taking it on faith that certainty is actually being delivered.

This automatically reduces their position to faith.

[August 25, 2009 9:25 AM](#)

[Bahnsen Burner](#) said...

Hi Rhiggs,

Thanks for your comment. Your point is both relevant and spot on.

You wrote:

"When asked how God does this, they tend to ignore the question or admit that they do not know."

In fact, heavy-weight (in more ways than one) apologist John Frame does just this. See the lengthy Frame quote which I included in [Part 1](#) of my analysis of RazorsKiss' debate (it's in the section titled "What RK Does *Not* Address"). Frame considers the question "How is it that people come to believe a Word from God which contradicts all their other normal means of knowledge?" and openly admits, "We know without knowing how we know."

As you point out, this is no formula for certainty whatsoever. Any claim to certainty on the basis of such admitted ignorance of method, is simply a pretense. And that is what faith is: it's a disingenuous claim to knowledge which one does not actually possess.

Oh, and stay tuned: Part 7 is coming right up.

Regards,  
Dawson

[August 25, 2009 10:07 AM](#)

[Whateverman](#) said...

Wow - nice evisceration. It leaves the presuppositionist with the dilemma of a God who is either constrained by natural law (thus preserving uniformity but destroying omnipotence) or is able to do as he pleases (destroying uniformity).

Thanks, to the both of you. This hits something which I'd been struggling to identify and express, but had missed it up to this point.

Cheers

[September 30, 2009 11:17 AM](#)

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