

Thursday, March 22, 2012

The Self-Attesting Absurdity of the Christian Worldview

Over the past week, I presented a three-part series exploring the common presuppositionalist claim that the “Christian worldview” is the “only worldview” which “provides” the necessary preconditions for intelligibility. My investigation of this claim, which can be found [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#), demonstrates why this claim simply cannot be true.

But in spite of giving the matter more careful and systematic attention than presuppositionalists themselves typically devote to their own talking points, this demonstration - and more importantly, just the idea of taking a critical look at such a claim - will likely be ignored by apologists.

One thing I discovered in my research on the topic of the preconditions for intelligibility, is that the three most fundamental preconditions for intelligibility are metaphysical in nature, namely the facts of existence, identity and consciousness. What is noteworthy here is the fact that these preconditions obtain *independent of conscious activity*. That is, they are not put in place as a result of some action of consciousness, whether that action is merely perceiving, wishing, believing, imagining, pretending to know, etc. Indeed, one could outright *deny* these facts, but they would continue to obtain regardless and unchanged. Specifically, contrary to what presuppositionalists claim about their worldview, a set of *beliefs* does *not* constitute the preconditions for intelligibility. On the contrary, a set of *facts* is the precondition for intelligibility, facts which do not depend on or conform to anyone’s *beliefs*.

But the presuppositionalist might take a different angle on the topic of the preconditions for intelligibility, and instead of premising intelligibility on a set of beliefs, he premises ultimately it on some *event* which supposedly took place in *history*. On such a view, a *historical event* constitutes the preconditions for intelligibility, which could only mean that *prior to* that event, the preconditions for intelligibility did not exist, and therefore there was *no* intelligibility at all. And since this event is supposedly *historical*, in fact the *culmination* of a long series of historical events recorded before it, any historical events *prior to* this event would have to have happened without the benefit of the preconditions for intelligibility being in place, and therefore themselves were *unintelligible*.

Would someone really affirm such an intensely absurd position? Given its utterly ridiculous implications, it would indeed seem highly unlikely. But presuppositionalists are a strange bunch, and are very often known for leaping without looking.

Consider the following statement from presuppositionalist blogger Chris Bolt, who writes:

There is no Christianity without the resurrection of Christ... and without Christianity, there is no intelligible experience.

This statement comes from Bolt’s blog entry [Reasonable Doubts About Overload Objections](#).

On the view which Bolt affirms here, there would be no intelligible experience without the resurrection. Of course, Bolt has in mind specifically the [resurrection of Jesus Christ](#) as depicted in the New Testament gospel narratives.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is supposed to be a *historical* event. Christian “scholars” assign a date between AD 30 and 33 for when this event allegedly happened. And if this event did not actually happen, there would be no Christianity. As the apostle Paul wrote in I Corinthians 15:17, “if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain.”

Christians themselves typically tell us that “the resurrection” is a “historical event.” For instance, the 19th century biblical scholar B.F. Westcott (1825-1901) [reportedly stated](#):

Taking all the evidence together, it is not too much to say that there is no single historical incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection.

Jason Engwer of [Triablogue](#) explains that

the widespread early understanding of the resurrection *as a historical event* is evidence that the New Testament accounts were meant to be taken as historical narratives. ([A Review of Michael Licona's The Resurrection of Jesus \(Part 6\)](#); emphasis added)

In his paper [Comments on John Johnson's Response to Frame and Hays](#), presuppositionalist theorist James Anderson holds that

if an appeal to the Koran trumps any evidence for the reliability of the New Testament, it will equally trump any evidence for the historicity of the resurrection!

Indeed, it appears that Christians, for the sake of holding their worldview as truth, *need* the resurrection of Jesus Christ to be an actual *historical event*.

But on the view which Bolt affirms, this would mean that intelligible experience is *ultimately grounded in a historical event*. Meaning: if that event did not take place, there would be no intelligible experience. It also means that there was no intelligible experience *until that event happened!*

Consequently, as a result of the clear implications of Bolt's expressed view, everything *prior to* Jesus' resurrection was unintelligible!

Just ponder this statement for a moment.

Consider the experience of all the biblical characters which, according to Christianity, historically preceded Jesus' resurrection. Indeed, that all of the Old Testament, and most of the settings of the gospel narratives up to Jesus' resurrection! According to what Bolt has told us, all of this was unintelligible!

Look at the tales of Adam, of Cain and Abel, of Noah, of Abraham and Isaac, of Job, of Moses and Aaron, of the prophets, of King David and Solomon the Wise, of Daniel in the lions' den and Jonah and the whale, of the virgin Mary and John the Baptist crying in the wilderness. All of this, Bolt is saying, is unintelligible, since the historical event upon which intelligible experience rests, had not yet happened. Even the ministry of Jesus, calling the twelve disciples, his preaching and miracle-working, his disputing with the Pharisees and Sadducees, his scolding of the money-changers, his wrestling with Satan, his raising of Lazarus, his last meal, his arrest and trial, his crucifixion and his final words from the cross... All of this, we are now learning, was unintelligible!

What's more, Christians typically regard the "history" documented in the Old Testament as the unfolding of a comprehensive "plan" leading up to the crucifixion *and resurrection* of Jesus. In other words, we have not only unintelligibility *giving rise to* intelligibility, but unintelligibility *informing* intelligibility, since the pre-resurrection content (which must be intelligibility, given Bolt's thesis) provides the underlying substance upon which the resurrection supposedly "makes sense" as a *fulfillment* of various currents involved in the unfolding of that "plan."

This makes for a proverbial "good grief moment" of biblical proportions. Indeed, how could one seriously propose that some historical event - either fictional or factual - could be a precondition for intelligible experience? It seems utterly absurd.

In his "e-book" titled [This Joyful Eastertide](#), Christian apologist-blogger Steve Hays tells us that "Historical truths are truths of fact, not truths of reason," and concedes that "the setting and timing of the Christ-event could have been otherwise" (p. 41).

There's another problem with Bolt's thesis predicating intelligible experience on some historical event. And that problem is implied in Hays' concession that "the setting and timing of the Christ-event could have been otherwise." If it is conceded that the setting and timing of an event could have been different, then it must be conceded that the setting and timing were not sufficient to provide the causal conditions for the outcome of the event in question. In other words, there might not have been a resurrection, or even a crucifixion and death. The setting, for instance, "could have" included a prefect of Judaea who was sympathetic to the rogue

messianism represented in the character of Jesus, and rather than allowing him to be crucified, instead had him whisked away and put under supervised protection. It “could have been otherwise.”

No doubt bunkered-down Christians will object to this with froth. But care should be taken not to miss the broader point with which presuppositionalists need to come to terms. Proponents of Anal Phil are well known for dividing truths into two opposing alternatives: necessary vs. contingent. If it’s the case that “the setting and timing of the Christ-event could have been otherwise,” then it seems that Anal Phillers would deem “the Christ-event” - regardless of what it is thought to constitute - as a *contingent* truth rather than a *necessary* truth.

This would mean that premising the intelligibility of human experience on some historical event would mean that the preconditions for intelligibility are *contingent* rather than “necessary,” which again vies against what presuppositionalists themselves have historically insisted.

To be sure, any way you slice this, it comes up rife with absurdities. And these absurdities are typically detected by giving more careful thought to what presuppositionalists say than presuppositionalists themselves typically give. So let ‘em speak!

I’m glad these aren’t my problems.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Christian Psychopathy](#), [Preconditions of Intelligibility](#)

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