

Another Response to David, Part 4: Paul, Q and Groping Traditions

I wrote:

I'm not talking linguistic philosophy either. You had mentioned 'the building blocks of thought', and those are concepts, not words. This is basic epistemology, not linguistic philosophy. You can't have language without concepts. The ability to form concepts comes first, but language helps us retain and organize the concepts we've formed."

David wrote:

This is a silly quibble, but just so you don't think I'm being dishonest in what I stated: 'Words are the unit of thought in most of our thinking and writing; they are the bricks of our conceptual formulation.' (Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 3 ed., page 128)

I didn't think you were being dishonest, David. I just think you're wrong. I think Ramm is wrong as well, but I've come to expect such espousals from Christians. Christianity has no theory of concepts, so it comes as no surprise to find Christians confused on this matter. In fact, it is no "silly quibble." The absence of the objective theory of concepts is one of chief problems with any mystical worldview. As I mentioned, words are symbols - specifically, auditory/visual symbols - which represent concepts. I quote Rand:

A word is merely a visual-auditory symbol used to represent a concept; a word has no meaning other than that of the concept it symbolizes, and the meaning of a concept consists of its units. It is not words, but concepts that man defines—by specifying their referents. (*Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, p. 52)

Though he most likely does not realize it, Ramm is propounding a falsehood.

David wrote:

Regarding the word study fallacy you keep insisting is proper exegesis: Straight out of a hermeneutics textbook, under the heading of "word-count fallacy": "We make this mistake when we insist that a word must have the same meaning every time it occurs. For example, if we are confident that a word carries a certain meaning in seven of its eight occurrences in Scripture, we might be tempted to conclude that it must have the same meaning in its eighth occurrence. Yet as Darrel Bock maintains, 'word meanings are determined by context, not word counts'." (Bock, "New Testament Word Analysis pg. 111, *A Hands on Approach To Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, Duvall pg 130)

If this is the definition of the word study fallacy, then I have not committed it. For one, I have considered the context of the passage in question in determining the meaning of "brother of the Lord," for as I (and many others) have pointed out, Paul says "brother of the *Lord*, not "brother of *Jesus*." I buttressed my interpretation by citing a source which explicitly defines "Lord" as a title, when you called it a name. Furthermore, I nowhere maintained that, because other instances of the word "brother" in Paul's letters denotes a spiritual rather than biological relationship, it *must* therefore mean a spiritual as opposed to a biological relationship in the passage in question. This is clear from my statement that it *most likely* rather than *necessarily* means a spiritual relationship in the passage in question.

David wrote:

You deem my inquiries about James as trifling, but even Wells himself says that his theory stands or falls on this. Indeed the reason I have pressed this point is because your original statement about a recent resurrection in Paul demand such evidence be discussed.

Let's keep in view what I had actually stated. I wrote:

Now David, I did pose some questions on how revelation is supposed to work, but I do not see that you've addressed them. Instead, you seem to prefer trifling over a passing reference to James as "the brother of the Lord," which seems to be a very small matter in comparison to the claim to have received a revelation from a deity.

Keep in mind that I am more of a philosopher than a historian (the former is more a passion where the latter is more a side hobby). A major branch of philosophy is epistemology - how do we discover and validate our knowledge, and how do we establish our knowledge claims? - and is probably the most important area of philosophical inquiry. Paul claims to have received his gospel directly from the risen Christ by means of revelation (Gal. 1:11-12). It seems that anyone can claim anything and say he knows it by means of revelation. How do I know that Paul really received a revelation from some divine source? How could I verify this? Apparently I'm supposed to just take his word for it, for nothing objective is offered to secure such a claim. And questioning such a claim is a big no no in Christianity: it is tantamount to questioning whether or not the divinely approved "Word" is true or not, and we're not supposed to do that. As Bahnsen says, the bible is supposed to be unquestionable. So rather than addressing such questions, it appears that we're not supposed to ask them. But I'm not afraid to ask, so I ask. But believers don't seem to be able to give much of an answer to this kind of question, even though it seems far more important to me than, say, what Paul meant by his passing reference to "James the brother of the Lord." Besides, as far as I'm concerned, this point has been settled: it's a church title, not intended to denote a sibling relationship. So it is for these reasons that I stated what I said above. I am aware that, insofar as Wells' case for legend is concerned, this is an important issue. But in the larger scheme of things, it's a minor quodlibet at best. In regard to Wells' views, it's a hurdle he clears with ease.

David quoted G.A. Wells:

If Paul means blood brother of a historical Jesus, then it would suffice to establish--against my view--that Jesus had really lived in the first half of the first century. Furthermore, I must admit that this interpretation of Paul's words does seem the immediate and obvious one. Here, then, is a case where what seems to be the plain sense of a text . . . would weigh very heavily indeed against my view of Christian origins. (HEJ, 167)

Regarding "the twelve," David quoted more of Wells:

If these words were really written by Paul, then it looks as though he was aware that Jesus chose twelve disciples; and if Paul in this respect corroborates what the gospels say, then it would be reasonable to infer that he also knows the principle facts of Jesus' life (DJE, 124)

David then commented:

In order to get himself out of the quagmire he's created ;) , Wells must argue that the Corinthian passage is an interpolation (DJE, pg 124) even though every single shred of manuscript evidence includes the full passage. That means there is zero textual warrant for his claim. This constitutes special pleading. You said you were ok with the creed being authentic though right?

Comparing manuscripts is not the only way to know that something has been interpolated. Especially if there's a substantial interval between the time when the original is believed to have been penned and the date of our earliest extant copies. In the case of Paul's letters (including I Corinthians), the earliest copy we have Papyrus 46, which [Griffin dates](#) to AD 175-225, at the earliest AD 150, or at least if not more than 100 years after Paul originally wrote the letter. This interval provides more than ample opportunity for tampering with the text. Also, certain indicators within the text itself can give this away. For instance, in I Cor. 15 we find reference to "the twelve," which Paul never mentions elsewhere in his several letters.

David wrote:

In addition, Wells must reject both references to Jesus in Josephus to hold up his theory. Written around 93-94 AD, Josephus' writings clearly link Jesus to his disciples and connect his crucifixion to Pilate. Now I grant that many register concern about the authenticity *Antiquities 18:3*, but who else is rejecting all references to Jesus? Wells of course.

Wells is not a lone ranger in rejecting the two passages in Josephus as interpolations. Not at all. I'm sure if you do a little digging, you'll find others do to. Wells gives his reasons in *The Jesus Myth*, pp. 200-221.

David wrote:

Princeton Seminary's James Charlesworth: "We can now be as certain as historical research will presently allow that Josephus did refer to Jesus." (*Jesus Within Judaism*, pg. 96)

I would expect soundbites such as this from someone like Charlesworth. But notice how it uses a string of words to say nothing very definite. If historical research will not presently allow that Josephus really did refer to Jesus, then

how certain can we be? And whose research? Of course, Charlesworth's own. As a professor at a seminary, I'm sure he fills his title well.

David wrote:

In addition, Wells **must** also twist the reference in Josephus about James to be consistent. According to the passage "the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James" met his death after the death of the procurator Porcius Festus, yet before Lucceius Albinus took office (Antiquities 20.9)...which is also where we derive the traditional date of 62 AD for his death.

This statement comes from the so-called 'shorter passage' in Josephus. As I pointed out in my previous blog, Wells provides reasons for supposing this passage to be a Christian interpolation (cf. *The Jesus Myth*, pp. 217-221). There Wells interacts with defenses of the passage's authenticity provided by R.T. France and R.N. Tyler and shows why they are weak. So if this passage is a Christian interpolation, as Wells holds, then - contrary to what you say - Wells has no need to "twist" this reference in order to remain consistent with his broader thesis.

David wrote:

At any rate Wells has since changed his mind about the existence of Jesus, so now his earlier critiques of Paul need to be re-assessed and I seriously doubt they will maintain consistency.

Yes, Wells is now inclined to suppose that a real human being (not an incarnation of a divine being, mind you) was behind many of the stories and sayings which informed the primitive basis of the Christ cult. But if true, this is still totally damning to Christianity. Indeed, even if one does not accept Wells' overall conclusion, he still makes massive blows to the literalist interpretation of the New Testament, sufficiently so that I don't think it can recover. But confessionally invested believers will keep trying, I'm sure.

David stated:

Apparently Q has persuaded him that Jesus may have been a real person.

Wells credits J.D.G. Dunn for helping with this in *Can We Trust the New Testament?* (cf. p. 50).

David then quoted Van Voorst:

'A final argument against the nonexistence hypothesis comes from Wells himself. In his most recent book, *The Jesus Myth* (1999), Wells has moved away from this hypothesis. He now accepts that there is some historical basis for the existence of Jesus, derived from the lost early "gospel" "Q" (the hypothetical source used by Matthew and Luke). Wells believes that it is early and reliable enough to show that Jesus probably did exist, although this Jesus was not the Christ that the later canonical Gospels portray. It remains to be seen what impact Wells's about-face will have on debate over the nonexistence hypothesis in popular circles.', Van Voorst, Robert E, 'NonExistence Hypothesis', in Houlden, James Leslie (editor), 'Jesus in History, Thought, and Culture: An Encyclopedia', page 660 (Santa Barbara: 2003)

This tells me a lot. Van Voorst refers to Wells' modification of his theory as an 'about-face' - suggesting a 180-degree turn in his views. This is misleading. Wells' allowance of some shadowy figure behind some of the earlier traditions which ultimately wound up in New Testament narratives about Jesus does not constitute a wholesale revision of his views of the data. The conclusion that the gospel accounts are legends is constant throughout all this. In fact, one could argue that Wells' modified view actually strengthens his critique of Christian origins, for it better accounts for the several streams of traditions which we observe in the gospel narratives. Wells writes:

The essential point, as I see it, is that the Q material, whether or not it suffices as evidence of Jesus's historicity, refers to a personage who is not to be identified with the dying and rising Christ of the early epistles. (*Can We Trust the New Testament*, p. 50)

Keep in mind the following point that Wells makes of Q:

Q does not mention Jesus's death, and does no more than hint that the hostility extended to him may have been what led to it; he is represented as the last in a long line of Jewish prophets sent out by Wisdom whose messages met with apathy, rejection, even persecution. Q certainly does not regard his death as redemptive and does not explicitly mention his resurrection. It never calls him 'Christ' (Messiah) and has no allusion to eucharist, nor indeed to any social or cultic practices which would separate its group from mainstream Judaism.

In all these respects the Jesus of Q differs from the Jesus of Paul, who was “delivered up for our trespasses”, “put forward” by God “as an expiation by his blood”, and “raised for our justification” (Rom. 3:25; 4:25) (*The Jesus Myth*, p. 103)

So Q represents a non-Pauline tradition which does not involve a dying and rising savior, but which has been grafted into the narrative of Jesus’ life in Matthew and Luke.

Elsewhere Wells notes:

[R.E.] Brown is surely right to say that “in all probability the first-century composition of the Gospels was not simple”, and that our chances of determining it “are so slim that it is better to adopt a simpler overall approach that solves most of the difficulties and leaves some minor difficulties unsolved.” On this basis, he accepts Marcan priority, but with the modification that Matthew and Luke were influenced to some extent also by oral tradition. He also defends the majority view that neither Matthew nor Luke knew the work of the other ([*The Death of the Messiah*], pp. 42-45). There are some 230 verses common (verbatim or nearly so) to the two that are not found in Mark; they place this shared non-Markan material in entirely different contexts, and this is one reason why it is unlikely that the one took it from the other and so knew the other. Luke’s dependence on Matthew is urged by some scholars, but there are strong reasons against it (such as his failure to reproduce any of the material special to Matthew in his passion narrative). If, then, the common non-Markan 230 verses were not taken from the one by the other, they must derive from a common non-Markan Greek source not now extant and known as Q (German Quelle = source). They consist mainly of sayings of Jesus, and so Q is known alternatively as the ‘sayings source’. In sum, the majority view is that Matthew and Luke each independently used two sources, Mark and Q (each supplementing them with a certain amount of material that is not shared). (*The Jesus Legend*, p. 97)

So Wells has come to see that the sayings source derives from an actually existing personage, whose name is not known (that name could have been Jesus, or the sayings could easily be posthumously credited to the Jesus of the new Christ cult), but “who is not to be identified with the dying and rising Christ of the early epistles.” So if you want the person behind the history here, look to Q.

David wrote:

In a lecture given in 2003, he admits that Paul probably did believe that Jesus was an actual Jewish man who was crucified. (<http://www.bede.org.uk/gawells.htm>)

Since you apparently did not see it before, I’ll quote Wells again on this point:

My view is that Paul knew next to nothing of the earthly life of Jesus, and did not have in mind any definite historical moment for his crucifixion. As we saw, holy Jews had been crucified alive in the first and second centuries BC, but traditions about these events, and about the persecuted Teacher of Righteousness, could well have reached Paul without reference to times and places, and he need not have regarded their occurrences as anything like as remote in time as they in fact were. Whenever it was that Jesus had lived obscurely and died, he had, for Paul, returned promptly after death to heaven; and the evidence for this exaltation, and indeed for his whole religious significance, was his recent appearances to Paul and to contemporaries of Paul which signaled that the final events which would end the world were imminent. Thus even if the death and resurrection were put at some indefinite time past, it remains quite intelligible that Christianity did not originate before the opening decades of the first century AD. Nor need any supposed relevance to Jesus of the Wisdom literature have been appreciated earlier. (*Can We Trust the New Testament?*, p. 34)

David asked:

How do you square this with your statement given your relied on Wells for nearly all citations made during our interection?

As I explained [in a discussion I had regarding similar issues](#):

Where Doherty may be regarded as a “mythicist,” I can be regarded as a “legendist” - I think it’s clearly the case that the stories we read in the gospels and the book of Acts are the product of legendary developments, regardless of whether or not Mark came first, regardless of whether or not there was ultimately a human being named Jesus which initially inspired sacred stories messianic heroism.

The citations I’ve made from Wells’ earlier books did not consist of arguments seeking to conclude that Jesus never

existed. Rather, they help show how the story of Jesus grew as a legend.

by Dawson Bethrick

Labels: [Christian Legends](#)

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

8 Comments:

[Robert_B](#) said...

Greetings Dawson and David: I hope all who read this comment are well and feeling good.

Dawson observed: "As Bahnsen says, the bible is supposed to be unquestionable."

This is very interesting and is a result of the Protestant reformation. Luther, Calvin, and the other reformers rejected the notion that Church Tradition was as source of authoritative governing instruction in favor of the view that canonical scripture instead was the sole authority. However, it is amusing to note that the same Church Traditions rejected by the Reformers were responsible for selecting and probably composing the documents deemed canonical. While Bahnsen and friends would recoil in horror at the thought of submitting to Papal authority, they willingly embrace an anthology of texts selected by vote of the Catholic Church. Ha-ha. How funny.

[August 28, 2008 7:56 AM](#)

[Robert_B](#) said...

Greetings and best wishes to all.

Dawson acutely reasoned: "So Wells has come to see that the sayings source derives from an actually existing personage, whose name is not known (that name could have been Jesus, or the sayings could easily been posthumously credited to the Jesus of the new Christ cult), but "who is not to be identified with the dying and rising Christ of the early epistles." So if you want the person behind the history here, look to Q."

If there was a historical "Jesus" (a very common name amongst ancient Jews) associated with the Q1 sayings, he was a Cynic Sage. The origins of [Hellenistic Cynicism](#) lie with its founder, Diogenes of Sinope.

Great men are not remembered for quoting others. However, fantasies are often represented as mouthing the sayings of the great ones. It seems to me that the most likely reason Hellenistic Cynic sayings were grafted into an early Jewish messiah cult was that Hellenistic Jews or Judaized Greeks who happened to be Cynics joined the cult. Subsequently, Diogenes' teachings were adopted. There is no need to multiply complexity by positing a Nazorite who just happened to have a similar set of teachings to that of Diogenes or some other Cynic philosopher. There is no problem here. Cynic sayings ascribed to a mythical individual have the character of a whole philosophical movement rather than of a single person.

[Doherty responded to a comment along these same lines thusly:](#)

As for the Gospel teachings, we have direct evidence that they are based wholly or in part on a pagan precursor, namely that of the Greek Cynics, an itinerant preaching movement in many respects like that of the Kingdom of God sect we see in Q and the Galilean element of the Synoptics. In my book, *The Jesus Puzzle* (p.159-161), I make a close comparison of the Q1 sayings with the teachings of the Cynic movement. Robert Price, in his *Deconstructing Jesus* (p.150-162) provides an exhaustive catalogue of the close correspondences between the sayings placed in Jesus' mouth and those of the Cynics. Since Cynicism long predated the Christian movement, or even the Kingdom preachers of Q, the direction of borrowing is evident. But to whom were those Cynic sayings attributed? I can do no better than to quote from Price's wide-ranging and fascinating book (p.150):

"First, do we receive from the Q1 sayings and anecdotes a striking and consistent picture of a historical individual? Mack thinks we do. There is a sly sense of humor coupled with common sense and prophetic anger. There is a definite outlook on life. And thus, one might think, a definite personality, a real character! But no. The problem is that once we discern the pronounced Cynic character of the sayings, we have an alternate explanation for the

salty, striking, and controversial "personality" of the material. It conveys not the personality of an individual but that of a movement, the sharp and humorous Cynic outlook on life. What we detect so strongly in the texts is their Cynicism. The fact that so many Q1 sayings so strongly parallel so many Cynic maxims and anecdotes proves the point for the simple reason that the Cynic materials used for comparison stem from many different Cynic philosophers over several centuries! If they do not need to have come from a single person, neither do those now attributed to Jesus which parallel them."

(For more on Robert Price's Deconstructing Jesus, see my book review under "The Case For the Jesus Myth": BkrvPric.htm.)

[August 28, 2008 8:42 AM](#)

[Robert_B](#) said...

Dawson correctly points out: *I have considered the context of the passage in question in determining the meaning of "brother of the Lord," for as I (and many others) have pointed out, Paul says "brother of the Lord, not "brother of Jesus."*

An interesting thing about the use of adelphos is that the word has multiple meanings. It can mean son of the same mother, kinsman, colleague, a term of address used by kings in letters, a term of affection between spouses, a fellow member of a religious community, a term referring to related things like Leviathan's scales, a general reference to things brotherly or sisterly, or generally of anything double or twin in pairs.

If the author of Gal. 1:19 (Marcion's version of Galatians did not have verses 1:18-24.) had meant to infer a sibling relation between James and Jesus, why did he not say James kassignêtoio tou Jesus?

Kassignêtoio only has the meaning of a sibling or family relationship, a brother esp. of those born from the same mother, or in later usage of sisters of the same mother.

If the Gal. 1:19 interpolater had meant to infer James as son of the same mother, he would have used Kassignêtoio. But he did not. Thus Galatians 1:19 falls and cannot be used as an excuse for faith a historical Jesus existed.

[August 28, 2008 10:27 AM](#)

[Robert_B](#) said...

[Galatians chapter 1 at Perseus.tufts.edu](#)

[adelphos reference from Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon](#)

[Kassignêtoio reference from Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon](#)

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[Robert_B](#) said...

[Did Paul write Galatians ? by Frank R. McGuire](#)

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[Robert_B](#) said...

[English Reconstruction and Translation of Marcion's version of To The Galatians](#)

According to By Brooke Foss Westcott in "A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament" "Marcion preserved without alteration the text which he found in his Manuscript." p.320

[August 28, 2008 1:31 PM](#)

[david](#) said...

Running low on content and high on rhetoric.

1. Dawson said *Though he most likely does not realize it, Ramm is propounding a falsehood.*

No I think he's talking about literary analysis (words are the building block of literary thought). Could it be that "word" has more than one simple meaning? Do you claim to have an objectivist epistemology? I would like to see how that works out in a naturalistic system.

2. Dawson: " *Besides, as far as I'm concerned, this point has been settled: it's a church title, not intended to denote a sibling relationship.*

You wish it was settled, but I will be happy to continue demonstrating that this ad-hoc position about James is completely without merit. Of course seeing how stubborn you are when admitting error, I don't see how that would do any good.

3. Dawson: *Comparing manuscripts is not the only way to know that something has been interpolated. Especially if there's a substantial interval between the time when the original is believed to have been penned and the date of our earliest extant copies. In the case of Paul's letters (including I Corinthians), the earliest copy we have Papyrus 46, which Griffin dates to AD 175-225, at the earliest AD 150, or at least if not more than 100 years after Paul originally wrote the letter. This interval provides more than ample opportunity for tampering with the text. Also, certain indicators within the text itself can give this away. For instance, in I Cor. 15 we find reference to "the twelve," which Paul never mentions elsewhere in his several letters.*

If we argue from silence and assume "the twelve" was contextually unknown the audience yes. But I reject both of those assertions. At any rate, what other documents in ancient history do we have manuscripts dating within 100 years? Seems like an ad-hoc standard to me.

4. Yes, Wells is now inclined to suppose that a real human being (not an incarnation of a divine being, mind you) was behind many of the stories and sayings which informed the primitive basis of the Christ cult. But if true, this is still totally damning to Christianity. Indeed, even if one does not accept Wells' overall conclusion, he still makes massive blows to the literalist interpretation of the New Testament, sufficiently so that I don't think it can recover. But confessionally invested believers will keep trying, I'm sure.

Ok my turn. Indeed, even if one does accept [some scholar's] overall conclusion, he still makes massive blows to the hyper-skeptical interpretation of the New Testament, sufficiently so that I don't think it can recover. But confessionally invested deconvertes will keep trying, I'm sure. :P

[August 29, 2008 8:13 AM](#)

[david](#) said...

Dawson said: *t comes as no surprise to find Christians confused on this matter. In fact, it is no "silly quibble." The absence of the objective theory of concepts is one of chief problems with any mystical worldview.*

As a philosopher, do you find it intellectually honest to make such ambiguous statements in an attempt to buttress your usual "oh its no surprise that Christians do that.." rhetoric?

At least could you provide this?

- 1) Define a mystical worldview
- 2) Give one reason why Christianity lacks an objective theory of concepts
- 3) Provide at least a sentence explaining your worldview's objective basis for concepts

[August 30, 2008 2:10 PM](#)

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